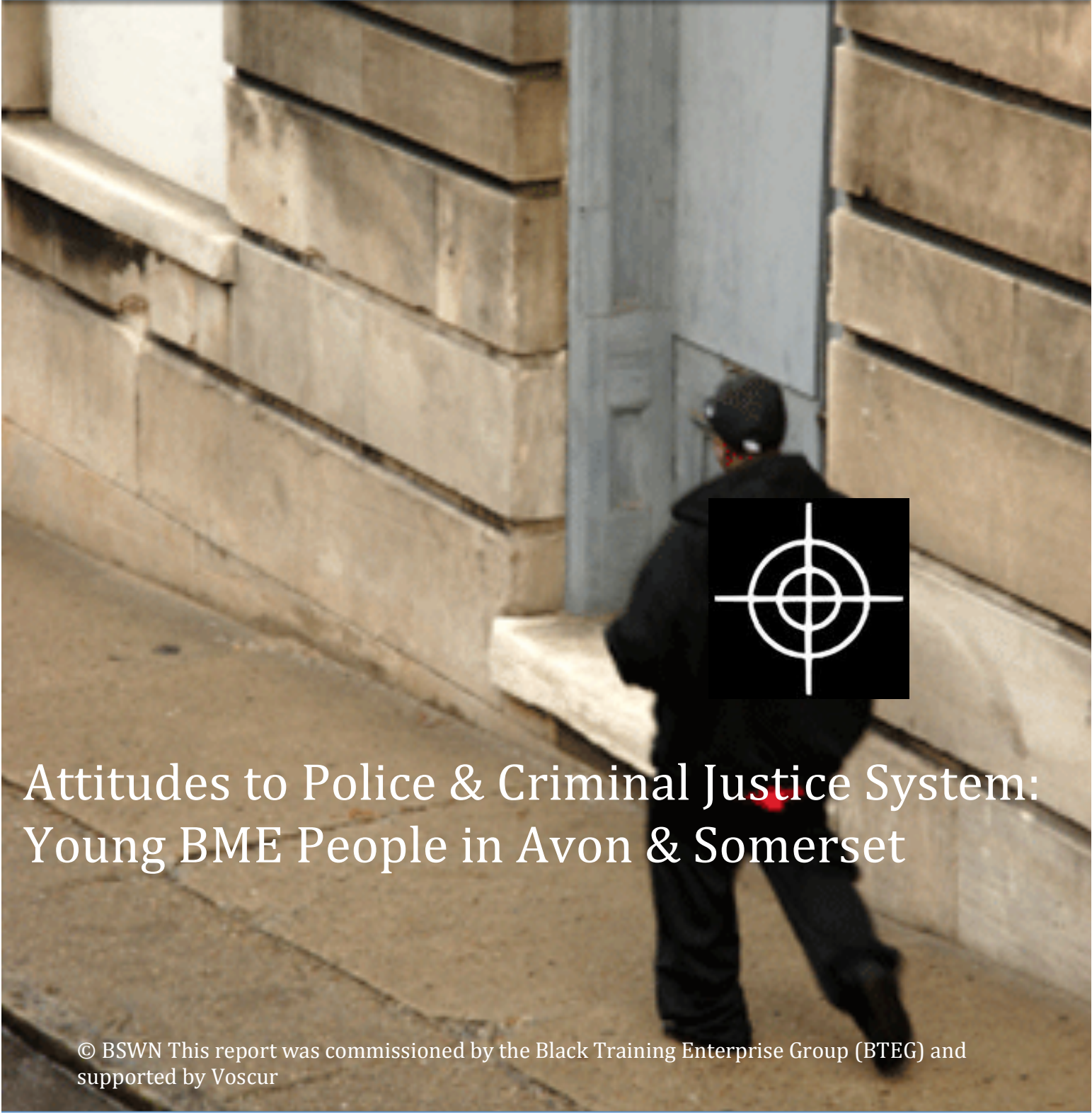


BSWN

Working for the Benefit for all Communities in the South West



Attitudes to Police & Criminal Justice System: Young BME People in Avon & Somerset

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A series of focus groups of young BME people from the Avon & Somerset Constabulary area were held during February and March 2013. The focus groups identified the following areas of concern in order of priority:

1. Better cultural awareness and equality training for police;
2. Education of BME communities
 - (a) regarding their rights when challenged by the police;
 - (b) regarding the legal process generally;
3. More accountability by police for their actions in stopping young BME people in particular;
4. Institutional racism in the police force;
5. Distrust of police leading to under-reporting of crime by BME people – including hate crime;
6. Aggressive attitude of police to BME people triggering an angry and resentful response;
7. A need for recruitment of more BME officers;
8. Earlier intervention to prevent crime;
9. More emphasis on community policing;
10. More resources for agencies working with problem families;
11. The fact that police cautions are disclosed when a person's history is sought from CRB blights a young person's prospects of future employment;
12. Recording arrests and not convictions blights future prospects of young people when the arrest leads neither to Court proceedings nor to a conviction;
13. Lack of confidence in the police. Too often when BME people requiring police intervention call police to a scene of crime they arrest the BME victims and not the perpetrators of the crime;
14. There is an urgent need to recruit more judges and magistrates from a BME background as well as for more Legal Assessors for the Magistrates Courts who come from a BME background.

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 BTEG has been funded by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to develop a network of BAME led and mainstream civil society organisations working on issues of race equality and supporting BME communities in and around the criminal justice system (CJS.) BTEG has supported a small number of local pieces of work through members of its network and the partnership with BSWN & Voscur is one of these local partnership projects supporting local members to engage with statutory agencies around policy affecting BME communities
- 1.2 Following the May 2010 General Election, the UK Government published its programme, which included a commitment to 'introduce measures to make the police more accountable through oversight by a directly elected individual, who will be subject to strict checks and balances by locally elected representatives'.
- 1.3 The Police Reform and Social Responsibility (PRSR) Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 30 November 2010. The PRSR Bill provided for the election of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to replace police authorities in 41 police force areas in England and Wales from May 2012.
- 1.4 Police and Crime Commissioners' (PCCs') roles include:
 - Meeting the public regularly to listen to their views on policing;
 - Producing a police and crime plan setting out local policing priorities;
 - Deciding how the budget will be spent; and
 - Appointing Chief Constables and dismissing them if necessary
- 1.5 In Avon and Somerset Sue Mountstevens, a mother of three and magistrate, was appointed following the election. As Avon and Somerset's first Police and Crime Commissioner, Mountstevens states her priorities; tackling violent crime particularly against women and children, tackling burglary and giving victims a louder voice.
- 1.6 The over-representation of black young people within the justice system is a well-evidenced phenomenon. Just before the election of Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales **Dr Aisha K Gill**, *Reader in criminology, University of Roehampton*, wrote: "There is strong evidence that black people are over-represented throughout the criminal justice process. In the last two decades we have seen a punitive trend in criminal justice policy, and the changes in police practice that accompany it have negative consequences for BME communities. Indeed the growth in the expansion of proactive policing and in police and prosecutorial powers have disproportionately affected BME communities."
- 1.7 Crime continues to be one of the most controversial sources of racial tension between the police and local communities. Disproportionate use of stop and search remains widespread – with a massive difference in how different ethnic groups are treated. Black men are 26 times more likely than their white counterparts to be stopped and searched under the Criminal Justice and Public

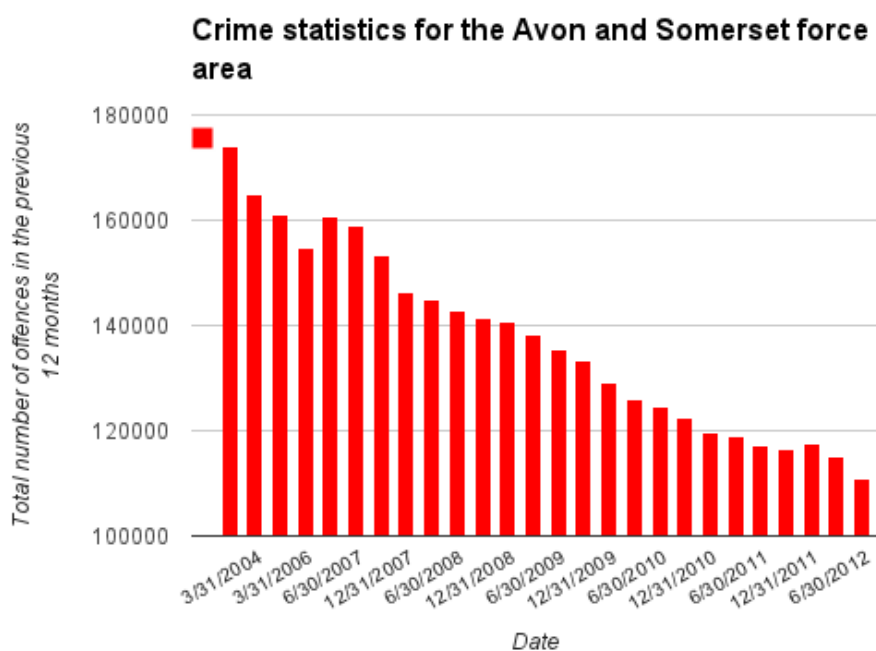
Order Act according to a report by the Guardian dated June 2012.

- 1.8 Black people also have a higher chance of being arrested and imprisoned than their white counterparts. They even face stiffer sentences for the same crimes – black offenders are 44 per cent more likely to be given a prison sentence for driving offences.
- 1.9 Mistrust of the police is widespread among Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) young people. What difference will PCC make? Will the voices of young Blacks be heard and taken into account? How will Sue Mountstevens prevent the on going tensions between BME communities and the police.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 A Police and Crime Commissioner is an elected representative charged with securing efficient and effective policing of a police area in England and Wales. The first incumbents were elected on 15 November 2012.

Table 1



- 2.2 A total of 110,922 crimes were recorded in Avon and Somerset in the year leading up to the commissioner's election see Table 1 above. Reductions were recorded in most categories, with sexual offences, up by 12 per cent to 1,723, and drug crime, which was up by 11 per cent to 7,044, the main exceptions. Separate figures released by the Home Office in July showed that Avon and Somerset Police's detection rate was 30 per cent in 2011/12, unchanged from the previous year and among the highest in the country.
- 2.3 Table 2 shows the level of crime in Avon and Somerset in the four areas targeted by the new Police and Crime Commissioner for Avon and Somerset.
- 2.4 Young BME are more likely to be victims than contributors to the

development of the criminal system in the UK. In terms of progress through the youth justice system, some of the key patterns have been summarised in a recent review of the reformed youth justice system by the Audit Commission (2004) as:

- Young black people are more likely to receive a higher tariff response such as community sentences, and less likely to receive Reprimands and Final Warnings;
- There has been a disproportionate increase in the proportion of black and mixed race young people on bail who are remanded to custody;
- One in 12 black young offenders, and one in ten of those of mixed race, are sentenced to custody compared to one in 40 white young offenders;

- 2.5 The over-representation of black young people in criminal justice systems is by no means confined to the UK. In the UK, this evidence led the Youth Justice Board to commission research into ethnic differences at various stages in the youth justice process (Feilzer and Hood, 2004).
- 2.6 Lord Macdonald, former Director of Public Prosecutions, note that millions of Britons are denied justice by the persistence of racism. He describes racism as a "tubercular virus lurking in the shadows". Macdonald said, "We should not deny those millions of people for whom the comfort of social justice is still not constantly there, those people who still live, through no choice of their own, outside its embrace and protection." So what, if anything, could Mountstevens do to address this imbalance?

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 Between 28th February and the 12th March 2013 five focus groups were held. Young black and minority ethnic (BME) people were invited to take part in focus group sessions to gather their views in relation to policing and crime in Avon and Somerset.
- 3.2 The sessions were organised by Black South West Network (BSWN) in partnership with Voscur and the Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG). Young Black participants were offered the chance to share their views and help identify the key issues affecting BME young people that they would like Sue Mountstevens the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to address.
- 3.3 The focus groups sessions explored the following:
- Key issues affecting BME young people in relation to policing and crime;
 - Role of the PCC and BME youth and young people generally;
 - Empowering young people to share their experiences of being involved in the criminal justice system such as Stop & Search;
 - How to reduce the disproportionate number of BME young men in custody;
 - Identifying ways whereby the PCC could address the above problems
- 3.4 Young people from each focus group were then invited to present their findings to the new PCC at a round table meeting to be held in June. The focus groups

and the meeting with the PCC provide a good opportunity for the young people from a variety of cultures and backgrounds to make their voices heard on how the police and the criminal justice system impact on their lives.

- 3.5 In total 33 young people or more participated in the focus groups. The findings from the sessions are recorded below. Composition of the focus groups was ethnically diverse. The geographical spread of the parts of Avon & Somerset from which the young people came was, Bristol, Yeovil, Chard, Street, Martock, Burnham-on-Sea, Bridgewater and Somerton. The ethnic origins of the young people attending were African Caribbean, Sudanese, Angolan, Filipino, Somali, Iraqi, Pakistani and Spanish. There were also three white English young persons present who attended because they were friends of the group 2 (which met in Langport, Somerset). There were ten girls and twenty-three boys. All were either at senior school or attending college.
- 3.6 It has proved impossible to be more precise with regard to the numbers attending because some young people refused to be identified. This of itself bears witness to the suspicion with which young BME people regard the police.

4 FINDINGS

- 4.1 The findings in this report represent the views of thirty three or more young people from BME backgrounds that participated in several focus groups designed to elicit their ideas on the policing and crime issues affecting them; explore the roles of the PCC; how the new Commissioner should engage and involve them in decision making, how to encourage them to share their experience of stop and search and their views on criminal justice system. The finding also point to ideas and strategies where the PCC might to reduce the disproportionate number of BME young men in custody.
- 4.2 In the main the purpose of the work was to examine BME young people's attitudes to the current policing and criminal justice system and to test options for change. Limited time and resources meant extensive research could not be carried out into the extent to which the system discriminates against young BME people in Avon and Somerset. However, previous work had shown the system to be very badly stacked against BME. Table 3 below shows the percentages of ethnic groups sentenced in 2010.
- 4.3 Participants were asked for the views on the Commissioner's **plan for reducing the impact that anti-social behaviour has in their communities**. The majority of young people from all the sessions said they mistrust the police and therefore did not feel comfortable reporting crimes or seeking assistance even if they had been victims. They believe the police should invest in community development work with BME young people to help improve trust and establish a constructive relationship with BME groups.
- 4.4 Participants believe work with Trading Standards and other partners to tackle tobacco and alcohol sales to young people were needed to reduce antisocial behaviour. They also felt there was a need to ensure that traders responsible for underage alcohol and tobacco are targeted and not the young people themselves.

- 4.5 Participants felt that racism should be regarded as anti-social behaviour. The police should place more emphasis on training in equality and diversity not only within the force, but working in schools and colleges. It was strongly voiced that the police have a role to play in liaising with educational institutions in eradicating racist behaviour.
- 4.6 The PCC for Avon and Somerset also wants to: **Prevent and reduce violence, particularly violence towards women and girls** *“I will do this by encouraging and enabling reporting, supporting early intervention and improving access to support and services, particularly amongst those most vulnerable to harm”* she said.

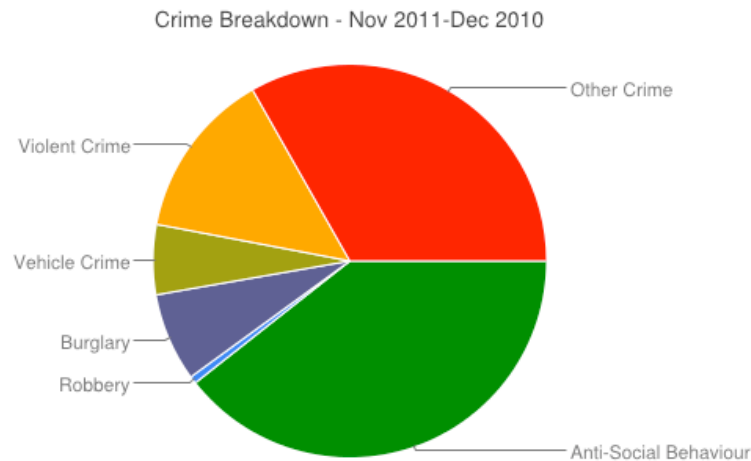


Table 2

- 4.7 The chart above shows the current levels of all four priorities areas including violent crime. Participants said there was a need to ensure swift police response and support for victims of hate crimes. Participants reported hate crime as a major issue. They felt the police could do more to ensure BME young people are aware that they can and should report incidents of race hate crime (including verbal hate crime) and whom they can contact for support (for example Support Against Racists Incidents (SARI) or Victim Support). At one of the Bristol focus groups the view was expressed that victims would approach SARI for help when faced with Race Hate crime because SARI was likely to achieve a positive result for the victim than a complaint direct to the police.
- 4.8 The PCC wants to: **Prevent and reduce crime in your area, particularly burglary offences.** *“I want to further reduce crime and improve feelings of safety in your area, with particular focus on domestic and commercial burglary. I will work to tackle the causes of crime and support joined up prevention, enforcement, rehabilitation and criminal justice approaches to youth and adult offending”.*

Ratio of the youth justice population to custodial sentences for different ethnic groups, 2006/07

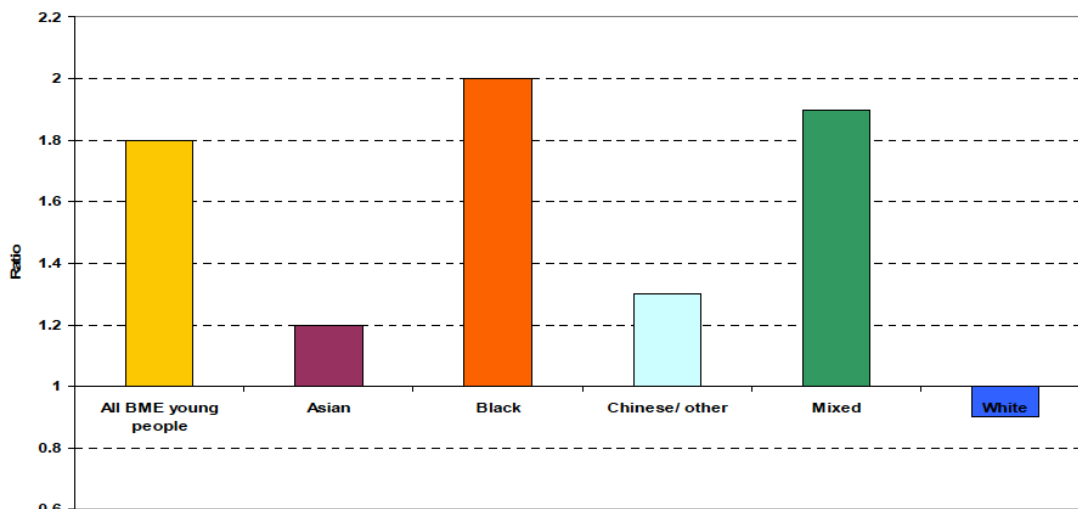


Table 3

4.9 BME young people are almost three times as likely to be sentenced to a long-term period of custody than anticipated given the composition of the youth offending population. For Black young people, the risk of a custodial sentence of two years or longer, is four times what might be expected (see tables 3 and 4)

Ratio of the youth justice population to sentences of long-term detention for different ethnic groups 2006/07

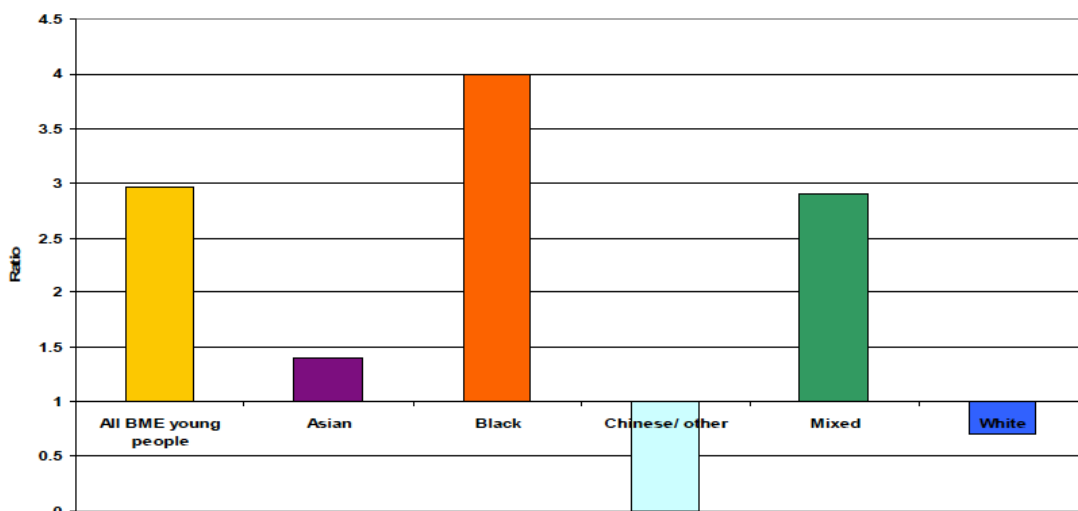


Table 4

4.10 Participants felt lack of knowledge about people's culture was in some way a contributory factor in the way they are treated by the system. They also emphasised that better knowledge of communities was essential for good policing to be effective. They felt better use could be made of good community policing including imaginative use of PCSOs. Many young people felt that PCSOs are more visible in their communities and more approachable. PCSOs can be employed to build good relations with BME young people and help reduce the risk of them being the victims or perpetrators of crime.

- 4.11 Participants would like to see more use of restorative justice (RJ), particularly for lower level crimes.
- 4.12 Participants thought further use of restorative justice (RJ), was a good way of getting perpetrators of Hate crime to address their victims.
- 4.13 The new PCC also wants to: **Ensure victims are at the heart of the criminal justice system.** She would like to see “*improved victim satisfaction with and influence over the services they receive*”. The new PCC wants to do this by “*developing an integrated approach to victim services that has the voice of victims at its heart. I will be a fierce advocate for all victims, and young people in particular, who are more likely to be victims of crime than any other group*” she said.
- 4.14 Participants said this could be achieved by establishing young peoples’ champions within the police and the office of the PCC to highlight issues raised by young people and to support BME and other young people who are more likely to be victims of crime.

Sentenced		White	Black	Asian	Other	Unknown	Total
Fine	London	15.8%	18.6%	20.6%	11.2%	17.1%	17.0%
	Rest of E&W	16.4%	19.4%	17.7%	10.9%	22.4%	17.1%
	E&W	16.4%	18.9%	18.8%	11.0%	21.4%	17.1%
Community Sentence	London	26.5%	29.3%	26.9%	18.6%	23.6%	26.7%
	Rest of E&W	32.9%	29.7%	27.9%	22.5%	30.0%	32.2%
	E&W	32.2%	29.5%	27.6%	20.7%	28.7%	31.2%
Suspended Sentence	London	9.7%	8.1%	8.8%	12.9%	11.5%	9.5%
	Rest of E&W	9.9%	9.0%	11.2%	11.1%	10.1%	9.9%
	E&W	9.8%	8.5%	10.4%	11.9%	10.4%	9.8%
Immediate Custody	London	25.3%	25.7%	25.2%	41.9%	30.0%	26.7%
	Rest of E&W	22.8%	27.7%	31.4%	42.7%	19.7%	23.3%
	E&W	23.0%	26.6%	29.2%	42.4%	21.8%	23.9%
Other	London	22.7%	18.3%	18.5%	15.4%	17.8%	20.1%
	Rest of E&W	18.0%	14.3%	11.7%	12.8%	17.7%	17.5%
	E&W	18.5%	16.5%	14.1%	14.0%	17.7%	18.0%
Total Sentenced	London	27,670	17,749	5,937	2,727	6,715	60,798
	Rest of E&W	231,923	14,196	10,651	3,339	26,515	286,624
	E&W	259,593	31,945	16,588	6,066	33,230	347,422

Source: Court Proceedings database

Table 5

Average immediate custodial sentence length at all courts by offence group and ethnic appearance, England and Wales 2010

Offence group	Average immediate custodial sentence length (months)					
	White	Black	Asian	Other	Unknown	Total
Violence against the person	16.8	20.1	23.6	21.8	20.2	17.8
Sexual offences	48.9	60.4	39.0	46.0	45.5	48.7
Burglary	18.5	22.7	16.9	17.5	18.7	18.7
Robbery	34.5	36.6	31.3	35.2	32.4	34.5
Theft and handling stolen goods	3.7	4.5	6.3	7.6	5.1	4.1
Fraud and forgery	11.5	9.3	11.7	10.3	11.9	11.0
Criminal damage	18.1	14.8	21.8	18.2	17.8	18.0
Drug offences	28.5	34.3	29.4	28.9	41.4	30.7
Other (excl motoring offences)	8.3	14.7	16.2	13.3	9.4	9.6
Indictable motoring offences	9.9	9.6	9.0	9.2	8.6	9.6
All indictable offences	14.9	20.8	19.9	19.7	17.6	16.2

Table 6

4.15 Taking into account the disproportionality of the above sentencing practice, the facilitation team was concerned about the value of BME young participants opinion as a means of informing change. For this reason it was decided to set out the results of the findings under the four headings outlined in the new Police and Crime Commissioner plan for Avon and Somerset. This gives the structure and feasibility of improving young people's participation, knowledge and monitoring the impact of their views.

4.16 We begin by looking at the numbers of young people in the criminal justice system; young people recommended under the four areas in the new policing and crime plan for Avon and Somerset; their suggested methods of improving public knowledge, inclusion and options for change.

5 OTHER ISSUES

5.1 **Other issues raised by BME young people that fall outside of the PCCs stated priorities are as follows:**

5.2 Participants said it was crucial to provide more cultural awareness training for the police to help them understand cultural and religious beliefs of diverse communities. Improving the 'cultural competence' would improve police engagement with BME communities and reduce potential tensions and mistrust of the police.

5.3 Participants also felt that the police do not reflect the diversity of the communities they live in and would like to see an increase in the number of police from BME backgrounds. The police should initiate work with BME young people and their families that could contribute to changing attitudes to BME people pursuing a career in the police. Ethnicity data relating to police officers were relatively complete with only 1.2% of all police officers in post without a declared ethnicity on 31 March 2011.

5.4 Between 2007 and 2011, the percentage of BME police officers in post rose from 3.9% to 4.8%. Police officers who defined themselves as Asian and Mixed accounted for 1.9% and 1.3% of all police officers respectively compared with 1% for Black police officers. There was also a small but steady increase in the representation of the Asian and Mixed groups across the five-year period from 1.5% and 1.0% in 2007, respectively. The proportion of police officers from the Black group remained stable at 1.0% during this period. The statutory duty imposed on the Constabulary is to promote & diversity actively and that presumes having as a goal recruiting a police force whose diversity matches that of the population it serves. The Equality Report of the Avon & Somerset Constabulary for 2012 estimates the BME component of the population of the constabulary area as 6% and at 12% in Bristol where the majority of BME people live. The proportion of BME officers from a BME background as at the date of the report was 4.7% and the statistics do not show a very vigorous recruiting strategy.

Police officers in post (full-time equivalents) by self-identified ethnicity, England and Wales as at 31 March 2007 - 2011

	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Chinese or Other	Not Stated	Total
2007	94.7%	1.0%	1.5%	1.0%	0.4%	1.4%	141,882
2008	94.6%	1.0%	1.6%	1.1%	0.5%	1.4%	141,854
2009	94.3%	1.0%	1.7%	1.2%	0.5%	1.3%	143,778
2010	94.1%	1.0%	1.8%	1.3%	0.5%	1.3%	143,735
2011	94.1%	1.0%	1.9%	1.3%	0.5%	1.2%	139,110

Source: Home Office

Table 7

5.5 The ethnic breakdown of senior police officers in post has been relatively stable over the last five years, with the percentage from a BME background at around 3.0%. In 2011, 1.2% were from an Asian background, 1.0% Mixed, 0.7% Black and 0.1% Chinese or Other.

Senior police officers in post (full-time equivalents) by self-identified ethnicity, England and Wales as of March 2007-2011

	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Chinese or Other	Not Stated	Total
2007	96.6%	0.7%	1.2%	0.6%	0.2%	0.7%	1,662
2008	96.3%	0.8%	1.1%	0.8%	0.2%	0.8%	1,693
2009	95.7%	0.7%	1.4%	0.9%	0.2%	1.1%	1,713
2010	95.6%	0.7%	1.3%	1.2%	0.1%	1.2%	1,725
2011	96.3%	0.7%	1.2%	1.0%	0.1%	0.7%	1,583

Source: Home Office

Table 8

5.6 Participants felt that if there were more diversity in the force there would be greater appreciation of why BME people behaved in certain ways and fewer misunderstandings, which led to confrontations. Some young people feel the use of police cautions, which do not result in arrest or lead to prosecutions, can lead to them being stigmatised when they are seeking employment and training. The use of police cautions on young people should be minimised and where they are used should not be kept on record.

- 5.7 Participants said the police should work with other criminal justice agencies to help ensure that BME people are aware of their rights if they are ever stopped or challenged by the police. There was a need to promote among BME people a greater understanding of legal process within the criminal justice system.
- 5.8 Participants felt that if BME young people were more aware of their rights, where to seek help and how to deal with the system this would save the state time and money.
- 5.9 There was also much common ground on the unfairness of CRB checks, which disclose indiscriminately police cautions, arrests, which do not result in prosecutions, and arrests that result in acquittals. These CRB records are not an accurate guide of a person's past history as far as criminality is concerned and they blight the future of young people forever making employment difficult.
- 5.10 Failure to address these issues presents the police with a serious problem as regards crime reduction. In four out of the five groups consulted there was a basic mistrust of the police, which led to a reluctance to report crime and engage with the police at any level. In contrast, the rural group trusted the police and wanted to engage with them in tackling racism as well as petty criminality and vandalism. One person from a Somali background said that Somali people often don't know understand the law. It was a cultural matter and did not want to break the law but did so through ignorance. Also the police would not listen to them when they tried to explain this. More needs to be done to educate the Somali community about what the law is and also to explain to them what their rights are.
- 5.11 This led to discussion about whether more should be done at school to teach young people a little basic law and also more about civil rights. "We are told that in this country we are policed by consent and this principle was easier to respect if in turn we are treated with respect. When we are stopped and interrogated by the police are we obliged to answer when we don't know why we are being interrogated?" said a participant.
- 5.12 There was a widespread mistrust of the police. "Why do they speak to us in such a threatening way? Even their body language is threatening" said another participant. A further discussion took place about wearing bandanas and headbands. Young people from different parts of Bristol sometimes wore coloured headbands or bandanas to show what part of town they were from. The police assumed the youngsters were in a gang and would stop them and so naturally they would react angrily. "Why should I have to give my name and address if I haven't done anything?" a focus group members asked.
- 5.13 At one of the sessions in Bristol, a representative from the PCC's office intervened when stop and search was being discussed and distributed little booklets about people's rights when stopped and searched. There was a suggestion that earlier intervention by the police and other agencies would prevent a lot of crime happening. The PCC representative at the meeting explained how the police budget was agreed and how it was allocated to different divisions within the region. Naturally Bristol gets the biggest share but there isn't enough to go round. Preventative policing suffers from this.

- 5.14 There was a view that Police Community Support Workers were often better at doing community policing than full police constables. A participant commented that they would never report a racist incident to the police, as they never took it seriously. Instead she would always report racist incidents which happened often to her family to SARI as they were much more effective in getting action and results than the police. It was very hurtful to her and her family not being believed by the police.
- 5.15 Another person said that he had never reported a crime to the police because it wasn't worth it. In the case of an African Caribbean making a complaint, they said, the police have made up their minds before they even start investigating it. There was a feeling in hate crime cases that the perpetrators of hate crime generally got away with it and that if you reported a hate crime you often ended up being charged along with the perpetrator.
- 5.16 Someone else commented that young black males may have the highest arrest rate but they also are the statistically highest victims of crime. "You got the feeling that the attitude of the police was that BME people did not have right to complaint". Participants also raised the issue of the high prison rates of young black men. There was a feeling that there was a need for more black magistrates and judges and also in the case of the Magistrates Courts a need for more black Court officials and assessors to advise the Bench. The PCC representative at the meeting intervened again to point out that it was also the case that there was a similarly high rate of young black men being sectioned under the Mental Health Act. This led to more discussion about lack of cultural awareness not only among the police but also in the criminal justice system.
- 5.17 There was then more discussion about lack of knowledge among young people about what their rights were. This led to discussion about police cautions. Several contributors said that they or people they knew had admitted to alleged offences simply to get the police off their backs and get home even though they had done nothing. Other contributors talked of cases where they had been charged and the offences were then dropped or else the case had gone to trial and they had been found 'Not Guilty'. Despite this a subsequent CRB check would disclose that they had been charged. This had detrimental effects later on their chances of getting a job. It could not be right that your future should be blighted for ever because you had just been warned by the police about an incident which had never been subjected to the test of court proceedings or even if it had and you had been found not guilty or the case had been dropped yet this was on your record for the rest of your life.
- 5.18 Many contributors at this stage shrugged their shoulders and said: 'I don't have any rights in this country anyway'. There was a general mistrust of the police. This, many contributors said, led to an under-reporting of crime by the BME communities. It was also alleged that a fear of reprisals from the perpetrator of a crime to a member of the black community might lead to reprisals by the criminal or friends of the criminal.
- 5.19 Another contributor said that frequently criminals who were carrying weapons would pass them on to younger members of the black community because they would get a more lenient sentence than adult black people carrying weapons.

6 RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

- 6.1 In contrast, at the focus group held in Langport where the participants all came from more rural areas, participants commented that relationship with the police were generally good. There was racism but mostly it was based on ignorance. Everyone then split into groups to list matters of concern, issues with police around respect and lack of confidence in them was identified as a key area of concern. One participant said “My family had been bothered by attacks by hooligans when the shop window was smashed. The first time this happened the police arrived but far too late. The second time the police came at once and dealt with the matter effectively. The hooligans were obliged to sign a behaviour agreement”.
- 6.2 Participants were also worried about cyber crime and talked about how a website they had set up was hacked into and no one seemed to be able to find out how this had happened.
- 6.3 The Langport group was concerned about the amount of under-age drinking and the ease, with which youth could get their hands on alcohol, thus was raised as a major concern. One participant said, “Off-licences do not observe the law and it is not enforced”.
- 6.4 One participant expressed the issue that hate crime caused his family much hurt and offence. “When we first came to England ten years ago were been bothered by a lot of hate crime/racism. When my family complained the police were slow to take action but things have improved a lot”. He also admitted that “There is still a lot of casual racism but most of it is just ignorance”. There was some comment to the effect that most people were fair minded and tolerant.
- 6.5 The Langport discussion group also talked about an incident in Bridgewater when a member of the group was confronted with a group of youths who shouted racial abuse at him. He didn’t understand why. He didn’t think of calling the police and said it didn’t occur to him that the police would help. He didn’t think it was serious enough.
- 6.6 Another member of the group remembered an incident when he was subjected to racist name-calling by a youth. In his case the police were called and took action. He thought they were ‘pretty good’. He and his mother were invited to a restorative justice session when the police produced the offender and confronted him with what he had done and he soon understood that what he had done was wrong. This group conceded that there was a lot of low-level racism based mostly on ignorance. One of the group had been fostered and his foster parents made a lot of thoughtless racist comments through ignorance.
- 6.7 Two other Langport discussion groups talked of incidents when members of the group had been either caught smoking weed or else caught bringing in weed from abroad but did not blame this on racism. On the other hand they knew that they should not have been doing this; on the other hand they were

concerned about how easy it was for under 18 year olds to get tobacco and alcohol from shops and off-licences. They thought there wasn't nearly enough monitoring by the police of what was going on.

- 6.8 These groups also commented on casual racism in school, in college and in daily life but said that they had just learned to live with it.
- 6.9 The groups then reported back with their comments, which had been captured, flip chats, which each group had used. The most noticeable observation, which was widely held, was that the group had not had much interaction with the police who did not have a high profile in rural Somerset, which was where the entire group came from. None had been stopped and searched and none complained about unacceptable behaviour with the police. Where they had experienced contact with the police (see the two restorative justice incidents narrated above) the reaction was generally favourable and sometimes quite complimentary.
- 6.10 There was also a generally favourable attitude to PCSOs who, the group thought, were good at dealing informally with minor incidents. See view expressed above that the time of the fully qualified police should be directed to dealing with major incidents and not with minor matters which could be dealt with by informal means.
- 6.11 There was however, a lot of discussion about the easy accessibility of tobacco and cigarettes and concern was expressed that very little seemed to be done about monitoring off-licences, corner shops and supermarkets which were responsible for selling these items with no questions asked. The group also talked about vandalism and thought that perpetrators should be forced to confront the effects of their behaviour.
- 6.12 The group thought that the attitude of the police was no different from the society in which they lived and casual, thoughtless racism and language were everywhere in schools, colleges and everyday life. This was not confined to racist talk but homophobic talk – such as referring to someone as 'gay'. All the members of the group seemed to accept this as inevitable and something you just had to put up with. They thought that there had been a gradual improvement over the past ten years during which they had been growing up in the area. They were strongly of the view that the police had a role, along with school and college authorities, in educating the public, young and old, to understand equality and diversity and how painful and humiliating racism was. People seemed to think that racist remarks were 'just a joke' but they were not a joke to the victims.
- 6.13 The following were identified by the group as matters of concern in order of priority:
- 6.14 When dealing with a situation involving young BME people the police should try to listen more. They must realise that in dealing with BME people there may be cultural issues to take into account. There is still a lot of racism in the police and there is a continuing need for cultural awareness training. There is a need for more PCSOs to support the police. PCSOs are good at sorting out minor matters. Fully qualified police officers should be free to concentrate on major

criminal behaviour. There is a need for more imagination in dealing with criminal behaviour – including race hate crime. For instance there is a need to use restorative justice more to bring home to offenders the harm that race hate crime does to victims.

6.15 There is a need for much more emphasis on training in equality and diversity not only in the police force but in schools and colleges. The police have a role to play in liaising with educational institutions in eradicating racist behaviour.

6.16 In country areas young people are getting away with tobacco and alcohol misuse too easily because retailers are selling drink and cigarettes to under-age people. There needs to be tighter law enforcement in this area.

6.17 Note by organisers:

This group of youngsters has been meeting regularly over the years under the auspices of Somerset Racial Equality Council ('SREC'). Over this period, despite the fact that the group includes members from across the entire county, they have become friends and supported each other. It is a model worth following in other areas of the South West.

Also: the maturity of views of these young people contrasts with the bitterness expressed by young people in the groups, which met in Bristol. This may have something to do with the fact that many (but not all) of the members of the group came here originally as unaccompanied child asylum-seekers and were fostered by local (white) middle class families whose attitudes they have absorbed. Most of the group are educational achievers either with aspirations to go on to university or already settled into college courses.

Finally the organisers suggest that it may be worthwhile for officers from the Bristol Division of the Avon & Somerset Constabulary to have discussions with their colleagues from the Somerset Division. Although there may be social and class reasons for the mature and temperate attitude of the members of the Langport focus group as regards the police and criminal justice system, the style and practice of policing in the Somerset Division may also contribute to the generally positive attitudes of the BME youngsters in that area.