

WMCA Board

Date	17 January 2020
Report title	West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit
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Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The WMCA Board is recommended to:

- (1) Note and welcome the progress to date on the establishment of the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (WM-VRU) - a collaborative regional approach to addressing violence, vulnerability and exploitation.
- (2) Commit to actively working with the VRU on its prevention agenda - including through agreements for each WM authority to work with the VRU in ways that add value, support preventative work in local settings (including targeting funding to the right places), and can be held to account through appropriate local forums.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is twofold:

- 1.1 First, to show how the West Midlands is approaching the challenge of increased violence through the establishment of a Violence Reduction Unit. This is a collaborative, multi-sector body that will convene a range of activities and initiatives designed to embed a 'public health' approach to violence across the system. It is hosted and held to account by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), and funded principally by the Home Office (with financial and in-kind contributions from a range of other organisations including Public Health England, WM Police, Local Authorities and the WMCA). Its work programme, staffing and ethos is built through close collaboration between public services and communities, underpinned by the conviction that "violence is preventable, not inevitable".
- 1.2 Second, to enlist the support of WMCA Board members as an active and vital part of this collaboration. Increasing knife crime, gun crime and domestic violence cannot be addressed by the Police alone. These issues have deep determinants, and the role played by local authorities, public services, businesses, education providers and communities in preventing violence before it escalates cannot be overstated. The WM-VRU is *not* an agglomeration of activity to a regional level – it is an enabling function designed to amplify, support, fund and connect initiatives that can make a difference within communities. It will succeed through the strength of collaboration that we create around it. This is the reason why this paper is being brought to WMCA Board.
- 1.3 The following sections show how we have approached the set-up and work programme of the WM-VRU; and how it builds on the foundation of the region's WM WHO Violence Prevention Alliance, the Gangs and Violence Commission, and the Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People programme. It shows how we intend to translate the promise of greater focus and resource in prevention into action on the ground.
- 1.4 The WM-VRU was launched by the PCC and partners with a strong statement of intent about the need for a step-change in collaboration to address and prevent the causes of violence. This paper asks for a commitment from Board members to this ethos; and to help embed a model that has seen levels of violence decrease by circa 40% in Glasgow over 10 years as a result of this approach.

2. Background

- 2.1 The backdrop to the establishment of the WM-VRU is one of a notable increase in violence within several of the UK's urban areas, and within the West Midlands in particular. In this region, gun crime has increased by 33%, and instances of knife crime have increased by 85% since 2012. Domestic violence has

increased 14% since 2018 and violent crime against the person is up 32% in the last year.

- 2.2 The risk factors underpinning this are complex, with most lying outside of the reach of the criminal justice system. They range from local patterns of criminal activity to the impact of poverty, economic marginalisation, health, social care and changes to the funding regime for preventative services for young people. Whilst many of these challenges remain systemic and ongoing (and indeed continue to pose severe demand challenges for public services), Government has recognised that more focus and resource needs to be put into prevention – announcing £100m in the Spring Statement to tackle ‘serious youth violence’, including the establishment of a number of Violence Reduction Units which utilise the ‘public health approach’.
- 2.3 The link between violence and public health is fundamental. Preventing violence and exploitation and reducing vulnerabilities is an essential part of addressing health inequalities. There is strong evidence that addressing the social determinants of health such as housing, education, and access to healthcare will result in better health outcomes; further enhanced by taking a lifecourse approach by considering interventions from birth to old age. By adopting a public health approach and tackling these wider determinants in a co-ordinated, collaborative and strategic way we aim to reduce violence, vulnerability and exploitation. From conception onwards, there are multiple relevant points in an individual’s life that can present an opportunity for appropriate interventions.
- 2.4 The WM-VRU embeds the public health approach. This means it will describe the importance of understanding health, social care and economic needs, identification of risk and protective factors to support individual and population level interventions, and support the development of a ‘whole system’ approach to tackle complex problems using evidence based interventions.
- 2.5 This public health approach aligns strongly with activities that are already happening in the West Midlands – meaning that, unlike some other areas, we have not had to start a WM-VRU from scratch and others are learning from us. These include:
 - A Violence Prevention Alliance – built through partnership between WMP, Public Health England and the PCC, which has trialled a number of activities that will be scaled by the extra funding afforded to the VRU.
 - A Gangs and Violence Commission – established by the PCC and Chaired by Bishop Derek Webley, which outlined the blueprint for a community-led approach to addressing violence and gang culture in Birmingham.
 - The Preventing Violence Against Vulnerable People programme – which is a partnership of Local Authorities and WMP designed to strengthen collaboration and preventative activity against vulnerability, child exploitation and strengthen safeguarding.
 - A substantial programme of work – developed by the WMCA and PCC in partnership since 2017 – evidencing patterns of vulnerability in the region and the potential for different approaches to youth justice reform.

- Many activities that are already embedded within local health, criminal justice and public safety partnerships – giving us a chance to amplify and evidence what we think works, and better support the efforts of local authorities, communities and partnerships that can make a difference at a neighbourhood level.
- 2.6 The WM-VRU thus brings several programmes of work together and gives the region the possibility to amplify and grow them. On 12th August 2019, the OPCC received confirmation that the West Midlands would receive £3.37 million (for FY 19/20) to establish its VRU. This has been the trigger for substantial, rapid work to establish our Unit, bring together a number of secondments to begin its work, and begin to scale and evidence the activities (outlined below) that sit within its workplan.
- 2.7 The Unit was publicly launched on 3rd October, with key partners (including the WMCA represented at officer-level by Henry Kippin) signing the following declaration:

The members of the Violence Reduction Unit board hereby pledge to support our communities, so they thrive and ensure our streets, homes, workplaces, schools, colleges and public spaces are safe. Schools, councils, hospitals, GPs, the police, and many more partners, will all work together to create safer and less fearful communities.

The VRU will implement the public health approach to prevent and reduce violence, vulnerability and exploitation.

Together, we will:

- *Stop violence before it starts*
- *Tackle the cause and impact of violence*
- *Focus on enabling safe futures for our children*
- *Reduce violence in the West Midlands*
- *Recognise the diversity of the challenge we face across the region.*

3. Further Detail on Purpose, Progress and Activities

(a) Governance, Structure and accountability

3.1 The WM-VRU presents a significant step in governance terms. We have commenced a whole system local and regional coordinated approach to preventing and reducing violence, vulnerability and exploitation. The governance of the approach to date has been managed through a small 'executive group', who have led the funding application, developed the vision and mission statement and supported the creation of the WM-VRU team. The executive group is;

- Alethea Fuller, OPCC
- Dr Sue Ibbotson, Public Health England

- ACC Vanessa Jardine, West Midlands Police
- Clive Heaphy, Birmingham City Council, representing LA's
- Julie Nugent, WMCA
- Phil Johns, Birmingham and Solihull STP, representing NHS partners
- Claire Dhami, WM-VRU

3.2 It is a requirement of the Home Office that the WM-VRU creates a formal Board – ensuring that, in addition to those parts of the public sector represented above, there is clear opportunity for communities, voluntary sector organisations, experts by experience, young people, academics and other sector voices to influence the way the Board coproduces and oversees the strategy. As with the Violence Prevention Alliance, which was the blueprint for the WM-VRU, the Co-Chairs of the Board are PHE's West Midlands Regional Centre Director, Dr Sue Ibbotson, and West Midlands Police Assistant Chief Constable Vanessa Jardine.

(b) WM-VRU activities

3.3 The WM-VRU has a budget of **£4,034,000** for this financial year. This includes **£3.37** million from the Home Office, a **£524,000** grant from the Police and Crime Commissioner which was formerly the Violence Prevention Alliance budget and a **£140,000** contribution from local authorities and West Midlands Police which represents the legacy work of the preventing Violence Against Vulnerable People programme.

3.4 As well as funding and evaluating new projects, the additional money will allow us to roll out and expand current schemes already in place. We group violence prevention into three categories. Primary prevention prevents violence happening before it starts. Secondary prevention identifies risk factors early and stops violence in its tracks and Tertiary prevention helps victims and perpetrators avoid further involvement in violence. Below are just some of the initiatives being funded between now and April 2020.

3.5 Primary prevention

- Mentors in Violence Prevention – Mentoring programme in schools whereby children mentor other children to prevent violence.
- School Engagement Officers – These officers will help schools tackle violence by linking them up to appropriate support for those identified as at-risk. This support consists of sport, integrated-mentoring and character building education.
- Specialist mentoring - Targeted mentoring for young people (aged 10 – 18) at risk of violence and living in high crime areas.

3.6 Secondary prevention

- IRIS – Helps GP practices identify patients affected by domestic abuse and provides the victims with support.

- Behavioural Change Campaign – Using behavioural science and networks to influence behaviour and develop a counter-narrative of hope and aspiration, particularly for young people.

3.7 Tertiary prevention

- A&E Interventions – Intervening in the lives of young people who present at A&E units for treatment after incurring an injury through violence. Mentoring and support are offered to help the young person escape the cycle of violence.
- Intensive support for people leaving gangs - This programme will provide a package of intensive support for both young people and adult gang members resettling from custody or those recently released.

(c) Outcomes

3.8 The Home Office require two products by March 2020. The first is a ‘problem profile’ or strategic needs assessment setting out what types of violence and exploitation occurs in the West Midlands, who it affects and impacts upon and what we know about vulnerabilities. This is already underway. The Unit will also undertake a ‘mapping and gapping’ exercise to understand the current activity to prevent and reduce violence, vulnerability and exploitation and compare this against the problem profile in order that, in future years we can better target needs, resources and activity. The second product required is a violence reduction strategy, which the region needs to co-produce and own together. The strategy will be broader than the delivery of funding – it will set a strategic ambition for the region and detail our journey to achieve this.

3.9 Violence is a multi-agency problem requiring a multi-agency solution. Consequently, positive outcomes from a multi-agency violence prevention approach should be evident and monitored across multiple sectors. The WM-VRU is currently developing an outcomes framework to monitor and evaluate its approach. This will, in turn, become an evidence base that the region can use to collaborate, adapt and improve local approaches to violence reduction.

3.10 The Home Office have set three performance measures for the WM-VRU, which are:

- (1) *Reduction in hospital admissions for assaults with a knife or sharp object and especially among those victims aged under 25;*
- (2) *Reduction in knife-enabled serious violence and especially among those victims aged under 25, based on police recorded crime data;*
- (3) *Reduction in all non-domestic homicides and especially among those victims aged under 25 involving knives.*

4. Next steps

- Legacy PVVP activity is being carefully translated across to the VRU, and the future role of the VRU in relation to Community Safety Partnerships and statutory safeguarding arrangements are being developed.

- A proposed budget for 20/21 will be considered by the VRU Board in January 2020.
- A shared regional strategy to violence prevention and reduction will be agreed by the end of March 2020.
- We will develop and maintain our national position as a market leader in how the proposed new legal duty to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence through the Serious Violence Bill will be implemented in the West Midlands.
- We will engage deliberately with each WM authority to create a 'compact' which outlines a set of commitments to ensure the VRU is adding most value within local settings, and which can be held to account through local Health and Wellbeing Boards and other appropriate forums.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The WM-VRU is funded via a grant from the Home Office to the Police and Crime Commissioner – which is conditional on maintaining the cross-regional collaboration outlined in this paper. Additional resources from the VPA and PVVP are managed through existing budgets as detailed above. The spending round announced a further £100 million for violence reduction activity in 2020/21 and the Serious Violence Bill references ongoing commitment to VRU's.
- 5.2 The WM-VRU received confirmation on 30th December from the Home Office that £3.37 million is available in 2020/21 for the WM-VRU. It is anticipated this will again be via a partnership application process.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 The WM-VRU is not a statutory partnership or unit. The Police and Crime Commissioner will be the accountable body for the activity of the Unit and as such the legal implications for the WMCA are limited.
- 6.2 There is no legal requirement for the Police and Crime Commissioner, as the accountable body for the Home Office VRU funding to report on the WM-VRU's progress. However the Police and Crime Commission is keen to reflect the partnership approach to the WM-VRU through providing regular updates to regional partners, and ensure updates are presented at PSR Board and Wellbeing Board as appropriate, alongside the regional Community Safety Partnership Board, the Local Criminal Justice Board and the Strategic Police and Crime Board.
- 6.3 There may be legal implications of the proposed Serious Violence Bill. It is proposed by Government that the bill will place a new duty on public sector bodies, ensuring they work together to address serious violence. The main elements of the proposed bill are:
- Placing a duty on relevant public agencies and bodies to prevent and reduce serious violence.

- Providing sufficient flexibility so that the relevant organisations will engage and work together in the most effective local partnership for any given area, whether that be a Community Safety Partnership or other multi-agency partnership such as local safeguarding arrangements.
- The legislation will enable statutory guidance that will set out the likely implications on a sector-by-sector basis.
- Amending section 6(1) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which sets out the strategies Community Safety Partnerships must formulate and implement, to explicitly include serious violence.

7. Equalities Implications

- 7.1 The activity of the WM-VRU will focus on particular protected groups to prevent and reduce violence where appropriate. This may include interventions targeted at, for example, women and girls, BAME young men and looked after children.

8. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 8.1 The WM-VRU will make proactive and positive interventions in areas which support inclusive growth outcomes, and which are represented in the WMCA's Inclusive Growth Framework. For example:

- The case for prevention in relation to vulnerability and the determinants of violence strongly overlaps with that of investing in those people and communities who are economically marginalised, and that are under-represented in the workplace.
- Patterns of violence are strongly related to those of economic marginalisation - so an investment in reducing violence, vulnerability and exploitation is an investment in those communities specifically.
- There is a significant cost of violence in terms of lost productivity and the ability of the whole population to contribute to and benefit from growth; and the safety and security of our region for citizens, communities and businesses.
- Success in reducing violence over the medium term could make a substantial difference to the trajectory of population health outcomes in the region. These are monitored regularly at a local and regional level, and via the WMCA's Wellbeing Board and PHE Population Hub.

9. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

- 9.1 The VRU will cover all areas of the West Midlands. Interventions will be targeted based on evidence of demand and need, and on the basis of engagement and collaboration with partners. The WM-VRU has commenced cross boundary engagement with non constituent members on particular issues such as county lines activity, have established a network of national VRU leads and are actively participating with the Home Office to share knowledge.

9.2 In addition to Scotland's existing VRU, the following funding was made available to PCC's in England and Wales VRU in 2019/20 and will remain the same in 2020/21:

Area	Amount of funding from the Home Office
Met	£7,000,000
West Midlands	£3,370,000
Greater Manchester	£3,370,000
Merseyside	£3,370,000
West Yorkshire	£3,370,000
South Yorkshire	£2,000,000
Northumbria	£2,000,000
Thames valley	£1,500,000
Lancashire	£1,500,000
Essex	£1,500,000
Avon and Somerset	£1,500,000
Kent	£1,500,000
Nottinghamshire	£1,000,000
Leicestershire	£1,000,000
Bedfordshire	£1,000,000
Sussex	£1,000,000
Hampshire	£1,000,000
South Wales	£1,000,000

10. Other Implications

None

11. Schedule of Background Papers

VRU Brochure