

Chance to Change Pilot Qualitative Research Study

Final Report Findings
For Barrow Cadbury Trust

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1. Introduction

Chance to Change (C2C)¹ is a deferred prosecution scheme which was delivered across two pilot sites in West Yorkshire and London. Such a scheme was referenced within the Lammy Review (2017) as a solution to address the ‘consistent differences in plea decisions’ between minority ethnic and White defendants. Drawing upon statistical analysis, Lammy found that plea decisions for racially minoritised defendants across England and Wales were negatively influenced by what was described as a ‘trust deficit’. These defendants ‘trust neither the advice of solicitors paid for by the government, nor that the criminal justice system will deliver on the promise of less punitive treatment in exchange for prompt admissions on guilt.’ (Lammy 2017:29). Consequently, within both Magistrate and Crown court processes, minority ethnic people were less likely to enter a *guilty plea* at an early stage and subsequently forfeited the right to discounted sentences when found guilty (Min and Ferris, 2022, Lymperopoulou 2023, YJB 2021a).

Deferred prosecution schemes therefore intentionally remove the legal requirement for an *admission of guilt*, allowing people who are *accused* of an offence to access supportive interventions designed to address the personal, social, and economic factors that may contribute to offending behaviour (Weir et al 2021; Lammy 2017). Alongside benefits to the accused, there is evidence that such initiatives may also reduce the (capacity) demand and costs of court services and empower the police to respond to low level crime and disorder problems by offering diversionary, out of court solutions (Green 2020). Initial evidence emerging from the evaluation of the Checkpoint programme² found that only 6% of individuals who engaged with the scheme went on to reoffend. Comparatively, these reoffending rates were approximately 15% lower than a similar cohort, who did not have access to the Checkpoint programme (ibid).

The appeal of deferred prosecution and diversionary schemes as a solution to: mistrust of court and sentencing processes; differentials in plea decisions; and the perennial challenge of ethnic disparity in the criminal justice system of England and Wales, necessitates further serious consideration.

To facilitate examination of these issues, researchers from Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) were commissioned by the Barrow Cadbury Trust to undertake a qualitative study of the Chance to Change pilots.

The research project aimed to:

- Explore how the Chance to Change projects were being delivered in the pilot sites,
- Examine the experience of engaging with and delivering a deferred prosecution scheme;
- Consider how the removal of admission of guilt was experienced by Chance to Change pilot participants; and
- Examine the potential benefits of participation with the Chance to Change project.

1 It should also be noted that the legacy name ‘Turning Point’ (TP) was used by workshop participants and interviewees in London as an alternative to ‘Chance to Change’ and will therefore be used interchangeably throughout this report.

2 ‘Checkpoint’ is a deferred prosecution, diversion scheme targeted at adult offenders within County Durham and Darlington, England, UK. <https://justiceinnovation.org/project/checkpoint>

2. Methodology

This qualitative study comprised two interrelated components: theory of change workshops, and interviews with stakeholders and Chance to Change service users. In total, 39 individuals were involved in the research from November 2020 to September 2022 across the two research sites: London and West Yorkshire. The methodologies for the two components are detailed below. The research project was supported by a steering group comprised of representatives from the Barrow Cadbury Trust, the Ministry of Justice and Manchester Metropolitan University.

2.1 Theory of change workshops

Theory of change (ToC) workshops were conducted in November 2020 for the London pilot, and June 2021 for the West Yorkshire site. These aimed to understand the theoretical base that underpinned the Chance to Change (C2C) pilots. In facilitating the workshops, we were guided by realist evaluation principles (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) to identify: **what** the scheme was intended to achieve (outcomes); **how** it intended to achieve this (mechanisms and processes); and the **context** in which it was being delivered. The workshop findings informed the interviews. A total of 23 individuals participated in the workshops (across both sites), with each workshop running for approximately three hours.

2.2 Semi-structured qualitative interviews

Building on the findings from the theory of change workshops, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with Chance to Change service users, partnership agencies and Chance to Change project staff. The interviews explored the perceptions and personal experiences of project delivery and scheme participation. Eight interviews were conducted with practitioners delivering Chance to Change in West Yorkshire. Eight interviews were conducted in London, which included three interviews with service users who had engaged with and completed the Chance to Change programme.

An interview schedule was designed for each of the participant groups to ensure that issues discussed were relevant to each group, and that within each group a similar set of issues were explored. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour, depending on an individual's length and level of involvement with the project. The interviews were recorded with the permission of participants to ensure an accurate account of the interview and allow for detailed analysis of the data.³

2.3 Analysis

The research team undertook a thematic analysis of the data which allowed them to familiarise themselves with the data and charting the data using a thematic framework (Ritchie, et al 2013). This approach allowed the team to identify emerging themes. The process was interactive between the researchers, providing a 'checking mechanism' for the interpretation of the data and examination of themes and sub-themes.

2.4 Limitations

A central aim of the research was to consider the experiences of individuals engaging with the Chance to Change scheme. Despite numerous attempts, we were unable to interview any young people taking part in the Chance to Change project in West Yorkshire due to challenges with recruitment – difficulties engaging gatekeepers to recruit young people, and young people not attending interviews, or not wanting to take part in interviews. Similarly, we had limited interviews with individuals who took part in Chance to Change in London. Unfortunately, this has limited the extent to which we can report the experience of those engaged with the Chance to Change scheme.

Interviews with staff members who had been involved in delivering Chance to Change were undertaken to gather their reflections and perceptions on how Chance to Change was being delivered and the perceived benefits of the project. It is important to note that some staff had limited involvement with Chance to Change, only working with small numbers of people as part of the scheme or only recently working with Chance to Change cases. This, naturally, affected their ability to comment on the Chance to Change scheme.

³ One participant refused for the interview to be recorded.

The study was significantly affected by the global coronavirus pandemic, which affected travel and engagement with the pilot sites. Covid-19 also impacted the number of young people involved in the Chance to Change project in West Yorkshire. According to interview participants, the number of young people going into youth panels overall reduced during the pandemic, as policing was targeted elsewhere and crime across the board significantly reduced (Harris et al 2022). Additionally, the roll out of Chance to Change in West Yorkshire was staggered and, in some districts, delayed due to the impact of the pandemic, which further reduced the number of young people engaging with the project and practitioners' involvement in the pilot.

The use of the randomiser as part of the Randomised Control Trial Evaluation⁴, which was operating at the time we conducted our research was described by participants as impacting the number of individuals being offered Chance to Change. A key component of this impact evaluation was the adoption of a randomiser, a mechanism through which people who were accused of an offence were (randomly) allocated to either undertake the Chance to Change programme (the treatment group), or processed through the more established charging and prosecution process (non-treatment group). The implementation of this methodology reduced the number receiving the Chance to Change intervention.

4 <https://www.college.police.uk/research/projects/turning-point-nw-london-replication-randomised-trial-police-led-diversion-north-west-london>

3. Findings

In this section, we present the findings from the two theory of change workshops and the semi-structured interviews conducted with: practitioners and partnership agencies who were responsible for delivering the programmes; and services users who had engaged with and completed Chance to Change. We begin by presenting the *delivery models* in both pilot sites, noting how the Chance to Change approach was adapted to address specific local/geographical concerns. This is followed by an exploration of the overarching *aims* of the Chance to Change project, identified during the workshops and interviews, before a consideration of what participants regarded as the *benefits of the Chance to Change* project for the organisation and the individuals targeted by the programme.

3.1 Delivery Models

Distinct delivery models of the Chance to Change programme operated in each site. In London, Chance to Change evolved from Turning Point, an out-of-court diversion programme targeted at adults within the borough of Barnet. Turning Point was funded and delivered as a distinct intervention but was co-located within a police station and staffed by non-police staff. It was intended that the presence within the police station would facilitate the speedy identification and referral of people who had been accused of offences. The Chance to Change delivery model, at the time of the research project, was presented as a new intervention premised upon the legacy of Turning Point. Conversely, the Chance to Change pilot in West Yorkshire was more integrated, comprising a delivery model between the police and the youth justice service. The West Yorkshire project focused on under-18's, which allowed the Chance to Change pilot to utilise already established pathways with the youth justice service and youth justice police officers to manage the process.

Notably, both pilot projects were designed to be 'cost neutral' with partnership agencies and organisations engaging in the pilot projects. with no additional resources.

3.1.1 London

Procedurally, eligible service users were assessed by dedicated project Offender Managers. Following this, a contract was drawn up informed both by an assessment of the needs of the accused individual and interventions tailored according to the services that were available through the project's partnership network. Once a contract had been agreed and signed, service users were required to comply with the contents of the contract within a time-limited period, after which they were deemed to have completed the terms of the contract and would then receive No Further Action (NFA) from the Chance to Change project.

Initially, recruitment processes involved the training of police officers as Evidential Review Officers (EROs), who would take responsibility for identifying eligible cases for the Chance to Change project and, in turn, the allocation of cases to the randomiser. However, for one Chance to Change practitioner:

"In truth, there is definitely more of a chasing mechanism. A large part of my role now is to *source* suitable offenders. Before it was to help sergeants who were processing (suspects). But now I scour the systems we now have available to find people and then I would prompt EROs to send people our way."

(London theory of change workshop participant)

The above was followed by some acknowledgement of early implementation problems, where "some [police] officers will not refer to Turning Point and some [police] officers don't like Turning Point."

"[W]hen I first joined...there was this misconception that we [the project] wanted every case and every offender and every offence type. And I think when we first came in there was more a thing of damage control aspect to it."

(London theory of change workshop participant)

3.1.2 West Yorkshire

The integrated model in West Yorkshire appeared to have ameliorated any tensions caused by organisational practice and cultural differences, as one West Yorkshire participant stated:

“You’re pushing against an open door, because obviously youth justice colleagues would see the benefits of not criminalising young people, so all of a sudden when we’ve got police coming and presenting a concept such as Chance to Change...what’s not to like from a youth justice perspective, who are all invested in doing the right thing for those young people”

(West Yorkshire interview participant).

In West Yorkshire, eligible young people who had gone through the randomiser and were allocated into the treatment group were referred to the youth justice service, where they were allocated a youth justice worker. The youth justice worker had 28 days to complete an assessment with the young person, which was used to guide the support plan. The same assessment was used for other disposals and aimed to try and understand underlying issues. The case was then referred to the multi-agency Out of Court Disposal panel, for consideration. The panel decided on the outcome and whether they could offer Chance to Change. If Chance to Change was approved, the panel developed a tailored programme of work for the conditions of the Chance to Change contract. These were taken back to the young people before the contract was signed and the programme of work commenced.

Although the project sat within the youth justice service and they did the majority of the work with the young people, they drew in specialist services if needed, such as CAHMS, speech and language, or specialist support related to exploitation. Similarly, interviewees reported that if positive relationships with third sector organisations already existed, they would be built into the plan and the youth justice practitioners may have had more of an oversight role. Involvement of external agencies was a careful ‘balancing act’, as practitioners reported not wanting to overload young people who often had a lot of services already involved in their lives. This could become overwhelming and lead to more adverse behaviours.

3.1.3 Tailored interventions and support

Beyond the delivery model, there were parallels between the London and West Yorkshire projects around tailored interventions and the support available.

In West Yorkshire, although practitioners spoke of Chance to Change being similar to a court order with access to similar support and services, engagement was voluntary, as young people could opt in and support was individualised and tailored to an individual’s needs, rather than solely offence focused. Practitioners felt this meant it was viewed more positively amongst young people. Similarly, the number of conditions attached to a contract could vary depending on an individual’s needs and circumstances:

“[The] plan will be based on the reality of young people’s lives already and trying to maximise chances of keeping them out of trouble”

(West Yorkshire interview participant).

A wide variety of support and interventions could be put in place as part of the contract to meet the needs identified in the assessment. Activities could include, for example, educational activities, work on emotional regulation, triggers and recognising signs earlier, victim focused work and restorative justice, either direct or indirect, peer influencing and reparation. If young people did not comply with the conditions of their contract, youth justice workers would inform the police and they would go back to the Crown Prosecution Service to be considered for other options.

Similarly, London service user contracts were built around support offering help with employment through a work advisor, housing/accommodation advice, mentoring and life skills (financial budgeting, managing expenses). Where relevant, service users were referred to groupwork interventions delivered by external agencies and organisations, such as anger-management programmes and substance misuse interventions targeted at the offence for which they were accused. Similar to the West Yorkshire model, victim-focused work and restorative/reparative justice approaches were included as an intervention to make amends to victims and to increase victim awareness.

3.2 The Aims of Chance to Change

Four overarching themes emerged from the theory of change workshops and interviews surrounding the central aims of the Chance to Change projects: *avoiding criminalisation; addressing the provision gap; responding to racial disparity across the criminal justice system* and particular to West Yorkshire; *supporting a child-first approach to criminal justice*. Alongside reflections from Chance to Change practitioners, the views of service users are also highlighted.

3.2.1 Avoiding criminalisation

Across both pilot sites, there were a number of concerns highlighted by practitioners that the Chance to Change pilots were designed and implemented to address. For instance, in West Yorkshire, Chance to Change was presented as an opportunity to divert people away from the criminal justice system, reduce the number of first-time entrants into the criminal justice system, and prevent those who were accused of an offence(s) from receiving a criminal record.

“Young people make mistakes and then they’re catapulted into the criminal justice system, and this is just a really good opportunity. We know that there are some young people that will go on to reoffend, but the vast majority don’t, so this is a good opportunity, they make amends and it’s important we have a robust support package in place for them...”

(West Yorkshire Theory of Change workshop participant)

Practitioners also highlighted how Chance to Change provided young people who had given no comment interviews and/or denied the offence the opportunity to access an Out of Court Disposal and related resources. Relatedly, this also meant that young people could avoid going to court, which could have a negative impact on individuals by exacerbating distrust of the criminal justice system and police, and potentially resulting in a criminal record, impacting their opportunities in the future.

In both theory of change workshops, practitioners spoke of the negative consequences of receiving a criminal record, including the impact on future employment opportunities and references to the ‘revolving door of crime’ leading to a ‘life of crime’.

“For me, Turning Point is all about stopping reoffending and how we do that in the most effective way. Because that criminal record does affect employment. So the problem is that people offend and once they’ve got the criminal record, they’re more likely to reoffend. Because they can’t get a job, because they can’t get stable employment. It affects things like housing. Having that criminal record has such a massive influence on somebody’s life, that anything productive that we can do to allow people to avoid that I think is very valuable.”

(London Theory of Change workshop participant)

Similarly, another participant in the London workshop noted that whilst,

“[T]he mistake can be serious enough that they may have to go to court. This is about how do we keep them out of court and avoid that record as this can have an impact on people going forward. And prevent them from having a criminal record.”

(London Theory of Change workshop participant)

Supporting the above reflections, those who had engaged with the Chance to Change programme in London also acknowledged how referral to the Chance to Change programme could be the result of an isolated act. Indeed, two service users who had no previous convictions agreed to engage with the programme precisely for the reasons cited above. For example:

“And even though it wasn’t a charge or anything. I kind of took it as an opportunity to keep my record clean considering like I said, it really was my word against hers. And when it comes to like domestic fights, it can easily get messy. But I don’t hold any malice against her. Like it was literally a split moment of emotions run high.”

(C2C service user)

As a result,

“I didn’t want to drag this out or I didn’t want it to be something that holds against me at the end of the day either. So yeah, I just took on the Turning Point.”

(C2C service user)

Further, practitioners spoke of the Chance to Change programme as providing an opportunity for individuals to access interventions and support packages tailored to their individual needs, as a measure to prevent repeat offending for similar offences:

“[Chance to Change] is more flexible and adaptable [than other court orders] around the young person and it's been fit to purpose, rather than ‘this is something that you need to do’ it's been fit to the purpose of that young person”

(West Yorkshire interview participant).

This was viewed positively as a means of supporting engagement, as the interventions were more meaningful if they were tailored to their individual needs. The articulation of these benefits was further set against what some practitioners discussed as the failings of the court system.

“I think what the [Chance to Change] pilot highlights the ineffectiveness of the court system. I think Turning Point has come in as a response to that to try and address that. So if we see the courts' failures to address the problems that lead to offending – let's say someone stole from a shop to fund their drug habit – what Turning Point allows is to intervene at the point where we can address the drug habit which could prevent them from offending again in the future. The court would continually sanction them because that's their function. [E]arly intervention would address that problem per se and if you can get programmes that focus on their specific issues then you can hopefully address that too.”

(London Theory of Change workshop participant)

This has emerged as an important point highlighting the capacity and resource pressures affecting the criminal justice system. As a non-criminalising solution that diverted individuals away from the courts, Chance to Change was offered to individuals who had come into contact with the police and were accused of offences. While this was discussed as a positive feature of the pilot programme, there is a need to consider which groups are more likely to encounter the police and thereby be considered for the Chance to Change intervention.

Relatedly, when considered within the context of ethnic disparity and mistrust within the criminal justice system of England and Wales, and specifically the police, locally based diversionary schemes may have particular consequences for minority ethnic groups, who are evidently more likely to encounter the police and, in turn, be subject to police sanctions (Uhrig, 2016). Further, and to be discussed in more detail within the next section, police practitioners also highlighted what they regarded as a ‘provision gap’, referring to the absence of a proportionate intervention for those individuals who had simply ‘made a mistake’.

3.2.2 Addressing a provision gap

Chance to Change was understood as not being suitable for “inherent criminals”, but as a common-sense diversionary tactic away from future criminality. This point was elaborated within the London theory of change workshop where participants said there was ‘no court disposal for adults who make a mistake’:

“I see [Turning Point] as getting hold of those people who have made an error of judgement, I'd rather call it, than a mistake. As a mistake would imply that he didn't mean to do it. And if you punch somebody in the face, then you probably meant to do it. So, it's more an error of judgement. So, rather than giving them a criminal record, can we do something with them to stop them from getting there?”

(London Theory of Change workshop participant)

Similar views were echoed across interviews with practitioners in West Yorkshire, where Chance to Change was seen as providing an appropriate response and ‘bridging the gap’ where an incident was too serious to not take any action or issue a community resolution, but not serious enough to issue a caution if it was a first offence and a ‘genuine mistake’:

“It's the ones where a young person made a mistake and it's totally out of character and ordinarily it would sit at your statutory level and that's where it sits to do the work with them but not criminalise them as a result of it, so they don't end up with a caution or a youth conditional caution”

(West Yorkshire interview participant).

Although it wasn't clear how accusatory-offence seriousness was determined by individual officers and, in turn, Chance to Change practitioners, addressing the provision gap was articulated as providing a bespoke non-criminalising resolution. As discussed by a police officer in London:

"Prior to [Turning Point] there is no method of dealing with young offenders without unnecessarily criminalising them and at the same time having an element of control"

(London Theory of Change workshop participant).

Police officers also noted how the implementation of Chance to Change provided them with a level of control when dealing with accusations of criminality. As raised by police practitioners in the London theory of change workshop:

"[T]he police are forced into giving a higher sanction where we have an element of control. If we don't think they'll comply, then we may give a Youth Condition Order where we have an element of control, but they get a criminal record for it and there's no in between."

(London Theory of Change workshop participant)

With Turning Point,

"We can now give them the interventions they need, without criminalising unnecessarily and that's the biggest plus of Chance to Change."

(London Theory of Change workshop participant)

The extent to which non-criminalising solutions such as Chance to Change increases the likelihood of people who are accused of offences or who have made a "mistake" being pulled into the criminal justice system is worthy of further consideration – particularly where those who have been accused are made subject to legally binding interventions outside of formal legal safeguards of due process. Again, when considered within the context of ethnic disparity and racial disproportionality across the criminal justice system of England and Wales, the discretionary use of diversionary solutions that afford the police further control of who is diverted and who is not requires attention (McAra and McVie, 2010; Lymperopoulou, 2023).

3.2.3 Addressing racial disparity

In the West Yorkshire theory of change workshop, there was some recognition of Chance to Change as a coordinated response to the differential sentencing highlighted by the Lammy Review - particularly in addressing disparities in outcomes for minority ethnic people at the point at which someone might receive an Out of Court Disposal (OCD) or go to court. Participants also spoke about the impact of the disproportionate use of stop and search on minority ethnic people. However, due to relatively low numbers of young people accessing Chance to Change at the time of interviews, participants felt unable to comment on the extent to which the project had addressed ethnic disproportionality, and instead reflected on which aspect of the project they felt could have an impact. While the topic of the Lammy Review, racial disparity and mistrust arose unprompted within the West Yorkshire workshop, it was not raised in the London workshop until prompted by the facilitator. Again, it is important to note that the London project was implemented in 2018 as Turning Point and potentially precedes the strategies that arose following the publication of the Lammy Review recommendations.

For practitioners with responsibility for delivering the Chance to Change pilots, the question of ethnic disparity in guilty pleas and sentencing outcomes was peripheral to the more immediate aims of the pilots. Chance to Change as a method to address ethnic disparity in plea decisions and sentencing outcomes arose not as an intentional strategy or solution, but as opportunistic, in light of the assumed benefits of deferred prosecution schemes as a non-criminalising intervention. One of the central aims of this research project concerned a consideration of the extent to which deferred prosecution schemes may offer a solution to ethnic disparity in sentencing. This appears to be at odds in light of the limited acknowledgement and recognition by practitioners of the ways in which Chance to Change could be utilised as a mechanism to tackle ethnic disparity.

Public perceptions of the criminal justice system and, in particular, perceptions of the police, was raised and discussed amongst service users who had engaged in the Chance to Change pilots and practitioners. In interviews, participants stated that Chance to Change provided opportunities to improve trust in the police, which could address the negative perception that the police are 'out to get you' by emphasising how the project provided help and support to people who were referred to the project. Again, attention needs to be paid to the historical context through which minority ethnic people and Black people in particular, experience the police. While the offer of Chance to Change was appreciated by racially minoritised people, it was still met with scepticism, as it was associated with the police.

"I would say that it's introduced me to individuals that can benefit me or put me in certain positions. That's one thing I'll say."

(C2C service user)

However,

"It didn't do anything except increased my anxiety every time I walked into the police station and walk out of it. Okay, as an individual that has been arrested before, nobody likes to go walk into a police station. That's one. That's like anybody that's been to prison, wouldn't like to go to visit to see someone else in prison, because we put them back to where they were in their head. So, it's just that it was, as I said, I'd studied the reasons for it [Turning Point]. But it just wasn't something I was really happy to do."

(C2C service user)

Such attitudes appeared to remain even where participants had positive views of and relationships with programme staff. There was a sense that "because the meetings were in a police station, you kind of have your back up" (C2C service user) with words such as "suspicious" and "paranoid" used to describe service users' feelings on entering the police station.

Removing admission of guilt

Presented as a guiding principle of deferred prosecution schemes and central to Chance to Change, the removal of admission of guilt aimed to reduce the level of no comment interviews and not guilty pleas. It was envisaged that this principle would go some way towards addressing the 'trust deficit' between the police, the wider criminal justice system and minority ethnic people, as discussed earlier. However, removing admission of guilt was not raised by practitioners in the theory of change workshops or interviews. Further, when prompted by facilitators, the topic of admission of guilt surfaced tension in workshop discussions, as illustrated by the following quote:

"When Turning Point first came to [the area], the biggest issues for police officers was that no admission of guilt was required. For police officers, what is drilled into us is that admission of guilt is required to get any out of court disposal, and that was a bit of a different take to what we're used to. For many people, that was a hard pill to swallow, to understand. It was also the bit that I found, not to say uncomfortable but difficult to understand. How do victims feel about this? We deal with victims quite a bit, and some may not be bothered at all, but some may not like it and effectively being called a liar. The police or the system are allowing them to 'get off' with the crime. And that won't sit well with some of the victims. I understand why it's there, but for me that's still a bit of an issue"

(London Theory of Change workshop participant).

Similarly, in West Yorkshire, this was highlighted as a challenge during the initial roll out of the programme, when raising awareness amongst police officers that they could triage for Chance to Change for no comment or not guilty responses. Consequently, it was disclosed that officers often reverted to traditional methods of summons for no comment interviews. In West Yorkshire, the removal of an admission of guilt was described as an element that made the Chance to Change intervention distinct from other Out of Court Disposals (OOC), where a non-admission of guilt would typically discount any consideration for an OOC.

For another participant in the London theory of change workshop, it was unclear whether an admission was actually necessary to take part in Chance to Change:

"I'm a bit confused now, because as I understood it there had to be an admission of guilt"

(London Theory of Change workshop participant).

While in theory the removal of admission of guilt was presented as a core principle for Chance to Change participation, it transpired across London and West Yorkshire that an admission of guilt did not preclude involvement with the Chance to Change pilots. One participant noted,

"ERO [Evidential Review Officer] has deemed that there is enough evidence that the offence took place. I find that not many [service users] outright deny the offence. Whether there is admission of guilt or not we're still able to support them through a process of change and help them to access services. Admission of guilt doesn't come into play – once the individual is in the room, they can still work with that person"

(London Theory of Change workshop participant).

Despite this confusion, removal of the need for an admission of guilt was viewed by practitioners delivering Change to Change as being a positive aspect of the scheme, as it provided individuals with the option to voluntarily access and engage with support and help without feeling guilty or being blamed, which in turn could impact on their engagement and motivation to take part.

For service users, the topic of 'admission of guilt' was similarly unclear and ambiguous. Admission of guilt did not seem to be integral on referral to the programme. For those who had engaged with the programme, admission of guilt had already been established through the police preliminary investigation into the incident/accusation. Those who were interviewed recognised their behaviours and acknowledged their culpability. From this position, as a deferred prosecution programme Chance to Change was delivered with the principle of no admission of guilt seemingly irrelevant to referral and recruitment onto the programme. However, in discussing admission of guilt, service users with no previous convictions who were referred to the programme, feared the potentially damaging effects of criminalisation and conviction that would accompany refusal or non-engagement with the programme:

"Yeah, I told them I hit him. But not to justify it, I told them what led up to the incident and why it happened and my concern for my kids, kind of thing. So essentially yes, I did admit guilt."

(C2C service user)

"No. I don't believe so. No, no. Okay. I think during my initial statements that I gave; I did explain to them that there was hitting involved. So, in that sense, yeah, but one of the other accusations was that I broke into her apartment. And that, I didn't admit to, because I didn't break in."

(C2C service user)

For service users, the notion that no admission of guilt was necessary for involvement with Chance to Change interventions was a welcomed feature of the project. One service user attending groupwork provision explained:

"[B]ecause I didn't see the need for disclosure that I don't have to talk about my situation with anyone during the [groupwork] programme. I don't have to explain myself or I don't have to prove, deny or accept any of the allegations that were made against me. So, I just kind of took it on as an opportunity for free therapy. Who doesn't need therapy?"

(C2C service user)

It is generally recognised that the principle of admission of guilt endures as an essential component of effective practice on offending behaviour programmes, where the 'offender' is required to acknowledge their offending behaviour as a criterion for attending and engaging in programmes of intervention (McGuire 1995). For the Chance to Change pilots, whilst there was admission of guilt during referral to the programme, for service users who engaged with external organisations, admission of guilt was not essential. The above participant's positive experiences of the groupwork intervention suggests that acceptance of guilt, in this instance, may be less pertinent to programmes of intervention than studies have claimed to date.

3.2.4 Supporting a 'child first' approach to youth justice

Chance to Change was also perceived as supporting the development of a child first approach to criminal justice, as it provided the opportunity to avoid stigmatising, labelling and punishing young people as a 'criminal' and receiving a criminal record:

"[Chance to Change] is all about trying to deal with issues of a young person's behaviour and the negative impact on communities with a mechanism that is less 'criminal justice' and more about actually trying to make a difference and is a more child first set of arrangements. That is what I think Chance to Change is trying to do"

(West Yorkshire interview participant)

Furthermore, theory of change workshop participants viewed Chance to Change as an opportunity to address mistrust of authority figures such as the police, solicitors, and the criminal justice system more broadly, as police were perceived to be responding differently to individuals and communities. However, it was also noted by a participant in the West Yorkshire theory of change workshop that there was a belief that solicitors were advising people to give no comment interviews to the police. This requires further exploration. As with the workshop participants, interviewees felt the Chance to Change project had the potential to try to challenge the perception that the police were 'out to get you' or not there to help, and that opportunities should be provided for positive engagement between young people at risk of offending and police officers. This was evident in the following account:

"Some policing of young people has the potential to make that worse and some to make that better and this has the opportunity to make it better as it involves a police officer sitting down with a child and family and saying we're not out to get you, we're not going to hammer you for as much as we can get away with, we're not going to criminalise you for the sake of criminalising you, we're not out to spoil your future. We want this to be an opportunity to get the support you need and find a way of avoiding being in this situation again. Here's an opportunity for you. That's a positive conversation to have"

(West Yorkshire interview participant).

Participants reported that, on the whole, this option was viewed positively amongst young people and their families.

This is important in the context of the Youth Justice Boards' strategic plan to develop a child first youth justice system, providing support to children and young people and preventing them from being drawn into the youth justice system (YJB 2021b). The youth justice system was perceived as viewing "children as children", with skilled practitioners who were good at engaging young people. However, some participants questioned whether there was still a risk that young people would be labelled once they start working with the youth justice service as part of the Chance to Change project, which potentially conflicts with the aims of the pilots and particularly the accused status of service users. Some participants felt that individuals would have been working with the youth justice service regardless of the outcome, so Chance to Change was viewed as just another sanction. Others, however, felt the role of voluntary sector organisations delivering interventions could overcome these risks. Building stronger links with community groups and engaging with universal community support services (similar to the London model) were put forward as a potential solution by interview participants. A recent report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation highlights the benefits of establishing strong and broad partnerships with mainstream community services to support prosocial change and the development of positive identities for children (Ball and Moore, 2021).

3.3 Benefits of the Chance to Change project

Despite some of the challenges highlighted above, participants were consistent in voicing the positive outcomes and benefits of the project for service users and the police service. Such benefits included: supporting compliance and engagement, avoiding criminalisation, embracing a 'child first approach' that would reduce the numbers of young people going to court (particular to West Yorkshire). However, from the outset, it is important to acknowledge the benefits that involvement had for service users who had undertaken the project in London:

"I think at the beginning, like I felt very emotionally attached to the situation [event]. Where, I felt like I wanted some peace. And I realised that like, at the end of that I actually found it [peace]. I didn't need to hear from him (ex-partner). I didn't need to hear from her in order to receive it. I managed to get that through my own work and the support of Turning Point as well."

(C2C service user)

"They were helpful. They genuinely try and help me in situations, for example, the key worker will try to speak to me and help me out in life situations and see how I can better things. And then the other individual that was there talking about work, he was a good helper, he still calls me occasionally to see how I am and see if I need any help. It's good, it has a purpose."

(C2C service user)

3.3.1 Compliance

A benefit of the Chance to Change programme was reported as supporting engagement – both in relation to enforceable conditions related to the offence, but also in relation to wider holistic conditions that were not enforceable, such as child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) referrals, education or parenting support, or support with substance misuse. Chance to Change was consistently viewed as an 'opportunity', so individuals were more willing to listen to advice and support. This was further echoed during the interviews, where practitioners described incentivising cooperation and engagement, and as one participant commented, for some young people a deferred outcome might incentivise engagement with the project. It was also suggested that Chance to Change supported building relationships with young people and their parents / carers, as practitioners had something different to offer rather than traditional disposals that were viewed as criminalising young people.

How this was presented to young people, in terms of whether it was presented as a positive opportunity, was perceived to be significant in determining whether people chose to take part. Similarly, an individual's circumstances may influence how the project is perceived. For example, a practitioner described how one young person felt lucky to have the opportunity to take part in Chance to Change, as they were just about to enter the world of work. Whilst avoiding a criminal record, and the impact this could have on an individual's life chances and self-perceptions was a driver for some young people, for others it was not. Practitioners reported that the benefits of Chance to Change may resonate more with the parents or carers of young people, or older individuals who may feel fortunate to have the opportunity and welcome the support provided as part of the project. Older individuals may be more aware of the long-term impact of having a caution, or other disposals on their record.

Related to this, those involved in 'selling' the project were also felt to have an influence. The responsibility for maintaining the scheme, including ensuring the identification of eligible individuals and referral to the Chance to Change team, was driven by what could be described as 'project champions', upon whom the responsibility for 'selling' the project would also fall. This work was said to have often fallen to individuals who had to balance engagement with the project alongside work in their existing roles. For one police officer in London, it was apparent that not all individuals who were eligible for Chance to Change would be referred to the project, as not all officers believed in the scheme. During the London theory of change workshop, it was suggested by one police officer that there remained an organisational belief that "things should just go through the court". This thinking was at odds with the principle and aims of Chance to Change.

Partners within the London workshop referenced the virtue of support and the non-intrusiveness of the project, which facilitated compliance and engagement. At the London theory of change workshop, participants questioned what was defined as completion of the project, compliance, and what happens if someone doesn't engage. One participant replied:

“Yes, it simply is a pass or fail. Now as Offender Manager’s (OM) our job is to support the individual. So, it’s not here you are, off you go, I’ll see you in four months and let you know if you passed or failed. The OM is responsible for checking whether the individual is engaging or not. Now, it’s not a one size fits all – that they missed one or two meetings. There may be factors that may contribute to non-engagement - they don’t have Wi-Fi, don’t have bus money, mental health problems. In answer to your question, there isn’t a clear answer as to what you have to do to pass or fail. It’s just an evaluation of how they’ve got on throughout their four-month contract and a decision will be made. But we are monitoring them throughout the whole process.” (London Theory of Change workshop participant)

For another partnership practitioner, there were further concerns as to what constituted compliance, and how this was communicated between the offender managers and the partnership organisations. It emerged during the interviews that an individual could be recorded as having completed the requirements of their contract, even where the intervention was not undertaken. One service user, who was unable to identify a suitable therapeutic intervention to address their ‘anger’, was recorded as having attained this objective because they could provide evidence of their search attempts to find an intervention (even though they were unsuccessful in identifying a course and therefore unable to undertake the intervention). While such flexibility and discretion may prove beneficial for the service user, these findings question what intensity of intervention (often referred to as dosage) is required, and the levels of attendance/engagement required to warrant programme completion. Further, there is the potential for this to initiate discretionary responses to measures of compliance and non-compliance.

Similarly, successful completion and measures of engagement were discussed with the West Yorkshire interviewees. Completing a set number of sessions and shifts in understanding and awareness was considered to be an indication of successful completion. Checks were made by the youth justice police officers during the course of the contract to ensure young people were engaging, whereby reviewing logs and caseworker notes helped to identify any issues with engagement. Youth justice police officers would meet with young people if they were not engaging and identify any reasons for non-engagement that may need support. Overall, practitioners reported that engagement and co-operation with Chance to Change was high amongst those who had taken part in the project. The voluntary nature of participation, and that support was tailored to their specific needs rather than just being focused on the accusation, was perceived to be more meaningful and more likely to lead to better cooperation/engagement. Similarly, talking through the consequences and potential impact (i.e., could receive a criminal record) at the start of the process was viewed as supporting engagement.

Amongst the service users who contributed to this study, there was a sense that they were targeted for the Chance to Change programme due to the increased likelihood of their compliance and ‘success’.

“Tell you what it is, I feel I was an easy success for the Turning Point programme, it’s a box they can tick. Because, I don’t have a history of criminal offending, I didn’t have a rap sheet. I literally had nothing. So, I think they just thought, let’s go for an easy win. I’m very aware of policing stats and all that stuff. So, let’s get this guy on this thing, it’s an easy win for us. They can say oh, he’s turned his life around even though it wasn’t that deep.”

(C2C service user)

Interviewees delivering Chance to Change did, however, provide some examples where they had faced challenges with engagement or individuals declined to take part in Chance to Change. For example, one young person was reported to be reluctant to engage as they did not agree with all the information provided by the victim, although they did accept the disposal overall and engage with sessions with the victim worker. Others refused to take part as they were reported to not want to engage with any service, or they contested the accusation and did not feel there should be any consequence. In this example, the practitioner highlighted there was overwhelming evidence of involvement in the incident. Again, for one service user who was required to write a letter to the 'victim', there was a reticence around what they perceived to be the victim's equal culpability.

"I was asked to write an apology letter and if I'm honest, I didn't want to. But needs must and all that...[I]n terms of the judicial system, there was no acknowledgement that this guy had done anything wrong."

(C2C service user)

This presented problems for this service user around the development of their contract. Practitioners were keen to stress that these were a minority and that participants reported the majority of people wanted to take part and were "quite on board".

For some partner organisations delivering interventions, involvement with Chance to Change meant that some participants would incur costs, which may present as a barrier to engagement and compliance. Such findings echo those of Green (2020), where deferred prosecution schemes were largely underfunded, and the onus for financing and delivering the interventions typically falling to voluntary sector organisations. One workshop participant in London said that some service users were required to undertake a victim awareness course at a personal cost of £75 - "It's reparative – all they have to do is pay a fine and attend a course and then they are done."

The contractual requirement for the accused to pay for their intervention raises questions about project accessibility, involvement and fairness. Chance to Change is presented as an opportunity for the individual to engage in interventions that may minimise the likelihood of acquiring a criminal record. This account suggests that successful completion of the scheme by an individual may be contingent upon the accused's *ability to pay*, rather than the effectiveness of the scheme.

The view indicated in the quote above, that Chance to Change is reparative, also raises concerns. If we accept reparation as a form of sanction/punishment, this potentially contravenes the principle of deferred prosecution where no admission of guilt has occurred.

If Chance to Change may significantly reduce the likelihood of acquiring a criminal record for those accused of an offence, particularly for minority ethnic people, then this may contribute to addressing the 'differences in plea decisions' and, hence, respond to the problem of the increased likelihood of differential treatment for minority ethnic people in the courts system.

Finally, the question of compliance and engagement arises as a central topic for wider research. There is little to distinguish between different levels of compliance and engagement with some service users required to complete a contract with very few conditions and others with comparatively more conditions. The number or level of conditions that the service user is required to undertake in fulfilment of their contract is clearly an important area for future exploration – particularly in considering the potential risks of differential treatment in the number and type of conditions.

3.3.2 Avoiding criminalising individuals

According to some practitioners, Chance to Change did not differ greatly from other traditional disposals such as a Youth Conditional Caution, in terms of what was delivered. However, the main difference is that participation in Chance to Change did not result in individuals receiving a criminal record. It was noted by one participant that Conditional Cautions were no longer automatically disclosed unless for specific reasons as part of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. The benefits of not receiving a criminal record were again discussed in terms of reducing the negative impact on future life chances, such as employment opportunities, or education, and Chance to Change was described as "*lessening the blow*" (West Yorkshire interview participant). Furthermore, not labelling individuals, particularly young people, as 'criminal' or 'offender' was viewed as being positive in relation to creating a positive self-identity, which is well evidenced in desistance literature (Hazel et al, 2019; Maruna, 2001):

“If a young person has a concept of themselves as bad or no use, or an offender, or a criminal, then they are more likely to behave in that way and we need to enable them to conceptualise themselves as being able to contribute positively towards their society, being able to hold down a job, being able to succeed in education, being a good partner/ son/ father and you don’t achieve that by treating them like a criminal, labelling them as a criminal, punishing them as a criminal”

(West Yorkshire interview participant)

Such views were also echoed by one Turning Point service user, who recognised the potential value of the programme’s approach. In particular, they note the benefits that the programme could have for young Black people.

“I do think there is some value in the Turning Point programme because some YOS clients have been on it and especially if it’s the first offence, it gives people the chance to not be criminalised. Particularly for young Black boys if I’m being honest. I think it can be a game changer.”

(C2C service user).

They continue,

“In principle, it’s a fantastic programme. Not so much for older people like myself who should know better, but for young Black boys who are too quick to get criminalised by the police.”

(C2C service user).

The above sentiments were also expressed by individuals who had engaged with the Chance to Change programme, recognising the implications and problems of criminalisation for future opportunities.

“Once someone has a criminal record that’s it. It’s there. There is no other options besides a caution and a caution is viewed as either a ‘bit soft’ or extremely harsh depending upon what you want to do from there on. The caution is effectively another criminal record. As the police, we like to take some action. We never like an NFA (No Further Action). Turning Point is a useful tool; it allows us to sit in the middle ground between harsh action or not, as the case may be.”

(London Theory of Change workshop participant)

Slowing an individual’s trajectory into the criminal justice system was also viewed as a benefit of the Chance to Change project. Not convicting individuals at the first opportunity and providing the youth justice service with the chance to work with individuals and undertake diversionary and educational activities, was identified as a positive aspect of the project. This meant that if a young person (in the West Yorkshire pilot) reoffended after taking part in Chance to Change, there would still be the option of a caution on an admission case and the chance for the youth justice service to work with them again. This was viewed positively, as a means to build on the work they had already completed, thus further reducing the young person’s chance of appearing in youth court – the benefits of which are discussed below. During the theory of change workshop, the issue of whether there would be confusion and / or a lack of engagement among young people if they reoffended and received another Youth Conditional Caution, repeating the same interventions with the same workers, was raised. This requires further investigation with young people.

Reducing the number of people going to court was also seen as important. Avoiding negative experiences in court, which can be intimidating and overwhelming for young people, and if found guilty has the potential to lead to a more serious conviction, was highlighted as a further benefit of the Chance to Change project.

“Benefit of deferred prosecution, not having to go through statutory processes of court, interviews, admission stage, that’s massive because that’s really scary”

(West Yorkshire interview participant).

Alongside this, the potential cost saving of not sending individuals to court was also highlighted.

4. Key reflections

This report has primarily examined the experiences of practitioners involved in delivering Chance to Change, including the delivery models and aims of the programme, and potential benefits for individuals taking part in it. The following reflections and points for consideration are drawn from:

- The practitioner interviews in both London and West Yorkshire and from the two theory of change workshops which were delivered as part of the project; and
- A small number of service user interviews in London

Given the resultant small-scale nature of the research that was possible for this project, we have made suggestions below where further research is required to explore the identified issues and concerns.

4.1 A positive step

Overall, amongst practitioners who took part in the workshops and interviews, Chance to Change was viewed positively. In West Yorkshire, practitioners spoke of Chance to Change as providing opportunities for responding to accusations of low-level offending behaviour and diverting individuals from reoffending by providing early interventions. Taking a child first approach and building on strengths were identified as positive aspects of the Chance to Change pilots that may contribute to reduced levels of criminalisation, offering a scheme which affords individuals access to valuable support and resources, which they would potentially otherwise be unable to access.

Similarly, service users (in London) spoke about positive aspects of the Chance to Change / Turning Point project. Interviews with service users ended with the question "If you were telling a friend about the Chance to Change programme, what would you tell them?"

"It does what it says on the tin. It is a Turning Point. It may not give you all the options or be as flexible as you might want it to be but remember you're coming into this where you're at a low point. So to make the most out of it, and remember as you're doing it, you're doing it for you. You're doing it because this can be an opportunity for you to be a better version of yourself. You're not having to admit to anything, you are not forced to kind of like, divulge any information that you don't want to, you take it in as you want to."

(C2C service user)

On the police,

"It gave me a bit of hope to be honest. There's still a long way to go, there's a culture behind that. There's a reason why I feel that way considering I am somebody who has never been involved in any kind of criminal activity. For me to feel that kind of way is jarring, it's annoying. Because you never want to feel that the people who you see as being there to serve and protect, being afraid to approach them. But the experience of Turning Point showed me that there are things being done."

(C2C service user)

"I would say depending on your situation, prevention is better than a cure. So if you can go about doing it and preventing yourself from getting into a worse situation, than you're already in, then do it. If you don't want to, then that's on you."

(C2C service user)

"I think this is a great opportunity, not to get a criminal record. This is a good opportunity not to become a permanent YOS [youth offending service] fixture. It may sound like a cliché, but this is not a road that you want to go down, you don't want to be one of those guys. So this is an opportunity for you to do something better with yourself."

(C2C service user)

"I think if something like Turning Point can be a permanent fixture for more people, not just kids, but maybe kids so they have a chance to have some kind of start. If you start kids off with 'you're a criminal' it's very hard to come out of that, especially if you're from certain backgrounds and certain areas. It's very hard to say I'm going to turn over a new leaf if I have this label attached to me for the rest of my life. It's not fair. It's not fair on them. So I think if the judicial system can make a better version of Turning Point, I think it could be amazing for the younger generation and particularly Black girls and Black boys who get criminalised for doing the same things that other kids do."

(C2C service user)

However, what emerges from the service user findings (from London) is a tension between principle and practice. In practice, questions were raised by these participants over the extent to which it can address ethnic disproportionality and over-policing. Furthermore, striking the balance between meeting individuals' needs through providing support; and intervening in people's lives that could be deemed as being disproportionate in relation to the seriousness of the offence, also needs further exploration with service users.

4.2 Deferred Prosecution scheme?

Central to deferred prosecution was the removal of an admission of guilt to enable people who have been accused of an offence to access targeted interventions before a plea has been entered (Lammy, 2017). What emerged from the interview and workshop findings with practitioners was a level of confusion / ambiguity regarding whether an admission of guilt was required for individuals to take part in Chance to Change. In fact, the principle of the removal of an admission of guilt was often not discussed until prompted by the researchers. In these instances, the removal of an admission of guilt was highlighted as a feature that distinguished Chance to Change from other Out of Court Disposals, where an admission of guilt was required. Although in principle Chance to Change was designed as a deferred prosecution scheme, in practice, practitioners described it as another disposal alongside other Out of Court Disposals (Green 2020).

4.3 The continuing problem of racial disparity?

Interviewer: "How many times have you encountered the police?"

Service user: "I honestly couldn't tell you...I've lost count at some point."

The quote above demonstrates the challenge to one of the central aims of the Chance to Change programme; that of building trust in the criminal justice system through a single programme/intervention, however, well intentioned. For minority ethnic service users, trust in policing is (inevitably) also informed by prior experiences of being policed, as well as an awareness of racial disparity and differential treatment (Harris et al 2022, Williams and Clarke 2018). In interviews, experiences such as those outlined above, were expressed by service users.

"The police need work. I perceive the police as a racist institution. That's because of my experiences, my peer group, the experience of the people I work with now and stuff that just happens in the UK on a regular basis."

(C2C service user)

"Joint enterprise, or whatever the new name for Joint Enterprise is. It's not like this was a major crime, an individual was found with an offensive weapon, and they took ownership of it. It's on the bodycam... you get into their [police] web when I was younger. Now I'm older, I don't really get into interactions with the police."

(C2C service user)

In addition, when discussing the arrest that resulted in their referral to the Chance to Change programme, one service user explained:

"I got arrested by the Territorial Support Group, around here we call it a gang unit. I know, Manchester got its own gang unit and all of these things. Because they saw us in a group, they automatically assumed that 'they're involved with certain things, they must be associated with certain people'. [S]o they automatically assume like yeah, we're going to arrest some of these gang members and don't even know if they're gang members. So, we're gonna take them and put them in cells for the sake of it."

(C2C service user)

“Growing up in [area] I know quite a few people who have had like run ins [with the police] or you know, culturally speaking in terms of history. Like the history between my community and the police hasn’t been a positive one to be honest. And there are many cases where injustice [is] done in certain cases, or people who have prejudice towards them.”

(C2C service user)

Discrimination in policing was raised by participants in the Chance to Change project in London. Attitudes were overwhelmingly negative, highlighting individual experiences of differential treatment by the police. Consequently, minority ethnic people may be reluctant to decline the Chance to Change project and ‘chance’ the judicial process due to both their perceptions and realities of racial injustice and the criminal justice system and concerns of receiving more punitive sentences (YJB 2021a, Williams and Clarke 2018, Clarke and Williams 2020). There is evidently a concern here where the mistrust of the court processes and legal system by minority ethnic groups and the fear of discrimination in sentencing, is utilised by the police as a method for taking control at the local level and influencing attendance on diversionary schemes such as Chance to Change.

4.4 The trust deficit

There is also a concern that Chance to Change/ Turning Point removes the option/provision of individuals to seek redress/justice through the court process. For example, the risks of criminalisation and (possible) conviction due to non-acceptance of the Chance to Change programme was apparently explicitly explained to those service users (in London) who were interviewed for this project. This was perceived by the service users as “manipulation.” One individual, who was initially informed by an investigating officer that “I don’t think you’ll get criminalised”, was then visited by another officer, who “just kept alluding to the fact that it could affect my job, it could affect my livelihood.” They said:

“I wasn’t a big fan of his because it felt like he was trying to goad me into doing the Turning Point programme. ‘Mate, it’s not looking good for you, obviously the type of work you do.’ I don’t like those psychological games. Just say what you want to say. You don’t need to trick me...”

(C2C service user)

This approach developed into:

“[It will] definitely go to court and definitely affect your livelihood. So, I wasn’t thinking in terms of guilty or not guilty, I was thinking this guy was threatening the lives of me and my children. It was all very confusing... so you’ll have to do this programme otherwise you will get a criminal record.”

(C2C service user)

For this service user, being a parent, having no previous convictions and being in full-time employment, meant that the threat of criminalisation and punishment for what they were being accused of was perceived as unjust. This was similar for another service user, who did have previous experiences of the police and wider criminal justice system:

“In short, they said to me, because of the fact that I’ve been arrested before or [they have] spoke to me before. This is now going to go down on my record. So, it’s either I go about doing the course [Chance to Change] to make sure that it is clear off my record. That is basically what he [the police officer] said.”

(C2C service user)

They continued:

“They gave me a letter when I was released from the station to say this is something that was an option, that was available to me. [I] was then contacted by the police and told to come in and that’s when they said to me ‘Yeah, so if you don’t do it, then this is gonna happen’. My mom works in college, so when the DBS check comes up, it will pop up with something to do with the household, whether it’s to do with her directly (or not).”

(C2C service user)

The suggestion that non-engagement with Chance to Change would result in a conviction, and therefore may show up on Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) requests, surfaced as a significant motivation for this individual to engage with the programme. In response to the question, 'did you feel like you had a choice?' They remarked:

"Realistically, everybody has a choice. However, it's a case of when you feel as though you're being manipulated into it. Because they openly said, 'if you don't want to do it, you don't have to, but these are the side effects [consequences]'. And it's like, okay, so I don't really want to do it. However, they're not giving me an opportunity to actually get another way or deal with the situation another matter."

(C2C service user)

The above disclosures of coercion toward the Chance to Change programme may simply reaffirm levels of mistrust in the criminal justice system especially for minority ethnic people, as the provision of a police alternative to the formal due process is perceived as disingenuous and potentially counterproductive towards building trust in the police.

In light of the documented racial disparities in policing and particularly the practice of stop and search (Shiner, et al 2018, Uhrig, 2016) and in the context of the findings from the Casey Review (Baroness Casey of Blackstock, 2023), the opportunity for Chance to Change to remedy such disparities needs further exploration.

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