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Policing After Lockdown:
Rebuilding Relationships with the COVID Generation

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Executive Summary

This briefing summarises an independent SIPR funded qualitative study exploring how young people in marginalised communities perceive the police in the period following the COVID 19 restrictions. The research involved young people, youth workers, school staff and police officers across two communities in Dundee and Edinburgh. While young people described the pandemic itself as a past event, its social and economic consequences continue to shape their lives, opportunities and relationships with authority. The study identifies low trust, fear of police presence, community level trauma and significant structural inequalities as the primary factors influencing current police and youth relationships.

What Works

- Proactive relationship building with young people in everyday settings rather than only during enforcement.

- Trauma informed practice aligned with Scotland's Vision for Justice to support proportionate and compassionate engagement.

- Partnership working with youth work and education practitioners who already hold trusted relationships with young people.

- Approaches that take account of local context such as gang exploitation, annual disturbances or historical tensions.

- Youth participation in shaping policing initiatives to increase ownership and relevance.

Key Findings

1. Deepening poverty and marginalisation continue to be the dominant influence on young people's daily lives.

2. Trust in the police is low and often unstable, with some young people expressing fear or reluctance to engage.

3. Workers in youth work, education and policing operate with different expectations and thresholds which can confuse young people.

4. Local context including criminal exploitation and community tensions strongly shapes behaviour and attitudes.

5. Rising educational inequalities since COVID 19 increase risk of isolation, disengagement and offending.

Next Steps

1. Create structured opportunities for young people to contribute to local policing approaches.

2. Provide learning for police officers that focuses on poverty awareness, inequality and cultural understanding.

3. Develop shared training and reflective sessions for police, youth work and education staff.

4. Strengthen multi agency forums for information sharing and joint planning.

5. Clarify roles and expectations across agencies to support consistent practice.

6. Introduce simple follow up practices after significant police interactions to support wellbeing and relationship building.

Conclusion

The study illustrates that young people in disadvantaged communities continue to experience significant social and structural pressures which shape their perceptions of policing. A relational, trauma informed and collaborative approach across police, youth work and education offers the strongest path toward rebuilding trust and improving outcomes for the generation growing up in the wake of the COVID 19 period.