

Breaking the cycle of youth violence

Foreword

Violent crimes, such as murders and gun and knife crime, account for around one per cent of all crime. But the impact of them on society is huge in terms of lives and communities destroyed.

So it is concerning that in recent years the number of these offences being reported have started to rise in England and Wales.

Why? One factor is likely to be better reporting. But there is plenty of evidence to suggest the increase is genuine with police reports, hospital records and crime surveys all showing similar trends.

One of the most striking findings is that the rises are not limited to the major cities. Nearly all police forces have seen an increase.

This trend is at least partly due to the county lines phenomenon in which drug-selling gangs from major urban areas such as London, Birmingham and Liverpool exploit children, young people and vulnerable adults to commit crimes and supply drugs to markets elsewhere.

Councils have had to prioritise protecting the most vulnerable in recent years and are well aware of the growing number of children in care or young people with mental health problems who are particularly susceptible to exploitation by these criminal networks.

While there is good evidence that enforcement can play a vital role in tackling this, the Government has made it clear more needs to be done on prevention and early intervention.

This is where councils can step in. Whether it is to do with education, social care, health, housing or employment, local government is in a prime position to use its influence to protect and support young people.

The Government has shown its commitment to local areas through a variety of funding streams from the Trusted Relationships Fund to the Early Intervention Youth Fund.

And, as the case studies in this report show, councils are stepping up to the challenge. There are universal interventions that target whole populations, such as Liverpool's work with secondary schools across the city. Other projects are more targeted, helping those young people who are beginning to fall into a life of crime.

There is, of course, much more that can be done. Councils are, in many ways, just at the beginning of this journey to curb violent crime with growing evidence that the key is a 'public health approach' – treating it as a disease that can be cured. By working together with our local partners we can make a difference.

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Key statistics

1% of all recorded crime is homicides and knife and gun crime (Home Office)

57% rise in police recorded knife crime between 2013/14 and 2017/18 (ONS)

34% rise in police recorded firearms offences between 2013/14 and 2017/18 (ONS)

32% rise in murders and manslaughter between 2013/14 and 2017/18 (ONS)

3/4 of homicide victims had previously been a victim of crime (Metropolitan Police Service)

3% of 14-year-olds have carried a weapon (Millennium Cohort Study)

51% rise in number of under 18s suffering assaults with a sharp object in last four years (NHS).



What is the ‘public health’ approach?

It is a term that is increasingly being used. The phrase began to gain traction following the World Health Organization’s report on violence in 2002. The idea is that violence should be treated like a disease: identify the cause and it can be cured.

In the UK the approach has been pioneered by Glasgow. Back in 2005 Strathclyde Police established the Violence Reduction Unit after studying how police in Boston, USA, had had success in the 1990s after working with schools, doctors and other partners.

The aim was to create a long-term attitudinal change in society as well as working with violent individuals to help them break the cycle of violence. The unit was soon expanded across Scotland and is now funded by the Scottish government.

It runs a range of projects, including:

- a team of navigators that work in four A&E units to engage people who arrive with violence-related injuries and then try to connect them with other services to break the cycle of violence
- an employment programme whereby offenders are offered 12-month contracts with Street and Arrow, social enterprise that runs street food stalls
- Mentors in Violence which is working in over 50 schools, training students how to become ‘empowered bystanders’ to promote a positive school climate by challenging abusive behaviour
- a training programme which has been offered to vets and hairdressers along with doctors, dentists and nurses to help them stop the signs and engage with victims of domestic violence
- a scheme that sees doctors go into schools, explaining the consequences of violent injuries and how confrontation can be avoided. It has reached more than 150,000 since it was launched in 2008.

The work has had a significant impact. Glasgow was once known as the murder capital of Europe, but in the past nine years the number of violent offences – homicides, attempted murder and serious assaults – has halved to under 1,000 a year.

The lessons have informed thinking elsewhere. Bristol City Council said its approach has been based on the lead taken in Glasgow, while in autumn 2018 the London Mayor Sadiq Khan announced that the city would be getting its own unit.

What is the Government's position?

The Government set out its thinking in the Serious Violence Strategy, published by the Home Office in April 2018. The document said law enforcement was very important, but it made clear tackling the rising tide of violent crime was going to take much more than that.

It said partnerships across education, health, social services, housing, youth services and victim services were going to be essential. It also called for local leaders to fully involve the communities they are working in.

The strategy set out a number of steps being taken centrally to support local areas. These included:

- the creation of a new National County Lines Co-ordination Centre
- a £11 million two-year Early Intervention Youth Fund (£17.7 million was subsequently awarded)
- the National Citizen Service for young people aged 15 to 17 offering residential activities to build skills and confidence
- the Big Lottery backed £40 million Youth Investment Fund
- the £13 million Trusted Relationships Fund to pilot approaches to support young people at risk of exploitation and abuse.

The strategy built on previous government initiatives. In 2017 the Government published its Drug Strategy, which focused on reducing demand, restricting supply and supporting recovery.

Predating that was the Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation Programme and the Modern Crime Prevention Strategy, which included measures on knife sales.

The Government has also tightened up legislation on firearms in the Policing and Crime Act 2017 to crackdown on supply.

Following the publication of the strategy, the Home Secretary announced a £200 million Youth Endowment Fund to support young people most at risk of youth violence including those displaying signs such as truancy, aggression and involvement in anti-social behaviour in order to steer them away from becoming serious offenders. In addition the Home Secretary announced the Government would be consulting on a new legal duty to underpin a 'public health' approach to tackling serious violence. There will also be an independent review of drugs misuse.

But, more than any other, the latest strategy stressed the importance and power of local initiatives. In compiling the strategy, the Home Office reviewed 14 studies that looked at reducing aggressive behaviour in individuals aged under 21.

Eleven of the studies found interventions to be effective at reducing violent behaviour with the most recent finding an average reduction in aggression of 25 per cent.

The message was loud and clear: catch young people before they go down the wrong path and encourage them to make positive choices.

What are the key steps for councils?

1. Encourage a multi-agency approach and make sure any strategy addresses the root causes: childhood trauma, social inequality, poverty, mental health problems and education and training.
2. Look to help young offenders into employment and training to 'break the cycle'.
3. Engage the community. Recruiting community mentors and supporting youth clubs are both good options.
4. Work with schools. They can provide valuable intelligence about who is at risk and can also be great partners in delivering universal interventions to children.
5. Start young. Many of the most proactive councils are working with pupils at the end of primary school.
6. Language is important. Young people caught up in crime are victims as well.
7. Collect the data. Analysing A&E attendances and arrests can help identify trends and hotspots.
8. Streamline referral systems. Some councils are setting up hubs to review and assess cases.
9. Make sure parents and carers know what signs to look out for so they can spot early if children are being exploited
10. Consider working with other groups, such as taxi drivers, train staff and security guards, as they may be able to spot changes in behaviour and the arrival of criminal gangs.

Case studies

City of Bradford Council: learning from child sexual exploitation

Bradford Council has been tackling problems with child sexual exploitation (CSE) head-on for some years and is now identifying and helping a growing number of victims. More recently the council, working with partners, has turned its attention to criminal exploitation.

The challenge

Over the last decade there has been increasing awareness about the risk of CSE. Often vulnerable young people are targeted, such as those in care and children with learning disabilities. The process involves a stage of grooming when a child receives gifts, but violence or the threat of violence often follows.

In recent years there have been several high-profile court cases where organised gangs have been prosecuted for abusing large numbers of children. But tackling and preventing abuse requires a coordinated effort day-in, day-out.

The solution

Like many large cities, Bradford has experienced issues and so a CSE Hub was set up in 2012. It brought together senior children's services staff, social workers, police, nurses and voluntary sector representatives.

It meets daily and to discuss and assess cases referred to it with each classified as being high, medium or low risk. Once a young person has been identified, the hub can help arrange support.

The hub works with a number of voluntary sector providers to help ensure young people are matched with the support they need. This includes the Turnaround project in Bradford run by Barnado's and the Children's Society's Hand in Hand scheme in Keighley. There is also a scheme run by local charity Mesmac dedicated to boys and young men and a project called Pace that works with parents, teaching them how to safeguard their children.

Children's Services Strategic Commissioning Manager Mary Brittle said: "What is important is that the support that is provided is tailored to the young person. The people running the projects are really familiar with the local areas, are in touch with what is happening and are having a positive impact on the young people they work with."

Bradford Council has also sought to do some proactive prevention work. This has included work with the GW Theatre Company, which has run awareness-raising productions in schools. One of the most successful was Somebody's Sister, Somebody's Daughter about street grooming and sexual exploitation, aimed at pupils over the age of 14.

Impact

The prevention work has had a big impact. Evaluation of the Somebody's Sister, Somebody's Daughter production showed it increased understanding of sexual exploitation by 45 per cent and more than 30 young people made disclosures or sought help after seeing the play.

Following the success of that work, Bradford became one of six councils to co-fund the development of Mister Shapeshifter, which

was aimed at nine to 11-year-olds. There have been over 60 performances in Bradford's primary schools so far, reaching 4,000 children.

Results show that 82 per cent of children who have seen the play said it helped them to understand more about abuse and exploitation. The emphasis on raising awareness and seeking to identify cases has resulted in an increasing number of referrals into the hub. There are now over 1,100 a year, up from 430 in 2014/15.

Assistant Director for Performance, Commissioning and Partnerships Jenny Cryer said: "We see that as a good sign. It shows we are reaching more people – and by doing that we can make a difference.

"But over time we have begun to see it is not just about sexual exploitation. We understand better the ways in which some children are victims of exploitation through being groomed by organised criminal networks and coerced into involvement with criminal activity, including drugs and violent crime."

Lessons learned

In recognition of the growing threat of criminal exploitation and its strong-track record, Bradford Council was successful in its application for the Home Office's Trust Relationship Fund.

A total of £1 million has been awarded. A steering group – under the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board – has been created to oversee this work. Similar to the CSE Hub, there will be one-to-one work and group work, but also awareness raising workshops in schools and the community for both children and parents.

Voluntary sector providers have been recruited to do the work, joining together as a consortium, but flexibility has been built within the contract to allow other groups to be recruited if a gap in provision is identified.

The age range of children being targeted is younger than it was previously. The new work is aimed at children aged 10 to 14. The average age of the children supported through the CSE Hub is 15.

Ms Cryer said: "We want to identify children at a younger age to prevent exploitation earlier. I think one of the things we have learnt is the need for flexibility. We are now offering support late into the evenings and on weekends, while having a consortium gives us that flexibility to be responsive."

How is the approach being sustained?

The one-to-one work has already started. The plan is to provide support to over 100 young people through the one-to-one work over the next 18 months. Meanwhile, the group work and awareness-raising workshops will get under way in 2019. The awareness-raising is being targeted at east Bradford to start with.

"The Trusted Relationships Fund will help us reach more people. We know we have children who are victims of exploitation and we want to find new ways to provide support to them and to work across our partnerships and our communities to tackle this," Ms Cryer added.

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Bristol City Council: involving the community

Bristol Council has adopted a public health approach to tackling violent crime – and in doing so is fully engaging the community. A stakeholder group has helped to design and implement the strategy, while community champions have been recruited to work with young people.

The challenge

Gang violence and street conflict has affected parts of Bristol for many years. Back in 2001 armed police were placed on the streets in the city centre in response to a sharp rise in gang-related violence.

Over time various initiatives have been launched by the police, council and others to crackdown on the problems.

The dynamics of who is involved has changed and continues to change. A constant, however, is that gang-related violence in the city is inextricably linked to illicit drug supply.

In recent years gangs have been increasingly exploiting vulnerable young people in the city to sustain their criminal activity. Last year one in three offences committed by young people were crimes of violence against the person and there is a worrying increase in the number of young people carrying knives.

The solution

Two years ago Bristol Council decided to refresh its approach by placing a heavier emphasis on early intervention and prevention and community involvement.

Its Preventing Gang Involvement and Youth Violence Strategy was launched in 2017 by the Safer Bristol Partnership. The strategy was focussed on safeguarding young people from aged 10 upwards. It set out a new vision across three key themes:

- engagement and support
- empowerment
- enforcement and disruption.

Crime Reduction Manager Stuart Pattison said: “The traditional approach had been focused around the criminal justice system. But by doing that we were not really addressing the underlying cause of the problems. Now, much like the lauded Violence Reduction Unit in Scotland, we have adopted a ‘public health’ approach.”

The impact

Bristol Council has set up a single front door and referral pathway through its multi-agency safeguarding hub. It now gets referrals from a variety of different sources including schools, social care, the youth offending team and the police as well as direct referrals from concerned members of the community. Sadly demand remains high. Currently the hub considers around 50 referrals a month.

Each month key partners meet to discuss the young people most at-risk. Mr Pattison said: “We have a really rich source of data and information. We were not joining it up before, but we are now.

“We are looking at everything from those on the periphery of gangs and crime to those who are completely entrenched. We even model those who are at most risk of gang involvement and exploitation in the future. We can tailor the support around each person.”

Statutory services including social care and early help are available, but crucially the council has also sought to involve the community as part of the solution.

A network of community champions has been recruited and trained to act as voluntary mentors to young people at risk of being caught up in violent and organised crime. They are working with young people to ensure they get the education, employment, housing and wellbeing support they need.

Mr Pattison said they are proving to be incredibly effective. “The mentors are authentic as they come from the community and the holistic support plans provide a meaningful alternative, enabling young people to turn their back on lucrative if extremely dangerous criminal activity.”

In the long-term, Mr Pattison said he expects to see falls in the knife crime involving young people and also the public’s experience and perception of crime and anti-social behaviour. “It will not happen overnight, but I expect in the next year or so we will see the impact of the work we have started and this will continue to accelerate.”

Lessons learned

Bristol has placed community involvement at the heart of its new approach, said Mr Pattison. “We recognised that it was the big thing we were missing. In the past statutory agencies have secured some funding and parachuted in projects, thinking they have the solution.

“But we knew we had to do something different to tackle the gang-related violence we are seeing. Now we are co-designing and delivering interventions with the community

members directly affected which means we benefit from their vast experience and expertise.

“We are lucky we also have a really strong voluntary and community sector. So we have involved them all along the way. A stakeholder group, including young people, faith groups and civic societies, designed the strategy and is now helping to implement it. We are fortunate that Bristol is a beneficiary of both the Youth Investment Fund and anti-knife crime Community Fund.”

Desmond Brown, a community activist and chair of the Bristol Commission for Race Equality, is one of the members of the 20-strong stakeholder group. He said: “The community needs to be held to account, it is in their gift to protect their young people and not allow criminals to prosper. This isn’t a blame game, we all need to work together.”

How the approach is being sustained?

Now that good progress is being made with early intervention and prevention, Bristol is turning its attention to what else can be done to help those who are already being criminally exploited and caught up in the criminal justice system.

The pilot is based on a deferred prosecution model. In return for escaping a criminal charge and potential custodial sentence, offenders will instead be expected to engage with a community mentor for six to nine months and engage in intensive programmes, including employment or education, as well as staying out of trouble. The mentors will be paid for this work.

Mr Pattison said: “We think it is a really unique approach. I am not aware of anywhere else doing something similar for this cohort. We know when they are entrenched like this it is very challenging to get them away from the gangs.

“But we will not turn our backs on our young people and organised crime groups will find it increasingly difficult to groom and exploit them. The pilot will start with a small group and we will evaluate their outcomes properly but we are confident this, and our overall strategic approach, can have a significant impact.”

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Liverpool City Council: working with schools to tackle knife crime

Liverpool has been rocked by a number of stabbings of young people recently. The city council responded by working with partners to launch a programme of support in schools to deter young people from carrying knives.

The challenge

In October 2017 a young man, Sam Cook, was out celebrating his 21st birthday in Liverpool city centre. He never made it home. He was stabbed to death in a bar. Since then another two teenagers have died in tragic circumstances as rates of knife crime have risen.

The deaths shocked the city, prompting the mayor to launch a campaign which saw knife arches placed across the city centre's clubland district and more than 100 venues given knife wands to enable security staff to search customers.

But a conference organised at the end of last year involving 50 key professionals from the council, police, housing and education decided more needed to be done, particularly in schools with reports children as young as nine had been caught carrying knives.

The solution

Disarm, Liverpool's strategic multi-agency partnership to tackle gun and knife crime and gang violence, worked with schools to launch a new programme of support in September 2018.

Secondary schools have been offered a range of different support. These include a knife crime assembly led by senior youth worker Alan Walsh, who runs Anfield Boxing Club, which highlights the causes of knife crime and the impact on families. A knife arch has been provided by police to demonstrate some of the steps being taken to reduce incidents.

An emergency nurse, Rob Jackson, has also been giving graphic presentations showing images of victims and the long-term effects of injuries.

On top of the assemblies, which are offered to all year groups, schools have also been provided with information about a range of programmes targeted at specific ages. These include Humanutopia, a one-day workshop that aims to boost self-esteem, confidence and raise aspiration, and Gangs, a five-session programme that works with the most at-risk youngsters.

Merseyside Police Superintendent Louise Harrison said: "We believe it is really important that the consequences of carrying and using a knife are made clear to everyone – especially young people – and that by going into schools and reaching young people at the earliest stages will have the greatest impact.

"We want to reach out and challenge the perception that carrying a knife is somehow socially acceptable and through education and engagement we hope we can help tackle fears or peer pressure that may drive young people to carry knives."

Impact

Since the assemblies started, over half of all secondary schools in the city have taken part with two or three being held every week.

Rob Lawton, Assistant Head Teacher at St Margaret's Academy, said his pupils had found the assembly 'excellent'. "Without exception the students all thought the presentation was very good. When asked why, they answered that they thought it was relevant and made it all a bit more real and closer to home than they had realised."

The programme has also received the backing of head teachers. David Hayes, of the Liverpool Association of Secondary Heads, said schools were pleased with the campaign. "All schools take safeguarding very seriously and in particular educating our young people in staying safe. Anyone could be a victim."

Lessons learned

When rolling out this sort of campaign, Jill Summers, Liverpool's Head of Safer and Stronger Communities, said there are several important steps to take.

The first is to make it universal. "If you target certain schools they get worried that it may then look like they have a particular problem. So we were adamant all schools should take part – and the head teachers agreed. Everyone needs to know how to keep themselves safe as children, no matter what school they go to travel all over the city."

Ms Summers said they have also adjusted the content with the year seven and eights not being given as graphic presentations as some of the older children. "You have to be careful about the messaging. You don't want to make people terrified of going out. We have been careful to put the risks in context too."

How is the approach being sustained?

The aim is to have delivered assemblies in all the secondary schools in the city by the end of this academic year. But beyond that there is a desire to coordinate the schools work across the region. To help achieve this, a pan-Merseyside strategic knife crime group has recently been established.

"There are five councils across Merseyside and one police force. We want to spread good practice and do more coordinated work so we can learn from each other.

"We have already agreed to run one of our assemblies in a school in Knowsley so in the future we could see much more work like this. We are looking to coordinate work across a number of work streams," Ms Summers added.

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Safer London: helping young women escape from criminal gangs

The Safer London charity is working with councils across the capital to help young women caught up in criminal networks and at risk of sexual exploitation. Advocates working alongside council teams help hundreds of young women every year to escape the abuse.

The challenge

The role of girls in gangs and criminal networks is often hidden from view. But research by the Centre for Social Justice has shown it is a serious problem with gangs routinely targeting young and vulnerable girls.

The think-tank has called it an ‘appalling parallel world’ of sex abuse and crime in which male gang members entrap girls and use them for sexual rituals and gratification as well as to carry drugs because they know they are less likely to be searched by police. Identifying and helping such girls can be difficult for authorities.

The solution

Safer London is a charity that works with young people across the capital. One of its longest-running schemes is Empower which provides support one-to-one with young people aged 11 to 18, normally over a six-month period, who have fallen under the influence of criminal networks and are at risk of sexual exploitation.

The work is coordinated by young people’s advocates which are placed in council teams, such as youth offending teams, community safety units or children’s services. The service is currently working with 17 councils across the capital.

By working closely with the council teams, they are able to identify and have children referred to them that may need their help. Once a referral has been made, the advocates arrange to meet the young people and then gradually help them address the problems they face. The main focus is on personal safety and healthy relationships.

Safer London Project Manager Anna Reilly says: “At the start it is all about building up a relationship. The advocates will talk, they might do some worksheets and watch videos going through these issues.

“In time we may also look to get them involved in activities, such as music and dance groups. We even got one girl involved in a prestigious dance school on one occasion. It is about building their confidence and self esteem and mixing with people they can have healthy relationships with.

“We can also help them access other services : education, sexual health and mental health for example. Support can also be provided to families.”

A similar service is also provided by one of Safer London’s other services, London Gang Exit. It is aimed at a slightly older cohort than Empower – 16 to 24-year-olds – and is funded by London’s Office of Policing and Crime. It offers individuals support with housing, education and training and has a dedicated worker for young women.

The impact

The support provided helps change the lives of young people, stopping falling into a life of crime and exploitation.

Jess' story is typical. She was 18 when she was referred to Empower by a gangs youth worker who had noticed her hanging around a number of different gang members. She had previously been involved in shoplifting, robbery offences and concealing weapons.

Jess was homeless and as she had nowhere else to go was sleeping on friends' sofas. These friends were all gang members and she knew they were involved in dealing drugs and violent crime. She didn't want to get involved with their activities, but they were the only people who had offered her support.

Through her work with Empower Jess was given help to find safer housing, supported to access counselling and secured work as an apprentice. "My whole life has changed," she said.

But Jess is just one of many helped each year. Over the past 12 months more than 3,000 people have received support. They are assessed at the start and then every eight weeks for progress they are making against a range of measures from relationships and education to health. On average 80 per cent of outcomes show an improvement by the end of the support.

Cathy Henchion, CSE coordinator at Lambeth Council, said the work done by Empower is invaluable. "We greatly value the expertise that the Empower worker is providing to vulnerable children.

"The worker is highly-skilled and the engagement from the girls referred to her is 100 per cent, which evidences her relationship skills. Children and young people who are being exploited by adults and others can be very distrustful of professionals and often do not wish to undertake direct work with their social worker."

Lessons learned

"You have to be persistent," said Ms Reilly. "At first our workers will spend a lot of time waiting in coffee shops with their laptops. It is not uncommon for the young people not to turn up.

You have to keep going by returning the following week and build up that trust. These young people can be remarkably hard to engage.

"You also have to be prepared for the fact that they may not want to engage with the police. We will always try to support prosecutions, but our first concern is the welfare of the individual and getting them out of the situation they are in."

Ms Reilly said the attitude and language used by professionals is also crucial. "I have seen examples of where social workers have put in people's records that the young person 'is putting themselves at risk or is involved in prostitution'. It suggests they are not a victim of exploitation when they are. We need to think carefully how we describe people as it shapes our attitudes towards them."

How is the approach being sustained?

The number of councils the service works with is increasing all the time. Currently Empower has advocates in 17 councils. But meeting demand is a constant challenge.

Ms Reilly said: "We do not operate a waiting list. As these young people are in very vulnerable positions we don't think it is safe to keep them waiting.

"In some places we have five advocates, in others, it is just one. With extra funding we could do more. One of the key areas we want to focus on more is engaging with young men. They can be vulnerable and affected by exploitation too, but even in areas where we are funded to work with boys we currently do not get that many referrals."

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Norfolk County Council: moving from enforcement to early intervention

Norfolk Council has had great success in identifying and arresting criminals involved in county lines. But now the local community safety partnership is turning its attention to doing more work on early intervention and prevention.

The challenge

Norfolk is just two hours away from London by car or train. As county lines started to emerge across the UK, the area found itself being targeted.

Within a few years a whole network of criminal activity had spread into the county. There are believed to be around 20 lines in operation with recorded crimes rising by over 10 per cent a year.

Meanwhile, the number of blade injuries at Norfolk hospitals jumped by 25 per cent over three years.

The solution

Norfolk constabulary and its partners have worked to disrupt and prevent drug dealing and organised crime over the last two years.

This has been done through Operation Gravity, which was launched in December 2016. It has been led by a multi-agency gold command team involving key personnel from the police, councils and health, which has worked closely with the Metropolitan Police and National Crime Agency.

By sharing intelligence they have been able to target and identify individuals involved and the places where criminal activity is taking place.

It has required close working with communities and visiting vulnerable people subjected to violence by these gangs.

This has led to a series of raids on premises and arrests. These have tended to be done in coordinated short bursts. For example, over one weekend in October 2018, 22 arrests were made and large quantities of heroin and weapons seized.

Norfolk has also focused efforts on raising awareness about the issue by working in schools. The Safer Schools Partnership has organised a play that has toured local secondary schools across the county educating young people about the risks and consequences of crime.

The performance explores cases where young people have been exploited and used to transport drugs and urges anyone who may know of someone at risk to come forward. It has been delivered to more than 60 schools so far.

The impact

By autumn 2018, police had arrested 750 people as part of Operation Gravity. Around a fifth of the arrests were young people under the age of 18.

Deputy Chief Constable Paul Sanford believes the operation has been a great success. "When we launched Operation Gravity we made it clear that Norfolk was not open for business for illegal drug activity and the message remains the same.

“We have been overwhelmed by the public support – and whilst it has led to more reports of illegal drug activity and knife crime in the county – it has enabled us to take action where it is needed.”

But he added the force has had to take a proportionate approach to bringing charges. “It is a sad fact that during this operation we have arrested a number of children in their late teens. Where it is appropriate, prosecutions do follow. However, on many occasions our focus has been on protecting the child and preventing their further exploitation.”

This has led the police to work closely with the council’s youth offending team and social services to provide support to young people who have been exploited.

Lessons learned

The success of Operation Gravity has also highlighted the scale of the challenge facing the authorities.

Norfolk’s youth offending team know of over 100 young people who are strongly suspected of being involved or at risk of criminal exploitation. Meanwhile, the number of children ‘missing’ – in that authorities have lost track of where they are – has risen by 80 per cent since 2015 and is now around 1,000.

Norfolk Community Safety Partnership Business Manager Jon Shalom said: “It is clear that there is a lot to do. We have had great success on the enforcement side, but now we want to do more in terms of early intervention and prevention, building on some of the work that has happened in schools.

“I think one of the key things that has become apparent is the need to have someone to coordinate this work. It is something we did with the Prevent agenda and we believe it could help us achieve things again so that is something we are looking at.

“There is quite a significant crossover with the two programmes in terms of trying to engage and protect vulnerable young people. I think learning from Prevent is something that can help.”

How is the approach being sustained?

Norfolk’s Community Safety Partnership has made county lines one of its three key priorities going forward. A task and finish group has been established to bring partners together and a county lines strategy has been developed.

The creation of a multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) team is being seen as central to the future work. It will have input from the youth offending team, children’s services, public health, the police and voluntary sector.

The aim is to create a single referral and assessment process that will ensure victims of exploitation, including county lines, receive the support they need.

The partnership has successfully applied for funding with £700,000 awarded from the Government’s Early Intervention Youth Fund. This will help fund a number of initiatives including developing a detached youth work team and the addition of family support workers for the MACE team.

There will also be a programme of awareness-raising and investment in alternative pathways to provide positive educational experiences, training and employment opportunities to de-incentivise participation in criminal activity.

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Northampton Borough Council: setting up youth clubs to tackle criminal activity

The Community Safety Partnership in Northampton has started working with schools to warn pupils about the dangers of knife crime. The initiative has paved the way for a new project which will see youth clubs created to target at youngsters most at risk of finding themselves caught up in organised and violent crime.

The challenge

It has been apparent for some time that Northampton Council is facing growing problems with organised crime. The town's location – between London and Birmingham – has left it vulnerable to county lines and cuckooing¹.

High rates of deprivation have also been linked to crime. Northampton has two local areas in the one per cent most deprived in the country and 15 per cent of children live in out-of-work households.

Police figures suggest over half of gangs and drug lines in the area have links to young people under the age of 18, while young people using local services have identified problems linked to substance misuse, family relationships, bullying, sexual health and low self-esteem.

Chief Inspector James Willis, the District Commander, said many young people are equipping themselves with knives out of fear of other teenagers, while others are being groomed by gangs. "Northampton and the wider county has seen a big increase in knife crime.

"It sadly mirrors the increase across the country, partly fuelled by the rise of gangs trafficking drugs from cities into smaller towns. All the evidence suggests that if you carry a knife you are more likely to be stabbed. It won't protect you. It will just put you at more risk of injury, prosecution or even death."

The solution

The Community Safety Partnership has identified working with schools as a key priority to prevent more children getting caught up in crime.

In February 2018 a CSE event was held at a local theatre where drama productions and awareness sessions were delivered to 500 primary and secondary schools.

And later in the year, the partnership turned its attention to knife crime launching #StopKnivesSaveLives in September. It is a joint project by the ambulance service, police, youth offending service, university, borough council and youth organisation Free2Talk.

The campaign has been targeted at year six and year seven pupils. The year six pupils have been given talks about community safety, warned about the dangers of rail tracks and about the risks of knife crime.

Councillor Anna King, Northampton cabinet member for community engagement and safety, said: "We did not want it to be too graphic. But we have seen really young people get caught up in crime – some as young as 12 – and so we wanted to start raising the issues early.

¹ Cuckooing: where drug dealers take over the home of a vulnerable person to use as a base.

“We have had a local judge come in to talk to the pupils as well. He talked about his experience of sentencing young people, warning one mistake can have terrible consequences for your life.”

The sessions for secondary school pupils have been more hard-hitting featuring a video filmed by the ambulance service showing the impact of a stabbing and how it has to be treated. Talks have also been given by the youth offending service as well as police officers.

Lee Brentnall, Ambulance Operations Manager for Communications, Engagement and Safeguarding for East Midlands Ambulance Service, said the aim of the video was to provide a perspective “that is seldom heard”. “We are keen to work together to safeguard our young people and reduce deaths and serious injuries with knife and violent crime.”

The impact

The talks are in the process of being rolled out to schools across the town. By the end of this academic year all 17 secondary schools and many of the primary schools will have been involved.

Teachers in all the schools have also been present to help raise awareness of the signs to look out for.

The feedback has been really positive. Pupils have been asked to complete a survey following the sessions. Some 94 per cent said they now know significantly more about the consequences of carrying an offensive weapon, 79 per cent about blood loss and first aid and 80 per cent about weapons and the law.

Lessons learned

Councillor King said the work engaging schools has been really successful, but it also led the Community Safety Partnership to conclude there was a real gap in provision.

“The preventative work in schools has been a really important development. We also know there is a lot of good work going on at a tier four level through the youth offending service.

“But there is less in place at a tier three level – for those who are just beginning to find themselves at the edge of criminality. I think it is probably a common problem across the country.”

How the approach is being sustained?

In 2019 a new initiative – run by Free2Talk – will be launched. It will see youth clubs set up in three areas aimed at targeting those aged 10 to 17 who are involved in low-level crimes. The work is being funded by the Home Office’s Trusted Relationships Fund after Northampton was awarded funding of £800,000 to pay for the work.

Social workers, police and youth offending teams will be encouraged to refer young people into the youth clubs where there will be specially trained workers there to engage them.

It will also be open to all young people in an area in a bid to get those who are referred mixing and developing healthy relationships.

The club will have music, computer consoles and regular activities. Mentors will also work from the youth clubs to provide more intensive one-to-one support for those who need it.

Councillor King said: “Tackling knife crime is a big priority for us so we are grateful to have secured the funding. We really think this could have a big impact and reduce the number of young people being exploited.”

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North East Lincolnshire Council: tackling county lines head-on

North East Lincolnshire Council set up a partnership board to tackle county lines drug-dealing two years ago. The move has prompted a series of new initiatives, including the appointment of a link worker, training for health staff and projects to support victims.

The challenge

North East Lincolnshire Council became aware of child criminal exploitation as a local issue in the spring of 2015. This became apparent following the emergence of children reporting exploitation and several violent incidents. An analysis revealed a link to drug supply and the exploitation of children.

During the following weeks and months multi-agency meetings were held to begin to understand the issues facing the area. In the autumn North East Lincolnshire Council took part in a Home Office peer review.

It concluded that while the area was not demonstrating typical youth gang violence traits, it did have county lines difficulties. An action plan was formed.

The solution

One of the first steps taken was the formation of a Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) Partnership Board. It was set up in 2016 and is composed of representatives from the police, council, health and other partnership agencies.

The creation of the board soon prompted changes, including the appointment of a CCE link worker at the council, while the police identified a police community support officer who acted as the conduit for them.

Together they have worked closely to ensure that workforce development and knowledge around the agenda has been a primary consideration.

GPs and other primary care staff have been given training to ensure they know what to look out for. Child Criminal Exploitation Lead Trish Leivesley said: "We needed professionals to become curious, to start asking questions. The young people were presenting to them with these injuries that they were saying were related to accidents. They were being patched up and sent away."

Police officers, social workers and health staff have also been given an easy-to-use screening tool to help identify those at risk of being exploited through county lines. Safeguarding level two training on exploitation and trafficking has also been rolled out.

Meanwhile, projects have been undertaken with groups of young people involved in county lines exploitation. These include theatre and photography-based projects. So far 11 children have taken part in these.

Mrs Leivesley said: "They have given the young people a chance to explore their feelings and talk about their experiences. When you do this, you can then help them to come to terms with what has happened and get them the right support whether that is from the youth offending team, mental health or social care. The opportunities to capture the child's experience have been taken and used to inform practice."

The impact

The work has begun to have an impact. North East Lincolnshire has been commended by a recent Home Office peer review in 2018. The report praised the area for taking steps to “identify and address” the issue and “successfully” implementing changes.

It said the partnership appeared “strong and well informed”, with Manchester, Merseyside, London and the West Midlands identified as the routes in.

Mrs Leivesley said the partnership’s understanding of county lines and how it affects the area has “increased significantly”.

Lessons learned

The work on county lines has required a change in culture, said Mrs Leivesley. “At first the language used confirmed that the children were not perceived as victims.”

She said it was similar to the issue CSE several years ago where professionals referred to victims as sex workers or promiscuous. Changing the language used has been important.

“You immediately start to ask what you can do for them. You can use modern-day slavery legislation to support them and intervene with perpetrators.”

How is the approach being sustained?

The council has been successful in gaining funding from the Home Office’s Trusted Relationships Fund. The council and its partners are utilising the funding to establish a new team called Gaining Respect and Finding Trust (GRAFT).

This project will include mental health specialists, a Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) practitioner and other experts to work directly with children and support them to attempt to exit exploitation.

Meanwhile, Humberside Police has pledged its commitment to the threat by creating a new team to tackle the perpetrators of child criminal exploitation.

The council recognises that intervening at an earlier stage is crucial. Earlier this year a mapping exercise was carried out looking at the characteristics of 73 children exploited through organised crime.

Several common themes emerged. Some 94 per cent were in alternative education provisions, all had used drugs, over half had presented with injuries and just under half admitted to carrying a weapon.

Mrs Leivesley said: “We are making progress, but we know we don’t have all the answers yet. The new investment will allow us to do much more. Three particular areas of focus are housing, education and engaging with communities.”

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Southend Borough Council: providing a coordinated approach

Southend Council has created a new steering group to coordinate the fight against county lines, ensuring the two safeguarding boards, community safety partnership and health and wellbeing board (HWB) are working together. It has already led to a public awareness campaign being run and other projects are now in the pipeline.

The challenge

Southend has been on the frontline of the fight against county lines. As a coastal town just outside London, organised gangs have targeted young people to help them supply drugs.

Council Community Safety Unit Programme Director Simon Ford said: “County lines has become a big problem across the country. We have seen young children targeted here. It has been a really worrying development.

“Young people are being placed in desperate situations, feeling trapped and that there is no-one to help them. They become indebted to these gangs and are exploited, committing crimes to pay off debts.”

The solution

As part of the process of responding to the emerging trend, Southend decided to review how its approach was coordinated. There were four separate boards which were having input into county lines work – the community safety partnership, two safeguarding boards and the HWB.

Mr Ford said: “Each board has its own action groups and sub-groups. We realised there was no overall coordination and work was being duplicated. The police also had Operation Rapture, which was focused on gangs. We had various things happening, but it just wasn’t as effective as it should have been. People were not working together.”

The decision was taken in early 2018 to set up a violence and vulnerability steering group to coordinate the work. It is a joint sub group of all four boards, chaired by the chief executive and involving representatives from each.

Mr Ford said: “It meant for the first time we were able to put together a joint action plan with six key priorities, including data gathering, enforcement, protection and awareness raising.”

The impact

The impact has been immediate. Within a few months the new group had helped several projects to get off the ground.

One has been a campaign aimed at parents. See the Signs urges parents and carers to find out more about how these criminal groups operate, the language that is used and to be aware of any signs that their child may be involved, such as excessive texting and phone calls, going missing from home or school and unexplained acquisition of money, clothes and phones.

Outdoor and social media advertising has been used and a dedicated hotline number created. Taxi drivers, security guards and train staff have also been given advice on what to look out for.

Chief inspector Neil Pudney, District Commander for Southend, said the coordinated approach is helping to get an important message out there. “Young people can fall into gang lifestyles in different ways, but loving and vigilant parents can spot issues and get help before they develop. Gangs recruit young people by portraying a glamorous lifestyle, but the reality is far different.”

Lessons learned

Mr Ford said the need for better data has become one of the key priorities. “We realised we just did not have a clear picture of activity – how many A&E visits there are or how many arrests have been made for example.

“We are beginning to develop a dashboard to keep track of all this. We want to report on it monthly so we can see clear trends and patterns and respond to them.”

If it works, Mr Ford, who sits on a Home Office task group for county lines, believes it could be deployed nationally. “Having a good handle of exactly what is going on is important if we are going to tackle this.”

How is the approach being sustained?

The next big campaign will target recreational drug users, said Mr Ford. “There are people who use drugs recreationally on a Friday and Saturday night – a line or two of cocaine. We want to appeal to them.

“They are likely to be the sort of people who have a social conscience. They would not buy their trainers from a sweatshop in India, but they are simply unaware of where their drugs come from. They think it is some flash guy from Ibiza. But it’s not. Instead it’s exploited children from the place they live. We think we can have an impact on demand for these drugs.”

Mr Ford said the coordinated approach to county lines has also got them thinking about other areas they could apply the same principles to. “Domestic violence cuts across all the same areas so we are looking to see if we should do the same thing for that. It is becoming a really important way of working.”

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Wakefield Council: diverting young people from crime

Wakefield Council's award-winning Liaison and Diversion Service is helping young offenders steer themselves away from crime by providing support for everything from mental health problems to help accessing education and training. The approach has proved so successful it is now being replicated in other areas.

The challenge

In 2009 the Government-commissioned Bradley Report laid bare the inefficiency in the criminal justice system. It cited figures showing over nine in 10 prisoners had mental health problems and learning disabilities.

It warned a lack of early support could be a factor in the offending history with prisoners falling into a pattern of re-offending before being given a custodial sentence.

The research prompted Wakefield Council to re-think its approach to the way it supported people who found themselves in trouble with the police.

The solution

The council formed a Liaison and Diversion Service in partnership with the police to work with offenders who have vulnerabilities. It was initially focused on under 18s, but was then extended to all ages when it was commissioned to be one of 10 national pilot sites by NHS England in 2013.

The 13-strong multi-disciplinary team is based at Wakefield's police headquarters. The team includes mental health nurses, youth offending practitioners, specialist

practitioners and police officers.

Those that are identified as having vulnerabilities – whether it is a mental health problem, learning disabilities, substance misuse or even help with employment, education or housing – are assigned a case worker to carry out a full assessment.

This looks at all aspects of the person's life, taking a whole family approach identifying vulnerabilities which may be contributing to their offending behaviour. The person is then diverted on to interventions that are appropriate and proportionate to the offence using restorative practice.

This could be a victim awareness or shop theft session facilitated by a volunteer from the Restorative Practice Team. In addition young people are then offered voluntary interventions around their unmet needs and vulnerabilities.

Liaison and Diversion Team Manager Clint Hepworth said: "This is a tailored plan for that individual and could be wide-ranging from educational support to re-engage with school or college, an assessment with a speech and language therapist to identify any communication difficulties, a referral to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) for emotional wellbeing and mental health or an educational session around safe use of the internet and risks of child sexual exploitation.

"The idea is that the direct support from our team lasts no more than 12 weeks. At the start we establish a care plan and an exit strategy. We want them engaged with the services they need before we can then move on."

The impact

Over the past 12 months the service has worked with nearly 250 young people. A similar number of older adults have been provided with support too. Re-offending rates stand at 22 per cent, compared to 32 per cent for those who do not receive the tailored support.

Some 85 per cent of young people remain engaged with services after the 12-week support ends – significantly higher than the national average for other schemes nationally.

One of the young people who has been helped is Jack. He was referred into the service after assaulting his mother. This followed a number of other offences.

The case worker developed a plan with Jack and his family, including help from the youth offending team, education support, sessions with a speech and language therapist and mental health and wellbeing support. The benefit of being an all-age service meant the case worker was able to offer mother mental health support. His case worker attended his initial sessions with these services to help him get engaged.

He has not re-offended since and the family say they are much happier. His mother said the service was “really, really fantastic”. “It turned a negative situation into a positive. There would have been more arrests for sure without the support. I’m no longer scared of my son. I have my son back and got our bond back and a happy home.”

The work of the team has also been recognised by a number of awards, including being named best liaison and diversion service in the country in 2017/18.

Lessons learned

As the service has developed, the council has recognised the need for a dedicated pathway for women. The Liaison and Diversion Service now works with Wakefield’s Well Woman Centre.

The centre provides women with support on everything from developing self-esteem to personality disorders and healthy relationships.

Mr Hepworth said: “Having the specialist expertise from the centre has been invaluable. In fact, due to the success of the referral pathway we found ourselves high levels of demand and we began to have waiting list.

“So we worked with the centre to develop the restore project which allows individuals to access the centre and access support until specialist help could be provided. If you keep people waiting you risk them becoming disengaged. I think that is an important lesson we have learned.”

How is the approach being sustained?

Wakefield’s success has meant it has been commissioned to expand the service and now provides a Liaison and Diversion Service in both Leeds and in Bradford.

Like the Wakefield service, they are both funded by NHS England. The experience of Wakefield’s team has also been used to inform the development of services nationally.

Former Wakefield Chief Superintendent Mabs Hussain, who worked closely with the service until he left to take up a new post in Manchester in late 2018, said the service has achieved “real success”. “Addressing the root causes of why people turn to crime and assisting them in turning their lives around forms a central part of our approach and is among the best methods we have of reducing criminality.”

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Want to find out more?

**Local Government Association:
Public health approaches to reducing
violence (2018)**

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documents/15.32%20-%20Reducing%20
family%20violence_04_WEB.pdf](http://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/15.32%20-%20Reducing%20family%20violence_04_WEB.pdf)

**Home Office: Serious Violence
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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/
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youth-violence-rapid-review.pdf](http://www.eif.org.uk/files/pdf/preventing-gang-and-youth-violence-rapid-review.pdf)

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