

North Yorkshire Community Commission Final Report: Key Priorities and Recommendations for Change

April 2024

Foreword from the Police, Fire, and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire, Zoe Metcalfe:

I welcome the key recommendations from the Community Commission within this report. In particular, it reflects the value of additional mental health training for officers and improved communication between the police and the wider public, as well as the importance of the PFCC's role in holding the police to public account.

Introduction

The North Yorkshire Community Commission is a community-led project funded by the North Yorkshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's (PFCC) Community fund and delivered by Leaders Unlocked. Over a six-month period, six representatives from underrepresented and traditionally marginalised groups across North Yorkshire were recruited and supported to develop and carry out peer-led research within their own communities. The group then developed and presented a selection of key priorities, findings and recommendations for change for the PFCC, North Yorkshire Police (NYP), North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service (NYFRS) and partners.

In total the Community Commission held six focus groups and engaged with 90 underrepresented community members from the following organisations:

- York LGBT Forum
- Up For Yorkshire
- Ark House Rehab
- Revival North Yorkshire
- Northallerton Mencap
- Disability Support Forum

Note

The Community Commission's work was undertaken in the months before North Yorkshire's transition to a Combined Authority and Mayoral system. It is intended that the findings and recommendations put to the PFCC should be transferred to the relevant authority responsible for Policing, Fire and Crime following the May 2024 election.

Community Commission Project Overview



Police Visibility & Community Relationships

Findings:

Groups feel that they have lost the community policing relationship that used to exist. Many, especially in more rural areas said they never saw police officers and wanted more visible police presence to create reassurance.

The lack of relationship was increased by constant staff changes and officers and PCSOs regularly moving to new roles, making it difficult for communities to build trusted relationships with their local NYP contacts.

Community groups we spoke to could not name any local officers and wouldn't know how to contact police for non-emergency issues.

Quotes:

"I have lived here for 18 years, and you used to be able to see a local policeman on a bike every day – I haven't seen one for several years."

"No familiarity with local police."

"Community engagement is challenging; we can't engage when we want to."

"I wouldn't bother ringing the police as they would take too long to get here."

Recommendations:

- **Police officers should attend local community groups more regularly while on patrol. This could include dropping into community cafés, food banks, and other community initiatives.**
- **NYP should put greater consideration to the longer-term impact when assigning officers and PCSOs to community relationship roles. These roles should go to staff looking to build long-lasting community relationships.**
- **Promote more widely to local communities who their local police and fire contacts are and how to contact them.**

Final Meeting Outcome:

North Yorkshire Police agreed to share the contact details of area commanders with Community Commission researchers to more easily allow community groups to contact local officers and arrange engagement visits.

Hate Crime

Findings:

Authorities' responses to hate crimes varies drastically. Some reported receiving positive support on one occasion, and not receiving it in others.

Hate crimes are radically underreported. In particular, we heard how instances of transphobia are made more difficult to report because of its acceptance in public discord and transphobic rhetoric by public figures in positions of authority.

Quotes:

"Who you get on the switchboard can make a real difference."

"Media enables bigots; police awareness but lack of proactivity."

"Death by a thousand cuts - if we reported every time, I'd be doing nothing else."

Recommendations:

- **Make more public shows of solidarity with protected groups, such as the trans community, to demonstrate that North Yorkshire does not tolerate hate crime and discrimination.**
- **For NYP, delete discriminatory or abusive comments and responses on your own social media accounts.**
- **Report successful hate crime uplifts and positive report outcomes to relevant community groups to increase confidence in reporting.**

Final Meeting Outcome:

PFCC's office agreed to develop a coms campaign on a positive hate crime reporting outcome shared in the meeting to increase confidence in reporting.

Community Safety

Findings:

Lots of marginalised and underrepresented community groups do not feel safe both out in public and while using public services, including on the streets, on public transport, and in provided accommodation. This was consistent among many different groups, who all felt fearful of victimisation.

It was raised that there needs to be more methods of accessing support and reporting crime while out and about. This would make individuals safer and more confident to access all areas of their community.

Quotes:

"Need a hub where people can go to report crime, reaching out to the police is scary."

"People feel safer on the streets than in accommodation provided."

"Members of the LGBT community won't go out alone; it affects people's lives."

Recommendations:

- **Develop an 'Ask for Angela' style campaign that allows people to report feeling unsafe in various public settings. Staff would be trained in who to contact and what action to take.**

Final Meeting Outcome:

Both the PFCC office and NYP to hold further conversations on developing a community safety campaign in partnership with local businesses.

Mental Health

Findings:

Mental health is an often-overlooked factor in many police, crime and community issues.

Groups we spoke to recognised that police have a role to play in mental health but are not adequately trained to offer the level of support or understanding often needed. There was concern that those with mental health issues may be wrongly criminalised and discriminated against.

It was recognised that there are mental health support options available but that access barriers including waiting lists, cost, and not knowing what suitable support is available was a serious issue.

Quotes:

"Police are just not well trained enough to deal with mental health issues."

"The support system has eroded – lack of investment"

"Poor mental health and crime go hand in hand"

Recommendations:

- **Develop better signposting to ensure that individuals are directed to the best support service to meet their needs.**
- **Ensure that all officers and professionals dealing with the public have a minimum level of mental health training.**

Final Meeting Outcome:

North Yorkshire Police shared their new implementation of the 'Right Care Right Person' scheme aimed at diverting mental health related incidents away from police and towards more appropriate services.

Transparency

Findings:

Openness and transparency amongst authorities were recurring concerns among the groups we spoke to. Lots were unaware of the role of the PFCC, or that they could make complaints through this route. The structures and methods of holding police to account, including the complaint process, should be made clearer.

Communication between authorities and communities could be improved. In particular, surrounding the topics of return of goods by NYP. Community members we spoke to said the process was slow and they were not kept well-informed about the progress of their property.

Quotes:

"No cohesion between different teams."

"Foster better communication and collaboration among service providers."

"Can't be honest with the police."

Recommendations:

- **Utilise the upcoming change within North Yorkshire and York to a mayoral system to ensure clear channels for holding police to account. This should included ensuring a well-promoted and easy-to-understand complaints process.**
- **Improve communication from police to the public, including more frequent and reliable updates on issues such as return of property.**

Final Meeting Outcome:

PFCC's office shared new plans to improve the transparency of the complaints process and agreed to provide updates and the project progresses.

Conclusion

The Community Commission provided an opportunity for underrepresented groups to share their experiences and opinions of police, fire, crime, and community issues. It is hoped that the research findings and recommendations for change will be recognised by authorities and partners as a valuable resource for improving services for local communities and will be taken forward by the relevant agencies.

Contact

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