



Date	06/07/21
Title of Paper	Westminster's Partnership Response to Serious Youth Violence
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Purpose of Paper	For information

1. Background and context

Serious youth violence is a key priority for Westminster City Council and the Safer Westminster Partnership. The SWP's 2020-23 strategy outlines 'Protecting the most vulnerable in Westminster from becoming victims or offenders of violence or exploitation' as one of its five priorities.

Levels of serious youth violence have fluctuated over the past year, due to Covid-19 lockdowns. Youth violence and knife crime with injury have increased following each lockdown easing. The night-time economy has an impact on these figures, as most youth violence taking place in Westminster is not committed by Westminster residents. However, there were 50 knife crime with injury victims in Westminster in the last year, aged 1-24 and the Integrated Gangs and Exploitation Unit has noted an increase in serious youth violence incidents in 2020, with incidents increasing from 55 key incidents in 2019-20, to 134 in 2020-21. There is concern that as Covid-19 restrictions lift further, that we will see a rise in serious youth violence in the borough.

2. Purpose of this paper

This paper provides the current position and multi-agency response to tackling serious youth violence in Westminster (June 2021), as lockdown restrictions lift and the City reopens.

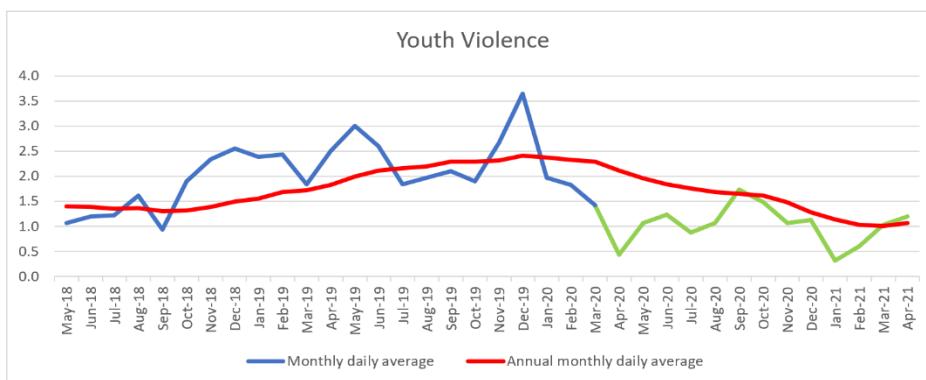


3. Levels of serious youth violence in Westminster

Prior to Covid-19, overall crime rates had been increasing in the borough. However, since Covid-19, crime rates in the borough have increased and decreased in line with the three lockdowns.



There were 449 knife crime offences in the last 12 months compared to 1041 the previous year (57% decrease.) Approximately 1.2 victims a day.



There has been a 50% decrease in youth violence victims in the last year. There were 50 knife crime with injury victims under 24. Since January 2021 youth violence has

been increasing but as of April 2021 rates are just below pre-pandemic levels.

Most youth violence taking place in Westminster is not committed by Westminster residents, only 40% is¹. Non-resident youth violence is most likely to be concentrated in the West End and St James’s area.

On the ground, feedback from the Integrated Gangs and Exploitation Unit suggests a decrease in serious youth violence activity of 20% during the first lockdown as a result of the stringent restrictions and wide adherence to them in the community, which severely limited movements. However, since this period, those involved returned and became more active and there was no drop in the second lockdown or third lockdown. Serious youth violence incidents increased from 55 key incidents in 2019-20 to 134 in 2020-21.

¹ Police CRIS data between October 2019 to September 2020.

² This must be seen in the context of the IGXU noting that Police information was not always being shared. The issue was raised and in September 2020 information sharing was increased.



The rise in violence within Westminster is believed to be linked to a number of connected factors:

- a drop in numbers involved in County Lines³;
- ‘Olders’ returning to the borough who have not been seen for a long time;
- a shift in drug dealing business practices

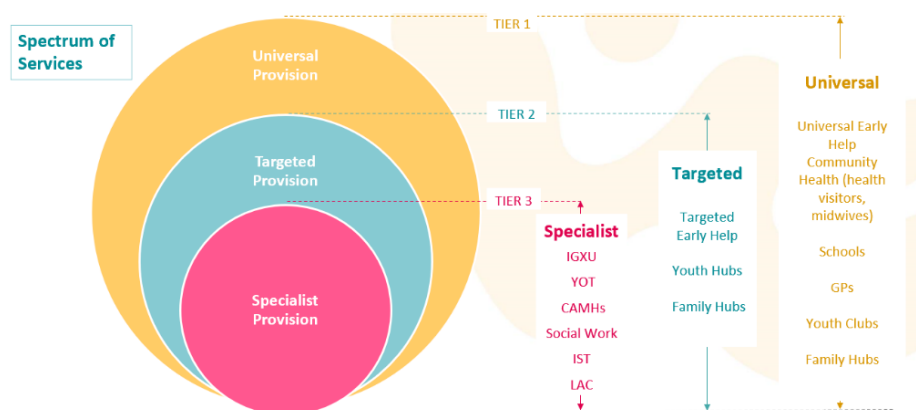
Additionally, there is a small but significant increase in young women as victims of serious youth violence (from 0 to 3) and a sense that there is more hidden harm than we are aware of. Young people are incredibly active on social media and exchanges on social media will be exacerbating tensions. There are fears about a further increase in the summer as tensions continue to rise and people stay in Westminster who would normally be going away on holiday.

4. Multi-agency response

Serious Youth Violence Reduction Board: The Serious Youth Violence Reduction Board is a multi-agency partnership board which looks at how we can work together to adapt to the changing nature of violence in Westminster. The board looks at the drivers behind serious youth violence in the borough, in order to provide appropriate and co-ordinated strategic and tactical responses, as well as how we can empower our communities to help reduce serious violence. It oversees the partnership’s Violence Reduction Action and the Public Health approach to reducing serious youth violence,⁴ including piloting initiatives in Church Street with a view to taking these lessons and seeing what can be adapted on a wider scale across Westminster.

Overview of services working with young people to prevent Serious Youth Violence

There is a wide spectrum of universal to specialist work across the Council and partner agencies to tackle serious youth violence.



³ A term used to describe gangs or organised criminal groups involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more areas using dedicated mobile phone lines. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and will often use coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons.

⁴ Public Health approach to serious youth violence is a life course whole system approach, looking at the root causes, wider and contextual influences of health and crime, which is informed by data and intelligence. Prevention and early intervention are key, as well as working with a wide range of partners as part of a long-term, integrated multi-agency approach.



Integrated Gangs and Exploitation Unit (IGXU): The IGXU is a non-statutory, multi-agency unit, established in 2011, which identifies and works with young people aged 10-25, who are vulnerable or at-risk of exploitation or are involved in group violence/ gang-related activity. Joint working across Council departments, health and voluntary sector, with integrated police officers which allows for streamlined information sharing and a swift response to evolving tensions in the borough. It aims to improve young people's life choices and reducing SYV by offering 1:1 support, sexual health advocacy, pathways to education, training and employment, family therapy, substance misuse and enforcement. The IGXU is currently working with 87 cases (70 males and 17 females; 55 under 18 years old and 32 over 18 years old).

Street Work, Workshops and Community Engagement: The IGXU deliver a range of ad-hoc street work, workshops and community engagement alongside local youth workers including 'drive-out' visits to hotspot areas during Covid-19 offering support and safeguarding and reassurance to the wider community. A dedicated Serious Youth Violence Community Engagement Officer has delivered community events on keeping young people safe and healthy, outreach workshops and group sessions for parents, and discussions on the role of community leaders in reducing serious youth violence. Training has also been developed and delivered to 400 plus frontline professionals from the Council, schools, voluntary sector and partner agencies - RAGE (Raising Awareness of Gangs & Exploitation.)

Enforcement: A Serious Violence Enforcement Officer is based within the IGXU and works with key partners to effectively co-ordinate civil and housing enforcement against problematic people and premises where there is evidence of ASB or criminality.

County Lines and Substance Misuse: The MPS Gangs Officers lead on investigating County Lines with the primary aim of safeguarding the most vulnerable young people and to identify and pursue offenders. Partners can make referrals via the Multi-Agency Safeguarding hub (MASH) and Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT) referrals desk.

Substance Misuse Strategy: A bi-borough substance misuse strategy is being developed which will look at how to best support young people, contribute to harm minimisation, and reduce substance misuse. Alongside this, will be the development of an awareness raising campaign about the impact of the drug market on local children, young people, and communities.

Youth Offending Team: The Youth Crime Prevention Partnership (YCPP) is an active partnership of local agencies, which acts as the management board that oversees the local delivery of Youth Justice Services. It is chaired by the Executive Director of Children's Services and provides strategic direction to prevent offending and reoffending by children and young people. The YOT currently works with 28 young people and the highest offences in 20/21 were for robbery (23%), drugs (21%) and violence against the person (17%).

Early Help: Early Help works across the universal to targeted spectrum and where most of the early intervention work happens. It is driven by an active Partnership Board, co-chaired with the Young Westminster Foundation. Over 300 staff and patterns have attended trauma informed training. Strong links have been made between primary schools and the 3 family hubs. Where some young



people have a higher level of need and risk, they may be in receipt of a statutory social work intervention.

Parenting Support: Parenting courses continued to be delivered throughout the pandemic. Two resource booklets have been produced: 'Advice & Guidance to Parents & Carers about SYV, Knife Crime & Gangs' and 'Talking to your children about a violent incident'. These have been translated into 5 languages and have been circulated widely in the community. Family Services have delivered a 4-month funded project, the Parenting/Carer Champion Network: testing the effectiveness of parents supporting other parents around issues of serious youth violence. 14 Peer Navigators were trained who speak a range of languages.

Early intervention work with schools:

- **MPS Safer Schools Partnership:** Westminster has 10 Safer School Officers that cover the Secondary Schools signed up to the Safer School Partnership and a dedicated PRU officer. The Safer Schools Partnership encompasses 14 schools who need regular support. An additional 10 schools link in on ad hoc basis, also supported by local ward teams.
- **School Inclusion and Trauma-Informed Work:** The School Inclusion project prevents school exclusions through a collaborative trauma-informed systemic approach, and as a result our exclusion rates are starting to fall. Working in 16 schools, with 83 teachers trained and 59 young people on the programme. No young person on the programme has been permanently excluded. An award scheme is being finalised for schools who develop the whole school approach and share the learning with other schools.
- **An Early Help Family Practitioner linked to each School** for consultation and advice. This enables reviewing of concerns about pupils, sharing information on services available to support the needs of children and families.
- **Family Hub Partnership Panel:** Schools have an opportunity every month to share concerns with locality partner services, as part of case discussion about families at pre-referral level.
- **West London Zone:** Working in 4 schools, they help children and young people build the relationships and skills they need to get on track socially, emotionally and academically to thrive in adulthood.
- **Mental health support teams in schools:** Teams deliver evidence-based interventions for mild to moderate mental health issues, supporting senior mental health lead in schools to introduce or develop their whole school approach, giving timely advice to school staff and liaising with external specialist services to help children and young people to get the right support and stay in education.
- **'Safe Camp'** which is run by London Sports Association and supported by the MPS in Pimlico. Police provide input on safety, stop and search etc.
- **IGXU Schools and Youth Engagement Officer:** This role will support the delivery and development of projects, training and workshops within schools and youth clubs.

Partnership working with the Police: The Local Authority has a close working relationship with the police and below are some examples of this work:



- **Problem solving partnerships:** These meetings for key ASB hot-spot areas involving police, council, registered housing providers, contracted street-based services and Westminster Housing, in response to community concerns and ASB triggers.
- **Police Youth Engagement & Diversion Team:** The 11 YE&D Team officers work with partners to identify young people at early stages of being involved in criminality or at risk of becoming involved to divert them. They identify early engagement opportunities, attend youth clubs and other diversionary opportunities and collectively work with young people and their families.
- **Concern Hub:** This is a meeting to map all youths of concern and ensure there is co-ordinated partnership activity to engage and divert.
- **Home Visits:** The MPS are mapping the entire cohort of youths of concern, RAG-ing them and then ensuring that they all get regular home visits to engage and divert. Reds will be visited once a week, ambers once a month, and greens once every three to six months.
- **Community calls:** BCU Commander has attended 3 community calls hosted by WCC between BAME community representatives, youth representatives and cross-party councillors, to hear and address concerns.
- **Monthly meetings held between MPS BCU and WCC** regarding gangs tensions. Attended by IGXU leads and Children's Services Director.

Voluntary sector: The Council has strong links with many of the voluntary sector providers who deliver services in Westminster. Key to this relationship are the Young Westminster Foundation, who we work closely with in developing projects providing early intervention and diversion from serious youth violence. The Young Westminster Foundation have recently conducted 'Our City, Our Future' 2020/21 needs analysis, covering the issues and experiences of young people growing up in Westminster over the past year.. A key finding was that over 70% of young people expressed concern about people carrying knives, being followed or ambushed, or sexual harassment or assault. The Young Westminster Foundation has also produced a website <https://ourcity.org.uk/> for young people to access information on activities, programmes and support for young people under 25. There is a range of activity taking place over the summer for young people, including summer camps, sports, arts, cooking, mentoring and leadership.

5. Post-incident response:

When serious incidents of violence occur, there is a need for joined up working across the partnership to suppress escalation in violence, co-ordinate diversion and engagement activity, and ensure all safeguarding concerns are appropriately managed. In immediate response to a serious incident of violence; a Partnership Violence Suppression (PVS) Meeting is chaired by a Police Senior Officer, with key representatives across the Police & Local Authority present. This is a short action



focused meeting to ensure that there is a co-ordinated response to tackling violence on the BCU. Individuals involved are identified and engaged with immediately to prevent further violence.



The council, police and other partners have developed a Violent Incident Response Procedure following a murder or other incident of serious violence. The purpose is to ensure a co-ordinated response to the victim/s and suspect/s families as well as ‘connected-communities’ such as schools, colleges, friends etc. The aim of the Partnership Community Conference is to discuss a clear and consistent community message and methods of delivery, including standard holding message; the need for any community meetings with local community groups; potential deployment of partnership representatives into the community; the role that local elected Members, community groups and faith groups can play in delivering messages and providing feedback; and whether there are other events to build on e.g., Police Anniversary events, memorial events, funerals, judicial proceedings.

6. Serious Violence Statutory Duty

The serious violence duty is a duty placed on local organisations to collaborate and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence, as set out in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act 2021. Draft guidance has been published in May 2021 and it is likely that it will become law later in the year. The duty requires the following specified authorities within a local government area to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence: Police; Justice (Probation Services and YOTs); Fire and Rescue; Health (Clinical Commissioning Groups); local authorities. The key requirements for Westminster are:

- **To be part of a multi-agency partnership to reduce serious violence.** This does not need to be a new structure, and existing structures, such as the Serious Youth Violence Reduction Board, can be used. Membership of the board has been reviewed and the one gap is the Clinical Commissioning Group who we would need to engage with and ensure representation at the Serious Youth Violence Reduction Board. It is also recommended that educational



establishments are represented at the partnership meeting. There is also an opportunity to engage wider partners, such as registered housing providers.

- **To produce a serious violence strategic needs assessment and strategy.** There is no need for a dedicated serious violence strategy, the strategic needs assessment and strategy produced by the CSP can be used for both the Serious Violence Duty and Crime and Disorder Act requirements. The Serious Youth Violence Reduction Board agrees that the Safer Westminster Partnership's strategy and strategic assessment give a detailed account of our needs and strategic intentions around serious youth violence.
- **To consult with education providers** located in the partnership area, including: local authority maintained schools, academies, independent schools, free schools, alternative education providers and further education. It seems that education providers are not required to cooperate but rather where an education provider chooses to or is requested to actively collaborate with the partnership, they should be asked to input into the development of the strategic needs assessment and consent to any actions in the strategy which apply to them.

Recommendations will be made to the Safer Westminster Partnership as to how we will adequately meet the new requirements within the statutory duty.