

Scrutiny Review

Rewriting the Narrative -
Youth Violent Crime



Contents

FOREWORD	4
RECOMMENDATIONS	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 Scope of the review	9
1.2 How did we complete this review	9
1.3 Why take a public health approach	10
SECTION 2: UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE	12
2.1 National	12
2.2 West Midlands	12
2.3 Our city	13
2.4 What drives violence	13
2.4.1 Risk factors	13
2.4.2 Protective factors	14
2.4.3 Adverse Childhood Experiences	15
2.4.4 Substance Misuse.....	15
SECTION 3: OUR FINDINGS	16
3.1 Learning from the Scotland Violence Reduction Unit.....	16
3.2 Existing good work and targeted intervention in Wolverhampton	18
3.3 Policing	21
3.4 Creating A Sense of Belonging - Gangs and Youth Violence	22
3.5 Focus on Early Years and Early Intervention	24
3.6 Youth Offending Team (YOT)	25
3.7 School Exclusions	26
3.8 Increasing employment opportunities	27
SECTION 4: CONCLUSION	28
APPENDICES	30
Appendix 1 - Members of the Scrutiny Review Group	30
Appendix 2 – List of witnesses	31

FOREWORD

Wolverhampton is a truly thriving city and over recent years we have seen significant investment and improvement in housing, transport infrastructure, education and the open environment. Our children and young people are setting impressive standards with more young people than ever engaging in education, employment and training.

Our schools are getting better, there has been significant improvement in GCSE attainment at Key Stage 4 and reductions in school absences and exclusions. All this positive news is a result of services and communities working together for the betterment of Wolverhampton communities.

There is however always room for improvement. A city such as Wolverhampton which houses a diverse population will naturally face challenges, which must be explored and collectively addressed. One such challenge is that of youth violence.

Nationally, youth violence has become a hugely contentious public and political issue and the debate about the causes, extent and solutions seems to constantly occupy the media.

Rarely though do we pause to challenge our own reactions, assumptions or the opinions we form about the issue. That's why, in September 2018, following a knife incident which tragically resulted in a young person losing their life, the City of Wolverhampton Council made the decision to undertake a scrutiny review into youth violence in the city.

Growing up in an area of Wolverhampton that has been heavily affected by poverty, I have witnessed the long-term effects it can have on local communities. I was fortunate to have a strong family network to provide support and guidance which enabled me to go on and gain a professional qualification. Not all young people have this support and the report requests that the Council investigate how such a network of support and guidance can be made available for all young people to engage with in their own communities.

We need to equip our young people with the tools they need to make the right decisions in the future. This responsibility rests with us all.

This review will contribute to a wider programme of work currently being developed by the City of Wolverhampton Council; in particular, the focus on Young People that the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ian Brookfield, has prioritised and our new Council Plan 2019-2024.

Cllr Obaida Ahmed
Chair

RECOMMENDATIONS

These 10 key recommendations aim to support, enhance and share, existing good work where it has been identified and to seek assurances that where initiatives have proven successful that all possible steps are taken to ensure that these can continue.

It is not the intention of the Review Group to prescribe in detail how this is done but to ensure that those with the knowledge, expertise and resources; who are best placed to make such judgements are supported and encouraged to do so.

Recommendation 1: That Scrutiny Board receive regular updates from representatives of the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (WMVRU) outlining how the work of the WMVRU is contributing to, supporting and enhancing the work already being undertaken in Wolverhampton.

Recommendation 2: That the Council takes all necessary steps to ensure that the Holiday Squad programme becomes embedded within a youth offer which continues to be refined and informed by the Growing up in Wolverhampton survey.

Recommendation 3: That the Council continues to support young people in the City through the provision of sustained and co-ordinated youth provision, strategically informed by the Youth Engagement Strategy (#YES).

Recommendation 4: That the Council collaborates further with voluntary and community sector organisations and communities to design and develop services for preventative approaches to tackling youth violence.

Recommendation 5: That the Council develops a commissioning approach with the voluntary and community sector to tackle youth violence. This should be based on a strong evidence base with a long-term view and a requirement to enhance service stability.

Recommendation 6: That the Council considers how it can routinely build into its design and planning processes, considerations relating to the creation of healthy, cohesive and safe communities.

Recommendation 7: That all frontline Council employees who have direct contact with young people including teachers, health workers, youth and community workers be encouraged to complete the PCC (Police and Crime Commissioner) funded ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) training package.

Recommendation 8: That reports considered by the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel routinely consider how the recommendations contribute to preventing and reducing youth violence.

Recommendation 9: That the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) ensure that Wolverhampton specific initiatives that have been commissioned through the PCC continue to be funded through the WMVRU (e.g. St Giles' based at Accident & Emergency at the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust).

Recommendation 10: That progress and governance relating to the above recommendations resides with the Safer Wolverhampton Partnership Board and that as such, the Chair of the Scrutiny Review into Youth Violent Crime, becomes a member of the Safer Wolverhampton Partnership Board.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

No one is born violent. Violence is preventable, and it is often the circumstances surrounding an individual at an early age that either puts them at a higher risk of becoming violent or provides them with the tools to lead a fulfilling and rewarding life. This report highlights the importance of early intervention and the necessity of training for all those who have direct contact with young people to enable them to spot the signs of adverse childhood experiences and to take appropriate action.

This report considers areas of good practice already taking place within the city such as Catch 22, Eyes to Success, the Summer Squad and Believe to Achieve and the good work being carried out by the Council's own Youth Offending Service and Community Safety Team. Alongside this, the report provides evidence and examples of successful initiatives carried out by the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit and makes a number of recommendations regarding how these initiatives can be fed into the future West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit.

The report highlights the need to increase employment opportunities to help mitigate the risk factors associated with violence. By equipping our young people with a skill and providing them with an alternative role model in the work place, many of the risk factors associated with violence can be mitigated.

The report also considers the important role that the community will play in providing a sense of belonging for young people to provide them with somewhere to go, something to do and someone to show them that there is an alternative.

We must all take responsibility for our young people and their futures and together provide them with the opportunities, tools and skills they need to write their own, successful narratives.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This cross-party review provides the platform for placing violence prevention at the heart of our council commitment to ensure everyone in Wolverhampton can live their lives in a safe and supportive environment.

Exposure to violence affects young people's physical and emotional wellbeing. This can have an impact throughout their life course meaning they are more likely to be exposed to a range of health damaging behaviours, as well as impacting negatively upon their education, employment and future life opportunities.

By taking a public health approach to violence reduction within this scrutiny review we have been able to define the scale of the problem at a local level, examine the characteristics of those affected by violence and the risks that follow exposure to violent incidents. We have learned from national and local examples why violence occurs, helping to shape our understanding of the factors we have the potential to modify through a range of population-based prevention interventions.

Addressing youth violence is not the responsibility of one single organisation, the responsibility for protecting our young people and supporting them to make the right life choices needs a cross sectoral approach.

This report draws on a large array of information gathered from evidence sessions, a visit to the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU), meetings with practitioners and youth workers, police officers, the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, health professionals, community groups and a range of relevant publications and reports.

This review makes a series of recommendations that can be used to address risk factors for violence and promote protective factors across all ages. These include working collaboratively with partners and communities to strengthen their role in the design and delivery of prevention interventions, as well as working systematically to impact positively on wider social, economic and health outcomes for our residents across the City of Wolverhampton.

Cabinet is asked to endorse the recommendations made in this report and consider the allocation of resources including longer term funding and commissioning of services for those at risk of committing violence, becoming a victim of violence, or both.

1.1 Scope of the review

The overarching aim of the review was to make recommendations to reduce violent crime in young people across Wolverhampton, and strengthen prevention and resilience by identifying the risk factors and causes of violent crime.

The review did not define an explicit age, this was to avoid restrictions on applying data and inviting input from a range of services and people, many of which will not work to prescribed age bands. However, to provide some consistency with recognised definitions¹, the review broadly recognised young people being up to the age of 24. All genders and geography across Wolverhampton was in scope for this review.

To ensure a common shared understanding of what violence is, the review took guidance from the World Health Organisation's Violence Prevention Alliance, which defines violence as *'the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation².'*

Setting the basics, the review specifically aimed to:

- a) Examine and understand the current situation regarding violent youth crime in the city;
- b) Gather information and evidence regarding youth crime in the city;
- c) Question witnesses and experts from partner organisations, groups and communities regarding their experiences of youth crime in the city;
- d) To make recommendations based on the evidence collected and to work with partners to see these recommendations implemented.

Consequently, the review aimed to identify evidence based, long term recommendations that will underpin and enhance the work already being carried out in Wolverhampton by the council and its partners.

1.2 How did we complete this review

The process to gather information was comprehensive, which resulted in the use and exploration of data, evidence, best practice and expert input from a range of services and people.

Those parties invited as witnesses provided the Group with qualitative and quantitative data which provided the Group with a rich picture of youth violence and helped shape recommendations. A full list of witnesses can be found at Appendix 2.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth#Terminology_and_definitions

² <https://www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/definition/en/>

Desktop research was undertaken on the public health approach to reducing violence to help strengthen the Group's understanding of the reasons why this approach is taken. A number of strategies were considered at both national and local levels, for example, the national Serious Violence Strategy³ published in 2018 and the local Tackling Violence and Exploitation Strategy⁴ published by Wolverhampton's Community Safety Partnership, locally known as Safer Wolverhampton Partnership⁵.

1.3 Why take a public health approach

The Group were committed to taking a systematic approach to this review and were aware of the heralded public health approach to tackling violence.

'Violence is a public health issue. Living without the fear of violence is a fundamental requirement for health and wellbeing' (Public Health England).

Globally and within the UK, it is recognised that taking a public health approach to violence will yield long term change. Over recent years there has been greater acknowledgement of the significant role public health can play in addressing violence. The relative importance of violence as a public health issue is clearly illustrated by the results of the 2013 Global Burden of Disease Study, which shows that interpersonal violence and self-harm are among the top 25 causes of global years of life lost.

Violence should be treated parallel to any complex health problem, as the predisposing risk factors to violence are changeable and preventable. Taking a public health approach enables a comprehensive understanding of these risk factors, which is fundamental when implementing interventions to prevent violence.

Taking a public health approach enables population level change and shifts the focus away from acute interventions, whether that be measures deployed in time of crisis or at individual behaviour change level and brings a focus on prevention and early intervention.

Public health approaches bring a life course lens to the problem, identifying key points during the life time where risk factors are more influential and prevalent and evaluates how interventions can be shaped to tackle these risks.

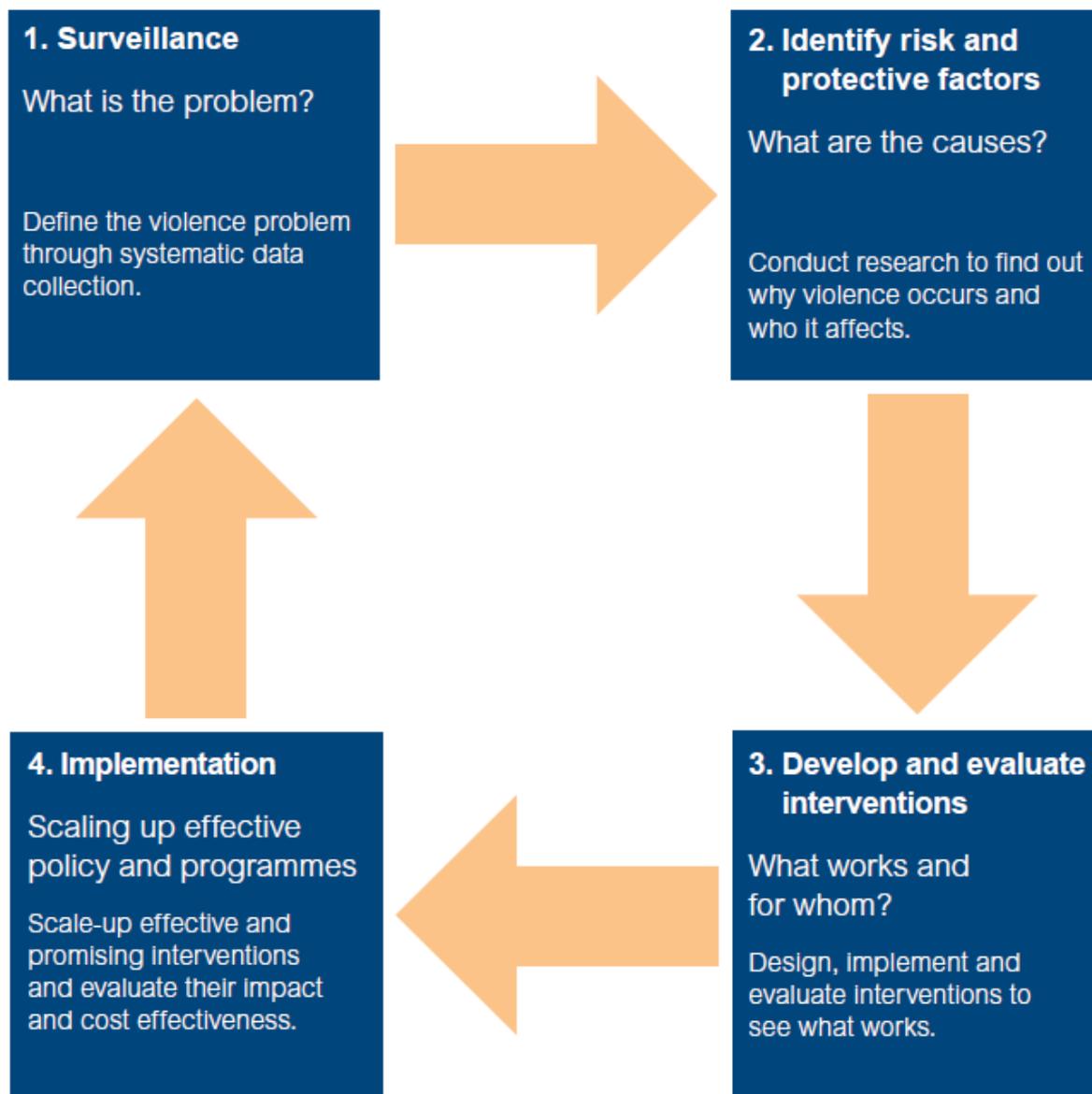
³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-strategy>

⁴ <http://www.saferwolverhampton.org.uk/documents/TVE%20Wolverhampton%20Strategy.pdf>

⁵ www.saferwolverhampton.org.uk

The World Health Organisation provides a useful diagrammatic that summarises what a public health approach to violence looks like.

Figure 1: World Health Organisation Public Health Approach to Violence



SECTION 2: UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE

2.1 National

It was important for the Group to gain a brief understanding of the national picture, in terms of government direction and violence prevalence across the nation. This information was sourced through desk top research and input from witnesses.

The most recent central government strategy in tackling violence was launched in 2018. The Serious Violence Strategy³ sets out government's commitment to reduce violence across the spectrum from enforcement to prevention. The Group welcome the focus on prevention and early intervention, and in particular the commitment to invest more funds in supporting young people before they become involved in serious violence.

The Group heard that nationally crime has generally come down over recent decades, with the level stabilising in more recent years, this concerns all ages not just young people. However, some crime categories have seen increases, including violent crime. For example, in 2018, there was no real change in commonly occurring violence which caused low harm, however, lower-volume higher harm violence increased.

The Group noted the complexities of data availability for the age group in question as the way data was collated and recorded varied in police forces.

2.2 West Midlands

The Group invited the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (WMPCC) as a witness. He outlined his commitment to tackling youth violence through a public health approach. Subsequently, in June 2019, it was announced that £3.37 million of government funding will be used to establish a West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). The Home Office funding has been awarded to the West Midlands WMPCC to combat a rise in violent crime in the region. The WMPCC has since reiterated that the new VRU will adopt a 'public health approach', which means issues like gang activity and knife crime will not only be seen as a policing priority, but as a problem that needs to be tackled by all agencies through a systematic process of understanding what drives violence and who is most affected.

The Group welcome this funding and the proposal to create a West Midlands VRU.

Across the WMPFA, between January 2015 – December 2018, the total amount of violent crimes recorded was 300,273 – 7% of this violence was committed by those aged between 10-24. The level of violent crime in Wolverhampton was proportionate to other areas across the region. The Group took particular note of this proportionality of youth violence, as general perceptions can lead us to believe youth violence is much more prevalent.

2.3 Our city

On 10 July 2019, Cabinet approved Wolverhampton's Strategy for Tackling Violence and Exploitation⁴. The new strategy recognises that the lines between crime types are becoming increasingly blurred and crimes that were previously dealt with separately are now to be addressed by a more joined up strategy, with shared ownership and governance from the Safer Wolverhampton Partnership (SWP) and the Adults and Children's Safeguarding Boards. The Group are in favour of this approach, which will enhance the city's safeguarding efforts.

The Group heard about violence prevalence in the city and were reassured to hear that only a small proportion of violence in Wolverhampton was committed by 10 to 24-year olds, only 8% during the period of 2015-2018. This fact needs to be highlighted and reinforced that the vast majority of young people in the Wolverhampton do not commit violence.

The majority of victims and defendants were from a White British ethnic background, in line with the Wolverhampton population. The next largest group of defendants were Black-Caribbean and Mixed-White & Black Caribbean, both are over-represented when compared to numbers within the Wolverhampton population

In terms of gender, the majority of victims were female and the majority of defendant's male. Larger number of female victims may suggest that there is more domestic violence than being reported. However, domestic violence falls outside the scope of this review so was not further explored. Less male victims might suggest that males are not reporting crime as much due to gang related issues or misplaced loyalty.

2.4 What drives violence

The Group were made aware that violence is preventable. No one is born being violent, it is the circumstances that surrounding that young person that can either put them at higher risk of becoming violent or protect them enabling a fulfilling and rewarding life.

2.4.1 Risk factors

The Group heard that a combination of individual, relationship, community, and societal factors contribute to the risk of youth violence. Research on youth violence has increased understanding of factors that make some populations more vulnerable to victimisation and perpetration. Risk factors are characteristics associated with youth violence, but they are not direct causes of youth violence.



Figure 2: Risk Factors to Violence

Source: Centres for Disease Control and Prevention

2.4.2 Protective factors

The review found that there are protective factors too, which if present reduce the risk of perpetrating violence. Protective factors are those that enable a young person to resist or overcome the risk factors and these can be seen below. The council and its partners have a duty to develop processes that will better embed the protective factors in young people to make them more resilient to the risk factors that lead to violence.

Protective Factors		
Individual	Family	Peer and social
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intolerant attitude toward deviance High IQ/ high educational aspirations Positive social orientation Popularity acknowledged by peers Highly developed skills for realistic planning Religious/moral beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connection to family Able to discuss problems with parents Perceived parental expectations in school performance Frequent shared activities with parents Consistent presence of parents during at least one of the following: when awakening, when arriving home from school, at evening, mealtime or when going to bed Involvement in social activities, parental/family use of constructive strategies for coping with problems (provision of models of constructive coping) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possession of affective relationships with those at school are strong, close and pro-socially oriented Commitment to school Close relationships with non-deviant peers Peer groups that do not condone antisocial behaviour Involvement in pro-social activities Exposure to school climates that have: Intensive supervision, clear behaviour rules, consistent negative reinforcement of aggression, engagement of parents and teachers

Source: Centres for Disease Control and Prevention

2.4.3 Adverse Childhood Experiences

Early childhood experiences have a significant impact on a person's life. People who experience four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are 10 times more likely to be involved in violence every year by the time they are 18, compared to a young person who hasn't experienced any ACEs.

Adverse Childhood Experiences are not just a concern for health. Experiencing ACEs means individuals are more likely to perform poorly in school, more likely to be involved in crime and ultimately less likely to be a productive member of society.⁶

The aim of the project is to ensure that learning from ACEs is embedded across organisations, at a strategic level and in day to day practice at the front line.

Anyone who has direct contact with young people including teachers, health workers, council employees, youth and community workers and police officers or who has a statutory responsibility for the safeguarding or wellbeing of young people must receive training on the importance of adverse childhood experiences.

Clear guidance and information must be provided to enable people to spot the signs of ACEs and a clear referral pathway must be made available to enable anyone who has concerns about a young person to get them the help they need.

How to spot the signs of ACEs and the pathway to follow to get help must be widely publicised (one possibility could be a campaign similar to 'Ask for Angela').

2.4.4 Substance Misuse

Harmful and hazardous alcohol use are risk factors both for being victimised and perpetrating youth violence. The same can be said for young people who grow up in households where substance misuse is prevalent.

According to the 2014 Crime Survey for England and Wales, 47% of violent offences were believed to have been committed under the influence of alcohol⁷.

It is clear there are factors in a young person's personality, development and environment which can pre-dispose them both to drug and alcohol misuse and to anti-social behaviour. There also appears to be causal links from young people's alcohol and drug use to crime.

⁶ <http://violencepreventionalliance.org/projects/ace/>

⁷ Office for National Statistics (ONS) Overview of violent crime and sexual offences (February 2016) <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/compendium/focusonviolentcrimeandsexualoffences/yearendingmarch2015/chapter1overviewofviolentcrimeandsexualoffences>

SECTION 3: OUR FINDINGS

3.1 Learning from the Scotland Violence Reduction Unit

As part of the review, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Group visited the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU), which has seen celebratory outcomes around tackling violence. SVRU has embedded a public health approach to tackling violence and is seen as exemplar practice nationally and beyond.

More detailed examples of the work carried out by the SVRU are considered below, but it is the ethos and philosophy of the SVRU that has driven its' success and it is this that needs to be replicated in Wolverhampton and the West Midlands.

The Group noted that the SVRU had no overarching written strategy at the beginning, this was allowed to evolve over time alongside a steady cultural change and growth in trust and communication between the SVRU and the communities it sought to help.

The SVRU was given permission to experiment, to try out new ideas, failure was accepted as a possible outcome and this was not a deterrent to trying.

There has to be trust and a commitment to actually 'doing' which means an acceptance that a violence reduction unit might, when appropriate, need to operate outside of the bureaucratic committee structures of local authorities, police authorities and other similar organisations.

The focus was on long term commitment. The Group heard from one officer who had spent three years in a community, building relationships and trust and breaking down the barriers that alienate and exclude young people and lead them down the pathway of violence. The officer highlighted the pivotal factor that the SVRU genuinely embraced and involved the people it was trying to help.

Mothers who had lost children to gang violence were invited to speak to young people, youngsters were invited to sign up to a 'pledge to change' scheme, following which support was provided to change their circumstances such as unemployment, places on cadet forces, volunteering schemes to help these young people meet and work with other members of the community.

It was clear to the Group that young people need a positive destination to aim for and it should be the ambition of the future West Midlands VRU to provide these destinations and by working closely with communities and partners to enable our young people to reach them.

Good practice examples from the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit

Using people with lived experiences is something that the SVRU has wholly embraced and which has proven very successful. Below are a few examples that the Group saw and heard about first hand when they visited Glasgow.

- **Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)**

The SVRU has successfully introduced Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP), which is Scotland's largest anti-violence schools programme operating in more than 20 local authority areas. MVP aims to empower students to safely speak out against all forms of violence from rape and sexual harassment to bullying and abusive behaviour. It encourages young people to not be a bystander and to consider what they can actually do to help when they see a situation occurring.

- **Hospital Navigators**



Working in emergency departments across the city, the Navigator⁸ scheme aims to stop the revolving door of violent injury in hospitals. The Navigators complement the work of medical staff by engaging with patients who have been affected by violence. Using a wide range of contacts with services outside the emergency room the Navigators offer support to help patients change their lives. The aim is to break the cycle of violence for the individual and ease the pressure that violence places on the NHS.

The Navigators are people with real life experiences who can bring empathy and a shared understanding to a person in crisis. The Navigators are not a formal organisation, and this helps to gain the trust of the patient, they are a constant presence in the hospital and are able to build relationships by showing that they are there for the long haul, not just until a shift is over.

The Group is aware that there is a similar scheme to this in Wolverhampton's New Cross Hospital run by St Giles's Trust but that funding for this is not guaranteed and time limited based on a bidding process.

⁸ <http://actiononviolence.org/projects/navigator>

- **Street & Arrow Project**



One scheme that the Group was very impressed with during its visit to Glasgow was Street & Arrow⁹. Street & Arrow is a social enterprise scheme set up by the SVRU that dishes up tasty modern street food and second chances for its employees.

Street & Arrow hires people with convictions for 12-month blocks. During this time workers are paired with a mentor who can help them master everything from basic employment skills like turning up to work on time through to debt management and relationship issues.

The Group met with workers in the café and heard their stories and their journeys. For one employee in the café, his journey had included a hospital admittance following a violent stabbing, a meeting with a navigator, a stint in the Street & Arrow Café and now a role as a mentor. This individual had grown up around violence and hard drugs, had lost partners and parents to drugs and alcohol and nearly lost himself. The work done by the SVRU had enabled him to break out of the cycle and ensure that his young son had a much better start in life and a father that could be there for him.

3.2 Existing good work and targeted intervention in Wolverhampton

The Group was very impressed by a number of existing community groups and community workers that it heard from. It is however clear that limited and time restricted funding (often from bids) makes stability and longevity hard to control.

It is clear that the use of the word gang is sometimes off putting for potential service users and a number of the providers spoken to were starting to move away from this terminology. From the information considered it is also evidence that work with children needs to begin at a very early age as some of the children, with weapons, being seen by the community groups were as young as six.

It is also clear from discussions with the community groups that there is a need for education for parents to enable them to recognise the signs of Adverse Childhood

⁹ <http://actiononviolence.org/projects/street-arrow>

Experiences (ACEs) in their children, and services to help them manage and deal with the possible consequences of these.

Processes also need to be put in place to encourage parents, carers and young people to feel empowered to speak up and seek help or guidance. The group understand that this will be increasingly difficult for families where there are gang members present.

The real success of the community groups is linked to the fact that there is a great network of services and individuals in the city. This cannot be manufactured, it is about building trusting and lasting community relationships where information can be shared and used appropriately to keep the city and its young people safer.

The matters of education, early intervention and pathways to support are dealt with in more detail later in this report.

Community Projects

Below are just some of the examples of good initiatives that the Group heard about:

- **Girls Allowed**

A programme lead by Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council comprising a consortium of voluntary and community sector partners to deliver a suit of complementary interventions specifically targeted at young females who are vulnerable or involved in gang related activities.

One important aspect of the 'Girls Allowed' scheme is that it is not publicised as being a gang-related programme as this can sometimes deter individuals and schools who do not want to be seen to have a gang problem.

- **Catch 22**

Catch 22 works at every stage of the life cycle from cradle to career and because of this it enables project workers to have a deep insight into the challenges and opportunities facing young people today. A recent success for Catch 22 has been with one of the Pupil Referral Units in the city. The centre had identified a gap with support offered to pupils identifying with aggression; Catch 22 provided services one day a week and since then there have been no incidents reported to the police.

Catch 22 confirmed that they are also starting to move away from using gang terminology to a more violence-centred approach.

- **Eyes to Success**

Eyes to success was originally set up as a drama and dance workshop but due to the noticeable change in youth crime, had changed its approach to one of a community reference group dealing with high risk mediation.

The work that this organisation does is outstanding, and it works because those involved know their communities and the individuals in their communities. Individuals who may be in need of intervention can trust, respect and listen to the service providers.

The organisation may have more local information and knowledge that more formal organisations such as the police might not have such as where the real community tensions are. By intervening at the start of a possible escalation or prior to any retaliation, serious consequences can in many cases be avoided.

- **The Way Youth Zone**

The Group welcome news of recent developments to invest additional funding into The Way Youth Zone and the introduction of an outreach programme, the Group will await feedback from these activities before making any specific recommendations.

- **Summer Squad**

The Group is also aware that the Leader of the Council recently launched his Summer Squad initiative which the Group welcomes. This saw the coordination of a programme of over 320 events across Wolverhampton during the summer holidays which engaged tens of thousands of children and young people. Giving young people more things to do during the holidays also helped bring about a noticeable decrease in instances of youth crime and disorder over the summer, as can be seen in the below table.

The activities on offer included targeted support but the majority of events were open to all children, young people and their families.

Feedback from the Summer Squad activities highlighted the importance that those engaging in the activities placed on having all of the information in one place and activities being held in places that were easy to access for them and that they could enjoy as a family.

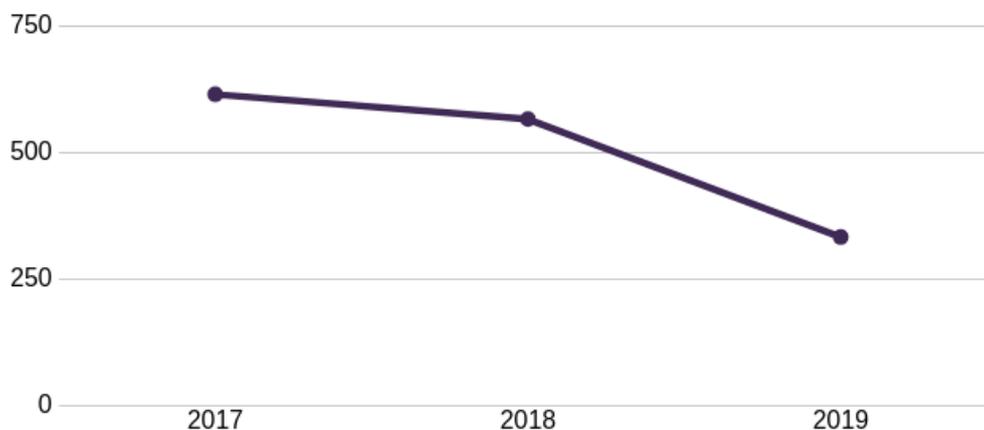
The Summer Squad programme was not about investing money in new provision, but about co-ordinating and publicising existing activities and raising awareness of what was available.

Compared to the same holiday period in 2018, there was a 48% (103 to 55) reduction in anti-social behaviour (ASB) and a 64% (154 to 55) reduction from 2017. The most notable reduction was in the number of defendants aged 10 - 18 years of age, with 24 incidents recorded in 2018 and just 6 in 2019.

The number of ASB reports to Wolverhampton Homes had also decreased, by 17% (from 34 to 29) for the same period. Incoming calls to the council reporting

ASB over the same holiday period had decreased by over 37% since 2018 (from 572 to 358) and nearly 43% since 2017 (from 626 to 358).

Impact of Summer Squad Youth violence and antisocial behaviour 22 July - 19 August



Feedback from organisations involved in the initiative indicates that, in the main, they were pleased to have been involved in Summer Squad, helping to strengthen relationships between the City of Wolverhampton Council and the voluntary and community sector. Nearly 96% (23) said they would recommend being part of Summer Squad to other organisations, with some organisations reporting an increase in numbers attending and comments appreciating the wider exposure that being part of Summer Squad gave them.

3.3 Policing

One question which the Group were keen to address was whether the budget reductions and cuts in police numbers were directly linked to the increase in recorded violent crime.

When questioned on this matter the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner acknowledged that the West Midlands Police Force was facing the largest round of cuts to date, in the region of 25% which would include 2100 uniformed officers.

Efficiencies were already being made through the use of technology and mobile devices and the aim remained to deliver the best possible service within budget.

The Group heard from the WMPCC that 21st century policing is not just about putting police on the streets and that many officers work behind the scenes dealing with issues such as social media and drill¹⁰ videos in order that the force can proactively target offenders in a more effective way.

¹⁰ Drill music is a style of music that originated in the South Side of Chicago in the early 2010s. It is defined by its dark, violent, nihilistic lyrical content and ominous trap-influenced beats. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drill_music

Every public service organisation is encouraged to refer any concerns regarding young people to the police who, depending on the age of the child will take appropriate action which might include liaising with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) team or visiting the Youth Offending Team. The police might also go through intelligence to try and identify young children who are at risk and refer them to an appropriate organisation.

The group are of the opinion that the police service needs to be more adequately resourced with neighbourhood policing given a higher priority than at present.

Stop and Search

Stop and search operations are being used more widely in Wolverhampton which the Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner (APCC) considers will give residents more confidence that the police are there to protect.

There were 1,048 stop and search activities carried out in the city between November 2017 and October 2018 with 341 resulting in a positive outcome (32.5%). Positive outcomes included where an item or substance had been seized, a warning given, a community resolution agreed, or an arrest made. There were 707 stop and search activities where no further action was taken.

The matter of stop and search is a divisive topic and many contrasting views were expressed during the review.

The group were however satisfied that stop and search is a useful tool provided it is intelligence led and used as part of a focused exercise. If it sends a message to even a few young people who might be considering carrying a knife, not to do so or to stay at home then it is worth it.

3.4 Creating A Sense of Belonging - Gangs and Youth Violence

The group heard that young people are heavily influenced by peers which can make them more susceptible to becoming a young gang member, particularly if the environment they reside in has a concentration of gang activity. Consequently, some young people enticed into gang activity have siblings or older relatives who are also in gangs or Organised Crime Groups (OCGs).

Many young gang members have a mistrust of authority, may have been expelled from school and lack any real sense of belonging. This can force them along a path of social exclusion where they are easy prey for gangs and gang related criminal activity. To help these vulnerable young people, steps must be taken to provide an alternative route for them to choose.

Even if young people have the skills and knowledge to understand the dangers that gang membership entails, if there is no alternative and no one to show them another way, they may still be lost.

In relation to location-based gang crime, young gang members are influenced by more entrenched gang members which can lead to the use of peripheral people such as siblings. It is therefore very important to try and dissuade these youngsters from a very early age and provide alternative role models.

Community Groups and Community Cohesion

There is a toxic gap that vulnerable young people can fall into when they have nowhere to go, nothing to do and no one to show them an alternative. The longer young people are on the streets, due to no-longer being in education, having a poor home environment or being unemployed, the more likely they are to fall into this gap and become exposed to a life of violence.

There can often be some initial success when an outside organisation comes into a community to provide services, but these services then need to be taken on by members of the community to provide longevity and stability.

Members of the community can make a significant difference in engaging with young people and providing the solution. Practically, this may for example be community representatives volunteering a few hours each week to coach and support their young people. Local businesses for example, may be willing to offer the use of their premises to help such dialogue take place

Young people are more likely to listen to members of their own community, and accept them as role models, who have lived experiences to share. Trust is vital and is not always easy to establish with outside organisations with limited funding and interchangeable representatives.

Intergenerational Centres

The group heard from Geoff Thompson, Founder and Executive Chair of the Youth Charter, about the success of Intergenerational Centre. These centres are invested in by all services and offer a special social space for events that help to reinforce the fact that wellbeing is for everyone.

Intergenerational centres are an example of a life course, public health approach to community cohesion and wellbeing that mirror and invert gang activity, providing an alternative pathway with role models that can help young people find and embrace their identity.

Achievements of young people need to be rewarded, intergenerational centres can be a place for this. Being recognised and applauded by older members of the community will help to make young people proud and want to continue down the right path.

Social Coaches and Mentors – Empathy not Sympathy

In order engage young people empathically and to help them make the right choices they need to hear and have access to real stories told with emotional intelligence from

people who have lived them. It is vital to recruit the right people and the group will request that a piece of work be carried out to investigate how best to recruit and support social coaches and mentors for young people in the city.

Social Diversity and Socio Regeneration

The Group heard from Geoff Thompson that more social diversity and mixed demographic housing estates are required to bring about community cohesion and that this should be taken into consideration at the planning and development stages.

We cannot keep putting the same demographic of people into the same built up areas and the example was given of Moss Side in Manchester that had moved from a gang culture to a perceived extremist culture. Mr Thompson highlighted success stories whereby developers had been requested to provide some additional building work for youth facilities in Manchester and in one case he had managed to get a sports stadium built at no extra cost.

3.5 Focus on Early Years and Early Intervention

Many young people who commit violent crime are not equipped to rationally handle challenge and confrontation.

The Government's Ending Gang and Youth Violence programme¹¹ emphasised prevention and early intervention. Risks can exist at birth with strong predictors emerging early on. It is vital that local early help and safeguarding systems spot and respond appropriately.

The Interim report from the Youth Violence Commission¹² states that: 'The cost of failure to act early and to help each child reach their full potential is immense so the economic as well as the moral case for action is pressing.

It is estimated that £17 billion per year is spent by government in England and Wales addressing the costs of late intervention'.

The moral case is in-fact overwhelming; responsibility and duty lies with all of us as individuals and as communities or groups, to ensure that our young people are equipped at the earliest possible time in life with the skills, knowledge, guidance and confidence to enable them to make the right decisions for their future selves.

Youth Provision and the Youth Engagement Strategy

Being Health, Being Connected, Being You #YES

¹¹ Home Office (November 2011) Ending Gang and Youth Violence: Cross government report
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-gang-and-youth-violence-cross-government-report>

¹² The Youth Violence Commission (July 2018) Interim Report
<http://yvcommission.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Interim-Report-FINAL-version-2.pdf>

An early and co-ordinated approach is the key focus of the Council's Youth Engagement Strategy. The Group had expressed some concerns in relation to the apparent reduction in youth clubs and services in the City and the move away from locality-based provision.

The Youth Engagement Strategy will seek to provide a co-ordinated approach to youth engagement and provision by bringing together, for the first time, the individual youth related strategies into one cohesive document.

A task and finish group consisting of Children's Services, Education, West Midlands Police, Public Health, The Way, Headstart, Communications, Insight and Performance and Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council; has already been established and initial work including setting up a website and mapping provision in the City has already been carried out. A recent consultation on 'growing up in Wolverhampton' has also received over 2000 responses.

The Strategy will seek to recognise the importance of young people's voices in shaping services in the City and will value their contribution in making the City a great place to bring up families.

3.6 Youth Offending Team (YOT)

A challenge for service providers dealing with young people potentially at risk of violence is how to identify them before they come into contact with the police at which time it may already be too late.

The Group learnt that a multi-agency approach is already used by the YOT involving the police, education partners, nurses, social workers, substance misuse workers, probation officers, sober mentors and connexions. These organisations are co-located and can genuinely create a team around the child. All young people identified are subject to an in-depth assessment prior to a personalised programme being put in place.

The Group were impressed with the work being carried out by the Youth Offending Team and the individual programmes put in place for the young people including schemes to pay something back to society. One scheme involved young people working on allotments and donating the produce to community organisations thus helping to reintegrate young offenders back into the community where they can start to feel a sense of belonging and build resilience against the risk factors considered earlier in the report.

Again, the focus for the YOT is on early intervention and working with families and schools to help young people take an alternative positive outlook on life.

Victim mediation is a powerful way to help young people and their families deal with what is happening around them and provide them with the tools to end the cycle of violence.

Young people today are presenting with much more complex problems. YOT is undergoing a training and transformation process to enable it to embrace new ways of working to manage young people who may have experienced significant trauma in the past, which has created a physiological change in the brain. The Group welcome the dedication of the YOT in seeking to evolve and change to be able to address the new complexities being presented.

The Group heard that there was a bid proposal being put forward for a Troubled Families Scheme, the scheme would provide a rapid response where a school identified specific concerns about a young person or a young person had committed an offence. The scheme would work with the young person to try and prevent exclusion from the school. It is vital that wherever possible a young person is given help and guidance in the first instance and that excluding or criminalising a young person be avoided unless as a very last resort.

3.7 School Exclusions

A focus on early intervention is vital to decreasing the number of genuine school exclusions in Wolverhampton. Work is being carried out by the council to help generate a culture of belonging for young people which will include work to prevent exclusions.

The practice of Off Rolling does not appear to be an issue in Wolverhampton. Off Rolling is where a pupil is removed from a school roll without using a permanent exclusion, and when the removal is primarily in the best interests of the school, rather than the best interests of the pupil. The Group welcome this and the plans to increase monitoring of children on a modified timetable from September 2019.

A review into alternative provision in the city is being undertaken by the council. This review includes consideration into how children are reintegrated from alternative provision back into mainstream school.

When giving evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee into Knife Crime, Will Linden from the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit stated that:

In Scotland, the Edinburgh youth transition study, which is a cohort study of about 4,000 young people in Edinburgh from birth, looked at the single biggest predictor of crime and antisocial behaviour. The one that came back time and time again was exclusion from schools. That was not necessarily just for knife crime and gangs but went across all forms of criminality. Separate studies done in prisons and youth offender institutions show that about 80% of those within our institutions have been excluded from schools. The more time they are excluded from schools—as in length of time or separate exclusions—the more likely they are to be involved in it as well.¹³

When visiting the SVRU, the Group met Mr Linden to discuss the issue of exclusions. Mr Linden explained that in Glasgow, a young person would not automatically be

¹³ <https://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/f93ead82-eee8-4090-a879-2096ed3a9eb1>

excluded for carrying a knife as a one-off incident and that by doing this schools were exhibiting a risk avoidance approach rather than a preventative or restorative approach. Mr Linden stated that in Glasgow, the number of permanent exclusions had dropped to just 1 from 140. It was however noted that in Glasgow all schools came under the direct control of the Director of Education and that there were no academies with separate governance processes. In Glasgow, if a young person was discovered with a knife at school a full case conference would swing into action and the incident would be reported to the Children's Panel, but there would, in most cases not be any criminal action taken and the child would be allowed back into the school.

The work of the Mentors in Violence Prevention considered earlier in the report had also played a part in reducing violence in schools by demystifying it. If young people feel safe going into school, it is less likely that they will choose to carry a weapon.

The Group are aware that a number of initiatives are currently being considered by the Education Directorate regarding school exclusions and alternative school provision and that these are due to be considered by the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel on 22 January 2020. The Group will recommend that when considering these items, the Panel ensure that links to violent crime are taken into consideration.

3.8 Increasing employment opportunities

The Group learnt that one of the most powerful ways to help a person help themselves is to open the door to employment. The SVRU established the #BackingSecondChances initiative which outlined that 'a job can change the course of a person's whole life, help them become a good role model for their children and show others in their community that a positive future is possible'.¹⁴

By equipping young people with a skill and providing them with an alternative role model in the work place many of the risk factors associated with violence can be mitigated. By signing up to an apprenticeship or a vocational course, a young person may be able to break out of a cycle of low aspiration that may have become the normal in their own family or social group. An employer can provide an alternative role model for the young person when there is a lack of such a person in the home.

Work will need to continue to change the perception of apprenticeships as somehow being a second-best option of education and to highlight the benefits such an option might afford a young person.

It is important to understand and highlight to businesses the benefits of having a diverse workforce and the role they can play in the prevention and rehabilitation of young people, something that is generally synonymous to a business's social ethical values. Businesses can help to provide expertise and some financial assistance to young people to further help them to choose the alternative route away from a life of violence.

¹⁴ Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, #BackingSecondChances, <http://actiononviolence.org/projects/backingsecondchances>

Lack of employment opportunities or low aspirations are risk factors for a young person making poor life decisions.

The number of vocational courses on offer has decreased but there is a push to re-establish these. The Group welcomed news that Wolverhampton college is currently in talks with secondary headteachers about the provision of a more flexible curriculum.

SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

At the start of this Review, the aim was stated as being:

to identify evidence based, long term recommendations that will underpin and enhance the work already being carried out in Wolverhampton by the council and its partners.

Evidence gathered and provided to the Group has highlighted the fact that good work, good initiatives, good people and good organisations are already in existence in Wolverhampton and are working hard to support our young people and to help them to make the right choices in life. This needs to be sustained, supported and where possible rolled out further and this is where the recommendations focus.

The recommendations seek to support and uplift good, existing work where it has been identified and the Group seek assurances that where initiatives have proven successful that all possible steps are taken to ensure the good work can continue.

The summer squad initiative has shown incredible results in a very short time and funding must be found to enable this to continue and where possible grow.

Where best practice has been identified from organisations and initiatives such as Catch 22, Believe to Achieve and Girls Allowed; this needs to be celebrated and our young people recognised. These groups and initiatives require stability to carry out their work and this needs sustained funding. The Group seek assurance from the Council that all necessary steps will be taken to ensure that successful community groups and youth empowerment services be able to continue with the exemplary work they currently do.

We all need to work together to identify where problems exist and to help provide the solutions. Training, community cohesion, employment opportunities, education and sustained funded activities and interventions for our young people are all areas that will provide them with the tools they need to succeed in creating their own success.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Members of the Scrutiny Review Group



**Councillor
Obaida Ahmed**
Chair



**Councillor
Simon Bennett**
Vice Chair



**Councillor
Bhupinder
Gakhal**
Member



**Councillor
Sohail Khan**
Member



**Councillor
Linda Leach**
Member



**Councillor
Rita Potter**
Member



**Councillor
Beverley
Momenabadi**
Member



**Councillor
John Rowley**
Member



**Councillor
Zee Russell**
Member



**Councillor
Steve Simkins**
Member



Wendy Thompson
Member

Appendix 2 – List of witnesses

- David Jamieson, Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands
- Ashley Bertie, Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands
- DCI Tom Chisholm, West Midlands Police
- Lynsey Kelley, Head of Community Safety, City of Wolverhampton Council
- John Denley, Director of Public Health, City of Wolverhampton Council
- Emma Bennett, Director of Children’s Services, City of Wolverhampton Council
- Meredith Teasdale, Director of Education, City of Wolverhampton Council
- Celia Payne, Manager with the Youth Offending Team, City of Wolverhampton Council
- Rachel King, Head of Service, City of Wolverhampton Council
- Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service, City of Wolverhampton Council
- Kush Patel, Childrens’ Innovation Lead, City of Wolverhampton Council
- Geoff Thompson, Youth Charter
- Parpinder Singh, Senior Public Health Specialist, City of Wolverhampton Council
- Lina Martino, Consultant in Public Health, City of Wolverhampton Council
- Steven Marshall, Director of Strategy and Transformation, Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group
- Margaret Courts, Children’s Commissioning Manager, Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group
- Paul Smith, Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust
- Catch 22
- Eyes to Success
- Gangs Steering Group
- Believe to Achieve
- Wolverhampton Youth Council
- Robert Hart, Head of Service for Inclusion Support, City of Wolverhampton Council
- Darren Martindale, Service Manager, Vulnerable Learners
- The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)
- Alastair Muir, Deputy Director of the Scottish VRU
- Will Linden, Co Deputy Director of the Scottish VRU
- Keith Jack, Inspector with the Violence Reduction Unit, Navigator Lead.

The group would like to thank John Denley, Director for Public Health; Lynsey Kelly, Head of Community Safety and Celia Payne, Manager for the Youth Offending Service and Parpinder Singh, Principal Public Health Specialist; who have all given a great deal of time, energy and expertise to this review.