



Custody Coaches

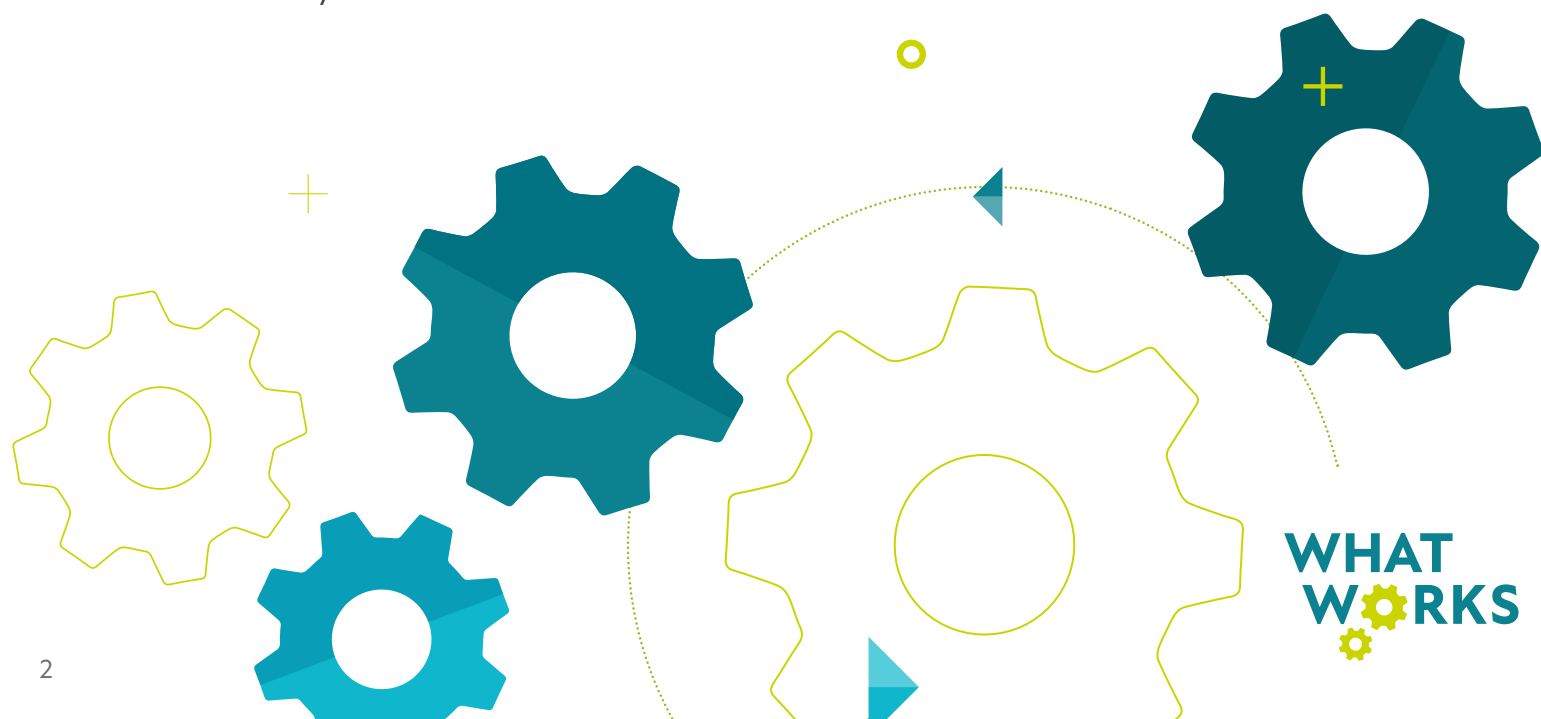
A Randomised Controlled Trial of
a Custody Navigator Programme



What is the What Works Series?

Welcome to Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership's "What Works" series; a collection of publications which present the results from our intervention evaluations and relevant pieces of research.

- A key role of the Violence Prevention Partnership programme is to invest our Home Office grant into the testing of new intervention approaches; funding not only their delivery in our local areas but to run robust evaluations of those interventions, adding to the evidence base around what works in preventing violence.
- We aim to gather evidence on the effectiveness and impact of interventions in preventing or reducing violence. That evidence is then played back to our local partnership systems to provide learning, and to inform the system change that is needed if we are to shift our focus towards higher impact intervention and diversion approaches.
- Our evaluations and research also contribute to a growing national evidence base, through formal academic publication and sharing with bodies such as the Youth Endowment Fund and the wider network of Violence Reduction Units (VRUs).
- Each of our interventions has been through a rigorous research and design phase, using our Research Project Lifecycle which puts in place a structure around which the highest quality of research projects can be designed and run. The Lifecycle ensures that interventions are based on quality ideas, knowledge of the existing evidence, analysis of data relating to cohort design and expected caseload, and well-documented design decisions. This ensures that the way that we implement and deliver the intervention is consistent, and enables us to deliver the right test of an intervention that is based on evidence, and that can actually be implemented in the real world. This also allows us to run multiple concurrent Randomised Control Trials (RCT), the gold standard approach to determining what works.
- Through the Thames Valley "What Works" series of publications, we provide all our partners with an accessible, yet complete, summary of key findings from our research. We aim to identify next steps and to assist in identifying how the learning could be applied to wider local services, to support that longer term, sustainable approach to preventing and reducing violence in our communities.
- For clarity, this is our local approach and is separate to other "what works" approaches being undertaken by other bodies, such as the Youth Endowment Fund. Although we will be sharing our evaluations accordingly to contribute to the wider evidence base.



What are we testing?

Each of our interventions or research exercises has been carefully designed around a clearly defined test methodology, cohort and research question. We have used our Research Project Lifecycle to ensure that we deliver an efficient, evidence-based intervention in a way that can be tested in the real world using the most rigorous research methods possible. More detail relating to our Research Project Lifecycle can be found at Appendix A on page 12.

This report summarises the findings of our trial of the Custody Coach intervention; a mentoring and referral style intervention, following the completion of a six month follow-up period after each person received the start of the intervention in custody. This report comprises all outcomes that have occurred since the intervention has been delivered and provides strong evidence that this approach is not high impact, and may have little to no impact on offending and re-arrest rates.

For the purposes of the Custody Coaches project:

- A randomised controlled trial was conducted to test this approach.
- The treatment cohort was made up of 137 young people aged between 18 and 30 who had been involved in offences involving non-domestic violence, threats of violence, or weapons offences (whether in the offence relating to their present custody arrival, or within the past 12 months).

Does making a support offer in the custody environment, with additional access to community mentors and sports provision reduce reoffending and custody return rates in the treatment cohort?

The Custody Coaches intervention was set up in January 2023, and a randomised trial was commenced in January 2024, following a process evaluation being conducted. It was designed to engage with people who were in police custody having been arrested for a violent or weapons offence in four custody blocks within Thames Valley Police.

It was hypothesised that time in custody may act as a reachable or teachable moment for an individual, and that meeting a mentor in custody could utilise the impact of the arrest as a significant personal event, to prompt positive behavioural change when they are potentially at their lowest, through a provision of mentoring support, hope and an opportunity to access additional support.

Key findings Summary

There was no significant difference between the treatment and control groups on any of the following factors:

- ▶ Rate of return to custody within 6 months
- ▶ Offending rate in non-police initiated crimes
- ▶ Offending rate in violent crimes
- ▶ Offending rate in violent or sexual crimes
- ▶ Offending rate in knife crimes
- ▶ Whether the person returned to police custody on one or more occasion

£300.25 Cost of the intervention was £300.25 per person being offered support.



Only 54.5% of people accepted seeing the custody coach in custody.



Only 13.6% of all young people who were offered a custody coach went on to receive additional support with mental health, addiction issues, housing, employment or mentoring.

Making a support offer to people in the custody environment does not appear to reduce their reoffending rates or the rate that they return to custody, when compared to business as usual treatment in custody.

Possible Explanations:

It is possible that whilst it is easy to identify and interact with people in the custody environment, that the stress caused by being in the custody environment may make it not an effective place to intervene. In other words, whilst physically reachable, people in custody may not be emotionally reachable, and so it may well not be a teachable moment.

It is likely that the light touch nature of this intervention, which was much less intensive than other interventions we have tested, may not have been sufficient to elicit a change in behaviour in this cohort, especially given that other teams such as liaison and diversion may also make offers to some people in custody with identified needs.

This adds to previous evidence produced in this What Works series which suggests that more in-depth problem solving approaches that are directed towards the needs of each individual have a greater effect, or impact, on behavioural change.

Intervention, Cohort and Trial Methodology

Intervention

The Custody Coaches intervention was set up in January 2023, and a randomised trial was commenced in January 2024 off the back of a process evaluation being conducted. It was designed to engage with people who were in police custody having been arrested for a violent or weapons offence in four custody blocks within Thames Valley Police.

The coaches delivering this intervention were trained community mentors employed by football clubs, who were contracted to perform the in custody mentoring, as well as referral and follow-up mentoring or support if wanted by the young person.

When a young person was eligible for the intervention, and randomised into the treatment group, the coach would attend the custody block and approach the young person to perform an assessment of the person's needs, with the young person's consent as a requirement for delivering this support. If accepted, they would explain numerous paths or interventions that they could refer the young person to locally, but again each referral was only made if consented to. They would not discuss the circumstances of the case, and would remain independent of the police investigation. The coach was there to support the young person in accessing support with abuse issues, mental health, or with access to education, employment or training, and could also provide mentoring support as a follow up service as part of the intervention.

In total, across the entire implementation, the custody coaches intervention was delivered to 403 young people; with 137 of these during the randomised trial period.

The cost of running the intervention, for the pre-experimental period and the randomised trial period, was £121,000; this equates to £300.25 per person being offered support. This cost is partially due to the open offer of ongoing support, and also due to it being difficult to predict when people who meet the referral criteria would attend each custody block, requiring coaches to travel to attend each appointment in custody. However, this cost does not include the police resources that supported delivery of the project; part time resource of one Sergeant as a project manager, and one police constable who performed the day to day identification of cases.

Cohort

Young people became eligible for the intervention if they were between 18 and 30 years old, and were arrested and were presently in police custody for one of the following offences, or were presently in police custody for another offence, but had been in custody for one of the offences listed below within the previous 12 months:

- Assaults – Section 18 (Causing Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) with intent), Section 20 (Wounding or Causing GBH), Section 47 (Causing Actual Bodily Harm (ABH)), Section 39 (Common assault), Assaults against emergency workers
- Public Order Offences – Section 5 (Threatening/abusive language), Section 4A (Threatening words/actions directed at a person), Section 4 (Causing fear of violence), Section 3 (Affray) or Section 2 (violent disorder)
- Robbery
- Possession of bladed articles (knives) and/or offensive weapons
- Breach of bail for all those offences in scope
- Breach of SVRO
- Harassment Offences
- Cause bodily harm by wanton, furious or dangerous driving
- Burglary offences where aggravated, or intending/committing GBH only
- Offences relating to assault with poisons or corrosive substances
- Kidnap

Any persons with mental health concerns, that were identified when being booked in by the custody sergeant, were excluded from eligibility.

Trial Methodology

Eligible cases were identified by a police constable whose role was to regularly check the custody suites electronically and to identify cases that met the criteria. This included reviewing risk assessments, care plans, detention logs, and completing secondary investigations for people who had been arrested for other offences but who may have been arrested for one of the trigger offences in the past twelve months.

When identified, cases were entered into a protected spreadsheet which required all mandatory information to be inputted before it would then provide the randomisation result, with guidance about whether the custody coach should be brought in to meet with the person, or whether the case would be in the control group. Repeat records were identified and excluded on the second or subsequent attendance. The randomisations were pre-generated through use of random.org, but they were blind to the officer until all information was added.

When the case was allocated for treatment, the relevant custody coach would be contacted to attend and offer their support, as described above. Where the case was randomised to control, the person received business as usual treatment, with nothing removed or added, so that this intervention could be tested in terms of whether it improves upon usual service, and in order to not disadvantage any person by conducting a trial.

This randomised trial was conducted between 2nd January 2024 and 9th September 2024. The finalisation date was determined due to having a requirement to report on findings before the end of the financial year, and with re-arrest being an outcome measure; we required a follow-up period of at least 6 months, as return to custody rates are not high enough on average for any shorter period than this, and it would have been beneficial for this to be 12 months if it had been possible within the funded evaluation period.

Data were retrieved from police systems on 17th March 2025, and follow-up data was limited to a six month period (183 days from the date of their randomisation was used as the measure of this, to ensure standardisation throughout the year) that started on the date of the randomisation.

During the randomised trial, there were 137 people randomised into the treatment group, and 149 into the control group, and the team of officers managing the allocations and tracking the delivery did a fantastic job of ensuring that we treated individuals as intended.

Findings

Six Month Follow-up

In order to be thorough, differences were looked for in:

- Mean rate of re-return to police custody in the Thames Valley.

We also looked for differences in whether the person has been a suspect in a number of different categories of offences:

- Non-police initiated offences (includes all offences other than possession, supply, or obstruct police type offences).
- Violent offences (includes all offences where violence or threat of violence is part of the offence).
- Violent or sexual offences (includes all violent offences and all sexual offence types).
- Knife-related offences (offences that meet Home Office guidance for reporting as knife offences; this does not include offences where a weapon is possessed, but not shown or used).

All of these offence groups were also examined for differences in overall count, as well as count of individual days on which an offence of this type occurred; this controls for the number of offences that may have been committed on the same day and standardises the analysis.

- In addition, whether each person returned to police custody on one or more occasion was examined, to control for rate of return.

All of these results remained the same when the members of the cohort who were under 25 were looked at as a sub-group to establish impact for 18 to 25 year olds.

There were no significant differences between the treatment and control group in any of the above measures, so this intervention does not appear to have had an improved effect in comparison with business as usual treatment in any area.

Engagement in Custody

There were three cases where the person in custody had already been released before the custody coach arrived, which left 134 who were offered an assessment and discussion of their needs and what they could be referred onto. 73 people accepted the assessment, with 64 people refusing to speak with the custody coach. So the assessment was only done for 54.5% of people. Unfortunately it was not possible to join up the data for the assessments to the outcome data.

Uptake of Follow-on Support

Of the 403 young people who received a visit in custody as part of the custody coaches programme, in the trial period or in the previous twelve months of delivery, only 55 went on to receive any follow-on support outside of the custody environment with any of mental health, addiction issues, housing, employment or mentoring.

Only 13.6% of the people who received support in custody went on to receive additional follow up support

When put into cost terms, the overall cost per person being offered support as part of the programme was £300.25. When we take into account that 45.5% of people did not engage with the support in custody, that cost becomes £551.14 per person who talks to a mentor in custody. If we then look at how much it costs per case that goes on to receive ongoing support, this cost becomes £2,200 per person who goes on to accept any level of support out of custody as a follow-on offer.

Data analysis tables

We have included all data tables associated with our analysis at Appendix B.

A note on statistical significance

Statistical significance simply helps us to determine whether the results of an experiment are likely to be true, and not just due to random chance. Traditionally in scientific literature, $p < 0.05$ is used as a cut-off to indicate that this finding is less than 5% likely to have occurred by chance. This is the point we have used to determine statistical significance.

However, this cut-off can be moved, and might not even be essential depending on what is being evaluated, the level of cost and benefit, and the ease of implementation. In other words, if all of the findings are going in the same beneficial direction, the implementation is not expensive, and the potential benefits are a massive reduction in negative outcomes then we may choose to be much more flexible with the traditional values for significance as it is not the main important factor. There are other things, such as all findings going in the same direction, which may improve trust in the findings and give much greater confidence than through the use of statistical significance alone. However, none of these things were true for this dataset.

Statistical significance is also sensitive to sample size, with larger numbers making it easier to find an effect if it is there, and this is a small experiment. However, the results in this experiment are not all going in a consistent direction, and it does not appear that the size of the trial is the limiting factor.

What does this mean?

These findings show that there were no differences between the treatment and control group in any of the measures that were examined. Thus, it is concluded that this intervention did not work, when delivered in this way, for the cohort that was eligible. This was both for the 18–30 group as a whole, and for the 18–25 year old cohort when examined individually.

Making a support offer to people in the custody environment does not appear to reduce their reoffending rates or the rate that they return to custody, over business as usual treatment in custody. This finding is consistent for the whole cohort, and for those under 25.

There are a number of factors that could be at play for why this intervention does not appear to have worked. The first two that should be addressed both relate to the trial; number of cases and treatment integrity. This was a small trial, and therefore may well be underpowered. There is only one finding, that does not transfer over to the under 25 group (return to custody at least once), that even nears significance, and even that may be due to it being calculated on a less rigorous statistic (2x2 chi-squared test instead of t-test). The remainder of the findings are centred around no change, with percentage change ranging from increase to decrease. It is really important to point out that none of the increases are statistically significant either, therefore this is likely just fluctuation in a group that has not overall been impacted by the intervention. Had it been that the intervention would be shown to work, but the trial was underpowered, it would have been expected to see variables moving in the direction of reduction consistently, but maybe not significantly and that is not the case.

There was no treatment of control cases, and there were only three cases noted where the person had been released from custody before the coach could get there to see them, so treatment integrity was high, as it was intended to deliver the intervention as an offer, and then with consent. However, 45.5% of people refused to speak with the coach in custody.

It is possible that whilst it is easy to identify and interact with people in the custody environment, that the stress caused by being in the custody environment may make it not an effective place to intervene. In other words, whilst physically reachable, people in custody may not be emotionally reachable, and so it may well not be a teachable moment, and it definitely was not for the 45.5% of people who refused to even speak with the custody coach. It was not possible to match the outcome data to the people who accepted or refused the contact in custody, so this is very much a test of what happens overall if an intervention is implemented in this way, and it is a limitation of the research that we are not able to examine what happened in those that didn't refuse.

It is likely that the light touch nature of this intervention, which was much less intensive than other interventions we have tested, may not have been sufficient to elicit a change in behaviour in this cohort, especially given that other teams such as liaison and diversion may also make offers to some people in custody with identified needs. Whilst there was an ongoing offer of support, this was a live trial of what happens when this intervention is delivered, and despite the offer of additional support was there, only 13.6% of people used any part of that offer, making this quite an expensive mechanism for offering additional support to people who need it. The requirement for people to ask for the additional support may well be something that could be changed, so that offers are made easier to become involved in.

There may well be groups of people who may benefit from lighter touch interventions, and whose potential trajectory in the following year may be easier to alter. If a cohort such of this can be identified to attempt to deliver interventions to as part of a trial, it would be worth considering, as this is likely to be a large percentage of the overall level of violence in an area, though there is very little evidence of what works in lower harm cohorts so testing would definitely be needed. For many people who come into custody for violence, however, this may not be the case and more in depth problem solving may be needed if any change is to occur, simply due to the complexity of the challenges and adversity that those people are facing in their lives.

This adds to previous evidence produced in this What Works series which suggests that more in-depth problem solving approaches that are directed towards the needs of each individual are much more effective.

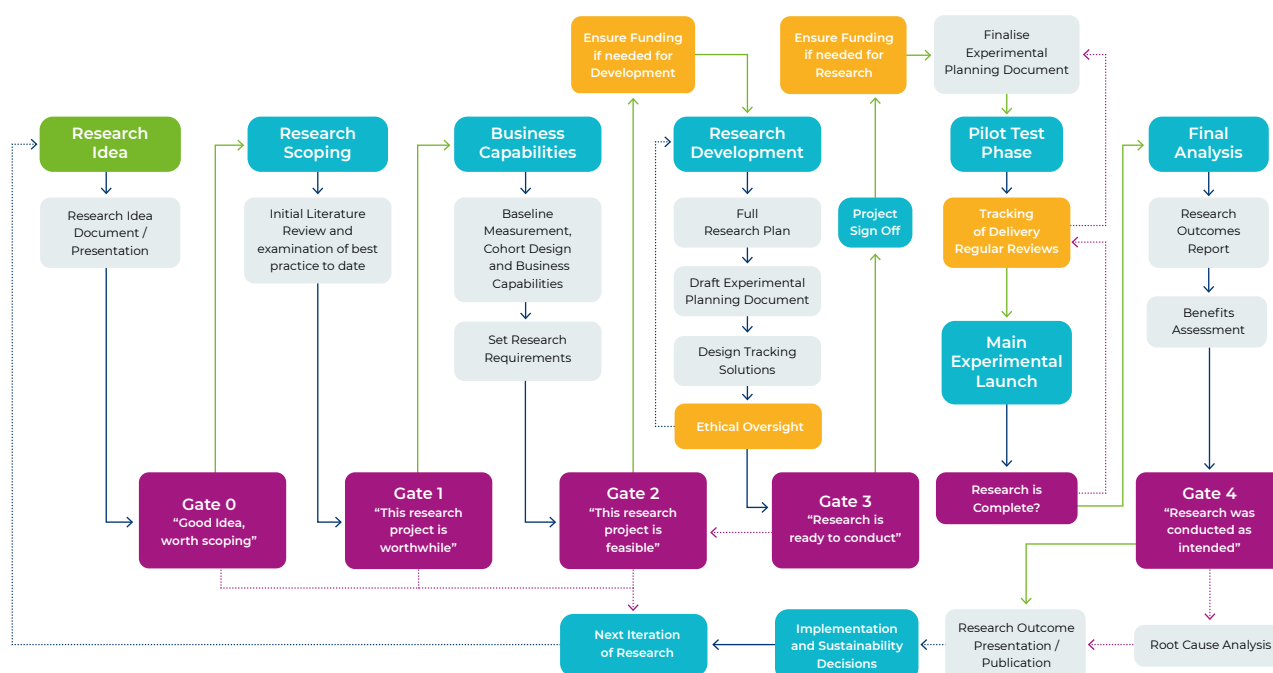
Appendix A: Our Approach: The Research Project Lifecycle

In order to avoid some of the pitfalls often associated with public sector research projects, which often lead to not being able to say what works, or what effect has been had for the money or resource invested, we developed the Research Project Lifecycle.

This is a project management approach to running research projects in the public sector, and allows for the research management team to pause at each stage to ensure that it still meets the needs of the organisation, that it is based in best evidence, that it is possible and feasible to run, and that it is well planned, ensuring the best and most ethical test of something that can actually be implemented.

This approach has enabled Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership to conduct multiple concurrent high quality interventions, including six randomised controlled trials in a range of different areas.

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.
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Appendix B: Data Analysis Tables

All Ages

T-Tests

What is being tested	Treatment	Control	Percentage change from control	T-test results	Likelihood of finding by chance
Return to Custody as a Suspect	0.790	0.723	9.27%	t = 0.3738 df = 245.96 p-value = 0.7089	Over 70%
Non-Police Initiated Crime Count as a Suspect	1.51	1.41	7.09%	t = 0.24191 df = 277 p-value = 0.809	Over 80%
Violent Crime Count as a Suspect	0.659	0.588	12.07%	t = 0.39653 df = 256.02 p-value = 0.692	Over 60%
Violent or Sexual Crime Count as a Suspect	0.696	0.601	15.81%	t = 0.51587 df = 254.01 p-value = 0.6064	Over 60%
Knife-related Crime Count as a Suspect	0.145	0.122	18.85%	t = 0.33199 df = 271.1 p-value = 0.7402	Over 70%
Non-Police Initiated Crime Days as a Suspect	1.12	1.11	0.90%	t = 0.051164 df = 282.36 p-value = 0.9592	Over 90%
Violent Crime Days as a Suspect	0.522	0.514	1.56%	t = 0.05903 df = 260.31 p-value = 0.953	Over 90%
Violent or Sexual Crime Days as a Suspect	0.551	0.527	4.55%	t = 0.16749 df = 258.37 p-value = 0.8671	Over 80%
Knife-related Crime Days as a Suspect	0.116	0.0946	22.62%	t = 0.43225 df = 266.52 p-value = 0.6659	Over 60%

Chi-Squared Tests

What is being tested	Treatment	Control	Percentage change from control	Chi-squared test results	Likelihood of finding by chance
Return to Custody as a Suspect at least once	Yes = 46 No = 92	Yes = 63 No = 85	-24.12%	$\chi^2 = 2.2051$ df = 1 p-value = 0.1376	Under 15%

Under 25s Only

T-Tests

What is being tested	Treatment	Control	Percentage change from control	T-test results	Likelihood of finding by chance
Return to Custody as a Suspect	0.698	0.571	22.24%	t = 0.65554 df = 159.69 p-value = 0.5131	Over 50%
Non-Police Initiated Crime Count as a Suspect	1.03	0.981	4.99%	t = 0.15815 df = 196.25 p-value = 0.8745	Over 80%
Violent Crime Count as a Suspect	0.479	0.476	0.63%	t = 0.016853 df = 198.34 p-value = 0.9866	Over 90%
Violent or Sexual Crime Count as a Suspect	0.531	0.476	11.55%	t = 0.30339 df = 196.62 p-value = 0.7619	Over 70%
Knife-related Crime Count as a Suspect	0.0833	0.124	-32.82%	t = -0.60942 df = 147.51 p-value = 0.5432	Over 50%
Non-Police Initiated Crime Days as a Suspect	0.812	0.819	-0.85%	t = -0.02754 df = 198.98 p-value = 0.9781	Over 90%
Violent Crime Days as a Suspect	0.365	0.419	-12.89%	t = -0.44055 df = 194.74 p-value = 0.66	Over 60%
Violent or Sexual Crime Days as a Suspect	0.406	0.419	-3.10%	t = -0.099687 df = 198.26 p-value = 0.9207	Over 90%
Knife-related Crime Days as a Suspect	0.0833	0.0857	-2.80%	t = -0.049752 df = 187.04 p-value = 0.9604	Over 90%

Chi-Squared Tests

What is being tested	Treatment	Control	Percentage change from control	Chi-squared test results	Likelihood of finding by chance
Return to Custody as a Suspect at least once	Yes = 30 No = 66	Yes = 39 No = 66	13.64%	$\chi^2 = 0.5332$ df = 1 p-value = 0.4653	Over 40%

Authors and Referencing

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Contact Us



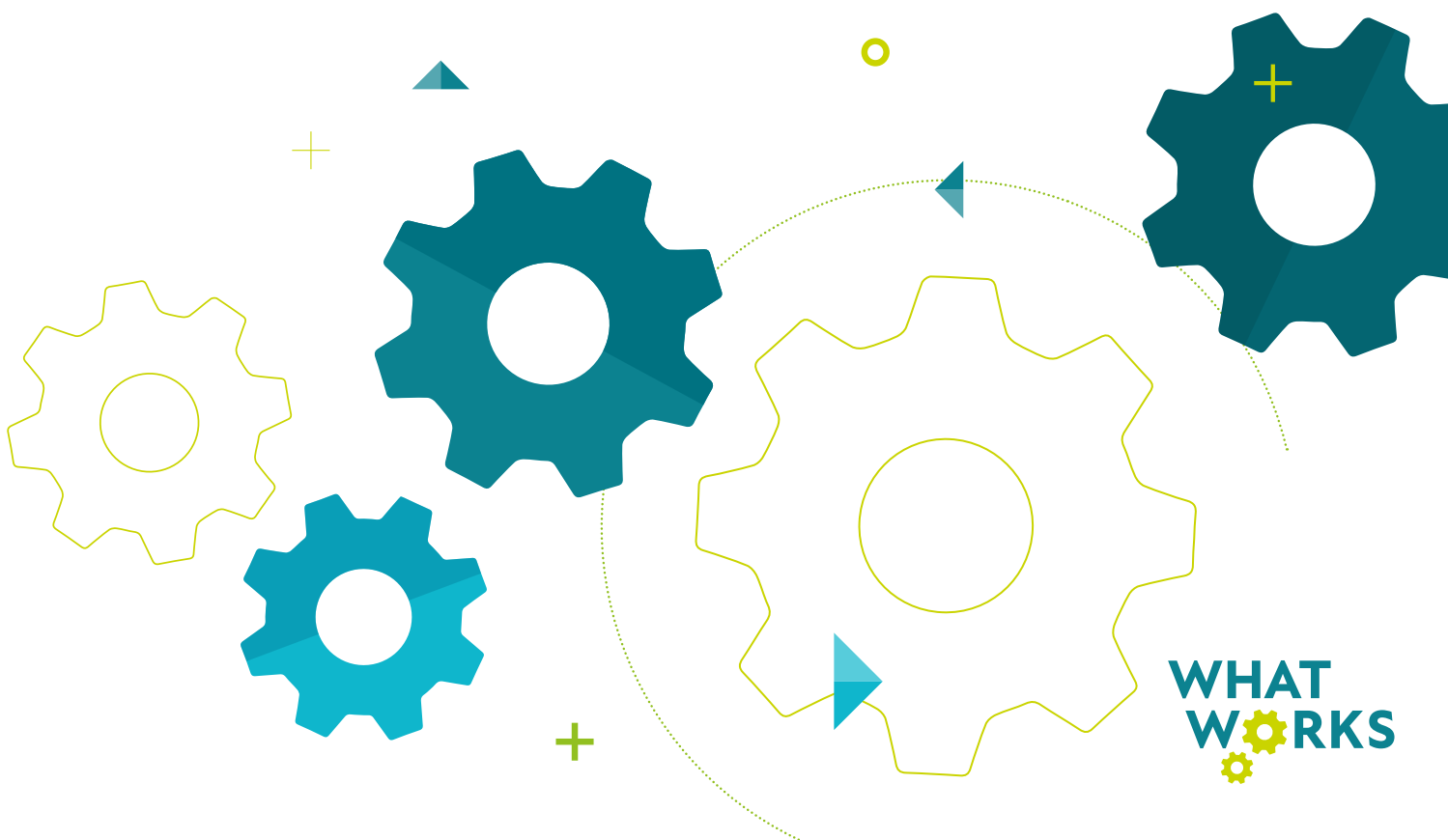
If you have any questions please contact the core programme team via vpp@thamesvalley.police.uk



Our website has information on all our projects and evaluations.
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**WHAT
WORKS**

