

ANNUAL REPORT

2026



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 I was elected as your Police and Crime Commissioner, I have 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 as you will see set out in this report. But, 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 by focusing on what works, how we respond to the needs of our communities, and putting 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 [Serious Violence Response Strategy 2024-2029](#).

The strategy is Northumbria's collective response to tackling the causes and impacts of serious violence, and it sets out our approach to tackling violent crime over the next three 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.

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.

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 areas:

- Gateshead Council
- Newcastle City Council
- North Tyneside Council
- Northumberland County Council
- South Tyneside Council
- Sunderland City Council



INTRODUCTION & LOCAL CONTEXT

There have been small increases in both the levels of serious violence and knife crime during 2025, although the rates of offences per 1,000 are lower than those seen post-covid, whilst the costs associated with serious violent crime shows a slight decrease of **3.5%** in 2025, along with a reduction in the cost per resident.

Levels of serious violence increased by almost 3% in Northumbria, an increase of 633 offences. A decrease was seen in Northumberland local authority area, with small increases in the other local authority areas.



There has been a **reduction in the levels of homicides in 2025, decreasing by 13.3%** following static levels in 2024.



A breakdown of serious violence offences shows **reductions in robberies of a person (20.6%), and assault with injury offences (3%).**

As highlighted in previous years almost a third of **offences of serious violence in Northumbria was domestic related**, with 6,456 offences. **Offences of Violence Against Women's and Girls accounted for 40% off all crime** during 2025, with 75% of those victims aged over 25 years old.

Levels of offences involving a knife have also increased during 2025, with an 8% increase (83 offences). With a reductions witnessed in Northumberland and Newcastle local authority areas. And **possession of knife offences decreased by 7% (43 offences)**, with 566 offences during 2025.

A breakdown of knife enabled offences shows **reductions in sexual offences (66.7%), and robberies of a person (19.2%).**

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 2025. With offenders likely to be aged between 25-35 years old, with half of all offenders.

We have seen a **small increase of 17 hospital admissions due to a sharp object** during the current financial year to date (April – December 2025) when compared to the same period in 2024, reflective of the small increase in offences. We have also seen a **small increase in the hospital admissions due to an assault** during the current FYTD, increasing by 39 admissions.

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 positive reductions in areas of high serious violence during 2025.

THE VRU LANDSCAPE

Funding for 2026/27 for the Serious Violence Reduction Programme, including VRUs, was confirmed in January 2026 by the Home Office. This allows the Northumbria VRU to continue with the proposed commissioning intentions.

The VRU has submitted a delivery plan for the forthcoming year which will continue to prioritise serious youth violence and public space knife crime, with the Governments existing three measures still a key focus to reduce in;

- Hospital admissions for assaults with a knife or sharp object (for all ages, and especially those under 25-year-olds);
- Knife and sharp enabled serious violence recorded by the police for all ages;
- Homicides recorded by the police but especially among those victims aged under 25 and in non-domestic settings (where the data allows).

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.

Serious violence and knife crime continue to be national priorities due to increases in prevalence and the impact serious violence has on individuals, families, and communities. On 7th April the Policing Minister launched the Governments halving knife crime action plan which seeks to bring a number of departments together to meet this manifesto pledge, and this will be reflected in the local delivery. The plan is presented as a four-part approach:

- **SUPPORT** young people to get a better start in life (Strengthening support systems around children and families to prevent adverse childhood experiences and risk factors linked to serious violence. This includes increased investment in youth services, Young Futures Hubs and support to address persistent school absences and investing in mental health support teams in schools)
- **STOP** those at risk from turning to knife crime (Focus on identifying and protecting children most vulnerable to exploitation and serious violence, ensuring evidence based support and joined up public services. There will be investment in the County Lines Programme and further investment in VRU's)
- **POLICE** our streets to punish perpetrators and stop offending (improved effectiveness and visibility of law enforcement, cracking down on the availability of dangerous knives. This includes more neighbourhood policing, new investigative tools and approaches and tightened regulation and accountability regarding the sale and online promotion of knives.)
- **END** the cycle of knife crime (Measures focussing on strengthening the youth justice system to better divert young people and improve the rehabilitation of adult offenders to address life factors that increase their risk of offending. This will include the identification and targeting of a small group of habitual knife carriers who pose a disproportionately high risk to the public.

THE VRU LANDSCAPE

The development of the Young Future Prevention Panels has commenced nationally, with local pilots developed across the 20 current VRU areas during 26/27. As a pilot area Northumbria will have 3 partnerships (Newcastle, South Tyneside, and Sunderland).

In addition, the Knife Crime Concentrations Fund (KCCF) will further increase the Governments focus on tackling areas with the highest concentrations of knife crime. Northumbria, as one of the identified 27 areas, will target areas through intensive problem solving / Problem Orientated Policing (POP), with the aim of a 33% reduction in knife crime in those areas, and that interventions should be designed to be sustainable to maintain reductions long term.

The VRU will continue to convene the responsibilities of the Serious Violence Legal Duty on behalf of all specified authorities locally during 2026/27. The priorities outlined below were designed to address the findings of the strategic needs assessment and were agreed by the Serious Violence Strategic 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 Government has also recently announced the police governance reform proposals in the UK, with the aim to strengthen police governance by abolishing police and crime commissioners at the end of their current term in 2028. This change will transfer police governance functions to mayors of strategic authorities or elected council leaders through new police and crime boards.

The reforms are part of a series of changes to drive quality, consistency, and efficiency in policing and ensure it is set up to deliver for the public. The proposals include a new three-tier structure for policing, with the National Police Service, responsible for delivering specialist capabilities nationwide (e.g. digital, data, forensic and specialist crime fighting support), and police force mergers of the current 43 force structure, creating smaller Local Policing Areas embedding policing in local communities.



THE VRU LANDSCAPE

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. An engagement plan has been developed and is ongoing with a refresh of the Police and Crime Plan planned for later in 2026.

The [‘Safer Streets and Stronger Communities’ plan](#) for Northumberland and Tyne and Wear is for 2025 – 2029, 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 including public health, local authority, teaching, social worker, police, and 3rd Sector.



The VRU is governed by the **Strategic 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.

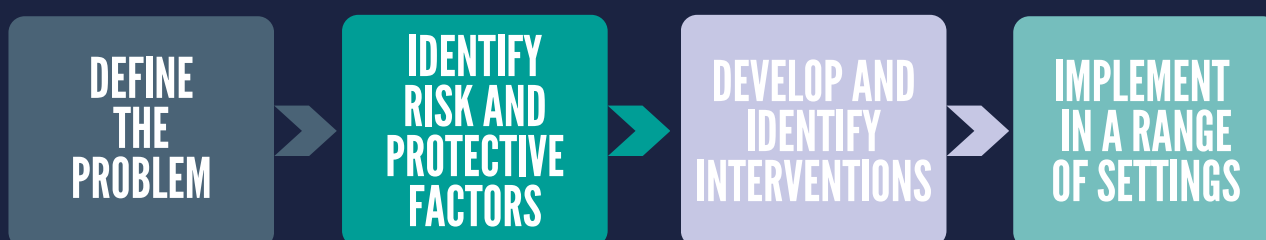
OUR MODEL AND APPROACHES



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 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. 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:



OUR MODEL AND APPROACHES

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.

The VRU has developed an interactive Strategic Needs Assessment dashboard to meet the requirements of the Serious Violence Duty and contains multi-agency data, including Police data, hospital admissions, NEAS, Fire Service, and other public health datasets.

The SNA has been produced collaboratively with partners through the serious violence data working group, with representatives informing and shaping the product. The SNA and the data contained within it will be refreshed annually, and to support partners locally a separate Serious Violence dashboard will continue to be updated monthly providing the latest violence data.

After consultation with partners, the World Health Organisations (WHO) definition of serious violence was used:

“The intentional use of physical force or power threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation”

OUR MODEL AND APPROACHES

The following crime types included:

- Homicide
- Knife crime enabled serious violence
- Serious violence including violence against the person
- Robbery
- Sexual assault
- Domestic related violence
- VAWG

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

Over the past year, a wide range of interventions have been delivered with partners to respond to local needs. These are just some of the initiatives making a difference across the region:

23,298

**YOUNG PEOPLE RECEIVED
EDUCATIONAL INPUTS**

654

**EDUCATION INPUTS DELIVERED
INCLUDING KNIFE CRIME**

800+

**SIGN UPS TO THE VIOLENCE PREVENTION AMBASSADORS
PROGRAMME WITH ALMOST 300 PEOPLE COMPLETING
ALL 4 MODULES AND JOINING A GROWING NETWORK.**

261

**PROFESSIONALS RECEIVED
WORKPLACE DOMESTIC ABUSE
AND VULNERABILITY TRAINING**

117

**STUDENTS SUPPORTED
BY OUR STUDENT SUPPORT
CHAMPIONS**

£13,500

**SECURED BY YOUNG PEOPLE, THROUGH THE
LOCAL YOUTH FUND, TO LEAD INNOVATIVE
PROJECTS TO PREVENT SERIOUS VIOLENCE**

**THE SAIL TEAM PROVIDED TAILORED SUPPORT, RESULTING IN YOUNG
PEOPLE REDUCING OR STOPPING HARMFUL BEHAVIOUR THROUGH
CONSISTENT GUIDANCE AND TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS.**

**THE SEASONAL VIOLENCE PROGRAMME WHICH INCREASES
ACTIVITY DURING THE SUMMER AND WINTER, CONTINUES TO SEE
REDUCTIONS IN SERIOUS VIOLENCE, KNIFE CRIME AND ASB.**

**THE DRUG TESTING ON ARREST APPROACH, FOR ADULTS ARRESTED
FOR TRIGGER OFFENCES, IS CREATING A FAST PATHWAY INTO
SPECIALIST TREATMENT AND WRAPAROUND SUPPORT.**

DELIVERY, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE

There were some notable impacts during Year 7 from the commissioned projects, including the Seasonal Violence Programme, Safe Return, and the Out of Court Disposal DWP Partnership.

SEASONAL VIOLENCE

The Seasonal Violence programme takes a targeted approach to tackling issues linked to serious violence. The project and targeted activities continue to see reductions. During the latest two months (December & January) there were reductions in ASB, Serious Violence and Knife Crime across the hotspots compared to the same months in 2024.

- During December and January there has been a 30% reduction in levels of ASB in Gateshead town centre.
- In Newcastle and Sunderland City Centres levels of serious violence remained static.
- In Wallsend, North Tyneside there were both reductions in ASB of 51% (22 incidents), and serious violence 7%.
- Two targeted areas in Northumberland decreased in ASB, with Bedlington reducing by 10.5% and Blyth by 13.7%, with reductions in serious violence in Ashington and Blyth, decreasing by 8.7% and 5.7% respectively.
- South Tyneside saw decreases in incidents of ASB across two targeted areas (Temple Park and Simonside), reducing by 40% (15 incidents) and 15.7% (8 incidents). These areas also saw reductions in violence, both decreasing by 35%.

SAFE RETURN

Safe Return is an early Intervention initiative to address high numbers of missing children in Sunderland. This approach targets children that are below the statutory threshold for support. In this case 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
- **Independent Brand** – delivery through a non-statutory experienced organisation

The recent evaluation found that there was;

- **Positive Reduction in Missing Episodes:** Stakeholders reported 81% reduction in missing episodes compared to a 51% reduction in missing episodes for the 59 young people who declined the support, attributed to the proactive nature of the scheme.

DELIVERY, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE

- **High Vulnerability of Cohort:** A significant proportion of young people referred to Safe Return had safeguarding concerns, including Child Protection Plans, Early Help involvement, and being Looked After Children.
- **Flexible and Relational Model:** The programme's adaptability to emerging risks through regular weekly contact and relationship-building was identified as a major strength.
- **Strong Impact on Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health:** 24% of young people were identified as having mental health concerns, 18% drug and alcohol and 10% referenced violence in the home.
- **Greater Informed Decision-Making Amongst Young People:** While the cohort of young people who completed the worksheet was limited, their responses appear to show how Safe Return has a positive influence on their capacity to make informed and safer choices in the face of situations which they may find challenging.

DWP PARTNERSHIP

The Out of Court Disposal DWP employability pathway offers a bespoke service, which aims to identify barriers through a full needs-based assessment and ongoing assessment as needs change/develop. Customers feedback that the intensive support offered, and flexible voluntary nature of the ongoing programme has made them feel that their needs are important and the right support is accessed.

The care co-ordination aspect of the programme allows to support the cohort to successfully engage with specialist support provision and if provision is not meeting their needs for any reason, they are offered alternative options. When the cohort feel heard and that their support needs are being met, they are more likely to successfully sustain Education Training or Employment.

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 7, 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

The OPCC, VRU and partners continue to engage with our communities and stakeholders to better understand the landscape of violence across the Northumbria force area.

As detailed within the SVRP Partnership guidance the SNA should embed the views and voices of the communities and young people served by the SVRP Partnerships into operations and delivery. An engagement and communication plan has been developed as part of the Response Strategy 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 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 2025/26 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 Violence Reduction Unit also continues to develop its interventions through monitoring data and exploring case studies which illuminate the experience of our communities. We continue to engage with those involved with the interventions and partners including;

- A **Knife Crime Task Force** was established, looking at ways to build on a regional response to tackling knife crime.
- As part of a **Strategic Board consultation**, two large board member focus groups were consulted on how we can improve the strategic boards moving forward. Partners feedback is leading to an amalgamation of the Serious Violence Reduction and ASB boards.
- During 2025 an event took place with the first cohort of **Violence Prevention Ambassadors**. Their views led to the development of a new county lines module to expand the programme which was launched in an online Lunch & Learn session in March, with over 80 ambassadors joining. They also expressed the need for a resource around teenage relationship harm, which is being developed with the Northern Stage theatre, young people and all local authorities, with an expected launch event in May. The Violence Prevention Ambassadors Network now has around 300 members and made up of practitioners, education staff, youth workers, policing, LA staff, and more. The network is an area of engagement we will be building on in the year ahead.
- The **County Lines Video resource** was developed with young people and Northern Stage and launched last year. It has 7k views on YouTube and is used in education inputs.
- 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.

The VRU has increased engagement with young people to provide greater insight into the experiences of young people and co-produce interventions to reduce serious violence, providing a consistent approach to engagement. Examples of this engagement and co-production include;

- Through the local youth fund responses from young people provided an understanding around feelings of safety, where they feel safe/unsafe and what they think would improve it. Young people were also part of the youth panel to launch the fund, and decide which projects should be funded, ensuring the fund continues to be led by them.

DELIVERY, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE

- The Trainee Detective Programme continues to understand the impact the programme has had on the young people involved, involving young people, schools, and parents. Previous participants of the programme returned as new trainee detective ambassadors to support other young people. They also delivered an assembly in their school supported by VRU staff, Northumbria Police and the Connor Brown Trust.
- There were a number of discussions with young people, the VRU, Northumbria Police, and Samantha's Legacy prior to them creating the knife bench in Blyth. A follow up session was held to recognise their work and discuss the impact they felt the bench had.
- The VRU Education Team is actively engaging with schools and students to investigate further their experiences and perceptions of serious violence; this will complement the co-production of learning resources for children and professionals.
- The voice of young people is also informing the Prevention Panel in Gateshead, through 2 young people from the PAC (Peer Action Collective) network who have been helping inform how young people are engaged and have a voice in the future.



EVALUATION & FORWARD PLANNING

Local Evaluation

We continue to evaluate the VRU 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 8 we will continue to evidence impact through internal and external evaluations.

Throughout the last year the VRU has continued to work 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 (Safe Return, Out of Court Disposal and the Serious Violence Reduction Partnership).

The evaluation of the Serious Violence Reduction Partnership found that the Northumbria VRU is a well-respected and highly valuable part of the North East landscape to tackle serious violence, which helps to shape local and regional agendas and approaches through established strong partnerships and multi-disciplinary working. This partnership continues to be data-led, with increasing data sharing and a growing evidence base to shape commissioned interventions and approaches.

Evaluation of the Safe Return intervention highlighted positive reductions in missing episodes for the young people supported through the intervention. The programme's adaptability to emerging risks and relationship-building was identified as a major strength. A significant proportion of the young people referred were identified to have high vulnerability, with the evaluation noting that the support had a strong impact on their emotional wellbeing and mental health, and a positive influence on their capacity to make informed and safer choices in the face of situations which they may find challenging.

The evaluation of the Out of Court Disposal pathways highlighted positive reflections for all approaches, with successful working from all pathways across multiple agencies and services, including health, housing, community services. All pathways, women's pathway, youth pathway, employment pathway, and the serious violence pathway all had high compliance from those engaged, and all showing positive changes to pre and post engagement outcomes. It was noted that no support would end without further signposting to services if needed, including drug/alcohol recovery, Andy's man club, James Place, and Safe Havens.

It was also noted that all other pathways often referred into the DWP collaborative pathway due to its success.

In partnership with local universities, the VRU will evaluate the Drug Testing on Arrest intervention, the Violence Prevention Ambassadors programme, and the Young Future Panels during year 8, to provide an understanding of the effectiveness of these approaches and the impact they're having in Northumbria.

EVALUATION & FORWARD PLANNING

Theory of Change

Using our Theory of Change we continue to improve our operating model as we reflect on what we do, how to best measure success, and consider what works and how. This sets out the activities, anticipated outputs and outcomes and intended impact we will deliver throughout the year and enables us to better engage with partners and beneficiaries in co-producing new and refining existing interventions.

We monitor the progress of our activities and impact throughout the year using the short and long term success measures that are linked to our Theory of Change. This progress and impact is measured and monitored using a Home Office toolkit which has been adapted by the Northumbria VRU, 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 8 of the Northumbria VRU, 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 2026/27:

DESISTENCE

The **Focused Deterrence** project aims to take a multi-agency approach to addressing serious youth violence in Sunderland City centre, Newcastle City Centre and South Tyneside through facilitating access to support services, and law enforcement intervention when needed. This approach is based on engaging a wide range of key partners to provide person-centred intervention and support for young people who are identified as being responsible for a disproportionate number of violent offences in the city centre. Jointly working in a trauma informed way to identify and meet the needs of these young people key partners include safeguarding partnerships, Youth Justice Services, health and children services. Bringing together the intelligence and knowledge of these services aims to provide a more holistic and trauma-informed approach to prevent serious violence.

The projects each works with a small cohort of 10-15 young people who are involved in serious youth violence. Those who meet the threshold for the service receive tailored 1-1 interventions with the Focused Deterrence team.

The **Findaway** programme is managed by WWIN Specialist Domestic Abuse Services but reaches across the whole of Northumbria. Findaway provides a telephone helpline for anybody who is concerned about a relative or friend to talk to a trained practitioner who can listen to and provide some emotional support for their concerns; some information about the dynamics of domestic abuse and the barriers to leaving; and discuss with them the practical steps they might consider taking to support the person they are concerned about.

Working within commissioned services across the 6 local authority areas as part of the MATAC process, our **Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programme (Hub & Spoke)** provides 1-1 support to perpetrators and working 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 Programme (VPA)** is a series of e-learning modules designed to increase awareness around the impact of knife crime, joint enterprise, gangs and youth violence, and hidden harms, and County Lines.

- **Knife Crime Awareness** – The causes, consequences, and prevention strategies for Knife Crime.
- **Joint Enterprise** – The legal implications and misconceptions of group-related criminal activity.

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- **Gangs and Youth Violence** – Understanding 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.
- **County Lines and Exploitation** – Understanding what County Lines are, how criminal groups recruit and exploit vulnerable individuals, what to look out for, and practical support.

The 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. Using a public health model, whole system approach, we are acknowledging that tackling serious violence requires input from schools, police, health community and voluntary sector and community leaders.

The **Seasonal Violence Fund** enables activity in each local authority area of Northumbria Police Force area to focus on serious violence, knife crime, possession offences and homicide hotspot areas, as identified within the VRU's SNA. The interventions are led by Community Safety Partnerships and Northumbria Police and include extra activity in identified areas. Intelligence will be gathered routinely, and activity will occur using a place-based approach and will increase visibility in identified communities.

Working with our 6 local authorities and their behaviour change services, the **Northumbria Hub and Spoke (H&S) Model** is part of the MATAC process and provides 1:1 intensive case management to high risk, high harm serial perpetrators of domestic abuse. The model includes integrated survivor support to reduce the impacts on adult and child survivors. H&S does not just focus on behaviour, but on the whole person and the wider circumstances around them. By addressing both behaviour and the underlying causes of harm, the H&S Model includes work that helps: stabilise their day-to-day lives; reduces the pressures that increase risk to their victim-survivors; supports them to take responsibility for their behaviour; and helps them create safer families, safer relationships, and safer communities. During 2025-26, offending scores for the perpetrators have shown sustained decreases in offending around recency, frequency, gravity and number of victims in the 12 months after exiting the programme.

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. It gives people the understanding and confidence to have conversations with friends, family and colleagues around issues like misogyny and sexism that lead to violence against women and girls. It also offers a range of tools to challenge sexist attitudes and behaviours to help people around you recognise the problem and think about how harmful it is. 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 sessions are delivered using a mix of direct, scripted, input from the trainers and group exercises that are designed to encourage the learner to think about gender inequality and misogyny.

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EARLY INTERVENTION

The **Drug Testing on Arrest (DToA)** approach is a nationally recognised pilot integrating criminal justice and public health approaches to address substance misuse as a driver of serious violence.

The model links testing at point of arrest to rapid referral and support for adults arrested for trigger offences, serious violence and/or domestic abuse, creating a fast pathway into specialist treatment and wraparound support. Individuals will be intercepted whilst in custody and then offered ongoing support within the community to offer holistic support to address criminogenic and social need.

Safe Return emphasises early intervention to allow the underlying issues associated with young people experiencing missing episodes to be addressed. This approach targets children in Sunderland and South Tyneside that are below the statutory threshold for support, those aged between 10-17 years old with less than three missing episodes. A personalised support plan is created in the second meeting with the young person, and a workbook is introduced on the third meeting which covers various topics relating to their life, e.g., home and family, relationships, friendships, emotional wellbeing, anger, anxiety, goals for the future.

Every young person participating in the programme completes an outcome questionnaire upon their arrival where they score 10 areas of their lives, such as physical health, mental health, positive friendship groups, and family dynamics using a Likert scale. This enables their support worker to structure their individual plan according to the young person's needs.

Our dedicated **Education Team** continues to 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. The VRU continues to fund Pol-Ed which supports Local Authorities by providing educational resources and tools to deliver to Children and Young People as part of a 3-tier educational engagement model and supports teachers with unique sessions that develop children's understanding, resilience and willingness to support each other.

The **Student Support Champions (SSC)** work with young people and offer support on topics such as involvement with knife crime, county lines, drug use, drug dealing, and challenges at home or with family members, working with at-risk young people on a 1:1 basis and in small groups. They're embedded in a group of primary and secondary schools in Newcastle with the aim of improving school attendance and behaviour, reduce suspensions and exclusions, strengthen community links, and prevent serious youth violence, in addition to providing signposting and navigation support from statutory and community-based services.

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Our **Out of Court Disposal Pathways** (18-25 Pathway, DWP Partnership, & Serious Violence Prevention Pathway) continue to provide a response to crime that police can use locally without having to take the matter to court. They are designed to address the offending behaviour of the person being diverted away from the CIS.

- The **18-24 pathway** works with male offenders to better understand the reasons for the offending behaviour and works to address social and criminogenic need to divert from court and aide desistance.
- **Working in partnership with the DWP**, this pathway works with some of the most vulnerable people across Northumbria force area and offers support to reengage with Job Centre Plus and provides bespoke advice and support on obtaining benefits.
- The **Serious Violence Prevention Pathway** is a training package designed by Northumbria VRU and delivered by Northumbria Police and aims to raise awareness of the impact and consequences of serious violence.

Also under the out of court response framework, **Project CARA** (Cautioning and Relationship Abuse) works with any standard risk DA perpetrators receiving a conditional caution and meeting CARA criteria to address their behaviours. Perpetrators must attend 2 full-day awareness raising workshops (4 weeks apart). In 2025-26, 398 offenders were referred to CARA with 262 completions. Outcomes showed positive change in relation to awareness of domestic abuse; how offender views personal/family relationships; how offender views their own behaviour; their motivation to change aspects of behaviour or life; and reduced reoffending.

In partnership with the regions two football foundations, Newcastle and Sunderland, our **YOLO** programme provides mentoring support for young people aged between 10 and 16 years and who have been identified as at risk of becoming involved in violence or other serious crime. YOLO matches a young person with a YOLO mentor (an employed role) and encourages them to meet weekly for around 20 weeks. This aim to help the young person form a good relationship with a positive role model, to develop social skills, form constructive relationships, and develop positive behaviours and aspirations. The interventions aim to support young people to maximise their potential and reduce the likelihood of their involvement in knife crime and serious violence in future.

The programme is divided into three phases, Intervention, Consolidation, Transition. During transition each young person is exited from YOLO into services that can continue to provide the young person with support and guidance to further the work completed in their community.

NE Youth's ACT Ambassadors are young people with lived experience who will work alongside each prevention panel to hear the voice of children and young people who have been part of the panel process. They will provide reassurance to children and young people who are about to participate in the panel process, and they will provide 'what works' information to the panel members. ACT

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ambassadors will interview children and young people to hear their experiences of VRU interventions and deliver their findings to Young Future Prevention Panel members to inform and influence future delivery.

To support the Education Team, Focus Deterrence Intervention, Prevention Panels, Youth Justice Service, and Action for Children, the **Do It Profiler** is an established neuro-diverse web-based modular screening and assessment tool which allows a child-centred approach to be taken to gather information to enable instant functional guidance to be delivered. The tool generates a report that highlights strengths and challenges with practical guidance.

The **Make a Change (MAC)** intervention in Newcastle is a community wide, early response to people using harmful behaviour in intimate relationships. Whilst MAC does work with those with more entrenched behaviours, it is also very much an early intervention: identifying and responding to patterns of domestic abuse at the earliest opportunity, with a pathway to a behaviour change. MAC also delivered multi agency training and bespoke sessions with over 400 professionals, providing the skills to have early conversations with those who harm and having clear referral pathways to MAC.



CONCLUSION

As the nature of violence evolves, and in line with the Government's Safer Streets manifesto commitment to halve knife crime and violence against women and girls over the next decade, the Northumbria VRU and partners are committed to making a positive and lasting difference to the lives of individuals and families across the region, building on the strong foundations already in place.

The Northumbria VRU continues to embed its five-year Response Strategy (2024–2029), which provides a framework for refining and delivering our approach, while identifying new opportunities to reduce serious violence. The high-level objectives of the strategy remain unchanged, with progress and impact monitored through the Serious Violence Reduction Board and the Serious Violence Delivery Group.

The core strategic objectives are to reduce:

- **Hospital admissions for assaults with a knife or sharp object (for all ages, and especially those under 25-year-olds);**
- **Knife and sharp enabled serious violence (for all ages);**
- **Homicides recorded (especially among those victims aged under 25 and in non-domestic settings).**

Through collaboration with specified authorities and partners, the identified priorities demonstrate a whole-system commitment to tackling serious violence at a local level and reflect the strategic aims of the Northumbria VRU.

The development of Young Future Prevention Panels has commenced nationally, with local pilots developed in Newcastle, South Tyneside, and Sunderland. These will focus on identifying young people who are not currently engaged with, or known to, existing services, enabling earlier intervention and support.

In addition, the Knife Crime Concentrations Fund (KCCF) will further target areas in Northumbria through intensive problem solving / Problem Orientated Policing (POP), with the aim of reducing knife crime by 33% in those areas, and that interventions should be designed to be sustainable to maintain reductions long term.

During the next year the VRU and partners will work together to reduce serious violence in Northumbria, with a wide range of interventions which will be delivered to respond to local needs and make a difference within our communities and across the region.

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Out of Court Disposal (OCD) - 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 apprised 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.

Hospital Navigators

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.

Focussed Deterrence (Newcastle)

CA was referred to the FD intervention after being arrested in Newcastle City Centre for Affray. At this time there were growing concerns around associations of older peers, escalating risks and involvement in serious offending behaviours. Following this incident, CA was further arrested for further offences including facilitation of Child sexual exploitation (CSE) Robbery and False imprisonment. CA remains under investigation for facilitating CSE and is due to stand trial for robbery and false imprisonment in June.

Whilst recognising the seriousness of these offences the FD worker looked at the chronology of information shared from police and children's social care which established a pattern of events which indicated CA was not only involved in offending behaviours but would also suggest CA was a victim of exploitation. Prior to the FD intervention, CA has consistently refused to engage with services, and despite multiple safeguarding referrals, due to lack of engagement this vulnerability had not been further explored.

Through persistent engagement and a focus on trust and building relationships, the FD worker has supported CA and parents to work with services for the first time. This is a significant step forward given previous refusal, distrust and disengagement. As a result of the FD intervention, a referral into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) was completed and CA has now received a conclusive grounds decision, formally recognising him as a victim of exploitation.

Through referring to available services offered within YJS, the FD worker has also supported CA to complete a Speech and Language assessment (SALT). This has identified communication needs and enabled a better understanding of communication, ensuring appropriate support is in place including during any involvement in the criminal justice process.

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Through consistent interventions, CA is now beginning to recognise the unhealthy and exploitative nature of his relationship with an adult male, who is also his co-accused in relation to criminal offences. Whilst understanding CA is still under investigation and acknowledging any criminal proceedings, sensitively the FD worker has been able to challenge CA's understanding of what constitutes appropriate relationships particularly in the context of coercion.

The FD intervention has played a role in ensuring that CA is recognised as a victim, with vulnerabilities identified and considered within a wider safeguarding context. This represents a significant shift where his own experiences of exploitation had not been recognised, and he was only viewed as a perpetrator. The FD worker has provided CA with a consistent point of support enabling CA to begin to feel heard, better understood and now more willing to engage with services and support moving forward.

The FD intervention has helped to create a more trauma informed approach around CA and his family, supporting CA and his family through the criminal justice process, whilst recognising CA's own experiences of exploitation and also maintaining a focus on risk management a safeguarding.

Out Of Court Disposal (O OCD) - Women's Pathway

FN received a caution for assaulting emergency workers and was referred at the beginning of July 2025. It was her first offence. Initially, her mental health and alcohol use seemed to be the triggering factors however following conversations it became apparent that there were possible concerns of domestic abuse within her relationship.

FN had been to residential rehab for alcohol use and returned to the area, where she continued to drink in moderation but did not perceive herself as being an alcoholic. She described issues in her relationship because her partner believed she should not drink at all. FN described how her mental health deteriorated after a breakdown in the relationship, she drank to excess and wanted to harm herself, which brought her to the police's attention. What began as a welfare call ended with an arrest as she pushed an officer's arm and tried to grab another's vest to get their attention.

The Diversion Worker initially felt there was likely more to the relationship than what was being reported. In order to not damage the trust with FN, the worker discussed the possibility of domestic abuse. FN accepted support around her emotional wellbeing and self-esteem, so a follow-up appointment was planned. Meanwhile, FN referred herself to a drug/alcohol service.

When FN came to the follow-up appointment, she reported that another professional had also raised concerns about domestic abuse and there had been a more concerning incident

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with her partner, involving police. The concerns raised by professionals including the Diversion Worker, as well as the more concerning incident, made her reflect on her relationship and understand that she had been experiencing abuse. Since the incident, she had split from her partner and was receiving support from a Domestic Abuse Team.

The Diversion Worker liaised with her Domestic Abuse Key Worker to understand the support they could offer. This was principally around safety planning and inviting her to participate in the Freedom Programme. In order to further support FN with her separation, the Diversion Worker referred her to the DWP for welfare/benefits support. She had been relying on her partner's income to maintain the household, so it was imperative that she received support, so she was not pushed back to him.

Before the incident, FN had wanted to work in the helping professions and was studying a relevant course. She was concerned that the incident would reflect on a DBS check and reduce her chances of working in the sector. The Diversion Worker referred her to Changing Lives' Lived Experience programme where beneficiaries of Changing Lives' support can access training and a work experience placement within the organisation. The aim of the programme is to boost the workforce in Changing Lives who have direct lived experience.

During the support FN was able to access a safe space to reflect on the relationship, learn about domestic abuse and overcome the manipulation she had experienced, reflecting on how her alcohol use and mental health issues were linked to the harm she was experiencing within the relationship; alcohol became a coping mechanism.

FN continued to work with other services including a Drug/Alcohol service and a Domestic Abuse team, and was able to demonstrate good insight into the risks her ex-partner posed to her, and she could also express positive changes in certain areas of her well-being. The DWP worker was able to get her Universal Credit application open, an advanced loan and mortgage support, easing the financial burden on her. FN also started the training for the Lived Experience Programme and was progressing towards accessing meaningful work experience within Changing Lives, with benefits in terms of future employability.





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