

MAYOR OF LONDON

A report on the
**London Violence
Reduction Unit**

produced for the
Home Office

MARCH 2021



SNAPSHOT OF THE YEAR 20/21

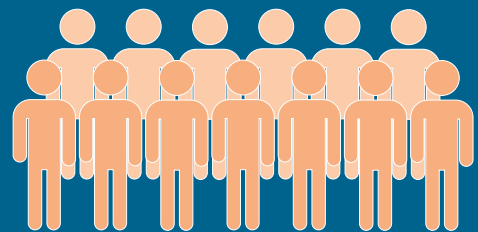
Financial cost of violence to London
£3bn

Total VRU invested into interventions in 2020/2021

 **£19.7m**

Programmes and projects commissioned

 **126**

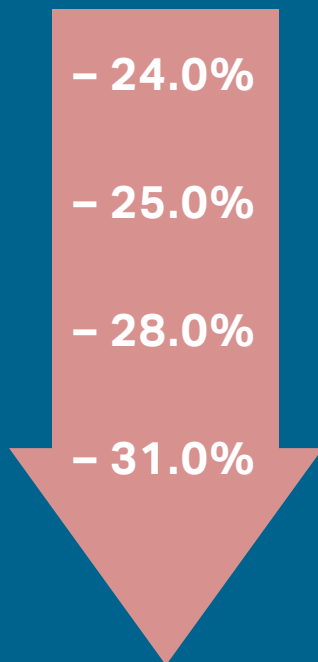


People reached directly and indirectly

c.80,000

Drop in violent crime (comparing 2019 to 2020):

- Knife crime: -25.0%
- Knife crime with injury (victim u-25): -28.0%
- Gun crime: -24.0%
- Robbery: -31%



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Executive Summary

In 2019 violence cost 150 Londoners their lives. Financially it cost the capital £3 billion. Sadly, this was not a one-off. In 2018 the figures were broadly similar. In fact, going back to 2014 the pattern of violence across London is a familiar one.

Of course, no statistic comes close to representing the incalculable emotional pain and loss to families, friends, and communities. And it is their stories and very often their determination and action that both makes and drives the hugely compelling case for a different approach to tackling violence.

It was this context which prompted the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, to announce the establishment of England's first Violence Reduction Unit in 2018. The Unit became operational in March 2019. The Mayor was clear he wanted to do something different, to make sure equal weight was given to tackling the causes of violence alongside enforcement. And he was clear that London should adopt a public health approach towards violence that prioritises intervention and prevention and places communities and young people at the heart of change.

Inspiration and insight were drawn from violence prevention work in Scotland and the United States, where new approaches had made an impact and provided a compelling case for change. An early visit by the London VRU to Glasgow helped shape and inform our focus. We have since been joined by 17 other VRU units across the UK and are now part of a flourishing national network of committed specialists and

practitioners. Together we are finding our collective voice and sharing our practice; providing challenge to the status quo and directing support and resources to our very local communities.

Our first Annual Report sets out what we've achieved. It delves into how we are governed and scrutinised, the data and evidence we have drawn on, the partnerships we have forged, and the programmes we've funded. It answers the questions specifically set by the Home Office and critically describes our learning and analysis about what works.

Most importantly, it tells our story of how we've listened and engaged with London's diverse communities. The London VRU had three core aims when it was set up, namely to reduce violence, increase feelings of safety amongst Londoners, and to ensure that we put communities and young people at the heart of decision making.

Since the beginning we have prioritised working with communities across London, and spent much time visiting and listening to their experiences. Despite the challenges of COVID we have determinedly maintained and adapted our engagement with local community groups and organisations who have in turn been working tirelessly to adapt their support to young people and families in these unprecedented times.

Conscious that the voice of young people is far too often missing from decision making one of our first actions was to establish the VRU's Young

People's Action Group. We have recruited ten dedicated and talented young Londoners, who are working alongside the team to provide insight, ideas and solutions.

Our Strategic Needs Assessment, published in January 2020, is the first ever capital wide assessment of violence and is accompanied by an assessment of the reviews of homicides that had taken place over the last five years.

Together these insights and evidence have empowered us to develop a strategy and investment plan with a sharper focus on supporting young people and families. We have applied a strong contextual safeguarding approach to our work, recognising that too often the focus is narrowly placed on individuals and neglects the context, environment and societal factors.

We have prioritised our investment in those who hold key trusted relationships with young people – parents and carers, teachers, peers, communities and youth practitioners. Those who have the capacity to support young people most in need and can provide opportunity and foster ambition in young Londoners. Alongside this investment we have adopted a place-based focus, supporting strategies at a local authority level through to initiatives in specific neighbourhoods. Our recently launched flagship MyEnds programme aims to strengthen local consortia and networks. It speaks to the importance of a very localised approach to get under the skin of the problem and to empower local residents to find solutions.

Our parenting networks across London have called for more mental health support and guidance for parents of adolescents. We have also added extra support for young people who have been exposed to trauma. We know the link between exclusions and violence is strong: we have invested in school inclusion programmes which are providing tailored guidance and opportunities to those young people excluded from mainstream education.

We know young people want more quality youth activities, and youth workers require support. We have invested in after school activities, grassroots initiatives; and a pan London leadership programme for one of the most neglected professions, youth workers.

One of the most depressing findings from the Strategic Needs Assessment was the intractability of violence in certain communities. Deprivation and poverty co-exist as long-term drivers of violence. Three quarters of London boroughs with the highest levels of violent offending, are also in the top ten most deprived and have higher proportions of children under 20 living in poverty than the London average. The impact of a decade of austerity has exacerbated inequalities, and further stretched those vital preventative public services. This makes a place based focused at a borough, ward, and neighbourhood level even more important.

One of the strongest powers of the Mayoral office is its convening and influencing role. The report outlines how we are drawing on that power to build pan London alliances. Working together is a mantra that trips easily off the tongue but is much, much harder to do effectively and genuinely.

Our partnership approach has avoided imposing new structures, but instead prioritised extending and strengthening existing networks. We have forged positive relationships with the NHS, the Police and Education: working closely with the violence reduction lead for the NHS, Martin Griffiths; and benefiting hugely from a police secondee in the team, Jack Rowlands, that ensures close links with the MPS.

We have recognised the importance of the voluntary sector who are often leading on innovation and ideas through a charity network. Our research advisory group, while early in its evolution, is generating interesting and important ideas for research.

Local authorities, the lynchpin of local place-making, have been a key partner. We have worked very closely with each of the 32 London boroughs to galvanise good practice and partnership in the formation of borough Violence Reduction Action Plans. Supported by the MPS and London Councils, these plans have moved from a focus on limited enforcement objectives to a much more expansive public health remit exploring issues around vulnerability, exploitation, and safeguarding.

Of course, what is essential with all our programmes and partnerships is to understand what works and what doesn't. And in doing so to support a collective London view of effective policy and practice around violence reduction. The report outlines the developing framework for impact assessment which begins to do that, and which will also be an important means for the Greater London Assembly and funders to scrutinise our work.

Finally, none of this work could have been achieved without the right team in place. The London VRU is made up of specialists in public health, policing, youth work, social services, data and evaluations and lived experience.

It is from these diverse yet complementary perspectives we are best placed to marshal the evidence and data to support effective interventions. It is from these diverse professional backgrounds that we can forge the enduring partnerships and secure the necessary long-term government funding required so that we can change the picture of violence in London.

Introduction and local context

London is one of the greatest cities in the world. It is also one of the safest compared to cities of similar size

However – despite that fact – safety and security rank high amongst Londoners' top concerns

In 2018/19 one in four Londoners felt that violence and gangs were a problem locally. This becomes even more stark in certain areas of London and within certain communities.

Perhaps that is not surprising. In 2019 150 people lost their lives to violence in the capital. In 2020 there were 126 homicides. Sadly, they are part of a tragic trajectory that has seen violence increase since 2014, though there are early signs of this trend beginning to reverse. The financial cost to the capital of these murders was estimated at £3bn to the capital. But, of course, no statistic can come close to representing the incalculable emotional pain and loss to families, friends, and communities.

The Mayor has spoken about being 'tough on crime, and tough on the causes of crime', about how violence is relatively easy to identify but its causes are far harder to understand and address. They involve extremely complex and deep-rooted problems, like inequality, social alienation, poverty and a lack of opportunities for young people.

In January 2020, the London Violence Reduction Unit published our Strategic Needs Assessment, the first ever to be completed across all of London. It showed that the deprivation of certain London neighbourhoods and their vulnerability to violence appears to be entrenched. Shockingly just over half of all the poorest neighbourhoods in London today were also the poorest over a century ago. In addition, gang territories are broadly identical to areas identified as poor in the late 1800s.

It is not clear what could explain the apparent deep-seated relationship between neighbourhood poverty, weak social cohesion, and vulnerability to gangs. Nor is it clear why these neighbourhoods, whose population demographics have changed hugely over the past 100 years, should have a continued gang presence.

But what we do know is that these chronic issues would have been made harder to deal with due to Government austerity measures in the last decade and the impact on public services and the voluntary and charitable sector. Between 2011/12 and 2018/19, almost half (46%) of funding for London's youth services was withdrawn. At the same time, police officer numbers have fallen which has impacted on our ability to disrupt and deter violence. This has happened at a time when the illegal drugs market (one of the key drivers of violence) is growing.

What they certainly point to is the importance of a place-based focus, to use research, data and personal experience to get under the skin of intractable issues and to develop a long-term, sustainable prevention strategy. Essentially to take a fresh approach.

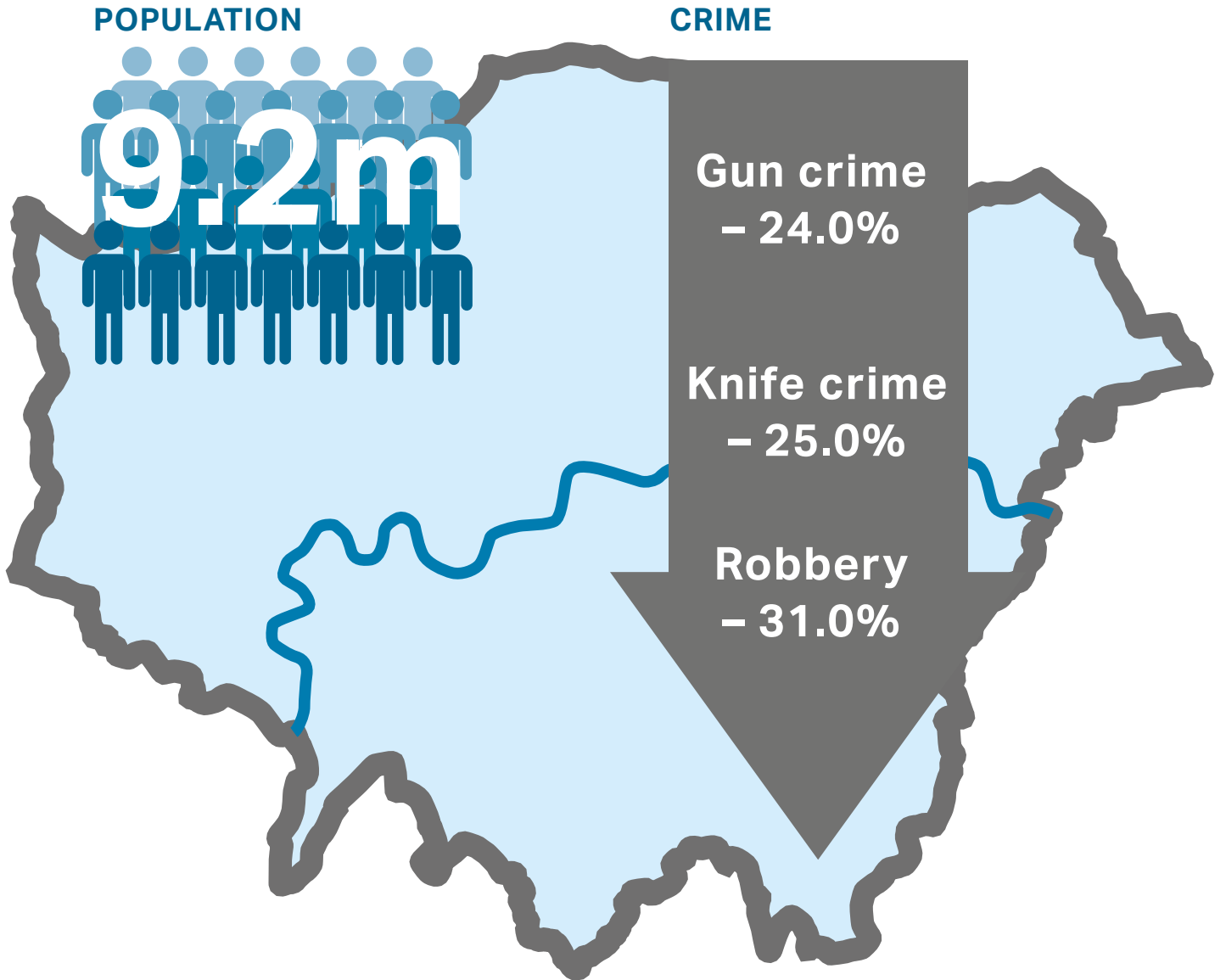
This was the motivation behind the Mayor's announced intention in September 2018 to set up the London Violence Reduction Unit. This was the first VRU in England and Wales and was launched in March 2019. We take a longer-term view and focus on promoting a new public health approach to reducing violence and increasing safety across London that has communities and young people at its heart.

This public health approach has had positive results elsewhere – most notably in Scotland and particularly Glasgow, where homicides fell by over 65% in a decade. In setting up the London VRU, the Mayor drew on the expertise and experience of the Scottish VRU.

The VRU is working with experts and existing networks to develop better policy, share good practice, and invest in the most impactful programmes. But if London is to truly work for all its inhabitants, then we must start by acknowledging and addressing inequalities. That also means spreading the wealth of opportunities that London provides more equitably.

LONDON DEMOGRAPHICS

Population:	9.2m
Police officers per 1,000 residents:	3.5 (2020) 4.1 (2008)
Knife crime: (2019 calendar year vs 2020 Calendar year)	– 25.0%
Knife crime with injury (victim u-25):	– 28.0%
Gun crime:	– 24.0%
Robbery:	– 31%



POLICE OFFICERS PER 1,000 RESIDENTS 2008



POLICE OFFICERS PER 1,000 RESIDENTS 2020



SECTION 1: LONDON VRU

Key points:

- *How violence reduction was managed before the introduction of the VRU and how we have built upon that*
- *London VRU and our areas of work*
- *London VRU's staffing structure*
- *London VRU's operating model*

BACKGROUND

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 established a Police and Crime Commissioner for each police force area across England and Wales. In London, the elected Mayor is the equivalent of the Police and Crime Commissioner and is responsible for policing (except for the City of London). He has delegated responsibility to the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, Sophie Linden.

The Mayor is required by law to produce a plan that explains how the police, community safety partners, and other criminal justice agencies will work together to reduce crime. Reducing violence in London is a top Mayoral priority as well as a key concern for Londoners.

The current Mayor has rolled out a wide range of programmes to address this issue since coming to office in May 2016. In 2017, he published the Police and Crime Plan 2017-2021 which set out his ambitions for the safety of London. In June 2017, he published his Knife Crime Strategy. Tellingly, the strategy foreshadowed one of the fundamentals of the public health approach that the VRU would adopt – the need to work together to reduce violence:

“No one person or organisation has all the answers to knife crime, and we embarked on producing this strategy with a clear ambition to involve as many organisations, groups, communities, and individuals as possible – bringing together the expertise and passion of people doing excellent work every day to keep young people safe.”

– Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan (2017)

To demonstrate his commitment to make London safer the Mayor also announced a comprehensive strategy to combat Violence Against Women and Girls.

In September 2018 he announced plans to create the London Violence Reduction Unit, the first VRU in England and Wales. This signified a step change in London’s approach to tackling violence.

Since then, the Home Office has committed to establishing and funding 17 other VRUs across the country. Each VRU is taking an approach developed regionally with partners and communities. These are aligned to the local governance structures and ensure that each region’s model and governance structure is unique and reflects local needs. London’s VRU is part of the Expert Steering Group for the VRU network across England and Wales.

ABOUT THE LONDON VRU

The VRU was set up to take a fresh approach to violence reduction in the capital. It is doing this by working with a range of public and private sector institutions and communities across London. The aim is to identify and tackle the underlying causes of violence, and to support solutions that are proven to mitigate these causes.

In September 2019, we published our strategy and work programme with three strategic aims:

- To reduce and stabilise violence across London – violence is a concern for us all; we will all play our part to reduce it.
- To increase feelings of safety – recognising that London is one of the safest cities in the world.
- To put community at the heart of our work – only by doing so do we have a sustainable long-term approach towards reducing violence.
(Ref: [VRU Strategy](#)).

A public health approach is a long-term sustainable approach to preventing violence. It acknowledges that to genuinely change behaviour we must examine the context and influences that impact on individuals at significant points in their life. It means understanding that no individual operates in a vacuum that they are both part of and influenced by a huge range of other contexts. It ensures that violence should not be seen as an isolated incident.

The VRU's strategy is rooted in a contextual safeguarding approach¹ which focuses on:

- **Children and Young People**
Reducing Adverse Childhood Experiences and building resilience.
- **Families and Home**
Supporting and enabling them to nurture and protect young people.
- **Peers and Friends**
Supporting young people to be the best they can individually and together.
- **Community and Neighbourhoods**
Enabling and empowering communities to lead from within to build sustainable futures.

The VRU's approach broadly falls into the following five areas:

1. **Understanding the issues**
The VRU commissions research to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of issues across London and locally. This research can augment and add greater texture to information the unit accesses through public datasets, reports, and experts and helps inform our interventions.
2. **Convening partners**
Any successful public health approach relies on strong partnerships. The VRU convenes partners to work with us – and each other – to develop effective and joined-up approaches to violence reduction.

3. **Funding and delivering innovative programmes** The VRU's budget for 2020/21 is £19.7m. This enables us to fund ambitious programmes designed to improve the environments and behaviours that, if unaddressed, may otherwise lead to violence. Our current focus is on early intervention. This includes supporting vulnerable and exploitable young people and developing the capabilities of those that young people depend on, such as their families, communities, and youth practitioners.
4. **Learning what works** The VRU uses evaluation data from funded programmes to learn what has worked and what hasn't – and why, and to inform future investment. The national VRU network enables the London VRU to learn from what works elsewhere, and to share our own learnings.
5. **Shaping policy** Listening to the voices of our communities, London's young people, alongside data analysis is vital to make the case for change. These insights enable the Mayor to develop more impactful London-wide policies and to work constructively with government for policy change.

The VRU multidisciplinary team structure has been developed to reflect these priorities.

STAFFING/TEAM STRUCTURE

Lib Peck started as Director of the VRU in March 2019. The VRU team was recruited throughout 2019. It includes specialists in public health, youth work, community safety, social services, policymaking, programme management, data and evaluation, communications, and policing. (See organogram on next page).

The team's strengths lies in our diversity of professional background and lived experience. This includes youth workers and community engagement who work directly with young people and vulnerable adults with those from policing, local authorities and public health backgrounds.

From the start, the team's capacity and expertise has been complemented by working with secondees from key partners. These include from the Metropolitan Police, local authorities, and health. There are plans afoot for further secondees from the housing sector and from education.

More recently, we have established our Young People's Action Group, made up of 10 young Londoners from across the Capital all with different life experience and a shared commitment to reduce violence. The group's remit is to influence all areas of our work, while our commitment is to provide each of them with training, connections and a salary.

1. **Contextual Safeguarding** is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra familial relationships can undermine parent-child relationships. *Contextual Safeguarding*, Carlin Firmin 2017

In addition, we have an apprentice in our team in keeping with our values of providing young people with opportunities.

Team members are the touchpoint between the VRU and specific communities, networks, and partners. There are staff leads for schools, PRUs, and APs; for parents, carers, and families, youth practitioners; and community and grassroots organisations.

Being visible to communities is a key principle of the team and we believe is vital to building trust. By fostering these relationships, we can bring local or nuanced insights into our work and are more confident that it reflects the ambitions and needs of London's diversity.

There is huge scope for collaboration with other teams and departments within City Hall. These include MOPAC (our host agency), the Education and Youth team, the Health team, and the Skills and Employment team.

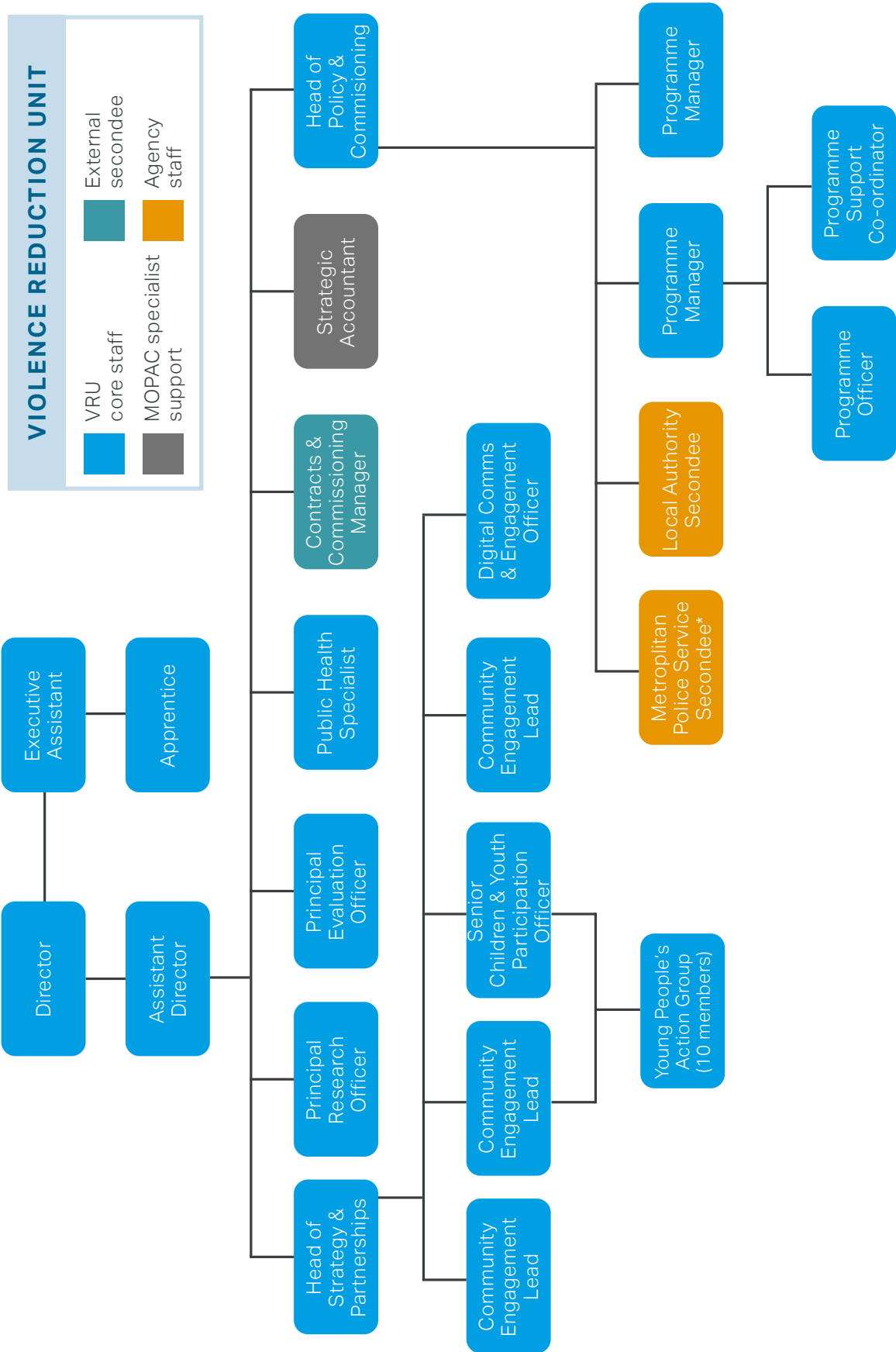
At an operational level, the team has a range of skills in programme management; programme delivery; contract management; relationship management/stakeholder engagement; commissioning, tendering, and procurement; accounting; evaluation and analysis; and communication.

OPERATING MODEL

The VRU consulted with communities and other key partners before determining our operating model. We heard that community involvement, both informally and formally, was integral to a successful operating model. The VRU has established several informal networks around parenting, research and for local authorities and leading VCS organisations.

We also heard that a pan London approach that worked collaboratively with public sector authorities would be most effective. As a result, we dismissed options that considered a "hub and spoke" model of between four and six local delivery units across London's 32 boroughs and Community Safety Partnerships for fear of more bureaucracy and duplication.

The VRU contributes funding to all 32 CSPs and this is centred around their production of a local violence reduction action plan. These are produced to a similar format to enable the sharing of good practice and local challenges, and the VRU works alongside London Councils and the MPS to provide support to each of the 32 London boroughs.



SECTION 1A: MEETING LONDON'S NEEDS

Key points:

- *How the VRU structure meets local needs*
- *The challenges of 2020*
- *The impact of the national pandemic on our ability to deliver*
- *Diversity and the VRU*
- *The impact of the Black Lives Matter movement on our work*

MEETING LOCAL NEEDS

One of our biggest challenges is to operate at scale in a city the size of London. The scope and profile of violence varies both between boroughs, sometimes considerably, and within the very diverse communities across London. The size and structure of the public sector is large and complex. To put into context, Glasgow which developed the first VRU in the UK has some 1.6 million inhabitants and is served by one local authority. This compares to a population of some 9.3 million in London and 32 boroughs and 12 Borough Command Units.

The different profiles of violence in each borough (and often within different parts of the same borough) means that a one size fits all approach will not work. As such, practice needs to be shaped by local need.

To achieve this, each Community Safety Partnership (CSP) develops its own local violence profile and develops a local violence reduction action plan. The VRU with the Metropolitan Police and boroughs, through London Councils, devised a single action plan template for London. This ensures consistency and a range of actions that support a public health approach. It also enables each CSP to tailor its violence reduction work to the local violence profile, needs of communities and local service best practice.

The plans focus on local analysis and enforcement, steps taken to reduce access to weapons through to safeguarding and educating young people. This involves communities, supporting victims of violence and exploitation and offering diversionary and preventative opportunities. The plans include how the CSP is strategically linked to the local structures such as the Safeguarding Children's and Adult's Boards and the Health and Wellbeing Board. This ensures there is a comprehensive local public health approach to violence and vulnerability reduction.

The VRU with MPS and London Councils reviews each plan and then works with each borough to develop and improve it. We prioritise sharing good practice, understanding challenges and putting inter borough collaboration at the heart of our Violence Reduction Partnership sessions jointly run with London Councils and the MPS. This work is led by the sub-team managed by the Head of Policy and Commissioning.

CHALLENGES IN 2020

The year 2020 has been the most challenging for Londoners. It has laid bare how socio-economic disparities really are a matter of life and death. Of course, this is something we have long seen reflected in data around victims of serious violence where the links between poverty and violence are already well established. Yet the magnitude and scale of COVID-19 has forced policymakers, politicians, the public, and the police to pay more attention to these issues of inequality.

These uncomfortable truths coincided with the horrific killing of George Floyd in America on May 25 2020 at the hands of police. This further fuelled global protests about policy brutality and systemic racism in the States which, in turn, shone a more powerful light on the Met's policing of the pandemic in the context of long-running discontent with how Black communities are policed. The Mayor's response to this growing movement was to engage with communities and the Met and to publish a new Action Plan which focuses on redressing the disproportionate use of police powers within these communities. Further detail on this Action Plan and the VRU's contribution towards it features later in the report.

The global health pandemic has exacerbated many of the root causes of violence and has stretched already underfunded youth services to the brink. In particular young Londoners have experienced increased mental illness, stress, and trauma. Their physical and social lives have been put on hold. Their education has been interrupted and their prospects of training and employment are now much bleaker. At the moment young people's need is greatest, the excellent and numerous VCS and community groups who support and inspire young people, and with whom we work, are suffering the most severe financial challenges, and coping with the transition to a virtual communication world.

THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL PANDEMIC ON OUR WORK

The VRU has continued to work at pace throughout the COVID-19 pandemic despite the huge professional and personal challenges all Londoners have faced, including the VRU team.

That is because the pandemic has intensified the urgency of the work we do. Many of the young people who have been affected most profoundly are the same young people we now need the most support, confidence and inspiration if they are to avoid the alienation and exploitation that make them more vulnerable to violence. The pandemic has hugely increased the numbers of young people needing that support.

As a strategic response, the VRU's Director is providing leadership of a London-wide mission supported by the VCS and London councils to shape and deliver a key recovery priority - 'A New Deal for Young People'. This prioritises investment and support for personalised mentoring and accessible quality youth activities for those young Londoners most in need, to improve their wellbeing, safety and prospects.

In terms of delivery, the VRU has worked well remotely as we outline below. But the biggest impact of COVID-19 has been on the work of the community engagement leads. They have had to adapt to remote and virtual meetings rather than the planned extensive engagement through direct visits. While remote working has at times enabled a greater reach for some audiences it still doesn't provide the quality of face-to-face conversation.

FLEXIBLE USE OF FUNDS AND REPORTING

Early into the pandemic, we organised discussions with our partners, providers, and stakeholders to hear how directly COVID-19 was impacting on their organisations and services. We learned the impact on many community groups and service providers was significant, both in terms of service delivery and financial uncertainty.

We responded by enabling grassroots organisations to use grants to cover core costs and we relaxed requirements around reporting on programme delivery. These measures were very much welcomed by organisations who were simply trying to stay afloat and couldn't deliver programmes as intended due to lockdown restrictions.

We were also able to respond quickly and effectively to the Home Office's request to distribute funding of £568,000 to small charities working with young people in London. We helped 50 organisations and want to record our respect and appreciation of the resourcefulness and innovation these groups displayed through 2020.

London Community Response Fund

In July 2020, Mayor Sadiq Khan invested £2.1m to provide positive opportunities and focused support for vulnerable young Londoners most impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown.

This was one of a number of City Hall's measures to support young people and to ensure we were best prepared to tackle any outbreak of violence involving young people as lockdown restrictions were eased. The funding supported youth work projects over the summer and autumn dedicated to improving the wellbeing and opportunities of young people. It was available for projects responding to the needs of communities affected by COVID-19 across 32 London boroughs, via the London Community Response.

At the time, the Mayor said:

"The services provided by our dedicated frontline youth workers have the ability to change lives. That's why I've committed more than £2 million to help youth organisations provide support this summer to the most vulnerable young people and their families, many of whom have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19."

The £2.1m investment was made up of £1.6m from the Mayor's Young Londoners Fund and £500,000 from the Violence Reduction Unit. The London Community Response Fund managed the allocation of funds.

London Funders – a network of investors in London's civil society – oversaw the London Community Response. This helped support civil society organisations and charities to provide their vital services during a time of rising demand but shrinking resources.

Young People's Action Group recruitment

Despite the pandemic, we successfully recruited ten young Londoners to form the Young People's Action Group. This was done without face-to-face meetings. The young people showed resilience, innovation, and adaptability to respond to challenging circumstances. The group is now injecting new energy and ideas into the team.

DIVERSITY, AND IMPACT OF BLACK LIVES MATTER

Like many organisations, we acknowledge that structural inequalities are engrained throughout society. We also know that these disparities are often most starkly evident in the areas closely related to our work – violence, policing, and the criminal justice system.

London is one of the most diverse cities in the world. From the start, we have recognised the importance of diversity – diversity of thought, experience, and perspectives. This is clear in the membership of our board, the PRG, and in the make-up of our staff team. The VRU has seven core values, one of which explicitly speaks to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), and another which focuses on Fairness.

But we must not assume that good intentions are enough to ensure that these systemic inequalities do not manifest within our team, or impact how we work with each other, our partners, and communities. To be genuine and effective agents of positive system change, we must first look within. Therefore, we are reviewing our own diversity and inclusion policies through a consultancy. This has been jointly commissioned with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime.

We recognise that a proactive approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is crucial if we are to meet all our aims. We have agreed to establish a more rigorous and sustainable approach towards embedding equalities, diversity and inclusion in our strategy and team.

We hope to see the following outcomes:

- ▶ To develop a brave and trusting space to discuss challenges and aspirations for achieving genuinely inclusive and diverse culture, practice and processes.
- ▶ Co-production of long-term strategic EDI approaches and plans.
- ▶ To better understand the learning needs of all of the team, specifically around structural racism, bias, privilege, intersectionality and white supremacy.

In October 2020, the Mayor declared City Hall a committedly anti-racist organisation. He launched an organisation-wide cultural change programme. This is underpinned by an independent review into the structural barriers that prevent Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and specifically Black progression. He is also setting targets by gender and ethnicity for the proportion of Black male and Black female staff across the GLA and MOPAC. The aim is to ensure its make-up reflects the wider London population, specifically the senior leadership teams.

“Your background, gender and ethnicity should have no bearing on what you can achieve which is why part of becoming actively anti-racist involves acknowledging the fact systemic racism remains pervasive across society. Employers and businesses must do more to embed anti-racist practices in their operations and their company culture.”
– Sadiq Khan

VRU VALUES

- ✓ We're better together
- ✓ Fairness opens doors
- ✓ Positivity adds up
- ✓ Our faces are familiar
- ✓ Communities must guide us
- ✓ We're here to be bold
- ✓ EDI is in our DNA

SECTION 1B: MEETING LONDON'S NEEDS

Key points:

- *How the London VRU monitors and reviews its progress through the Partnership Reference Group (PRG)*
- *How the London VRU understands new risks and responds to them*
- *Membership of the PRG*

THE PARTNERSHIP REFERENCE GROUP

The PRG was established in September 2018 with the initial remit of shaping up a violence reduction approach across London, including the establishment of a Unit. Since then it provides the strategic lead, direction, support and challenge to the work of the Violence Reduction Unit.

The PRG is chaired by the Mayor and includes the Deputy Mayors for Policing and Crime; Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement; and Education and Childcare.

The PRG is made up of leading representatives from the MPS, NHS and public health, probation and education and local authorities. The 32 London boroughs are represented by the political lead for crime and community safety and local authority officers nominated by London Councils, the cross-party organisation that works on behalf of all its member authorities.

Representatives from the community, VCS and youth sector also sit alongside the public sector representatives. Their presence at such a senior level ensures that a diverse range of opinions and experiences are heard. It also helps to ensure there is a strong community voice influencing how we deliver violence reduction.

The VRU Director reports to the PRG, and VRU team members are invited to PRG meetings on an ad-hoc basis to update on specific areas of work relevant to the agenda. The PRG meets quarterly.

IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO RISKS

Over the past year, we have presented our Strategic Needs Assessment and review of serious case reviews to the PRG alongside thematic discussions. These have revolved around race and equality, public health and adverse childhood experiences, and education and exclusions.

We give regular updates on violent crime trends so that the partnership can understand emerging risks and patterns of violence. This is being expanded to also take account of wider datasets including London Ambulance calls, data from the Index of Multiple Deprivation and School Exclusion data. The PRG receives regular reports on the unit's activities from the Violence Reduction Action plans to the MyEnds programme.

To aid transparency and accountability, we publish minutes of every PRG meeting at www.london.gov.uk

PRG MEMBERSHIP

- Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London
- Sophie Linden, Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime
- Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement
- Joanne McCartney AM, Assembly Member and Statutory Deputy Mayor
- Mary Harpley, Chief Officer, GLA
- Diana Luchford, Chief Executive, MOPAC
- Lib Peck, VRU Director
- Carolyn Downs, London Councils, Executive Lead for Community Safety and CEO of Brent Council
- Jamie Carswell, Director of Housing and Safer Communities, Royal Borough of Greenwich
- Councillor Danny Thorpe, Executive Member for Crime and Public Protection, London Councils
- Tony Theodoulou, London Director of Children's Services lead for Youth Offending Services, London Councils
- Nick Ephgrave, Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service
- Dr Kevin Fenton, Regional Director PHE London
- Dr Vin Diwakar, Regional Medical Director for NHS England (London)
- Dr Martin Griffiths, Clinical Director for Violence Reduction, NHS England
- Mark Turner, Regional Director of Commissioning for NHS England (London)
- Sir Sam Everington OBE, Chair, London wide Clinical Commissioning Council
- Gabriel Amahwe, Director of Probation, London CRC Councillor
- Kilvinder Vigurs, Divisional Director, National Probation Service (London), HM Prison and Probation Service
- James Banks, Director of London Funders
- Education Sector Representative - Emily Bentley, Preventing Serious Violence Team Leader, BAEA, Department for Education
- Jake Ferguson, Chief Executive, Hackney CVS
- Ben Lindsay, Lead Pastor at Emmanuel Church New Cross
- Ebinehita Iyere, Lead Project Co-ordinator, Juvenis
- Baljit Banga, Executive Director, Imkaan
- Andrea Simon, Head of Public Affairs, End Violence Against Women Coalition
- Rosemary Watt-Wyness, Chief Executive, London Youth
- Jeremy Crook, Chief Executive of Black Training & Enterprise Group

SECTION 1C: WORKING WITH OUR PARTNERS AND COMMUNITIES

Key points:

- *How the London VRU works in partnership with its stakeholders and communities*
- *Partnership working with the Metropolitan Police Service, Health and Education, Schools and with the Voluntary and Community Sector*

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNITIES

The causes of violence are diverse and complex, and the socio-political make up of London is just as diverse and complex. We know that we can't tackle violence from our offices in City Hall, and we certainly can't tackle violence working alone or in silos. That's why we work with a range of key partners across the city who each have a role to play in reducing violence. These include schools, PRUs, the Metropolitan Police, health services, local authorities, prison and probation services, businesses, charities, and grassroots organisations. At its heart, the Violence Reduction Unit has to be a partnership.

We also prioritise working with local communities, especially in areas that have been most affected by violence. We believe strongly that we will only achieve long-term success in reducing violence by putting communities at the heart of our efforts.

We recognise these partners already have deep experience of working in this area that predates our existence. We can add value by supporting their work, amplifying their voices to policymakers, and creating cohesive and productive pan-London networks. This is the best way to support and enhance the good work already being done.

One of our strongest powers is our role as convenor and influencer through system leadership. The VRU provides London with greater capacity, expertise and coordination to identify the root causes of violence and deliver early interventions.

The pan-London approach, with the Mayor's mandate, gives us influence and a non-statutory duty to enable innovation and flexibility. This is therefore exercised through several VRU networks.

Our Partnership Reference Group provides strategic direction, support and challenge to the Violence Reduction Unit. As well as a partnership with the NHS London's Violence Reduction Network, we convene various other networks and focus groups. These include a charities network, a youth practitioners' network, a parent/carers' network, an academic network, and a newly created Young People's Action Group.

Aside from forming these networks, the VRU's work with partners has also included:

- Establishing secondment arrangements with key partners through which seconded staff can ensure a multi-disciplinary approach within the unit.
- Providing a significant number of grants to community and voluntary organisations – a demonstration of our commitment to working with partners in delivery.
- Launching a new £6.6m programme, MyEnds, which supports locally led projects designed to reduce violence in the neighbourhoods most affected by violence. This programme, built on the foundation of strong consortiums, aims to build and strengthen local networks and grassroots organisations. It recognises that those closest to the issues should have a central role in owning and leading the collective response.

WORKING WITH EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Our work is steered by the Partnership Reference Group which includes the DfE as a member.

We work with mainstream schools to develop an inclusive whole school approach that supports happy and healthy young people and to minimise exclusions. We have also prioritised working with Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Alternative Provision. We know that these play a vital role in supporting vulnerable young Londoners to stay in education. After consultation with PRU headteachers and career advisors, education policy and practice experts, we developed the PRU Support Programme.

This programme is designed to offer additional mentoring support to vulnerable young Londoners who attend Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). The aim is to provide support, encourage aspirations, and enable young people to think about their future in a safe and encouraging environment.

This programme will also work to re-engage, through sport, those at risk of disengaging from mainstream education during school holidays. And finally, it will fund local, community-led after school activities to keep young Londoners safe, as this is a known high-risk period.

We also hosted a secondee from an alternative provision leadership programme (The Difference) to develop practice-sharing seminars and a rapid

practice summary. The aim is to quickly share effective practice between PRUs, alternative provisions, academies and special schools for children with social emotional and mental health needs.

This year-long series will focus on issues such as: attendance, child criminal exploitation, post-16 transitions, supporting parents, reintegration and exclusions and multi-agency partnerships.

WORKING WITH HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS

Our work is steered by the Partnership Reference Group which includes NHS leadership.

Over the past year, London NHS's focus on violence reduction has evolved considerably. Violence reduction was also identified by London's health and care system as one of the region's priorities in the recently published Health and Care Vision for London. Consultant Martin Griffiths has been appointed as the NHS Violence Reduction lead for London and more recently, England and Wales.

The NHS London Violence Reduction programme has set up a Clinical and Professional Violence Reduction Network, which meets quarterly, is chaired by the Clinical Director into which the London VRU can contribute. Its purpose is to provide direction to the various programmes established as well as to advocate and champion preventative violence reduction approaches across all NHS services.

The development of both the VRU and NHS London Violence Reduction programme puts us in a good place to deepen our working relationship. Martin Griffiths and Lib Peck (Director of London VRU) co-chair a new Violence Reduction Steering Group (VRSO). This will support greater understanding, connections and alignment of activities within both programmes to maximise impact. It will also explore working together to see where future strategic opportunities may exist to pursue together in partnership.

The Violence Reduction Steering Group, which meets every six weeks, will first focus on the NHS's partnership with the VRU. As it develops, the group will look at where scope could be broadened to include other key partners such as education, housing, public health and community.

WORKING WITH THE METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE

The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) oversees the MPS in respect of enforcement tactics to reduce violence within London. Since April 2018 the Mayor has provided £15m funding for a dedicated Violent Crime Taskforce, which focuses on those areas and individuals at greatest risk. As well as the Taskforce, the Met has received funding for Violence Suppression Units to address violence at a more local level.

For the 2020/21 financial year, the Home Office provided surge funding of £13.6m towards MPS violence reduction work. The Metropolitan Police is working hard to bring those responsible for violence to justice, as well as taking knives and weapons off our streets. In addition to this enforcement activity, the MPS are working alongside the VRU to contribute to a broader public health approach towards tackling violence. In addition to the involvement of the Assistant Commissioner for the MPS at the PRG, the unit has benefited hugely from the experience of an MPS Chief Inspector secondee supporting its work.

The Chief Inspector's key responsibility is to lead the relationship between police and the VRU. He acts as the subject matter expert for that sector and ensures it is fully represented in the VRU's work. This includes managing and contributing to the delivery of several workstreams.

This includes:

- Identifying 14 Prevention and Diversion Police Leads, supporting programmes, developing best practice and supporting a Violence Reduction Champion's Network. This has helped to support 15 forums including coordinating 200 Violence Reductions Champions, connecting them to wider partners.
- Launching a Violence Reduction Champions Network. This is a network of MPS officers and staff interested in developing and exploring best practice around prevention, diversion and early intervention. So far 14 forums have been held, and eight strands of best practice explored.
- MPS Diversion Directory which provides a detailed library and directory of funded programmes and organisations across London. This enables police and partners to connect to funded organisations to collaborate and connect young people with positive opportunities. A first version has been circulated to police BCUs and prevention and diversion leads across London. This has been shared with local authority Heads of Community Safety and incorporated into MOPAC confidence and satisfaction strategy. The MPS secondee has created a national Teachable Moments Working Group, incorporating all the VRUs across

the UK. The purpose is to showcase best practice around teachable moments, identify innovative work and support other VRUs to adopt proven programmes. This includes an initial event in January followed by further workshops during the year.

The MPS is also supporting the VRU's work in reviewing Local Authority violence reduction plans.

The VRU has invested significant funding to the MPS to support the diversionary and prevention opportunities that help to reduce violence. This includes the DIVERT and ENGAGE programmes overseen by the MPS secondee.

The DIVERT programme, nationally recognised as best practice, is a police custody diversion programme for 18-25-year-olds. It currently operates in six custody suites across London, helping 1,000 young adults away from violence into education, employment, training and mentoring.

ENGAGE is a VRU funded police custody diversion programme for 10-18-year-olds. It is delivered by Camden Council and supported by the MPS in Holborn and Islington Custody. Navigating COVID-19, ENGAGE has managed to work with over 140 young people since its launch.

These programmes are being continuously reviewed to explore if they can be rolled out to other local areas.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS

Early on, we recognised that working effectively with London's 32 Community Safety Partnerships would be vital to ensuring a consistent public health approach to violence reduction. Whilst many of these CSPs already had violence reduction plans in place, there was a lack of consistency and sharing of good practice across London. As such, emerging themes were being missed. There was also a huge difference between boroughs regarding how they linked violence and vulnerability. Our work with the boroughs has created a consistent approach and instilled an ethos of collaboration.

To do this, we expanded on the work within the London Knife Crime Strategy. This provided a template for local violence reduction action plans to widen activity into broader serious violence and vulnerability. It was designed to ensure a consistent model for future action plans. That way good practice, emerging themes and local initiative could be readily drawn out of plans. London Councils and the London Heads of Community Safety were key partners in this work.

We have adopted a peer-to-peer learning approach with CSPs and local authorities. This will help to make the system sustainable. In the first year, it has supported work to boost local partnerships and shift towards an emphasis on prevention. This includes drawing in wider expertise from children's services, the youth sector and health.

WORKING WITH CHARITIES AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

We work closely with charities and grassroots organisations. As referred mentioned earlier, our charities network made up of the top 15 VCS organisations in London works on issues related to violence. We have also prioritised listening and working with grassroots organisations, which are often community-led. They have the trust of their local communities, alongside extensive local knowledge gained from working on the frontline for years. Their insights and intelligence have enabled us to better respond to local needs.

As an example of this partnership, in April, we awarded £350,000 to the East London Business Alliance (ELBA) to deliver an innovative community-led programme, Everyone's Business. The programme will help young people into work, access entrepreneurial support programmes and link into social business networks to strengthen their prospects. It will run in Tower Hamlets which is home to Canary Wharf. According to Trust for London, despite this Tower Hamlets' child poverty rate of 57% is the highest in London's City Hall research has shown a link between poverty and violent crime. The programme is built on the premise that giving hope, skills, and opportunities to young people, families, and communities is everyone's business.

CASE STUDY:

MyEnds puts emphasis on local answers to violence

At the start of 2020, we published our strategic needs assessment. It brings together existing research and analysis to detail what was known about violence in London and set out recommendations for how we / our partners should respond.

One of the key observations was that violence in London is highly geographically concentrated. Violence in some boroughs may be low. However, there may be specific locations within those boroughs where violence is high or increasing. It is often concentrated in areas as small as an estate or a cluster of streets.

An important conclusion of this report was that “smaller is better”. The SNA advocated for a highly localised approach to understanding and responding to violence in London.

We responded by launching the *MyEnds* programme to get under the skin of the problem. The aim is to empower local communities and VCS groups to take the lead, come up with fresh projects and build sustainability. In essence *MyEnds* will support more resilient and safer neighbourhoods.

We expect this work will be grounded on a commitment to increase trust and collaboration between local communities, stakeholders, key local institutions, and statutory partners.

Equally, *MyEnds* is about increasing the sustainability of community networks. That way they will be well placed to respond to local emerging needs and add long-term capacity and support to an area. By developing this ground-up approach, we hope to see new ideas and locally led interventions that reach those who need them most.

We have encouraged consortium proposals from experienced community-led organisations with the skills, influence, passion, and access to networks in the community to drive change.

Through *MyEnds* we hope to see:

- Community networks that are empowered and strengthened. These networks will be made up of individuals who are closest to the issues. As such, they can play a central role in leading the solutions.
- Creative, innovative, and effective local neighbourhood responses to reducing violence. We know that not everything will work, but we want to encourage challenging and creative mindsets, nonetheless.
- Local communities that are aware of local initiatives and support them, who know how they can get involved, and are motivated enough to play their part.

SECTION 1D: DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT (SNA)

Key points:

- *How we developed the Strategic Needs Assessment*
- *How we use data to inform our work*
- *The impact of Covid19 on violence*

HOW WE DEVELOPED THE STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A Homicide Review was commissioned in April 2019 by the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in a partnership between the Social Care Institute for Excellence and the University of Bedfordshire. The Homicide Review looked at Domestic Homicide Reviews, Serious Case Reviews (SCRs, also now known as child safeguarding practice reviews), Safeguarding Adults Reviews, and Independent Investigation Reports (formerly known as Mental Health Homicide Reports) to review learning across the statutory review process.

As part of the same commissioning, the Behavioural Insights Team undertook a Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA), setting out the strategic needs and requirements across London and detailing the key causation factors, common patterns in relation to homicide.

The two reports were published on the VRU website on 30 January 2020 and should be seen as complementary of each other. The VRU faced a challenge in commissioning the SNA, as the size and complexity of London, meant that the assessment would not be able to provide the detailed analysis of violence often found within a problem profile. The SNA provides a broad strategic picture of violence and causational factors across all of London. Local problem profiles are developed at borough level that give the granular local analysis of violence.

The report on statutory reviews of homicides, highlighted that whilst Domestic Violence Homicide Reviews

(DVHRs) have clear guidance around when and how they should be conducted and reviewed through a consistent process overseen by the Home Office; other statutory reviews do not have similar guidance and many homicides are not currently subject to any statutory review process.

For example, while DVHRs are required for intimate partner related homicides arising from abuse neglect or violence, SCRs in relation to children under 18, are only required in relation to death arising from abuse or neglect and not violence per se. One of the key recommendations from the review was therefore to make sure that the circumstance in which SCRs were undertaken is widened, so that all partners could better understand risks and were better able to prevent homicides.

Following the report's publication, the Mayor of London wrote to the Home Secretary to highlight the gaps in homicide review requirements and to call for change. It is encouraging that the government is now actively considering legislation to develop a wider homicide review process.

The Strategic Needs Assessment was the first ever London wide, published strategic assessment of violence, looking not just at crime but wider risk and protective factors in relation to violence. The MPS undertakes analysis of violence utilising crime data but the SNA looked at broader datasets, including those from A&E attendance and the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The report brought together data analysis and new research

from leading academics to complement the voices of London's communities with evidence of large-scale patterns and trends to inform decision making. The report highlighted the known evidence base for violence and violence-reduction and set out key recommendations to support the VRU's response to violence.

The existing violence reduction evidence base, as mapped by the VRU through the Strategic Needs Assessment, largely focussed on individual risk factors associated with violence. For example, poor parental supervision, weak attainment in school, being excluded from school and exposure to violence are all well discussed across violence-related literature. The report did highlight that understanding of settings (place-based) and situational drivers of violence was where the gaps in evidence were greatest, and therefore were recommended as immediate research priorities for the VRU over the forthcoming year.

To this end, the VRU commissioned the following two research pieces, due to be completed in spring/summer 2021:

- Vulnerable Neighbourhood Analysis – to address the identified gap in our understanding of setting (place-based) related violence. The research will explore both human (e.g. social trust, community cohesiveness) and environmental (e.g. proximity of alcohol outlets or transport hubs) factors and aims to support and inform the VRU and partner's local or community response to violence.
- Situation, Motives and Micro-pathways to Violence (homicides) – to address the identified gap from our analysis of statutory reviews of homicides and violent incidences that accompanied our strategic needs assessment. The research will explore the context, motives and situation immediately before homicides involving homicide victims aged under 25, where the offence was committed outside the home. The research will support the VRU to identify early intervention opportunities and how agencies can work more collaboratively to identify and support those at risk.

The Strategic Needs Assessment has guided the VRU's work over the past year by highlighting additional opportunities to support people, including the VRU expanding its work with Pupil Referral Units and with parents.

The SNA in highlighting place based opportunities, led to the VRU developing place as a key work area for this year and beyond. This has included the work with local authorities and the community led violence reduction programme MyEnds. Both these areas of work are discussed in detail within this report.

Whilst much of the SNA confirmed existing knowledge and provided greater detail on it, the gap in learning from homicide reviews, came through as an area of opportunity for further work. This is being taken forward through the Situation, Motives and Micro-pathways to Violence research detailed above.

A key recommendation of the SNA was to consider the importance of place-based violence reduction interventions to support those neighbourhoods who have experienced sustained and high levels of violence. The SNA also overlaid wider datasets such as health and deprivation, to illustrate that concentrated areas of violence were also concentrated areas of poverty and deprivation and in some areas that link has been there since the 19th century.

Whilst compiling this report, the VRU also took the opportunity to review the SNA. The review accompanies this report as Appendix 1.

HOW WE USE DATA TO INFORM OUR WORK

The VRU has a data programme which is improving our ability to measure, understand, monitor and anticipate violence from a public health perspective. The VRU uses data to:

- Understand the picture/drivers of violence to inform future plans.
- Understand changing patterns of violence.
- Advocate change and aid communications.
- To begin to measure the performance and wider impact of the VRU, e.g. through the VRU's evaluation programme.

The VRU currently uses a wide range of data including:

Police Recorded Crime

The VRU has access to Metropolitan Police data at an aggregate level, down to ward level through the Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and the Metropolitan Police published dashboards, which are updated monthly. The crime types include:

- all violence against the person offences (homicide, violence with injury, and violence without injury).
- sexual assaults (rape and other sexual offences).
- robbery.
- knife crime.
- gun crime.
- lethal barrelled discharges.
- 'flagged'** Met data as domestic, gang-related or knife-enabled.

The VRU and Greater London Authority partners are in discussion with the MPS over options to enhance existing data sharing agreements to maximise opportunities for the VRU's access to police data in the future.

The VRU also sources data from Data. Police.UK, which goes down to Lower Super Output Area level, but does not include Home Office sub-classifications.

Perceptions of crime

The VRU monitors Londoners' perceptions of violence and safety through the Crime Survey for England and Wales and the MOPAC Public Attitudes Survey, which is London specific, updated monthly and goes to ward level.

Health Service Data

The VRU monitors health service data through a number of different sources. The VRU has a close working relationship with analysts within the Greater London Authority who host London's Information to Tackle Violence (ISTV) data, which now has pan-London coverage with data received from all Type 1 Accident and Emergency Units across London (29 hospitals). The hospitals submit returns on a monthly basis and roughly 1400 records are received each month. London Ambulance data is monitored down to LSOA level and updated monthly. The VRU also utilises wider health data sources such as Public Health England Fingertips.

Wider Data Sources

Although crime and health data offer a good overview of patterns of violence across London, following a public health approach the VRU also monitors and uses data from a wide variety of other sources including Indices of Multiple Deprivation, Education and Transport for London data.

Data Quality

The VRU recognises that poor data quality often limits the contribution that data can offer to the understanding of the scale and nature of violence in London. The VRU has begun to examine the quality of the data it uses and found a number of opportunities. An example includes greater consistency in the use of "flags" in crime recording, to more accurately assess whether an offence is gang or knife related.

Data Tool

The City Hall Intelligence Unit with MOPAC and the VRU, has developed a data tool, which provides a flexible way of using a wide range of the datasets described above, to highlight areas of multiple need and which could be best suited to preventative interventions.

THE IMPACT OF COVID19 ON VIOLENCE

There have been significant reductions in most types of violent crime during both the initial lockdown and the various further stages of restrictions. Exceptions to this are offences within a domestic setting, including both intimate partner and intrafamilial violence. The attached Review of the Strategic Needs Assessment provides a more detailed overview of the impact of Covid19 on violence.

SECTION 1E: CULTURAL AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF THE VRU

Key points:

- *How we maintain our corporate memory*
- *How we embed the public health approach to achieve whole system change*
- *How we communicate our work*
- *How we coordinate our work with others*
- *How we manage our finances*

CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

Our values provide the foundation for cultural sustainability. The team's work is underpinned by collaboration, fairness, transparency, and genuine engagement. This creates an ethos where ideas, contacts, successes, and challenges are shared. It is important to note that the public health approach speaks a lot to collaboration between VRUs and external partners. That same ethos must also extend to how VRUs work internally both within the unit, but also with other internal departments in City Hall.

The Director of the VRU took up post in March 2019. One of the first actions was to recruit a team with a wide range of professional and lived experience and reflecting the communities we serve. Through positive and progressive recruitment processes as well as secondment arrangements with partners we now have a well-balanced and expert team. This includes staff who have worked on the frontline in some of the communities most affected by violence, alongside those who have extensive experience working in and alongside youth services and young people. This is important for getting good quality first-hand information and insights. We have welcomed staff seconded from local authorities, health services, the police, the National Probation Service, and from charities that we work with.

Key to our approach to cultural sustainability is to work collaboratively with statutory, voluntary and community sector partners. These are all represented through membership of the VRU's

Partnership Reference Group (described in detail in Section 2 of this report).

In a city as vast and complex as London, we have a duty support and empower organisations and individuals in local communities who can make a positive impact on tackling violence. We are not set up primarily to deliver interventions. There are many brilliant charities and community-led organisations already doing this across London, and our success relies on them. Doing with communities not to them is vital for community buy-in, support, and co-production.

The team's structure allows, even requires, staff to develop in-depth knowledge of the sector, including key programmes, stakeholders, communities, and trends. Our shared value relating to visibility is vital here:

"Our faces should be familiar: We want people to feel that we are visible and approachable. To develop relationships that work, we must take active steps to bring down barriers and build up trust. We will do what is necessary – both online and in person – for our communities to know and trust us."

The community engagement team embodies this. The leads for community engagement have deep knowledge and strong interpersonal relationships with various community groups and leaders, and local community-led interventions. The lead for schools, PRUs, and APs has similar knowledge of our funded programmes, alongside a deep understanding of the wider issues, data, and educational approaches to reducing

violence. We involve communities to develop work. Examples include: a Parent/Carer Champion network that informs our work in respect of parenting; a Charities Network that acts as a sounding board for our work with charities and third sector providers; and a Youth Practitioners Forum. We have also launched a Young People's Action Group that has recruited young people as paid members of the VRU, informing our work.

This is part of a wider strategy to develop strong relationships with stakeholders, and those with even longer histories of working in this area. This will enable us to learn what's worked, what hasn't delivered results, and develop ways to collate, share and store this vital information. We have, for example, conducted 360s and surveys with stakeholders and partners. Some of these have been the basis for reports and briefings that we have published and shared upwards within City Hall and laterally to our partners. These networks and the forums we convene them in are platforms for continuous conversation and sharing. They are important for both acquiring knowledge and circulating it more widely.

During COVID-19 restrictions, we started exploring if and how digital platforms could aid engagement and knowledge-sharing. Technology will have a growing role to play in sharing information about our strategy, our stakeholders, and our interventions, both externally and internally. These are just a few examples of how we are developing the close working relations and specific knowledge that the team depends on to function.

An important part of retaining corporate memory is creating a permanent team; and we are pleased that at a time when many employees across London were concerned about their job security we were able to put almost all VRU staff on to a permanent contract. It also increases the likelihood that they will stay and keep the knowledge and networks within the team. Likewise, we have been delighted to attract some of our originally seconded staff to stay with the VRU on a long-term basis. As the VRU sits between MOPAC and the GLA, we can access both organisations' training programmes, and we actively support staff development.

We publish the agenda and presentations or documents related to the PRG online and minute meetings to ensure there is a record of our work. Every month, we respond to questions from members of the London Assembly which are published or form the basis of the Mayor's Questions which is live streamed. We further provide monthly updates for the Mayor's Report. Finally, every decision made by the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime – usually relating to funding spend – is published online in a detailed decision paper. All of this ensures that there is a record of key decisions and activities relating to the VRU. This is in line with our value around fairness and transparency.

Communications are key to our efforts to become more transparent. Creating content also means making a digital trail of our work – through newsletters, social media feeds, blogs, press releases, and reports. This also aids corporate memory, as this content will remain visible to the public, partners, and staff forever.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

Communicating with our stakeholders and sharing practice is important to us. We have identified seven key channels:

1. **Website** – Currently a microsite that benefits from being hosted on london.gov.uk. It is where we will give an overview of who we are, who we are working with, what we are doing, and what events and activities are coming up.
2. **Newsletter** – an ever-growing list of key stakeholders and interested parties. and round-up of other updates. We often give space over to other teams in City Hall we're working with to share their successes.
3. **Twitter** – Our account launched in mid-2020. It shares updates, amplifies the voices of our partners and communities, and picks up on sentiments and challenges in the wider sector. It also enables us to connect with the other 17 VRUs.
4. **Publications** – Two important pieces of research that we commissioned were published. A report by Power the Fight was also published later in the year. We fund, contribute to, and share relevant publications with our communities and internal stakeholders. An article we wrote for the British Academy is due for publication in 2021.
5. **Press/Media** – We have regularly engaged local media and have had the work of the VRU and some of the programmes we fund featured on BBC London News, ITV London News, The Guardian, and Channel 4 News amongst others.
6. **Events** – we have managed to participate in online events with staff members, including Jordan from our Young People's Action Group, and have delivered speeches and featured on discussion panels in recent months.
7. **Digital platforms** – as mentioned earlier, we are exploring a potential digital space to aid our community engagement efforts.

We also work with partners on joint campaigns where the messages and audiences of campaigns align with our values. This year, we have supported campaigns led by the Metropolitan Police, Crimestoppers, The Damilola Taylor Trust, and London Youth.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

While the VRU is looking to make positive change now, our aim is to reduce violence and increase safety in a long-term sustainable approach that enables us to best develop tried and tested preventative measures and work constructively with communities. Our budget enables us to fund ambitious programmes designed to improve the environments, relationships, or behaviours that, if unaddressed, may lead to violence.

When the VRU was established in September 2018, it had funding of £1.8m. This funding increased to £7.8m in 2019/2020. The Home Office awarded the VRU a further £7m, bringing the VRU's budget for that year to £14.8m.

For this current financial year, the Home Office has again awarded the VRU £7m, plus an additional £0.6m from the Vulnerable Children's Charities fund. When added to the VRU's budget allocation from City Hall, the VRU's budget for the 2020/21 financial year stands at £19.7m. The expenditure breakdown can be seen below.

VRU 2020/21 FUNDING	BUDGET £M
Home Office	7.6
VRU Core Budget (Mayoral funding)	5.0
Mayoral Growth Funding	5.0
London Crime Prevention Fund Co-Commissioning	1.6
Reserves	0.5
EXPENDITURE	19.7

All the £19.7m budget is committed to a range of violence reduction programmes which are presented thematically below.

VRU 2020/21 EXPENDITURE	BUDGET £M
VCS/Community	8.0
Local authority	5.7
Education, schools and settings	5.9
EXPENDITURE	19.7

Listening to and learning from communities and VCS partners, the VRU is clear that programmes need time to develop and funding needs to be secured for more than just one year.

Where we have flexibility through mayoral funding, we have ensured our programmes are funded for more than a year.

The Mayor is committed to longer-term sustainable programmes to reduce violence, confirming a core budget of £5m for 2020/2021 and £5m for 2021/2022; with a further £4m growth funding for 2020/2021 and £5m growth funding for 2021/2022 for multi-year funding opportunities.

This mayoral multi-year funding arrangement facilitates better delivery of interventions and engagement, provides more robust evaluation which will support and inform future strategy and direction, and ultimately helps the VRU to deliver the best outcomes for London. With this security, the VRU has adopted a sound financial strategy over a four-year period to enable the delivery of

our longer-term programmes. Although strategic challenges do arise with unknown longer-term funding from the Home Office.

However, mayoral funding only accounts for half of the VRU's budget, and there is continued uncertainty about future levels of government funding. At the time of writing we have been informed that the VRUs will be funded for one further year in 2021/22 to a similar level as previous years. As the recent Youth Violence Commission report recognised, it is vital that this long-term ambition to reduce violence is underpinned by a long-term funding agreement from government.

In the report, published in July 2020 following three years of research, the cross-party Commission concluded:

The Commission is concerned that at least two key changes are needed if the recently established regional VRUs are to fulfil their potential:

1) Long-term funding commitments - regional VRUs have been given insufficient, short-term funding. Furthermore, the Commission has been alerted to the fact that too many of the regional VRUs have already been pressured to spend money in haste, resulting in short-sighted attempts to achieve immediate (yet inevitably elusive) results. This is antithetical to an evidence-informed, public health approach to reducing violence and sets the VRUs up to fail.

To a lesser extent, employing staff seconded from partner organisations has meant that we've avoided expensive agency fees for temps. We have also benefited from the deep and specialist knowledge secondees come with. Through partners, we have (pre-lockdown) been able to gain free access to meeting/event spaces that we would normally have had to pay for. We have also been able to leverage the communications capacity and reach of our partners to target and amplify our own messages. This means we have not had to spend funds on digital advertising campaigns.

SECTION 2A: DELIVERY OF RESPONSE STRATEGY AND INTERVENTIONS

Key points:

- *Strategy and decision making around determining investment*
- *Strategic connection between our interventions*
- *Our response to the pandemic*
- *Challenges in the year ahead*

OUR STRATEGIC RATIONALE

In line with the public health approach, we are looking at violence as a preventable consequence of a range of contextual factors. These include adverse early-life experiences, or harmful social or community experiences and influences.

We published our draft strategy in July 2019 and our first full strategy later that year. At the same time, we built the evidence that would give us a sharper focus for action.

We published two studies at the start of 2020, including the first ever London-wide strategic assessment of violence. This provided a map that helped us determine where to deliver early, targeted interventions to reduce the spread of violence across the city. In response to this new research, and the pandemic, we updated our strategy in May 2020.

During our first year, we focused on consulting with and listening to communities about the key challenges across London, and what they felt needed to be done.

Our investment programme focuses on a targeted preventative approach. It includes investment in youth work, schools, diversionary activities, working to improve a mix of physical environmental factors alongside supporting young people who are most vulnerable because of Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Our Strategy contains eight core objectives:

1. Supporting individuals to be more resilient
2. Supporting stronger families
3. Young people leading change
4. Enabling communities to be strong, safe and resilient
5. Prioritising wellbeing and achievement in schools
6. Giving young people every chance to succeed
7. Making London a more compassionate and safer city
8. Increasing confidence in public institutions and changing the message around violence.

We have concentrated additional funding specifically to areas most affected by violence. In our first 18 months of operation investment has been targeted towards priority intervention programmes including:

- £4m to put youth workers in hospitals across London
- £4.7m to tackle school exclusions across 16 boroughs
- £1m to train doctors to better identify and support victims of domestic violence across seven boroughs
- £1.4m into nearly 40 grassroots organisations across London, and a further £2.4m to develop an after-school offer and mentoring offer
- £8.8m to help all 32 boroughs reduce violence
- £ 6.6m to invest in a hyper local approach in neighbourhoods affected by violence.

HOW WE MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THE INTERVENTIONS WE FUND

We believe the DIVERT programme is a good example of a programme that is delivering results and which the London VRU has funded. So too the IRISi programme, which trains GPs to spot signs of domestic violence, was scaled up to respond to a rise in domestic abuse during lockdown. And a programme that trains young people to develop filmmaking skills and create pathways into industry has been renewed and improved following a pilot. All those programmes had evidence to support their cases for VRU funding.

However, we must be aware of gaps and where new interventions are needed to respond to new evidence. When our SNA highlighted the hyperlocal nature of violence in London, we developed and funded a new programme *MyEnds* to respond to local challenges.

HOW OUR INTERVENTIONS SUPPORT EACH OTHER

Among many outcomes driving our interventions, two are particularly relevant for showing how interventions feed into one another. To create sustainability within the system, we must build capacity within communities and among professionals to support young people and their families.

Many of our interventions focus on supporting training of practitioners, on peer-to-peer support, and on mentoring. Our Youth Practitioners' Leadership Programme is investing in the professional development of 100 talented frontline practitioners to better

equip them to influence change at the highest level.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Unpredictable funding arrangements are a key challenge. Our ability to plan for 2021/2022 depends on the level of funding allocated to it from the Home Office.

The Mayor has agreed multi-year core funding to the VRU. However, without similar long-term funding allocations from the Home Office, it is difficult to plan for future financial years. As highlighted previously, a sustainable and long-term funding model is critical to maintaining cultural memory.

We also believe funding announcements with short-term submission and spending windows are problematic. They create challenges in running competitive and fair bidding processes at short notice. This impact on smaller organisations who – already stretched – may not have the capacity to meet tight deadlines. It puts additional burdens on VRUs, and may strain relationships between VRUs and charitable, grassroots, and community organisations we work with and rely upon. And, moreover, it may hamper efforts to deliver the best value for taxpayer money.

HOW THE VRU WILL RESPOND TO EMERGING CRIME TRENDS

In 2020, emerging crime trends have been linked to the pandemic and restrictions placed upon normal ways of life.

In the first lockdown, all forms of violence fell dramatically - except domestic violence.

We responded to this increase by extending funding for IRISi. This is our GP training programme that helps them to better spot signs of domestic abuse and refer patients to specialist services. There was also a reported rise in a specific form of domestic abuse, namely Child/Adolescent-to-Parent Violence (CAPV). This was most noticeable when schools were shut during the spring lockdown and children were at home – often in stressful conditions for both children and parents/carers.

The pandemic has accelerated a shift towards people living more of their lives digitally. As this shift continues, the growing threats posed by social media must be considered, especially to young people. Our programmes such as The Social Switch and YPLP already address this by training young people and those who work with them how to deal with online threats. Related to this, the lucrative drugs market will mean that young people may continue to be exploited into running county lines. Young people are often recruited online for this purpose. Part of our strategy to combat this is to ensure more young people are kept in school, in addition, young people in PRUs/APs should be supported with guidance, mentoring, and after-school activities.

£2.38m

We recognised there was a significant risk that disadvantaged students might not return to education post-lockdown, putting their futures at risk. That's why we made £2.38m in funding available to PRUs to provide mentoring and other activities to keep those young people engaged.

CASE STUDY:

***DIVERT* is helping young people get their lives back on track**

Divert is an innovative programme helping young people to get their lives back on track at a difficult moment in their lives.

The scheme funds specialist coaches who visit young people (18-25) in police custody and offer them a package of support to get them back into education, training and employment and stop them from re-offending.

For the young person alone in police custody, the last thing they expect is someone knocking at their cell door to offer them a genuine opportunity to talk about how to improve their future.

DIVERT coaches appear when the young person is at a crossroads, so are highly receptive to their offer. Coaches (who are independent from the police) provide support and guidance which includes developing a plan that offers opportunities to move away from crime.

Divert currently operates from six custody suites across London. They are in Brixton, Tower Hamlets, Lewisham, Croydon, Wood Green, and Hackney.

DIVERT has been evaluated by the College of Policing, with the full evaluation due later in 2021. Emerging findings show a 20% reduction in re-offending and:

- 1,169 young adults have benefited from DIVERT engagement and have received Information, Advice and Guidance.
- 786 have received training and development including online and virtual training and development courses.
- 101 are now employed.

The programme is led by the Metropolitan Police, Bounce Back and the New Era Foundation.

SECTION 2B: COMMUNITY AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Key points:

- *How London's VRU works with the city's communities*
- *How does London's VRU work with, involve and empower young people?*
- *The communities we are proactively building relationships with*
- *Challenges and successes from our work with communities and young people*

WORKING WITH LONDON'S COMMUNITIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE

A successful public health approach is rooted in good multi-agency working and close working with communities. In our first year, we consulted with and listened to communities about what they thought the key challenges across London are, and what needs to be done.

Everything we do is rooted in the community and shaped by the experiences and expertise of those who are closest to the local issues and challenges. Communities, and the organisations working with them, understand better than anyone what is driving violence in our city and are already working hard to address it.

We aim to be accountable to the public and the communities we serve and work with a wide range of partners, including community groups and grassroots organisations.

We all want to end violence. We must involve individuals, members of the community and young people experiencing some of the day-to-day challenges we want to address. Community voices are crucial to the VRU's work and the community will be involved at every stage and in all key decisions. Our aim is for equitable collaboration amongst community partners.

One strategic aim of the VRU is *"To put community at the heart of our work – only by doing so do we have a sustainable long-term approach towards reducing violence"*.

HOW WE ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Our work is overseen and guided by the PRG. As discussed previously, this has permanent representation on the board from community-led organisations, and from organisations that support young people. We also have a community engagement team who prioritise engagement directly with grassroots organisations, youth practitioners, and young people themselves. We recognise the value of community expertise and the vital role community voices play in shaping and developing policy as well as creating institutional/systems change.

We are working towards creating opportunities to deepen relationships with London's diverse communities and statutory and institutional partners. We aim to build collective knowledge that strengthen our projects and programmes.

The London Recovery Programme has identified the need to restore confidence, minimise the impact on communities, and build back our economy and society.

Nine recovery missions have been established. Our director is providing leadership on the mission which will shape the delivery of 'A New Deal for Young People'.

The New Deal is a chance to work collectively with a range of stakeholders. This includes organisations that support children and young people with SEND. We will ensure their voices, and those of all young Londoners, will help shape and deliver the mission.

EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

We have found that community-led research, for example, enhances culturally appropriate approaches. This leads to outcomes which are more likely to be trusted and acted upon by the community.

Community involvement can improve transparency and accountability among communities. We want to ensure there is continued and increased support for opportunities to engage.

It is therefore important to compensate individuals for their community expertise when participating in policy sharing and development. The unit has already begun to identify community expertise and has put in place appropriate mechanisms for genuine engagement.

Our notable example is the Young Leaders Action Group of ten young people who will help directly influence our work.

For the young people involved, the benefits are not just financial. Involvement supports personal and professional development, creates networking opportunities, and exposure.

THE COMMUNITIES WE WORK WITH

In the last 18 months, we've developed a grassroots network, parenting network, and a youth sector practitioners' network so these expert voices are heard and acted upon.

As useful as creating these networks is for us, they also have benefits for their members. For example, the parenting network facilitates peer-to-peer connections, providing access to information, signposting to relevant support, and engaging parents/carers within communities. This network can also serve to reduce feelings of isolation and anxiety for parents and carers.

The desire to support stronger communities that can take the lead in making their communities safer underpins much of our engagement. Our new flagship programme MyEnds is about increasing the sustainability of community networks so they are well placed to respond to local emerging needs and add long-term capacity and support to an area.

CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

London's community-led groups are showing the very best of our city by helping to support our most disadvantaged communities during difficult times. They are at the forefront of this work and often the first point of contact for young people.

Our investment includes £1.38m for community-led groups to support young Londoners most in need, providing them with skills, opportunities, and support in the hours after school. This is where evidence shows they are most at risk of becoming involved in / or becoming a victim of violence.

The VRU's role is an influencing one, using evidence and insight to advocate for a systemic change. For example, reducing exclusions is vital and here the Mayor is using his influence to advocate for reducing school exclusions where we know the correlation between school exclusions and serious violence affecting young people is increasingly clear.

Violence cost the capital £3bn in 2019. Our budget to support interventions that aim to prevent violence was £19.7m in 2020. The needs of the sector far outstrip that. We therefore must manage the expectations of a sector that was already underfunded and stretched before COVID-19 hit. The financial support that we can provide to them is limited. We must abide by the processes set out which are designed to ensure that public funds are distributed competitively and fairly.

COVID-19 has also affected these organisations' ability to do their work in communities, with spaces shut down and people staying indoors. We heard from many practitioners and organisations how much harder it had become to reach at-risk young people without access to schools, youth clubs, and sports clubs. We also heard how the digital divide meant some of the most disadvantaged young people were cut off. This includes from education, from their peers, and from trusted adults like youth workers who could only contact them through technology. The cost of devices and connectivity is proving to be a real barrier to some.

£1.38m

Our investment programme includes £1.38m in funding for community groups to support young Londoners in greatest need. Through that allocation, community groups can provide opportunities, and support in the hours after school, a time when they are most at risk of becoming involved in or becoming a victim of violence.

CASE STUDY:

Power the Fight: Therapeutic Intervention for Peace report

We commissioned this report to evidence the experiences of young people, families, and practitioners. Our aim was to improve the effectiveness of therapeutic responses to violence affecting young people in London.

It is widely acknowledged that serious youth violence devastates the lives of young people, families and communities. What is less documented is how communities best heal from such tragic circumstances. Furthermore, the existence of barriers for those impacted in terms of seeking professional support to move forward and to build resilience.

There are 11 key findings and four key recommendations. The report concludes that effective therapeutic interventions to end violence affecting young people rely on applied cultural competency. It also recommends pragmatic steps for service improvement.

Lib Peck, our Director, said:

"This report challenges us to think differently... it questions whether the support is accessible enough to reach the communities where it is most needed".

SECTION 2C: SUCCESSES AND BARRIERS TO DELIVERY

Key points:

- *The key successes and barriers impacting our delivery*
- *The impact of the national pandemic on our work*
- *The potential repercussions of the national pandemic on our work*

MEETING CHALLENGES

In a notoriously challenging year, we have made progress in key areas. Firstly, the unit recruited and operationalised a full complement of staff, including secondees and an apprentice. Being at full strength has enabled the team to widen and deepen our work with partners from across the public and voluntary sector over the year.

We have refined our strategy and developed and increased our investment programme keeping a good balance between innovation and tried and tested projects. The recruitment of a ten-strong Young People's Action Group has been a huge achievement given the circumstances.

Despite this, there are pressing factors that have affected – even shaped – our work over the last year. Political and economic challenges continue to play their part. Uncertainty about the future, an unstable jobs market, and the after-effects of austerity have meant that organisations are inclined to be looking inwards to adapt, prepare, or survive. Yet collaboration, is the bed stone of the public health approach. We have already started to see how peer-to-peer learning can succeed through our Local Violence Reduction Plans. This will create a greater culture of sharing of expertise across London.

THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL PANDEMIC AND POTENTIAL REPERCUSSIONS

In our convening role, we can't ignore there's a history and implicit lack of trust between some of our key partners – communities and some of the statutory institutions, including the police. MOPAC launched an action plan to try to improve this specific relationship, but also to address this more widely. We believe that services must be local, community-based, and representative of the people served.

Of course, these factors all pre-date the COVID pandemic. This has affected every aspect of people's professional and personal lives notwithstanding the wider political and economic effects. We heard during the pandemic how young people, families, schools, grassroots organisations, and many of our partners were struggling to adapt.

The emerging danger is the post-COVID economic picture will worsen the drivers of violence. More families will be pushed into poverty and fewer job opportunities will be available for young people. Young people will be saddled with student debt and limited employment prospects. Disadvantaged students will struggle to catch-up and keep-up if schools or year groups periodically close due to COVID restrictions and further lockdowns. Already-stretched local services and preventative services will be under even greater financial pressure just as needs amplify.

All forms of recorded violence were down in 2020 except domestic violence. However, we are aware that lockdown restrictions would have contributed to these reductions.

There are opportunities too. This includes promoting a shift in narrative from talking about crime to talking about violence. It also means a shift from focusing on the individual perpetrators of violence to the context that violence developed. Our attempts to reframe how we approach violence isn't merely a communications exercise. We believe that this should be embedded in local service delivery. Investing in a contextual safeguarding model is critical.

YPAG

Our London VRU's Young People's Action Group, will ensure their voice is reflected our work, and that they have the opportunity to lead change.

Listening to and promoting the voices of young people and communities is one of our core values. In that spirit, the ten young Londoners we recruited from a range of backgrounds is a real opportunity to draw fresh insights into the unit's work. It also enables us to access wider networks of young people through the YPAG's network of peers.

SECTION 3A: LOCAL EVALUATION PROGRESS AND NEXT STEPS

Key points:

- *The focus and methodology of our evaluation*
- *Expected impacts and conclusions*
- *Next steps*

As part of a nationwide network of VRUs, we are committed to contributing to the development of the evidence base. This includes 'what works, and for whom' to reduce serious violence. We will do this by our funded interventions to answer these questions. Being able to answer those questions – and to conversely identify what doesn't work and why – can build evidence-informed policymaking. It will also mean that the most effective programmes can be scaled up and sustained.

Evaluation is also a core part of our Performance Framework – both of our funded interventions and our overall progress and impact. It allows us to demonstrate how well the unit is meeting its stated impact, outcomes, and objectives.

However, reducing violence is complex, and even more so in a city the size of London. We need to reflect this complexity within our performance framework. That is why we commissioned subject experts to help develop an evaluation programme of our funded interventions. We also commissioned a process evaluation to demonstrate the impact of how we are working towards achieving our objectives and identifying areas to develop.

EVALUATION

Firstly, we worked with the Tavistock Institution to review the interventions we have funded. This review sought to establish which interventions to evaluate.

The evaluation criteria included: the unit's needs in terms of accountability, learning, and decision-making; the need to provide evidence of 'what works' to key stakeholders; the size of the intervention and funding amount; and how innovative it was. We also factored in the capacity, both within the interventions and within our team, for carrying out or commissioning evaluation.

We are now proceeding with the review's recommendations, which also included a way of systemising our evaluation processes.

Secondly, we recently commissioned ECORYS to undertake a process evaluation which will report in May 2021.

Both these local evaluations complement the central evaluation the Home Office is undertaking which will primarily focus on evaluating VRUs at a programme level.

SECTION 3B: PROMISING PRACTICE

Key points:

- *Establishing good practice to reduce risks to young Londoners' safety*
- *Case study: Stepping Stones is supporting young Londoners to make a smoother and safer transition to secondary school*

One of our priorities is reducing the risks to safety that young Londoners face. There is substantial evidence that schools are one of the safest places for young people. The link between school exclusions and violence affecting young people is becoming increasingly clear. In Glasgow, school exclusions have been reduced by 81% in the last ten years. Over the same period, violent youth crime fell by 48%.

In London, exclusions have steadily increased since 2012. Nearly 900 children were excluded from secondary school in 2018/19. A further 25,000 secondary pupils had more than one fixed period exclusion. Statistics reveal exclusion is used disproportionately against certain groups. These include that students who have special educational needs or disabilities, black students, and students eligible for free school meals are excluded disproportionately.

We have been working with schools, boroughs, alternative provisions, and others to better understand how to support children at risk of exclusion or going missing from school. Our Supporting Inclusive Schools programme is currently working with 200 schools with above average exclusion rates in 16 London boroughs. Our aim is to create more inclusive environments to support young people to stay in school and out of trouble.

STEPPING STONES

The *Stepping Stones* programme (see overleaf) supports a successful transition from primary school to secondary school. It responds to research that shows this is a period of change in a young person's life that, if unsupported, may lead to them dropping out of school.

CASE STUDY:

Stepping Stones helping young people to make the transition

The transition from primary to secondary school is a period of significant change. It requires young people to negotiate and adapt to a new organisation and culture. This includes a new and often larger setting with different educational practices, new peers, organisational structures, and social interactions.

If the transition is not navigated smoothly, this can adversely affect a young person's educational outcomes. This includes their behaviour, attainment, and attendance, potentially leading to them dropping out of formal education for life. A young person out of mainstream education is at higher risk of being involved in serious violence, whether as victim or perpetrator.

Stepping Stones is a school-based programme aimed at young people at risk of not successfully navigating the transition from year six (last year of primary school) to year seven (first year of secondary school). These young people may be facing uncertainty, risk, and anxiety about the transition.

The programme has six parts:

- **Engagement activities with primary** Liaising with primary school teachers, year six students, and parents to identify those who may benefit from the programme.
- **Summer school** Running a two-week summer school in the month before they start secondary school to help immerse selected students into the secondary school environment before term begins.
- **Lessons** Sessions for the selected pupils to help develop their confidence and deal with different social and academic situations.
- **Peer mentoring** Training year 10 students to support the chosen young people through weekly one-to-one mentoring sessions.
- **Community mentoring** Engaging external adult mentors to provide support with peer mentoring and lessons.
- **Aspirational / Career-based activities** Working with external organisations to inspire chosen students about different careers and their future goals.

CASE STUDY:

Stepping Stones helping young people to make the transition

Stepping Stones was piloted in three secondary schools in 2017/18, with each school receiving students from three or four feeder primary schools.

Attainment

Two of the three pilot schools saw a strong improvement in the proportion of students making satisfactory progress in Maths and English.

For these two schools: in Maths, an average of 74% of *Stepping Stones* students made satisfactory progress, compared to 54% of the previous year. In English, an average of 83% of *Stepping Stones* students made satisfactory progress, compared to 67% the year before.

Behaviour

Shy, quiet students improved their confidence in the classroom and social settings. Students with behavioural issues improved their self-awareness, maturity and control over their emotions. In one school, 74% of *Stepping Stones* students scored satisfactory or higher in their commitment scores compared to only 46% previously.

Attendance

Two out of the three pilot schools saw a strong improvement in attendance rates among *Stepping Stones* students compared to previous years. At one school, the proportion of those achieving 95% attendance or higher increased from 54% to 70% for *Stepping Stones* students in one year.

Impact on peer mentors

Peer mentors developed: leadership skills and maturity, listening skills and empathy, communication skills and confidence, a sense of commitment to their school and confidence in their future aspirations.

Economic assessment

Stepping Stones more than pays for itself. Economic modelling from the pilot indicates that the impact on the net budget over 10 years is £515,836 with a return on investment of 212%.

SECTION 3C: PROGRESS AGAINST LOCALLY DEFINED SUCCESS MEASURES

Key points:

- *Our objectives and the outcomes we work towards*
- *How we use partner data to support our work*

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

In taking a public health approach, we have developed a logic model (see page 78). This identifies eight objectives which we will show impact against in two or three years, and four outcomes which we will demonstrate how impact against in five years.

Our eight **objectives** are:

1. Supporting individuals to be more resilient
2. Supporting stronger families
3. Young people leading change
4. Enabling communities to be strong, safe and resilient
5. Prioritising wellbeing and achievement in schools
6. Giving young people every chance to succeed
7. Making London a more compassionate and safer city
8. Increasing confidence in public institutions and changing the message around violence

Our four **outcomes** are:

1. Neighbourhoods most affected by violence have increased community cohesion, control and social trust
2. Young people have increased skills and opportunities
3. Those with greatest need have the support they need to reduce impact of violence
4. More communities involved in violence reduction work.

Our main aim is to develop solutions which deliver sustained reductions in violence. We know that the impact of long-term primary and secondary preventative work is unlikely to be demonstrated through short-term measures and by only applying a narrow range of recorded crime and Accident and Emergency datasets. We are therefore developing local and longer-term indicators to demonstrate our success.

We can, however, report that Home Office funded projects have supported 3,884 young people through positive intervention. This number is anticipated to reach 5,100 by the end of March 2021.

We know that recorded crime data only shows part of the picture of violence. An important additional indicator is the London Information Sharing to Tackle Violence (ISTV) programme, coordinated by City Hall. This enables data sharing between Emergency Departments (EDs) and other partners to help tackle violent crime across London.

Each ED in London collects a small amount of data from every victim of violent crime who presents for treatment. The data set is based on the NHS and College of Emergency Medicine approved ISTV Minimum Dataset.

3,884

Through Home Office-funded projects, 3,884 young people have currently been supported through a positive intervention. This number is anticipated to reach 5,100 by the end of March 2021.

ISTV is a small, anonymised dataset and covers the following areas:

- Time and date of the incident
- Time and date of arrival in the ED
- Specific location of the incident
- Primary means of assault

Each ED in London shares the ISTV data set with the GLA SafeStats Team on a monthly basis. The data is loaded onto the GLA's SafeStats portal – a pan-London database - where it is added to other data. This includes police crime data, information from Transport for London and from the London Ambulance Service. Once on SafeStats, it can be accessed by local Community Safety Partnerships and the Metropolitan Police Service to inform their violence prevention work.

The MOPAC Evidence and Insight Team runs a monthly Public Attitude Survey that looks at perceptions of safety. We actively monitor this and use it as a dataset for some of our project commissioning.

COVID-19 provided the VRU, our partners and commissioned services with an unprecedented challenge in terms of restrictions on traditional ways of working. It has also significantly changed the profile of violence, since restrictions were in place.

London experienced a reduction in most types of violent crime through the initial lockdown period. These began to rise as restrictions were lifted but the levels are still below those of last year.

SECTION 3D: THEORY OF CHANGE

Key points:

- *How our theory of change works and the rationale behind it*
- *Our model*

THEORY BEHIND OUR PROGRAMME

We demonstrate the theory underpinning our programme through our updated strategy which follows our Strategic Needs Assessment. This provided a more updated and detailed look at patterns of violence in London. It laid out a picture of key drivers of violence and gave an overview of the evidence of what works.

One of the key messages was the need for us to focus on neighbourhoods by taking a more 'place-based approach'. This responds to the recognition that deprivation, austerity, and poor community and social cohesion, control, and trust make some neighbourhoods more vulnerable to violence. This assessment was carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic. We expect its impact will further heighten these factors.

We have given this approach more focus in 2020/21. This is by strengthening the contextuality of our programmes and taking forward a research programme to explore this agenda further. We are also increasing our support of the delivery of the 32 local authority action plans – a key element of our work.

Insight from both our community engagement programme and the Strategic Needs Assessment has enabled us to revise and focus our objectives. We will enable support, confidence, aspiration, and opportunity by:

- **Supporting young people to be more resilient** through widening our work to address vulnerabilities, including the role of drugs and alcohol, gangs and exploitation.

- **Giving young people every chance to succeed** by ensuring those who are least able to access opportunity are provided with appropriate support. We also seek to remove barriers to accessing mentoring, skills, and employment.

This will be underpinned by:

- **Supporting stronger families** as part of a contextual approach to supporting young people, for example through parenting.
- **Enabling communities to be strong, safe and resilient** with a stronger focus on place-based approaches.
- **Improving wellbeing and achievement in education** and widening our lens to include PRUs and APs. This includes recognising the need to continue to focus on inclusive schools and giving young people power to influence and shape decisions that affect them. This will be by emphasising young people as decision makers rather than recipients.
- **Making London a more compassionate and safer city** by continuing our focus on developing trauma-informed approaches across public services. We want to increase confidence in public institutions and change the message around violence. We will continue to shift the narrative to reduce the stigmatisation of young people.

This has further led to us to review our logic model. Overleaf is a graphical representation of the relationship between our interventions, objectives, outcomes and aims.

LONDON VRU: THE LOGIC MODEL - A CHAIN REACTION

Overall Impact

What we are aspiring to achieve

Londoners feel safer

Violence in London is stable and reduced

Communities and neighbourhoods participate in the development of violence reduction solutions

Outcomes
5 years

Measurable change to demonstrate overall impact - what would success look like in 5 years time

Neighbourhoods most affected by violence have increased community cohesion and control and social trust

Young people have increased skills and opportunities

Those with greatest need have the support they need to reduce the impact of violence

More communities involved in VR work

Home Office data to monitor progress

Objectives
2-3 years

Measures the impact of our interventions

Increasing confidence in public institutions and changing the message around violence

Improving wellbeing and achievement in education

Giving young people the chance to succeed

Supporting individuals to be more resilient

Building a more compassionate and safer city

Giving young people power to influence and shape decisions that affect them

Enabling communities to be strong, safe and resilient

Interventions

PRIORITISATION OF INTERVENTIONS FOR EVALUATION

Develop a local indicator to set to monitor progress

SECTION 3E: LESSONS LEARNED AND FORWARD PLANNING

Key points:

- *Lessons learned*
- *The year ahead*
- *Our recommendations to Government*

LESSONS LEARNED FROM 2020

In looking at lessons learned over the past 12 months, our most significant concern is around the future of the 18 VRUs in England and Wales.

London was the first VRU, but since then the Home Office has announced funding for 18 areas in England and Wales. We benefited greatly from £7m of subsequent Home Office funding in 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Just as importantly, we have benefitted from the networking and shared learning between the 17 other VRUs. The 18 VRUs all operate in different circumstances in terms of political structures, remits, and partnership models. This is doubtless due to differing local demographics, violence profiles, and local needs. However, there is still a lot of common ground. The Home Office's work to aid collaboration between VRUs has been very welcome. We would strongly recommend that the networking support for these VRUs continue to be supported by the Home Office in future.

As previously set out, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought fresh challenges and unpredictability. This has meant that commissioned service providers have often had to adapt and, in some cases, pause some activity. These challenges have been recognised and supported by the Home Office. This includes for example the Vulnerable Children's Charities fund, which enabled us to support 56 small charities operating in the London area. Conversely, the lack of flexibility in requiring funded services to have spent and delivered their projects by 31 March has been extremely challenging against this backdrop.

To adapt to these changes and ensure maximum use of Home Office funding for London, we reviewed the forecast spend of all the funded project. We identified some that would be unable to deliver full spend and outcomes by the end of the financial year. It would have been helpful to providers and service users to reprofile this spending within the overall Home Office funding.

To support a long-term public health approach to violence reduction, some projects would benefit from being funded over a longer period to ensure they can be assessed meaningfully.

Our top recommendation for government is to set out the funding for the 18 VRUs in England and Wales over the next three financial years. This will provide certainty and enable long-term planning. It will also help lay a stable foundation on which VRUs can focus on the delivery of future goals.

APPENDIX 1: REVIEW OF THE LONDON VRU STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The VRU Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA), completed in January 2020, was the first ever London wide, published strategic assessment of violence, looking not just at crime but wider risk and protective factors in relation to violence.

This was complemented by a report that looked at statutory reviews of homicides, which identified both trends in relation to some homicides and also opportunities for a more comprehensive statutory review process for assessing risk factors and learning, across a much broader range of homicides.

This report sets out how the VRU workplan for 2020 was guided by the SNA, so that the VRU focussed delivery on five priority areas. The five areas are outlined in this review report but covered more comprehensively in the VRU Annual Report.

The SNA also made recommendations in respect of research to build the evidence base even further. This report sets out how that research has been progressed over the past year.

The SNA is a strategic document that provides a broad picture of violence and causal factors across all of London. The size and complexity of London means that the assessment is not able to provide the detailed analysis of violence often found within a problem profile. Local problem profiles are developed at borough level that give the granular local analysis of violence. The SNA supports the strategic approach to violence reduction over a 3 to 5 year period.

This report therefore is not intended to replace the SNA which remains valid but instead to review progress since publication, eleven months ago.

WHAT IS THE VRU LEARNING ABOUT VIOLENCE IN LONDON?

A significant amount of work has already been undertaken by the VRU to map the current evidence-base and explore the research related to reducing violence. This has been both during and following the production of the Strategic Needs Assessment.

The Strategic Needs Assessment was the first ever London wide, published strategic assessment of violence, looking not just at crime but wider risk and protective factors in relation to violence. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) undertakes analysis of violence utilising crime data but the SNA looked at broader datasets, including those from A&E attendance and the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The SNA report brought together data analysis and new research from leading academics to complement the voices of London's communities with evidence of large-scale patterns and trends to inform decision making. The report highlighted the known evidence base for violence and violence-reduction and set out key recommendations to support the VRU's response to violence. It also mapped out gaps in understanding within the evidence base and opportunities for further research, to enhance that understanding further.

The existing violence reduction evidence base, as mapped by the VRU through the Strategic Needs Assessment, largely focussed on individual risk factors associated with violence. For example, poor parental supervision, weak attainment in school, being excluded from school and exposure to violence, are all well discussed across violence-related literature, although the majority of person-related evidence concerning violence is quite historic or not London-specific. The VRU is updating and enhancing this understanding through additional research. The understanding of settings (place-based) and situational drivers of violence is where the gaps in evidence are greatest, and therefore where immediate research priorities for the VRU over the past year have and continue to be.

To this end, the VRU has commissioned two research pieces, due to be completed in spring/summer 2021:

Vulnerable Neighbourhood Analysis

– to address the identified gap in our understanding of setting (place-based) related violence. The research will explore both human (e.g. social trust, community cohesiveness) and environmental (e.g. proximity of alcohol outlets or transport hubs) factors and aims to support and inform the VRU and partner's local or community response to violence.

Situation, Motives and Micro-pathways to Violence (homicides)

– to address the identified gap from our analysis of statutory reviews of homicides and violent incidences that accompanied our strategic needs assessment. The

research will explore the context, motives and journey up to homicides involving under 25's committed outside the home. The research will support the VRU to identify early intervention opportunities and how agencies can work more collaboratively to identify and support those at risk.

The VRU has produced a research strategy that supports the VRU to take a public health approach to violence reduction by informing and supporting evidenced based practice and supporting the VRU to understand the needs of the population so programmes meet the need of those who could most benefit.

The research strategy sets out four key goals for the VRU's research programme and outlines identified key challenges to accomplishing each goal and sets out clear actions for how the VRU will work towards achieving these goals. The four interrelated goals are:

- **Appropriate research/evidence culture:** Strengthening a culture of research and evidence within the VRU
- **Capacity Building:** Laying out how the VRU might strengthen the wider violence reduction research systems and evidence base
- **Translation:** Strengthening links between violence research and violence reduction policies, delivery and practice.
- **Priorities:** Set out the identified violence reduction research priorities in London

HOW HAS VIOLENCE CHANGED OVER THE LAST YEAR?

The picture of violence has fluctuated significantly over the past year. Pre-Covid 19 most violence related crime types were following anticipated seasonal trends, with January and February being seasonally low months in terms of the volume of violent crime.

As the pandemic spread and restrictions came into place, there was a significant reduction in most types of recorded violent crime. This was particularly so during the first three months of restrictions, which saw the first national lockdown and most retail, entertainment and licensed premises closed.

As restrictions eased through June and July the levels of recorded violent crime began to rise from the abnormally low levels in lockdown but remained below the levels of 2019. With tiered restrictions introduced through the Autumn to the end of the year, levels of recorded crimes of violence have again showed significant reductions on last year.

Whilst the general trend for recorded violent crime has been down, with people spending considerably more time within their home, offences of violence within domestic settings have seen increases. This has been the case for intimate partner domestic violence, as well as broader intra-familial and neighbour related violence.

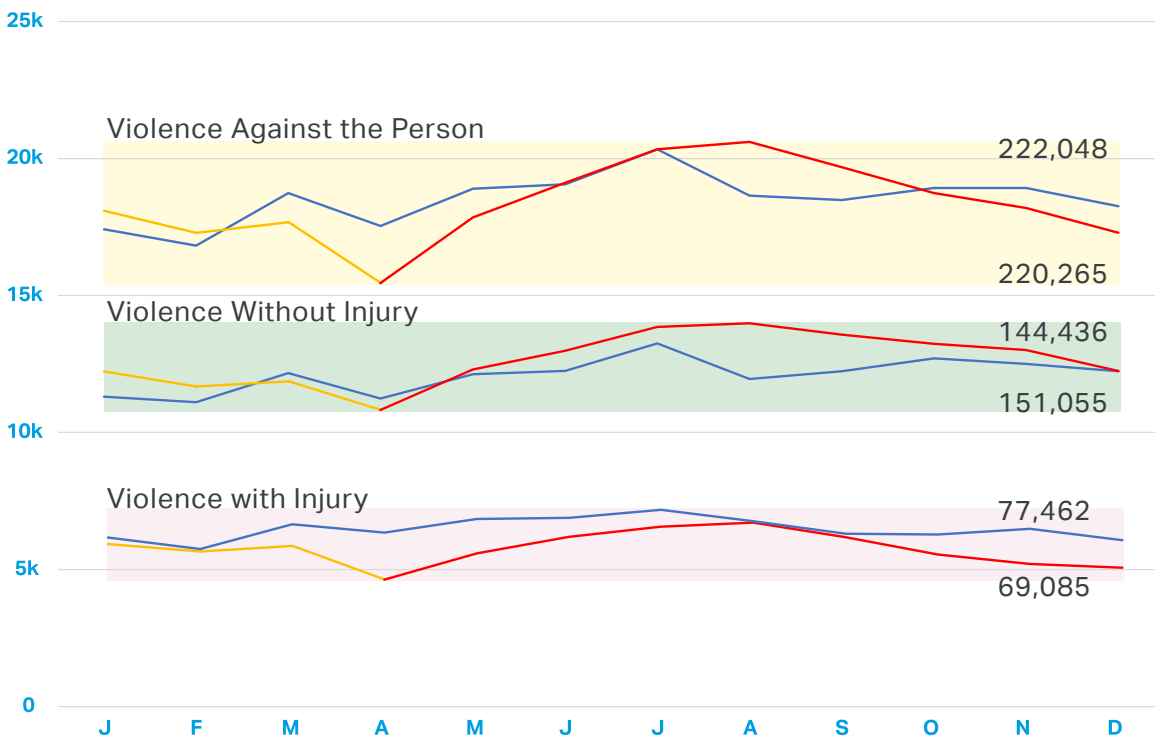
To provide detail around the various types of recorded violent crime, this report contains a number of graphs for various types of offence categories. They show the offence levels for 2019 (blue) compared to 2020 (yellow pre-lockdown, red from lockdown in early March onwards).

VRU VIOLENT CRIME REPORT: CY 2020

All data is to December 2020 and is provided at a monthly level within the trend charts. All text refers to yearly change in London crime. Chart labels highlight the yearly total. On 2 December London was placed in 'Tier 2', 'Tier 3' on 16 December and 'Tier 4' on 20 December.

■ 2019
 ■ 2020
 ■ Post-COVID 19 measures

Violence Against the Person



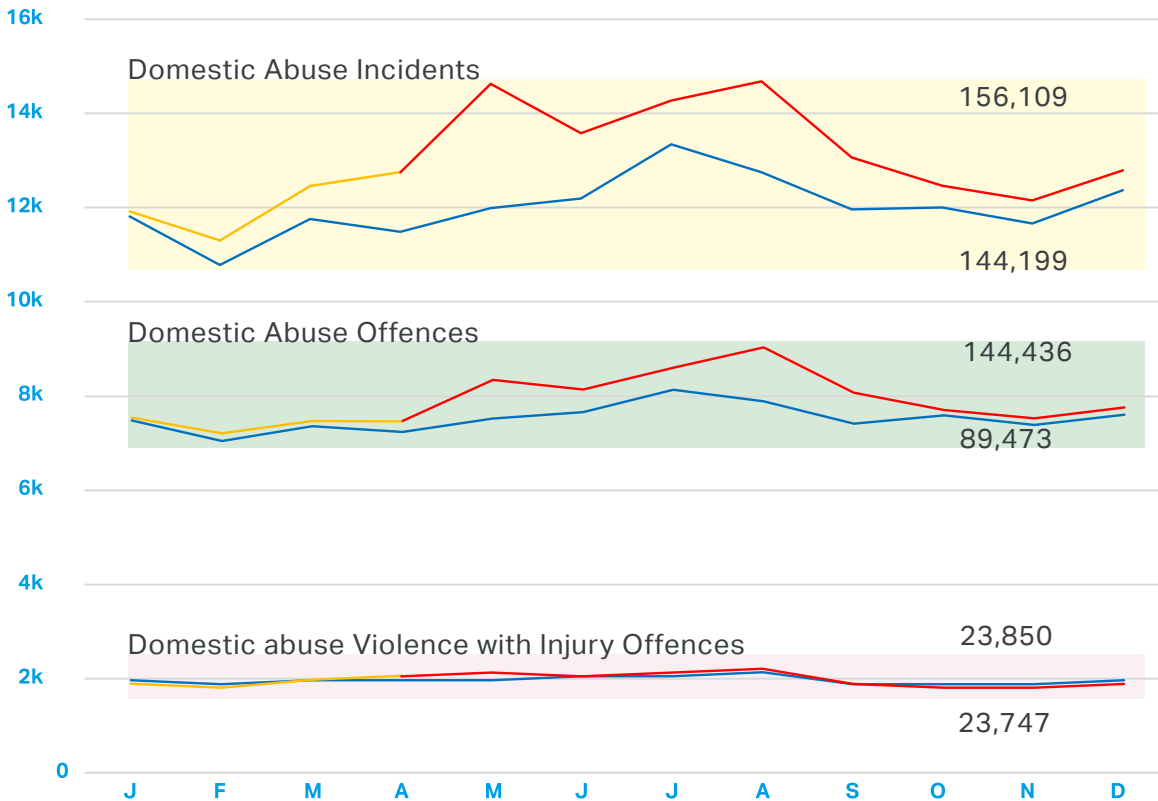
During CY 2020 violence against the person offences remained relatively stable with only a 1% reduction recorded, a total of 1783 fewer offences when compared to CY 2019.

The MPS recorded an 11% fall in the most harmful violent offences, with violence with injury offences reducing by 11% (8,377 fewer offences) during the same period. Conversely violence without injury offences increased by 5% (6,619 more offences).

Both the increase in violence without and the decrease in violence with injury correlate with the implementation of government COVID-19 restrictions.

■ 2019
 ■ 2020
 ■ Post-COVID 19 measures

Domestic Abuse

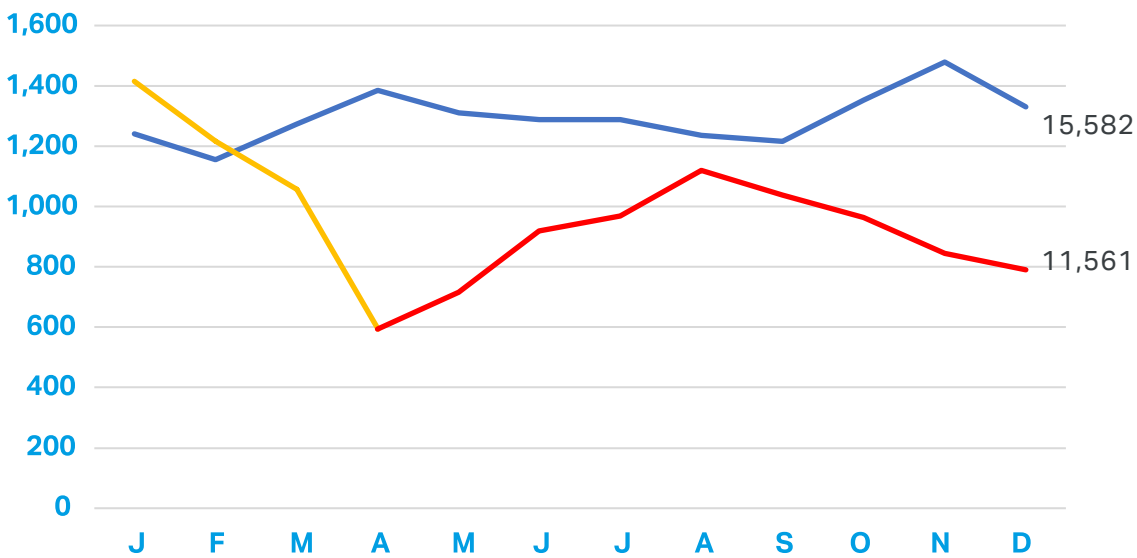


Both domestic abuse incidents and offences increased during 2020 by 8% (11,910 more incidents) and 6% (5,006 offences) respectively. However, offences of domestic abuse violence with injury remained relatively stable when compared to CY 2019 (103 more offences).

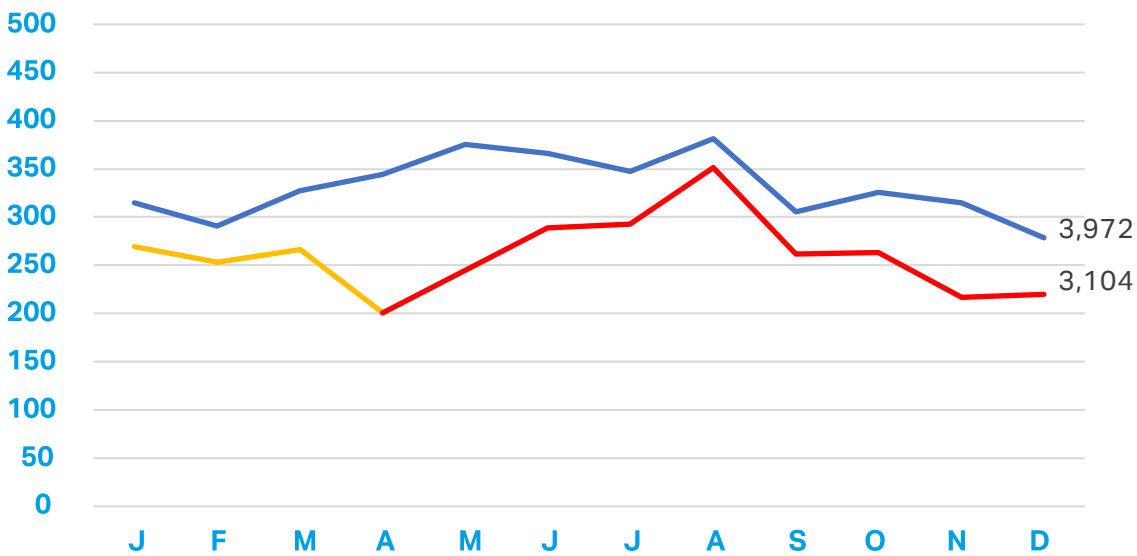
■ 2019
 ■ 2020
 ■ Post-COVID 19 measures

Knife crime

Knife Crime Offences



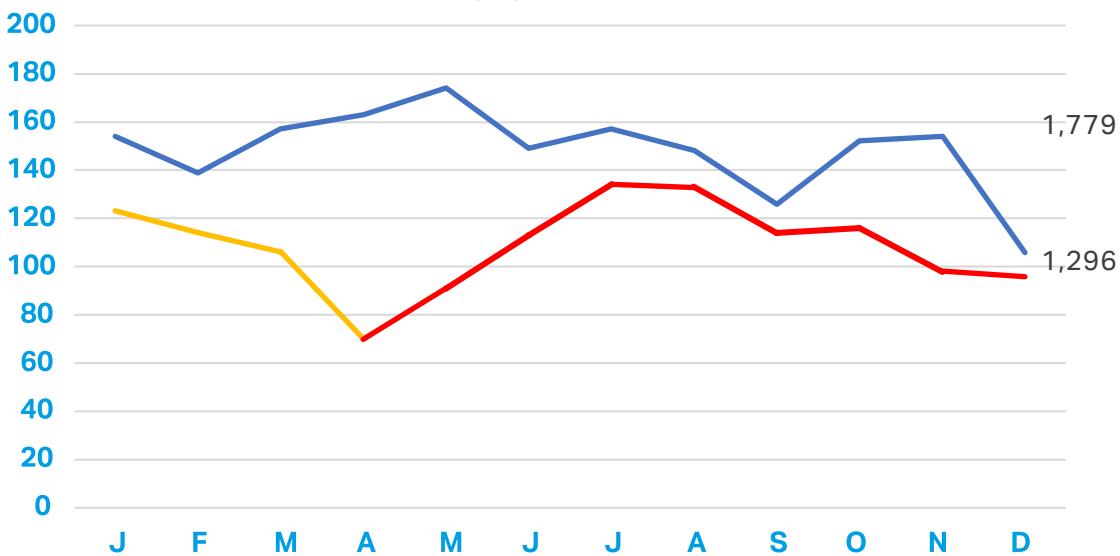
Knife Crime with Injury Offences



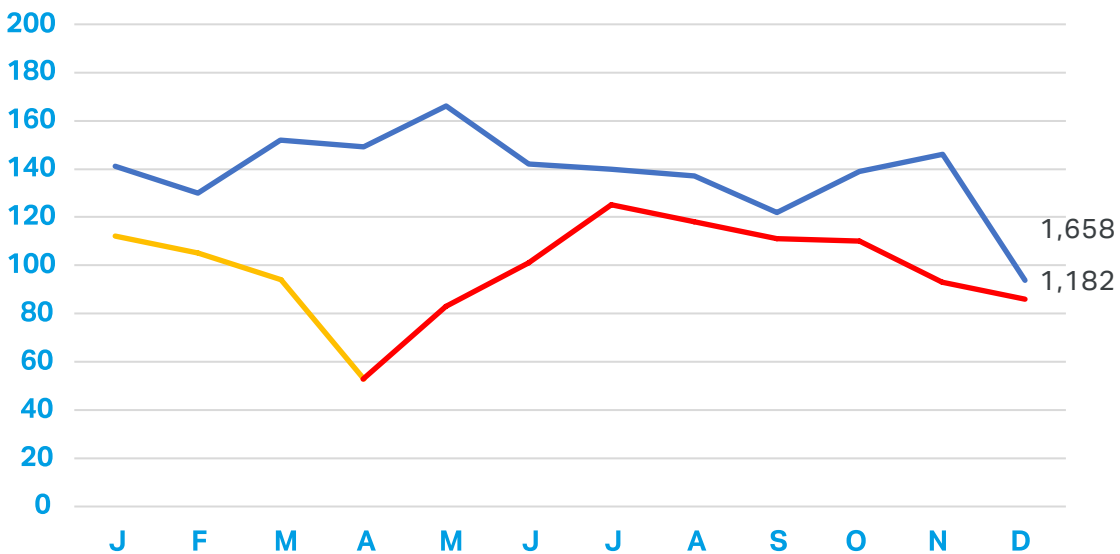
■ 2019
 ■ 2020
 ■ Post-COVID 19 measures

Knife crime

Knife Crime Injury Victims 1-24



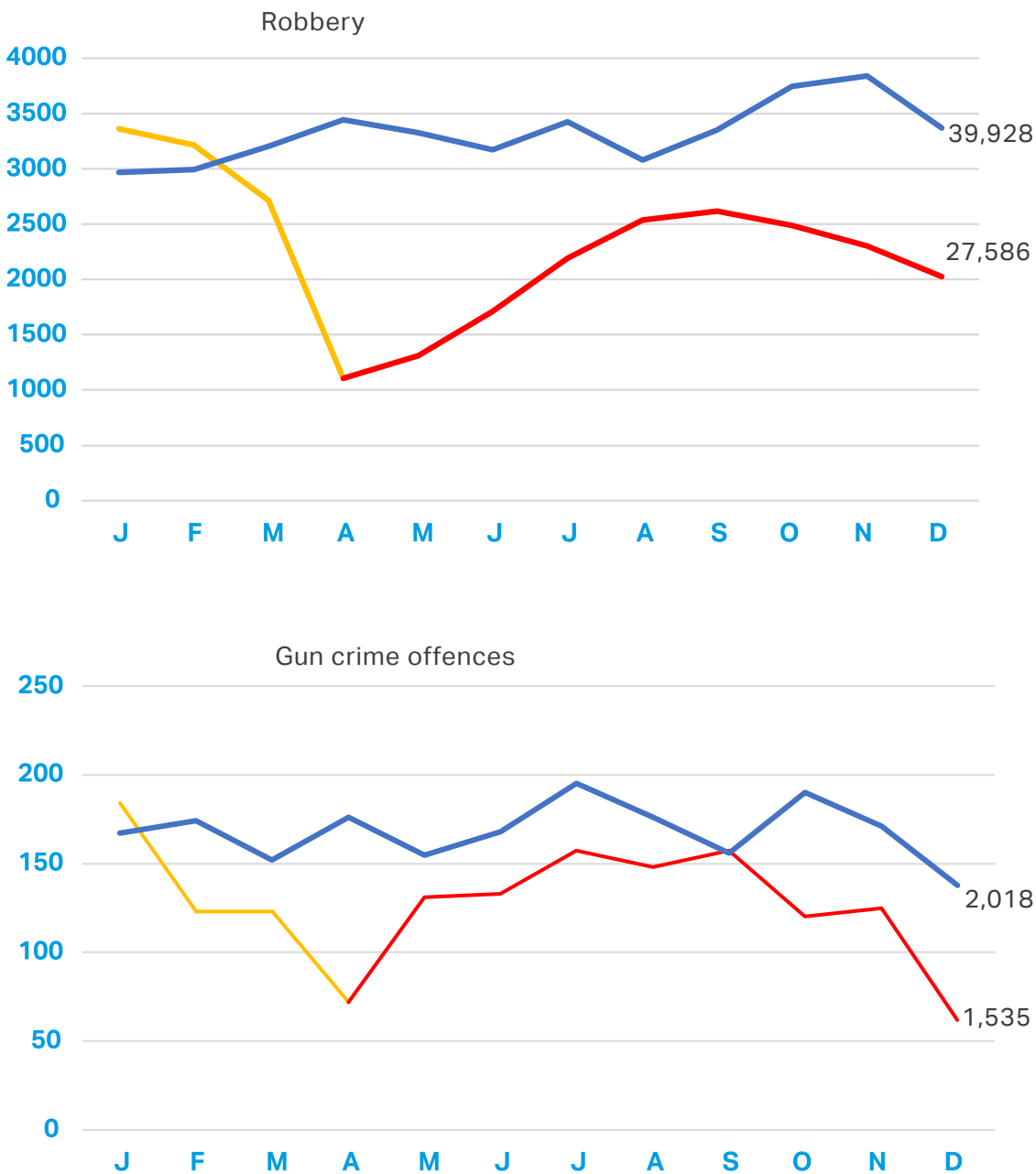
Knife Crime Injury Victims 1-24 not DA



Knife crime reduced by 26% (4,001 fewer offences) during CY 2020, with similarly proportionate reductions recorded across knife crime with injury and all of its related measures.

■ 2019
 ■ 2020
 ■ Post-COVID 19 measures

Robbery and Gun crime



Robbery offences decreased by 31% (12,342 fewer offences) during CY 2020 when compared to the previous year. Gun crime offences reduced by 24% (483 fewer offences).

HOMICIDE

There was an overall reduction in the number of homicides in London in 2020, compared to last year and 2018. The number of confirmed offences of homicide recorded by the Metropolitan Police is shown in the table below.

Homicide represents a very small proportion of overall violence and so reductions whilst welcome, should not be seen as a significant indicator of violence reduction overall. In discussing homicide, irrespective of whether there has been an increase or decrease, every homicide is one too many and the devastating impact upon families and friends, is something that can never be reflected in statistics. Our thoughts are with all those who have so tragically lost loved ones through violence in the past year.

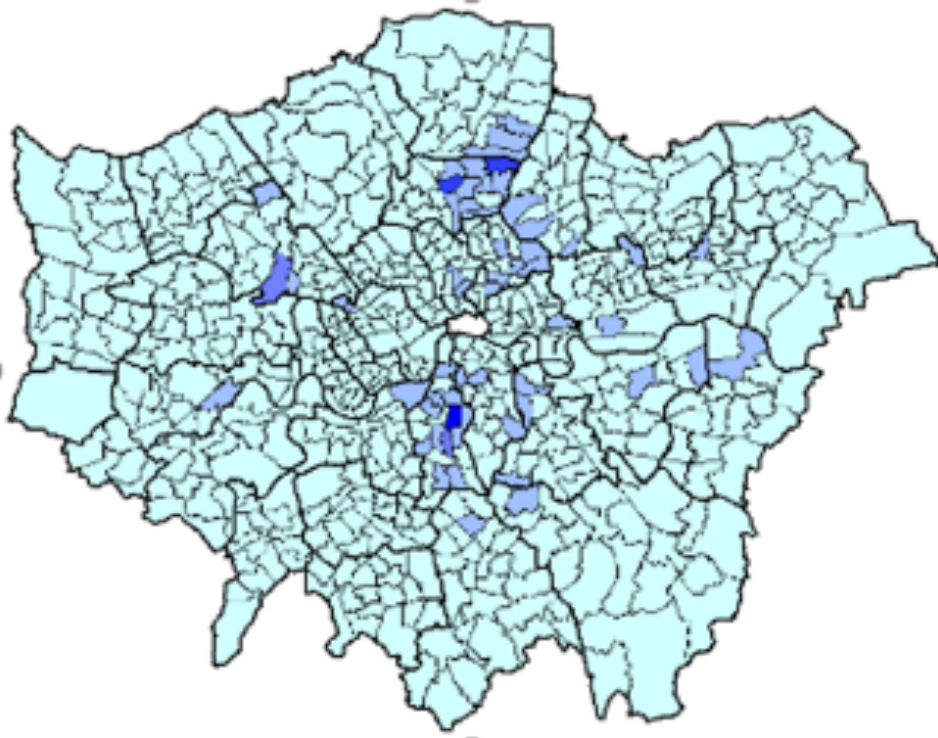
The VRU has access to a range of analytical products and datasets through support from the MOPAC Evidence and Insight team as well as the GLA Intelligence Unit, in order to monitor violence and emerging trends. There is also direct access to the published Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime Data Dashboards.

Crime data is available at ward level and below, so that an understanding of really distinct areas at risk of violence can be determined.

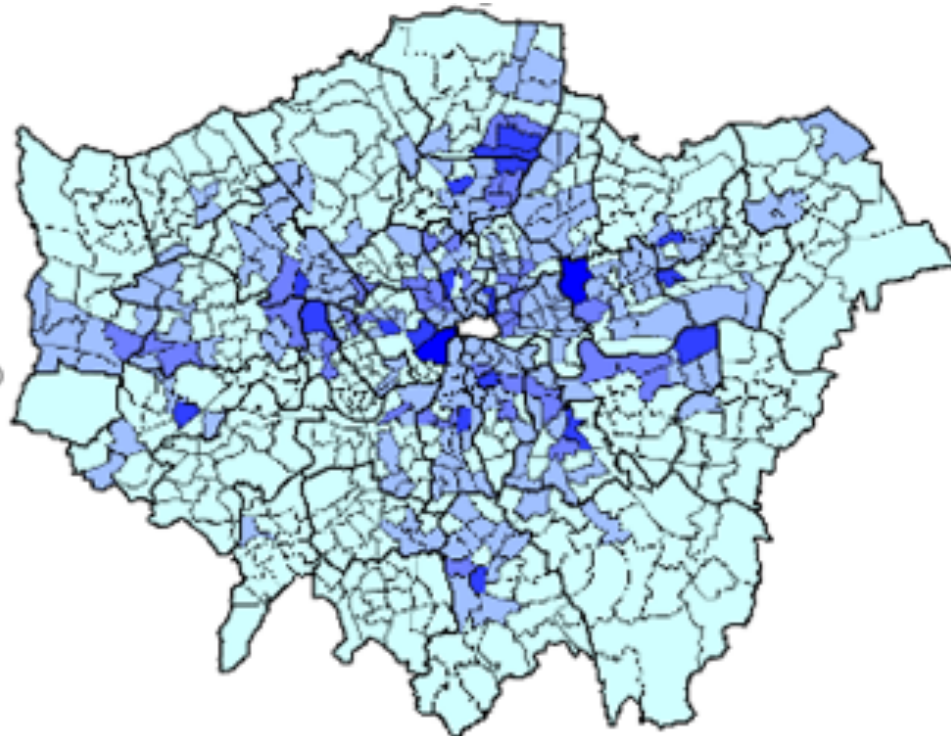
The two maps opposite provide an illustration of ward level data in relation two types of recorded violent crime. A whole range of data sets can be overlaid to highlight areas of greatest risk from violence.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
TOTAL	106	110	94	119	109	122	133	150	126
Firearms	6	10	4	10	13	10	15	11	14
Knives	51	47	55	60	61	80	81	90	71
Teenagers	9	12	13	19	13	26	23	25	14
Under 25	32	36	39	36	43	66	52	54	40
Domestic Violence	19	31	18	31	17	19	27	15	19
Non-Domestic Homicides	87	79	76	88	92	113	104	135	107

Lethal Barrelled Weapon Discharges



Knife Injury Victim Under Age 25



WIDER DATA

Although police call and crime data provides a good understanding of patterns of violence across London, the VRU also monitors and uses data from a wide variety of other sources including public perceptions of violence and safety, British Transport Police, Transport for London, Ambulance, ISTAT Hospital data, Education, Indices of Multiple Deprivation and further socio-economic and health related sources.

The GLA Intelligence Unit, with MOPAC E&I and the VRU has developed a data tool, that uses all the police violence indicator recorded crimes, public perceptions of violence and the additional datasets described above. The datatool provides a flexible way of looking at data and prioritising it to show the areas that would best benefit from a particular intervention. For example when looking at commissioning sports interventions as positive activities to reduce violence, the VRU can overlay violent crime and health data, to understand where interventions could have positive impact on both violence and health.

The VRU uses this data to inform the Unit's wider strategic plan and is in the process of developing new and adapting existing data sharing agreements in order to establish an accessible core data set to help pan London and local authority plan where the focus of violence reduction action should be. The core data set will enable the VRU, and partners across London including communities, to be better able to measure, monitor and anticipate

serious violence and the wider key drivers of violence e.g. employment and deprivation.

To support greater understanding between City Hall, local authority and MPS analysts, the VRU, London Councils and MPS have arranged a joint Violence Reduction Partnership session, in order to support better understanding between analysts and ensure continued development of analytical products at London and borough levels.

HOW IS THE VRU RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE IN LONDON?

The VRU's response to violence in London is contained within the 2021/22 VRU Workplan (this forms the VRU Response Strategy, as requested by the Home Office).

The London VRU published a draft strategy in July 2019 and its first full strategy in September 2019. The Strategic Needs Assessment was then published by the VRU at the start of 2020 and provided an assessment of violence that helped determine where to deliver early, targeted interventions to support a public health approach for violence reduction.

The Strategic Needs Assessment has guided the VRU's work over the past year by highlighting additional opportunities to support people, including the VRU expanding its work with Pupil Referral Units and with parents. The SNA in highlighting place-based opportunities, led to the VRU developing "place" as a key work area for this year and beyond. This has included the work with local authorities and the community led

violence reduction programme My Ends. Both these areas of work are discussed in detail within the VRU Annual Report.

In response to the SNA and in light of the coronavirus pandemic, the VRU's strategy was updated in May 2020 and contains three strategic aims and eight core objectives which have influenced where VRU activity is prioritised.

The aims are:

- ▶ To reduce and stabilise violence across London – violence is a concern for us all; we will all play our part to reduce it.
- ▶ To increase feelings of safety – recognising that London is one of the safest cities in the world.
- ▶ To put community at the heart of our work – only by doing so do we have a sustainable long-term approach towards reducing violence.

The objectives are:

1. Supporting individuals to be more resilient
2. Supporting stronger families
3. Young people leading change
4. Enabling communities to be strong, safe and resilient
5. Prioritising wellbeing and achievement in schools
6. Giving young people every chance to succeed
7. Making London a more compassionate and safer city
8. Increasing confidence in public institutions and changing the message around violence

Over the past year, the Unit has expanded its programme of work with parents and families, in schools and PRUs, with hospitals and the police, with young people themselves, and with youth practitioners that support them.

YOUTH WORK

Any successful prevention and early intervention agenda to reduce violence will include youth workers. The VRU recognises that in order to effectively do their role, youth workers also need support and development themselves, which is why the VRU launched Rise Up, a Youth Practitioners Leadership Programme, working with a partnership consortium. Programmes like Rise Up empower the next generation of youth practitioner leaders with strong links to young people (many of whom have been directly affected by violence) and their communities to bring about change, increasing the quality of youth work that young Londoners receive.

EDUCATION, SCHOOLS AND SETTINGS

Exclusions were highlighted as a key area for the VRU to focus within the Strategic Needs Assessment. Exclusions have steadily increased since around 2012. Nearly 900 children were excluded from secondary school in 2018/19 and a further 25,000 secondary pupils had more than one fixed period exclusion. The number of pupils in Alternative Provision (AP) has also increased since 2013/14.

The VRU has been working with schools, boroughs, and others to find out more about the specific challenges that they face to support children at risk of exclusion or going missing from school. The VRU's education programme is supporting the good work London schools are already doing to deliver more inclusive education in a more inclusive environment.

The VRU's £4.5m education programme consists of three strands: Programme delivery focusing on supporting inclusive schools and supporting PRUs; Research on good practice and policy in PRUs; Partnerships to reduce school exclusions

In response to the increased vulnerability caused by COVID19, the VRU is looking at how the Unit can further support London's most disadvantaged young learners. For example, the VRU was a co-funder of the London Community Response Fund and the current funding round has focused on supporting children and young people in the capital over last summer and through the current academic year.

NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LOCAL VIOLENCE REDUCTION PLANS

The work of the VRU with local Community Safety Partnerships, is detailed within the VRU Annual Report, as is the innovative My Ends community led programme, which is focussed on distinct hyper-local areas. The VRU will also be supporting grassroot community groups in neighbourhoods most at risk of violence, recognising that those closest to the issues should have a central role in leading the collective response.

YOUNG PEOPLE – GIVING THEM THEIR VOICE

The VRU recognises the importance of young people feeling that they have a stake in shaping their own futures. The VRU has selected ten impressive young people from across London with lived experience of violence or campaigning on youth issues to form a new Young People's Action Group. This group is directly influencing the VRU's work and ensures that decisions are made with the input of London's young people.

The VRU has also held a workshop which will feed into the Mayor's action plan for improving trust, confidence, transparency, and accountability in the Metropolitan Police. The workshop has ensured that the voices and experiences of London's young people are fed into this plan.

PARENTS AND CARERS

The VRU held online conversation with parents and carers to understand their experiences as parents and ideas on developing peer support networks during COVID-19. This has led to the development of a parenting network programme, which the VRU has commissioned and made available to all 32 London Boroughs. This enables local voluntary sector organisations to build a local parent and carers network for each borough.

DIRECT RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS HIGHLIGHTED THROUGH THE STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Several recommendations for the VRU were highlighted through the Strategic Needs Assessment. The following table shows how the VRU has responded to and progressed these over the last year.

KEY RECOMMENDATION FROM STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT	HOW THE VRU HAS RESPONDED
<p>Improve our ability to measure, understand, monitor and anticipate violence.</p>	<p>The VRU is in the process of developing an accessible core data set to help pan London and local authority plan where the focus of violence reduction action should be – the VRU has been formalising data sharing agreements that will enable the utilisation of data from a range of sources which will enable the VRU, and partners across London including communities, to measure, monitor and anticipate serious violence and the wider key drivers of violence e.g. employment and deprivation. The VRU is organising a session for local authority and police analysts to increase and support local responses.</p>
<p>Drive a culture of iterative research and experimentation to bring about long-term reductions in violence</p>	<p>The VRU has worked to develop a culture of iterative research, with quantitative and qualitative analysis highlighting need, for example the VRU has commissioned a Child/Adolescent to Parent Violence Needs Assessment following consultation with communities and monitoring data highlighting an increase in this form of violence throughout lockdown. Where needs have been identified the VRU uses creative collaboratively designed pilots with built in evaluation to test the effectiveness of these interventions and the feasibility of them working in other areas.</p>
<p>Commission research on the neighbourhood and situational drivers of violence in London</p>	<p>The VRU has commissioned research to address the identified gap in the understanding of setting (place-based) related violence. The research will explore both human (e.g. social trust, community cohesiveness) and environmental (e.g. proximity of alcohol outlets or transport hubs) factors and aims to support and inform the VRU and partner's local or community response to violence. The research is due to complete in March 2021.</p>

KEY RECOMMENDATION FROM STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT	HOW THE VRU HAS RESPONDED
<p>Work with communities to adapt evidence for the local context.</p>	<p>The VRU recognises that those closest to issues should have a central role in owning and leading a local, contextualized collective response. One of the ways the VRU aims to support this is through collaborative commissioning processes that facilitate co-design. An example of this is the VRU's MyEnds programme in which £ 6.6m has been allocated to four locally led projects codesigned to reduce violence in specific neighbourhood areas that are most impacted by violence.</p>
<p>Work with communities to adapt evidence for the local context.</p>	<p>The VRU recognises that those closest to issues should have a central role in owning and leading a local, contextualized collective response. One of the ways the VRU aims to support this is through collaborative commissioning processes that facilitate co-design. An example of this is the VRU's MyEnds programme in which £ 6.6m has been allocated to four locally led projects co-designed to reduce violence in specific neighborhood areas that are most impacted by violence.</p>
<p>Ensure interventions reach those who need them.</p>	<p>The VRU is working with delivery partners across London to identify and remove barriers of access to ensure those that need services can receive support. The VRU is also exploring this through research that leads to action. For example, the unit commissioned a community led research project that identified the importance of services being culturally appropriate, this has led to the unit reviewing the cultural appropriateness of current services and ensuring this is built into future commissions. Ensuring interventions are reaching those who need them is also a key element within the VRU's evaluation programme, both at intervention level and for the VRU as a unit.</p>

CONCLUSIONS

The VRU Strategic Needs Assessment published 11 months ago remains valid in providing a strategic picture of violence across London, as well as pointing the way for additional research, to fill gaps within existing knowledge.

Additional research is underway and so too is a VRU workplan, that focusses on key priorities to support people and reduce violence in places, with a specific focus on areas where the risk of violence is greater. The detail of the workplan for the forthcoming year is provided as a separate document or "response strategy".

The VRU will continue to assess the picture of violence and causal factors through an annual review process.

APPENDIX 2: RESPONSE STRATEGY – LONDON VRU WORKPLAN 2021/22

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The VRU published a draft strategy in July 2019 and its first full strategy in September 2019.

Two studies published by the VRU at the start of 2020, including the first ever capital-wide assessment of violence, provided a map of violence that helped determine where to deliver early, targeted interventions to reduce the spread of violence across the city. In response to this new research, and in light of the coronavirus pandemic, the VRU's strategy was updated with an addendum in May 2020.

The VRU has now published the updated strategy in May 2020 which contains three strategic aims and eight core objectives which will influence where funding is prioritised.

The aims are:

- **To reduce and stabilise violence across London** – violence is a concern for us all; we will all play our part to reduce it.
- **To increase feelings of safety** – recognising that London is one of the safest cities in the world.
- **To put community at the heart of our work** – only by doing so do we have a sustainable long-term approach towards reducing violence.

Insight from both our community engagement programme and the Strategic Needs Assessment has enabled us to revise and focus our objectives.

From 2021 the VRU Objectives will be:

Enabling support & confidence, aspiration and opportunity by:

1. Supporting individuals to be more resilient

Widening our work to address vulnerabilities including the role of drugs and alcohol, gangs and exploitation.

2. Supporting stronger families

Ensuring those who are least able to access opportunity are provided with appropriate support and barriers removed, to access mentoring, skills and employment.

Underpinned by:

3. Young people leading change

As part of a contextual approach to supporting young people, for example through parenting.

4. Enabling communities to be strong, safe and resilient

The communities are both communities of interest and geographically based, with a stronger focus on placed based approaches.

5. Prioritising wellbeing and achievement in schools

Widening its focus to include PRUs and APS but also recognising the need to continue to focus on inclusive schools.

And therefore;

6. *Giving young people every chance to succeed*

By ensuring a greater focus on young people as decision makers rather than recipients.

7. *Making London a more compassionate and safer city*

By continuing our focus on developed trauma informed approaches across public services.

8. *Increasing confidence in public institutions and changing the message around violence*

To continue to create a shift in the narrative to reduce stigma and promote positive messages about young people.

The updated addendum to our strategy provides greater clarity on our focus, which we have gained from the Strategic Needs Assessment and Review of Homicide Reviews and our extensive community engagement programme.

Specifically, our focus for the next 18 months will be young people aged up to 25. But as an initial response to COVID 19 and its impact on violence, there is a need for a greater emphasis on support of vulnerable and exploitable young people, by continuing to recognise the importance of stronger families and communities.

During 2020/2021 in line with the public health approach, the VRU has continued to look at violence not as isolated incidents or solely a police enforcement problem, but at violence as a preventable consequence of a range of factors, such as adverse early-life experiences, or harmful social or community experiences and influences. This has meant putting communities and young people at the heart of tackling the issue; and particularly in those parts of London most affected. To help us achieve this, our commitments in 2020/2021 have focused around education and inclusion-based projects, community-based projects together with specific projects for young people, youth practitioners, support to communities and Local Authorities in response to critical incidents; as well as piloting other community and parent group programmes.

To continue to support this long-term approach, in 2021/2022 the VRU will continue to provide leadership across three overarching programmes of work:

1. Data/evidence/evaluation

2. Programme delivery

3. Partnerships and policy

Over the past 18 months the VRU has consulted with and listened to communities about what they view our key challenges to be across London, and what needs to be done. Based on learning and consultation over last 18 months, the VRU now has its greatest focus into five key priority areas with each key priority linking into the three programmes of work above:

- Youth Work
- Education, Schools and Settings
- Early Intervention for Violence Prevention
- Neighbourhoods & Local violence Reduction Plans
- Young People – giving them their voice

The Strategic Needs Assessment and Review of Homicide Reviews provide a more updated and detailed look at patterns of violence in London as well as a picture of key drivers of violence and an overview of the evidence of what works. One of the key messages is the need for the VRU to focus on neighbourhoods taking a more 'placed based approach', to respond to the recognition that deprivation, government cuts, lack of community and social cohesion, control and trust are thought to have increased the vulnerability of some neighbourhoods to violence. The impact of COVID-19 may emphasise this further.

Therefore, the VRU will give this

approach stronger focus in 2021/22, strengthening our contextual approach and taking forward a research programme to explore this agenda further. This will build on a key element of the VRU's work, which is to support the delivery of the 32 local Community Safety Partnership action plans.

In its systems leadership role, the VRU will continue to broaden the contribution of partners to help deliver this plan to ensure a whole system approach, supported by holding partners to account, resourcing new ways of working and building political and organisational backing. The Partnership Reference Group already provides strategic partnership oversight but will continue to develop a joint programme approach to ensure it capitalises on both strategic and operational organisations synergies and share expertise and experience.

The VRU will ensure that the voice and experience of communities, the voluntary sector and young people are placed firmly at the centre of our plans. This means that the VRU won't lead all areas of activity and will support partners to lead areas within their sphere of expertise.

Building on the work and learning over the first two years of this strategy, a new strategy will be published in 2022.

COVID IMPACT

Serious youth violence has been rising in London and nationally since 2014. During the last decade of Government austerity, violent crime has risen in London and across the UK. Between 2011/12 and

2018/19, 46% of funding for London's youth services was withdrawn.

The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on children and young people in London has been profound. It has affected young people's mental health and education and has pushed some further into poverty. A clear link between deprivation and serious youth violence has already been established. Unfortunately, the pandemic and its related measures have also had a serious impact on charities and grassroots organisations, and their ability to continue providing crucial services to London's young people at a time when they're needed most.

During lockdown, levels of knife crime offences and serious youth violence decreased dramatically – as expected – on previous years, down between 50 and 70% year-on-year in some weeks. When lockdown measures were eased, knife crime offences and serious youth violence have gradually increased, but still remained 20% and 19% respectively below the equivalent period last year.

We know that the main drivers of violence are all hiding in plain sight. They may have been locked down but they are not going away. Communities are ever more isolated and under pressure. COVID-19 is hitting BAME communities hardest. The challenge is bigger than before. But we, and our partners, are struggling to tackle these harms from behind our closed doors. While all attention is now on containing the virus, we know that tackling violence is a moral necessity and will remain a high priority for London.

It is more vital than ever that we encourage a grass roots response to violence in local communities. We have to ensure the voice of young people, which has been locked down for too long, is both heard and acted upon. Put simply, we can't ask others to innovate and work flexibly while we work, consult and commission in the same old ways.

In short, we have to make a reality of words like agile, flexible, effective, collaborative. And we have to make the money we are responsible for, work so much harder to deliver better outcomes. We have started to make those changes.

RECOVERY

The VRU will also be supporting the grassroot community groups in the neighbourhoods most affected by violence, recognising that those closest to the issues should have a central role in owning and leading the collective response. This important work has laid the foundations for the interventions that we will expect to see bring about a reduction in violence in our capital in the long term.

The Violence Reduction Unit's approach to recovery considers the impact of COVID-19 on violence post-lockdown. Through more short-term responses, it also looks at how that relates to young people impacted by violence.

There is an urgent need to pull together a comprehensive programme of support for the most disadvantaged young people that includes access to immediate therapeutic support and diversionary activity.

When we think about young people and the community in which they live, they are largely influenced and impacted by the key relationships in their life and the context in which they present themselves. It is therefore important to focus on those key relationships and build on the support they may bring as underpinned by a public health approach. Such relationships include:

- Parents and carers
- Practitioners and teachers
- Peers and local communities
- Statutory services

Building on those relationships and thinking through the VRU's work plan, there are several elements being varied, flexed, or revised to ensure optimum or more immediate response to COVID-19.

The VRU's Director is providing leadership on the strand of London's recovery mission focused on young people.

The New Deal for Young People has set an ambitious target:

'Every young person in need is entitled to a personalised mentor and access to quality youth activities by 2024.'

MOVING FORWARD

The VRU team has worked hard to establish trust, initially confronting a suspicious community and VCS sector – how were we going to do things differently? We have made a lot of

ground here, difference has been the key.

In the VRU's second and third full year of operation, the Unit is using this invaluable intelligence to expand its programme of work with parents and families, with local authorities, in schools and PRUs, with hospitals and the police, with young people themselves, and with the youth practitioners that support them.

Any successful prevention and early intervention agenda to reduce violence will include youth workers. But they also need support themselves which is why the VRU launched Rise Up, a Youth Practitioners Leadership Programme working with a partnership consortium - London Youth, Leap Confronting Conflict and Core Leadership.

We have tested our strategy with our partners and in October 2020 London VRU were paired with Greater Manchester VRU for a Peer Review exercise. This was a light touch process based on local expertise and was conducted over a period of 3-4 days in December 2020. The process was extremely helpful to develop further understanding for our work. It was a valuable introspective and self-reflection exercise of our work which we took as highly appreciated learning.

Many strengths were highlighted which gave helpful strategic clarity, including: a very clear focus on the community and young people, connections and links between inequality and violence, supporting partners to lead areas

within their sphere of expertise, the Mayor's clear commitment to commit to 3 year funding programmes promotes innovation and flexibility and an inclusive and 'contextual' approach to violence intervention, encouraging innovation and creativity.

Furthermore, areas for development were also recognised to support the unit development, including: more emphasis of the good work with our health partners could be better defined, a summarised strategy document might be helpful as a quick reference guide for partners an Londoners, greater clarity over the relationship and governance with the MPS surge funding could be defined and development of data sharing with partners where applicable.

Following our reflective exercises, we have concluded that we are a Unit focused around people, purpose and place, therefore with small adjustment and clarification, it is still relevant in a post COVID context. In summary, our short-term strategy focuses on young people: How do we give young people voice, how do we support them, how do we inspire and encourage them, how do we prevent them getting caught up in violence.

Listening to young people, we have framed our work around how we tackle the influences that most adversely affect young people. Adopting a contextual approach to our work, which values the key role place plays in reducing violence,

we have focused our invested time, capacity and money at a local level – working closely with local communities and local authorities and convening public sector alongside voluntary sector partnerships.

The inter-relationship between our leadership and convening power, policy advocacy, and commissioning and delivery is an important one with each function strengthening and reinforcing the other.

Commissioners and funders in all sectors are already rethinking about how they work to better support community organisations and service providers through the crisis. The VRU wants to change how we work as a commissioner. And we need to become more flexible both as part of our response to the crisis and the way we work in the longer term.

APPENDIX 3: EMBEDDING THE PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

EMBEDDING THE PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

The Mayor announced the establishment of the VRU in 2018 to embed a public health approach and achieve whole system change for London. We published our initial strategy in 2019, which has been updated since the Strategic Needs Assessment was published in January 2020.

The strategy sets out how we are adopting a public health approach and how this is being achieved through listening to partners and Londoners. It also details the principles for London's approach, how the evidence base is being built and how we will sustain the approach over the long-term.

The table below sets out what a public health approach means for London.

PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH PRINCIPLE	WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?	WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE LONDON VRU?
Focused on a defined population, often with a health risk in common.	Connectors could be geography, common experience, diagnosis or demographic characteristics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geographical connectors are London focused, the common feature for an initial point of intervention will be an experience of violence.
With and for communities.	Focused on improving outcomes for communities by listening to them and jointly designing interventions with them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community at the heart of what we do. *Community in its broadest sense – residents, families, businesses, institutions. Not just the loudest voices or the gatekeepers. Community and youth involvement at all levels and at all stages. Decision-making and governance structures relating to the VRU include community and youth voice, consistently. Community engagement needs to be outreach based and integrated with local community partners. This is not about reinventing services – we have strong community-based services and excellent practice in London – this is about system change.
Not constrained by organisational or professional boundaries.	People's needs often do not neatly sit within a service user grouping, looking across organisations means that we can look across the system for solutions and not be too narrow in our approach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The approach needs to be 'top down and bottom up' – the leadership of the Mayor and others, combined with the change from within in communities and services. It also needs to be 'sideways along'. So that every single partner in London agrees that: reduction of violence will be embedded in their practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in their own programmes of work in how they work with others in how they work with the public and communities Shared accountability
Focused on generating long term solutions as well as short term responses and containment.	Acting on the causes and determinants as well as controlling the immediate impact of the problem. Identifying actions to be taken now to put solutions in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To achieve a long-term reduction in violence in London, through a partnership public health approach – with a focus on prevention and early intervention.
Based on data and intelligence to identify the burden on the population, including any inequalities	Analysis of the differences between our population of interest and their peers gets to their real story and the challenges faced. It also tells us about the impact across the system, underlying causes and protective and risk factors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VRU will use a Strategic Needs Assessment to inform areas/populations of focus. The Homicide and Serious Case Review will inform pan-London areas of priority for system change.
Rooted in evidence of effectiveness to tackle the problem.	Learning, where we can, from the experience of others and evaluating new approaches. This is important so interventions can be replicated if they work or revised if they don't.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VRU will use data and information from a range of sources to inform and shape practice. For example, health principles such as 'First, Do No Harm' will be adopted alongside community involvement principles such as 'Asset Based Community Development' and commissioning principles (see below). The VRU will be iterative – we will learn as we go.

MAYOR OF LONDON

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