

# Focused Deterrence in Practice: An Evaluation of the GCSC Programme

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**Prepared by**  
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This evaluation was undertaken by Black Box Research and Consultancy Ltd. Their members attended sessions of Get Connected – Stay Connected: Hemlington between March 2024 and March 2025 to collect qualitative data in the form of observations, surveys and semi-structured interviews for the purposes of evaluation.

Black Box is a nationally recognised criminal justice consultancy specialising in modern slavery with a specific focus on forced labour, criminal exploitation and county lines drug supply. The principal objectives of Black Box are to provide support to victims and survivors of modern slavery and to enhance public awareness both in domestic and international settings. By leveraging its knowledge in expert witness testimony, training and grass-roots evaluation, Black Box endeavours to equip professionals with the necessary tools to assist children, young people and vulnerable adults experiencing exploitative environments and contact with the Criminal Justice System.

Get Connected – Stay Connected (GCSC), delivered by Project Connect, is a continuation of the ‘Get Connected’ and ‘Stay Connected’ programmes, designed to sustain and enhance collaboration among professionals working to prevent youth violence. It focuses on maintaining strong relationships, regularly updating action plans and ensuring accountability among partners. By building on the momentum from Get Connected, it aims to achieve long-term success in youth violence prevention efforts.

## Funding

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## Abbreviations

ABC	Acceptable Behaviour Contract
ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour
ASBI	Anti-Social Behaviour Injunction
ChN	Child In Need
CURV	Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence
GCSC	Get Connected – Stay Connected
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SAYVE	Safeguarding Against Youth Violence and Exploitation
SYV	Serious Youth Violence
SNA	Single Needs Analysis
ToC	Theory of Change

# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of Project Connect's Get Connected – Stay Connected (GCSC) programme, delivered in Hemlington, Middlesbrough. The GCSC programme continues the work of the successful Get Connected programme, fostering ongoing engagement and stronger collaboration among those preventing youth violence. This programme brings together practitioners from policing, community and support services to implement focused deterrence, engaging with children and young people who need support to prevent involvement in serious violence. The aims of the programme were to:

1. Reduce serious violence;
2. Improve community cohesion;
3. Increase levels of safety among young people and the wider community;
4. Create a sustainable infrastructure beyond delivery of the programme.

## 1.2 Methods

A mixed-methods approach was utilised for this evaluation, incorporating observations, surveys and interviews. The sample consisted of 11 practitioners and eight children. Practitioners participated in interviews (N=9) and two surveys (N=6 and N=7) during the programme. The target children were invited to participate in interviews (N=1). A case study approach was adopted to understand the child's experience of the GCSC programme. Information about their engagement was gathered by proxy through speaking with a youth worker on the delivery team. Police shared enforcement records detailing actions taken prior to and throughout the duration of the programme. Community interviews (N=2), alongside informal conversations with approximately 12 adults and 20 children, conducted to understand their experiences of living in Hemlington.

Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes regarding the effectiveness of the programme and to develop recommendations for improving future iterations of GCSC. In addition, a Social Network Analysis was conducted to map partnerships and understand the relationships between key practitioners, as well as highlighting gaps in engagement and collaboration.

## 1.3 Key Findings

Thematic analysis of practitioner interviews identified four key themes regarding the GCSC programme:

- i. The purpose of focused deterrence;
- ii. Programme delivery and partnerships;
- iii. Programme outcomes;
- iv. Project Connect components.

Practitioners generally understood the aim of focused deterrence. However, there were inconsistencies in the utilisation and comprehension of key components such as the Safeguarding Against Youth Violence and Exploitation (SAYVE) plan, call-in sessions and clear deterrence pathways, raising concerns about the overall consistency of the programme.

The programme worked primarily with children presenting with anti-social behaviour (ASB), with the intention of intervening early to reduce the risk of escalation into more serious harm. As later case studies show, the needs and behaviours of some participants were complex and, in some cases, extended beyond lower-level ASB. Practitioners held mixed views on the programme's direct impact on ASB: some reported clear positive effects, while others highlighted the influence of wider contextual and system factors that may also have shaped outcomes.

Five children demonstrated a reduction in enforcement actions received while on the programme. Two children experienced an increase in enforcement actions after joining the programme, compared to the period prior to their involvement, and one child's enforcement data was not recorded due to their age. For some children, despite fewer overall enforcement actions, the severity of their offending (and enforcement action) increased. Children reported valuing their supportive relationships with youth mentors, describing a sense of being heard and cared for. Tailored peer group sessions were also highly engaging, offering valuable insights into the risks of criminal activity and pathways to more positive futures. However, several barriers to engagement were identified, including practical challenges such as children moving out of the area, limited support from educational institutions, a lack of parental understanding or buy-in around focused deterrence and a shortage of age-appropriate services for younger children.

Regarding programme delivery and partnerships, practitioners identified strong collaboration among core organisations, including the Police, Council, Linx, and Project Connect. This network fostered effective relationships – particularly through GCSC’s interactive sessions – which balanced statutory and community functions well.

The effectiveness of 'pulling levers' within the community was also questioned due to the perceived absence of key partners – such as education – from programme delivery. Children highlighted a lack of alternative activities in Hemlington as a factor that could contribute to their involvement in ASB.

Regarding sustainability, the evaluation identified that the existing network of central organisations (Police, Council, Linx and Project Connect) provides a solid foundation for the programme's long-term viability. While tools such as the Safeguarding Against Youth Violence and Exploitation (SAYVE) plan were designed to support sustainability, considerations over the accountability of this post-programme were raised. Regardless, practitioners acknowledged Project Connect's crucial role in supporting the development of new relationships that will prove beneficial in future work.

## 1.4 Recommendations

The evaluation identified several recommendations to improve future delivery of the GCSC focused deterrence programme:

1. Ensure a shared understanding of participant identification criteria and adapt interventions to align with the developmental needs of younger children;
2. Clarify and consistently implement core deterrence components, including the escalation model and children’s understanding of consequences;
3. Strengthen multi-agency collaboration by streamlining information-sharing, distributing responsibilities more equitably, and improving engagement with schools;
4. Enhance access to external support services (e.g. mental health, grief counselling) to increase the programme’s ability to support long-term behavioural change;
5. Invest in meaningful parental and community engagement, including earlier involvement of local organisations and dedicated parental support;
6. Broaden evaluation perspectives by capturing parent and community voices, systematising programme documentation, and embedding children’s feedback;

7. Ensure continuity between tender and delivery phases: Avoid delays and loss of momentum by streamlining the transition process between programme commissioning and implementation.
8. Avoid duplication and enhance communication: Future programmes should be better coordinated to prevent overlap with similar interventions in the same area;
9. Support long-term sustainability by securing ongoing funding, leveraging community-based assets like youth clubs, and reinforcing practitioner accountability through the SAYVE plan.

These recommendations are aligned with the programme's Theory of Change and are designed to strengthen its pathways to long-term impact for the Hemlington community.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Project Connect

Project Connect was founded in 2021 with the aim of creating meaningful, lasting connections to help develop a strategy, vision and mission that lead to shared action plans and strive for effective solutions for community improvement.

### 2.2 The Get Connected Programme

The Get Connected Programme is a 9-12 month initiative that protects young people (aged 11-25) from violence and exploitation, primarily by tackling serious organised crime. It focuses on disadvantaged and vulnerable youth, including those involved in anti-social, violent or criminal behaviour. The Programme's multi-faceted approach is based on 27 years of experience working in the most deprived communities across the North West, North East, Cleveland and East Midlands.

#### Programme Structure and Approach

Get Connected facilitates an open environment for cross-sector practitioners and community members to come together through themed workshops to develop a shared understanding of local issues. These facilitated sessions encourage awareness and the sharing of current local knowledge in a safe and empowering environment. The core components of the Get Connected programme include:

- Workshops – Themed workshops focus on the specific locality and its needs to promote community cohesion;
- Steering Group – Comprised of community representatives (practitioners) creating shared strategies;
- Action Planning – Co-creation of a Safeguarding Against Youth Violence and Exploitation ('SAYVE') Plan to tackle the identified issues and priorities;
- Guided Process – Coaching and mentoring of community partners both during and in-between thematic workshops;
- Interactive Sessions – Supporting partners to put into practice strategies and shared learning;
- Teamworking – Developing problem solving techniques and developing listening skills to gain new perspectives on how to tackle the issues;
- Mind Shift Methodology – Introduction of Mind Shift Methodology to support partners to challenge unconscious bias, gain new perspectives and develop strategies that make use of available resources.

### Key Phases of the Programme

The Get Connected Programme is delivered in two parts. Sessions are facilitated by Lifestyle Advocates who use their knowledge of the criminal justice system to guide balanced debates on community issues.

- Part A consists of five action workshops that aim to:
  - Challenge existing narratives and mindsets;
  - Share knowledge relevant to the Violent Crime Strategy;
  - Analyse and improve current provisions;
  - Create actionable solutions.
- Part B runs concurrently to Part A and includes community engagement events to gather information and knowledge through:
  - School Voice: Working with local high schools;
  - Community Voice: Focus groups for community empowerment and joint problem-solving;
  - 1-2-1 Interviews: With practitioners;
  - Network Voice: Meetings with local multi-agency partnerships.

## 2.3 Linx Youth Project

Linx Youth Project (hereafter Linx) has provided detached and centre-based support services in one of the UK's most deprived areas since 1993. Linx has provided stability and a safe space to disadvantaged, disengaged and often highly disaffected children and young people aged 10-18 years (up to 25 for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). Linx aims to 'provide high quality services and opportunities that enable children and young people... to achieve their full potential, develop a sense of belonging and improve their life chances<sup>1</sup>.'

### Engagement with Children and Young People

Linx engages with children and young people by developing a sense of belonging and creating positive learning opportunities that can improve their health and well-being. Linx provides a place of safety where young people socialise, discuss interests and concerns, and receive support from experienced youth workers.

### Collaboration in the Community

Linx is a trusted and recognised charity that works in partnership with key statutory and voluntary/community agencies in Hemlington and alongside government programmes and initiatives to break down barriers, promote social inclusion and achieve the best possible outcomes for young people and their families.

## 2.4 Crime and Violence in Middlesbrough

The delivery of Get Connected – Stay Connected: Hemlington is largely owed to the proliferating rates of violence reported in Middlesbrough in recent years. In 2020, the Cleveland Police Force reported that it had recorded the third highest rate of violent crime in the country<sup>2</sup>. According to figures published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), there were 73,339 incidents of crime reported in Cleveland in the year ending December 2024, a reduction of 5,975 crimes reported from the previous year<sup>3</sup>. Despite this reduction in overall crimes reported, data revealed that there was a 6% increase in knife crimes reported from January to December 2024 when compared with

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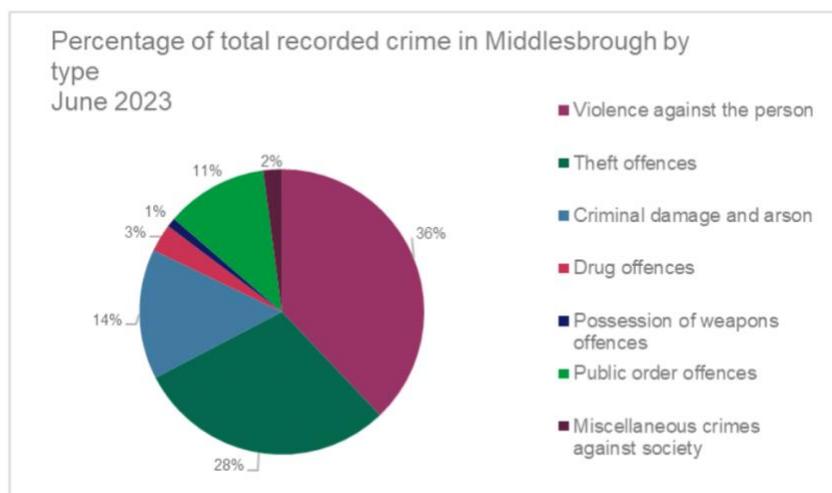
<sup>1</sup> Linx Youth Project (2024) *Past and Present*. Available at: <https://www.linxyouthproject.co.uk/past-and-present/> (Accessed: 20 June 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland (2020) *Preventing & Addressing Serious Violence in Cleveland*. Available at: <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/content/uploads/2020/10/Appendix-A-Violence-in-Clevelandredact.pdf> (Accessed: 30 August 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics (2025) 'Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2024.' Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2024> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

the previous year<sup>4</sup>. The Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV) reported that one in twenty crimes reported in Cleveland are categorised as a serious violence offence<sup>5</sup>.

In the year ending March 2023, Cleveland Police Force – responsible for Middlesbrough – reported a 15% increase in crimes compared to the previous year<sup>6</sup>. In Middlesbrough specifically, this was matched by a 24.6% increase in crime incidents recorded between July 2021 and July 2022<sup>7</sup>, significantly higher than the 1.1% increase across England<sup>8</sup>. In total, 27,127 crime incidents were reported in Middlesbrough in the year ending July 2022, an increase of 5,356 from the previous year<sup>9</sup>. According to Middlesbrough’s Community Safety Partnership, ‘one in every 12 violent crimes in Middlesbrough are serious violence offences<sup>10</sup>.’ As shown in Figure 1, violence against the person made up 36% of all recorded offences in Middlesbrough up to June 2023.



**Figure 1.** Recorded Crime by Type in Middlesbrough<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Office for National Statistics (2025) 'Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2024.' Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2024> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner (2024) 'Violence in Cleveland.' Available at: <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/curv/about-curv/violence-in-cleveland/> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Office for National Statistics (2023) 'Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables.' Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/policeforceareadatatables> (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Varbes (2023) 'Crime in Middlesbrough.' Available at: <https://www.varbes.com/crime/middlesbrough-crime> (Accessed: 30 August 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Office for National Statistics (2025) 'Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2024.' Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2024> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council. (2024) *Live Well JSNA - Violence Reduction*. Available at: <https://www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-07/Live%20Well%20JSNA%20-%20Violence%20Reduction.pdf> (Accessed: 4 July 2025)

<sup>11</sup> South Tees Health & Wellbeing Board (2024) *South Tees Joint Strategic Needs Assessment*. Middlesbrough Council. Available at: <https://middlesbrough.gov.uk/media/lb1ddyby/south-tees-jsna-live-well-violence-reduction.pdf> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

## 2.5 Structural Drivers of Youth Violence in Cleveland

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) refer to highly stressful or traumatic events that occur during childhood or adolescence. These can be isolated incidents or ongoing threats to a young person's sense of safety. Examples of ACEs include abuse, neglect, substance misuse, loss of a parent/caregiver and poor mental health within the home environment. There is a plethora of academic research linking involvement in the criminal justice system to the presence of ACEs. Indeed, the more ACEs an individual has, the higher their risk of negative outcomes, such as interaction with the criminal justice system, increased vulnerability to exploitation<sup>12</sup>, school exclusion<sup>13</sup> and a greater likelihood of engaging in harmful behaviours such as substance use and self-harm. In Cleveland, children with high rates of ACEs are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims or perpetrators of serious violence<sup>14</sup>.

The local context presents significant challenges. Cleveland Police report disproportionately high rates of looked after children and school exclusions – both key indicators of future involvement in crime and exploitation<sup>15</sup>. Middlesbrough, one of the most deprived areas in the country, sees 33% of children living in income-deprived households<sup>16</sup>. In 2019, 16.1% of children attending school in Middlesbrough were persistent absentees – the highest rate in England<sup>17</sup> – and school exclusion rates also exceeded the national average<sup>18</sup>. In 2022, a Cleveland-wide survey of 851 children revealed that 17% had missed school due to feeling unsafe and many reported feeling unsafe in public spaces including parks, public transport, and nighttime economy venues<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Home Office (2023) 'Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines.' Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults-county-lines/criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults-county-lines#:~:text=%E2%80%9CCounty%20lines%20%E2%80%9D%20is%20a%20violent,locally%20or%20in%20other%20counties.> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>13</sup> Office for National Statistics (2022) 'The education and social care background of young people who interact with the criminal justice system: May 2022.' Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/theeducationandsocialcarebackgroundofyoungpeoplewhointeractwiththecriminaljusticesystem/may2022> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>14</sup> Crest Advisory (2022) *CURV Strategic Needs Assessment*. Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner. Available at: <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/CURV-Strategic-Needs-Assessment-4.pdf> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>15</sup> Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland, 'Appendix A - Violence in Cleveland', Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner, 2020, <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Appendix-A-Violence-in-Clevelandredact.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland (2020) *Preventing & Addressing Serious Violence in Cleveland*. Available at: <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Appendix-A-Violence-in-Clevelandredact.pdf> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>17</sup> Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland (2020) *Appendix A - Violence in Cleveland*. Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner. Available at: <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Appendix-A-Violence-in-Clevelandredact.pdf> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Crest Advisory (2022) *CURV Strategic Needs Assessment*. Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner. Available at: <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/CURV-Strategic-Needs-Assessment-4.pdf> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

A 2021 Crest Advisory report estimated that 37% of young people in Middlesbrough were at risk of involvement in serious violence, whether as victims, witnesses, or perpetrators<sup>20</sup> – the highest in any single area nationwide. More recent data from the Police and Crime Commissioner shows that, in 2024, 24% of serious violence offences involved at least one person under 25, with 9% involving a vulnerable child or young person<sup>21</sup>. Cleveland Police further reported that 20% of suspects and 25% of victims of serious violence were under the age of 20<sup>22</sup>. The Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV) strategic needs assessment found that 57% of children and young people surveyed had either experienced or witnessed serious violence<sup>23</sup>, with a growing trend of weapon-carrying among younger children – particularly 10-11 year olds<sup>24</sup>. Notably, in the year leading up to March 2024, Cleveland Police recorded 794 knife crime offences – a 12% reduction from the previous year<sup>25</sup>.

## 2.6 Community Safety and Crime Trends in Hemlington

Hemlington – a ward within Middlesbrough – has a population of 6,568<sup>26</sup> and is under the jurisdiction of the Middlesbrough North Policing Neighbourhood, who operate as part of the Cleveland Police Force area.

Prior to the commencement of GCSC, Cleveland police reported 125 crimes in Hemlington. The month after the GCSC programme concluded (April 2025), Cleveland Police reported 94 crimes. However, when focusing specifically on anti-social behaviour, there was a slight increase in reported incidents, rising from 21 to 26<sup>27</sup>. These crimes are categorised in the table below.

**Table 1.** Cleveland Police reported incidents of crime in March 2024 and April 2025

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<sup>20</sup> Crest Advisory (2021) 'Violence and Vulnerability.' Available at: [https://64e09bbc-abdd-42c690a858992ce46e59.usrfiles.com/ugd/64e09b\\_5abf5bb2228a4b77a23237ba80ef86a4.pdf](https://64e09bbc-abdd-42c690a858992ce46e59.usrfiles.com/ugd/64e09b_5abf5bb2228a4b77a23237ba80ef86a4.pdf) (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>21</sup> Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner (2023) 'Decision 2023/24 – 0035: CURV: Interactive Youth Survey Report and Cleveland School Risk Index.' Available at: <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/working-for-you/decisions/decision-notices/decision-2023-24-0035-curve-interactive-youth-survey-report-and-cleveland-school-risk-index/> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Crest Advisory (2022) *CURV Strategic Needs Assessment*. Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner. Available at: <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/CURV-Strategic-Needs-Assessment-4.pdf> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

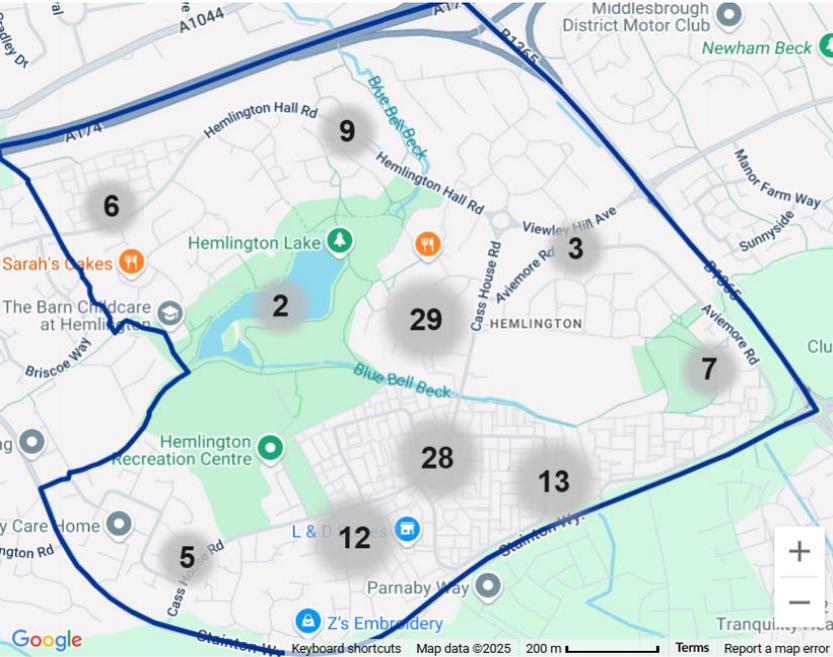
<sup>25</sup> Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner (2025) 'Funding opportunity launched to reduce knife crime and serious violence.' Available at: <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/news/funding-opportunity-launched-for-youth-knife-crime-education/> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>26</sup> CityPopulation.de (2023) 'Middlesbrough (Unitary District, United Kingdom) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map and Location.' Available at: [https://citypopulation.de/en/uk/northeastengland/wards/E06000002\\_middlesbrough/](https://citypopulation.de/en/uk/northeastengland/wards/E06000002_middlesbrough/) (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>27</sup> Cleveland Police (No date) *Top reported crimes in this area*. Available at: <https://www.cleveland.police.uk/area/your-area/cleveland/middlesbrough-south/hemlington/news/top-reported-crimes-in-this-area> (Accessed: 25 July 2025)

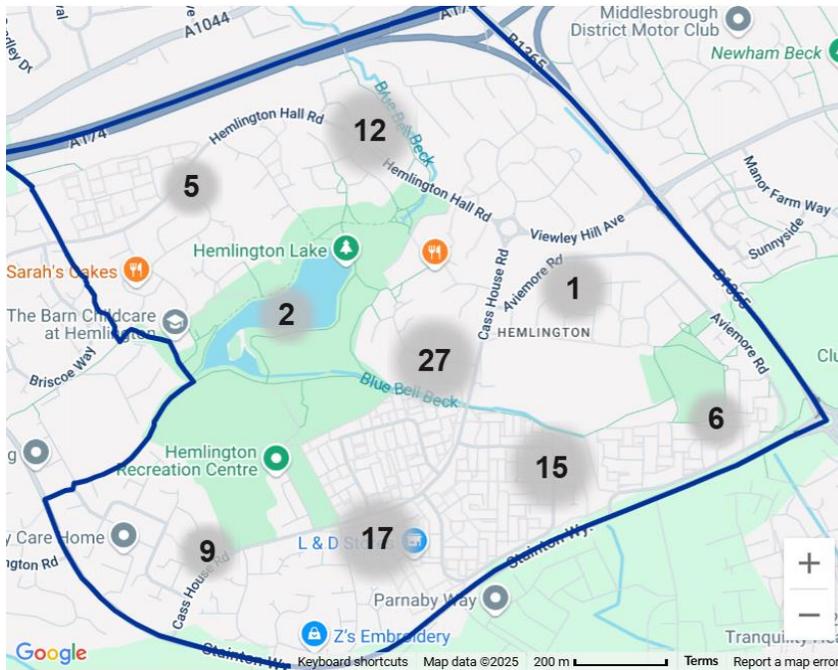
Type	Month Prior to GCSC (March 2024)	Month Post GCSC (April 2025)
Violence & Sexual Offences	35	28
Anti-Social Behaviour	21	26
Criminal Damage & Arson	21	17
All Other Crime	48	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>94</b>

Cleveland Police provided visual mapping of the location of crimes in Hemlington<sup>28</sup>, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. This map presents similar hotspot areas at both time points, with the exception of some reductions along Cass House Road.



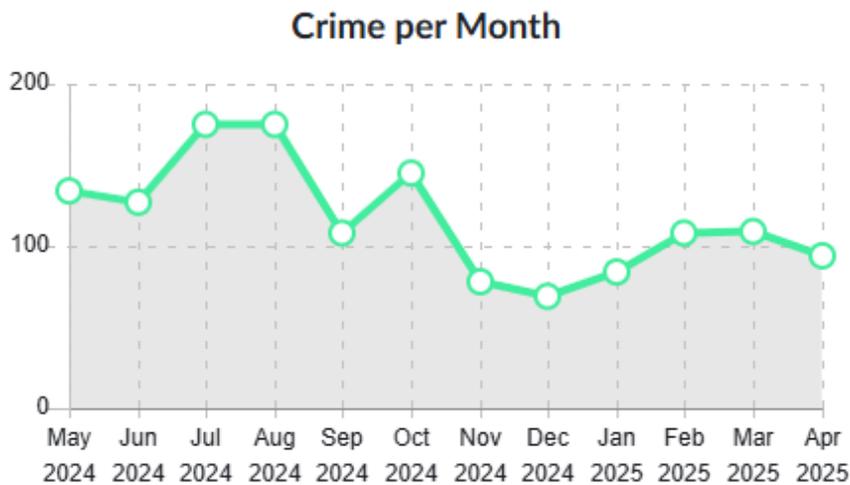
**Figure 2.** Map of Hemlington crime in February 2024

<sup>28</sup> Ibid



**Figure 3.** Map of Hemlington crime in April 2025

Cleveland Police shared a graph showing the crimes per month since May 2024<sup>29</sup>, presented in Figure 4. This depicts a fluctuating number of crimes reported per month, notably there was a reduction between October 2024 and December 2024, which has steadily increased until March 2025.



**Figure 4.** Cleveland Police reported incidents of crime per month in the Hemlington area

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

Police data indicate that Hemlington has been a focal point of enforcement activity, with Operation Fortress resulting in 280 arrests, 143 stop and searches, and 239 anti-social behaviour warnings – drawing significant attention to the area’s challenges<sup>30</sup>. Some children and young people in Cleveland reported that deterrence interventions might prevent crime; however, that such interventions should also include positive diversion activities, such as engaging young people in constructive alternatives to being on the streets, investment in the local area, and the Criminal Justice System taking positive action (e.g. supporting victims and punishing perpetrators<sup>31</sup>). Children and young people identified key priorities to improve feelings of safety, namely infrastructure changes (e.g. more street lighting, CCTV), the physical presence of police in their local area, tackling anti-social behaviour (e.g. drug and alcohol use, road-related nuisance, and arson) and responding to gender-related concerns, for example, situations where males made females uncomfortable<sup>32</sup>.

## 2.7 Focused Deterrence

Focused deterrence originated in Boston, USA, during the 1990s under the Operation Ceasefire initiative<sup>33</sup>, a highly collaborative and interagency strategy designed to reduce youth violence, particularly serious gang-related crime, by combining law enforcement 'sticks' with social service 'carrots'<sup>34</sup>. Focused deterrence targets a small number of offenders responsible for a disproportionate amount of local violence, aiming to significantly impact crime rates through direct engagement. This model adopts a support-first approach<sup>35</sup> – recognising that individuals often engage in violence due to personal trauma or challenging life circumstances<sup>36</sup> – and seeks to help those most at risk desist from such behaviours<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Operation Fortress was a multi-agency operation implemented in February 2022 to tackle anti-social behaviour and crime in Hemlington.

Cleveland Police (2023) 'Neighbourhood Team Awarded for Operation Fortress.' Available at: <https://www.cleveland.police.uk/news/cleveland/news/2023/july/neighbourhood-team-awarded-for-operation-fortress/> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>31</sup> Crest Advisory (2023) *CURV Strategic Needs Assessment*. Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner. Available at: <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/CURV-Strategic-Needs-Assessment-4.pdf> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Youth Endowment Fund. 'Focused Deterrence', Youth Endowment Fund, 2024, <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/focused-deterrence/>

<sup>34</sup> Braga, A.A., Turchan, B. and Winship, C., 2019. Partnership, accountability, and innovation: Clarifying Boston's experience with focused deterrence. *Police innovation: Contrasting perspectives*, pp.227-247.

<sup>35</sup> Youth Endowment Fund. 'Focused Deterrence', Youth Endowment Fund, 2024, <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/focused-deterrence/>

<sup>36</sup> Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership (2024) *What works, focused deterrence*. Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership.

<sup>37</sup> Youth Endowment Fund. 'Focused Deterrence', Youth Endowment Fund, 2024, <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/focused-deterrence/>

## Key Principles

Focused deterrence draws heavily from deterrence theory (see Zimring and Hawkins, 1973)<sup>38</sup>. It is based on three core strategies; support, community engagement and deterrence<sup>39, 40</sup> – to influence criminal behaviour<sup>41</sup>.

## Support

Focused deterrence provides genuine, tailored support to targeted individuals, offering viable alternatives to habitual offending through re-engagement efforts<sup>42</sup>. This can include strengthening family relationships, supporting education and employment, providing housing assistance, offering substance abuse treatment and other social services, with caseworkers building trust and confidence with the children and young people<sup>43, 44</sup>.

## Community Engagement

Community members – including victims' families and individuals with lived experience of the criminal justice system – play a vital role in reinforcing an anti-violence message and supporting individuals with a desire to change. This also helps to enhance police legitimacy and collective efficacy within affected communities.

## Deterrence

Failing to disengage from criminal activity results in certain and swift enforcement actions from the police, also known as 'pulling levers'<sup>45, 46, 47</sup>. Police utilise existing legal sanctions to emphasise to targeted individuals that persistent offending behaviour will not be tolerated. Some models have employed arrests, probationary periods and other criminal justice proceedings, whereas others

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<sup>38</sup> Zimring, F.E. and Hawkins, G. (1973) *Deterrence: The legal threat in crime control*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>39</sup> Youth Endowment Fund. 'Focused Deterrence', Youth Endowment Fund, 2024, <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/focused-deterrence/>

<sup>40</sup> Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (2020) *Glasgow's Community Initiative to Reduce Violence Second Year Report*. Available at: [https://www.svru.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CIRV\\_2nd\\_year\\_report.pdf](https://www.svru.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CIRV_2nd_year_report.pdf) (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>41</sup> Braga, A.A., Weisburd, D. and Turchan, B. (2019) 'Focused deterrence strategies effects on crime: A systematic review', *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 15(3), e1051

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Olphin, T., Bottomley, S., Webb, A. and Stock, M. (2024) *What Works Series: Focused Deterrence 12 Month Findings*. Kidlington, UK: Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership

<sup>45</sup> Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership (2024) *What works, focused deterrence*. Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership.

<sup>46</sup> Youth Endowment Fund (2021) *Focussed Deterrence Technical Report*. Available at: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Focussed-Deterrence-Technical-Report.pdf> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>47</sup> Braga, A. A., & Kennedy, D. M. (2020). A framework for addressing violence and serious crime: Focused deterrence, legitimacy, and prevention. Cambridge University Press.

have implemented consequences outside of the criminal justice system such as evictions from rental housing<sup>48</sup>. The nature of enforcement should reflect the seriousness of the offending behaviour.

### Implementation of Focused Deterrence

The Youth Endowment fund have highlighted that core delivery partners include police, support and community<sup>49</sup>. The responsibilities of these partners are identified in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The responsibilities of focused deterrence partners

Partner	Responsibility
Police	Deliver transparent, respectful policing with certain, swift consequences.
Support	Ensure rapid coordination and deployment of diverse services.
Community	Champion shared values, deter violence and strengthen engagement with support services.

Models of focused deterrence are varied, for example some models emphasise enforcement, while others prioritise building relationships, rehabilitation and early intervention<sup>50</sup>. Practitioners can adapt interventions to the local context, type of violence/crime, and age of the individuals involved<sup>51</sup>. The Youth Endowment Fund outlines the core processes for implementing focused deterrence. These include<sup>52</sup>:

1. Identifying Key Crime Problems and the High-Risk Individuals or Groups Driving Them  
This involves detailed analysis of crime data and intelligence<sup>53</sup>. Partners work together to complete coordinated multi-agency review panels<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Youth Endowment Fund (2022) *YEF Application Guidance*. Available at: [https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/YEF\\_AC\\_ApplicationGuidance3.pdf](https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/YEF_AC_ApplicationGuidance3.pdf) (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>50</sup> Youth Endowment Fund (n.d.) *Toolkit: Focused Deterrence*. Available at: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/focused-deterrence/> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Kennedy, D.M. (2006) 'Old wine in new bottles: Policing and the lessons of pulling levers', in Weisburd, D. and Braga, A.A. (eds.) *Police innovation: Contrasting perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.155–170.

<sup>54</sup> Olphin, T., Bottomley, S., Webb, A. and Stock, M. (2024) *What Works Series: Focused Deterrence 12 Month Findings*. Kidlington, UK: Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership.

## 2. Assembling a Dedicated Team to Identify Individuals through their Combined Crime Knowledge

Some models of focused deterrence use data analysis and strict criteria to identify their target cohorts.

## 3. Direct, Personalised Communication with Targeted Individuals

This often takes place via 'call-in' meetings where law enforcement, community leaders, and social service providers inform the targeted individuals that continued violence will result in swift enforcement, while pathways to legitimate opportunities and support are available<sup>55,56</sup>. In Boston's Operation Ceasefire it was reported that 'the deterrence message was not a deal with gang members to stop violence. Rather, it was a promise to gang members that violent behaviour would evoke an immediate and intense response'<sup>57</sup>.

## 4. The Project Team Continues to Build Relationships with Targeted Individuals

This involves members of the local community coming together. Therefore, when individuals want to desist from criminal activity, partner agencies are able to provide them with services to make the transition<sup>58</sup>.

## 5. If Individuals do not Desist from Criminal Activity then Practitioners Should Enforce Sanctions<sup>59</sup>

This means applying proportionate enforcement measures to maintain credibility of the deterrence message and reinforce the consequences of continued involvement in violence or offending.

### Effectiveness of Focused Deterrence

Focused deterrence strategies implemented in America have reported considerable success, including reduced levels of crime reduction<sup>60</sup>, violent gang offending and homicide<sup>61,62</sup>,

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<sup>55</sup> Braga, A.A. and Weisburd, D.L., 2012. The effects of focused deterrence strategies on crime: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the empirical evidence. *Journal of research in crime and delinquency*, 49(3), pp.323-358.

<sup>56</sup> Braga, A.A. and Kennedy, D.M., 2021. *A framework for addressing violence and serious crime: Focused deterrence, legitimacy, and prevention*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>57</sup> Braga, A.A., Weisburd, D. and Turchan, B. (2019) 'Focused deterrence strategies effects on crime: A systematic review', *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 15(3), e1051.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Braga, A.A. and Weisburd, D.L., 2012. The effects of focused deterrence strategies on crime: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the empirical evidence. *Journal of research in crime and delinquency*, 49(3), pp.323-358.

<sup>61</sup> McGarrell, E.F., Chermak, S., Wilson, J.M. and Corsaro, N., 2006. Reducing homicide through a "lever-pulling" strategy. *Justice Quarterly*, 23(02), pp.214-231.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

shootings<sup>63</sup> and youth homicide<sup>64</sup>. A systematic review and meta-analysis of 24 evaluations of focused deterrence strategies found a statistically significant, moderate crime reduction effect, with the largest reductions observed in programmes targeting criminally active gangs or groups<sup>65</sup>.

Evidence suggests this model can be successfully adapted in a UK setting reducing various offences such as weapon possession, physical, non-violent and violent crimes<sup>66</sup>. The Youth Endowment Fund estimated focused deterrence can have a high impact on crime, reducing crime by approximately 33%<sup>67</sup>. The College of Policing also reports a moderate reduction in crime, however, this varies depending on the context. The most significant reductions in crime were seen in programmes that focused on tackling serious violence linked to ongoing conflicts among gangs and criminally active groups<sup>68,69</sup>. A recent randomised controlled trial completed by Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnerships reported a 54% lower overall crime harm score, including 60% fewer knife-related crimes as a suspect and 75% fewer as a victim<sup>70</sup>.

Focused deterrence strategies can generate broader crime reductions due to 'the spillover effect', deterring rivals or allies through social connections<sup>71</sup>. However, crime reduction was specific to the area where focused deterrence was implemented<sup>72</sup>.

Successful focused deterrence hinges on robust interagency collaboration. Pre-existing relationships between criminal justice agencies, community groups, and social service agencies, which formed a powerful 'network of capacity' has been viewed as crucial for Boston's Operation

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<sup>63</sup> Braga, A.A., Apel, R. and Welsh, B.C., 2013. The spillover effects of focused deterrence on gang violence. *Evaluation review*, 37(3-4), pp.314-342.

<sup>64</sup> Wellford, C. F., J. V. Pepper, and C. V. Petrie, eds. 2005. *Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review*. Committee to Improve Research Information and Data on Firearms. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

<sup>65</sup> Braga, A.A., Weisburd, D. and Turchan, B. (2019) 'Focused deterrence strategies effects on crime: A systematic review', *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 15(3), e1051.

<sup>66</sup> Williams, D.J., Currie, D., Linden, W. and Donnelly, P.D. (2014) 'Addressing gang-related violence in Glasgow: A preliminary pragmatic quasi-experimental evaluation of the Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV)', *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 19(6), pp.686-691.

<sup>67</sup> Youth Endowment Fund (n.d.) *Toolkit: Focused Deterrence*. Available at: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/focused-deterrence/> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>68</sup> College of Policing (n.d.) *Crime Reduction Toolkit: Focused Deterrence Strategies*. Available at: <https://www.college.police.uk/research/crime-reduction-toolkit/focused-deterrence-strategies> (Accessed: 4 July 2025).

<sup>69</sup> Braga, A.A. and Weisburd, D.L. (2012) 'The effects of focused deterrence strategies on crime: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the empirical evidence', *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 49(3), pp.323-358.

<sup>70</sup> Olphin, T., Bottomley, S., Webb, A. and Stock, M. (2024) *What Works Series: Focused Deterrence 12 Month Findings*. Kidlington, UK: Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership.

<sup>71</sup> Braga, A.A., Apel, R. and Welsh, B.C. (2013) 'The spillover effects of focused deterrence on gang violence', *Evaluation Review*, 37(3-4), pp.314-342.

<sup>72</sup> Corsaro, N., Hunt, E.D., Hipple, N.K. and McGarrell, E.F. (2012) 'The impact of drug market pulling levers policing on neighborhood violence: An evaluation of the high point drug market intervention', *Criminology & Public Policy*, 11(2), pp.167-199.

Ceasefire<sup>73</sup>. These partnerships facilitate sufficient 'levers'<sup>74</sup>. Strong interagency collaboration, alongside ongoing evaluation has been identified by researchers to maximise the effectiveness of focused deterrence, enabling the adaption of models to local contexts<sup>75</sup>.

Challenges in implementing focused deterrence successfully, include poor communication among partners, a lack of leadership prior to the intervention<sup>76</sup>, uncertain enforcement actions, poor interagency communication and coordination, deficiencies in marketing the deterrence message to the targeted audience<sup>77</sup>, lack of support from partner agencies or community groups<sup>78</sup>, and not have adequate resources based on demand<sup>79</sup>. Personnel turnover impacts the accountability and sustainability of focused deterrence initiatives given the reliance on key individuals<sup>80</sup>. To combat this, previous programmes, such as Chicago, have held 'reboot' training to ensure continued staff buy-in and integrity<sup>81</sup>, establishing a governing body that operates beyond the current working group, and implementing consistent performance systems for intelligence gathering and analysis, thereby ensuring continuous partner involvement<sup>82</sup>.

While deterrence principles are widely supported, scholars have noted that other factors may also contribute to reductions in violence<sup>83</sup>. For example, although Boston's Operation Ceasefire is often cited as effective<sup>84, 85</sup>, some argue its impact is difficult to isolate<sup>86</sup>, as similar declines

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<sup>73</sup> Moore, M. (2002) 'Creating Networks of Capacity: The Challenge of Managing Society's Response to Youth Violence', in Katzmann, G. (ed.) *Securing Our Children's Future: New Approaches to Juvenile Justice and Youth Violence*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

<sup>74</sup> Braga, A.A., Turchan, B. and Winship, C. (2019) 'Partnership, accountability, and innovation: Clarifying Boston's experience with focused deterrence', in *Police innovation: Contrasting perspectives*. [Place of Publication]: [Publisher], pp.227-247

<sup>75</sup> Brennan, I., Simanovic, T., McFarlane, P., Sutherland, A., Graham, W., Powrie, M., Larigkou, I. and Holmes, E. (2024) *Focused Deterrence Randomised Controlled Trial: Early Implementation Report*. London: Youth Endowment Fund. Available at <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/YEF-FD-Early-Stage-Implementation-Report-October-2024.pdf> (Accessed: 25 July 2025).

<sup>76</sup> Fox, A.M., Novak, K.J. and Yaghub, M.B. (2015) *Measuring the Impact of Kansas City's No Violence Alliance*. Kansas City, MO: University of Missouri – Kansas City, Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology.

<sup>77</sup> Delaney, C. (2006) *The Effects of Focused Deterrence on Gang Homicide: An Evaluation of Rochester's Ceasefire Program*. Rochester, NY: Rochester Institute of Technology.

<sup>78</sup> Saunders, J., Ober, A.J., Kilmer, B. and Greathouse, S.M. (2016) *A Community-Based, Focused-Deterrence Approach to Closing Overt Drug Markets: A Process and Fidelity Evaluation of Seven Sites*, Appendix G. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

<sup>79</sup> Braga, A.A., Turchan, B. and Winship, C. (2019) 'Partnership, accountability, and innovation: Clarifying Boston's experience with focused deterrence', in *Police innovation: Contrasting perspectives*. [Place of Publication]: [Publisher], pp.227-247.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Grunwald, B. and Papachristos, A.V. (2017) 'Project Safe Neighborhoods in Chicago: Looking Back a Decade Later', *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 107, pp.131–160.

<sup>82</sup> National Network for Safe Communities (2016) *Group Violence Intervention: An Implementation Guide*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services.

<sup>83</sup> Braga, A.A., Turchan, B. and Winship, C., 2019. Partnership, accountability, and innovation: Clarifying Boston's experience with focused deterrence. *Police innovation: Contrasting perspectives*, pp.227-247.

<sup>84</sup> Cook, P.J. and Ludwig, J., 2006. Aiming for evidence-based gun policy. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 25(3), pp.691-735.

<sup>85</sup> Morgan, S.L. and Winship, C., 2014. *Counterfactuals and causal inference: Methods and principles for social research*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>86</sup> Fagan, J. (2002) 'Policing guns and youth violence', *The Future of Children*, pp.133-151.

occurred in other cities<sup>87, 88</sup>. Others emphasise the complexity of contributing factors (see Braga et al 2019)<sup>89, 90</sup>, making it challenging to attribute outcomes solely to focused deterrence models.

### Contribution to the Evidence Base

Previous research has called for evaluations of focused deterrence approaches, specifically in tackling youth crime in England and Wales<sup>91</sup>. The current evaluation aims to add to the existing evidence base by providing an in-depth reflection primarily from the perspective of practitioners and targeted individuals (i.e. children and young people) who were involved in the GCSC programme in Hemlington. While existing literature on focused deterrence largely addresses serious violence, the current iteration primarily targeted anti-social behaviour.

## 2.8 The Get Connected – Stay Connected (GCSC) Programme

The aims of GCSC: Hemlington were to:

1. Reduce serious violence;
2. Improve community cohesion;
3. Increase levels of safety among young people and the wider community;
4. Create a sustainable infrastructure beyond delivery of the programme.

### GCSC Delivery Plan

To meet the above aims, the programme outlined several core components within its service model, which included:

- Hemlington Compact: A signed commitment from all involved partners to remain engaged, committed and invested with the GCSC Pilot throughout the contract term;
- Safeguarding Against Youth Violence and Exploitation (SAYVE) Plan<sup>92</sup>: A coordinated approach agreed among practitioners that sets out clear goals, actions and increased accountability by assigning named 'leads' and 'champions' for each proposed objective. Leads and champions collaborate to drive successful implementation of proposed

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid

<sup>88</sup> Levitt, S.D., 2004. Understanding why crime fell in the 1990s: Four factors that explain the decline and six that do not. *Journal of Economic perspectives*, 18(1), pp.163-190.

<sup>89</sup> Braga, A.A., Turchan, B. and Winship, C. (2019) 'Partnership, accountability, and innovation: Clarifying Boston's experience with focused deterrence', in *Police innovation: Contrasting perspectives*. [Place of Publication]: [Publisher], pp.227-247..

<sup>90</sup> Ibid

<sup>91</sup> Wellford, C., Pepper, J. and Petrie, C. (eds.) (2005) *Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

<sup>92</sup> The SAYVE plan is a collaborative framework from the "Get Connected" programme. It enables facilitators to guide participants in pinpointing local issues and jointly developing action plans with clear, measurable results. It promotes stakeholder alignment on strategies and responsibilities to tackle youth violence and broader community challenges.

recommendations, to guide practitioners and hold them accountable. Each recommendation outlines specific actions, each with an assigned owner. When these individual actions are completed, they collectively ensure the recommendation's goal is achieved;

- Directory of Services: A resource created by GCSC and community cohesion partners to signpost individuals to key service contact details, providing a clear understanding of the services and referral pathways;
- Fully integrated Focused Deterrent Model: A focused deterrent model designed by GCSC. This model proposed a three-phase approach, which included:
  - Strategy One: Support: Linx Youth Service to act as the delivery partner who oversees contact and interaction with children;
  - Strategy Two: Deterrent: Integration of police and statutory partners to exhaust all opportunities for engagement with children and young people prior to implementing deterrence and special enforcement strategies;
  - Strategy Three: Community Engagement: Evolved GCSC programme including action workshops and community engagement events.
- Community Representatives: GCSC ensuring that the community were represented through recruiting a diverse representation of adults from across Hemlington, alongside integrating young people from across Hemlington who have experienced serious youth violence;
- Training and Support: GCSC to work with learning and skills providers to offer community representatives pathways into accessing courses and programmes that enhanced their communication skills. This was intended to provide pathways into further learning or employment opportunities;
- Wider Family: In accordance with public health approaches, GCSC outlined the importance of the wider family and home environments to support children. They were identified as key stakeholders through which support could be delivered by Linx and partnership agencies.

### GCSC Theory of Change

GCSC looked to enhance Project Connect's Get Connected programme by introducing new, bespoke components in conjunction with the Theory of Change (ToC). A ToC is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen. This

highlights the logical connection between the input, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact. This is presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3.** GCSC Theory of Change

<b>Stage of ToC</b>	<b>Description of details</b>
<b>Input</b> (Resources – What is Needed to Succeed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get Connected – Stay Connected (GCSC): Project Connect and Linx</li> <li>• Safeguarding Against Youth Violence and Exploitation (SAYVE) Plan</li> <li>• Multi-Agency Collaboration garnered through Get Connected and Steering Group</li> <li>• Policing – Special Enforcement and Deterrence Strategies</li> </ul>
<b>Activities</b> (Components of Intervention – What Do You Plan to Do?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evolving GCSC Programme</li> <li>• Identify Young People/Case Studies</li> <li>• Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)</li> <li>• Community Consultation and Scrutiny Group</li> <li>• Training Delivered to Champions and Navigators</li> <li>• Strategic Steering Group</li> <li>• Hemlington Compact</li> <li>• Creation of Directory of Local Services</li> <li>• Familial Signposting to Support Services</li> <li>• School Voice Questionnaire</li> </ul>
<b>Output</b> (Immediate Results Linked to Activities – How Will Delivery be Measured?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised and Improved SAYVE Plan</li> <li>• Community Champions/Navigators</li> <li>• Youth Panel Members (Trained)</li> <li>• Committed and Greater Participation from Consistent Practitioners</li> <li>• Families Linked with Funded Employment, Training and Education (ETE) Courses</li> <li>• Young People Included and Consulted With</li> </ul>

<p><b>Outcomes</b> (Indirect or Immediate Effects – Any Measurable Effect from Activities?)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance Multi-Agency Collaboration and Accountability</li> <li>• Increased Partnership Referrals</li> <li>• Young People and Wider Community Empowerment</li> <li>• Improved Life Chances Among Young People, Families and Carers</li> <li>• Reduction in Anti-Social Behaviour and Serious Youth Violence Across Hemlington</li> <li>• Increased Community Safety</li> <li>• Swift Justice for Young People Identified as Failing to Engage with Services</li> </ul>
<p><b>Impact</b> (Long-Term, Societal-Level Goal – Reducing Serious Violence)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in Serious Youth Violence</li> <li>• Improvement in Support and Greater Community Cohesion</li> <li>• Young People Feel Safe within the Community</li> <li>• Sustainable Infrastructure Including Local Partners Working in Collaboration</li> <li>• Swift Justice and Enhanced Community Understanding of the Consequences of Crime</li> </ul>

*Note: The contents of this table are derived from the GCSC Theory of Change diagram, with minor adaptations for presentation.*

## 2.9 The Evaluation

This evaluation investigated whether GCSC had met its proposed outcomes and impact as defined in its aforementioned ToC model. More specifically, the primary goals of the evaluation were to assess the impact of the programme on:

1. Reducing serious violence;
2. Improving community cohesion;
3. Increasing levels of safety among young people and the wider community;
4. Creating sustainable infrastructure beyond delivery of the programme.

There are six main steps in conducting a ToC evaluation, these include:

1. Defining the ToC: This involves identifying the long-term goals, intermediate outcomes, and specific activities and inputs that are expected to lead to these outcomes;
2. Data Collection: Collecting relevant data to assess the programme's progress along the ToC;
3. Testing Assumptions: Evaluating the assumptions underlying the ToC. These assumptions include the factors or conditions that must be true for the programme to work as expected;
4. Context Analysis: Consider the wider environmental, social and political context in which the programme operates. For example, do any external factors influence the programme's implementation and outcomes;
5. Comparing Actual Outcomes to Expected Outcomes: This involves looking at intended and unintended consequences;
6. Identifying Key Learning Points: Assess the reasons behind the success or failure of the programme in achieving its intended outcomes. Identify key lessons learned and areas for improvement.

## Research Questions

The evaluation explored the intended impact of the programme by addressing the following key questions:

1. Has there been a reduction in serious violence in Hemlington as a result of GCSC?
2. To what extent has the programme increased multi-agency collaboration and partnership working?
3. To what extent has the programme increased community cohesion?
4. Do community members in Hemlington feel safer as a result of GCSC?

## 3. Methods

### 3.1 Data Collection

To answer the research questions and assess whether the programme has met its goals, the evaluation incorporated a mixed methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative data. As Get Connected – Stay Connected (GCSC) aimed to provide support to at-risk children, the evaluation predominantly employed a case study approach, exploring outcomes of individual

children. This allowed for exploration of the unique trajectories and experiences of those who participated in the programme.

Quantitative data collection methods included:

- Case studies: Detailed reviews of individual participant data, encompassing their unique characteristics, assessed risk levels, identified needs, and patterns of offending behaviour. Such data incorporated metrics including school attendance, engagement with services, and the utilisation of enforcement measures relating to targeted individuals, recorded both before and after programme involvement;
- Review of official records and crime statistics (pre and post-programme);
- Surveys evaluating collaborative partnerships among practitioners across Hemlington pre and post-programme.

Qualitative data collection methods included:

- Semi-structured interviews with the children selected as case studies;
- Semi-structured interviews with key practitioners during the programme;
- Informal conversations and interviews with members of the community.

Data collection was accessed via and facilitated by the programme facilitators and delivery partners and single points of contact within Hemlington. Data included organisational records, programme records, community consultations, surveys, questionnaires and case studies. Practitioners participated voluntarily and were selected based on recommendations from programme facilitators.

### Practitioners

To capture insight from the practitioners involved in the programme, a variety of methods of data collection were employed, including surveys, interviews and observations. These methods are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Data collection methods used with practitioners

Method	Aim	Participation
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<b>Survey 1</b>	<p>To collect information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contextual understanding</li> <li>• Networks and partnerships</li> <li>• GCSC programme</li> </ul>	<p>Distributed in August 2024 and October 2024 to all members of the GCSC programme. 33% (N=2) attended two Get Connected (GC) sessions, 50% (N=3) attended four Get Connected sessions, 17% (N=1) attended five Get Connected sessions.</p>
<b>Survey 2</b>	<p>To collect information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information sharing</li> <li>• Case management</li> <li>• Referrals</li> <li>• Training and capacity building</li> <li>• Resource sharing</li> </ul>	<p>Distributed in December 2024 to all members of the GCSC programme.</p>
<b>Interviews</b>	<p>To collect information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understandings of focused deterrence</li> <li>• Programme design and implementation</li> <li>• Service delivery and enforcement processes</li> <li>• Child’s experience and understanding of focused deterrence</li> <li>• Programme outcomes, impact and evaluation</li> <li>• Community context</li> </ul>	<p>Semi-structured interviews were completed with key practitioners (N=9) between December 2024 and March 2025.</p>
<b>Observations</b>	<p>To capture information on the level and impact of partnership work and contribute to the case study notes</p>	<p>Evaluators attended a number of GCSC and steering group sessions between March 2024 and April 2025</p>

	for children involved in the programme	
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Eleven practitioners engaged with the evaluation through completion of surveys and/or participation in interviews. An overview of their engagement is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Practitioner organisation and engagement in data collection

Sector / Organisation	Member of Steering Group	Completed Survey 1	Completed Survey 2	Interviewed
Charity	Yes	✓	✓	✓
Charity	Yes	✓	✓	✓
Charity	Yes	X	✓	✓
Charity	Yes	✓	X	✓
Police	Yes	✓	✓	✓
Council	Yes	✓	✓	✓
Police	Yes	X	✓	X
LA:Youth Justice	Yes	X	X	✓
LA:Social Care	Yes	X	X	✓
Facilitator	Yes	X	✓	✓
Charity	Yes	✓	X	X

**Community**

Community input was collected in September 2024 via interviews and informal conversations with individuals who either resided in Hemlington or utilised the facilities in the area. Evaluators attended Hemlington Library for one morning to speak with members of the community. Twelve library users engaged in discussions about their community, focusing on youth violence and anti-social behaviour, community cohesion and perceptions of safety. Another evaluator attended the Swift Tees running group. This group holds two sessions per week within Hemlington, with attendance open to all. Approximately 60 individuals attended the event that the evaluator participated in, where informal discussions with participants were undertaken both during and

post the activity. In addition, two semi-structured interviews with local Housing Committee representatives were conducted, lasting approximately 45 minutes each. Conversations focused on serious youth violence, sense of community and perceptions of safety. Data was synthesised, see [community findings here](#). Lastly, evaluators attended one youth club session to capture children and young people's views on their community. The evaluators spoke to approximately 20 children and young people aged between 11-18 years.

## Children

Eight children received support over the programme's duration. Of these, one child was under 10 years old, six children were aged between 11-14 years and the two remaining children were aged between 15-18. One child was female and the remaining seven were male. All children identified as being from a White ethnic background. Three children identified as having a disability.

All children referred were identified as being involved in ASB; this was viewed by practitioners as having the potential to escalate to serious violence. Other reasons for referral included criminal activity (N = 4); poor school attendance/performance (N = 6); Child in Need (N = 2); trauma/bereavement (N = 3); poor mental health (N = 2); risk of exploitation (N = 2); bullying (N = 1); violent behaviour (N = 1); concerns of gang involvement (N = 1); conflict with relationships at school and home (N = 1); school exclusion (N = 1); and negative attitudes to police (N = 1).

All children were enrolled in full-time education throughout the programme. At the conclusion of the project in March 2025, five children remained actively engaged with, and received support from, the youth worker.

Multiple data collection strategies were considered to capture the child's voice in the evaluation. One semi-structured interview was completed with one child. Further interviews were not completed due to time constraints and strain on the mentor-child relationship. It was decided by the youth worker and Project Connect facilitator that priority should be given to support services over evaluative data collection. To overcome this, regular consultations with the youth worker began in September 2024. These consultations provided valuable proxy data regarding the child's experiences, programme impact, and relevant contextual factors, such as familial, social, and educational factors. This indirect approach allowed for the capture of crucial insights while minimising disruption to the relationship between the youth worker and children.

Police enforcement data – including records of arrests, charges and warnings issued to individuals – identified within the focused deterrence strategy, were collected and analysed to assess the impact of enforcement efforts. Data provided insights on enforcement pre-programme, during programme and post-programme.

## 3.2 Data Analysis

To explore the nature and quality of collaboration among practitioners involved in the focused deterrence programme, quantitative data analysis was undertaken through Social Network Analysis (SNA). This included the analysis of data from the structured survey that was distributed to key individuals across partner organisations, asking them to report on the presence and strength of relationships with other practitioners across four domains: (1) information sharing, (2) case management, (3) training and capacity building, and (4) resource sharing. Responses were used to construct weighted, directed networks, with edge weight indicating frequency or perceived strength of collaboration. The data were processed and visualised using Gephi software. Separate graphs were generated for each domain to identify role-specific patterns, alongside an aggregated network capturing overall stakeholder interaction. Node size was scaled by degree centrality to reflect the prominence of practitioners, while edge thickness and colour gradient were used to denote the strength of ties. While all edges were visualised as bi-directional for consistency, the underlying data captured directional responses. Additional metrics such as betweenness centrality and network density were calculated to support the interpretation of stakeholder positioning, bridging roles, and potential gaps in collaboration. Insights from the network visuals were triangulated with qualitative interview data to ensure contextual understanding and allow for the validation of observed patterns.

Qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews with practitioners involved in delivering GCSC aimed to explore their understanding of focused deterrence and their perceptions of how well the programme components achieved desired outcomes, such as reducing serious youth violence and improving multi-agency collaboration. After recording and transcribing each interview, transcripts were imported into qualitative analysis software, NVivo 14. Thematic analysis began once all interviews were completed. The process of thematic analysis included the assortment of interview data into codes, before these were then assorted into themes. Codes, defined as small units of analysis that reflected shared patterns of interest, were first identified at a semantic level, representing the explicit language and meaning used by

participants. As analysis progressed and the researcher's understanding deepened, latent codes were introduced to capture more conceptual and interpretive meanings. These initial codes were then grouped into candidate themes, which served to summarise and organise the data. Codes were deliberately arranged into themes that remained distinct or even contradictory, to ensure the analysis could tell a coherent and nuanced story in response to the research questions.

## 4. Findings

These findings are derived from quantitative and qualitative data which included interviews, focus groups, observations, surveys and the gathering of secondary data of crime and enforcement statistics. This section provides insight into whether the programme has achieved its four aims of:

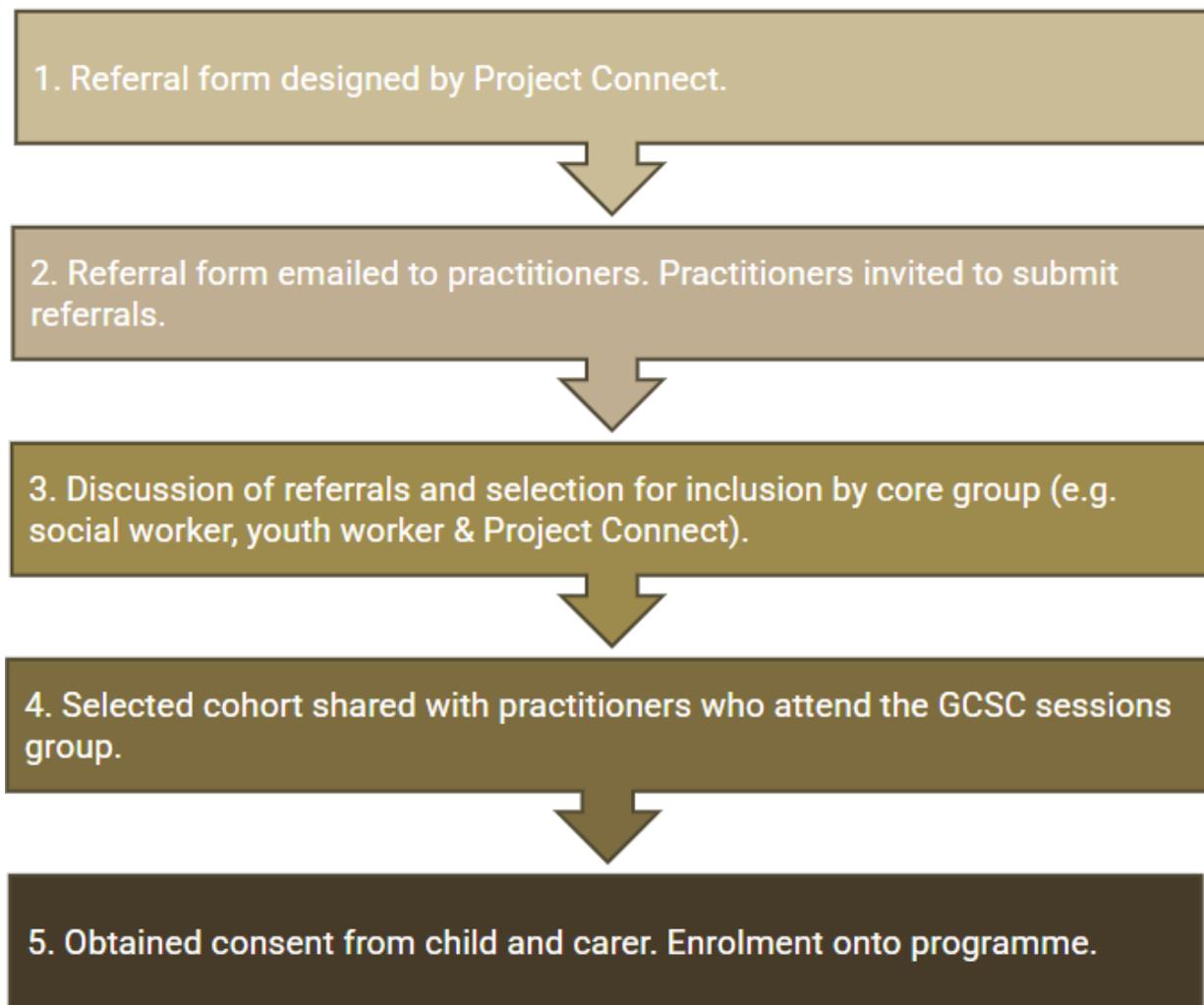
1. Reducing serious violence;
2. Improving community cohesion;
3. Increasing levels of safety among young people and the wider community;
4. Creating sustainable infrastructure beyond delivery of the programme.

Findings reflect on the programme's Theory of Change (ToC), aiming to understand how and why the programme was expected to achieve its intended impact. Overall, the evaluation validated many of these identified pathways of change; however, gaps or weaknesses in the intended ToC were also identified, leading to actionable recommendations for future iterations.

Findings are outlined in four sections: the referral process; practitioners; community; and children and young people.

### 4.1 The Referral Process

Referrals onto the programme utilised practitioner expertise and discretion. Project Connect encouraged multiple referrals for the same child or young person from different practitioners to indicate a shared view of need. The Project Connect facilitator explained that they were not bound by specific criteria, other than those selected must live in Hemlington. Children who were receiving interventions from other services could be referred; however, some practitioners raised concerns that this might dilute the programme's impact. Evaluators observed the referral process during Get Connected – Stay Connected (GCSC) sessions; this was confirmed by the facilitator and is shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5.** Referral process of GCSC programme<sup>93</sup>

## 4.2 Practitioner Perspectives

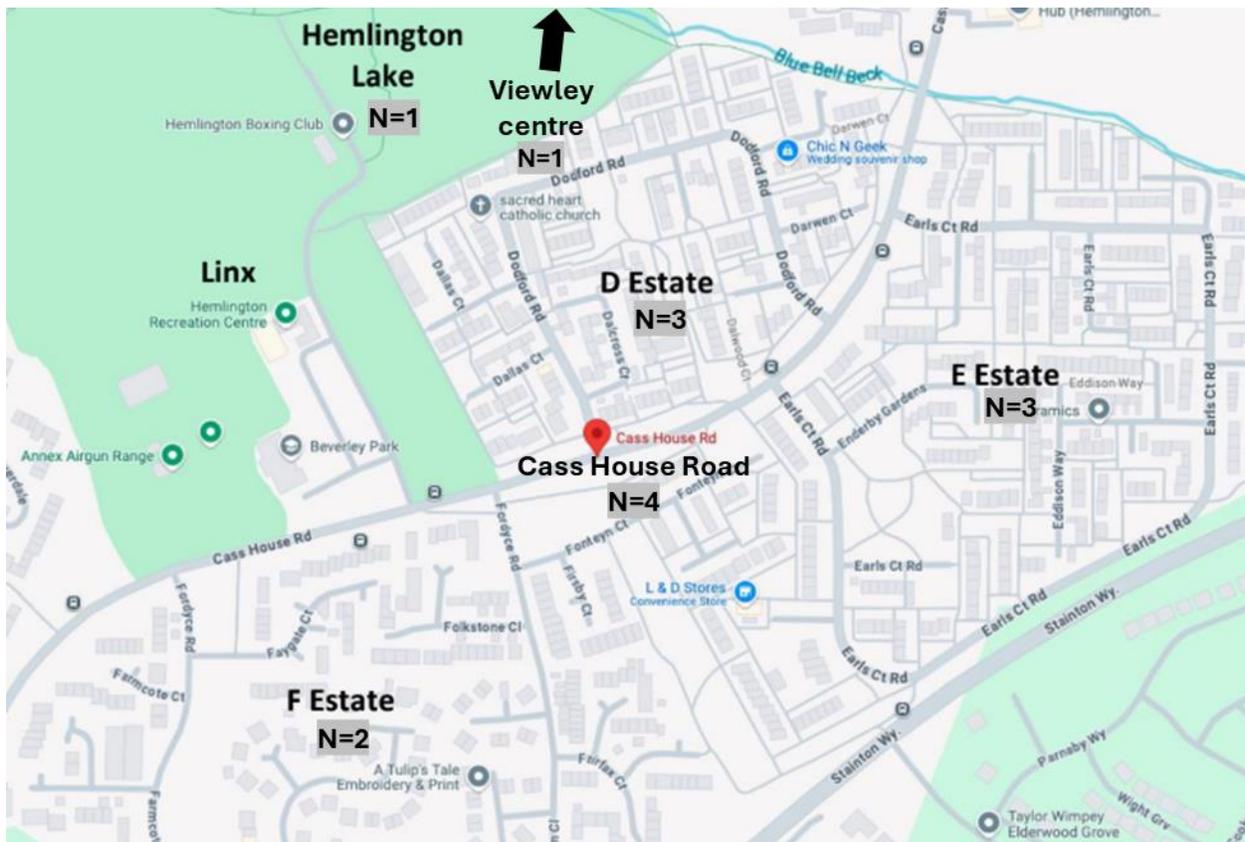
### Survey Responses

The completion of surveys by practitioners who engaged with the focused deterrence programme provided insight into the risks of violence and anti-social behaviours within Hemlington, and where specifically these were most likely to be experienced. Further, survey responses provided a means to capture the existing networks between practitioners involved in youth violence prevention.

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<sup>93</sup> This diagram was made by Black Box Research and Consultancy with approval from the founder of Project Connect that the content is correct.

Contextual understandings of the risk of violence and crime in Hemlington were attained through the completion of survey one between August and October 2024. Collectively, practitioners ranked criminal damage (N=4) as the most common local offence, followed by ASB, theft, driving incidents and drug offences (each N=2), and other specific crimes (each N=1). Crime hotspots included Cass House Road (N=4), in addition to D and E estates (each N=3) as presented in Figure 6. Incidents were reported to primarily occur in the evenings but also during the day.



**Figure 6.** Practitioners' perceptions of where crime occurs in Hemlington

Practitioners identified key risk factors of crime and violence in Hemlington, including the normalisation of violence, deprivation and drugs (see Table 6 for details).

**Table 6.** Practitioners' perceived risk factors of crime and violence in Hemlington

Theme	Explanation
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<b>Normalisation of violence</b>	Limited positive role models available so negative peers are a welcome alternative. This is compounded by poor upbringing and parents and grandparents who have been associated with crime, violence and drugs.
<b>Deprivation</b>	No specific references to how this is a risk factor, but easily identified.
<b>Drugs</b>	Exploitation and county lines highlighted.

Survey two provided an assessment of working partnerships in Hemlington which aided understanding of the network of local practitioners involved in youth violence prevention, identifying which organisations collaborate with one another, how often and for what purpose (e.g. information sharing, case management, referrals, training and capacity building, and resource sharing).

The Overall Network Analysis (Figure 7) revealed a core-periphery structure. Central organisations (police, council, Linx, Project Connect) exhibited strong connectivity and collaboration, effectively balancing statutory and community functions deemed beneficial for this programme.

Key practitioners implementing focused deterrence in the GCSC programme included the police, council, Project Connect and Linx (see Table 7 for further information on their respective roles), in addition to numerous peripheral actors (e.g., fire services, healthcare, housing services). Several actors were semi-detached or linked only through one or two relationships.

**Table 7.** Overview of organisations implementing focused deterrence and their roles

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Likely role</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Police	Central coordinator and gatekeeper	Dominant in most interaction types (e.g. resource sharing, referrals, case management)
Council	Strategic partner	Interacted with almost all other core and peripheral agencies

Project Connect	Operational hub	Strong links with both statutory and community partners
Linx	Community-based delivery leader	High involvement despite being non-statutory

While this core-periphery structure was functional for central coordination, it may have impeded broader information flow and cross-sector innovation. A key implication was restricted access to essential wrap-around services and provisions for the programme and its participants, compounded by limited local infrastructure. The network's stability and continuity was heavily reliant on the central core (police, council, Project Connect and Linx), where the withdrawal of any core member risked significant disruption to the programme.

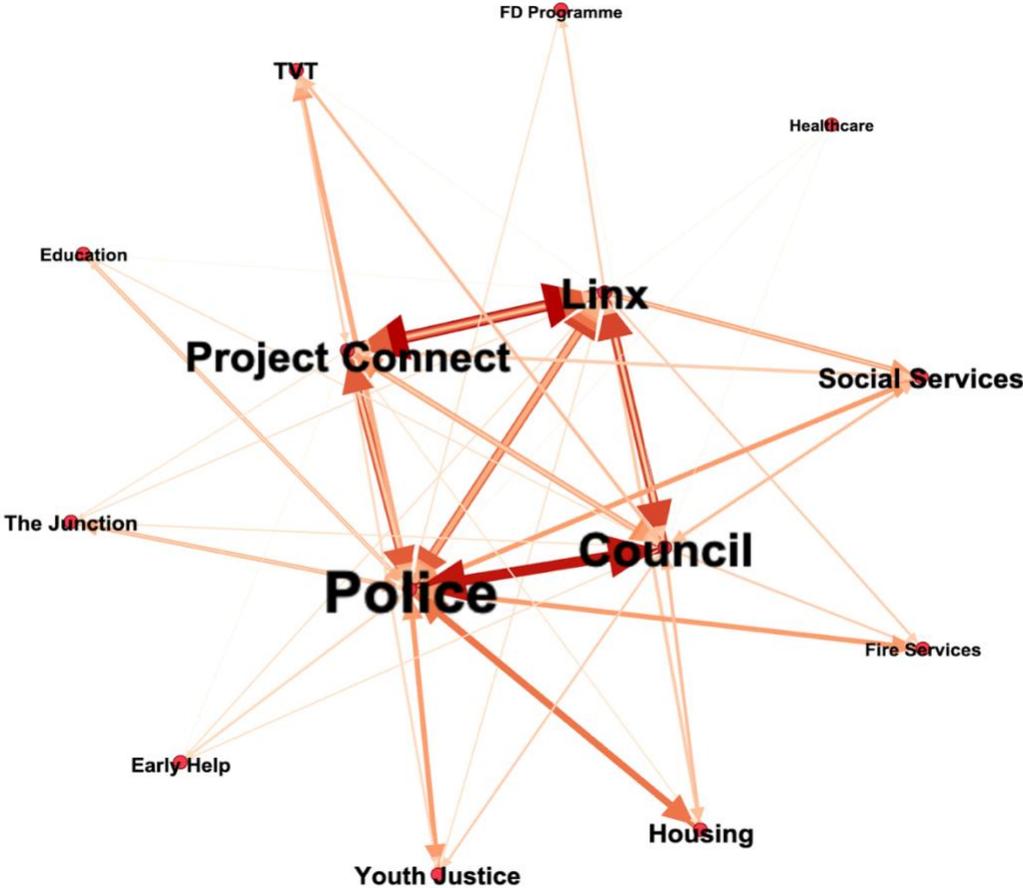


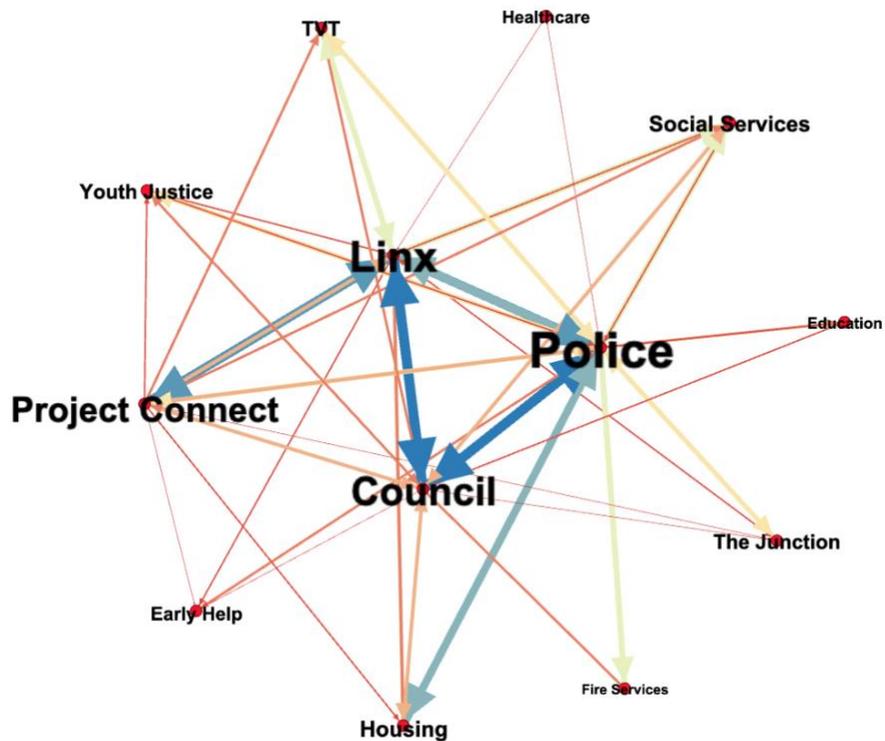
Figure 7. Overall Network Analysis

## Case Management Network

The case management network depicts stakeholders who were directly involved in the management of children and young people involved within the GCSC programme, through activities such as a joint intervention plan or case review. The graph revealed Linx as the most central and connected operational core, involved in nearly every case and engaged in frequent, mutual discussions with the council, police and Project Connect. A strong link between Linx and Project Connect underscored their vital role in coordinating complex cases. This supported the point that the Project Connect facilitator and the Linx youth worker meet regularly to coordinate complex cases.

Project Connect also linked to the council and police, showing its facilitator role across the system. The council and police both showed numerous connections and thick arrows to/from Linx and Project Connect. They functioned as core case management pillars – handling risk, safeguarding and service access, though their high connectivity suggested a potentially disproportionate weight in the network and therefore workload.

Education, healthcare, social care, Tees Valley Together, early help, fire services, The Junction and youth justice all appeared smaller and positioned at the edge of the network. These connections were mostly thin and one-directional – often feeding into Linx or police. This suggests these actors were infrequent contributors to multi-agency case planning, despite being essential for wraparound care (e.g., mental health, school reintegration, early trauma support). Therefore, while the core team was strong, the broader ecosystem of care remained weakly integrated into active case management. Given that the success of the GCSC programme relied on multi-dimensional support, trust building and addressing root causes, the figure highlights a clear need to formalise engagement from peripheral practitioners (especially education, health and social care) to achieve sustainable, system-wide impact.



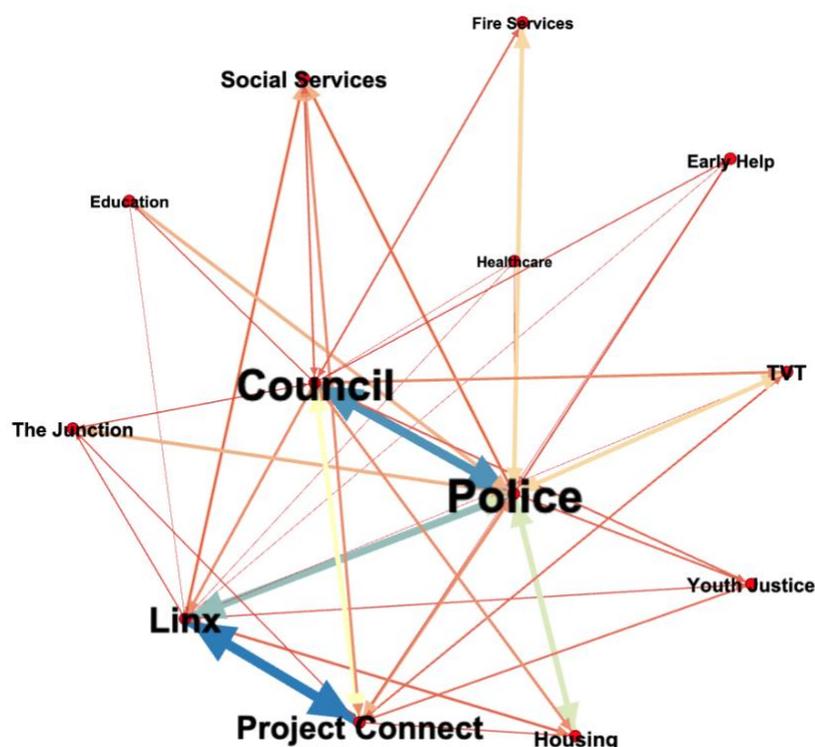
**Figure 8.** Case Management Network

### Information Sharing Network

The information sharing network depicts the degree to which Hemlington-based practitioners interacted for the purpose of knowledge exchange, including to provide updates, policy briefs, data and best practices. Analysis revealed that Linx were operating in isolation from statutory power. This is visually presented in the absence of a bi-directional flow between Linx and statutory agencies. It reflects concerns voiced during interviews surrounding the criminalisation of the young people. Instead, Linx channelled information through Project Connect, who acted as a trusted intermediary.

Project Connect appeared to act as an information bridge, positioned to receive and distribute information between community and statutory partners. The multiple strong connections from Project Connect to the council, police and Linx demonstrate the critical role it occupied in information sharing.

There was a heavy flow of information towards the council and police (from social services, housing, early help, etc.). Their node size and central position reflect a high volume of connections rather than dominance over data flows, whereas organisations like education, healthcare, fire services and The Junction were on the periphery, with minimal information flow. Their marginalisation shows informal knowledge remained locked within the core delivery circle, limiting the ecosystem's ability to act holistically.



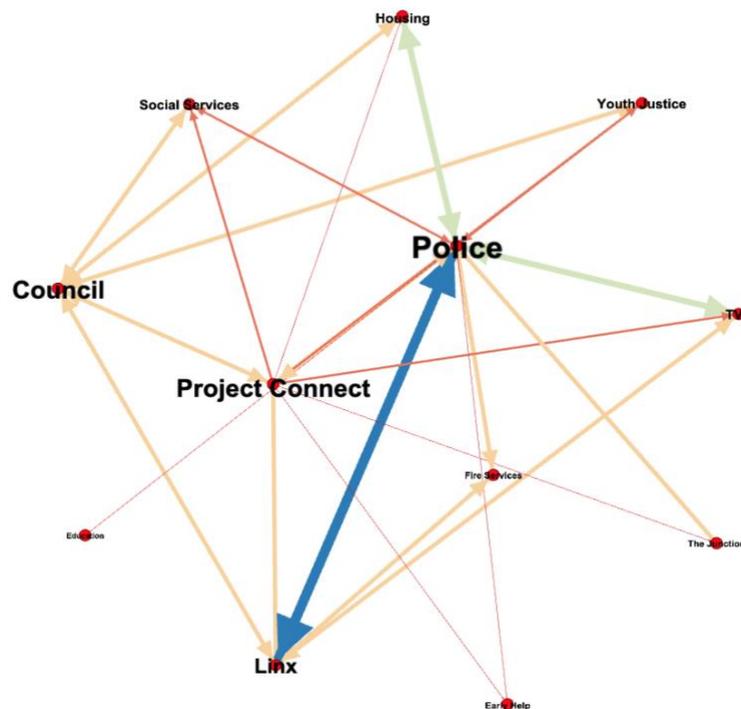
**Figure 9.** Information Sharing Network

This network is a striking visualisation of the philosophical tensions within focused deterrence models, where statutory agencies prioritise risk and safeguarding, while community organisations prioritise trust, engagement and early intervention. Without trustworthy, bi-directional information sharing mechanisms, there are real dangers of:

- Duplication or omission in responses;
- Criminalisation of young people prior to support being offered;
- Missed opportunities for system-level learning from localised insights (e.g., emerging youth trends, hotspots, school disengagement).

## Training Network

The Training Network revealed the capacity through which stakeholders engaged for the purpose of upskilling and learning through workshops or courses provided by other organisations. Project Connect was identified as a central connector, particularly linking community and third-sector partners. Its centrality was attributed to convening bi-monthly stakeholder meetings which facilitated information sharing, capacity building, skill exchange, partnership development; and blending training, updates and planning. Project Connect's position enabled it to function as a crucial bridge in this multi-agency environment, translating knowledge between institutional and frontline levels.



**Figure 10.** Training Network

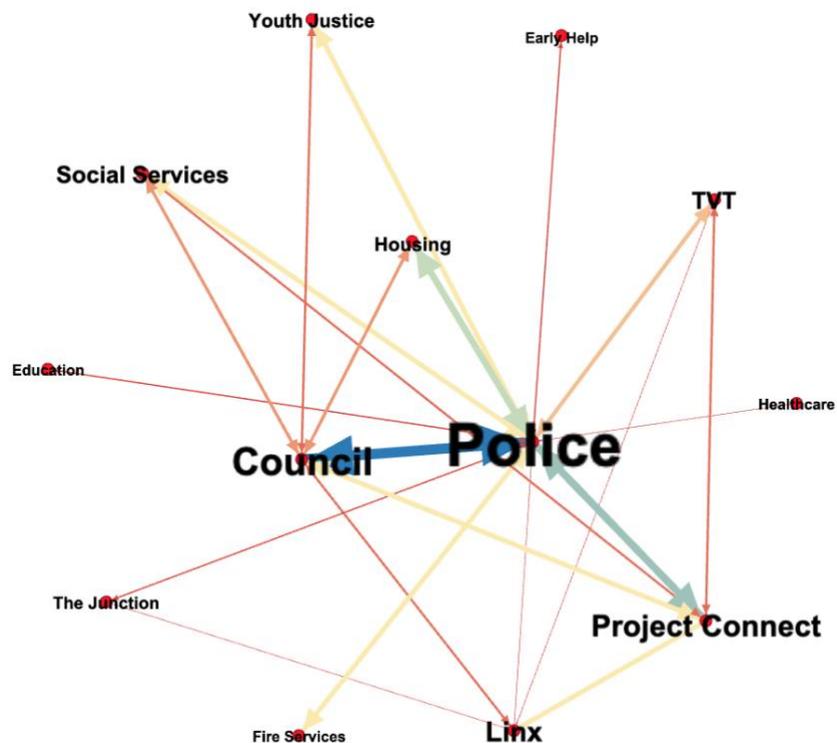
## Resource Sharing Network

The resource sharing network depicts engagement based on the exchange of formal assets, including staff, facilities, data-sharing agreements and funding. The police were the dominant central actor, exhibiting high connectivity and extensive resource flow. The largest node size

indicates a high degree of centrality and the thickest incoming and outgoing edges suggest that it both received and provided extensive resources.

The council and Project Connect were also central, serving as key brokers of operational capacity. Both had multiple connections and larger node sizes than most, acting as hubs for resourcing relationships. This implies that public institutions (such as the council) and delivery partners (such as Project Connect) were critical brokers of operational capacity.

The resource sharing network was found to be moderately sparse, with numerous peripheral nodes (e.g., fire services, healthcare, The Junction) having few connections, suggesting potentially minimal or one-way engagement. This sparsity implies low redundancy and potentially fragile capacity, increasing the risk of service isolation if central providers withdraw and highlighting an overreliance on these key practitioners. Although cross-sectoral, resource integration appeared uneven, potentially indicating silos or inequities in the capacity for tangible resource sharing among partners.

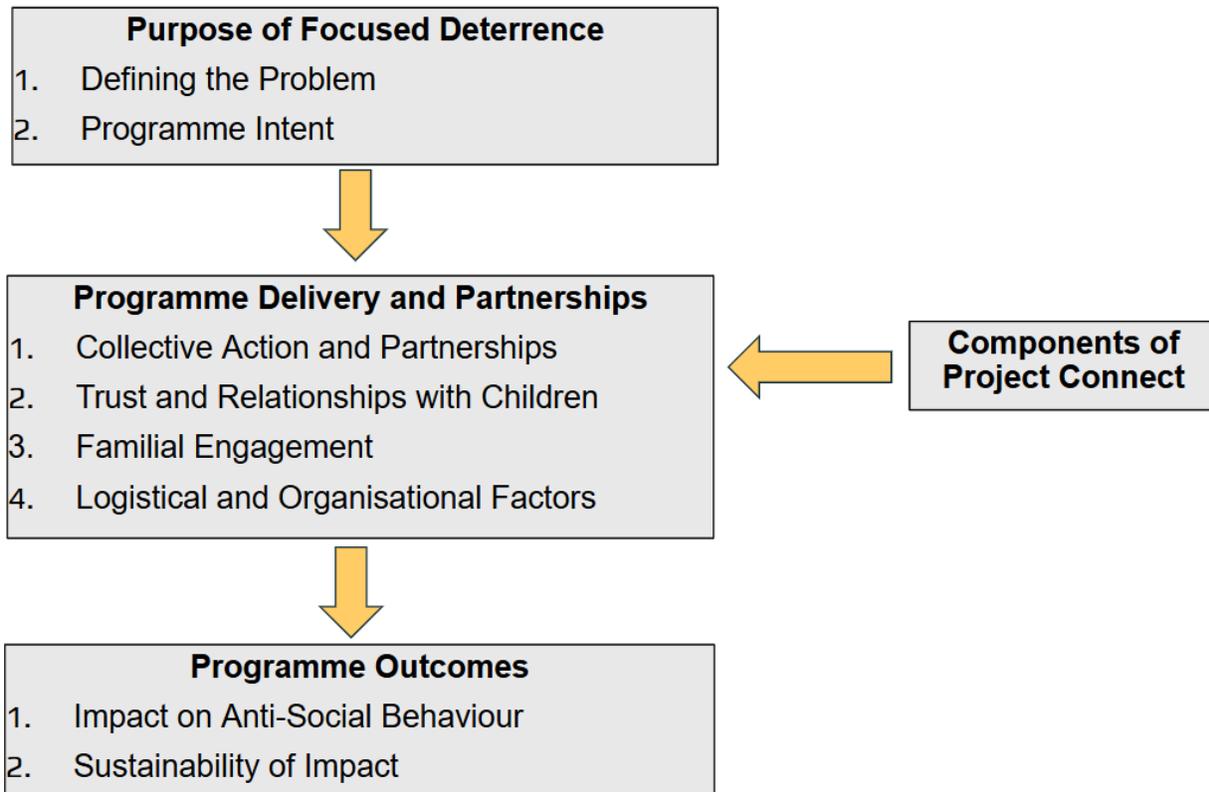


**Figure 11.** Resource Sharing Network

## Practitioner Interviews

Thematic analysis of interviews with practitioners involved in GCSC identified four key themes (see Figure 12): the purpose of focused deterrence; programme delivery and partnerships; programme outcomes; and the influence of Project Connect on implementation.

1. Purpose of Focused Deterrence: Explores practitioners' understanding of the GCSC programme and how focused deterrence was conceptualised and applied;
2. Programme Delivery and Partnerships: Examines delivery experiences and inter-agency collaboration – with four subthemes: collective action; relationships with children; familial engagement; and logistical/organisational challenges;
3. Programme Outcomes: Describes the perceived impact of the programme, particularly in reducing anti-social behaviour and the sustainability of its effects;
4. Components of Project Connect: Considers how Project Connect shaped GCSC delivery, identifying both effective elements and areas for improvement in future programmes.



**Figure 12.** Practitioners experience of the GCSC programme

The following section outlines the key themes, including direct quotes from the practitioners. All identifiers have been removed to protect participant anonymity.

#### 4.2.1 Purpose of Focused Deterrence

This theme recognises practitioners' understanding of the purpose of the GCSC programme and its adoption of a focused deterrence model. Practitioners recognised that the intended purpose of GCSC in Hemlington was to work with children who were involved in ASB and to deter them from engaging in it further.

*'The overall goal of the project is to identify and work directly with the offending children and to look at why they are offending... understanding their individual reasons for committing the crimes and working through that process with them.'*

Practitioners identified the range of ASB that children were involved in, including *'throwing stones across the main roads, smashing windows [and] terrorising residents verbally.'*

*'People are scared to come. Some of it is anti-social behaviour, but the children have chipped into criminal behaviour as well.'*

Some practitioners felt that local referral patterns and service configurations influenced the final composition of the cohort. Another practitioner noted that they were often unaware of a child until statutory services became involved, making it difficult to identify and refer them at an earlier stage.

*'Because we come from the statutory services they have already had to have been arrested, it sort of makes it hard that there could be kids that all of the services are involved or aware of but we physically won't be aware of them until they've been arrested and charged.'*

#### 4.2.2 Programme Delivery

This theme explores the delivery of the GCSC programme. Practitioners recognised four factors that impacted the programme delivery, including:

1. **Collective Action and Partnerships:** While strengthened collaboration supported information-sharing, inconsistent coordination and differing approaches across agencies limited effective multi-agency responses;
2. **Trust and Relationships with Children:** Practitioners highlighted the importance of building trust through group sessions and reflective work, though this was sometimes hindered by non-attendance or disengagement;
3. **Familial Engagement:** Engaging families was seen as crucial, with various methods trialled and future opportunities identified to better involve parents and carers in the process;
4. **Logistical and Organisational Factors:** Challenges included inconsistent stakeholder participation, unclear referral rationale and difficulties adapting delivery to different age groups, all of which impacted implementation.

### Collective Action and Partnerships

Practitioners reported the positive impact that collective action and partnerships had on the delivery of GCSC. This collaboration facilitated targeted information sharing, wraparound support and improved risk navigation.

*'Key strengths are the interaction between agencies and actually it sounds really simple, but they're sitting down at a table and discussing things from every angle.'*

While the focused deterrence model relies on a balance of deterrence and support, partners including police and community organisations often had conflicting priorities, possibly leading to tension where practitioners prioritised different aspects of focused deterrence, such as swift punitive measures versus relationship building and prevention.

*'The key difficulty is tension between punishment and support... I do agree support should absolutely come first. However, I have looked at the wider public, not just the one individual, so I think that that's probably where the challenge lies.'*

*'We try and not enforce at all because we don't want to be seen as part of an enforcement team because we want to provide support.'*

However, practitioners acknowledged that despite different priorities, they were all working towards the same goal.

*'Obviously they've got different priorities, haven't they? But we all want to achieve the same thing in the end.'*

Some practitioners reported that their roles might make it inappropriate for them to be present during certain discussions about the children, questioning who were *'safe ears to share confidential information with'*. For example, if police were present during discussions, they would have to act on information about ASB or criminal activity if made aware of it. Other practitioners recognised that some information – particularly surrounding lower-level criminality – might have been withheld to avoid police intervention.

*'I would imagine information probably has been held back, because obviously by the conversations being phrased as we may give some information about criminality, and then no conversation happening about criminality, I can only assume something's been left out... I think they were talking about the sort of lower level things i.e. smoking cannabis, that sort of crime but we can't turn a blind eye.'*

Another practitioner reported that they think the information sharing is similar to what it was previous to the programme. One of the challenges is not having engagement from other practitioners, meaning that the information sharing is one-directional.

*'I think we're probably communicating similarly... we were having meetings but not getting anything back and we were sharing information among ourselves on a daily basis anyway. So it felt like we were regurgitating information to other partners who attended the meetings but were getting nothing back from other partners.'*

Another challenge in accessing information was that the delivery team's main youth worker was not part of a statutory agency.

*'It's a shame that as a youth worker and leading this project, we don't have access to the social care system to find out information regarding the children.'*

Some practitioners reported a delay in information sharing, for example they only learned about a child's arrest or involvement in an incident during a GCSC meeting. Practitioners recognised that this might impact the support that they were able to provide to that individual.

*'Everything always comes back to communication, because if we were sharing that information, as soon as possible, we'd be able to implement more support... for example... I don't even know why [the child] was given an anti-social behaviour contract on Tuesday, nobody's told us.'*

Participants identified that key practitioners – such as education – were absent or inconsistent, reducing the effectiveness of the programme and limiting collaborative efforts and co-ordinating responses. Practitioners recognised the valuable support, intelligence and insight that educational representatives could have that would facilitate support for the child.

*'Education should have been there... they see children Monday to Friday most of the times a year. They have lots of influence in terms of support, intelligence, worries, what's working well, what aspirations the children have. So that's a big missing part to be fair and for the community as well.'*

Another practitioner highlighted potential challenges with education. For example, children involved in the programme may all attend different schools, therefore the practitioner questioned which education representative should attend the GCSC session.

*'Education is always key and it's tricky because you can't categorise every young person from Hemlington and going to the same school... Would you have three different teachers from three different schools? Or would there be someone within Middlesbrough Council who oversees all of that being there to be able to provide oversight of what the issues are in school and what can everyone do to address it. Because I go to meetings for education and you've got the Special Educational Need Officer there and an Inclusion Officer and everyone sort of knows the plan for the young person, but school don't even attend those meetings. So, if a child is really struggling in school, should there be a spokesperson from the Council who can provide oversight?'*

Despite the multi-agency nature of the approach, some partners failed to engage meaningfully, either by failing to attend sessions, contributing minimally or lacking sustained involvement outside of scheduled activities. Other participants noted that only the core group had remained engaged in the duration of the programme. One participant reflected on one of the GCSC meetings, acknowledging that *'there was only four services there.*

*'It sometimes feels like you're not getting the buy-in from all the agencies.'*

*'There's been people who have dropped out along the way, so has it maintained to the same level [as the] start? Probably not. There is still a good level of collaboration between the core partners that turn up month in month out. A lot of the schools dropped out, among others, didn't they? So, things like that obviously would have been a benefit to have them involved.'*

### Trust and Relationships with Children

Practitioners reported that the programme's success was founded on building trust-based relationships with children. This was critical for meaningful engagement, particularly given the prevalent mistrust of statutory services in the area. Having consistent, non-judgemental interactions with children helped to break down barriers and create a safe space for honest discussions. According to one participant, children also felt comfortable disclosing challenges which allowed for more tailored interventions.

*'The key to it is the relationship... The way you get progress is through trust and confidence through that relationship with the youth worker... There's an inherent mistrust in communities like Hemlington with the police for all kinds of reasons... we work very, very, very hard to make sure that relationship with each of them is positive, progressive and effective.'*

### **Box 1. Child Voice**

Children reported enjoying the group sessions, particularly the opportunity to connect with peers who were also working on improving their behaviour. They valued the supportive environment and appreciated having consistent check-ins with a youth worker who took the time to listen and offer encouragement.

*'My favourite parts have been the activities and trips they organise – they give us something to look forward to. Also just having someone there to talk to, who checks in and really listens. It's also been good meeting new people who are in the same boat but trying to do better too.'*

The role of the youth worker was identified as a key aspect of successful programme delivery. Practitioners highlighted that the youth worker's positive attributes, attitude, local knowledge of the area and genuine care for the children were a strength to the programme. Other practitioners highlighted the youth workers' success in helping children feel '*seen, loved, cherished [and] cared for*'.

*'[The youth worker is] local, she knows Hemlington back to front... She's got the right attitude. She's got the right skill set, but more importantly, she's got the right heart to do what she does.'*

Practitioners identified that having group sessions encouraged engagement and provided a platform to have open discussions, share experiences and receive peer support in a less pressured environment compared to one-to-one interventions.

*'I think going forward doing the one-to-ones with the individuals in the school, but then doing a group session every week and make that more issue based... I think we'd get a lot more from them as a group than one-on-one because it's not so intense... Each young person that's on this programme is involved in some form of ASB. So it'll be weekly sessions around knife crime, hate crime, county lines, things like that, just to provide a bit more education to the children, get them involved, make sure they understand what it is,*

*and if they've got any questions then they can ask. It's going to be an open session really for them to share their experiences as well as gain knowledge around specific topics.'*

The community organisation's approach emphasised voluntary participation and relationship-building. This also led to some children bringing their friends to youth club or sessions due to positive experiences with the youth worker.

*'This is all voluntary on their part and you know, the 'trick' essentially was to convince youngsters that this was going to do them and their families good in the longer term.'*

*'From what I heard was that actually children were coming to youth sessions and then bringing their friends and to me, that's a success.'*

## **Box 2. Child Voice**

Children highlighted qualities of the youth worker that helped them build a relationship, such as being non-judgemental, easy to talk to, supportive, and willing to listen to them.

*'[The Youth worker] has been easy to talk to from the start. She listens without judging, and it doesn't feel like she's just doing a job – she cares. Having someone like that, who checks in and helps me figure things out, made a big difference. I feel like I can open up to her about things I wouldn't tell anyone else. That trust helped me stick with the programme.'*

## **Parental Engagement**

This subtheme explores the challenges associated with engaging parents, as well as the added value of their involvement. Practitioners emphasised that working with families not only helped build trust but also provided vital context about the child's circumstances, enabling a deeper understanding of the root causes of their involvement in ASB.

*'Parents need to be more involved... maybe speak with the families and get a bit of background about the child, whether they can identify reasons why each of them are involved in anti-social behaviour.'*

However, barriers to parental engagement included lack of time/resources to dedicate practitioner engagement with parents; as one practitioner acknowledged they would need to *'increase my hours [...] to work with parents.'* The lack of parental engagement impacted delivery of the programme. For example, when enrolling the children onto the programme, the practitioner found difficulty in securing parental consent, attributing this to parents' limited understanding of the programme.

*'Parents were quite reluctant to give consent to the child joining the programme. I think it was because they didn't fully understand what the programme was about.'*

The youth worker reported that attendance at the sessions fluctuated. Reengaging children in the programme after school term holidays was a particular challenge. Participants reported that sessions were cancelled due to non-attendance and that children needed encouragement to return. When the youth worker spoke to parents about this, parents appeared dismissive of their child's lack of engagement. Having parental buy-in for the programme would support attendance at sessions.

*'In the run up to Christmas we had good attendance and seemed to be here every week. We had the police and fire brigade come along and we had two guys come along from drugs and alcohol, which they seemed so engrossed in, I couldn't get them away and they asked if they will come back and deliver another session... The last two weeks, the sessions haven't gone ahead due to nobody attending... they came to the youth clubs and I said 'don't forget Thursday' but then nothing... they just said that they forgot... They do need encouragement.'*

### Logistical and Organisational Factors

Participants emphasised the importance of selecting an appropriate delivery partner to ensure the programme's success. They noted that Linx was chosen through the commissioning process due to their strong community presence in Hemlington, existing relationships with local practitioners and familiarity with many of the children involved – making them well-placed to lead the work effectively.

*'We [partnered] with Linx because as part of the model, we wanted this to be community led. They were based within the community and already have that footprint... They've got the youth centre so when this is finished the kids can still access that youth club.'*

*'Our history [of] 30 odd years here in Hemlington, very well known, highly respected within Hemlington, among children, their families and the community as a whole... we have really good links to relationships with the community and the children.'*

The referral process was based on practitioner discretion and intimate knowledge of the children. Practitioners viewed flexibility in the structure of referrals (as opposed to a rigid criteria) as being important. However, they also recognised that this meant some children would be missed due to capacity limits. Practitioners reported feeling confident in selecting the right individuals based on their understanding of who would benefit most. Partners often nominated the same children, highlighting the need for that child to be involved in the project.

*'I think it's been quite open for us to put forward who we feel would benefit from [the programme] and who we can have a positive effect on... all the partners have put their own nominations in and generally it's been a case of partners seem to nominate the same people.'*

*'As far as the referral process is concerned, the way it kind of transpired is that we know all these children, and who are most likely to be involved, we know them quite intimately, so the majority of those that were selected were people that we knew and we knew very, very well. Therefore we knew that they would take most benefit from that support, the way that the referral pathway was constructed... it encouraged us to have that debate and that dialogue with other agencies such as housing, police, social workers, you know, all that kind of stuff. So we could agree who they were.'*

Many participants advocated for a larger-scale delivery programme, feeling that the current scale was insufficient given the number of children who could benefit. Practitioners expressed frustration at the limited scale and the need for more dedicated, full-time support.

*'I'd like to see on a bigger scale... lots of these agencies who could potentially nominate 1,000 kids, never mind five, to benefit from this kind of support in an area like Hemlington, or lots of the other areas we work in, there are countless children who could benefit from this kind of engagement and that kind of consistency in support.'*

Structural and operational challenges faced by the community organisation included insufficient support for frontline youth workers and staff turnover, disrupting effective engagement. Due to staff turnover, some practitioners felt that they were working in isolation. The practitioners suggested that there was enough scope for another member of staff to be involved.

*'[The senior youth worker] was never meant to do this on her own, she was meant to do it with [another member of staff], but they left their role and were not replaced, but she hasn't had the right support and all that. That's been fixed because [the programme facilitator] stepped in but should that have been him that stepped in or should it have been somebody from [her own organisation] stepping in to support her?'*

*'When I agreed to do the project, I thought I was gonna be supported and shadowed right through this programme because it was a new programme... I thought the [lifestyle advocates] would have been involved a lot more and especially in terms of delivering sessions... coming in and having talks with the children and things like that, I just thought there would have been a lot more involvement... potentially there is room for another member of staff.'*

Another challenge to the programme's implementation was that the start date had been delayed by several months because commissioners had to re-tender. These delays in commissioning led to a loss in momentum and challenges in implementing the programme effectively.

*'We were meant to start in November and then we submitted the tender within the time frame... Get Connected had only finished in July, so we still had some good momentum. We have key people in positions within Linx at that point... we had to re-tender and then we didn't get sign off until February... so we were three months behind.'*

Due to these delays, some practitioners reported confusion over their role and responsibilities in implementing the programme.

*'We went through the full contract and everything like that. What are the expectations that were written, right at the beginning... what are we expected to do and [we had a meeting about it] but we came out of that meeting and still didn't have an idea because none of it had started off the way that it was supposed to.'*

Another challenge was the attendance at and frequency of meetings. Participants highlighted challenges in scheduling meetings with some of the key practitioners due to delays and cancellations. Other practitioners felt that some key stakeholders were missing from meetings, which hindered communication.

*'Unless I made the meeting [with certain practitioners], it didn't happen and I guess you get to a point where you're constantly calling meetings and meetings were being cancelled.'*

*'There's definitely challenges in terms of communication... to keep this project going and relevant and everyone on the same page, I think meetings should be happening regularly with everyone.'*

Gaining consent from schools and parents for one-to-one sessions proved to be another significant challenge, with youth workers reporting lengthy delays in email responses and parents frequently providing excuses for their children's non-attendance.

*'The one-on-one sessions, there's been quite a few challenges there... getting consent from school to go in and start the one-to-one sessions during school hours... there were weeks that would pass without getting a response from emails... I think parents as well, they knew of the meetings and every time I either called or went to the house to collect the young person, it was just the same excuse that it was the holidays.'*

Practitioners noted that the current level of support was not sustainable due to funding ending, reporting that the short time they were able to spend with the children was insufficient.

Practitioners further expressed frustration with short-term funding and the reluctance of longer-term providers to commit, urging for further resources to support the delivery of programmes such as GCSC.

*'One of the big things that comes out of this sort of evaluation; it's great to find and get the data and understand the issues, but to be able to do something with that, it needs to be resourced.'*

Challenges were faced in leveraging external support systems including education, employment and recreational activities, due to limited infrastructure and lack of engagement from local partners. Participants described the difficulty in getting other organisations to work in Hemlington due to past negative experiences, while others highlighted the lack of infrastructure for children to use in Hemlington.

*'It's really tricky, [when you] say Hemlington to another organisation they quite often say 'absolutely not, we've had bad experiences in that area before.' We've got organisations who have targets to work with; specific children like our cohort, so that obviously works to our advantage that we can use them such as like public health for example, they need to target our group because they're the ones who are you know involved with alcohol, drugs and smoking and things like that.'*

*'I've always said one of the biggest things about Hemlington is that there is nowhere for children to go, there is a massive gap in infrastructure. I really pushed to get infrastructure in the priorities because I feel if there was a facility that was there that had a full sports hall or something like that then there would be more for youth and families to do. There would be space for kids to go.'*

### 4.2.3 Programme Outcomes

This theme explores the perceived outcomes of the GCSC programme. There were mixed perceptions on whether there had been a noticeable improvement in community safety and/or a reduction in ASB. While some practitioners identified reductions in ASB as a key outcome, others were sceptical about the extent of change and whether it could be directly attributed to the programme. Practitioners highlighted challenges in attributing any observed reduction in ASB

directly to GCSC due to the presence of other police-led initiatives and external interventions, creating a complex cause-and-effect relationship. The impact on ASB also varied among the individuals involved in the programme ([see case study section on page 67](#)).

*'In the short term, ASB has gone down in Hemlington of which GCSC will absolutely have played a part, but without doing huge amounts of analysis saying whether it's this or whether it's other actions, because there's a lot of things going on... from talking to partners, their interactions with the children seem to be very positive. So I think from that perspective, it can only have a positive effect.'*

Another perceived outcome was the sustainability of the skills and relationships developed throughout the programme. Practitioners noted that they had built working relationships with other key partners which they anticipated would be sustained in future practice.

*'I've met lots of different practitioners and I've got that working relationship with them which won't end.'*

Another practitioner noted that the programme had improved their awareness of local services, enabling them to better utilise available support within the community.

*'It's probably raised my own understanding of Linx, for example, so I have got a better understanding of what's in Hemlington, so that's been positive from my point of view. Raising my own awareness here.'*

#### 4.2.4 Components of Project Connect

This theme focuses on the sessions and support facilitated by Project Connect to enhance collaboration between different organisations in Hemlington. Project Connect aimed to strengthen multi-agency working, hold practitioners accountable, provide face-to-face engagement opportunities, introduce practitioners to new organisations and provide support. A key strength of Project Connect, as acknowledged by practitioners, was their availability and willingness to offer support to the practitioners when needed.

*'[The programme facilitator]'s really stepped up and, you know, he's always on the phone, and that's great, I know I can lean on him if need be.'*

Another strength identified by practitioners was that Project Connect had facilitated collaboration with other organisations.

*'They've been brilliant because they've introduced me to people who I didn't know. So for me that's been fantastic.'*

One practitioner identified limitations of the meetings, reporting that they were too long, not an efficient use of time, or that they were *'regurgitating information'* that they were already sharing. Another felt that the meetings needed to be more direct and fact-based.

*'[One practitioner] came in the last 15 minutes of the session. She gained as much as we did in an hour and a half... all of us are busy all of the time, so it needs to be like, straight to the point, and more facts and information... it doesn't seem like very well planned in terms of those sessions to decide on what the recommendations are... we did that last year but it dropped off then, what's to say that it's not going to drop off now? Like, what's changed? We've not done anything different.'*

The Safeguarding Against Youth Violence and Exploitation (SAYVE) plan was developed by Project Connect with the aim of improving practitioner collaboration and ensuring accountability for their roles. Despite this, its effectiveness was hampered by several issues. A striking example of this disconnect presented during one practitioner's interview when asked about the SAYVE plan; *'What's that plan?'*, suggesting that the plan was not being implemented or understood by those on the ground. Although the facilitator consistently referred to the Plan and encouraged reflection on its recommendations during GCSC sessions, it was unclear how deeply it was integrated into participants' daily practice. Furthermore, the system of assigning 'leads' and 'champions' to specific recommendations on the SAYVE plan – ensuring that responsibility for implementing them was assigned – was undermined by frequent staff turnover, often leaving recommendations without a responsible individual. Additionally, several of the leads and champions listed in the most recent version of the SAYVE plan did not regularly engage with GCSC sessions. This meant there was little insight into how they were championing the recommendations in their time spent between GCSC sessions.

Some practitioners believed that the lifestyle advocate's role would be more prominent during the programme. On a few occasions practical constraints prevented the lifestyle advocate from fulfilling this role, leaving a gap in stable male mentorship for the participating children. The lifestyle advocate was only able to attend one meeting over the duration of the programme, which the children responded positively to, therefore practitioners felt that greater involvement from this individual would have led to more progress.

*'The other frustration I think which would have made it more effective, is getting the children to have more access to people like [the lifestyle advocate] with a different life background, lifestyle, perspective. When the children got to see him, it was quite remarkable... the deal at the start was that [the lifestyle advocate] would play more of a prominent role throughout all different sorts of circumstances, that never happened. But I think had that been the case we would have had quite a bit more progress.'*

However, one practitioner reported that the children may have misunderstood the lifestyle advocate's message, potentially leading them to glorify dangerous behaviours.

*'We had [lifestyle advocate] attend once... [the children] were saying about how like [he] was in prison and the reasons why and that they're going to go out on a shoot-out with him. So, I think it might have had the opposite effect. So, they might be looking at glorifying [the lifestyle advocate]... apparently, the conversations were really good, that they were having, so I think like once isn't enough to sort of like get that through to them.'*

Practitioners suggested that having a local lifestyle advocate/lived experience mentor would have been more appropriate.

*'The problem is the distance, isn't it? Like it's really hard for [the lifestyle advocate] to get up here... but if we knew that that was going to be a bit of a barrier, why not recruit somebody a little bit more local.'*

### 4.3 Community Perspectives

To understand community perspectives on crime, violence, cohesion, and safety in Hemlington, the evaluation team conducted interviews with housing representatives from the local community

and held informal conversations with the residents and users of Hemlington facilities (hereafter referred to as community members). The evaluators also attended a youth club and spoke with children about their experiences of living in Hemlington. This section will provide an overview of the concerns raised, specifically regarding criminal activity and violence in Hemlington, community cohesion and perceptions of safety.

### **Criminal Activity and Violence in Hemlington**

Concerns about safety were frequently linked to criminal activity and violence, particularly due to the perceived increase in drug activity. Community members reported various levels of crime, from children engaging in 'knock-a-door run', to serious incidents such as (vehicle) theft, joyriding, vandalism and arson. Some youth club attendees reported receiving damage to their properties from having bricks thrown at their windows and experiencing racist or threatening comments shouted at them in public.

*'I have kids ringing my doorbell and running away... it doesn't bother me because kids are kids... But what they're doing is they're stealing the cars to joyride in.'*

*'Tesco has had their windows smashed in twice, and some kids break into the backyard and steal a load of chocolate.'*

One of the challenges in identifying these individuals was attributed to the use of masks by those perpetrating crime, leading to further feelings of uneasiness among residents.

*'You can't really tell who they are because you can only see their eyes, so you can't pinpoint who it is anymore because I can't see their faces, I can't do nothing about it.'*

### **Community Cohesion**

Participants from the housing community reported difficulties in organising local events for children and the wider community, citing poor attendance and a lack of interest despite efforts (e.g., fairs, arts and crafts, movie nights, bingo). Organisers felt unfairly criticised for not doing enough when faced with this lack of engagement and absence of feedback on desired activities.

*'We tried doing a free movie night for kids. No one was interested. We get told that we aren't doing enough but what are we supposed to do if there is no interest... There's nothing for the kids to do [but they are] not giving us any feedback on what you want us to do.'*

Community members expressed a loss of pride in living in Hemlington, attributing it to a weakened sense of community, limited local development, and poor cleanliness – factors they felt were negatively affecting the area's identity and morale.

*'I just want to have pride to live where I live, like a community. We used to have pride to live in Hemlington. We were happy to live here but we don't have the sense of community anymore.'*

While there were a range of community activities and hubs in Hemlington, several barriers limited their accessibility and effectiveness. In some cases, activities were poorly advertised, suffered from low attendance, took place in outdated facilities or were subject to informal restrictions. Even when services were available, local residents could still face exclusion. For example, during time spent with Swift Tees running group, the researcher observed that most participants were not from Hemlington, but travelled in briefly to use the scenic lake route. Although the local boxing gym could be seen as a positive outlet for young people, the researcher found that many of those involved in GCSC had been banned from the facility due to previous behavioural issues. Similarly, while the library appeared vibrant during a Macmillan coffee morning, its limited opening hours reduced overall accessibility for the community.

Several residents felt that Hemlington had become increasingly run down. Half of those interviewed at the library compared the area to Coulby Newham, questioning why it receives greater investment in amenities such as shops and health services while Hemlington is perceived as neglected. The presence of empty retail units – such as the closure of local hairdressers and other shops – was seen as contributing to a sense of dereliction and decline.

*'With some of the shops being empty, people think it is derelict, hairdressers has packed up, there used to be a carpet shop but then that went. When you see the shops packing up and then people are not interested.'*

## Perceptions of Safety

A pervasive issue was residents' reluctance to report incidents to the police. This was driven by a fear of potential repercussions from perpetrators and a belief that police intervention would either be ineffective or escalate the issue. The close-knit nature of Hemlington ('*everyone knows everyone*') was seen as contributing to the fear of reporting due to potential identification and retribution.

*'People don't call the police because they don't want/won't go anywhere else. Like would they just say the same thing and harass you even more. The police come to the door wearing a uniform, that gets around.'*

Community members expressed a desire for a more active and sustained police presence to improve safety perceptions. They noted the current strategy relies on data from reported incidents to target patrols. Overall, residents expressed disappointment with short-lived police and council initiatives; temporary increases in patrols or CCTV were noted, but these were not sustained, leading to a return to previous conditions. Some residents felt external parties who were responsible for implementing initiatives did not genuinely care about the area.

*'We were promised last year about more community police officers, especially in our housing area, and I don't see it.'*

Some residents had installed their own security cameras due to criminal activity, however, several of these cameras had been vandalised by children from the area.

*'When I put the first camera up, I put a sign on my door, saying 'CCTV'. But they threw stones at the centre of the camera and eventually smashed it. The camera is for my own personal safety, me and my wife.'*

Fear has led individuals to avoid certain areas (e.g. Hemlington Lake and the surrounding areas, such as Viewly Centre Road) particularly after dark. Indeed, young females attending the youth club warned the female evaluator against visiting these locations alone due to safety concerns. Past incidents, including an attack on an elderly woman, were cited as reasons for this caution.

This has impacted community members and children's willingness to frequent these areas and use public transport, for safety reasons.

Additionally, children at the club shared personal experiences of violent incidents involving other local children, including those on the GCSC programme. Several community members and children expressed fear of being knocked down by quadbikes, leading them to actively avoid areas known for frequent quadbike activity. One young girl reported being targeted and nearly run over by boys on a quadbike, leaving her frightened to walk home alone. Children also reported experiencing racism in Hemlington, with one young female detailing being the victim of racist abuse, which included violent threats and criminal damage to her home.

In March 2025, one of the representatives from the housing group provided insight into changes that they had observed since their initial interview in September 2024. While they reported no changes in ASB levels or community cohesion, they did report a feeling of improved safety.

*'I still don't go down to the shops after a certain time but that was more of a precaution. I was told [by somebody] recently [that] they [had] seen a big group of kids coming towards them and was expecting trouble, but the kids was polite etc. So there has been some improvement in safety.'*

### **Box 3. Child Voice**

When speaking with the youth worker, children shared their experience of growing up in Hemlington, specifically discussing their involvement in dangerous or illegal activity.

*'Living in Hemlington has been difficult at times. There are a lot of risk factors, like gangs, drug activity and people getting into trouble just because there's nothing else to do. Some areas feel unsafe, especially at night. There aren't many positive activities or spaces for children and the services that are around aren't always easy to access or well known. For leisure, most of us hang out in the streets or at the park, sometimes just walking around with mates. Peer pressure can be a big thing – if your friends are doing something risky or illegal, it can be hard not to get involved.'*

## 4.4 Children and Young People's Perspectives

### Interventions and Impact

Support for the children enrolled onto GCSC began in June 2024 and continued until the programme's conclusion in March 2025. During this time, participants received tailored one-to-one sessions, which were responsive to their individual needs and changing life circumstances. Alongside this, children were invited to attend group sessions featuring workshops, peer-led discussions and structured activities focused on personal development, behaviour change and self-reflection. Topics addressed included drugs and alcohol abuse, anti-social behaviour and fire safety. These sessions were led by the youth worker, often in collaboration with local partners such as the fire brigade. The programme also included a 'call-in' session supported by a lifestyle advocate with lived experience of the criminal justice system. This session aimed to offer a stark warning about the consequences of continued involvement in violence, while clearly outlining the support available to help children make positive changes.

#### **Box 4. Child Voice**

Children involved in the programme shared that they had started to reflect more on their behaviour and decision-making, with some reporting improved school attendance and more positive daily routines. They spoke about feeling less angry and bored, crediting GCSC with helping them find focus and providing opportunities to engage in new, constructive activities.

*'Since joining the programme, I've started thinking more before acting. I avoid certain people and places now, and I've been going to school more regularly. I've also tried new activities that I never would've considered before, and I feel more focused on what I want for my future. I don't feel as angry or bored all the time.'*

The children recognised GCSC as a turning point – an opportunity to change their trajectory. They reflected on past behaviours, including skipping school and mixing with the wrong crowd, and described how the programme had helped them become more aware of the consequences of their actions.

*'I think I was referred because I started hanging around with the wrong crowd and skipping school. There were a few incidents where I was close to getting into real trouble, and some adults around me – maybe school or youth workers – could see I was going down the wrong path. The programme seemed like a chance to turn things around before it got worse.'*

*'I've become more aware of how serious things can get. Some of the workshops and conversations we've had have opened my eyes to how quickly things can spiral out of control - how one bad decision can affect your whole life or someone else's. I think I understand the consequences a lot more now.'*

### Engagement in Interventions

Challenges to consistent participant engagement were evident throughout the programme. Early difficulties included delays in obtaining parental consent and limited access to children via schools. Engagement dropped significantly over the summer, with only eight of 23 scheduled sessions delivered. These issues persisted post-summer, alongside new challenges such as children demanding incentives to attend sessions and group dynamics discouraging participation in group work – both of which presented difficulties for maintaining the integrity of the focused deterrence approach.

### Enforcement Data

Enforcement data was provided by police, revealing a varied impact of the programme on participants. The following enforcement actions were implemented during GCSC including:

- AS13's<sup>94</sup>;
- Warning letters;
- Arrests;
- Child in Need (CiN) plans;
- Letters banning the use of local facilities;
- Anti-social behaviour injunctions (ASBI), breaches and final warnings;
- Acceptable behaviour contracts (ABC) and breaches;
- Referrals to and involvement in other statutory services such as Youth Justice.

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<sup>94</sup> An AS13 is a specific type of anti-social behaviour (ASB) warning letter issued by the police or Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

The most common type of enforcement pre-programme and during programme was AS13's.

Due to children joining and exiting the programme at different times, it is difficult to make direct comparisons between the enforcement actions. All children reported a reduction in the number of incidents pre-programme to post-programme, as shown in Table 8. Despite fewer enforcement actions, the measures taken in response to anti-social/criminal behaviour were more severe.

**Table 8.** Number of enforcement actions at different points in the programme

	C1	C2	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8
<b>Pre-programme:</b> Year prior to joining the programme	15	19	6	15	12	2	7
<b>During:</b> Timeframe varied for each child	1	24	13	1	2	0	3
<b>Post:</b> Within six months after exiting the programme/receiving soft touch approach	0	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Note: Enrolment periods for children on the programme varied. 'N/A' denotes those who continued their participation until the conclusion of the programme. Enforcement actions post-programme are unknown for these children. Enforcement data on C3 was not provided, likely due to their age.*

#### 4.4.1 Case Studies

##### *Case Study 1: C1*

C1 was referred to the GCSC programme due to escalating anti-social and criminal behaviour in their community, alongside strained family relationships and poor school performance. They received weekly one-to-one sessions with a dedicated youth worker, focusing on building trust, exploring the root causes of their behaviour (such as peer pressure, isolation and stress) and understanding the consequences of their actions. These interventions initially led to significant improvements: their mother reported reduced arguments and better communication at home, while local authorities noted a decline in C1's involvement in criminal activities. Subsequently, C1 expressed increased confidence and a better home life.

However, C1's progress was disrupted when they were re-located out of the Hemlington area. This change resulted in C1 no longer attending their local school and regular one-to-one sessions

ceased due to geographical barriers. Despite the youth worker's efforts to maintain contact and support, C1's carers eventually requested a pause in interventions.

**Box 5. Key Observations**

- This case highlights the initial success of targeted intervention and the complex interplay of individual, family and community factors that challenge the sustainability of support during significant life changes.

*Case Study 2: C2*

Despite ongoing criminal activity, including theft, C2 engaged in one-to-one and group sessions, reflecting on their behaviour and discussing future career aspirations. However, C2 was unaware of the long-term consequences of their actions, initially not realising that their criminal involvement as a teen could impact their future career.

Their engagement in GCSC was inconsistent, often disrupted by external factors, family instability and recurring court appearances and arrests. Interventions focused on building trust, setting boundaries and connecting them with support, but inconsistent progress and continued risky behaviours persisted. C2's attitude towards practitioners and their willingness to take responsibility for their actions shifted when they completed a voluntary interview with the police.

C2 was described as reserved, taking time to build trust. While they eventually formed strong relationships with practitioners, this trust was challenged when C2 perceived the youth worker as a 'grass'. They remained heavily involved in anti-social and criminal behaviour. C2 predominantly engaged with the programme when they perceived a personal benefit. Notwithstanding this, C2 showed an eagerness to see the youth worker, highlighting the importance of consistent support from a trusted practitioner. The youth worker noted C2's need for a male role model, potentially reflecting his difficult family circumstances – as the child showed immediate interest in male practitioners.

**Box 6. Key Observations**

- This case highlights the critical need for consistent support, positive male role models, and the strategic use of local community levers to assist children. It underscores the importance of clear communication with children about the long-term consequences of their actions, while also illustrating how peer influence and limited boundaries at home can shape behaviour — reinforcing the value of involving parents in the programme.

### *Case Study 3: C3*

Initially, C3 presented challenges with engagement and attendance at youth clubs, highlighting the limited support options available for their age group. Linx actively participated in multi-agency meetings to plan their support. Despite minimal engagement with the lifestyle advocate, C3 showed a strong connection with their youth worker and engaged more outside of the school environment, suggesting the context of the sessions were important factors in their participation. C3's engagement was limited due to their young age, which led to their inclusion in the programme after other services were unable to support them. During one-to-one sessions, they exhibited avoidant behaviours, such as covering their eyes, prompting a shift to a 'soft-touch' approach and the eventual discontinuation of sessions. Although too young to attend Linx youth club, C3 showed enthusiasm when sessions did take place, with their behaviour in group settings largely shaped by peer influence.

#### **Box 7. Key Observations**

- This case underscores the importance of a strong, trusting relationship with a youth worker as the foundation for meaningful engagement with C3. It also highlights the need for age-appropriate services to prevent early involvement in criminal activity and to promote positive, supportive relationships from a young age.

### *Case Study 4: C4*

C4 consistently engaged with the programme, attending almost all sessions and openly discussing their behaviour, which facilitated therapeutic conversations about their offending and broader needs. Despite this positive engagement, the number of enforcement actions that they

received had doubled during the programme. C4 disclosed past ASB incidents, demonstrating a lack of understanding regarding consequences. In an interview with evaluators, C4 openly described past dangerous behaviours – such as putting fireworks through letterboxes – which they found ‘funny’, showing little concern for victims or potential consequences. This highlights a significant disconnect from the impact of their actions and a lack of accountability, reinforcing the importance of building trusting relationships to support behavioural change. Despite this, C4 expressed a desire to improve, noting that they were learning to manage their behaviour and emotions through sessions with the youth worker. They were also motivated to change how they were perceived by the community, suggesting volunteering opportunities like gardening at a local care home.

C4’s progress was temporarily disrupted following an incident at school. A safeguarding concern was raised, which resulted in Early Help involvement. After a period of negative behaviour over Christmas, including a missing episode and arrest, C4 re-engaged positively with their youth worker and resumed one-to-one sessions.

#### **Box 8. Key Observations**

- This case highlights that while strong individual engagement can foster openness and some behavioural progress, sustained positive change is often undermined by external factors - particularly challenges within the home environment - even when serious safeguarding concerns and legal interventions are present.

#### *Case Study 5: C5*

C5 was referred to the project by their mother due to concerns about potential ASB. The youth worker built trust through one-to-one sessions, providing practical support including creating a curriculum vitae and guidance on education pathways, leading to C5 enrolling in further education. This intervention successfully steered C5 toward positive development and they exited the programme with improved prospects. However, despite this positive exit, C5 was subsequently arrested for serious and violent offences. Therefore, although the number of enforcement actions had reduced the activity requiring the enforcement action became more serious. This outcome, coupled with differing views on their desire for continued support (some practitioners believed that

C5 refused support) highlights the complex challenges of sustaining long-term positive behaviour after programme disengagement.

#### **Box 9. Key Observations**

- While initial interventions successfully redirected C5 away from immediate negative influences and towards positive development, sustaining long-term behavioural change without consistent programme support remained challenging. Practitioners also differed in their views on C5's engagement, with some questioning their willingness to continue, while the youth worker adopted a 'soft-touch' approach to maintain contact.

## 5. Discussion

This report evaluated the Get Connected – Stay Connected (GCSC) programme, specifically examining its application of focused deterrence within Hemlington. The evaluation aimed to identify programme strengths, ascertain implementation challenges, and outline critical areas for improvement for future iterations. This discussion will detail the key findings relative to the programme's objectives, making comparisons to other focused deterrence models and ending with actionable recommendations for future iterations.

### 5.1 Purpose of Focused Deterrence

The evaluation highlighted a strong alignment between the stated objectives of the GCSC programme and practitioners' understanding of what focused deterrence entails. The emphasis on a tailored, individualistic approach was a key strength, acknowledging the complex and varied needs of children involved in anti-social behaviour (ASB). The strategic focus on preventing escalation to serious youth violence was also a logical and efficient use of resources within the local context. However, the findings regarding children and parental perceptions point to potential areas for development. Parents reported concerns and confusion to the youth worker over the intention and longevity of the programme. This highlighted the critical importance of having clear, consistent and proactive communication with families – Building trust and demonstrating the value and sustainability of the intervention were essential for fostering greater parental engagement and support, which significantly impact a young person's journey and experience of interventions.

## 5.2 Implementation of Focused Deterrence

### Referral Pathway and Selection of Participants

The evaluation identified a notable difference in participant identification compared to some other focused deterrence models. While some UK models have used strict criteria and data analysis to identify target cohorts (see Thames Valley Violence reduction partnership<sup>95</sup>), the Hemlington iteration relied more heavily on practitioner discretion, allowing flexibility and nuanced professional judgement. In practice, this resulted in a cohort primarily presenting with anti-social behaviour and related vulnerabilities. This suggests the programme functioned largely as an early-intervention model, with practitioners seeking to reduce risk and prevent escalation into more serious harm.

The age range of children (9-18 years) also warrants specific considerations. While including children under ten-years-old onto the programme was initially seen as positive due to the lack of alternative interventions for young children in the area, this evaluation revealed the challenges of applying focused deterrence to such a young age group. These difficulties stemmed from the child's developmental immaturity and inability to comprehend the concept of focused deterrence, as well as the limited availability of appropriate enforcement actions and support avenues given their age. This resulted in the youth worker offering a 'soft touch' approach<sup>96</sup>. This suggests that focused deterrence requires significant adaptation for young children in order to be fully effective and raises questions about the appropriate lower age limit for this specific programme model or the need for distinct intervention strategies for younger cohorts within the programme. A child may not fully comprehend the 'carrot and stick' approach, may misinterpret the gravity of the message or lack the cognitive maturity to link abstract consequences to their behaviour in a way that truly deters criminal behaviour.

Furthermore, the evaluation highlighted that individual adaptations in programme delivery can undermine the consistent and coordinated approach essential to the success of focused deterrence. While flexibility is sometimes necessary, these variations demonstrate that focused

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<sup>95</sup> Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership (2024) *What Works? Focused Deterrence*. Available at: <https://www.tvvpp.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/What-Works-Focused-Deterrence-FINAL-6.pdf> (Accessed: 24 July 2025).

<sup>96</sup> \*An open-door 'soft touch' support policy was available to children when one-to-one support was no longer required or was not possible. The youth worker was still available for the child to approach and/or the youth worker would occasionally check in with the child.

deterrence is not a one-size-fits-all model and requires firm adherence to its core principles to achieve maximum impact.

### Community-Led versus Statutory-Led Delivery Model

The community-led delivery model brought clear strengths. Linx's established presence in Hemlington, trusted local relationships and access to a local youth centre were recognised by practitioners and the commissioning body as important assets. These factors positioned Linx well to build the trust-based relationships needed to engage children and families, particularly in a context where mistrust of statutory services may be prevalent. At the same time, the evaluation highlighted the importance of strong statutory connectivity, particularly in relation to access to information and specialist support. Taken together, the findings suggest that future focused deterrence models may benefit most from combining the trust and reach of community-based delivery with timely access to statutory systems and services.

### Partnership Work

Multi-agency partnership work was a central feature of the programme and one of its clear strengths, particularly among core partners. Practitioners described effective collaboration between key organisations and valued the opportunity to share information, discuss risk, and coordinate support. At the same time, partnership working was experienced as uneven, with some agencies more consistently engaged than others and some practitioners reporting uncertainty around the scope of information-sharing. These findings suggest that future delivery would benefit from clearer protocols, broader partner engagement, and more consistent structures for communication and joint working.

### Focused Deterrence Components

Core components of focused deterrence include clear communication of support and consequences, consistent delivery of key messages and coordinated responses across agencies. In Hemlington, these elements were only partially implemented, which limited fidelity to the intended model.

- Deterrence and enforcement: Police enforcement activity continued alongside the programme, but the wider deterrence model was not consistently operationalised in a way that was clearly understood across the partnership. Future models would benefit from a

more clearly defined and consistently applied framework for communicating consequences and responses.

- Call-in sessions: Call-ins are a core feature of many focused deterrence models, providing direct communication about consequences, support and expectations. In this programme, not all children received a call-in session, and there was variation in how messages were delivered and understood. Future delivery should ensure these sessions are implemented consistently and are developmentally appropriate for the cohort.
- Children's understanding of focused deterrence: While practitioners believed children had some understanding of the programme's aims, this was not consistently evidenced across the cohort. The wide age range of participants is likely to have shaped how effectively concepts such as deterrence, consequence and support were understood. This highlights the need for clearer, age-appropriate communication in future delivery.

### 5.3 Outcomes of the GCSC Programme

The intended outcomes of the GCSC programme were to:

1. Reduce serious violence;
2. Improve community cohesion;
3. Increase levels of safety among young people and the wider community;
4. Create a sustainable infrastructure beyond delivery of the programme.

This section will evaluate the effectiveness of the GCSC programme against its intended outcomes, providing an assessment of the programme's impact and the key findings.

#### Reduce Serious Violence

In practice, the programme worked primarily with children presenting with anti-social behaviour and related vulnerabilities, with the broader intention of reducing risk and preventing escalation into more serious harm. This reflects the realities of local need and referral practice during the delivery period.

Practitioner views on whether anti-social behaviour reduced during the programme were mixed. While some reported positive movement, others noted the difficulty of attributing change directly to GCSC given the influence of wider contextual and system factors. In addition, variation in the delivery of core focused deterrence components means the programme's impact on preventing

more serious violence cannot be clearly isolated. Taken together, the findings suggest that GCSC showed value as an early-intervention approach, but that stronger model fidelity and clearer outcome measures would be needed to assess focused deterrence impact more definitively in future.

In the child voice reports, children reported to have an increased awareness of the impact and consequences of their actions. This improvement in their self-awareness led to a shift towards more prosocial behaviour. For example, children reported that they had begun to avoid certain places, engage in new activities and engage with new people. These findings suggest that the programme successfully intervened at a pivotal moment for these children, identifying anti-social behaviour early and offering them an alternative path. Children also reported that the group sessions encouraged self-development. This recognises the valuable influence that peer connection can have in supporting children with engagement in activities and desire to change.

### Improve Community Cohesion and Increase Levels of Safety Among Young People and the Wider Community

Improving community cohesion and increasing levels of safety among both children and the wider community were intrinsically linked community-level outcomes. Practitioner accounts highlighted the challenging context in Hemlington, describing residents who had been impacted by ASB and indicating a clear need for interventions that could enhance safety perceptions and foster cohesion.

Practitioners had mixed views on whether the programme contributed to a reduction in ASB and improved community safety. While some saw positive movement, the difficulty in attributing any changes directly to the programme – due to confounding factors – makes it challenging to definitively link the intervention to improvements in community-level safety. Furthermore, the findings on partnership dynamics and information sharing barriers suggest that the programme – despite the youth worker's success in building trust with the target children and the value of the core multi-agency group – faced significant hurdles in mounting a fully coordinated, system-wide response necessary to impact overall community safety and cohesion. Issues within multi-agency mechanisms (e.g. Project Connect components, challenges with information sharing and lack of implementation of the Safeguarding Against Youth Violence and Exploitation (SAYVE) plan) and limited 'lever pulling' for comprehensive support, restricted the collective action needed for community-level change beyond the immediate engagement with the target group.

In the child voice reports and community voice, children identified challenges of growing up in Hemlington such as the lack of positive activities, accessible services and often negative influence of peer pressure. This supports the academic literature highlighting systemic vulnerabilities that lead to criminal activity.

### Create a Sustainable Infrastructure Beyond Delivery of the Programme

Findings highlight concerns about the programme's long-term sustainability due to short-term funding and the absence of a formal structural legacy. Without an embedded framework, progress and relationships built through the programme risk dissolving once funding ends. Although the SAYVE plan was introduced to support continuity, its impact may be limited without clear accountability mechanisms to ensure practitioner commitment.

Despite these concerns, practitioners noted a positive outcome in the strengthened professional relationships formed through GCSC's collaborative forums – connections that are likely to endure and support future multi-agency work. The selection of Linx as the delivery partner was also seen as a strategic strength, as their ongoing presence in Hemlington through weekly youth clubs offers a potential route for sustained engagement with children beyond the programme's formal end. Children consistently described their youth worker as non-judgemental, supportive and empathetic. These trusting relationships were central to creating a safe environment where children felt able to communicate and reflect – providing a model of consistent, caring adult support that may have lasting influence.

## 5.4 Components of Project Connect

Project Connect introduced several mechanisms intended to support multi-agency collaboration, programme delivery and sustainability, including the SAYVE plan, Get Connected sessions, Steering Group meetings and practitioner support.

The SAYVE plan provided a useful framework for collaborative action and long-term sustainability. However, its implementation was not consistently embedded across the partnership. Staff turnover, variable engagement and inconsistent awareness of designated roles limited its practical impact. These findings suggest that future delivery would benefit from clearer accountability structures and stronger integration of the SAYVE plan into day-to-day practice.

Broader partnership engagement beyond the core group remained variable. Findings from a previous Hemlington-based evaluation (see [here](#)<sup>97</sup>), specifically highlighted the limited engagement of key stakeholders. While there were positive examples of community-based organisations contributing to delivery, this engagement was not always fully integrated into the formal focused deterrence structure. Future iterations would benefit from earlier and more consistent involvement of key partners.

A significant limitation identified was the programme's restricted 'lever-pulling' capacity within its partnership structure. Specifically, practitioners lacked consistent and timely access to the essential external services – such as mental health support and grief counselling – needed to incentivise engagement and build resilience. This gap weakened the 'carrot' element of the focused deterrence model, reducing the programme's ability to offer the holistic support required to help children desist from offending.

Despite these challenges, the [Training Network](#) Analysis identified Project Connect as a central connector in facilitating capacity building and skill exchange among community and third-sector partners through its bimonthly stakeholder meetings. The direct operational support for frontline delivery staff, particularly the youth worker, improved over the duration of the programme, with a clear expectation for more active support from the programme facilitator. The [Resource Sharing Network](#) Analysis further showed Project Connect, alongside the police and council, as a key broker of operational capacity. The [Case Management Network](#) Analysis underscored Project Connect's centrality, linking statutory and community partners in coordinating complex cases, supporting interview accounts of the lead facilitator and youth worker meeting regularly.

However, the effectiveness of the 'Stay Connected' meetings designed for quarterly stakeholder gatherings faced challenges. Issues included inconsistent or non-attendance from some partners (particularly education), perceived limited information sharing by some practitioners and meetings being viewed as inefficient or lacking a clear focus, leading to practitioner frustration.

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<sup>97</sup> Black Box Research and Consultancy, 2023. *Get Connected Hemlington Evaluation: 31st August 2023*. [online] Available at: <https://blackboxresearchandconsultancy.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Get-Connected-Hemlington-Evaluation-31st-August.pdf> [Accessed 3 Aug. 2025].

Practitioners felt that greater involvement from the lifestyle advocate could have offered valuable male mentorship to participants. While lived experience was widely valued, its impact was limited by logistical barriers and unclear expectations around the advocate's role. This highlights the need for clear communication, shared expectations and defined responsibilities to integrate such roles effectively and safely.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this evaluation, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen future iterations of the programme. These are grounded in the real-world insights of those involved and strategically aligned with the evaluation's Theory of Change (ToC), ensuring each action supports long-term outcomes for the Hemlington community.

### Programme Design and Delivery

While key strengths were identified in programme delivery, several enhancements are recommended to ensure fairness, consistency and responsiveness:

1. Clarify referral criteria and tailor support for younger participants: Ensure a shared understanding of the programme's scope and referral criteria to encourage appropriate and consistent inclusion. Interventions should be adapted to meet individual needs, with particular attention and resources allocated to younger children (12 and under).
2. Strengthen Deterrence Components and Clarity: Ensure focused deterrence elements – such as the Call-In model and escalation processes – are clearly defined, consistently applied and effectively communicated to children and practitioners alike;
3. Ensure continuity between tender and delivery phases: Avoid delays and loss of momentum by streamlining the transition process between programme commissioning and implementation.
4. Improve integration of lifestyle advocates: Explore alternative models to embed lifestyle advocates more effectively in programme delivery, ensuring they are consistently involved and aligned with core objectives.
5. Streamline data access and reduce duplication: Appoint a designated Statutory Delivery Partner with direct access to relevant data systems to improve efficiency and reduce manual reporting demands on other agencies.
6. Avoid Programme Overlap: Future programmes should be carefully coordinated to prevent overlap with similar interventions in the same area. Improved communication between

initiatives can reduce stakeholder fatigue, streamline delivery, and support more accurate impact measurement.

### Partnership and Collaboration

To enhance the effectiveness of multi-agency collaboration:

1. **Streamline Information Sharing:** Improve protocols to ensure timely and efficient exchange of relevant information across agencies, avoiding duplication and delays;
2. **Distribute Responsibilities:** Promote a more equitable distribution of responsibilities across partners. Reinvigorate the implementation of the SAYVE Plan and enhance engagement with key stakeholders – especially schools – by improving the format and purpose of 'Stay Connected' meetings;
3. **Enhance 'Lever Pulling' Capacity:** Improve referral pathways and access to external services (e.g. mental health, bereavement support) to strengthen the support network available to children and families.

### Community and Engagement

Effective engagement with the wider community and families remains essential:

1. **Explore Meaningful Parental Engagement:** Invest in dedicated parental engagement roles to build trust, clarify programme aims and support families in reinforcing positive outcomes at home;
2. **Ensure Earlier and Consistent Community Involvement:** Involve local community organisations (e.g. fire service, drug services) from the outset of programme delivery to ensure consistent presence and support throughout.

### Evaluation and Learning

To promote reflective practice and continuous improvement:

1. **Broaden Evaluation Perspectives and Systematise Documentation:** Expand data collection to include parental and community feedback. Maintain consistent documentation of programme activity and share interim findings to inform practice in real-time;
2. **Integrate the Child's Voice:** Actively seek and incorporate children's feedback to ensure services remain responsive, empowering and aligned with their evolving needs.

## Sustainability

For long-term success, sustained support and strategic planning are required:

1. Strengthen Accountability for SAYVE Plan Implementation: Ensure clear mechanisms are in place to hold practitioners accountable for the delivery of SAYVE plan actions beyond the programme's conclusion;
2. Secure Continued Funding: Advocate for ongoing investment to maintain consistent service provision for children. Leverage existing community resources – such as youth clubs – to sustain relationships and engagement post-programme.