

Bristol City Youth Council
REPORT 2024



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Foreword

Early evening of the Youth Voice Conference 2024 – there was a slight buzz in the air, I could tell that the Youth Councillors were nervous excited. Neve and Binta were practicing their roles in the main hall. Claire (Y&C Worker) explained to me that City Hall was going to be lit up with the colours of National Youth Work Week green, orange and purple – the youth council decided to go outside to have a group photo taken, I went out with them just to watch and maybe help if needed. After their photo shoot they wandered back into the building. I decided to walk over to the Cathedral so that I could see the City Hall lit up from the other side. After this I was walking back to the building when I came across my colleague Michelle (Y&C Worker), who was waiting for three of the young women to arrive, they attend the Young Women’s group that Michelle and Carol run over in the South. Michelle was a tad fretful, as she thought that they would be a bit anxious about coming to the conference. They hadn’t been to anything like this before and Michelle talked to me about how they might be nervous about coming along.

They arrived, one of their Mums dropped them off, we could tell they were anxious; who’s going to be there? Not walking in on my own! Say we don’t like it? Have we got to stay the whole time? Michelle reassured them the best she could – even resorting to saying if you’re not comfortable and you want to leave, I’ve got my car I’ll take you home. I walked into the conference with the three of them and walked them over to a table that already had some people on it, I sat down with them and explained a bit of the session, food was being served so I urged them to get food, we’re not going up there on our own Michelle – I’ll come with you she said and I walked them all out to the food where I left them.

Neve and Binta brought the room to order, and the conference began. There were a series of questions for the tables to discuss, at this point I took on the job of walking around the tables listening to what young people were talking about supporting them to explore the different campaigns. What I did notice was that the three young women, Mae, Elle and Ada were really engaged in the tabletop discussions, I could see that they were animated and really appeared to be enjoying the discussion.

One hour later, we’ve moved to the Chamber, 100ish young people sitting in the Chamber, 50/60 adult listeners in the gallery. Mary and Suryajit heading up the proceedings (very well organised) – young people in the Chamber are feeding back their thoughts and ideas around the campaigns – young people are talking about their personal experiences, their experiences within their differing communities – very challenging conversations for them and for the adult listeners. Mary is doing a real great job of keeping things on track and on time.

Then Ada lights up a microphone and begins to talk about a local incident from her own personal experience, Ada obviously felt safe to talk about such a personal experience in this environment, I felt an immediate emotional reaction to what Ada was saying, from the perspective that it was so personal to Ada, and from the perspective of having met Ada outside City Hall at the beginning with her friends – the nervousness that they had displayed, to Ada feeling that she could open up in the Council Chamber to tell a little bit about her own story.

Whilst reflecting on the conference later in the week, I remembered the Power of Youth Work, and I remembered the Power of young people. The Youth Voice conference gave a space over to the young people of Bristol; to speak on behalf of themselves, the youth council had setup the conference in such a manner that they drew other young people in to feel safe to speak publicly many of which rarely get the opportunity to do that.

Whilst being an Adult-Listener I observed that the young people were so engaged that they appeared to forget that they had 60 or so other adult listeners in the gallery – it was an honour for me to have been invited to the conference and to have experienced the opportunity to really hear what the young people of Bristol have to say.

The Power of Participation is to be wondered at.

Written by Marlene McAllister – Senior Youth and Community Worker



Acknowledgements

The Bristol City Youth Council (BCYC) would like to acknowledge the young people from all the youth organisations across Bristol and the youth workers that have supported them, not only at our events throughout the year but for the raising of youth voice as a city.

Organisations that have attended:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspiration Creation Elevation (ACE) • Babbasa • BRICKS • Bristol Robins Foundation • Children’s Scrapstore • Creative Youth Network (CYN) (City Wide) • Docklands Youth and Community Centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hartcliffe Girls Group • Hartcliffe Club for Young People • Knowle West Media Centre • Listening Partnership (WECIL) • Learning Partnership West (LPW) • Oasis Hub (City Wide) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southmead Development Trust • Street Space • The Vench • Wellspring Settlement • Young Bristol (City Wide) • Young Carers Voice (City Wide) • Youth Moves.
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We would also like to acknowledge the youth voice planning group for the extra commitment they made in planning the Youth Voice Conference.

To the Bristol City Council (BCC) staff who supported us in using the Conference Hall and Council Chamber, Catering for the Conference, Audio and Visual support from Tom Gray as well as the support from the Youth and Community Work Team.

To the adult listeners, thank you for making youth voice a priority by attending the conference and listening to young people.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the young people of Bristol, throughout the year you have shared your voices and opinions on such important issues. Without you this report would not be possible.

Introduction

The Bristol City Youth Council is a group of 29 young people chosen to represent Bristol's youth. 18 of us are democratically elected through our Bristol Youth Election representing the areas of East central, South and North. 5 young people have been elected through their equality groups to diversify the voices contributing to our youth council. 6 young people are elected through their areas from their engagement with local services or organisations.

The main aim of the Bristol City Youth Council is to represent the voices of young people in Bristol and campaign on their behalf.

Our city-wide campaign is **Knife Crime and Safety**, and this was voted by Bristol's young people at our 2023 Youth Voice Conference. From this the youth council has split its focus into 4 sub-groups which are: **Knife Crime, Safer Environments and Communities, Police and Crime**, and **Prevention, Education and Welfare**.

In this report, we will discuss the topics raised in the Area Youth Forums, by our constituencies of North, South and East Central in 2024. This concluded with our Annual Youth Voice Conference held in November 2024, where we discussed the most highlighted themes that came up across all Area Youth Forums.

We have collated all the aspects that young people have said are going well and what could be improved around the 4 themes and will also present what change they would like to see going forward in Bristol. We hope that these views and opinions will bring meaningful and lasting positive change so that the voices of young people can be heard and action can be taken to make sure that our young people feel they belong, feel supported and feel safer in Bristol.

Disclaimer: In this report you will see we have used the word gangs, this is the exact words used by young people, both written and verbally. We understand that this terminology is outdated and we believe it is meant to explain the issues of peer conflict, serious youth violence and child criminal exploitation however we have decided to keep the word in when it has been used directly by young people.

Area Youth Forums

An Area Youth Forum is an event led by the Bristol City Youth Council where young people from their local area share issues, discuss topics, and convey opinions in a safe environment.

In 2024, the Bristol City Youth Council held 3 Area Youth Forums over the entire year.

Area Youth Forum Locations

	Wednesday 13th March	Wednesday 19th June	Wednesday 25th September
North	Greenway Centre, Southmead	Greenway Centre, Southmead	BAWA Club, Southmead
South	Ashton Club for Young People, Ashton Gate	Hartcliffe Club for Young People, Hartcliffe	Filwood Community Centre, Filwood
East Central	BRICKS, St Anne's House, Brislington	Wellspring Settlement, Barton Hill	Oldbury Court Childrens Centre, Oldbury Court.

Some of the priorities raised at the Area Youth Forums throughout the year were:

North	South	East Cental
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's Safety • Lighting • Gangs • Youth Violence • Schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighting • Knife Crime • Mental Health • Schools • Littering in parks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knife Crime • Schools • Lighting and repairs to MUGA'S • Flytipping • Ageism and racial profiling by security guards.

Themes

Throughout the year from the Area Youth Forums Bristol City Youth Council identified 4 recurring themes from the 3 areas of Bristol.

Communities:

Young people feeling like they belong or don't belong in their community, parks and spaces for young people. The effects of flytipping and littering, anti-social behavior (ASB), parking/speeding, schools and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) referrals.

Youth Services:

Support for young people in school and outside, things to do that are free or low cost, along with safe spaces, more youth spaces and sessions.

Safety:

Women's safety, online safety – being bullied online, areas where young people don't feel safe, lighting and policing.

Knife Crime:

Witnessing other young people with knives, feeling unsafe, policing, recent tragedies affecting young people.

These 4 identified themes were the discussion points for the Annual Youth Voice Conference.



Youth Voice Conference 2024

The Annual Youth Voice Conference was held on Wednesday 6th November 2024 at City Hall. Over 100 young people from all over Bristol attended this event. Many youth sector organisations supported young people during this event, which was also held during National Youth Work Week.

The aim of the Youth Voice Conference was for young people from across Bristol to come together and discuss the 4 identified themes from the Area Youth Forums.

The first section was based around creating conversation and collecting input from young people engaging in table discussions around the 4 themes supported by table facilitators from Bristol City Youth Council.

The second section was young people taking over the council chambers sharing their thoughts, feelings and opinions on the 4 themes.

During their time in the chambers adult decision makers and councillors sat in the public gallery as keynote listeners to hear and take note of what young people discussed.

At the end of the discussions in the chambers a vote was carried out for the youth of Bristol to choose what theme they felt was most important for them in their area.

The whole conference was an extremely powerful event that was planned, by young people, for young people with no adult voices throughout the night.

We have written the points from the chamber discussion in this report. The following information was taken from the chamber's transcript and notes of discussion from young people across Bristol. We have broken down every discussion theme into sections.



Theme 1: Communities

Introduction:

Within this theme we have broken it down into the areas we represent: North, South and East Central, and looking at particular places within that area. Young people have expressed what they like about their area, concerns and what they would like to see improve.

“Communities can link to almost every theme here, youth services, safety, knife crime, they all share something.” Jesse; Bristol City Youth Council

East Central:

In East Bristol young people praised the area's accessibility and how it is interconnected, however there were worries around the closing down of businesses. Young people said that Hillfield's had a good sense of community because of well looked after green spaces, cleanliness and low crime.

Young people showed concerns about the poor lighting and would like to see more regular public transport and for the Hillfield's youth group to be reopened.

“The youth club in Hillfields being shut down has made a big impact on the young people in Hillfields. They've all said that actually having that youth club there was a big support to them and where they would go usually”. Eden; speaking on behalf of young people of Hillfields.

In Speedwell, the general feeling is dissatisfaction to peer conflict, violence and drug use which does not promote a sense of community. Young people would like to see less violence and traffic, as well as more public transport to feel safer.

In St George there is a lack of youth services and poor lighting in parks which make young people feel unsafe. The young people of St George would like to see a more reliable and free public transport system, better lighting and public toilets in parks.

More centrally in particular St Paul's has a good sense of community as they appreciate the diversity, good transport links and the feeling of safety because of knife amnesty. Unfortunately, in St Paul's there is excessive littering, gentrification and ineffective policing regarding antisocial behaviour, drinking, drugs and smoking.

The CYN Welcome Wednesday group in East Central enjoy the community, they feel they have been welcomed especially within ethnic groups. However, they were unsatisfied with public services and discrimination.

There is general unrest in East Central around issues with drug use, fly tipping and poor lighting.

North:

In Lawrence Weston young people feel they have something to do for all ages, they have a safe place with friends and a community food pantry. However, they feel unsafe in the area due to intimidating people including drug users. There is a lot of littering and rubbish including needle usage in play areas. Young people feel there is not enough green spaces and poor-quality housing.

Young people would like to see the rebuilding of parks and play areas.

In Southmead young people feel a sense of belonging in their area including having an inclusive youth service. They feel there is good lighting and enough green spaces. However, young people have raised the issue of fly tipping and feeling unsafe in the Greystoke area as well as concerns on women's safety.

“Fly tipping is a big issue. Bins are broke, hardly cleared. There’s plenty of green space and open space in Southmead and the community is quite welcoming. There’s a lot of anti-social behaviour and homelessness and drug abuse in Southmead, but other than that it’s quite welcoming”. Mason; Southmead.

In Lockleaze young people like the services that are available to them including the vench and the scouts. However young people feel unsafe due to knife crime and anti-social behaviour.

Young people would like to see more lighting and less litter as well as more outdoor spaces.

South:

In Knowle young people feel a sense of community as people help each other and local people make it a community. There are lots of community spaces including centres, gardens and the cricket club. However young people do not feel safe, especially on their own and at night. Young people also raised the issue of littering and fly tipping.

Young people would like to see more lighting and community clean ups.

“We have had some comments about flytipping as well as some bumps and cracks on the road in South. Bad lighting and smashed glass all over the bus stop”. Daniel ; Listening Partnership.

In Hartcliffe, Bedminster and Knowle West young people feel that there is not enough to do in their areas as well as not having enough free places to go. Young people are affected by knife crime and violence and feel that there is a lack of support within schools.

Across the 3 areas we noticed the common issues raised by young people were flytipping and littering, better lighting and places for young people to go.

Theme 2: Youth Services

Introduction:

Within this theme we have broken it down into the positives, negatives and solutions for youth services.

“I demand funding, I demand change and demand youth services that are accessible for all our young people in Bristol”. Edward; Listening Partnership & Bristol City Youth Council

Positives:

Youth services were found to give the opportunity for young people to socialise and give them something to do, with support, one of the things that makes it so accessible is staff that have built strong relationships with them. This was all possible because the young people see youth services as fun and not as strict as schools.

Young people feel that youth services have a positive impact on the lives of young people in Bristol. From offering local opportunities in sessions to new experiences in the form of trips. It allows them to socialise, have something to do with a variety of activities in a more informal way than schools, young people see the benefit of youth work by learning new skills, building strong relationships with their peers as well as receiving support from youth workers. Specifically, CYN Welcome Wednesday group have received support to learn English. Young people feel understood, which gives them a sense of belonging.

Young people find it useful that these services are free or at a low cost and they are provided with food. Young people also see how youth services can create a better balance between different communities by building relationships and how having a youth service and a place to go can decrease anti-social behaviour.

“Youth services are key to life as a young person in Bristol. They help us build strong relationships in communities, learn new skills. It’s a good, safe place to be inclusive”. Ellen speaking on behalf of Welcome Wednesday group.

Negatives:

Young people are aware that a lot of the issues surrounding youth services is due to the lack of funding from government which can and has led to the closure of youth centres. Young people feel there is not enough frequent sessions as well as more opportunities for trips. Young people also feel that smaller organisations need more funding.

Young people feel that there is a lack of youth services and support of trusted adults and the impact for young people can have a significant effect on them and their communities, including young people becoming involved in anti-social behaviour and criminal activity, it is felt there is not enough places and safe spaces available to them. Young people also identified that this denies them to develop their skills and access opportunities.

Young people also felt that youth services should be more accessible, including more integration of SEND young people, more diversity in terms of staff recruitment and sessions for older young people aged 16 – 18.

Young people really feel that there needs to be more promotion regarding youth services to reach a wider demographic of young people and extra support for young people accessing services for the first time.

Solutions:

Young people at the youth voice conference 2024 said that more promotion and awareness about youth clubs/settings is needed. Age specific youth groups can help young people be around peers at similar stages and with similar interests in activities, especially more youth sessions for older young people (16-18).

Young people call for the increase and improvement of funding for youth services both from national government and local council.

Theme 3: Safety

Introduction:

Within this theme we will explain where young people feel safe, where they feel unsafe, factors that contribute and solutions that would make them feel safer.

During our Youth Voice Conference young people have said they feel most safe when they have sense of community around them however this is not all young people and all communities. Young people have also said that they feel a sense of safety especially with groups of friends, in youth groups and around trusted and close adults.

“As we are aware the safety of young people in Bristol has drastically decreased within the last decade of this happening over the cause which is most spoken of now is knife crime. However, there are so many other reasons why young people’s safety has been compromised and I would like to mention a few.” Ezra; Bristol City Youth Council

Communities:

Young people in Bristol have said they feel unsafe even in their house due to things happening on our streets. This can include dangerous driving, anti-social behaviour, public indecency, and visible street drug use. Young people sometimes feel unsafe when using public parks due to these issues, also seeing adults and other young people acting in an intimidating way. Young people have also felt unsafe about hearing cases of grooming and drug users in the community.

Young people feel unsafe due to the lack of zebra crossings and would like to see more around schools. They often see vandalism around them and have to avoid uneven or cracked pavements and smashed glass. Young people have identified there is a lack of lighting in various communities which impacts their safety.

Public transport:

Young people feel unsafe when taking the bus due to driver behaviour e.g. driving past bus stop, challenging age and young people feeling like they are being discriminated against. Other passengers can also make young people feel unsafe due to their behaviour including drug use.

“The negative parts are about feeling unsafe on public transport and how that we shouldn’t have to go through things that happen to us on public transport as were only young, young kids just trying to get to our places”. Eden; Hartcliffe Girls Group

Online/Social Media

Young people identified that they see violence online far too easy, there is a concern of the glamorization of certain lifestyles online that can lead to unrealistic expectations and unsafe situations.

Young people have stated that online bullying is now rife, and social media is now the place where most bullying takes place. Young people believe that banter goes too far and gets out of control too quickly on social media and unsupervised group chats. Bullying online is glorified and goes unpunished.

School

Bullying is not only online but is still frequent in schools, young people stated that school can be a toxic environment where bullying goes unpunished, and fights regularly occur. Young people feel a lack of safety in school because of this.

Young people have witnessed the selling vapes and drugs, as well as the use of alcohol in school. Young people said they do not feel safe in school due to knives which can also lead to young people carrying knives for protection.

Police

The issues of bias stop and search was raised, young people said the police engage in racial profiling. Harassment from police and lack of effective policing was also mentioned.

Young people feeling unsafe because of grooming and street crime such as muggings and theft.

There is a feeling of mistrust towards the police by young people however they want to see more police presence in the community to feel safer.

“Police are more reactive than present”. Grace, Young Bristol

Women’s safety

Young Women have said they feel unsafe walking at night. Young women in Bristol are subjected to misogynistic comments, verbal and sexual harassment, cat calling and intimidating behaviour by men including being stared at and following. All this can lead to young women worrying how they portray themselves i.e. feeling like they have to dress in a certain way. It is felt women are not safe.

Solutions/Improvements

Young people have discussed improvements needed such as lighting in our streets and public parks as well as regular maintenance and building repairs.

Young people believe more guidance is needed for bullying online, increased protection and more education to stay safe online. Young people suggest age limits for apps should be increased.

Young people would like more education around safety in school including communication to prevent fights and there needs to be more interventions around bullying in school. There is also a need for women’s rights to be talked about and better understanding of how young women are impacted when it comes to being safe.

Relationships need to be built between police and members of the community, including young people, to feel safe. More police presence would make young people feel safer especially at night time.

Theme 4: Knife Crime

Introduction:

Knife crime is one of the biggest issues in Bristol. At the youth voice conference this was the most heavily discussed topic. We heard about views and perspectives from people of different backgrounds across Bristol.

“Knife crime is not just limited to murders, it is the wider concept of stabbing, carrying or trading bladed weapons and the consequences of these actions for victims, perpetrators and their families”. Darrius; Bristol City Youth Council

What's going well:

We have heard that young people are receiving education on knife crime in certain schools. This is a crucial step towards lowering rates of knife crime as it affects a large proportion of those of school age, there is also training at some youth clubs about what to do, if you witness a knife attack which can help save lives.

Impacts on young people:

Knife crime has become more frequent. And now, more than ever, young people are put in a scary, traumatic situation which no one should ever experience. Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly common for young people to carry a knife to feel safe, yet carrying a knife puts you in more danger. Young people should feel safe without having to carry a knife.

Resources:

There has been an increase in incidents involving knife crime in Bristol and the surrounding areas, and there are lots of factors that young people believe can change in order to reduce the impact. Young people believe there are not enough surrenders bins or bleed kits, and young people think this is partly down to lack of funding. Surrender bins are essential to help tackle bladed objects of the streets and bleed kits help to prevent fatal injuries so these need to be funded and more should be placed around the city. It was also raised that young people should have youth workers' support to ensure safe transport from one place to another. Another issue raised was online safety because lots of crimes are first talked about on social media platforms such as Snapchat, so young people need to understand how dangerous these platforms are.

Education:

There are not enough workshops on knife crime and how to keep safe, educating young people is a crucial step to preventing knife crime and so more needs to be done including:

- Preventative workshops for younger children
- Support if you have started to carry a knife or know someone who is.
- What to do in a knife crime incident i.e. first aid training for bleed kits.
- Awareness of the result of being involved in knife crime/youth violence.

In schools PSHE lessons needs to be more relevant because lots of important topics are not discussed. There is not enough education on knife crime and what to do in situations involving knives. There are not enough discussions in schools and knife crime needs to be a more specific topic.

Furthermore, talks in school are not taken seriously and there is not enough support for young people impacted by knife crime. There should be more bag checks in school to discourage students from carrying knives. However, suitable actions need to be taken for those who do. Punishment such as exclusions should be limited as this leads to young people being more at risk.

Factors:

There are many factors that increase the number of those carrying knives that need to be addressed. These include criminal exploitation of young people in relation to drugs, grooming, blackmailing and pressure. Other factors are postcode rivalries, accessibility of certain knives, bullying and retaliation, glamorisation of a particular lifestyle.

Parents need to feel they won't be judged and will be supported when they seek support and guidance from services.

Unsafe streets encourage people to carry knives, making the streets more dangerous for everyone.

“So a lot of our points about knife crime were from personal experience. Exclusions often lead to gang involvement, issues and getting involved with knife crime. We also talked about the fact that knife crime is really amplified by the media and almost glorified sometimes in the media, which is a really big issue and leads more young people into doing it.” Zara speaking on behalf of young people from East Central.

Police:

We have heard that students think there is not enough police presence in schools. There are also not enough police on patrol, which can help to reduce crime rates. Young people believe they are being profiled by police, which means there is a bad relationship between young people and the community, which needs to be fixed.

Summary of Solutions/improvements:

Knife crime is an important issue within Bristol, there are steps you can take to bring the crime rate down.

These include more bleed kits, more surrender bins, more funding for youth spaces, more education in schools on knife crime and awareness, and more funding for bleed kits.

There should also be more knife crime workshops on how to keep safe, help for witnesses or victims, victims of the crime should be entitled to free therapy for trauma, Structured discipline programmes, for example army cadets. Keeping yourself safe workshops - online safety and preventative workshops for younger children.

There should be education in schools. For example, police talks, self-defense classes and young people also need more support from the police. There should also be more protection after leaving peer groups or exploitative adults, safety precautions and education in schools, including more discussions and training on bleed kits.

Conclusion

Result of the vote

Following the vote that was taken after the conference, results quickly came in for each area, revealing their most prioritised issue that they would like to focus on.

The votes were:

North Area: Safety

South Area: Knife Crime

East Central Area: Youth Services

Over the next year, during the upcoming area youth forums we will focus on discussing these topics with attending young people in each area.

Young people

To have over 100 young people attend the youth voice conference was really amazing and much more than we had expected which made the conference much more lively. It was really awesome to see so many people speaking immediately especially in the chambers as it can be really daunting to speak in front of other young people and decision makers. We would like to emphasise how incredible the young people were throughout the entire conference, the respect they showed for everyone else, the participation and bravery that they had as well.

Ask of adults

For adults that are reading this report we ask that you seriously consider your role in supporting the issues raised by young people, our suggestions to you are:

Please update us on work already happening around this

Please involve us in work you plan to do, by involving us and the voices of young people

Continued feedback to us so we can relay this to young people across Bristol.

Be a continued advocate for youth voice and participation for young people in Bristol.

We would like an update on these 4 point by June 2025.

Dates of Area Youth Forums 2025

In 2025 Bristol City Youth Council will hold another 3 Area Youth Forums in North, South and East Central areas of Bristol:

Wednesday 12th February, Wednesday 9th June and Wednesday 17th September.
6pm-8pm.

Information for venues and agendas to follow.

Contact the Bristol City Youth Council:

Email: ywparticipation@bristol.gov.uk

Instagram: @bristolcityyouthcouncil