



ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

17th December 2024

Working in Partnership to Prevent and Reduce Serious Youth Violence

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Cover Report

1. Overview

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of work taking place across the West Midlands Police Force area to reduce serious youth violence and provides an update on the work of the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) and West Midlands Police (WMP). The work of the VRP and WMP contributes to the delivery of the priorities around working in partnership and preventing and reducing crime contained in the Police and Crime Plan 2021-25.
- 1,2 The West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) was established in 2019, through Home Office funding, to provide the infrastructure for multi-agency working and to co-ordinate a long-lasting public health approach to serious youth violence. The aim of the Partnership is to achieve significant systems change, with a focus on early intervention and prevention.
- 1.3 The introduction of the Serious Violence Duty in January 2023 strengthened the role of the VRP and led to the co-production of a [West Midlands Violence Reduction Strategy](#). This sets out our collective vision for reducing and preventing violence affecting children and young people and sets the tone for the region, acting as an umbrella for local violence prevention delivery plans.
- 1.4 West Midlands Police (WMP) published their [Serious Youth Violence Strategy](#) in 2023. It recognises the drivers of serious youth violence and provides a long-term commitment for WMP to work with and influence partnerships to tackle the contextual and environmental issues that make children vulnerable to exploitation and associated threats relating to serious youth violence. The Strategy has six priorities, each priority has an identified senior police lead who is responsible for ensuring that actions under each priority are implemented and monitored. The work of the leads is coordinated by the SYV lead who reports into the Strategic Youth Violence Reduction Board, chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable for Local Policing. They regularly report on progress to allow the continued co-ordination across the portfolios. An operational board also meets to ensure a tactical focus is maintained in order to deliver the overarching aim of reducing serious youth violence.

2. Achievements and Challenges

- 2.1 The VRP is made up of place-based teams, thematic teams (working in education, criminal justice and health) and a data and evaluation team. The team produces a regional strategic needs assessment annually which informs a range of commissioning activity including but not limited to: mentors in custody and in accident and emergency; therapeutic services; resettlement services; focused deterrence programmes; and training/workforce development. Since April 2024, interventions and activity funded by the VRP has reached over 15,000 young people aged under 25 and training delivered by the VRP has reached over 7,000 professionals working with children and young people across the West Midlands.
- 2.2 Since the introduction of the Serious Violence Duty (SVD), agencies have focused their efforts and resources regionally and locally to further their understanding of the risks and harms caused by violence across the region. Between the financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24, serious youth violence in the region reduced by 9.1%, which amounts to 737 fewer young people being victims. In particular, knife enabled youth violence has reduced by 3% (12 fewer victims). Despite these reductions, we know that knife crime is justifiably still a real concern to our communities, and that there is still much work to do. In the last year alone (23/24), a total of 43 people lost their lives to violence, with 13 of these instances involving a knife, and five being young people under 25; it is critical therefore that the work we do continues.
- 2.3 Project Guardian is West Midlands Police Response to Serious Youth Violence (SYV), partially funded through the Home Office Hot Spot Response programme. A dedicated intelligence function has informed SYV and Anti-Social Behaviour hotspots, known as Targeted Guardian Patrol areas (TGPs).
- 2.4 Project Guardian is supported by the Guardian Taskforce, which is a dedicated resource of 1 Inspector, 5 Sergeants and 36 Police Officers to tackle SYV and Knife Crime in the hotspots, deploying a variety of tactics. Between January and October 2024, the task force deployed 695 times, conducted 2411 stop and searches, made 601 arrests and seized 510 weapons. They have provided a further 16,700 hours of visible patrols in communities.
- 2.5 In addition, the TGPs are subject to enhanced patrols by local policing officers, along with developing problem-solving activity to identify the causes of crime in the area, and responding with appropriate resources. In 2023/24, an additional 9,500 hours of local policing patrols were conducted in the TGPs, resulting in a reduction of offending for SYV and robbery in those areas by around 15%.
- 2.6 The Guardian Intelligence Team complete weekly reviews of each knife related offence to understand additional investigative opportunities. They also identify Habitual Knife Carriers (offenders who have committed a crime involving a knife on 2 or more occasions) to either offer local rehabilitation opportunities or to pursue through a criminal justice route. Around 150 Habitual Knife Carriers have been identified since 2023, providing additional opportunities to support and intervene.
- 2.7 The funding for the VRP and Project Guardian is currently secure until 31st March 2025. A sustainability plan has been developed which sets out the current position in terms of violence prevention work and how we will ensure that the systems across the region are in a good position to continue to prevent and reduce violence. The PCC has been lobbying at a national level directly and through local MPs. The VRP Director is in regular discussion with the Home Office re. the need for continuation of this funding and is in the process of drawing up plans for 2025/26 to ensure that this

work can continue. Specified authorities also have a responsibility to ensure that they are doing all that they can individually and in partnership to prevent violence.

3. *Actions undertaken*

- 3.1 The VRP commission a range of interventions across the criminal justice, health and education landscape, as well as provide direct support to local areas to develop their responses and approaches to reducing violence affecting young people.
- 3.2 The VRP has supported local partnerships with their work to mitigate spikes in violence over the summer. Working closely with Project Guardian, summer risk assessments were provided to each local area to support their planning. The VRP provided an additional £175,000 to support the commissioning of activity and interventions which reached almost 3,000 children and young people across the region. In October half term, a further £60,000 in funding was provided to sustain this holiday period activity.
- 3.3 The VRP has played an instrumental role in delivering coordinated responses to serious incidents of violence including: deploying detached youth workers in a variety of locations in the immediate aftermath of violence or in response to increased community tensions; mobilising teachable moments support in custody and hospitals; ensuring therapeutic and other interventions are available; and offering support to schools which may have been affected. To support with a consistent partnership response to incidents, VRP have also produced an Incident Response Good Practice Guide which supports organisations to prepare for/mitigate a significant incident; manage an incident in a trauma informed way; and use recovery-focused approaches.
- 3.4 A key priority for the VRP has been to work with the Youth Assembly who have created the [My Tomorrow Campaign](#) which seeks to provide a counter narrative to violence. In support of this, Change Makers has been created which is an upstander programme being delivered in schools. 26 Young Leaders have been recruited to deliver the programme in community settings.
- 3.4 In August, around 100 children and young people attended Walsall's first ever youth summit at the Town Hall. The [Shaping My Tomorrow](#) event gave 9 to 25-year-olds the chance to have their say on decisions and services which affect them.
- 3.5 Since April 2024, 243 sports professionals have received training from the VRP to respond to vulnerability, and enhance their provision to meet the needs of young people at risk. A sports system referral toolkit has also been produced to support the sector to deliver more sports to more young people impacted by violence and/or exploitation.
- 3.6 The VRP Education Team works strategically across the region to enhance violence prevention and reduction initiatives in education and address the drivers of violence through education. During quarter 2, July-September 2024, they have:
 - Engaged directly with 120 schools across the region, providing training, awareness and support with prevention planning;
 - Delivered prevention programmes to 1900 children and young people;
 - Delivered train the trainer primary prevention programmes to 300 professionals, enabling education to deliver sustainable prevention.
- 3.9 Successful delivery of the Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) continues at pace. As of September 2024, Coventry CIRV has 36 individuals actively engaging in support and 13 currently referred on for disruption; and Wolverhampton CIRV has

31 actively engaging in support, 14 currently referred on for disruption. This programme provides direct support to young people at direct risk of violence.

- 3.10 The [Faith Alliance Strategy](#) was launched in November 2023 and has led to new projects, including three new safe spaces for young people in faith settings in Birmingham and Dudley and the launch of a new Youth Leadership Programme for Faith Alliance members. Early next year, the Faith Alliance (which now has almost 500 members) will also launch a new regional project that seeks to unite faith communities in the aftermath of incidents of serious violence, both to address community trauma and limit the onward transmission of violence.
- 3.11 The above sets out some of the work being led and/or commissioned by the VRP. The [2023/24 VRP Annual Report](#) provides a more comprehensive overview of activity.
- 3.12 In November 2023 West Midlands Police implemented a refreshed Knife Crime Policy to ensure officers effectively and expeditiously investigate knife crime. The policy gives guidance and direction to officers on arresting suspects, use of searches to recover weapons, how to deal with juveniles promptly and using Serious Violence Reduction Orders (SVROs) on those aged 18 and over as part of the Home Office Pilot.
- 3.14 Every knife crime is subject to review by an expert in knife crime through a monthly review which has shown improvements in all aspects of the policy since its launch. The audit has identified barriers to better performance and intervention opportunities. One of the areas for improvement included training on the policy, specifically how to apply evidence led prosecutions when a victim disengages.
- 3.15 The training developed focuses on the tragic loss of Ronan Kanda, aged 16, who was murdered in a case of mistaken identity in June 2022 in Wolverhampton. The training seeks to change the culture within West Midlands Police, making sure that officers have Ronan and other young people in the forefront of their minds when dealing with anyone for knife crime. It has been delivered to over 2000 members of staff.
- 3.16 The monthly audit also identified a delay in swift intervention in relation to young people arrested for knife crime. Changes have since been made to this process to ensure that decisions are made while the young person is in police custody which provides the opportunity to deliver a teachable moment.
- 3.17 A set of 'Child First' principles are being developed for West Midlands Police in line with the Youth Justice Board national work that was launched in 2023. This will ensure that where opportunities lie for prevention of further harm where children come into contact with the criminal justice system. This will support our work in partnership with local Youth Decision Making Panels under the knife crime policy, but also more broadly by seizing opportunities for early intervention for offences that may be considered less serious.
- 3.18 The Homicide Prevention Strategy is new for the force and is supported by an Executive led board structure under ACC Crime. Serious Youth Violence is one of the strands of the strategy. The board focuses on any organisational learning and critical areas to prevent future homicides and includes recommendations from Offensive Weapon Homicide Reviews.

4. Future Work

- 4.1 The VRP will continue to lead, facilitate and directly deliver/commission interventions to prevent violence. Whilst we are seeing a positive reduction in violence affecting young people we know that knife crime is justifiably still of real concern to our communities, and that there is still much work to do. In the last year alone (23/24), a total of 43 people lost their lives to violence, with 13 of these instances involving a knife, and of which five young people under 25; it is critical therefore that the work we do together, and with our young people and communities, continues.
- 4.2 We will be focusing on the development of a youth movement, strengthening the counter narrative to violence and seeking to provide the tools and resources young people and communities need to play their part in preventing violence.
- 4.3 The Sustainability Plan sets out how the VRP and key stakeholders will be working build on work to date and in particular will focus on:
- Discussing within their own organisations potential ongoing funding opportunities to support a central VRP team and understand/mitigate against potential funding fallout.
 - Lobbying through relevant regional/national networks for ongoing/additional funding.
 - Committing to working towards a trauma informed/aware approach/response in line with the Regional Trauma Informed Coalition Workforce Development Framework.
 - Ensuring local early help and safeguarding systems are in a good position to identify and respond appropriately to the risks associated with serious youth violence.
 - Ensuring that each specified authority is confident that a public health approach to violence prevention is embedded in business as usual.
 - Continuing to support the counter-narrative to violence in the West Midlands, tackling stereotypes and providing new opportunities for young people.
 - Actively using the regional and local strategic needs assessments to support local understanding of patterns of violence.
- 4.4 A review of Police School Intervention and Prevention Officers (SIPOs) and Early Help Officers is underway to seek to identify best practice across WMP and bring further consistency to the work of these colleagues who form part of Local Policing Partnership Teams. The aim is to ensure these resources are efficient and are universally applying a problem-solving approach to interactions with young people in line with the priority to reduce SYV and other harm committed and experienced by this young group. This work will ensure the roles align to the principles in the recently published WMP Neighbourhood Policing Strategy Engaging Communities, Solving Problems and Targeting Activity.
- 4.5 More recently, the Police have shifted their focus to primary schools, as a result of a number of serious and tragic incidents across the force area. The Police SYV team are working to develop some age appropriate content aimed at primary schools. This includes discussions with a school in Wolverhampton to develop a 'Googlebox' style intervention where some children are filmed discussing some of the podcast/video material that we already have, which will be shared on their school TV channel. This will be followed up by visits of the people featured in the podcast and video material (e.g. Nikita Kanda) where the children get to speak directly to those from the films and ask questions about knife crime. If successful this package/recording of the children discussing the content can be shared with other primary schools across the force area.
- 4.6 Sandwell LPA working with Sandwell Safer Partnership are seeking to develop some interventions with primary schools. This has been funded by the VRP and content will be available for sharing. This will be supported by a partnership

'Knife Crime Strategy' following the recent Knife Angel visit to the borough and work with the Kanda family following the murder of their son Ronan. We believe this will be the first partnership strategy focusing on knife crime specifically and will also support the cementing of the new WMP Knife Crime policy and approach to Youth Decision Making Panels as described above.

- 4.7 West Midlands Police will review the Serious Youth Violence Strategy in line with any new asks from the Home Office in relation to the anticipated broader Knife Enable Crime expectations and will continue to listen to families affected by knife crime in shaping our policies and approach, recognising any knife crime incident is one too many.

5. *Financial Implications*

- 5.1 The majority of direct work with young people in the region which is aimed at reducing risk and vulnerability around SYV and exploitation is funded by different government grants which are due to come to an end in March 2025. As described above in this report, the PCC and the VRP Strategic Board are doing all that they can through national, regional and local representation to raise awareness of the risks and potential consequences of the different funding streams coming to an end. The VRP team are working on several proposals with local partnerships to strengthen and sustain investment in violence prevention and reduction activity, for example, a National Lottery Community Fund bid that would bring an additional £1.2 million into a consortium of providers in Walsall who are all delivering interventions aimed at young people experiencing violence and/or exploitation.

For VRP the uncertainty in relation to funding for 2025/2026 has had a direct impact on our ability to retain staff in the team and this will also impact providers receiving funding from us and other funders, i.e. SAFE taskforce. With uncertainty in funding from April 2025, providers will also need to stop accepting new referrals shortly after Christmas. The impact will be on our most vulnerable young people and families and it is critical that we continue our efforts together to support sustainability.

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