



V VIOLENCE AND
EXPLOITATION
REDUCTION UNIT
BEDFORDSHIRE

22-23

**ANNUAL
IMPACT
REPORT**

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BEDFORDSHIRE'S VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION REDUCTION UNIT ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT 2022/23

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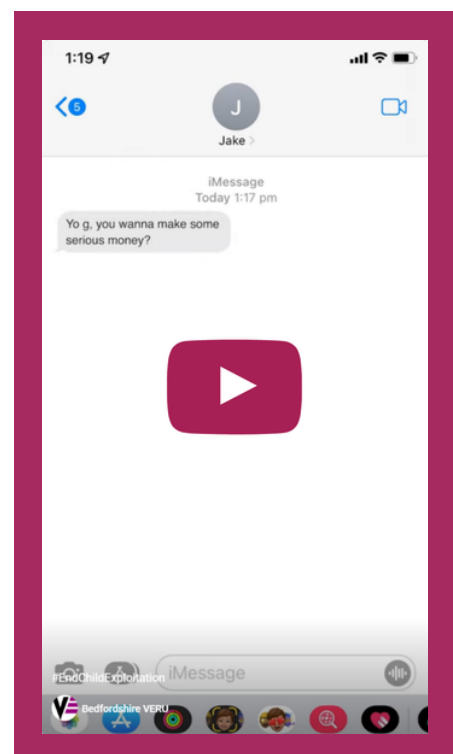
Key activities and deliverables over the past year include supporting a pilot project to tackle long-term absenteeism with the OPCC, regarding the disruption of long-term absenteeism from school leaving young people vulnerable to criminal exploitation and engagement with the judicial system. The success of the project can be directly attributable to the VERU and our YIS team and the support of one of our commissioned services which has been strategically placed directly into schools. The VERU hosted a highly successful visit from the Home Office in January 2023, and in March 2023 hosted the Bedfordshire Hope Hack in Luton, which was attended by local school pupils and young people up to the age of 24. One notable success was our partnership in the Bedfordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner's Youth Conference, for Year 9 students across Bedfordshire which ran February – March 2023. The free event was run in conjunction with Bedfordshire's VERU and aimed to help young people to understand the impact that their actions and choices can have on the rest of their life, whilst inspiring, informing and empowering them to be part of the solution in reducing crime in Bedfordshire. The events were a huge success with 280 attendees over the 3 days, plus 87 facilitators (professionals from partner organisations)/staff/speakers. This equates to roughly 367 people.

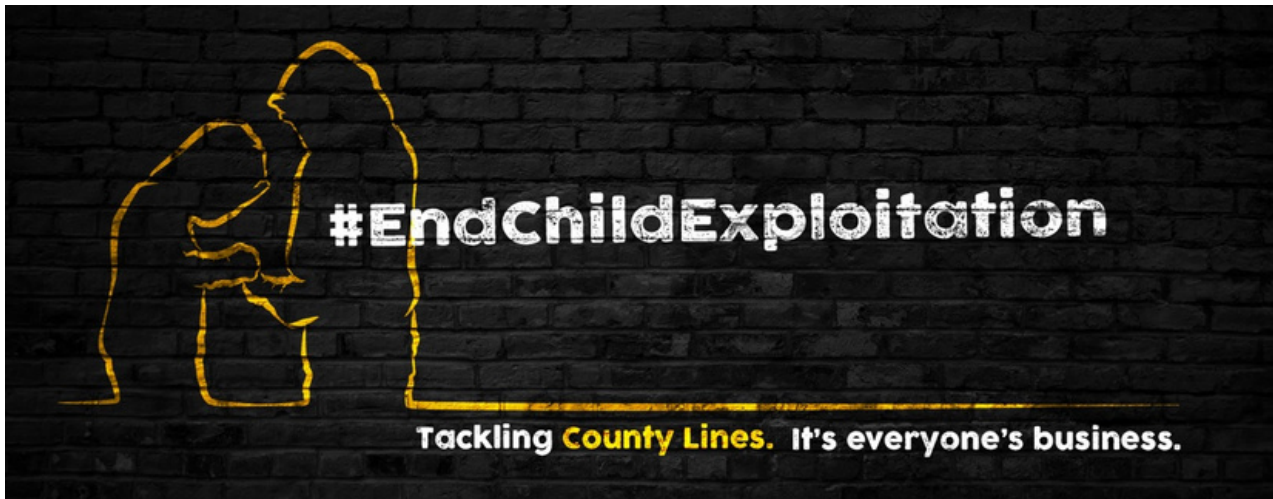
Throughout October and November 2022, we worked closely with Bedfordshire Police to raise awareness of exploitation. Our joint #EndChildExploitationcampaign was used to mark both County Lines Intensification Week and Operation Sceptre, the national police response to knife crime.

Our 'Jake' exploitation video created by the VERU's communications officer became one of the most effective pieces of campaigning public sector agencies in Bedfordshire have ever run. It generated nearly half a million impressions across multiple platforms and drove record numbers of people to the VERU website.

Amongst other interactions across Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube the ad attracted:

- 483.3k Impressions
- 136.7k Views
- Almost 3k Website visits





Bedfordshire VERU YIS Referrals Report April 2023

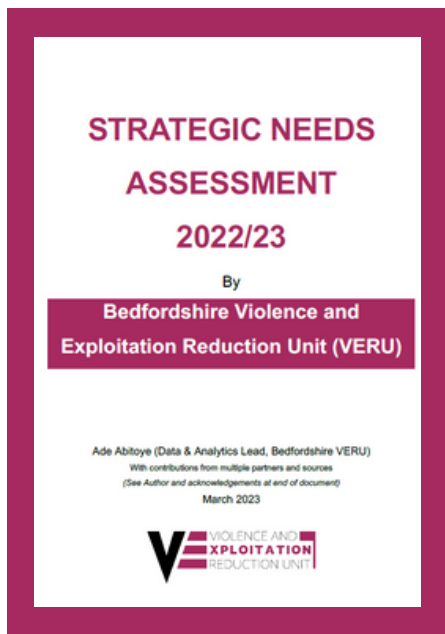
The outstanding and best practice work of the VERU's Youth Intervention Specialist (YIS) team continues to have an impact across the county. The VERU YIS team is unique due to being part of the VERU and not a commissioned service. The staff are academically qualified but also have lived experiences that make them so relatable to the young people, parent, or carer as well as the professionals they also support. Not only do the YIS team have a referred caseload they also provide themed presentations to schools and other groups such as the Youth Conference mentioned earlier.

A Child Exploitation Needs Assessment (CENA) to doc was produced by the VERU in 2022 under the auspices of the VERU-led Data and Intelligence Group on Violence and Exploitation in Bedfordshire (DIGVERB). The needs assessment was initiated and agreed locally in Bedfordshire by all agencies and services working on reducing and tackling violence and exploitation problem in Bedfordshire. The purpose of the CENA was to generate a baseline assessment that reflects the levels (or 'burden') of child exploitation (CE) in Bedfordshire. The report, which covers children and young people (CYP) up to the age of 25 years, provides an overview of the prevalence of CE across the county, as well insight into how the issue can be suitably tracked and managed in the future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



FOREWORD



Our landmark Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) provides a comprehensive overview of what violence and exploitation looks like in Bedfordshire. It is maintained by the Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) with the support of a whole host of other agencies. It forms the basis of the Strategic Response to these issues in the county, outlining how we can all work together collectively across Bedfordshire to provide a whole systems approach to these issues and keep young people in our communities safe, this is outlined in our Action Plan.

When our VERU team first published a version of the SNA in 2020, with the assistance of colleagues from public health, the VERU was in its infancy. There were question marks about where the VERU would fit into the network of different agencies already working in this space, as well as uncertainty about the whole concept of violence reduction units and how long they would be around for. Three years have passed since that report was published and the journey I, my VERU colleagues and our partners have been on has been extraordinary. The VERU is now embedded in the collective response to violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire, providing a distinct, valued, and expert voice in different spaces, connecting with projects and communities that other agencies have previously struggled to engage with, as well as leading and coordinating multi-agency work to prevent violence and exploitation in areas such as data and communications.

What struck me in our latest SNA is the prevalence of sexual violence in the county, especially that committed by young male perpetrators against women and girls. The VERU's remit has traditionally been in areas such as knife crime, county lines and child exploitation, and our team is focused relentlessly on working with young people and their families affected by these devastating issues. However, the evidence suggests that tackling issues like domestic abuse is inextricably linked with violence prevention. Having been seconded into the national policing response to violence against women and girls (VAWG), I know all too well the enormous focus being placed on this matter – and the scale of reform still needed to keep women and girls in every community safe. I believe the VERU has a lot to offer to the fantastic work already underway to combat VAWG in Bedfordshire. Our team is already involved in some of this work, and I hope we can embed ourselves further in this area over the coming months.

Other key recommendations focus on the need for us all to adopt a truly multi-agency approach. Whether it is closer sharing of data or pooling our knowledge, resources, and projects already underway in hotspot areas for violence, better coordination between different agencies can truly maximise our impact and ensure our outcomes match the collective will that undoubtedly already exists to keep children and young people in Bedfordshire safe.



Kimberley C. Lamb

Kimberley Lamb, VERU Director



This report documents our Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit's (VERU) journey for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. It summarises our pan Bedfordshire effort to fulfil the VERU delivery plan - as detailed in our 21/22 Home Office Grant Agreement. The successes highlighted within this report reinforce the importance of multi-agency working. The VERU encourages shared practice and the embedding of pragmatic plans for the sustainability of our unit. Our ethos remains steadfast - "It takes a Village to Raise a Child". Obtaining three-year funding has allowed us to continue to work in close partnership with our key Bedfordshire stakeholders - which includes the police, local government, health, education, housing, voluntary sector, and community. The longer-term funding has enabled us to recruit excellent staff, ensuring that our specialist unit continues to tackle the root causes of violence and exploitation by delivering sustainable prevention and early intervention solutions.

Violence and exploitation are key public health issues influencing the health and wellbeing of populations and leading to significant inequalities within populations.

The main locations and communities at risk of violence and sexual offences are found in the South-central wards and other pockets (such as in rural areas Sharnbrook and Riseley wards) in Bedford; Western areas (Cranfield and Marston Moretaine ward and most south-western wards) and some northern pockets in Sandy, Pottton, Biggleswade North in Central Bedfordshire; Southern wards and other pockets spread across the north-western wards of Luton. The directly age standardized rates (DSR) for both Police-reported violence and sexual offences and health-recorded assaults show that the higher rates for Bedford and Luton (compared to the Bedfordshire rate) are mostly statistically significant and the rate for Central Bedfordshire is significantly lower than Bedfordshire and the two other boroughs.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the small areas identified as having significantly higher rates than the Bedfordshire rate align with the most deprived areas of the county. The DSRs increase with deprivation and the most deprived decile has a significantly higher rate than (and generally about six times) that of the least deprived decile.

In terms of at-risk groups, there were generally more female victims than male victims, although there were more male victims in certain categories (such as in cases of violence with injury that were presented in hospital). The top age groups of victims were mostly teenagers aged 15-19 years and young adults aged 20-24 years, 25-29 years, 30-34 years old. The breakdown of victims by ethnicity is less useful and mostly difficult to make any conclusions because the proportion of “unknown or unspecified” ethnicity is mostly too high. However, in some cases, it appears some ethnic minority groups were overrepresented (such the black ethnic group regarding hospital admissions due to violence). Where offender details were recorded, most of the offenders were identified as male.

The top two rape and sexual offences (Sexual assault on a female and Rape of a female aged 16 or over) constitute six in every 10 reported offences from the offences included in the Rape and Serious Sexual Offences Problem Profile for Bedfordshire 2023. The top three recorded vulnerabilities for all victims of rape and sexual assault were Age/Under 18, Domestic Abuse and Child Abuse. The most common vulnerabilities amongst the top repeat victims were poor mental health, drug use, alcohol abuse & CSE. Most of the other patterns for rape and sexual offences mirror those of the wider violence and sexual offences crime category. Where the relationship between the victim and the offender was recorded, the most common relationship between the victim and offender was Spouse/Partner/Ex-Partner (40%), followed by Friend/Associate (26%). Where the relationship was recorded as Spouse/Partner/Ex-Partner and Friend/Associate, the offenders were predominantly male (96%).

Violence and sexual offences in Bedfordshire are more likely to occur in May and the summer months (of June, July, and August). Night-time (especially from 12 midnight to just before 4am over the weekend) is the most at-risk time.

One of the most important factors or circumstances related to violence and sexual offences in Bedfordshire is domestic abuse. Almost 4 in every 10 recorded violence and sexual offences recorded by the Police were related to domestic abuse and domestic abuse is the top aggravating factor for these crimes. This was particularly the case for violence against women and girls (VAWG) in private spaces. Some other factors or circumstances related to violence and sexual offences in Bedfordshire include drug and alcohol, harassment, child at risk, online crime, use of knife or other sharp instrument, etc. For instance, between June 2018 and September 2022, there were 28 homicides in Bedfordshire and of the 28 homicides, 6 were motivated by drugs supply and 8 involved the consumption of drugs or alcohol or involved substance abuse. Information on this, based on the cross-partnership Drug and Alcohol Needs Assessment required by the 10-Year National Drug Strategy – From Harm to Hope 2021 – is included in this SNA. There are currently 35 known Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) in Bedfordshire, and they are highly likely to be drug motivated with almost all of them being involved in drugs whether directly or as professional enablers. Just over a third of the OCGs use county lines business model. In addition, Bedfordshire had identified 22 county lines and 346 cuckooed addresses as of 2022, with over half being in Luton.

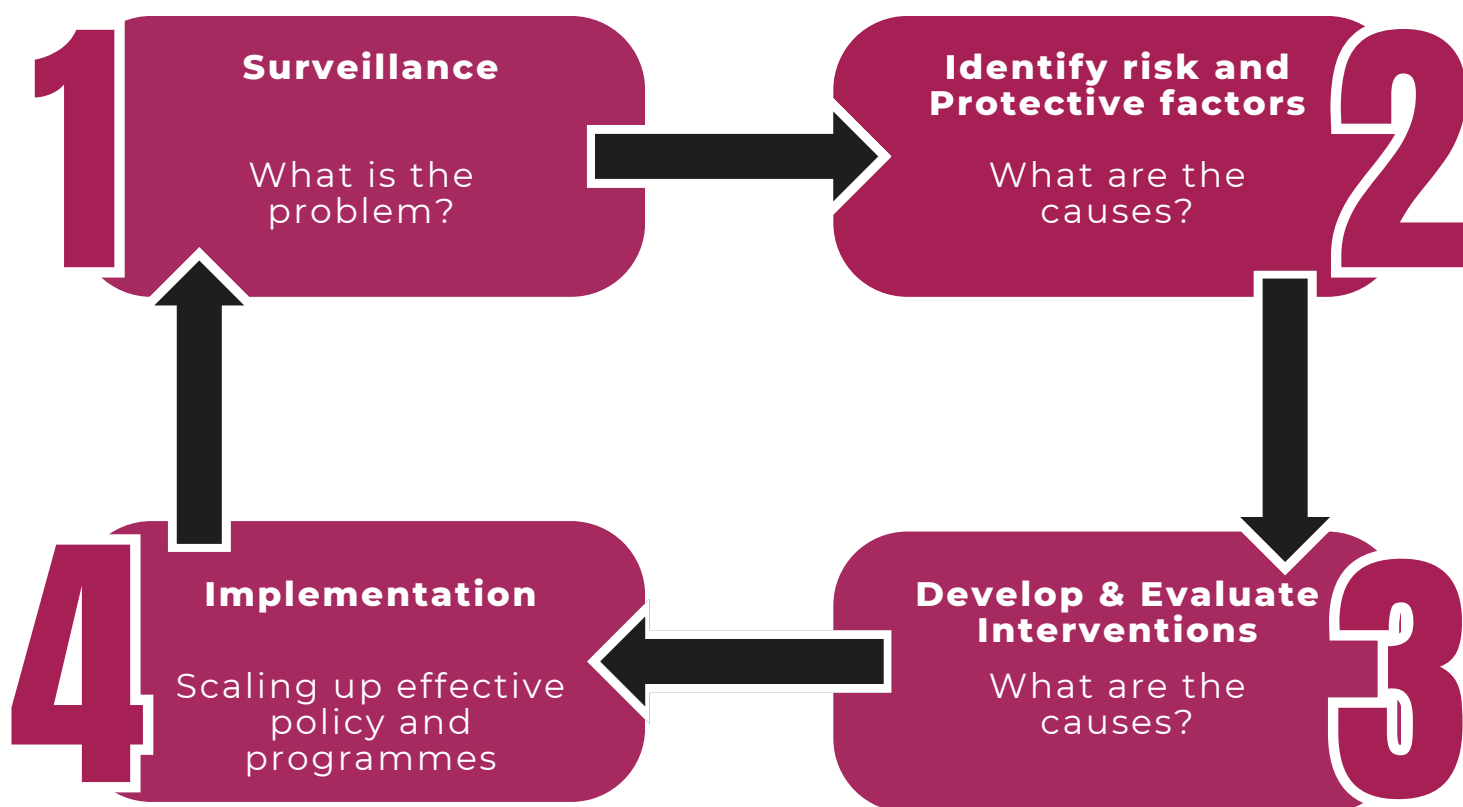
The estimated rate of children and young people up to 25 years old (CYP) who are victims or at risk of child exploitation in Bedfordshire is 86 per 10,000 CYP. Luton has the highest rate, followed by Bedford. Overall, in Bedfordshire, the dominant age group of victims or those at risk of CE is 15-19 years old. The vast majority (75%) of the victims or those at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation are males and most of the victims or those at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (54%) are females.

The rate of first-time entrants into the youth justice system for 10-17-year-olds is significantly lower in Central Bedfordshire, and similar in Bedford Borough and Luton Borough compared to England. In addition, the rate of first-time entrants into the youth justice system for 10-17-year-olds has significantly decreased in a decade (from 2011 to 2021) in all the three local authorities. Furthermore, the rate of Children and Young people aged 10 to 17 years cautioned or sentenced per 1,000 population is significantly lower in Central Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough and Luton Borough compared to England. This rate has also decreased significantly from 2013/14 to 2020/21 in all the three local areas.

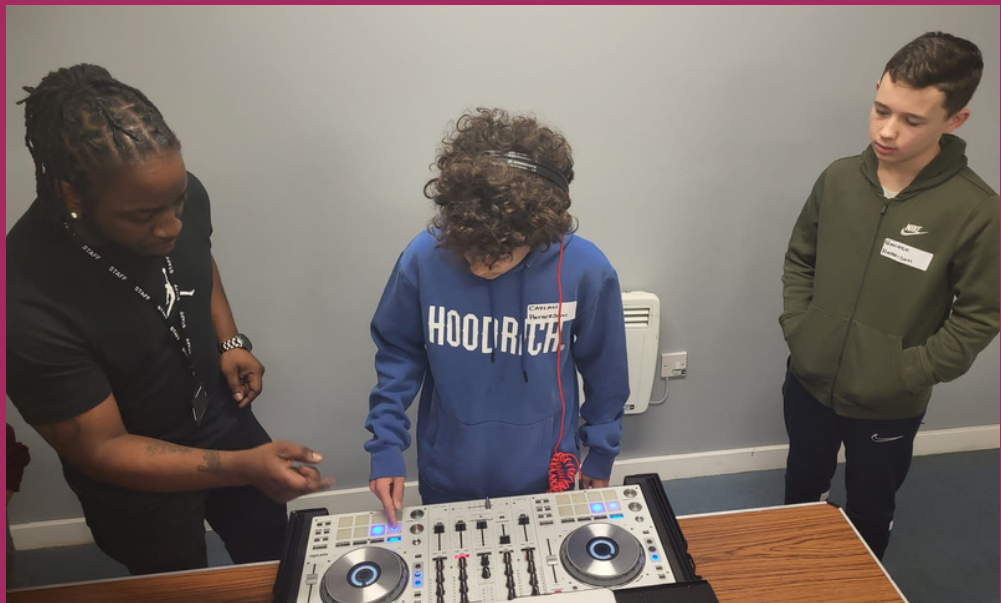
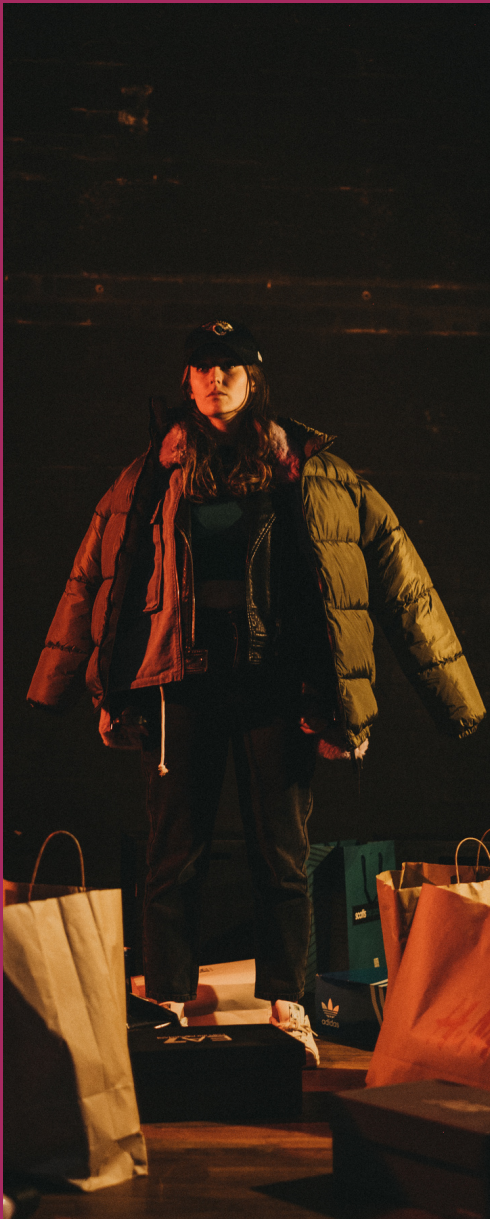
Definitions and scope

The World Health Organisation (WHO) 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 deprivation.”

The Serious Violence Strategy, published by the Home Office in April 2018, includes the following types of crime within the strategy: “specific types of crime such as homicide, knife crime, and gun crime and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as in gangs and county lines drug dealing. It also includes emerging crime threats faced in some areas of the country such as the use of corrosive substances as a weapon.”



WHO model for violence prevention



INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

Whole-system multi-agency approach

Taking a “whole-system multi-agency approach” to preventing and reducing violence and exploitation refers to how we view the issue and how we can work together to prevent violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire. Multiple organisations have defined what taking this approach means to them, but ultimately there are key features of such an approach outlined below.

At the core of this, is partnership working- we need to work across organizational boundaries to tackle this problem, working as a whole system at a place level (2). Partners need to have a shared understanding of the approach that is being taken, and a common vision. We need to know what is driving the problem (the “causes of the causes”) and address the wider determinants (such as housing, education, employment) which have an impact on violence and exploitation. We need to focus on how we can prevent people in our community from being involved, or at risk of, violence and exploitation before it starts or detect it early.

We should be considering how we can reduce this risk across the population (universal approach), as well as targeting individuals who are more at risk of becoming involved in violence and exploitation (targeted approach). Finally, the approach we take, the decisions we make, needs to be driven by high quality data. We need to consider how we can best maximise the data that we have in the system, and how we can work across agencies to have a greater impact through the sharing of information.



The 5Cs: a place-based multi-agency approach to serious violence prevention. Source: extracted from “A whole-system multi-agency approach to serious violence prevention.”

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Model, Governance and Accountability

The governance of the VERU strategy sits with Bedfordshire's Drugs, Alcohol, Violence and Exploitation Strategic Board (now called the Serious Harm Strategic Board) which oversees the Bedfordshire VERU. In addition, the three Directors of Children's Services will report to their respective Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB) on this strategy and its implementations. The LSCBs will hold partners to account for their role in delivering this strategy and associated action plans.

The Serious Harm Strategic Board was formed to encompass not only VERU Oversight but also to channel partner agencies in the 10-year central Government Drug and Alcohol policy. This group has allowed key stakeholders and partners, including Health, to form an alliance and establish working practices to combat the myriad of issues the county face. The board also now communicates the Serious Violence Duty commitments via the OPCC, which is supported by the VERU with statutory obligations on specified authorities. With the VERU already established, most of the alliances have already been formed under the previous VERU Oversight Board for example, the data sharing group (see below for additional detail).

There is strong evidence which suggests the VERU is becoming an expert in the Public Health approach to serious violence. As reported DIGVERB is a collection of data analysts and partners that share their data and forms a holistic view of the issues facing police and partners in the violence and exploitation areas in the county. This has been harnessed by the inception of the Serious Harm Board which includes all relevant partners at senior level and includes local authority health managers as well as the BLMK NHS directors who are very supportive of this approach. Coupled with the SVD - this has placed an obligation to work closer - which due to the VERU being in place, most of the start-up issues have already been eliminated some time ago.

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Data Sharing

The Data & Intelligence Group on Violence and Exploitation Reduction in Bedfordshire (DIGVERB) has been developed as a technical multi-service group that is ultimately accountable to the Serious Harm Reduction Board. This group will regularly provide updates and report any findings and recommendations to the Pan Bedfordshire Exploitation & Missing Strategic Group and other Strategic Groups in the system as appropriate.

The DIGVERB routinely convenes monthly and works to use data and intelligence to achieve a shared understanding of current local issues on – and related to – violence and exploitation, opportunities to implement interventions and evaluate their impact. Through a collaborative approach, partners will aim to overcome the barriers to effective data and information sharing and create a Common Recognised Information Picture (CRIP) which can be used to mobilise effective preventative and operational interventions. The DIGVERB will work together to understand what data is available and its utility; and agree to appropriate data-sharing protocols. The membership is driven by topic and knowledge expertise requirements – these will be reviewed as appropriate and inform changes to membership on an ongoing basis.

The DIGVERB has a range of local organisations and bodies represented in the Group or has access to them and/or their data via existing members

These include:

- Police and crime commissioner (PCC) – represented by the VERU
- Bedfordshire Police senior officers.
- Local authorities, including public health, children’s services, education, housing, alcohol and drug commissioning
- Relevant partnerships and collaborative bodies such as community safety partnerships and youth offending teams

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- Local academy head teachers and education networks
- Health organisations such as clinical commissioning groups, NHS England health and justice commissioners, and Public Health England (PHE) centres.
- Third sector services including providers of drug and alcohol services.
- Work-related bodies such as Jobcentre Plus, and Department for Work and Pensions employment support providers.

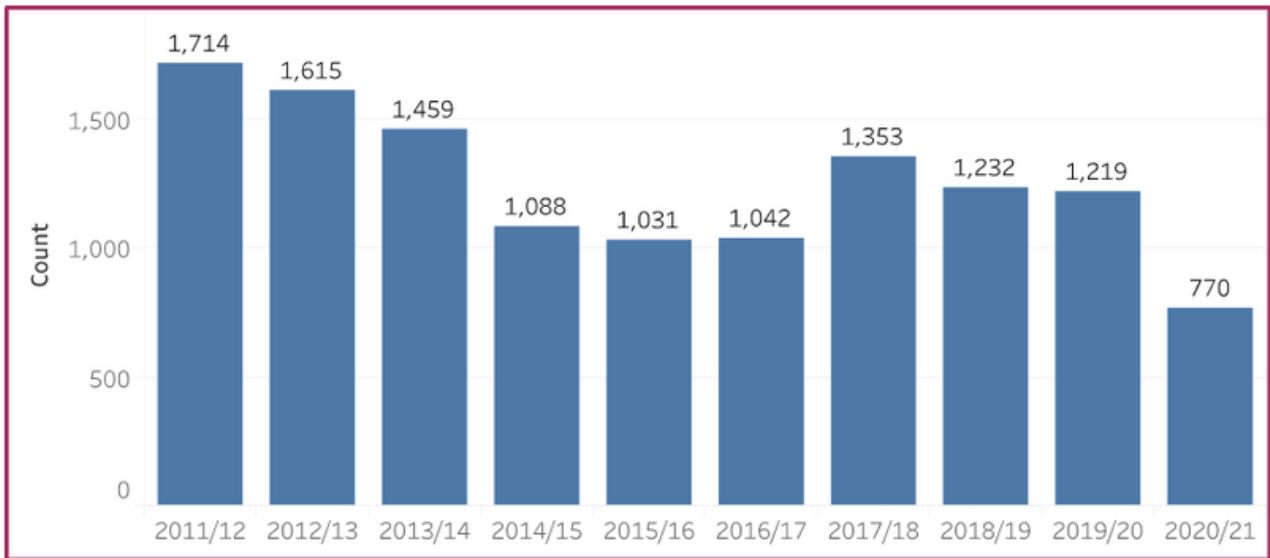
The DIGVERB has a “live” Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) in place on DocuSign, which partner agencies can access and sign. Most of the agencies represented in the group have signed up to this DSA. The data from all our three local authorities and other agencies was used for a child exploitation needs assessment based on the DSA.

There is a separate Information Sharing Agreement (ISA) in place to access relevant A&E attendance and ambulance data. The ISA specifically states that the Police Serious Violent Analytical Crime Team will have access to the Level 2 Data for Hospital Admissions. However, there is a possibility for the VERU to gain access to this, if necessary. The Level 2 Data is used, when required, to provide a report to police-led SV meetings and to partners & stakeholders (including the DIGVERB).. We are pushing ahead to progress better access to – and quality of – relevant health data, but this is significantly dependent on our health colleagues.

A&E attendances related to violence and sexual offences are “first A&E attendances” where assault was specified in the Patient Group field of the HES A&E dataset.

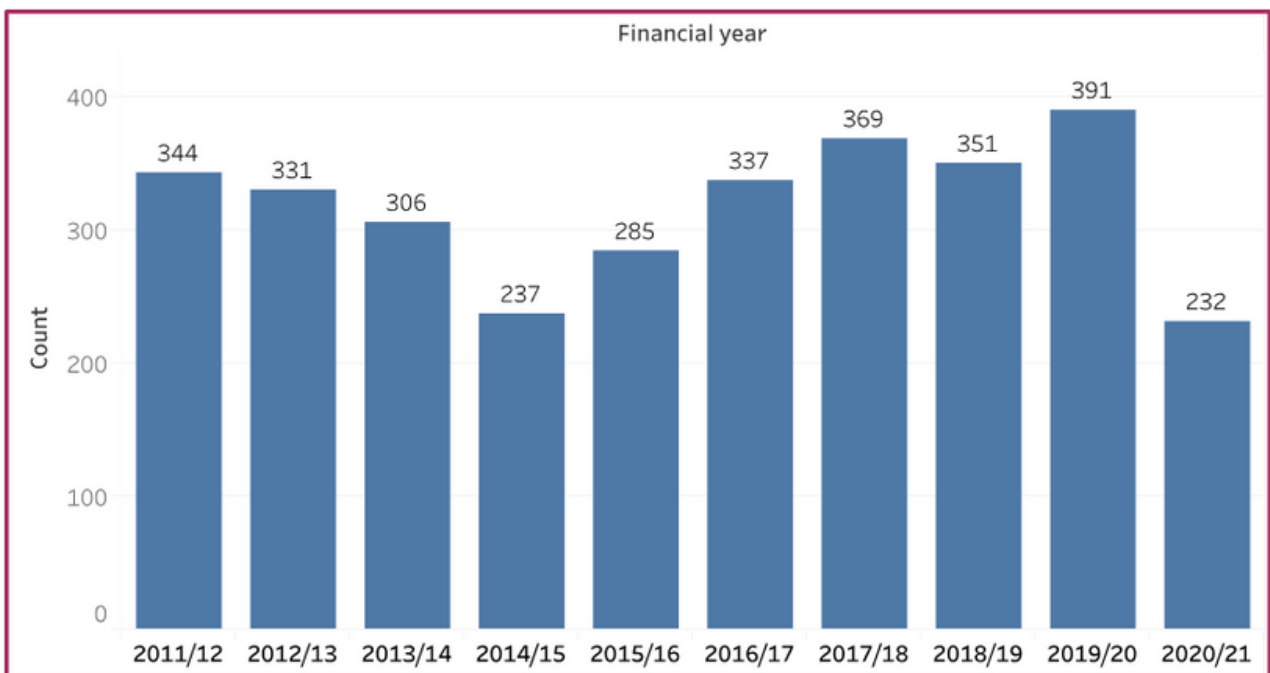
The annual number of A&E attendances, based on the HES data, by residents in Bedfordshire after assault from 2011/12 to 2020/21 is in the table below. Over the most recent 5-year period for which data is fully available (2016/17-2020/21), there were 5,616 A&E attendances.

A&E Attendances after assault



Data Source: Hospital Episodes Statistics (HES), NHS Digital

Number of hospital admissions due to violence in Bedfordshire, 2011/12-2020/21



Data Source: Hospital Episodes Statistics (HES), NHS Digital

Discussions have taken place about the possibility of building an integrated data capability whereby police data is linked to other relevant datasets. Such discussions have been had internally in the VERU Oversight Board, the DIGVERB, and externally with Thames Valley VRU and Youth Endowment Fund. The initial plan is to replicate the Thames Valley VRU's data model (but likely with some differences), and possibly share in their infrastructure, which may reduce costs for both VRUs. The PCC has also been informed that there is a need for such a capability and his help has been requested for whenever there is a relevant funding opportunity. The main barrier to this moving forward is funding for the additional resources required and we are yet to secure funding for this. There is no specific timeline, and it is entirely dependent on funding.

Reduction in hospital admissions for assaults with a knife or sharp object, and especially among victims aged under 25.

In 2021/22 (the most recent financial year for which data is available), there were 70 recorded hospital admissions for assaults by sharp object in Bedfordshire. Though this seemed like an increase from the previous year (2020/21) when there were 50 recorded hospital admissions, this was not a typical year because of the pandemic which generally had an impact on non-COVID hospital activities in 2020/21. Thus, comparing the data for the most recent financial year (2021/22) with the year before (2019/20) is more useful. Based on this, there was about 18% reduction in recorded hospital admissions for assaults by sharp object (for all ages) in Bedfordshire from 2019/20 (n=85) to 2021/22 (n=70).

Half of the 70 (n=35) of the 2021/22 recorded hospital admissions for assaults by sharp object in Bedfordshire were for those aged under 25. In the previous year (2020/21), there were 25 recorded hospital admissions for assaults by sharp object for under 25s in Bedfordshire, which seemed to be similarly affected by the pandemic.

Thus, comparing the data for the most recent financial year (2021/22) with the year before (2019/20) shows that there was a 14% reduction in recorded hospital admissions for assaults by sharp object for under 25s in Bedfordshire from 2019/20 (n=40) to 2021/22 (n=35).

Data source: [NHS Digital](#)

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Reduction in knife-enabled serious violence, and especially among victims aged under 25.

In 2022/23, the monthly average count of serious youth violence (SYV) in Bedfordshire was 168, a slight reduction from the previous year (2021/22) when the monthly average count was about 171.

About 11% of the 2022/23 monthly average count of SYV (19/168) on average were knife-enabled. Almost 14% of the monthly average in the previous year (23/171) were knife-enabled. This represents a slight reduction in knife enabled SYV.

Data source: [Bedfordshire Police](#)

The SNA

The SNA broadly confirmed some of what were already known, with a few surprises arising from more information on areas such as VAWG and night-time economy. Because of better access to data, more robust statistical methods were employed to refine the results and enhance local understanding. For instance, the use of standardisation on local data (for the first time) allowed the possibility to directly compare areas and find statistical significance in differences of rates which are useful in refining hotspots in the context of the population of the area (especially small areas). Furthermore, in pulling together all the various strands of work done locally, the SNA becomes the go-to document for robust understanding of violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire in one place for the VERU and partner agencies. The SNA weaved together what the data says with what the residents want to feel safe and then what the evidence says we can do about the issues, to provide clear evidence-based recommendations.

The SNA extensively identifies the target populations and those at risk of SV by place, time, and person. The numbers of those reached by interventions are collected separately (via quarterly returns from VERU-funded interventions). The VERU will work on bringing the two data together in the year ahead, by using the former as the denominator and the latter as the numerator.

In developing our SNA, the [Strategic Needs Assessment guidance](#) and other key documents variously referenced in the SNA were consulted. Two broad categories of data were used to develop the SNA.

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One is the Police Recorded Crime data both from the publicly available police.uk data about crime and policing and the local Bedfordshire Police data. The other is Health Data from the National Health Service (NHS) Hospital Episodes Statistics (HES) and the East of England Ambulance Service. In addition, a variety of other data sources were used to provide a local picture of violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire – these include locally produced profiles, needs assessments, and nationally curated data sources. Most of the local data and information were sourced through the VERU-led DIGVERB.

The SNA provides information that is useful for providing a focus for further analytic assessment, prioritising operational work, identifying intelligence gaps, highlighting opportunities for prevention and enforcement, and providing justification for actions. Thus, the SNA underpins most of the VERU work in terms of the 2020-2025 Strategy, Action Plan, funded community interventions, areas to influence with partner agencies, and other organisations we work with.

The SNA and RS have been shared with almost all (if not all) services and agencies within Bedfordshire related to violence and exploitation (via their key contacts). The SNA is not yet published online but the plan is to publish it (or a summarised version of it) online at a later date. The RS will be published online. The delay in publishing the SNA in its current form is partly because we wish to ensure that any sensitive information is not put in the public domain.

Sustainability

The VERU Manager will have a keen focus on potential additional funding pots that we can be applied for, supported by the OPCC commissioning team. The VERU does not have an expert bid writer or the staffing resource to look for and apply for funding, this is a role that we have asked the OPCC to undertake. Our VERU Director met with the Director of the YEF and discussed applying for relevant YEF and other funds throughout 23/34. We were reminded that the applications are very complex, with national competition for funding being extremely high. The VERU was advised that we use skilled and experienced staff to support our bid applications for funding.

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Once we are successful in our funding applications, we will recruit temporary project staff to manage the project accordingly – the staffing being financially supported directly from the money that we will receive. The VERU manager will be the team's main contact for any funding sources and will be responsible for highlighting any opportunities and bringing them to the attention of the OPCC staff on behalf of the VERU. The relevant Leads will be required to support the OPCC team with whatever information and data they may require. The VERU manager will provide the VERU Director with an updated funding pipeline every quarter.

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Item	Matched Funding	Funding Source	Details
Accommodation Costs	£15,000.00	Bedfordshire Police, OPCC, CSPs, LA's etc.	Providing Office Space & equipment, including staff passes, email address.
Staff/Training/ Recruitment	£15,000.00	Bedfordshire Police, OPCC, CSPs, LA's etc.	Staff Secondments into the VERU; including Finance Management, Communications, Exploitation Lead, Data/analytical Support, Early Intervention.
Staff/Training/ Recruitment	£15,000.00	Bedfordshire Police, OPCC, CSPs, LA's etc.	Attendance to Partnership Meetings; MAGPAN, Serious Youth Violence Panel, Data & Intelligence Group, Pan Beds Exploitation Communication Group
Staff/Training/ Recruitment	£10,000.00	Bedfordshire Police, OPCC, CSPs, LA's etc.	Agenda setting and Chairing Communications Officers from each, Support Services provide attendance at the Pan Beds Communication Meeting
Staff/Training/ Recruitment	£10,000.00	Bedfordshire Police, OPCC, CSPs, LA's etc.	Partnership contributions from towards the Bedfordshire Against Violence and Exploitation communications campaign (BAVEX)
Staff/Training/ Recruitment	£10,000.00	Bedfordshire Police, OPCC, CSPs, LA's etc.	Sharing of data from Partners to inform VRU Strategy and activity - SVD
Consultancy Services	£8,000.00	Bedfordshire Police, OPCC, CSPs, LA's etc.	Financial Contribution to the CSP's from the OPCC.
Consultancy Services	£10,000.00	Bedfordshire Police, OPCC, CSPs, LA's etc.	Agenda setting of the DAVE Board re: DIGVERB
Consultancy Services	£10,000.00	Bedfordshire Police, OPCC, CSPs, LA's etc.	Staff time to attend Pan Beds Partnership meetings including the DAVE Board
Consultancy Services	£9,000.00	Bedfordshire Police, OPCC, CSPs, LA's etc.	Attending Pan Beds Exploitation & Missing Meetings including the strategic group, monthly meeting & fortnightly SPOC Meeting.
Consultancy Services	£10,000.00	Bedfordshire Police, OPCC, CSPs, LA's etc.	Additional Support Services Locally, regionally and nationally to Reduce SYV.
Consultancy Services	£10,000.00	Bedfordshire Police, OPCC, CSPs, LA's etc.	CSP Support; for example, Contextual Safeguarding Meetings, Cuckooing Meetings, safer cohesion- any schemes linked to managing the night-time economy.
	£132,000.00		

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Cultural Sustainability

The Bedfordshire VERU has established its own distinct brand and communications, as well as playing a leading role in the whole systems approach to tackle violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire from a communications perspective.

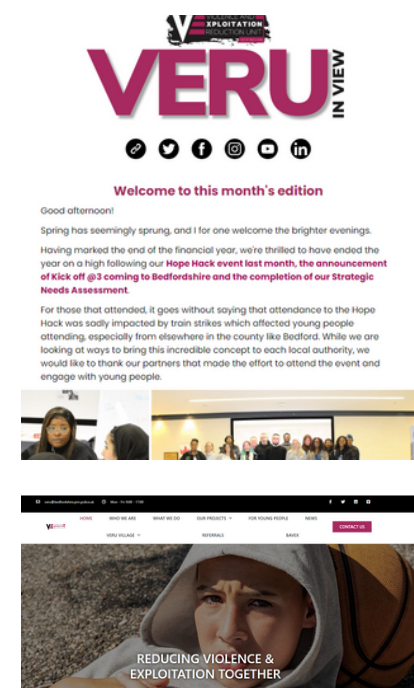
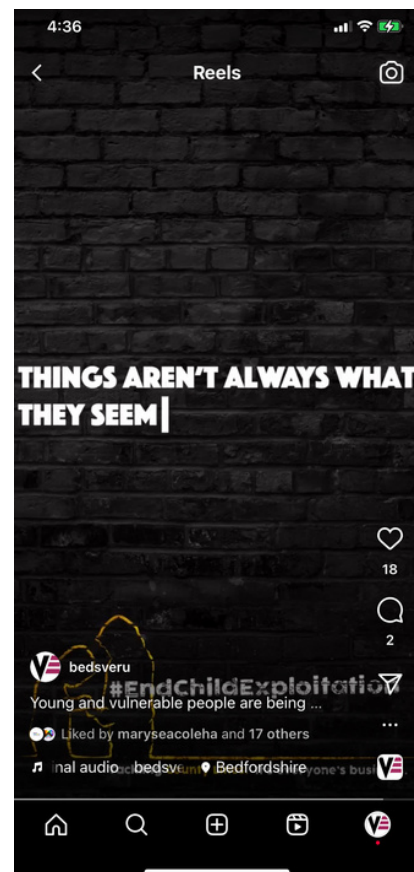
The VERU has developed a significant following across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, with more than 2,000 followers combined across all of these main social media platforms, as well as having a presence on LinkedIn and YouTube. Across 2022/23 our Facebook posts generated 123,556 impressions across 49,476 separate Facebook accounts, while posts on Twitter generated 60,199 impressions.

The VERU's standalone website was viewed 16,719 times across the year. The website hosts specific pages outlining things like resources, local support services and training materials for professionals, education settings, young people and families respectively, with these pages viewed over 3,000 times across the year.

Our monthly VERU in View newsletter is sent to just over 1,100 partners from agencies like police, local authority, third sector and community groups. This resource is also used by partner agencies who wish to reach this same demographic.

Over the past year the VERU has featured multiple times in local media, including on our regional TV programmes BBC Look East and ITV Anglia. The VERU also regularly runs advertising to extend its reach onto platforms used by young people, with advertising campaigns over the past year on Snapchat, Spotify and YouTube. Sometimes VERU branded products are run in adverts and funded by other agencies as part of partnership campaigns.

In November our 'Jake' exploitation video became one of the most effective pieces of campaigning public sector agencies in Bedfordshire have ever run.



INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

It generated nearly half a million impressions across multiple platforms and drove record numbers of people to the VERU website. More than 3,000 views were recorded across the site compared to the previous monthly high of around 2,000. Our region's police forces are interested in rolling the advert out on the same platforms with their own branding.

For our recent Hope Hack event, posts advertising the event beforehand reached 6,570 Facebook accounts and generated 22,713 impressions on Twitter, with a combined 402 link clicks across both platforms. Advertising the event on Snapchat generated 255,234 impressions among young people aged 13-24, around three quarters of which were aged 13-17. Nearly 3,700 people 'swiped up' from the ad to view the Eventbrite page, which received more than 8,092 views and 51 tickets were sold.



However, it is working in partnership where the VERU's comms comes into its own. This is typified by the Bedfordshire Against Violence and Exploitation campaign, the whole systems campaign to tackle all forms of exploitation linked to organised crime in Bedfordshire. The VERU's head of communications leads this campaign and chairs the Pan-Bedfordshire Exploitation communications group which governs it, which is attended by communications and operational colleagues from a multitude of different agencies.

Under this campaign the VERU has led on the multi-agency #EndChildExploitation campaign alongside agencies such as Bedfordshire Police, the Eastern Region Special Operations Unit and local public health agencies. This campaign delivered social media advertising which reached a combined 4.8 million people, generated 5,000 link clicks through to various campaign landing pages as well as delivering talks in schools, briefings for professionals, media packages and a Facebook Live webinar.

**INFRASTRUCTURAL
DEVELOPMENTS**

The VERU leads on the communications for the TREE project, a multi-agency outreach programme where youth workers and other professionals engage with young people during joint patrols. The VERU's comms expertise has included producing merchandise to support this activity as well as booking an advertising van to follow the teams and create interest. The VERU hosted a collection of summer sports and other leisure activities over the summer holidays, including lots of information about partner activities, which was visited 451 times over the summer. It also leads on hosting the VERU Youth Voices series of podcasts on YouTube, conversation sessions with young people which are held in partnership with one of our commissioned projects.

We have worked alongside a local housing association and a national charity to promote two apps which provide support for young people, Is This Ok and Tap Out, while the VERU is signposted to as a support service through a number of different channels and projects such as Dallow Cares, police weeks of action to tackle knife crime and county lines, as well as a list of support services for those at risk of exploitation.

In relation to how the VERU is working with key partners and vice versa, the VERU has membership and presence in key strategic, tactical and delivery boards. The VERU Director, Kimberley Campbell-Lamb is on the Force executive Board, Divisional Commanders Operating Group (DCOG) and manages a pillar of the Police Race Action Plan for Bedfordshire Police. This demonstrates the high level of importance the Police senior management place on working with, and drawing on, the Directors' professional and VERU experiences.

As part of the force's Serious Violence Board, our VERU presence allows the GRIP enforcement side an opportunity for Senior Investigating Officers to link directly into VERU for interventions.

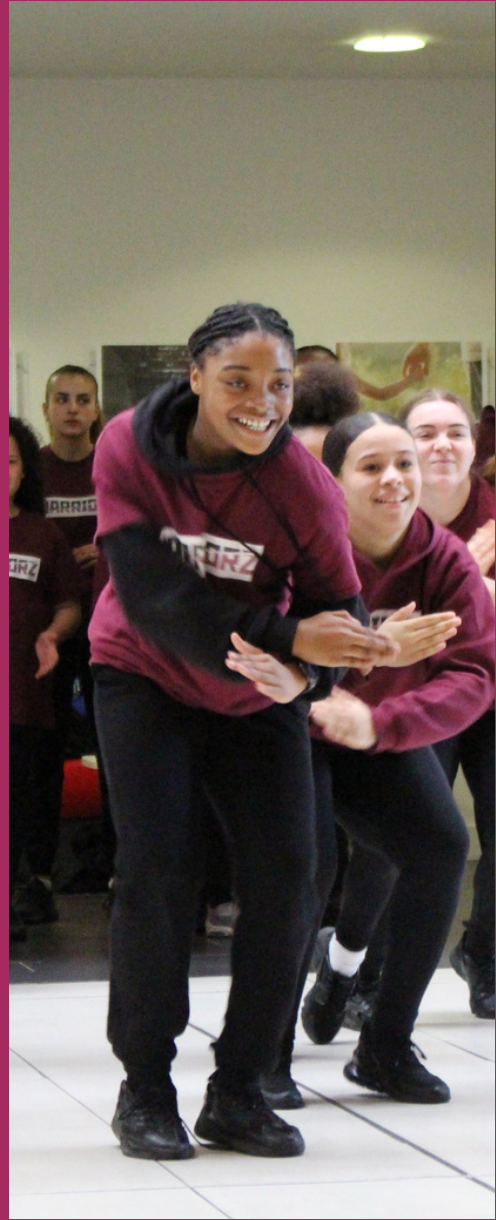
Examples would be where partners and police are tackling issues collaboratively, including post-enforcement activity whereby VERU resources and interventions can work alongside police partners (and other partners) to reduce / elevate community tensions following an event or incident.

**INFRASTRUCTURAL
DEVELOPMENTS**

The continued support for policing colleagues across our community interventions as the VERU can deploy prevention, diversion, and therapeutic interventions largely coterminous with our hot spots policing areas. It works collaboratively with our three Community Safety Partnerships, for example, on implementing recommendations from our Drugs Market Profile. The VERU hosts the analysts' partnership data-sharing group which seeks to improve the understanding of causal and risk factors for serious violence in our hot-spots.

The VERU attend Partnership Meetings specifically where Serious Youth Violence (SYV) is discussed, for example MAGPAN (Luton Multi Agency Gang Panel) & SYV (Central Beds & Bedford Serious Youth Violence Panel) Panel. Alongside being members of the Missing and Exploitation strategic and Tactical boards, there is a Contextual Safeguarding response in each on the local authority areas where hotspots/areas of concern are discussed. The VERU manager and GRIP Det. Chief Insp regularly meet to discuss interventions as well as tactical plans in hot spot areas.

**INFRASTRUCTURAL
DEVELOPMENTS**



DELIVERY

Intervention Delivery

The findings of the SNA feed into our Strategic Response document, which in turn builds the VERU's Action Plan. The Action Plan is built using the YEF Toolkit framework, which is how the Primary, Secondary and Tertiary classification of interventions is decided. For the coming year, the Action Plan will also list the 'ministerial priorities' as well as the 'ToC' so that all Leads within the VERU are constantly reflecting and reevaluating whether they are meeting the national and local remits of the VERU. Another area for Development for the coming year includes upscaling evidence-based practice.

The VERU's Funded Community Interventions

Luton Youth Offending Service – The Tree Project has operated since January 2021 and has been highly successful, the numbers of young people engaged in positive activities had been incredible and the visibility of the workers on the project saw a reduction in the usual community tension seen following an incident of violence.

Bedfordshire Youth Offending Service - Tree Project (Tackling, Reducing and Ending Exploitation) has its roots in the ethos of the Operation StaySafe scheme introduced in England in 2008. Ultimately devised to safeguard vulnerable children and young people at risk of exploitation that leads to violence via joint patrols and outreach work in target areas such as town centres.

Boxing Saves Lives - The project will continue to provide one-to-one support for young people across Bedfordshire through boxing and mentoring. This builds on the organisation's success since October 2020, where they have worked with over 1,000 young people in that time. Dependent on demand, some funding will be allocated for school programs, usually six weeks in length as a key prevention technique in targeting those at risk of exploitation, exclusion and harm.

Samson's Academy - work with some of the harder to reach community in and around Bedfordshire. Supporting young people who are at risk of County-lines and youth criminality, those also at risk of gang affiliation are brought together to look at the root-causes of their behaviours. They are supported by our in-house All England qualified boxing coaches and PT's/Tutors as well as our therapy team.

They are taught about conflict resolution, 1st Aid, team-working, Law & Order as well as being taken to the Crown Courts in Luton and being addressed by one of the Judges on the circuit. With lessons being delivered by qualified youth engagement staff they are directed into making the right decisions with their lives and futures. They are encouraged to participate in additional sports such as basketball and football which encourage teamwork and communication. All cohorts are assigned a mentor from the therapeutic team who they will meet with once a week where they will maintain a video journal or a written one for the entire duration of the course.

Bedford Community Safety Partnership – Safe Spaces - Delivered through the CSP Contextual Safeguarding & Tasking meeting, partnered with Groundwork, the project aims to identify emerging areas of concern around violence and exploitation. The project will aim to deliver 'Safe Spaces' to young people aged 12-18 (up to 25 with additional needs) across Bedford Borough.

Luton Community Safety Partnership - We will work with VCS partners under the Fairness Taskforce initiative to help bring the voice of young people and their lived experience and perceptions to the fore. The project will co-produce interventions to help us understand and find solutions to increase trust and a feeling of safety within young people from all backgrounds in Luton. We will also improve understanding around how hate crime and hate incidences can be reported, working with schools, the VCS sector and others to make sure young people are using the system.

Central Bedfordshire Community Safety Partnership - Targets hotspot areas for exploitation, serious youth violence and county lines activity. Identifying & engaging with children & YP involved / at risk of becoming involved. Messages to the exploiters and local communities. Intelligence gathering, long term diversion activities.

Mary Seacole Housing Association - MSHA believes working and building on people's existing strengths and supporting them to discover their aspirations is the best way to engage them in a positive future.

In 2022 we launched the Seacole Academy which has supports 330+ participants with their educational and employment needs through a menu of choices, to broker opportunities for employment. One of these choices is Media Creation. Media can be a means of self-expression, a creative outlet, and an open space. For young people media is a platform to meet other creative people, be inspired by others, and build social skills.

Bedfordshire Open Door - The aim of this initiative is to deliver specialist counselling provision to young people aged 13 – 25 years who are at risk, are victims of crime and have had or are experiencing acute childhood experiences. The service supports young people to process the trauma that they have experienced. The intervention will support the young person in developing communication skills and develop strategies to manage aggression and displays of violence.

Canter Equine Assisted Learning Therapy - The CANter programme is a distinctive framework which allows the client to learn and grow from the horse- human relationship. The horses work as metaphors, helping the client to find their own solutions to the challenges of change.

Chums - The service supports young people to process the trauma that they have experienced. The intervention will support the young person in developing communication skills and develop strategies to process their trauma in a safe way, supporting them to also manage aggression and displays of violence.

Diverse FM - With the support of this grant Diverse FM Community Media & Training would like to engage with children and young people from socio-economic disadvantage backgrounds, especially those who were made vulnerable by Covid-19 pandemic and offer them all with access to a range of innovative and creative qualifications, education and learning, awareness raising workshops and diversionary activities, such as radio broadcast opportunities, leadership development and team building activities, indoor / outdoor sports and recreational activities, weekly tuition support and dedicated IAG and other employability support to help them develop life-long, employability and other key skills, leading to improved educational attainment, physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Next Generation Youth Theatre – NGYT was set up in early 2012 by Laura and David Lloyd with the purpose of providing high quality, accessible and inclusive theatre, dance and arts opportunities to the young people of Luton.

Link to Change - Challenge Project is based upon our learnings and will see Link to Change provide an effective provision around child exploitation. This provision will reduce the chances, risk factors and vulnerabilities, whilst increasing the protective factors of children and young people aged 7-18 years in Bedfordshire. The project will address the factors that exist at different levels within their environment including- individual, family, community and society. 3. Beneficiaries will have the ability to understand other perspectives, communicate effectively and adapt positive strategies for personal development.

Embrace - Embrace will provide Therapeutic Support specifically to the Youth Intervention Team Referrals. Every YP referred into the VERU YIS Team will be offered Therapeutic CBT support through Embrace; This support will help young people become more aware of these negative thoughts and learn how to change or manage them. This support will be offered on a 'no wait' basis and can be intensive, providing more than one session per week.



As noted in the Executive Summary, the outstanding and best practice work of the VERU's Youth Intervention Specialist (YIS) team continues to have an impact across the county. What makes the provision unique is that the YIS team includes some staff with lived experience of the environment they work in. They go beyond the role of other interventions, for example, attending standard and emergency strategic meetings, helping young people to find employment, and supporting the parents and families of the young people they are working with.

VERU YIS Referrals Report April 2023

The role of the VERU is to use a multi-agency approach to tackle violence and exploitation. We are proud to share a perfect example of how the YIS team and partnership working can disrupt exploitation, while helping victims become survivors.' C's Story – Identified as a regular missing person, and often absent from school, the YIS team were made aware of a young person that was suspected of being a victim of exploitation by older men, after receiving a referral from Children's Services.

Through shared information between partners, including 'C's school and Bedfordshire Police, our YIS worker was able to bridge the gap between 'C' and local authorities. This led to the identification of the perpetrator and ultimately the disruption of communication with 'C'.

Over a period of time the YIS team member was able to instigate a managed move, ensuring 'C' was in appropriate accommodation that could support their needs. As a result, we are thrilled to share that 'C' is not only back in school and thriving, but they are also regularly attending one of the VERU's commissioned projects. The YIS team member said: "As a whole this is a fantastic success story. However, a notable takeaway for me would be 'C's change in perspective. "When I first met with 'C', they were adamant that there was no issue with their relationship with the perpetrator. But towards the end of our time together, 'C' said that they can now see how they were being exploited and that the behaviours of the perpetrator was not OK".

Another notable success was our partnership in the Bedfordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner's Youth Conference, for Year 9 students across Bedfordshire which ran February – March 2023. The free event was run in conjunction with Bedfordshire's VERU and aimed to help young people to understand the impact that their actions and choices can have on the rest of their life, whilst inspiring, informing and empowering them to be part of the solution in reducing crime in Bedfordshire. The day was made up of a variety of topical workshops, inspirational guest speakers and an interactive theatre production exploring the themes of public sexual harassment (commissioned by Bedfordshire Police's Safer Streets Project). All attendees were provided lunch and refreshments during the day. The events were a huge success with 280 attendees over the three days, plus 87 facilitators (professionals from participating organisations)/staff/speakers. This equates to roughly 367 people. Numbers slightly dipped due to Luton school strikes.

We are still working on collating the feedback with the OPCC, however some initial feedback from the students that completed our survey includes:

"Roseanne's story about AJ was incredibly powerful and heart-breaking. An absolute inspiration" (Roseann is part of our Youth Intervention Specialist team).

"Brilliant"

"An insightful day"

"Fantastic"





ABSENTEEISM PILOT

Executive Overview

In June 2022 Bedfordshire's elected Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Festus Akinbusoye launched a 12-month pilot project to support schools and local authorities deal with long-term persistent absenteeism. PCC Akinbusoye initiated this pilot based on a Department of Education[1] and Ministry of Justice[2] report into school absenteeism and youth offending[3], as well as his concerns around missing children and those that repeatedly come into police custody.

Another driver of this initiative was his concern around the quality and availability of Education Welfare Officers (EWO). Of the three Local Authorities in Bedfordshire, one was charging its schools over £40,000 for this service, one stopped charging a few years ago, and the third would not disclose how much it charged. In effect, a lottery system was in place in supporting schools to tackle absenteeism.

This intervention forms part of the Commissioner's focus on early intervention, crime prevention through system-wide partnership working. Bedfordshire's Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) jointly embarked on this pilot project with the aim of safeguarding and protecting our young people by reducing the risk of exploitation/criminalisation and steering them away from entering the Criminal Justice System. The VERU is funded by the Home Office through the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The participating schools were provided with the opportunity to work closely with the VERU's Youth Intervention Specialist (YIS) team who provide tailored support to young people with a pattern of persistent absenteeism, and who could be at risk of exploitation. Wider support for families was also offered as part of the initiative. Dan Gaze Support Services played a major part in supporting delivery of the project and we are grateful for all their efforts in supporting young people.

Key aims were to:

- Improve school attendance
- Improve engagement between the intervention provision and the identified pupil as well as their family
- Minimise contact with policing and wider criminal justice system

[1] Working together to improve school attendance (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[2] examining-the-educational-background-of-young-knife-possession-offenders.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[3] understanding-educational-background-of-young-offenders-full-report.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Headline figures

As a result of this initiative, more than 100 young people were referred by participating schools, and accepted into the pilot project. Strikingly, of these young people, we can report 100% engagement as detailed in the pilot findings.

The parents / carers of these young people told the teams that they are thankful for the support in addressing their child's absence from education as they often feel powerless in tackling the issue alone. The engagement of the young people and feedback from schools and parents, is a result of the specific experience and skills of the Youth Intervention Service and the co-opted service commissioned by the VERU.

Headline outcomes

The feedback from participating schools has been positive. The professionals who work closely with co-opted service feel that the impact has been significant, with up to 3 of their identified young people receiving additional mentoring support per hour of the school day. This has helped to achieve one of the main aims of the pilot, to provide our schools with an additional resource in tackling persistent absenteeism.

When speaking to the young people themselves, many communicated that having someone to trust and empower them, outside of their teachers and families, has allowed them to feel heard and that no issue is unworthy of their mentor's time. This has allowed the VERU team to build a strong rapport with the young people referred into the pilot, encouraging them to build relationships and talk freely in a trusted environment.

Working closely with the families as the VERU do, many parents have expressed more general concerns relating to their financial struggle and frustrations at how fines for non-attendance is further impacting their financial insecurity.

Moving forward, although referrals pertaining to the project itself have closed, all Bedfordshire schools are able to make referrals into the VERU where the criteria required to have been accepted into the project are met. It is planned that the VERU Education Specialist will meet with all schools who participated and the project to discuss and support continuing impact. The VERU will also ensure that all schools across the county are aware of the project and the support available through the VERU and co-opted services.



Co-production

For long term, meaningful, sustainable change, we need a shift in the way we work, how our community perceives violence and exploitation and how well our interventions suit their needs. Therefore, our community needs to co-design our solutions with us, so we are tailoring the approach at “place level.” Co-production can build trust within our community, and we need to ensure that communities feel empowered to make a difference. Additionally, we need to acknowledge the fact that this change will be complex, and it may take time to become embedded. The VERU strategy focuses on how to reduce and prevent future violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire.

The Key aims of the strategy are:

- To review and use data and intelligence (e.g., high-level findings from the strategic needs assessment) to inform the short term and long-term priorities for Bedfordshire VERU.
- To highlight and identified actions required to address the “causes of the causes.”
- To have a strong focus on prevention (including primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention).
- To ensure that there is a coordinated multi-agency approach (which includes all organisations, the voluntary sector, and the communities themselves), to protecting, preventing and supporting children, young people and their families, who are involved in, or at risk of, serious violence and exploitation.

Young people are consistently represented in the work of the VERU through the feedback that is sought from interventions and requested directly by the VERU. We also use data from the local SHEU reports (Schools and Students Health Education Unit), which provides information which can feed directly into the SNA and Action Plan.

We are also on the panel for Central Bedfordshire who are developing a Youth Questionnaire, which will provide more recent and strategic information compared to the SHEU reports.

The VERU are funding work by the Luton Community Safer Partnership regarding youth voice and concerns they have in the Borough which is leading to pilot programs being commissioned in 2023/ 24 financial year. The VERU funded project allowed for organisations working in the youth space to seek views on a range of issues around policing, housing employment and training. The VERU obtains valuable feedback from events such as the Hope Hack held in Luton in March 2023, the feedback helps to provide information to support in the running of events; attending professionals at these events provide 'critical friend feedback', helping to develop our work in the community.

As evidenced by the [Quarter 3 Outreach Report](#), the VERU is reaching a large and diverse element of the local population. In the coming year the VERU hopes to develop relationships within the Roma community, which continues to be exploited as has been the case internationally over centuries. This will hopefully be possible through other community groups we work with, for example, Dallow Cares. We are in the process of drafting a strategy for this.

The VERU appointed a new Community and Engagement Lead in October, they recently received the Queens Award for Voluntary Services. From the outset of their new appointment, they have been visiting our commissioned groups and key partners across the county. In October they attended Bedfordshire Police's Dallow Cares Community Engagement event, alongside YIS team members. The event saw residents and statutory organisations discuss how all parties can work together to make the Dallow area of Luton a safer place to live, work and visit. They visited the Mary Seacole Housing Association for an exclusive look at their newly renovated media suite. The purpose-built space will facilitate their four-week accredited media course which allows young people to develop skills in video editing, sound engineering and more. At Bedfordshire Open Door the VERU Lead joined the team as they discussed how each member uniquely contributes to the organisation's mission, as well as looking at new and creative ways to increase their impact.

Challenges and risks

The challenges, especially in the case of the Hope Hack, is the weather during the winter months, this year the teacher strikes and train strikes. In addition, some young people will not attend events if they are restricted due to gang territories. Bedfordshire is a large semi-rural county and use of public transport is essential for young people to move around the county. The OPCC Youth Conference ran across school days, when school transport and facilitators were available, the Hope Hack event ran on a Saturday.

The VERU has a Safeguarding Policy and a Lone Worker Policy for the YIS team. There is also a check in and check out WhatsApp group for the team when they are making home visits so that staff can make safety checks in real time. We have an appointed DSL within the VERU and will be training two other members of staff with the qualification in the coming year. Risk Assessments are completed before home visits, and guidance is in place for members of the YIS team.

The VERU actively seeks out and encourages advice and challenge from external organisations and charities who engage regularly with the VERU as well as the young people we work with.



IMPACTS & PERFORMANCE

Local Evaluation

The focus and methodology of our local evaluation is and will be based on the model of data which is the basis of our SNA. We evaluate the socio-demographic characteristics of the population in the area to serve as context in assessing the current and future impact of interventions, considering health, care and wellbeing needs about violence in the local area [1]. Therefore, (Section 2) of our SNA provides a Demographic overview of Bedfordshire. Section 3 presents a profile of Violence and Exploitation in Bedfordshire. Section 4 uses local community safety surveys to consider the Perceptions of serious violence and exploitation in each of the three local authority areas of the county. Section 5 briefly touches on Risk and protective factors for violence and exploitation. Section 6 considers the various approaches used for Preventing violence and exploitation. Finally, section 7 provides Recommendations arising from conducting this SNA.

The SNA is an epidemiologically based needs assessment, which combines the epidemiology of violence and exploitation (by time, place, and person) with an assessment of the evidence for potential interventions at a high level. The content has been derived from multiple sources mostly via the VERU-led Data and Intelligence Group on Violence and Exploitation in Bedfordshire (DIGVERB), which was created and developed as a technical multi-service group. The DIGVERB was set up to help fill the gaps that were found – and implement some of the recommendations made – in the previous SNA related to multi-service data.

Whilst the aims and responsibilities of DIGVERB are detailed in an agreed Terms of Reference, the DIGVERB works towards achieving 3 key aims:

- Bringing all relevant partner agencies in Bedfordshire together and adopting a collaborative approach in data and intelligence
- Overcoming the barriers to effective data and information sharing.
- Creating a Common Recognised Information Picture (CRIP) – a “one version of the truth”, which can be used to mobilise effective preventative and operational interventions.

[1] Serious Violence Duty: strategic needs assessment guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Therefore, where possible, analytical products (such as needs assessments, problem profiles, etc.) completed by member agencies of the DIGVERB underpinned parts of the SNA. In addition, data from local, restricted, and public sources were analysed and information & evidence from authoritative sources were utilised to meet the objectives of the SNA.

Independent evaluation of the VERU will be completed by the University of Bedfordshire, Professor Fiona Factor, and her team of academic staff. We are working on ensuring all the data and commissioned services are with the university to work through the initial process evaluation and then set the parameters for the longer-term impact evaluation of the VERU commissioned services. The VERU will be reviewing the evaluation reports and ensure any recommendations can be utilised by us and local partnerships where they fall into their fields of work. The SNA and SR have formed the basis of our updated action plan. The evaluation will also be a driver to review and ensure the commissioned services are the correct ones to be servicing the action plan. As usual the VERU will present the findings of evaluation through the Serious Harm Board and then our other strategic partner boards. The evaluation reports will also be shared across our community safety partnerships, to ensure the services.

Key monitoring progress against the contract is reviewed regularly and the cascading of information back to the various partners included in the Strategic Overview board – OPCC, Education, Health and Local government departments. Ensures that all key partners are aware of any challenges and or barriers in a timely manner.

Bedfordshire VERU prides itself with establishing commissioned services with grass roots organisations that are specialist or unique in their approach. For example, Canter Equine who use horses to support therapeutic and counselling support to young people. They have had great success in establishing rapport with the cohort of young people – most have had no experience of working with horses – and have felt enabled to discuss or disclose issues that no other agency has managed to hear and been able to support and refer onwards where appropriate following the six-week programme.

**IMPACTS &
PERFORMANCE**

One case study relates to a young man who was exploited by local drug dealers, his initial reluctance to attend one of the courses through his school soon turned into him being vocal at not wanting to be so vulnerable and wanting to change his behaviour.

The VERU further funded him at the end of his initial course as there was a real chance he would be pulled back into the previous way of life. We are pleased to say that has not been the case.

Success Measures / ToCs

The ToC provides a pathway of who we commission, who we need to work with in local authority and identify the areas we need to be reactive to, such as emerging hot spots and delivery or support in those areas following police interventions.

The VERU is seeking to increase match funding of commissioned services with local partners and businesses. It has established a clear set of pathways of support and have worked tirelessly to develop and embed positive relationships with local authorities and partner agencies. Within the timespan advised, there will be a clear expectation that impact evaluation will have provided clarity over what success looks like and how the implementation of commissioned intervention have had on the serious violence area. There will still be a demand for VRU's in some manner unless the level of serious violence falls. COVID 19 pandemic impacted the level of violence however early indications are the level of serious violence have been rising and at the time of the report, they are back to close to pre pandemic levels across the country.

In terms of risks or issues that could have been avoided, one key aspect was the funding for 12 months only, this impacted the way the VERU could confidently commission services and reluctance on some organisations to work as they were being offered a short-term contract. The Home office change of 3-year funding has increased confidence in the smaller organisations to work with the VERU which is a proactive thing to report on.



CONCLUSION

The VERU has had a positive impact across the level of services supporting young people in Bedfordshire. The commissioned services have worked tirelessly to bring their expertise to the large variety of issues they have faced, and we are proud to be associated with such professionals. The VERU work closely with local authority services, for example the Luton Youth Partnership with their TREE project, replicated by Bedford Youth offending Service, is one where we have dovetailed into a larger project that is designed to reduce exploitation of young people in the county by a wrap-around service. Although the project is new, the impact has been positive, and we will be supporting the services again in the coming years. We also work with the three local authority Community Safety Partnerships on supporting their projects in local hot spot areas, with the objective to prevent young people becoming involved in criminal activity or exploitation.

The success of Bedfordshire's VERU will continue to be reinforced by the strength of its relationships with its key stakeholders. We are grateful for the input and support received from our Pan-Bedfordshire partners to date. Who, together with the VERU staff, have helped us to deliver another year of significant activity. We do, however, recognise that there is much more work to do. Work that increasingly involves the third sector and increased statutory involvement with housing and education for example. Finally, the VERU acknowledges that very little of what we do will embed sustainable and systemic change if we negate to understand the impact of societal inequalities. In the VERU we have observed that by being an organisation with an inclusive and listening ear for our communities everyone (working and or living in Bedfordshire) can be encouraged to be part of real and needed structural change. Moving forward, the VERU hopes that by evidencing what works and firmly underpinning our VERU work with data and analysis, that we can continue to evolve our response to violence and exploitation -for the long-term betterment of the county of Bedfordshire.

Looking to the future there will be further development of the VRU village – built on the African proverb 'It takes a village to raise a child'.

Small teams of volunteers that will provide their experience and professional capability towards supporting young people who have specific needs under a 'hut' This will further develop our influence in the community and provide additional support in a sustainable way.

We will be developing, utilising and working with other local organisations who support Youth Ambassadors to promote the VERU themes.

CONCLUSION

BLANK

Night-Time Economy

The Night-Time Economy (NTE) is one of the drivers of violence in Bedfordshire. Whilst it is an important aspect and feature of any thriving community, it should be safe for the public to participate in without the fear of becoming a victim of violent crime or the vulnerable being preyed upon.

A NTE profile 2022 was completed in January 2023 by the Bedfordshire Police. The profile used data between May 2021 and October 2022 and between 1900 and 0700 hours from the following sources:

- ATHENA where crime types consisted of either violence against the person, criminal damage, public order, sexual offences (including rape), drugs, weapons, or crime related incidents for domestic and hate.
- STORM incidents where closing category was anti-social behaviour.
- ATHENA Custody – All nominals arrested from the identified hotspot streets.
- Prison and police station locations were removed from data as these are not NTE locations.
- Other data sources used: MOSAIC, NHS, BTP, open source, College of Policing “What Works” toolkit.
- Benchmarking requests were submitted to all forces and responses recorded.
- Partner data from NHS, BTP and BFRS supported findings of crime data.

The NTE profile identified and focused on four hotspots in Bedfordshire: Luton hotspot, Central Bedfordshire hotspots (in Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable) and Bedford hotspot. Some of the key findings per hotspot are summarized in the table below.

Some of the concerns related to some or all of the hotspots identified in the NTE profile include underage buying and drinking of alcohol; drug dealing, drug possession/trafficking; drink driving; not enough officers on foot; some links with gang / OCG nominals relating to violence, sexual assault and drug offences; gang fights; underage females were being let into a pub on Saturday nights; lack of CCTV in some areas; fights with bar staff; and a higher proportion of criminal damage.

Summary of key finding from the Night-Time Economy profile for Bedfordshire, by identified four hotspots – Luton hotspot, Central Bedfordshire hotspots (in Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable) and Bedford hotspot, based on May 2021 to October 2022 data.

Theme	Luton Hotspot	Dunstable Hotspot	Leighton Buzzard Hotspot	Bedford Hotspot
Number of offences and antisocial behaviour (ASB) incidents in the 18-month period	2112 offences and 625 ASB incidents – the highest count of all the hotspots. Average 10.4 offences per weekend.	482 offences and 140 ASB incidents in the 18-months Average 2.7 offences per weekend.	272 offences and 117 ASB incidents in the 18-months Average 2.2 offences per weekend.	1,488 offences and 381 ASB incidents in the 18-months Average 9.4 offences per weekend.
Key locations	The Mall (5%) including Thistle Express Hotel, The Galaxy (5%), Flame (3%) and Off the Wall (2%).	The Old Sugar Loaf, High Street North (4%) and Asda carpark on Court Drive (2.5%). Court Drive is the biggest issue for ASB.	The Picture House (9%)	Vogue nightclub (5%), The Pilgrims Progress (2%), The Rose (2%) and The George and Dragon (2%). (ASB: Mercure Centre Hotel).
Top Offences	Violence without injury (35%), Violence with injury (22%) and Public Order offences (17%).	Violence without injury (38%), Violence with injury (23%) and Public Order offences (15%).	Violence without injury (35%), Violence with injury (22%) and Criminal Damage (21%).	Violence without injury (38%), Violence with injury (22%) and Public Order offences (16%).
Domestic and hate crimes	16% of crimes flagged as domestic and 3.5% hate crime.	16% of crimes flagged as domestic and 3% hate crime.	5% of crimes flagged as domestic and 5% hate crime.	14% of crimes flagged as domestic and 4% hate crime.
Peak Days and Times	Saturday into Sunday followed by Friday into Saturday between 00 – 0100 and 21 – 2200 hours. (ASB: Saturday into Sunday followed by Friday into Saturday. ASB is relatively consistent until around 01:00 hours when it starts to reduce.)	Friday into Saturday followed by Saturday into Sunday. 23–0300 hours and a smaller peak 19–2000 hours. (ASB: Saturday into Sunday followed by Friday into Saturday. Between 19 – 2200 hours.)	Friday into Saturday and Saturday into Sunday between 00–0200 hours. (ASB: Saturday into Sunday followed by Sunday into Monday. 19 – 2200 hours, with a further peak at 23 – 0000hours and 01 – 0200 hours.)	Friday into Saturday followed by Saturday into Sunday between 23–0300 hours. (ASB peaked Saturday into Sunday. Peak times 21–0100 hours.) Footfall data identifies July 2022 as the peak month and 19-2200hrs as the peak time of footfall. BTP also identified 34% of offences occurring at Bedford Railway station, peaking Saturdays and Fridays between 1900-2200hrs. Predominantly theft / violence.
Offenders' demographics	Mostly male, aged 20-32 years, and 50:50 White or Ethnic minority.	Mostly male, aged 20-29 years, and White.	Mostly male, aged 11-29 years, and White.	Mostly male, aged 18-25 years, and White.
Victims' demographics	Mostly male, aged 20-31 years, and almost 50:50 White or Ethnic minority.	50:50 male or female, and mostly aged 20-29 years and White.	Almost 50:50 male or female, and mostly aged 40-59 years and White.	Mostly male, aged 18-25 years, and White.

