

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

NORTHUMBRIA VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNIT



NORTHUMBRIA
POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER

violence
reduction
unit

Improving lives to prevent crime

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1) INTRODUCTION AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Foreword by Northumbria PCC and Head of the VRU

The Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit has one core belief; if we improve lives we can prevent crime. Every act of violence is one too many, and while we will never prevent all violence, we are confident that a relentless focus on turning lives around can make a real difference.

Across Northumbria thousands of individuals and organisations are coming together to address serious violence. We know it takes more than just a police officer to tackle violent crime. It's about families, neighbourhoods, teachers, charities and more working together to improve lives. The Northumbria Response Strategy sets out what our Violence Reduction Unit is going to do to support these people and help turn lives around.

No one is born violent, no one is born a criminal, so we need to ask ourselves what happens in the lives of some people that violence should become a routine part of their lives. It's crucial that our approach tackles not only violence but the causes of violence.

Here in Northumbria we're using a public health approach to reducing violence. That means treating violence the same way we would a disease, recognising the symptoms, understanding the causes and then stopping its transmission, helping people to avoid it and giving people the tools, they need to tackle it. We have made an initial 5-year commitment to this approach through the production of our Response Strategy.

Northumbria VRU had adopted The World Health Organisation definition of violence: "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation."

To that end our public health approach to violence prevention seeks to improve the health and safety of all individuals by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual becoming a victim or a perpetrator of violence. The approach consists of four steps:

1. Work out what is the problem, what effect does violence have on our communities?
2. Why does violence occur? What are the causes of violence and what factors increase or decrease the risk of violence occurring?
3. To find out what works to prevent violence by designing, implementing and evaluating interventions.
4. To implement effective interventions in a wide range of settings to tackle both the causes of violence and violent acts themselves, in addition to evaluating the impact of these interventions.

1) INTRODUCTION AND LOCAL CONTEXT

To achieve this we,

- Take brave decisions that require a long-term commitment, recognising the complexity of the issue and seeks to build an evidence base that reflects the need
- Adopt a preventive methodology: by tackling 'upstream' risk factors, we aim to lessen 'downstream' consequences
- Take a whole population approach, not one which just focuses on high risk individuals
- Take a system wide multi-agency approach that includes involving business and volunteers

The Violence Reduction Unit has only been operational for a short space of time, since its inception in September 2019, and has already made great inroads with developing this approach. It has done that by recognising all the amazing work that many in our region are already undertaking. Our ongoing approach will look at how we add value, share best practice and enhance what is already out there.

We're lucky to live in a relatively safe part of the UK, but we know that violent crime is on the rise and if we want to keep this region safe, we really need to get behind this approach.

One of our key learning points to date has been the need to be adaptable, and this very much applies to the ongoing development of the VRU and our approach in Northumbria. We will continue to evolve our practises as our learning develops for example working in partnership and developing our understanding of the issue of serious violence across Northumbria, and what events in people's lives lead to these acts of violence being committed. By continuing to strive to understand the causes, we can help future generations and improve lives to prevent crime.

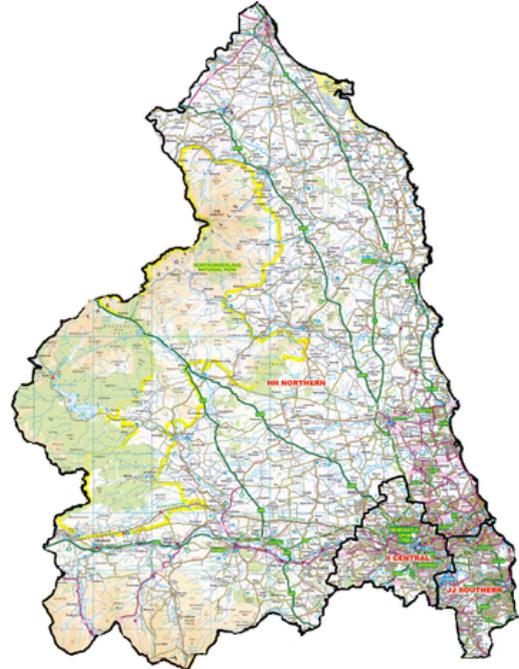
Northumbria has a population of 1.5 million people and covers an area of more than 2,000 square miles in the North East of England, from the Scottish border to the north down to County Durham to the south and from the Pennines to the west and across to the North East coast. It includes a wide range of communities including rural areas, towns and two major cities, Sunderland and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, all with very different community, social and policing needs. While the area has seen some high-profile economic successes, bringing prosperity in some parts, there are still many communities with very significant levels of deprivation.

1) INTRODUCTION AND LOCAL CONTEXT

The command area of Northumbria Police covers the counties of Northumberland and Tyne and Wear, with a population in the region of 1.3 million.

Within the two counties there are six Local Authority administrative areas:

- Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
- Newcastle upon Tyne City Council
- North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
- Northumberland County Council
- South Tyneside Council Metropolitan Borough Council
- Sunderland City Council



In the year to September 2019, over 47,000 offences of violence against the person were recorded across Northumbria, almost 130 per day. Patterns of violent crime in the area broadly mirror the increasing trend seen nationally 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. The VRU along with partners continue to develop the picture across Northumbria, enhancing and updating current data and developing intelligence processes.

Most 'harm hotspot' neighbourhoods, defined as those with the highest violent crime rates across Northumbria, are in areas of high deprivation and data shows that around half of all reported violent crime occurs in a relatively small number of these hotspots. 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 incidents across Northumbria in the most recent recorded year, almost 69 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.

Prior to September 2019 there was no Northumbria VRU structure in place. Work of this nature was co-ordinated and delivered within the boundaries and available resources of the six Local Authority areas.

1) INTRODUCTION AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Whilst a VRU did not exist, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria strived to create opportunities to develop violence reduction initiatives. This included Operation Encompass in partnership with Northumbria Police and Education partners to directly connect the police with schools to ensure support for children living with domestic abuse in their homes, and the Domestic Abuse Whole System Approach (DAWSA) project which used Home Office Police Transformation funding to create and implement an innovative approach to tackling domestic abuse across Northumbria working with statutory and operational partners from across the six Local Authority areas.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

i. MODEL, GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY

The Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit has one core belief; if we improve lives, we can prevent crime. Every act of violence is one too many, and while we will never prevent all violence, a relentless focus on turning lives around can make a real difference.

The Police and Crime Commissioner has made a commitment to tackling the root causes of violent crime through a public health approach. To this end the Violence Reduction Unit was formed with a clear remit to work with partners to make the most of existing resources and develop new approaches to tackling the issue.

Reducing violence and addressing the complex issues which lead to individuals becoming victims and perpetrators will take time. An effective public health approach requires a change in culture; a change in how we collectively engage with individuals, families and communities as well as a change in practice and delivery at a local level. The long-term vision is to see a reduction in violence and a clear pathway of support for individuals and families that reduce their risk of being drawn into violence.

The Northumbria VRU is a centrally located team working within the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and across all six local authority areas within Northumbria. The core VRU team was established in September 2019 and consisted of 9 staff; this has been added to with a further post in year 2. The team now consists of the Head of VRU, a Police Chief Inspector, 4 Project Coordinators, a Comms and Engagement Officer, a Partnership Analyst, a Project Support Officer and a recently appointed Domestic Abuse Specialist. The staff within the team has a wealth of partnership experience between them including public health; local authority; teaching; social worker; police; 3rd Sector.

In addition to the core team the VRU appointed Local Authority Single Point of Contacts (SPOC) that will drive and support the local collaboration with our communities and coordinate a diverse range of partner organisations to deliver intervention across four response strategy themes.

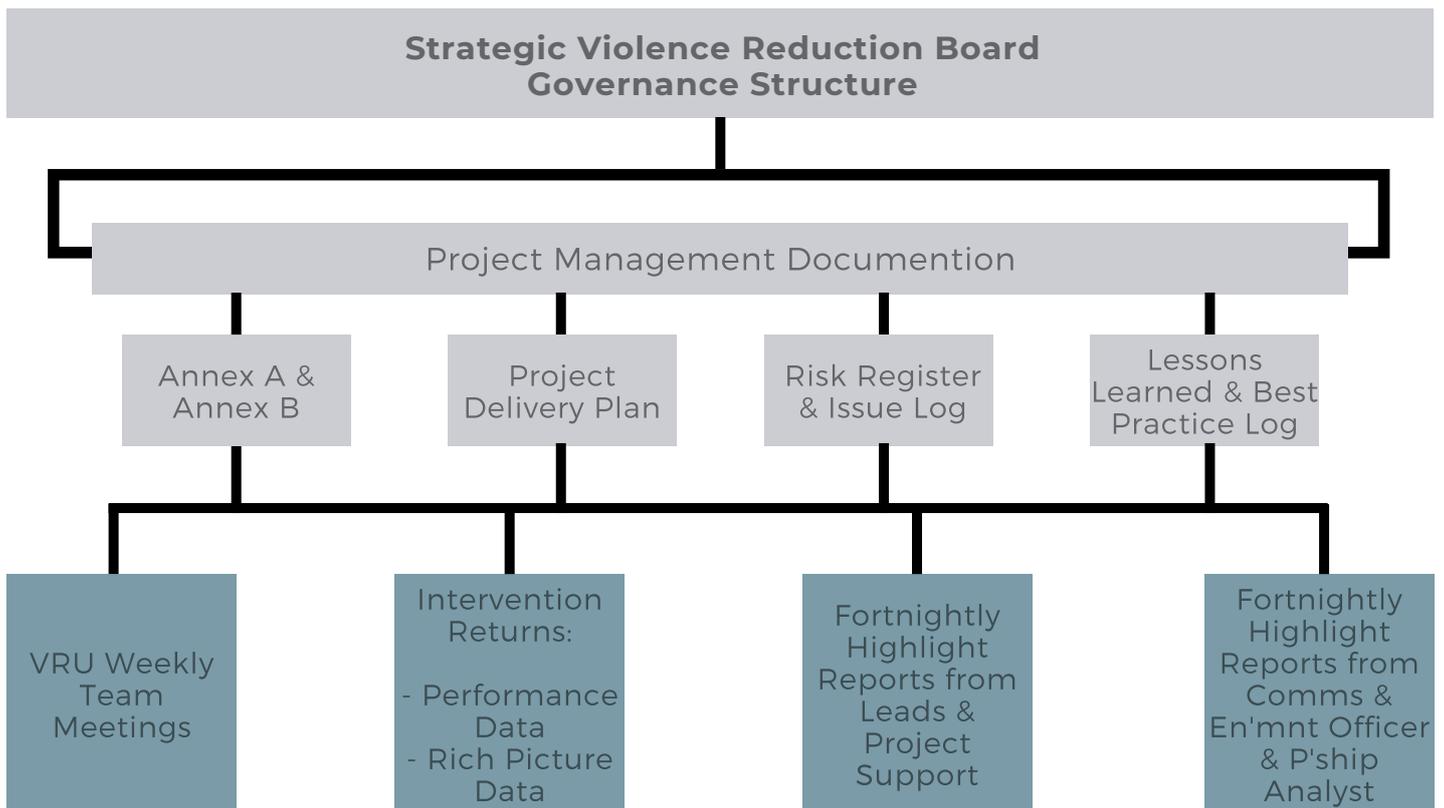
The Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) report to an appointed Strategic Board whose core function is to offer leadership and, working with all relevant agencies operating locally, strategic coordination of the local response to serious violence.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

The Board is made up of partners from across the supporting disciplines and geographical area and includes:

- Police and Crime Commissioner
- Police
- Local Authority; Chief Executive; Cabinet members, Public Health
- Public Health England
- NHS Trust
- Children services/YOT
- Housing provider
- Education
- Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service
- North East Chamber of Commerce
- Voluntary sector agency
- Young people’s representative’s Public health approach expert

The following chart shows the VRU Governance structure and the reporting functions:



The VRU hold quarterly meetings with the Strategic Board where the progress and performance are monitored. It also allows for emerging issues to be identified and discussed following the production of a Response Strategy Performance Report which is prepared for each meeting.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

The meetings are also themed to allow the VRU to provide a greater in-depth update on the progress and impact on elements of the response strategy. These are presented by lead members of the core VRU team.

In addition to the regular reporting of progress and performance there is also a project delivery plan for each member of the core team with key actions and responsibilities which are updated every 6 weeks and centrally held by the Project Coordinator. This ensures that all strategic and operational actions are monitored and progressed, and any risks are identified at the earliest opportunity.

There is also a strategic risk register which gives consideration to the following risks which could have an impact on the direction and overall implementation of the VRU:

- Development and Implementation of National policy in relation to tackling Serious Violence;
- Impact of reform of Probation services;
- Future funding of VRU's;
- Ongoing commitment and engagement from Local Authority partners; Impact of key national events;
- Retention of key staff.

In addition to internal comms and engagement the VRU continue to deliver high quality and engaging content across our channels and in the media, highlighting the work that is being delivered and the impact that it is having in the community. We have highlighted case studies that show the audience the impact the interventions are having with those they are working with. The content delivered has been well received, and it is clear from post engagement that the audience prefer media around the positive impact the VRU is having within the community and hearing/seeing content directly from intervention sessions.

We have used our engagement opportunities to deliver on our aims of building new relationships, deliver a strong public perception campaign and listening to public feedback. From our work to date it is clear that partners, services and organisations alike are extremely supportive of our work. The Unit is an attendee at partners' strategic board meetings. There are also regular visits to interventions by the Police & Crime Commissioner to learn of progress and impact.

In addition to attendance at meetings the VRU also publish a newsletter which informs organisations and communities of the VRU's progress and activities, as well as engage via social media channels.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

A series of events have taken place or been informed by engagement with community groups throughout the quarter. In addition to the dissemination of the findings and recommendations from the Youth Survey, a dedicated Youth Safety Ambassador forum has been established informed by earlier consultation work with young people around knife crime. This forum has representation from young people from all 6 Local Authority areas and allows us to consult and share information with young people around vulnerability, exploitation and violence reduction.

At a service delivery level, the PCC and Head of the VRU have continued to facilitate delivery partner meetings which provides a forum for partners to directly feedback on emerging issues and provides information that can help shape future delivery.

The VRU have supported the development of the consultation process for the next Northumbria Police and Crime Plan ensuring the communities that have been identified as being in harm hotspots are able to engage in the process.

The impact of Covid-19 continues to be monitored both in terms of the operation and governance of the VRU as well as the delivery of interventions. Remote working and virtual team and partnership meetings continue to be utilised and these arrangements are reviewed each month, depending on the current and emerging restrictions. In terms of the delivery of interventions all key areas of work are now working to capacity with slight changes in delivery put into place as and when required. A COVID business continuity plan has also been agreed with each of the intervention projects to mitigate against any emerging issues.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

ii. MULTI AGENCY PARTNERS

We have continued to develop our partnership approach with changes to the membership of the VRU Strategic Board including the addition of representatives from Probation and the Youth Justice Board. Our thematic groups have further been developed and in addition to the five current groups; Youth Engagement, School Engagement, Serious Violence Insight, Community Safety Partnership Strategic Group and Community Engagement and have added a Drug and Alcohol Strategic Group and an Early Help group. We have grown our local partnerships increasing both our delivery partner, community organisation and wider community engagement numbers.

To further strengthen partnership, buy-in the VRU has actively focussed on strengthening our organisational identity. This has been to ensure partners and stakeholders gain a sense of the meaningful ownership the VRU has of the development, co-ordination and delivery of strategic and operational violence reduction work across Northumbria. This has been achieved through wider promotion of the VRU and the Response Strategy, including the Insight work that has help define this, and an increase in the number of strategic partnership forums. This includes closer working across existing partnerships groups at a strategic level, increasing networking opportunities in line with shifting COVID-19 restrictions and requirements and being more proactive with regards to communication.

There has also been recognition of the importance of working with local communities to inform the development of the work locally and improve its impact. This has greatly informed and enabled the development of our place-based interventions. From this we have developed initiatives with local communities, working with individuals with lived experience of, for example, deprivation, trauma and violence to deliver interventions in their area.

The nature of the current short term one-year funding arrangements does not lend itself to strengthening partnerships as the uncertainty this creates about the capacity the VRU has to develop, foster and support a sustainable Northumbria wide co-ordinated response to violence reduction is in itself prohibitive.

The funding arrangements have generated a degree of uncertainty in addition to concerns regarding longevity and sustainability and this has created a challenge in terms of securing partnership buy-in. This also serves to amplify the challenges of developing strategic and operational partnerships across six Local Authority areas with the issues of inner city and urban deprivation and rurality. More specifically the challenge of building partnerships and achieving buy-in, especially with partners who have statutory responsibilities who may be wary of over investing in VRU partnerships given the relative uncertainty that lies ahead. In addition, the year on year uncertainty regarding funding impacts on the credibility of promoting a Public Health approach to tackling serious violence.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Moving into year two of VRU delivery, evidence was emerging of clarity around the role of the VRU as lines of communication were being more effectively established and appreciated. There was recognition from different stakeholder groups that their dedicated input was further required to build on the achievements of year one, and that with this there would be significant dividends on the time they invest.

This can be demonstrated by the successful development of a range of thematic VRU partnership groups, with membership across the six Northumbria Local Authorities including; Community Safety Partnerships, Drug and Alcohol Commissioning, Early Help, Education and Education. Beyond Local Authority Partners Health, Police, National Probation Service, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue partners also members of the VRU partnership framework and contribute to the development of cross cutting initiatives that reach beyond the remit of their individual organisations. This is in addition to their continued, and strengthened effort, to contribute to the Insight Report work. Other cross cutting work includes the partnership that has been developed with RISE who are the Northumberland and Tyne and Wear Active Partnership. This has seen resources being made available to VRU delivery partners that have contributed to activity-based interventions that are designed to not only contribute to the violence reduction agenda but also the national physical health agenda. This has been particularly well received as the benefits of being active have contributed to the positive mental health of participants and also added to the sense of ability and achievements. Both aspects being particularly beneficial during the lockdown periods where both positive mental health and the ability to achieve have been at risk.

This is one demonstrable example of the positive outcomes the VRU has achieved through partnership working and the sharing of resources and funding. The work with Community Safety Partnerships has resulted in the co-commissioning of twelve primary and secondary interventions which target young people with the most complex needs. It is expected that 110 young people will benefit from targeted bespoke interventions that will increase the range or reach of services into identified harm hotspots.

Our efforts to increase community engagement have seen the development of a working relationship with Fulfilling Lives Newcastle Gateshead. This is part of our endeavour to increase our connections to communities of lived experience and mutual aid. We know that recovery, not only from addiction but from poor mental health, trauma and offending, is infectious and the strength of these communities is in their lived experience and evidence that recovery is achievable. This work builds on our existing place-based work, where we already commission services that are delivered by people from the communities, they work in. Adopting mutual aid, lived experience and place-based intervention approaches into our strategic planning ensures we are able to engage with communities in a meaningful way.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Our commitment to joint working extends to maximising the mutual benefit of violence reduction funding streams. All of our work continues to be based around the four key themes of the Response Strategy (Youth Diversion, Working with Families, Reducing Offending and Connecting Communities) and links into the ongoing development and deployment of Surge Activity. The implementation of these cross-cutting themes allows us to proactively target interventions at areas of most need as well as adapt to take into account the current challenges locally.

We continue to work collaboratively with Police colleagues who are co-ordinating Surge activity. This includes joint working on the development and delivery of Police POP plans within our hotspot areas as well as support and contributions to local partnership problem solving meetings such as the Vulnerable Victims and Exploitation Group in Newcastle where plans have been developed utilising the four themes of the VRU Response Strategy. In addition to this, the VRU is a member of the Police Surge/Knife Crime operational group and provides regular updates on progress and opportunities for further joint working. An update on Police Surge activity is also provided to the VRU Strategic Board as part of the annual forward plan. Our collaborative approach is also reflected in our commitment to work together to produce a joint local evaluation.

Throughout year two we have sought to strengthen the voice of the community, intended beneficiaries, partners and stakeholders. This has included building our relationship with Fulfilling Lives Newcastle/Gateshead (FLNG), further developing our young people's Violence Reduction Ambassadors, building the capacity of our Community Reporters. Ongoing work to build the strength of our stakeholder networks has seen regular school engagement sessions, Northumbria wide CSP/VRU strategic meetings and the development of a Northumbria Drug and Alcohol commissioners/VRU group. We have also facilitated targeted consultation events with stakeholders and beneficiaries using a wide range of engagement methods within the boundaries permitted under the range of COVID-19 measures that have been in place across Northumbria. As an example, this has included working in partnership with Northumbria Police and Newcastle Council a Criminal Exploitation and Serious Violence workshop for frontline professionals was delivered on 2nd October, with approximately 200 people attending the webinar. A youth survey delivered by the VRU highlighted the need for more youth support services. Over 1300 responses were received from young people, many from our harm hotspot areas, with youth support services one of the top 4 areas of support identified as needed post-lockdown, along with Mental Health services, employment support, and health and wellbeing services. The outcome, findings and recommendations from the survey have been fed into the Insight working groups to ensure this influences current and future strategic planning and operational delivery.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

As we continue to develop the VRU approach, into 2021-22, we will refresh the Insight Report and review and refresh the Response Strategy to ensure it meets our most current understanding of need. We will in turn continue to both review and develop our partnerships. As previously highlighted the uncertainty surrounding VRU funding presents significant barriers to developing and sustaining these partnerships. Our ambition is to build on our existing partnerships, focusing on further supporting place-based interventions and increasing the understanding communities have regarding the actions they can take to strengthen their own communities and be part of the violence reduction effort. The extent to which we are able to be successful in this is largely dependent on not only the amount of central funding provided but also the timeframe it will be available for.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

iii. DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT (SNA)

The VRU has developed an Insight Report (SNA) into serious violence and vulnerability across Northumbria. This report has been developed collaboratively with key local partners, using and layering data from police, fire & rescue, local authorities, CRC and probation, public health, NHS (A&E departments), and the voluntary sector. The insight report will provide the basis for the VRU and the partners to identify the key 'harm hotspots' across Northumbria, supporting the development and evaluation of interventions and support implementation.

The insight report has identified a link between the levels of serious violence and levels of deprivation. In general, violent offences in Northumbria are higher than the national average and reflect a more deprived demographic population, further supporting the link between poverty and violent crime. The report also highlighted that Northumbria has worse performance on factors associated with higher adverse childhood experiences than the national average and would therefore be expected to have higher rates of ACEs. All local authorities except North Tyneside would be expected to have a higher prevalence of people with 2 or more ACEs than the England average, and also a greater prevalence of people with 4 or more ACEs in Northumbria as a whole.

The Insight Report was developed through a well-established, multi-partnership Insight Working Group is in place with representatives from all six Local Authorities and other key partners including Health, Police and Probation services. The Insight Group was instrumental in developing the insight report and will continue to drive forward the Insight work and develop a data sharing Public Health approach. This working group has been split into three sub-groups (Information Sharing Agreement, Data Dashboard, and Reducing Offending) to develop and progress a number of work streams. This includes the next insight report, the initial developments of a data dashboard, working towards a developed information sharing agreement for all partners, in addition to developing our understanding of serious violence and the pathways of those involved in serious violence through the reducing offending sub-group.

The Insight Report, along with the VRU Response Strategy, has been shared with a wide range of partners and organisations within Northumbria but also with neighbouring Regions. In addition, the Response Strategy has been published publicly on the OPCCs website.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

The data shared thus far has been largely aggregated data however some individual level data has allowed for the identification of those harm hotspot areas and the targeting of those areas of need through some of the interventions in year 2, including the placement of community hubs within three areas of need, the appointment of the link workers within communities, and a more targeted approach of the Education Team, one of the key VRU interventions, through their engagement in schools.

The level and quality of data will be developed further throughout this year through the insight group. This improved data will then be used within the next Insight Report.

Further to the annual report a quarterly update and performance report is provided to the VRU Board. This has been prepared to reflect all the key elements of the Response Strategy so that partners can monitor progress, receive information on emerging issues and best practice and provide feedback and insight into future iterations of the report. This report brings together all the elements of the Insight Report (Strategic Need's Assessment), including the hotspots as well as providing an overview of progress against Serious Violence measures force wide. The report also highlights case studies and best practice to demonstrate the impact of the VRU and the interventions in the communities.

Information and knowledge sharing is progressing well despite the COVID 19 restrictions which has resulted in much of the activities remaining remote. We have carried out a range of interventions within local authority areas during the summer via our Education Engagement team. We have also continued with our Partner Engagement sessions with a specific session on the theme of Youth Engagement and Diversion. The VRU have also delivered a CPD session to frontline workers on how to support young people who experienced trauma during lockdown, which was well received and beneficial to their roles. We have also supported the Education sector and partners with a further training programme, looking at taking an adversity awareness approach to their work and how they continue to support young people through these challenging times. Given the increased vulnerability during the lockdown period, the VRU have worked together with Northumbria Police and Newcastle Council to develop and host a workshop for frontline professionals on Criminal Exploitation and Serious Violence. The event was aimed at professionals and frontline staff, with inputs from a range of organisations and individuals including; Metropolitan Police, Action for Children & NERSOU. The event also included inputs from individuals who have been victims of criminal exploitation and how they are now using their lived experience to support young people.

In addition, the development of a multi-agency information sharing arrangement (ISA) is progressing through the Insight Group. The group involves data professionals in addition to Information Governance and Legal representatives, both from partners and our commissioned organisation NECS (North of England Commissioning Support).

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

This group meets monthly and discusses the challenges and barriers to the current sharing arrangements and looks to find solutions. The group is looking to create a targeted agreement for the dashboard/data warehouse that is being created, this dashboard/warehouse will contain multi-agency data/information which will allow for that to be shared with partner organisations to monitor performance but also develop a greater understanding and make greater informed decisions.

The ISA will be developed through the Insight sub-groups alongside the development of the dashboard. Discussions are ongoing with partners around the current dashboards within their organisations and how this solution can be fed into those. The dashboard will be created by NECS with a proof of concept planned for March, this will also be progressed through the Insight Group with the aim of creating something that will allow the VRU and partners to identify those harm hotspots and areas of needs, but also establishing data feeds and structures for future sharing. Alongside the created dashboard for the VRU and partners to access there will also be a data warehouse developed as a repository for the multi-agency data.

One of the main challenges has been the collation and sharing of data between multi-agencies, either through existing developed partnerships or through new established groups. The timeliness of data sharing was also a challenge as a result of Covid-19, as partners adjust and respond to different priorities. This has similarly impacted the progress of accessing Information Sharing to Tackle Violence (ISTV) data locally, although this is being progressed with the support of key partners to access and capture this data. Local Authorities currently receive a download each month and use this data internally, but the quality is inconsistent. There is an ongoing project to review the current ISTV and Emergency Care data sets to better understand the local position before looking at where improvements are required and developing a plan to work with the hospitals and A&E departments to enhance the current offering.

Throughout lockdown and Covid-19 the impact has been evident in the levels of crimes, making comparisons and understanding the impact of the VRU challenging. During lockdown overall levels of crime reduced, including serious violence offences and admissions to hospital for assaults, although levels of anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse rose. However once restrictions were lifted the converse effect happened with levels of crimes rising.

To support this emerging pattern the VRU coordinated and monitored levels of ASB and Domestic Abuse during lockdown to better understand where the issues existed and identify those areas where levels had risen. This data collection was then fed into partner organisations and also used to support successful funding applications to the Youth Endowment Fund and to the National Drive Programme which will work with Domestic Abuse perpetrators.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

In addition to the levels of crime, lockdown also had an impact on young people. This resulted in the [VRU conducting a survey with young people](#) to better understand the impact of lockdown. This generated a fantastic 1374 responses from young people across Northumbria, and was supported by educational establishments, youth groups, third sector organisations and local authorities. The aim of the survey was to develop an understanding of the challenges of lockdown facing young people and identify what support they may need once restrictions are lifted.

The survey identified that the top priorities for young people post-lockdown were access to mental health services, employment support, health & wellbeing services and youth support services.

- 92% of those who completed the survey were still attending an educational setting.
- In terms of the impact of lockdown, 62% (856 respondents) were worried about their mental health, with a further 21% worried about their financial situation.
- Whilst the majority of respondents stated they didn't know if crime had increased during lockdown 128 (9.3%) believed it had, whilst 95 (6.9%) thought it had decreased.
- Post lockdown respondents stated that support was needed for mental health services (67%), employment support (50%), health & wellbeing services (49.7%), and youth support services (44%) were the four most popular services across every age range.
- Other responses included educational support, additional/free tutors and sport & leisure activities.

These findings were shared with wider partner organisations including schools, local authorities, CSPs, and were well received by both education and youth services. The findings helped them understand the issues that young people had highlighted and helped focus discussions with local authorities around the Wellbeing for Education Return. They tailored their local response and received additional funding to adapt the National training programme to include local context. The VRU was also able to use the survey to identify what the gaps in provision are (mental health, employment etc) and then linked the local authorities and schools up with their local services and providers that we commission/support.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

iv. CULTURAL AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF VRU MODEL

Establishing the Public Health approach:

Key to retaining the corporate profile of the VRU is a clear vision and key principles that are supported and promoted at the most senior level. Through the development of a Response Strategy with four overarching key themes we have been able to set out an approach that seeks to progress the public health approach. The four Response Strategy key themes (Youth Diversion, Working with Families, Reduce Offending, Connecting Communities) are universal and all partners can relate and contribute towards them. This is important and ensures that our approach goes beyond traditional operational approaches which are often misinterpreted as being solely an issue for the Police. The Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria is fully committed to adopting a public health approach to tackling violence and that leadership and vision at a senior level elevates the role and importance of the VRU and assists with bringing more senior leaders together to support the work and drive the strategy forward.

The VRU is still in the early stages of its approach and in order to achieve whole system change there needs to be a sustained commitment to a public health approach alongside a strong evidence base which highlights the impact and benefits of interventions and joint working in areas of most need. Key to this is the continued use and development of intelligence to both identify hot spot areas and track changes as well as to improve our ability to identify risks at the earliest opportunity. In order to start this process, the VRU has put in place an initial 5-year Response Strategy which clearly outlines our approach under our four recurring themes with associated measures of success. Our Insight Report (Strategic Needs Assessment) is also closely aligned to the strategy with the findings influencing the allocation of resource into those areas of most need. All of our interventions are interlinked and seek to work with individuals, families and communities at varying stages. The recurring theme throughout is the importance of place-based interventions providing opportunities for individuals and families to access services at the earliest opportunity. The Strategy is clear and outlines some high-level commitments for future years which have been endorsed by the VRU Strategic Board.

Effective communication and engagement:

Northumbria VRU has established its brand and is now recognisable in the media through its consistent language, high quality imagery and professional branding. From the inception of the unit we structured our external communications plan around educating the public, celebrating successes of our interventions and connecting partners. We have continued to do this in a consistent manner which has become recognisable across our social media, local partners networks and in print media.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

When celebrating success, we wanted to tell the whole story, not just part of it – which is why our case studies have largely been video content where we can capture emotion, examples and deliver first person accounts naturally. We have seen great success in sharing stories relating to difficult topics including county lines, criminal exploitation and serious violence and knife crime. These have provided our audiences with hard hitting, but informative stories, and how we are supporting those involved. Other highlights include our month long, nationally recognised, Knife Angel campaign in February 2020. This month showcased our ability to bring together a vast network of partners and lead on the comms and messaging throughout. Across the month we secured several TV appearances, radio features, press articles and dominated local social media impressions.

Smaller, but more common successes, come via our social media channels that regularly put out high quality, engaging content, informing and updating our audience on the work of the VRU. This is a trusted source of accurate information, data and credible news. We have now built a reputable reputation for high quality communications and our work is easily identifiable in local networks through our brand and quality of content.

Working with partners and organisations:

The VRU provides a central strategic point for all local authorities and associated partners across the Northumbria force area. The work of the VRU seeks to complement and enhance existing activity across the six local authority areas as well as seek to identify and elevate elements of good practice. In order to ensure close working with organisations there is a clear governance framework in place which is promoted through our Response Strategy. Senior leaders from key organisations make up the membership of the Strategic Board and also act as ‘champions’ for the range of interventions delivered through the VRU, providing support and expertise where required. As part of our framework we have also established a number of key subgroups including education engagement, youth engagement, community safety partnerships and early help and intervention. These groups are at varying stages of development, but they ensure that organisations have the opportunity to shape our approach as well as influence how interventions are delivered within local areas.

Key to the success of the VRU is to ensure that there is a wide range of skills and experience within the operational team. Due to the short-term nature of current VRU funding recruitment has been made up of a combination of secondments from local authority partners and Northumbria Police and a range of fixed term contracts. The team is made up of individuals with a range of skills and specialisms from local authority, community safety, education, health, communications and engagement. The varied skills, experience and knowledge of the partnership and organisational landscape across Northumbria enabled the VRU to mobilise and deliver interventions relatively quickly.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

This was a key requirement to meet the tight deadlines for the initial funding allocation from the Home Office. In terms of wider training and development within the team it is difficult to put in place long term plans due to the short-term nature of the funding. However, training opportunities are identified on a need led basis through our work and where possible staff are supported and encouraged to take these up. As the team continues to establish itself a wider Performance and Professional Development approach will be embedded. We are fortunate that we have been able to attract high quality experienced staff as well as work with partners to secure secondments into certain roles. However, a key challenge for the VRU moving forward is to attract and retain high quality staff due to the short-term nature of the funding. This makes it difficult to plan for the future.

The VRU has established its identity across Northumbria and has sought to engage and involve partner organisations at every stage. Through the promotion of the public health approach the VRU seeks to work collectively to provide targeted, multi-disciplinary approaches to reducing violence at a local level. We seek to collaborate with other organisations both in terms of effectively commissioning interventions and projects as well as working together on joint approaches. We have developed a framework that allows us to build this relationship over time and looks to jointly develop and adopt key 'public health approach' principles into business as usual practices. This will take time and as the VRU develops we will continue to develop our relationship with other organisations ensuring our activity compliments existing approaches and addresses current gaps in provision as well as highlighting elements of good practice.

Connecting with communities:

Through the VRU we aim to work with partners to improve community pathways to services at a local level. There is a need to change the relationship dynamic between some families and individuals and mainstream services promoting the benefit of early interventions as well as the take up of universal services to improve equality of opportunity. To this end there is a need to connect with communities and to ensure that interventions and approaches to reducing violence and wider vulnerability resonate with them. Communities play a key role in how we shape these approaches and there is a need to engage in a meaningful way. The Northumbria VRU has started this process through its local interventions and regular communication and engagement approaches, however, more needs to be done in the coming months. We have started this process through the delivery of community link workers in areas of most need, engaging with individuals with 'lived experience' who are working direct within their communities to shape services and provide support. We are also in the process of rolling out adversity awareness sessions within community settings as well as continuing our education and engagement at local levels to raise awareness and increase community capacity and resilience.

2) VRU INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Adopting a public health approach to tackling violence and vulnerability requires a cultural change and a long-term commitment. For this to be successful communities needs to be at the heart of this work.

Future sustainability:

The VRU is still in the early stages of development and as such opportunities to explore and secure match funding have been limited. Two key challenges have made this process difficult, the first being the short-term nature of central funding which makes it difficult to plan for the future as well as seek confidence from others to support via match funding. The second key challenge has been the impact of COVID-19 and the pressure this has put on all services and partners. However, there is a commitment to the ongoing development of the VRU and in order to support this we have secured 'in kind' support from partners such as resource allocation at a Chief Inspector level from Northumbria Police to align the key principles of the VRU with operational policing. We have also been able to benefit from organisational support in the form of support for secondments to the team and the identification of key individuals within organisations to provide support and a key point of contact for VRU working groups and initiatives.

As it continues to develop, the VRU will seek to explore with partners how we can sustain elements of practice and promote additional opportunities to source funding to support initiatives and maximise investment at a local level. The VRU is also keen to explore how it can work with local businesses to improve engagement and opportunities for joint initiatives.

3) DELIVERY

i. DELIVERY OF THE RESPONSE STRATEGY (RS)/INTERVENTIONS

The establishment of the Northumbria VRU in 2019/20 enabled the development of the strategic need's analysis (Insight Report) process, the Northumbria VRU Response Strategy and the delivery of a range of violence reduction interventions. The latter providing the opportunity to test out primary, secondary and tertiary interventions to understand what works in the context of the local needs profile. The Insight Report into serious violence and vulnerability across Northumbria provide the basis for the identification of the key 'harm hotspots' across Northumbria. This has also highlighted the scope of need that informed the range of VRU interventions delivering prevention, early intervention, therapeutic and desistance across Northumbria. This in turn has informed the development of the Response Strategy themes, the commissioned interventions within those themes and the evaluation of the interventions and support delivered.

Following the review of learning from year one the Response Strategy was revised as was the Insight Report working group. This saw the formation of three insight sub-groups; Information Sharing Agreement, Data Dashboard, and Reducing Offending. This has brought a greater focus on the individual themes and has strengthened the Insight work.

This also helped to further shape the initial five-year future plan, developed in 2019-20, that originally set the direction of travel and defined the longer term strategic and operational commitment required to tackle violent crime in Northumbria, in the context of a public health approach. As the Insight Report is refreshed, and socio-economic factors affecting violent crime change, the five-year plan and annual Response Strategy are updated. This process supports the commissioning cycle from strategic needs assessment, operational planning and delivery, evaluation back to strategic needs assessment.

The outcomes and learning from the initial mobilisation work undertaken in 2019/20 informed the continued development of the VRU priorities in 2020/21. This included redefining the Response Strategy delivery themes to include:

- Reducing (Re)offending
- Connecting Communities
- Youth Diversion
- Working with Families

Whilst maintaining the high-level objectives of:

- Reducing knife enabled serious violence
- Reducing hospital admissions for knife related serious violence
- Reducing homicides

3) DELIVERY

To maximise value for money and ensure that the greatest capacity could be achieved via the VRU funding there was an endeavour to:

- Continue to support existing interventions that contributed to the VRU aims and had a history of successful outcomes. This included continued support for tertiary prevention initiatives such as Operation Encompass which was brought under the VRU with a focus broadening delivery to include community delivery and a focus on identified harm hotspots. Also, the primary prevention/desistance intervention YOLO was continued. Both of these interventions also offered a Northumbria wide delivery model ensuring a consistent approach across the area.
- Upscale interventions that were shown to be effective in the 2019-20 round of VRU funded interventions. This approach ensured that primary and secondary early intervention and prevention place-based interventions that demonstrated positive outcomes in the previous year were able to be upscale. This included introducing place-based interventions in new localities as well as supporting existing VRU funded ones. This also demonstrates the importance of cross cutting work as the VRU funding was used to add an extra dimension to the services being delivered by existing hyper local community hubs or was enabled the VRU to be involved in the design, planning and delivery of new hubs a partner.
- Continue to develop the evidence base for what works by continuing to fund new initiatives. This includes expanding the work of one of the VRU year one delivery partners to explore the impact predictive data modelling can have. This primary and secondary prevention and desistance intervention used police and criminal justice partner data to identify young people on the cusp of entering the criminal justice system.
- Strengthen our partnership links by co-commissioning interventions with Community Safety colleagues based on shared priorities and a common understanding of need. This enabled us to fund locality-based interventions where specific identified needs can be met and include the development of primary therapeutic support.
- Explore opportunities for partnership work and additional funding. This approach enabled the VRU to lead on a successful application to the Youth Endowment Fund COVID-19 bidding round. The successful bid delivers primary and secondary interventions with a prevention, therapeutic and desistance led approach. The interventions are delivered across the whole of Northumbria by six delivery partners working collaboratively.

Commissioning of interventions has followed the public health approach and best practice in commissioning; strategic needs assessment, strategic and operational planning, evaluation and identifying 'what works' with a commitment to scale up effective interventions.

3) DELIVERY

Whilst evaluation of bids for VRU funding carried a weighting for evidence-based interventions it was also recognised that there is a need to commission services in an effort to develop the evidence base where there may be no substantial evidence.

A Response Strategy Delivery Plan is used to monitor the progress being made against the deliverable elements of the strategy and also allows for in year revision to be made that reflect the changing need throughout the year. Particularly with reference to the impact of COVID-19.

The transition from year one to year two delivery was managed during the developing COVID-19 pandemic. This presented some challenges, which served to amplify the challenge of maintaining continuity of delivery with the relatively late announcement of VRU funding for 2020-21. This had resulted in some delivery partners losing staff, who had moved to more secure employment due to the uncertainty of future funding. This not only interrupted service delivery but also had the impact of some of the year one learning being lost as those practitioners who came into post in late 2019-20 and early 2020-21 did not have the understanding that had been gained by the previous months developing and delivering the VRU interventions. This is a scenario that has manifested again as 2020-21 draws to a close, we are already aware that some delivery partners are at risk of losing staff due to the continued uncertainty around future VRU funding.

In Quarter 1 of the 2020-21 year due to the impact of COVID-19 the vast majority of engagement took place remotely. The core VRU team moved to home working in the last weeks of the previous financial year and as such meetings, including the VRU Board in April, were cancelled, while partners adapted to a new way of working.

The 22 commissioned VRU interventions worked quickly to move to remote working however, again the impact of the COVID lockdown was evident with a total of 111 engagements in the first quarter in comparison to 1309 in the second and 7282 in the third. The move back into lockdown in November and the increased restriction in December leading to a further full lock down in January once again had a significant detrimental impact on the delivery partner ability to engage with people.

Moving towards a more virtual way of working has enabled us to make good progress in establishing the theme groups that support our Response Strategy and maintain membership. This has been particularly effective with our Insight Group which has met virtually and has agreed a programme of meetings and activities for the remainder of the year to develop our Insight Report (Strategic Needs Assessment) further. We have also successfully established our Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Strategic Group which has met three times since the start of March and will oversee the implementation of local intervention projects linked to our Response Strategy. Our School engagement group is planned to take place mid-July as we work towards arrangements for schools based VRU intervention from September onwards and we will continue to establish our youth and community engagement groups during Q2.

3) DELIVERY

During lockdown overall levels of crime reduced, including serious violence offences and admissions to hospital for assaults, although levels of anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse rose. However once restrictions were lifted the converse effect happened with levels of crimes rising.

To support this emerging pattern the VRU coordinated and monitored levels of ASB and Domestic Abuse during lockdown to better understand where the issues existed and identify those areas where levels had risen. This data collection was then fed into partner organisations and also used to support funding applications.

In addition to the levels of crime, lockdown also had an impact on young people. This resulted in the VRU conducting a survey with young people to better understand the impact of lockdown. This generated a fantastic 1374 responses from young people across Northumbria, and was supported by educational establishments, youth groups, third sector organisations and local authorities. The aim of the survey was to develop an understanding of the challenges of lockdown facing young people and identify what support they may need once restrictions are lifted.

3) DELIVERY

ii. COMMUNITY AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Our presence on social media has increased constantly throughout the year with partners, including those delivering interventions, promoting our work and their part in it through their own social media channels. This has helped maximise the reach of our work. VRU related posts are frequently the top performing posts and most engaging across the PCC social media channels.

Engagement through our place-based work has enabled us to reach into specific hyper local community groups. This includes the work carried out by our Community Development Officer in the Southwick Hub, who came into post in September and has successfully worked with community members to develop a local community engagement plan. This work is part of a multi-agency community hub, brought about by Police and Community Safety intelligence and data regarding organised crime gang activity in the area.

At a service delivery level, the PCC and Head of the VRU have continued to facilitate delivery partner meetings which provides a forum for partners to directly feedback on emerging issues and provides information that can help shape future delivery.

The VRU have supported the development of the consultation process for the next Northumbria Police and Crime plan ensuring the communities that have been identified as being in harm hotspots are able to engage in the process.

In quarter one there was a heavy focus on engaging with young people and the organisations that support them, to better understand how emerging needs could be identified and understood to enable planning to meet those needs as they present. The majority of this work had to be re-profiled and delivered remotely, a consequence of the COVID-19 lockdown. An online youth survey, exploring the impact of lockdown across Northumbria survey was launched in June 2020 received 1374 responses before it closed in July 2020. Through the survey we sought to understand the challenges facing young people during lockdown and the support they felt they would require once restrictions eased. Following this we worked with the education sector, along with the third sector to ensure that we provided interventions and services that meet the needs identified by the participants and could aid the transition back to school or beyond from September. Participants ranged from 14 to 25 years of age and 922 of the participants were aged 14 to 16 years.

The outcomes from the youth engagement survey were shared as part of the virtual information sessions hosted by the PCC and Head of the VRU in August to inform the conversations around future youth engagement and diversion.

3) DELIVERY

In addition to the dissemination of the findings and recommendations from the Youth Survey a dedicated Youth Safety Ambassador forum has been established informed by earlier consultation work with young people around knife crime. This forum has representation from young people from all 6 Local Authority areas and will allow us to consult and share information with young people around vulnerability, exploitation and violence reduction.

Our work in schools has been adapted to provide more input in community and youth settings, linking in with summer roadshows and mobile activities as well as through the development of a range of online and remote learning resources to ensure that this intervention continues to have an impact.

In order to address the delivery issues around the SLO intervention opportunities to be added to the programme of events for the Northumberland Youth Engagement Bus have ensured staff can deliver the intervention to a wider audience at no additional cost.

There has been a significant focus on the added value and benefit that can be achieved by strengthening partnerships. Close working with the Tyne and Wear and Northumberland Active Partnerships, responsible for reducing the number of people who are inactive, has resulted in a number of joint working ventures with VRU intervention delivery partners. This includes the development of a pathway for VRU intervention participants to work towards accredited coaching training and also opportunities to participate in vocational volunteering with Volunteer It Yourself. The latter providing young people with the opportunity to learn trade and employability skills through helping to fix local youth and community facilities in need of essential repairs and improvements.

We have increased our reach into communities of lived experience, recovery and mutual aid. This is part of our work with Fulfilling Lives Newcastle Gateshead. Through regular meetings we have developed a framework with the aspiration to take the learning from the Fulfilling Lives programme and share this with delivery partners, strategic partner stakeholders in an effort to shape future delivery with a greater emphasis on beneficiary involvement and influence in service design, delivery and evaluation.

3) DELIVERY

iii. SUCCESSES AND BARRIERS TO DELIVERY

In the short time frame since the VRU was established in September 2019 the VRU have established effective working practices with key partners at both strategic and operational levels to address serious violence locally. This development is ongoing; however, it has allowed for the development of a shared understanding of, and public health approach to, serious violence.

Key to helping us to achieve this, a number of pieces of work have taken place;

- The insight report was developed to provide us with insight ahead of phase 2 and identified where we needed to focus our attentions
- 3 Local Authorities hosted Locality Reviews to build local insight and look into County Lines activity
- A force wide strategic review took place, focusing on; County Lines, exploitation and vulnerability
- Consultation and engagement began with Community & Voluntary Sector organisations
- Recruited anti-violence ambassadors from Youth Parliament to work closer with young people.
- Welcomed Knife Angel to Gateshead for a month of intervention work with over 1300 young people
- Developed an Education Team that has engaged with over 990 young people in the last quarter through a number of community and school engagement events.
- Introduce community-based link workers into some of our areas of need.
- Supported and developed three community hubs who are working with families and individuals within communities.
- Introduced and developed adversity awareness training and delivered this to frontline professionals within partner organisations.
- Commenced a piece of work looking to engage with businesses with VRU activity, including increased opportunities to offenders to access training and employment.

SARA (Southwick Altogether Raising Aspirations)

Since the ground-breaking launch of the new SARA project in early September, along with the VRU funding, the project has managed to achieve many things and make progress with a number of planned community events.

- Contact made with community organisations who have since put SARA in touch with other key organisations i.e. Rise has put us in touch with Sunderland Community Action Group;

3) DELIVERY

- Partnership working and speaking to voluntary groups and sectors has meant more information and intelligence is being shared. For example, the Multi-Use Games Area behind Southwick Community Centre has been identified as an asset for potential community use. It has also revealed that the land is unregistered and that a provider has previously shown interest in gaining ownership and reusing the asset, with support from Sunderland Council's legal department. SARA VCS Group will help progress reuse; ☒ Social prescribing contacts made including Sunderland Home Grown and Prince's Trust/ Tyne and Wear Fire Brigade who are keen to be part of SARA; ☒ SARA is on Thompson Park Task and Finish Group with Friends of Thompson Park as a result of engagement with Vivienne Metcalfe and members of Friends of Thompson Park;

The VRU Strategic Board continues to provide strong buy in and support, continuing to meet virtually every quarter. It provides the Board with an update on the VRU activities and on the performance against the Response Strategy, as well as an update on the local evaluation process. Meetings continue to be held virtually but there continues to be strong buy in from board members. During the last quarter we have also successfully held two school engagement sessions as well as continued our monthly Community Safety Partnership meetings to share updates and ensure that joint progress is being made against the Response Strategy. The move to remote working has also enabled the VRU to access wider partnerships across the six locality areas, in particular Child and Adult Safeguarding Partnerships and Youth Justice Boards.

The importance of working with local communities to inform the development of the work locally and improve its impact has been developed with a clear commitment and foundations have been established. This is evident through the interventions funded by the VRU and the working relationships with key organisations within the communities.

Whilst developing effective work partnerships has been one of the early successes of the VRU it has also been a challenge due to the impact of Covid-19. Much of the engagement and delivery has been remote and some of the planned events and engagement have either been delayed or have yet to be delivered, including further locality reviews, and further face to face networking events between key partners. The importance of those continued networking events was highlighted earlier this year when the VRU held a successful and well received launch event with the funded interventions. It provided participants with the opportunity to obtain an overview of the VRU's proposed activities and overall vision but also gave them the chance to get to know organisations, services, and stakeholders from across the region. The event allowed for the forming of new partnerships and the strengthening already existing ones.

3) DELIVERY

The local evaluation in year 1 highlighted that some partners felt the short-term funding and timeframes were a challenge to be able to evidence impact, however it was acknowledged that the funding was seen to enable services to deliver significant impact for those they worked with. For some it allowed them to start projects they'd wanted to do and would continue to do, demonstrating that even short-term funding can lead to system change. It provided the opportunity for some to make new contacts and develop stronger working ties. The development of new referral pathways were also seen across several projects.

Despite Covid-19 presenting a challenge it has also provided an opportunity for the VRU to access wider partnerships across the six locality areas, in particular Child and Adult Safeguarding Partnerships and Youth Justice Boards. And the work to further develop those local operational and strategic partnerships, data sharing agreements and processes, and embed sustainable change within Northumbria continues.

4) IMPACTS AND PERFORMANCE

i. LOCAL EVALUATION PROGRESS AND NEXT STEPS

At the start of Year 2 the VRU made a commitment to carry out a joint local evaluation that brings together VRU and Police Surge activity. A local company with experience working with partner organisations have been commissioned to carry out this work.

The evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the Response Strategy and the impact of the commissioned interventions. It will consist of three work packages, detailed below, that explore the collaborative approach between the VRU and Northumbria Police to tackling knife crime and serious violence in the Northumbria area.

Work Package 1: Collaborative Approach

A complementary and collaborative approach to Police Knife Crime Surge Fund activity and the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) is being developed, in the expectation that increased and targeted operational activity, alongside wider engagement, awareness and education through targeted interventions, will have a significant and positive impact across Northumbria Police Force Area.

Work Package 2: Knife Crime Surge Fund Delivery

Evaluation of activity focussed around three themed areas:

- Hotspot Areas: Prevention and Enforcement
- Individuals and Groups: Intelligence and Targeting
- Investigative Response

Work Package 3: Violence Reduction Unit

The evaluation will identify and assess the key principles of locality working and examine the impact of key interventions, with a focus on:

- Partnership working and use of shared data/intelligence.
- Sustainability of working practices as a result of Public Health Approach.
- Feasibility of scaling up the approach to other areas.

The commissioned service will consider the findings for the year 1 evaluation and suggested recommendations, exploring how this learning has been built on throughout year 2. The evaluation will identify and assess the key principles of locality working and examine the impact of key interventions, with a focus on:

- Partnership working and use of shared data/intelligence.
- Sustainability of working practices as a result of Public Health Approach.
- Feasibility of scaling up the approach to other areas.

4) IMPACTS AND PERFORMANCE

In addition, the provider will design a Value for Money framework that will enable partner organisations to understand the cost v impact of interventions and the degree to which tactics employed have been cost effective and derive business benefit.

The commissioned service has started undertaking one-to-one interviews with key staff within the VRU and the Police, with a phased approach to interviews, focus groups and observations with key partners and interventions.

As in year 1 the findings from the local evaluation will be identified throughout and fed into the VRU so they can be considered against existing activity and the proposed activity in year 3. With a final report expected in May 2021.

4) IMPACTS AND PERFORMANCE

ii. PROMISING PRACTICE

The VRU continue to strengthen the partnership working with the six CSPs. The VRU meet monthly with the six CSP leads from the respective local authorities. This meeting is to look at how we can better coordinate activity in relation to serious violence across the area, share learning and best practice and potentially develop further Northumbria wide work. In addition, the VRU have worked with the six CSPs to put in place 12 interventions which will tackle serious violence. There are a range of projects looking at a number of initiatives including work around criminal exploitation, creating a specialist pathway for Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse and the recruitment of prevention workers in two of the six Youth Justice Teams.

And in partnership with Northumbria Police and Newcastle Council a Criminal Exploitation and Serious Violence workshop for frontline professionals was delivered on 2nd October, with approx. 200 attending the webinar.

The VRU continue to also work collaboratively with Police colleagues who are co-ordinating Surge activity. This includes joint working on the development and delivery of Police POP plans within our hotspot areas as well as support and contributions to local partnership problem solving meetings such as the Vulnerable Victims and Exploitation Group in Newcastle where plans have been developed utilising the four themes of the VRU Response Strategy. In addition to this, the VRU is a member of the Police Surge/Knife Crime operational group and provides regular updates on progress and opportunities for further joint working. An update on Police Surge activity is also provided to the VRU Strategic Board as part of the annual forward plan. Our collaborative approach is also reflected in our commitment to work together to produce a joint local evaluation.

The VRU are also working closely with Police and local authorities to develop problem profiles in key hot spot areas and working collaboratively with community-based organisations. As we continue to understand the issues within our hot spot areas, we have placed a greater emphasis on those areas of most need. For example, we have refined the work we are developing in relation to Community Link Workers to focus on the areas of North and South East Northumberland in response to emerging issues of violence and wider exploitation. Working with partners we are using the next few months to build on this resource, identify additional funding and opportunities to enhance provision as well as start early planning for possible interventions in a third year.

Our work in schools has been adapted to provide more input in community and youth settings, linking in with summer roadshows and mobile activities as well as through the development of a range of online and remote learning resources to ensure that this intervention continues to have an impact.

4) IMPACTS AND PERFORMANCE

In response to the findings of our Insight Report we also appointed a Domestic Abuse Specialist to address the current and emerging issues associated with DA across Northumbria as well as ensure that our Response Strategy and associated interventions reflect the current position. This work has developed significantly over the last quarter including a range of partnership and operational interventions through the VRU and this has been factored into the ongoing delivery plan which drives our work locally. This includes working with partners to implement the Drive project across the 6 local authority areas. We will continue to build on this work and ensure that issues of DA are explicitly considered and addressed through all of our interventions.

4) IMPACTS AND PERFORMANCE

iii. PROGRESS AGAINST LOCALLY DEFINED SUCCESS MEASURES AND THEORY OF CHANGE (TOC)

In Northumbria we want to improve lives to prevent crime. By using a public health approach, we are able to better understand the causes of violent crime and work more effectively to stop it escalating. The Violence Reduction Unit will achieve that aim by working with others to stop violence before it starts, halt its progression and provide ways out for people already trapped in violent behaviour.

We will ensure frontline staff, training and resources are in place to help prevent violence and support those seeking to improve their lives. We are seeking to strengthen communities to resist violent crime, using local intelligence to interrupt the transmission of violence by analysing where it may occur and intervening with those at higher risk.

To fully adopt a public health approach, we need to change the way we use our existing resources to tackle the problem. Our approach places a greater emphasis on working with communities and making the most of the skills and expertise that exists within our neighbourhoods and services.

We want to:

- Provide opportunities for young people to access activities and services that enrich their daily lives, provide new experiences and promote the importance of positive role models.
- Reduce the risk of individuals being drawn into violence and other vulnerabilities and make it harder for others to take advantage.
- Ensure that communities are better informed of the risks and know where they can get help.
- Better understand and prevent offending behaviour to both reduce the risk of victimisation and the impact on families.
- Make the most of the skills and expertise across Northumbria, making sure we have strong partnerships in place that work together to deliver the public health approach.

This will take time and commitment from everyone and that is why we have set out our initial five-year strategy with some clear milestones to ensure our public health approach is realised.

The high-level objectives of our strategy are:

- Reduce knife enabled serious violence
- Reduce hospital admissions for knife related serious violence
- Reduce homicides
- Reduction in serious violence offences
- Reduction in reported ASB
- Reduction in crime

4) IMPACTS AND PERFORMANCE

In order to achieve this, we have developed and established a local approach that provides us with the best opportunity to not only meet these objectives, but also create an environment that reduces the scale and impact of serious violence for generations to come. Therefore, our strategy focuses on four key themes to deliver our Public Health approach.

- Youth Diversion
- Reduce Offending
- Working with Families
- Connecting Communities

Within each of these four themes there are also a number of additional measures of success which are monitored each quarter. They will also be measured with the local joint evaluation in year 2.

4) IMPACTS AND PERFORMANCE

iv. LESSONS LEARNED AND FORWARD PLANNING/RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

The risk of failing to attract and retain high quality staff and the risk of failing to secure long term buy in from partners could have been avoided had a longer-term commitment to central funding for VRU's been agreed from the outset. The lack of certainty from year to year makes it difficult to plan and also has an impact on organisational resilience, particularly when major events such as COVID take place. Change will take time and through VRU's there is a real opportunity to influence and co-ordinate approaches at a local level to improve the development, delivery and access to services for individuals and communities. There is support at the most senior levels across the Northumbria force area and further commitment towards long term central support from government would ensure that we maintain and build on this for future years.

Future of the VRU:

The VRU set out an initial 5-year plan as part of its first iteration of the Response Strategy. As we head into the third year of delivery it needs to build on what has worked to date as well as continue to embed the approach across Northumbria. In order to achieve this there needs to be a balance between commissioning targeted interventions as well as delivering and leading our own. This will continue to build the profile of the VRU as well as provide greater opportunities to seek support and contributions from other organisations and services across the force area. There are three key elements of practice that will shape our approach:

1) The provision of family and youth support within areas of most need. This is made up of the improvement of access and the promotion of services that support individuals and families within their local area. The key emphasis is on early intervention with a focus on utilising the expertise of local practitioner's as well as ensuring that services are shaped by individuals with 'lived experience'. This approach has two elements; the promotion of universal services to all and the targeting of specific services to those who need them at the earliest opportunity.

2) Taking a direct approach to intervening with those who are showing signs of vulnerability or are on the fringes of criminal/anti-social activity. This will take the form of direct intervention with young people as well as working with other services and organisations to address wider needs of other family members such as siblings. The overall aim is to reduce crime and instances of violence as well as reduce the risk of vulnerable individuals being exploited by others.

4) IMPACTS AND PERFORMANCE

3) Intensive intervention and diversion for those involved in serious gang/criminality. Bringing key agencies together to provide an operational and problem-solving response in areas of most need, identifying and working with those who are at risk of causing the most harm to communities.

5) CONCLUSION

Since its inception in Autumn 2019, significant progress has been made within the Northumbria VRU. The VRU has acted as a catalyst, bringing together senior leaders from local authorities and key partner organisations to ensure there is a co-ordinated approach to tackling serious violence and wider vulnerability. The strength of existing partnerships as well as the commitment to adopting a public health approach to tackling violence has enabled a wide range of quality interventions to be developed and delivered in a short space of time. There is a strong Voluntary and Community Sector across Northumbria, and this has enabled the progression of individual projects in areas of most need working with some of our most vulnerable young people and their families.

The development of the Insight Report provides us with a wide range of data from a number of partners and this has assisted in identifying those key harm hot spots where interventions will be targeted. This is the first time that an intelligence document of this nature that incorporates all six local authority areas has been produced. The inclusion of additional data sources such as health and safeguarding has provided a richer picture of the challenges faced by individuals and communities. However, more needs to be done to ensure that we can effectively refine and apply data on a regular basis and further work needs to be done with partners to improve data sharing and to develop a user-friendly interface that can assist with direct service delivery.

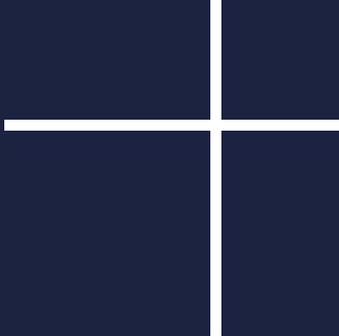
The Response Strategy sets out an initial five-year commitment to reducing serious violence and the four interconnecting themes enable partners beyond traditional community safety disciplines to identify how they can contribute. This strategy will be developed further over the next 12 months to take into account the progress made as well as adapt to the emerging issues and opportunities that arise. The clear link to the Insight Report both provides an evidence base to support interventions as well as a clear process to monitor progress and impact.

The ongoing issues caused by the COVID pandemic have had an impact on the VRU, both in terms of partnership commitment and availability due to conflicting demands as well as in terms of how interventions can be delivered. However, the current situation further highlights its importance, particularly in relation to providing support to families and communities who have been most affected by the pandemic, with a number of vulnerabilities heightened over the past 12 months. The fact that all of the current interventions have been able to adapt and continue delivery during this period is testament to the commitment to the wider cause and to the motivation to meeting emerging issues, predicting what new challenges lie ahead.

5) CONCLUSION

In a short space of time VRU's have been able to make a significant impact locally and have clearly proven their importance in terms of driving co-ordinated activity as well as developing and promoting emerging practice. The ongoing uncertainty caused by short term funding is a challenge, and while this will not prevent activity from taking place, it does limit the overall impact in local areas as well as affect the ability to plan in the long term. There is a commitment to exploring elements of sustainability and transfer of principles into day to day operations, but this will not happen overnight. To fully adopt a public health approach takes time and to achieve wider system change requires a long-term commitment. The foundation of our approach in Northumbria has been established and there is a commitment to build on this in the coming years with more opportunities to add value and make a positive difference to the lives of individuals and families across the whole region.





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