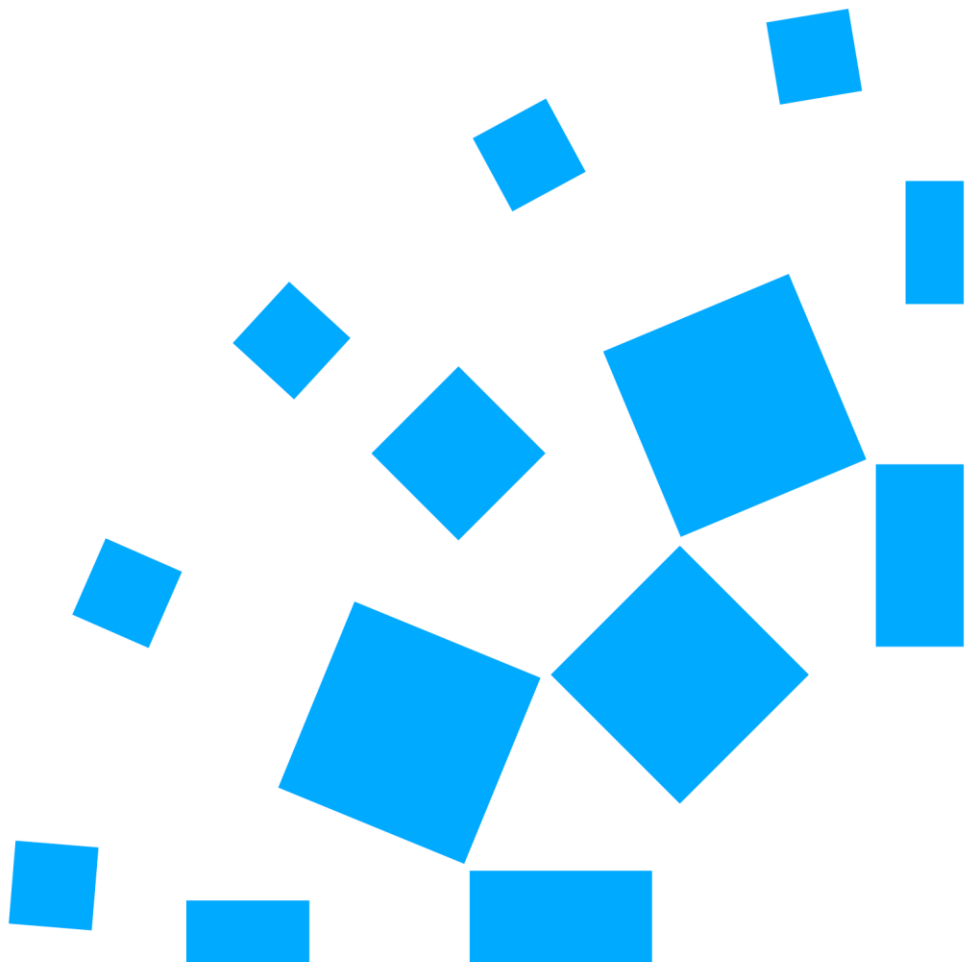


# The Suffolk Police youth engagement team (YET)

Summary of theory of change and feasibility study

August 2024



## About the Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme and the Phase 3 Reports

The Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme (VVCP) was initially funded through the Home Office Police Transformation Fund, with Phases 1 & 2 of the programme completing in March 2020. Phase 3 of the programme was funded by the Home Office Tackling Exploitation and Abuse Unit (part of the Serious and Organised Crime Group), and included funding to further explore four interventions assessed as part of Phase 2. These interventions were:

- Adolescent Risk Team (ART)
- County Lines Management Team (CLiMaTe)
- Outcome 22
- Youth Engagement Team (YET)

Phase 3 of the programme was awarded to researchers from the University of Birmingham, who first conducted a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) to assess the available evidence for each intervention. Then, for each intervention in turn, the researchers developed a theory of change and carried out a feasibility study. Phase 3 of the VVCP was intended to complete in March 2021, but the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on staffing and resources delayed the completion of the fieldwork, the submission of the reports and their quality assurance processes.

For each of the interventions, the College has provided an Executive Summary with the University of Birmingham's full report supplied as an appendix. The College's Executive Summary provides a brief overview of the report and its key findings. The full report, independently authored by the University of Birmingham and attached as an appendix, presents the views of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the College of Policing's views or policies.

The full report sets out the theory of change and feasibility study undertaken by the University of Birmingham, with a view to assessing the value of undertaking a full evaluation of the specified intervention. The full report is divided into two sections. The first sets out the theory of change, while the second presents the feasibility study.

## The intervention

The Suffolk Police youth engagement team (YET) is a dedicated police team working in the Ipswich area to identify and safeguard children and young people (CYP)<sup>1</sup> deemed to be at risk and to robustly pursue offenders. CYP are deemed vulnerable if there is evidence of their involvement in local gangs, local drug dealing or street violence, or due to general safeguarding concerns, such as going missing. Any young person who is identified as meeting a risk-assessed threshold is considered at a regular multi-agency meeting and assigned a lead professional most appropriate to their case. This lead professional could be a YET officer, or a youth justice or children's services practitioner. Lead professionals work with partners to create bespoke packages of support, including diversionary activities and opportunities around education, training or work experience, which are then monitored. The YET also gathers evidence against potential exploiters and takes the appropriate enforcement action.

The YET aims to improve the circumstances and living situation of at-risk CYP, as well as their families. The YET also seeks to reduce demand on police and partners from the CYP who it works with, as well as from the gangs themselves. Additionally, it aims to improve the way that Suffolk Police is viewed by the CYP and partner agencies they work with.

The YET uses an innovative approach that aims to tackle the underlying, long-term causes of involvement with gangs and its effects. The YET is also trying to affect a cultural shift within the force regarding how CYP in general are treated in interactions with the police, seeking to engage rather than alienate and to use a more trauma-informed approach.

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<sup>1</sup> Currently defined as those under the age of 18, although they may work with looked-after children beyond this age.

## The evidence base

A rapid evidence assessment<sup>2</sup> identified six studies evaluating interventions that had similar central elements to YET (targeting at-risk young people and multi-agency working).

From these studies, two strategies were identified that may help to ensure that young people are appropriately and consistently targeted:

- having a clearly defined set of indicators to identify at-risk young people<sup>3</sup>
- ensuring that professionals are trained in the application of those indicators<sup>4</sup>

Local knowledge, as well as knowledge of the young person, is likely to be important when identifying the interacting factors in a young person's life.<sup>5</sup> It could therefore be difficult to roll out interventions like the YET nationwide. Pre-existing networks between the various agencies and organisations may improve implementation, as these programmes appear to hinge on good collaboration.<sup>6</sup>

## Theory of change

The theory of change details how the organisation, resourcing and activities of the YET, alongside local partner agencies, should achieve the aims of the intervention. Based on the findings gathered through discussions and workshops with police officers and other professionals who were involved in the team's development and current operation, key elements of the YET for successful implementation and those that appear to be driving change were identified.

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<sup>2</sup> Bandyopadhyay and others (2022).

<sup>3</sup> Scholte and Smit (1988); Kassman and others (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Scholte and Smit (1988).

<sup>5</sup> Kassman and others (2015); Braga and others (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Cahill and others (2008); Scholte and Smit (1988); Rajaei and others (2013); Braga and others (2019).

## Context

- Having a focus that is wider than the particular offences or crime problems created, also considering the long-term causes of the behaviour.
- The target locations are manageable within the YET's resources, in terms of staffing and travelling time.
- Partner agencies are similarly able to support individuals locally.

## Operating environment

- Officers recruited to established roles.
- Links to other relevant policing teams, including those with responsibility for schools, Operation Strobe,<sup>7</sup> modern day slavery and trafficking, and safeguarding.

## Approach and activity

- Proactive, preventative work with identified CYP using the four 'P's model (prepare, prevent, pursue and protect).
- Building relationships with CYP and families working in an open and bespoke way alongside partners for as long as necessary.
- Consistent staffing with officers able to build relationships with partner agencies and CYP.
- Defensible decisions about which CYP to work with, using Suffolk Police's Vulnerability Assessment Tracker (VAT).
- Close working with partner agencies to share information and intelligence in a timely fashion, to allow joint decision making.
- Where possible, avoiding enforcement activities with the identified CYP.
- Proactive work to target exploiters and the criminal behaviour of the CYP.

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<sup>7</sup> Operation Strobe identifies CYP at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation, including those who regularly go missing and do not engage with local agencies. These CYP may then be taken on by the YET.

## Partners

- Joint decision making regarding individual cases.
- Regular information sharing.
- Avoiding duplication of effort.

## Resources, staff skills and expertise

- Officers recruited to established roles.
- Geographically based team allows joint working with neighbourhood policing teams and other partners.
- Links to other policing teams with responsibility for schools, neighbourhood policing and other related areas of business.
- Working a shift pattern that allows contact with partner agencies and CYP.
- Briefings and training to Suffolk Police colleagues to raise awareness of the YET's work and encourage wider use of their approach.

## Force support

- Force commitment to the YET and work in this field in the form of human resources and strategic oversight of the work.
- Appropriate building from which to operate.

## Logic model

### Problem

- Serious violence linked to local gang activity (including county lines gangs) in Ipswich leading to the exploitation of CYP, episodes of going missing and increased demand on agencies. This has been a particular issue since around 2016.
- Initial tactics focused on enforcement (for example, arrests) of local drug dealers proved effective in the short term, but not against the underlying, long-term causes of these issues – Operation Woven (launched March 2017).

### Response and activities

- Establishment of the YET, a team of one sergeant and six PCs (November 2019 for the current operation).
- Posts are established and officers are recruited specifically to this role and trained by local partners (SAGE).
- Officers are split into three teams of two PCs to cover the three Ipswich neighbourhoods (central, east and west), to allow joint working with NPTs and schools' officers, as well as other partners (for example, by attending meetings).
- Use Vulnerability Assessment Tracker (VAT), based on police data, to identify CYP to work with and track progress.
- PCs will work with CYP to create rapport, to build a picture of life and needs, and to identify diversionary activities and other bespoke support needs, including with their family.
- For non-engaging CYP, PCs use enforcement strategies to deter criminality and will act against exploiters.
- The role of the YET officers is to consider the wider issues driving this violence and drug dealing, and to provide diversion and other upstream activities to aid prevention, using the four 'P's model of policing.
- Links to Op Strobe (CYP at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation), integrated offender management (for those close to 18 years old), missing persons and vulnerability advisors, and modern slavery team for offenders.
- Part of a multi-agency strategic response to local and county lines gangs. This includes the SAGE team, which is funded to deliver the strategic plan and offer diversionary activities.

## Outputs

- Number of CYP identified via monthly VAT (churn of CYP and change in position on the list and in terms of high, medium or low category and score), as well as direct referrals.
- Number of CYP engaged with (activities undertaken – for example, referrals to diversionary activities or to partner agencies)
- Number of enforcement activities undertaken (for non-engaging CYP or against exploiters).
- Number of miscellaneous investigations opened on Athena to track work.
- Number of problem solving plans (PSPs) created and closed, as well as any change in scores.
- Number of missing persons episodes.
- Engagement with local partners already working with CYP or appropriate to be involved, via multi-agency meetings and attendance at meetings of other agencies (such as children's services strategy meetings).

## Outcomes

### Short-term (within scope of the evaluation)

- Identification of CYP experiencing, or at risk of, exploitation by gangs.
- Engaging with, and providing support to, identified CYP and their family (either police or another agency).

### Medium-term (not within scope of evaluation)

- Improved outcomes for identified young people and their families, regarding:
  - living circumstances and family breakdown
  - involvement in education or employment
  - reduction in offending
  - going missing
- Improved multi-agency working with partners.
- Improved opinion of the police by CYP.

### Long-term (not within scope of evaluation)

- Less demand on the police in relation to CYP at risk.
- Lowering of risk for CYP in Ipswich.
- Reduction in levels of gang and youth violence in Ipswich.
- Reduction in the number of local drugs gangs operating locally.
- Increased prosecution of offenders (drug dealers).



## Findings from the feasibility study

The success of the feasibility study was measured by assessing the project's performance in the domains outlined by Bowen and others (2009). According to Bowen and others (2009), a feasibility study is a construction of questions and methods. The domains represent key areas of focus for a feasibility study to address those questions and detail those methods. The domains are:

- acceptability to recipients
- demand for intervention
- implementation as planned
- practicality for delivery with constraints
- adaptation to new circumstances
- integration into existing processes
- expansion to a different setting

The feasibility study was assessed in these domains using data collected through interviews with police officers, CYP and their carers and parents, an observation of a meeting, and analysis of data and problem-solving plans.

The findings of the feasibility study broadly support the key factors that were identified in the theory of change as underpinning the operation of the YET. The areas where the operation differed to the theory of change relate to the high demand on the team and the lack of an easy fit within existing police structures.

### Acceptability to recipients

YET officers, partner agency representatives, and CYP and their parents and carers all saw the benefits of the team. YET officers were described as non-judgemental, caring, understanding and honest, and were said to have a different outlook to other police officers.

### Demand for intervention

The level of demand currently exceeds the capacity of the YET, partly due to the team's proactive search for at-risk CYP using the VAT. A formal referral process

might help to ensure that other police teams have done some initial research before passing cases on to the YET.

## Implementation as planned

The YET is being successfully delivered and in April 2021, the VAT was revised. This version of the VAT uses data from the previous four weeks to ensure it is up to date. When the VAT was run for the first time, the YET sergeant reported that it had produced a longer list of CYP, around 200, some of them new to the YET. The sergeant was hopeful that it would produce a list of CYP in need of YET support and, if the VAT indicators provide more specific detail as to their reasons for police contact and risks, also those who perhaps may not need as much additional research.

Observation of the triage meeting held to discuss this list of CYP produced by the new VAT in April 2021 showed that most of the CYP discussed – around 20 to 25 CYP – were known to the local authority children's and youth justice service representatives present. The CYP discussed were those for whom a problem-solving plan was in place, those who were of most concern or those new to the YET. The meeting provided the opportunity to discuss the work of the other services, exchange up-to-date contacts for the CYP, and discuss where the YET could best add to this work. In cases where a number of agencies are working with CYP and their family, and where the behaviour or circumstances are liable to short-term change, these regular multi-agency meetings can help to ensure all are working to the correct information. This, in turn, can help avoid duplication of effort and different agencies working against each other. This was evident when the meeting discussed recent local incidents that involved CYP who are on the caseload of a number of agencies. All were able to provide the information and intelligence they had, to update on the actions of their agency and to decide the next steps to be taken.

## Practicality of delivery with constraints

The relocation of the YET to a separate building has provided many benefits. Moving the YET to this building means that officers are able to walk to many incidents and have become known in the local community, which is one of the gang-affected areas

in the town. They are also finding working from a non-police building to be useful for building community relations.

YET officers interviewed reported that the building would be of even more use if it could provide a space for them to work with CYP who lack a safe environment in which they can meet with officers or undertake schoolwork. This would require the provision of a stand-alone computer to allow the YET officers to assist the CYP with schoolwork or job preparation and applications. It was also suggested that it could act as a safe place for officers (YET or response) to bring CYP to while waiting for children's services assessments.

## Adaptation to new circumstances

The YET has made an effective change from an enforcement-based drugs operation to an engagement team providing long-term support to CYP and their families. The team continues to alter in response to demand, local requirements and the changing multi-agency context.

## Integration into existing processes

Interviews conducted for this study suggest that while the YET was initially created to respond to a specific policing issue (as Op Woven), it now sits within – but disconnected from – existing local policing structures. It was reported that the existing police structures that the YET uses to flag its work do not always work as well as they could. For example, despite the YET flagging their cases on Athena to note their involvement to other officers, not all information is passed from other police teams back to the YET. Additionally, a more consistent focus might help to integrate the YET with other teams in the force. Standardised training on safeguarding and exploitation of children would be of use for officers joining YET.

Regarding the fit of the YET within multi-agency systems, the team needs to consider how they will work with new Suffolk Against Gang Exploitation (SAGE) hubs. At the time of the feasibility study, the YET were also considering using funding from external education partners to pay for an additional police community support officer (PCSO). This PCSO would be responsible for ensuring the exchange of timely and accurate information on CYP at risk.

## Expansion to a different setting

The YET are starting to expand work to other Suffolk towns but are keeping their main focus on Ipswich. There have been suggestions to increase the upper age limit to 21 to maintain level of support for those who still need it when turning 18.

However, expansion would require additional officers and a consideration of the extra demand it may cause for local partner agencies.

## Conclusion

- The YET is seen as **acceptable** and important by both the team themselves and by the CYP, parents and carers, and partner agencies they work with.
- The YET has been **implemented** since November 2019 and there is high **demand** for the team's work, which currently exceeds their capacity.
- It is **practical** and has **adapted** from an enforcement-based drugs operation into an engagement team providing long-term support to CYP and their families.
- However, with such a broad focus, it does not easily **integrate** with existing police structures. The team must consider how it will continue to adapt to a changing multi-agency context.
- There are opportunities for **expansion**, but this would require additional resources.
- While these are promising results, additional data is needed to assess whether the YET has been successful in achieving its outcomes. Any further evaluation would need to wait until changes, such as the new version of the VAT and the introduction of the multi-agency exploitation hubs, have had time to embed.

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UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

# The Suffolk Police youth engagement team (YET)

Theory of change and feasibility study report

August 2024

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# Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Theory of change .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1. Theory of change .....	4
1.2. Background context and environmental factors .....	5
1.2.1. Current context .....	6
1.2.2. Environmental factors .....	6
1.3. Operating environment .....	7
1.3.1. Operating environment .....	7
1.3.2. Target population .....	9
1.4. Intervention .....	9
1.4.1. Aims .....	9
1.4.2. Approach .....	10
1.5. Service delivery partners .....	14
1.5.1. Partner agencies .....	14
1.6. Resourcing .....	16
1.6.1. Staffing and expertise .....	16
1.7. Force support and governance .....	18
1.8. Outcomes and intervention efficacy .....	19
1.9. Concluding comments .....	21
<b>2. Feasibility study .....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1. Introduction .....	21
2.2. Bowen domains .....	25
2.2.1. Acceptability .....	25
2.2.2. Demand .....	28
2.2.3. Implementation .....	32
2.2.4. Practicality .....	35
2.2.5. Adaptation .....	36
2.2.6. Integration .....	37
2.2.7. Expansion .....	40
2.2.8. Limited efficacy testing .....	41
2.3. Concluding comments .....	45
<b>References .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Appendix A: Logic model .....</b>	<b>49</b>



## Introduction

This report details work commissioned by the College of Policing as part of the Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme (VVCP), funded by the Home Office.

The report has been independently fulfilled by the University of Birmingham. It presents the views of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the College of Policing's views or policies.

This report sets out the theory of change and feasibility study undertaken by the University of Birmingham on behalf of the College of Policing, with a view to assessing the value of undertaking a full evaluation of the Suffolk Police youth engagement team. The report is divided into two sections. The first sets out the theory of change, while the second presents the feasibility study.

There is a separate report presenting findings from existing literature regarding policing interventions to tackle vulnerability and violent crime. The findings for the youth engagement team specifically are captured in an EMMIE table in that report, which can be read in conjunction with this report and its associated logic model.

The EMMIE framework (Johnson and others, 2015) was developed to assess five dimensions of each systematic review:

- **E** – effect size produced (the magnitude of any impact on crime)
- **M** – mechanism activated (how interventions work)
- **M** – moderators and contexts for the activation of the mechanism (where it works best)
- **I** – implementation conditions that supported or obstructed delivery (how to do it)
- **E** – economic assessment of interventions (what it costs)

Vulnerability is an important and growing area of police activity. This has especially been the case over the last five years, although police and partner activity in this field has a much longer history. This more recent concern is linked to a shift in policing more generally to consider the threat, harm and risk to – and of – individuals affected by offending and the offences committed. In response to this focus on vulnerability, police forces have introduced a number of different interventions and approaches.

However, there is inconsistency in the knowledge and practice observed between local, regional and national responses to the issues of vulnerability and violent crime. As such, the College of Policing is keen to assess which of these interventions and approaches are effective and would be appropriate for further use. To this end, the College developed the VVCP with financial support from the Home Office's Police Transformation Fund in 2018.

This report considers one of the four interventions funded in Phase 3 of the programme. All of these interventions are concerned with children and young people (and in one case vulnerable adults) are experiencing, or at risk of:

- exploitation (criminal, sexual or other forms such as trafficking)
- harm and violence
- involvement in the criminal justice system (as both offenders and victims)
- other forms of vulnerability (often linked to involvement with gangs or other serious offenders)

# 1. Theory of change

## 1.1. Theory of change

Theories of change explain how the activities undertaken by an intervention contribute to results that lead to intended or observed outcomes. Theories of change support feasibility studies and evaluations of the intervention by identifying key indicators for monitoring, identifying gaps in available data, informing additional data to be collected and providing a structure for evaluation.

This theory of change report has been prepared to identify the key elements of the approach, structure, activities and outcomes of the Suffolk Police youth engagement team (YET). The YET is a dedicated police team that focuses on:

- tackling serious violence linked to local gang activity (including county lines gangs)
- the related exploitation of children and young people (CYP)
- episodes of going missing
- increased demand on the police and other partner agencies

The YET officers do this by working directly with CYP, working with practitioners in partner agencies (including the local authority children's service, youth justice services and education providers) and targeting gang members who exploit CYP for enforcement activity. The team is based in Ipswich, as this is where the demand has centred, and it was initially drawn from resources from the south of the force area, which covers Ipswich. The theory of change is based on discussions and workshops with police officers who were involved in the YET's development, current YET officers, representatives of partner organisations and the findings from previous research into the issues in Ipswich. Two initial discussions were held with a group of five police officers who were key to establishing the YET and/or now manage the team. Following these meetings, two multi-agency workshops were held in January 2021. These featured a total of 19 attendees, in both strategic and operational roles. This included representation from the following organisations:

- Suffolk Police – YET officers and supervisors
- Suffolk County Council's community safety and CYP services, including:

- social workers
- early help practitioners
- practitioners from Suffolk Against Gang Exploitation (SAGE)
- the child exploration team
- Raedwald Trust – providers of alternative educational provision
- Heathpatch – facilitating links between the statutory and voluntary sectors regarding diversionary activities for young people

## 1.2. Background context and environmental factors

The precursor to the YET was Operation Woven, an Ipswich-based enforcement operation to tackle local problems of violence linked to local urban street gangs and their involvement in drugs supply. Issues of serious violence linked to these local gangs started to become a particular issue in Ipswich around 2016. There were some links to county lines, but Ipswich also had locally based gangs involved in drugs supply that were recruiting young people. This was creating demand on Suffolk Police regarding forms of serious violence, including knife and gun crime, drug supply, and the exploitation of young people and vulnerable adults. Operation Woven was launched in March 2017 and focused on enforcement (such as arrests) of local gang members and drug dealers. This approach proved effective in the short term, with many of those involved processed through the criminal justice system. However, these tactics did little to tackle the underlying, long-term causes of involvement with gangs and its effects. This is the work that the YET was developed to undertake along with partner agencies.

For a time during its development, the team was called the police youth gang prevention team. According to current YET officers and partner representatives, this name labelled any identified CYP as being involved in gangs (for example, from schools' and other agencies perspectives), which also added to the CYP's kudos among their peers. It was decided that this was the wrong message to send about CYP, so the name was changed to the youth engagement team. This was agreed with all partners through discussions at all relevant levels of key partner organisations and has been used ever since.

### *1.2.1. Current context*

The YET is part of a broader multi-agency local approach to the issues of youth violence and gangs in Ipswich. This also saw the creation of SAGE (one of the key partners during the development and establishment of the YET), as well as the engagement of local agencies from the statutory and voluntary sector. The YET's operating model is predicated on effective multi-agency working.

In March 2021, SAGE was reorganised into a number of exploitation hubs with a remit beyond the street gangs, which were the original trigger for the work locally. The lead-up to this reorganisation is discussed below in the second section of this report, which presents the findings from the feasibility study.

### *1.2.2. Environmental factors*

Ipswich is the largest town in Suffolk and contains areas of high deprivation compared to the national average for England. The issues with youth violence have been linked to two established gangs operating in the town since 2012/13, which had a clear identity and were run by local families. These attracted membership from younger children (aged from 10 upwards) who were often in local authority care or in unstable family situations. The increase in violence linked to these gangs followed the post-2008 economic downturn and the associated cuts to public services, including provision for young people locally. Rivalry between the two gangs, which cover different postcode areas of Ipswich, escalated and involved the filming and sharing of incidents online, perpetuating tit-for-tat responses.

In 2018, a Suffolk County Council survey<sup>8</sup> of 1,524 young people (aged 10 to 18) found that 43% felt that there were places in their local area where they felt unsafe or could get hurt, while 38% reported that they had been in situations that made them feel unsafe, or where there was a chance they could get hurt. However, regarding how safe the respondents generally felt, on a scale of 1 to 5 (not scared to really scared) the average response was 1.5, suggesting that overall respondents did feel safe.

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<sup>8</sup> 2018 Safety Survey for Young People. Suffolk County Council Localities and Partnerships Team. This survey is due to be repeated but at present is the only data available.

Ipswich is a relatively small geographic area, which allows the YET officers to develop good working relationships with local practitioners and to travel around it relatively easily. As such, officers are able to respond to incidents called up on the radio when on their shift that involve CYP they are working with. The scope of the team has widened to include the other larger towns in Suffolk, such as Bury St Edmunds, Lowestoft and Felixstowe. This has been prompted by a rise in issues of gang violence, drug dealing and youth exploitation in these areas. This has been linked to:

- the displacement of CYP who are in local authority care and who have been moved between care providers in different areas of the county
- CYP who simply move with their families to other parts of the county
- CYP who go missing when visiting friends across the county

However, the primary focus of the work remains on Ipswich, due to the YET being a local resource to the south of the force area.

### Key elements of the YET's context that appear to be driving change

- Having a focus that is wider than the particular offences or crime problems created, also considering the long-term causes of the behaviour.
- The target locations are manageable within the YET's resources, in terms of staffing and travelling time.
- Partner agencies are similarly able to support individuals locally.

## 1.3. Operating environment

### 1.3.1. Operating environment

The YET in its current form was established in November 2019 as a team of one sergeant plus six police constables (PCs). The team's posts are established, and officers are recruited specifically into these roles<sup>9</sup>. They are non-uniform roles. Officers record crimes and undertake their own basic investigations (albeit less so

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<sup>9</sup> Further details regarding the recruitment and skills of YET officers are provided in the 'Resourcing' section below.

than when they were working under Operation Woven), although more complex investigations are handled by specialist colleagues.

As the YET has developed, it has established links to areas of police practice that support its work. These include:

- Operation Strobe, to raise the profile of CYP at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation, including those who regularly go missing and/or are not engaging with local agencies
- integrated offender management, for those close to turning 18 and entering adult provision
- missing persons advisors
- the modern slavery and vulnerable communities team

In addition, the team now manages a police community support officer (PCSO) placed in the local pupil referral unit (PRU), which is funded by the Raedwald Trust, a third-sector alternative provider of education.

This is due to the level of overlap in the CYP who attend the PRU and those who are part of the YET caseload. Poor school attendance is one of the factors of concern to both the PRU and YET.

As noted above, the YET is part of a broader response by local agencies in Ipswich to the issues of gang violence, including the establishment of SAGE, a multi-agency strategic response that offers diversionary activities to identified CYP of concern involved in county lines and gang activity. SAGE is chaired by the gangs and county lines manager from the local authority. It is comprised of:

- social workers
- early help workers
- other children and youth service practitioners
- youth justice and restorative justice practitioners
- community engagement officers
- education, training and employment workers
- psychology and mental health workers

### 1.3.2. Target population

The YET service users are CYP who are:

- under the age of 18,<sup>10</sup> although they may work with looked-after children beyond this age
- identified as vulnerable due to their involvement in local gangs, local drug dealing or street violence
- identified as vulnerable due to more general safeguarding concerns, such as those who go missing, miss school regularly and/or are at risk of being excluded

CYP are identified through a range of means, outlined below, both by the police and by partner agencies.

### Key elements in the operating environment that appear to be driving change

- Officers recruited to established roles.
- Links to other relevant policing teams, including those with responsibility for schools, Operation Strobe, modern day slavery and trafficking, and safeguarding.

## 1.4. Intervention

### 1.4.1. Aims

The YET's aims are to:

- identify and safeguard at-risk CYP
- work with those CYP and their families to improve their circumstances and living situation, including providing opportunities around education, training or work experience, diversionary activities and referrals to partners as necessary
- reduce demand on police and partners from the identified CYP
- robustly pursue offenders, to reduce the demand on the police and partners from gangs themselves

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<sup>10</sup> It has previously been 21 years under previous versions of the team, but 18 years aligns YET with the age groups covered by partner agencies.



- improve the way in which Suffolk Police is viewed by identified CYP and partner agencies

These aims are achievable only through close joint working between the YET, other police teams and partner agencies, which underpins and facilitates the YET's work.

#### *1.4.2. Approach*

The core role of the YET is to work with the identified CYP to:

- create rapport
- build a picture of their life and needs, including the circumstances and needs of their families
- identify bespoke and flexible support, as well as appropriate diversionary activities

The YET's role is therefore to consider the wider issues driving the behaviour of the CYP, and to identify ways in which it can be addressed before the CYP move further into the criminal justice system. This can involve attending meetings about the CYP or their family that are organised by partner agencies, in order to share and gather information. These include:

- strategy meetings with children's services
- in-year fair access panels at schools where CYP are at risk of being excluded
- meetings with the Department for Work and Pensions regarding employment or benefits

The day-to-day activities of the YET PCs are defined as follows on their role profiles.

- Use intelligence-led patrols and deployments to proactively deter and disrupt the criminal and anti-social activities of CYP who have been identified as vulnerable to committing violence or exploiting others.
- Work with internal and external partners to identify and address developing and ongoing safeguarding issues linked to threat, harm and risk in respect of vulnerable young persons.
- Make relevant referrals for CYP and escalate matters through appropriate channels as required.
- Gather, record and disseminate intelligence accordingly.

- Participate in external multi-agency meetings and internal tasking meetings, as directed by line management.
- Support response and neighbourhood teams with a problem-solving approach to deal with incidents of youth violence and/or exploitation.
- Work with education and voluntary partnerships to promote early intervention and diversion for young people.

This approach draws upon the four 'P's model of policing, which defines the role of police as being to prepare, prevent, pursue and protect. Examples of each of these within the YET include:

- Prepare – work with schools and other education providers to dissuade CYP from gang involvement linked to the kudos and glamour promoted by local gangs.
- Prevent – identify ways of diverting CYP from gang involvement and associated offending, including diversionary activities offered by statutory or voluntary services.
- Pursue – intelligence-led patrols and other deployments to deter and disrupt the offending or anti-social behaviour of CYP who are, or are associated with, members of gangs.
- Protect – use all available legislative powers (of the police and partner agencies) to prevent and deter crime or other behaviour linked to gangs and criminal exploitation. These have included dispersal orders, strict bail conditions, criminal behaviour orders and curfews.

YET officers try to focus on the prepare and prevent elements of this work, trying to prevent further involvement in the criminal justice system. The pursue and protect elements are used more for exploiters identified in their work or CYP who will not engage with the YET but remain involved in offending or who have breached conditions. In order to protect the working relationship that they are developing, officers will avoid using enforcement actions against the CYP where possible. In these cases, YET officers will draw upon the resources of other police teams to conduct an arrest.

The CYP who the YET work with are identified primarily via Suffolk Police's Vulnerability Assessment Tracker (VAT). However, direct referrals to the YET are

also made by police colleagues from other teams and those from partner organisations. The VAT is made up of indicators of involvement in gangs and crime and CYP at risk of exploitation. These indicators were introduced in the early days of the YET but were revised in March 2021 to better ensure that CYP appropriate for YET support were identified. The changes made to the indicators and an early sense of the impact are outlined below in the second section of this report, which outlines the findings of the feasibility study.

Once CYP are identified, the YET sergeant will then research each child or young person. This includes looking at their custody records, intelligence reports, investigations and missing episodes, as well as any information publicly available from Facebook, Instagram and other similar platforms. For those CYP already known to YET or another partner agency, the current status of that work will be included. This information is used to triage each case to assess what work is already being done and where value could be added by the YET.

The list of CYP is then considered each month at a multi-agency triage meeting chaired by the YET sergeant. This meeting is also attended by partner professionals from children and young people's services from the local authority and the youth justice service (usually five attendees). The meeting is used to decide which service and practitioners are best placed to work with each CYP and how other services can support the CYP, as it is usually the case that the CYP identified are known to local services and may already be engaging with practitioners. This process provides a means to reach defensible justifications for the selection of CYP working with the YET. In some cases, a YET officer will be the lead professional for a CYP, who will form part of their caseload. In other cases, the YET will be involved alongside other partners and will limit their involvement to undertaking a visit to the CYP to offer support and/or make them aware they are of interest to the team.

YET officers will log the work they undertake with the CYP assigned to them using the Athena system. They will flag the CYP within Athena, so other officers are aware that the CYP are known to the YET, and they will use a miscellaneous investigation to record their work, again to make information available to all officers within force. The work of the YET officers is underpinned by problem-solving plans (PSPs), which are based on the SARA model (scanning, analysing, response, assessment). This helps the officer to plan and monitor their work with CYP and with partners to help

hold all those involved accountable. The PSPs draw on both police and partner data, in order to provide as complete a picture as possible. The PSPs include an outline of the reason for YET involvement, the other agencies involved, background regarding the CYP and their family, and their current circumstances. The use of these plans is new to the operation of the YET.<sup>11</sup> The sergeant monitors these regularly on Athena and has introduced a spreadsheet to assess the quality of the plans against set criteria, and to track their progress using the monthly VAT scores. The sergeant considers whether each element of SARA has been undertaken well, whether the plan develops a number of working hypotheses, whether the officer has consulted partners and previous plans, and whether the officer has considered long-term sustainability. The sergeant then asks whether the plan's responses have had a positive impact and whether the objective was achieved, whether these have been properly evidenced and whether the plan evidences any failures or learning opportunities.

The progress of the work undertaken with the CYP on PSPs is also considered at a monthly performance and tasking meeting, which is chaired by the local area superintendent.

YET officers will work with CYP (they hold a caseload of between 8 and 10 CYP), and with partners, for as long as is deemed necessary by all those involved. There is no fixed term for their involvement. Exit plans are developed to support the CYP moving into other services as necessary.

As noted, in addition to the work with CYP, the YET also work to tackle identified exploiters. This has included the use of child abduction warning notices (CAWNs), slavery trafficking risk orders (STROs), and powers under the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

## Key elements of the YET's activity that appear to be driving change

- Proactive, preventative work with identified CYP, using the four 'P's model.

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<sup>11</sup> Previously, YET officers drew up tactical action plans, which were more of a running log of the work done.

- Building relationships with the CYP and families, working in an open and bespoke way alongside partners for as long as necessary.
- Consistent staffing, with officers able to build relationships with partner agencies and the CYP.
- Defensible decisions about which CYP to work with, using the VAT.
- Close working with partner agencies to share information and intelligence in a timely fashion to allow joint decision making.
- Avoiding enforcement activities with the identified CYP where possible.
- Proactive work to target exploiters and the criminal behaviour of the CYP.

## 1.5. Service delivery partners

The YET works closely with statutory and voluntary sector partner organisations in order to work most effectively with the CYP identified to be at risk. The YET's activity is intended to result in partners experiencing a reduction in demand for their services and intelligence from the YET, which allows them to intervene earlier or more effectively. This section discusses the multi-agency nature of their work in more detail.

### 1.5.1. Partner agencies

The key partner agencies for YET include:

- Children and young people's services of Suffolk County Council, such as:
  - social workers
  - early help practitioners
  - the make a change team (regarding all forms of child exploitation)
  - the activity group (which aims to prevent CYP entering local authority care)
- SAGE, a multi-agency partnership on the issue that is housed by Suffolk County Council
- Suffolk County Council youth services
- district and borough councils and community safety partnerships
- schools

- providers of local authority care, such as the YMCA and Benjamin Foundation (for those aged 16+)
- NHS clinical commissioning groups and foundation trust, regarding mental health and medical care
- youth offending service
- probation services
- Crown Prosecution Service
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Raedwald Trust, a third-sector alternative provider of education

The YET will jointly work on cases with practitioners from these agencies, based on a collaborative decision of who is best placed to have direct contact with the CYP, to avoid them being overwhelmed by a large number of professionals. These decisions are made jointly by the YET sergeant and representatives of Suffolk County Council, to avoid duplication of effort. This also prevents agencies from working against each other on cases and ensures that the CYP can access all the support they need.

The YET has also developed relationships with providers of diversionary activities, to which they refer identified CYP. The range of activities has been expanded during the period that YET and SAGE have been operating, including football, kick boxing, running and mountain biking interventions.

During the theory of change workshops, those involved in establishing YET in Suffolk Police noted that, despite this close working with partner agencies, they had led the response to the problems in Ipswich back in 2017. They had identified relevant agencies and brought them into their work and ensured that they delivered on their responsibilities in this field. It was noted by these officers that Suffolk Police have been faster than other partners to focus on the issues in Ipswich and to develop solutions. They noted that partner agencies were looking to the police to tackle the problems, not only initially when the problems needed police intervention, but also to coordinate the longer-term, preventative work, which is traditionally outside of their remit. YET officers note that even now, after some years of partnership working on this issue, they can often become involved in work that is not traditional police work, such as accessing diversionary activities. However, the YET officers do consider part

of their aim to be safeguarding the CYP that they work with and, in turn, to ultimately reduce demand on the police and partner organisations.

## Key elements of working with partners that appear to be driving change

- Joint decision making regarding individual cases.
- Regular information sharing.
- Avoiding duplication of effort.

## 1.6. Resourcing

### 1.6.1. Staffing and expertise

The YET is a dedicated team of:

- one sergeant
- six PCs
- one PCSO attached to the local pupil referral unit, a role funded by the Raedwald Trust

These roles are established posts, initially drawing on precept funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office, with officers recruited into them. This differs from earlier versions of the YET, where officers were drawn from response abstractions and those on one-year or two-year rotations. It was reported by the current YET sergeant that this led to a lack of consistency in the officers working with the CYP, and with varying levels of skills and expertise among team members. The six current YET officers are split into three teams of two PCs to cover the three Ipswich neighbourhoods (central, east and west). This supports close joint working with police colleagues, such as neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs) and school officers who are also geographically based and will also be encountering CYP in their work. In addition, it allows consistency in the officers attending meetings with other partner agencies.

The force have specified the following criteria for recruitment to the roles.

- Excellent verbal and written communication skills, with the ability to communicate effectively with a wide range of stakeholders and audiences at all levels while building and maintaining effective partner relationships.

- Proven ability to work alone and with partners in finding short-term, medium-term and long-term sustainable solutions to problems and to reducing demand.
- Experience of effective planning and delivery of successful policing operations and investigations.
- Ability to identify vulnerability and effectively manage safeguarding.

YET officers work a seven-day shift pattern of earlies (8am to 4pm, or 9am to 5pm) and lates (3pm to 11pm, or 4pm to 12am). They will amend shifts depending on the requirements to attend meetings with partners or local needs. This provides the YET officers the opportunity to work with other agencies who work standard office hours, but also to cover evenings when the CYP may be available and/or at risk. This also allows YET officers to undertake curfew checks for those CYP who have them. This is followed by four rest days for the whole team. During this period, partner agencies can log concerns via the standard control room routes or through the multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH), but not directly to the YET.

The YET are also trying to affect a cultural shift within the force regarding how CYP in general are treated in interactions with the police. The aim is to have general police interactions with CYP – for example, from response officers – and to use some elements of the YET approach, which involves seeking to engage CYP rather than alienating them. As such, the YET's sergeant has started to provide input into training the force's new recruits regarding the YET's aims and role. It is hoped that in time, these activities will result in a more trauma-informed approach being used with CYP by all officers, not just those involved with the YET. In this way, the YET hopes to have an impact beyond the direct work of its relatively small team.

### Key elements of YET's staffing that appear to be driving change

- Officers recruited to established roles.
- Geographically based team allows joint working with NPTs and other partners.
- Links to other policing teams with responsibility for schools, neighbourhood policing and other related areas of business.
- Working a shift pattern that allows contact with partner agencies and CYP.
- Briefings and training to Suffolk Police colleagues to raise awareness of the YET's work and to encourage wider use of their approach.



### *1.7. Force support and governance*

Regarding senior and strategic support for the YET from Suffolk Police, the team is managed by an inspector from the neighbourhood and partnership team, who covers the south of the force and also holds responsibility for modern slavery, vulnerable communities and missing persons. The YET is overseen by two superintendent roles that together provide strategic oversight of CYP work in the force:

- a detective superintendent (within safeguarding and crime investigation)
- the southern area commander (delivering policing services to CYP in Ipswich and the surrounding areas)

Within the force, a strategic governance board, chaired by the assistant chief constable, provides leadership and oversight of the work of YET. This is supported by a tactical delivery board, which is chaired by the southern area NPT inspector reporting into the southern area county policing superintendent, who is the force's strategic CYP lead. Work in this area is guided by the force's strategic action plan, which sets aims and milestones for the work and underpins joint working with other local agencies. Its stated vision is as follows.

End the impact from urban street gangs and county lines dominated drugs markets in Suffolk communities, preventing exploitation of the young and vulnerable, associated violence and weapons crime.

The work of the YET is one way in which the force is working towards this vision. The work of Suffolk Police in this area of gangs and exploitation of CYP (of which the YET is part) feeds into multi-agency oversight and governance structures, including the Ipswich community safety partnership. This, in turn, feeds into the countywide Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership for Children, which brings together the police, local authorities and health services. This group holds Suffolk Police accountable to improvements in this area of policing.

As noted, the team's posts have been made substantive, which represents an investment in YET from the force, who have also invested in other posts in this area of work. For example, in 2018, they increased the neighbourhood policing presence in schools officer posts. In Ipswich, this increased from one PCSO to one PC and three PCSOs. Suffolk Police are also due to appoint three new officers for the 18-to-

21 age group, who will transition into adult services. The force employs missing persons, modern slavery and vulnerable communities advisors. It also runs Operation Strobe, which identifies CYP at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation, including those who regularly go missing and do not engage with local agencies.<sup>12</sup>

There is also a force-wide county lines operation, Operation Velocity, which is managed separately. This seeks to disrupt these gangs, act against the organised crime groups running them and safeguard the CYP who have been drawn into them as dealers and runners. The CYP identified by Operation Velocity are sometimes also identified by the YET, in which case the teams will work together. In addition, there is a monthly tasking meeting focused on the top 10 missing CYP. This is chaired jointly by a detective chief inspector who is the lead for missing persons and a CYP lead from children's services. The YET sergeant often attends this to feed in intelligence, as do representatives from partner agencies.

#### *1.7.1. Physical location*

Officially, the YET is located in the main local building for response officers, which also houses some local authority children's services staff. This is located on the outskirts of Ipswich. However, due to changes introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, the YET was moved to a neighbourhood policing partnership building in a neighbourhood of Ipswich where gang activity is an issue. This is further discussed in the second section of this report, which outlines the findings of the feasibility study.

### Key elements of force support that appear to be driving change

- Force commitment to the YET and work in this field, in the form of human resources and strategic oversight of the work.
- Appropriate building from which to operate.

## 1.8. Outcomes and intervention efficacy

The YET's aims are to:

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<sup>12</sup> These CYP may then be taken on by the YET. As outlined in the 'Bowen domains: Demand' section below, Operation Strobe does not have officers allocated to it to work with CYP, so this is a means to raise their profile within the force.

- identify and safeguard at-risk CYP.
- work with those CYP and their families to improve their circumstances and living situation, including:
  - providing opportunities around education, training or work experience
  - diversionary activities
  - referrals to partners as necessary
- reduce demand on police and partners from the identified CYP
- robustly pursue offenders and reduce the demand on the police and partners from gangs themselves
- improve the way in which Suffolk Police is viewed by identified CYP and partner agencies

The theory of change outlined above details how the organisation, resourcing and activities of the YET, alongside local partner agencies, should achieve these aims. In the course of developing the theory of change for YET, the following outcomes (short-term, medium-term and long-term) were identified.

### Short-term outcomes

- Identification of CYP who are experiencing, or are at risk of, exploitation by gangs.
- Engaging with and providing support to identified CYP and their family (either through the police or another agency).

### Medium-term outcomes

- Improved outcomes for identified young people and their families, regarding:
  - living circumstances or family breakdown
  - involvement in education or employment
  - a reduction in offending
  - going missing
- Improved multi-agency working with partners.
- Improved opinion of the police by CYP.

## Long-term outcomes

- Less demand on the police in relation to CYP at risk.
- Lowering of risk for CYP in Ipswich.
- Reduction in levels of gang and youth violence in Ipswich.
- Reduction in the number of local drugs gangs operating locally.
- Increased prosecution of offenders (drug dealers).

These outcomes are presented in a logic model (Appendix A), alongside other aspects of the YET. The achievement of these outcomes would support the YET to achieve its stated aims. The feasibility study's role is to assess to what extent and in what ways the YET might be doing this currently. These findings are provided in the second section of this report.

## 1.9. Concluding comments

This first section has described the aims, activities, structure, processes and resources of Suffolk Police's YET, in order to develop a theory of change. As such, it has identified the key ingredients that makes the YET operate and how these link to its intended aims and outcomes. This section has been based on the findings gathered at workshops and preparatory meetings with key strategic and operational stakeholders from relevant local organisations.

The second section of this report outlines the findings of a feasibility study of the YET, which aims to test this theory of change against the operation of the intervention in the real world. These findings will demonstrate whether the theory of change is an accurate reflection of the actual operation of the YET. In addition, it will provide conclusions regarding the suitability for the YET for a full-scale evaluation.

## 2. Feasibility study

### 2.1. Introduction

This feasibility study report is structured using the domains developed by Bowen and others (2009). These are:

- acceptability
- demand

- implementation
- practicality
- adaptation
- integration
- expansion
- limited efficacy testing

For each domain, the relevant Bowen question is addressed using information drawn from two sources. The first is from the theory of change. This is information that was gathered from discussions and workshops with police officers and other professionals who were involved in the YET's development and current operation, as laid out in the introduction to the first section of this report. The second source is data collected to test the key elements that appear to be driving change identified in the theory of change. These were:

- interviews with two YET PCs
- interviews with two CYP who have worked with YET, as well as their carers<sup>13</sup>
- interviews with the mothers of three CYP who have worked with YET<sup>14</sup>
- observation at a multi-agency VAT triage meeting
- analysis of YET's VAT data for a six-month period (September 2020 to February 2021),<sup>15</sup> as well as direct referrals
- analysis of a sample of 10 PSPs prepared on YET cases since November 2020.
- analysis of Suffolk Police force data regarding levels of demand in relation to gangs and youth violence

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<sup>13</sup> These were identified by the YET and details provided to the research team. Both were in local authority care.

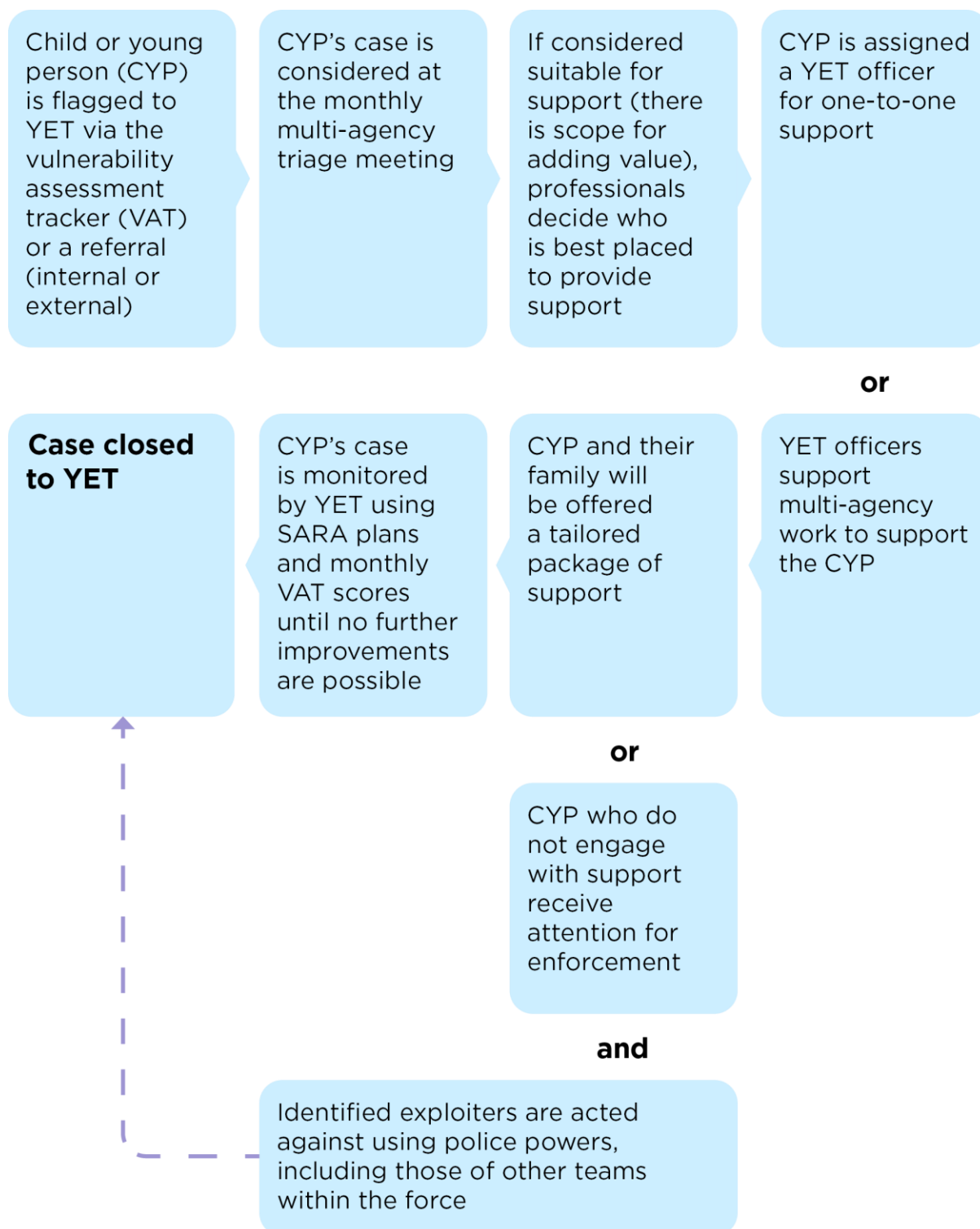
<sup>14</sup> These were identified by the YET and details provided to the research team. The team tried to speak to the CYP directly but in each case was told they would not be happy to take part.

<sup>15</sup> As noted above, the indicators that make up to VAT are currently being changed. This version was not available to this study – a first test run was produced in April 2021, after this report was written – and so the analysis was conducted on the most recent runs of the previous version.

Together, these data sources provide additional information on the operation and effect of the YET.

This section begins with a flowchart that maps the journey of a child or young person through their interaction with the YET.

**Figure 1.** Journey of a child or young person through the YET.



## 2.2. Bowen domains

### 2.2.1. Acceptability

To what extent is the YET judged as suitable, satisfying or attractive to programme deliverers and recipients?

All YET officers, as well as those managing the team, reported in interviews that the YET was an important and necessary addition to Suffolk Police's work in this area. It was reported that the team performed a novel function in the force that enabled them to reduce the demand created by the CYP in question. For example, YET was able to reduce the CYP's number of missing episodes or respond more efficiently to them because of the greater rapport that the YET officers have with them. Through the YET, these officers reported being able to know about, and work with, at-risk CYP at an earlier stage than they had done so previously. Officers also have the means to gather intelligence about the operation of local and county lines gangs or those involved in child exploitation. This is due to the YET proactively seeking out at-risk CYP through the VAT processes and multi-agency working with partners.

In interviews with officers delivering YET, the range of skills present within the team were highlighted as being of key importance. In particular, officers identified problem-solving skills as key to the work of the YET. In the view of one officer, these were linked to length of service, as they believed that, over time, officers in response roles will encounter the same problems and the same people repeatedly, but may have no time or scope to try and help in any long-term way. Some of the YET officers have come from neighbourhood policing or safer neighbourhood teams, where a more long-term problem-solving approach is used, and this is also felt to be vital within the YET. For example, officers need to be able to develop rapport and working relationships with the CYP and to sustain these over a period of a year or more. They need to develop a similar rapport with professionals in partner agencies too. To be able to effectively address the issues, the officers need to understand why the CYP are coming to police attention, which may relate to family circumstances as much as to the actions of the CYP themselves.

Regarding the recipients of the YET, there are two relevant groups:

- the identified CYP and their parents or carers



- professionals in partner agencies with which the YET works

Partner agency representatives echoed officers' views about the benefits of the YET. The involvement of a police team in this work was considered beneficial because of the intelligence and powers that the team brought with them. Officers were often spoken of highly for their ability to engage with the CYP, and for their consistency and tenacity in doing so. YET officers note that they also build rapport with partner agencies – such as places that house CYP in care, like the YMCA in Ipswich – in similar ways to how they build rapport with CYP. One YET officer is the single point of contact for the YMCA building and will attend regularly to speak with resident CYP and the staff. They noted that this has given them the opportunity to feedback to staff regarding any incidents involving residents. Analysis of the sample of PSPs prepared by the YET shows that officers often spend as much time meeting and exchanging information with other professionals as they do engaging directly with the CYP. In some cases, this is the primary role of the YET if it is felt that the CYP has sufficient good working relationships with other professionals or will not engage with a police officer. This means that information and intelligence on police systems are up to date and available to other officers who may be responding to incidents or leading investigations.

The two carers of the CYP interviewed also spoke highly of the YET officers. In both cases, the carers, who have years' experience of such work, reported the YET officers (sergeant and PCs) to be excellent at engaging with the CYP in a fair and supportive manner, aided by their ability to provide diversionary activities of interest. The diversionary activities were reported to be a way to start to break down barriers between the CYP and the police, and to engage them with the team and to provide distractions from, or alternatives to, the activities that had initially brought them to the attention of the police. They also had regular contact with the YET themselves regarding their cases. They reported that if they were in need of police support – for example, because the CYP were being violent or were found in possession of drugs – they much preferred to contact the YET directly (if they were on shift) because they knew their response would be supportive, informed by their knowledge of the CYP and with long-term relationships in mind. As such, the carers were acutely aware of the gap created when the YET officers were all on rest days.

The CYP and parents spoken to similarly reported universally positive experiences with YET officers.<sup>16</sup> They reported the YET officers to be friendly and discrete in their interactions, and to provide facts and straight answers – for example, around the likely outcome of continued offending or involvement in gangs. The officers were not felt to be driven by an agenda, or the need to tick a box, as was felt in interactions with some other agencies. This is supported by the YET’s ability to stay involved in a case when other agencies have withdrawn because of service criteria or timeframes. The YET’s involvement can be much more flexible and bespoke, allowing them to return to a case if circumstances change. They were reported to always follow through on actions discussed and to do so more quickly than some other agencies. Analysis of the sample of PSPs provided by the YET shows that officers can act as brokers between other agencies and CYP and their families. Often, there are longstanding pre-existing relationships with agencies such as children’s services or education providers that have broken down, and the YET officers will try to move these on so that all parties are able to work together. This is also the case for the wider police force. For example, there were instances of YET officers following up for the CYP whether property from previous investigations can be returned.

While all interviewees were clear that the YET officers were police officers, they often reported that they were unlike other police officers they had encountered, being easier to engage with. One CYP interviewee described them as having a ‘different outlook’. It was common for the CYP, parents and carers interviewed to describe the YET officers as non-judgemental, caring, understanding and also honest. Various examples of YET officers acting outside of a traditional policing role to make the CYP feel cared for and supported were given. This included securing charitable funding to ensure that CYP and their siblings had presents for Christmas, that CYP had items for the arrival of a child, and that a memory bench, tree and plaque could be installed for a parent who died suddenly. A visit to Scotland Yard after attending a gangs meeting in London was also mentioned as an activity welcomed and remembered by the CYP who attended. The fact that the team wore plain clothes was noted, as was their differing attitude from other officers encountered. It was reported that the

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<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that the group of CYP, parents and carers interviewed were selected by the YET and agreed to take part in the study, and so may be expected to be supportive of it.

majority of the CYP working with the YET are male, as are the majority of the YET officers. This contrasts with practitioners from other agencies – in particular, children’s social care, who are often female. It was reported by some parents and professionals that the YET officers can therefore provide a different sort of interaction with the CYP.

The CYP, parents and carers interviewed were reaching the end of their time with the YET, and all reported missing the officers and the support they had provided. The cases varied in the reasons why they had been referred to the YET and the severity of the problems involved. In all cases, positive changes had been seen by parents or carers over the time they had worked with the YET. In a number of cases, the work of other agencies was also cited as leading to these changes, along with other changes in the circumstances of the CYP. However, the work of the YET officers were seen as contributing to these positive changes. In particular, it was noted that YET officers were often the only professionals to continue to have face-to-face contact during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Data that would be of most use to a full-scale evaluation of the YET includes further interviews with YET officers, other Suffolk Police officers, professionals from partner agencies and CYP working with the team, as well as their parents or carers. In this study, only a small number of interviews with each group were conducted, which provided very valuable insights into the operation of the team and the effect of this on the CYP they work with, as well as their families.

### *2.2.2. Demand*

**To what extent is the YET likely to be used and how much demand is likely to exist?**

It was reported by YET staff and management that the level of demand currently exceeds the capacity of the YET. In part, this was reported to be due to the success of the team’s work, which means that more cases are referred to them from within the force. Since coming into post in late 2020, the current YET sergeant has introduced processes to support the decisions that the YET have to make about which CYP to work with. For example, the CYP returned each month via the VAT, as well as any referrals received, are all researched by the sergeant using police systems and any other available data to assess who might benefit most from YET

involvement.<sup>17</sup> A monthly multi-agency triage meeting is then held, chaired by the sergeant, to agree with relevant partners from the various parts of the local authority children's services and the youth justice service that CYP will be assigned to YET and what work to focus on.

It was noted by YET officers that while they work with other teams within the force on the area of CYP at risk of exploitation, they are one of the few who will hold a caseload. For example, Operation Strobe is a way to raise the profile of CYP at risk but does not hold those CYP as part of their caseload. The force's modern slavery advisors are civilian staff who again do not hold a caseload and are not able to undertake investigations. Unlike other forces who have an exploitation team regarding CYP at risk, the YET is the only similar sort of resource within the force. As such, it was noted by senior officers that a formal referral process into the YET from other police teams may be needed to ensure some initial research has been done into the CYP and what YET might be expected to contribute.

The YET is also a proactive team that seeks out its own work, primarily via the VAT. Regarding the VAT, which is the main way in which CYP are brought to the attention of the YET, the six months of data provided by the team shows that the number of individuals returned grew each month, from 38 in September 2020, to 131 in February 2021.<sup>18</sup> Over the course of the six months, the average number of CYP returned was 82. These CYP are more likely to be male (63.8%) than female (36.2%) and were on average 15 years old. The YET also provided one month's data (for November 2020) to show the outcomes of the triage work that the YET sergeant undertakes and the multi-agency meeting decisions. The data shows decisions for 68 cases (73 cases were returned in the VAT that month). Of these, 18 were allocated to a YET officer. A further 24 are listed for a YET officer to visit, to gather more information to see if they should be formally allocated to a YET officer. A further five cases are described as not engaging with the YET, and so are not new to the YET. The remaining cases list reasons why they are not suitable for the YET,

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<sup>17</sup> As outlined in the first section of this report regarding the intervention's approach.

<sup>18</sup> During this period, the VAT indicators remained the same. The data has been checked with the YET and no external reason can be provided for the increase, beyond an increase in demand.

most often because other more appropriate agencies are already engaging with them. This shows that, in this one month at least, the majority of the cases brought to and considered by the YET are acted upon in some way.

The need to review CYP flagged by the VAT was also highlighted by YET officers. A low score on the VAT does not necessarily mean that the young person requires less intervention.<sup>19</sup> As such, there is work created for the YET in needing to review and research the cases flagged each month, which is undertaken by the team's sergeant. They gave an example of a case where this process generated considerable work for the team, but they felt prevented later demand on the wider force by acting proactively.

The case concerned a young person who had a low score on the VAT. Upon researching the case, they identified a report by a member of the public about the young person being assaulted by an older male in a park. On further investigation, this man was found to be the young person's father, who was trying to remove her from the park, fearing her involvement with older gang members. Further research with other agencies found that her family had concerns about her involvement with such people and had reported these. For example, the school was found to have concerns over her declared liking of gang culture and drill music. However, the family did not feel they were being supported. Furthermore, her parents were separating, which was creating other tensions at home.

A YET officer was tasked to visit the home. The young person was not keen to engage, but the YET stayed in contact. The young person then started to go missing. In time, the young person disclosed to the YET officer her victimisation at the hands of older gang members in a series of offences, including rape and assault in London, where she had been taken to meet other men. These offences are now the subject to investigation by the Metropolitan Police Service. In addition, there were threats made to her family from gang members. The YET became involved in supporting the family to move house, first to temporary accommodation and then to another home in the county. At first, the YET held the investigation into the gang offences, as they

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<sup>19</sup> However, this may change once the revised VAT is introduced and the scoring becomes less blunt (see the 'Implementation' section below for more details).

were the officers who were initially involved. However, such investigations were reported to be resource-intensive and so YET requested that it be taken over by CID. Following this, the YET started to withdraw support following an exit plan. As a sign of the rapport created with the family, the young person named a pet goldfish after the YET officer involved.

This example shows how the YET not only works with CYP in terms of creating high levels of demand on the force, but can also be the first to pick up on cases that could lead to high levels of demand in the future. The YET sergeant reported their view that at the point when they became involved in the case, no other police team would have picked it up. This could be seen as a clear benefit of the way in which the YET operates. However, it does create difficulties regarding the level of demand their proactive work creates. The YET is a small team that has a dual role to support the CYP and their families, as well as pursuing exploiters.

Other ways in which the YET generates its own work was noted during the research. The YET undertook a first test purchase operation<sup>20</sup> with local hotels in 2021 to check whether CYP under 18 years old are able to book rooms in their names. This was prompted by CYP on their caseload reporting being asked to do this by older people. As a result, YET officers have left photos of the CYP in question at some local hotels and asked staff to call 999 if they tried to book rooms. When they did, the YET were able to arrest the older men who accompanied them for child abduction offences. During an operation planned for this year, those hotels involved will receive a debrief and feedback from YET officers following the operation.

For a full evaluation of the YET, a review of VAT data over a longer period of time, ideally at least one full 12-month period, would be of most use. In addition, interviews with YET officers would mean that additional demand placed on the team could be explored.

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<sup>20</sup> Based on Operation Makesafe used in the Metropolitan Police Service.

### 2.2.3. Implementation

## To what extent can the YET be successfully delivered to intended participants?

The YET as it is organised currently is the latest development of the team since its inception in 2017. Those working within and with YET who were involved in this study reported that it is being successfully delivered, in that it is thought to be helping to identify and support the CYP alongside professionals within other agencies. The extent to which this success can be assessed using the data available to this study is considered in the 'Limited efficacy testing' section below.

Regarding further details of the YET's implementation, the VAT was reviewed and revised during the fieldwork for this study, in part because access to the police data used to populate the VAT changed in March 2021 due to technical changes within the force. Previously, this data concerned 19 indicators grouped by levels of risk, each incidence of which simply scored one.

- High-risk factors include if the CYP is:
  - linked to an address in an urban street gang area
  - a disengaged victim
  - suspected of the supply of Class A drugs
  - suspected of aggravated violence
  - linked to a drug-related police operation
  - linked to intelligence regarding gangs
  - linked to firearms
  - an associate of a gang member
- Medium-risk factors include if the CYP is:
  - suspected of the supply of class B or C drugs
  - suspected of robbery
  - suspected of violence or public order offences
  - linked to anti-social behaviour
  - linked to alcohol use
  - linked to weapons

- linked to drugs
- Other risk factors include if the CYP:
  - has multiple mobile phone numbers
  - has alias names
  - has missing episodes
  - uses gang-related hand gestures or language

These were reported to be based on National Crime Agency indicators of gang involvement, which were developed some time ago. However, these indicators, especially those regarding involvement in offending, are felt by the YET officers to be suitable more to those involved in gangs in a more established way than the CYP that the YET works with. In addition, it was reported that the way in which some of the indicators were operationalised within the force skewed the results. For example, the data period drawn upon was considered to be too long and so risked drawing on out-of-date information and intelligence. Regarding specific indicators, individuals with more than one phone number on the force's systems could be those who have changed their phone number frequently, rather than those who have multiple phones at any one time. Similarly, in a relatively small town such as Ipswich, it is likely one could live in an area defined as an urban street gang area, based on a postcode area, without having any involvement in a gang. Indeed, analysis of the six months of VAT data provided showed that the majority of CYP highlighted in these runs of the VAT had these particular indicators. For example, over the six months of data, 82.5% of cases were listed as being linked to an address in an urban street gang area and 63.9% had multiple mobile phone numbers. The next most common indicator was to be an associate of a gang member (54.5%), which seems a more direct indicator of gang involvement, with the most common offending indicator being a suspect of violence or public order (32.7%). In addition, it was felt that some key indicators of vulnerability and risk were not present within the VAT – in particular, good data on episodes of going missing, which is known to be a key risk factor. While this was listed as an indicator in the previous set above, it relied on data from external sources. Police data on missing incidents are held on a separate system (Compact) from Athena and there was no link established between them. As of March 2021, plans were in place to rectify this.



It was therefore felt that this was a good time to review the indicators making up the VAT, to ensure they were fit for purpose. The new indicators making up the VAT from April 2021 onwards include the following.

- High risk (scores 3):
  - number of investigations for robbery, violence, public order and drugs (where the CYP was a suspect, victim or witness)
  - intelligence regarding firearms, violent crime, gangs and drugs and missing episodes<sup>21</sup>
- Medium risk (scores 2):
  - number of investigations for criminal damage, anti-social behaviour, non-firearms weapons and alcohol-related incidents (where the CYP was a suspect, victim or witness)
  - intelligence regarding non-firearms weapons (including knife carrying)
  - criminal damage and anti-social behaviour
- Unscored:
  - total count of investigations where CYP is a victim or suspect
  - count of intelligence reports<sup>22</sup>
  - number of missing episodes

As in the previous version of the VAT, all CYP who are returned based on these indicators are reviewed by the YET sergeant. This means that there is no cut-off point based on the score of the CYP for YET involvement, which instead is based on a review of the individual case.

This version of the VAT uses data from the previous four weeks to ensure it is up to date. The YET sergeant reported that it had produced a longer list of CYP, around 200, some of them new to the YET. The sergeant was hopeful it would produce a list of CYP in need of YET support, as well as those who perhaps may not need as

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<sup>21</sup> Sexual offences may also be added to this category.

<sup>22</sup> These indicators are used as an early warning catch-all measure, with the more offence-specific indicators used to generate the score.

much additional research, if the VAT indicators provide more specific detail as to their reasons for police contact and risks.

In April 2021, a triage meeting was held to discuss this list of CYP produced by the new VAT in April 2021. Observations showed that most of the CYP discussed – those for whom a PSP was in place, were of most concern or were new to the YET, which numbered around 20 to 25 CYP in total – were known to the local authority children’s service’s and youth justice service representatives present. The meeting provided the opportunity to discuss the work of the other services, to exchange up-to-date contacts for the CYP, and to establish where the YET could best add to this work. In cases where a number of agencies are working with a CYP and their family, and where the behaviour or circumstances are liable to short-term change, these regular multi-agency meetings can help to ensure that all agencies are working to the correct information. This, in turn, can help avoid duplication of effort and different agencies working against each other. This was evident when the meeting discussed recent local incidents that involved CYP who are on the caseload of a number of agencies. All agencies were able to provide information and intelligence they had, to update on the actions of their agency and to decide the next steps to be taken.

For a full evaluation of YET, VAT data using the new indicators would be the key source of data regarding the implementation of the team. This would need to be available for a period of at least 12 months. The analysis of this data would be supported by further observations of the monthly triage meetings and interviews with YET officers and professionals from partner agencies.

#### *2.2.4. Practicality*

**To what extent can YET activity be carried out with intended participants using existing means, resources and circumstances, and without outside intervention?**

YET was established as an additional resource due to the demand created by the issues of violence and gang activity in Ipswich. As such, it was not provided within existing means and resources. This was justified due to the level of demand placed on the police due to these issues, both initially (when the team operated as Op Woven as an enforcement response) and now, when there remains demand from CYP who are at risk from exploitation. The human resources currently used to

provide the YET are outlined in the first section of this report regarding staffing and expertise. The 'Acceptability' section above discusses views of interviewees about what they consider to be important about these officers.

The relocation of the YET during the COVID-19 pandemic to a separate building has shown how the team can benefit from specific resources. The YET will remain in this new building. This means that officers are able to walk to many incidents and have become known in the local community, which is one of the town's gang-affected areas. Officers are also finding working from a non-police building to be useful for building community relations.

YET officers who were interviewed reported that the building would be more useful, as it could provide a space for them to work with CYP who lack a safe environment in which they can meet with officers or undertake schoolwork. This could include a stand-alone computer to allow the YET officers to assist the CYP with schoolwork or job preparation and applications. It was also suggested that it could act as a safe place for officers (YET or response) to bring CYP to while waiting for children's services assessments.

Any full evaluation of YET would need to consider the longer-term effects of these changes, as well as any other changes that may have affected the practicality of YET. These would be drawn out during interviews with YET officers.

#### *2.2.5. Adaptation*

To what extent does the YET perform when changes are made for a new context or with a different population?

As outlined in the first section of this report, the YET has developed since 2018, from an enforcement-based drugs operation to an engagement team providing long-term support to CYP and their families. In this way, both its target population and its way of operating have adapted since its inception.

All those interviewed as part of this study considered the current version of the team to be the most effective version since its inception. Practitioners from partner agencies, particularly the various teams of the local authority's children's services and youth justice service, value the work that the YET does with identified CYP. The information sharing that takes place between agencies and the YET, which draws on

the intelligence that YET officers are able to gather from their interactions with the CYP, is considered to be of great use. CYP, as well as their parents and carers, also reported positive experiences of working with the YET and compared this favourably to their experiences of working with other services and with interactions with other parts of Suffolk Police. YET officers reported CYP disclosing offences committed against them or other relevant information during their interactions, which have led to investigations, both within Suffolk Police and other forces.

The changes introduced by the current YET sergeant show that the ways in which the team operates can continue to alter in response to levels of demand and local requirements. In addition, the YET operates in a multi-agency context that also changes, as will be outlined in the 'Integration' section below.

A full evaluation of the YET would need to consider the longer-term effects of any adaptations made to the YET. These would be drawn out during interviews with YET officers and professionals from partner agencies, as well as observations of YET activities.

#### *2.2.6. Integration*

### To what extent can the YET be integrated within an existing system?

For the YET, integration can be considered regarding existing police systems and multi-agency systems. With regard to existing police systems, interviews conducted for this study suggest that while the YET was initially created (as Op Woven) to respond to a policing issue, it now sits within – but disconnected from – existing local policing structures. The team is managed by an inspector from the neighbourhood and partnership team, who has responsibility for linked areas of work, including modern slavery and missing persons. In turn, YET is overseen by two superintendent roles, which together provide strategic oversight of CYP work in the force. These roles are a detective superintendent (within safeguarding and crime investigation) and the southern area commander (delivering policing services to CYP in Ipswich and the surrounding areas). This dual management reflects the fact that the YET is a resource local to Ipswich and surrounding areas (the south of the force area), but also undertakes specific work in the field of CYP. In contrast to other teams within the force, this work is proactive and involves managing a caseload,

rather than being reactive (for example, in the case of the safeguarding team who feed into the MASH). It was reported that the policing structures YET uses to flag its work do not always work as well as they could. For example, despite YET flagging their cases on Athena to note their involvement to other officers, information is not always passed to them from other police teams. The sergeant reported attending the local tasking and tactical coordination group (TTCG) meetings for the Ipswich area and finding out about actions taken regarding CYP on the YET caseload, or about the areas in which they operate, that would affect their work but had not been communicated to them. In order to better join up work, a new 'meeting in a meeting' is to be started, which will act as a pre-meet to the TTCG. This will take place seven days prior to draw together the work of different police teams in the area.

While there are a number of aims for the team's work (as outlined above), these can pull in different directions. This includes focusing on CYP or on exploiters, and focusing on high-risk CYP or on early intervention work with CYP at less risk. Those interviewed reported that the emphasis in the YET's work has altered over time. This has depended on local priorities and on the officers leading YET (who have changed frequently in the recent past), and has been influenced by the work undertaken by partner agencies. For a relatively small team, it is necessary to decide priorities in a clear and justified manner. It was felt that a consistent focus on the aims of the team would help it to integrate further with other teams within the force. This will be of greater importance as the YET starts to work in geographical areas other than Ipswich as issues with gangs and youth violence grow in other parts of the county. This is discussed in the 'Expansion' section below.

Linked to this, it was noted by those interviewed that there is no specific or standard training for officers joining the YET. There was some initial bespoke training for YET officers, but this has not been repeated for new team members. Officers may well have developed relevant skills in previous posts – for example, in neighbourhood policing roles. However, the work of the YET is more focused on issues of safeguarding and exploitation, and relates to a specific age group. As such, it was argued that training on these issues and engagement with this age group would be of use to officers starting with the YET. It was reported that funding had been requested for training in these areas, such as:

- the Solihull two-day Foundation Course (regarding increasing awareness and understanding of emotional health and wellbeing, including the developmental effects of childhood trauma)
- training concerning exploitation and modern slavery

With regard to the YET's integration within the existing multi-agency context, the YET is part of a wider local response to the issues created by local gangs, drug dealing and associated violence and exploitation. Around the same time as YET was developed, SAGE was created to bring together relevant local agencies.<sup>23</sup> SAGE was funded for two years. In 2020, an evaluation was undertaken to review its work. The findings were positive regarding work with CYP and their families and with other partners. As such, a decision was made to fund two exploitation hubs from April 2021 for two years to expand the work of SAGE beyond Ipswich, and to expand its focus on gangs and county lines to include wider sexual and criminal exploitation of CYP. The hubs are led by local youth justice services and local authority children's services, and will cover Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds (with a possible further expansion to Lowestoft). The hubs will consist of a manager and six specialist outreach staff and a police intelligence officer who will link to Op Velocity (the force's county lines enforcement operation). Building on the work of the YET, the hubs will use a VAT of their own based on multi-agency data, to identify and track vulnerable CYP and highlight hotspots. However, this VAT will be run on referrals into the team, rather than a proactive search of data, which is the approach that the police VAT employs.

At the time of the research for this study, the YET was discussing how it would work with these new hubs, as it was clear that they would work together. Indeed, the manager of the hubs was present at the YET VAT triage meeting observed in May 2021. As such, any full evaluation of YET would need to consider how these changes to the environment in which YET operates, both within Suffolk Police and

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<sup>23</sup> These include social workers, early help workers and other children and youth service practitioners, youth justice and restorative justice practitioners, community engagement officers, education, training and employment workers, and psychology and mental health workers. SAGE is chaired by the gangs and county lines manager from the local authority.

with partner agencies had on the operation of the team. This could be done through interviews with relevant partner agency staff and YET officers. This could also consider the effect of placing a PCSO role, funded by the Raedwald Trust education provider, within the team to ensure an exchange of information regarding CYP identified by the Raedwald Trust to be vulnerable or at risk of exploitation.

### *2.2.7. Expansion*

#### **To what extent can the YET be expanded?**

Demand for the type of work that the YET does is starting to increase in other Suffolk towns, including Bury St Edmunds, Lowestoft and Felixstowe. As such, the YET is starting to work in these other areas, while keeping its main focus on Ipswich as a local resource for the south area of the county. Some of those interviewed also noted that the focus of the YET on those aged under 18 years can create difficulties for those turning 18 but still in need of support. This situation is also faced in other services where provision alters for those aged over 18. While YET officers will maintain some contact with those aged over 18, its remit means that the level of support will decrease. Some have suggested that the upper age limit could be increased to 21, as had been the case in previous versions of the team.

However, to undertake the same level of work in these other locations and with older age groups would require additional officers, given that the level of demand in Ipswich currently already exceeds the capacity of the YET. Indeed, it was reported by YET officers and their partners that because the whole team works the same shift pattern and so take rest days together, this creates a gap in provision. As such, YET officers noted that they do spend some of the time when they come back on shift catching up from the rest period. The YET is currently too small to provide two shifts who can work opposite shifts. This is the case for other teams within the force that cover the whole force area and work staggered shifts, so that there is always some cover.

It should also be noted that the capacity of local partner agencies is also relevant to any proposed expansion of the YET. Officers noted that CYP who they identify and who require referrals to other agencies can be turned away due to high thresholds introduced to manage the demand on these services.

A full evaluation of the YET would need to consider how any expansion of the YET to other geographical areas or client groups had affected the operation of the team through a review of case data (to see whether the group of CYP that the YET work with had changed), and through speaking with YET officers.

#### 2.2.8. Limited efficacy testing

### Does the YET show promise of being successful with the intended population, even in a highly controlled setting?

The YET as it is currently organised has been in place for around 18 months. The views of YET officers, partner practitioners and CYP, as well as their families, are outlined in the sections above. They broadly report that the current operation of the YET is effective with regard to its aims.

Data from the VAT was also analysed to see whether it could provide a sense of the effectiveness of the team. Across the six-month period for which data has been provided, a total of 493 cases were returned. This sample was made up of 209 individual CYP, of which 100 (47.8%) made a single appearance in the data, with the remaining 109 reappearing, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Number of times individuals appeared in the sample of untriaged VATs.

Appearances in the data	Number	Percentage
1	100	47.8%
2	16	7.7%
3	43	20.6%
4	28	13.4%
5	12	5.7%
6	10	4.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>100%</b>



Of those who appeared more than once, an assessment can be made of the change in their VAT score in the time they worked with the YET. The data is somewhat inconclusive. The average score for the first month of data was 8.7, which rose to 9.1 in the last month. This is likely linked to an increase in intelligence during this time, which will increase a person's score. Just over half of the cases (58, 53.2%) showed no change in their VAT score between the first and last month they appear in the data, 25 (22.9%) showed an improved or lower VAT score, and 26 (23.9%) saw a worse or higher score. A paired sample t-test showed that the difference between the first and last scores is not statistically significant ( $T = -1.252$ ,  $p = 0.213$ ). However, this untriaged data will include all CYP returned in each VAT, so it will include those who the YET have not worked with, or have only had minor involvement with.

Considering only those cases who have a PSP in place, who the YET have worked with closely (beyond visits to introduce the YET), would be more appropriate. Between the end of 2020 and March 2021, 36 PSPs have been created for relevant CYP. Of these, 29 have VAT scores for at least two months (on average, data is available for 4.6 months). However, analysis shows little change in average score between the start and end of the YET's work. In the first month, the VAT score range is 7 to 16, with an average of 9.9. For the last month, the range and the average are the same. Considering the change in scores between the first and last month, 8 cases (27.6%) saw no change in scores or an increase, whereas 13 (44.8%) saw a decrease in scores. A paired sample t-test showed that the difference between the first and last scores is not statistically significant ( $T = 0.126$ ,  $p = 0.900$ ).

While these data indicate to some extent a positive effect of the YET's work, the version of the VAT they are based on can make analysis of these data difficult. The revised VAT, with its amended indicators and graded scoring, would make more detailed analysis of this type of data more valuable once it has been in place for a sufficient period. This should be a key source of data in any evaluation undertaken.

With regards to the long-term outcomes of the YET (see Appendix A), Suffolk Police provided analysis of relevant data from Athena to the research team. This data related to affecting levels of offending and gang activity in Ipswich, and was broken down by geographical policing area, where Ipswich is defined as the south of the

force area, and financial year, where 2017/18 marks the introduction of the original Op Woven with the YET as it currently operates.

Regarding whether there has been a reduction in levels of gang violence in Ipswich since the introduction of the YET, the force considered levels of youth-on-youth violence not related to domestic abuse, due to the lack of gang-specific violence measures. Table 2 below breaks down the number of violence with injury offences recorded, where both suspect and victim were aged under 18 years at time of the offence.<sup>24</sup>

**Table 2.** Violence with injury offences where both the suspect and the victim are aged under 18 years, by police area and financial year.

	<b>Policing geographical area</b>			
<b>Financial year</b>	<b>South (Ipswich)</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>Total</b>
2017-18 (Op Woven)	166	120	107	393
2018-19	161	120	143	424
2019-20 (YET)	135	113	152	400
<b>Total</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>1,217</b>
<b>% change</b>	<b>-18.7</b>	<b>-5.8</b>	<b>+42.1</b>	<b>+1.8</b>

The levels of this type of violence were highest in the south of the force area in 2017/18, but have fallen here in this period by the largest degree (18.7%). They have remained fairly stable in the east and have increased in the west, which includes Bury St Edmunds, an area noted to be experiencing a rise in gang and drugs offences, to the extent that the YET are starting to work in this area. It is difficult from this data to ascribe these changes to the action of the YET, as opposed to other changes in these areas. However, they do show an improvement in the state of

<sup>24</sup> Data for 2020-21 has been excluded due to the likely effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures.

youth-on-youth violence in the south or a possible displacement effect towards the west.

Data regarding the activity of local drugs gangs in Ipswich was provided by drawing on drugs supply or trafficking offences where the suspect is under 18 years at the time of the offence.

**Table 3.** Drug trafficking offences where the suspect is aged under 18 years, by police area and financial year.

	<b>Policing geographical area</b>			
<b>Financial year</b>	<b>South (Ipswich)</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>Total</b>
2017-18 (Op Woven)	56	8	25	89
2018-19	33	8	23	64
2019-20 (YET)	34	7	42	83
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>% change</b>	<b>-39.3</b>	<b>-12.5</b>	<b>+68.0</b>	<b>-6.7</b>

Similar to Table 2, this data shows that levels of these offences were highest in the south of the force area in 2017, but have fallen substantially over the period considered. This has been matched by a rise in the west. It should be noted that this type of offence will be affected by proactive policing decisions and so will not provide a complete or objective picture of the levels of offending. However, it does show the effect of policing decisions in the force areas.

Finally, data were provided regarding the prosecution of offenders for trafficking offences. Table 4 below shows numbers of drug trafficking investigations that have resulted in a charging decision where a named suspect is under the age of 18 years.

**Table 4.** Numbers of suspects aged under 18 years who have been charged with a drug trafficking offence, by police area and financial year.

	<b>Policing geographical area</b>
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<b>Financial year</b>	<b>South (Ipswich)</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>Total</b>
2017-18 (Op Woven)	43	5	11	59
2018-19	26	2	10	38
2019-20 (YET)	20	5	33	58
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>% change</b>	<b>-53.5</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>+200.0</b>	<b>-1.7</b>

This data again shows that levels of these offences were highest in the south of the force area in 2017 but have decreased, by over half, in the period considered. They have remained unchanged in the east and increased two-fold in the west. Additional data provided by the force showed that the majority of these offenders were aged 16 and 17 years. This was the case for the force areas as a whole (109, 70.3%) and in the south (68, 76.4%).

The data in this section can offer only a partial assessment of the effect and efficacy of the YET. However, it does tend to point towards a positive effect for the CYP concerned and the levels of relevant offending in the local area. The increase in related offending in the west of the force area should be further investigated to uncover its causes. Individual level data on the policing and offending outcomes of CYP who the YET have worked with should be used in any future evaluation of the team to enable further conclusions to be drawn about the effect of its work.

## 2.3. Concluding comments

The purpose of this section of the report was to outline the findings of the feasibility study, in order to assess whether the YET is operating in the way outlined in the theory of change. In addition, this section will provide conclusions regarding the suitability for the YET for a full-scale evaluation.

Regarding the operation of the YET, the findings from the feasibility study broadly support the theory of change. The key factors that were identified in the theory of change as underpinning the operation of the YET have been evidenced in the fieldwork for the feasibility study, as laid out in the sections above regarding the

domains of the study. The areas where the current operation of the YET was found to vary from the intention of the theory of change relates to the high demand on the team and the lack of an easy fit within existing policing structures for the team. Combined with a range of aims for its work, this means that the focus of the team can change – and has changed – depending on local leadership and priorities. While police teams need to be responsive to local conditions and requirements, any change in focus – for example towards exploiters – will have an impact upon the work currently undertaken with CYP and their families. This current work has been shown to be of value to practitioners in partner agencies, as well as to the CYP and their families.

Regarding the outcomes outlined for YET in the logic model (Appendix A), indicative evidence for the YET achieving these has been partially provided from the feasibility study data. One short-term outcome was for the YET to identify CYP who are experiencing, or at risk of, exploitation by gangs. The YET does this through the VAT and aims to do so more effectively with the updated police VAT. Another short-term outcome was to engage with and support identified CYP and their family. This has been evidenced through interviews with YET officers, partner practitioners and CYP, as well as their families and carers.

Medium-term outcomes for the YET were to improve the circumstances for CYP and their families, improve multi-agency working with partners and improve the opinion of the police held by CYP. Again, there is evidence from the interviews and observations conducted and from the review of PSPs that the YET is achieving these outcomes.

Long-term outcomes were to reduce the demand on the force in relation to CYP at risk and to lower the risk for CYP in Ipswich. There was some mixed evidence of this from the study. Regarding demand, the proactive nature of YET's work, using the VAT to identify CYP at risk, means that the team creates its own demand. While this demand may have fallen on the force at a later date and required more intense work at that point, is difficult to evidence outside of the anecdotal examples provided. It does seem that the early and multi-agency work that the YET undertakes could be reasonably expected to prevent later and more resource-intensive demand from the same CYP. Regarding lowering the risk for CYP, this is one of the central ways in which the YET decide to a close a case. However, the way in which the older version

of the VAT operates means that it is difficult to assess whether risk levels have been reduced, beyond a case-by-case review of the details. It is expected that this will be improved through use of the new VAT.

Other long-term outcomes were to reduce levels of gang and youth violence in Ipswich, to reduce the number of local drugs gangs operating locally and to increase prosecution of drug dealers. These outcomes have been evidenced by the data provided by the force. While this is indicative aggregate data rather than causal, it does suggest that the work done by the YET in the south of the force has had the intended effect on these outcomes. This data also reflects the findings of the interviews that there is growing demand elsewhere in the force area – for example, in the west of the force area, around Bury St Edmunds.

Two key changes have taken place in the operation and context of the YET during this study, which would need time to embed before further evaluative work is conducted. Firstly, the new version of the VAT would need time to operate. The YET would need to consider how data could be extracted from it for a further study, as this proved to be time-consuming for this study (specifically anonymising the data to allow sharing). The YET should provide a way to better track the levels of demand on the team and the effect of its work, especially if the new indicators provide finer, less blunt data on the reasons for being flagged to the YET. Secondly, the introduction of the multi-agency exploitation hubs work need time to embed, to see how the YET ties into them. Any further study would need to consider whether more data is available on the long-term outcomes of YET, as the data here is indicative rather than causal. Any further evaluative work could also consider the rise in drug-related and gang-related offending in the west of the force area.<sup>25</sup>

The YET has been able to provide this study with a range of data to evidence its operation and effect. It would be a valuable exercise to revisit the study in a year or so, once the above changes have embedded and sufficient data is available to evidence the effect of the YET in more detail.

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<sup>25</sup> Discussions with the force also suggested considering Essex as a comparison site, as opposed to Norfolk, which was not felt to be an appropriate comparison site.

## References

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## Appendix A: Logic model

### Problem

- Serious violence linked to local gang activity (including county lines gangs) in Ipswich leading to the exploitation of CYP, episodes of going missing and increased demand on agencies. This has been a particular issue since around 2016.
- Initial tactics focused on enforcement (for example, arrests) of local drug dealers proved effective in the short term, but not against the underlying, long-term causes of these issues – Operation Woven (launched March 2017).

### Response and activities

- Establishment of the YET, a team of one sergeant and six PCs (November 2019 for the current operation).
- Posts are established and officers are recruited specifically to this role and trained by local partners (SAGE).
- Officers are split into three teams of two PCs to cover the three Ipswich neighbourhoods (central, east and west), to allow joint working with NPTs and schools' officers, as well as other partners (for example, by attending meetings).
- Use VAT, based on police data, to identify CYP to work with and track progress.
- PCs will work with CYP to create rapport, to build a picture of life and needs, and to identify diversionary activities and other bespoke support needs, including with their family.
- For non-engaging CYP, PCs use enforcement strategies to deter criminality and will act against exploiters.
- The role of the YET officers is to consider the wider issues driving this violence and drug dealing, and to provide diversion and other upstream activities to aid prevention, using the four 'P's model of policing.
- Links to Op Strobe (CYP at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation), integrated offender management (for those close to 18 years old), missing persons and vulnerability advisors, and modern slavery team for offenders.
- Part of a multi-agency strategic response to local and county lines gangs. This includes the SAGE team, which is funded to deliver the strategic plan and offer diversionary activities.



## Outputs

- Number of CYP identified via monthly VAT (churn of CYP and change in position on the list and in terms of high, medium or low category and score), as well as direct referrals.
- Number of CYP engaged with (activities undertaken – for example, referrals to diversionary activities or to partner agencies)
- Number of enforcement activities undertaken (for non-engaging CYP or against exploiters).
- Number of miscellaneous investigations opened on Athena to track work.
- Number of PSPs created and closed, as well as any change in scores.
- Number of missing persons episodes.
- Engagement with local partners already working with CYP or appropriate to be involved, via multi-agency meetings and attendance at meetings of other agencies (such as children's services strategy meetings).

## Outcomes

### **Short-term (within scope of the evaluation)**

- Identification of CYP experiencing, or at risk of, exploitation by gangs.
- Engaging with, and providing support to, identified CYP and their family (either police or another agency).

### **Medium-term (not within scope of evaluation)**

- Improved outcomes for identified young people and their families, regarding:
  - living circumstances and family breakdown
  - involvement in education or employment
  - reduction in offending
  - going missing
- Improved multi-agency working with partners.
- Improved opinion of the police by CYP.

### **Long-term (not within scope of evaluation)**

- Less demand on the police in relation to CYP at risk.
- Lowering of risk for CYP in Ipswich.
- Reduction in levels of gang and youth violence in Ipswich.
- Reduction in the number of local drugs gangs operating locally.
- Increased prosecution of offenders (drug dealers).

