

# 'Just people like us'

Children's Parliament consultation on  
Police Scotland's strategy  
'2026: Serving a Changing Scotland'

June 2017



# Acknowledgements

Thank you to children and staff from:

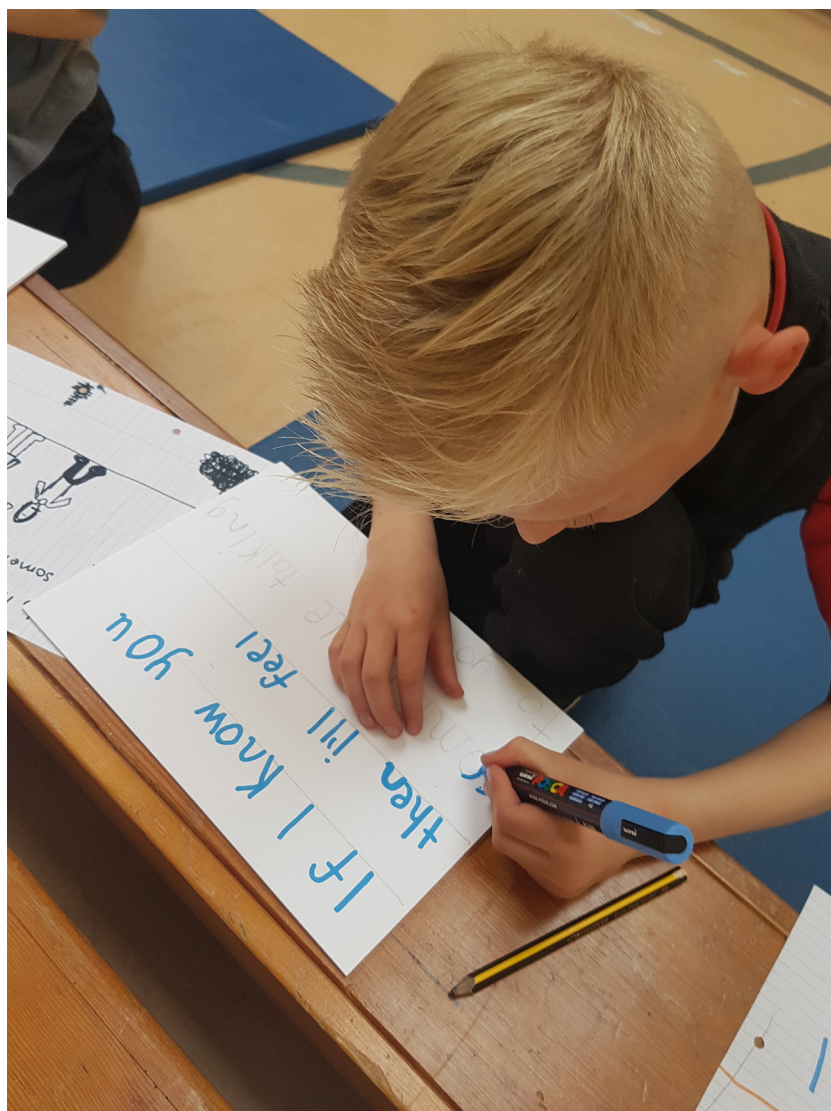
- Denbeath Primary, Fife
- Dalmarnock Primary, Glasgow

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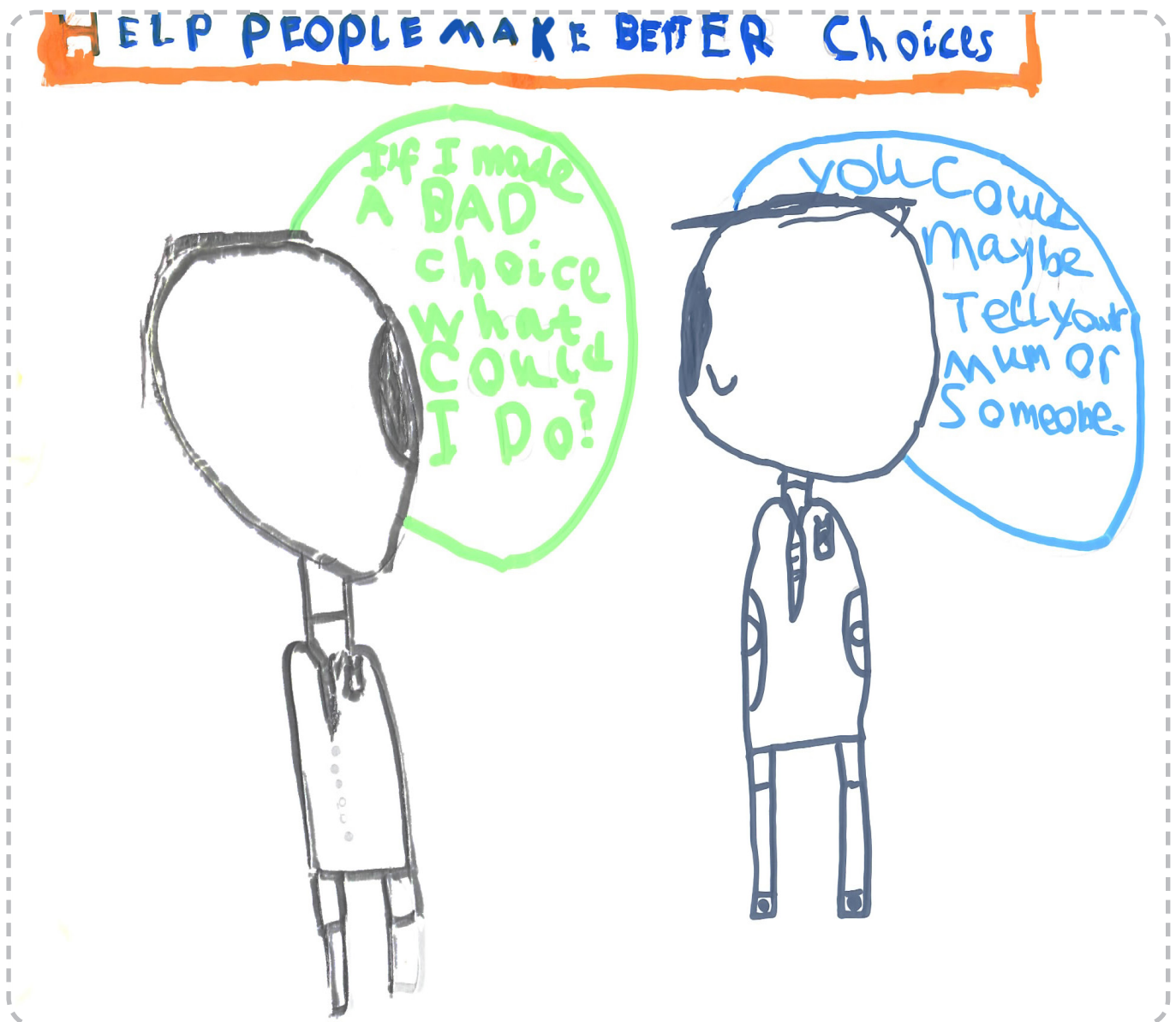
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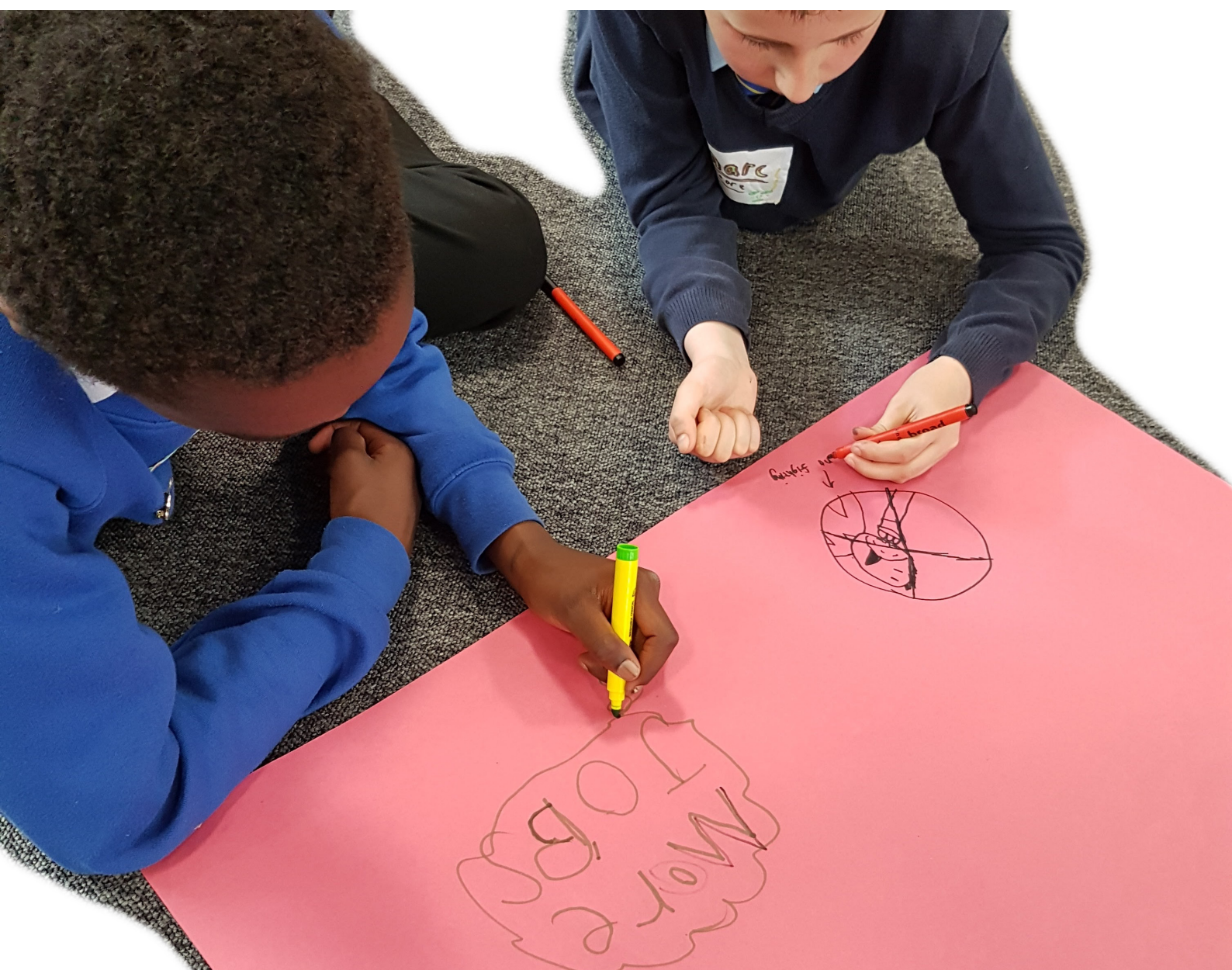
# About the consultation

In early 2017, Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority published the draft strategy for the future of policing in Scotland entitled '2026: Serving a Changing Scotland'. The document outlines the approach, values and priorities that will guide the work of Police Scotland for the next ten years. The strategy states that 'the main purpose of policing is to improve the safety and wellbeing of persons, localities and communities in Scotland'. To achieve this aim, Police Scotland must include the voices of the citizens they are serving, including those of children.

As part of the public consultation on this strategy, Police Scotland commissioned Children's Parliament to engage directly with children so that their experiences, views and ideas can be included in the dialogue informing Police Scotland's direction of travel.

Children's Parliament facilitated creative workshops that addressed the following themes:

- Children's knowledge of and experiences with the police
- The role of police in our communities
- How police should think, speak and behave
- Children's hopes for the future of Scotland and how police could help make this vision a reality



The children's responses from these workshops form the basis of this report and can be viewed on the following pages.

This report also draws on previous Children's Parliament consultations about the police and police powers, specifically consultations on Police Powers to Stop and Search Children and Young People for Alcohol (2016) and the Lothian and Borders Police Youth Strategy (2009).

## 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. Every space we create is a Children's Parliament.

## About the children

The consultation workshops involved a total of 39 Members of Children's Parliament (MCPs) between the ages of 7 and 12 years old. 19 boys and 20 girls took part in this consultation. We worked in two settings – with Denbeath Primary School in Fife and Dalmarnock Primary School in Glasgow. We sought to work with children from diverse backgrounds, including children from areas of multiple deprivation, children with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and children with disabilities and learning difficulties.

The quotes in this report come directly from the children.





# Key Messages


During the consultation workshops, key messages arose from the children. A complete summary of the children's specific ideas and recommendations can be found on the following pages of this report.

## 1. It's all about relationships

Children want to have positive relationships with the adults in their lives, including the 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. Children want to get to know the police officers in their area. They believe that having a positive relationship with the police when they are young will ultimately lead to better relationships with them as they grow up.

## 2. I feel safe but...

Despite recognising that the police help keep them safe, many children highlighted that they often felt anxious, worried or guilty when they see the police out in the street. For children, a police presence implied that there was something scary or threatening happening nearby. It also made them feel targeted or like the police assumed they were doing something naughty. This indicates a strong underlying misapprehension of the police, especially when the officers are unknown to the children. More work could be done to help children understand the role of the police in their communities and to reduce the stress children feel when they see police out on the street.

A young boy with blonde hair is holding a white sign with blue text. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with a wooden door and a white wall.

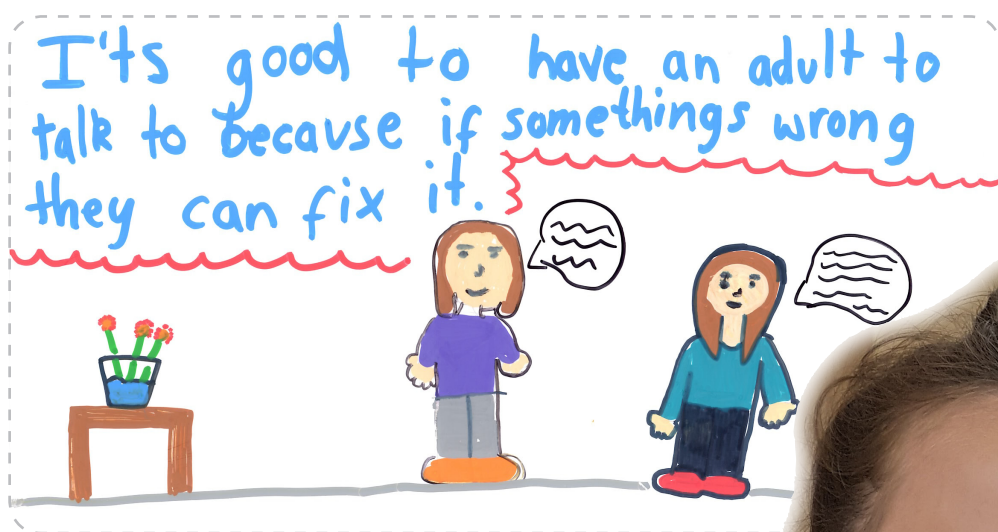
"At the start of the day, I was scared of the police – I got goosebumps when the policeman walked in. Now that I've had the chance to talk to him, I will feel less scared when I see other police out and about."

– Boy, 9

If I Know you  
then i'll feel  
COMfortable talking  
to you.

### 3. Role modelling and mentoring

Children see the police as having a moral duty to keep them, their families and their communities safe and healthy. They speak about police providing information, listening to people's worries, and helping people make better choices in their lives. We know that if children's levels of emotional wellbeing are low, their chances of progressing well across all aspects of their lives is limited. Children from families and communities facing challenges that impact on their health, happiness and safety do less well at school and have a higher chance of being involved in risky behaviour than children who receive good support and encouragement. By developing positive relationships with children, police could help ensure that Scotland is a place where all children can thrive.



## 4. Police are people too!

Children expressed a natural empathy for police officers, recognising that the situations they face on the job will have an impact on their thoughts and feelings. They discussed the fact that police might find themselves in stressful, scary or emotional situations whilst at work and felt it was important for members of the public to recognise the impact this has on them as people. Children want all people to be respectful of and to empathise with each other. They want the police to be a part of the community so that positive relationships can develop more naturally because the community sees police as 'just people like us'.

If you talk to the Police  
When you are young you will  
get to now that they are just  
normal people like us

"The police have lots of different feelings just like us. They can be happy but also sad."

– Girl, 9

## 5. Listen to us and include us

"Every voice matters. We may be children but we have ideas that can help!"

– Girl, 12

Children want all the adults in their lives to listen to them and take them seriously. They ask to be included in decision making, especially when the decisions have a direct impact on children's lives. As a public body, Police Scotland and the Scottish Policing Authority have a duty to respect and promote the rights outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and to listen to children's views about their lives. Children believe that they should be asked for their views from an early age, not just when they become teenagers. Police should engage with children as a matter of course – locally and nationally.



# 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 some reporting direct contact with police about an incident at home or in the community or because they've visited their school. However, many children have never spoken to a police officer and their only knowledge of the police comes from what happens in their communities, what they hear from parents and other family members, and what they see on television or in films, which can lead to misinformed, negative or uncertain views of the police.

"My dad was accused of bad things when my mum made up lies about him. I had to talk to the police about it."

– Girl, 8

"I think they came and spoke to the whole school once."

– Boy, 10

"They used to come to our classes, but now they just come to assemblies sometimes to talk about things like internet safety."

– Boy, 10

"I was accused of stealing by my friend and I had to talk to the police about it. I was terrified of the police even though I knew I hadn't done it. I didn't think they would believe me!"

– Boy, 10

"One time I had to go to the police station, but I don't know why. I was scared."

– Girl, 7

"One time I said 'hi' to a police officer and he said 'hi' back!"

– Girl, 8



Children thought that the role of the police was to:

- Take notes
- Look for clues
- Search for missing people
- Walk around to check things are okay
- Keep us safe
- Handcuff "naughty" people
- Use weapons
- Uphold the law
- Obey their commanders
- Arrest criminals
- Go to court to report
- Work at the airports
- Check on prisoners
- Give talks at schools
- Keep control at big events
- Solve crimes
- Keep us safe from terrorists
- Give parking/speeding tickets
- Bring justice to the world
- Make people feel less worried
- Have lots of power and control
- Talk to other police about plans
- Guard important people, like the Prime Minister
- Help homeless people and people with disabilities
- 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



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## Children's experiences and views 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, most said they felt safe and protected. Some 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 recognise that police hold a lot of power in our society, and if they have limited direct, positive contact with the police, then they can feel intimidated and scared in situations involving the police.

"I feel safe  
because people  
might not do bad  
things if they see  
police."

- Boy, 7

"I get  
goosebumps  
because they make  
me frightened and  
shocked and scared."

- Girl, 8

"I feel guilty  
even when I  
know I haven't  
done anything."

- Girl, 8

"If the  
police are there,  
I won't get hurt."

- Girl, 9

"It's confusing  
because I feel safe  
and scared at the  
same time."

- Boy, 8

"I am worried  
because they might  
be looking for me to  
tell me something bad  
about someone in my  
family."

- Girl, 10

"If there's  
something  
frightening going on,  
then it makes me feel  
safer if the police are  
there too."

- Girl, 10

"I can get  
panicked when  
I see the police."

- Girl, 9



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), but some felt more unsure or suspicious of the police more generally.

When I don't  
know the police



I get Goosebumps

When I do know  
the police



I feel happy  
and amazing

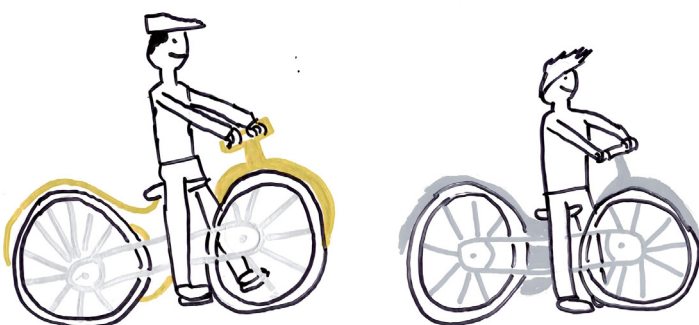
"I would feel safe speaking to a police officer I knew but not just a random one. A strange police officer doesn't know you and it would be uncomfortable."

– Boy, 9

All 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.

The children felt it was important to bring children and young people together with the police as much as possible, and ask that the police engage positively with them in public places.

Cyical fun with police



"Join in our football games rather than move us on."

– Boy, 10

# Think, Feel, Speak, Behave

Throughout the consultation, the children were asked to reflect on when they felt positively and negatively about the police in Scotland. The table below outlines examples of situations and behaviours that stand out to children.

| Children feel positive about the police when they:  | Children feel negative about the police when they:   |
|---|--|
| <i>Treat people fairly</i><br><i>React quickly</i><br><i>Listen to your point of view</i><br><i>Deal with every call</i><br><i>Know how to deal with people</i><br><i>Try their best to protect the public</i><br><i>Secure public places</i><br><i>Try to keep you calm</i><br><i>Enforce the law</i><br><i>Tell you what you've done wrong and teach you</i><br><i>Are helpful, professional, dedicated, inspiring, friendly and reliable</i> | <i>Don't turn up when you phone</i><br><i>Don't believe you</i><br><i>Treat people unfairly</i><br><i>Are aggressive/violent</i><br><i>Are not fully briefed</i><br><i>Make mistakes</i><br><i>Pick on people</i><br><i>Get a wee bit impatient if you wind them up</i><br><i>Knock loudly on the door – it's scary!</i><br><i>Don't have enough time to do what they need to do</i><br><i>Interrogate people</i><br><i>Are intimidating with all their gear and serious faces</i> |

After reflecting on what police officers do, the children thought about how they should do it. They considered the thoughts, feelings, words and actions police officers should have whilst on the job.

## How might police officers think and feel?

- *Maybe a little scared, sad or nervous*
- *Happy if they solve the case*
- *Understanding*
- *They should care about people*
- *Be proud and happy to help*
- *Ready to do their job*
- *Not be angry*
- *They should think of a plan*

"They should be proud and feel ready!"

- Girl, 8

"They should think 'I can help this person easily'."

- Boy, 10

## How should they talk to people?

- Politely
- Nicely and with manners and respect
- Should not shout unless they really need to
- Speak in their normal voice
- Calmly
- In an appropriate way
- Friendly and enthusiastically
- In a patient way
- Well mannered
- Listen as well as talk
- Softly, not shouting
- Sensibly
- Happily and cheery
- Slowly and use easy words to understand

"It depends if the person they are talking to committed a crime or if they are just asking how they are doing because if they committed a crime they would talk in a firm voice."

– Girl, 11

"When they speak to children they shouldn't use confusing words, but shouldn't talk down to them."

– Girl, 11

"The police might be confused because they don't speak the same language as the person."

– Boy, 8

Police should  
talk to  
people nicely  
and calmly,  
they should  
only shout if  
they need to!



## How should they behave?

- *Be outstanding, mindful and respectful*
- *How they are supposed to, like they are proper police*
- *Shouldn't look bored – they should look like they care*
- *They shouldn't shout at children*
- *Seriously and like adults*
- *Nice and friendly to people*
- *They should be concentrating and focused on their job*
- *Listen to others*
- *They should treat people the way they want to be treated*
- *Not scary*
- *Trustworthy*



"They should behave like they care. Eye contact is important when they're talking to people."

- Boy, 10

"They should show a lot of respect"

- Boy, 8

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## Future of Scotland

Over the next ten years Scotland will experience many changes in population, environment and technology. The main focus of the new strategy is ensuring that policing is keeping pace with the changes in order to best serve the public.

To begin thinking about the future of Scotland, we asked the children about where they live now and what they like and dislike about their communities.

### What children like about the communities in which they live:

- *People are friendly and say, "hi"*
- *It feels safe and calm*
- *People are respectful*
- *Living in a quiet place*
- *Playing outside with friends*
- *Lots of places to go – parks, shops, community centre, pool*

"I feel like I know a lot of people in my town. When I see them, I know who they are and I feel safer."

- Girl, 11

## What children don't like about the communities in which they live:

- Vandalism
- Litter and dog fouling
- Noisy/moany neighbours
- Lots of traffic
- Not enough for children to do
- Poor lighting
- The way alcohol makes people behave in public
- The threat and presence of violence in the community

"If adults are making big decisions, then you should have a say because you might have different ideas than them."

- Girl, 11

By 2026, children envision a Scotland that is healthier, happier and safer for all people. Children want to create a Scotland with "nice communities anyone would be happy to live in"! (Boy, age 10)

Specifically, they wanted:

- Children to have a proper childhood
- People to be friendly and happy
- To make sure everyone has their rights
- Scotland to be more peaceful – less violence, fighting, child abuse and murders
- Higher, better and fairer wages - "the amount of money you deserve" (Girl, age 12)
- Less alcohol and fewer pubs – "it's a bad influence on kids and they worry and aren't looked after properly" (Boy, age 12)
- More hospitals to help more people survive and be healthy
- To protect the environment - eco-friendly, clean and safe
- More houses and shelter so no one is homeless
- Safer roads
- People to listen to children



"When adults don't listen to children, I feel angry because when I try to tell them something important and they don't listen, it feels like they don't care. Parents, teachers and police should listen to us!"

- Girl, 9

# The Police in the Future

To make Scotland a healthier, happier and safer place to grow up, children make the following suggestions for how the police could help:

*Children think that seeing the police in the community regularly would make them feel safer. Children want more policing in the park so it is a safe space for them to play.*

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"The police should walk about in the world to see what's happening and how they can join in!"

- Girl, 8

*Children want police to be a bit nicer and easier to talk to, to include them and to share ideas with them. They could come into classes so children can speak with police officers and ask questions.*

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*Children think the police should have a community bus for children (like the one for young people and adults) that visits schools and community centres so children can speak to the police about being healthy and safe. The police can help children to make good choices.*

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*Children want the police to do fun things in the community (e.g. participate in football games, organise community cycle events, go to school fairs, etc.) and help in the community (e.g. pick up litter in parks, etc.).*

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*Children want police to visit people – not just when bad things happen! Check in on how families are doing without having to be asked or planned, then they might be able to help if something's wrong that might otherwise be hidden.*

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*Children feel that it's easier to speak to police officers when they know them and when they're not wearing lots of scary gear. Police should be friendly and approachable and get down on children's level when they are speaking together.*



## Final thoughts

Throughout this consultation, children expressed the view that police are 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, happy and safe place to live.

However, they often feel that adults hold all the power and children recognise that police in particular hold a lot of power in our society. Children can be intimidated and scared in situations involving the police. To improve experiences and outcomes for children we need to influence the adults around them – shifting judgemental, negative or limiting interpretations to views and behaviours that are inclusive, caring, supportive and optimistic.

By recognising the power differential and understanding how children might be feeling, the police can have positive, respectful interactions with children and help them feel safe and happy in their communities.

Ultimately, children want to have positive relationships with the adults in their lives, including the police. They want to trust the police and know that they are going to be respectful and act in ways that will keep them and their families and friends safe. The children believe that by getting to know people when they are young, the police will have better relationships with the communities in which they work.

Children have unique concerns about their communities and want to be a part of the solution by sharing their views and ideas with the police and other adults who make decisions. A rights-based relationship starts with human dignity, leading to greater kindness, empathy and trust. Adults who understand and model this approach at home, in school and across public bodies and government, create environments and interpersonal relationships that help children to be the confident, skilled and connected active citizens that we need as a nation.

