

From: Matthew Scott, Kent Police and Crime Commissioner
To: Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel
Subject: Violence reduction - update
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Introduction:

1. The Government's Serious Violence Strategy set out its response to serious violence and increases in knife crime, gun crime and homicide.
2. Whilst Kent is not experiencing the same issues as some cities, violence against the person increased by over 20% in the year to March 2019. Although in part a reflection of improved crime recording accuracy, and greater victim confidence to come forward and report to the Force which are both positive, the Commissioner and Chief Constable are not complacent and acknowledge there are real increases in some crimes. They also recognise that Kent faces unique challenges linked to county lines operating out of London and other areas, with young people in local communities being exploited.
3. This report outlines some of the key actions taken by the Commissioner in conjunction with partners to tackle violent crime and its causes; it also updates on funding received from the Home Office to support activity.

Violence Reduction Challenge:

4. In April 2018, the Government published its Serious Violence Strategy that set out its response to serious violence and increases in knife crime, gun crime and homicide. Action in the strategy centres on four themes:
 - tackling county lines & misuse of drugs
 - early intervention & prevention
 - supporting communities & local partnerships
 - law enforcement & the criminal justice response
5. Locally, the Commissioner's response to the Serious Violence Strategy was the Violence Reduction Challenge (VRC). Commencing in June 2018, the year long study brought together the emergency services, victims, charities, statutory bodies and other partners to look at the nature of violent crime in Kent, and agree a partnership approach to tackling the underlying causes.
6. To help protect some of the most vulnerable from the most violent, one of the recommendations was for the Commissioner to use a portion of his annual commissioning budget to create a Violence Reduction Fund. Having set aside £1m over three years, the Commissioner invited statutory organisations, community and voluntary groups to bid for a maximum of £35k per year, to fund activities such as awareness campaigns, prevention initiatives, diversion and rehabilitation projects.
7. In July 2019, nine projects received funding and will do so again in 2020/21 and 2021/22 provided that they evidence taxpayers' money is being used effectively and comply with monitoring requirements. Further information can be viewed [here](#), but the projects include:
 - Kent Police (£36,814) to deliver a Mini Cadets scheme in local schools, building on the successful Volunteer Police Cadets scheme.
 - Rising Sun & Choices (£35,000) to provide support for girls aged 11-16 who are at risk of sexual exploitation or being in coercive and controlling relationships.
 - Kent CrimeStoppers (£35,000) to increase 11-16 year olds awareness of weapons, street crime and sexual exploitation.
 - Uprising Youth and Community (£32,000) to deliver a knife crime awareness campaign in east Kent.
 - Reform Restore Respect (£5,000) to deliver 90-minute workshops to Year 6 pupils around gang violence and knife crime.
 - The Forward Trust (£34,125) to provide a Violence Reduction Peer Mentoring programme for clients accessing their East Kent Community Drug and Alcohol Services.
8. Following the success of the model in Margate, the VRC also recommended the creation of a multi-agency taskforce in Medway to enable partners to work closer in tackling some of the underlying causes of crime. Funded by the Commissioner, a Taskforce Manager within Kent Police has been appointed and work to bring partners together under one roof is well underway.

9. A further recommendation was the commissioning of a new service to provide specialist advice, guidance and support to victims of stalking. Whilst there are national organisations such as the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and Paladin, there is limited support available in Kent. The Commissioner is currently scoping the options for piloting a countywide stalking support service.
10. The VRC also helped shaped the Commissioner's decision-making with regards to investing the 2019/20 council tax receipts on 180 additional police officers, and to continue supporting the work of the St Giles Trust. The charity has been working in Kent since 2017 to help young people at risk of being exploited by county lines gangs to turn their lives around.

National picture:

11. In March 2019, the government announced a dedicated £100m Serious Violence Fund to crack down on violent crime.
12. In April 2019, those forces across England and Wales worst affected by serious violence and knife crime received a share of £51m surge funding to support additional police officer deployments, improved intelligence, and short-term operational activity. In May, the same forces received a further share of £12.4m.
13. The funding was allocated to the 18 forces with the highest number of hospital admissions for 'assault with a sharp object'. Those to receive a share included the Metropolitan Police, West Midlands Police, Greater Manchester Police, Sussex Police and Essex Police
14. Kent Police received £1.66m which was used to boost patrols over the Easter weekend, conduct more weapon sweeps and execute early-morning warrants against people suspected of being involved in county lines and other serious criminality
15. Additionally, the government have proposed a new legal duty on public bodies to prevent and tackle serious violence. Recognising that it is not something the police can simply arrest its way out of, the new 'public health duty' will cover the police, local councils, local health bodies, education representatives and youth offending services. It is designed to ensure that relevant services work together to share data, intelligence and knowledge to understand and address the root causes of serious violence including knife crime. The government also plans to amend the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to ensure that serious violence is an explicit priority for Community Safety Partnerships.
16. In support of these proposals, the then Home Secretary provisionally allocated a further £35m to the Police and Crime Commissioners in the same 18 force areas to set up Violence Reduction Units (VRUs). The government's intention is that these units will lead and coordinate a local multi-agency response to serious violence and its underlying causes. By implementing a public health approach, they will also act as a focal point for effort to stop children and young people being drawn into the spiral of crime and violence in the first place.
17. In June 2019, the Home Office notified the Commissioner that Kent had been allocated £1.16m to establish a VRU. The funding is required to be spent by the end of March 2020. Following receipt of further guidance, and a telephone conference with the Home Office, Kent's application for funding was finally approved on 9 August 2019.
18. Whilst in the early stages of development, the goals of the VRU will be to:
 - Find the major causes of violence and co-ordinate activity across Kent to tackle violence and deliver long term reductions.
 - Involve communities in its work and build capacity to deliver the best long term solutions to reduce violence.
19. The VRU is expected to be agile and able to proactively develop information and intelligence from all agencies to enable bespoke prevention and early intervention activities at a hyper local level. It will bring together specialists from health, police, local government, probation and community organisations to provide a coordinated, multi-agency approach to tackling the root causes of violent crime and prevent young people from being drawn into crime in the first place. Partners will be focussed on spotting the early signs of what might lead to criminal behaviour and concentrate attention and resources on what has the biggest impact.

20. Governance of the VRU includes:

- Kent Police and Crime Commissioner
- Kent Police
- Public Health, Medway
- Public Health, KCC
- Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley; Medway; Swale; and West Kent Clinical Commissioning Groups (signatory for all eight Kent CCGs).
- Integrated Children's services KCC (with responsibility for YOTs and Early Help Service)
- People Services Medway
- Public Health England

21. The VRU will oversee a dedicated helpline for young people affected by violence, either as a victim or as someone being drawn towards violent groups, activities or behaviours. The helpline will offer emotional advice and practical signposting, as well as referrals to an outreach service. Early interventions provided by the outreach service are likely to include mentoring and evidence based intervention therapy incorporating help to parents. Further outreach work will be commissioned to help divert individual young people identified as being involved in low level knife crime away from such behaviour.

22. A Programme Manager and VRU Manager will be appointed at the earliest opportunity. Whilst the problem profile and response strategy are being drawn up, these two roles will (amongst other activities) focus on the consultation strategy to ensure that local communities are consulted on the approach and key areas of focus. This strategy will include early engagement, journey mapping with specific groups to identify course of life intervention points and ongoing consultation and feedback with a focus on young people.

23. The Government's Serious Violence Strategy (published in April 2018) also included a commitment to delivering a £22m Early Intervention Youth Fund (EIYF) over two years - £11m in 2018/19 and £11m in 2019/20. The purpose of the Fund was to provide support for early intervention programmes with young people at risk of criminal involvement, as victims and/or perpetrators.

24. On 26 June 2019, the then Home Secretary announced that the remaining £3.3m of the EIYF would be distributed to 10 areas to support projects that prevent young people from being drawn into crime and to help them make more positive life choices.

25. The Commissioner was successful in bidding for £527,573 which will allow further work to divert young people at risk of exploitation by county lines gangs away from criminality and abuse, and better support young people who come into contact with the police to try and prevent future offending. It also increases the scope to improve links with local schools to deliver more effective crime prevention messages.

Conclusion:

26. The Government's Serious Violence Strategy recognises that to break the cycle of violence that devastates the lives of individuals, families and communities, there needs to be a balance between prevention and effective law enforcement.

27. The Commissioner also understands the pivotal role he has in delivering against this objective; in terms of both holding the Chief Constable to account for policing in the county, and working with partners to deliver initiatives that help provide people with the tools, support and opportunity to live violence-free lives.

28. As set out above, the foundations for delivering greater partnership activity to address the root causes of violence were established through the Commissioner's VRC. Whilst early days, thanks in part to additional funding from the Home Office, there is now the opportunity to deliver broader, wider and more coordinated activity to make a real difference to lives in Kent.