

Youth Violence and Vulnerability Community Listening Project – Summary Report

Introduction

This is the report of the Community Listening Project on Youth Violence and Vulnerability based on the findings from both group and individual consultations carried out with local residents living in Essex, including Southend and Thurrock unitary authorities, aged 10 years and over during November and December 2021. It updates the findings from previous consultations carried out in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

The project was run by the Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services (ECVYS) as part of their wider annual ‘Youth Voices’ on behalf of the Violence and Vulnerability Unit (VVU), with data collection carried out in each District by Essex based Community Voluntary Services (CVS), and analysis undertaken by Maldon and District CVS.

A number of methods were used to collect people’s views. They were:

- Local community and social groups including coffee mornings, job club, and an adults with learning disabilities group
- Outreach at local schools, colleges, shops, libraries and churches
- Online surveys

In total 378 people aged between 10-60+ years from all 4 Essex regions (Mid, South, West and North) across 7 Districts took part in the community listening consultation. Almost double the number that participated last time.

The findings form the basis of this summary report.

For a copy of full report and findings please contact ECVYS on 01371 874273 or officeadmin@ecvys.org.uk

Key Findings

1. Communities’ biggest concern about youth violence and vulnerability is still knife crime

The findings from this year’s consultation show that communities’ biggest concern about youth violence and vulnerability is still knife crime (see table 1). This concern is in broad agreement with the findings from the detached youth work listening exercise being carried out in parallel with



this consultation. Plus Essex Police figures for the VVU show that knife enabled crime against under 25 year olds has been an increasing trend over the past 24 months.

Overall communities' concerns about youth violence and vulnerability have not changed since last year (see table 1). They are still concerned about gang violence, drugs, anti-social behaviour, becoming a victim of crime and lack of police enforcement and positive activities for young people.

Table 1: What is your biggest concern for you right now regarding youth violence in your local area?

Top 10 concerns in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21

	2021-22 n = 378	2020-21 n= 202
	%	%
Knife crime	35	43
Gang violence including county lines	23	30
Drugs - taking and dealing and related violence	15	n/a
Theft	14	n/a
Anti-social behaviour	14	24
Being a victim of crime	10	13
Not concerned	5	6
Lack of action by police	4	3
Being out after dark / alone	3	n/a
Lack of youth groups and activities	3	5

Reading about the number of young people who are stabbed and murdered. It's a concern that this kind of violence seems to be more frequent, and is starting to be more widespread. Uttlesford

Young people do not have good activities on offer so they do other things which can be disruptive. Maldon

Gang crime is an increasing problem especially with gangs seeking to expand their territory using county lines, exploiting vulnerable youth.

Epping Forest

Having enough police to support. Braintree

What appears to be an increasing number of youths carrying knives.

Brentwood

2. Communities are worried about young people being exploited by gangs in their local area

Over two thirds (68%) of respondents are worried about young people being exploited by gangs in their local area. The reasons they were worried about this, regardless of what area of Essex they lived in, were press and social media stories, and factors that made young people vulnerable including drug use, the lack of local youth activities available, peer pressure and poverty.



3. The majority of people feel safe when out in their local community

Despite participant’s concerns about youth violence and gang exploitation, almost two thirds (65%) feel safe when they are out and about in their local area.

4. What makes people feel unsafe

However, a large minority - almost one in 4 people (24%) feel unsafe when out in their local community. They mainly feel unsafe after dark due to poor lighting, large groups of people and lack of police presence. And these top 3 answers given for what makes them feel unsafe have not changed since the previous consultation. See table 2 below.

Table 2: What makes you feel unsafe?

Top 3 concerns in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21

	2021-22 n = 378	2020-21 n = 202
	%	%
The dark / unlit areas / poor lighting	25	52
Groups of people	20	15
Lack of police	12	22

*Poor lighting makes you feel vulnerable when you see groups of young people gathering it might be innocent but you don't know. **Brentwood***

*Large gatherings of youths that don't seem to have a purpose. Unfamiliar places after dark with little or no street lighting. **Epping Forest***

*Bad Street lighting, groups hanging around for no reason. **Colchester***

*No visual police, patrol cars, drunks, lack of street lighting, turn off too early. **Tendring***

5. What a safe space for young people should look like

The main areas of agreement of what a safe place for young people should look like were:

- Well decorated and warm, or sheltered if outdoor
- Accessible - local, drop in and open late
- Light touch adult supervision
- Multi-activity to appeal to all tastes and talents
- Café or food to be available
- Wi-Fi and charging points



Participants' descriptions of what a safe space for young people should look like were very similar to those made in the previous consultation.

6. Activities for young people

Participants listed a wide variety of activities for young people to do. They were in order of frequency mentioned:

- Sports
- Outdoor activities
- Music
- Community and voluntary activities
- Music
- Digital and gaming
- Life skills
- Arts and crafts
- Performing arts



Milford on Sea Community Centre
Youth Club flyer

These suggestions are the same as those given in the previous consultation

7. Communities feel that crime 'hotspots' should be tackled using both direct and indirect methods

Communities feel that crime hotspots should be tackled directly by having visible police patrols, better lighting and CCTV in those areas to deter groups of young people or criminals, and indirectly by offering young people alternative places to hang out in such as youth centres or clubs and activities to do.

More community policing in that area, talking to young people not necessarily arresting them. Maldon

Give them Youth centres etc. with organised activities, make them feel part of their community. Tendring

Good youth provisions and outreach workers. Epping Forest

Better lit areas and more policing. Braintree



Obvious CCTV as deterrents, random police patrols. Brentwood

8. Community suggestions for a VVU knife reduction media campaign

Communities feel that any media campaign to reduce knife crime needs to:

- Stress the impact it has on both victim, perpetrator and their families and friends
- Be designed in conjunction with young people, especially those directly affected both victims and perpetrators
- Look at previous campaigns and initiatives
- Offer information and other ways for young people to stay safe rather than carrying knives

Save a life, drop the knife. Epping Forest

A knife is a tool not a weapon. Maldon

9. Whole community approach is needed to tackle youth violence and vulnerability

Communities feel that the way to tackle youth violence is a whole community approach in which young people, parents, schools, youth services and the police work together educating and supporting those who are vulnerable to provide positive role models and offer alternative ways of behaving. Suggestions include:

- More community policing so that they are visible on the streets and can build relationships with young people
- Greater understanding and awareness of young people's needs and issues
- More positive examples of young people's behaviour. Not all young people are bad
- More funding for youth services, clubs and activities
- Training for staff and volunteers working with young people to be able to communicate in a non-judgemental way and have training in mental health first aid to build relationships and trust with them
- Support for vulnerable families so that parents feel able to model positive behaviour
- More promotion of existing online and community resources and support is needed to make young people aware of what is out there



Conclusion

The findings from this year's community listening project are very similar to the previous consultation which suggests that we know communities views on youth violence and what they think should be done about it.

Communities want a holistic approach in which parents, communities, schools, voluntary organisations, youth services and the police all work together to address this complex issue both directly and indirectly, responding to existing bad and criminal behaviour, tackling structural issues that support such behaviour such as poor lighting and paving, and underfunding of youth and police services whilst offering opportunities that encourage change and positive behaviour.

What is now needed is funding and action from the various agencies to tackle youth violence and vulnerability and time for that action to have an impact on communities and their views and experiences. Otherwise the same issues will continue to be reported each year and the public will lose confidence in organisations' ability to achieve change.

Recommendations

1. Joined up working between young people, parents, communities, voluntary organisations, the police, youth groups and schools to build relationships and find holistic solutions to youth violence
2. Promotion of positive examples of young people's behaviour
3. More visible community policing and law enforcement
4. More safe indoor and outdoor spaces for young people where they can socialise, undertake a range of activities including sports, digital, creative, community and school work
5. Training for people working with young people in mental health first aid and non-judgemental communication techniques
6. Improved street lighting – increased hours and locations
7. Greater use of CCTV to deter criminals
8. Targeted support for vulnerable families
9. More funding for existing organisations including the police, local authorities, schools, mental health services and youth organisations to carry out these recommendations.

