



## OFFICE OF THE POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR THAMES VALLEY

### Report to Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel 29<sup>th</sup> January 2021

#### **Thames Valley Police update on Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)**

**Knife Crime is down 6% from last year and is at its lowest level since 2016. Personal robbery is down 23%. The positive outcome rate for Violence with Injury is up 23%.**

#### **1. Background**

The Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) brings together key partners from across Thames Valley to provide a co-ordinated response to tackling serious violence across the region.

This multi-agency approach involves local authorities, health, education, policing, third sector organisations, members of the community and many more, all working together to understand the root causes of serious violence and focussing on place-based problem solving in order to address them.

The VRU takes a public health approach to tackling violence – looking at violence not as isolated incidents or solely a law enforcement problem but instead as a preventable consequence of a range of factors such as adverse early-life experiences or harmful social or community experiences and influences.

Thames Valley's VRU therefore focusses on four main themes:

- Supporting communities and partnerships
- Early intervention and prevention
- Tackling county lines and the misuse of drugs
- Effective law enforcement and the criminal justice response

In 2019 the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley received £1.16m to support the introduction of the VRU. Following a successful launch the funding was renewed in March 2020 with an additional £1.16m.

A range of short and long term activities and interventions are currently being delivered by the VRU including:

- Work with schools to develop educational materials for students and parents
- Mentoring and detached youth work

- Community engagement events
- Drug diversion schemes for young people under 18yrs
- Policing operations and intelligence led patrols
- Custody diversion schemes for young adults

## **2. Work stream highlights:**

### **a) Partnerships and Communities**

- Nine local place-based 'task forces' identified/established to bring a whole systems approach to problem solve and tackle the causes of serious violence
- Volunteer-led Hospital Navigator Scheme established in the five major trauma hospitals across Thames Valley to act as capable guardians, working with medical staff to identify and support those impacted by violence
- Partners and community assets in local hotspot areas identified and a sustainable framework of participation created to help them work together to problem solve and tackle serious violence
- Community engagement events held to bring together partners and members of the community to problem solve tackling serious violence and form action groups to plan and deliver community based initiatives
- Young people receiving support via 1:1 mentoring and detached sessions, providing positive opportunities to reduce the risk of exclusion and involvement in violence

### **b) Early Intervention and Prevention**

- A framework of Trauma Informed networking across schools and with partners to enable the delivery of interventions and preventative problem solving across schools and into the communities
- Youth Action Groups formed to improve local engagement, better understand the root causes of violence and support young people to come up with solutions
- Resource packages developed and provided to schools to supplement their curriculum with content designed to provide students with the knowledge to make safer choices and recognise risks to themselves and their peers
- Schools trained in the Mentors in Violence Prevention programme enabling them to support young people to positively influence the attitudes and behaviours of their peers and reduce the risk of them becoming involved in serious violence
- A Trauma Informed Approach embedded within policing and across the Thames Valley

### **c) Data and Targeting**

- Local analytical tool developed, enabling the identification of key locations and times of serious violence to inform prevention and enforcement activity
- An information sharing, governance and security data solution to drive a public health approach across the Thames Valley to prevent harm
- Provision of a secure cloud-based Data Lake giving the capability to link data from partner organisations within the Thames Valley Together project
- Powerful data visualisation technology to improve targeting
- An Ethical Board supported by an Ethical Framework to scrutinise the process.

### **d) County Lines and Drugs Misuse**

- Drugs Diversion Scheme in place Thames Valley wide providing specialist support for people found in possession of drugs to prevent prosecution and break the cycle of re-offending
- Enhanced information sharing network established to help safeguard young people identified as at risk of exploitation through County Lines

### **e) Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice**

- Proactive policing activities delivered across the Thames Valley to reduce serious violence and knife crime
- Intervention and diversion program using focussed deterrence tactics rolled out across the force to help local areas support young people involved in county drugs lines or violence to access services and positive opportunities
- DIVERT scheme operating in four custody suites across Thames Valley supporting young adults by identifying local pathways and interventions to prevent them from re-entering the criminal justice system

## **3. Focus for next year**

The TV VRU is committed to building on the extensive work that has been delivered throughout this year, as well as exploring ways this can be developed further. Our key objectives will include:

- Reviewing our current work stream structure to place a greater emphasis on a place based approach and embedding our activities as business as usual
- Continuing to move the focus of our work from secondary and tertiary interventions to primary interventions
- Continuing to embed whole systems change both regionally and locally

- Continuing and building on our community engagement / community lead work
- Exploring new models of funding to ensure cultural and financial sustainability
- Beginning to work with other organisations such as local businesses

#### **4. Conclusion**

It goes without saying that 2020 has been a challenging year for the Thames Valley VRU, our partners and our communities.

As a newly established Unit, and in the face of the complex and uncertain nature of a global pandemic, we have worked tirelessly to try to ensure that we could deliver what we had committed to within our Response Strategy whilst supporting those who needed us most.

Throughout the year we have retained flexibility, our plans evolving to reflect the ever-changing demands and needs across the Thames Valley. The enthusiasm and support of our partners and local communities have been key to this. Their engagement and commitment has helped us to ensure that we could continue to deliver a complex programme of work aimed at tackling serious violence in our local areas and across the wider region.

The information included in this briefing is just a snapshot of what has been delivered and achieved over the course of the year and we are confident that the collaborative work of the unit has helped, and will continue to help, keep some of the most vulnerable people in our communities safe from harm.

We look forward to developing the work of the Unit and continuing to strengthen our networks and relationships into 2021 to ensure a whole system approach to tackling and preventing serious violence across the Thames Valley.

**John Campbell QPM**  
Chief Constable  
Thames Valley Police

29 January 2021