

**REPORT OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER****Themed report – Response to Knife Crime**

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**1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the panel with an overview of the actions taken to address serious violence across Northumbria, the successes made to date and the future steps to embed this work and maintain the reduction in serious violence achieved so far. At the end of 2019, Northumbria was the third best performing VRU and fourth best performing force nationally in terms of % reduction for 'Violence against the person' offences.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 Following the announcement from the Home Office of the monies made available through the Serious Violence Fund, the PCC pledged to use the additional resource to tackle the root causes of crime and the impact of deprivation on crime trends. The funds would be used to reverse the impact of austerity across the region and improve the support network available to the most vulnerable – intervening before an individual turns to a lifestyle of crime.

- 2.2 The funding was made up of two parts – £1.6 million allocated to the PCC for the creation of her VRU, and £2.32 million handed to the force to enable additional 'Surge' operational activity. The investment from the Home Office would enable a joint approach to tackle serious violence, with the VRU and force working together to improve lives to prevent crime, reassert public confidence and support the most vulnerable communities of our region.

- 2.3 Given the short timescales attached to the funding, the PCC prioritised 4 key areas; early intervention, youth diversion, mental health and drugs, alcohol & homelessness, and awarded over £920,000 in funding to deliver life changing interventions.

In the months from the funding announcement to the end of 2019, the force recorded a reduction in; total overall crime, drug offences and possession of weapon offences, indicating the early impact of the serious violence strategy.

**3. Formation of the Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)**

- 3.1 In keeping with the PCCs commitment to tackle the issue of serious violence through a public health approach – the VRU comprises of professionals from varying backgrounds including; community safety, public health, voluntary &

community sector and media & communications. To ensure our collaboration with the force was maximised, we also have a Chief Inspector and Business Analyst within the Unit, on secondment from Northumbria Police.

- 3.2 The VRU Strategic Board, which is chaired by the PCC, and made up of senior partners from across education, health, prohibition, local authorities, housing and more, defined the priorities of the VRU and outlined the work streams involved in phase 1.
- 3.3 Given that the first phase of our work had to be delivered, concluded and evaluated by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, it was agreed that the VRU would prioritise; community based interventions, strengthening relationships at a community level, engage and work with young people, and establish a wide support network for the most vulnerable.
- 3.4 To maximise the speed and efficiency in which the above could be achieved, as well as to strengthen local relationships, we established a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) within each Local Authority. This individual would be a senior officer who would be able to develop connections, influence change, improve data & intelligence sharing, and provide expert local opinion on the plans of the VRU.
- 3.5 Throughout phase 1 the PCC was at the forefront of our engagement with service users, providers, and the communities engaged as we sought to gather insight and intelligence on the pre-cursors to serious violence and what the root causes of crime in Northumbria were. These findings have been reported on in our Insight Report and Response Strategy, and will form the work delivered by the VRU in phase 2 of our work.
- 3.6 Our commitment to tackling serious violence by intervening at the earliest stage and educating young people was demonstrated throughout the month of February as we coordinated and hosted the Knife Angel in Gateshead, after the PCC was approached by Samantha's Legacy. Over a three week period, educational workshops were delivered daily to students of all ages as well as a sold out theatrical performance and several engagement workshops took place. The work delivered featured prominently in the media and attracted praise for its approach to tackling the issue of knife crime, and starting the conversation with young people about the dangers of carrying a knife. Comments from visitors and praise about the work can be read in the following articles:
  - <https://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/hard-hitting-performance-visits-tyneside-17793074>
  - <https://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/inside-hard-hitting-knife-angel-17700262>
- 3.7 At the conclusion of phase 1, the PCC can confirm the following was achieved by the VRU:
  - 3687 young people engaged through funded interventions
  - 1500 educated through the Knife Angel project
  - 200 professionals upskilled through VRU training
  - 183 families mentored as part of our early intervention work

- 85 individual adults supported by a VRU intervention
- 70 schools/colleges involved in the work of the VRU
- 23 Voluntary & Community Sector organisations funded

Further details of the Interventions can be found on the VRU page of the PCC Website - <http://www.northumbria-pcc.gov.uk/violence-reduction-unit/vru-intervention-fund/>

#### **4. Northumbria Police 'Surge' Activity**

- 4.1 Funding was used to carry out a number of interventions aimed at enforcement and prevention as well as increased capacity for investigative and intelligence activities. Police activity focussed on the following elements:
- 4.2 Prevention and enforcement in hotspot areas: This included prevention activities aimed at young people in schools and youth settings as well as increased use of digital technology to increase public engagement. A network of knife crime ambassadors supported engagement activity and a range of information events were staged aimed at young people to increase awareness. To support enforcement activity, increased patrols have been carried out in hotspot areas. Increased intelligence led stop and search activities have also taken place as well as increased use of Community Support Officers at large scale events. A number of co-ordinated 'days of action' took place aimed at prioritising the detection of wanted individuals linked to weapons and violence offences. Additional test purchasing activities were also carried out in hotspot areas.
- 4.3 Increased intelligence and targeting of individuals and groups: In order to support a targeted approach, a dedicated knife crime analytical team was established to assist with operational activity, such as focussed enforcement operations on known organised crime groups and urban street gangs. Increased analytical capability also supported the identification of a violent offender cohort for targeted intervention.
- 4.4 Investment in enhanced investigative, equipment and technological capability: Additional equipment was procured for front line officers such as Tasers and Knife Wands and mobile CCTV. An engagement vehicle was also purchased for use on an outreach basis in key 'hot spot' areas. Increased ANPR capability has also enhanced prevention and detection capabilities. Additional Police Staff Investigators have also been recruited as well as additional equipment to assist with forensic examination.
- 4.5 A key element of 'Surge' activity was increased education and engagement with young people. A programme of intervention with schools was developed, alongside a training package to be delivered to children and young people. By the end of January 2020, 91 schools had benefitted from knife-crime interventions, involving 8,645 children and young people. The sessions were delivered by three School Safeguarding Liaison Officers, who had backgrounds in training and education. The aim of the intervention was to improve relationships with local schools and young people, delivering an input which will reduce the risk of offending in the future. Feedback from the sessions

highlighted that 89% of children and young people felt they knew more about the consequences of knife crime to their victims and families.

## **5. Impact**

5.1 The combination of increased operational activity alongside wider engagement, awareness and education through targeted interventions, has had a positive impact across Northumbria. This is reflected in the latest crime statistics reported by the Office for National Statistics in April 2020.

5.2 Between April 2019 and March 2020:

- There has been an 18% reduction in knife-enabled serious violence across the Northumbria force area, from 964 offences to 794
- The number of young victims of knife-enabled serious violence, under the age of 25, has reduced by 23%, from 254 to 195
- The Police have removed 6,498 knives from Northumbria streets
- Northumbria force is below the national average for knife enabled serious violent crime, per head of population
- There has been a 56% increase in the number of stop and searches by Northumbria Police for offensive weapons
- There has been a 9% increase in the number of possessions of knife offences force wide

5.3 In terms of health data, for the 12 months to the end of March 2020, the NHS projected a 36% reduction in emergency admissions to hospital for assault with a sharp object, of which there is a projected reduction of 63% for emergency admissions of young people under 25.

## **6. Next steps**

6.1 The PCC has committed to the long term future of the VRU and the method taking to tackling serious violence – this is reflected in the desire to implement the 5-year Serious Violence Response Strategy developed at the conclusion of phase 1. The strategy, which utilises the findings from the Insight Report and ensures we address the relevant harm hotspots identified is developed around four key themes:

1. Youth diversion
2. Reduce offending
3. Working with families
4. Connecting communities

6.2 Having seen the impact of the work first hand throughout the project, the PCC has also committed to continuing the engagement and partnerships with all six Local Authorities to ensure successful implementation of the strategy across the region.

6.3 There will be a continued focus on community engagement and making sure that the most vulnerable are at the heart of all decisions we make. We will continue to understand the root causes of crime in Northumbria and implement interventions to tackle these and ultimately improve lives to prevent crime.

6.4 Our relationship with Northumbria Police will strengthen in phase 2 as we develop new ways of working and deliver more collaborative projects. There is a strong partnership already established and we will ensure that the work of each other complements the overall serious violence strategy across Northumbria.