



Home Office

Violence Reduction Unit Interim Guidance

March 2020



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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/violence-reduction-units-vrus>.

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Violence Reduction Unit – Interim Guidance

1. Introduction and Context

In March 2019, the (then) Home Secretary announced £100million Serious Violence Fund to help tackle serious violence. Of this, £63.4 million has been allocated to 18 police force areas worst affected by serious violence to pay for Surge operational activity, such as increased patrols. £1.6 million will be deployed to help improve the quality of data on serious violence, particularly knife crime, to support planning and operations. A full list of forces and the funding they have received is available online¹.

The remaining £35 million of the Serious Violence Fund has been invested in Violence Reductions Units (VRUs) in the same 18 areas, which will form a key component of our action to build capacity in local areas to tackle the root causes of serious violence. VRUs will bring together police, local government, health and education professionals, community leaders and other key partners to ensure a multi-agency response to the identification of local drivers of serious violence and agreement to take necessary action to tackle these. This includes being responsible for driving local strategy and embedding cultural change alongside their commissioning role as a means to make the VRU sustainable. We recognise that greater law enforcement on its own will not reduce serious violence and that we must continue to focus on early intervention and prevention. The introduction of VRUs across England and Wales represents a substantial and exciting system change in the field of violence.

The combination of both Surge and VRU activity ensures greater capacity for multi-agency working from both an operational and strategic perspective. Whilst all areas are working towards this at a greater or lesser extent, any organisational and behavioural change of this scale can take considerable time to fully embed and have an impact. For example, data sharing between organisations can take time to embed across all partners ensuring they are able and empowered to work differently. VRUs provide an infrastructure for greater multi-agency working which is locally defined based on the drivers of serious violence and the response required.

As such many areas are developing a VRU as a direct result of the opportunity provided through the Home Office funding. The Serious Violence Priority Projects Unit (SVPPU), has been set up to deliver the programme of work across the Serious Violence Fund (SVF), amongst other things. The SVPPU has developed a package of Challenge and Support for the implementation of the SVF, including visits to all the 18 areas, workshops for VRUs, Impact Meetings with Home Office Ministers, the creation of a National

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/police-granted-funding-boost-for-action-on-serious-violence>.

Forum to allow all areas to benefit from learning about VRU implementation, and finally this interim guidance document.

Whilst the VRU programme is led by VRUs, it is of course informed by involvement from a range of other Government departments. This guidance has been shaped by the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care, Cabinet Office, Ministry of Justice, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and of course VRUs themselves.

Through the programme of visits to VRUs, it's clear that they are taking different approaches, with different emphasis on certain elements, and with different levels and styles of local leadership (see Table 1 below for an overview of this). This is to be expected with such an ambitious programme of work driving systems leadership in a broad range of areas.

This document has been drafted following visits to all of the VRUs, taking learning from these as well as from the first VRU workshop held in November 2019. Input has also been received from the Cabinet Office Serious Violence Team, who are working on developing the Government Response to Serious Violence and ensuring that Government investments have the greatest possible impact at a delivery level.

This guidance is deliberately discursive and informal in tone and is aimed at areas currently receiving HO funding, however it can be useful for all areas thinking about establishing a VRU. For current VRUs the requirements for receiving the VRU funding are set out within your Grant Agreements, so developing anything further as a result of this document is entirely up to you. To assist with acting upon the guidance, each section includes questions you may wish to ask yourself about your VRU, as well as links to documents of interest².

This VRU Interim Guidance has been drafted in response to requests from VRUs themselves. It should be stressed there are a number of other extremely helpful documents relevant to reducing and preventing violence, notably the Whole System Multi-Agency Approach to Serious Violence Prevention resource published by Public Health England in October 2019. This, and other useful content is referenced throughout this Interim Guidance. The Home Office is also working on guidance to support areas with the implementation of the Serious Violence Duty, announced in the Queens Speech in December 2019. For clarity, the table below shows the difference between these guidance documents.

² At the time of publishing this document it is important areas and organisations follow PHE guidance on working together digitally where possible given the Coronavirus pandemic to further develop a VRU or embed a VRU.

	Serious Violence Duty – statutory guidance	VRU - Interim Guidance	Whole System Multi-Agency Approach to Serious Violence Prevention (Public Health Guidance)
Who will it effect?	All areas in England and Wales	18 areas in receipt of Home Office funding	All areas
Is it statutory?	Yes – all areas will be under a statutory duty to comply	No – 18 VRUs can adopt the guidance to the extent they wish	No
When is the guidance relevant?	When it is published – date TBC	Now	Now

Following the confirmation of funding for VRUs in 20/21, we will issue further guidance as to how to access this, in line with the processes this financial year. The revised VRU Interim Guidance 2020/21 will build on the content outlined here, and as we learn about how VRUs are embedding across England and Wales we will incorporate the learning from successes.

2. VRU models

Through the Serious Violence Fund, the 18 areas receiving funding are taking approaches developed regionally with partners and communities, and which are aligned to the local governance structures. As such, each is different. As the VRUs embed and grow, we will be interested to establish the elements of the different models which may have greater impact. The central Home Office evaluation will explore different models being adopted both through its process element and, if possible, will evaluate impact of different models in the future.

2.1 Table of VRU models

A table in Annex A represents how VRUs are taking different approaches, with different emphasis on certain elements, and with different levels and styles of local leadership.

2.2 VRU Scotland

Many VRUs are basing their models on the Scottish VRU. Scotland introduced a violence reduction programme in Strathclyde in 2005 and extended it nationally in 2006. The Unit's broad-based approach involved three strands – criminal justice enforcement measures, short and long-term preventative work, and efforts to change attitudes to violence in Scottish society. Violent crime trends in Scotland fell after the introduction of the programme:

- Homicide rates, police recorded serious assault numbers, robberies, and knife possession offences all fell by around a half between 2006/07 to 2014/15;
- Common assaults declined by 26% from 2006/07 to 2014/15;
- The Scottish Crime Survey recorded a 46% fall in violent crime against adults from 2008/09 to 2017/18;
- Hospital admissions for assault with a sharp object fell by 28% from 2007/08 to 2017/18.

This cannot automatically be taken as a sign of effectiveness for the programme for three reasons. Firstly, many other nations, including England and Wales, that did not implement a violence reduction programme at the same time, also experienced marked drops in violence in the decade up to 2014. Secondly, there has been relatively little robust evaluation of the Scottish approach. Thirdly, like England and Wales, there is evidence that the downward trend has ended for some (but not all) of the violent offence-types in Scotland.

However, while Scotland's trends share the same overall shape as England and Wales, the magnitude of the violent crime decline in Scotland was larger up to 2014, and the magnitude of the violent crime rise since then has been smaller. Furthermore, some offence types, including homicide, have not risen at all since 2014 in Scotland. In other words, based purely on an analysis of

crime trends, there is some evidence of a potential crime reduction effect for the Scottish programme of activity.

Whole system violence reduction, or 'public health' strategies aim at reducing involvement in serious violence through three layers of prevention:

- a) primary services provided for a whole population (in violence reduction these refer to preventing violence from happening in the first place),
- b) secondary services for those 'at risk' (in violence reduction the focus is on preventing violence from escalating to serious criminality) and
- c) tertiary services for those who have experienced or caused injury (in violence reduction these relate to preventing violent offenders from reoffending).³

These three layers have been recognised as the key strategic cornerstones of the Scottish VRU in their latest ten-year (2015-2025) strategic plan. More detail on the whole system, or 'public health' approach is outlined below.

³ Scottish Government (2008) *Preventing Offending by Young People: A framework for action*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

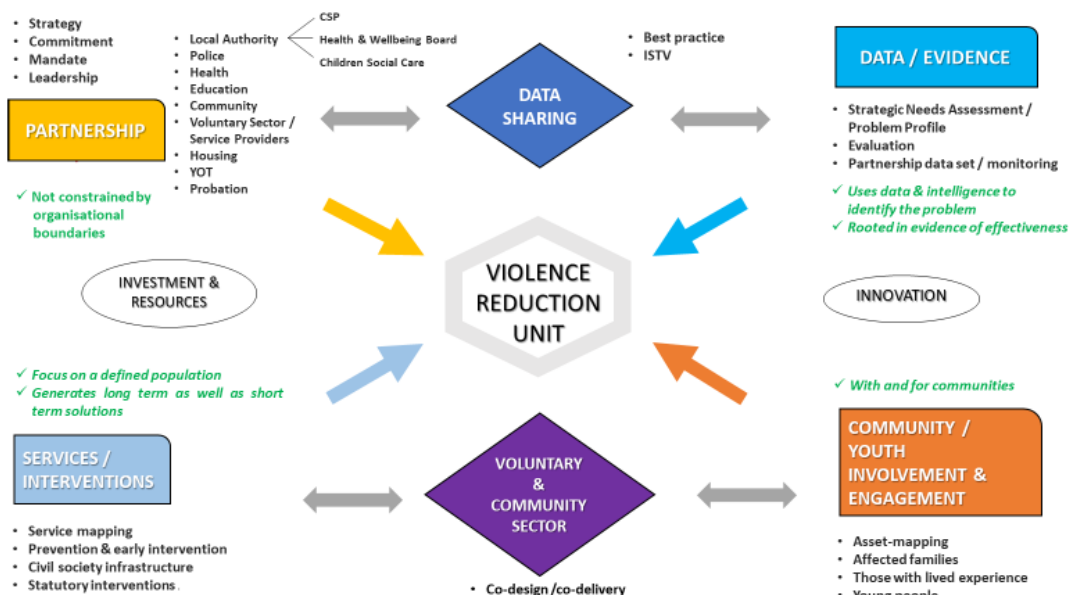
3. Whole System Violence Reduction Principles

The VRU Application Guidance published in summer 2019 summarised a whole system approach to violence reduction as follows;

- Focused on a defined population;
- With and for communities;
- Not constrained by organisational or professional boundaries;
- Focussed on generating long term as well as short term solutions;
- Based on data and intelligence to identify the burden on the population, including any inequalities;
- Rooted in evidence of effectiveness to tackle the problem

These are explored individually below. Diagram 1 below shows how these public health elements (in green) can be embedded in the functions and structure of a VRU. VRUs may also wish to make reference to the ‘five Cs’ model outlined in Public Health England’s Whole System Multi-Agency Approach to Serious Violence Prevention. In turn VRUs cover a wide geographical area and may have to work within and across VRUs coordinating relevant local partnerships in response to particular drivers of serious violence. This includes working with and for multiple communities and mobile populations.

Diagram 1: an example VRU model



Questions to consider

**Have you researched the whole system/ public health approach to reducing violence?*

**Have you visited another VRU or explored learning from Scotland?*

Learn more

World Health Organisation Violence Prevention Alliance: Principles of a Public Health approach

https://www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/public_health/en/

Whole System Multi-Agency Approach to Serious Violence Prevention: Public Health England

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/838930/multi-agency_approach_to_serious_violence_prevention.pdf

Responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences: Public Health Wales

<https://phw.nhs.wales/news1/news/responding-to-adverse-childhood-experiences-an-evidence-review/responding-to-adverse-childhood-experiences/>

Serious Organised Crime strategy 2018

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-and-organised-crime-strategy-2018>

A whole-system multi-agency approach to serious violence prevention' by Public Health England

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/838930/multi-agency_approach_to_serious_violence_prevention.pdf

3.1 Focused on a defined population

This should be informed not only by your geographical region, but by your problem profile / strategic needs assessment. Being able to establish multiple risk factors, and the interconnections between these can help areas to shift into a more preventative space and ensure a more efficient use of resource. One area found that over 30% of their Serious Violence offences were committed by an offender who had been a victim of crime in the preceding three years – heralding an obvious opportunity for earlier intervention.

Questions to consider

**Do you have a detailed picture of the demographics of those affected by violence?*

**Are there groups / communities more disproportionately impacted than others?*

**Can you outline who are the victims, offenders, and the overlaps between these groups?*

** Do you know what are the influencing factors for those who are both a victim and perpetrator? How are you going to use these to target your interventions?*

** Have you tried mapping which services these individuals have come into contact with?*

** Have you had sight of and/or used the SOC Local profile as part of your assessment?*

Learn more

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819840/analysis-of-indicators-of-serious-violence-horr110.pdf

<https://www.eif.org.uk/report/preventing-gang-and-youth-violence-a-review-of-risk-and-protective-factors>

Case Study: South Yorkshire

South Yorkshire VRU have compiled a comprehensive list of data which could be drawn together to inform a strategic needs assessment / problem profile – though it's so comprehensive it might be all but impossible to compile it all.

Data on individuals and families (for example younger siblings who could be at risk) could be compiled. Data on service provision/ interventions, such as service users, and the impact of interventions should also be considered (see also section 5.1). For all of these elements, trends, comparisons year on year etc. are useful, as well as of course demographic and geographic breakdowns.

Some areas may be able to measure things like feelings of safety, confidence in police and other local services, and community cohesion. These, along with the data below, can form the fullest possible understanding of the local context in which violence occurs.

The data includes:

- Crime data, such as offence types, volumes, arrest rates, sanction detection rates.
- Education data (by primary, secondary school and FE colleges), such as exclusion, absence, those with Special Educational Needs, those in Alternative Provision and the length of time spent in education, attainment levels.
- Housing and Homelessness data, such as those in temporary accommodation, those placed outside the borough, Refuge places,

Looked After Children (at age 18 -25 years) who require / receive housing support.

- Employment and Income data, such as those Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), those in receipt of Universal Credit or other benefits, children living in poverty.
- Health services data, such as hospital admissions for violence, alcohol and substance misuse, and ambulance data.
- Mental and physical health data, such as those accessing / waiting list size for psychological therapies, substance misuse.
- Criminal Justice data, including those on orders through National Probation, Community Rehabilitation Company and Youth Offending Services, reoffending rates, out of court disposals, restorative justice.
- Secure Estate data, including offences occurring within the secure estate, interventions provided, and those who have children.
- Deprivation data, such as the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, number of food banks
- Vulnerability data, such as those known to be involved in County Lines, those involved in or subject to criminal/ sexual exploitation, data on Missing episodes including Return Home Interviews conducted, hotspot locations for 'found'.
- Children's and Adult Social Care data, such as referrals to social services, children on child protection plans, children's homes in the area.

The full list is updated regularly and available for VRUs to view on Basecamp⁴.

3.2 With and for communities

No two areas receiving VRU funds are the same. This goes for the geography, the culture, the history, the context, the way serious violence manifests itself in the area, but no more so than in the community resident in the area and affected by serious violence.

Genuine community involvement in the VRU – as opposed to traditional engagement or consultation – is one of the things which makes a VRU have the kind of local impact which existing multi-agency structures don't always have.

Questions to consider

**Have you considered how to involve or engage individuals / groups which you have not previously engaged with?*

**Can you outline how you bring community voice consistently and credibly into the VRU at a strategic level?*

⁴ Basecamp is an online platform where VRUs in receipt of Home Office funding share live learning with each other. To gain access please speak to your contact in the Home Office.

**Have you undertaken any new community engagement / involvement to inform the direction / focus of your VRU?*

**Have you undertaken any events / workshops / consultation activity with communities / young people / those with lived experience?*

**Have you mapped local community assets, community groups, voluntary sector support and faith groups and is this mapping used by local staff and residents to access support?*

**Are you building capacity in communities, e.g. through training or developing residents, or through small grants to community organisations?*

**Are businesses encouraged to support their communities, with impact?*

**Do families and communities help to design local services?*

**Do families know how to navigate local services and know how to get help?*

Learn More

Working with the third sector: FOSS report

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/working-third-sector-pdf--1ab.pdf>

Youth Participatory Engagement Systems and Structures: Contextual Safeguarding Network

<https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/en/toolkit/structures-and-systems/youth-participatory-engagement>
<http://www.assetbasedconsulting.net/uploads/publications/A%20glass%20half%20full.pdf>

A guide to community-centred approaches for health and wellbeing – Public Health England

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/768979/A_guide_to_community-centred_approaches_for_health_and_wellbeing_full_report.pdf

Local Public Service Transformation: A Guide to Whole Place Community Budgets

<https://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/WholePlaceCommunityBudgets.pdf>

MHCLG's community's framework:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/by-deeds-and-their-results-strengthening-our-communities-and-nation>

Case Study: London VRU

Putting young people at the heart of our approach to tackling violence is essential. That is why the VRU team has spent lots of time listening to young people.

It is as a result the VRU programme is providing further funding for youth workers across hospitals in London, to steer young people away from violent crime and offer support.

The Unit is also supporting local grassroots groups through the Knife Crime Seed Funding programme and through this are giving young people the access to the activities they want – like sport, mentoring, counselling and education. The Knife Crime Seed Funding programme is helping nearly 25,000 Londoners aged 10 to 21.

One of the first actions of the Unit is establishing a young peoples' action group who will have a stake in all of the Unit's work but particularly on shaping how we change the message around violence, ensuring the youth voice is properly representative and by supporting peer-to-peer engagement.

At the end of October City Hall hosted an open evening for 200 young people which included workshops and market stalls showcasing a range of exciting opportunities for youth involvement. The event was also an important opportunity to reach out to Pupil Referral Units, looked after children and young offenders, providing them with a platform to lead and propose projects that contribute to the aims and objectives of the VRU.

But the conversation needs to be ongoing, which is why the Unit is working closely with specialists in youth participation to design, plan and deliver a programme of work with young people.

We have made a public commitment outlining how it will work with the diverse communities in the capital. As well as outlining what the phrase 'communities' means to the London VRU, they commit to:

- Work with a wide range of community voices: we know that some voices are louder than others and that institutions can sometimes seem to be listening to the same small groups of voices. We will work to ensure we're reaching out beyond the most established voices, including by working with partners to draw on their expertise and access their networks.
- Involve young people: alongside communities, we will ensure there is a range of youth voice and representation at every level of the VRU working

including its decision making. We'll pay young people for their time where we're asking for a substantial contribution.

- Be as accessible as possible and create meaningful opportunities for involvement: we recognise that bodies like the VRU can be hard to reach and can feel inaccessible for many groups. We will work to reduce as many of those barriers as possible by creating clear and varied avenues to engage with, shape and deliver this work. We'll always consider the scheduling of meetings etc to best enable a range of partners as well as young people to participate. We will ensure there is the necessary time and space to work together.
- Recognise where communities are coming from: the community is not one homogenous block. Different sets of issues and inequalities create different challenges. We know that there is no one-size-fits-all approach and we will recognise different groups' needs and perspectives.
- Be transparent about the decisions we are making and the impact of community involvement: we will be open and transparent about decisions that are being made and how community input has shaped them. We will always be clear why we're asking for input and what we've done as a result. Where appropriate, we will publish as much of your input as possible, so we can be held to account.
- Amplify community voice: the VRU will amplify community voice in the national debate around violence reduction. We will be informed by the unique expertise and experiences of London's communities.
- Ensure community involvement is sustained over the long term: we will create regular opportunities for structured community involvement, alongside ongoing dialogue. This will take various forms including but not limited to meetings and events.
- Create opportunities: we will play our part in enhancing opportunities for the communities we work with, including looking for routes to employment and skills development and utilising opportunities that may arise within the GLA family.
- Tackle stereotypes: we will seek not to perpetuate damaging stereotypes of the communities we work with; we will work to consider how we are using our communications channels to share positive stories of the communities we work with, alongside more challenging ones.

London VRU: Approach to community involvement

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/violence_reduction_unit_-_our_approach_to_community_involvement.pdf

3.3 Not constrained by organisational or professional boundaries

By working more closely with traditional criminal justice and community safety partners, as well as developing stronger relationships with other key partners like health, housing, local businesses, VRUs can drive a more coherent strategic partnership response to violence. However, violence can also operate in connection with cross boundary threats such as county lines may require partners to work collaboratively across regions.

Most areas already operate across agency boundaries and there can be the risk of complacency in assuming existing multi-agency activity is sufficient. One review prepared for a VRU area identified that existing multi-agency groups were working in ‘thematic silos’ based on crime types. In some areas, multi-agency groups are attended by the same professionals and discuss the same individuals, leading to inefficient use of time and potentially a failure to identify and respond to interconnected needs.

Questions to consider

**Can you demonstrate what is different about the VRU multi-agency work which wasn't previously in place?*

**Have you considered how the VRU interacts with existing multi-agency structures and forums, such as Community Safety Partnerships and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements?*

**Have you considered how your governance arrangements ensure key agencies are held to account for local decision making?*

**Have you considered the benefits of co-location?*

**Have cultural barriers to multi-agency working been identified and addressed, and is there a multi-agency communication plan for workforces?*

**Are services integrating where this makes sense for local residents?*

**Is there quality assurance and support across services to improve practice? e.g. through supervision and guidance, or a team around a school.*

**Is there a shared culture, practice model, set of principles and processes for professionals in partner agencies working across the system?*

Learn more

Collective Impact: Stanford Social Innovation Review

https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

A glass half-full: how an asset approach can improve community health and well-being: IDeA

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/glass-half-full-how-asset-3db.pdf>

Contextual Safeguarding Audit Toolkit

<https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/en/toolkit/audit-process>

The international centre on contextual safeguarding, University of Bedfordshire, <https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/>

Case Study: Leicestershire VRU

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) has a long history of multi-agency, integrated working but the establishment of the Violence Reduction Network (VRN) (the name for our VRU) provides the opportunity to critically appraise the partnership structure and effectiveness through the lens of a whole-system approach to violence prevention. Central to the VRN's mission is to promote and support 'prevention through connection' to ensure that we build a system that is capable of tackling the complex causes of violence and securing short and long term change. We are finding that the following elements are important in securing flexibility and collaboration between organisations and existing partnership arrangements:

- **System leadership:** Board membership needs to be of sufficient diversity and authority to be able to tackle and bring about change when organisational practices may be impeding or frustrating violence prevention. There has to be an appetite for critical thinking and enabling different ways of working where beneficial. Our Board recognises the need for system leadership and it also has a direct link to the sub-regional Strategic Partnership Board, an established Board with Chief Officers from all local public services, which provides a route for escalation if needed.
- **Co-location of the VRN team:** We have a small, co-located multi-agency team tasked with driving forward our programme of work. However, we have intentionally located this within a Network of interested groups and agencies at community and organisation level. We are also supported by a group of champions drawn from agencies not represented within our central team. This is proving important in ensuring we have both expertise and reach across the partnership.
- **Common language and understanding:** To be able to work effectively across organisational boundaries, there has to be shared language and understanding across different organisations, communities and partnership arrangements. An important role of our VRN, through the work on our Strategic Needs Assessment, is to generate and share knowledge around violence prevention. We organise Network Events and we will be using a range of media to promote key messages and findings.

- Workforce development: Linked to the above is the importance of developing the workforce's knowledge and skills across the system rather than within individual organisations. Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma-Informed Practice is an area which is relevant to all agencies and we're investing in multi-agency training to again arrive at a common understanding and support consistency in practice relevant to violence prevention across the system. An intended consequence of this will be to strengthen links and understanding across different professional groups.
- Partnership infrastructure: We are ensuring that the VRN is linked in to other relevant Boards and partnership arrangements during the early stages of its work. However, we are also appraising current strategic and operational partnerships to consider how we can strengthen connections and reduce duplication. We are also working closely with Community Safety Partnerships to establish their role within the Network.

3.4 Focussed on generating long term as well as short term solutions

VRUs often have a wider geographical remit than many multi-agency approaches in reducing serious violence. VRUs have a key role in understanding, planning, resourcing, and commissioning services aimed at prevention and early intervention as opposed to crisis response, or secondary and tertiary prevention. Whilst responding to the issue at hand is essential, longer term reductions in serious violence cannot be achieved without 'getting ahead' of the problem by addressing the drivers of serious violence, and the contexts in which it can flourish. For example, research on the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) has led many areas, like South Wales, to develop their own response to preventing ACEs (please refer to the diagram below). Similarly understanding at risk cohorts and intervening early to prevent violence whilst at the same time supporting practitioners with the tools to do so.

PREVENTING ACEs IN FUTURE GENERATIONS COULD REDUCE LEVELS OF:



We support initiatives where ACEs are already present. If its too late for prevention its not too late for prompt positive action.

Statistics source: Public Health Wales, Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study 2015

It should be noted that as our understanding of ACEs, the impact they have and the ways of preventing and responding to them develops, we do not lose sight of their function as an epidemiological tool – in other words that ACEs should be viewed and understood at population level to understand risk and vulnerability, rather than as a diagnostic tool for individuals.

Questions to consider

**Have you considered what proportion of your funded interventions / VRU activity is directed towards primary / secondary / tertiary prevention?*

**Have you engaged with schools, FE colleges and youth services in your region?*

**Have you aligned any work with the Troubled Families Programme / early help?*

**Is there a multi-agency workforce development plan which helps all partners to understand and identify need early, and work in a whole family way?*

Learn more

Director of Research, Policy and International Development Public Health Wales: ACEs

<http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/file-manager/UKandIrelandCollab/profmabellis-scotlandfinal.pdf>

What Works to prevent youth violence and crime: Early Intervention Foundation <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/what-works-to-prevent-gang-involvement-youth-violence-and-crime-a-rapid-review-of-interventions-delivered-in-the-uk-and-abroad>

Realising the potential of Early Intervention: Early Intervention Foundation <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/realising-the-potential-of-early-intervention>

Keeping Children Safe in Education: HM Government https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835733/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2019.pdf

Working Together to Safeguard Children: HM Government https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779401/Working_Together_to_Safeguard-Children.pdf

School/college security guidance: : HM Government <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-and-college-security/school-and-college-security>

National protocol on reducing criminalisation of looked-after children: : HM Government <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-protocol-on-reducing-criminalisation-of-looked-after-children>

Early Help Service Transformation and Data Maturity Models <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/troubled-families-early-help-service-transformation-maturity-model>

Case Study: Lancashire

In 2012, Blackburn with Darwen published the first ACEs study in the UK. Epidemiological evidence found that almost half (47%) of adults across the borough have suffered at least one ACE, with 12% of adults in Blackburn with Darwen having suffered four or more ACEs. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have been linked to increased risk of future victimisation or perpetration of violence by those who experience them. Evidence shows an intergenerational cycle of ACEs, so prevention and early support is imperative to positively impact upon this.

Senior executive level leaders from across the Lancashire partnership met and provided the mandate for the planning, design and delivery of trauma informed practice to be co-led and produced by the three Directors of Public Health (Blackpool, Blackburn with Darwen and Lancashire) working closely with senior leaders across the partnership. This meeting provided the foundation for 'Trauma Informed Lancashire' with a strong focus on local communities and schools through cultural change, leadership and practice inputs. They recognised the significance of having ACE Aware/Trauma Informed Communities and links to serious violence, namely:

- **Identify the risk factors due to ACEs;**

- **Understand root cause; break the cycle; develop more Resilient Families;**
- **Students with 3+ ACES** - more likely to experience academic failure, have attendance issues or exhibit behavioural problems;
- **Reducing ACES-** *enhance life chances, improve life choices, reduce exclusions, decrease % of Vulnerable Children ‘lost’ in the system;*
- **Decreasing the number of Vulnerable Children staying within the system** -reduces the number who could potentially be targeted for criminal activities (*including County Lines, involvement in knife crimes and drugs*).

The trauma informed root cause approach to behaviour management and personal development for pupils, their families and the wider community and has seen the following impact so far:

Ofsted feedback- improved to ‘GOOD’ rating from ‘requires improvement’

- ✓ *‘There have been considerable improvements in pupils’ behaviour and attendance. Leaders’ high expectations of pupils and staff mean that **there has been a change in the school’s culture**. Pupils value their education and the opportunities it can provide, and they want to do well’*
- ✓ *‘Pupils explained to inspectors that the **best thing** about their school is their **teachers**. They value the help and support they receive. Staff foster **strong and supportive relationships** with pupils’*
- ✓ *‘The **behaviour** of pupils is **good**’*
- ✓ *‘There is a **calm atmosphere** around school’*
- ✓ *‘Pupils appreciate the benefits that a small school community can offer, **they liken their school to a family**’*
- ✓ *Parents are ACE aware*
- ✓ *Improved attendance- Whole school 1.8%, Disadvantaged 2.4%, SEND 3.3.%*

Senior school case study-exclusions

The proportion of pupils excluded for a fixed period has decreased.

Year	Total	Repeat
2016	7.7%	5.1%
2017	15.1%	3.2%
2018	4%	0.7%

The number of students permanently excluded from school has halved.

Case study Two-Primary Head Teacher:

“When working in a Trauma Informed way you have more of a direction. You have a purpose. All staff and the community know why you are doing something. For example, now that we are all trauma informed, it allows us to be more streamlined, effective, efficient, identify need and put support / intervention in place more quickly so that you make a difference. By looking through the same lens rather than different ones you understand it more, which is more effective and efficient. This is especially the case in a primary school as this is where it all starts. This is where we can be more nurturing. However, Trauma Informed Practice needs to be everywhere, which also includes adult and young people’s services. It is important too that the

voluntary sector understand about Trauma Informed Practice. Everybody should be made aware that resilience and self-esteem underpins learning, life, and the future decisions children make when becoming independent. This includes making wrong decisions. It is important to look at the bigger picture as the cycle will continue if not addressed”.

By undertaking a Trauma Informed Approach, the VRU and co-production Teams can address the preventative measures and data from the Needs Assessment 2019-2020: **Educational achievement and youth employment; Truancy and Exclusions; Crime and antisocial behaviour; School readiness (including attachment and parenting)**

3.5 Based on data and intelligence to identify the burden on the population, including any inequalities

This should be informed by your problem profile / strategic needs assessment, see section 4.1 below.

Questions to consider

**Is your region compliant with Information Sharing to Tackle Violence (ISTV) processes and NHS Standard ISB 1594 And 30/2012 (see weblink below)?*

** Do you know what information you need to identify the threat and population affected?*

**Do you know who holds that data and do you have the right protocols and processes in place to share information between multi-agency partners in a safe and secure way? What data is already being shared and collected between partners that could be built upon, e.g. through the Troubled Families Programme?*

**Do you have analytical capacity to pull this intelligence /data together?*

** How do you ensure feedback loops of data providers to ensure they can see the value of their input?*

** Have you had sight of, or utilised the SOC Local Profile?*

Learn more

Violence Prevention: Risks and outcomes: Public Health England Datasets
<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/indicator-list/view/DzLUDyTbE6>

Information Sharing to Tackle Violence Minimum Dataset
<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/information-standards/information-standards-and-data-collections-including-extractions/publications-and-notifications/standards-and-collections/isb1594-information-sharing-to-tackle-violence-minimum-dataset>

An Analysis of Indicators of Serious Violence: Home Office

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819840/analysis-of-indicators-of-serious-violence-horr110.pdf

Understanding local needs for wellbeing data: Happy City

<http://www.happycity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Understanding-local-needs-for-wellbeing-data-JULY-2017.pdf>

Code of practice for disclosing information for authorities delivering public services: HM Government

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-economy-act-2017-part-5-codes-of-practice/code-of-practice-for-public-authorities-disclosing-information>

3.6 Rooted in evidence of effectiveness to tackle the problem

VRUs will wish to ensure that any interventions commissioned have minimum viable standards in terms of being able to demonstrate their effectiveness. Establishing the extent to which an intervention is able to demonstrate impact can be difficult. So planning at the outset on how to collect data to capture outcomes can help measure progress. The Home Office have commissioned an independent evaluation of VRUs (find out more below) which will aim to provide more of a steer on how we can measure VRU impact in the future. However, the Home Office would also encourage VRUs evaluate where possible the interventions they are funding.

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) (in round one, now closed) required applicants to have a clear theory of change which explains how their intervention achieves their outcome. Find more information on the YEF and how it can support VRUs in section 5.2 below.

Questions to consider

**How do you know what service provision is available in your area? How do you know how effective the provisions are?*

**Do the type of interventions you are proposing to fund have evidence of having worked in your area or in other areas?*

**Are there mechanisms for continuous improvement?*

**Do you collect feedback from families on the service they received? Is this feedback used as learning to support changes in practice?*

**Are you able to provide regular and detailed outcome data to inform strategic decision making?*

Learn more

Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) Evidence Standards

<https://guidebook.eif.org.uk/eif-evidence-standards>

The Centre for Youth Impact – Evidence Standards

<https://www.youthimpact.uk/standards-of-evidence.html>

Campbell Collaboration website:

[https://campbellcollaboration.org/component/jak2filter/?Itemid=1352&issearch=1&isc=1&category_id=101&xf_4\[0\]=1&xf_8\[0\]=3&ordering=publishUp](https://campbellcollaboration.org/component/jak2filter/?Itemid=1352&issearch=1&isc=1&category_id=101&xf_4[0]=1&xf_8[0]=3&ordering=publishUp)

College of Policing What Works Toolkit:

<https://whatworks.college.police.uk/toolkit/Pages/Toolkit.aspx>

Problem Solving for Neighbourhood Policing: UCL

<http://library.college.police.uk/docs/Problem-solving-for-neighbourhood-policing.pdf>

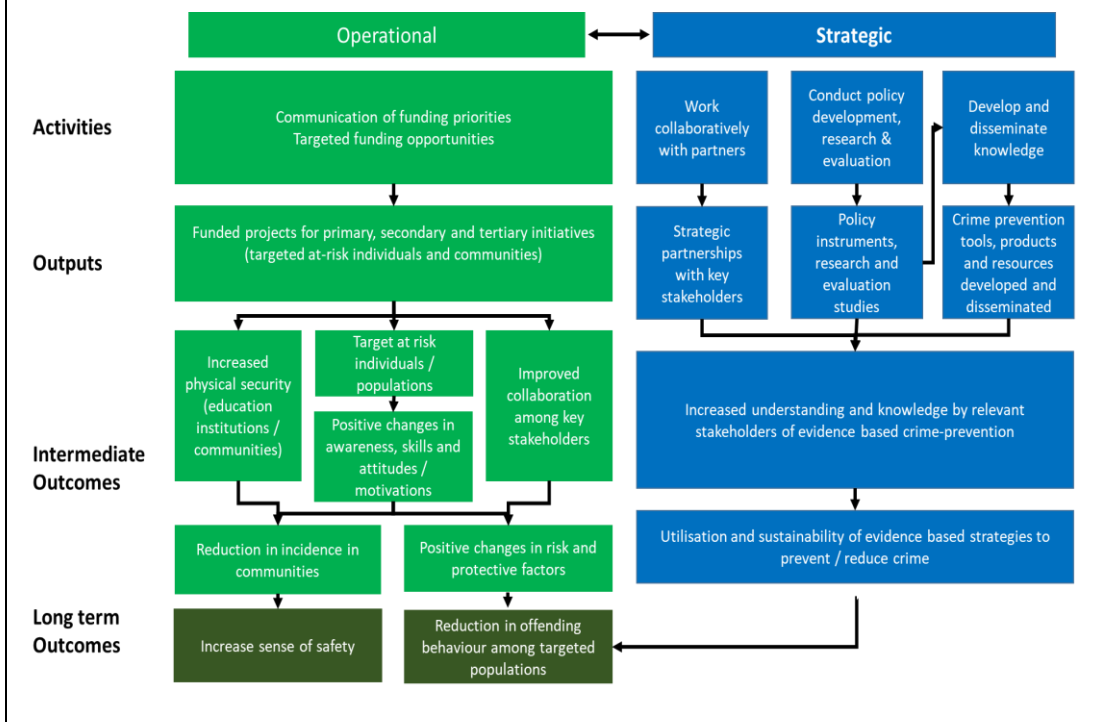
Case Study: Greater Manchester (GM)

- The GM VRU has commissioned Manchester Metropolitan University as core partners. They are supporting with the development of an outcomes framework and underpinning Theory of Change to steer the Unit's approach (see fig 1)
- In terms of local and specific interventions, much VRU time and attention has been spent on multiple engagements with service providers, professionals, community members and grassroots organisations in order to gain a sense of what provision is out there and the perceived strengths and gaps
- This has allowed the unit to begin to map, against our theory of change, where focus is needed to improve the outcomes we want for different populations
- It is unlikely that any one VRU will ever obtain a comprehensive overview or understanding of the reality in their area due to the sheer breadth and complexity of the working landscape. The logic model espouses that by building strong relationships we can influence a wide range of practices without direct control
- The VRU has always promoted reviews of evidence of interventions that work to reduce violence, youth offending and their drivers to partners. This is an on-going role to support local initiatives and influence strategies
- As the VRU Unit develops its business plan, there will be a stronger focus on supporting changes in systems and on interventions based on evidence of need and of ways to meet that need, at primary, secondary and tertiary stages of prevention.
- One of the VRUs central pieces of work will be a multi-media campaign based on engagement with young people and community

groups to challenge the negative perceptions of young people and tackle norms around violence. To inform this, a small pilot is running first to test what messages resonate with different users of social media and the internet.

- The VRU is currently producing an evaluation toolkit to support local providers and commissioners to consider the outcomes they expect to achieve and how (theory of change). This will allow them to consider which inputs and outputs they are likely to see in the short-medium term and how to measure this. The VRU will collate these to inform on-going work.

• Fig.1



4. VRU mandatory requirements

VRUs were required to produce a problem profile (or Strategic Needs Assessment), identifying the drivers of serious violence acting in the local area and taking steps to identify the cohorts of people most affected; and a response strategy, describing the multi-agency response being delivered by the VRU, its members and other partners that will tackle the drivers identified in the problem profile and work to reduce serious violence in the specified local area.

4.1 Problem Profile/ Strategic Needs Assessment

In order to collaborate effectively partnerships will need to share data and intelligence where appropriate. This will primarily consist of sharing anonymised aggregated data to inform the strategic, tactical and operational response to serious violence in the VRU area.

The Home Office hasn't specified in VRU guidance what should be included. Data could include hospital data on knife injuries, the number of exclusions and truancies in local areas, police recorded crime, missing data and other measures of vulnerability, volume of ACEs, Police Systems data (local crime information), CAD data (emergency call requests), areas of high social services interventions, and information on threats such as county lines including the activity of serious organised crime gangs and on drugs markets, data on reoffending and retaliation, etc. How that data is used in order to inform the development of a problem profile is locally driven by each VRU however there are weblinks of good practice included below.

A wealth of existing data is available already – often the barrier to bringing this together is the lack of dedicated resource and no clear place to coordinate and provide strategic leadership to respond to the findings of any analysis. VRUs provide this resource and leadership. Some areas are adapting existing data sets, such as the Cambridge Harm Index. Beyond crime and vulnerability data, Happy City's Thriving Places Index measures wellbeing at Local Authority level.

Questions to consider

**Have you utilised data sets from partner agencies to inform your understanding of violence?*

**Are you able to provide regular and detailed outcome data to inform strategic decision making? Are you working with partners to use data to conduct joint needs assessments and joint analytical products?*

**Are you using your data to identify potential / hidden risks? e.g. children who have multiple factors that suggest they are at risk of child sexual exploitation? Are you using data to predict which families might need help in the future?*

Learn more

Information sharing Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers: HM Government

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721581/Information_sharing_advice_practitioners_safeguarding_services.pdf

Safeguarding adults: sharing information: Social Care Institute for Excellence

<https://www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/adults/practice/sharing-information>

Guide to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR): Information Commissioners' Office

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/>

The SARA Model: Arizona State University

<https://popcenter.asu.edu/content/sara-model-1>

4.2 Response Strategy

The Response Strategy should set out how the action being taken by the VRU will enhance and complement existing local arrangements responding to serious violence and related issues such as Child Criminal Exploitation /Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) where relevant to your VRU. This is also where a VRU can demonstrate that it is meeting the multi-agency elements of providing both long-term and short-term solutions.

Questions to consider

**Can you articulate what is different as a result of creating the VRU linked to your strategic needs assessment /problem profile?*

**Can you outline a vision for your VRU?*

**How will you measure the performance of your VRU on a regular basis? How will you use this performance information to shape your activity?*

4.3 VRU evaluation

The Home Office commissioned independent evaluators, Ecorys and Ipsos Mori, to lead an evaluation for 19/20 of VRUs. The Home Office evaluation is key in building the evidence base in the long term and help the government understand the effect of its investment and identify best practice to share learning.

The independent evaluation will form two parts;

- a) a qualitative process evaluation that will help understand how VRUs are being implemented in practice and what the challenges are when setting up a VRU and a public health approach to tackling serious violence,
- b) a study to assess the feasibility of carrying out a robust impact evaluation of the VRUs in the future. The feasibility study will be informed by the findings from the process evaluation.

Many VRUs are looking at their own internal evaluation to ensure they capture local data that will help drive forward the work of the VRU. It is important that duplication between the Home Office evaluation and that carried out by VRUs is minimised, so it is important you notify the Home Office of your evaluation plans.

The Home Office will also commission an independent evaluation in 2020/21. This will build on the feasibility study from 2019/20 and explore how VRUs are developing in their second year.

Questions

**What data do you need to collect in the short and long term to make evaluation possible?*

**Have you consulted with evaluation experts (either internally or external) about local evaluation approach?*

Learn more

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/evaluation-policy-makers-straightforward-guide/pages/10/>

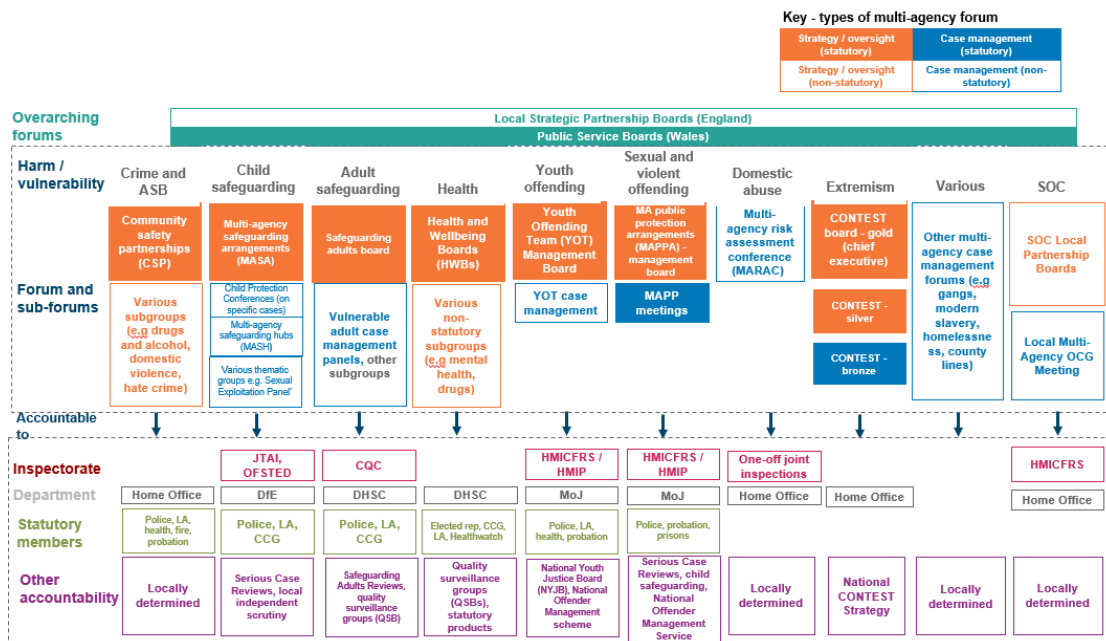
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government>

5. VRUs and partnership

VRU and local governance structures

VRUs operate within and across areas with agencies that have differing accountability and oversight. In turn there is no holistic accountability and quality assurance to ensure that multi-agency forums collectively take a whole system approach to tackling serious violence. For example, the new multiagency safeguarding arrangements bring together three Safeguarding Partners (Police, Health and Local Authority) and other relevant agencies including schools to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children including identifying and responding to their needs. This can be a useful existing local structure for VRUs to use, however, this isn't the only structure and you may also want to consider DWP, local businesses and business reduction partnerships. The diagram below attempts to set this out.



5.1 Interventions

The impact of the VRU will not only rely on increased multi-agency data and intelligence sharing, greater collaboration, and strategic coordination and leadership. VRUs are also investing in interventions which should make a difference to those affected by violence in the area.

VRUs are required to spend not less than 20% of their funding on interventions until March 2020. From an initial analysis of the applications VRUs sent to the Home Office we can understand more about the amounts being spent and types of interventions. VRU's allocations on interventions varied depending on current multi-agency working and establishment of

VRUs, for example in some cases VRUs have allocated up to 90% of funding on interventions whereas others have gone lower at 34%.

Out of 151 interventions commissioned by VRUs, the type of intervention and what they have commissioned varies depending on regional and local need. For example, 15% (23/151) of interventions will be working directly with or delivered through schools and pupil referral units, 11% (16/151) of interventions will be working directly with prisons and custody and 3% (4/151) of interventions are focused on imbedding a Trauma informed approach through training⁵.

In addition to the above, VRUs will need to understand and address violence issues which operate across area boundaries such as County Lines. Services will need to adapt to take into account the complex circumstances and multiple vulnerabilities of service users as well as facilitate collaboration between multiple local-level partnerships across regions as cases cross regional boundaries, such as liaising with serious and organised crime community co-ordinators.

As with community involvement, the strength of the interventions commissioned through the VRU will be a litmus test for impact of VRUs. Voluntary and Community Sector partners often have access to affected communities beyond the reach of statutory partners. They are embedded within, and often have grown out of, the local area itself and as such have credibility and reach which the VRU should prize and value.

5.2 Serious Violence Duty

The Serious Violence Duty was announced in the Queen's Speech in December 2019, and the Government has committed to bring forward legislation as part of the Serious Violence Bill.

This new duty will bring together agencies and bodies across a range of sectors including police, local authorities, health, education, social services and the criminal justice system, to plan and collaborate to prevent and reduce serious violence. We are particularly concerned with specific types of crime including homicide, knife crime, and gun crime and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as in county lines drug dealing. Alongside introducing this Duty, we will also be amending the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to ensure that serious violence is an explicit priority for Community Safety Partnerships.

It is not the Government's intention that the duty will require the creation of new multi-agency structures. We expect local senior leaders to use existing structures to ensure that agencies and bodies are working together to prevent

⁵ A caveat in using this data is this was extracted at a early point from VRU delivery plans that have been subject to some change during the lifetime of the grant so should be used with caution.

and reduce serious violence in their local areas and improve community safety.

The SVPPU team are working closely with those developing the Serious Violence Duty to ensure that the relationship between the guidance for implementation of the Serious Violence Duty and the work on VRUs is undertaken in conjunction. The Statutory Guidance for the duty will outline the relevant detail required for compliance with the new duty, including sector-specific guidance for police, fire and rescue services, health services, local authorities, youth offending teams, probation services, prisons, youth custodial establishments and educational establishments. VRUs will be invited to input into this process. It is also important to note that while VRUs can provide the infrastructure required to meet the Serious Violence Duty, they in itself will not be a statutory function. The presence of a VRU will not be viewed as automatic compliance with the Duty in a given area however local partnerships will wish to work closely with VRUs (if there is one present in their area) in the development of the problem profile/strategic needs assessment and response strategy given the valuable information they are likely to hold. Duty holders will have the flexibility to discharge their responsibilities through existing multi-agency fora, including but not limited to Community Safety Partnerships and safeguarding arrangements.

5.3 Youth Endowment Fund

The YEF is a £200m investment targeted at funding and developing early intervention projects over 10 years. The objective of the YEF is to prevent children and young people at the highest risk of involvement in serious violence, from becoming involved in crime and violence, including reoffending. The YEF will robustly test and evaluate every intervention it funds to develop a strong evidence base showing the interventions that are most effective. Operating independently of government, the YEF will also act as a Centre of Expertise.

The YEF will work with charities, statutory services and communities across England and Wales to develop and fund the most promising interventions in deterring children and young people away from crime and violence. Since the YEF will operate for a minimum of ten years, it will have the capacity to bring successful interventions all the way through from innovative idea through to pilot stage and eventually on to deployment at scale.

As a Centre of Expertise, the YEF will identify which approaches are most effective and then disseminate and promote this new knowledge and practice. The evidence provided will transform the existing local and national responses and will enable VRU's to design increasingly effective early interventions and support structures for children and young people in their local community who are at risk of becoming involved in serious violence.

The YEF will aim to work alongside VRUs to provide support and potentially fund and evaluate place-based approaches to violence reduction.

6. Conclusion

VRUs are a priority for the Government. Funding confirmation for 20/21 was announced in December 2019, following a raft of new commitments from the Government to crack down on violent crime. The Government has committed to providing the police with more powers to stop and search those who have been convicted of knife crime, delivering 20,000 extra police officers and putting violent criminals behind bars for longer.

Rightly, VRUs will begin to turn their attention to forward planning and sustainability.

Sustainability of funding, governance arrangements and effective cultural and behavioural change to ensure longevity of the VRU is likely to develop at different rates depending on your local challenges. Factoring in sustainability planning at the outset, allowing for local evaluation to underpin and future proof future activity ensures reflective learning and good practice of the VRU.

Being open to new and innovative approaches combined with getting the basics right in the early stages of VRU set up and multi-agency working can help progress VRU development at the onset. For example, pooled budgets can reduce silos and incentivise agencies to develop effective joint decision-making arrangements and governance.

The commitment in each VRU to working together differently, to innovation balanced with evidence-led decisions, and to making a real difference to residents and communities is clear in the rigour and passion with which VRUs are already operating. Continued commitment and hard work will be needed to both fully embed the VRUs, and to realise the benefits through fewer homicides, reduced violence, and safer streets for everyone.

Annex A- VRU Table

	Regional or Hub+Spoke VRU model	Established full time leadership	Co-located	Established Public Health England/Wales Involvement	Embedded youth engagement and community voice in VRU	Own Definition of Serious Violence Used:	Funding on intervention	Mentoring /1-2-1 work	Intervention in schools	Intervention in prisons	Mental health support	Employment intervention	Intervention in police custody	Intervention in health settings	Intervention w. parents / families	Intervention with siblings	School inclusion activity	Other or overlapping intervention	Led by Police	Led by Public Health England/Wales	Led by PCC/Local Authority	Data-sharing a priority	ISTV/ Cardiff model co-ordinated through VRU
London	Regional	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	90%	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×	✓	×	×	×	✓	✓	✓
West Mids.	Single	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	86%	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	×	×	×	✓	✓	✓
GMCA	Single	✓	✓	✓	×	×	81%	✓	✓	×	×	×	✓	×	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Merseyside	Single	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	73%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓
West Yorks.	Regional	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	74%	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓
South Yorks.	Single	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	50%	×	✓	×	×	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×
Northumbria	Single	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	50%	×	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓
Thames Valley	Single	×	×	✓	✓	×	51%	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓
Lancashire	Single	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	62%	×	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Essex	Single	✓	✓	✓	×	×	50%	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×
Avon&Somerset	Regional	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	45%	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kent	Single	✓	×	✓	×	✓	54%	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	×	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
Nottinghamshire	Single	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	40%	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓
Leicestershire	Regional	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	39%	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓
Bedfordshire	Single	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	64%	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	×	×	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓
Sussex	Regional	✓	×	✓	×	✓	80%	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓
Hampshire	Regional	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	54%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	×
South Wales	Single	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	34%	✓	×	×	×	×	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	×	×	✓	✓