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To: Kent Community Safety Partnership – 18th November 2021

Classification: For Information

Subject: Update on the work of the Kent & Medway Violence Reduction Unit

Summary: This report provides an update on the work of the Violence Reduction Unit. Attendees are asked to note the contents of the report.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Kent & Medway Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) is funded by the Home Office to develop a public health, preventative approach to serious violence across the County. The VRU focusses on those aged under 25 involved in public place violence, including those involved in County Lines and weapons related harm.
- 1.2 The core function of the VRU is to offer leadership, establish a Core Membership and, working with all relevant agencies operating locally, provide strategic coordination of the local response to serious violence.
- 1.3 The public health approach to tackling violence is informed by the work of Public Health England as set out in 'A whole-system multi-agency approach to serious violence prevention' (Public Health England, 2018). The report proposes a 5C approach to violence prevention which includes Collaboration, Co-production, Co-operation in data and intelligence sharing, Counter-narrative and a Community consensus approach.

2. Impact on Serious Violence

- 2.1 Serious violence within the remit of the VRU is defined as that which involves public place offences primarily including murder or attempted murder, grievous bodily harm, offences where a knife or weapon has been used and offences where injury has been caused.
- 2.2 Figure 1 below shows that levels of public place serious violence are lower than the two previous years and remain lower than 2019 before lockdown restrictions were in place.

Serious violence (SVC) involving those aged under 25 (excluding DA)

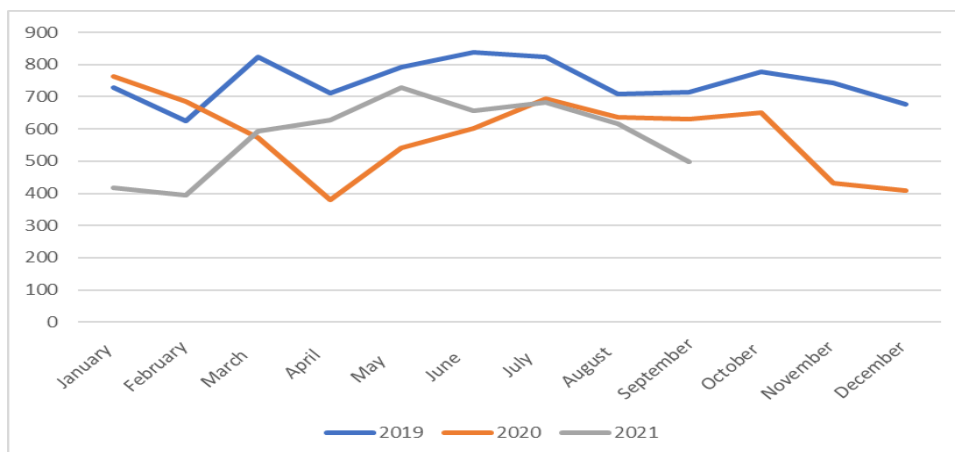


Figure 1. VRU SVC victim or suspect aged U25, excluding DA

3. Activity

3.1 Data sharing. VRU analysts use data from Kent Police, KCC, Medway Council and the Probation service to map and analyse individuals, groups and places where serious violence occurs. The work now includes the regular identification and mapping of young street groups. These groups are those with the following characteristics

- a) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group
- b) engage in criminal activity and violence
- c) operate in a defined geographical area
- d) have some form of identifying structural feature
- e) may conflict with other, similar, groups

The groups do not meet the threshold to be considered a 'gang' but the behaviour and impact on their community requires a coordinated multi-agency approach to reduce the harm caused and to offer support to individuals.

3.2 The VRU, Kent Community Safety and the Hampshire Police and Crime Commissioner's team are developing the InterACT data sharing platform. The work will allow data to be shared and analysed across organisations and will support a clearer view of the patterns and trends of harm which affect communities.

3.3 Knives & weapons. The VRU are focussing on reducing knife and weapon harm as a priority for the current year. Discussions between VRU partners have supported the development of a plan which will allow better information sharing on the patterns and trends of knife crime, a suite of agreed resources that can be used by professionals and interventions that can be used either with first time offenders or repeat offenders. The VRU are working with young people to design an awareness campaign on the risk of carrying knives.

3.4 Gangs and County Lines. The Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy has now been agreed and the governance of the strategy sits with the Community Safety Partnerships for Kent and Medway. The VRU will provide bi-annual progress reports to strategic CSP Boards. An awareness campaign on County Lines and criminal exploitation was launched in September 2021 using the 'Eyes Open' website and the resources available on the site have been shared with all schools and colleges in the County. The VRU are identifying young people at risk of criminal exploitation using partner data and these individuals are discussed at district multi-agency meetings so that plans can be established to protect them from harm.

3.5 Place based violence. The VRU and Kent Police are regularly identifying hotspots of serious violence. The VRU were successful in securing 'Grip' funding from the Home Office in June 2021 which is used to fund an enhanced Police presence in violence hotspots. The VRU and Community Safety Partnerships are collaborating to promote a multi-agency response that supports the enhanced Police presence.

3.6 Serious Violence Duty. The Government are legislating to include serious violence as a priority for Community Safety Partnerships as part of an amendment to the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act. This requires the production of an annual Needs Assessment that informs the strategic response and an action plan to tackle serious violence. A shared needs assessment has been agreed between the CSPs and the VRU and work will begin in November 2021 to produce the analysis of violence. This will be used to identify key priority areas for both the CSPs and the VRU and will inform the work undertaken in the new financial year.

- 3.7 Commissioned services. The VRU continues to fund community services which support those involved in violence or offer diversionary activities to keep young people safe. In July 2021 the VRU were successful in bidding for £730,000 of additional funding which is being used to offer high intensity therapeutic interventions such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or social skills training, and to fund projects offering support to those admitted to Accident and Emergency departments due to serious violence in Medway and Margate.
- 3.8 Community engagement. A pilot project to test a model of community engagement has been established in the north of the County. The work to involve communities in the design and delivery of services remains challenging and the VRU will work with partners to identify the best ways to achieve meaningful community engagement.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 The KCSP is asked to note the progress and activities undertaken by the Violence Reduction Unit.