

DORSET POLICE & CRIME PANEL – 24 SEPTEMBER 2020

SERIOUS VIOLENCE

REPORT BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper updates members on the Police and Crime Commissioner's work to support the development of a joint approach to serious violence within Dorset, recognising the operational independence of the Chief Constable.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Government's Serious Violence Strategy was published in April 2018¹, and sets out the national response to serious violence and increases in knife crime, gun crime, and homicide. Whilst the strategy has preventative elements, its focus is very much on breaking cycles of violence – what policing terms 'hard-edged prevention'.
- 1.2 Much of the national focus on serious violence is therefore centred on what previously referred to as TKAP or TGAP (tackling knives or tackling gangs action programmes), and are now referred to as EGVE (ending gang violence and exploitation). Whilst this national focus is necessary and evidence-based, Dorset is not subject to these kinds of criminality, and therefore the focus of Dorset Police and its partners on tackling serious violence has and continues to be around reducing and preventing knife crime.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Dorset is not subject to the same extent of knife crime reported in some major metropolitan areas of the country. The carrying of knives by young people is not endemic in our policing area, and instead tends to be associated with criminal gang activity such as county lines drugs supply which is already actively targeted.
- 2.2 At the same time, both Dorset OPCC and Dorset Police recognise that there has been an increase in the volume of knife crime in recent years, and that early intervention, education and awareness are critical, as is targeting those known to carry knives and prosecuting offenders to the full extent of the law.
- 2.3 Ultimately, like many complex and multifaceted issues, tackling knife crime goes beyond policing, and therefore a public health approach to harm reduction is strongly advocated.

3. PCC ACTIVITY

Developing a Public Health Response to Serious Violence

- 3.1 In 2018, Dorset Police began the development of its knife crime strategy, the plan being to outline the strategic vision and objectives for tackling a reported increase in knife crime

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-strategy>

volumes, and to include a tactical action plan that would drive and monitor delivery of the strategy. OPCC contributed to the early draft of this strategy and suggested that rather than take a singular focus around policing, it was appropriate to consider a wider partnership approach. Such an approach should note that whilst activity might often coalesce around the immediate threat to safety that is associated with knife crime, a holistic response is needed to ensure all aspects contributing to its increase were addressed – in other words a public health approach to knife crime should be taken.

3.2 The public health, or harm reduction model, was by then well established in policing. Popularised by Scotland’s Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), which spearheaded a halving in the number of homicides in Glasgow over a ten-year period (from its formation in 2005), thereby eliminating its reputation as the ‘murder capital of Europe’, the model takes a public health approach typified by the following:



- Taking a population approach (universal) rather than one just focusing on those at risk (targeted) or high risk individuals (specialist);
- Shifting focus towards upstream risk factors and prevention, rather than consequences;
- Placing statistics and a strong evidence-base at the core of any initiatives; and
- Employing a system-wide, multi-agency approach.

3.3 The initial knife crime strategy however relied solely on policing data, building on the reviews of knife crime undertaken over the previous few years. This approach was deemed appropriate given the requirement for Dorset Police to provide a quarterly data return to the Home Office, and it was mooted that the goal of a wider partnership strategy might be one for future iterations.

3.4 Whilst OPCC was somewhat unsatisfied with this decision, this was agreed given it was preferable to produce a strategy and begin taking shared actions against the delivery plan, rather than spend additional time in the drafting stage. OPCC therefore undertook its own light touch review of similar strategies from other Forces, began to identify best practice from elsewhere, and suggested the inclusion of further material and analysis from the subsequent iterations of the strategy.

3.5 Shortly after the merger discussions collapsed in late 2018, the executive teams of Dorset Police and Dorset OPCC met to consider what areas of work should be prioritised over the remainder of the PCC term of office. Whilst both organisations were undertaking business as usual during the period of merger consideration, it was recognised that a formal consideration of some of the Alliance business areas and how they are structured might be appropriate. (For completeness, three broad items were tabled for discussion – innovation, prevention and the local Government restructure.)

3.6 It was noted that the Alliance Prevention Department was structured to deliver similar functions in different ways in Dorset and Devon & Cornwall, primarily based on the differing priorities and commitments of the respective PCCs. Likewise, operationally there were some differences where functions sat within the Department in one Force, and outside in the other.

3.7 As a result of discussions across both Forces, by February 2019, the Chief Constables and PCCs agreed a partition of the Prevention Department. This allowed for a specific focus on the individual requirements of each force, and as a first step a knife crime problem profile was undertaken within Dorset.

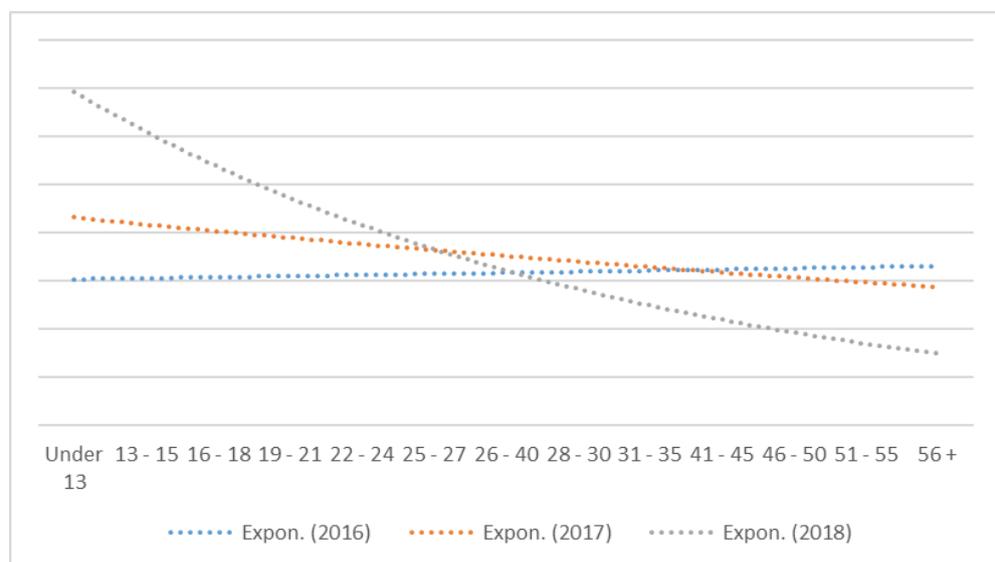
3.8 This problem profile was undertaken to better understand the recent knife crime trend in Dorset and the possible causes for it, and to establish the risks to the general public. This profile was limited to the data that is required by the Home Office quarterly data requirement and, broadly speaking, knife crime is defined by the Home Office as any criminal offence that

has been committed using a knife or other sharp object as a weapon. Importantly, the review therefore, did not include offences of possession of knives, or similar weapons.

3.9 The headline finding was that despite the volume of knife offences remaining stable between 2016 and 2017; 2018 saw a modest increase. The profile also highlighted a correlation between the prevalence of knife crime and areas that are considered to be deprived, and increasing number of young people becoming victims of knife crime. Finally, it was confirmed that the number of knife crimes resulting in serious injury remained low.

3.10 The HO knife crime dataset, by not including the offence of knife possession, provides a more accurate national picture of serious violence, but given the number of cases in Dorset remains low, OPCC requested possession data be included to ensure a complete local picture. OPCC analysis of this dataset highlighted a change in the demographic of knife crime from a relatively flat age profile of possession in 2016 (blue line), through an increase in younger people being found to carry knives in 2017 (orange line), through to half of those being found to carry knives in 2018 (grey line) being aged 24 years or less.

3.11 V'



Whilst these initial analytical products were helpful, and started to highlight some of the pertinent facts around the prevalence of knife crime within Dorset, there remained a number of unanswered questions. From an OPCC perspective, the issue was that the findings did not sufficiently identify priorities to enable targeted activity to be undertaken (or commissioned).

3.12 At the same time, April 2019, two strands of work were underway nationally. Dorset Police was supporting the national knife amnesty under the banner of Operation Sceptre, and the Home Office had relaunched its national #knifefree campaign. The centrally-developed materials to support both campaigns were, by design and unremittingly, 'gritty' and 'urban' and therefore did not resonate within Dorset.

3.13 The Chief Constable and PCC therefore jointly took the decision not to use these national campaign materials, and to refocus local media lines around awareness, education and early intervention rather than, for example, the devastating effects of knife crime injuries and the sentences received by perpetrators that other forces led with.

3.14 As it was becoming clearer that Dorset was not going to be well served by the national focus on knife crime injury, or by national analysis of knife crime, OPCC requested further analysis to develop the knife crime profile and identify opportunities for targeted activity. This request included a disaggregation of the knife crime data to separate out domestic abuse incidents, and to begin to build a victims profile, initially focusing on the age of the victim.

- 3.15 Separately, the BCP community safety team undertook an analysis using the ‘Cardiff’ model, which uses public health injury data to overlay police data to build a fuller picture of knife and sharp instrument injury over time. This analysis suggested a marginally younger age profile for victims of knife crime than for all violent incidents resulting in treatment at a hospital emergency department. CSP analysis of the ‘weapon’ used in violent assaults also suggested that in around 60% of cases the weapon was a knife, with improvised sharp instruments such as screwdrivers or scissors being used far less frequently.
- 3.16 By June 2019, the knife crime problem profile, and the aforementioned pieces of analysis had been combined into the inaugural Dorset Police Knife Crime Strategy and Delivery Plan. This was a continued improvement on the problem profile and set out a number of high level findings and hypotheses that more readily lent themselves to partner initiatives and action.
- 3.17 This is the current strategy, and has allowed OPCC to build its understanding of the identified key drivers of knife crime in Dorset, and to work with its partners to deliver targeted intervention and preventative work. Some of the highlight OPCC activity undertaken against each driver are as follows:
- A high proportion of knife use is related to domestic abuse. OPCC therefore focuses its activity on supporting initiatives to raise awareness of domestic abuse – many examples of which Members have previously been briefed on, but most recently includes a targeted campaign using social media, website banner advertising and printed messages on pharmacy bags to ensure vulnerable individuals were aware that services remained in place over the lockdown period.
 - Young people disproportionately appear in knife crime statistics, but the vast majority do not use knives (potentially other than for shows of bravado, or threat). The focus here is also therefore on education and awareness, and OPCC remains a strong supporter (and funder) of the Dorset Police Safe Schools and Communities Team which is a partnership between the Force, OPCC and Dorset Combined Youth Offending Service, and delivers knife crime awareness sessions to targeted schools across Dorset.
 - The element of criminality that uses knives and serious violence in Dorset is largely related to the drugs trade. Around one third of incidents where knives are used to cause injury are drugs-related. The issue with this cohort is comorbidity. Knife using criminals and victims are often drug using, and often have poor mental health – in essence they are vulnerable. Whilst OPCC therefore encourages the Force to disrupt activity, it also funds and supports a range of treatment and prevention schemes that deliver support and awareness to those suffering from substance misuse and poor mental health.
 - Finally, Dorset Police through its analysis and intelligence gathering also has built a good understanding of knife crime hotspots, and employs specialised policing tactics in those areas. Part of that policing response is covert. This policing activity is solely a matter for the Chief Constable.

The Challenges of National Funding

- 3.18 Dorset has struggled to secure funding to support its ambition to reduce serious violence as Forces with more entrenched and significant issues continue to be prioritised. In late 2018, OPCC led the development of a pan-Dorset bid, and liaised closely with policing, local authority and youth offending partners to further develop our joint approach for targeted diversion around early help provision for youths at risk of offending. This was a complex undertaking requiring a range of views to be coalesced in a relatively short period of time.
- 3.19 The output was a three-part bid to the Home Office Early Intervention Youth Fund (EIYF) to develop a ‘whole system’ approach to tackling serious violent crime locally. This involved, firstly seeking funds for the development of a digital platform to enhance partnership working

through the more effective sharing of information and co-ordination of resources. Secondly, developing a system-focused approach to the early identification of, and early intervention with, young people and young adults at risk in Dorset. And finally, developing a coordinated diversion scheme as an alternative to youth cautions and youth conditional cautions for those vulnerable young people who are suspected of an offence and at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

3.20 These linked bids were not supported by the Home Office, and therefore OPCC took steps to seek local agreement to develop elements from this broader programme through existing local resources and budgets. This was primarily achieved by OPCC:

- Working with Community Safety Partnerships, Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership, Adult Safeguarding Boards and others to support the implementation of a pan-Dorset Children At Risk Or Linked to Exploitation (CAROLE) model. This is now well embedded and ensures that considerations of vulnerability at the heart of our shared services.
- Funding a new Child Exploitation Transformational Lead post for one year, reporting to the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership and overseeing arrangements across partner agencies to prevent or reduce the risk of exploitation of children and adults. This role supports the CAROLE partnership structures to identify risk and share data, enabling better support for children and young people.
- Funding a range of youth mentoring and diversion schemes. These not only divert young people at risk of offending from entering the criminal justice system, but also identify and support young people at risk of exploitation. This work has been delivered in conjunction with the Dorset Combined Youth Offending Service and BCP and Dorset Councils.

3.21 In early 2019, the Government supported Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) launched its first grant round. OPCC again undertook to build a partnership bid that addressed the key issues outlined above, and recognised the progress made since the initial EIYF bid. Unfortunately, again, despite significant work by the OPCC and all partners, Dorset was unable to secure funding, but was encouraged to submit a bid for the next available funding round. The YEF fund was due to open its second round in early 2020, but this was changed into a Covid-19 specific fund with a more limited set of bidding criteria, which negated the opportunity for a bid application to be made. OPCC continues to actively engage with any national competed funding opportunities to support its work on serious crime reduction and prevention.

3.22 Related, in June 2019, the Home Office announced² the allocation of £35m to PCCs in 18 force areas to support serious violence reduction by the creation of a series of local Violence Reduction Units. This was in addition to £63m surge funding to support those forces that were worst affected. OPCC analysis suggested that the HO methodology for the funding allocation was flawed, for two primary reasons:

- Firstly, that the funding was allocated on the basis of the count of hospital admissions for sharp object injury, rather than the rate of the same. Smaller forces would have lesser numbers of hospital admissions, and so a more accurate methodology would have used rates of admission that took into account resident population levels.
- Secondly, that given the £35m funding was for the establishment of violence reduction units, which are preventative in nature, the funding should have been made available to all PCC areas, rather than just those with as established problem. Violence, of course, being a national issue.

3.23 OPCC produced an alternative funding methodology, and using this rate-based calculation, larger forces such as Thames Valley, Hampshire, Kent and Sussex would no longer be

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-office-allocates-35-million-to-police-forces-for-violence-reduction-units>

eligible; and instead be replaced by smaller forces that experienced proportionately higher levels of serious violence in recent years. These forces included Humberside, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Durham and notably Cleveland, which had the fifth highest rate of violence. Dorset still did not feature, but OPCC did not undertake this analysis to plead its own case, rather to demonstrate a fairer way of disseminating national funding, using a methodology more closely aligned to the current police grant allocation formula.

- 3.24 The PCC set out his above thoughts on national serious violence funding in a letter to the then Policing Minister. The PCC's letter was duly responded to by the Head of the Serious Violence Priority Projects Unit within the Home Office, accepting that while no method of allocation was perfect, the decision was taken to discount rates in favour of counts. Similarly, OPCC continues to strongly advocate for a fairer methodology for serious violence funding.

4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 OPCC has worked hard to support the continued development of the Dorset Police knife crime strategy in recent years. The current position is that the Force and OPCC have a good understanding of the policing data, and a good understanding of the drivers for knife crime, and what options are available to reduce and prevent these. OPCC has directly commissioned and supported a range of initiatives as a result of this. Opportunities to include other partner data in the Force strategy, notably public health data, still exist.
- 4.2 The Chief Executive has developed a high-level target operating model for the creation of a Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in Dorset. One of the early enablers for this is a joint needs assessment, to build a shared understanding of vulnerability and harm reduction across all partners. This approach is supported by Dorset Police, and is being led by the ACC Partnerships and Resources. Ultimately, it may not be possible to deliver a full-fledged VRU without securing significant external funding.
- 4.3 For the moment, education and awareness raising remains the priority activity area. The Chief Constable has commissioned a review of extracurricular schools education provision. The output of this review will be used to determine how best to further enhance the offering around knife crime awareness provided by the Safe Schools and Communities Team.
- 4.4 The development of a Dorset Police violent crime strategy has just been agreed. Currently in the very early stages, OPCC will liaise closely with the strategy lead and advocate for a public health approach to be at the core of any refreshed vision and strategy.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 Members are asked to note the report.

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