

ANNUAL REPORT

2025



Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit

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FOREWORD

... from your PCC



I am committed to ensuring you feel safe, whether out in public places or in the comfort of your own home.

Since my election in May 2024, I've prioritised being in communities, listening to residents, and understanding what matters most to you.

That's why tackling serious and organised crime is a key priority in my [Police and Crime Plan](#).

Through the Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit, Northumbria Police, and local partners, we're working to address the root causes of serious violence, making sure the right support is in place for individuals, families, and communities.

By taking a joined-up, public health approach, we have already made real progress. Over the past year, there has been significant reductions in serious violence, knife crime, and hospital admissions, but we know there is more work to be done.

This isn't about quick fixes, it's about creating lasting change.

We must keep intervening early, educating and empowering young people, supporting families, and creating opportunities that help steer individuals away from crime.

The [Northumbria Response Strategy](#) sets out how we'll build on this momentum. It focuses on what works, responds to the needs of our communities, and puts prevention at the heart of everything we do.

Together, we will continue to build safer streets, and stronger communities for everyone.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'S. E. D.' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Susan Dungworth
Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner

INTRODUCTION & LOCAL CONTEXT

The Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit and its strategic partners continue to successfully work together to implement and deliver against the milestones identified within the Response Strategy. The [Serious Violence Response Strategy 2024-2029](#) is Northumbria's collective response to tackling the causes and impacts of serious violence.

Violence is a symptom, often an outcome of a number of factors, requiring a range of solutions and approaches. Across Northumbria we are committed to adopting a public health approach to tackling serious violence and since 2019, we have been working collaboratively to:

- Better understand what serious violence looks like across Northumbria.
- Test and adapt approaches to tackle serious violence.
- Develop and maintain strong links with key partners.
- Work towards applying a whole system approach to tackling serious violence and wider vulnerability.

The Northumbria Serious Violence Response Strategy sets out our approach to tackling serious violence over the next five years.

Our vision is that Northumbria is a place where individuals, families and communities thrive, making the most of opportunities to live, learn and work, free from the fear of violence.

The strategy outlines five key priorities to take this work forward as well as key challenges and the measures we are committed to achieving to meet our aims.

Nature of violent crime in Northumbria

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.

Northumbria Police covers this geographical area, including the counties of Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. Within these 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



INTRODUCTION & LOCAL CONTEXT

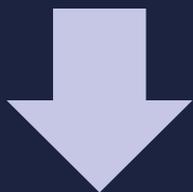
In August 2024, civil unrest seen across the UK, and in our region, resulted in instances of violent disorder. We have continued to work in collaboration with all our partners to reduce violence and ensure that Northumbria remains a safe place to live, visit and work.

Across Northumbria we have seen the positive downward trends in the levels of serious violence and knife crime continue during 2024. With both showing a year on year reduction since pre-covid years. The costs associated with serious violent crime shows a slight reduction of 4.8% in 2024, along with a reduction in the cost per resident (£409 per head).



Levels of serious violence reduced by almost 6% in Northumbria, a decrease of 1,385 offences. With reductions across all local authority areas. With levels of homicides remaining static during 2024 with 15 offences.

A breakdown of serious violence offences shows a 33% reduction in threats to kill, and a 7.5% reduction in assault with injury offences.



As highlighted in previous years a third of offences of serious violence in Northumbria was domestic related. Offences of Violence Against Women's and Girls accounted for almost 40% of all crime during 2024, a 9.82% reduction compared to levels in 2023.

Levels of offences involving a knife have also decreased during 2024, with a 5.7% reduction. With a reduction witnessed in four local authority areas. And possession of knife offences decreased by 2%, with possession of other offensive weapons increasing by 18%.

You are more likely to be a victim of a Knife Enabled offence if you're aged over 25 years, with two-thirds of all offences in 2024. With offenders likely to be aged between 25-45 years old, with half of all offenders.

We have seen a decrease of 34% in hospital admissions due to a sharp object during the current financial year to date (April – December 2024) when compared to the same period in 2023. We have also seen a decrease in the hospital admissions due to an assault during the current FYTD, decreasing by 28%.

Deprivation is a significant problem in Northumbria, impacted further by the current cost of living crisis, and leads to higher levels of violent offences in neighbourhoods with the highest levels of deprivation. This can leave young people more vulnerable to childhood adversity, poor mental health, and the risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence.

Whilst tackling serious violence will not happen overnight and requires commitment from all partners across Northumbria, we have witnessed some green shoots during 2024.

THE VRU LANDSCAPE

In February 2025, the Home Office confirmed that funding to support VRU activity would continue for the financial year 2025/26. Whilst this allows the VRU to continue with the proposed commissioning intentions and work with partners, the inherent risk of short-term funding creates financial instability with partners and organisations which must be carefully managed.

The VRU has submitted a delivery plan for the forthcoming year which will continue to prioritise serious youth violence, with the Government's existing three measures still a key focus to;

- Reduce Hospital Admissions for knife related serious violence
- Reduce Knife Enabled serious violence
- Reduce Homicides

The proposed interventions are evidence based and show clear links to the findings from the Serious Violence Strategic Needs Assessment. The priority will be for interventions aimed at young people aged 25 and under.

Further, as part of the Government's commitment to half knife crime and violence against women and girls over the next 10 years as part of its Safer Streets manifesto pledge, it is likely the VRUs scope will be broadened to incorporate a wider preventative approach to tackling vulnerability, particularly in relation to serious violence, VAWG, ASB and Child Criminal Exploitation.

Part of this work will see the establishment of Prevention Partnerships across all Local Authority areas. The guidance recognises the work of VRU's as 'systems leaders' in relation to co-ordinating the partnership response to tackling serious violence. As a result of this there is a proposal to pilot new arrangements for Prevention Partnerships in the existing 20 VRU areas during 2025/26. Although guidance is awaited, a local model will consist of the establishment of a Prevention Partnership(s) and a prevention panel in each Local Authority area. Panels will be tasked with identify those young people who are not involved with or actively known to services.

Serious Violence Duty

In January 2023, the then Government announced the introduction of the Serious Violence Legal Duty, which places responsibilities on specified authorities to work in collaboration to tackle serious violence in their local area. Duty funding for 2025/25 has also been confirmed which will continue to be used at a local level to continue with the serious violence action plan implementation within the 6 respective Community Safety Partnerships.

Who are the Specified Authorities:

- Police
- Probation Services
- Youth Offending Teams
- Fire and Rescue Authorities
- Integrated Care Boards (ICB)
- Local Authorities

The Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) has convening responsibilities for the Duty on behalf of all specified authorities.

THE VRU LANDSCAPE

Specified authorities and partners from different disciplines worked to develop strategic outcomes, contributing to the development of key priorities and actions, advocating place-based approaches to tackling serious violence.

The priorities outlined below were designed to address the findings of the Strategic Needs Assessment, and were agreed by the Strategic Violence Reduction Board.

- Create stronger systems to address serious violence.
- Data, evidence, information sharing and evaluation.
- Prevention and Early Intervention.
- Criminal Justice and Enforcement.
- Supporting communities through communication, engagement, and reassurance.

These priorities reflect a system wide commitment to tackling serious violence locally and includes the strategic aims of the Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit and its partners.

The Police and Crime Plan

The Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner launched the [Police and Crime Plan](#) in February 2025 following a period of public consultation which identified Serious Violence and Organised Crime as a local priority which is featured in the new plan.

The 'Safer Streets and Stronger Communities' plan for Northumberland and Tyne and Wear is for 2025 – 2029, and has identified six police and crime objectives and reflects the crime and community safety issues identified in our communities.

- **Engaged and responsive police force** - deliver an engaging police service that's both efficient and effective.
- **Crime and ASB** - reducing and preventing crime and ensuring tackling ASB is a high priority, making residents feel safe and supported.
- **Serious violence and organised crime** - continue to embed a public health approach to reduce serious violence and ensure a robust and proactive stance is taken against organised criminals, protecting young people from falling into crime.
- **Violence against women and girls** - further develop long term work to change behaviours and educate people around healthy relationships, misogyny and consent.
- **Hate crime and community cohesion** - strengthen communities by supporting, listening and tackling hate crimes in all its forms.
- **Victims and justice** - improve awareness of the support available to victims and ensure it is easily accessible



OUR MODEL AND APPROACHES

Model, Governance and Accountability

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 the team currently consists of the Director of the VRU, a Public Health Specialist, 3 Project Coordinators, a Domestic Abuse Specialist, a Domestic Abuse Project Coordinator, a Communications and Engagement Officer, a Partnership Analyst, an impact and intervention analyst, a public health analyst, a Support Officer, and the Education Team. The staff within the team has a wealth of partnership experience between them including public health; local authority; teaching; social worker; police; 3rd Sector.

The VRU is governed by the Serious Violence Reduction Board, which is chaired by the Police and Crime Commissioner, and brings together the six Community Safety Partnerships and other key partners, providing oversight in delivering the priorities and measures of the Response Strategy. This includes exception monitoring of local area action plans. The Board will contribute to the delivery and implementation of this strategy by capitalising on existing local arrangements to ensure partners work effectively across the system to avoid duplication.



The Serious Violence Delivery Group will oversee progress made against the recommendations identified in the Strategic Needs Assessment and commissioned interventions. We will use the Delivery Plan to build on what we know in relation to each of the priorities, developing key actions to address serious violence.

To support our governance arrangements, there are two thematic working groups which will contribute to the success of achieving our identified priorities.

Each of the thematic groups have an agreed Terms of Reference and there is representation from each of the specified authorities on the Groups, which include:

- Data and Insights Group – has led the planning and co-ordination of the Strategic Needs Assessment including information sharing arrangements to obtain relevant datasets from partners.
- Engagement Group – has developed an Engagement and Communication Framework to ensure engagement work with individuals, families and communities is co-ordinated across the six local authorities.

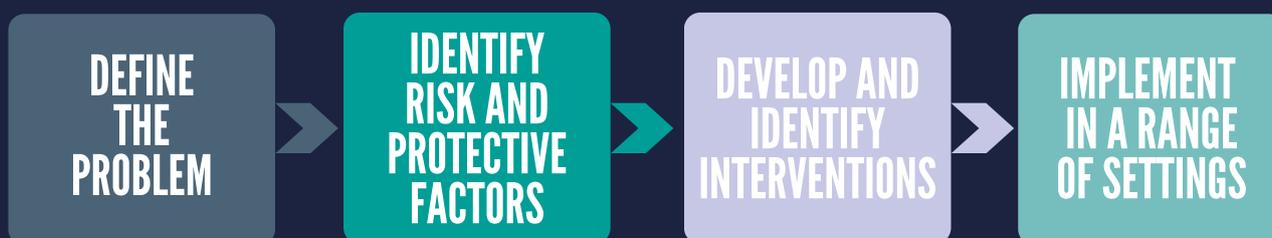
OUR MODEL AND APPROACHES



This strategy and its priorities will interface with other partnerships to complement their strategic plans. Through delivery of the duty there is a need to maximise the resources available across Northumbria. We will identify opportunities to apply good practice to address wider vulnerability and explore the feasibility of mainstreaming interventions and practices that can make the most impact.

Our Public Health Approach

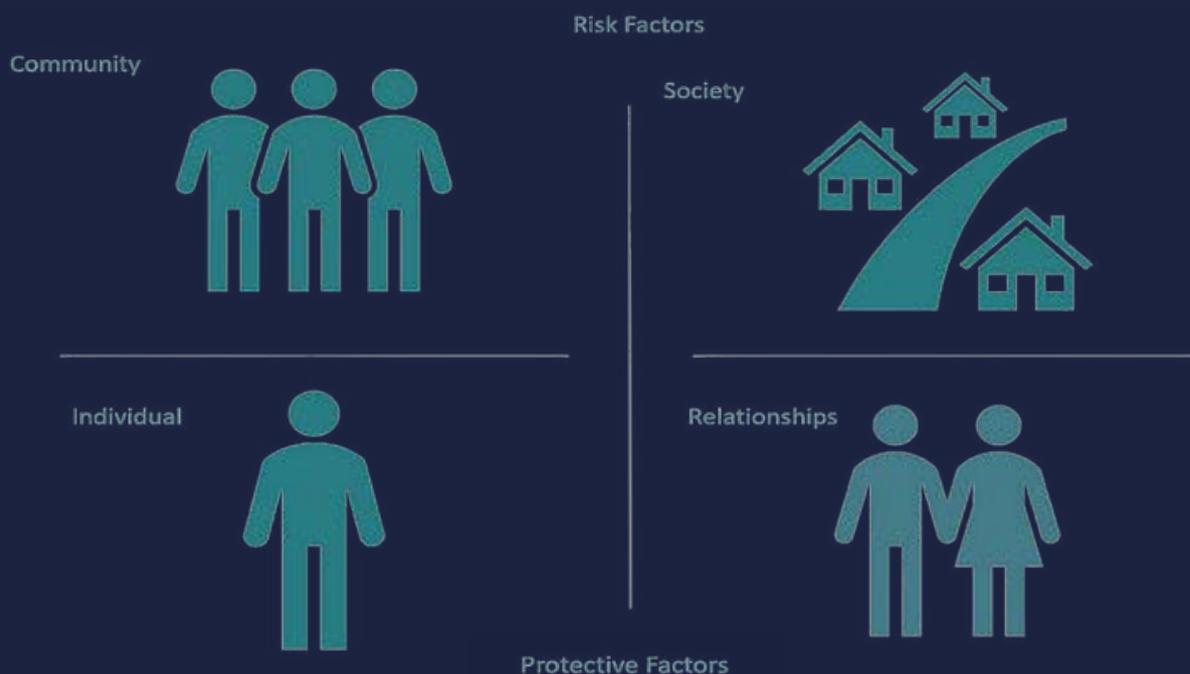
We are committed to adopting a public health approach to tackling serious violence. The principles of a public health approach provide a useful framework to develop approaches which consists of 4 key functions:



We know that Serious violence cannot be tackled in isolation and must be addressed through prevention strategies which address multiple risk factors which cause violence and promote protective factors.

OUR MODEL AND APPROACHES

Risks are factors that can predict an increased likelihood of violence occurring such as unemployment, poverty, unstable housing, homelessness, social isolation, stigma. Protective factors are those that reduce the likelihood of violence occurring in the first place, for example doing well at school, healthy relationships, positive role models, academic support, employment opportunities. These are broken down into different categories shown below:



By adopting a Public Health approach there is a strong focus on primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

- **Primary Prevention** - Universal, aimed at the general population, to prevent the problem from happening in the first place.
- **Secondary Prevention** - To identify characteristics indicating greater risk for particular individuals.
- **Tertiary Prevention** - To prevent identified problems from continuing by providing targeted interventions.

We work with partners in the development and commissioning of a wide range of evidence-based interventions that aim to prevent serious violence. When responding to youth violence and risk of, responses are based on the findings and recommendations from The Youth Endowment Fund Toolkit.

Development of the Strategic Needs Assessment

Our Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) continues to provide an evidence based public health assessment of serious violence across Northumbria. The SNA aims to provide an increased understanding of the types, distribution, and extent of serious violence across Northumbria, as well as an awareness of the prevalence of the underlying risk factors associated with the cause of violent crime.

OUR MODEL AND APPROACHES

A key requirement of the serious violence duty is for local areas to develop a strategic needs assessment (SNA) and strategy to tackle and prevent serious violence. The Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), on behalf of all specified authorities, is coordinating these elements of the Duty.

Each of the six Community Safety Partnerships have developed Local action plans, based on the findings of the Strategic Needs Assessments which will be led by local partners through their respective Community Safety Partnerships, with the support of the Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit as required.

The sharing of data and intelligence is critical to understanding the nature of serious violence, with the SNA including data from multiple partners, including Police, Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service and Tyne & Wear Fire and Rescue Service, North East Ambulance Service, Local Authorities, and local hospitals and NHS Trusts.

Our access to partnership data, systems and the sharing of information continues to improve through the work with the public health institute at Liverpool John Moore's University, allowing us to provide further insight whilst maintaining a public health approach.



DELIVERY, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE

Delivery of the Response Strategy (RS) / Interventions

Throughout Year 6 the VRU funded interventions continued to show impact and successes within our communities, delivering support and mentorship to those vulnerable individuals within Northumbria.

11,008

**YOUNG PEOPLE RECEIVED
KNIFE CRIME AWARENESS**

431

**KNIFE CRIME AWARENESS
SESSIONS DELIVERED**

133

**VIOLENCE PREVENTION AMBASSADORS TRAINED TO
TACKLE ROOT CAUSES OF SERIOUS VIOLENCE, WITH
TRAINING ONGOING FOR A FURTHER 470 PEOPLE**

34,350

**INDIVIDUALS RECEIVED
TRAINING AND AWARENESS
VIA OUR EDUCATION TEAM**

166

**STUDENTS SUPPORTED
BY OUR STUDENT SUPPORT
CHAMPIONS**

58

**YOUNG PEOPLE RECEIVED TAILORED INTENSIVE
SUPPORT THROUGH THE FOCUSED DETERRENCE
PROGRAMME**

9

**FUNDED PROJECTS
THROUGH ROUND 6 OF THE
LOCAL YOUTH FUND**

80

**YOUNG PEOPLE
ENGAGED IN THE TRAINEE
DETECTIVE PROGRAMME**

THE SEASONAL VIOLENCE PROGRAMME HAS SEEN

UP TO

28%

**REDUCTION
IN ASB, AND**

UP TO

15%

**REDUCTION IN
SERIOUS VIOLENCE**

DELIVERY, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE

There were some notable impacts during year 6 from the commissioned projects, including the Hotspot Response Fund, the Violence Prevention Ambassador Programme, and the Education Team.

Hotspot Response Fund

The hotspot response fund, locally known as Project Shield, targets anti-social behaviour and serious violence in 15 specific hotspots in Northumbria. This targeted approach continues to see reductions in ASB, Serious Violence and Knife Crime, contributing to the overall reductions across Northumbria. During the period October-December 2024 reductions included;

- Serious Violence in all hotspots decreased by 20.5% (-181 incidents) during Q3, which has contributed to an overall reduction of 5.8% in serious violence across Northumbria in the 12-months to December 2024.
- Knife enabled Serious Violence continued to fall in the hotspots in Q3. In the hotspots, when comparing knife crime in Q3 24/25 to the same period in 23/24 there has been a reduction of 50% (-17).
- ASB incidents continue to show a downward trend across all categories in the targeted areas, indicating potential improvements in community safety or effectiveness of interventions. During Q3 24/25 there was a 27.8% (-534 incidents) reduction in ASB overall (all hotspots combined) when compared to Q3 in the previous year, with a total of 1,389 incidents.
- And during the quarter there was 8,210 hours of patrols across the 15 hotspots, resulting in over 25,000 engagements in the community.

Violence Prevention Ambassadors Programme (VPA)

Just four months after its launch, the Violence Prevention Ambassadors Programme has reached a major milestone, training over 130 ambassadors and engaging more than 450 individuals in the fight against serious violence.

Led by the Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit, the initiative is growing rapidly, building a strong network of frontline staff, youth workers, and community leaders equipped with the knowledge and tools to intervene early and prevent violence before it escalates.

With tackling serious violence remaining a top priority across the Northumbria force area, this surge in trained ambassadors reflects a growing commitment to breaking cycles of violence and creating safer communities.

DELIVERY, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE

Education Team

The Violence Reduction Unit Education Team have continued to educate our young people on the risks and consequences of violence and weapon carrying, and the laws and consequences of topics such as knife crime, exploitation, online safety, drugs and alcohol. However, this is not something we can do in isolation. There is a need to ensure we are using our resources in the most effective and collaborative way.

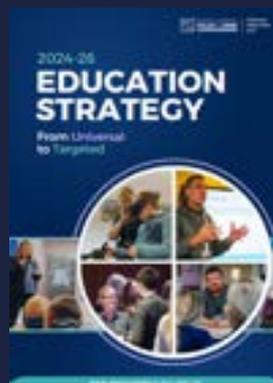
The team delivered 1,584 sessions in 169 schools, reaching 34,350 young people attending the sessions.

An Education Strategy has been created to support delivery of the education team and ensure there is a coordinated and coherent approach to violence reduction themed learning, which will recognise and involve all partners. It sets out our planned partnership approach to building on the positive work that has taken place to date, maximising the resource and expertise available across Northumbria.

To support our tiered approach (Primary, Secondary, Tertiary Prevention) we will deliver on three priorities:

- **Dedicated Resources** – ensure a suite of educational resources around violence reduction are available for professionals, young people and the general public.
- **Targeted Interventions** – use data and intelligence to target our bespoke sessions and interventions to the people that need them most.
- **Strategic Partnerships** – further develop our links with education services and establishments at a strategic level to help us deliver this strategy and further develop our approach.

There are a number of case studies at the end of the report to further highlight some of the good work and impact in our region during year 6, highlighting successful interventions in the identified harm hotspot areas, following support from the VRU, showing signs of encouragement and progress.



DELIVERY, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE

Community and Youth Engagement

We have developed a Communications and Engagement Plan that focuses on keeping partners and members of the public informed of activity. The table below outlines how each communications channel will be used to promote the work of the VRU.

Inform	Provide communities and partners with information on understanding the impact and consequences of Serious Violence, and any opportunities to tackle the problem in communities.
Consult	Consulting with communities to obtain feedback through clearly defined channels, listening to concerns and aspirations and gathering information.
Involve	Involve communities by working directly with them through processes to ensure there is a common understanding of the issue and that community views, concerns and aspirations are reflected in the development of options or approaches.
Collaborate	Collaboration is working in partnership with communities as a team, incorporating their input and advice, jointly formulating solutions and/or options, and sharing agenda setting and deliberation of issues.
Empower	Empowering is about placing final decision-making in the hands of the community - the community decides what will be implemented.

Through these channels, we aim to understand what causes violence and inform members of the public on the impact and experiences across the Northumbria Police Force Area. We have therefore identified the following actions:

1	Continue to review our Communication and Engagement Plan to ensure clear and consistent messaging around serious violence is delivered to target audiences.
2	Continue to co-produce campaigns to reflect the views of our target audience and to ensure the delivery of key messages through the communication channels they use most.
3	Build on our Engagement Working Group, which already features engagement leads from across the six Local Authority areas, by extending the membership to the VCS, ensuring the views of partners and the wider public are included in all aspects of our work.
4	A key focus on engaging with diverse communities such as has faith based or BME.

DELIVERY, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE

Through the plan several engagement activities have been carried out in 2024/25 by the Northumbria VRU Communications and Engagement Lead to inform the Strategic Needs Assessment and Response Strategy.

Other activities have also provided further engagement opportunities with young people and our communities to inform a local response to tackle the issue.

The VRU held some **commissioning consultation workshops** with key stakeholders with the purpose of generating discussion and gathering input on priority interventions across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of prevention for 2025/26.

The discussions focused on identifying critical areas for intervention that would continue to address violence reduction initiatives. Key findings highlighted the need for enhanced education and targeted support across all three levels of prevention, including;

- Expanding educational programmes, across the wider workforce, to ensure frontline staff are equipped to address the complex needs of vulnerable populations.
- Developing targeted interventions for vulnerable adults, particularly those facing substance misuse and mental health challenges.
- Providing focused education and support services for young people at risk of violence, ensuring early intervention to prevent future harm.

The VRU held the sixth round of the **Local Youth Fund** which provides young people with a platform to share their ideas for preventing serious violence and knife crime. This resulted in 9 projects receiving funding, including sport sessions (football and boxing), a photography project exploring the young people's feelings of safety in the community, a Culture Day event, a film workshop, and a space for young people to share views, experiences and innovative ideas in preventing serious violence. The fund has a youth panel to review applications and give their recommendations for funding, ensuring the process is youth led.

The **Violence Prevention Ambassadors Programme** was launched to help tackle the root causes of serious violence. In March 2025, the VRU held its first ambassador session, providing an engagement opportunity with those being trained. This focused around the challenges organisations are seeing in communities, what challenges young people are facing, how ambassadors will put their learning into action, and how they believe the programme could be improved going forward. Since launch over 600 people have signed up and have either been trained or are working through the modules.

The **Trainee Detective Programme** initiative offers young people an immersive, hands-on experience to understand the impact of knife crime through a week-long programme that mirrors a real-life investigation. The programme has been run on 4 occasions, resulting in 80 young people engaged. Some of the original cohort from the first week returned as Youth Ambassadors in the programme.

DELIVERY, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE

Alongside Northumbria Police and wider partners, the VRU is committed to tackling knife crime through education and early intervention, helping young people make safe, informed choices. As part of this, it has worked with University of Sunderland students to develop **knife crime awareness videos** for use in education sessions. Students addressed the difficult issue with creativity and sensitivity, producing five powerful educational films, which will be a vital tool in ongoing awareness and prevention work.

The VRU also worked with the Northern Stage and Meerkat Films to develop the new **County Lines film**. The powerful new film highlights the devastating reality of county lines and exploitation, and features local young people, with local accents and even a local school, and shows how young people can be drawn into these dangerous criminal networks, and the consequences that follow. The film was shared with schools, partners and organisations to raise awareness and to help students, parents and professionals spot the warning signs and prevent exploitation.

The Hotspot Response Fund, known locally as Project Shield, targets anti-social behaviour and serious violence in specific hotspots in Northumbria. The 15 hotspots identified within Northumbria included the City Centres of Newcastle and Sunderland and the transport network. A focus of the project is increased patrols within the hotspots, this provides an opportunity for engagement with Police and Local Authority Patrol Officers to understand the issues in our communities. During the most recent quarter (October-December 2024) there was 8,210 hours of patrols across the 15 hotspots, resulting in over 25,000 engagements in the community. In addition, the project has delivered a community perceptions survey to fully understand the impact of the project on the community in the hotspot areas.



EVALUATION & FORWARD PLANNING

Local Evaluation

We continue to evaluate the VRUs progress against its aims and objectives of reducing serious violence in Northumbria. Testing and refining the approach with the aim of developing an understanding of what works and in what context, with the emphasis on impact than process. During year 7 we will continue to evidence impact through internal and external evaluations.

The VRU has been working the Rocket Science Lab to refine some of this work further, with a priority on understanding what is working for the young people and what impact the VRU is making through the evaluation of three specific interventions (YOLO, Focussed Deterrence, the Education Team, Out of Court Disposal and the Hospital Navigator). There are ambitions to both contribute to the evidence base of what works as well as challenge what constitutes evidence through demonstrating impact for individuals, families, and the wider community. The evaluations have found that strong partnerships and multi-disciplinary working have been established, with further evidence of data sharing and analysis, increased community engagement, and commissioning interventions.

There was further positive evidence of increasing protective factors for young people that are likely to reduce their future involvement in crime and violence, including improved confidence and aspiration, increased ability to manage anger and constructively problem solve as well as an increased awareness of the impacts of violence and knife crime. Young people valued the support they received and felt they had a positive impact on them and their futures.

Evaluation of the Focussed Deterrence programme highlighted the model and its delivery, which has developed effective and sustained partnership working. The evaluation also noted that there was a noticeable reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour for the young people on the programme, with a decrease in reoffending and missing episodes. The behaviours of the young people and their relationships with staff have improved, with positive impacts on the community and young people's trust in the police.

The evaluation of the Education Team, including the Student Support Champions, highlighted that 1,584 sessions were delivered in 169 schools, recording 34,350 session attendances. The session themes were pertinent, relevant and engaging for young people, with school staff engaged in the programme and reporting being more aware of the signs of the risks if violence and exploitation. Some young people benefited from follow-up sessions delivered by teachers during their own PHSE curricula. The evaluation also found that the Education Team adapted the delivery based on setting or atmosphere which proved highly valuable and ensured young people remained engaged, allowing the team to further the understanding of the issues in the local area.

Theory of Change

We continue to embed Theory of Change (ToC) into our core practice. Theories of Change have improved our operating model as we reflect on what we do, how to best measure success, and

EVALUATION & FORWARD PLANNING

consider what works and how. This will enable us to better engage with partners and beneficiaries in co-producing new and refining existing interventions.

Our Theory of Change sets out the activities, anticipated outputs and outcomes and intended impact we will deliver throughout the year. In delivering our Theory of Change we will work collaboratively with partners, stakeholders and intended beneficiaries facilitating a range of activities that includes:

- Strategic Management via the Northumbria Violence Reduction Strategic Board.
- Engagement and consultation with partners, stakeholders, communities and beneficiaries.
- Governance arrangements that support and enable our Insight work, Impact Assessment, Co-Production and the delivery of our violence reduction interventions.
- Evaluation and impact assessment that demonstrates the effectiveness of our work and overall contribution to reducing serious violence and the contribution to the Northumbria Police and Crime Plan.

The short and long term success measures that are linked to our Theory of Change will enable us to track the progress of our activities and impact during the year.

To support VRU's with Theory of Change and intervention monitoring the Home Office asked Ecory's and partners, the national evaluators of the VRU programme, to develop a toolkit. The toolkit presents examples of good practice and provides context and circumstances around specific interventions to determine how they should be monitored and evaluated. This toolkit has been adapted by the Northumbria VRU for intervention monitoring, allowing an assessment of whether the interventions are reaching their intended target groups and achieving their desired outcomes.

Forward Planning - Response Strategy

As we move into Year 7 of the Northumbria VRU, the Response strategy will continue to deliver by prioritising action, leadership and system change in five priority areas listed below and set the plan of action for work programmes for 2025-2026.

Priority 1: Create Stronger Systems to address serious violence.

Priority 2: Data, Evidence and Evaluation

Priority 3: Prevention and Early Intervention

Priority 4: Criminal Justice and Enforcement

Priority 5: Communication, Engagement and Reassurance

The Serious Violence Delivery Plan builds on what we know in relation to each of the identified priorities and provides a response with key actions to tackling serious violence. We will continue to use a Public Health Approach and work closely with local partners and communities to understand these impacts and address the risks that we know contribute to violence.

EVALUATION & FORWARD PLANNING

The following interventions will be adopted within Northumbria during year 7:

DESISTENCE

The **Findaway** programme empowers communities to identify and better respond to domestic abuse. It supports families, friends and community members who are often worried about a loved one but who currently don't have the knowledge, tools and resources to keep themselves and their loved ones safe from further harm. Findaway advocates supported 104 people who contacted their phoneline and this support gives those worried about a victim more confidence to safely support them.

Focused Deterrence offers tailored intensive support, targeted interventions and swift enforcement for individuals causing the most serious violence in our communities. Sunderland City Centre became the first area to benefit from this new intervention. They offer intensive support working with them to address their behaviour, as well as responding to the wider needs of their families. They work using a problem solving approach to disrupt activity and enforcement as appropriate to reduce reoffending. The SAIL (Sunderland Altogether Improving Lives) Team brings together dedicated violence reduction staff, officers from Northumbria Police, Sunderland City Council ASB officers, neighbourhood wardens and key specialists, to deter individuals from crime and provide some much needed respite for the city. The approach has also been adopted in Newcastle City Centre, with the multi-agency team co-located within the City Centre.

The **Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programme (Hub & Spoke)** offers 1-1 support to perpetrators and works with victims offering support. This programme is a behaviour change initiative working with high harm perpetrators who have been identified through the MATAC process. The work will be part of a wider plan to both reduce their offending, provide additional support to the family and ensure further safeguards are in place to mitigate the impact on young people in the family.

PREVENTION

The **Violence Prevention Ambassadors (VPA)** programme is building a strong network of frontline staff, youth workers, and community leaders equipped with the knowledge and tools to intervene early and prevent violence before it escalates. The online training, made up of four interactive modules, offers individuals with crucial insights into:

- **Knife Crime Awareness** – The causes, consequences, and prevention strategies for Knife Crime.
- **Joint Enterprise** – The legal implications and misconceptions of group-related criminal activity.
- **Gangs and Youth Violence** – what gangs are, the role of women and girls, and preventing recruitment.
- **Hidden Harms** – Recognising the impact of parental substance misuse, mental health issues, and domestic abuse, and understanding how to support those affected.

Upon completing the training, participants become Violence Prevention Ambassadors, joining the fast-growing network dedicated to tackling the root causes of serious violence.

EVALUATION & FORWARD PLANNING

The **Active Bystander** approach tackles the root causes of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) requires a primary prevention and long-term approach. There is an identified need for a preventative approach to engage men and boys (as a key part of the solution) around issues connected to masculinity, gendered social norms, misogyny and sexism. Primary prevention work in this field will also not only impact on men's violence towards women and girls, but towards other men and boys. Active bystander interventions can help equip people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to challenge harmful social norms and call-out sexism and misogyny wherever it is seen. It will help give men and boys the chance to develop identities and behaviours that are healthier for themselves and others - to generate a shift in norms and attitudes not just in themselves but importantly in their peers.

The VRU has funded training for frontline staff such as the accredited **DARE toolkit** which is increasing staff confidence to open up early conversations with those they suspect may be harming a loved one, partner or ex-partner. The VRU is supporting the wider roll-out of the DARE training using a network of DARE champions as part of a train-the-trainer approach.

In order to reach young people at the earliest opportunity, our **dedicated education team** deliver informative, interactive and impactful sessions, covering a range of violence reduction topics, in schools and community settings. Education is such a powerful tool as it equips young people with the knowledge to make positive life choices. Through participation in our sessions, they receive an understanding of the risks, impact and consequences of violent crime and the support services available to them. The team have also had a key focus on delivering knife crime sessions to engage young people during Op Sceptre, a national week of action and county lines sessions during an intensification week.

Embedded in eight secondary schools in Newcastle the **Student Support Champions** offer support on local youth violence issues, including knife crime, working with young people on a 1:1 basis and in small groups to build trusted relationships, encouraging them to seek support. The champions deliver violence reduction-themed learning and provide signposting and navigation support from statutory and community-based services. The project aims to improve school attendance, behaviour, reduce suspensions and exclusions, strengthen community links, and prevent youth violence.

EARLY INTERVENTION

Our **Out of Court Disposal pathways** continue to provide a response to crime that police can use locally without having to take the matter to court. It provides an opportunity to work with first time low-level offenders to divert them away from the Criminal Justice Service, by addressing the underlying causes of their behaviour. This includes an 18-25 pathway, and a Women's Pathway.

In partnership with the regions two football foundations, Newcastle and Sunderland, our **YOLO** programme provides mentoring support for young people aged 10 to 16 years identified as being at risk of knife crime. Upon entry to the programme, young people are allocated mentors to work with them on a one-one-one basis to establish positive relationships and ensure full support is in place, as they take part in sessions to address their identified needs.

EVALUATION & FORWARD PLANNING

In partnership with Sunderland Royal Hospital and Northumberland Hospital, the **Hospital Navigators** are based in the Emergency Departments at times when young people are more likely to attend, in order to provide them with on-going support in the community. This intervention engages young people at point of crisis with pathways to wider community support and continued engagement will be developed as part of the project. CBT, knife awareness and solution focussed brief therapy have already been delivered as part of the intervention for young people.

When a person comes into police custody it is defined as the 'Teachable Moment', the point at which the offer of support is more likely to be heard in a positive way. The **Drug Testing on Arrest (DToA)** custody divert intervention will provide this opportunity. The intervention will be delivered by staff experienced in working within the CJS. Evidence and data informs us that we need to look at an older cohort and based on need create with strong links to testing on arrest.

The **Safe Return** early intervention initiative addresses high numbers of missing children in Sunderland. This approach targets children that are below the statutory threshold for support, those children with less than three episodes. Our key principles are that the responses are:

- **Preventative** – avoids further escalation
- **Supportive** – Individual at the centre of response, needs based and outcome focussed
- **Partnership** – working together on community-based solutions
- **Education** – Individuals are better informed about recognising push and pull factors and awareness of support available and keeping safe
- **Independent Brand** – Delivery through a non-statutory experienced organisation

Northumbria Violence Reduction (VRU) Unit **working in partnership with DWP**, to meet a joint objective to improve people's quality of life, by addressing poverty through enabling progression into the workforce and increasing financial resilience. The intervention works to enhance employment, education and training opportunities and reengage people with DWP provision across Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. The model has been created to engage and support vulnerable people, within our communities that are at risk of being involved in serious violence, the DWP coach provision provides a bespoke service that can improve lives and help prevent crime.

The VRU secured Home Office perpetrator fund resources and commissioned **Project CARA** which is an awareness raising early intervention for standard risk domestic abuse perpetrators receiving a conditional caution from the Police. In the first 5 months, 126 perpetrators were referred to the CARA intervention. Of the first 27 of these to complete the programme, 100% reported an increased understanding of domestic abuse and 100% reported an increased understanding of the impact of their behaviour. 61% of victims reported a positive change in their perpetrator's behaviour.

CONCLUSION

The VRU and its partners are committed to making a positive difference to the lives of individuals and families across the whole region and building on the current foundations.

The Northumbria VRU continues to embed a 5 year Response Strategy (2024-2029) which allows the VRU and partners to refine and deliver our approach as well as identify new opportunities to reduce serious violence. The high level objectives of our strategy remain the same, with progress and impact continuing to be monitored via both the Serious Violence Reduction Board and Serious Violence Delivery Group.

- **Reduce hospital admissions for knife related serious violence**
- **Reduce knife enabled serious violence**
- **Reduce homicides**

With the changing landscape of violence, in addition to the Government's commitment to half knife crime and violence against women and girls over the next 10 years as part of its Safer Streets manifesto pledge, the VRUs scope will likely be broadened to incorporate a wider preventative approach to tackling vulnerability, particularly in relation to serious violence, VAWG, ASB and Child Criminal Exploitation.

In addition, the VRU and partners will establish a Prevention Partnership(s) and a prevention panel in each Local Authority area to identify those young people who are not involved with or actively known to services.

Through specified authorities and partners, the identified priorities reflect a system wide commitment to tackling serious violence locally and includes the strategic aims of the Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit and its partners. With our access to partnership data, systems and the sharing of information improving through the data working group and the work with the public health institute at Liverpool John Moores University, allowing us to provide further insight whilst maintaining a public health approach.



CASE STUDIES

Out of Court Disposal (OOC) - DWP Pathway

DC was referred into the programme via the employment Out of Court Disposal pathway resulting from an assault against an emergency worker. Specific needs were identified around stabilisation of benefits, mental health, bereavement, confidence and self-esteem, debt management and employment.

During the full needs-based assessment, the individual advised that they had been on sick leave from work for several months due to their mental health following a historic bereavement. They were struggling with debt and whilst they felt unable to return to work on their current contracted hours or duties, they could not see any other way forward financially, which was causing further anxiety. DC had recently been informed that their claim for tax credits was to migrate to UC, which had also caused them anxiety. DC admitted that prior to the offence their alcohol intake had been increasing and they had sought support through their GP, whom also connected DC with talking therapies.

Specialist support was put in place to support DC and their partner to complete the migration process to UC, something which had caused some anxiety. A referral was made into Changing Lives women's services for support around confidence and self-esteem and a number of 3-way appointments were conducted to support DC to engage with the service. A case conference was held with the UC work coach to ensure they were fully appraised of the additional support needs for the individual, ensuring that DC felt fully supported and understood in their first visit to the JCP. This in turn ensured that the individual began to feel more confident in managing the new UC claim and could develop a positive relationship with the work coach.

DC was signposted to specialist advice around their current employment, having been on sick leave for several months and unsure of their rights or support available to return to work. A referral was also made for DC for specialist support around debt management and signposted to support around the cost of living, through the local authority.

DC was able to successfully return to work with the support of their GP and the employers OT team on slightly reduced hours and with workplace adjustments. DC is continuing with the UC health journey with the support of their UC work coach. DC continues to access support through Changing Lives and talking therapies, and we are continuing to support DC with fortnightly telephone support appointments in their initial few weeks back in employment.

Out of Court Disposal (OOC) - DWP Pathway

MH arrived by ambulance and presented at the SRI having consumed alcohol and cannabis. MH resided at a residential home and had a support worker, it was explained that they had concerns around exploitation and county lines due to unexplained monies and travel

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occurring around exploitation and county lines due to unexplained monies and travel occurring around the Northeast to meet up with acquaintances found on social media.

MH engaged well with the initial appointments and agreed to ongoing support. At assessment MH discussed wanting to access education and admitted she would like to work on her awareness of/and current substance misuse. Through further discussions family networks and relationships, peer relationships, exploitation and county lines were identified as areas of concern and intervention work for MH.

MH has worked and engaged well as we have explored these subjects, as trust and relationship has grown MH has opened about her emotional and mental wellbeing. We have discussed some further work around these subjects. Tools have been put in place for MH to use when feeling low, MH is also able to identify coping strategies that work for her when feeling low. She has been working on tracking her emotions, feelings, diet and daily activity to identify what is affecting her mood and changes to be made. Positive feedback about MH has been received from staff at her residential home.

MH is not currently attending school but has opened up about her reservations on being in education and her future aspirations.

MH is still being supported within the service and new interventions are being put into place as the relationship develops and more situations are identified during appointments.

Safe Return

SM was referred to the Community Diversion Service Safe Return Scheme by Northumbria Police and Together for Children. She presented with 9 missing episodes, of which four were carried out in 2024. Multiple risk factors for future missing episodes were identified, such as, missing at her previous school and recently having changed schools, and living in foster care with another service user with whom they would historically go missing together.

Initial appointments and assessments identified that SM requires support around;

- Ability to recognise when somebody is a poor influence - due to discussing poor historical friendships and going missing under the influence of what was suspected to be peer pressure, SM recognised she could improve in that area.
- Confidence in oneself and in making positive changes - SM struggles in that area, as it was noted she does not have self-confidence which also links to making positive changes.
- Doing well at school - SM struggles concentrating in class, mainly on subjects she finds difficult to comprehend, cascading to fidgeting and poor anger management. This has historically led to suspensions..

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These are areas that could potentially contribute to future missing episodes if not addressed. SM has been engaging with the service for two months now, and the above areas were the focus of her interventions so far, with interventions delivered on peer relationships, self-confidence, and anger management. SM's improvement has been remarkably fast, with no further missing from home episodes or suspensions from school since we started work together.

Although ongoing, there have been significant changes regarding SM's understanding of the effect others' behaviours has on her emotions and boundaries she has set herself, and recognising the way intense emotions such as anger can affect her mentally and physically. In addition, through intervention work, SM has a safe space to reflect on, and recognise her positive traits, and skills which has supported her journey towards self-appreciation and confidence.

Community Diversion (Youth)

EC was referred to the Community Diversion Service by their social worker due to a risk of exploitation or she was suspected to have already been exploited. EC was open to MSET and was linked to older males in a stolen car who had travelled to Manchester. Her older sister was known to associate with older males and had links out of the North-East.

At the Community Diversion Service assessment reviews, EC was assessed as needing support around;

- Safe and Healthy Sexual Relationships - EC had no concept of what made a 'healthy relationship' and how to spot unhealthy relationships.
- Drugs and Alcohol - EC admitted that she will often drink alcohol to excess and would smoke cannabis often.
- Impulsivity - EC shared that she does not think about the consequences of her behaviour and will often act impulsively. EC feels really 'low' after she has acted impulsively as they often regret what they have said/done.
- Road Safety - EC admitted not having road sense and often running into the road without properly looking if there is oncoming traffic.
- Anger Management - EC would run away from home or people if they felt overwhelmed and angry. Support around managing anger and emotions was necessary to help EC with managing emotions and keeping themselves safe when overwhelmed.
- Healthy Friendships - some of EC's friends were negative influences and would put her at risk of harm.

EC has been engaging with the service and has completed her care plan, with the above areas the focus of her interventions so far. She has developed coping strategies for when she is

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feeling angry/overwhelmed, which helped when EC was faced with an overwhelming situation. EC has reduced her alcohol/cannabis consumption dramatically and often goes two or three weeks without any alcohol/cannabis at all and recognises she will go towards alcohol and cannabis when she is feeling stressed and overwhelmed. We will be completing more work on this and other more positive activities.

EC has improved her relationships with her parents by managing her emotions more effectively and has made some new friends and is not associating with anyone older than herself, recognising previous relationships were not positive and were exploitative.

EC has not had any missing from home episodes, and all professionals have recognised that there has been a dramatic improvement in her behaviour, and if continued social services won't need to be involved.

YOLO (NUF)

MN was referred to the YOLO programme with the aim to support him with positive behaviour change due to the concerns over what he was getting involved in within the community. MN was associating with negative influences who were getting him involved in crime and it was identified that YOLO would be a positive engagement tool for him.

Once MN was referred to the programme the key was to gain a positive rapport as quickly as possible. During the early weeks of engagement a common ground (football & Newcastle United) was identified to be able to use in conversation and engage MN in sessions.

MN would talk at the start of every session about recent results and matches which would then set up completing the chosen intervention afterwards very easily. Once rapport had been built we then began to have open and honest conversations regarding MN's behaviour and what he believed he needed to improve on. These conversations were extremely positive with MN identifying key areas of improvement that was needed and working together to discuss how we would achieve these targets.

Throughout the programme MN has displayed a turnaround in his behaviours, he has not come to attention of the police or had any concerns regarding what he is doing in the community. MN has also had exceptional feedback from school and is now regarded as one of the stand out pupils in the school. His Mother has also noticed a change in his behaviours, with no concerns MN will be involved in any trouble and is excited to see where he goes once he leaves school.

MN has continued to maintain positive feedback from staff throughout the programme advocating his positive behaviour change and encouragement weekly to sustain it. Due to this positive behaviour change MN has also received a reward of match tickets to watch Newcastle United.

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MN feels more positive for his future and is happy knowing he no longer causes his Mum concern over his behaviours.

MN is currently in his last year of school and is looking to leave school and find employment or an apprenticeship in plastering and has expressed a desire once he finishes the programme and school to return to the Foundation for support in employability and finding an apprenticeship.

MN has been a standout participant on the programme and has displayed an incredible change in his behaviour and is testament to him and all his hard work. He has shown maturity and honesty in himself well beyond his years and has an extremely bright future ahead.





NORTHUMBRIA
**POLICE & CRIME
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