

Violence Reduction Unit – Update

Overview/Lines to take

- The number of violent deaths both in London and across the country is tragic. Violent crime in our city leaves families broken and communities devastated.
- The causes of violent crime are extremely complex and are decades in the making, made worse by years of austerity and governments cuts to the police and youth services.
- The Mayor is expanding City Hall's long-term public health approach to tackling the root causes of all forms of violence by forming a Violence Reduction Unit in London. He is leading from the front by working in partnership with the police, the health service, local authorities, community groups and youth services because it is clear there is no one single solution to tackling this complex issue.
- We are working hard to challenge the perception it is safe to carry a knife and the VRU will seek to better understand where to make positive early interventions because we know some offenders have themselves been victims or witnesses of violent crime in childhood.
- This will work alongside work to deliver our comprehensive strategy to tackle violence against women and girls in all its forms. However, we are clear that tackling the causes of violence will not happen overnight.
- One of the first actions of the new Violence Reduction Unit will be to lead an urgent homicide and serious case review into the most violent incidents in the capital.
- This will provide us with the evidence better to understand the areas of high-risk, so we can prioritise efforts and resources to tackle the areas we can make the biggest impact to reduce violence.
- Also part of its initial work, the unit will use data, research and knowledge from across the partnership to help tackle challenges such as street violence, knife crime and both domestic abuse and sexual violence as they are often present in the life of perpetrators of violence.
- We will also appoint a new director to lead the unit and develop a long-term partnership strategy to tackle all forms of violence.
- Building on existing partnerships, the VRU will bring together specialists to work together to reduce violence in the capital by taking a public health approach.

- The Mayor initially directed £500,000 to mobilise the unit and has now announced he will invest a further £6.8m to be directed towards local services and programmes. They will provide greater capacity to deliver early interventions to help prevent the spread of violence and support projects that will help tackle the complex root causes.
- Our public health approach will learn some of the lessons of Glasgow's success, scaling up an approach that has worked in a city with a population of 600,000 people to a capital with nearly 9 million. It will also build on the ongoing hard work London boroughs and community organisations to understand and address all forms of violence.
- The work of the VRU will be informed by and delivered in collaboration with communities, as well as a variety of other key partners including health, criminal justice, local authorities and faith leaders.
- Practically, the VRU will aim to better understand the risk factors in a person's early life that can lead to serious violence by using data from health, criminal justice and other public services. Alongside this, it will focus on improved and quicker interventions at a local level, with the aim of reducing violence at its core and protecting those vulnerable to exploitation.
- The VRU will function alongside enforcement and investment in preventative services. The Met and its City Hall-funded Violent Crime Taskforce have had an impact on tackling violence, having made more than 2,000 arrests and removing hundreds of knives and dangerous weapons off our streets.
- The new unit also complements the Mayor's £45 million Young Londoners Fund, which offers young people positive alternatives to crime and helps those caught up in gangs to get into employment and training.
- The unit builds on the wide range of interventions already delivered by the Mayor's Knife Crime Strategy. This includes: the development of bespoke action plans for each borough, every school and college having access to a knife wand, £1.4m invested to provide youth workers in Major Trauma Centres and the Mayor's anti-knife crime media campaign, 'London Needs You Alive'.

Latest update

- Work on the VRU is well underway. Lib Peck, the London Councils Executive Member for Crime and Public Protection (leading London boroughs' cross-party work to keep Londoners safe) and current leader of Lambeth Council has been appointed to lead London's new Violence Reduction Unit (VRU).
- Violence reduction has been a core part of Lib's career to date across Lambeth and in the third sector. Lib has been the leader of Lambeth Council since 2012 where she focussed on addressing domestic violence and supported the adoption of a public health approach to violence reduction in the borough in March 2018. As Lambeth leader, she is also the Deputy Chair

of London Councils and Executive Member for Crime and Public Protection, leading London boroughs' cross-party work with the Mayor, Metropolitan Police and partner agencies to keep Londoners safe.

- Lib was appointed following an open and transparent competition run by recruitment consultants Hays, including partner organisations and a community panel who met shortlisted candidates. Executive search agents proactively contacted a number of individuals and there was a wide and talented field. The interview panel included senior representatives of the NHS, Metropolitan Police Service and local authorities, as well as City Hall.
- Lib will be based in the Mayor's office, reporting to the Mayor. Her start date will be confirmed shortly. She will work with partners to agree the long-term legal and governance structure of the Unit.
- Sadiq also intends to direct an additional £6.8m from council tax and business rates to invest in the Violence Reduction Unit. This new investment – which is on top of an initial £500,000 the Mayor invested towards initial set-up costs, will be directed towards local services and programmes to provide greater capacity to deliver early interventions to help prevent the spread of violence, and supporting projects that will help tackle the complex root causes.
- A Partnership Reference Group has been established to guide future work. The Group's first meeting was held at the end of October and a second meeting at the end of November. The Group is made up of representatives from local authorities, community groups, health, education and criminal justice partners.
- Key lines of inquiry have been identified to initiate an analysis of serious youth violence in London, using existing data sets focused on people aged under 25.
- The initial analysis suggests an increase in levels of serious youth violence in terms of Metropolitan Police recorded offences, hospital admissions, and a more recent small increase in ambulance attendances.
- The Partners have noted that violence in London is a multifaceted and complex problem which requires a range of responses.
- The Violence Reduction Unit will progress a strategic approach for London, and actions for impact on defined population groups, in the short and longer term as both are needed to control and prevent further violence.
- Their focus will be on:
 - The problem of the increasing 'normalisation' of violence amongst perpetrators.
 - The importance of early intervention and influencing youths at an early transitional stage to achieve generational change in the longer term.
 - Recognising that solving the problem will involve a culture change as part of a much longer-term strategy over approximately 10 years.

- Being innovative and flexible, open to trying different approaches, and reacting quickly if the approach does not work.
- Continuing action to understand and prevent the carrying of knives.
- Extending teachable moment interventions in A&E beyond the injured person to include their visiting peers.
- Supporting the use of evidence-based 'diversion from criminality' programmes targeting people immediately at risk. (This is a focus of the Young Londoners Fund work).
- Supporting local authority plans for out of school and holiday activities for young people.
- Identification of an early area for partnership focus – for example keeping young people in education and tackling exclusions.

Public health approach

- The Mayor and his team have spent time researching the experience of agencies in Glasgow and other cities, where a public approach has led to large reductions in serious violence over the past decade.
- A public health approach treats violent crime as a disease, first working to contain it and stop it from spreading, then addressing the root causes. In practice, this often involves intervening at critical moments in a young person's life; for example, if they have suffered trauma or been excluded from school.
- A public health approach is rooted in good multi-agency working and close working with communities, focused on prevention, and informed by the systematic use of evidence. It looks at who is affected by violence, how they are affected, and the relationship between violence and health inequalities. It uses data and evidence to understand and tackle the root causes of violence and to prevent or mitigate its impacts in defined populations.
- Community ownership and participation are key to the success of a public health approach as solutions can only be sustained by communities themselves.
- Reducing gun and knife crime has been a priority in London for a long time, with several strategies and initiatives deployed. New concerns include the younger age at which young people are being affected, and escalating gang activity. This is an issue for all organisations involved in community safety, not just for the police.
- Serious youth violence is seen as being amenable to a public health approach because it affects people's health and wellbeing at individual and community levels. It is preventable if actions are implemented across the system of public services, and through wider social policy. The costs of violence to the health and care system, the criminal justice system, and wider society are potentially avoidable.

- Although a public health approach does not rely on law enforcement as the 'solution' to tackling violence, enforcement remains a key element as it is here that the manifestation of current violence is contained and reduced.
- Enforcement ensures that victims, witnesses, communities and the wider public see that where serious violence does take place it is addressed, safety and wellbeing are prioritised, and communities are protected from further violence. This in turn contributes to feelings of safety and security within communities, and the reassurance that the state is undertaking its responsibilities in terms of public protection and justice.
- Key enablers of a public health approach to tackling Serious Youth Violence include;
 - Identifying risks, inequalities and opportunities for prevention across London.
 - Evidence reviews of violence reduction interventions to identify both quick wins and longer-term investments.
 - Engagement of relevant academic, research, charitable and philanthropic organisations in London.
 - Advocacy for resources for children's and other services that support families and communities.

These will be built into the work plan for the violence reduction unit.

Q&A

Q: What is the VRU doing and how many meetings has it had?

Work on the VRU is well underway, with a VRU mobilisation lead now in place. The Mayor announced towards the end of last year that a director to lead the unit will be appointed later this month.

Sadiq has chaired two Partnership Reference Group meetings that have been set up to guide future work of the VRU as it continues to be set up and mobilises. Representatives from local authorities, community groups, health, education and criminal justice partners all attended.

Q: How many staff work for it?

We are in the process of mobilising the unit and the intention has always been to start with dedicated City Hall staff to support its work and boost capacity over the course of the next year to ensure we are making interventions at a local level, on the frontline, and where they are needed most.

It will also include working with partners at a local level, to commission services and initiatives that have an impact on the frontline.

We have been clear this is a long-term strategy, enhancing our partnership with specialists from health, police and local government to lead and deliver a public health approach to tackling violence in the capital.

We will appoint a new Director of the VRU in January and add to a small team of experts to deliver the vital work of the unit. This is not about a central power base full of bureaucrats, it's about a small team that will have strategic oversight and can work locally to help identify and boost capacity to make early interventions.

Q: What is new in terms of action and staffing that didn't exist before?

This is about taking a long-term public approach that does not just focus on knife crime or serious violence, but violence in all its forms. We have laid the foundations of a public health approach through the Knife Crime Strategy, and now through the VRU we will broaden that out to all types of violence. We know from the example in Glasgow that this approach takes time to scale up – in Scotland the model has been in existence for 13 years and is now getting the attention it deserves.

We are working right across the GLA, from health, education and communities as part of a wide-ranging multi-faceted approach to tackling this issue. We are also working with partners in health, criminal justice, local authorities and community groups as part of this approach.

At the first reference group meeting, it was agreed the one of the first actions of the new Violence Reduction Unit will be to lead a homicide and serious case review into the most violent incidents in the capital. We are using this as the evidence base for our work.

Q: What is its upcoming work schedule?

The Partnership Reference Group has agreed that the unit's initial focus will centre on the findings of an urgent homicide and serious violence case review.

This will provide us with the evidence better to understand the areas of high-risk, so we can prioritise efforts and resources to tackle the areas we can make the biggest impact to reduce violence.

The serious case review will cover cases involving violence, including all homicides, from 2014, the year serious violent crime started rising.

Also part of its initial work, the unit will use data, research and knowledge from across the partnership to help tackle challenges such as street violence, knife crime and both domestic abuse and sexual violence as they are often present in the life of perpetrators of violence.

We are also looking to appoint a director to lead the unit later this month to help develop a long-term partnership strategy to tackle all forms of violence.

~~Q: What is a public health approach to tackling violent crime?~~

Answer

A public health approach treats violence like any other health issue that causes disease or physical harm. First, you work to contain it and stop it spreading, and then you address the causes, to lower the chances of it happening again. Throughout medical history, we have learned to combat infectious diseases by containing the spread and prevent future outbreaks by putting money into designing better public education, sanitation, medical care and housing. The idea is that the same approach used in tackling disease can be deployed to cut knife crime and other forms of violent crime.

Q: What does it mean in practice?

Answer

In practice, a public health approach means intervening at critical moments in a young person's life. For example, if a young person has been excluded from school, suffered trauma, experienced a family breakdown or been a victim of violence themselves, it means stepping in to give them the right support at the right time. A troubled upbringing, and specifically the factors listed above, makes it more likely that a young person will commit violence later in life. By addressing these risk factors in young people, it is possible to prevent violent incidents in the future.

Q: Are you just copying Glasgow's model?

Answer

No – we have been carrying out extensive research to understand the approaches taken in Glasgow where a long-term public health approach to tackling serious violence was adopted.

In Glasgow, the approach has been in place for over a decade and has delivered large falls in violence. By adopting a similar approach in London, we want to build on and learn from Glasgow's successes. But it's important to be clear that the challenges we face compared to Glasgow are very different and substantially more complex, not only in terms of the type of violence, but it's spread across the city. That, combined with the governance structures in London, makes it a challenge but is why we are looking to work with partners to adopt the model to the scale and significantly different complexities faced in the capital.

As a result, we will build a unique London model, which builds on the good examples from Glasgow and other cities in the world, but that also fits the particular set of challenges and opportunities that London offers.

Q: Isn't cutting crime about policing?

Answer

Tough, intelligent policing is crucial to tackling violent crime and anyone breaking the law must be caught, punished and reformed. But the police cannot solve violent crime alone – prevention is crucial, too. As well as focusing on enforcement, City

Hall looks to learn from what has worked in other places to prevent serious youth violence from occurring in the first place.

Q: Has this been tried anywhere else?

Answer

Scotland's public health approach to tackling youth violence has been much talked about. Over ten years, this saw a massive reduction in knife crime, particularly in Glasgow. The Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Cressida Dick, and Sophie Linden, deputy mayor for policing, have visited Scotland to learn more about how the public health approach worked, while Mayor Sadiq Khan has met the team responsible in London.

Scotland did not adopt a public health approach as an alternative to tough policing, but in addition to it. In Glasgow, police played a major role in the early days by containing violent incidents, just like acting to contain a disease.

Q: Could the same thing work in London?

Answer

Scotland had a few key things on its side – solid funding, a long-term strategy that took a decade to work, and all key agencies in Glasgow on board and accountable to one administration. This is more difficult in London where the system is fragmented. The Mayor's remit includes setting out the police's strategic priorities, but he does not have the power to direct other agencies that make a difference, which answer to central government and need to be willing to cooperate to make the public health approach a success.

Q: How is City Hall taking a public health approach?

Answer

The Mayor's Knife Crime Strategy, published in June 2017, outlined a public health approach for London. For example, major trauma centres in London hospitals share information about violence that is not reported to the police. The Mayor is also working with Ofsted and local councils on tackling serious violent crime, and chairs the London Crime Reduction Board, which brings together NHS England with other the relevant agencies across the capital.

Q: What kind of violence are you targeting? Is this all about knife crime?

Answer

We have made some really good strides with the Knife Crime Strategy and that focus will continue alongside the work of the VRU. Our new and enhanced partnership will broaden its outlook beyond knife crime to all forms of violence, which will include preventing and reducing knife crime, gun crime or offences involving a corrosive substance, and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as in gangs and county lines drug dealing, domestic abuse and

sexual violence. The unit will also be initially focusing on those situations where the victim and/or offender is under the age of 25.

Q: What will VRU actually do? What would a day in the life look like?

Answer

The Unit's work will involve gathering data from health, criminal justice and other public services to identify the underlying risk factors that can lead to violence, diagnose the problem and then assist in the development and the delivery of plans and interventions to tackle them. By having all partners involved in this work and working closely with communities, we can engage all the expertise, resources, legal powers and influence at their disposal and bring them to bear on these issues.

Partnership working is integral to everything we do at City Hall and this will build on the work we have already begun on a public health approach, which includes funding major trauma centres in London hospitals to share information about violence that is not reported to the police and working with Ofsted and local councils on tackling serious violent crime.

In addition, the Mayor chairs the London Crime Reduction Board, which brings together NHS England and other relevant agencies across the capital. The new VRU will seek to develop that work, broaden it out to all violence, not just knife crime, and understand how and where interventions can be made earlier in people's lives to prevent violence in London.

Q: Will it have an office and full-time staff?

Answer

The intention is to start with dedicated staff to support its work and boost capacity over the course of the next year to ensure we are making interventions at a local level, on the frontline, and where they are needed most.

It will also include working with partners at a local level, to commission services and initiatives that have an impact on the frontline.

Q: Why are you only doing this now? Isn't this too little too late?

Answer

The causes of violent crime are complex and many years in the making and the solutions will take time, that's why our new approach is a long-term one. We have taken immediate action to tackle the rise in violent crime through enforcement – investing in the Met Police and the Violent Crime Taskforce – and through the Young Londoners Fund which is providing diversionary activities for young people, so they can turn their backs on a life of crime.

We have laid the foundations of a public health approach through the Knife Crime Strategy and through the VRU are broadening that out to all types of violence. We know from the example in Glasgow that this approach takes time to scale up – in Scotland the model has been in existence for 13 years and is now getting the attention it deserves.

We need to be clear that this unit is not a substitute for the investment our public services need if London is to significantly cut levels of violent crime. The government has enforced nearly £1bn of savings on the Met Police and cut youth services to the core. The Mayor refuses to sit back while the government buries its head in the sand on violent crime, that's why he is implementing a series of measures including a public health approach, enforcement and youth investment to do everything possible to bear down on violence on our streets.

There is no quick-fix solution to the problem of violent crime, which has been on the rise in the capital and across the country since 2014. The Mayor has been working extremely hard to tackle the problem ever since elected in 2016 – bringing together experts, politicians, and the communities most affected, publishing the Knife Crime Strategy last year which set out a public health approach, and providing new support for services that help to keep young people out of crime.

The Mayor's immediate priority has been to bear down on violence, using the investment in the Violent Crime Taskforce to bring those responsible to justice and remove knives and dangerous weapons from our streets. The Mayor also invested £45 million in providing opportunities for young Londoners to help them turn their backs on a life of crime.

This new long-term strategy involved a co-ordinated approach to run alongside all the work we have already put in place to tackle violence in the capital.

Q: Will communities have a voice in this new unit?

Answer

Yes, absolutely – the community voice is integral to all our efforts to tackle serious violence and communities will be a key part of the development process and the day-to-day work of the unit. Community representatives will be invited to be key members of the new VRU Partnership Board.

City Hall will also build on the extensive engagement events we have already held, ensuring that London's communities play a vital role in shaping the work of the unit.

Q: The Mayor keeps blaming Government funding cuts for rising crime and violence – so how are you going to pay for this new partnership?

Answer

The work of the VRU will not deliver results overnight. The causes of violent crime are many years in the making and the solutions will take time. That's why our new approach is focusing over the long-term.

It is important to be clear where we are because of the crippling government cuts to policing and public services. This unit is not a substitute for the investment our public services need if London is to significantly cut levels of violent crime, but the Mayor is determined to do everything he can to tackle the issue head on.

But it's important to understand that our expanded public health approach runs alongside work we are doing now that is having an impact. That includes investment in the Met police and the City Hall-funded Violent Crime Taskforce – a team of 272 officers that have made more than 2,000 arrests and removed hundreds of dangerous weapons from our streets. We are also investing in hundreds of projects and preventive programmes that are giving thousands of young Londoners better life opportunities and a chance to turn their backs on a life of crime.

But the Mayor will make no apologies for calling out the government for its years of damaging cuts that are having an impact on the rise in violence on our streets. He will not relent in his efforts to press the Government to direct more funding to policing and all frontline services. It is desperately needed.

Q: What does the Commissioner think about this idea?

Answer

The Metropolitan Police is working hard to bring those responsible for violence on our streets to justice, as well as taking knives and weapons off our streets. We are both clear that enforcement alone will not bring about success, but it will play a part alongside our public health approach and investment in diversionary projects to provide young Londoners with the opportunities they so desperately need.

Q: Why don't you just spend this money on more police officers?

Answer

Policing plays a vital role in tackling violence, and at a time where years of Government cuts to police funding have severely impacted the service, the Mayor has provided unprecedented backing to the Met to keep officer numbers as high as possible and to fund the creation of the new Violent Crime Taskforce.

However, we know that we cannot tackle violence through enforcement alone. This new partnership will work alongside enforcement work with the Met police, together with our Young Londoners Fund which is providing opportunities for young people in our city. There is not one single measure that will end violence, we need a series of measures and a co-ordinated approach – which the Mayor is leading from City Hall.

Q: How have you engaged with communities on this issue?

Answer

The Mayor has met with many bereaved families and community leaders to discuss the impact and the appropriate response to the tragedy of losing so many young people on London's streets. In April he hosted a large meeting of grassroots community groups at City Hall to talk about how we all can work together to address the root causes of serious youth violence. Since then we have been involving communities in ongoing conversations and responding to their concerns.

City Hall has been visiting community groups across London to hear more about their work and ensure that they are fully up to speed with what we are doing to respond, so that we can work together.

City Hall's peer outreach team, a group of young people from diverse backgrounds who ensure that young people's voices inform our policies, have been working hard on this issue – meeting with community groups, engaging with Young Offenders teams and helping to shape everything we do on this issue of serious youth violence, including the Young Londoners Fund.

The Mayor has also been meeting with Faith Leaders to discuss this issue. He has committed to meeting with Black Majority Church leaders on a quarterly basis because of the concerns they have expressed to me about the disproportionate impact of serious youth violence on their communities. The Mayor is committed to action and takes every concern he hears seriously.

The Mayor has brought additional capacity into his community engagement team to support individuals and community groups who are already doing good work to connect with each other and the resources they need to do even more.

Q: Both the Mayor and the Commissioner have criticised middle class cocaine users fuelling the drug trade and in turn exacerbating the violence in London. Will this new unit be tackling the drug trade?

Answer

There is a definite link, between drugs, criminal gangs, knife crime and violent crime. The VRU will certainly be looking at the drug trade, its role in violence in the city and how we can help to address that.

You might think buying a small amount of drugs is a victimless crime, but it isn't. You might not even give a second thought to where those drugs came from and how they made it to you. But as the Commissioner has said, there is misery at every level of the drugs supply chain. Drug users should be under no illusions – anyone buying drugs is ultimately participating in and supporting a market in which violence, exploitation and abuse is an accepted part of doing business.

That's why we're working to take action at every level of the drug market – from the user to the street dealer to organised crime. As well as the investment the Mayor has made in policing, he is also investing £3million over 3 years in a pan-London project, Out There Response and Rescue, to deliver 'county lines' service to support vulnerable young Londoners preyed upon and cynically exploited by criminal gangs to deal drugs.

Q: The success of the Glasgow violence reduction model was in no small part due to a massive increase in stop and search. Will we now be seeing the same in London?

Answer

The Mayor supports the use of targeted, intelligence-led stop and search in London, and we have seen increases in the use of these powers as the Met has intensified its activities to tackle knife crime and serious violence.

Q: You say you have been working to address the problem of violence since you became Mayor, but under your leadership the problem has got worse hasn't it?

Answer

We can't escape the consequences of Government cuts both to policing and the services which help to steer our young people away from crime. What we can do is bring together all those who can help to address the problem and make sure we are using our collective resources as best we can to make a real difference.

We need long term solutions – and that is why we are working to set up this new partnership and help protect our young people and future generations from this terrible scourge.

Q: Is this announcement an admission that the Mayor's current Strategies aren't up to the job?

Answer

Far from it. The creation of this unit builds on the public health approach set out in the Knife Crime Strategy – and the emphasis on working jointly with everyone who can help in the fight against knife crime and against all other forms of violence. The strategies will sit alongside the work we are doing on enforcement, our new VRU and the investment in opportunities for young Londoners.

Q: Will you be publishing a new Police and Crime Plan/Knife Crime Strategy/VAWG Strategy?

Answer

No. This work will sit alongside strategies the Mayor has published.

Q: You say that prevention is a priority for you in your fight against knife crime, and yet it took 18 months for you to come up with a knife crime strategy and it'll be another year until we see this new initiative up and running. How can you justify these delays?

Answer

The Mayor has been clear about his determination to tackle violent crime – which began rising again in 2014 – ever since his election. Decisions to increase the amount of funding City Hall given to the police and a commitment to doubling dedicated ward officers were early steps to ensure communities had the policing they needed to respond to knife crime.

The Mayor is not prepared to accept that the pattern of peaks and troughs in violence in London that we've seen over the years is the norm. We need long-term solutions and that can only come through a lasting unit approach rooted in the principles of prevention, enforcement and intervention.

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Q: Do you have anything to say to the families and communities living in fear as a result of you having failed to take sufficient, swift action to tackle rising violent crime in our city?

Answer

Every life lost to violence and every community traumatised by crime is a tragedy, which is why the Mayor has been prioritising tackling violence since he was elected. But violence started to increase in 2014, while this Government cut funding for the police and essential social services and now we're witnessing the consequences.

We know that the solution to knife crime and violence lies in the communities most affected by it. This is why the Mayor is investing millions into youth services and grass roots projects to turn people away from violence and protect them, at the same times as he is investing £140 million in the police to take action against those who commit these crimes.

Q: How are you working with the Home Office on this problem?

Answer

The Mayor has discussed the issue with the Home Secretary and he attends the Home Office's cross-party taskforce.

The Mayor have also written to other key Government Departments – Health, Education, DCLG, Ministry of Justice and DCMS – calling for action from them to work across Government to tackle this issue.