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**Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to serious youth violence in Coventry.  
Response from Simon Foster, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner.**

The inspection report, published on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2024, details findings from a joint targeted area inspection, regarding the response to serious youth violence and criminal exploitation, of those aged over ten years in Coventry. The inspection took place from 18<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2024. This inspection is part of a joint programme aimed at evaluating how local authorities, police forces, health services and other agencies collaborate to protect young people, assessing the partnership, strategic and operational response. The inspectors included representatives from Ofsted, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, and the Care Quality Commission.

The overarching findings indicate that, children at risk of serious youth violence and criminal exploitation are safer due to partnership efforts. The collaboration has resulted in sustained progress in reducing harm to children from serious youth violence and criminal exploitation over several years, employing a public health approach. The report details how partnership working in Coventry possesses a well-developed understanding of the causes and consequences of serious youth violence and the vulnerabilities of children. This understanding has consequently reduced the risk for many young people.

The inspectorate commended the systemic approach of strategic partnerships, operational meetings, and partnership subgroups. The report highlights how partners utilised opportunities to learn and develop practices in this highly complex area, fostering a strong supportive and collaborative culture. This approach has consequently led to positive outcomes for highly vulnerable children in Coventry. The report also praised the Coventry Youth Violence Prevention Strategy, led by West Midlands Police (WMP). This strategy focuses on identifying intelligence, early intervention opportunities, and targeting those who pose a threat. Additionally, the strategy aims to create long-term positive impacts, such as changing attitudes and offender management, to address young people at risk of reoffending.

The inspection acknowledged the complexities involved in addressing serious youth violence in Coventry and emphasised the continuous need for improvement. Consequently, the inspection outlined five areas for partners to enhance. Although these enhancements do not directly relate to WMP, they hold significant value for advancing professional development, concerning attitudes towards children in the context of serious youth violence and exploitation. For example, the inspectorate highlighted that 'some professionals

are not sufficiently curious and accept children's explanations at face value'. This indicates that children's voices are at times accepted, with a potential to overlook their broader life experiences. This oversight may result in certain risks and needs not being fully comprehended at an early stage. This underscores the importance for WMP to address the significance of maintaining professional curiosity, when engaging with young people and that cannot be overstated.

Approximately 25% of the total WMP workforce has received face to face trauma awareness raising training including Cadets; Custody; Force Contact; Forensic Scene Investigators; Public Protection Unit; Professional Standards; Response; and Senior Leadership Teams. All new recruits currently receive the training, as part of the Police Constable's Entry Programme. This training has been funded by the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP). Trauma-informed practice acknowledges the need to see beyond an individual's presenting behaviour and to ask, 'What does this person need?' rather than 'What is wrong with this person?'

Another area highlighted for improvement by the inspectorate, concerns 'the understanding of the impact on different groups of children regarding serious youth violence, particularly the potential for disproportionate responses to Black boys'. With fifty-eight per cent of children in Coventry being from ethnic minority backgrounds, it is imperative for WMP to ensure their response to serious youth violence is both proportionate and unbiased. Certain police practices, such as stop and search, have long been recognised as areas where ethnic disproportionality is prevalent.

I am committed to maintaining full transparency and promoting better practices within WMP, placing significant emphasis on scrutiny through various processes. For instance, I established ten stop and search scrutiny panels, convening every two to three months across the West Midlands. Comprising members of the public, these panels are tasked with analysing anonymised stop and search records, to verify adherence to correct procedures. They serve as a tool to assess how effectively police utilise their powers to combat serious youth violence and to gauge their understanding of ethnic disproportionality.

The VRP and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), have commissioned anti-racist practice training, which will be delivered across the West Midlands to various local partnerships, including officers from West Midlands Police. Additionally, the Annual Violence Strategic Needs Assessment, enables us to better understand disproportionality and guides the commissioning of culturally competent programmes and initiatives, such as lived-experience navigators in Accident and Emergency Departments and Custody Suites.

In May 2023, the Violence Reduction Partnership, in collaboration with West Midlands Police and other partners, launched the Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) in Coventry and Wolverhampton.

The programme is supported by a £2 million investment from the Home Office and the Youth Endowment Fund. Additionally, West Midlands Police have allocated 24 extra officers, over two years to evaluate the effectiveness of the 'Focused Deterrence' approach in addressing group violence.

The programme leverages the existing evidence base, while introducing innovative methods. In both Coventry and Wolverhampton, it operates from a community building and includes a team of careers staff, family support professionals, volunteers, lived-experience mentors, and police officers. The aim is to identify and address the root causes of violence through genuine, trust-based relationships, while clearly communicating and enforcing consequences, if engagement is not forthcoming.

The intervention employs a police-led navigator approach, to help individuals disengage from violent groups and behaviours. CIRV serves as a mechanism for identifying risk, being present at critical teachable moments, sequencing interventions that are often already commissioned, and placing young people into real opportunities. The approach is primarily designed to engage anyone at high risk of violence who meets the selection criteria, connecting them to a pathway out of gangs, violence, and county lines. When necessary, the approach also coordinates disruptive actions for those who are criminally active, but fail or refuse to engage.

As of the week commencing 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024, the total number of referrals and those identified as meeting the criteria for the treatment group (post-randomisation) is 452. Once identified or deemed suitable after triage, individuals are offered the programme. Out of the total number eligible and offered the programme, 99 cohort members are currently engaged and receiving support. As part of the deterrence arm of the programme, 29 cohort members are in the 'disruption' pathway. While 269 individuals are in the 'at risk' monitoring pathway, meaning they are eligible, have been offered the programme, but have not yet accepted or engaged with the support, and have not met the threshold for disruption. To be eligible for CIRV, individuals must be at least 14 years old, with no upper age limit. The oldest person in the cohort identified is 62 years old as of June 2024.

The VRP also funds a Community Navigator, who supports the local Violence Reduction Board, providing additional capacity to coordinate activities, that support and promote violence prevention. The local VRP budget is allocated to harm prevention work in nurseries and support for young people, identified as being at risk of violence.

The recently launched My Tomorrow campaign, aims to provide platforms and opportunities for young people to lead in our approach to violence prevention and to ensure that communities and professionals truly understand the experiences of young people today. Coventry, along with other areas of the West

Midlands, will develop an action plan to embrace the campaign and ensure that young people have access to the opportunities, they are entitled to and need.

In conclusion, this report sheds light on crucial aspects of addressing serious youth violence and criminal exploitation in Coventry. The insights gleaned from this evaluation, serve as invaluable guidance for refining our strategies and collaborative working practices. They underscore the ongoing commitment to supporting our response to safeguarding young people, ensuring it is both effective and responsive to their needs.

Yours faithfully,



**Simon Foster**

**West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner**