

**STRATEGIC POLICING AND CRIME BOARD
17 November 2020**

Police and Crime Plan Priority: Regular Item

Title: West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit

Presented by: Clare Gollop

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This paper provides an update on the development of the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit, and outlines the core work streams being progressed by the unit during the course of 20/21.

2. Background and context

2.1. The Board received a briefing in Year 1 of the VRUs establishment (2019) setting out the background to the Serious Violence Fund, the context of the public health approach to violence reduction, and acknowledging the wide range of activity that had previously been delivered via the Violence Prevention Alliance; Gangs & Violence Commission; Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People programme; and other vulnerability and community safety activity.

2.2. The Violence Reduction Units are being established to lead system change across organisations, in order to create conditions where it is less likely that violence will occur. Arrangements around the country vary, but they broadly have:

- a multi-agency central unit that provides capacity to support organisations to work more effectively together, and/or to improve their own response to preventing violence
- commissioning arrangements for interventions to reduce violence
- evaluation capacity to identify impact, and to support mainstreaming interventions into business as usual

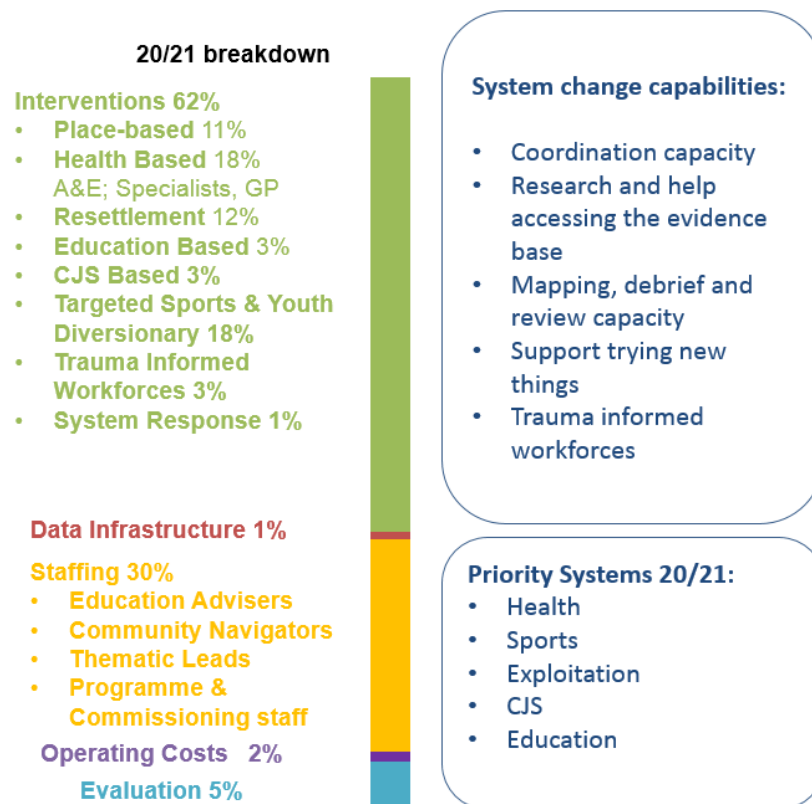
3. Funding levels and grant arrangements

3.1 The West Midlands Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner is the accountable body for reporting on the grant from the Home Office to support the establishment of a multi-agency Violence Reduction Unit. This is separate from force funding arrangements and is also separate from the Home Office funding allocated to the force to provide a policing response to serious violence (the policing Surge grant). The West Midlands VRU grant totalled £3,307,000 in both 19/20 and 20/21, but covered costs for approximately 6 months in 19/20 and a full year in 20/21.

3.2 The Home Office ambition is for the VRU networks to also provide an anchoring route for the securing of additional funding related to the reduction of vulnerability to violence from a wider range of sources. To date in 20/21 the WMVRU has provided a commissioning route for:

- £200K per annum over two years from the Youth Justice Board, in order to extend the parenting peer support programme trialled in Sandwell, to cover all 7 Youth Offending Services within the West Midlands police force area. This project provides a support network for families of young people who are being dealt with as offenders within the criminal justice system.

- £285,158 one off investment from Treasury funds as Covid-19 support for micro-charities (with incomes under £200,000) involved in supporting vulnerable children. This grant stream was released following representation from VRU Directors across the country as to the importance of small local charities to our response. This resulted in 31 micro-charities within the West Midlands receiving funds to support their work with local communities.
- 3.3. The central VRU grant comes with a large number of grant conditions which determine the way in which the funds can be allocated. This includes ensuring that a minimum of 20% of the funding is invested in commissioned interventions (in WMVRU 20/21 62% is invested in this way) and identifying the core partnership members (see Paragraph 4.5). In addition, there are a number of mandatory products to be completed during the course of the year, with the majority of these due in early 2020 – an annual report; a strategic needs assessment, and a response strategy.
 - 3.4. The strategic needs assessment was updated at the close of 19/20. It is available online [here](#) and at Appendix 1.
 - 3.5. The grant is actively managed by the Home Office through fortnightly progress reviews between the Home Office Serious Violence Unit and the VRU Director; quarterly monitoring and performance reviews, and an annual performance review at a ministerial level. There is a positive working relationship between the Home Office and the VRU Director. The West Midlands VRU performance is considered by the Home Office as in line with or exceeding expectations against delivery plans at this stage in the year.
 - 3.6. The Police & Crime Commissioner meets on a fortnightly basis with the VRU Director to review progress and support the implementation of VRU activity. The Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner Treasurer provides oversight of VRU accounts.



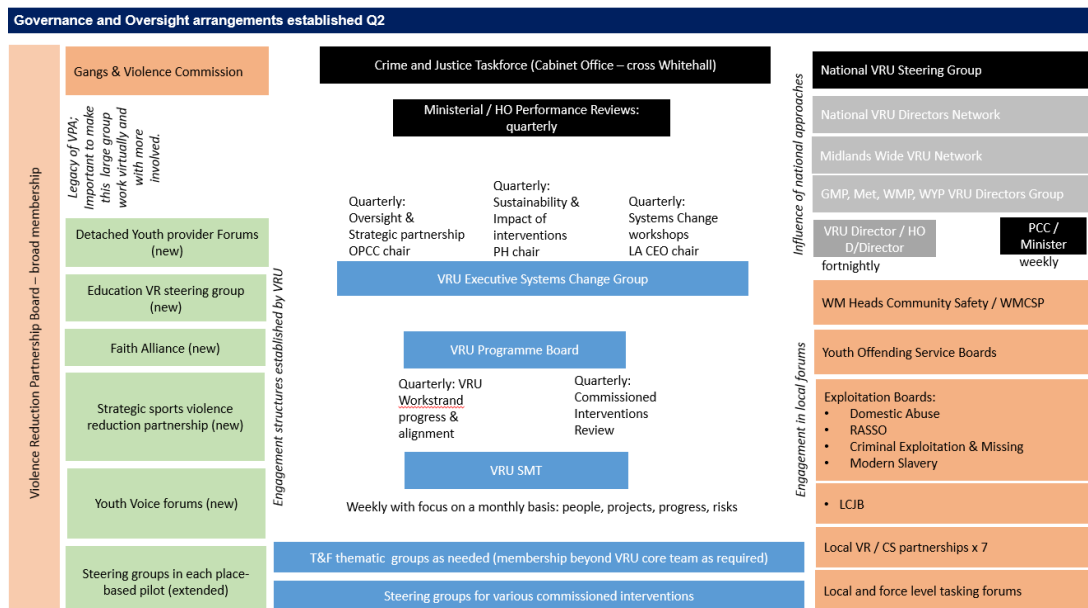
4. Governance arrangements

- 4.1 The governance arrangements for the VRU have been revised since the Board's last update. The new arrangements see a wider group of people involved in steering the VRU projects at a local level, and a wider group of organisations involved within the VRUs formal executive oversight structure.
- 4.2 At a local level, each of the VRU's place based pilots is delivered through a steering group involving community members, providers and organisations working in that locality. These meet fortnightly, coordinated by the VRU navigator and influence the design and the delivery of the place based projects. There are now 8 place based projects, one in each local authority area and a second in Birmingham. See para 5.
- 4.3 The VRU has now recruited community navigator roles to connect the work of the unit with that of the local violence reduction partnership and other locality based assets. Embedded within community safety partnership structures, this additional coordination and delivery capacity is intended to support the local violence reduction partnership to work with partner organisations more effectively, and to make it easier for local areas to draw down assets from the central VRU.
- 4.4 The VRU engages with each of the community safety partnerships individually and also with the West Midlands CSP and Heads of Community Safety Forums collectively.
- 4.5 The VRUs executive oversight group has increased in line with the Home Office requirements for the core VRU members. It now includes representatives from:
- Local Authority Chief Executives (Birmingham, Walsall)
 - Public Health England
 - Local Authority Public Health Directors (Coventry),
 - Crown Prosecution Service
 - Youth Offending Services (Sandwell)
 - NHSE
 - Clinical Commissioning Groups (Birmingham & Solihull)
 - Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
 - Regional Schools Commissioner
 - Education Psychologists Regional Network (Solihull)
 - West Midlands Police
 - Chair of the Sports Strategic Partnership Board
 - Chair of the Violence Reduction Education Sector Reference Group
 - West Midlands Combined Authority

Invites have also been extended to West Midlands Ambulance Service.

- 4.6 The executive group meets on a monthly basis, cycling through three themes:
- VRU oversight and delivery – chaired by OPCC
 - Data, Impact and Evaluation – chaired by Public Health
 - System Change themes – chaired by Local Authority. The systems change workshops this year have focussed on organisational approaches to youth voice.
- 4.7 Since the Board last received an update, the VRU has launched three strategic advisory networks; the Strategic Sports Partnership Board (6.3); the Education Sector Reference Group (6.9) and the VRU Faith Alliance.
- 4.8 Through the Faith Alliance, the VRU supports people of all faiths to come together to identify ways to reduce violence; sharing good practice and resources. This has led to the development of faith-based materials, counter-narrative campaigns, the Places of Peace campaign which saw faith buildings used for non-religious after school activities, and trials locating support and prevention services within faith locations.

4.9 In addition to the above, the VRU attends and provides updates to a wide range of multi-agency, organisational, or practitioner forums.



5. Geographic areas of focus 20/21

5.1 The VRU grant limits its delivery of services to the West Midlands Police force area and encourages more intensive delivery in identified impact areas where violence is more prevalent.

5.2 Working with local partners, the VRU has identified 8 impact areas to focus place based delivery in 20/21. The approaches that we trial in these areas should provide broader benefits by developing good practice to share across the region; for example, we are already identifying opportunities to extend some work in Hillfields either across the city of Coventry, or into the nearby impact area in Wood End.

5.3 These pilots were impacted by the loss of dedicated resources at 19/20 funding cliff edge; delays in recruitment; and by the impact of lockdown and local restrictions. We have sought to mitigate these issues by using other VRU assets for preparatory work; navigators are now in place in all areas bar Dudley.

5.4 All of the place based pilots are developed via a local steering group, involving organisations and provider networks with an interest in the place, and the people who live, work, and spend time in the location. During 20/21 the navigators will also establish or build upon existing youth steering groups.

5.5 In addition to the place-based pilots, which all vary in focus and design, the community navigators will ensure that the VRUs wider suite of interventions operate effectively within the impact areas, and connect across existing local provision and into the VRU capability centrally.

The 20/21 place based pilots are outlined below:

1. **Hillfields, Coventry.** “A whole life-course approach to preventing violence”: the delivery of universal protective behaviours programmes to nursery aged children and their parents; targeted and universal support inside schools and work to support practitioner networks; family and multi-generational engagement and support.
2. **Three Estates, Kings Norton.** “Increasing community resilience post lockdown to reduce and prevent violence”: strengthening community and family resilience, fostering a well-integrated local partnership and enhancing the local youth services offer.
3. **Lozells.** Focusing on trauma informed training, universal protective behaviours work, intensive intervention in three small areas, extending existing detached youth and after school programmes, and the Eyes Wide Open Campaign

4. **St James's, Dudley:** Team Around the Community Model; pilot in development
5. **Chelmsley Wood, Solihull:** Establishing a robust local partnership focused on violence prevention and reduction in Chelmsley Wood. The partnership will be made up of local stakeholders and will share resources, problem solve and work together to minimise duplication.
6. **Wolverhampton.** 'Tackling Violence Prevention and Reduction in Lower Super Output Areas' Working with the community in micro-local areas where there are high incidences of deprivation, community issues, and violence to develop more cohesive and coordinated responses.
7. **Walsall: An Education Approach to Violence Prevention and Reduction.** Embedding trauma informed approaches in Walsall College, extending to feeder secondary schools.
8. Work is also currently underway with **Sandwell** steering board to develop their place-based project.

6. Priority systems

- 6.1 During 19/20 the VRU partnership identified 5 key "systems" for violence reduction activity. In 20/21 we have focused on developing relationships, mapping and engaging within these systems to identify how the unit can assist. These are each very complex systems, particularly at a regional level. It is acknowledged that much good work is underway already within and between systems, but also that these systems are strained.
- 6.2 **Violence Reduction through Sports.** We have supported the establishment of the Sports Strategic Partnership Board to harness and support the range of activity already underway across the region. We have developed the skills of a network of community sports providers in order to ensure they are better equipped to support young people with complex needs – providing referral pathways, skills such as mental health first aid, training in recognising and acting on signs of harm and exploitation, bereavement counselling etc.
- 6.3 Together with this network, despite the Covid constraints, we delivered sports based interventions to 816 young people, with more than 500 of them identified as vulnerable and referred into the sports diversionary impact programme, 100 of these from the education system. This total number is smaller than in previous years, but the support is much more targeted to those with more acute vulnerabilities and is more connected to the work of criminal justice partners.
- 6.4 We are keen to ensure that events such as the Commonwealth Games and Coventry City of Culture bring about lasting impacts for young people who are at risk of violence, and are working with the inclusion and legacy teams.
- 6.5 The "West Midlands Way" to deliver violence reduction through sports has been recognised as leading national good practice. We are now the national portfolio lead for the VRU network for this topic, providing access to a wider range of national sports and criminal justice policy makers.
- 6.6 **Education.** The VRU has built upon previous activity which sought to deliver interventions alongside or within schools in the region, and has listened to feedback from the sector about the range of - often standalone - initiatives available to them. We have worked with the seven local authorities to embed VRU Education Intervention Advisers within local authority inclusion teams.

- 6.7 Using data that draws on a wide range of vulnerability indicators, this team will work with schools in their area to match interventions with need, and to ensure that interventions are delivered with appropriate wrap around support for staff and for students. The team will also support schools to unlock additional help from the central VRU to stop the transmission of violence in response to serious incidents.
- 6.8 The unit has already begun to streamline and make more accessible the wide range of 'schools' offers that were in place throughout WMP, OPCC, and the VRU during year 1, and is supporting the force to adapt approaches to police engagement with schools.
- 6.9 The Mentors in Violence Prevention programme is being extended from secondary schools with the development of primary and further education modules, and programmes adapted for use within faith, sports, and wider youth group settings.
- 6.10 Our work in this area is influenced by the Education Sector Reference Group, which brings together a wide range of education practitioners with an interest in reducing violence. This group held a seminar in July attended by over 70 practitioners, to showcase some of the good practice that is already in place. The group includes representatives from DFE, the Regional Schools Commissioner and Ofsted alongside practitioners from a wide range of settings.
- 6.11 We are shortly to publish research about the impact of exclusions, joining a number of other VRUs who are speaking out about the importance of supporting young people who are in trouble at school to avoid becoming involved in violence or exploitation.
- 6.12 **Health.** Our system level engagement with the health sector has undoubtedly been impacted by the Covid-19 landscape. Preparatory work is advanced for a Clinical Leads Network which will support engagement across the different organisations involved in the health system in our region. Together with the VRUs in Nottingham and Leicestershire, we have supported NHSE in their establishment of a Midlands wide Health Serious Violence Forum. This meets for the first time in November, and will support strategic engagement at a policy level across the region.
- 6.13 The VRU has supported the development of proposals to improve the way in which anonymised data about serious violence injuries is tracked and shared amongst partners to improve our collective understanding of trends and patterns. Together with health partners, we are currently responding to the recommendations made in the evaluation of the ISTV system.
- 6.14 **Exploitation.** The VRU has supported the review and relaunch of the four multi-agency regional exploitation boards, continuing the governance work set in train by PVPP. The four boards now have a clearly defined set of priorities, with many of these being shared between the boards. In addition, the delivery of activity together across more than one board has become more common. The four boards are: Domestic Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Modern Slavery, Criminal Exploitation and Missing. Priorities for these are at Appendix 2.
- 6.15 There are clear links between the work of the VRU and that of each of these boards, particularly when the impact of adverse childhood experiences is considered. The VRU has a domestic abuse thematic lead, responsible for integrating our effort with that of an already busy sector. In conjunction with the DA board, the VRU is supporting a systems mapping exercise to identify and demonstrate gaps and interdependencies within existing provision. The unit is also funding the IRIS scheme within GP settings; and piloting IDVA roles within hospital and faith based settings.

- 6.16 The Criminal Exploitation and Missing Board is supporting partners to improve the coordination of responses to county lines and other forms of criminal exploitation. Building on existing practice across the local authority, voluntary sector and safeguarding landscape, the board is seeking to support partners to improve awareness, data and information sharing, referral routes, standards of response and good practice. An example of the board's impact has been in ensuring that a recent Home Office funded Rescue and Response service was integrated into existing local systems rather than developed in isolation.
- 6.17 **Criminal Justice System.** There is already a huge amount of diversionary and development work in place across this system, which is also a system landscape affected significantly by Covid-19. The VRU has focused in the first instance on working with three key parts of the system: the 7 Youth Offending Services to deliver the Parenting Peer Support Project together (see para 3.2 above); the Crown Prosecution Service to support the roll out of trauma informed training; and West Midlands Police. Some of the products developed by the VRU for wider settings have also been adapted for use within the prison sector.
- 6.18 West Midlands Police have supported the VRU by embedding a chief inspector and a sergeant within the unit and have encouraged the VRU at an executive level to influence WMPs internal transformation activity. The VRU has supported the force's development of a violence reduction strategy, tailoring the pillars of the public health violence reduction approach to core policing activity. It has also realigned the investments made through Surge funding and Operation Guardian to work much more closely with the VRUs place based activity and to adopt a more prevention-led approach.
- 6.19 The force has committed to continuing to work closely with the VRU and to integrating further the Surge funded resources which are focussed on stopping violence here and now with the VRUs longer term prevention activity. The VRU and the force are developing joint responses to stop the transmission of violence after critical incidents and to embed prevention-led activity within more traditional pursue and disruption law enforcement activity.

7. Interventions

- 7.1 The majority of the VRUs interventions have been able to continue to engage with appropriate cohorts despite the considerable challenges to the operating landscape due to Covid-19. The providers who deliver these services deserve recognition for the obstacles they have overcome and the flexibility demonstrated. The VRU has sought to support the provider networks by hosting problem solving sessions, escalating issues for resolution, flexing funding arrangements and cascading promising practice.
- 7.2 **ACES and Trauma Informed Workforces.** This service has transitioned from supporting Sandwell and Dudley to providing support across the VRU footprint. Online training packages for individual use and facilitated use have been developed. Going forward a greater number of the VRU Community Navigators and Education Intervention Advisers will be able to deliver train the trainer packages, with a focus on adopting trauma informed practices at a local level, and in key organisations. We are currently developing support for CPS and West Midlands Police to become trauma informed organisations and are keen to support other organisations on this journey.
- 7.3 **IRIS.** IRIS is a national evidenced based domestic abuse support programme which aims to upskill GPs to identify and effectively respond to DA. The scheme has been

operational in the West Midlands since 2015 and was originally commissioned by the Violence Prevention Alliance. The VRU makes a tapering contribution to the IRIS programme, with one CCG now adopting the costs in full, and others seeking to mainstream the delivery of the programme in 2021. Whilst more than half of the practices in each of the CCGs we are supporting are now trained, referral rates are still lower than expected, in part likely due to the changes in the way in which GP services are being delivered this year.

7.4 Reachable Moments from custody. This service provides community based mentoring and intensive support for young people coming to police attention for involvement in violence or other serious criminality, or at risk of exploitation. This piloted service is oversubscribed with more people than the design strength currently being supported. Early indications suggest a significant drop within the identified re-offending rate for young people engaged with the project.

7.5 Resettlement Projects. This suite of projects provide intensive support for young people being released from prison or the custodial estate who wish to exit gang based activity. The risk profile for young people involved within these projects and their families is high. Providers support them to take steps to reduce this and also support their engagement with a wide range of statutory or mainstream services. The covid-19 landscape has complicated the delivery of these projects, but the numbers of young people our network is supporting is broadly on track.

7.6 Reachable moments in hospital settings. The VRU supports three different models of reachable moment interventions in hospital settings: two models within Accident and Emergency departments and one within Birmingham Women & Childrens Hospital. The covid-19 landscape has complicated the delivery of these projects, but identification of alternative referral routes has ensured all approaches continue to deliver. The VRU is supporting a steering group to bring together the different providers and commissioners involved in these projects.

8. Evaluation and impact assessment.

8.1 The VRU is subject to a wide range of evaluation activity; most of which is still within the data collection phase at the time this update is being provided.

8.2 The Home Office commissions national evaluations of the VRU network; the first publication describing the implementation of the VRUs during 19/20 has been published and is attached at Appendix 3a and 3b The second phase of this evaluation is underway now.

8.3 The VRU commissions local evaluations to inform the national evidence base as part of its grant conditions. This year these evaluations will focus on the system change achieved within the local place based pilot areas; and on specific interventions: reachable moments from custody; and the resettlement schemes.

8.4 The VRU is also supporting evaluations that were in train already for VPA funded projects and for projects that are jointly funded with others. We have submitted evaluation proposals funded through a range of routes for our sports diversionary impact programme and ACEs work.

9. Cliff edge funding risks and sustainability

- 9.1 The VRU is able to fund its central capability and the suite of interventions to March 20/21, but can currently make no guarantee beyond this period. The timeline for confirmation of the future grant and its conditions for the VRU to operate within is affected by political events but is anticipated to be as late as April.
- 9.2 This year, the confirmation of the grant was not available until 4th June and services already in train were underwritten by the OPCC until that point. This mitigated the closure of the VRU and its interventions. There was a delay in establishing any new commitments or growth areas.
- 9.3 The VRU is currently operating on parallel tracks – making plans to close our interventions and transition service users to alternative support wherever feasible but also planning for future funding at a range of levels.
- 9.4 The WM VRU has been proactive in its engagement with Home Office funding decision makers; hosting a number of conversations with policy officials, in person visits from the Permanent Secretary, and virtual visits from the Minister for Policing. The Police & Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable have raised the profile of risks to the VRU funding in a range of forums.
- 9.5 Our interventions are at varied levels of maturity, but some were in place prior to the VRU and are further towards mainstreaming. Discussions with bodies who are best placed to incorporate these into their business planning commenced at the start of 20/21; there remain risks as most are public sector organisations also impacted by the spending review cycle.
- 9.6 Whilst we are unable to control risks linked to the cliff edge funding, we have sought to operate in a way which builds sustainability in at a very local level and ties in progress. Almost all our systems change activity is delivered through train the trainer models, and by influencing practice within existing local infrastructure, like the local violence reduction partnerships.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None arising

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10. The West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit is funded via the Home Office under the Serious Violence Act 2018. The OPCC is the grant recipient and accountable body for the WMVRU and is required to report quarterly progress to the HO against key objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. The Board is asked to note the contents of this report.

Clare Gollop
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