

Response Strategy

2023–2024

June 2023

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Introduction

The scope of this Response Strategy:

From April 2022, Violence Reduction Units were given indicative budgets by the Home Office to develop a three-year programme, with an annual Response Strategy setting out approaches and activities.

We now enter the second year of that three-year programme, building upon the foundations we set last year.

This Response Strategy sets out the Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit's programme of work for the year ahead, 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Section 1 of this document contains:

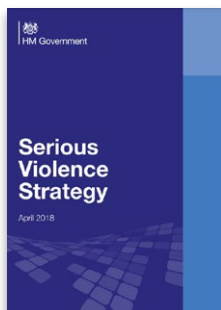
- An overview of the national policy context.
 - Our core function, the underpinning principles to our approach and our Theory of Change.
 - An overview of all our funding and resources; the VRU core grant but also the role of seconded staff and where match-funding has been secured.
-

Section 2 describes the three key elements of our programme for 2023–2024:

- Delivering upon our core function of leadership and coordination.
- Investing into and coordinating pilot interventions and our wider activities.
- Evaluating our pilot interventions and building an evidence base for what works.

National policy and strategic context

Serious Violence Strategy



The Serious Violence Strategy 2018 set out the need for effective law enforcement of violence, drugs and exploitation, but with emphasis on earlier intervention and diversion. It describes the need for a focus upon young people and efforts to address the root causes of violence. The public health approach, treating violence as you would a disease, remains a guiding principle.

The Strategy demands a whole-system approach, with all public partners working better together, the involvement of the private sector, voluntary bodies and our communities.

Current ministerial direction remains aligned to the strategy:

- The use of evidence and evaluation of what works to inform investment.
- Mature data-sharing arrangements and targeted responses to violence.
- Multi-agency working and a whole-system partnership response.

Youth Endowment Fund



In 2019, the Youth Endowment Fund was given a 10-year mandate to prevent young people becoming involved in violence. Its £200m endowment

fund is invested to identify which approaches have most impact, building the evidence base of what works. The YEF Toolkit provides an evolving framework for effective intervention approaches and guides investment.

Violence Reduction Units



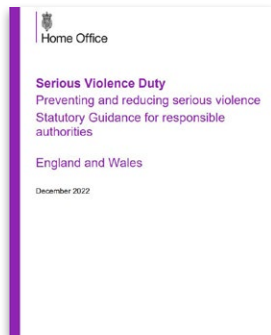
Also in 2019, a network of 20 Violence Reduction Units were established by the Home Office in those areas with the highest levels of serious violence, including the Thames Valley. The VRUs are partnership bodies which enable strategic leadership and coordination and are also funded to deliver and evaluate interventions locally, building local capacity and sustainability.

Harm to Hope



In 2021, the government's Beating Crime Plan was published, followed by a new 10-year drugs strategy, From Harm to Hope. These reinforced the areas of priority and maintained ministerial priorities with regard the approach to tackling serious violence and the role of the Violence Reduction Unit.

Serious Violence Duty

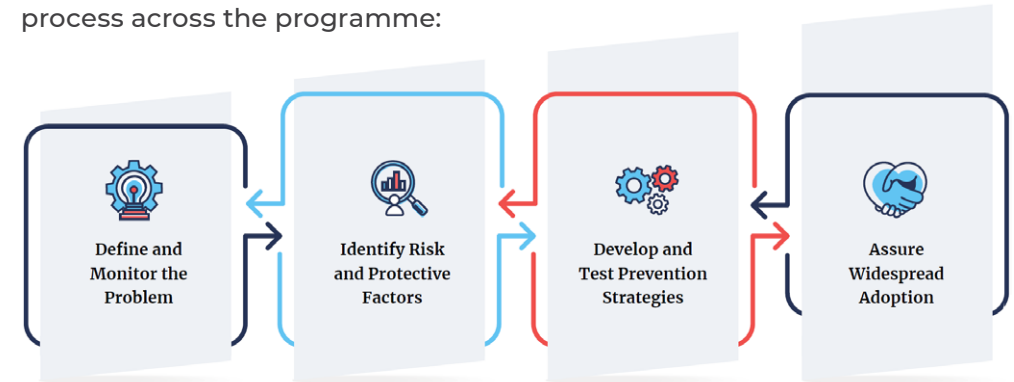


The Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Act 2022 included a new Serious Violence Duty. It invoked new legal responsibilities upon specified authorities, including local authorities, police, fire & rescue, health bodies, youth offending teams and probation. It requires improved data sharing within local partnerships, the development of Strategic Needs Assessments and the publication

of collaborative Local Plans to address violence and its causes. Police & Crime Commissioners now hold an oversight function.

The Public Health Approach

Taking a public health approach to preventing violence is central to national policy and we have embedded the four-step process across the programme:



Our data-led approaches include the ongoing development of the *Thames Valley Together* data-sharing architecture and processes. The analytical tools and insights it promises are vital to our identification and monitoring of the problem as well as informing our shared understanding of the risk and protective factors.

We invest in a programme of pilot interventions in line with evidence and we put in place ongoing evaluation of these. Outside of these core interventions we will work with partners to identify other local practice which has promise and seek to support further evaluation.

Through these steps we will build an evidence base to promote the wider adoption of these approaches, supporting change and future sustainability.

A place-based and whole-system way of working

We work across nine local violence reduction partnerships aligned with the upper-tier local authorities, representing 13 Community Safety Partnership areas and three NHS Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)

The nine partnerships we coordinate with are:

- Safer Oxfordshire Partnership Group – coordinating the 5 local CSPs
- Milton Keynes Together Partnership
- Safer Buckinghamshire Board
- Bracknell Community Safety Partnership
- Reading Community Safety Partnership
- Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead Community Safety Partnership
- Slough Community Safety Partnership
- West Berkshire Community Safety Partnership
- Wokingham Community Safety Partnership

With a large geography and a complex partnership landscape across the Thames Valley region, taking a place-based approach is essential.

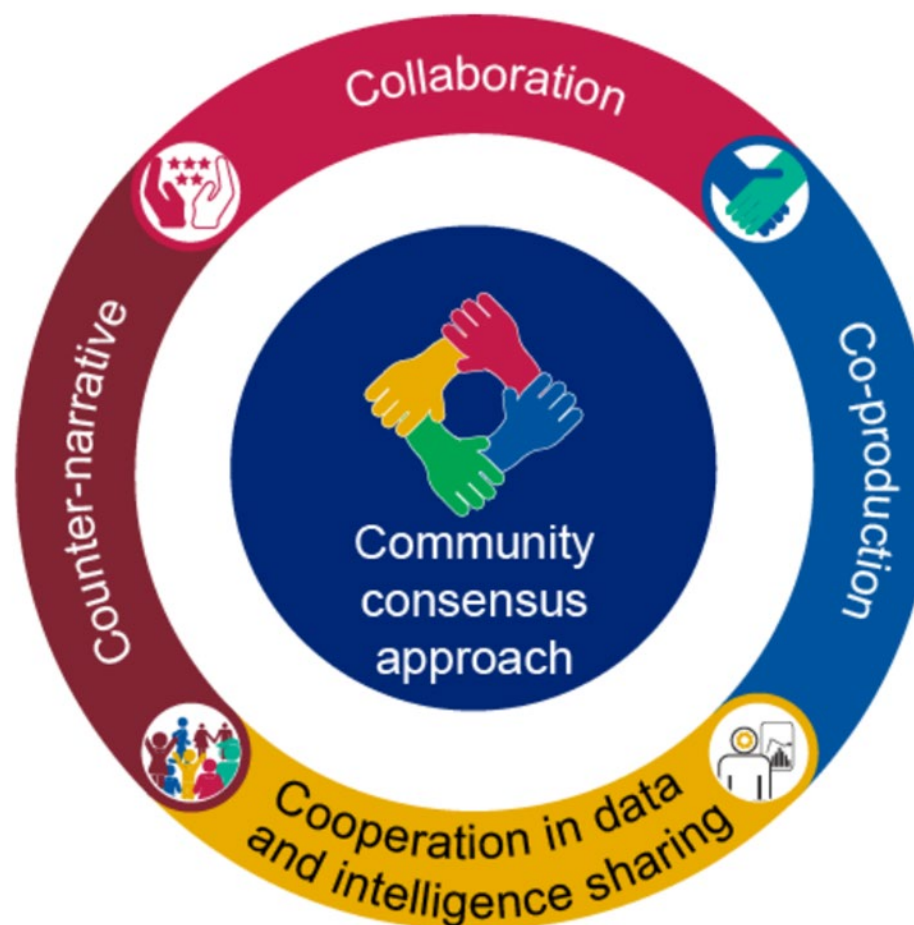
These partnerships have representation throughout our Operating Model, we liaise with the Violence Reduction Coordinator roles in each system and direct with wider local partners. We also attend local partnership structures.



Adopting the 5 Cs approach

We have adopted the “5 Cs” approach as described in national policy regarding whole-system working to prevent violence.

- We build **community consensus** and we **collaborate** with partners using the VRU Operating Model and wider networks.
- We **co-produce**, identifying what works through evidence and evaluation and in response to local need and by working with local partners.
- We **co-operate** through *Thames Valley Together*, our data-sharing platform and through joint working on Strategic Needs Assessments at local and regional level.
- We embed a shared **counter-narrative** to violence through all our activities described in this Response Strategy.



Reference: [A Whole-System Multi-Agency Approach to Serious Violence Prevention](#), Public Health England, 2019

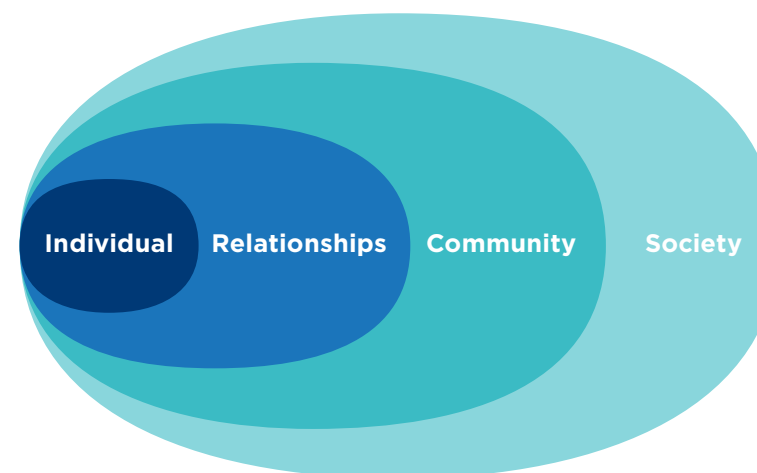
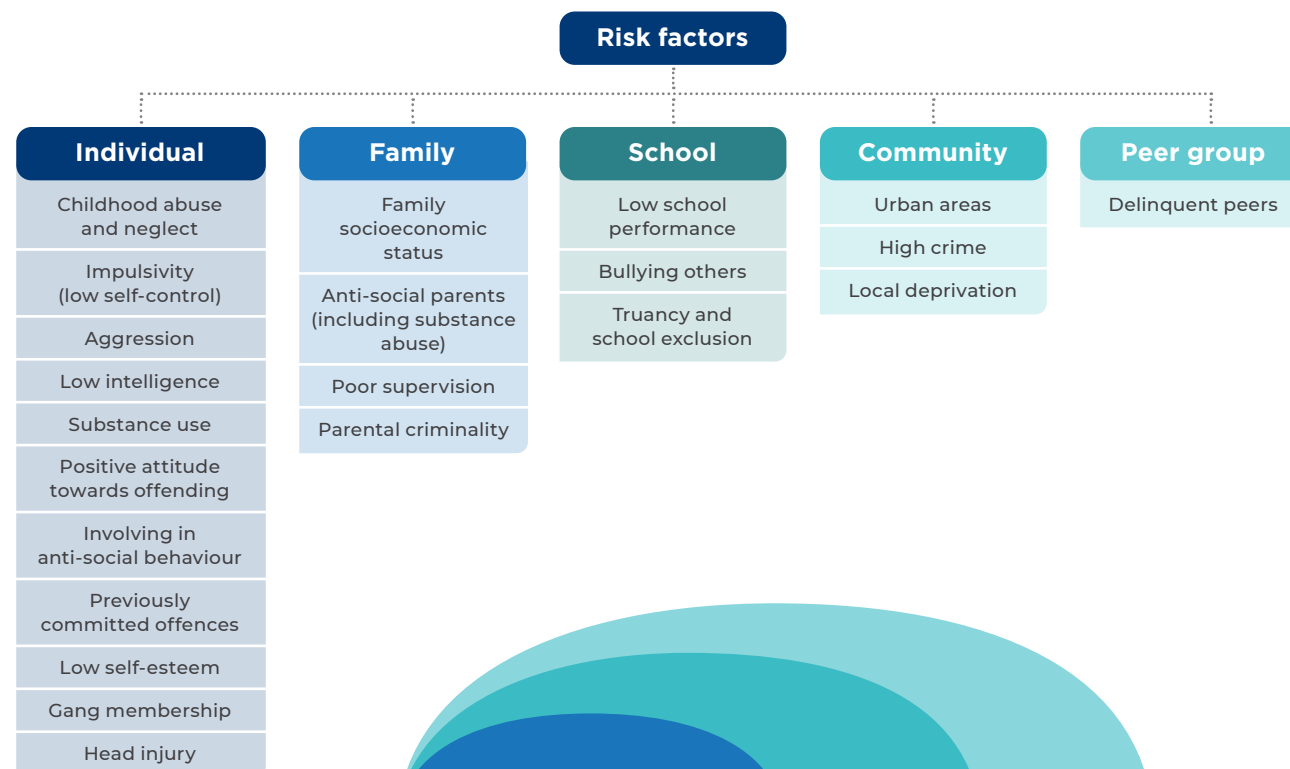
Understanding local drivers and root causes of violence

The VRU programme is informed by an understanding of the drivers of crime and identified risk factors.

We use our own data and local understanding to identify these risk factors and the opportunities to address the drivers of crime.

The Thames Valley Strategic Needs Assessments undertaken over previous years will continue to be developed and will inform future work.

We also acknowledge the evidence that violence is an outcome of interaction amongst many different risk factors at the individual, relationships, community and societal levels, with each treated as of equal importance.



References: *Thames Valley Strategic Needs Assessments – 2021–2022, 2022–2023*, Thames Valley VRU; *Serious Violence Strategy 2018*, HM Government, 2018; *A Whole-System Multi-Agency Approach to Serious Violence Prevention*, Public Health England, 2019

Our shared vision and core function

A teal hexagon with a 3D effect, tilted slightly to the right. The text 'Our vision' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font in the center.

Our vision

The Vision of the Thames Valley VRU is to reduce serious violence in our communities, especially where it affects young people in public places.

We will enable the Vision by improving community safety and wellbeing through a change in the behaviours associated with violence. We will make this culturally and financially sustainable by focusing on whole systems.

A dark teal hexagon with a 3D effect, tilted slightly to the right. The text 'Our core function' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font in the center.

Our core function

To provide leadership and strategic coordination of the local response to serious violence.

Enabled through our leadership of the VRU Operating Model and by building the capacity within our local partnership systems.

Enabled by our partners through their own active participation within that Operating Model, their own local leadership and delivery.

Our underpinning principles

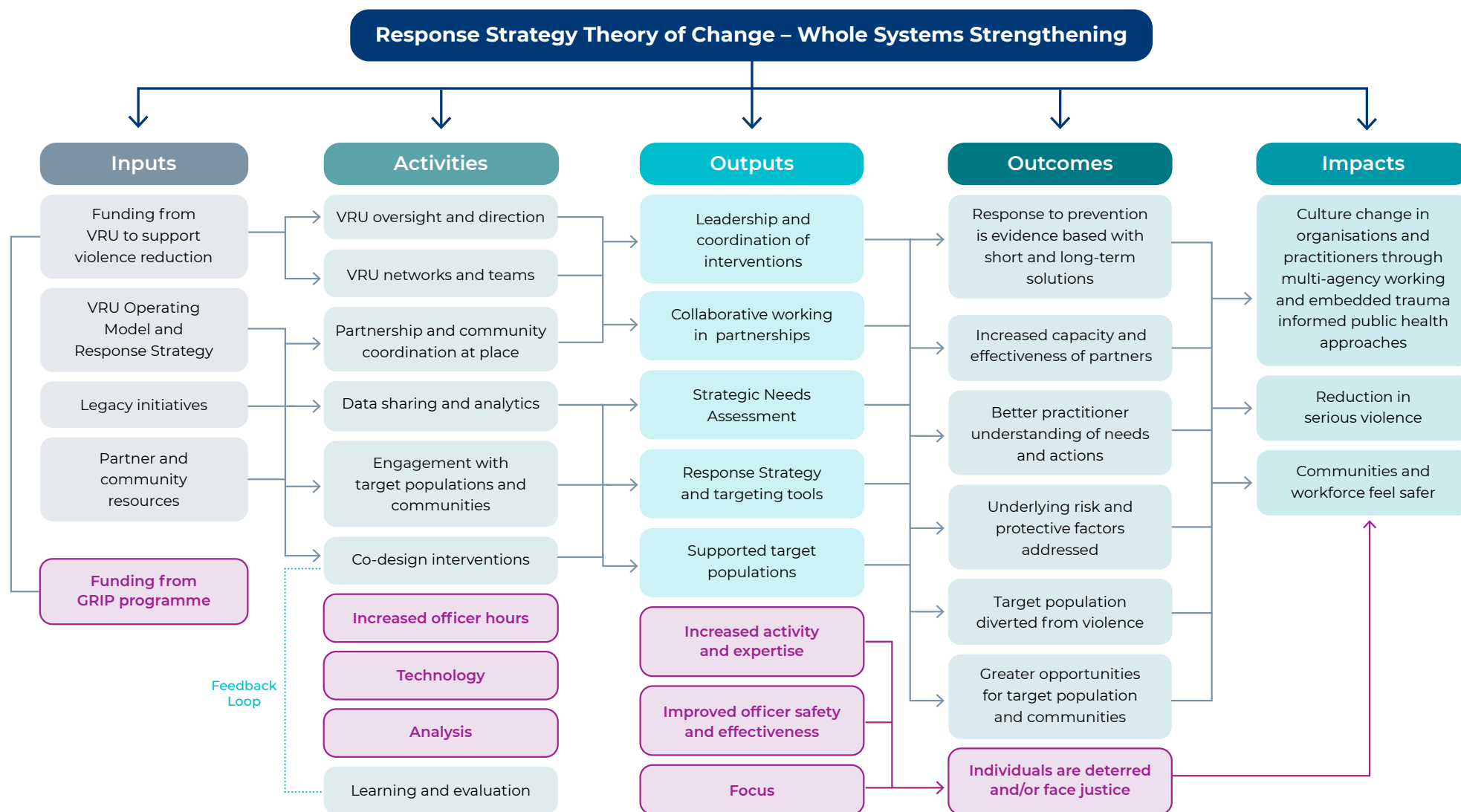


Serious Violence Definition

In May 2023, partners across the Thames Valley agreed to adopt a revised single definition for serious violence, to reflect the local response to the Serious Violence Duty. This version of the Response Strategy contains this updated definition:

“Serious Violence includes specific types of recorded crime, such as homicide, grievous bodily harm, incidents that involve a knife, and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as in county lines drug dealing.”

Our Theory of Change



Our resourcing and accompanying ministerial priorities and direction

In April 2022, Violence Reduction Units were given an indicative three-year budget to develop a programme of work through to the end of March 2025.

The grant tapers down and match-funding requirements increase, marking a move toward greater long-term local sustainability beyond central funding.

- **Year 1 – 2022–2023:** The VRU fully utilised a budget of £2m, with some of the delivery rolling-over and funding activity in Year 2. A 10% match-funding requirement was met.
- **Year 2 – 2023–2024:** An approved budget of £1.53m. A 15% match-funding requirement has been met.
- **Year 3 – 2024–2025:** An indicative budget of £1.51m to plan against, with a 20% match-funding requirement.

Ministerial direction and the VRU grant guidance sets that the VRU must:

- Establish the resources, structures and processes to lead and coordinate partners.
- Develop and deliver a three-year programme which responds to the harms, vulnerabilities, risk and protective factors associated with violence.
- Invest at least 30% of the VRU grant in tailored interventions responsive to local need, designed in line with the Youth Endowment Fund Toolkit.
- Invest at least 10% of the VRU's intervention spend on evaluating these activities to build the evidence base of what works, supporting sustainable long-term adoption beyond the provision of central funding.

Thames Valley Police – a leading partner

Recognising the opportunity and importance of establishing a strong Violence Reduction Unit, Thames Valley Police has been a leading partner since establishment.

The force has seconded thirteen police officers to the VRU core programme team. It also provides co-opted support from across its Finance, Information Governance, HR, Vetting and Procurement teams.

These officers and staff are working directly to oversee the development, commissioning, delivery and evaluation of VRU grant funded interventions. They also lead on wider pieces of work in line with Thames Valley Police's objectives but which are complementary to the VRU and our partner's shared efforts to tackle violence and its drivers.

Our close partnership with Thames Valley Police has allowed the maximum benefits to be realised from separate Home Office funding streams. This includes the Grip programme and also funding provided to support efforts to tackle county lines and wider drug harm prevention. The VRU provides a structure to allow that coordination activity.

The annual value in-kind is £845,000, providing over 55% of the total VRU core grant in match funding and exceeding the required 15% for the 2023-2024 year



The Grip programme – additional operational policing to suppress violence


The Home Office Grip programme delivers extra resourcing to police forces for additional enforcement activity tackling serious violence, with a focus upon data-led hotspot policing and problem-solving orientated operations.

Grip is separate to the VRU grant and is overseen by the Assistant Chief Constable for Local Policing and coordinated through a Gold command structure.

The Grip budget is used by Thames Valley Police to fund additional shorter-term violence suppression operational activity. It supports the force's technical capacity to use data to target the "hot places" where violence is most prevalent over time, and also the "hot people" who pose the greatest risk to others, or who are at risk of crime and exploitation.

In addition to operational policing, the Grip grant supports some roles working alongside the VRU's Data, Digital & Technology network. It is also funding elements of the technical ICT architecture upon which the *Thames Valley Together* data-sharing platform is hosted.

Grip is not part of the VRU's programme of activity, but the close partnership with Thames Valley Police allows a joined-up approach and mutual benefit across the continuum of education, prevention, early intervention and diversion and enforcement.



**The force has
an allocation of
£2m over three
years, £750,000
per year**

The Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner

Matthew Barber, Police & Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley is the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for the VRU grant.

The passage of legislation bringing forward the Serious Violence Duty has created a new responsibility for the PCC, one of oversight of local partner readiness and their adherence with the Duty provisions.

The membership of the VRU represents all the Duty Holders, those organisations on whom those provisions rest.

To date, the VRU has worked through its Operating Model structures to convene and coordinate partners and offer leadership and support in “getting upstream” of the Duty.

With the law now in place, the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner will now work to develop the oversight function and to convene and support partners in their Duty readiness.

The OPCC will also work with partners to develop a regional Strategic Needs Assessment for 2023–2024 and a Thames Valley Serious Violence Strategy. This will sit across local SNAs and Local Plans, to be published by the local partnerships in January 2024.

The OPCC also manages a grant to support local partners in response to the new burden created by the Serious Violence Duty. This will deliver an additional £756,000 over three years.



Active partners and involved communities

With the Serious Violence Duty now live, there is an increased requirement for **active** leadership and collaboration at both a regional and local level.

Our Operating Model facilitates representative leadership from the nine place-based partnerships and wider partners. These local systems have their own existing structures which bring together system leaders from key public partners as well as other stakeholders, including the voluntary and community sector. Through this they will deliver a whole-system approach to prevent and tackle violence in their local communities.

The VRU's programme of work will be an input into those local systems, particularly in those areas we identify as having high harm and violence and where our VRU grant funded interventions are being piloted. These initiatives will be reflected in local plans and their approaches and impacts considered for longer-term adoption and sustainable delivery.

The VRU will share the outputs of our evaluations, the evidence base of what works and the value for money to build a persuasive argument for these interventions and the approaches to be sustained. As this evidence-base grows, it will be of particular use to those areas where interventions are being delivered, but also to all partners to consider the wider applicability.

Involving the voluntary and community sector (VCS)

The voluntary and community sector is key to the VRU's approach, with all our piloted interventions seeking to build their local capacity and the contribution they make to a local area.

The VCS is most effective when considered as a local partner of equal importance, able to activate and involve local communities to support young people and build strong communities. For the year ahead, the nine local partnerships will build on this approach within their strategic planning and operational delivery.

Community voice

The VRU will continue to work to understand community perceptions of violence and the risk and protective factors. This will shape our own priorities and intervention activity. The nine local partnerships will undertake their own work to understand the experience of local communities and involve them as they build the local response. This will also feed back into the work of the VRU.

Our core programme for 2023–2024

For the year ahead, the VRU grant and our wider programme of activity is divided across three key elements:



Investing the VRU core grant for 2023–2024

**Our core function
of leadership and
coordination**

£675,000

VRU programme management
office & networks **£675,000**

**Evaluation and
an evidence base
for what works**

£109,000

Evaluation activity **£109,000**

**Our pilot
interventions
and activities**

£745,000

Thames Valley Together
partnerships **£75,000**

Social value & career capital **£62,000**

School Navigators **£153,000**

Hospital Navigators **£110,000**

Sports & Inclusion **£75,000**

Operation Paramount **£43,000**

Custody Coaches **£50,000**

Custody Navigators **£40,000**

Focused Deterrence **£24,000**

Research-led intervention TBC **£113,000**

Total grant:

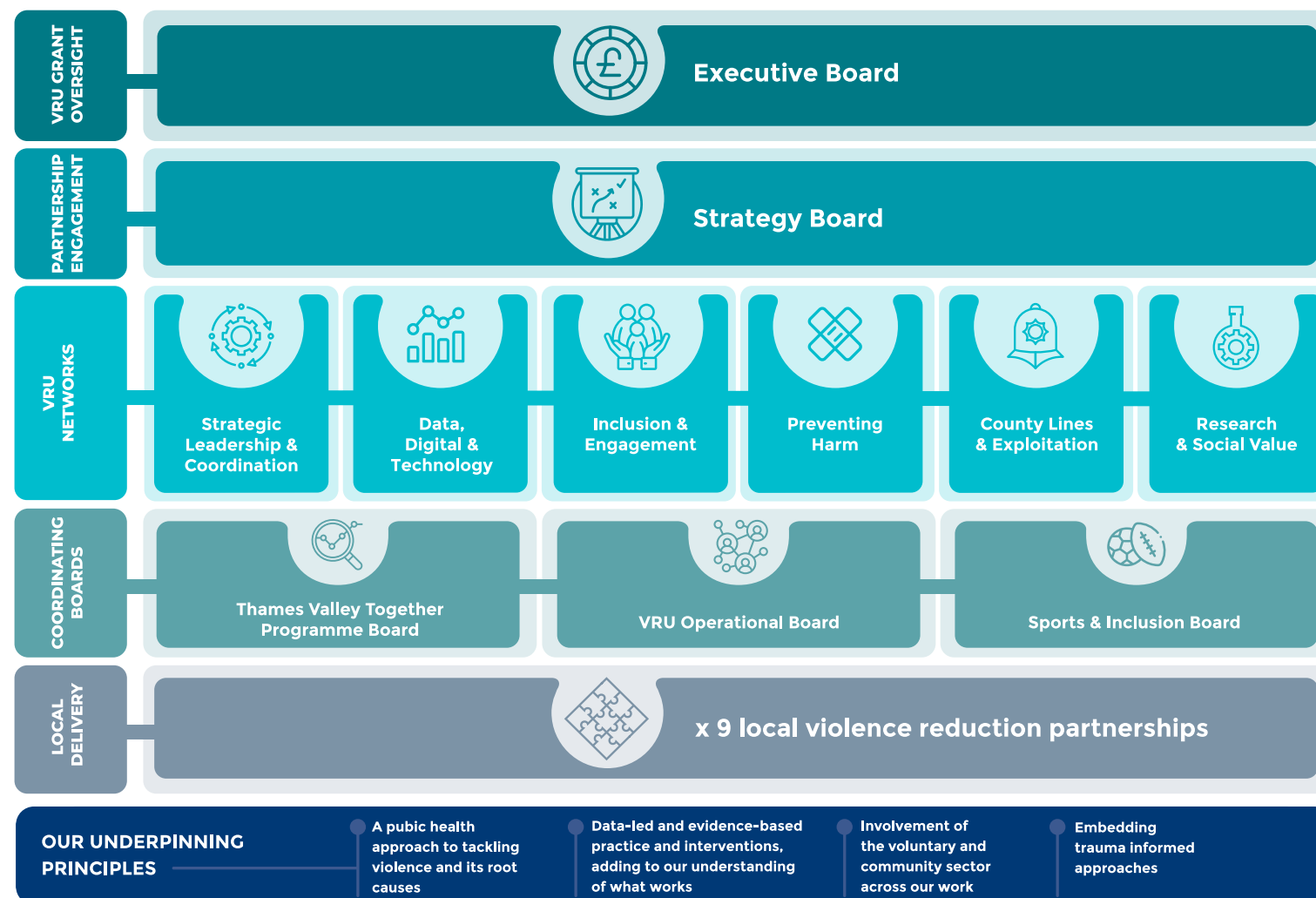
£1.52m

49% invested
in pilot
interventions

15% intervention
spend invested
in evaluations

Our core function of leadership and coordination

Our VRU Operating Model is a tiered structure of meetings and networks. Established over the past two years it enables coordination, communication and partnership working and supports our alignment with the “5 C’s” model.



Our Operating Model meetings:

Executive Board

- Scrutiny and oversight of the grant and our performance.
 - An interface with Chief Officers at Thames Valley Police .
-

Strategy Board

- Strategic level engagement across our partners.
 - Identifies and convenes the right leaders and develops a shared understanding of their role in violence prevention, common risk factors and the approaches needed to address them.
 - Creates a space for collaboration.
 - Includes a broad representation from local partnerships, regional bodies, voluntary and community sectors.
-

Six VRU programme networks

- Contribute to our coordination function and are the structure for all the VRU's programme of work.
 - They are collaborative networks and involve local partners, the voluntary sector and communities and support the co-design of our interventions.
-

Operational Board

- Tactical coordination of VRU activity with local violence reduction partnerships.
-

Project-specific working groups and governance boards

- A number of boards/meetings which provide project-specific coordination and governance.
-

Our VRU networks

We have established six networks aligned to themes in the national policy context.



All VRU grant funded interventions are developed, commissioned and monitored through the networks.

They also provide opportunities to create other collaborations, to deliver activities outside of grant funding, to attract match funding and to work with local partners and involve communities.

Our network teams work across a wide range of subject areas, attend meetings across the region and have their own wider professional networks.

Our pilot interventions and other activities

The second element to the VRU's programme of work is the delivery of our VRU grant funded interventions. We also have a wider programme of work delivered by our network teams, some of which attracts funding from other sources.

Each of the six networks has a programme of activity for the year ahead. The following tables summarises the key activities and any associated funding. If no funding is referenced then they are delivered through our staffing resource.

Each area of our programme will have its own project page on our website – tvvru.co.uk



This year, the VRU will invest over £600,000 in local intervention activity. This is in addition to £400k carried-over investment from 2022-2023 which will fund delivery in this financial year



Strategic Leadership & Coordination

This network represents the entire VRU and our core function. It is delivered by our Operating Model and the other five networks and their teams. Through this work we seek to promote the adoption of public health approaches, coordinate and support active local partnerships and facilitate engagement with our communities and the voluntary and community sector.

We will work with our partners to maintain the VRU Operating Model, encouraging their active participation at all levels and their strong leadership of their own local structures.

We will ensure a coordination of our work and the inputs we make to local systems as they develop their own response to the Serious Violence Duty.

As necessary, we can evolve our operating model in consultation with our strategic membership and the wider partnerships they represent, as we look to developing a Violence Reduction Partnership for the future.

For the year ahead, the Strategic Leadership & Coordination network is working on the following activities:

Network activity:	Summary:
VRU Operating Model delivery	Continue to convene partners and use the operating model as a coordinating structure and communications mechanism.
Evolution of the VRU Operating Model	As necessary, we will evolve the Operating Model in consultation our membership.
Programme management office	The VRU has a large and complex programme drawing on a number of funding / resourcing streams and with a range reporting requirements.
Communications	The VRU will continue to engage with stakeholders and partners to inform and involve them in our work and opportunities to support.
Leadership	The VRU continues to play an active role nationally, regionally and locally. We strive to be the best and to support adoption of our approaches.
Health pathways	We will work with NHS Integrated Care Boards and wider health partners to develop response to the health pathways mapping undertaken in 2022–2023.
Family Drug & Alcohol Courts	We will continue our work with the judiciary and local partners to explore the development of a Family Drug & Alcohol Court (FDAC) in the Thames Valley
Funding: All costs associated with VRU's core function, which includes accommodation, staffing etc are within the VRU core grant for 2023–2024	£676,000 from VRU core grant for 2023–2024.



Data, Digital & Technology

All our work is underpinned by data-led and evidence-based approaches, ensuring we have the best understanding of where serious violence is taking place in our communities, the risk factors and what protective measures we can put in place.

A priority focus is the development of the first multi-agency data-sharing and analytical platform, called *Thames Valley Together*.

Hosted by Thames Valley Police, the team works collaboratively with developers and analysts from across the Thames Valley to provide innovative responses to challenges across the partnership.

The team develop insights from data to drive activity in line with the public health approach to tackling violence. The VRU supports the development of Strategic Needs Assessments, using data sets held within *Thames Valley Together*.

The data and analytical tools are also vital to the VRU's evaluation activity, supporting evidence of what works and helping us to make the case for change.

The Thames Valley VRU is the national lead VRU for Data, responsible for developing new approaches and sharing learning with others.

The network is resourced primarily through the Grip programme as their work supports Thames Valley Police with effective law enforcement activity.

For the year ahead, £75,000 of VRU core grant will resource the network specifically to support local partnerships progress their use of *Thames Valley Together* and to realise its benefits.



For the year ahead, the Data, Digital & Technology network is working on the following activities which universally benefit all areas in the Thames Valley.

Network activity	Summary	Funding
Thames Valley Together	Multi-agency data-sharing & analytical platform.	£75,000 of VRU core grant 2023–2024 will support partnerships with benefits realisation of TVT.
Leading nationally for data	Lead VRU nationally for data, supporting national roll-out of the model and architecture.	Home Office has funded TVP with £90,000 for 2023–2024 to support national roll out of TVT model and architecture.
Thames Valley Service Directory	Developing a “for professionals” Service Directory for use by both VRU intervention staff and for wider partnerships.	
Supporting evaluation & impact	Developing data for use by VRU and local partners as they undertake evaluation of interventions, including developing value for money approaches.	
Hotspot Policing App	A mobile app to deploy officers to violence hotspots, monitor their patrol time and record activity. Seen as best practice innovation and we are supporting its roll-out with other forces.	Grip grant.
TVP Violence Reduction Hub	A Thames Valley Police hub offering a range of analytical tools and dashboards to help identify and manage knife crime, offenders, vulnerable people and areas.	Grip grant.
GIS Systems Training & Innovation	A dedicated GIS specialist supporting the use and adoption of GIS technologies and applications, with a focus on serious violence.	Grip grant.



Inclusion & Engagement

As part of the public health approach to tackling serious violence, our Inclusion and Engagement Network seeks to identify the earliest causes of violence, those most at risk and the preventative early interventions that can help reduce the likelihood of violence.

Our aim is that, through engaging with our communities, we can shape inclusive projects and partnerships that target those parts of the population where support is often insufficient or absent. This engagement – with young people, those with lived experience of violence and its causes, and those most at risk – is a key part of how the network operates, in order to ensure our work has an impact for those who need it most.

We have a particular interest in supporting education providers, delivering child-centred and trauma informed approaches and in supporting those with complex needs. Our network also leads on how we engage and coordinate with the wider voluntary and community sector.

For the year ahead, the Inclusion & Engagement network is working on the following activities.

An indication as to the geographic areas of delivery is given in the summary, with some providing universal benefit to the whole region, others specific local areas.

Network activity	Summary	Funding
School Navigators intervention	Supporting the development of social skills, addressing risk of exclusion and disengagement with education through provision of dedicated youth workers in schools in both Reading and Milton Keynes .	£153,000 VRU core grant 2023–2024.
Social Skills Online Training	An online training package for school children to develop social and conflict resolution skills. Both a tool for School Navigators to use and universally available to all schools as a standalone package.	Funded from 2022–2023 VRU core grant but delivery in 2023–2024.
Trauma Awareness Training	Working with Barnado's to deliver trauma informed approaches training to partners/community professionals. An online training package will be universally available across the region.	Funded from 2022–2023 VRU core grant but delivery in 2023–2024.
Hospital Navigators intervention	Five voluntary sector partners funded to coordinate volunteers trained as mentors/signposters to support, working in the main A&E departments, making the benefits universally available .	£110,000 VRU core grant 2023–2024.

Network activity	Summary	Funding
Sports & Inclusion Fund intervention	A fund established to drive increased sports & inclusion activities with a “Sports Plus” offer of support for those vulnerable. Funding local initiatives in priority areas including Milton Keynes, Reading, Oxfordshire, Slough, Wycombe .	£75,000 of VRU core grant 2023–2024 – a proportion of which is used to fund the VRU Sports & Violence Impact Manager post (see below).
StreetGames coordination	Continued partnership with StreetGames UK, providing leadership and coordination of our local Sports & Inclusion Board, delivery against the Thames Valley Strategy for Sport, and connectivity with national opportunities and match-funding. Support is universally available .	Provided by StreetGames.
VRU Sports & Violence Impact Manager	Continued funding for VRU Sports & Violence Impact Manager, working across the region, hosted by StreetGames for universal benefit .	VRU core grant 2023–2024 contributes toward 0.4WTE of the post, the remainder a contribution by StreetGames.
Operation Paramount intervention	Partnership with Thames Valley Police and charity Children Heard & Seen. Data-led (TVT) recognition of families with a parent imprisoned, targeted support offer and funding for dedicated case worker, hosted by CH&S. Working across Thames Valley for universal benefit .	£43,000 VRU core grant 2023–2024.
Amnesty Art intervention	A community-led counter-narrative/education and outreach programme in Reading . Sculpture installed and outreach programme to follow summer 2023.	Funded from 2022–2023 VRU core grant but producing legacy benefits in 2023–2024.
Cut It Out initiative	A domestic abuse awareness training package, developed with Activate Learning, aimed at students undertaking hair & beauty and also wider trade qualifications.	Developed at no cost through Activate Learning partnership.
Child Centred Practice	Work in partnership with Thames Valley Police delivering PSHE lessons, coordination of Schools Officers, training provision, networking with schools and developing policy. Universally available .	
Neuro-Diversity & Disability Special Interest Group	The network leads the delivery of a Special Interest Group which brings professionals, practitioners, researchers and academics and those with lived-experience together in a community of practice.	
Problem-Solving Training for partners	Delivery of training in practices such as the OSARA problem-solving model used by Thames Valley Police for local partnership staff, universally available .	
Voluntary & Community Sector Network	Utilising a Knowledge Hub to deliver a community of practice across members of the voluntary and community sector and a means of sharing information. Universally available .	
Counter-narrative development	Continued work with Claremont behavioural change agency to co-design and test new counter-narrative products for universal benefit to partners.	Investment carried-over from 2022–2023, with further £15k investment for 2023–2024 from VRU's communications budget.
Youth Voice	Working to support local participatory forum for young people and the VRU Young Leader programme.	



Preventing Harm

The Preventing Harm work network is delivering interventions which provide support, provision of intensive mentoring and diversionary activity to prevent offending.

It includes research into better understanding of risk factors for different genders and the piloting of potential new police powers which deliver both enforcement but also an opportunity for prevention. The network leads on the VRU's participation in a number of wider forum/partnerships where there is the opportunity to shape a focus upon harm prevention and early intervention.

For the year ahead, the Preventing Harm network is working on the following activities.

Network activity	Summary	Funding
Custody Coaches	Three voluntary sector providers (Reading Football Club Community Trust, MK Dons Sport & Education Trust and a third to be identified in Oxfordshire) deliver youth workers to engage with over 18s detained in custody to provide a “reachable moment” intervention and then an offer of longer-term mentoring in the community.	£50,000 VRU core grant 2023–2024.
Custody Navigators	A volunteer coordinator hosted by Thames Valley Police recruits, trains and coordinates volunteer Navigators who work in Abingdon Custody Suite (Oxfordshire) to offer an immediate sign-posting to support services. The scheme will expand to Loddon Valley Custody Suite to serve Berkshire .	£40,000 VRU core grant 2023–2024.
Custody Link Worker	A partnership with Oxfordshire County Council to deliver Drug & Alcohol Link Workers in Abingdon Custody, supporting improved referrals to services, coordinated via the Custody Navigator programme.	£50,000 funding via Oxfordshire County Council Public Health budgets.
Research into gender-sensitive approaches	Coordinating the delivery of a stage 1 research project (literature review and recommendations for next steps) into gender-sensitive approaches and women in the criminal justice system. Working with University of Reading and University of Exeter.	Funded with £60,000 from a Ministry of Justice BOLD programme grant. Research concludes early 2023–2024 for publication and consideration on next steps.
Serious Violence Reduction Orders monitoring	Supporting Thames Valley Police with resource to assist in the collation and reporting of data associated with the force's participation in the SVRO pilot.	



County Lines & Exploitation

The illegal drug market and the harm and risk factors created by substance misuse are key drivers to serious violence in our communities. The evolving threat of the county lines model of operation is driving new levels of exploitation and trauma, particularly in children and vulnerable people.

The network is led by Thames Valley Police officers and has a focus on coordinating the responses to county lines and drug related harm matters, including safeguarding processes to dis-incentivise the exploitation of the vulnerable and reduce serious violence.

This involves working in partnership across the Thames Valley in line with the Harm to Hope national drugs strategy and strategic combatting drugs partnerships.

A key role is the coordination of partnership responses across policing and local authority Public Health to respond to the health harms caused by substance misuse and to help break the cycle of drug use and associated crime and exploitation.

The network draws upon separate funding streams outside of the VRU core grant to support this work, in particular Home Office Surge funding delivered through the National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC). The seconded officers also work to meet Thames Valley Police's objectives while maximising the benefits to the wider VRU agenda by tackling drugs as a driver of violence.

The network includes an operational capability on behalf of Thames Valley Police, coordinating the force delivery of enforcement activity and the County Lines Intensification Week.

For the year ahead, the County Lines & Exploitation network is working on the following activities:

Network activity	Summary	Funding
Supporting operational activity	Officers lead work across the force to improve operational response to CDL and exploitation. This also includes the coordination of additional funding to deliver intensification weeks.	Additional Home Office Surge funding will be sought via the NCLCC.
Review of education and training – County Lines & Exploitation	A review of current training provision for police and partners on county lines, exploitation and drug related harm. Activity to enhance and deliver wider partnership opportunities.	All partners benefit from access to training materials and the Hydra training suite provided by Surrey Police. £32,000 secured for Thames Valley Police via the Surge fund for additional ICT and training.
PSHE schools training package	Lesson plans developed by the PSHE Association for schools to deliver to educate on the specific risks and practices of county lines models. Universally available.	£15,000 via the Grip grant
Cuckooing response	Development of a new multi-agency framework informed by national best practice to improve the response to cuckooing, delivering improved safeguarding processes and support, with joined-up working across partners.	
Officer carry of Naloxone/ Nyxoid pilot	To deliver a pilot of front-line officers carrying life-saving opiate overdose medication.	
Secure estate county lines coordination	Working with the secure estate in the Thames Valley to improve work in prisons which counters county lines activity and reduces violence within the secure estate.	
Drug related harm data sharing	Improving joint approaches to collecting, sharing and responding to information associated with drug related harm, exploitation and the connection to violence.	
CL&DH Special Interest Group	A collaborative community of practice for professionals and academics on the issue of county lines, exploitation and drug harm.	
Supporting partnership approaches to exploitation	Working across TVP and local partnership safeguarding processes to support coordination and improve responses, including the use of data-led approaches to identify those vulnerable.	£52,000 bid against Surge fund pending for Berkshire project.
Supporting the TVP establishment of new MASH team	Directly supporting the coordination of a training programme across the new MASH team	
Custody process for U18s at risk of exploitation	Working with TVP and the commissioned Liaison & Diversion services to improve the processes used in custody to support those vulnerable to exploitation.	
Enhanced enforcement opportunities for exploitation offenders	Supporting TVP to improve effective enforcement opportunities focused on exploitation offenders.	£52,000 bid against Surge fund pending for Berkshire project.



Research, Evaluation & Social Value

A core function of the VRU is how we support research into the approaches and effective practices to tackle the root causes of violence. The funding we receive from the Home Office to deliver pilot interventions is not to fund only the delivery but to enable us to undertake robust evaluation.

The VRU will invest over £100,000 in our capacity to undertake local evaluation of interventions

Through research and evaluation we can identify what works, or does not and create an evidence base. We also build our understanding of value for public money and return on investment. By doing this, we help improve processes and drive adoption and longer-term sustainability beyond the VRU grant funding.

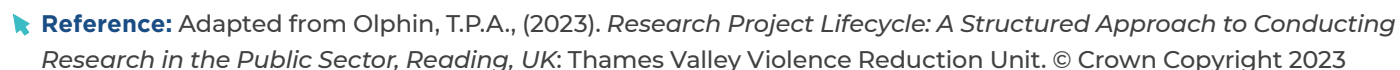
The VRU is embedding a research-based approach to service delivery. We will be aligning our programme of existing interventions, and the support we offer our local partners, around a new research life cycle which will ensure interventions are designed and delivered in a manner which yields best evidence.

The network maintains oversight of the VRU investment into a focused deterrence intervention in Milton Keynes from 2022–2023. In addition, the network will identify a new intervention for the VRU to invest into for the year ahead, with its design and implementation led by the research life cycle approach.

There is a close link between the VRU research and evaluation work and that of the Data, Digital & Technology network and the Thames Valley Together data-sharing architecture.

The network is also exploring how social impact and social value approaches, particularly with regard public sector commissioning, can become more sophisticated in their approach to support enhanced impact and longer-term sustainability.

Embedding a “what works” approach



Research, Evaluation & Social Value

The Research, Evaluation & Social Value network will deliver the following activities over 2023–2024.

Network activity	Summary	Funding
VRU Research Life Cycle	We will work to embed the VRU Research Life Cycle as a product and a guiding approach for both the VRU and our partners.	Funded under VRU grant for local evaluation.
Focused Deterrence intervention	The VRU invests as a contribution to Milton Keynes partnership's focused deterrence pilot, which will be further developed the year ahead.	£24,000 of VRU core grant 2023–2024 to the Milton Keynes partnership.
New intervention investment	The network will identify a new intervention for the VRU to invest into for the year ahead, with its design and implementation led by the research life cycle approach.	£113,000 of VRU core grant 2023–2024 available for investment.
Oversight and support in the design and implementation of research and evaluation activity across the VRU and supporting local partners	Through the VRU Head of Research a comprehensive and expert advice service is offered to guide the VRU's own programme of intervention evaluation but also to support wider partnership activities.	Part-funded through the evaluation proportion of the VRU grant, part-funded by the Grip grant.
VRU intervention evaluations	We will undertake evaluation activity of most commissioned VRU interventions. See next table.	Funded under VRU grant for local evaluation.
Unit Cost Calculator approaches	Working with the Data, Digital & Technology network to design, test and implement a standardised Unit Cost Calculator to provide information on value for money.	Funded under VRU grant for local evaluation.
Data Ethics Committee	The VRU established the Data Ethics Committee to advise on data use-cases and product development. Thames Valley Police has assumed the leadership but the VRU remains an active and leading partner.	Funded under VRU grant for local evaluation.
Leading nationally	Member of the government's Algorithmic Transparency Pilot to develop best practice for production of transparent algorithms for use in the public sector.	Funded under VRU grant for local evaluation.
Developing social value	We will work with experts and partners to support the development of new approaches to social value.	£60,000 of VRU core grant 2023–2024 is held to support with this work.

Evaluation plan for the VRU interventions

Over 2023–2024 all existing VRU interventions will be reviewed and the research life cycle applied to allow us to conduct rigorous evaluation where there is promise shown by the intervention.

For some interventions, this will involve a process evaluation as part of the review of business capabilities, to show how they have been implemented and how they can best be provided in the year ahead.

This will then allow for interventions to be evaluated through randomised controlled trial where possible.

The next table provides a summary of each intervention and current status within the life cycle process.

Gate 1 Undertaking literature review and experimental planning

Intervention activity	Summary	Next steps
School Exclusion Prevention Program, Oxford	Literature review is currently being conducted to identify mechanisms by which we might design or commission a provision for reduction of repeat school exclusion.	This will be assessed for the capability of running a randomised trial commencing in the 2023–2024 school year.
Speech and Language Therapy referrals in custody	Early stage consideration of an intervention using Speech and Language Therapy in custody.	Will be assessed for the capability of conducting a randomised trial within the 2023–2024 financial year.
Operation Paramount	Operation Paramount has shown a promise in helping families affected by parental incarceration.	Identify opportunities by which we may roll out to other areas as part of an evaluable trial, to enable us to quantify the benefits.
Counter narrative concepts	Initial literature review and experimental design	

Gate 2 Reviewing business capability for a full experimental trial

Intervention activity	Summary	Next steps
DARAT – algorithmic risk assessment for domestic abuse	New domestic abuse risk assessment tool (DARAT) for police. Assessing business capabilities in relation to implementing the system as a trial. DARAT is already built as an initial version, and is ready for pilot testing in two police forces within the next financial year.	This will also be subject to detailed review and assistance from Data Ethics Committee.
Problem Oriented Policing	Currently reviewing the mechanisms by which a problem oriented policing intervention could fit alongside our hotspots policing trial.	Will explore alongside Hotspot Policing App testing.

Gate 2 Process evaluation underway ahead of full experimental trial

Intervention activity	Summary	Next steps
VRU Custody Navigators	Pilot testing is being reviewed at present, with a process evaluation being conducted to identify optimal mechanisms for testing the use of custody navigators.	
Hospital Navigators	Review by Oxford Brookes University underway and is likely to continue as-is for 2023–2024 financial year.	Will explore potential for a higher quality trial of the program of work in the 2024–2025 financial year
Sports & Inclusion Fund	Provision of sports interventions is being reviewed at present with a view to commissioning experimental or otherwise evaluable trials of sports interventions in the criminal justice arena.	It is expected that some of these trials will commence in the 2023–2024 financial year but is dependent on identification of additional funding
Schools Navigators	Under internal review at present.	Business case and experimental plan being produced for a multi-site but non-randomised trial to be conducted in the 2023–2024 school year.

Gate 3 Feasible research project and Randomised Control Trial in progress

Intervention activity	Summary	Next steps
TVP Hotspot Policing App (Grip funded)	A randomised controlled trial of a phone-based tasking application. Assessing whether it can have an impact on levels of violent crime in areas that contain the highest concentrations of violent crime.	Initial randomised controlled trial found to be associated with non-significant decrease in violent crime. Trial being re-tested to establish a more impactful mechanism by which patrol can be used to prevent violent crime.
Focused deterrence intervention – Milton Keynes	A randomised controlled trial into focused deterrence of knife crime offenders. Part-funded by VRU.	This focused deterrence experiment is in its pilot phase at present, and upon completion of the pilot phase, it will be scaled up into a full trial.

Measures of our success

The strength of engagement and active leader participation in our Operating Model remains a measure of its success and we will respond to our partners and evolve the model as required.

Through our programme management function we will maintain oversight of our delivery throughout the year. We will monitor our spend against forecast, proactively manage our contracted third-parties and undertake regular reviews of intervention delivery against targets.

Our reporting processes will ensure we hold our delivery in review and can respond to barriers and challenges, while also sharing and celebrating success.

As our evaluations progress, we will identify opportunities to share learning with partners and evidence the impact where possible.

Through our governance and Operating Model structures we will ensure transparency in our delivery to both our sponsor unit in the Home Office and across our local partnerships and to the communities we serve.

Through careful programme and contract management, the VRU will invest the Home Office grant appropriately and ensure we can evidence both our delivery and the impact it has.

For the year ahead, our pilot interventions are invested to meet the following target numbers of young people to be reached:

Pilot intervention	Total people 24 and under	Total people 25 and over
Focused Deterrence	25	15
Custody Coaches	80	0
Custody Navigators	0	160
Operation Paramount	50	0
School Navigators	200	0
Hospital Navigators	150	50
Sports & Inclusion	200	0

Success for our partners

Over the coming year, local partners must respond to the new responsibilities of the Serious Violence Duty. They will continue to build strong collaborative structures which facilitate a whole-system approach and active leadership at the local level.

Through these partnerships they will further develop their understanding of local needs, publishing Strategic Needs Assessments. Each local area will develop their response to serious violence and its risk and protective factors. These plans will be published by January 2024 and be subject to scrutiny by the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner.

The VRU will work closely with local partnerships as our pilot interventions are delivered so the activity and approaches can be captured in these local plans. We will support locally developed interventions and approaches with support from the VRU to assist in developing evaluations and in sharing of evidence across our wider partnership.

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TACKLING VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES