



2021

# NORTHUMBRIA VRU INSIGHT REPORT

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**FIGHTING CRIME.**

**PREVENTING CRIME.**

**IMPROVING LIVES.**

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 NORTHUMBRIA  
**POLICE & CRIME  
COMMISSIONER**

*Improving lives to prevent crime*

**violence  
reduction  
unit**





## CLASSIFICATION: OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

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# FROM THE PCC

As we enter the third year of our violence reduction efforts, it is clear that we are both making great progress and facing up to the full scale of the challenge ahead.

And if we are to succeed in our mission of improving lives and reducing violent crime, then the information published as part of this Insights Report will be vitally important.

That core belief, that violence is preventable, has always been matched against the reality that change needs time. We will not create change overnight, and we have always been honest that the work we embark on will need long-term investment to succeed.

The data in this report makes clear the challenges and opportunities we will face along the way to that aim.

Violence continues to be a way of life for too many, but our community link workers and hubs continue to support people away from this.

Young people continue to face the temptations of criminality, but our education and diversion tams are making great in-roads with life changing interventions.

Too many people progress on to more serious offending, but we are working at the early stages of the criminal justice system to find those at risk and change this pathway.

It has been a challenging year for all involved in this work, and wider public safety and crime prevention efforts, and the VRU has had to adjust how it works during the pandemic while keeping the ultimate goal in sight.

Regional economic and social recovery from Covid-19 will mean we have to face new challenges and adapt to new ways of working. It is clear, for example, that the risk of a prolonged economic downturn brings with it the risk of increased desperation and crime for some.



# FROM THE PCC

Those areas which respond best to this national challenge will be those areas where all parts of the public and voluntary sector are working alongside each other.

That's why it is great to see that in our region, keeping our region safe is a task many people contribute to, and I want to say a big thank you to all our partners for the work they have done so far on behalf of the public. By coming together as a region and backing this public health approach we are laying the foundations for real change.

I look forward to continuing to work with you on this.

**Kim McGuinness**  
**Northumbria Police & Crime Commissioner**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Violence results in serious harm to people and communities across the Northumbria Police Force Area, with significant impact on individuals and their families. The Home Office has placed a duty on all partners to work together using the public health approach to community-wide issues, advocated by the World Health Organisation (WHO), focusing on serious violence, including homicide, drug-related crime and crime involving weapons, with the aim of addressing the root causes of violent behaviour.

This insight summary is an important part of what is an evidence-based strategy to planning and then delivering prevention programmes. It concentrates on identifying and quantifying violence and its effects but also investigates the drivers and mitigating factors involved, at local and police force area levels, placed within the national context.

The Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) covers the Northumbria police force area, which serves 1.5 million people within diverse communities, many of which are in socially deprived areas. In the year to September 2020, over 45,800 offences of violence against the person were recorded across Northumbria – just over 125 per day. Patterns of violent crime in the area broadly mirror the national, increasing trend and crime is unevenly distributed across area, with the highest rates recorded in the town and city centres of the metropolitan authorities and in South East Northumberland. Violent crime has reduced within key Night Time Economy areas since the first Covid lockdown, particularly Newcastle City Centre – but this is partly offset through increased violence outside these areas. The VRU and partners continue to develop the picture across Northumbria, enhancing and updating current data and developing intelligence processes.

Most 'harm hotspot' neighbourhoods – those with the highest violent crime rates across Northumbria, are in areas of high deprivation and relatively few harm hotspots account for around half of reported violent crime.

One third of recorded violence against the person is flagged as domestic abuse, with women four times as likely as men to be a victim. There were over 25,000 domestic abuse crimes across Northumbria in the 12-months to March 2021 – almost 69 per day, with over 38,000 incidents of domestic abuse in Northumbria during the same period – equating to 107 incidents per day.

People with serious mental illness and those sleeping rough are at significantly higher risk of being a victim of violence. The VRU will seek to build on the work of the Crime Survey for England & Wales to enhance the understanding of the perception and fear of crime amongst these vulnerable groups and across the wider population, through local surveys and focus groups.

Looking at the root causes of violence, recent research suggests a correlation between adverse experiences during childhood and the likelihood of being either a perpetrator or victim of violence. These range from abuse and neglect to household mental illness and drug abuse. Interventions which address the underlying social

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factors and reduce risk to the children, are key to combating long term harm associated with these experiences. The VRU and partners will seek to develop pathways for families and individuals to access support, concentrated in the harm hotspot neighbourhoods of Northumbria.

Deprivation is closely associated with the prevalence of these events, providing a link to the harm hotspots across Northumbria and in general, the population has a higher proportion of exposure to adverse experiences in childhood than the national average. VRU partners will develop a greater understanding of these adverse experiences and use a trauma-informed approach to further support the promotion of the importance of intervention at the earliest stage. Partners will work with communities to map locations of existing Community Hubs, optimise their effectiveness and inform people locally of the work of the VRU. Further efforts will focus on developing training and employment pathways for prolific offenders.

Northumbria has a higher recorded rate of the use of heroin and crack cocaine than the national average and forms part of a designated Home Office action area. There are clear links between violence, the threat of violence and the use of weapons, and the supply of drugs. Organised Crime Gangs continue to be the main distributors across Northumbria, with the further establishment of County Lines, by gangs from outside the force area.

The VRU and partners will explore a standardised method of data collection across Health (including NHS and GP practices), to ensure they can support harm reduction interventions as a key element of the tiered response strategy to tackle serious violence in the identified harm hotspots.

Prior to Covid, half of all violent crime is alcohol-related. All Northumbria local authorities, with the exception of Northumberland, report higher rates of dependent drinkers than the national average and all authorities have a higher proportion of binge drinkers than England as a whole. Alcohol dependency prevention is another key element of the tiered response strategy the VRU will use to tackle serious violence in the identified harm hotspots.

The VRU has developed a greater understanding of youth provision through Community Hub work in harm hotspot areas and sought to enhance knowledge of the underlying causes of children going missing and being excluded from school. Plans for 2020/21 had included school liaison officers working to deliver training to raise awareness of the risk of violence, again targeted at harm hotspot areas – however schools have been significantly disrupted by Covid related shutdowns.

There are various cross-cutting factors which impact on how violence is experienced. The use of technology is changing the landscape across Northumbria and indeed, the country with cyber-enabled grooming and exploitation, online drugs and weapons purchases and more sophisticated supply of drugs through County Lines. There are concerns that online exploitation increased while children were away from school 2020/21 while schools were closed to most pupils.

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The use of weapons increases the severity of injury and risk of fatality, from a violent assault. Prior to Covid, Northumbria has seen a sharp, sustained rise in knife and other weapons related offences since 2013, whether through better recording, increased stop and search or through actual increased carrying of weapons. During the most recent recorded year, there were 4,040 crimes involving knives, recorded across the area – an increase of 2% on the previous year. Offenders were mostly male and alcohol was a contributing factor.

It is difficult to quantify the acute health impacts of violence as there are significant disparities in recording systems between A&E providers across Northumbria. However, the NHS has introduced a more in depth data set for emergency care and all hospital providers should now submit data on the intent of injuries, nature of wounds and the location where injuries occurred, along with more detailed data on mental health, drugs and alcohol dependency and intoxication, with the aim of standardising recording. During 2019/20, emergency admissions to hospital across Northumbria following a recorded assault required 1,324 bed days, costing the NHS £2.1 million.

The Northumbria Police workforce reduced by 26% over the last 10 years to 2018/19, compared with a 14% reduction nationally. During 2019/20 numbers of police officers and staff started to increase, with an additional 74 WTE officers posts recruited too during 2019/20.

The law courts serving Northumbria have similar waiting times for violent offences as the national average, although these saw significant disruption during the first parts of 2020/21. Short custodial sentences, which research suggests have limited effect in many circumstances have decreased over the last 10 years. The VRU and partners are looking to develop an appropriate model for ‘Out of Court’ disposals, targeting low level offenders with diversionary interventions.

Violence at work is of greatest significance to those in protective, emergency and health services with police, fire service and NHS personnel reporting assaults and violent attacks with objects thrown. A partnership approach is used to tackle anti-social behaviour across the area with diversionary initiatives forming part of the VRU strategy.

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1) SERIOUS VIOLENCE STATUTORY DUTY

The VRU to work with partners in particular the CSP's to define a strategy for the delivery of the statutory duty around serious violence.

## 2) DOMESTIC ABUSE FUNDED INTERVENTIONS

Through the VRU and partnerships continue to develop domestic abuse funded interventions across Northumbria, including additional support through the Children Affected by Domestic Abuse (CADA) fund and the DRIVE intervention programme aimed at more intensive work with perpetrators of Domestic Abuse.

In addition the Ask Me Scheme will be delivered across Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland in 2021/22 with the aim of training members of the community to become Ask Me Ambassadors.

## 3) PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF VIOLENT CRIME

Continue to conduct local surveys and focus groups to understand the fear of violence, its impact and identify specific issues that can be addressed.

## 4) COMMUNITY LINK WORKERS

Through the delivery of bespoke interventions by the Community Link Workers engage with vulnerable individuals within the identified localities to reduce their risk of becoming involved in violence and associated activity, either as a victim or perpetrator.

## 5) COMMUNITY HUBS

Continue and develop the work with the communities within the three existing hubs to provide family-based early interventions, with input from individuals with 'lived experience'. In addition work with partners to expand this provision and develop a community hub within Byker.

## 6) IMPROVING HEALTH DATA QUALITY

The VRU and partners to continue to explore with CCGs a standardised way of data collection to improve data quality, to include mental health intervention, substance misuse as a key element of the tiered response strategy to tackle serious violence in the identified harm hotspots (mentioned later in the report).

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## 7) YOUTH NAVIGATORS

With youth offending teams, Police and associated partners the Youth Navigators will work with young people to reduce the risk of being drawn into the criminal justice system as well as reduce associated risks of further vulnerability and ASB. The navigators work will also extend to the young person's wider family network to identify and address any associated issues, including early intervention work with siblings.

## 8) YOUTH PROVISION

To further understand the gaps in youth provision across Northumbria, through the community hub work, specifically in the identified harm hotspot areas. This will further develop areas of need and the knowledge of the underlying causes.

## 9) EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT TEAM

Through the dedicated Education Engagement Team deliver training programmes to primary and secondary schools and other community organisations to raise awareness and reduce the risk of violence at the earliest opportunity. Widen the interventions into colleges, universities and Pupil Referral Units and alternative education providers, targeting those harm hotspot areas identified in the insight report.

## 10) YOLO

Continue and develop the YOLO programme to ensure that it is accessible to the most vulnerable young people within the areas of most need from being drawn into knife crime/serious violence. Expand the referral process to offer the provision to more young people at risk, with closer links to the Youth Navigators and the newly established Divert Team within Northumbria Police.

## 11) OUT OF COURT DISPOSALS & WOMEN'S PATHWAY

Targeting low level adult offenders as they enter the criminal justice system through three pilot programmes (Restorative Justice and community resolution, Conditional caution pathway, and Diversion of offenders from charge into a conditional charge) to reduce the risk of being drawn into more serious offending and diverting them to other avenues of support. The VRU and partners will look to develop an appropriate model for the Out of court disposals.

## 12) SHORT SENTENCE DIVERSION PROGRAMME

Building on from the exploratory approach in year 2 via the 'Whole System Approach' and working with Police and Probation colleagues, there will be a programme of activity delivered via a dedicated resource to an identified cohort of individuals who are causing the most issues within communities and are repeatedly entering the judicial system.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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