

Children's Parliament

Police Powers to Stop and Search Children and Young People for Alcohol

Children's Parliament Consultation
Final Report
July 2016



Contents

Introduction	
About this consultation	3
About the children	3
About Children's Parliament	4
What do the police do?	5
Children's view of the police	6
How children would feel if they were stopped by the police	7
Pros – why police should have these powers	8
Cons – why police shouldn't have these powers	9
Children's views on police powers to stop children and young people for alcohol	10
Final thoughts	12

Acknowledgements

Thank you to MCPs and staff from our partner schools:

- Calderside Academy, Blantyre, South Lanarkshire
- Sciennes Primary, Edinburgh



Children's Parliament
Summerhall
Edinburgh
EH9 1PL
0131 558 9030


www.childrensparliament.org.uk

info@childrensparliament.org.uk

 [@creative_voices](https://twitter.com/creative_voices)

© Children's Parliament 2016

Registered as a Scottish Charity SC026247

 We acknowledge the support of the Scottish Government through a CYPFEIF and ALEC Fund Grant

Introduction

About this consultation

The Scottish Government is facilitating a formal consultation process about the possibility of Police Scotland receiving new powers to stop and search children and young people for alcohol. The Government has not yet taken a position on whether these powers are needed and is therefore using this consultation to open up discussion around this topic and inform any future decisions. This new power is described as:

‘the power to search a child or young person under the age of 18 for alcohol, where a constable has reasonable grounds to suspect that the person is under the age of 18 and has alcohol in a public place.’¹

Children’s Parliament was commissioned by Scottish Government to engage directly with children to explore their views on the power to stop and search children and young people for alcohol. We facilitated workshops that addressed the following questions:

- What do the police do?
- How would you feel if you were stopped by the police?
- Pros – why should police have these powers?
- Cons – why shouldn’t police have these powers?
- Should police have a new power to stop and search children and young people for alcohol?

About the children

The consultation workshops involved a total of 40 Members of Children’s Parliament (MCPs) between the ages of 8 and 13 years old. 23 boys and 17 girls took part in this consultation. We worked in two schools – a primary in Edinburgh and a secondary in South Lanarkshire. We sought to work with children from diverse backgrounds, including children from areas of multiple deprivation and children with learning difficulties.

Children by year group:

- P4 – 3 children
- P5 – 3 children
- P6 – 12 children
- P7 – 2 children
- S1 – 10 children
- S2 – 10 children

The quotes in this report come directly from the children.

¹ Scottish Government (2016) Consultation on Police Powers to Search Children and Young People for Alcohol. Available at: https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/organised-crime-and-police-powers-unit/under18search/user_uploads/421031_p1--2-.pdf.

About Children's Parliament

Children's Parliament (CP) is Scotland's Centre of Excellence for children's participation and engagement.

Children's Parliament works for a future where all children in Scotland are actively engaged in shaping our world so that everyone is healthy, happy and safe. We believe all children should live and grow with dignity and be valued for what they can offer the world.

We work creatively through projects, consultations and training programmes to improve communication between children and adults and to build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding. This enables us to explore our world together. We provide children with opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings so that they can influence life at home, in school and in the community through change at a local and national level.

Children's Parliament uses children's rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the foundation for all our work and each project/consultation begins with an input about children's rights so that participating children increase their knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC and how it impacts upon their lives.

Every space we create is a Children's Parliament.

worried - About telling my parents.

Embarrassed

Everyone is looking at you if you were bad guy. Or that I got caught.

scared - Of getting in jail.

Nervous

Because maybe they will search more and I will end up in the Police station.

What do the police do?

We asked children about what they thought the police do for our communities and how they felt about the police generally. The children had varied experiences with the police with some reporting direct contact with police about an incident at home or in the community, others being familiar with police because they've visited their school, and some only seeing police from a distance as they were out in their community or from what they saw on television.

Children thought that the role of the police was to:

- Keep us safe
- Solve crimes
- Use weapons
- Look for clues
- Uphold the law
- Arrest criminals
- Work at the airports
- Go to court to report
- Obey their commanders
- Bring justice to the world
- Keep control at big events
- Handcuff "naughty" people
- Give parking/speeding tickets
- Make people feel less worried
- Walk around checking on things
- Guard important people like the Prime Minister
- Help on the streets when traffic lights aren't working
- Go to crashes and help the injured and find out what happened
- Keep everyone safe and happy by dealing with people who do the wrong things

Children's view of the police

The children had varying feelings about the police. The majority felt positively about the police, recognising that they were working to keep people safe and calm down situations that were out of control. When they saw police, they said they felt safe and protected.

Other children said that a police presence made them feel worried and nervous because they didn't want to do something wrong and get in trouble or because it might indicate that there was trouble nearby. Some of these children had experienced incidents to which the police were called and these experiences have stuck with the children, making them feel anxious about the police generally.

Children often stated that they felt comfortable with the individual police officers they knew (i.e. community officers based at their school, a neighbour who is a police officer, etc.), but some felt more unsure or suspicious of the police as a whole.

All of the children stressed the importance and value of building relationships between the police and children and young people. They felt that it would help to know more police officers and to see them outwith crisis situations, i.e. at community or school events.

Building positive and mutually respectful relationships between the police and children and young people is particularly critical if new powers are granted to stop and search children and young people for alcohol.

How children would feel if they were stopped by the police

Using a visualisation exercise, we asked children to imagine what it would be like to be stopped by the police while they were out in their community. The majority of the children had never spoken to the police while out in public before and had only engaged with the police in a casual setting, like a school visit. A small number of the children had experience with the police in a more serious situation following an incident at home or in the community.

The children identified the following words to describe how they would feel if a police officer stopped them and asked to search their belongings:



Many children said they would wonder why the police are coming to talk to them – “What have I done? Why are they picking me? Do I look like I’ve done something? Are they mixing me up with someone else?” They said they would feel worried that they were being picked out for something when they haven’t done anything wrong. Many children thought they would feel nervous or anxious if a police officer approached them because they wouldn’t know what to expect or how the police officer would treat them.

Additionally, children worried about how this would be reported back to their parents and the reaction they would have upon hearing their child was “caught by the police today”. Most children would want to tell their parents themselves, but some worried that their parents might overreact or assume that they’d done something wrong, even if that wasn’t the case, and they might be punished anyway.

Children’s Views on Consequences

In the workshops, we asked children to think about why it might be a good idea for police to have the power to search children and young people for alcohol. Children thought that having this power might help keep children safe, especially if it was done in a friendly, respectful and understanding way. They thought that if police were looking out and stopping children and young people for alcohol it could potentially “show that police care for the kids in Scotland.”

The children identified the following reasons why these new powers could be a good idea:

- It could keep you safe if you have had too much to drink e.g. stop you having an accident
- Can stop you from getting into more trouble
- Your own safety
- Makes you think about your health benefits for the future
- Teaches you that the police are looking out for you. For good reasons, not just to scare you.
- Might stop you getting into trouble with your parents. This would be reassuring to your parents.
- Helps prevent peer pressure, thinking that you’re cool if you have alcohol, wanting to fit in.
- Makes you less likely to have alcohol.
- Makes people safe
- Makes sure they don’t get hurt.
- Keeping yourself healthy (liver, etc.)
- They could find more than just alcohol.
- If the police could search your bags that would make you think twice.
- Before they search your bags they should tell you why they’ve chosen you.
- The police are trying to keep you safe from harm.
- It shows the police care for the kids of Scotland and don’t want you to have anything happen to you.
- You will stop because you make different choices and not do it again.
- It helps the environment we live in and makes it less likely to affect smaller and younger children.

Cons – why police shouldn't have these powers

In the workshops, we asked children to think about why it might not be a good idea for police to have the power to search children and young people for alcohol. Children felt that being stopped by the police in public could be very embarrassing and have a negative impact on your reputation, even if you didn't have anything on you/didn't do anything wrong. They were concerned about how it was done and how the police treated the child or young person they stopped.

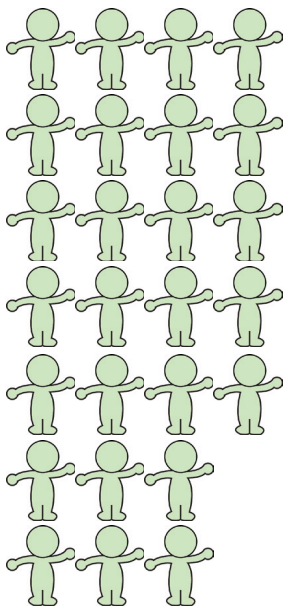
The children identified the following reasons why these new powers might not be a good idea:

- Would make you feel uncomfortable because you may have done nothing wrong
- The police may take advantage of the situation
- If the police approach you they should make you feel safe and be as nice as possible. Sometimes they disrespect you.
- If you say no to the police, that would make them more suspicious.
- Makes you feel embarrassed if people were staring at you.
- Invading your privacy i.e. personal belongings, etc.
- It could have a negative impact on your behaviour around police.
- Your parents might lose trust in you.
- You might learn to be sneakier about it.
- Police would go through your private stuff.
- Police think they're the boss of you.
- It may not be their stuff i.e. carrying it for someone else.
- You would feel intimidated, worried and embarrassed
- Feel like 'why did they choose me?'
- When you're being searched, you might have a lot of stuff in [your bag] and other people will be able to see your personal belongings.
- Parents might overreact.
- Family or friends might think of that as a bad thing and not trust you.
- When you are drunk you probably feel better lying.
- You would be judged by people who saw you being searched.
- The impact on your family and the people around you – parents being upset and angry (even if you didn't do anything wrong)
- People might film it and put it on YouTube.
- If a group of young people do something and all young people get blamed.
- Gets around [school and community] quickly and people ask a lot of questions.
- If they get pulled over, they might not care and will just get someone else to buy it for them.
- The impact it has on children – feeling nervous, embarrassed, etc.

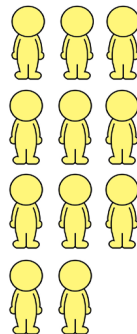
Children's views on police powers to stop children and young people for alcohol

At the end of the workshop, we asked all 40 children to vote individually on whether or not police should have a new power to stop and search children and young people for alcohol. Views on this question were varied. While the majority felt that this power might keep children safe, there were a lot of qualifiers and questions about what this would mean and how these powers would be used.

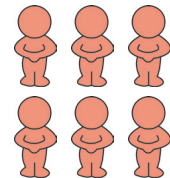
**Yes
65%**



**Not Sure
20%**



**No
15%**



26 out of 40 children thought that the police should have the power to stop and search children and young people for alcohol.

"Because some people might pretend that they're not carrying alcohol and the police don't have the power to say 'give it up' or 'let me check your bag', so I think they should have the power."

"I chose yes because it will prevent children dying from alcohol, but not under 8 because they do not understand the situation."

"Because if police try to search you for alcohol but find drugs or weapons then they can take them away from you."

"I think yes but with rules behind it, e.g. don't search them all the time."

"Because it will make kids feel safer."

"They should have this right because if people do have alcohol they should take it away in case the person with the alcohol gets too drunk, then they're putting themselves in a vulnerable position. The police are trying to prevent that!"

"Because they must have a reason for believing so and all they are trying to do is protect you and others around you. But maybe if they want to search you, do it somewhere privately so you don't get too embarrassed."

"It's for your own safety and other people's safety. Shows you why you shouldn't do it and how the police will find out. You'll learn what you've done. But there are also negatives."



8 out of 40 children were not sure if police should have the power to stop and search children and young people for alcohol.

"Because yes children shouldn't drink alcohol, but it might really scare young children and if a thing was made to stop young children being searched, someone might coerce you, e.g. a 7-year-old carrying alcohol for a gang."

"It seems there are really good examples of both of the situations and I'm still not very sure. Children will be nervous and embarrassed, but the police are trying to keep you safe from harm."

"Because they must have a good enough reason to stop you and they are just trying to do their job and protect you and make sure you don't get hurt."

"Because some children think it can help situations but some children are uncomfortable in those situations and don't feel safe [when stopped by police]."

"Depending on the situation. They shouldn't be able to think that you are someone who 'looks like they would drink' – they would need to see it, not just assume."



6 out of 40 children thought police shouldn't have the power to stop and search children and young people for alcohol.

"Because the chance is low [that they have alcohol]."

"If your friend's mum saw you, they might think they don't want their son/daughter going about with you anymore. You could lose friends."

"You might feel scared of them, or you felt happy before because you're on a day out but that would change after you were searched and you'd be unhappy."

"Because there are more cons than pros and the children they pull over can get really impacted, even if they were not carrying anything. It's embarrassing and people might get the wrong idea of who you are."

"You may have personal belongings with you that you don't want other people to see. It's embarrassing and it can affect your life and how you act around the police or even family."

"Because they'll take advantage of it and will probably treat you with less respect than they do now. If you feel uncomfortable being searched, you have no option."

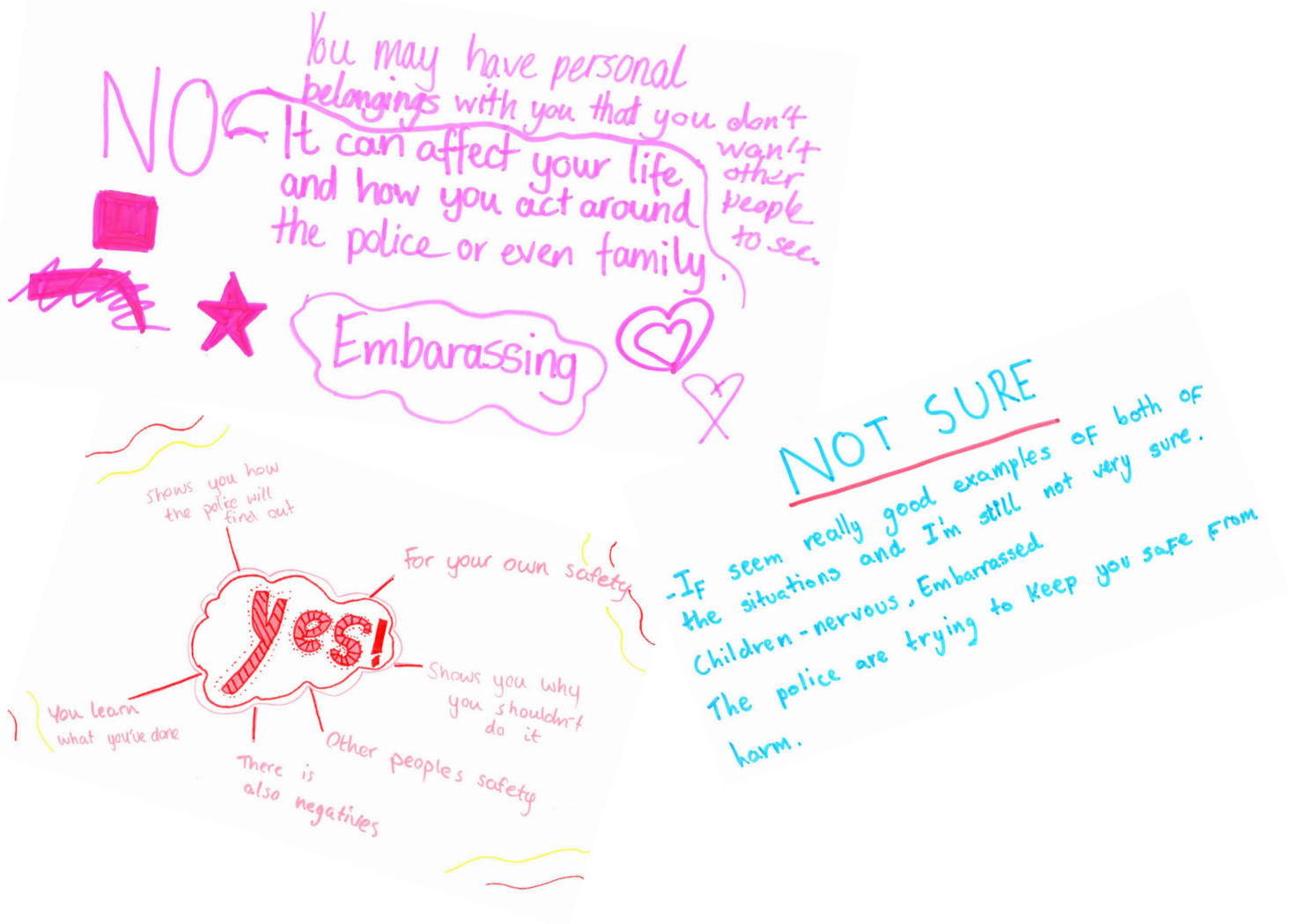
Final Thoughts

Throughout this consultation, children expressed the view that police were working hard to keep them, their families and friends and their communities safe. They recognised that the police have a crucial role in making Scotland a healthy and safe place to live. They have concerns and worries about alcohol and the impact that it has on their lives – both the direct impact on their health and their relationships and the wider impact on society.

Many children felt that police should be able to stop and search children and young people for alcohol if it was coming from a place of concern and looking after their wellbeing. It was also important that these powers were exercised in a way that felt respectful and non-threatening, especially as they recognised that children might feel very intimidated or scared by the police or might have had negative experiences with the police in the past.

Children were concerned about how being stopped and searched by police might impact on their reputations and how their families, friends and communities saw them. They felt that being stopped and searched could be very negative if you weren't carrying anything or doing anything wrong, people would still assume that you had. Any form of stop and search must be done in a way that does not shame or stigmatise children and young people.

Ultimately, children want to have a positive relationship with the adults in their lives, including police. They want to trust the police and know that they are going to be respectful and act in ways that will keep them safe.



If I was stopped I would feel a bit nervous but if the police officers were friendly and understanding then I wouldn't mind showing them my bag because I know I've not done anything.

If other people are watching it might not look very good

It would be a bit nerve-racking

The police are just trying to do their job



People can get the wrong ideas


It wouldn't be a nice feeling but if the officers were nice about it then I would understand

I know I would never be carrying about anything I'm not supposed to be

 Children's Parliament
giving ideas a voice

Children's Parliament
Summerhall
EH9 1PL
0131 558 9030

www.childrensparliament.org.uk
info@childrensparliament.org.uk

 @creative_voices

© Children's Parliament 2016
Registered as a Scottish Charity SC026247