

Annual Report

2022-2023

Laying foundations

The start of a three year Violence Reduction Unit programme

For the first time, in April 2022 the Home Office Serious Violence Unit issued the Violence Reduction Units with multi-year indicative grants, providing more certainty of funding beyond the immediate year ahead.

The direction was that VRUs were to develop a longer-term programme of work over the remaining three years of the budget cycle, from 1 April 2022 through to 31 March 2025.

Establishing a three-year programme which commenced on 1 April 2022 gave us the opportunity to:

- **Embed the Thames Valley Operating Model structure to lead and coordinate the multi-agency partnership. Through this, support all partners to play an active role in their local systems.**
- **Establish and invest into pilot interventions which best reflected local needs. These would represent the greatest potential for longer-term impact and adoption by local partners for a sustained future beyond central funding.**
- **Undertake longer-term evaluations of our pilot interventions, giving a better evidence base as to the processes required to run the intervention effectively and indications as to the outcomes. Thereby, build an evidence base on cost effectiveness and impact.**

While annual applications against the grant are still required, we now have a clear and consistent approach to our programme for the years ahead.

Our Vision and Core Purpose

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 multi-agency participation in the VRU Operating Model and by building the capacity within our local partnership systems.

Enabled by all partners through local leadership and delivery.

Our approaches and underpinning principles



Local need

Our programme and investments respond to the local areas of highest need and our understanding of the drivers of violence, as identified through the Thames Valley Strategic Needs Assessments and national policy context.

The [Strategic Needs Assessment in 2021–2022](#) set out local risk factors, drivers to violence and also explored some of the opportunities to implement earlier interventions or protective factors. This was a static document, providing useful insight which informs our work, but did not provide datasets for our local partners to use for their own purposes.

In December 2022, we developed our [Strategic Needs Assessment](#) further, making better use of technology.

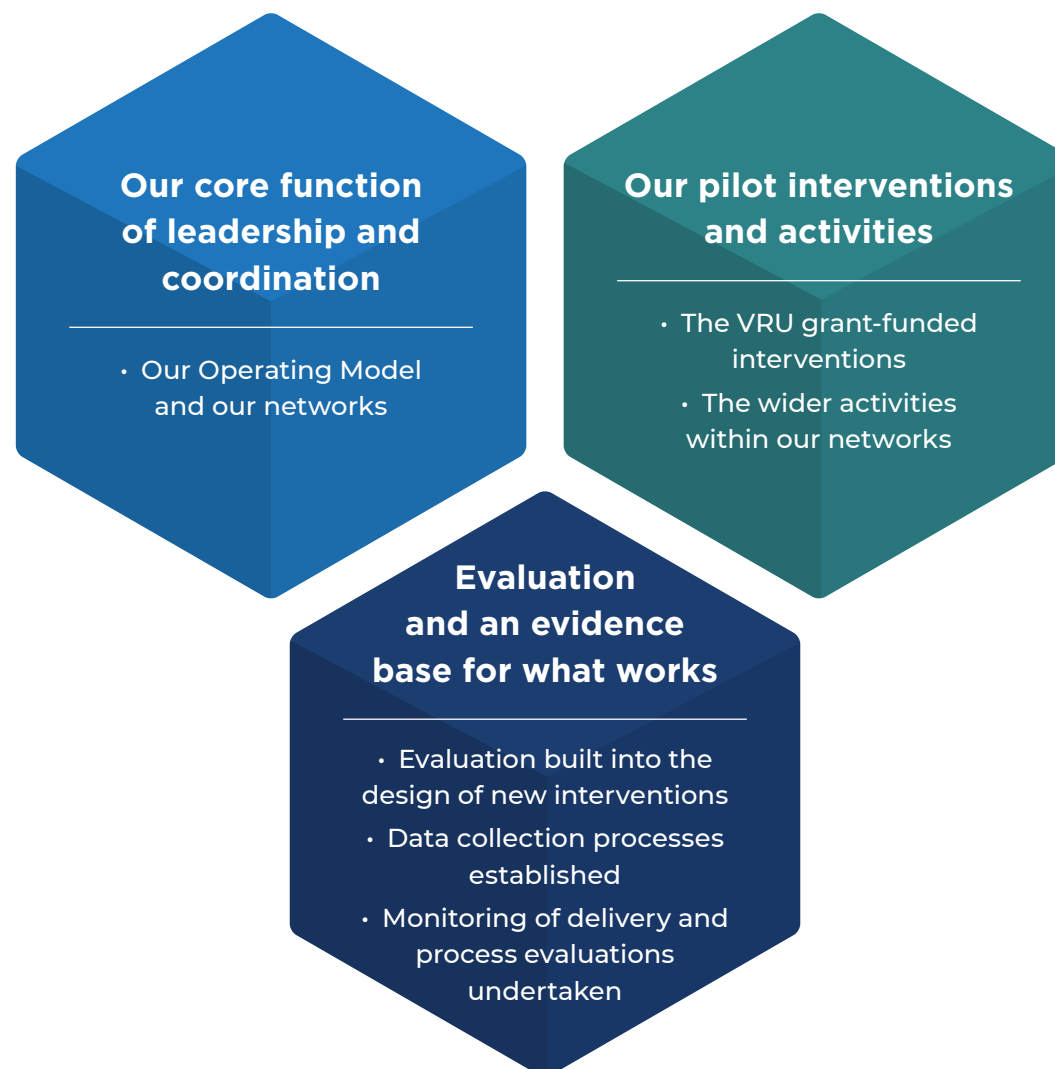
For the first time, we have been able to produce interactive datasets which allow the user to manipulate within the software and to download aggregated data, filtered by specific locations and types. This will support local partners in accessing data from police systems in a “self service” manner, for their own local purposes – not least, developing their own Strategic Needs Assessments.

The new interactive SNA has allowed us to share datasets with partners on what sort of violent incidents occur, where they happen, who they involve, and the cost of the harm caused.

We are working with the Thames Valley OPCC to build Thames Valley Together, our innovative data system, into future Strategic Needs Assessments. This will make it quicker and easier for analysts to pull together information to help them understand the nature and prevalence of violence and its risk factors across the Thames Valley.

Establishing our programme: The three elements for 2022-2023

We have focused this year on building a clear structure to our work, strengthening our partnerships and establishing the first in a three-year programme which is built around three core elements:



Our resourcing for 2022-2023

This year the VRU drew upon a number of sources of resourcing which we either directly managed, or in some way coordinated.

£2m	Home Office VRU core grant with a requirement for 10% local match funding.
£968,000	match funding provided by Thames Valley Police through in-kind resourcing of seconded officers.
£75,000	Home Office Grip programme grant to Thames Valley Police, coordinated by officers in the VRU.
£35,000	Home Office funding to support our national leadership role on data-sharing approaches.
£30,000	StreetGames UK contribution to part-fund the VRU Sports & Violence Impact Manager post.
£164,000	total match funding from other sources (local and national budgets) generated by StreetGames UK toward additional "Sports Plus" interventions.
£97,000	match funding into the Operation Paramount partnership with the charity Children Heard & Seen.
£60,000	from the Ministry of Justice BOLD programme to undertake research into gender-sensitive approaches.
£56,000	corporate sponsorship to fund Reading's amnesty art project

Investing the VRU core grant 2022-2023

**Our core function
of leadership and
coordination**

£940,000

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

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

£160,000

**Our pilot
interventions
and activities**

£900,000

Hospital Navigators	£125,000
School Navigators	£200,000
Schools social skills package	£20,000
Custody Coaches & Custody Navigators	£115,000
Sports & Inclusion	£150,000
Focused Deterrence	£150,000
Operation Paramount	£29,000
Trauma informed training	£100,000
Reading Amnesty Art	£10,000

Total grant:

£2m

45% invested
in pilot
interventions

17% intervention
spend invested
in evaluations

Establishing the VRU programme networks

Over the course of the year, we evolved the structure of our core programme team.

We aligned our staffing to six networks and have located all our interventions and wider activities within these networks.

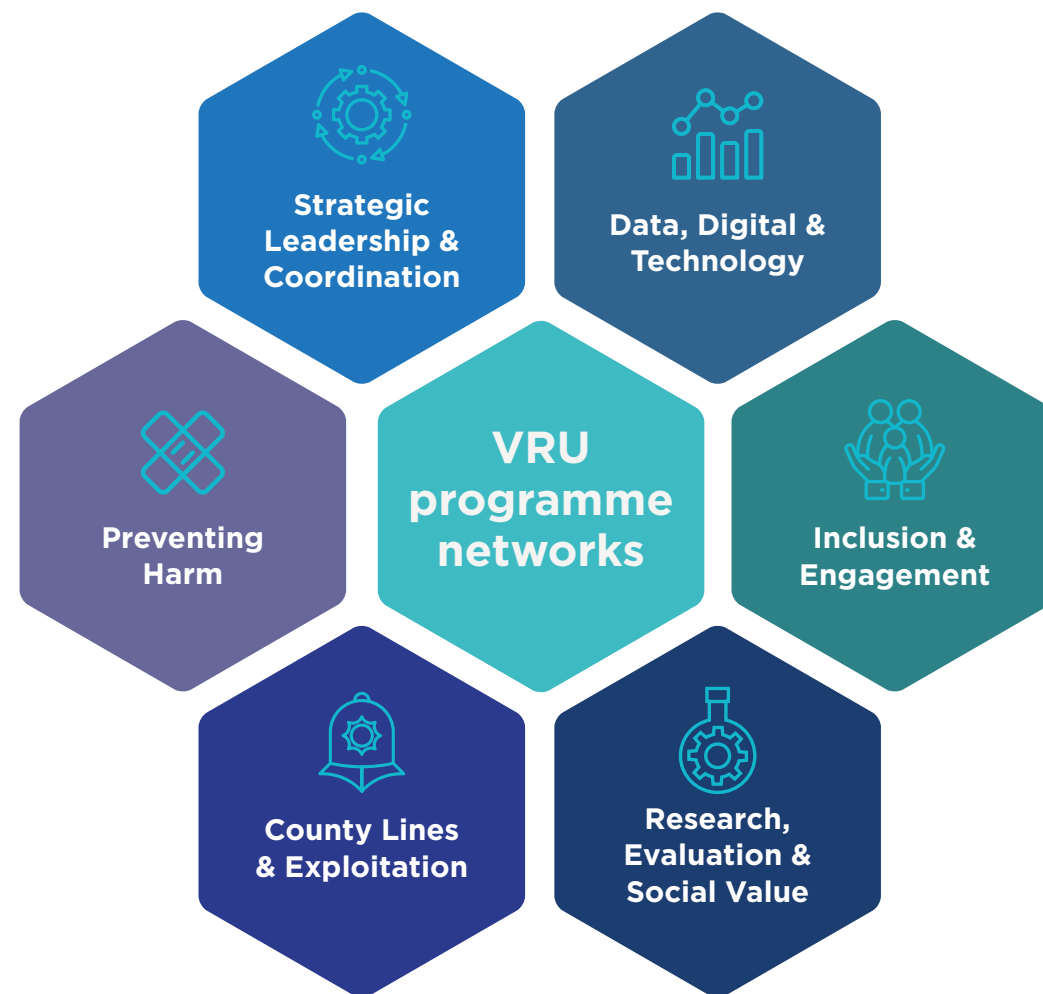
We aim to create networks which are collaborative, with our teams reaching out to local partnerships to embed our work in their local plans. We work with academics and expert practitioners and involve the voluntary and community sector.

Through the six networks, we deliver our core function of leadership and coordination.

The networks have also been successful in generating opportunities for new match funding contributions to support our work locally.

Leading nationally:

The Violence Reduction Unit is leading the national VRU network on data-led approaches. Our approaches to developing systems, infrastructure and processes to support multi-agency data sharing continue to mature. Over the past year we continued to take a leading role in supporting the wider roll-out and expansion to other areas across the country.





Strategic Leadership & Coordination

Our Programme Management Office

The VRU's team works across the six networks to oversee all of our programme of work.

We have also established a strong Programme Management Office function to provide a single means of oversight of what is a complex programme of activity.

Through the Programme Management Office, we are able to manage all aspects of the VRU core grant and other funding streams and resources. We have developed robust means of managing procurement and commissioning, managing finances, ensuring our staffing structures are correct, upholding information governance and security matters.

We have co-opted specialists in these various fields from within Thames Valley Police to support the Programme Management Office's function.

We also manage all the intervention performance and monitoring activity, providing regular reporting to the Home Office and our partners, risk management as well as the production of mandated products.

The Programme Management Office also plans and coordinates the VRU Operating Model meetings, delivers communications and undertakes wider stakeholder engagement.

Delivery of the VRU Operating Model

Over the past year, we have continued to convene our partners through our structure of meetings and networks of communication.

The VRU Operating Model was established to enable us to have regular engagement with partners and to provide support and leadership particularly as we approached the incoming Serious Violence Duty.

More tactically, it allowed us to involve partners in the development of our intervention programme and to build awareness and connectivity within the local place-based systems.

While Strategy and Operational Board took a priority focus upon our nine place-based partnerships, we also developed other mechanisms to enable engagement with a diverse range of partners across different specialisms. This includes with sports partners, with academics and with the voluntary and community sector.

Getting 'upstream' of the Duty

During the year we placed an emphasis on supporting partners with readiness ahead of the Duty, through raising awareness of developing policy, consultations, sharing and discussing guidance and looking ahead to implementation. We ran workshops on Strategic Needs Assessments, on development of Local Plans and on readiness. By continuing to fund the nine Violence Reduction Coordinators, we built their capacity to respond to the Duty requirements.

Strength in partnerships

Despite complex arrangements across the Thames Valley, we continued to enjoy strong partnership relationships at all levels.

By convening the widest range of partners we are able to drive the widescale adoption of data-led, public health approaches to tackling violence.

Our quarterly VRU Strategy Board convenes senior partners from across the nine geographic place-based partnerships, from regional partners such as HM Prisons & Probation Service, Youth Justice Services, but also community and voluntary sector representatives.

The VRU Operational Board convenes the funded Violence Reduction Coordinators and other tactical roles working in local geographies and across partner organisations.

In addition to our routine Operating Model meetings, in November we held our first “Partnerships & Priorities” conference, involving partners in the developing programme of investment for 2023 and sharing of best practice.

The event allowed for workshops exploring the incoming Duty, what readiness would look like and how it would be assessed.

The agenda also explored sustainability of our programme, involving the University of Oxford’s Blavatnik School of Government as we discussed opportunities for new commissioning approaches and driving social value.



Enabling the Voluntary & Community Sector

The VRU has invested heavily in approaches which seek to involve the voluntary and community sector in our work, both through our engagement and through our direct intervention investment.

We recognise the vital role they play, the capacity and capabilities they bring and their representation of our local communities and those we seek to support.

In September, our Sports & Inclusion Board, chaired by StreetGames, held a “Power of Community Sport” event for the many grass-roots community sport providers in the Thames Valley.

This was followed in November by our “Safer & Stronger Together” event which convened nearly 100 representatives from the VCS.

Both events championed the role of the VCS, shared their good work but also sought to challenge their approaches – encouraging greater collaboration and delivery at scale and working in response to identified needs as key partners in local systems.



Convening our health partners and mapping local service pathways

This year, to support stronger connectivity with our health partners the VRU commissioned NHS Arden & Gem Clinical Commissioning Support Unit (CSU) to develop a system and pathway mapping exercise.

The Thames Valley region is spanned by three separate NHS Integrated Care Systems (ICS) led by a respective Integrated Care Board (ICB):

- Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire (BOB)
- Frimley Health – which includes the Slough/Wexham Park area
- Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes – which covers the Milton Keynes area

In addition, Public Health functions sit within the upper-tier local authorities.

NHS Arden & Gem CSU completed two key products this year; the first is a system and key leader mapping exercise which provides a clear overview of the complex NHS and Public Health landscapes. It will help our local partnerships to create connections and join up work, particularly in readiness for the Serious Violence Duty.

The second product was a health pathways and services mapping exercise with a focus on those directly relevant to young people with vulnerabilities and where the services could assist in addressing risk factors associated with violence. This product is available to our local partnerships to aid their understanding of service provision in their local area and again for the purposes of Serious Violence Duty planning.





Data, Digital & Technology

The network has continued work to build the *Thames Valley Together* data-sharing platform, working closely with Thames Valley Police's Joint ICT department, which provides the hosting architecture.

We were able to develop the first proof of concept products harnessing the capability including a strategic data explorer and a new dashboard to support the focused deterrence intervention.

Six partnerships have now been supported to provide data into the system at a standard which meets the requirements of the Serious Violence Duty.

Buckinghamshire Council has been one of the leading partners in preparing to use the platform with a team of their staff given access and trained in how to use the analytical tools and utilise the available data sets.

We continue to work to support the remaining three partnerships and aim to have complete participation in the year ahead.

The team has worked closely with the VRU to ensure that the data processes can support the important evaluation activity for the year ahead, assisting in the delivery of evidence of impact and value for money.

Another major achievement for the year has been the engagement with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and participating in their "Sandbox" process, providing further assurance of the processes, security and data protections built into *Thames Valley Together*. This process will conclude in 2023-2024.

The team also provided significant support to Thames Valley Police and the Grip programme, developing a range of innovative products. These included the Hotspot Policing App, Serious Violence Dashboard and a wider suite of analytical and supervisory tools that places data at the heart of operational policing, putting the right officers in the right place at the right time.

**THAMES VALLEY
TOGETHER**

Establishing the Data Ethics Committee

The VRU established a Data Ethics Committee to ensure transparency and the ethical use of data, particularly important as we build the Thames Valley Together platform and harness the analytical power it provides.

The Committee provides an expert advisory function, able to consider proposed new uses of data and the way it is analysed and shared, to inform decisions or action.

The role of the Committee is not to make decisions, but recommendations, considering risks, benefits, confidentiality, equality and transparency.

These recommendations will help the partner organisation that holds the data to make the final decision on its use.

The Committee is chaired on a rotating basis by one of its members, which includes members of the community and wider expertise from academics specialising in data science, data, ethics, human and computer interaction, clinical psychology and more.

Importantly, the Committee has been set up with the ability to co-opt into its discussions those who are most affected by the data use-case being discussed. This allows its membership to be extended flexibly, so that it is operating beyond just a fixed number of core members, thereby improving representation as necessary.

The VRU has now passed the Committee to be led by Thames Valley Police as part of its business-as-usual approaches.

**THAMES VALLEY
TOGETHER**

The first deliberative forum on data ethics

Young people have their say

On 15 November 2022, in partnership with the prestigious University of Oxford's Ethox Centre, the VRU held a deliberative forum for young people to debate a proposed use of data.

Held at the university's Big Data Institute, recognised as global centre of excellence for data ethics, the event brought together over 60 students from three Oxfordshire schools.

Previously, the schools had participated in events which developed their understanding of what is personal data, how it may be used by authorities and why, the benefits and potential pitfalls.

They then brought this knowledge with them to the forum event, where they were presented with a real proposed data use-case.

They were asked to consider the concept of contagion amongst and across social networks – how violence can spread – and whether by using information and data the police and partners could predict and take early preventative action on those involved.

The students were facilitated in their discussions to reach their own set of recommendations and areas of consideration or concern.

At the end of the day, each group presented to an expert panel made up of Matthew Barber, the Police & Crime Commissioner, senior police officers and the Director of the VRU.

The levels of engagement were impressive, carefully considering balances around data sharing, who should make the intervention and at what point, what role for consent, and what was an appropriate intervention.

Their overarching recommendation was that the proposed data use was appropriate, but they made some very clear constraints and considerations to any application that may be developed in the future.

The event was a powerful demonstration of how a wider community – particularly those who are disproportionately affected by a chosen use of data – can be facilitated to play an important role in shaping the ethical development of approaches.



Our interventions



2022-2023 was the first of our three-year programme, allowing us to focus on the set-up and establishment of a suite of pilot interventions. These allow us to test the delivery and impact of innovative approaches which address the root causes of violence.

Our interventions are directed by our understanding of local need – prioritising investment into those areas identified by our Strategic Needs Assessment.

Some of the interventions had already been piloted in the previous year, allowing for their continued delivery, providing beneficial interventions from the very start of the year.

Others were new, requiring full scoping exercises with partners, identification of third-party providers, procurement and commissioning processes and the letting of contracts, recruitment and vetting of staff. This led to delays in the commencement of some interventions, but despite this all have now been taken into delivery.

Delivery against targets has been strong, despite delays in their commencement, with most meeting or exceeding the original delivery targets.

Our pilot interventions for 2022/2023:



Hospital Navigators

A 'reachable teachable' moment in A&E departments

As one of the longest established VRU-funded interventions, the Hospital Navigator programme continues to work with five A&E departments in busy hospitals serving the whole Thames Valley.

The VRU commissions a VCS partner with links into the local community to operate the scheme, recruiting, training and coordinating volunteers who work alongside NHS staff in A&E departments.

Our target:

150 aged 24 and under,
50 aged over 25

Delivered by end of financial year:

375 aged 24 and under,
254 aged over 25

Hospital Navigators work with those admitted in “risky circumstances”, offering a friendly face and someone to talk to once they have been treated. They discuss the circumstances of their admission and the potential support that could perhaps help them make positive changes.

Often, admissions are young people experiencing mental health crisis, exposed to alcohol or substance misuse, or who have suffered injuries from violence or self-harm.

The Navigators offer both immediate signposting and in a number of the schemes they also link back to a wider community-based mentoring offer, so the support continues once that person has returned home.

NHS teams repeatedly praise the scheme as offering some additional resource to help support someone who is vulnerable, helping to lessen the burden on busy medical teams and ultimately it is hoped to reduce further admissions by changing behaviours.

Another strength of the programme has been the ability to coordinate across five NHS hospital trusts and with five different voluntary sector providers. This has been supported by committed leadership supplied by Alison Chapman, of the NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire & Berkshire (BOB) Integrated Care Board.

This leadership has extended not only to coordination of the intervention, but also to engaging the wider NHS structures to explore how it can be built into future commissioning plans to provide longer-term sustainability.

The VRU is working with Oxford Brookes University to undertake an evaluation of the Hospital Navigator intervention scheme with a report due early 2024.

CASE STUDY ▶ YMCA Milton Keynes

National Crimebeat Award winner

In March 2022, Milton Keynes YMCA was recognised for its work to support vulnerable people through its Hospital Navigator project, delivered in partnership with Milton Keynes University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

The National Crimebeat is a youth crime prevention charity of the High Sheriffs' Association in England and Wales. An awards ceremony takes place in London in March each year to recognise innovative and effective crime prevention projects led by young people.

Tayler Tookey, who leads the coordination of the scheme for the YMCA MK and is herself a volunteer, said:

“Our brilliant team of volunteers have worked really hard over the past year to provide vital support to young people experiencing gang activity, serious violence or domestic abuse. We know that when people are in hospital, there is a reachable moment when intervention can be successful. It’s incredibly rewarding to see the impact this scheme has had on the young lives of those we have supported.”



Schools Navigators

Expanding mentor support into schools



Disengagement with education and suspension or expulsion stand as significant risk factors for young people becoming involved in crime and violence.

The VRU commissioned a new intervention programme which provides youth workers into schools, delivering one-to-one support for young people struggling with engagement or behaviour. Each will work with a cohort of young people for a period of time, around six weekly sessions on average.

Starting Point, a charity providing mentoring and support for young people, work across Reading. Their two Schools Navigator roles work across four schools, supporting young people who have been identified by the school to benefit from some additional support.

Their mentoring approach seeks to explore over a number of sessions their own assessment of their strengths and weaknesses, their emotions and the issues that may create challenges for them or influence behaviours that may cause difficulties at school or with their peers.

On completion of their sessions with the Schools Navigators, Starting Point's model seeks to utilise their network of volunteer Community Mentors. Where a young person is willing, a more enduring "match" is made with a mentor who then supports them outside of school. They spend time on shared interests and activities and build a relationship where advice and support can be offered.



Emma

Starting Point
Schools Navigator



Fran

Starting Point
Schools Navigator

Schools Navigators

Expanding mentor support into schools



SOFEA Milton Keynes is a charity providing education, employability and work experience training and employment opportunities. Their two Schools Navigator posts work with six schools across Milton Keynes.

They use a similar strengths and needs approach to exploring how to support a young person to make their own behaviour changes.

They have worked with those at risk of exclusion or with behaviour problems but also some identified as having wider risk factors including involvement in drugs or at risk of being exploited by others.

SOFEA are also a provider of alternative education at their Milton Keynes facility. When not working in one of the six other schools, the two Schools Navigators provide the same approach to those on the SOFEA education provision.

SOFEA also offers opportunities to those over 16, helping them to engage in employability training and work experience, supporting with CV writing and job hunting. They also provide therapeutic support, social events, trips out and activities which aim to boost social skills and give safe spaces.



Paul Cheesbrough

SOFEA Schools Navigator

**CASE STUDY**

Schools Navigator support, Reading

Lewis*, 14, was disengaged in education, with very low attendance and receiving multiple detentions. His school put him forward to the Schools Navigator to help increase his motivation as he heads towards starting GCSEs. Lewis attended all four sessions with the Navigator in school and was quick to arrange a fifth session outside of school.

He was offered ongoing support with Ryan, a Starting Point Community Mentor who shares a love of films and who has a similar personality and shared life experiences. They get on well and their relationship continues to build, with continued contact between them.

Most importantly, his school has commented on improved behaviour and overall engagement compared with his previous school years.

* Name changed to protect individual.

CASE STUDY

Feedback from Shenley Brook End School

“SOFEA has had a great impact on the kids that have been having regular sessions with Rae and Paul.

“Some of the students have opened up and told these guys things that were not yet known by the school so we have been able to act. The students welcome the friendly “listening ear”, helping them to share information on their situations/relationships/home lives.

“Paul and Rae have always been happy, smiling and have built some great bonds with students. The students look forward to seeing Rae and Paul and will actively ask me when they are next in.”

Jules Peters Behavioural coach,
Shenley Brook End School, Milton Keynes

Our target:

200 aged under 24

Delivered by end of financial year:

204

Custody Coaches

Creating a reachable moment for detainees in police custody

The VRU is working with two of the professional football club community trusts to deliver a custody-based intervention offering an immediate offer of signposting to support and longer-term mentoring to those detained in police custody.

Our target:

80 aged 18–24 and

160 aged 25 and over

Delivered by end of financial year:

105 aged 18–24 and

149 aged 25 and over

This includes engagements by both Custody Coaches and Custody Navigators

Milton Keynes FC Sport & Education Trust (SET) provide a trained and vetted Coach to work in Milton Keynes custody suite, while Reading FC Community Trust have three Coaches who support Loddon Valley (Reading) and Maidenhead custody suites – covering the majority of Berkshire. A third provider for Abingdon custody suite (Oxfordshire) is being finalised.

They work with those aged 18 – 24 years old and who have been arrested and detained for an offence associated with violence.

The Coach's independence from the police or other authorities, their use of sport to break down barriers and their direct links to the local community help them to make connections and offer support.

With major delays in police vetting, there were initial challenges in enabling the Coaches to work directly in custody, but they still found ways to make contact and offer support. With vetting now in place, although late in the delivery year, their ability to reach those in custody will increase.

The Reading scheme has had success in using their sports programmes to secure interest from a number of those they have engaged with.

The Milton Keynes scheme has developed some excellent connections with local employment agencies and has made supporting entry to employment a priority part of their offer.

CASE STUDY Custody Coaches

Keith Greene is one of Reading FC Community Trust's Custody Coaches. He has been supporting Shara, a 21-year-old woman who has had repeated arrests recently associated with alcohol-related incidents.

Keith has supported her to confront the turmoil in her life caused by a recent break-up, her housing challenges, family break-down and the effect of alcohol.

Having lost her job, Keith has focused on helping her to look for work, apply for suitable roles and remain confident despite knock-backs. Keith is confident that Shara will find a new role soon and it will give her some much-needed stability.



Keith Greene

Reading FC
Community Trust

Paul Stewart is the Custody Coach at MK Dons Sports & Education Trust. He has built relationships with a number of recruitment agencies, identifying those who look beyond an offending history and would still offer work.

He has had success in finding one man an interview which led not only to being offered a job but an apprenticeship with a major rail contractor.

He has also coached one young man to better understand the longer-term effects of alcohol and violence, exploring the potential impact on his employment, his family, and helping them to take their time in custody as a "wake up call" to positively change their behaviour.



Paul Stewart

MK Dons SET

Custody Navigators

Volunteers offering signposting in custody

The Custody Volunteer Navigator scheme initiated in 2022 applies the same “reachable moment” approach to offering support while in custody, but uses volunteers from the local community to offer that independent engagement.

The VRU has funded a dedicated coordinator who supports volunteers, trains them and then works with them to provide the supportive offer. They work with the same cohorts, looking to make positive engagements, to discuss the reasons for offending behaviours and to make referrals to other services for assistance such as drug and alcohol, homelessness support and employment.

During 2022/2023 the programme was delivered only in Abingdon custody, serving Oxfordshire, but is to expand to Aylesbury covering Buckinghamshire.

CASE STUDY Custody Navigator

Ale Ferrari has a busy day job as a leading academic, but she still finds time to volunteer as a Custody Navigator.

“I have volunteered with Thames Valley Police in other roles as I find policing fascinating and something quite different from my career.”

“Volunteering has been positive for me, giving me new skills and experiences. I am finding it rewarding to be able to provide an independent, non-judgemental conversation with people in custody.”

“I have found many people value the opportunity to chat, they do open up and talk about wider issues and by doing so it helps them to see what may be driving their behaviour and to reflect on what they could do to change things for the better.”



Ale Ferrari

Custody Volunteer
Navigator



Sports and Inclusion

A strategic approach to enhancing sport for good

We continue our strong partnership with StreetGames UK, the national charity working to champion grass-roots sports for the disadvantaged and as a protective factor.

StreetGames chair our VRU Sports & Inclusion Board, which brings together leading local sports clubs, the four “Get Active” partnerships which span the region and a number of local organisations.

Through this board we have developed a strategic approach which harnesses StreetGames’ experience and national partnerships, while also engaging and empowering local organisations.

The Thames Valley Strategic Plan for Sport has informed how the VRU has invested the Sports & Inclusion Fund, driving new interventions for vulnerable young people.

StreetGames has also undertaken an audit of community sport provision, identifying provision and gaps.

The strategy was launched in September 2022 at our first Sport for Good conference, convening nearly 80 representatives from across the region, all of whom are working to use sport to engage with young people and to offer enhanced support opportunities through that connection.



The Thames Valley Strategic Plan for Sport:

Three key objectives:

- Deliver more sports and inclusion provision in the most deprived areas and vulnerable communities in the Thames Valley
- Support greater capacity and capability in the workforce, embedding trauma informed approaches
- Increase the number of vulnerable/at-risk young people being referred into meaningful sports interventions

The VRU Sports & Violence Impact Manager

In 2022, the VRU entered a joint-funding initiative with StreetGames UK to recruit a dedicated member of staff to work across the Thames Valley as a Sports & Violence Impact Manager.

Chelsea Piggott joined the team and has been working to build new relationships, to identify areas of provision, creating opportunities for collaboration across providers and supporting applications for funding.

Chelsea has given the VRU additional capacity to support our local partnerships and grass-roots sports organisations so that they can deliver more sport as a preventative intervention.

“I was already working locally within the Get Berkshire Active partnership and this role has given me an opportunity to work at a regional level and with a broader partner base.

“Through the Community Sport Audit process, we are continuing to identify providers of sport-based interventions and those areas where we can direct additional support and investment.

“We are getting more young people involved in positive and healthy activities, improving their social skills, helping them make new connections with positive role models and in some areas even go on to find training and careers.”



Chelsea Piggott

Sports & Violence
Impact Manager

Sports & Inclusion Fund

Early intervention using the 'Sport Plus' model

In 2022, we made available a £100,000 Sports & Inclusion Fund to support investment into the five priority geographies as identified through both the Strategic Needs Assessment and the Community Sport Audit tool.

Our target:

120 aged under 24

Delivered by end of financial year:

127 aged under 24

The funding aims to deliver upon the Thames Valley Strategic Plan and supports "Sports Plus" activities – where sport is used to engage young people while also making a wider support offer, such as provision of mentoring or education opportunities.

VRU investment also generated other match funding from Sport England and local partners.

Funded organisation	VRU funding	Sport England funding	Local match funding
Reading FC Community Trust	£19,500		
Milton Keynes consortium	£20,000	£10,000	£15,000
Slough	£20,000	£10,000	£9,000
Oxford – the PT Project	£12,998		
Wycombe Wanderers FC Community Trust	£8,990	£7,010	£14,500
New activity in Oxford – being finalised	£18,512		

Provision is varied, from football sessions to street dance, from weightlifting to gardening and allotment keeping.

Similar with our other interventions, provision did not commence until late into the delivery year but despite that, our partners were able to meet and slightly exceed our target number of young people to be successfully engaged. The funded provision will continue to deliver benefits into the next financial year.

CASE STUDY ▶ Reading FC Community Trust

In October 2022, VRU funding to Reading Football Club Community Trust enabled them to run a Friday evening football session available to those 18 – 25 years old, working in partnership with the local young person counselling service, No. 5.



This filled a gap particularly for young people who on turning 18 were no longer able to attend sessions put on for younger children.

As a drop-in session, it is informal and relaxed allowing young people from across the local area to attend. Many have formed close relationships with each other and with the staff supporting the sessions.

They participate in a fun, healthy and positive activity in a safe environment, supported by professional qualified coaches many of whom have grown up locally and who have moved through the programme themselves. They have their own experiences of the challenges of growing up.

No. 5's Nathanya Legesse was himself a beneficiary of Reading FC's youth programmes and has gone on to become a trained counsellor involved in community outreach projects like supporting the Friday night sessions.

“Through these sessions we’ve brought a diverse group together, many of whom have come from challenging experiences and backgrounds. We are using the football as an opportunity to build up their social skills, manage some of the issues they may have experienced and created ways in which we can offer routes to wider support.

“We’re also working with them to help us shape a new service – a local open access young people’s Hub in Reading – which will launch soon. I’ve been directly able to engage the guys who come to these sessions in helping us to design how that will work so that it is tailored to meet their needs.”

Attracting additional funding for sports interventions

StreetGames as a national body has also been working with the Ministry of Justice to support the distribution of the Youth Justice “Turnaround” Fund to prevent offending and reoffending.

Coordinated through the VRU’s programme, an additional £100,000 was secured for the Thames Valley, further increasing the resources and range of sports intervention activities available.

Each programme was required to deliver a 12-week provision, with the following local projects funded:

Funded organisation	Ministry of Justice funding
Milton Keynes Dons FC	£20,000
Oxfordshire Youth	£20,000
Ride High Milton Keynes	£20,000
Together As One – Slough	£20,000
UDOIT Dance Foundation – MK and Bucks	£20,000



CASE STUDY UDOIT! Dance Foundation

Using streetdance to break down barriers

UDOIT! Dance Foundation is a national charity giving young people access to training from professional street dance tutors to build confidence in dance, self-expression and performance, while also addressing issues current to young people.

Funded to deliver a 12-week referral programme in Milton Keynes, UDOIT! worked with the local Milton Keynes Council and local agencies to identify a core group of young people aged 10–17 who would attend in small groups after school.

Young people were chosen based on a range of criteria and vulnerabilities, including educational engagement, risk of crime or anti-social behaviour. Over the course of the programme, 16 young people completed their sessions and participated in a final dance show.

As well as the dance, they also explored other sessions focused upon anti-social behaviour, the danger of knife crime and developed their social skills and leadership qualities. The young people's engagement with these sessions was positive and they all reported having learnt new skills and better understood the need to manage their behaviours so they could meet their full potential.

Madalyn said:

“I loved the sessions as I felt I could express my feelings within dance, when I was really struggling to speak about them to anyone.”

Chris said:

“I went away with my brain full of all the information about knife crime and its impact on people and it really made me think about how I just didn't want to get involved with anything like that.”

CASE STUDY Saddling up with Ride High

StreetGames UK was able to secure funding via the Ministry of Justice “Turnaround” fund for sports activities and a grant of £20,000 was made to Ride High, a children’s charity based in Milton Keynes.

Ride High works with disadvantaged young people, those who may have challenges with educational engagement, looked after children, those with mental health problems, victims of abuse or neglect and those who are vulnerable to a range of risk factors.

They provide young people with the opportunity to ride and work with horses, while supporting them to build their confidence, self-esteem, social skills and undertake educational activities to support their wider achievement.

During the 12-week programme, working in small groups they form close relationships with the staff and volunteers.

They learn new skills, acquire new knowledge, build relationships with their peers and adults which all contributes to their social skills and confidence.

The sessions also include education and art classes and completion of a record of their achievements. They are encouraged to take this record back to school to assist them with further applications for education, training and employment.

Charlie has been cared for by his foster mum Alayne for several years. He has struggled with his emotions and keeping calm, which affected his engagement in school.

Alayne said: “Charlie has loved every minute. He started shy and nervous but soon built some incredible relationships - particularly with Mark, one of the instructors. This is really important as positive male role models and being able to trust adults has been quite a challenge for Charlie due to some of his experiences in life. He has really engaged with the educational aspects too and his record of achievement is a source of great pride to him. It’s given him a sense of direction too and he is already talking about pursuing a career, and the education he needs for that, in working with animals.”

Charlie said: “Coming here and working with the horses really helps to keep me calm. I’ve learnt a lot, all about how to look after animals and also what it takes to work in this sort of job. It’s definitely something I’m now interested in. I’ll miss coming here for the horses, but I know what I want to do now.”



Focused Deterrence

Milton Keynes Together Partnership develop new approach

The Focused Deterrence project was initiated in 2022. It is the first of the interventions to be established under a more devolved model of project delivery, with the funding passed directly to MK Together partnership, which undertakes all the commissioning, project management and partnership involvement.

Focused Deterrence is a process of focusing upon a cohort of high risk individuals and working intensively with them over time, providing opportunities and support into diversionary activity to help provide “off-ramps” to their offending behaviours. Simultaneously, the individual is closely monitored with appropriate enforcement activity by the police should they continue to offend. The intent is to apply a balanced “carrot/stick” approach to support behaviour change.

As with other interventions, there was a delay in establishing the project as the model was developed and staff recruited. However, an initial pilot commenced in March 2023, the last month of the delivery year.

Two Focused Deterrence Coordinators have been recruited to work with those on the cohort, coordinating their access to a varied support package, signposting to appropriate services and bridging gaps between available support.

Current cohort: 10 young people aged 11–17; 20 adults aged 18–25

Criteria for inclusion: In the past 12 months – two knife offences, or one knife and one violence/sexual offence in the community

That pilot has completed and the scheme is being expanded, aiming to add a further 10 young people and five adults.

Importantly, taking the time to design the scheme at the beginning has also allowed the embedding of an impact assessment designed-in from the outset, allowing a high quality evaluation which will deliver its first results due October 2023.

Operation Paramount

Supporting families left behind by parental imprisonment

The VRU has continued to lead the expansion of Operation Paramount, an innovative process to identify children of a parent who is sent to prison, allowing a prompt offer of support for the whole family by the charity Children Heard and Seen.



For the first time, data from the HM Prisons & Probation Service (HMPPS) database is being used not only to track a prisoner's entry, movement through and eventual release from prison – but also to direct support to those vulnerable family members left behind at the point of their imprisonment.

The data is taken into the *Thames Valley Together* data sharing platform and allows for analysis, which then prompts a home visit by a Thames Valley Police neighbourhood officer who makes an offer of a voluntary referral to the support charity Children Heard & Seen.

Children Heard & Seen is the only charity offering support to families in the community, providing parenting support, advice on navigating the prison systems, social activities, residential and counselling support.

Since November 2021 to early June 2023, 620 children recently affected by parental imprisonment were recognised across the Thames Valley with all of those suitable receiving the support offer.

To end of May 2023, nearly 30 children/families have accepted a referral to Children Heard & Seen to receive direct support. Other families may later reach out themselves, now they are aware of the charity and as their needs change.

Children with a parent in prison may also have experienced wider adverse childhood experiences and trauma and be vulnerable in other ways, all of which are recognised as potential risk factors to violence. By providing support at the earliest opportunity, the intervention helps to address this.

In 2022, the VRU provided part-funding to support a Family Support Officer recruited by Children Heard & Seen and who is dedicated to working with those families referred via the Operation Paramount initiative.

Trauma Informed Training

Embedding trauma informed practice remains an underpinning principle to the VRU's work and we support our diverse partnership to also adopt these approaches.

We commissioned the children's charity Barnardo's as experts in the field to tailor an existing trauma informed practice training package for our local need.

Our priority was to ensure that our own practitioners – those working across our suite of interventions – had received the training. Then, we widened the offer out to our local partners including local authorities, voluntary sector bodies, grass-roots sport and community groups and specific professional groups.

We took a tailored approach, ensuring that the training was contextually relevant to those we engaged with to maximise its impact.

In addition to face-to-face and virtual training sessions, Barnardo's will support the development of an awareness-level learning package which we can make available as a standing resource.

The training has also opened the opportunity for us to work to support our partners as they progress to becoming trauma informed organisations.

Our target:

200 professionals trained

Delivered by end of financial year: 160

Further delivery funded through to end of August 2023.



Feedback from professionals on Barnardo's Trauma Informed Training

Carly Brazier, Lead Trainer, Barnardo's

“Our programme of training delivered in partnership with the Violence Reduction Unit has seen us work with a diverse range of professionals and practitioners, from right across the Thames Valley region.

“We focused not only on raising their awareness and understanding of how traumatic experiences of all forms can shape a person's neuro-development and their behaviours, but importantly we also sought to contextualise the training to fit the experience and roles of those we were working with. By doing this, we have been able to tailor our training with scenarios and examples that are directly relevant and as such are far more impactful and easy to apply.

“The feedback we have had from those participating has been extremely positive to date. In addition to training over 200 professionals by the end of our contract, we will also make available a learning resource for the VRU to promote.”

Testimonials:

“It was great being in a group of like-minded people and it was very informative. Thank you Meg and Carly – it is clear you are both passionate about what you do and I think a lot more people would benefit from attending this training.”

Pastoral Support Tutor, Windsor

“Informative session, very dynamic and extremely useful for my practice.”

Social worker, Slough

“Really good session with a mix of theory and practice. The trainers were engaging and encouraging of contributions from all who participated, helping us to apply the approaches directly to the way we work.”

Custody Detention Officer

Reading Amnesty Art project

The Amnesty Art project was inspired by the Knife Angel which tours the country and drives knife crime education activity. Amanda and Stuart Stephens, who lost their son Ollie to knife crime in 2021, suggested it visit their home town of Reading, but agreed with partners that a more permanent installation, and one that is more trauma-aware for those who may have experienced knife crime, would be preferred.

The VRU provided a small amount of seed-funding to allow the partnership to work with a broad range of community groups to develop an approach, bid for corporate sponsorship and go on to see both the installation of a permanent sculpture for Reading and a commitment to a legacy outreach and education programme.

From a small investment of £10,000 from the VRU core grant, the project went on to generate nearly £60,000 of additional funding, including from the GWR community fund and BA Better Lives Fund.

Supported through Starting Point mentoring in Reading, a group of young people worked with a local artist who helped co-design the sculpture, develop a website of education resources and a wider digital brand to be used on further materials.

The final design – “The Armoured Heart” – was installed in May, standing as a symbol of peace and the potential of young people in Reading.



Evaluating what works: Building our capability to deliver the evidence to inform a cultural and financial shift

For the delivery year 2022–2023, the VRU has invested to increase its capacity and skill-set to support the delivery of robust intervention evaluation processes, helping us to build an evidence base as to what works.

We aim to use our evaluation activity to demonstrate the impact of public health approaches to tackling violence. This requires a clear evidence base on efficacy and impact, but also for the increased value both in saved cost and effort. By developing this evidence base and creating the mechanisms to present partners with compelling information and data, we will support a cultural and financially sustainable shift in approach.

As it took time to establish the interventions, the evaluation activity has been primarily focused on undertaking process evaluations which explore the set up and early delivery of the intervention, reflecting on what has worked well and areas to respond for improvements.

There has not been the opportunity to establish more robust trial approaches across all interventions, but we are now well placed to begin to re-design delivery mechanisms and data collection for many, allowing commencement of new evaluation techniques, including Randomised Control Trials, for the coming delivery year.

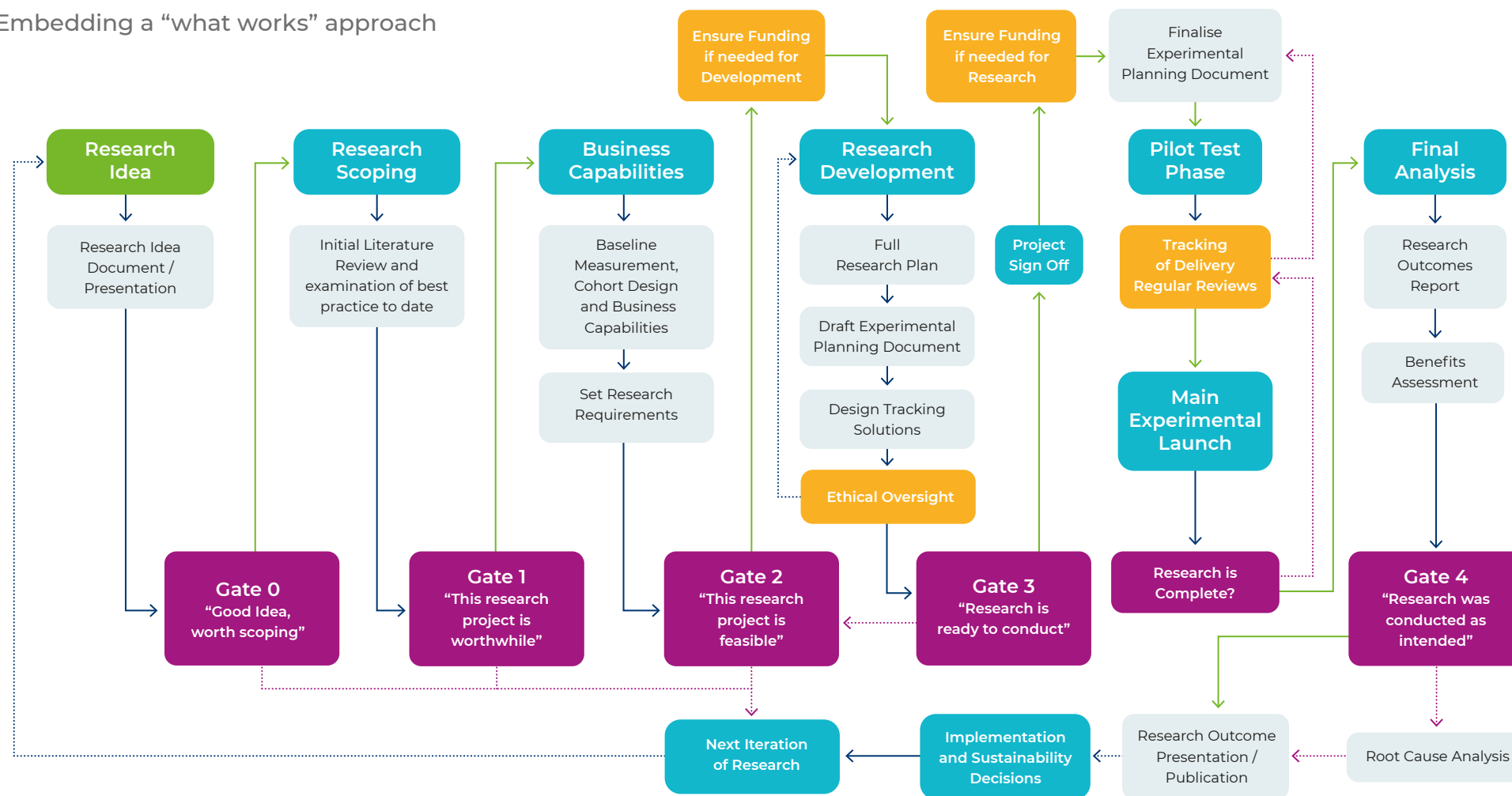
We have also designed a new “Research Life Cycle” process which will inform all our future intervention design and evaluation approaches.

The following table provides an overview of the interventions and the form of evaluation activity undertaken to date, what will follow and any products we anticipate completing:

Intervention:	Form of evaluation and brief description of its status:	Estimated date a product will be complete:
Schools Navigators	A process evaluation is being undertaken to examine the scheme establishment, with a move toward designing a more robust trial methodology commencing September 2023.	Process evaluation report complete August 2023.
Hospital Navigators	Oxford Brookes University commissioned to undertake a multi-site evaluation which will complete in early 2024.	OBU report to be published April 2024.
Focused Deterrence	The scheme has been designed from the outset to enable a Randomised Control Trial to be run, providing a high level of evaluation quality. Methodology has been finalised and data is being collected as the intervention delivers.	Interim RCT results for analysis 2023.
Custody Coaches	A process evaluation is being undertaken.	Process evaluation report complete August 2023.
Sports & Inclusion Fund	A process evaluation is being undertaken, supported by StreetGames.	Process evaluation report complete August 2023.
Op Paramount	Scoping underway to explore evaluation approach.	

The VRU Research Life Cycle

Embedding a “what works” approach



Reference: Adapted from Olphin, T.P.A., (2023). *Research Project Lifecycle: A Structured Approach to Conducting Research in the Public Sector*, Reading, UK: Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit. © Crown Copyright 2023

Thames
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TACKLING VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES