

Knowledge Exchange Network meeting notes

On 15th December, the [Knowledge Exchange Network](#) held their first meeting. The meeting brought together police Inspectors and Chief Inspectors from across England and Wales to co-create new and better ways of policing young adults aged 18-25.

Jack Rowlands, Chief Inspector at the Metropolitan Police, began the conversation by discussing the impact of trauma on young adults in the criminal justice system. He outlined how the [DIVERT](#) programme identifies police custody as a learning moment and uses it as an opportunity to turn young adult's lives around.

Jason Kew, Chief Inspector at Thames Valley Police, then discussed how community resolutions can offer an opportunity to address inequalities in the criminal justice system. He outlined how [TVP drug diversion](#) takes this approach alongside an understanding that behavioural changes take time to happen.

Finally, Brendan Cox, Director of Policing Strategies at the [LEAD National Support Bureau](#) in the US, spoke about taking a harm-reduction approach to responding to repeat low-level offences driven by unmet needs. He argued that system change requires collaboration between police, prosecutors, civil rights advocates, businesses and services.

The group were then separated into six workshop rooms to discuss the following:

- Local examples of innovative practice that balanced law enforcement with trauma informed and harm reduction approaches.
- Key enablers/barriers to this practice.
- Diversion practices in their local area
- The use of community resolutions for repeat low-level re-offending.

Diversion

The participants agreed that criminalising can often be the worst outcome for everyone involved. The police need to accept that community resolution is often the best outcome in relation to drugs offences and need to move away from outcomes that are always rooted in hard outcomes; *“it's not the outcome that's the most important thing, but the intervention behind it.”*

Many police forces are now beginning to think about how they will implement a two-tier framework for out of court disposals. There is currently no systematic way of sharing good practice and what works. Using community resolutions for low-level and repeated crime driven by health and human needs (such as those highlighted by Thames Valley and LEAD) resonated with the Inspectors, but many operational plans restrict their use to first time offenders – leadership will be key to unlocking their true potential.

The majority of participants favoured community resolutions over conditional cautions particularly for young adults who commit low-level and repeated crime. They highlighted young adults, particularly those with multiple needs such as homelessness, mental ill health and problematic substance use needs, will need additional support to comply with the community resolution programmes (See Surrey Checkpoint scheme as an example of this approach). Participants also discussed that there needs to be some flexibility for young adults who are doing their best to comply with the programme, but struggling to meet all the requirements. For example, if one of the

conditions is repatriation and the young adult loses their job due to Covid-19 and could no longer pay, Inspectors wanted to be able to use a problem-solving approach so that they can still divert that young adult away from the criminal justice system. (See: West Yorkshire Diversion scheme for this flexible approach).

The group discussed how understanding what type of diversion worked for different groups of people, and different types of crime, is key to its success. The group discussed how the diversion service should take into account people's culture, age and gender; as well as their offence type and histories of criminal justice involvement e.g. repeated first-time entrants.

Participants highlighted that the majority of schemes are directed for children or adults – and expertise on young adults is limited.

Participants told us about the need to monitor who and how many are diverted and into what programmes, so that neither the police nor the public loses confidence in the diversion programmes. Additionally, they highlighted a clear need to monitor who is being offered diversion/and who is not to ensure we can meet the support needs of individuals regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender and age.

For the out of court disposals to work, the processes need to be straightforward and should not create additional onus on the police officers; overly complicated mechanisms are well intended but might potentially set people up to fail.

Examples:

- Devon and Cornwall's [Pathfinder programme](#) is a deferred caution service for people over the age of 18. The programme holds offenders to account for their behaviour whilst addressing needs that are directly linked to their offending. Due to its success, there has been increasing interest in creating a programme for young people under the age of 18 who are on the cusp of transitioning to adulthood.
- The [Thames Valley Drug Diversion Scheme](#) is a specialised support programme for young people under the age of 18 which aims to prevent the cycle of reoffending and demand upon police services. If a young person has engaged with the scheme and commits another low-level drug offence, they will still have the opportunity to take part in the diversion - allowing for the reason for the possession to be explored and further support provided.
- [West Yorkshire's Liaison and Diversion Service](#) works with vulnerable adults who come into contact with the criminal justice system and diverts them into health, social care and additional support. The service also ensures that those who have offended can make amends for their crime by taking part in community pay back projects. The service is linked to a 12-week conditional caution scheme where conditional cautions are offered to adults who have committed low-level offences as an alternative to court.
- [Surrey's Checkpoint Plus scheme](#) is a deferred prosecution programme for people facing multiple disadvantage. The scheme has evolved from the Durham model and provides specialist navigators who sign post support for adults over the age of 18 who have committed low level offences. The scheme is a four-month process that includes targeted interventions.

- In Cumbria, a deferred caution scheme called Cumbria Pathways is going to be trialled starting in April 2021. This work has seen a huge change in culture, mindset and in getting buy-in from frontline officers.

Trauma informed approaches

Generally, the group felt that understanding trauma and the impact of trauma on young adults' lives encourages police officers to feel more confident about the use of diversion.

The group discussed new police recruits in Wales who are receiving trauma informed training which was beginning to have an impact on the language officers use and the way they interacted with the public.

Emerging practice

- Great Manchester Police are also training large numbers of officers in trauma informed approaches (500 in the City of Manchester alone). This work has been evaluated by Liverpool John Moores. They have also rolled out a smart phone app for officers called 'Making the Difference'.
- Staffordshire are doing work around street gangs and child exploitation, supporting a shift from enforcement to safeguarding. However, they do not have a VRU, so funding is difficult to secure.
- The group discussed a VRU funded programme for 18-25 year olds in Northumbria which works in partnership with a criminal justice charity and takes custody based and community referrals. However, barriers included a lack of collaboration; *"we don't have connection to business and education up in North east. We don't have the interconnectivity"*.
- The group also explored the approach taken in [Plymouth](#), where a ground-up community movement around understanding what trauma is, what it does and how you deliver services in a trauma informed way, has paved the way for cultural change. However, changing the *"hearts and minds"* of police colleagues took time.

Barriers

Funding: Joint funding across departments to invest in diversion was repeatedly raised as a barrier to innovation. The group discussed how an intervention does not technically fall under a police responsibility and therefore there is a struggle to determine where this money should come from. Another funding barrier was working on yearly funding cycles which meant there was a lack of long-term commitment.

Evidence: Some members felt that the lack of evaluations were hindering the success of good work. A member argued that we don't need evidence to see that there is good practice happening; *"We're dealing with real people. Why would we sit and watch somebody suffer when there's something we can do about it?"*

Risk aversion: The group discussed how diversionary pathways lack a formal method of prosecution. This means that if there is a slow diversion process and the person reoffends in that time, someone has to account for this. Therefore, we must adopt a county wide agreement of practice and not put the weight of decision on the individual officer.

Equally, members felt that multi-agency investment in case management was needed so that the diversion could be community led and not police led. The group agreed that, like LEAD, the police should be on the periphery of this work; *“if it’s working in US why can’t we do it here?”*

Cultural change: While there seems to be an appetite for innovation, a cultural change is needed. In policing, it is not seen as a success if you don’t make an arrest, especially when money is so tight: *“no one jumps for joy if you say you sent them on a drug reduction scheme”*. Despite this, the group felt that there has been some change in police recognition of ACEs and the link between trauma and criminal behaviour.

Change takes time: The group explored the need to recognise the value of change and its longevity. Pilots are seen as an opportunity but don’t often stay in place. Wales was used as an example of an area who have been successfully doing this for a long time.

High churn in police services also meant having continually brief influence on executive leaders about programmes.

Enablers

Peer to peer learning: Support from other inspectors, a network of VRUs who shared trauma informed approaches and peers with the knowledge and passion to help keep the message going and *“ensuring the light doesn’t go out”*, helped enable innovation. One member said that applying a trauma lens to policing itself paved the way for change.

Evidence: Having strong leadership, within policing and through partners was key to the success of innovative practice. Similarly, having strong links to academia was highlighted. [The Society of Evidence Based Policing](#) was highlighted as it created a network of champions for evidence-based approaches. The group discussed the need for robust evaluations to determine the success of innovative trauma informed practice. This included the need for proper investment in randomised controlled trials.

Funding: VRU funding was a big enabler to test and learn what works. There was a consensus across groups that the models developed within the VRU should now be tested and rolled across a broader cohort in the criminal justice system, particularly reaching out to young adults who are coming into the system for low-level but repeated offences.

Streamlined processes: For the out of court disposals to work, the processes need to be straightforward and should not create additional onus on the police officers; overly complicated mechanisms are well intended but might potentially set people up to fail.

Working with victims: Restorative justice with victims were seen as a key enabler for diversion work.

Strong local partnerships: Confidence in local partners to be able to successfully start supporting young adults who have been diverted.

Leadership and political messaging: The police need to accept that community resolution is often the best outcome in relation to low-level offences that are linked to drug and mental health needs. Chief Constables’ buy-in and leadership is important to bring the public alongside the new approaches.

The next Knowledge Exchange Network meeting will take place on Tuesday 26 January 2021 at 3-5pm. Click [here](#) to join the meeting.

We will be discussing the theme of public safety and asking what is next for public health approaches in policing. Please contact Stephen Walcott for more information: Stephen.Walcott@police-foundation.org.uk.