



**AVON &
SOMERSET**
POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER

**AVON AND SOMERSET
VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNIT**

Annual Report 2020/2021



January 2021

Introduction

“Serious Violence was starting to escalate in the area; lives were being lost and vulnerable people exploited daily. The police and our partners couldn’t respond to the issues in isolation, and thanks to the introduction of Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), we are now working together to make a change.

“VRUs are now well established across Avon and Somerset and they continue to provide innovative and collaborative solutions to support young people in our communities.

“Despite many challenges and increasing concern due to the impact of the pandemic, the commitment from our partners has been inspiring and the five local VRUs have been able to make real impactful change to those who need it most.

“Our model here in Avon and Somerset is unique in being a ‘hub and spoke’ approach, we decided to devolve the Home Office funding to the five local authority areas (Bristol, Somerset, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset). This approach really recognises the importance of local need and expertise and gives the opportunity to really listen to our partners and communities. We have built on existing networks and initiatives, but also created new ones where gaps were evident.



“We welcome the announcement from the Home Office of renewed funding to establish and build on a public health approach to tackling the root causes of these terrible offences that are having a devastating impact on victims, perpetrators, their families and entire communities.

“I am passionate about protecting the most vulnerable from harm and the VRUs remain a crucial part in taking a compassionate approach to keeping young people and our communities safe.

“This report highlights the dedication and commitment from our VRU colleagues and partners. Although substantial progress has been made, we still have a long way to go and I am confident that with dedicated partners around the table, the VRUs will continue to make strides in reducing serious violence in the coming year.”

- Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner Sue Mountstevens

“Avon and Somerset first received Home Office funding to set up Violence Reduction Units in August 2019.

“A key early decision was to adopt a hub and spoke approach which recognised that there were serious violence issues across the area but they were of a very different nature in each local authority. All needed an evidence based, early intervention and long term approach – this was underpinned by research commissioned from the Behavioural Insights Team on the underlying causes of serious violence. The model allows each unit to be tailored to the local demographics and partnership landscape but also for best practice and cross border information to be shared.

“Highlights have included real progress with data sharing and the VRU App; significant developments in working with schools especially around exclusions and weapons in schools; good engagement with health colleagues especially around sharing data and a real focus on targeting County Lines.

“Covid-19 has been a major challenge with a diversion of partner resources, impacting on delivery models and most importantly presenting further opportunities to criminals to target and exploit young people.



“The short term in year nature of the funding has been a challenge; there has been progress this year and the Home Office has also helpfully provided over £150,000 in emergency funding to assist with Covid activities. However, such important work based on a proven long term approach desperately needs a corresponding long term funding approach.

“I am delighted with the progress so far and especially the commitment of partners, the police and the OPCC team but there remains much to do and we will continue to work with our partners to progress this crucial initiative.”

John Smith, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Avon and Somerset and Chair of the Strategic VRU Governance Board.

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AVON AND SOMERSET VRU 2020/21

Working in partnership to tackle serious violence

736

Young people at risk of serious violence discussed at multi-agency VRU meetings



597

Young people received targeted interventions

766

Young people receiving universal intervention through schools programmes



1635

Young people engaged through detached outreach

392

Professionals received training on exploitation, ACEs and Trauma Informed Practice



Definition of Serious Violence

In Avon and Somerset, **Serious Violence** was initially defined as the principal offence categories "violence against the person" (VAP), sexual offences and "robbery" where the degree of harm or potential harm was such to deem it serious. For example, "Assault Occasioning Actual Bodily Harm" is classed as serious violence, whilst "Common Assault" is not; and all VAP offences where a knife was present are categorised as serious because of the potential harm resulting from the presence of a knife.

We include domestic violence in our definition of violence and all serious incidents of domestic violence in our definition of serious violence. All occurrences of serious sexual assault or rape are categorised as serious violence. We exclude certain high harm offences, such as child neglect, from our definition of serious violence because we believe the underlying factors that drive them are different and will require different responses.

This definition has evolved through subsequent needs assessment and delivery, with local VRUs focussing on different elements of this definition in order to meet the unique need of their locality. It is now felt that focusing VRU delivery by crime type alone can be limiting and a broader consideration of risk and vulnerability, including contextual safeguarding is required. This also enables a foundation for collaboration, it avoids duplication and enables VRU delivery to flex and adapt to current needs.

We acknowledge that some people have been both perpetrators and victims / survivors of serious violence.

Bath and North East Somerset uses the Avon and Somerset definition of serious violence in its plan and publicity but in practice the focus this year has been on youth violence, domestic abuse and street community violence. This links directly with its problem profile.

Bristol is working to the Avon and Somerset definition with the exception of Domestic Abuse. Bristol VRU is a whole system response to Exploitation which includes Criminal exploitation, Sexual exploitation, missing young people, serious youth violence, knife crime and county lines. The approach integrates a public health prevention response and a contextual safeguarding protection response which focuses on peer groups, places and individuals.

North Somerset and are working to the Avon and Somerset wide definition as detailed above.

South Gloucestershire is working to the Avon and Somerset wide definition detailed above with the exception, at this time, of domestic abuse due to existing arrangements/programmes for victims and perpetrators and it would detract attention from the other core topics of Night Time Economy, County Lines and youth knife crime.

For **Somerset**, the key crime types used for analysing the profile of serious violence are:

- Youth violence
- Knife crime
- Alcohol related offences
- Domestic abuse
- Sexual offences
- Drug related crime
- Serious and organised crime (SOC)
- Criminal child exploitation (CCE)
- Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

Local context

Population

	Population	% of Avon & Somerset Population
BANES	193,282	11.2%
Bristol	463,377	27.0%
North Somerset	215,052	12.5%
Somerset	562,225	32.7%
South Gloucestershire	285,093	16.6%
Total	1,719,029	100.0%

Age

The proportion of children across all LA areas is broadly similar but the age profile varies quite significantly across different age groups of adults. Over half the population of Bristol is under 35. Whereas over half the population of North Somerset and Somerset are 45 and over and in both these areas almost a quarter are 65 and over. These differences are also evident in the median ages which range from 32 in Bristol to 47 in Somerset.

Ethnicity

Based on the 2011 census the A&S population is has 89.1% white British, 4.1% white other and 6.7% Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' This varies greatly across the Local Authorities with Bristol being the most diverse and above the national average. Looking on a hyper-local level (Lower Layer Super Output Areas or LSOA) demonstrates the diversity further: in Bristol one LSOA has 98.6% white population whereas another has only a 19.6% white population.

Religion

The predominant categories are either Christian or no religion. As in other respects Bristol has the most diversity with 7.7% of the population having a religion other than Christianity; this is as few as 1.4% in Somerset.

Physical Geography

Across the whole of Avon and Somerset 22.8% of the population live in rural areas however this varies greatly by Local authority ranging from Bristol, which is wholly urban, to Somerset which has almost half the population in rural areas.

The geographical size, and population density, of Somerset is also considerably different to the other areas.



Local context

Crime rate

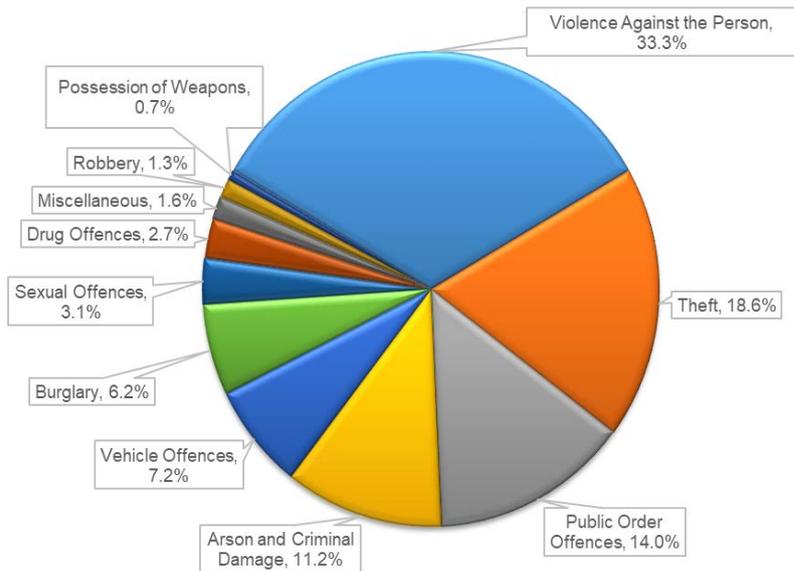
Crime rates are vastly different across the force area with the highest, Bristol, having almost double the rate of the lowest, South Gloucestershire.

Crime Rate (per 1000 people)	Annual rate (1 Apr 18 – 31 Mar 20)	Half year rate Apr-Sept 18	Half year rate Apr-Sept 19	Half year rate Apr-Sept 20
BANES	63.1	31.5	31.8	28.1
Bristol	114.2	59.4	58.7	52.1
North Somerset	73.0	37.2	38.3	33.0
Somerset	69.0	35.7	36.1	32.0
South Gloucestershire	59.0	29.5	30.0	27.0

Crime types

The proportion of recorded crimes across Avon and Somerset; this is broadly similar across all local authority areas.

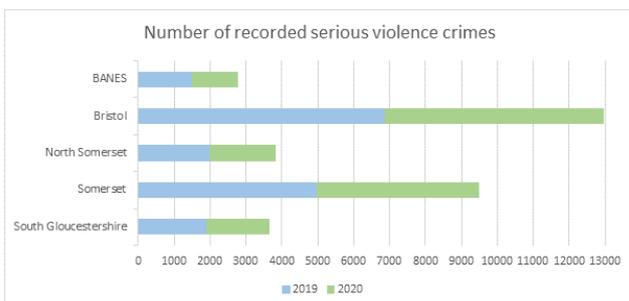
Serious Violence offences accounted for 12.7% of all recorded crime over the last three years. Serious violence, like all crime, saw a small increase from 2018 to 2019 but then a decrease to 2020. This decrease is largely attributable to Covid-19 restrictions as these levels were relatively stable prior to March 2020.



There were on average 17,661 serious violence offences in each 2018 and 2019 and 15,767 in 2020. An interesting comparison is to assaults which did not involve injury (i.e. 'non-serious' violence); this crime type actually grew slightly in 2020 making it markedly different to serious violence.

The rates of serious violence also vary considerably across the five local authority areas as the tables below show. However it should be noted this is broadly in line with variations in all crime levels (as seen above) i.e. these local authority variations are seen in crime as a whole and are not specific to serious violence.

In terms of the different **crime types** for every 10 serious violence offences, seven are violence against the person, two are sexual offences and one is robbery.



2 year totals	Annual SV offences per 1,000 people
BANES	7.2
Bristol	14.0
North Somerset	8.9
Somerset	8.4
South Gloucestershire	6.4
Avon & Somerset	9.8

Infrastructure pre 2019/20 VRU funding

Prior to the 2019 funding, serious violence has started to attract attention in different forums.

There were local responses to youth violence, CSE, criminal exploitation, missing children, radicalisation and the Prevent agenda.

Tackling serious violent crime was strategically overseen locally by the **Community Safety Partnerships, Safeguarding Boards** and **Youth Crime Prevention Boards** and operationally delivered by **Police, Community Safety Teams** and **Social Care**. Alongside and separately, the police continued with their standard threat/harm/risk work. There were also established Boards and pathways in response to domestic abuse.

Bristol's Preventing Gang Involvement and Youth Violence Strategy 2017-2020 identified the direct correlation between gang-related violence and illicit drug supply. **B&NES** launched its youth @ Risk Strategy with a related protocol on serious youth violence in 2019.

Prior to VRU funding, Bristol was the only local authority to have a dedicated team, similar to the VRU model, to respond to the issue in East/Central area of the city. This was established in April 2019.



PCC Sue Mountstevens and Desmond Brown of Bristol Safer Options and Growing Futures, Serious Violence Summit 2019.

Avon and Somerset Serious Violence Summit 2019

In May 2019 the PCC, working closely with Avon and Somerset Constabulary held a **Serious Violence Summit**, bringing together senior leaders from across Avon and Somerset to develop a multi-agency response to serious violence. The Summit was used to introduce the research being undertaken by an external consultant commissioned by the PCC, the Behavioural Insights Team which shaped a bespoke [Serious Violence Strategy for Avon and Somerset](#). The PCC also committed seed funding to Local Authorities to coordinate the development of serious violence work.

This meant that the OPCC had a framework ready on which to shape their response when it was announced that Avon and Somerset would receive £1.16 million of the Home Office's £35 million investment in Violence Reduction Units.

The Strategic Violence Reduction Governance Board is made up of key partners and meets quarterly to:

- Give strategic direction for the development of the Avon and Somerset VRUs, avoiding duplication with other work streams
- Monitor collective risks and issues
- Provide coordination across VRU activity where required
- Ensure that the VRUs follow a public health approach
- Oversee performance and delivery of VRUs
- Ensure that delivery is informed by Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) Report on Serious Violence in Avon and Somerset and the local VRU's problem profiles and response strategies.
- Ensure compliance with Home Office reporting requirements
- Seek to understand and resolve issues that require force-wide resolution or are strategic systems change / infrastructure issues e.g. data/intelligence sharing arrangements/agreements.

VRU STRATEGIC BOARD

Chair–Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner

Representation from:

- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC)
- Avon and Somerset Police
- Public Health England (PHE) South West
- Education
- Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs)
- NHS England and NHS Improvement
- Youth Offending Service (YOS)
- National Probation Service (NPS)
- Home Office – Immigration
- Voluntary sector (VCSE)

The devolved Hub and Spoke model sees the funding passed straight to the 5 spokes to design and deliver a **Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)** that fits the local context.

Funding is divided proportionally based on population and incidents of serious violence. Each area have written their own problem profiles and response strategies with action plans taking into account their own need and resources.

A clear benefit of this model is that the VRUs are building upon strong foundations within their respective Local Authorities. Existing partnerships and infrastructure meant we were starting from a well-established position. However, we do acknowledge that the Local Authorities have different resources and priorities which result in a varying pace of delivery and progress.

Strategic VRU Board meetings, Coordinators meetings and the roles of OPCC VRU Leads and Police Inspector provide links between the VRUs.

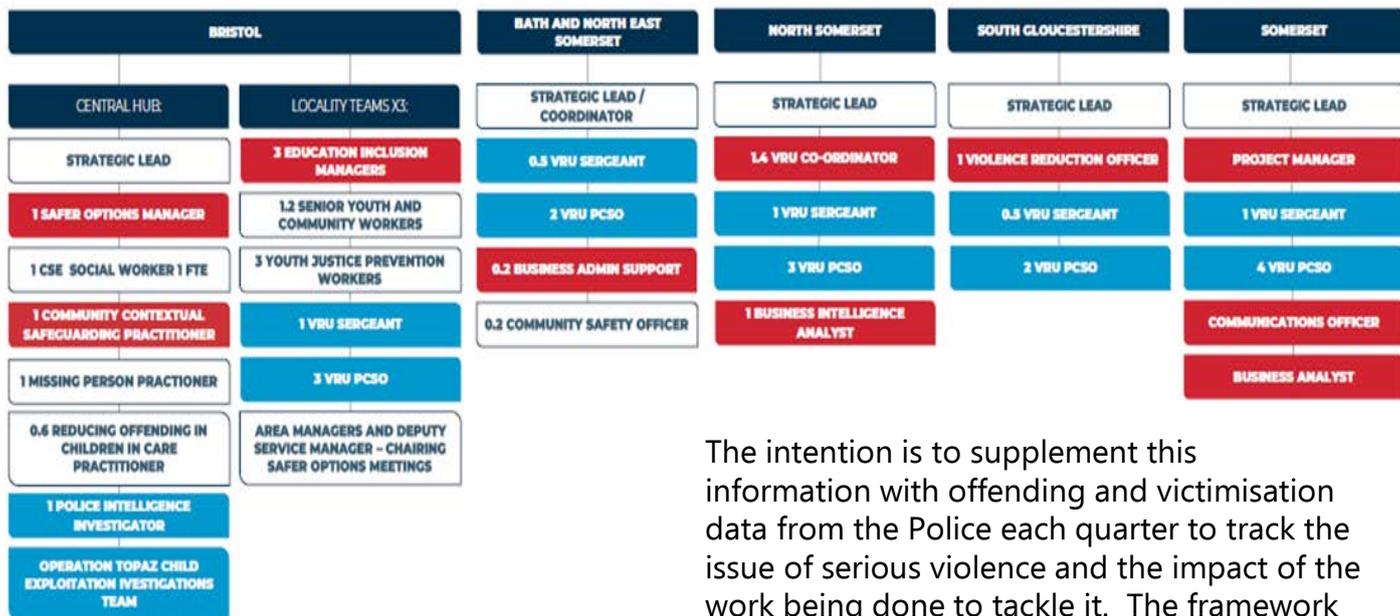
The central coordination and reporting function is by the devolved nature, removed from much of the detail. A balance must be found to ensure a comprehensive overview and accountability. This has been achieved in most part by building strong relationships through regular meetings and communication; while being conscious that any reporting and administrative requirements should be proportionate and reasonable.

Area	%	Funding
Bath and North East Somerset	10%	£114,884
Bristol	37%	£424,389
North Somerset	12%	£143,582
Somerset	31%	£362,225
South Gloucestershire	10%	£114,920
TOTAL	100%	£1,160,000

VRU Infrastructure

Avon and Somerset Violence Reduction Unit (spokes)

Key Local council funded A&S Police funded Home Office funded



The intention is to supplement this information with offending and victimisation data from the Police each quarter to track the issue of serious violence and the impact of the work being done to tackle it. The framework will also calculate the cost saving based on offending data, ie measuring reductions in serious violent crimes and reduction in violent homicides quarter on quarter.

This performance framework was introduced with the 2020/21 grant agreement in June 2020. The delay in confirmation of funding and then the unforeseen disruption due to Covid-19 and associated lockdowns have skewed the data. We do not have a full year of delivery yet and would be unable to attribute any changes solely to the work of the VRUs at this point. This will be more illuminating as we continue to collect this information going into 2021-22.

Local evaluation

The process evaluation element of the mandated local evaluation will see external consultants, review in greater detail the A&S VRU structure has been implemented and its successes/failures with its approach. This will include reaching out to members of the local communities and other stakeholders. It will assess the devolved approach and unique hub and spoke model. This will be a key in driving sustainability plans and help shape future the model.

VRU Performance Monitoring

We have designed a performance framework for each of the VRU spokes to complete each quarter to ensure a consistent standard of reporting. This information will be collated for the Home Office quarterly report, and also provide strategic oversight and feed into the key products.

Local VRUs report against the following sections within the framework:

Spend, mandatory product/s, VRU meetings and attendees, multi-agency approach, knowledge sharing, sustainability planning, Covid-19 impacts and adjustments, value for money, risks reporting, data sharing, demand, geographical hotspots, interventions and numbers reached, communications and engagement.

VRU Infrastructure

Governance and accountability reporting structures

B&NES

The VRU work is embedded in the B&NES Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership (BCSSP) and 4 of its sub groups to which it reports at each quarterly meeting (Exploitation, Domestic Abuse, Early Help and Intervention and YOS Management). The Serious Violence Steering Group meets quarterly and receives exception reports on the work plan. It also reports formally through the Exploitation Group to the BCSSP Operational Group on a quarterly basis. The wider partnership is developing a data monitoring dashboard that will include some measures of the effectiveness of serious violence work, including levels of reported crime.

North Somerset

North Somerset VRU update and receive feedback from the Community Safety Partnership board and through a newly formed Steering Group. The purpose of Steering Group is to work together to enable partners and communities across North Somerset to prevent and tackle serious violence. Given the high degree of overlap with other council, health, and police services, it should be managed using a "whole system" approach which will reduce duplication and ensure co-operation between agencies.

Bristol

The Bristol VRU (Safer Options) is governed through the multi-agency Serious Violence Prevention Group which reports to the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership Executive (an integrated executive with responsibility for safeguarding adults, safeguarding children and the community safety partnership). This group has oversight of the delivery of the Safer Options plan and the changes to the services.

Safer Options provides fortnightly briefings to relevant Cabinet Members on the development of the work.

Key to the Safer Options development is a systems change pilot around contextual safeguarding that is being evaluated by the University of Bedfordshire. These changes to approaches and interventions are led through a multi-agency Contextual Safeguarding Steering Group which reports to the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership Executive.

South Gloucestershire

South Gloucestershire have a VRU panel which is to oversee the operational work of the VRO, progress on the action plan and maintain updates on local and national trends and thinking. That is overseen by the Extra Familial Risk Management Group made up of senior managers who provide strategic oversight and support to overcome barriers. Ultimately both groups report to the Community Safety Partnership.

Somerset

The Somerset VRU provides quarterly updates to the Safer Somerset Partnership

Local VRU	B&NES	Bristol	North Somerset	Somerset	South Gloucestershire
Steering Group / governance meeting	Serious Violence Steering Group	Serious Violence Prevention Group	VRU Steering Group	Safer Somerset Partnership	VRU Panel meeting
Frequency	Quarterly	Bi-monthly	Quarterly	Quarterly	Bi-monthly

Other Strategic Governance Functions

An update on the VRUs is included in the PCC's report to the Police and Crime Panel on a quarterly basis.

VRUs are also represented on the ASSP – Avon and Somerset Strategic Partnership, the area's collaborative children's safeguarding board.

Accountability to key stakeholders and local community

The work of the local VRU spokes is fed back to the local community through local residents and existing partnership meetings.

Relationships with groups, businesses and individuals are being devolved through VRUs' project work: members of the community are involved in the co-production of responses to local issues.

'It takes a village' in Bristol

The Safer Options (Bristol VRU) team became a valuable partner in the community engagement 'It Takes A Village' series.

The sessions explored understanding of the causes of serious violence, CSE, CCE and how as parents, carers and a community, we can respond effectively.

This resulted in 87% of all attendees reporting an increase in confidence in their understanding of the issue. It also allowed us to update the community on available family support and youth provision in the area contributing to 78% of attendees feeling more confident about knowing what's available for young people and 74% understanding where families and carers can access support.

This is a fantastic example of increasing the understanding of safeguarding those most at risk within our communities. As residents understand the issues and have a regular forum to raise their concerns, they are also more equipped to hold the team accountable for the response.

Community based initiatives

The Covid-19 fund for micro-organisations offered additional opportunity for the VRU to link with organisations where staff and volunteers are within and part of the communities affected by serious violence. Their relationships, understanding and proximity means they are best placed to learn about local issues and emerging threats and can guide the response.

Community consultation on mandatory products

The mandatory products (Problem profiles and response strategies) and action plans were developed and written in partnership with key stakeholders, young people, their families and communities as experts by experience, and key holders of insight and intelligence.

To ensure we heard the voices of a cross section of those affected, focus groups interviews, surveys and events were arranged and included:

- Children and young people who were involved in youth violence Children and young people who had been involved in youth violence in the past.
- Children and young people who were on the edges of youth violence, or were affected by youth violence in some way.
- Parents and carers who were in touch with stakeholder organisations.
- Staff teams in stakeholder organisations.
- Members of the wider community

VRU Infrastructure

Diversity and inclusion

Recruitment into the VRUs has predominantly been through the OPCC, Police and five Local Authority areas, all of which are committed to improve representation of the communities we serve.

Importance has been placed on diverse experience when recruitment to roles within the VRUs, rather than specific qualifications or conventional career routes. This has resulted in a diverse workforce with a rich and varied knowledge base and relevant cultural associations to inspire, motivate and support young people.

We recognise the value of lived experience and representation has been most successful through the commissioning of providers to deliver direct services.

Community Mentors in Bristol

When asked, people in Bristol said that young people and their families should be at the heart of the response to Serious Youth Violence.

Young people said it was important for them to get support from people who they could relate to or who had similar experiences to them.

The VRU has engaged with community mentor programmes across the city as well as using the team's Community Consultant and community groups to identify key individuals from the community with relatable life experience. This is a highly respected and paid role, integral to the work of the VRU. Mentors receive training and support as well as opportunities to progress professionally.

Representation on the Strategic VRU Board

It is our aim to ensure voices of community and young people are heard and the diversity of our communities is reflected at all levels of our work, including the Strategic Governance Board. This is a priority for 2021/22.

The next step will be to welcome a Voluntary sector representative to the Strategic VRU, to replicate representation achieved at local level and continue to explore options for community representation.

Online presence

One of the actions from our Youth and Community Engagement working group was to create a public facing platform where the public, professionals and other stakeholders can be directed to learn more about the Violence Reduction Unit.

The PCC's website is hosting an [Avon and Somerset VRU page](#). The plan is to develop that page to include referral information and resources. Some local VRU spokes have also developed their own online presence to give more detail about their work.

North Somerset have a VRU page on the [Safer and Stronger North Somerset website](#).

Details and resources related to **Somerset** VRU's work including their problem profile and strategy can be found on their [webpage](#) on Somerset County Council's website.

B&NES has a [Violence Reduction Unit page](#) on the Council's website.

Bristol are developing a Safer Options platform as part of the Keeping Bristol Safe Website, a one-stop shop for those involved or interested in the approach.

Multi-agency working

The Public Health approach is one that recognises the causes and correlates of violence go beyond the remit and expertise of any one agency or profession. As a result, in order to identify where there is a risk of violence and to respond accordingly, agencies need to work together.¹

Serious Violence Summit

Over 100 delegates from local authorities, police, health, education, VCSE and other agencies attended the 2019 Serious Violence Summit. Table discussions led by Local Authority representatives covered both current serious violence issues and opportunities for prevention. They were asked to pledge their commitment on the day and so have been engaged since before the inception of the VRUs.

Strategic VRU Governance Board

Partners take an active role in the Strategic VRU Governance Board, attending quarterly meetings and contributing to relevant work streams in the interim, ie Health data, Education, County Lines and Community Engagement.

Local VRU meetings

Each of the VRU spokes hold regular multi-agency meetings to discuss individuals and groups at increased or emerging risk. These teams include partners from schools and alternative provision, drugs and alcohol services, housing providers, voluntary sector agencies including youth services and domestic abuse services, social care National Probation Service (NPS) and Youth Offending Services (YOS).



Surge and VRU partnership

The relationship between the OPCC and the Constabulary is vital in modelling partnership working which is the primary feature and function of the VRU.

The Police commitment to the VRUs is represented by a Surge funded staffing resource with an Inspector, 5 Sergeants and 15 dedicated PCSOs. The line of command is dedicated to tackling serious violence and all training, communications and tasking is consistent and VRU focussed.

This year has seen recruitment into vacant roles and an induction programme for new PCSOs. It has been a challenge getting the roles to full complement. South Gloucestershire in particular have felt the impact of vacancies within their team. This is being given attention as a matter of urgency.

The Surge Lead is a member of the Strategic VRU Board to ensure our workstream themes and resulting activity is aligned.

The VRU Inspector attends VRU Steering groups where he provides advice on tactical matters and support with resourcing. He also facilitates a 6-weekly meeting of VRU Coordinators and Police officers to share best practice and discuss operational matters.

The Sergeants play a pivotal role in the operational meetings, bringing intelligence and referrals to the VRU's attention.

The PCSOs are embedded in the work of the VRUs, delivering interventions, such as the Change and Consequence programme and detached youth work with partners from the voluntary sector across the force area.

In turn, any incidents or high risk individuals that cannot be addressed through the VRU, can be referred to the Local tasking teams for disruption or enforcement activity.

¹ Foegen, W. H., Rosenberg, M. L., & Mercy, J. A. (1995). Public health and violence prevention. *Current Issues in Public Health*, 1, 2-9.

Multi-agency working

Education

Police, schools and VRUs

In order to assist with safeguarding and achieving the best possible outcomes for children, young people and the wider school community, the Police have designed a **schools charter**. It has been created in consultation with education partners and aims to strengthen relationships and improve engagement. It lays out minimum expectations in the form of Universal and focussed offers.

Universal offer to every school a School Link Officer (SLO) from within their Local Neighbourhood Team. (The role of the SLO is for engagement and not for direct reporting of crime or safeguarding referrals.)

Planned engagement with SLO

- once every half term secondary/alternative education establishments/PRUs/colleges (i.e. 6 engagements per academic year),
- once a term Primary School (i.e. 3 engagements per academic year).

Support from Central Coordinating Team
Variety of engagement opportunities including PSHE lesson support and delivery, event attendance, bike marking, youth beat surgery, restorative approaches etc.
Child Criminal Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation training by Op Topaz (specialist Police team)

Focussed offer to identified schools, in addition to the SLO

Involvement of **VRU PCSOs** around Serious Violence.

Mini Police - targeted at areas of Policing Demand.

Black Police Association – for schools with large BAME population.

Response to offensive weapons in schools

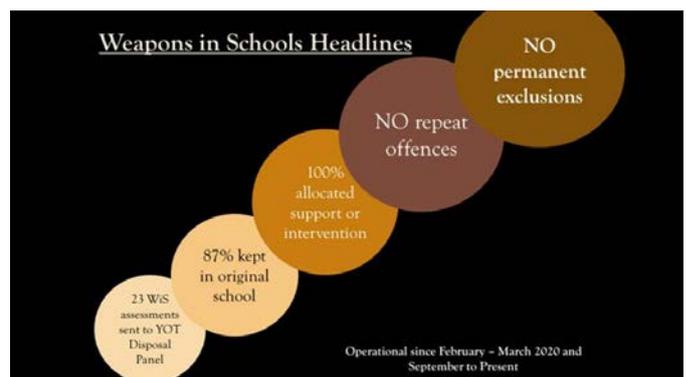
Bristol's Safer Options team, in conjunction with Local Authority and Police colleagues have devised guidance and a support package for when offensive weapons are found in schools.

It aims to support educational professionals to make robust, safe and proportionate decisions when responding to concerns about offensive weapons on the setting's site. This guidance has been in the context of developing multi-agency partnership and acknowledges children and young people are provided protection from risk and exploitation if supported to stay in school.

Instead of being reported directly to the police, individuals found in possession of a weapon in school will be referred to the VRU for a bespoke package of support. Headteachers are encouraged to consider early intervention and support, rather than immediate exclusion.

In cases where the weapon has been used or its use has been threatened, the guidance is clear that the Police should be called immediately.

Following its success in Bristol, this initiative will be rolled out to other VRU areas. It will form part of the Youth Offending Services' Out of Court Disposal pathway in cases where there are no aggravating factors.



Multi-agency working

Partnership working to tackle County lines

Serious Violence and Child Criminal Exploitation remain key characteristics of County Lines criminality and is carefully monitored. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic County Lines were more often linked to out of Force juveniles being trafficked into Avon & Somerset but this appears to have changed recently. It now appears that increasing number of local juveniles are becoming involved in County Lines criminality.

An example of the partnership approach to the issue of County Lines which links enforcement and disruption activity from the police complemented by activity in identified hotspots and targeted interventions coordinated via the VRU, including support for parents and specialist mentoring for young people.

This has been supported by a communications campaign across Somerset to raise awareness of how to spot the signs and encourage reporting, with a particular focus on frontline staff and rural organisations.

The number of known County Lines has dropped from 30 to 24 during 2020. This reduction is likely due to pro-active policing activity such as Operation Avalon in North Somerset and partnership working across the force but Covid-19 has also played a major role in disrupting business.

Additional funding streams

We are well placed through the Police, OPCC and Local Authorities to support serious violence work under other relevant funding streams, e.g.:

- Youth Endowment Fund,
- National lottery,
- Home Office Covid-19 fund,
- Community Action Fund.

This connects us to partners in the charity sector that are not directly funded through the VRU.

Health

Severn Violence Reduction Collaboration

Initially a health initiative driven by an Emergency Medicine Registrar at the North Bristol NHS Trust, representatives from the VRU have joined the steering group for the Severn Violence Reduction Collaboration.

It brings together partners from across criminal justice, health and support agencies to develop interventions for young people.

Outputs include **the Blunt Truth workshop** for children in school years 7&8; **Insight Programme**, a week long programme for young people identified as at risk of involvement in violent crime; **Bright Outlook** Education sessions for young people involved in violence but not yet charged and a programme for delivery as part of an Outcome 22, disposal of charge.

Members of North Bristol NHS Trust & Severn Major Trauma Network:

- Avon & Somerset Police
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
- South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust
- Great Western Heart Starters via Great Western Air Ambulance Charity
- HHJ Mark Horton, Bristol Crown Court
- Youth Offending Team
- Safer Options Team (Bristol VRU)
- Avon and Somerset VRU
- Senior Leaders in Education
- Empire Fighting Chance

Relationships with CSPs

Working in a multi-agency approach has increased capacity for our partners, provided opportunities for partnership working and reduced duplication of work. This approach allows for multi-disciplinary views to develop creative solutions to engage young people and secure better outcomes.

Each Local Authorities CSP (or equivalent) provides a governance function and also offers opportunity to complete comprehensive mapping exercises and deliver joined up responses across community safety and safeguarding.

Cross Border work

A partnership has been forged between the two VRU spokes based in **B&NES** and **South Gloucestershire**. Through their shared police resource they highlighted concerns about a group offending across both counties. This has centred upon a group of young people linked to drug activity, moped thefts and serious assault and a feud with a group from a nearby area.

Both VRU Co-ordinators completed mapping with the Police Intel Hub, shared pertinent information and are now in the stages of safeguarding those involved through joint complex strategy meetings with a view to support through individual interventions.

Cross Border conversations are taking place weekly at present to ensure that work is coherent. The anticipation is that both areas will be subject to some form of community problem solving via educational settings and youth services.

South Gloucestershire also shares a border with **Bristol** and has worked with the North Bristol VRU team to monitor gang affiliation and other vulnerable young people. The sharing of information is now a frequent exchange as we see a slight increase in South Gloucestershire young people appearing in Bristol locations connected to CCE/CSE activity.

Case study

A partnership approach in South Gloucestershire

14yr old Kris was active in his local area for ASB and threatening students who attended the same school from which he had been excluded. This culminated in him being investigated by the Police as part of a group who had tried to commit a robbery at a local shop using a knife.

Contextual Safeguarding/investigation by Police, ASB Team and the VRO revealed he had a number of associates who were involved in the same behaviours. A case conference was arranged and the cohort discussed with some being referred for safeguarding and therefore offered support from Social Care. Kris was one of those individuals. Others were managed by way of early intervention through the ASB Team.

The VRO was asked to work alongside Social Care staff to identify any issues of exploitation, gang membership and the knife possession. Partnership discussion identified that Kris had significant ACES and together, a comprehensive package of support was put in place.

Social Care worked on topics including his education and home situation whilst the VRO delivered inputs on knife crime and gang membership. The joined up approach has broken up the original group who caused so much disruption in the local area, has stabilised the family situation for Kris and brought about a cessation of his ASB and criminality.

Kris is now attending school and a mentoring scheme with a view to gaining qualifications and doing an apprenticeship when he is eligible.

Multi-agency working

Bristol

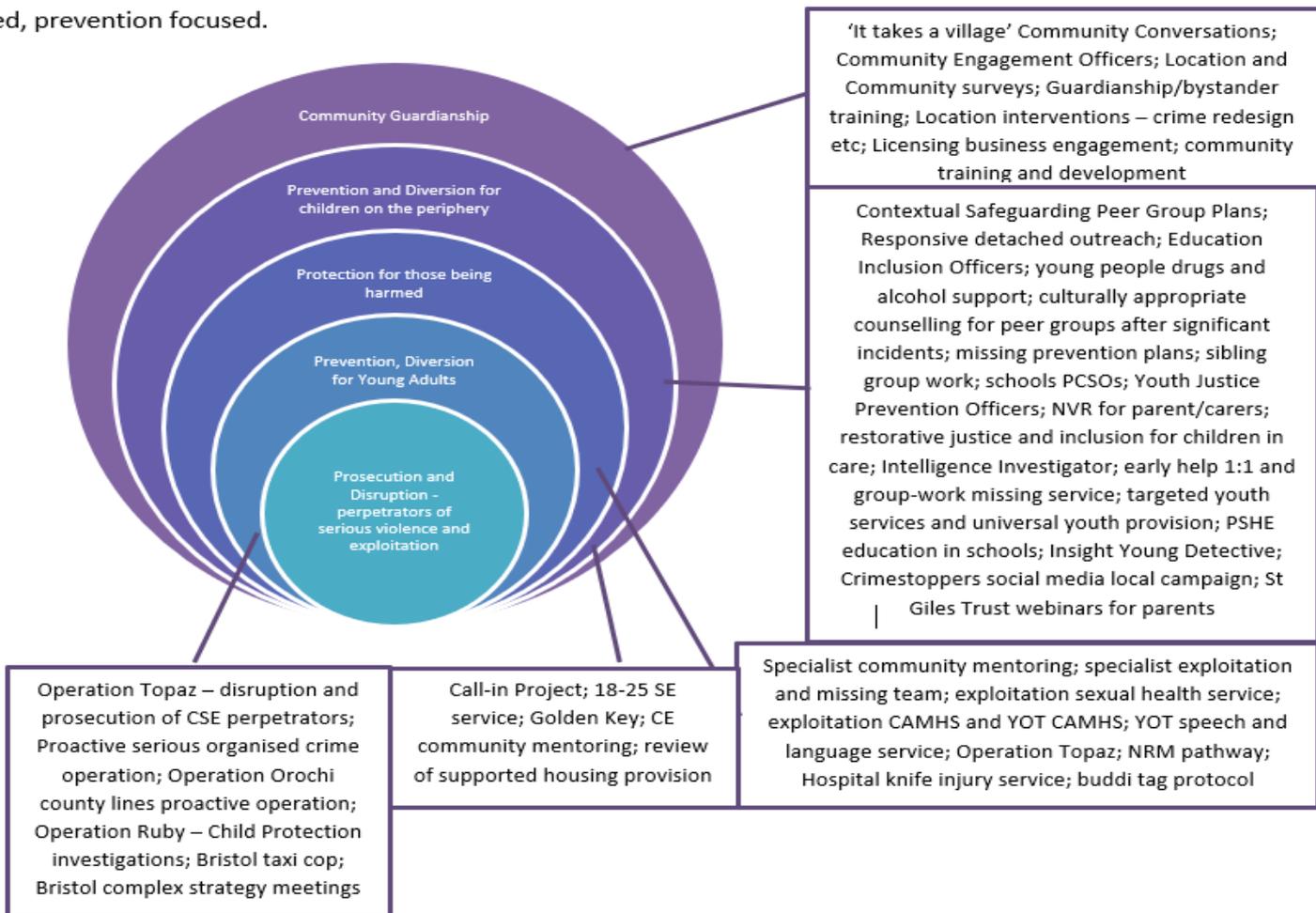
This has been an exciting year in Bristol as we have worked to consolidate the existing good practice, build capacity across a citywide response, and improve integration between safeguarding and prevention approaches.

We have scaled up our citywide response and developed our practice framework integrating Contextual Safeguarding and Public Health Violence Reduction approaches.

The diagram below shows how existing resource and new resource from across the partnership, and from multiple funding streams have been brought together to influence all aspects of the system and work to the shared aim of reducing violence and exploitation. The citywide hub led by the Safer Options Manager have been fundamental to this development, increasing resilience and building resource to coordinate a local place-based response in the three Bristol localities.

Safer Options (Violence Reduction Unit)

Whole system response to CCE, CSE, Missing, Serious Violence and Knife Crime Concerns; intelligence led, evidence informed, prevention focused.



Multi-agency working

Plans for future partnerships

As we expand our contextual safeguarding response across all local VRUs, this will involve identifying and engaging with new partners best placed to drive this work forward.

The Strategic VRU Board will be expanding its membership to include representation from the Voluntary sector. We are also seeking ways to ensure lesser heard voices of young people and community members are given opportunity to be heard at strategic level.

The refresh of the local Problem profiles and the force-wide Strategic Needs Assessment will help inform any gaps where additional partners need to be identified.

Next year in **Bristol**, we plan to build on our work to increase our wider partnerships with supported youth housing, adult social care, probation and housing. This includes the development of new protocols and pathways for peer matching to improve combinations of young people in high support beds across the city. Including: training for night managers in supporting missing young people completed, missing trigger plans for all young people at risk in supported accommodation in place and the development of a prevention offers for young people who have experienced homelessness.

South Gloucestershire are planning on engaging with the National Probation Service to understand the possible work streams around 18-25yr olds, Integrated Offender Management and the re-establishing of Serious violent crime offenders back into the community, asking what can the VRU do to support this work.

B&NES will strengthen transition arrangements between YOS and NPS and review opportunities for meeting the needs of young adults aged 18-25 who are not known to statutory services but are considered at risk of serious violence.

They will continue to explore the possibility of establishing a safe after-school, evening and weekend place for young people in central Bath which will involve partners.

Somerset have identified strengthening partnerships with their Councils' Adult Services as a priority for 2021/22.

In **North Somerset** the VRU's involvement with the inclusion panel will be a focus, to have closer working links with the schools to encourage referrals into the bi-weekly VRU meetings and make full use of the VRU interventions.

Data and SNA

The VRU App informs an integral part of the work of the VRUs.

It is a prioritisation tool that has been developed utilising Police data as the start point to understanding threat harm risk in individuals and groups of individuals who offend together.

Through 3 different programmes – SPSS, R and Qlik Sense – a visual App has been created to be able to view, as a starting point, those most at risk and those with emerging risk. iBase/i2 are subsequently used by Intelligence Analyst professionals in order to elevate the output of the App into a product of dissemination and tasking quality.

The initial data used is Police crime and intelligence data, which provides a list of offenders and offender relationships. 3 points of corroboration are used to substantiate relationships between people, which starts to show offending linked groups of people.

A universal harm score is applied to the offences associated to such individuals – this is a locally defined score based on the [Cambridge Harm index](#). A victim risk score is also calculated, which is important when considering exploitation in all forms. The App allows you to visually see this risk and offending plotted in various formats

Within the 11 – 17 years age group, there are 8,500 all-time strategic identified individuals, 2,600 have risk scores calculated.

Locally our VRU structure is set up in a way that Police will utilise the App at local meetings with VRU partners, so to initiate cohort identification. (frequency shown in table below)

Where partner data can be used next to this it will. Bristol and Somerset are advancing in this as legal gateways in data sharing have been achieved.

However even the power of utilising partnership discussion and knowledge alongside the App, is reaping a targeted risk based approach to VRU delivery and interventions. Full figures of number of children discussed at each meeting are shown in the table below.

Local VRU	B&NES	Bristol	North Somerset	Somerset	South Gloucestershire
Operational Meeting to discuss at risk individual and groups	Monthly	Central Weekly North Fortnightly South Weekly	Fortnightly	Weekly	Fortnightly

Young people discussed at VRU operational meetings						
	B&NES	Bristol	North Somerset	Somerset	South Gloucestershire	TOTAL
Q1	0	119	4		8	131
Q2	14	103	25	141	32	315
Q3	34	100	20	115	21	290
TOTAL	48	322	49	256	61	736

Data and SNA

Data Sharing

Avon and Somerset Police are also crafting a partnership sharing agreement to facilitate the sharing of i2 network products to support Contextual Safeguarding interventions.

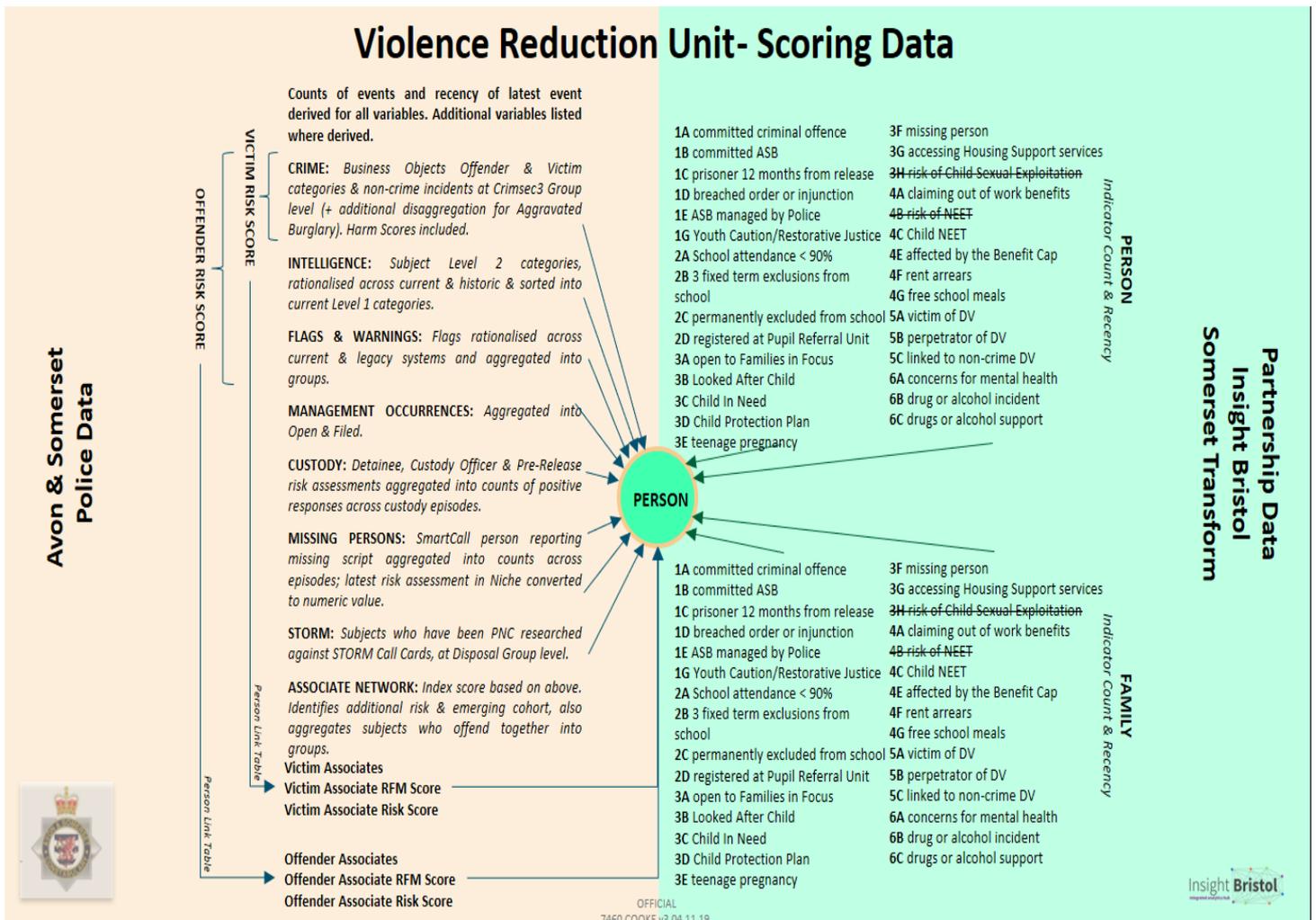
A future aspiration is to widen the scope of partners who feed into the App to include health and education and extend this to all Local Authorities, in order to provide a consistent offer across the force area.

Using data to identify risk

The table below shows the rich data sets that are used to calculate risk of victimisation scores.

There are two sets of available data that are crossed out '*risk of child sexual exploitation*' and '*risk of NEET*' as these are risk models in themselves.

The output of one risk report is not fed into a separate risk report to avoid feedback effects, misleading correlation and aberration from the source data.



Tracking those identified at risk and the impact of interventions

There is potential to track those identified as at risk and the impact of VRU interventions through existing recording systems.

The Police now record individuals and groups identified through the VRU on the Police's operational recording platform, Niche, as VRU management logs. This allows all police personnel to access this information and share at the appropriate level.

A Qlik dashboard is being developed to provide an overview of all these management logs and allow the police to maintain an overview of cases where they have a leading responsibility.

The VRU Sergeants also perform a vital function in tracking those identified, using the App on a regular basis to check their risk/harm score to see which have stabilised and which are escalating.

Data improvement work in Somerset

Somerset's data group is a multi-agency group made up of business intelligence and safeguarding professionals formed in August 2020, to deliver priority 5 of the Somerset Violence Reduction Strategy - "To improve intelligence and evidence base for serious violence in Somerset".

The VRU Data Quality trial picked seven young people from the VRU police app and cross-referenced their details held on Niche and Somerset County Council's Transform system.

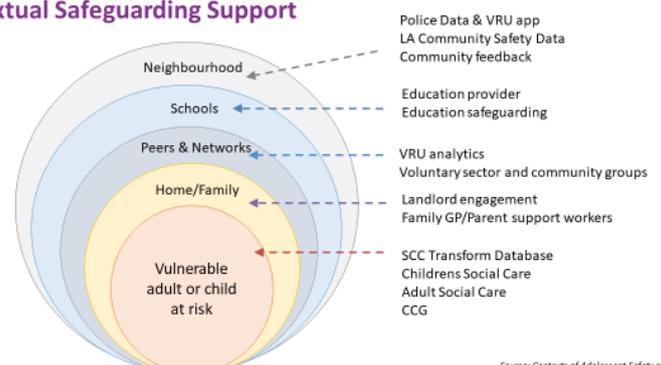
The audit found inconsistencies in data which would cause difficulties in cross-agency information sharing.

- 4 children had different spellings of names and/or aliases
- 4 children had different addresses on each system

All 7 individuals had flags or markers on either Niche or Transform that were not present on the other. These included alerts for County lines / vulnerable at risk, CSE, OCG risk and YOT involvement, highlighting the need for timely and consistent information sharing.

The group also aim to devise a consistent approach to recording and sharing information on County Lines, observing fragmented reporting currently. The group are exploring how agencies can use the same flag or recording methods and arranging an online County Lines feedback form for key partners. This joined up approach will result in a richer intelligence picture.

Somerset VRU Data and Contextual Safeguarding Support



Source: Contexts of Adolescent Safety and Vulnerability (Firmin 2013:47)

Data and SNA

Information Sharing to Tackle Violence (ISTV)

Engaging with **health partners** to meet the [NHS guidance on Information Sharing to Tackle Serious Violence](#) was a priority work stream identified at the outset of the VRU.

The Deputy PCC and Chair of the Strategic VRU has since met with North Bristol (UHB) Trust, University Hospitals Bristol and Weston (UHBW) Trust and Chief Executive of Royal United Hospital (RUH) Bath to discuss the systems and processes needed to capture and report hospital admissions data relating to serious violence.

The OPCC has also connected with colleagues from South Wales VPU to learn from and how their collation and use of data has evolved from the '[Cardiff Model](#)'.

Currently the Police's business intelligence teams receive datasets from Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI), Bristol Children's Hospital and Southmead Hospital. Somerset VRU has established relationships locally to obtain violence related A&E data from Yeovil District Hospital and Musgrove Park Hospital (summarised in table below).

One barrier to using this data to track trends and target resources, is the quality of the data. There are gaps and inconsistencies in the datasets, many of which can only be corrected at the source. Appreciating pressures faced by frontline staff in emergency care settings we are keen to explore how we can support them to meet the requirements of the ISTV guidance.

The aspiration is that we achieve a consistent standard of data from all Hospital Trusts in our force area. Non-personalised health data can then be fed into Qlik then VRUs pick it up through the community safety app.

We are due to present to BNSSG CCG's Governing Board to enlist Health partners' support in achieving this outcome.

Although not referenced directly in the ISTV guidance, the Ambulance service hold a critical position in this landscape. While hospitals usually only record home addresses, the ambulance service will hold data on call out location, enabling hotspot identification.

Between our developing links with the **South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWAST)** and work with the **Regional Data Set & Information Governance Reference Group** and the **Severn Trauma Violence Reduction Collaboration**, this is something we will take forward in the coming months.

VRUs	CCG	Hospital trust	Data shared	Recipient	Data quality
Somerset / North Somerset	Somerset	Taunton and Somerset NHS Foundation Trust	A&E Assault data Referrals to Intervention	Somerset VRU	To be improved
Bristol / North Somerset / South Gloucester	BNSSG	North Bristol NHS Trust	A&E Assault data	A&S Police	To be improved
Bristol / North Somerset / South Gloucester	BNSSG	University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust	A&E Assault data Referrals to Intervention	A&S Police Bristol VRU	To be improved
B&NES	Bath and North East Somerset CCG	Royal United Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	none	N/A	N/A

Regional Data Set & Information Governance Reference Group

As part of the NHS Long Term Plan prevention objectives, NHS Safeguarding is collaborating nationally, regionally and locally with internal and external partners to profile the national, regional and local data sets relating to abuse; exploitation and serious violence which together make up contextual safeguarding.

The regional group, facilitated by NHS England and NHS Improvement brings partners together to improve the multi-agency response to contextual safeguarding on public and private space violence, including all forms of exploitation and domestic abuse.

The group aims to:

- Use academic evidence to understand what good policing, health and social care looks and feels like to victims, survivors, perpetrators and offenders of serious violence
- Improve systematic data and intelligence gathering and sharing, where appropriate and supported by comprehensive data sharing agreements and frameworks
- Identify any areas of duplication and opportunities for collaboration and or, coproduction in order to generate efficiencies in use of resources.

The group has met bi-monthly since September 2020. The Chair, Assistant Director of Quality and Safeguarding & Regional Safeguarding Lead for the South West region has also joined the Strategic VRU Governance Board to ensure the work of the VRU aligns and optimises opportunities to use data effectively and lawfully.

Data Analyst resource

It has been a challenge to find resource with capacity and relevant skills to process and draw findings from the rich and varied data available.

Local VRUs **North Somerset** and **Somerset** have invested in their own Business Analysts and all VRUs call upon Data analysts within their Local Authorities to support their work. The Safer Options VRU works closely with Bristol Insights Team. The Police have also provided data support by running reports on specific thematics and providing information for the local problem profiles and Strategic Needs Assessments.

In the Autumn the OPCC ran a recruitment process for a Serious Violence Business and Performance Analyst. The role will provide strategic analysis as well as operational insight to projects and work streams relating to the VRUs and wider serious violence portfolio.

We were not able to appoint from the applications received during the first run and so the advert is re-running throughout January 2021. This has had an impact on the research and development capabilities of the central VRU Hub but will be a positive addition once in post.

Factors influencing data

Two factors have impacted the data and its processing in the last year, a break in funding and the pandemic.

An in-year announcement of 2020/21 funding meant a 3-month break in delivery and skewed data on impact of the service as a whole and the individual interventions. Early notification of 2021/22 funding in December is welcomed and will enable us to capture evidence on at least a full year of activity.

Covid-19 and related lockdowns have impacted all elements of this work. Analysis and development colleagues have prioritised their Covid-19 response work while adapting to the universal struggles of working from home during a pandemic. The data we do have cannot be taken out of context and must be viewed through a Covid-19 lens. It is difficult to use this data to predict future trends or evaluate impact when it has been such an unprecedented year.

Strategic Needs Assessment

In the 2019/20 funding period, each local VRU produced a Problem Profile and Response Strategy to meet the Home Office's requirements and to help shape their service provision. A summary of these documents can be found on the [PCC's website](#).

As part of the 2020/21 funding, each local VRU has been asked to review and refresh their respective products to reflect changes in the last year.

Consideration to Covid-19 and associated lockdowns will factor highly.

These updated products will allow local VRUs to once again report on local issues in detail and their individual responses. These in turn will feed into an Avon and Somerset wide Serious Violence Strategic Needs Assessment and a force wide response.

We have held a series of workshops with VRU Leads on the subject of the Strategic Needs Assessment to ensure we have access to the most up to date and relevant data.

Following the workshops, contact was made with data requests to Public Health Leads in each Local Authority, Education Leads, the Constabulary's Lighthouse Integrated Victim and Witness Care Unit, Avon and Somerset Police and South West Ambulance Trust. We will be collating data on both the driver factors and impacts of serious violence, acknowledging that figures on serious violence crime alone will not give the full picture.

In addition to crime figures, we will review data under the following headings:

- Local context and population information
- Crime trends
- Data on VRU cohort
- Gangs and organised crime groups
- Exclusions information
- Domestic abuse incident
- Drugs market
- Deprivation and social inequality
- Mental health
- Drugs and alcohol and use of treatment services
- Hospital admissions
- Engagement with hospital interventions



Serious violence – the tip of the iceberg. Source: Crest Advisory

Cultural and financial sustainability

VRU Funding model

We welcome the announcement of further investment in the VRUs by the Home Office for 2021/22.

However, the year on year funding is a significant risk to the sustainability of the work of the VRUs. Uncertainty around ongoing funding creates a climate of caution. This prevents VRUs investing in the more ambitious or innovative projects that need a longer lead time. It also risks losing highly qualified and experienced staff who are working on short term contracts or secondments.

Highlighted on the risk register, it has been discussed at Strategic VRU Board meetings this year and prompted Chair and Deputy PCC, John Smith to write to the then Head of Serious Violence Priority Projects unit to present the case for a longer term vision for the VRUs.

Alongside this, we have also sought means of creating legacy through systemic change and far-reaching interventions. The relationships developed with partners and the data sharing arrangements that have been established through the work of the VRUs will endure.

In devolving funds and the design and decision making to local areas, the VRUs have become embedded in existing infrastructure. This has meant that the corporate memory of what has been achieved through the VRU Hub and spokes remains within the local authorities and partner agencies.

Through the local evaluation of our Hub and Spoke model we hope to gain a fuller understanding of the impact and its sustainability.

Strategic VRU

The Strategic VRU has brought together partner agencies from Education Health, Police, PHE, Local Authorities Probation and Immigration without statutory obligation and no financial recompense.

This year has seen their commitment tested when their priorities and remits have shifted in response to the Pandemic. We have seen members reassigned or redeployed, in some cases to literally working on the Covid-19 response.

Their commitment to tackling serious violence and the work of the VRUs has been unwavering, offering an element of stability during a tumultuous year.

Police commitment

Avon and Somerset Constabulary are providing indispensable support to the VRU work with embedded Sergeants and PCSOs in each area. This is a resource provided without any claim on the VRU grant.

The Constabulary have confirmed that they will continue to make available embedded Constabulary resource at the same levels as currently throughout 2021/22 without any recourse to any ongoing VRU grant. This will provide a level of consistency in support and delivery.

Police and Crime Commissioner

2021 will see the Police and Crime Commissioner elections. We look forward to engaging with our new PCC to ensure that the focus and work of the VRUs to tackle serious violence remains a priority.

Local sustainability plans

B&NES

In B&NES, much of the knowledge and experience developed through this work is vested in staff with substantive posts that will continue regardless of whether any external funding is made available.

The operational group will continue and it is hoped it will eventually be integrated with work to address wider exploitation. There has been a focus on identifying learning and including elements of briefing and training for parent/carers and staff which will also leave a legacy.

North Somerset

North Somerset VRU is introducing a way of working through the VRU that involves local agencies and local people working collaboratively.

It aims to show the benefits of this way of working in order to ensure that it becomes business as usual and in place for the long-term. Those relationships can continue past any VRU involvement and help communities build resilience and competence to deal with issues themselves.

Bristol

We have already begun to embed elements of protecting children from serious violence and CCE and prevention of CCE as mainstream parts of existing staff members job roles to build sustainability and grow expertise and capacity across the workforce.

We have:

- Mainstreamed chairing of Safer Options meetings as part of the core safeguarding and prevention system to make part of the business as usual role for Deputy Service Managers and Area Families in Focus Managers
- Workforce and Partnership training on CCE rolled out via Zoom
- Restructure of specialist exploitation resources in Bristol City Council completed to enable value for money and increased impact
- Consultation and workforce support on a child by child basis accessed with significant take up building capacity across the lead professionals in the work force
- Serious violence part of the KBSP Keeping Children Safe in Communities Strategy
- Recruitment of a permanent Safer Options Manager (VRU Coordinator) in Bristol City Council
- Established virtual communities of practice for services involved in Safer Options
- Workshop with Avon and Somerset constabulary on the use of data and social networking data to improve targeted response to groups and networks

South Gloucestershire

The dedicated Violence Reduction Officer role is Home Office funded and it is unlikely that in the times of increasing austerity measures, the Local Authority would be able to continue this post without the ring-fenced funding.

In terms of the sustainability of the VRU work, then the legacy will be those systemic changes it is helping to make and the recognition of issues within the local area.

Expanding reach in South Gloucestershire

Dealer or No Dealer is a programme of 1:1 or group work sessions that looks to tackle the issues surrounding drug dealing and criminal exploitation at street level

Each session looks at different parts of drug dealing. Primarily it focus on the effects of children’s actions and the impact on others.

Rather than simply delivering training directly to young people, the South Gloucestershire Violence Reduction Unit has and has now funded delivery and “train the trainer” sessions. To date 19 professionals have received the training from the VRO.

This is part of an ongoing commitment to train all safeguarding leads, PSHE leads, Youth leads and Social Care staff with specialisms around exploitation. This will enable these professionals to deliver the training themselves, achieving a much further reach than if relying on a sole VRU staff member.

Awareness raising

Raising the profile of the vulnerabilities that lead to children and young people being exploited and being at risk of serious harm has a lasting legacy in itself.

As educators and parents ask what does this behaviour mean and know the signs to look out for and where to go for help, it improves outcomes for young people and lasts beyond the involvement of the VRU.

Awareness raising training			
VRU	Training	Recipients	reach
Bristol	CCE awareness training	Staff in 5 schools	50
North Somerset	Trauma Informed Practice, Contextual Safeguarding and whole family approaches	Frontline police officers and PCSOs	45
Somerset	Community resilience workshop	SCC all members briefing (all Cllrs) Somerset VRU team and supporting partners Public Health and Wellbeing partners	150
South Gloucestershire	Contextual safeguarding ACES Tackling CSE and County Lines Working with victims of child exploitation	Youth Leads School Safeguarding leads/PSHE Leads Community Safety Staff Neighbourhood Policing Teams Housing Coaches VRO	152
TOTAL			392

Intensive Engagement in North Somerset

The Intensive Engagement Programme is an approach being trialled in the Hillside ward area of Weston-Super-Mare, which if successful will be rolled out wider across North Somerset.

Using internationally recognised approaches, staff from the VRU, local agencies and the community will be working together to build stronger and more involved communities that work closely together to both raise understanding of issues and develop solutions and services to the local community.

Intensive Engagement is a structured and consistently repeatable process of community engagement and involvement activities aimed at improving co-production of community health, safety and resilience; shaping partners' strategies and resources and preventing, delaying and resolving problems. It is based on locally identified solutions and practices using an 8 step toolkit.

The local area identified, is where a significant proportion of violent crime and disorder have been recorded in **North Somerset**.

The VRU is coordinating this under the 'Communities Programme' within the VRU, with a focus on building community resilience to the issues that underpin violent crime. The VRU Sgt is leading the approach with staff and community from across the area assisting to deliver sustainable improvements to the areas defined.

The approach is building on existing approaches such as Redeeming Our Communities, ensuring that it complements and meets the needs of local residents.

Benefits:

- Early intervention
- Addresses local priorities and concerns
- Increased community intelligence and rich picture insight
- Challenges
- Shared vision and expectations
- Clarifying purpose, evaluation and impact measurement process
- Communicating strategy to ensure project is motivated and enables rapid progress

The VRU ensures activity is evidence driven and that the evidence (multi-agency data and engagement results) is presented in a usable format in which stakeholders and partners can see the reasons for our decisions and priority work areas. This means that the knowledge is not held solely by an individual or one agency and can be used by others who share the aims of the VRU.

Somerset

Somerset’s sustainability plan was presented to the **Safer Somerset Partnership Board** in December 2020 and sets out the essential functions of the VRU to be protected, in the event of funding ending (shown right).

While that is not a consideration for 2021-22, it remains relevant for future planning.

A legacy of **tools and resources** has been created of VRU activity in Somerset.

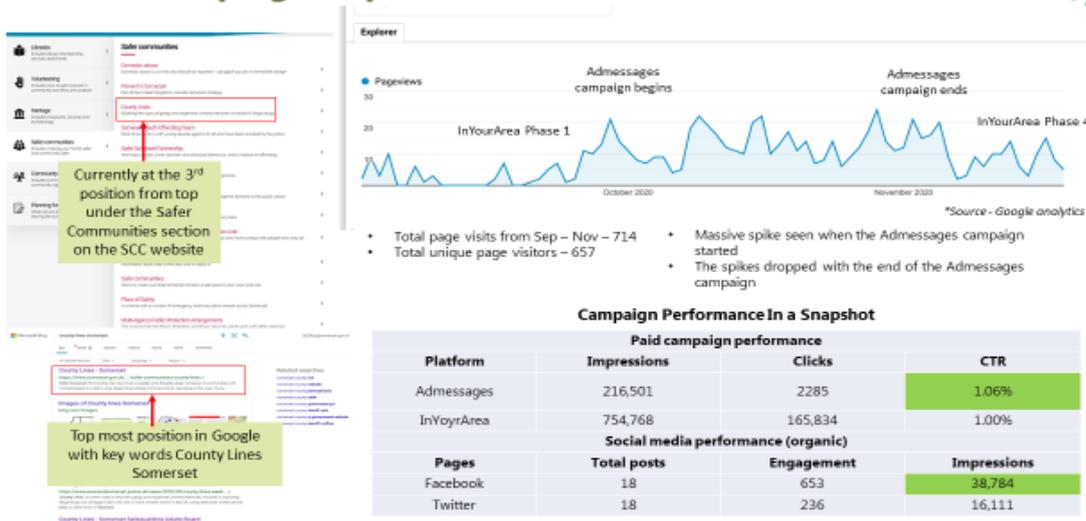
- Know your worth choices and consequence toolkit – county lines
- Know your worth choices and consequence toolkit – weapon possession
- Police/YMCA training film on young people who are vulnerably housed
- Domestic Abuse online training course
- Phoenix project – professionals resource packs
- Phoenix project - therapy room
- Collaborate digital – County Line and Knife Crime podcasts and videos
- Stand Against Violence online assembly pack
- ACEs webpages
- Domestic Abuse family cycle campaign resources
- Domestic Abuse Healthy Relationship campaign, new webpages and resources
- Weapon prevention online resource centre
- ASB prevention – promotional leaflets

- 1 Contribute to regional and national VRU agenda
- 2 Partnership representation; Safer Somerset Partnership, Education Safeguarding Partnerships and CE Sub Group
- 3 Data provision; Safer Somerset Partnership, Education Safeguarding Partnerships and CE Sub Group
- 4 Facilitation of multi agency response to data
- 5 Sustainment of VRU network to deliver public health approaches in the community

Somerset’s external communications campaign used different media to reach their target audience. Video optimisation on Youtube, website optimisation and Facebook for young people and newspapers, radio and digital content for adults.

The campaign and resulting resources and webpages will have a lasting impact in addressing County Lines across the county.

Overall campaign impact



Delivery of the response strategy / interventions

Each VRU spoke is responsible for their own response strategy and delivery plan.

There have been some necessary adjustments due to the pandemic and associated lockdowns. For example, one of **North Somerset's** key areas of focus was the *Targeting of alcohol aggravated violence in the Evening and Night-Time Economy*. The closure of pubs, nightclubs and other licenced premises over the course of local and national lockdowns in 2020 have meant this is less of a priority for the VRU.

A re-profile of Avon and Somerset's original delivery plan has seen spending previously apportioned to activity no longer relevant or appropriate in light of the pandemic, reallocated.

The Strategic VRU has oversight of delivery plans to highlight opportunities for joining resources and ensuring value for money. Raising the profile of the VRUs with partners also identifies potential co-commissioning opportunities.

Primary prevention

Universal or whole of population initiatives aim to build resilience in communities and address the primary or underlying drivers of violence.

Response strategies agreed that the effectiveness of the VRU work will be maximised by targeting early interventions in schools and educational establishments. As such this type of activity features in delivery plans across the force area.

Co-commissioning a force-wide intervention - St Giles Trust

St Giles Trust are commissioned through the Home Office Serious Organised Crime pilot to deliver their SOS mentoring scheme to young people being exploited. This funding was specifically for the Sedgemoor area of Somerset and North Somerset. North Somerset VRU match funded this contribution to extend this offer to their high risk cohort.

Discussions between partners identified the opportunity to expand this further to cover the remaining areas in Avon and Somerset. Three funding streams have been combined to commission one service and has resulted in the recruitment of a dedicated peer support Mentor with lived experience to work with young people disengaged from other services and support.

In addition, St Giles have offered FREE online resources:

- County lines webinar for parents
- County lines professional sessions aimed at Designated Safeguarding Leads and Teachers in schools and colleges

Delivery has been hampered by the pandemic: schools were closed or have reviewed their practice around external visitors. As such, interventions being delivered to children via schools have had to be reviewed and adjusted.

Interventions have been delivered, where commissioned services have been granted access, albeit presenting adapted content virtually in some situations.

Healthy relationships in North Somerset

An organisation called Tender have been commissioned to deliver a Healthy Relationships project across five schools in North Somerset. Tender is an arts and education charity working with young people to prevent domestic abuse and sexual violence. The aim is to promote healthy relationships based on equality and respect, and to raise awareness of unhealthy or abusive behaviour in current and future relationships.

During Q3 the two-day programme was delivered to the Voyage Learning Campus (a pupil referral unit) and Hans Price Academy secondary school. Both of these schools are located in the area of North Somerset where the highest proportion of violent crime is recorded. The projects for the remaining 3 schools had been due to take place during Q4. We will be reviewing potential for alternative means of delivery in light of current Covid-19 related restrictions.



Young people accessing universal sessions in education settings					
	B&NES	North Somerset	Somerset	South Gloucestershire	2019-20 total
2019/20	231		1295	3500	5026
Q1					2020-21 total
Q2					766
Q3		500	266		2019-21 total
TOTAL			1561	3500	5792

A culture of inclusion

The relationship between violence, education and youth is complex as many of the factors that cause disengagement from education are also risk factors for violence. The same is true for the association between school exclusions and violence including knife violence; children who carry knives almost invariably have complex problems that begin long before they are excluded, including poverty, family instability, mental ill health and special educational needs.

The issue of exclusions was highlighted in all of the problem profiles and response strategies and is supported by the findings in the *Timpson review of school exclusions* which highlighted exclusion as a risk factor for both violence perpetration and victimisation.

Along with the schools work described in the partnership working section of this report, VRUs have developed innovative responses to address the issue of exclusions.

Exclusions project in South Gloucestershire

South Gloucestershire's response strategy stated that their exclusions rate is above national average and a key area of focus.

The VRU has commissioned a research project examining how they can work with schools to reduce the exclusion rates amongst students with special educational needs (SEN).

Nine schools have agreed to take part in the work with the aim of "what would it take to reduce exclusions to zero." The findings of which will be shared and have the potential to affect lasting change.

We look forward to sharing the results of this project.

HMG (2019) Timpson Review of School Exclusion.

Education Inclusion Managers in Bristol

Bristol's VRU, Safer Options have 3 Education Inclusion Managers (EIM), 1 in each locality hub.

The EIMs work across primary schools, secondary schools, special schools, Alternative provision settings and the city's two main colleges.

All settings have been introduced to the Safer Options approach and have received information either face-to-face or via email on how to engage their Education Inclusion Manager if they have concerns about a child becoming vulnerable to Child Criminal Exploitation, Child Sexual Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence.

Education Inclusion Managers have:

- Completed weapons in schools assessments and arranging support from a Youth Justice Support Worker
- Arranged a mentor for a vulnerable young person
- Checked vulnerable young people's safety and wellbeing during lockdown
- Advocated for vulnerable pupils to remain in mainstream education during Bristol inclusion panel meetings
- Supported pupils' movement to a new school where appropriate
- Signposted school to support for young people
- Promoted CCE training via external providers to schools
- Offered extra information about vulnerable young people during Families in Focus meetings
- Shared intelligence and offering support to college providers.

The 'teachable moment' is the notion that a moment of intense crisis, when a young person is scared and faced with the consequences of their situation, can be a catalyst for positive change.

'Teachable moment' projects are being piloted in hospitals in Bristol and Somerset.

Admit Hospital based intervention in Somerset

A priority identified in Somerset's Response Strategy was to Tackle key risk factors and Advocate for systems change in relation to Cumulative risk. It highlighted the Needs assessment findings that hospital admissions for alcohol related conditions in under 18 year olds is significantly higher than the national average.

In response, the VRU has commissioned the **Admit project** being delivered by **Turning Point** at Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton. Young people who attend A&E with alcohol, drug or violence related injury are given help and support to reduce their risk of experiencing harm.

This help is delivered by two dedicated Young People Recovery workers who are located in A&E from 6pm to midnight every Friday and Saturday night to:

- Deliver Harm Reduction initiatives on youth violence and substance misuse
- Support young people to access treatment for alcohol and substance misuse
- Support young people to understand the impact of A&E attendance on the NHS
- Raise the profile of the community services among A&E staff
- Offer support to the parents of the young person
- Offer signposting and aftercare to the young person and family
- Link young people into Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services where appropriate,

Place-based approaches Community Development and Hyperlocal Response in Bristol

Bristol VRU's place-based approach has seen 6 hotspots be targeted for a hyperlocal response in 2020.

One of these is a specific road in Knowle, an area of the city with high deprivation and significant long-standing community tensions.

ASB and hate crime concerns have reduced since the summer as the result of a coordinated contextual safeguarding approach. Children have been engaged through a coordinated youth and community offer from the voluntary sector's Street Space, Grass Roots Communities, Creative Youth Network, Youth Moves and LPW.

The business community have engaged through Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI), and restorative justice charity Resolve West. Community meetings have been facilitated to encourage cohesiveness.

Education inclusion has been a focus for young people who are disengaged from schooling and work has begun to establish a more sustainable training and employment offer.

Contextual changes made to the space with additional CCTV being installed and sports facilities have been repaired and reopened. There are also plans to review options to address concerns about young people speeding in motorbikes/mopeds.

Increased policing and the multi-agency detached youth work has been key in reducing ASB. There has been a reduction in ASB reporting to the police, notably, none over Fireworks night which is a notorious time for disorder and ASB. This improvement has been noted by SARI and received positive reporting in local press. Detached work will continue to be delivered 3 evenings per week.

Multi-agency detached youth work in B&NES

Hotspot areas central Bath, Keynsham and Norton Radstock were identified through the problem profile and subsequent liaison with the police and other partners.

Local Voluntary Sector agencies, DHI and Youth Connect South West have been commissioned to deliver detached youth work in these areas and are making contacts with a large number of individuals (570 in Q3 of 2020/21).

Of the 570 engagements with young people, the following types of interventions were delivered:

- 45% Drug and alcohol harm reduction information
- 30% Sexual health information
- 65% Covid-19 information
- 40% Education
- 75% Diversionary activities
- 25% Housing
- 20% Conflict resolution
- 20% Violence (carrying of knives or other weapons, fighting, etc.)
- 15% Employment
- 15% Referrals to services (e.g. young people's drug and alcohol service, Project 28)

Of the 45 young people referred to Project 28, 60% had at least one follow up appointment.

Detached outreach / hyperlocal response 2020 - 21						
	Banes	Bristol	North Somerset	Somerset	South Gloucestershire	Total
Q2					93	93
Q3	570	605	18	16	351	1542
Total	570	605	18	16	444	1635

Early interventions (secondary prevention)

Targeted interventions aiming to change the trajectory for individuals at higher than average risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence. This individuals have been identified by their high or escalating risk score in the VRU app or referred to the multi-agency VRU operational meetings.

Targeted interventions						
	Banes	Bristol	North Somerset	Somerset	South Glous	Total
Q1	37	76	10	141	5	218
Q2	26	99	10	11	10	156
Q3	30	105	60	18	10	205
Total	93	229	80	170	25	597

Care Leavers Mentoring Programme – South Gloucestershire

Children who have experienced Adverse Childhood experiences (ACEs) are at higher risk of being exploited, victimised and/or associated with crime.

Trends in areas of known vulnerability indicate that an increasing number of young people could be at risk due to national increases in school exclusions, numbers of looked after children, and children on child protection plans. Their problem profile identified that in 2018/19 South Gloucestershire had 192 Looked After Children and 191 young people were reported as missing.

The Response strategy set a key action for 2020/21 for the VRO to develop a suite of interventions for use in supporting professionals and individuals to overcome violence crime indicators and characteristics of ACES.

In 2020 the VRU has supported a scheme for 15 care leavers to be trained as mentees to then mentor other care leavers. They worked alongside an existing mentoring company to receive their training and the scheme also sat with the support of a care leavers' app that was being designed separately.

That scheme has enabled care leavers to transition towards independent living and build their resilience and self-confidence

Summer programme in Somerset

Over the spring and early summer of 2020, it was reported that young people's vulnerability to crime and exploitation was increasing. Young people, not previously of any concern to services were congregating in public spaces, breaching Covid-19 guidance and engaging in low-level anti-social behaviour. Young people previously involved in low level criminality were escalating. A third group, with some overlap with both groups were at increased risk of criminal and sexual exploitation.

A list of 300 young people was drawn up by Children's social care, Police, and youth voluntary sector and priority was given to

- Young people listed by multiple sources
- Young people with no identifiable professional support system
- Young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- Young people open to children's social care or the Youth offending service

The final list was 141 young people from across Somerset.

A lead adult from a multi-disciplinary team, including the VRU PCSOs was identified to talk to each young person and build packages of activity around their interests and aspirations. This included working with horses, hairdressing, adventure activities such as climbing and carpentry.

Delivery

Covid-19 crisis fund for vulnerable children

This year we have seen existing vulnerabilities exacerbated and highlighted by Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns.

In the summer of 2020 £98,101 additional Home Office funding was awarded to 10 local charities supporting children and young people at risk of exploitation and serious violence. The additional funding was directed towards micro-charities that provide critical frontline services for children and young people, to ensure they can respond to the needs emerging as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, as well as continuing their day-to-day work.

Grants were awarded to the following organisations working directly with the most vulnerable children in our communities and helped reach 2393 children with food, counselling, mentoring or advice.

[Aspiration Creation Elevation \(ACE\), Bristol](#)
[Bristol Horn Youth Concern, East Bristol](#)
[Escapeline, Somerset](#)
[Grassroot communities, South Bristol](#)

[Growing Futures, Central East Bristol](#)
[Ignite Life Mentoring, Bristol and South Gloucestershire](#)
[Purple Elephant, Frome](#)
[Speakeasy, Somerset](#)
[The Space, Cheddar Valley](#)
[Youth Unlimited, West Somerset](#)

Under 25s Domestic Abuse Support in B&NES

Eight-year-old Zak was referred to **Southside Family Project** by his school as an emergency referral during the first lockdown. Both Zak and his older brother had witnessed their father's violence and emotional abuse before Mum left the relationship. Mum, Jane, described Zack as a "ticking time bomb and the family are walking on eggshells around him". He had damaged household items, including putting a chair through the TV and punching his step-dad Richard in the face.

Work undertaken

- Emergency Covid support - Whole family assessment - Meal delivery from Southside
- Children's activity packs delivered during lockdown - Weekly zoom calls with Mum and Step-Dad
- Fortnightly sessions with Zak doing play and art activities together.

Outcomes achieved

Mum has addressed the guilt around the abuse she suffered and found the strength to challenge her ex-partner and show the children that she can now protect them. Jane and Richard have seen value in consistent boundaries and positive parenting and the home is far more settled as a result.

Jane has stopped unsupervised contact between the children and their Dad, in the interest of the children's emotional needs.

Richard has gained an awareness of his step-children's behaviour as a result of their age and trauma. He said "I understand that he's not trying to challenge me but he's asking for help."

This increasing amount of insight from both Jane and Richard gives hope that they want to and are capable of making positive changes in order to help the family dynamic and provide emotional containment for the boys. A light switch moment happened when Jane started cuddling Zack when he was angry, instead of treating him like a violent adult she began soothing him like a child and this had a profound impact on Zack's emotional wellbeing.

Community engagement

Community and Youth working group

A priority this year was to maximise meaningful engagement with the local communities across our area.

There are examples of great innovation occurring locally. We established a force-wide Community and Youth working group to share good practice and also build upon this local work at a strategic level.

The working group has met 3 times since being established in July 2020.

Representation on the Strategic VRU Governance Board

The working group has discussed how best to have those directly affected by serious violence represented on the Strategic VRU Governance Board.

It has been agreed to find a community or voluntary organisation working directly with young people to act as a link to a wider range of voices. We will also be looking to involve community members and young people in the local evaluation and continue to explore ways of involving them in a meaningful way at a strategic level.

Connected Communities in Bristol

January 2021 will see the launch of Bristol's Connected Communities initiative, bringing together practitioners and stakeholders from community groups to enable co-produced responses to serious violence and exploitation, information sharing, sharing of best practice, and continuing professional development opportunities.

Consultation for problem profiles and response strategies

Young people, other community members and stakeholder organisations inputted to the design of each local VRU's problem profile and response strategy: Consultation was sought through the following routes:

- Children and young people who were involved in youth violence
- Children and young people who had been involved in youth violence in the past
- Children and young people who were on the edges of youth violence, or were affected by youth violence in some way
- Parents and carers who were in touch with stakeholder organisations
- Staff teams in stakeholder organisations
- Youth panels / council
- Forums facilitated by organisations working directly with young people

Community engagement plan and toolkit – North Somerset and South Gloucestershire

South Gloucestershire and North Somerset have collaborated to engage a consultant to develop an engagement plan and associated toolkit.

Particular consideration will be given to how to best engage with communities in light of Covid-19 restrictions.

Researchers will also provide coaching and mentoring on how to use the resources, what the responses mean and how to make changes based on the insight gathered.

The toolkit also provides a legacy of this piece of work as can continue to be used with different groups on fresh subject matter.

Community engagement

Feedback from local micro-charities

The OPCC hosted a roundtable in December for the recipients of the Home Office's Covid response fund for micro-charities working directly with children at risk of serious violence.

We heard how the pandemic and subsequent has compounded existing needs and highlighted dire fuel, technology and food poverty affecting children across our force area.

The funding enabled these frontline organisations to continue their vital work engaging with young people and their families, at a time when many other agencies were closed or providing a restricted service. All the while, ensuring the young people were central to the support they receive:

'we aren't just working, we want to empower young people and work with them to be part of a change.'

Communities, already feeling the impact of health, education and social inequalities are being disproportionately affected by Covid-19.

ACEs, deprivation and vulnerabilities are all proven drivers for serious violence so it is critical that the VRUs maintain robust links to these organisations and support them in supporting others during the pandemic.

Engagement with street-based communities in B&NES

B&NES' Problem profile identified that serious violence amongst, and perpetrated against, the street-based homeless population is high and reporting is low.

The behaviour presented is often related to trauma and learned behaviour following adverse childhood experiences; Impact of injury can be significant and long-lasting.

Through engagement and consultation, the aim is to:

- Research drivers of serious violence within the street-based community;
- Help professionals understand this experience better;
- Create a 'toolkit' for practitioners to help prevent serious violence.

The survey has started but has been hampered by the pandemic. Work is ongoing and the toolkit is due to be completed by the end of March 2021

Intensive Engagement in North Somerset The process of organising 'Intensive Engagement' with a focus on the Hillside ward in North Somerset started during Q2. The project enables local groups and communities to work together following an 8-step toolkit to identify and tackle concerns in specific locations.

A training session and a virtual partnership event took place during Q3. The event was well attended by partners and included community response officers, YMCA, early years lead, Drug and Alcohol Addiction Services, police, NSC housing, CSE coordinator, social care service lead and other organisations working in the local area. The discussions brought out many of the issues from residents and those working in the ward area including littering, homelessness, graffiti and drug use. The positive elements to take away from the meeting included identifying the assets in the area, the willingness to help resolve the issues from the partners at the meeting and their ideas of how to move forward, an example is the younger residents working with Children's Centres to create a rich picture of the ward area.

Next steps are that we are exploring using social media and virtual engagement tool to reach out to the wider community to ask the same questions and uncovering the negatives/triggers and the assets/opportunities for the area with a view to create an even richer picture.

At this stage the project is a pilot with the possibility to roll out into other areas of North Somerset.

Challenges

Funding model

Continued funding of the VRUs is crucial to address the long-term drivers and impacts of serious violence. The current annual allocation model presents a persistent challenge of how to plan and implement long term interventions and retain specialist staff and services. Short deadlines result in a hurried commissioning process and curtails innovation in the design of interventions. We are committed to working with the Home Office on a sustainable future for VRUs, one preferably supported by a commitment to multi-year funding.

Recruitment

As funding has been awarded year-on-year, this is a risk to staff recruitment and retention. It has been a challenge to recruit into the VRU roles where fixed term contracts are dictated by the term of the grant. This has been further compounded this year by the formal announcement of the 2020-21 grant coming 3 months into the delivery period. Our VRU partners in local authorities are understandably cautious and unable to spend money or commit to recruitment until the grant funding is confirmed. This meant a delay in recruitment to certain posts and failure to recruit in some cases. The response to Covid has also meant that non-essential recruitment was put on hold as local authorities reviewed key roles and existing roles have been redeployed as part of Covid contingency planning. It is a testament to the commitment of the partner agencies and individuals involved that alternative arrangements have been made and the work of the VRUs has endured.

Education engagement

There is a complex landscape of education providers and settings across Avon and Somerset. The most vulnerable cohort of young people are not in mainstream school, many with unclear or irregular provision. We have identified the importance of engagement in education and promoting a culture of inclusion in mitigating risk of exploitation and serious violence. However, due to completing demands on stretched resources, there has been inconsistent engagement from education institutions on the subject of serious violence. This has been exacerbated by the pandemic which has placed unfathomable pressure on education establishments.

Schools closures

As a result of Covid, schools have been closed, transferred to online provision or have reviewed their practice around external visitors. This has been a significant barrier to delivery. Interventions being delivered to children via schools have had to be reviewed and adjusted. While some interventions have been adapted for a virtual delivery, it has become apparent that not all children have equal and reliable access. It has been identified as a far-reaching issue with children having to share limited resources and some families not having the equipment or data or technical knowledge to enable their children to get online. It is clear that children most vulnerable and at risk are disproportionately affected by this digital poverty.

The reporting burden

The reporting burden placed on the VRU Leads within the VRU Hub and in turn in the spoke VRUs can seem disproportionate to the value of the grant. While we see the benefit of each mandated product in isolation; working on the local evaluation, Strategic Needs Assessment, Response Strategy and Annual Report alongside the quarterly reports is onerous and can distract from service provision. The Home Office's reporting structure and requirements do not reflect Avon and Somerset's Hub and Spoke model so it has been an arduous task, compiling five sets of information to produce one final product. Our priority is to find a balance that meets the grant requirements, yields useful products and minimises the burden on our local VRUs so they can concentrate on delivery.

Success

Commitment from partners

A significant success of the VRU this year has been the commitment to the Serious Violence agenda from partners. Members of the Strategic VRU Governance Board and the local VRU steering group have continued to meet during the pandemic and continued to drive this work forward.

Adaptability

The Local VRUs have shown adaptability in extraordinary circumstances. This year has seen a comprehensive re-profiling exercise to account for activity that was no longer relevant or viable. The new plan is evidence based and realistic and gives a clear sense of direction. VRUs continue to consult with their communities on what is important and respond to emerging needs as they arise. This includes specific responses to increasing the impact on children's mental health and vulnerability to exploitation as a result of Covid. VRU teams and commissioned providers have shown tenacity and resourcefulness in revising their mode of delivery in order to maintain existing relationships and establish new ones where needed.

Information sharing

A strength and a potential area for growth identified through the first lockdown in spring 2020 was the link with the Department of Education's REACT team and Regional Education Commissioner. There was a willingness to connect and seek ways to complement each other's work. Barriers to information sharing were overcome in the interests of safeguarding vulnerable children. We would be keen to learn from this pro-active style of engagement and use this to drive forward the VRUs offer to schools.

Impact and Performance

Local evaluation

Following a thorough tender process, we have engaged **Cordis Bright** to deliver our local evaluation which will have two elements: a process evaluation and an impact evaluation.

A) Process Evaluation – to review how the A&S VRU structure has been implemented and its successes/failures with its approach.

A&S has a unique hub and spoke model which reflects the devolved approach, there will be a requirement to understand each local VRU's approach and how these varied models have achieved responding to local need. In addition, understanding what the role of the Strategic VRU has had on both local delivery and achieving strategic aims. Has the hub and spoke model achieved a public health response to tackling serious violence in A&S?

B) Impact evaluation – to understand the impact the VRU's and their associated interventions and staff have had on individuals and their communities.

The VRU's would like to share learning through focusing the impact evaluation on community based interventions that are being used in some of the 5 areas. Community engagement and Community resilience are key areas of focus for Avon and Somerset (as well as the Home Office) this year, in focusing this part of the evaluation on community based intervention, allows for a strong foundation to develop this area of work both locally and strategically. We also believe these forms of intervention can be applied to many streams of vulnerability and crimes, therefore learning could be cascaded wider than just the VRUs.

Initially, we intended to consider the following interventions;

- Community Mentors based in Bristol
- Public Safe Space methods such as the MAVISBus (deployed to keep those enjoying the Evening and Night Time Economy in Weston-Super-Mare safe where they may become vulnerable).

In light of Covid restrictions and our adapted delivery plan, we will now reconsider the types of interventions we include in the evaluation.

Learning from the evaluation

We will review any recommendations from the process evaluation with the Strategic VRU Board and make a collective decision as to what must be acted upon.

The findings will help shape future plans for the VRU in Avon and Somerset.

Once the impact evaluation is complete we will use the learning locally to inform any commissioning intentions, as well as responding to any recommendations made of the existing evaluated interventions.

We will also share the conclusions with colleagues nationally via the VRU network and the Youth Endowment Fund's Centre for Excellence.

Evaluation design and research methods

During phase 1, Corbis Bright will build their understanding of the VRU model's approach and progress in implementation via review of programme documentation/data and semi-structured interviews with 20 key stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of the hub and each VRU. They will also conduct a workshop with strategic, operational and data leads in order to discuss and agree the most effective and feasible approaches to evaluating impact and how to capture outcomes data to enable this. They will review existing data collection mechanisms and work with VRUs to identify possible counter-factual approaches. In similar projects they have developed tools to measure distance-travelled as well as identified historical, retrospective or existing comparator groups to develop counterfactual approaches. They are skilled at evaluation feasibility studies that consider experimental designs. They will deliver:

- An evaluation framework which clearly sets out key evaluation questions, methods, data capture approaches, analytical framework, roles, responsibilities, timescales, risk management approach and communication strategy.
- An interim briefing which summarises interim process evaluation findings based on phase 1.

During phase 2, they will design and agree all research tools, including topic guides for consultation, e-surveys and any required performance and outcomes data collection tools. They will then conduct the final process evaluation and the impact evaluation of the chosen interventions. Evaluation activity will be informed by phase 1, but based on experience could include:

Process evaluation

- Online focus groups with community members (one per VRU), via existing networks/interventions, to understand their views on implementation and impact.
- Telephone/online interviews with VRU leads in similar force areas using a central model, to understand differences in implementation, perceptions or impact.
- An e-survey of wider stakeholders, to canvas their views on implementation, efficacy and impact.

Impact evaluation

For each intervention:

- Semi-structured online/telephone interviews or focus groups
- An e-survey of wider stakeholders and beneficiaries, distributed using similar approaches to the process evaluation survey.
- Analysis of performance and outcomes data, including any agreed counter-factual and cost-benefit approaches.

The main phase 2 output will be an accessible and insightful report which presents the most significant, robust and useful findings of the evaluation after analysis and triangulation across different methods. They take a matrix-based approach to qualitative analysis and would propose a thematic approach for this evaluation. For quantitative analysis, They use Excel/SPSS. They also propose using contribution analysis which we believe will support the development of the VRU in the future.

VRU App webinars

Following a session delivered at the 'Using Data Analysis to Problem Solving Serious Violent Crime' seminar hosted by NPCC in October, the VRU App has received widespread interest.

Consequently in collaboration with colleagues in Bedfordshire Police and their ACC Jacqueline Sebire who leads for NPCC on Serious Violence & Vulnerability, Avon and Somerset offered an opportunity to learn more through a webinar to share our methodology and how this is applied operationally through our VRU model. The second session was a detailed technical discussion aimed at Developers and Analysts and focused more on the 'how-to' aspect of the App development.

Separately Developer Seth Cook and Police colleagues have presented to the Minister for Policing, Kit Malthouse MP and representatives from the Home Office as well as the Youth Endowment Fund.

Community Engagement under Covid-19

North Somerset and **South Gloucestershire** VRUs have jointly invested in a project researching and developing a toolkit for reaching young people and communities.

It will give particular consideration to resources and methods that will overcome challenges as a result of Covid-19 related restrictions.

The learning from putting this into practice will be shared with other VRUs in Avon and Somerset as well as host Local Authorities.

As with other promising practice we will use the Home Office's diary of workshops to share promising practice with other VRUs from across the country.

Given the impact the pandemic has had on all aspects of our lives, agencies speak of a lot of learning about remote practice and operating under Covid-19.

In **B&NES**, the Steering Group is working to gather the learning in an accessible form with plans to hold a seminar or conference in the new year to share this more widely.

Response to weapons in Schools

NEW BRIGHT OUTLOOK is a youth diversionary programme aimed at young people who are on the periphery of criminality and on the Police /Partner agencies radar or who are already involved in low level criminality and ASB. The young people can also be directed to attend New Bright Outlook as part of an Outcome 22 disposal.

The programme provides intervention that can be used as part of an outcome 22 disposal for low level criminality and ASB. Within the VRU forum it is successfully being used in relation to knife possession in schools where there are no aggravating circumstances. Historically schools have been reluctant to report offences to the police for fear of criminalising the children.

As part of a package described in the *Multi-agency working* section of this report, this disposal has encouraged schools to report offences to the police knowing that this will be dealt with proportionately and put the child at the centre of the investigation.

The outcome is to increase reporting from the schools, reduce exclusions based on the offence and provide the best outcomes for the child.

Currently being piloted in Bristol, this will be extended to include the rest of the force.

Progress against success measures

Incidents of serious violence

A clear and obvious success measure of the Violence Reduction Unit/s in Avon and Somerset would be the reduction of incidents of serious violence.

Reference to the crime figures show there was reduction of 11.5% in serious violence offences between 2019 and 2020.

Knife enabled serious violent crime has reduced by 11.8% and although relatively low numbers, murder that was not domestic in nature has reduced by 55.6%

Offence	year		
	2018	2019	2020
Serious Violence Offences (VAP, robbery & sexual offences)	17,499	17,822	15,767
Knife Enabled Serious Violent Crime	507	518	457

Hospital admissions

The Home Office's key success measures for funding are: homicide, knife crime and hospital admissions for knife/sharps assault, with a focus on victims aged under 25.

Other metrics are also monitored.

The year up to June 2020 shows a 25% reduction in young people's admissions to hospital with an injury caused by a sharp object

Force (funded forces)	U25 NHS admissions for injury with a sharp object		
	Pre-funding year (to March19)	Year to Jun20	% change
Avon and Somerset	40	30	-25%
Bedfordshire	35	35	0%
Essex	40	35	-13%
Greater Manchester	115	105	-9%
Hampshire	30	20	-33%
Kent	30	25	-17%
Lancashire	50	45	-10%
Leicestershire	45	25	-44%
Merseyside	90	50	-44%
Metropolitan Police	585	480	-18%
Northumbria	40	30	-25%
Nottinghamshire	35	20	-43%
South Wales	25	20	-20%
South Yorkshire	65	60	-8%
Sussex	30	20	-33%
Thames Valley	45	35	-22%
West Midlands	235	170	-28%
West Yorkshire	100	75	-25%

A reduction of serious violence in Avon and Somerset

While the reduction in these figures is to be celebrated, it would be a misrepresentation to attribute this reduction directly to the work of the VRU. The decrease is largely as a consequence of Covid-19 and the related lockdowns. We will continue to closely monitor the figures and continued funding into 2021/22 will allow us to assess the lasting impact of these unique set of circumstances.

In the meantime, we can look at other sources to measure success and outputs of the VRU, rather than long term outcomes.

Perceptions of safety

Over the last two years of surveying 99% of residents said they felt safe during the day and this remains consistent. However this decreases significantly when considering perceived safety after dark which averages 83.1%; this measure is also more variable.



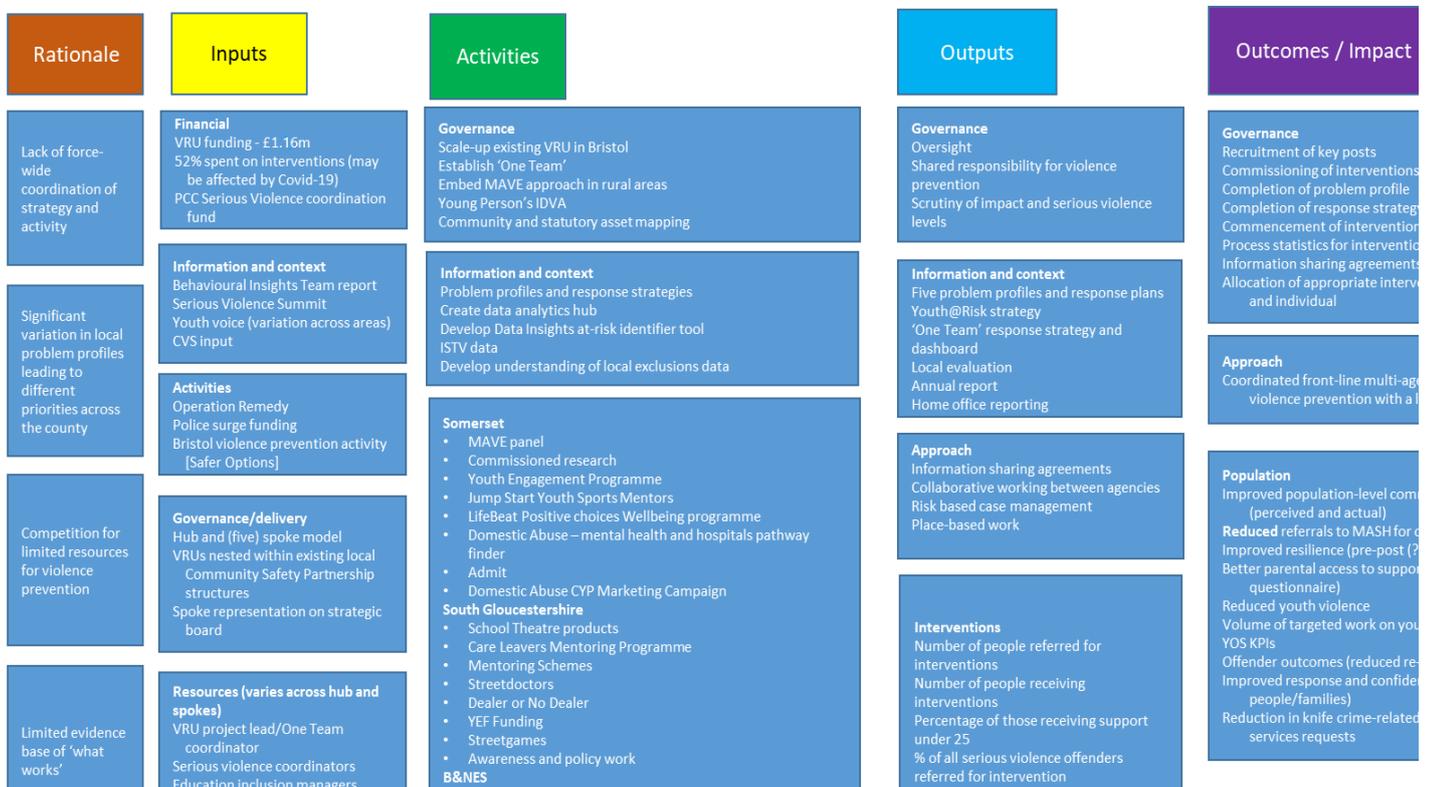
Local success measure	Baseline	Latest performance	Actions to improve performance
number of A&Es that share Assault data with the VRU	0 out of 5 in August 2019	5 out of 6 in December 2020	Working with CCG NHSE and Trusts to improve recording and include RUH Bath.
Local multi agency VRU meetings	1 in East / Central Bristol in August 2019	7 across all of Avon and Somerset in December 2020	Work on access to partner data
Information sharing agreements	2 between Police and Local Authority in Bristol for Troubled Families Programme.	6	Write one overarching Information sharing agreement to cover the work of all VRUs.
Weapons in schools arrangements	0	1 in Bristol	Extend programme to all 5 VRU / Local Authority areas

The Theory of Change

The Theory of Change (ToC) diagram was developed as part of the 2019/20 evaluation of VRUs. We shared and discussed this with the VRUs in late 2019.

National Evaluation partners Ecorys have updated the grid based on our review of more recent documents in 2020 (e.g. Problem profiles and Response Strategies).

We will be looking to overhaul this document as a result of our Strategic Needs Assessment and local and national evaluations and as part of our planning for 2021-22.



Lessons learned and future plans

Data sharing

Lack of data sharing between agencies was identified as an issue at the outset of the VRU and featured on the original risk register.

Sharing of Hospital data was considered to be 'quick win' due to the existence of NHS guidance on the subject and the proven success of 'the Cardiff model'.

However, partners' engagement has been variable and it has taken persistence to get to its current situation which still requires attention and improvement. It has been a challenge to connect with the relevant personnel and understandably, the prospect of NHS departments being given additional tasks is not appealing.

Now, with the VRU presence on the **Severn Violence Reduction Collaboration Steering Group** and with representatives from **NHSE** joining the **CCG** on the **VRU Governance Board**, we are in a stronger strategic position to drive this forward and align with the NHS Safeguarding's national work on data sharing.

Securing Information Sharing Agreements (ISAs) between partners within the VRU has also been an issue that impeded use of the VRU App initially. While work continues on a comprehensive force-wide ISA, the Police's commitment of Sergeants has meant that each of the VRUs have access to the information on the App through this role, subject to the role being filled.

Delivery plans

Another issue has been the relevance of delivery plans since they were written for the grant bid at the start of the year.

Since then, mainly due to the pandemic but also other factors such as a delayed start to spending and change of personnel within some of the VRUs, priorities and timelines have changed. This risked the previously agreed delivery plans being irrelevant.

The Home Office permitted us to submit a revised delivery plan in December 2020 which was agreed. This re-profile is an accurate account of the spend so far this year and the projections for the final quarter. It will ensure that we are able to adapt to changing trends and continue to meet the needs of our communities.

We will continue to monitor delivery against this re-profiled plan as part of our grant management process. Open and constructive dialogue with our Home Office contact will support our decision making in the final quarter of this year and into the next grant period.

Lessons learned and future plans

Uncertainty of funding

The nature of the annual grant process does not provide the security and predictability needed to devise a full forward plan.

It does encourage regular conversation on sustainability and robust contingency plans but this does not allow full potential to be reached. It affects staff retention and when staff leave it can disrupt delivery, it also means considerable knowledge gaps in the service.

VRUs are unable to secure most appropriate interventions, ie where delivery would cross into the next financial year or when a reasonable lead time is required. Resources such as staff time spent on preparing bids and contingency plans also distracts from implementation and delivery.

This is replicated in the funding of the broader policing settlement as highlighted by the HMICFRS in their State of Policing 2019: "More sustainable funding arrangements are undoubtedly needed. They could be implemented in the form of, say, rolling three-year programmes, adjusted each year. This would be an enormous aid to strategic planning."

VRUs have found diverse sources of funding and have grown in confidence in their forward planning but the most desirable mitigation here would be an award of multi-year funding in the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) planned to take place over the summer of 2021.

Next steps

- Learn from local evaluation
- Continue to monitor and manage risk, particularly around Covid-19
- Continued progression on key themes: Education, Community engagement, Data sharing, CCE and contextual safeguarding.
- Development of robust Theory of Change
- Recruitment and induction of new Serious Violence Business and Performance Analyst
- Welcome new PCC and ensure they have a full understanding of the importance of the work of the VRUs in tackling serious violence in Avon and Somerset.
- Support local delivery in response to local problem profiles and strategic Needs Assessment.