EVALUATION REPORT

Another Chance Fund Focused Deterrence: a multicentred randomised controlled trial

Interim Report 2026

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UCL Security & Crime Science
University of Oxford
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Youth Endowment Fund

About the Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

Children and young people at risk of becoming involved in violence deserve services that give them the best chance of a positive future. To make sure that happens, we'll fund promising projects and then use the very best evaluation to find out what works. Just as we benefit from robust trials in medicine, young people deserve support grounded in the evidence. We'll build that knowledge through our various grant rounds and funding activities.

And just as important, is understanding children and young people's lives. Through our Youth Advisory Board and national network of peer researchers, we'll ensure they influence our work and that we understand and are addressing their needs. But none of this will make a difference if all we do is produce reports that stay on a shelf.

Together, we need to look at the evidence and agree what works, then build a movement to make sure that young people get the very best support possible. Our strategy sets out how we'll do it. At its heart, it says that we will fund good work, find what works and work for change. You can read it here.

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Executive summary

The project

Focused deterrence (FD) is a violence reduction approach that uses deterrence messaging and enforcement, desistance support and community influence. Developed in Boston, USA, in the 1990s, FD targets those who have been involved in group-related violence and provides an initial communication to them that the police are aware of their behaviour and the continuation of it will result in severe consequences. Alongside this deterrence message, individuals are offered bespoke services (such as mental health, housing, education or employment support). FD also aims to utilise community groups and leaders to reinforce anti-violence messaging and showcase their support for the programme. In this project, FD was implemented across five sites in England (Leicester, Manchester, Nottingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton). In each area, delivery was led by a multi-agency partnership consisting of a Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)/Partnership, the police, other statutory services (including probation, youth justice and social work) and voluntary organisations. At an initial face-to-face meeting delivered by FD programme teams, children (over the age of 14 who have been or are at high risk of being involved in group-related violence) and adults were made aware that there would be consequences if they continued to offend and were offered tailored support and regular meetings with a support worker (navigator) for 3-6 months to help them desist from violence. If they continued to offend, they could receive a proportionate package of enforcement or disruption measures that could include police and civil sanctions. Typically, local multi-agency panels identified participants using police offending data. Young people were selected based on having at least one violent offence in the preceding two years and involvement in group violence, with some sites including 'suspect' status, which widened the pool.

The programme is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund and the Home Office. The evaluation adopted a two-arm randomised controlled trial, randomly assigning participants to the intervention or control group, alongside an implementation and process evaluation (IPE). As part of the IPE, the research team carried out interviews with young people and programme staff, observed delivery in practice and collected programme data from participating sites. The programme started engaging participants in July 2023. Delivery concluded in March 2026, with follow-up using routine police administrative data continuing until August 2026. By August 2025, 2,976 individuals had been randomised. 40% of children in the trial were White; 11% were from mixed or multiple ethnic groups; 11% were Asian or Asian British; 21% were Black, Black British, Caribbean or African; and 1% identified as being from another ethnic group. This interim report provides an update on sampling and delivery based on the IPE interviews and observations and the programme's process data. It aims to answer formative questions on how FD is being implemented, how multi-agency working is shaping delivery, what has influenced engagement with support, how data has been used and how delivery has differed between police and VRU-led sites.

Key conclusions
The study has achieved the required sample size, as it successfully recruited 2,976 participants.
Although deterrence was initially challenging, over time, sites have strengthened deterrence/enforcement through practical changes, frameworks and multi-agency working. Some challenges remain in communicating deterrence to young people while operating in a context of lengthy delays in the court system.
VRU-led interventions committed more time to engaging participants and achieved a higher take-up of support through navigators. However, they were less consistent in delivering deterrence messaging. In contrast, police-led sites tended to place more emphasis on structured delivery, goal-focused behaviour change and compliance.
Delivery success depends on substantial multi-agency working, preparation, strong governance and initial and ongoing investment in the cultural, administrative, community and technical elements of the partnerships.
Participants' initial engagement with support was influenced by trust in navigators and family gatekeeping. Continued engagement was more influenced by peers, daily routines and mismatched aims.

Interpretation

The study has achieved the required sample size to detect a 20% relative reduction in violence against the person offences, as it successfully recruited 2,976 participants against a target of 2,864 participants. Although the final number may reduce slightly once data cleaning takes place, the study has enough participants to meet that target, although delivery challenges in the early stages meant that the compliance rate in the treatment group was 73%. Of the 1,077 treatment group participants who received the intervention, 29% accepted the support on offer. Although deterrence was initially challenging, over time, sites have strengthened deterrence/enforcement through practical changes. These improvements included stronger alignment of all partners around enforcement, creative approaches in the communication of consequences and the development of an escalating enforcement process that supported the use of appropriate consequences for individuals' contexts from both the police and statutory services. However, some challenges have remained. These include limited resources, ongoing challenges in communication, value alignment between navigators and police, and delays in court proceedings. When comparing interventions led by the VRUs and the police, qualitative data indicates that VRU-led interventions committed more time to engaging participants and achieved a much higher take-up of support through navigators. However, they were less consistent in delivering deterrence messaging. In contrast, police-led sites tended to place more emphasis on structured delivery, goal-focused behaviour change and compliance. Police-led models expected earlier measurable behavioural shifts, such as desistance, supported by more structured data-driven monitoring and a stronger need to evidence impact to the wider police organisation. VRU-led models were more likely to treat safety, sustained engagement and consistent support as successes in themselves, with desistance an outcome that could emerge over time. This meant that VRU-led sites typically prioritised relationship building and support over escalating demands, while police-led sites more quickly targeted resources towards participants demonstrating readiness to change. Leicester sat between the two and combined lived-experience navigators with police involvement. Delivery success depended on substantial multi-agency working, preparation, strong governance, and initial and ongoing investment in the cultural, administrative, community and technical elements of the partnerships. However, barriers to data sharing, high staff turnover, cultural differences between the statutory and voluntary sectors and funding uncertainty created friction. Shared accountability and continued investment in the emotional, cultural, administrative and technical elements of the partnerships was central to knitting the different components of the programme together in practice. Dedicated data analysis capacity was also important in combining administirative data with intelligence from partner agencies, third-party providers and community sources.

Early engagement with support by participants was influenced by trust with navigators and family gatekeeping, peers (peers played a stronger role in a person's disengagement and examples of peers supporting engagement were rare), unstable routines (usually because of a lack of education or work leading to large amounts of free time) and mismatched aims (such as when cohort members expressed an interest for some perceived short-term benefit such as release from custody or simply to get the navigator to leave them alone). Engagement was more likely when navigators could overcome initial mistrust by being consistent and clearly distinct from business as usual service, with supportive families helping to open the door. It was also strengthened when the programme quickly provided meaningful, suitable support – especially stable routines and realistic pathways to legal income – making it easier for people to step back from peer influence.

Introduction

Background

Focused deterrence is a three-pronged intervention designed to reduce individual or area-level violent crime. Focusing on individuals who have a history of involvement in violence, it consists of clear messaging from authority and community figures about the threat of enforcement and disruption consequences for continuing to engage in violence. This messaging is complemented by the offer of support activities addressing psychological, interpersonal and occupational needs that create the opportunity for desistance 'turning points'.

Focused deterrence is frequently cited as one of the most promising violence interventions in reducing violent crime (Abt, 2019). A systematic review included more than 24 efficacy/effectiveness evaluations, 23 of which were undertaken in the United States (Braga et al., 2019). The review concluded that focused deterrence is an effective and valuable intervention to reduce serious violence but that the evidence base could be more rigorous, with a better understanding of the causal contribution of each component of the intervention (Braga et al., 2019). None of the studies included in the review used a randomised controlled trial (RCT) design, none were pre-registered or pre-specified, and most had too small sample sizes to make reliable population inferences. Studies also varied in terms of the outcomes used, levels of aggregation and inferences being made. Because of these issues and despite the positive assertions of the review authors, collectively, the evidence base for focused deterrence does not justify its status as an effective intervention nor are there convincing studies on the generalisability of evidence generated in a US context, with its outlying availability of firearms and rates of firearm-related homicides, to a UK context. Because they are typically *post hoc* evaluations of routine practice, the evaluations in the literature are almost exclusively quasi-experimental in design. Furthermore, the interventions tended to be delivered in response to extreme levels of violence in an area. These features make the findings highly susceptible to a range of biases, including false positive results due to being statistically underpowered and the likelihood of attributing regression to the mean as treatment effects. Furthermore, there appears to be significant implementation failure and publication bias that, when adjusted for, diminish the effects of these quasi-experimental studies (Braga et al., 2019).

An update of the Braga et al (2019) systematic review is currently in preparation. The timeframe for this update is likely to capture a number of RCTs, which will likely increase the overall quality of the included studies.

Focused deterrence has been implemented over 25 times in the UK, but only four formal evaluations are in the public domain: (1) The Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) in Glasgow; (2) Operation Shield in London; (3) CIRV Northampton and (4) Thames Valley Police.

The Glasgow and Northampton models are best characterised by a support-led public health approach to focused deterrence, and they were delivered by police teams working in collaboration with statutory and voluntary sector and community partners. Similarly, the Thames Valley intervention was led by social care and supported by the police. Operation Shield was designed to

be more enforcement-focused and was led by the police alongside community partners. The evaluation results of the Glasgow intervention were inconclusive or at least theoretically inconsistent: there were observed relative reductions in the number of possession of offensive weapon crimes but no change in police-recorded serious violence (Williams et al., 2014). The evaluation of Operation Shield in London did not proceed to an impact evaluation because of implementation failures (Davies et al., 2016). The evaluation of CIRV Northampton (College of Policing, 2021) did not include a robust impact evaluation.

A recent study by the Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership employed a RCT on a cohort of people under 25 years who had been involved in repeat knife offending or knife and violent and sexual offending (Olphin et al., 2024). Across a sample of between approximately 96 and 128 people, 45 of whom were randomly assigned to receive the intervention, no statistically significant difference was observed in counts of violent offences (1.24 vs 1.73 offences within six months in the intervention and control groups, respectively), but the average crime harm attributed to cohort members in the intervention group was statistically significantly lower than that of cohort members in the control group. Two further evaluations of focused deterrence are underway, led by the Metropolitan Police and employing an RCT design, but the results of these studies are not yet available.

The Another Chance evaluation is a multicentre, two-arm RCT involving seven interventions delivered across five cities in England (Coventry, Wolverhampton, Leicester, Nottingham and Greater Manchester). Each intervention has been designed following the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) focused deterrence framework (YEF, 2022) and, consistent with the general ethos of focused deterrence initiatives (Braga et al., 2019), adapted for local context and team structure. All seven interventions target people aged 14 years and over who have been, or are at risk of being, involved in group violence in the community. The evaluation of this intervention is being conducted via a combined RCT and implementation and process evaluation (IPE) under a realist framework (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Both of these are detailed in the trial protocol (Brennan et al., 2023). To summarise, the impact evaluation is a multicentre, two-arm RCT implemented across seven trials in five sites. The IPE covers both what is being delivered and also the views of those running the interventions and those subject to them, as well as assessing compliance with and fidelity to the programme. The integrated RCT/IPE means that measures from the IPE work will directly inform the analysis of the RCT, but for the purpose of statistical analysis the main contributions from the IPE are (i) measures of compliance with allocation and (ii) fidelity to programme.

The protocol for this study was registered as ISRCTN11650008 on 4 June 2023 and was updated most recently with the statistical analysis plan in August 2025: https://doi.org/10.1186/ISRCTN11650008.

Contextual differences between the sites

As outlined in the study's context–mechanism–outcome (CMO) framework (Simanovic et al., 2024; Sutherland and Brennan, 2025), there are some contextual differences among the sites that should be kept in mind when reading this document. These differences predominantly refer to the agency

leading the intervention and, by extension, the background of the navigators working with the cohort members.

Agencies leading the intervention

The five sites mentioned above are split into two main delivery modes based on the lead agency: Coventry and Wolverhampton are police-led, and Manchester, Nottingham and Leicester are violence reduction unit (VRU)-led. While this had no direct impact on the idea behind the programme itself (i.e. each programme still includes the three main focused deterrence components and is delivered in the community to a fairly similar cohort), there could be some differences in the level, strength and breadth of the pre-existing partnerships each site could rely on for service provision; the trust between the agencies and the cohort members/general public; the amount of confidence and comfort each site displayed when delivering deterrence; other site-specific operational challenges that will be discussed throughout the report (e.g. navigating the operational differences between frontline policing and police officers as programme navigators – see below – bringing bring in different community partners, reconciling different organizational cultures and managing the third party providers involved in the delivery of the support offer who were embedded within the core programme team to a variable extent). These differences could lead to outcome differences between the sites and will be reflected upon further in the final report.

It is also noteworthy that in Coventry and Wolverhampton, the intervention was delivered to an additional cohort that was not part of the evaluation. All discussion of Coventry and Wolverhampton, and data about the programme, is limited to those individuals in the trial.

The background of the navigators

A further implication of this contextual difference is the background of the navigators providing support to programme participants and working with them one-to-one. While there are two main types of navigators, (1) police officers as navigators and (2) community navigators (individuals with or without lived experience of violence hired through a third-party/voluntary sector organisation), there are further nuances in navigator teams within sites.

- The two police-led sites (Coventry and Wolverhampton) primarily used police officers as navigators. Following a cohort member's needs assessment, they could also be referred to a third-party provider, which would also allocate them a lived-experience community navigator to further support the work that police navigators had been doing.
- Two of the VRU-led sites (Nottingham and Manchester) had mostly community navigators working with their cohort members. However, in Nottingham, these were either individuals from a third-party provider or youth workers, while Manchester exclusively used navigators with lived experience of violence from one voluntary sector provider. It was also the only site at which support delivery was completely decentralised (i.e. on its own premises with little direct contact between the navigators themselves and the programme team).
- One VRU-led site (Leicester) used a combination of approaches, in which their primary navigators were individuals with lived experience of violence hired through a third-party provider, but they often worked in tandem with either a police officer as a navigator or a statutory services worker embracing the role of the navigator. This tandem approach was

mostly used in first contact, when presenting the support offer to the prospective cohort member, yet it could be used at any point throughout the process if deemed necessary.

As such, Leicester can sometimes be more similar to the police-led sites and at other times more aligned with the other two VRU-led sites. Where the former is the case, we will specifically state.

Evaluation objectives

Evaluation objectives are detailed in the updated study protocol, and further details of the summative evaluation are included in the statistical analysis plan. The summative and formative research questions are reproduced below. As this report does not address summative evaluation questions (SEQs), these are for reference only.

Summative evaluation questions

SEQ1: What is the difference in the number of charges or cautions for violence against the person offences by individuals (aged 14 years and over) at risk of involvement in violence receiving the focused deterrence intervention, compared to similar individuals receiving business-as-usual support? (relates to primary outcome for the study)

SEQ2: What is the difference in the time to a violence against the person offence (in days) by individuals at risk of involvement in violence (aged 14 years +) receiving the intervention in comparison to those of similar individuals receiving business-as-usual support? (relates to secondary outcome)

SEQ3: What is the difference in the number of co-offending crimes (i.e. crimes involving two or more perpetrators) by individuals at risk of involvement in violence aged 14 to 40 years receiving the intervention in comparison to those of similar individuals receiving business-as-usual support? (relates to secondary outcome)

Formative evaluation questions

Formative evaluation question (FEQ) 1: To what extent were the three components of the intervention delivered?

FEQ2: How did inputs contribute to the intervention functioning?

FEQ3: Who did the intervention work for and how?

FEQ4: How did local context affect intervention delivery?

FEQ5: To what extent was the intervention delivered as intended?

FEQ6: How did complexity affect intervention delivery?

FEQ7: How did proximal outcomes change?

FEQ8: Why did proximal outcomes change?

FEQ9: What was learned from how the intervention was delivered?

Ethics and trial registration

The full trial has been approved by the University of Hull, Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education Ethical Review Committee, under approval reference 2223STAFF14. Ethical approval was sought and achieved for the summative and formative parts of this evaluation, including the relevant documentation (e.g. draft interview schedules, a participant information sheet for each population and research activity, and a consent form for each population and research activity). All data collection, analysis and reporting for this interim report are covered within the ethical approval for the full trial.

All data collection and processing is compliant with General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act (2018). Data protection procedures and protocols are detailed in the project protocol.

Evaluation update

At the time of writing, randomisation and study entry have ended in all seven trials, with the final randomisation taking place on 26 August 2025. Delivery ended in March 2026.

The summative evaluation is now in the follow-up period (one year from the date of last randomisation, i.e. 27 August 2026), during which time outcomes for the cohort will continue to be collected through routine police administration.

On-site fieldwork ceased in June 2025, and monitoring of delivery is taking place through the routine collection of case management data and monthly meetings between the evaluation team and programme delivery leads. Reflective interviews with programme delivery teams will take place in 2026, completing project data collection.

Project team and stakeholders

The project team is a consortium of researchers from the University of Hull, the University College London (UCL), the University of Oxford and the University of Abertay, led by the University of Hull.

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- Dr William Graham, Abertay University (w.graham@abertay.ac.uk) – implementation consultant
- Dr Marc Powrie, University of Hull – researcher
- Edmund Holmes, University of Hull – researcher

- Irina Larigkou, University of Hull – researcher

There are no other potential interests to declare.

Interim report research questions

This interim report provides an update of trial sampling and intervention delivery – summative (S) research question 1 – and addresses a selection of issues relevant to the formative component of the project.

The summative research questions were:

S1: What was the flow of participants through the trial?

S2: What were the demographic and offending characteristics of the trial cohort?

The formative research questions section details the results of the qualitative analysis of interviews and field observations undertaken by the research team in 2024 and 2025. The topics explored were agreed with the YEF, as they were either areas of particular policy relevance (e.g. engagement with and disengagement from support and use of data), were relevant to the fidelity of the delivery (e.g. the evolution of deterrence and multi-agency partnerships) or were pertinent to the study's CMO configuration (police- vs VRU-led delivery teams).

The five overarching formative evaluation question questions (FEQs) were:

F1: How was deterrence implemented in the interventions?

F2: How did delivery differ between police- and statutory-led interventions?

F3: How did the multi-agency nature of the programme influence its delivery?

F4: How was data used in delivery?

F5: What influenced engagement and disengagement from the support offer?

The corpus of interview data and observations contained significant amounts of information relevant to addressing these questions, and each question could be the subject of an extensive standalone output. For brevity, in this interim report, we provide a short background to the question and its relevance for the trial, but we do not provide a literature review or theoretical framing. As each research question was based on different samples of respondents, in the Methodology section below, we include a summary of the general methodology and then in each thematic area, we specify the sample from which the relevant data was drawn.

Methods

This report's seven research questions can be separated into two main sections – summative and formative – that have common research methods and are described below. As answering the different formative research questions required insights drawn from different populations, their samples varied slightly. The specific samples for each research question are detailed below.

Sampling

Summative evaluation

The method for estimating the required sample size is documented in the statistical analysis plan. In summary, we simulated data sets based on assumptions informed by sample outcome data. Using an anticipated effect size of a 20% relative reduction in the number of offences in the intervention group compared to the control group, we determined that a sample size of 2,864 cohort members would provide 80% statistical power. The required sample size has been achieved, and the final (unreconciled) enrolment was 2,976. All individuals randomised for the trial were eligible for inclusion in the summative analysis.

As the randomisation data held by the evaluation team and the cohort characteristics data provided by the site teams have not yet been reconciled (e.g. to check for duplicates, recording errors and compliance violations), the total sample size differs (2,976 vs 2,938). The process of reconciling process and randomisation data will take place in 2026.

Formative evaluation

Sampling for the formative evaluation was not based on an *a priori* calculation but on a resource-driven estimate of field time. Each site was visited by a researcher for up to three consecutive days, approximately every six to eight weeks during the full implementation period (May 2024 to March 2025). During these visits, researchers undertook interviews with cohort members and delivery team members; recorded field observations of interventions, delivery team environments and community activities; and wrote daily researcher reflections.

The research team conducted 96 interviews with 66 cohort members, including 30 repeat interviews, and 84 interviews with delivery and programme team members. Researchers undertook 77 days of field observations, documenting them through daily written reflections. All data in this corpus was eligible for analysis as part of this report

Procedure

Summative evaluation

For the summative evaluation, each site had a strict set of inclusion/exclusion participation eligibility criteria (for more information, see the study protocol; Brennan et al., 2023). For each individual who met the eligibility criteria, information on the number of offences in the past two years, their age (in years) and their unique trial ID (created by the site delivery team) was sent to the evaluation team in batches. The age and offence information were converted into a binary

child/adult variable and a three-part ordinal risk[1] variable (low, medium or high), which was determined based on tertiles of offending frequency for that trial's cohort. These records were randomised by the evaluation team, stratified by child/adult status and risk. The individual's intervention condition was returned to the delivery team.

The sites routinely collected additional data on cohort members' gender, ethnicity and engagement with the intervention. To minimise the risk to data privacy, as this information was not necessary for randomisation, it was not required by the evaluation team at the individual level. For the purpose of this report, it has been provided in aggregate form at the trial level by the sites.

All data was processed using R and RStudio, including the packages 'tidyverse', 'janitor' and 'tableone'.

Formative evaluation

For formative evaluation, the population included all cohort members in the intervention group, delivery team and programme team members, and wider stakeholders. In practice, the sampling of cohort members was limited to individuals who had accepted the support offer, as recruiting those who had declined the support offer was not feasible. In addition to interviews, three research assistants undertook approximately 77 days of on-site observations. These were documented through daily researcher reflections, which included descriptions of their observation activities and subjective impressions of programme delivery.

All interviewees and observation participants provided a signed informed consent, and, in the case of children, parental assent was obtained prior to informed consent.

Cohort members

Recruitment of cohort members was typically conducted through research assistants during one of their scheduled site visits, often with support from the programme delivery team. The researchers introduced the study to interested individuals and provided them with a participant information sheet (see study protocol: Brennan et al., 2023). They then followed up with each individual's navigator after the initial visit, and, if the cohort member was still interested, an interview/observation would be scheduled. The consent form was signed on the day, after the individual was given a brief overview of the interview/observation and had a chance to ask questions or decide not to participate.

Intervention team

Recruitment of the intervention team (i.e., programme management and programme delivery team members) was done either during the researchers' site visits or online during one of the regular

[1] In retrospect, relative frequency is a more accurate characterisation of this variable as it is only retrospective in nature.

meetings between the evaluators and the site team. Either way, they would be introduced to the study and given a participant information sheet. Upon agreement to participate, an interview would be scheduled, and a consent form would be given prior to the interview.

Wider stakeholders

Wider stakeholders were predominantly recruited with the assistance of the intervention team. They had collaborated with their partners for an extended period and were often able to advise researchers on whom to contact and how. Equally, potential participants were linked with the evaluators, who introduced the study and provided them with the participant information sheet. If they were still interested in participation, an interview was scheduled, and informed consent was obtained prior to the interview taking place.

Interview data was transcribed and stored on a University of Hull server, along with researcher reflections. All interview transcripts and researcher reflections were processed using NVivo.

Measures

Summative evaluation

Site: one of five sites in which the intervention was delivered

Trial: one of seven trials in which the individual was enrolled

Intervention allocation: one of two conditions to which an individual was randomly assigned

Age: age in years at the time of randomisation

Number of offences: number of crimes by an individual in the two years prior to randomisation

Risk: one of three categories (low, medium or high) corresponding to the individual's frequency of offending in the past two years relative to the trial's cohort (see the statistical analysis plan for further details)

Ethnicity: one of five categories of ethnicity (Asian, Black, Mixed, White or Other)

Gender: one of three categories of gender (male, female or unknown)

Formative evaluation

Interview schedules were developed and refined across 2023, 2024 and 2025 to correspond with the project's formative evaluation questions. These wide-ranging interviews with a large sample covered many topics, allowing previously undefined research questions, such as F1 to F5, to be examined.

Analysis

Summative evaluation

The analysis of the summative evaluation data was descriptive. The study flow was described and illustrated by populating a CONSORT diagram using counts aggregated across the multi-centred trial. Cohort characteristics were descriptive, using counts and percentages aggregated across the trial.

Formative evaluation

The data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis assumed that the accounts of the respondents were valid reflections of those experiences and, accordingly, could be analysed using an essentialist approach. First, fine coding of individual words and phrases was undertaken by a single researcher. These codes were then grouped and clustered into emergent themes relevant to the research question (F1–F5), which were described critically and illustrated with supporting quotes where relevant.

Timeline

Table 1. Timeline

Dates	Activity
22/5/2023	First randomisation
1/5/2024	Field work initiation
31/3/2025	End of fieldwork
26/8/2025	Final randomisation
31/12/2025	End of programme delivery
27/8/2026	End of follow-up period
January 2027	Anticipated receipt of police outcome data
April 2027	Anticipated receipt of Police National Computer outcome data
September 2027	Anticipated draft final report

Summative data

S1: What was the flow of participants through the trial?

The updated CONSORT diagram for the trial until the end of August 2025 is below (see Figure 1). The diagram shows that the total number of cases randomised was 2,976, with approximately equal distribution of allocation to intervention and control conditions.

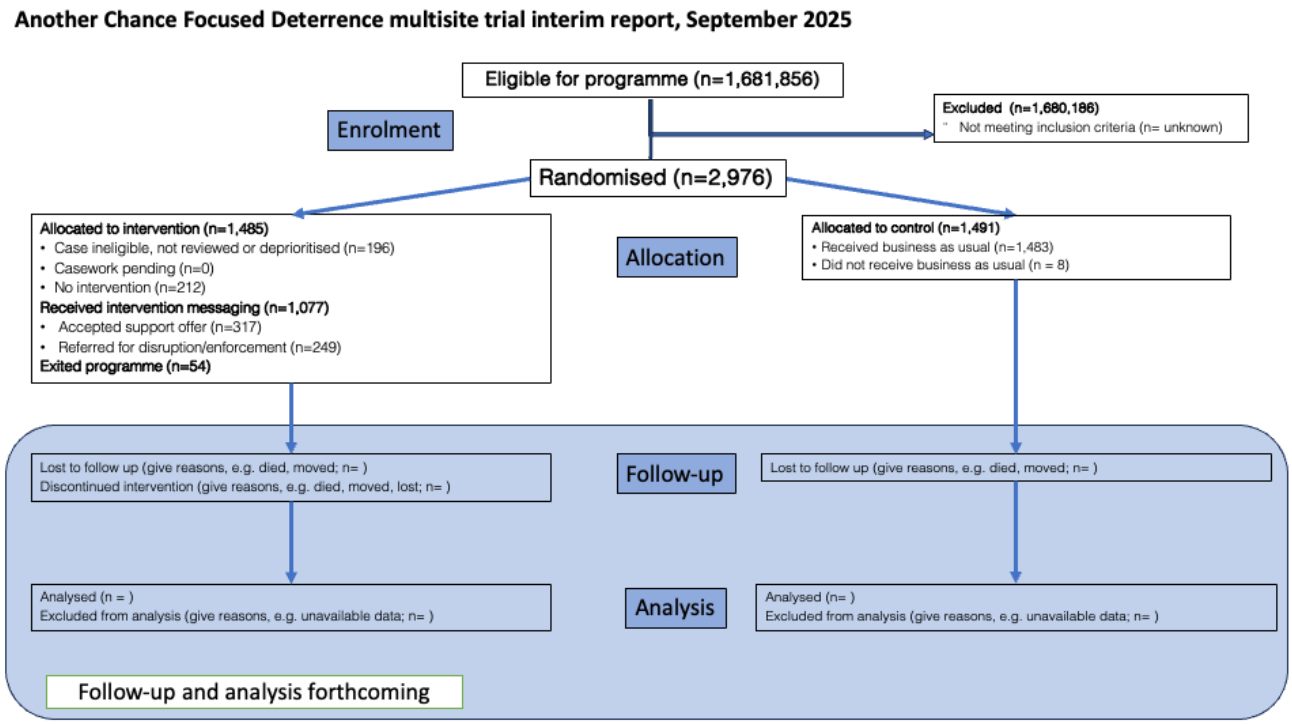

Figure 1. Updated CONSORT diagram

Of the 1,485 individuals allocated to the intervention, 13% were subsequently identified as ineligible.[2] Examples of ineligibility included the individual having moved out of the area between identification and randomisation, getting a custodial sentence and being removed from the intervention at the request of a police-organised crime team. 73% of the intervention group received at least the minimal intervention (i.e. a navigator visit/engagement), and 21% accepted an offer of support to desist from violence. Quarterly data returns provided by the sites indicated that 17% of the cohort had an active enforcement plan or disruption activity between June and August 2025. As this was live data from a limited period of the project, this statistic is an underestimate that will be corrected when the final process data is available.

Of the 1,491 individuals who were allocated to the control group, 8 (0.5%) were identified as not being compliant with treatment allocation, i.e. they received the intervention because they were inadvertently randomised a second time.

[2] As per the intention-to-treat approach outlined in the statistical analysis plan, these individuals will be retained in the study cohort.

Statistical power

As per the study protocol and statistical analysis plan, we estimated that a sample size of 2,864 cohort members was required to provide 80% statistical power. Although the data reconciliation process (e.g. removing duplicate cases) is likely to reduce the final sample size slightly, the study has achieved the required sample size needed to detect a 20% relative reduction in violence against the person offences.

S2: What were the demographic and offending characteristics of the trial cohort?

This section supplements the CONSORT diagram by providing information about the number of individuals in each of the seven trials and descriptive statistics relevant to stratification. The data is based on an integration of the initial data sent to the evaluation team for randomisation and the output of randomisation. It should be noted that the data is based on complete cases. Missing data will be addressed through the data consolidation process when sites return process data in the winter of 2025/26. Therefore, the counts and distribution of the variables are likely to change slightly between this publication and the final project report; the latter – due for publication in 2028 – should be taken as the definitive version of these statistics.

The distribution of cohort members by treatment allocation is presented in Table 2. The table shows a relatively even distribution across treatment allocation, indicating that the randomisation was effective and that the two arms of the trial are exchangeable. There was a statistically significant difference in the proportion of children and adults across conditions – 53% of the children in the cohort were in the intervention group – that will, along with risk and trial, be adjusted for in the final analysis because they were variables on which randomisation was stratified (see the statistical analysis plan).

Table 2. Counts and summary statistics of trial and cohort characteristics by treatment allocation

Trial distribution	Control	Intervention	Total*
Site			
Coventry	341	330	671
Leicester	315	317	632
Manchester	362	379	741
Nottingham	210	209	419
Wolverhampton	239	236	475
Trial			
Coventry trial 1	115	120	235
Coventry trial 2	226	210	436
Leicester trial 1	315	317	632
Manchester trial 1	362	379	741
Nottingham trial 1	210	209	419
Wolverhampton trial 1	148	150	298
Wolverhampton trial 2	91	86	177
Cohort characteristics			
Age			
Mean (SD)	21.13 (7.54)	21.07 (8.02)	
Median (IQR)	19 (7)	19 (7)	
Adult			
Adult	913	854	1,767
Child	554	617	1,171
Offences in the past two years			
Mean (SD)	6.14 (10.24)	6.38 (8.79)	
Median (SD)	3 (6)	3 (6)	
Risk			
Low	545	528	
Medium	521	482	
High	401	461	
Total	**1,467**	**1,471**	**2,938**

**Total numbers are based on preliminary process data in advance of reconciliation*
SD = standard deviation; IQR = interquartile range

Cohort characteristics

Age

The mean age of cohort members was 21.1 years (standard deviation 7.8 years), the median age was 19 years (interquartile range 7 years) and the most common age (mode) was 17 years. Almost 40% of the cohort were children (i.e. younger than 18 years of age at the time of randomisation). The minimum age was 11 years, and the maximum age was 71 years. As can be seen in Figure 2, the distribution was heavily skewed towards younger individuals: only 11% were 30 years or older at the time of randomisation.

As discussed in an earlier interim report, despite the minimum age ultimately being set at 14 years, 14 individuals between the ages of 11 and 13 years were randomised during the pilot period. A further seven individuals, all aged 13 years, were randomised during the full trial period at the request of the delivery partners, with the anticipation that they would be over 14 years of age at the point of intervention. These individuals have been included in the cohort characteristic statistics but will be out of scope for the full trial.

Across trials, the age profile varied systematically: Nottingham and Manchester explicitly limited the upper age of eligible individuals, whereas the others did not. The average age ranged between 17.8 years in Nottingham and 28.7 years in Wolverhampton in trial 1, although the difference in median ages between them was slightly smaller (10 years). The median age differed by at least six months between trials, and in both Coventry trials, the difference was over three years. The difference in modal age (i.e. the most frequent age at randomisation) is noteworthy. The most common age of cohort members in Manchester was 14 years, while in Wolverhampton trial 1, it was 22 years, with an interquartile range of 16 years, reflecting a widely distributed age cohort. Reflecting their tighter age restrictions, the interquartile ranges for Manchester and Nottingham were five and four years, respectively.

The differences in the age profiles of the cohort reflect a combination of varying eligibility criteria and local violence problems. Despite the observed variations, the intervention predominantly focused on individuals who were in late adolescence or older but with a meaningful heterogeneity that is likely to have affected how the deterrence, support and community aspects of the programme were delivered; what types of support were most commonly delivered; and how the programme was understood by stakeholders.

Clustering, such as that in Manchester around age 14 years before dropping considerably for ages 15 and 16 years, suggests that the intervention was being used to systematically target particular violence problems and is worthy of further exploration.

Table 3. Trial age characteristics

Trial	Mean (SD)	Median (IQR)	Mode
Coventry trial 1	24.4 (8.9)	21 (9)	21
Coventry trial 2	20.5 (8.5)	17 (7)	15
Leicester trial 1	22.4 (8.2)	20 (7)	17
Manchester trial 1	18.4 (3.8)	18 (5)	14
Nottingham trial 1	17.8 (2.7)	17 (4)	17
Wolverhampton trial 1	28.7 (10.8)	27 (16)	22
Wolverhampton trial 2	19.9 (6.2)	18 (6)	16

SD = standard deviation; IQR = interquartile range

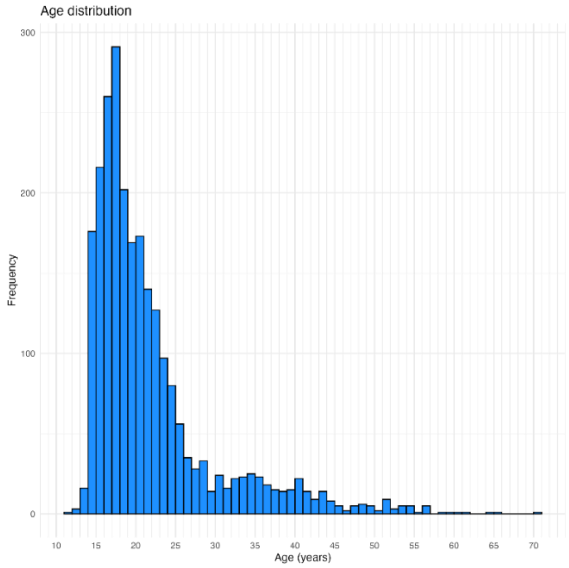

Figure 2. Distribution of cohort member age at randomisation (combined trial)

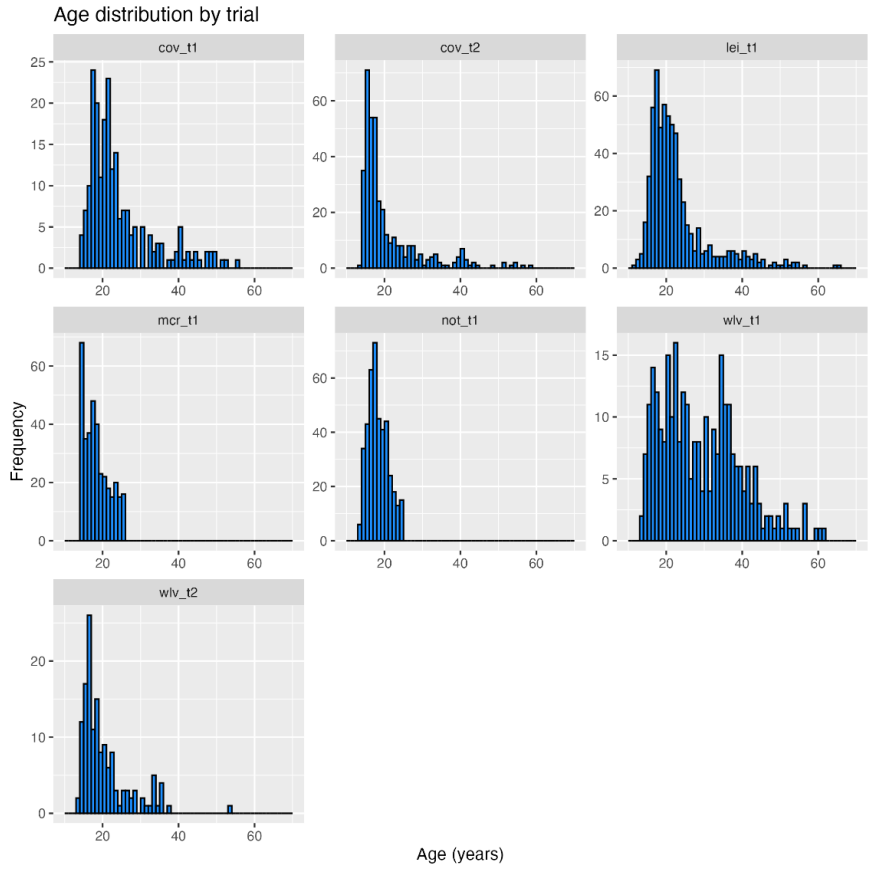

Figure 3. Distribution of cohort member age at randomisation (by trial)

Offence history

The mean number of offences attributed to a cohort member in the past two years was 6.3 (standard deviation 9.5), the median number of offences was 3 (interquartile range 6) and the most common number of offences was 1. The minimum number of offences in the cohort was 0, and the maximum number of offences was over 200. Two-thirds of the cohort had five offences or fewer.

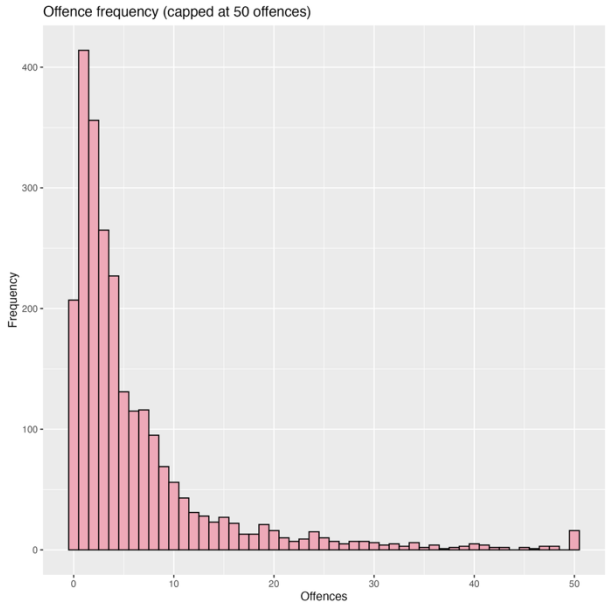

Figure 4. Distribution of offence frequency (full trial; capped at 50 offences)

The distribution of offences for each site is illustrated in Figure 4 and summarised in Table 4. The eligibility criterion for all trials, except trial 2 in Coventry and Wolverhampton, was that an individual had at least one violent offence attributed to them in the past two years. Consistent with the eligibility criteria, across the 1,792 individuals randomised in Manchester, Nottingham and Leicester, only two did not have one or more offences attributed to them. In Coventry and Wolverhampton, almost 20% (226/1,146) of cohort members did not have an offence attributed to them. This difference can be explained by the use of 'suspect' status rather than, for example, charge, caution or conviction, to establish eligibility at the CIRV sites. Around 80% of individuals identified as suspects in police crime records in England and Wales are not charged or cautioned, for a variety of reasons, including being innocent of the offence and the victim not supporting prosecution, meaning that these sites have a much wider pool of potential cohort members.

The notably higher average age of cohort members in Leicester is attributable to their eligibility criteria, which had no upper age limit, resulting in some highly prolific and persistent individuals being included in the trial.

Table 4. Summary statistics of offences per trial

Trial	Mean (SD)	Median (IQR)	Mode
Coventry trial 1	4.4 (5.9)	3 (4)	3
Coventry trial 2	2.9 (4.8)	1 (2)	1
Leicester trial 1	11.8 (15.3)	7 (10)	4
Manchester trial 1	5.8 (7)	4 (5)	1
Nottingham trial 1	5.5 (6.4)	4 (5)	2
Wolverhampton trial 1	4.3 (5.7)	2 (5)	1
Wolverhampton trial 2	4.2 (7.9)	2 (3)	1

SD = standard deviation; IQR = interquartile range

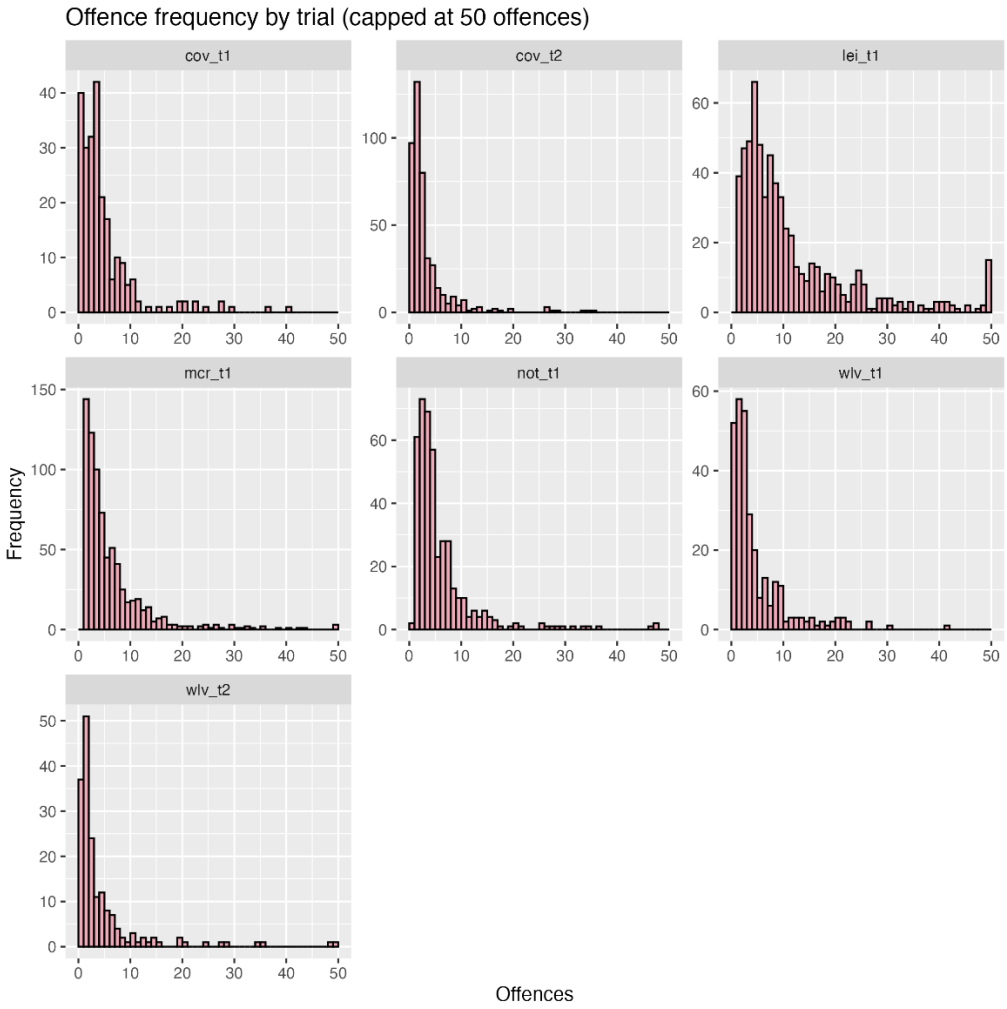

Figure 5. Histogram of offence frequency (by trial; capped at 50 offences)

Gender

Relative to their prevalence in the population, males outnumbered females by about 10 to one in the trial sample, and there were very few non-binary cohort members. The relatively large proportion of cases where gender was unknown is almost entirely attributable to the Coventry and Wolverhampton sites that relied on police records for gender and ethnicity when producing data for this report. This high rate of missing data will be addressed during the completion of the process data, due in April 2026.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of gender

Gender	n	%
Male	2,340	81.0
Female	211	7.3
Non-binary	<10	<0.1
Unknown	336	11.6

If the unknown gender cases are removed, males accounted for approximately 91% of the cohort, females accounted for around 8% and non-binary cohort members accounted for less than 1%.

Ethnicity

The most prevalent ethnicity in the trial cohort was White, accounting for four in 10 cohort members, but White cohort members were under-represented by around 50% relatively to their prevalence in the general population[3] (Census, 2021). Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnicities were all over-represented in the cohort relative to their prevalence in the population. In particular, people from Black and Mixed ethnicities were four and three times over-represented, respectively. However, it should be noted that the eligibility criteria limited the study population to cities where the prevalence of Black, Asian, Mixed and Other people is higher.

When a more complete picture of the cohort ethnicity is available, further analysis of the representativeness of the cohort will be undertaken.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of ethnicity

Ethnicity	n	%
Asian	322	11.2
Black	605	21.0
Mixed	305	10.6
Other	17	<0.1
White	1,149	39.8
Unknown	488	16.9

[3] Ethnicity is more diverse in younger populations in England, from which most of the trial population are drawn but the different age profiles across sites make a direct, concise comparison challenging here. For that reason, this statistic uses total population. More detailed comparisons will be available when the final process data are available.

Formative interim findings

F1. How was deterrence implemented in the interventions?

This section describes how one of the programme's three core mechanisms – deterrence – was planned and implemented in the trial. Central to our realist approach is the connection between context and mechanism. Therefore, deterrence is discussed from the perspective of the two main contexts – a police-led intervention and a VRU-led intervention.

As detailed below, we observed challenges in all areas in the implementation of deterrence and enforcement in the programme's early stages.

As the programme advanced, all areas became more comfortable with using deterrence messaging and enforcement, but all experienced challenges in how to deliver a deterrence message while simultaneously trying to establish a rapport with cohort members.

Escalating procedures for enforcement, which were introduced in the later stages of the intervention, proved to be a useful technique for planning and delivering enforcement if a cohort member continued to offend.

Background

As noted throughout the project's outputs and in the wider practice guidance and literature on focused deterrence, the intervention comprises a combination of the description of potential consequences for continued involvement in violence and a complementary offer of support to desist from violence and community influence. In keeping with the project requirements, all sites were asked to develop a focused deterrence intervention based on the YEF focused deterrence framework, a nine-point guide detailing the essential and flexible features of the intervention.

Sites developed these plans throughout the co-alignment and preparation phases, formalising them in operating manuals submitted as part of the YEF approval process. The evaluation team assessed these plans as part of a systems health-check process that was informed by documentary and qualitative data provided by the site delivery teams. Sites then implemented the intervention, developing and revising the deterrence, support and community aspects of the programme over time. The early implementation report, based on the first six months of delivery (June–December 2023), noted:

"There is clear qualitative evidence that the deterrence message was minimised or not delivered at some initial [contacts] in this early implementation phase. Delivery team members were, in some cases, unaware of the importance of a deterrence message and were sometimes resistant to this component of the intervention." (p. 9)

The report advised that:

"Future delivery requires clearer articulation of the deterrence message. There was also little evidence of a robust and predictable pathway to enforcement activity in most sites for those who reject the support offered in these early stages of implementation." (p. 9)

This report was presented to the site teams in spring 2024, and the importance of deterrence for programme fidelity was strongly emphasised. This discussion was followed by a request from the YEF programme support team for sites to strengthen the deterrence component of the programme and provide documentary evidence of this change.

As illustrated in the CONSORT diagram (Figure 1) above, approximately 31% of cohort members who received the intervention were referred for some form of enforcement. This is a doubling of the rate of enforcement referrals since the early implementation phase against a backdrop of a far higher rate of intervention delivery. This indicates that the deterrence feature of the programme expanded and evolved over the entire implementation period.

The section that follows details the evolution of deterrence in the programme. The evolution is described in sequential phases: design, early implementation and full implementation.

Sample

The section used a combination of interviews with navigators, programme leads and cohort members, as well as documentary evidence (e.g. operating manuals).

Findings

Design phase

Deterrence and enforcement in the design stages of the programmes were documented in operating manuals, other programme materials and TIDieR templates (see protocol). These are detailed, coherent and potentially feasible plans for the intervention to deliver swift and certain consequences for continued involvement in violence.

Themes of deterrence included the following features, although not necessarily in every trial:

1. Disruption and enforcement tactics are different from business as usual because they are managed by a designated disruption and enforcement coordinator.

"A dedicated disruption and enforcement coordinator, employed by the police, will oversee enforcement activity and arrange [for] one or more police-led [disruptions] or deterrence activities [to] take place" (Leicester programme documentation, evaluation protocol)

2. Each cohort participant would be asked to read and sign a contract that outlined, in plain English, what the programme sought to achieve and what would constitute enforcement action.

"Participants are informed about this element and its consequences during the initial engagement meeting and through the contract signed" (Nottingham programme documentation, evaluation protocol)

3. Breaking the contract in any way would result in the deterrence arm being activated.

"When necessary, the approach also coordinates disruptive functions for those who are primarily adults who have been referred, who are criminally active [and who] fail or refuse to engage." (Programme documentation, Wolverhampton TIDieR)

4. When a participant commits one or more designated offences (typically violence- or group-related offences), immediate enforcement and disruption action will escalate. This can, but will not always, also result in the removal of the support offer.

"To be eligible for the disruption and enforcement element, participants must meet specific criteria, including ongoing refusal to engage or disengagement from the service and community support element, as well as ongoing concerns about involvement in serious violence and associated crime." (Leicester programme documentation, evaluation protocol)

5. Deterrence will be delivered by both police and partners, including probation officers, case workers and social services, as well as through community mechanisms.

"The disruption and enforcement element of [the intervention] aims to (re-)engage individuals in the programme and deter them from involvement in offending behaviour. In so doing, the team will search for what works with each individual to make a meaningful effort [to engage them]. This will be done through NSDP (Neighbourhood Safety and Disruption Panel), police, youth justice, partner services and community pressures." (Nottingham programme documentation, evaluation protocol)

6. Enforcement and disruption will be graduated, depending on the severity of the offence or the degree of disengagement.

"At the point [at which] an individual involved in Another Chance commits a serious violence offence, they will be referred to Greater Manchester Police and other statutory partners to action one or more of a suite of enforcement measures." (Manchester programme documentation, evaluation protocol)

7. Programmes cannot influence ongoing police and court protocols.

"If an individual with a CIRV marker on their Police National Computer record is arrested anywhere in England or Wales, the arresting officer will contact the on-call CIRV phone number indicated on the [Police National Computer] marker. An assessment will be conducted, and in most cases, a visit will be arranged with the arrested person during their custody period. A similar process occurs if the person visits an emergency department with a suspicious injury or if new intelligence emerges. (...) CIRV does not interfere with the criminal justice outcome." (CIRV programme documentation, evaluation protocol)

And that:

8. Deterrence will involve community support for non-violence expressed through faith leaders, youth organisations and influential community figures (collectively referred to as the 'community voice'). The meaning of community was interpreted broadly and included everything

from immediate family to peer groups, navigators with lived experience of violence, community leaders and people living in the wider neighbourhoods of the cohort members.

"Print and electronic media will be used for broad messaging about the project, targeted at the wider community and practitioners. Community radio stations, [name] and [name], will be used, as they already have a degree of trust in target communities and involve dialogue and feedback." (Programme documentation, Nottingham TIDier)

These documents outline a range of communication and enforcement strategies that, if implemented, would provide a robust deterrent and response to violence. There was also evidence of efforts to enforce consequences through a procedurally just mechanism of escalating enforcement, but also, in Wolverhampton, enforcement could be implemented if a person continued to offend. At the time of their writing – prior to programme delivery – none of these activities had been applied in practice.

Early implementation phase

At the commencement of Another Chance delivery, what activities would constitute deterrence, who was responsible for delivering them and how they should be implemented was still being decided.

At this early stage, deterrence messaging in Leicester, Nottingham and Manchester was largely delivered through community navigators, who communicated the potential consequences of reoffending to their participants. In Coventry and Wolverhampton, deterrence messaging was delivered by police navigators.

During our early interviews, it was clear that navigators were unsure or even unaware of their relationship with police enforcement and disruption enforcers. As a result, some felt conflicted by the deterrence aspect of the programme:

"Truth is, we were not sure how it was all supposed to come together at the beginning. It was new to everyone." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

The delivery of the deterrence message by non-police navigators in several of the sites is one of the main factors distinguishing the Another Chance Fund Focused Deterrence project from previous focused deterrence interventions. It was also a source of identity conflict for navigators, who were required to deliver competing or even contradictory messages simultaneously: issuing a threat of consequences while seeking to quickly establish a trusting rapport and support the cohort member.

Theoretical and practical conflict in the navigator role

Navigators from both police-led and VRU-led sites considered their role primarily as providing support resources, mentoring and liaising with other agencies on individuals' behalves. Few, whether police or community navigators, saw their role as engaging in enforcement or disruption interventions. As a navigator from a VRU-led site explained, when asked about the deterrence element of the programme, *"I tend not [to] do that because that is not my role. That is the lead*

workers' role, whether it be the police or probation." At this early stage, that interpretation was correct as initial meetings in the site were planned to be delivered by a pairing of a navigator and a statutory lead worker. In practice, because of the challenges of coordinating visits to cohort members, navigators soon began to deliver the message independently.

One navigator considered that a young person's agency was over-emphasised within deterrence-focused interventions and that, on the contrary, vulnerability and community exposure to violence were primary drivers of offending behaviour.

"So, they're growing up in a community [where their] elders are in and out of prison. And they get to an age where, then, their peers are in prison (…) or wherever it might be. That's what we are working with, with these boys." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

These perspectives highlight a conflict in the intervention mechanism at this stage: competing theories that (a) violence is a choice, from which someone can opt out, and (b) violence is a deterministic consequence of exposures in a person's history and ecosystem.

This theoretical conflict had practical implications: some non-police navigators were reluctant to be involved in any deterrence measures that went beyond simple messaging of consequences, although they saw this discussion of consequences as one of their biggest tasks:

"I think it's one of the biggest things because a lot of the time, for example, the same young person I was talking about, he doesn't want to offend. He's a young person who just likes social mixing (...) I think a lot of the time, the young people, they think [that] because they're maybe under 18, they'll get a referral order, that's it. They might get a youth conditional caution, and it's not that deep. I think they don't really think about the implications that it can have in terms of later life and maybe their record and different things they can and can't do. (...) You just have to be very open and honest with them and let them know that there's consequences for your choices and your actions." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

However, checking up on cohort members, pointing out their actions or threatening consequences if someone reoffended was viewed as counterproductive to developing and maintaining a trusting rapport with the participant:

"It's not a case of necessarily point blank saying, do you realise the consequences of your actions? Often if you say something like that, you sound like a police officer, and that's what we don't do." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

Police navigators were more, but not entirely, supportive of the potential for a choice model of support and engagement to be effective. The CIRV model emphasised the importance of a desire to change but also acknowledged the influence of childhood adversity, vulnerability and community factors in the perpetration of violence. One CIRV navigator viewed their role as leveraging the individual away from negative influences through supervised support, rather than trying to deliver behaviour change through the threat of sanctions.

"The whole point of CIRV is [that] we show opportunities to people; we kind of empower them and make them believe and realise they can achieve things, and then we let them go and do it. Kicking in their door doesn't give them responsibility; it just says, 'You are not going to change.'" (Navigator, police-led site)

Even when a cohort member reoffended, they prioritised re-engagement over enforcement and consequence:

"We are different to what he has had in the past; we don't just say, 'Right, you've pissed about; I spent three hours trying to sort things, and you fucked about, so off you go'. I think it's really important we revisit so that this young man can learn from those mistakes and carry on." (Navigator, police-led site)

Navigator deterrence strategies

One strategy that navigators reported using, which dealt with the theoretical conflict they faced (between delivering the intervention as they were contracted to do and the moral and practical objections to deterrence messaging and enforcement), was to separate the engagement activity from the deterrence. At first, they focused on establishing rapport and gaining the trust and engagement of the cohort members. Then, in subsequent weekly meetings, they would begin to discuss the consequences of continued offending. This allowed them to present the deterrence message from a position of trust and, in the case of community navigators with lived experience of violence and adversity, experience.

"So, we went to the justice of galleries, and we did a whole session [on] knife crime. I told him about my experiences involved in that life, and we watched loads of videos on, like, different people and how it affects different families and how it affects not only the victim but their family as well. And we just spoke about, like, the different consequences you can get for carrying knives and all the different stuff about, like, what are the consequences and how people will be feeling if something did happen with a knife." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

Arguably, this approach had the dual effect of conveying the message of consequence – albeit not as a threat but as a warning – while reinforcing their identity as someone who exemplifies an alternative to violence and as someone in whom the cohort member can trust. In doing this, navigators demonstrated that despite previous offending histories, a person could earn respect, and there is compassion to be found in communities that have high rates of violence. They also were able to utilise their relationships with influential or significant community figures to help drive home the deterrence message:

"Yeah, we had a show, hero to zero, about blade carrying. It [was] powerful and cut through cause we [are] well known in the community, and we all had history, you know, so respect like (…) it's [a] thousand times better than just nagging away at them." (Community stakeholder, VRU-led site)

Police navigators also drew upon their experiences of (working in) the justice system. They used it to highlight the impact of having a criminal record on participants' future employment opportunities. They reinforced to the individuals that they have control over their own destiny,

despite the difficulties they might face at that moment in time. Participant setbacks and relapses soon became common occurrences, so navigators focused on the communication of the consequences of reoffending through non-confrontational messaging, rather than emphasising immediate, certain or severe punitive measures for minor lapses or bumps in the road.

"Yeah, you know, we talk about consequences; a consequence of this whole programme would be to remove you, that's a consequence. But other things as well, like, you know, if you get arrested, you think about your DBS [vetting], think about your chances of getting a job or think about your reputation and think about the harm you're causing to yourself, your future, your family, whatever." (Navigator, police-led site)

In these early stages, a common theme appears to have been a general lack of belief that deterrence alone could have a significant impact on involvement in violence. The origins of this position for police and community navigators differed, with the latter subscribing to a more deterministic social ecology theory of offending and desistance, while police navigators appeared to have arrived at their position through a rejection of deterrence as a result of witnessing the failures of a deterrence-focused system and/or due to personal fatigue.

Community involvement in deterrence strategies

Community involvement for police-led programmes was generally at the organisational level rather than the individual level, with community events highlighting the work that the focused deterrence programmes were doing and providing community engagement opportunities for participants through events such as the CIRV bike repair and winter sports days. These activities were generally support-focused and positive in tone, with little place for discussion of consequences or deterrence.

In contrast, navigators from the VRU-led sites, who generally lived and worked within the same communities as their participants, used personal relationships with community leaders and other support workers to reinforce their experience-informed deterrence message:

"Yeah, his dad innit is in prison, so no role model, but he listens to [name] (…) he goes for a haircut, and he tells them how bad things were in [site district] during the turf wars innit (…) he has respect." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

As detailed above, the early stages of programme delivery were a developmental period for the deterrence component of the programme. Navigators – both police and community – struggled with the theoretical challenges of delivering a combined deterrence and support intervention and faced practical challenges in delivering these simultaneously. The system for referring individuals who continued to offend to enforcement had been detailed. Still, only a small number of people had been referred, suggesting that the process was not functioning efficiently.

Despite the practical challenges, navigators found creative ways to embed deterrence messaging in their interactions with the cohort, albeit only with those who engaged with the support offer. They introduced a discussion of consequences once rapport had been established, allowing them to present deterrence in a paternalistic or protective manner. These approaches, which emerged organically, resulted in many individuals who received the intervention receiving little in the way of

deterrence or discussions of consequences in their initial meetings. Consequently, only those who self-selected into the support offer – potentially quite different from those who declined the offer – received the combined deterrence and support intervention; all others were susceptible to enforcement if they continued to offend.

Furthermore, those with lived (some community navigators) and vicarious (police and other community navigators) experience of violence and desistance from violence sought to convey consequences in a way that encouraged engagement with the support features of the programme. This approach suggests that although deterrence and consequences were discussed, they were not presented as a direct threat to the individual (as in 'scared straight' approaches), but rather as a vicarious example of how offending could derail lives and how accepting support would be a way to avoid further negative consequences.

This approach to delivering the deterrence component of the intervention at this stage can be viewed, on the one hand, as a violation of programme fidelity, where a core feature of the delivery model was not mature and, more importantly, incompatible with the values and beliefs of the individuals responsible for its delivery. On the other hand, it could be viewed as sites fitting the YEF nine-point focused deterrence framework into their local context and delivering the closest and most palatable version of deterrence within the resources and organisational cultures available.

As detailed in the introduction to this section, the findings above were documented in the programme's early implementation report. This report was presented to the delivery team in spring 2024 and prompted discussions about how to strengthen the enforcement referral system and ensure that deterrence and enforcement were consistently delivered during the initial contacts.

Full implementation phase

Alongside encouragement from the YEF and the evaluation team to more robustly implement the deterrence and enforcement components of the intervention, a number of cohort members were involved in serious violent offences. This prompted ongoing reviews of this aspect of the programme by the delivery teams.

"It became obvious that we were nowhere near prepared for when further action would need to be taken (…) it became the white elephant in the room." ***(Programme manager, VRU-led site)***

Delivery managers and their teams implemented several changes to their deterrence and enforcement strategies. These changes varied by site, reflecting the different delivery and personnel challenges. They included role-playing with navigators to ensure that deterrence messaging was delivered at the first meeting, (re)engaging police partners to ensure an expedient and robust enforcement referral system, adopting an escalating process for enforcement to share with cohort members and producing written information detailing the consequences of continued offending (coupled with information about support to desist).

Emergent themes that coincided with this process, based on qualitative accounts from navigators, stakeholders, cohort members and field observations, are described below. During this period, the proportion of individuals referred for enforcement increased from approximately 15% in the early

implementation period to around 30% in the full implementation period, indicating a significant improvement in this aspect of the process. The sensitive nature of the engagement process (accompanied by ethical and practical restrictions) meant that the initial meeting was observed infrequently. As a result, our understanding of how these changed is largely based on second-hand accounts from navigators and cohort members.

Within the accounts, there is evidence of improvements in fidelity, greater coordination and collaboration between the deterrence and support components of the intervention and the emergence of community influence within the deterrence mechanism. However, there is also evidence of conflicts and challenges within the delivery of deterrence that persisted through the full implementation period. These are informative in understanding how the intervention was delivered but also instructive for the design and delivery of future multi-pronged interventions.

Deterrence and support coaligning at the management level

There was some evidence that in both police-led and VRU-led programmes, navigators and enforcement staff began to work more collaboratively over the full implementation period:

"I feel now that they [navigators] understand, or they share my ethos on the disruption side of things and why we're disrupting. I'd say they're probably about 75% there. I'd say, definitely, where they had zero before." (Enforcement lead, VRU-led site)

An example of this collaboration in Coventry, for instance, saw the deterrence team identifying a participant as being particularly vulnerable on Friday and Saturday evenings, so they liaised with the navigator to provide additional contact support at this time:

"Friday evening, when CIRV are not in, yes, we're on call, but we're not here as such, he would tend to go out with friends, maybe have too much alcohol, drugs, before you know it, and coming in on Monday morning to see he's been arrested for, like, an alcohol-related offence or whatever (...) [enforcement lead] started getting the local guys [neighbourhood police] going round just to check up on him."

This collaboration was also evident during stakeholder meetings:

"Perceptions have changed, though, because you could very much tell at the start that the navigators, when it came down to deterrence, it's like, oh, no, that's not a good idea. Whereas now, they're kind of feeding back in our Monday meeting. They're coming to us saying, 'Well, actually, maybe it is worth putting them in both elements of the programme because they're not engaging with us like they used to'. So, I think perceptions are changing."(Data analyst, VRU-led site)

At the management level, this perspective seems to have been an accurate reflection of a more coherent deterrence delivery. As detailed below, in the tiered approach, enforcement became more than police activity, with different services beginning or threatening to 'pull levers' to deter further offending. However, as also demonstrated in the tiered approach, that collaboration did not extend to the court system, representatives of which were notably absent from all programmes, where delays impeded the delivery of legal consequences. However, as shown later in this section and

contrary to the preceding quote, cooperation between support and deterrence teams and their wider organisations was not always well developed.

Additionally, the move towards fuller implementation of deterrence and enforcement was not always well-resourced. At the police-led sites, navigators intimated that there was insufficient routine staffing of the enforcement component of the programme, which led to delays in developing and implementing formal deterrence protocols, such as in-person enforcement and intelligence gathering for arrest and court warrants. In Coventry, for instance, deterrence relied on front-line police officers working overtime to conduct disruption activities.

This, as enforcement managers conceded, inevitably led to many disengaged and offending participants not being effectively targeted.

"They're doing it in their free time, so, as you know, the disruption side of things at the moment is done on overtime (…) they're choosing to come in on their days off to enforce and to do the disruption side of things." (Enforcement lead, police-led site)

Implementation of tiered deterrence protocols

Programme sites gradually implemented tiered deterrence protocols based around actionable levels of enforcement and disruption when a cohort member was identified as continuing to be involved in violence and/or as disengaging from the support offer. Enforcement was also diversified in nature. Whereas it was predominantly led by policing in the early stages of the programme, a more pervasive pulling-levers approach was implemented over time, where other statutory powers were used to create a deterrent against future offending.

Although there were differences in execution, each site followed a similar staged/tiered pattern.

Stage one: warning the cohort member about their behaviour

This stage assumed that individuals were committing low-level crimes and most commonly as a single occurrence. It required the enforcement officer or the individual's navigator to contact the participant and make them aware that concerns about their behaviour had been raised. They would discuss with the participant the required level of compliance with the programme and reiterate the consequences of reoffending/disengaging. At this initial point, a general deterrence message was conveyed that they should either re-engage with the support offer/desist from crime or face escalated consequences:

"Once the nominal has been referred by [name], we would normally go round the house and make them aware that concerns have been raised (...) just chat – ask if there's anything we should know about, that sort of thing (...) we're in uniform yes, but at this stage, it's really about making them aware, that's all." (Enforcement lead, police-led site)

Stage two: a heightened police-led presence

The second stage was triggered when the participant demonstrated an escalation in the severity of the crimes committed and an increase in the number of incidents. This stage mainly consisted of the

issuing of a warning to the participant by the police and/or their navigator that the support offer would be modified/removed if they continued exhibiting those behaviours, followed by the site-specific deterrence strategy appropriate for stage two of tiered deterrence.

Localised examples of this included a heightened police presence in those areas where the participants' social circles tended to congregate (Leicester); random curfew checks (Wolverhampton); and applications for civil agreements/injunctions (Nottingham).

"So, phase two is going to be things like asset tasking management. Unannounced home visits (…) If we feel that there's enough there to go and build a warrant or get into that location to go and take their drugs away from them because we know they're dealing." (Enforcement lead, VRU-led site)

As protocols began to tighten, the capacity for individualised and targeted enforcement became more aligned with deterrence objectives of swift and certain punishment. This was evidenced through participant accounts:

"The police, about 15 minutes past 10, banging on my door in their van and that. Why would they be coming to my door at this time when they've only got to check daytime? Obviously, they ain't checking daytime, so they're clearly trying to get me." (Participant, police-led site)

Tiered deterrence appeared to have been the most effective when other stakeholders, including housing and social service managers, contributed to disruption efforts by threatening participants with housing or benefits withdrawals. As a participant from a VRU-led site said, *"Yeah. Actually, they already told me, like, you're under surveillance by police or something like that, and the drugs thing, the council women, you know, they could take the flat back."* Similarly, for a participant in another VRU-led site, *"It got to the point where I was just, 'Look, you need to fuck off coming round my house, threatening mam bout her rent money'."* This was particularly evident among younger participants who continued to deny their level of crime involvement or directed the blame elsewhere.

Individuals would still be given a chance to re-engage with the support offer/desist from crime, but continued failure to adhere to these types of sanctions led to stage three.

Stage three: formal legal measures

Programme participants reaching this stage of tiered deterrence had likely continued to offend, and their behaviour had escalated. The consequences here were usually the removal of the support offer and a move to the non-compliance enforcement stage, which constituted formal sanctions through organised disruption activities, such as the issuance of an arrest warrant or a request for a court hearing, most commonly led by the police. As detailed below, however, the slow functioning of the court system limited the effectiveness of this third stage.

As the demand for tiered deterrence and disruption interventions rose, enforcement leads increasingly spoke about disproportionate resourcing and the complexity of gathering enough intelligence to apply for court orders and warrants:

"It comes down to whether you want your staff on the streets doing disruption or back at base doing the intel." (Enforcement lead, police-led site)

Despite successfully establishing individualised disruption plans, the timeliness of enforcement was often impeded by delays in obtaining warrants or last-minute cancellations of court proceedings. One site described how the youth magistrates' court processed a large caseload slowly, making cancellations for court appearances fairly common. In one VRU-led site, the courts were under pressure from the prison service not to remand or deliver prison sentences to individuals, given the (over-)crowding in their prison system.

"When attending court, if they have been arrested for anything, then they're given so many more different routes, out of court disposals. So, it might be a community resolution, Youth Rehabilitation Orders. It might be police caution (…) anything to keep them away from a custodial sentence (…) you might be surprised at how many opportunities young people are given, even if they're fairly serious offences." (Data analyst, VRU-led site)

One navigator from a police-led site recounted a conversation with a custody officer who said, *"We are not taking him. I mean, what are you going to get out of bringing a [16-year-old] here? Because you will be taking him back to the same home. Just don't interview. Do a voluntary interview. Do it at another police station, but you're not bringing him into custody. You listen because the custody sergeant is God in custody."*

Although it might appear that this situation favoured the participant, it actually worked both ways, as several cohort members expressed frustrations that pending court hearings were hanging over their heads and preventing them from moving on in life:

"It's not worth it, the anxiety stuff; I've now got anxiety from waiting like six years for a court case, where I'm thinking, 'I'm going to jail. I'm going to jail'. It got changed [bail extension] five, six, seven times." (Participant, police-led site)

Communication and (in)congruence between support and deterrence

In Manchester and Nottingham, one individual employed full-time was responsible for managing and, in some cases, executing deterrence-related activities, whilst Wolverhampton, Coventry, and Leicester were having ongoing discussions around how best to enact deterrence initiatives as set out in their operating manuals.

As deterrence protocols tightened, better communication channels were established between managers responsible for coordinating the support and deterrence aspects of the intervention. On the ground, communication between navigators and disruption team members could sometimes be inconsistent, but navigators found a way to *deliver* deterrence messaging while ensuring that police were responsible for *enforcing* them:

"I don't enforce consequences; it's [name], and it's seen almost like it's almost detached from me. But I tell them what's gonna happen if they keep doing this, you know what I mean? I say, 'I'm not gonna do it'. I said, 'I'm here to help you. My point here is to help you, but by me helping you, I have

to tell you what's gonna go bad for you if you don't abide by the rules of the programme'. And I tell 'em that, and if they do get in trouble, I say, 'Look, I did try and inform you that if you keep going down this road, these roads, these things would happen'. So, I do tell 'em, but I try. And I think we try and separate that from what we're doing 'cause we're there more or less to help, but we just inform them of what will happen, you I mean?" (Navigator, VRU-led site)

As can be seen in the operating manuals, there was little intention for navigators and police enforcement to engage routinely. In retrospect, this may have created parallel systems, resulting in contradictory messages for cohort members. Some navigators – both police and community – felt that the contradictory actions and messages from different parts of the programme undermined the credibility of navigators and their rapport with cohort members and also reinforced a distrust of the police.

As a navigator from a VRU-led site said, *"We were engaging quite well with a lad; he wasn't involved in it, but he got arrested for something; the next time I met him, I could sense he was a bit aggrieved about it, and he was a bit angry towards me."*

"He did feel that every police officer was against him because he's so well-known; he'd be walking through town, and he'd be stopped, or they'd even, you know, say his name. And he'd be, it'd make him feel a bit like, 'Oh, everyone's against me'." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

Police-led navigators frequently raised concerns that front-line officers over-policed some of their participants, despite being told they were on the programme and being asked to stop targeting them. As a navigator from a police-led site explained, *"There was definitely tension between us [front-line officers]; yes, (...) communicating what we were doing and why proved a problem oftentimes."*

In the early stages of the full trial, levels of trust between navigators and enforcement staff were low. One potential reason was varied interpretations of the value of each other's work. In a police-led site, a police navigator suggested that frontline police regarded the goals of the programme as soft and inconsistent with a policing approach to dealing with violence:

"Police see it as, oh, you are taking the criminals out and buying them new trainers and pink and fluffy, not dealing with the criminals, so we are going to have to. Yes, it is quite negative." (Navigator, police-led site)

For community navigators, the distrust of police was in their use of intelligence, which the navigator felt was inaccurate and was used to harass some people in the cohort (although their being in the cohort may not have affected this police contact).

"They want to go in heavy with the, he has not stopped offending, so we're going to put in the deterrent side of things. However, he hasn't been offending. You can tell the frustration in my voice. This is just bad intel." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

Conclusion

As the programme entered its final years, the enforcement component of the programme came to function more efficiently. There was good collaboration at the management level, as well as a creative use of consequences from both statutory services and the police and a general alignment of organisational priorities. On the ground, however, a number of challenges remained, including resourcing of enforcement activities, communication and alignment of values between navigators and police, failures in the court system, and the programme's external identity. Most important was the practical contradiction of a single person simultaneously delivering a credible message of deterrence and seeking to establish rapport, as well as a common distrust of deterrence and policing (shared by some navigators, cohort members and their peers/families), which meant that the deterrence message was likely deployed suboptimally. Navigators found creative ways around this, such as detailing consequences in written form, expressing consequences in a protective way and using lived or vicarious experience of consequences to put forward a deterrence message in a way that also allowed them to establish relationships, maintain credibility and encourage engagement with support offers. Finally, although the deployment of enforcement became more efficient, endemic delays in criminal justice processes, such as court hearings and the processing of community orders, meant that the swiftness of consequences was rarely deemed feasible.

F2. How did delivery differ between police- and VRU-led interventions?

This section summarises the contextual differences observed in the sites. Our realist approach to the trial design relies on a CMO framework, where different starting conditions (in this case, the organisation leading the intervention – a police force or a VRU) are assumed to affect the delivery of the three mechanisms (deterrence, support and community influence), which in turn may affect the intervention outcomes.

As detailed below, we observed that VRU-led interventions committed to engaging cohort members for longer and had a much higher engagement rate but were less faithful to the front-loaded delivery of deterrence messaging. A potential outcome of this is that different ways of delivering the mechanism may affect different subgroups within the cohorts: police could potentially have better outcomes with lower-risk offenders, while the more resource-intensive approach of VRU-led sites may be better able to engage higher-risk cohort members.

The section ends by taking a critical perspective on the dichotomy between police-led and VRU-led approaches and suggests that Leicester may constitute a hybrid between the two contexts.

Background

The trial CMO configuration identifies the type of delivery team as the main contextual (C) difference across the trial. The delivery team was dichotomised into police navigators and community navigators. Two of the police-led sites – Coventry and Wolverhampton – had police navigators only; two of the VRU-led sites – Manchester and Nottingham – had community navigators with or without lived experience of violence and/or youth workers, while Leicester (also a VRU-led site) had community navigators working in tandem with statutory workers as navigators and/or police as navigators. The trial theory suggests that the different starting points were

important to how the mechanisms ($M_{1–3}$) of deterrence, enforcement and community were implemented and, ultimately, could result in different outcomes (O). In order to ground this configuration in evidence, this section details how the delivery of the mechanisms differed between police-led and VRU-led trials.

Sample

All trial interviews and field notes were included in this sample.

Findings

A thematic analysis was conducted to answer the research question: what are the differences between police- and VRU-led interventions? An inductive approach was used to generate codes, themes and subthemes. The key themes that emerged included approaches to fostering engagement, perceptions of the criminal justice system and enforcement, utilisation of multi-agency partnerships, definitions of successes and failures, and contextual differences between organisational culture and models.

Approaches to fostering engagement

Sites used various methods to foster engagement with participants, both during initial interactions and throughout their involvement with the intervention. Yet, there were some differences in how the police-led and VRU-led sites perceived support. These can be explained by using an analogy of pull-and-push forces; police-led sites would pull participants and offer them the support package, marketed as, "If you are ready and want to desist, we will help you." In VRU-led sites, however, there was a more pronounced push factor: navigators would communicate to participants that if participants *allowed* navigators into their lives, the navigators would help them. These two approaches were further illustrated in the 'Programme as a privilege', 'Support to foster engagement', and 'Demands of the programme' subthemes discussed below.

Programme as a privilege

Within the police-led sites, the support offer was advertised to programme participants as the chance to access a rare and lucrative opportunity that was available for them to exploit. This was often contrasted with business-as-usual services, which the prospective cohort members typically described as impersonal and as something that previously resulted in negative experiences. Participants were promised that if they engaged fully in the intervention, practitioners would do everything they could to support them in reaching their personal and programme goals. However, this was contingent upon the participant's willingness to take these steps. Notably, the hook in this offer was not the support package itself but an *opportunity* for participants to change their lives.

"He actually told me that if I want to work with him, I have to be serious about it, and I have to want to change my life." (Participant, police-led site)

A few quotes from the navigators illustrated a similar point:

"You have to reach a certain point where you say, 'All right, I am going to stop messing around now.' And say you are either working with us or you are not." (Navigator, police-led site)

"We have disengaged somebody for that exact reason because they need to give something back; we do the review, and there is a question on there, 'Are they contributing as well?' And then they might not physically be able to give us anything, but they can at least meet us halfway. They can be ready for appointments. And I think it is really important they know if they miss them, they are going to jeopardise their place on CIRV." (Navigator, police-led site)

This concept of programme engagement being a privilege was not limited to participant recruitment but was seen throughout the intervention as a method to maintain engagement and ensure compliance with the intervention's demands. It would be revisited if participants' engagement diminished or if they had a 'blip' in their desistance – a term for minor, non-violent offences committed during the intervention. As the quotation below explains:

"So, what I said to him was, 'Listen, we are having a two-week break, and I want you to reflect on everything I have done for you'. I mean, that sounds really bad, as if it is all about me, 'CIRV, what we are offering you and trying to help you with, you reflect on that. Spend two weeks doing that without our sort of service if you like, and then after the two weeks, I am going to re-approach you, and you are going to let me know how you feel'." (Navigator, police-led site)[4]

The privilege of being on the intervention was used in these cases to encourage participants to re-engage in what was presented to them as a unique and rare chance to change their lives, with participants being advised not to waste this opportunity.

Support to foster engagement

There was a general sense within VRU-led sites that the programme was an opportunity to address the fundamental gaps left by business-as-usual service provision. With participants often having had negative previous interactions with authority figures (e.g. teachers) and services, navigators deemed that engaging and building relationships with these individuals was a priority.

"[You've got] services coming and going, some letting them down, so that's why they'll say they don't want it, but then when you keep coming, and then you contact the thing, in the end they think, 'Aw, yes, go on. We'll give you a chance, innit'. So it's about building relationships." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

To foster these relationships, navigators promised participants that they would consistently provide guidance and serve as their advocates.

[4] This conversation was with a participant who had been involved in a minor non-violent offence while on the intervention.

“Participant: Yeah, I remember the first time. You know?

Interviewer: Can you tell me about it?

Participant: I wasn’t really cooperating.

Interviewer: Yeah? That’s fine. That’s fine.

Participant: Because I wasn’t really … I didn’t understand why someone would come and try [to] support someone else (…) but over time, they gained my trust.

Interviewer: Okay. How did they do that?

Participant: I don’t know, just a lot of showing up, you know, showing up and demonstrating that you're committed to being here to stay.“(Participant, VRU-led site)

Furthermore, navigators across all sites offered programme participants access to recreational or other miscellaneous support activities (e.g. boxing classes). This was often provided sooner in VRU-led sites due to their pre-existing relationships with various community organisations. When participants showed signs of disengagement, the support would not be withdrawn in VRU-led sites; instead, navigators would increase their efforts to demonstrate to participants that their initial promise of unwavering support was being kept. This was primarily done as an attempt to maintain engagement. As shown in the above extract, navigators would persistently re-emphasise this through their words and actions to build trust with participants and secure their engagement with the intervention. Once engagement had been secured, navigators were able to administer more official components of the service package, such as educational support and employment assistance, to foster desistance and behaviour change.

Demands of the programme

The police- and VRU-led sites also had differing demands on participant engagement. In police-led sites and in Leicester, likely given their tandem approach of community navigators and statutory workers/police officers as navigators working with programme participants, individuals were required to demonstrate a greater level of commitment and buy-in to the intervention. While both delivery models used the promise of support as an initial hook to engage participants, the police-led sites typically took longer to deliver that package because, acknowledging their policing identity, relationship-building took longer. In VRU-led sites, on the other hand, support was provided sooner and used as a tool to acquire engagement. There was an understanding of participants’ fluctuating commitment and a greater tolerance to their (non-)engagement (especially in the earlier phases).

“I don’t think there's expectation; I just believe that they just want the best for me and, like, try and push me to be better in life and try [to] succeed.” (Participant, VRU-led site)

While all sites held regular meetings between navigators and cohort members with the intention of fostering behavioural change, their approaches to those meetings differed based on their delivery model. VRU-led sites tended to have more casual meetings, prioritising relationship-building with participants before turning to conversations around desistance. One way this was achieved was by

giving individuals agency in choosing conversation topics and steering the meeting agenda; Manchester navigators were the most flexible in this regard, but Nottingham also offered this flexibility. Within these two sites, navigators placed emphasis on becoming a participant's advocate and establishing strong rapport, partly to counter participants' poor prior experiences with services and authority figures.

"Once they have got somebody that they trust and they see that you are there for the long run, not just when everything is easy, that you are there, [and] you come through the good and bad times, the bad times, I think that's what they appreciate." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

Both Manchester and Nottingham navigators aimed to be present and supportive of their participants, creating a safe environment in which to discuss what the individuals deemed important. While these sites did not demand a continuity of commitment throughout the intervention (i.e. their ebbs and flows in engagement were seen as natural), cohort members still had to demonstrate willingness to work with navigators; otherwise, they would be disengaged by (and from) the programme. Arguably, this approach may have benefited the recruitment of participants who would have initially been averse to the demands imposed on them by the police-led sites.

All sites aimed to create longstanding behavioural change within their participants and lead them towards desistance. However, this was more explicit within the police-led sites and Leicester, where interactions with cohort members were much more directly focused from the outset on fostering this change and encouraging desistance. While casual meetings were employed and rapport-building with participants was deemed vital for engagement, conversations were frequently centred around the goals of the intervention – ceasing criminality, disassociating from anti-social peers and demonstrating personal development – rather than on relationship-building itself. Navigators were still building rapport with cohort members, but they maintained a stronger and more consistent emphasis on demanding participant progress in accordance with collaboratively set goals.

This demand did not equate to navigators expecting instant desistance or a complete behaviour change upon engagement. Instead, as demonstrated in the extract below, participants in police-led sites were required to show a greater willingness to change and evidence this by completing tasks set by their navigators while simultaneously ceasing violent behaviours; they were expected to be ready to engage with the desistance process.

"He actually told me that if I want to work with him, I have to be serious about it and I have to want to change my life" (Participant, police-led site).

"[He thinks] that it's cool to go out with a knife. It's cool to go out and buy drugs and things like that (…) he thinks that that's acceptable; he thinks that that's okay. And I don't think that he's got to the maturity stage where he's like 'Actually, no, I want to do something with my life; I want to make something of my life." (Navigator, police-led site)

In comparison, at VRU-led sites, there was greater tolerance for participants who were not ready to change; they would be 'made ready' through support from practitioners and services.

"I don't think there's [an] expectation; I just believe that they just want the best for me and, like, try and push me to be better in life and try [to] succeed." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

Overall, the findings indicate the existence of differences in sites' approaches to fostering participants' initial and continued engagement, which could be an indication of different organisational values between the main delivery partners in the two models. While this idea will be explored further later in this report, data so far has demonstrated that the VRU-led sites tended to have a higher tolerance towards blips, would provide the support offer sooner and often saw the programme as a chance to show participants that there are people who would be there for them through thick and thin, that not all interactions with services needed to be negative.

Perceptions of criminal justice and enforcement

As alluded to in the section above, participants across all sites have had previous interactions with the criminal justice system, and, as a consequence, many individuals have had negative perceptions of certain practitioners, as well as the institutions themselves. Recognising this, most delivery teams attempted to distance themselves from the criminal justice system, especially the enforcement arm of the programme. Naturally, the VRU-led sites were more successful in this regard; police-led sites were inextricably linked with the wider criminal justice system and faced greater challenges in maintaining their detachment. The two subthemes, 'Negative police sentiment' and 'Enforcement perception', are discussed below.

Negative police sentiment

The findings indicate that participants within the VRU-led sites expressed significantly higher levels of negative sentiment towards the police. Many individuals at these sites explicitly stated that they would refuse to engage with their navigators if they were police officers; they were appreciative of their community navigators, who were deemed to be on their side. These views towards police were often derived from prior experiences, intergenerational trauma and perceptions of institutional discrimination.

"I would prefer to speak to someone like [community navigator] than a police officer because, me personally, I don't really like speaking to police officers like that. Because, obviously, [community navigator] does home visits; a police officer doing home visits, my parents wouldn't like it as well because my parents don't really like police officers." (Participant, VRU-led site)

These perceptions could also be due to one's unawareness of police being able to embody a preventative, public health role in violence prevention. For example, participants working with police navigators consistently described them as "not normal police officers."

"At first, you think, 'Oh God, a police officer'. But once you get to know them, you just realise that, actually, they're just trying to guide you now because you've had this mad lifestyle before, and you're trying to be normal, whatever normal is; they're trying to give you the steps to carry on, do you know what I mean?" (Participant, VRU-led site)

This might have been due to a slight bias among participants who chose to accept the support offer, especially within the police-led sites and Leicester (which had police officers/statutory workers working with the participants alongside community navigators), as accepting the support offer would mean that participants would have to accept that a police officer would be their navigator (or a close part of a navigator team in Leicester). Still, within the cohort interviews from the two police-led sites, police-related apprehension and some barriers to relationships with navigators were evident throughout all stages of programme engagement. However, they would typically diminish the longer the participant remained engaged. Once relationships were formed, police navigators were perceived as atypical compared to the wider force and were seen as supportive figures in participants' lives. Consequently, participants often maintained their negative views of the police as an organisation while building positive relationships with their police navigators. Leicester, which utilised both community navigators and police navigators, faced an interesting dilemma: in several cases, participants who formed relationships with lived-experience community navigators refused to meet with police navigators, at least initially, and in rare instances, entirely.

"When you start talking about that, there's going to be a time that you're going to have to meet one of the [police-navigators], then sometimes it can start impacting the engagement because they're saying, 'I don't want to meet the police; I don't want to meet the police'." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

Consequently, community navigators often had to explicitly state, and sometimes prove, that they were not police to be able to speak with participants. They still faced challenges in describing exactly how the intervention was working with the police and yet was not police-led, but these barriers were not as severe as those faced by police navigators. Navigators would frequently clarify that although they themselves were not a member of the police force, the broader team included the police:

"I've had some referrals say, 'No, we don't want it. No, I don't want (…) anything to do with you or police or anything like that'. We have to make it clear that we're not actually working for the police, but they've been referred through the police (...) That's why sometimes it's a bit of a stumbling block." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

Despite these negative sentiments, several participants across all sites demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the realities of policing. They acknowledged that while they themselves may have had negative experiences, most (or some) police officers were normal people who simply had a job to do.

Enforcement perception

At police-led sites, where programme involvement was framed as a privilege, some navigators reported being personally upset by repeat offending. These navigators, having invested significant time in providing support, saw this as a sign of disrespect towards themselves and the programme. Some felt that participants were wasting the opportunity and believed that (serious) reoffending indicated that these participants were not ready to change.

"But they need to know they can't take the mickey out of you because we need to be in control of what's going on, and they can't think, 'Oh, it's all right to go out and do some drug dealing because

CIRV are not going to get rid of me'. They signed that commitment form that you will be taken off the programme if you don't adhere to it. So, once you lose that sort of authority then it's not great." (Navigator, police-led site)

While navigators would still go to great lengths in an attempt to re-engage participants into the support side of the programme, those at the police-led sites were more inclined to refer participants to the enforcement arm if they were both disengaged from the intervention and reoffending, viewing this as a necessary response after a period of trying to support these individuals.

"So, they're not going to develop halos overnight, and things are going to go wrong. It's how wrong and how persistently wrong it is, and if there's a lack of effort coming, that can sometimes sway your judgement. But you just have to be frank with them, and say, 'Look, this is where we are at the moment; you're on the edge of being deselected; we want to work with you; we want to continue to work with you, but you've got to obviously improve here, here and here'." (Navigator, police-led site)

As previously discussed, practitioners across all sites generally sought to distance themselves from enforcement in order to preserve their supportive relationships with participants. Navigators with lived experience of violence felt more discomfort with delivering a threat of deterrence than navigators in police-led sites and some in Leicester, who viewed enforcement as an unfortunate necessity. Those more accepting of enforcement viewed or rationalised it as a choice: participants were presented with an option of either maintaining their criminality and facing enforcement or complying with the intervention and receiving support.

"As long as he's not doing anything stupid, you are not going to have to enforce any [deterrence] against him." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

None of the sites consistently applied enforcement strategies or deselected individuals from the support offer for what were deemed minor infractions (i.e. simple possession of a Class B drug). Still, the police-led sites were more comfortable withdrawing *elements* of the support package. This aligned with their philosophy that programme participation was a privilege that could be revoked.

"There's a line – I have been supportive, supportive, supportive, and it's, kind of, you have to, there has to be a line somewhere. They are kids often in survival mode, and they will take you for everything they can get without actually offering, like, giving you anything back. And you have to reach a certain point where you say, 'All right, I am going to stop messing around now', and say, 'You are either working with us or you are not. And if you are not, then you will be turned over'." (Navigator, police-led site)

In contrast, VRU-led sites were usually opposed to using support withdrawal as a lever within enforcement. This was consistent with their belief that participants required unwavering support from those who advocated for them; navigators feared that withdrawing the offer would trigger negative past experiences with (social) services and lead to even worse outcomes or participants' complete disengagement. Instead, they would persist with supportive measures while reminding the participants that maintaining a criminal lifestyle would eventually have a negative impact.

"Interviewer: 'We know you have done a robbery since we last met, now we are not going to go to the gym'. Is that something that would be used in the programme?

Navigator (VRU-led site): No. Not at all, mate; not at all."

Across all sites, disruption was universally seen as a last resort, and practitioners made concerted efforts to re-engage participants, offering multiple chances following their blips.

Utilisation of multi-agency partnerships

Police-led sites benefited from collaboration with a lived-experience mentoring programme within their partnership model. Following a needs assessment, some participants were also allocated a community navigator (similar to what VRU-led sites would provide) to address identified needs, but police remained their primary navigators. Those lived-experience mentors would meet participants, with or without their police navigators present, often having more casual encounters and attending recreational activities (e.g. the gym) with them. However, as with the navigators in VRU-led sites, they would also have more directed conversations around criminality and its associated risks, drawing from their own experiences. These community navigators would be involved in the organisation and delivery of recreational (go-karting) and directed (knife-wound first-aid) group activities, and they were seen as instrumental in bridging rapport and engagement gaps; they were not police officers, and they often had some shared experiences or characteristics with participants, as outlined below.

"I've got one [participant] who is okay with me; he respects me, but his preference is to speak to [partnership lived-experience mentor] and that is because she is a female, because perhaps there is a link in terms of heritage, because she's [got] learned experienced and because she is quintessentially not a police officer in any shape or form; there is so much more that he can discuss with her that she's not obliged to share with [anyone] or document [what has been said]." (Navigator, police-led site)

As demonstrated in the above extract, partners who were not police were able to form relationships with participants when police navigators faced challenges. In some cases, these partners also vouched for police navigators, as the perspectives of these lived-experienced mentors and *their* willingness to work with police officers held significant weight with cohort members.

Definitions of success and failure

All sites determined programme success as desistance from criminal lifestyles, engagement with (and positive outcomes from) the support offered and willingness to work with navigators. However, the VRU- and police-led sites again had differing perceptions of the levels of participant engagement that warranted success, as described in the next section. Participants also predominantly viewed success as securing stable employment that would offset their need to earn money through criminal activity. Desistance was also viewed as a success: while some would reminisce about the excitement and income derived from their previous lives, many concluded that the risks of such a lifestyle outweighed the benefits; they were tired of the stresses of being involved in criminality. Failure, on the other hand, was more often seen as a lack of support or

broken promises from practitioners – experiences similar to those previously encountered by business-as-usual services. Inability to change an individual's behaviour and secure their long-term desistance was also seen as a programme failure. The most prominent three themes here were 'Police-led sites: a broader definition of success', 'VRU-led sites: support as success' and 'Participant closure'.

Police-led sites: a broader definition of success

Police-led sites had higher expectations of participants when defining success, often demanding more significant changes in behaviour and sustained desistance sooner than their VRU-led counterparts. Their goals, benchmarked and assessed through repeat Outcome STARs measures, focused on fostering rationality and independence and on improving participants' interpersonal relationships, particularly with family members. There was also a strong emphasis on participants changing who they were and maturing while on the programme.

"Since I've been working with him, he's come from being involved in county lines, going missing, all that sort of stuff; I've been working with him, and I hadn't been working with him for very long; he's now back at school, he's settled, he's behaving himself." (Navigator, police-led site)

This focus was coupled with a pressure to demonstrate the programme's value to the wider police force through tangible outcomes. Thus, there was often a greater emphasis on desistance, which can be measured by crime statistics. This emerged as a consequence of the organisational culture of police forces, where units compete against one another for limited funding opportunities and staff.

VRU-led sites: support as a success

In contrast to the above, VRU-led sites put greater emphasis on keeping participants safe and providing them with consistent support throughout their engagement. More focus was placed on engaging with cohort members, forming strong relationships and offering them personal and practical support. At the same time, measurable behavioural change and desistance were given less immediate importance. Also, more time was allowed for modifying one's behaviour:

"If you put a young person in a disadvantaged community where there's not much available and not much there, you know, it's very hard for them to flourish in that area, so they need support, they need guidance, they need an adult, they need everything to keep them going. Whereas that's what [name of the delivery partner] has provided to us, the mentorship, the funding, everything there to keep the young people on track." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

In some cases, simply providing a previously isolated participant with support and a trusted adult was considered a success. However, adequate support provision, which led to improvements in participants' lives, such as acquiring a driving license or enrolling in (and completing) an education or training course, was seen as a more significant success. This aligned with an organisational culture focused on helping as many people as possible, with failure often being viewed as a participant's refusal to accept this offer. While desistance from criminality was the main aim of the programme, it was conceptualised as a result of a successful support application that would naturally come with time, rather than being something demanded of participants. Importantly,

VRU-led sites were less comfortable referring a participant who had, at one point, engaged with the support provision to enforcement. However, serious reoffending was not taken lightly in any of the sites. Yet, in the case of enforcement referral or support withdrawal in VRU-led sites, this was more frequently attributed to structural or external factors, such as poverty, adverse childhood experiences and exposure to neighbourhood violence, rather than a flaw in the participant or the practitioner.

Participant closure

All sites agreed that changing participants' lives and ensuring lasting desistance from crime within a six-month delivery timeframe was a challenging task. Yet, some VRU-led sites kept participants in the programme for longer, even up to a year, consistent with their goal of providing sustained and unwavering support.

"I am quite committed [to] my young people; if I take one on, I will tell them I am not going until you are ready. I know it says 12 months, but I think we have got a bit of leeway in the sense that it can be pushed a bit further if we [need it] to."(Navigator, VRU-led site)

Police-led sites and Leicester, on the other hand, adhered to more stringent criteria for exiting participants from the programme, typically aiming to disengage them around approximately the six-month mark (although this timescale was person- and needs-led, informed by Outcome STARs assessments); yet, all sites were given leeway in keeping participants on for longer if this was deemed beneficial for all parties. Once participants could no longer gain any further benefit from the support package and/or had changed their behaviour and did not appear on police intelligence for a set period, they would be exited as programme graduates.

Contextual differences between organisational models and their delivery structures

This section aims to understand the differences in approach to support provision between police-led and VRU-led sites. However, the findings indicate that this distinction does not fully capture the differences seen in their delivery structures. Namely, within this evaluation, three contextual frameworks emerged: centralised police-led models (Coventry and Wolverhampton), centralised statutory/voluntary-led models (Leicester and Nottingham) and a decentralised statutory/voluntary-led model (Manchester). Although Leicester and Nottingham are within the same organisational model, their delivery models do not align with that classification: Nottingham is, in some respects, closer to Manchester, while Leicester seems closer to Coventry and Wolverhampton. This is, in part, due to Leicester having probation and police officers within its leadership and delivery structures, as the most prominent organisations in the multi-agency partnership. In contrast, Nottingham had more substantial involvement from the city council and youth justice practitioners. As will be discussed, these differences created a distinct ethos at each site regarding the programme team's views on the support and deterrence aspects of the intervention and further shaped each organisational culture.

To conceptualise those cultural differences across sites, it might be useful to envision them as a scale. On the one end, Manchester adopted the most pro-social, child-first and trauma-informed approach to its delivery. This was followed by Nottingham, which had a similar position towards

young people, although it was seen as slightly less intensive in its welfare focus than Manchester, with a greater emphasis on fostering behavioural change. The delivery teams in these two sites predominantly comprised individuals from the community with lived experience of some of the issues that participants faced, be it violent crime, material deprivation or negative previous interactions with social services. It should be noted that some navigators from Nottingham were youth justice practitioners, but they still acted in a manner closer to navigators with lived experience than police navigators; their own past was often referred to as the main motivation to provide participant support, especially since they themselves had been through what was perceived as inadequate business-as-usual support. This resulted in a more empathetic form of support that, in the opinion of the delivery team members, was essential. Navigators were often convinced of the perceived value of their work and had less desire to prove the intervention's worth to their higher-ups or outsiders, as was the case within the police-led sites.

"I think a lot of them, you've been to uni, you've done your work and you think that we've got it all sussed. You don't know about life, like most of the mentors at [delivery team organisation] have got lived experience. Like I've been in foster care myself; I've been, when I was younger, in trouble with the police. I've had [an] unstable upbringing. I got expelled from school. I started my education and done my degree later in life when I was in my late 20s. So, I can kind of understand a lot of the young people." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

While there was also a strong focus on building and maintaining relationships, compared to VRU-led navigators, police officer navigators in Coventry and Wolverhampton (CIRV) displayed a greater focus on achieving behavioural change within the cohort, fostering rationality and an understanding of the consequences of their actions. This was perceived as paramount to ascertaining long-term desistance – the key metric of programme success. The approach here was driven by a culture which demanded tangible results to prove the intervention's worth, requiring quantitative data to justify the programme's existence. The preventative work undertaken within these sites was contrary to the more traditional role of police; there was a desire to justify themselves to wider departments that viewed the approach as either a luxury or 'soft and fluffy' compared to more established criminal justice tactics; they needed to prove its value to the often sceptical voices within their organisation (West Midlands Police).

"CIRV has got very negative, what's the word, very negative, kind of, things attached to it. People see it as, 'Oh, you are taking the criminals out and buying them new trainers and pink and fluffy, not dealing with the criminals like police should'." (Navigator, police-led site)

Consequently, intervention resources had to be targeted and utilised effectively to reach these goals, so the police-led sites turned to more technocratic principles, choosing to focus their efforts and support on participants who demonstrated higher levels of commitment and desistance or a clear desire to change.

"I think it is important that our time and energy needs to be focused [on] the ones who want to change and are ready to change." (Navigator, police-led site)

Finally, Leicester again occupied a unique position: while not a police-led site, its delivery model aligned more closely with that of CIRV than with that of Nottingham and Manchester. Culturally, the intervention was more technocratic and results-driven, with a similar desire to prove the intervention's worth, as outlined in the extract below.

"If they did decide to roll it out, generally it's not gonna be a cheap programme. But I know them, they're looking for the KPIs [key performance indicators], aren't they? Everyone wants the KPIs. Whether they say it or not, everyone wants a KPI in some form or shape, you know what I mean, to see if they're getting bang for their buck, you know what I mean? We'll put in two million to this. What have we got out of it? If there's only three people what ain't reoffending, then it's not good enough for us. We need to go and see a sizeable difference in what we're doing to make sure it makes sense. If not, then we might go back to business as usual." (Navigator, VRU-led site)[5]

This site incorporated elements of both models described above, utilising a tandem delivery team of lived experience navigators alongside criminal justice workers (police and probation officers). It is important to note that stakeholders, practitioners and programme participants across the sites were not homogeneous groups, and while overarching cultural themes defined how each site generally viewed different aspects of the intervention, a diversity of perspectives existed within them. Interestingly, these perspectives represented a variety of paradigms, such as the technocratic versus experientialist approach to the provision of support.

While key performance indicators were not part of the evaluation, slight differences between sites emerged with regard to their definitions of success. Some sites (mostly the police-led ones) were more focused on numbers and tangible outcomes, which they used to justify the intervention to the higher-ups. Other sites, such as Manchester and Nottingham, were somewhat more focused on the less measurable, intangible outcomes: a behavioural shift, an improved pattern of engagement with the support side of the programme and/or a greater focus on the prolonged support provision if this was likely to lead to graduation from the programme.

Furthermore, how the sites perceived violent crime and their approach to fostering behaviour change in participants delved into the debate around rationality and agency in criminality, contrasted against structural factors and determinants of criminality. The differing perspectives around crime influenced support provision, with the more technocratic and rationality-based police-led sites implementing a more goal-focused and structured support to achieve behaviour change, whereas the more experientialist and understanding VRU-led sites implemented a more sociological model, aiming to support their participants in order for them to empower themselves to change in light of structural disadvantages.

[5] Within the context of focused deterrence, a key performance indicator would imply a tangible metric to measure intervention and practitioner success (e.g. the recidivism rate of engaged individuals or the percentage of participants recruited).

Conclusion

This section sought to explain how mechanism delivery varied across programme contexts. Each intervention (delivery) style operated effectively within specific contexts. The approach used by the VRU-led sites required a longer initial engagement period due to its greater emphasis on relationship-building and fewer demands for strict adherence to programme requirements.

This model, exemplified in Manchester, might have a greater potential to reach participants who are deeply entrenched in criminality and those with strong negative sentiments towards police and service providers. The Leicester model, which utilised both community navigators with lived experience and statutory workers (e.g. police, probation officers and youth justice practitioners), might be able to access harder-to-reach groups (as in Manchester and Nottingham) while maintaining stricter demands for engagement and compliance with the intervention. Leicester's participant exit protocol is somewhat tighter and primarily data-driven, although, in practice, it was person- and needs-led, so individuals stayed on the programme for longer than originally anticipated. In Leicester, one of the main exit criteria is no involvement in offending for at least three months prior to the planned exit, alongside the delivery team's assessment of one's readiness for exit (i.e. they could be kept on for longer if there were still additional support elements to be completed).

In contrast, the model used in police-led CIRV sites might be better suited to participants on the periphery of criminality due to its focus on fostering behavioural change and adherence to programme demands. While these participants may also exhibit negative perceptions of the police, it is assumed that these attitudes would not completely inhibit their engagement, but lower engagement rates should be expected.

Overall, police-led and VRU-led sites' perceptions of violent crime and approaches to fostering behavioural change reflected debates within criminology, with arguments of rationality and individual agency contending with structural factors and social determinants of crime. These differing perspectives were exhibited in site approaches to programme implementation. Police-led sites, operating within a more technocratic and rational choice-orientated culture, provided goal-focused, structured support to achieve behaviour change, with a stronger demand for desistance (needed to demonstrate success to their wider organisation). In contrast, VRU-led sites, which were more grounded in an experiential and sociological understanding of crime, aimed to empower participants by supporting them to overcome structural disadvantages, providing more understanding around participant blips.

Finally, this section began with an assumption that context was a dichotomy of police-led and VRU-led. While there is some evidence for this, the Leicester delivery model occupied a middle ground between the two, deploying a tightly controlled model that used a diverse range of enforcement techniques coupled with credible community-based navigators who were able to engage cohort members effectively. It is plausible that a third contextual factor could explain mechanism delivery; this will be re-examined in subsequent publications.

F3. How did the multi-agency nature of the programme influence its delivery?

Multi-agency collaboration was a core component of the YEF focused deterrence framework. As with any partnership, this created opportunities and challenges. This section documents how the multi-agency partnership played out across the sites and how site leaders were able to maintain these partnerships over almost three years. Factors such as having a detailed framework for developing the implementation were cited as useful, while the use of random allocation complicated development and partnership working. Having sufficient lead-in time, involvement of an analyst from early in the project and meaningful engagement with community members were viewed as crucial foundations. Leadership and governance were noted as important for managing differing priorities between organisations, and in-person engagement was important for partnership sustainability.

Background

The YEF focused deterrence framework presents focused deterrence as a multi-agency activity that involves police and a range of other statutory services. These services include youth justice; probation; social services; education; housing; and health, as well as community and voluntary sector agencies that can provide various services based on the identified support needs of each individual. Indeed, having a multi-agency partnership, led by police or by a statutory-based VRU, was an essential criterion for funding.

A commitment to multi-agency collaboration reflects a common paradigm in statutory violence prevention activities in the UK. This is underpinned by the Serious Violence Duty (Serious Violence Duty, 2022) and Serious Violence Strategy (HM Government, 2018), which assert that violence prevention cannot be the job of the police alone. Statutory services and community/voluntary sector organisations can play an important role in the upstream prevention of violence by addressing the distal (e.g. childhood adversity and school disengagement) and proximal (e.g. substance misuse, unemployment and peer influence) causes of violence.

In the trial, how multi-agency partnerships were constructed varied across sites, reflecting the need to fit the intervention into existing systems. Bringing multiple organisations with unique values, priorities and personalities together to collaborate adds complexity and risk to any activity and was identified during co-alignment as a significant risk to effective delivery.

This section uses primary data to reflect on how multiple agencies cooperated to deliver this multi-pronged intervention.

Sample

The sample was programme team members from the four areas (Coventry and Wolverhampton had a partially shared programme team). Interviews were conducted online in summer 2025 as programme delivery was drawing to a close.

Findings

Initial engagement – gaining and sustaining buy-in

A consistent theme across all sites was the importance of preparation time. The programme began in April 2022, with a goal of starting the delivery in spring/summer 2023. The first randomisation was in May 2023, and all programmes had begun engaging participants by July 2023. Compared to other programmes in which the site leads had typically been involved – usually funded by the Home Office – this was a long preparation phase. As one site lead noted, reflecting on the usual rapid cycles of central government funding:

"They usually ask you to bid, don't confirm it until June, want you to have started in April before they've announced that you've got it, you know, and then [be] finished by the following March." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Site leads noted the value of this lead-in time in building the intervention, with some describing it as essential to programme success. The preparation phase enabled teams to understand local contexts, identify and get buy-in from potential partners and integrate evaluation processes before the start of delivery. It also allowed them time to build consensus across partners and create momentum before programme launch. More extended preparation periods meant that partnership building was not rushed or superficial but involved deliberate, meaningful efforts to co-design elements of the programme that, for partners, imbued it with integrity and credibility. Sites navigated this engagement phase differently, tailoring it to their local contexts. Leicester, for example, used workshops and engagement sessions to generate genuine ownership among communities. Being transparent about the purpose of the intervention and honest about the role each partner would play was seen as central to building legitimacy:

"Making sure to be clear and transparent about the aims of the intervention, the reasons behind it and the predicted benefits of it. They were also open about the potential role of each partner, the estimated length of the project, as well as the evaluation component attached to it. This helped with introducing the initiative and making them [communities] feel like they were part of this." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

This reflects a broader point: that early engagement was not simply about gaining signatures of support but about creating confidence that the intervention was qualitatively different from business as usual. Partners needed to believe that the programme would be delivered with integrity and that their contribution was recognised and valued.

Reflecting on the governance aspect, another programme manager emphasised the necessity of high-level buy-in. Strategic endorsement from senior leaders brought credibility and assisted in acquiring wider support for the programme:

"Early doors, it was really kind of beneficial in terms of the initial strategic engagement; it was top-level engagement in terms of the buy-in, buy-in that was really kind of instrumental at that stage. (…) [It] was sort of vital in terms of being able to, kind of, sell and get buy-in to the project generally." (Programme team member, police-led site)

This indicates that partnerships were not sustained purely on goodwill at the frontline. Strategic backing allowed projects to overcome initial scepticism and ensured that collaboration was embedded within formal decision-making processes rather than relying on personal networks alone. A CIRV team member highlighted the importance of joint decision-making. In their case, buy-in was reinforced by a governance model that ensured no single agency could make unilateral decisions:

"The way it worked within West Midlands Police, it wasn't sort of just a sole decision that [name] could make on behalf of [site]; we had to ensure that we were consulting and bringing on board those partners." (Programme team member, police-led site)

This approach generated a sense of shared ownership, ensuring that any major changes were collectively debated. As a VRU-led site lead said, *"Any changes to the programme needed to be taken back to that project board because we undertook to do this together, so we've got to, kind of, consider any changes together."* Sustaining buy-in required careful attention to partnership governance. Teams worked hard to embed decision-making processes that emphasised mutual accountability, thereby reducing the risk that partners would disengage when difficulties emerged. Nevertheless, early engagement was often undermined by uncertainty around funding. Most sites' experiences were that operational partners were reluctant to commit resources or staff time when financial arrangements were still unsettled:

"One of the big challenges was around the recruitment stage for those partners delivering with us because, at that point, we didn't have the grant agreements from the Youth Endowment Fund. (…) There was buy-in from the strategic level to attend those [early design] meetings, but that operational level, the delivery partners were quite difficult to engage because we didn't know whether we would be funding them or not." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

This highlights a structural tension in intervention design: projects are expected to mobilise collaborative working before certainty about funding is secured. While senior leaders could afford to engage on a provisional basis, frontline partners often had to withhold commitment until budgets were confirmed.

One site's experience adds a further layer of complexity. Its bid was initially rejected but later accepted after it expanded the geographical scope to include an additional area. This left the site with uneven levels of partner engagement:

"We were knocked back and then, kind of, brought in, kind of, brought back if the area was widened; I think we were a little bit more on the back foot in terms of some of the engagement with some of the, kind of, the [area name] spaces. (…) You had two areas at slightly different stages. So, it was, kind of, working with one set of partners that were very, kind of, committed, informed, knowledgeable and then the second set, it was just more, kind of, delayed, and it was closer to the start of the project. So, it wasn't, I think, as well embedded as a, kind of, a concept and approach as it was with [the main city name]." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Uneven trajectories of engagement could create disparities in partner understanding and enthusiasm within the same site. Where one set of partners had months to internalise the

programme logic, another set had only weeks, leaving them at a different starting point and potentially less prepared for implementation.

Early engagement was not seen as a one-time event but a dynamic process. Preparation time, transparency, senior endorsement, joint decision-making and certainty of resources all influenced whether partnerships were genuinely embedded or only provisionally secured.

The role of the Youth Endowment Fund framework in the programme design

All sites identified the YEF framework as a very useful tool for having those early discussions with potential partners. The framework provided them with clear guidance and was, at times, used to justify certain programme requirements. As a programme team member stated:

"The framework that [the] YEF provided (…) was actually, kind of, quite strong in that sense. It was, kind of, guiding enough but not too prescriptive, so, kind of, [it] enabled us to, sort of, apply that locally to get the, well, we've chatted about it, and we've got that high-level agreement, but now, you know, what would it look like boots on the ground sort of thing? So, it was quite a good flow, I suppose, into that sort of delivery-ready phase." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

It also enabled sites to be clear and transparent around what the programme will involve, why and how:

"Very early on, we convened a couple of things to support us with the governance. (…) This is where we ensured that we had a terms of reference our partners were aware of, their expectations." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

In some ways, the YEF framework acted as both a shield – protecting delivery leads from criticism – and as a guiding star, allowing site leads to legitimately dismiss suggestions or attempts at mission creep that would have diverted the intervention from its original aims.

However, a minority of sites reflected on the last-minute changes in the guidance and the YEF framework, specifically around working with violent individuals rather than groups, which emerged as a necessary adjustment in order for a randomised design to be put in place. As a programme team member explained:

"And then there was also an additional factor, which is that (…) we'd passed the bid around networked individuals; all the sites had talked to effect about urban street gangs. So, you've got a network, and then you're asked to not work (…) to the network but to work with individuals. Which meant that elements of how we'd intended to build the programme couldn't proceed." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Overall, having a framework to work towards seemed beneficial, but most sites would have preferred if some of the changes had not been introduced late(r) in the process.

Flexibility within a set structure

As already indicated, the level of flexibility allowed around the design of the programme was important in accounting for differences in the local context. This varied from having delivery at the city and county levels to variations in the lead delivery partner and in existing funding structures that could make procurement and the overall functioning of the intervention challenging. For example, one site struggled working within a city council that went bankrupt, which slowed down a lot of decision-making processes:

"So, although people would commit to things in our meetings, it kind of then, things took longer; things didn't always happen the way they should, and it was because things suddenly were beyond people's control." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

CIRV experienced some of the differences between their two sites emerging quite naturally, even though they shared some of the management team:

"The blueprint plans in terms of how we delivered across both sites were the same. (…) There were some nuances around because the makeups, like offender management, [work] slightly [differently] in Wolverhampton than [they] worked in Coventry. So, that naturally [bore] out some nuances in how it operated in each site, but, in terms of the resource, that was pretty much even on both sites." (Programme team member, police-led site)

Once the blueprint for each programme had been agreed on, there were still many changes over time as the intervention developed and moved into the delivery stages – this was seen as a process, a journey. As a CIRV team member suggested:

"And as we went along, there were things that we discovered that probably didn't go as smoothly to plan, and we had to, sort of, mitigate along the way and try to divert it in a different way to make it work for us. But, probably, [it] was slightly different to the original plan that we may have had around the community element of it, the disruption element of it." (Programme team member, police-led site

This move from the design to the early implementation stage was usually the time when the prominence of certain partners reduced and/or the need for others emerged. As a programme team member highlighted:

"I think some of the partners that we had that were engaged in the design stage were, kind of, always, sort of, one or two steps removed, kind of, almost in terms of places to refer to. They were bits of the system that needed to be engaged in terms of the design so they could understand where some of these referrals might come from. But, [they] weren't necessarily going to be involved in the day-to-day or the more intensive, kind of, bit of delivery in terms of the work. So, I think, that's where, kind of, as we went into implementation and delivery, they didn't necessarily go anywhere, but [the] connection dropped a little bit with them because of the nature of how it was being delivered." (Programme team member, police-led site)

Some partners would often stay in the steering group and oversee the delivery rather than moving into the provision of services, while the engagement of others ceased somewhat organically. For example, some sites reflected on times when probation was less involved, simply by the nature of the cohort members at that point in time, but would pick up its engagement if, for instance, a prospective cohort member's prison release date was approaching. One site also gave an example of realising that, moving forward, they would need fewer external services than they originally thought:

"What we found, as the project rolled on, is that there wasn't a huge demand to refer to other services. Actually, that single relationship [with the navigator] was more important. So we moved the budget, and at that point, the [third party provider] came in just to work with children and adults." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Given the evolving understanding of what enforcement would entail, as discussed in the section above, most sites saw the benefits of this flexibility predominantly within the support offer; being able to tailor the components to their local context was seen as a strength. CIRV, for example, reflected on the benefits of going through a hiring process for the programme's police staff rather than assigning officers to a specific role, as would be a more standard policing practice. Having people apply for the position *"meant that actually people [who] had applied for the role wanted to be there, and there was a sense of 'I'm doing what I want to do, and I've applied'"* (Programme team member, police-led site). However, when externally recruiting their delivery partners or specific community support groups, sites often went into tendering processes, and their existing procurement strategies were raised by some sites as a challenge for identifying and onboarding relevant partners, especially given the set timescales for the project and previously described issues around grant agreements (i.e. the time it took to gain access to resources to pay those partners and subsequent changes in the target area that required an expansion of partnerships). This combination of factors was sometimes experienced as challenging, as the sites had to onboard a provider fairly quickly but could not directly discuss the exact requirements of the role with them before first completing the tendering process. For example, in CIRV, tendering meant that *"we couldn't then directly speak to the individuals without knowing who [we] would be bringing on board as being those procured partners (…) but knowing that we had to quickly mobilise the project to have those partners in place"* (Programme team member, police-led site). Once they agreed on the partner, they could still not discuss (m)any further practical aspects of the role before the provider was actually in place and doing the work, given the quickly evolving nature of the role and difficulty imagining what it might look like on the ground. Also, they could not start doing the role before being paid (which depended on the grant agreement). So, some sites really felt the pressure to get things up and running while still negotiating the administrative and budgetary aspects of the intervention.

Another team experienced slightly different issues around the provision of third-party services, and its issue was related to an often-small pool of available candidates. This meant that *"everybody knows everybody"*, making a transparent tendering system more challenging. Voluntary sector, at least in this one site, also moved away from grant funding to commissioning about two decades ago:

"And that kind of shrinking financial pot means that you've got smallish organisations that are used to – live, live, live – year to year, traipsing around the latest funding routes and trying to fit those sorts of criteria, which means that they can be, (…) [it] seems, rivals, and, so if you, you have to be very careful around procurement." *(Programme team member, VRU-led site)*

Another site, on the other hand, faced challenges in that they did not want a big, nationally operating organisation with no local footprint to sweep in and win the contract for programme delivery; they wanted someone who was recruiting people with lived experiences of violence from their local communities. Yet, *"procurement people always tell you, 'You cannot write that in; that disadvantages some groups', so we had to find an acceptable way of putting in the specification [their requirements]."* (Programme team member, VRU-led site). Thus, while flexibility in the overall design was seen as a strong point of this intervention, there were still local differences and barriers that the teams had to acknowledge and overcome prior to, as well as during, programme delivery. As discussed throughout this section, these barriers included the need to tender and work within the existing procurement strategies, a small pool of the third-party local service providers and a lack of suitability in contracting larger organisations with little to no local footprint/experience.

Enablers of and barriers to partnership work

Partnership functioning during delivery was heavily shaped by the structures and systems in place. Clear governance arrangements, co-location of teams and accessible information-sharing mechanisms were widely described as enabling factors. Conversely, disconnected data systems, cultural differences across partners and wider criminal justice backlogs were cited as persistent barriers that often diluted the intended effects of the model.

Governance structures as enablers

One site highlighted the benefits of a strong governance system that placed authority for day-to-day management in the hands of a single strategic lead, even when staff were formally line-managed elsewhere:

"So, even though probation [and] youth justice are formally line-managed through their organisation, partners have given that strategic manager the authority to manage them as one team." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

This arrangement meant that, operationally, different agencies worked as one unit, reducing duplication and creating shared accountability. They also described how the innovation of "*nominated senior responsible officers*" created collective responsibility across the partnership:

"It's created almost that safety around it so that nothing escalates too much. We've got a home for anything and everything that happens. And the ethos is, 'We're in it together', rather than it being one particular agency's headache or issue." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

These accounts suggest that governance mattered not only for efficiency but also for culture. By embedding a "*we're in it together*" ethos, governance structures fostered resilience and prevented agencies from distancing themselves when problems arose.

A different site also found governance useful as a lens to identify potential inequities within delivery:

"They picked up on some disparity in the number of enforcement plans per ethnic groups, which I don't think I'd have spotted (…) if we weren't talking through it at the project board agendas." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Here, structured oversight created opportunities for reflexive monitoring, surfacing disparities that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Challenges around systems and information-sharing

While governance helped, information-sharing systems were often a source of frustration:

"We don't all use the same systems, and we don't use the same systems as [partner], and none of the systems talk to each other." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

The absence of interoperable systems created duplication, confusion and the risk of error. It also undermined the principle of swift, coordinated responses to risk, since partners could not always access or reconcile the same information.

The use of the shared eCINS platform illustrated what could be achieved when systems worked well:

"So they, community navigators, youth justice, probation workers and police, all have access to the same case management system, which allows that kind of day-to-day sharing of information and making sure you've got the whole picture, rather than just part of it." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Yet even here, questions of access and trust remained sensitive, particularly where lived-experience navigators required access to case files *"because there was a whole trust issue about people with previous convictions"* (Programme team member, police-led site). One VRU-led site mitigated this problem of data access by employing a *"need to know"* type of approach with different stakeholders, whereby individuals could only see the information relevant to their participants, regardless of their personal/professional background, thereby making it more equitable within the team. While everyone had access to relevant notes and general information, the enforcement/deterrence plans, for example, were a bit more locked down and, some information was for police only:

"So, not even probation or youth justice [got] to see that. So, we try really hard to make sure it's as equitable as possible and that we're not putting additional rules in because people happen to have previous convictions. We try and do it across the board: does this individual need to know this information? Yes? Well, they can see it then." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Still, information governance and determining the boundary between over- and under-sharing of data remained a significant barrier in this project. Even some analysts struggled with this because:

"At the start, you read all the policies, and you're like, 'I should share absolutely nothing'. And then, as you go on, you're like, 'Well, this is really unhelpful of me'. So, you become more open to it, but I think that's a lesson that I've personally learnt is, and also, that it's an ongoing challenge." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Consequently, sites spoke quite passionately about wanting to change the data-sharing systems, although they were aware that the likelihood of this happening was slim to none. As a programme team member noted, *"I'd love to make it so that everyone has access to the same systems. But do I think that's realistic? No."* (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Another programme team member went into a bit more detail around the changes they would like to see that they know the system is capable of but that would still be difficult to implement:

"I would change to – I don't know how we're going to make this happen. But basically, we've got, so we do use a shared case management system, but it's all double-keying. So, it's all where we need to get to it, with information-sharing for multi-agency working is we have systems that talk to each other. So, they kind of connect up, and they will share information automatically so that you see the whole picture when you go into your particular case management system. That really isn't going to happen. But we know that there's [a] capability out there for different systems to talk to each other. And we're just not very mature locally in respect of that, which is why we had to bring in this standalone case management system into [programme]. So, yeah, we'd absolutely, it should be, once you've made the case and you've got the grounds for sharing, you need it to be really automated for it to work well, whereas we still use really old-fashioned methods." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Some of these concerns stem from the introduction of GDPR, whereby previously, council workers, for example, could log onto the police system and gain access to almost any information. *"There was a huge amount of shared inputting in other systems. GDPR was kind of rushed and a slightly different relationship to an organisation – brush things away"* (Programme team member, VRU-led site). This emphasises the importance of finding the right balance between protecting individuals' data and their right to privacy and supporting the joint goal of multi-agency partnerships working for the betterment of people's lives. The physical location of teams was also raised as something that could affect one's ability to integrate systems and routines. For example, CIRV, as a police-led site, faced challenges with its police navigators being located away from the remainder of the force:

"I would say one of the greatest barriers was probably being located outside of the police building. So, whilst it's helped with the multi-agency working, it was a real barrier to our [police] integration within the local policing context. I think it's a little bit out of sight out of mind if I'm honest, when you have to then go and ask for things, like support with disruption, you're not very present in people's minds." (Programme team member, police-led site)

The problem here was not only symbolic. Being outside the police building meant that partners lacked everyday visibility, which reduced informal problem-solving and made it harder to secure operational support quickly. As noted in the earlier section on deterrence (F1), establishing the

credibility of the CIRV programme within routine policing was a challenge. This could, in part, be explained by their physical separation from other police colleagues.

Staff turnover as a barrier

Staff changes, particularly within the police partners, were another persistent challenge. One VRU-led site noted how police rotation policies could undermine working relationships:

"We had really good buy-in from some specific police personnel, and that they [partners] really like them. And then they moved because that's what the organisation does, and then you kind of have to pick it up a little bit again and get in with those new relationships." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

This cycle of building, losing and rebuilding trust was resource-intensive and demoralising, especially for voluntary sector partners, which struggled to understand why effective personnel were removed from posts just as they had developed credibility. However, having external funding and a flexible team with a diverse skill set mitigated some of the issues around staff turnover and maintained overall stability within the programme.

Cultural differences across partners

Finally, the cultural and organisational ethos of working in a multi-agency partnership created tensions. One VRU-led site lead highlighted divergent orientations between youth justice and police partners:

*"Youth justice has a real c*hild-first *agenda, whereas the police talk about c*hild-first *but not if a child had done something wrong: that just goes out the window, which isn't quite c*hild-first*."*
(Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Such differences in organisational philosophies complicated joint decision-making. Where youth justice emphasised welfare and rehabilitation, police partners often foregrounded risk management and enforcement. Without mechanisms to bridge these perspectives, collaboration risked breaking down into contestation over priorities.

These accounts demonstrate that partnership effectiveness was contingent not only on goodwill but on the infrastructures that supported or constrained collaboration. Governance structures that fostered shared responsibility and reflexivity were powerful enablers. Co-location and interoperable systems enhanced everyday integration, while their absence undermined trust and efficiency. Staff turnover and cultural differences exposed the fragility of collaborative arrangements, highlighting the need for stabilising mechanisms and deliberate investment in shared ethos.

Sustaining partnership engagement

If early engagement was about building enthusiasm, the delivery phase was about sustaining it. All sites recognised that enthusiasm fades once the novelty of design workshops ends and that ongoing commitment requires deliberate effort.

The fragility of momentum

Sites were able to maintain the momentum by sustaining it on everyone's radar and not letting the conversations around it go quiet. This was done by making things relevant to the stakeholders, showing up in the right places, for example, after a serious incident or coming to different meetings and always emphasising one's link to a programme, even if tenuous. Keeping an interest is not only relevant for partner engagement but also for the core teams. As one site lead explained, VRUs are still quite hierarchical, so they need the chief and senior officer to sign up for any new project, and those individuals *"can get distracted or diverted off to something else"* (Programme team member, police-led site). So, building strong relationships with senior leadership and *"making life as easy as possible for them"* while also ensuring they did not get saturated or think that a programme became [a VRU's] sole focus, which could also lead to a loss of momentum, was a delicate balance. A VRU-led site's programme member captured this reality clearly:

"So, I guess with the whole multi-agency stuff, it's just a forever journey and a forever endeavour."

Their description reflects how maintaining engagement was not a one-off challenge but an ongoing process. Similarly, another programme team member described how momentum was lost when design stages were delayed. Their bid to be one of the project sites went through rejection, resubmission and eventual approval, leaving the team on the back foot with some partners. This had consequences during delivery:

"Building that enthusiasm again was challenging, especially when working with different partners on such a broad level." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

This suggests that early stumbles could have had longer-lasting effects.

Reliance on the involvement of the right individuals

Partners' engagement often hinged on specific people rather than whole organisations. This was particularly evident with regard to participation in panel review meetings. Those meetings were a crucial aspect of the partnership, whereby partners would come together, share available information to gain a holistic picture of a prospective cohort member, prepare approaches to engage individuals with the programme and discuss an individual's progress through the programme, yet it was important to have the right people in the room:

"Using social services as an example, [it] is an absolute minefield because there are millions of social workers who cover different children. So, having a panel meeting and expecting the right person to be there has been a work, you know, a learning curve for us." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

As alluded to in the quotation above, large services, such as children's social care, posed challenges in identifying the right staff for panels. For example, different people needed to be involved based on the geographical area of interest, the cohort member's school or pupil referral unit attendance, and other nuances that were not always clear from the start. While it was easy to imagine that one service would have one service lead who would know everything about their organisation and staffing, it

quickly emerged that there were many different aspects of the work that each service was covering, which needed to be navigated by sites. Without clear strategies to identify and secure the attendance of the right people, panels risked becoming ineffective or disconnected from frontline realities.

The role of regular meetings

To mitigate these risks, sites invested heavily in regular multi-agency meetings. One programme team member explained how these forums opened access to services that participants would not otherwise have received:

"A lot of our young adults don't realise what they're eligible for. And through having dedicated contacts with our support workers, with DWP, they've actually been able to open a lot of routes that they didn't know they were eligible for and [that] our support providers didn't know that young people were eligible for." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

These meetings served as more than administrative updates. They were spaces where information was exchanged, hidden barriers were uncovered and responsibilities were clarified. The process helped ensure that no single agency carried the burden of problem-solving alone.

Another team member also noted the motivational effect of meetings:

"They're [partnership meetings] quite energising, aren't they? Because that enthusiasm, that buzz, really, I think they motivate each other there." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Here, the relational dynamics of meetings reinforced morale. Seeing other partners committed to the same goals reassured teams that their efforts were not isolated.

CIRV offered a further example, describing how co-location created a similar motivational environment:

"For me, it's the co-location, so (…) it doesn't feel like we've got a particular room, a particular partner sitting, we've got like a little, a little burrow of rooms here rather than one big space, but we all mix in amongst different groups." (Programme team member, police-led site)

This shows how both physical and relational proximity supported the sense of being in it together. Where partners worked side by side, engagement was easier to sustain, and informal interactions reinforced the formal structures of governance.

Strategic risks to sustained engagement

Programmes required constant visibility within busy organisational landscapes, as competing priorities, shifting strategic agendas and staff turnover meant that enthusiasm could quickly dissipate if the intervention was not actively reinforced. A programme team member noted how fragile engagement could become when serious violence was deprioritised at the strategic level. They warned of a scenario where declining crime rates could reduce police attention to preventative efforts:

"So, for example, this is like, could be a living nightmare for us as a [VRU] – serious violence gets deprioritised by the police because they've seen a downward trend. So, they're like, 'That's not our biggest threat now, so it's off the table'. That's the worst-case scenario for us because straight away it's like, well, their eyes won't be on us then, and we need them to be committed. So, then you have to do lots of work to say, 'Yeah, we understand it's not a strategic priority at the moment, but, however, this work's going on, so you don't need to worry about it becoming one again in the future because we've got it all covered'." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

To guard against this, sites invested in keeping the programme visible, ensuring that decision-makers had up-to-date information to brief upwards or justify continued support. This reflects the political nature of engagement: sustaining partnerships required not only relational work at the operational level but also constant advocacy at the strategic level.

It was also not automatic. It depended on constant effort to refresh interest, reinforce the programme's value, and manage personnel changes. Regular meetings and co-location helped to maintain momentum, but structural vulnerabilities remained. Over-reliance on key individuals, shifting strategic priorities and the constant risk of disengagement meant that partnerships had to be actively nurtured throughout the life of the project.

Lessons learnt

By the end of the early delivery period, sites had formed clear views on what enabled multi-agency partnerships to work and what needed to change. Their reflections reveal lessons not just for focused deterrence but for collaborative violence reduction more broadly.

A recurring lesson was the importance of adequate time to prepare, design and embed evaluation processes, yet delivery partners often underestimated the technical and administrative demands of a project of this complexity, making it a challenge to negotiate the project's research design with wider stakeholders.

The impact of evaluation and randomised allocation

Sites reflected positively on evaluation being an integral part since the design stages. They thought it increased the value of everyone's work, as there would be some tangible results to reflect on, and it maintained stakeholders' adherence to the model and the blueprint. The framework prompted people to think carefully about any potential changes they considered implementing and really made them stick to the programme design: *"We've had occasions where we've considered what we want to do in terms of the fidelity of the model and evaluation."* (Programme team member, police-led site)

As a programme team member emphasised, too, they had the discipline to implement the intervention as intended. They benefitted from the flexibility of the design, where changes were able to be made, but they also did so *"in a really measured, recorded way so that you know what the changes are that you've made. (…) [So] working with evaluators from day one, rather than trying to bring them in later on [has been beneficial]."* (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Yet this way of working also shone a somewhat negative light on current practices, where services were inclined to take quick wins, and there was a lack of patience for proper evaluation, as mentioned already when discussing organisational differences in work practices. One team commented that:

"One of the biggest challenges was the evaluation side and actually doing the evaluation properly. And obviously, the randomised control trial as well. So, that was a real, kind of, cultural change for us and made us realise as a partnership how immature we are in terms of how we evaluate because we're all exercised about the fact that this is going to take a couple of years, or longer, really. But it's obviously, it's high quality, so we should, and everyone is committed to it. But that was quite a debate." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Some teams further reflected on the benefit of working with the evaluation team from the start. They appreciated the guidance and the support provided, especially in discussing some of the challenging aspects of the intervention with their partners. As a programme team member commented when reflecting on the requirement for this project to involve an RCT component:

"In terms of cracking that issue, we leaned on you guys [the evaluators] quite a lot, I think, for some of the arguments around that. In particular, it was very helpful in terms of to be dialled into; we did a big sort of voluntary sector networking event (…) and (…) I was going to say we wore people down, that's not right. But I think we did, kind of, win the discussions, win the arguments to a certain extent." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

So, as already implied, the randomised controlled aspect of the study took a lot of time to get buy-in from the partners as well as the sites, and some were vocal about the problems this caused them, especially in the early stages. For example, a site struggling to meet required timelines stated:

"And I think on top of all that, we also had the issue of the randomised [controlled] trial to deal with and resolve and get partners' buy-in in that." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

One site, reflecting on the challenges of the enforcement component, noted, *"Actually, the biggest thing was not the deterrence. The biggest thing was the RCT"* (Programme team member, VRU-led site). However, they did learn to embrace the study requirements. In fact, in this interview, they admitted:

"The rigour around evaluation has been a curse but also a blessing. I think it's, that's allowed us to, I think we've ended up being quite committed to the evaluation. When I put the bid in, it was just to get some money locally so we could do something. I think I've turned; you've turned me." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Randomisation also challenged the way some sites decided to work with communities. For example, one site found it difficult to engage community organisations, such as the local radio station, in a programme that had no referrals; even if someone qualified for the intervention, they might still not receive it due to being randomised into a control group. So, they changed the way they conducted their community engagement and opted to give small grants to organisations to support the programme instead. But, at the end of the day, *"I was really pleased with the difficult*

conversation stuff that we commissioned because that felt like it was granular, and it got into communities." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

The randomised component was not well understood in another site:

"Everybody assumed that we would, the people in the intervention group would get everything, and the people in the control group would, crucially, stop getting business-as-usual services. And it was only when it was really clear that business as usual could carry on with control group participants and that if any harm was detected in the intervention group, we would, or there's processes in place to stop the programme altogether, that I think made people a bit more confident and happy with the programme." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Despite the initial challenges presented to the sites by the evaluation and study design, they eventually began to see the benefits that it brought to the sites and realised that it could strengthen their delivery model. Sites were also very pleased with the ability to have interviews with the evaluation team, which they saw as *"useful for reflection as practitioners"* (Programme team member, VRU-led site) and *"like it's a bit like therapy, going back in time and reliving it all"* (Programme team member, VRU-led site).

In addition to the perceived benefits of working with the evaluation team, sites reflected very positively on the support and understanding from the funder, which contributed to an encouraging working environment. In a programme team member's words:

"I've enjoyed working with [the] YEF and yourselves [evaluators]. (…) I think it's been well-supported. And I think the fact that [the] YEF have, kind of, understood the need to support project management, I think lots of projects I've been involved in in the past, there's been a reluctance to do that." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Nevertheless, there have been instances of occasional lack of clarity in the YEF guidance, especially in the early stages, which caused unnecessary delays. As a site lead explained:

"But some of the issues we came up against [were] the times, you know, we were drip-fed things, so if we'd known at the start that this is everything we need to do at the end of nine months [preparation phase], I think it would have been easier for us." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

A programme team member also discussed the relevance of being clear in one's requests but more broadly, as an important factor for multi-agency partnerships, which was linked to the existing data systems and a general lack of funding. As they stated:

"People will commit, on paper, to everything until it's in practice, and then they're like, 'Oh, that's actually quite a lot to do'. So, I think being clear in what you want and trying to be consistent. So, for us, with data collection from providers, we've tried to be consistent and not change what we've asked for at all because I know that that's been negative feedback from other projects that have come from other partnerships, is that people change what they ask for. So, then that's quite hard

again if you don't have a lot of money invested in systems to then provide all that information." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

As the quote above alluded to, sites raised significant challenges that their analysts faced (assuming they had an analyst) and spoke at length about the need for a designated business support person to assist in a project of this breadth. This will be discussed in more detail in the section below.

Having an analyst and a business support person should not be optional

Analysts were often used as a central point of contact and as the person who would be able to record and collate data from different systems into one usable format. As one site stated, analysts were also invaluable in aligning information with police intelligence. Related to the analyst role was the timeliness of the intervention for individuals of interest, too. For example, a programme team member at the same site reflected on the need to work with cohort members at the right time, which was a lesson they found important for some other similar programmes, too:

"If you've got a strict [criterion] of when you think is the right time to intervene with them [cohort members], you need to get there as soon as they meet that [criterion], don't you? Whereas, often, we're doing quite big batches of data on a regular basis; you have people that's only several months down the line, they actually get spoken to long after any of the things that happened, long after the right moment really." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Having a designated programme analyst who can review the data almost in real time could assist with the provision of services at the right moment.

Another key message from the sites was the importance of business support staff in helping analysts manage their workloads and the need for improved recruitment strategies in this area. As one team member shared:

"We ask them [analysts] to input loads of information, (…) there's quite a lot of admin involved with all these meetings. So we had, we put funding in for it [business support person], and we just couldn't bloody recruit. Recruiting through the police just didn't attract the right people. Recruiting through [the] city council, but then they couldn't see our system, so it was, yeah." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

In addition, given the high number and frequency of meetings in this project, there was a strong need for someone to take minutes, send out information in advance and follow up with people on actions. However, this was not an issue just for the core programme teams, as it was also raised as a problem for other agencies involved in the partnership, as well as the council; it was common for managers to perform business support duties. Not having an individual in this role reduced the accountability people felt for the actions they agreed to in meetings, making the overall system less efficient.

Authentic community involvement

Another lesson emphasised by programme managers was that genuine community involvement requires more than symbolic gestures. One programme lead made this point explicitly:

"When we say the communities will be involved as partners, this is what we mean by it. (…) We were very explicit, always checking out, 'Are you actually on board, or is it just something that you're kind of saying?'" (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

This deliberate insistence on clarity and accountability reflected an awareness that statutory services often resort to tokenistic forms of engagement. One site went further, framing community involvement as a cultural shift rather than a technical task:

"Everyone will talk about community engagement and involving communities, but when it comes to walking the walk and actually letting them into the actual partnership rather than, kind of, just something that we engage with, that's quite challenging. Because people worry, and there's trust issues and things." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

These reflections highlight that community partners needed not only a seat at the table but also mechanisms to scrutinise and influence decision-making. Without this, legitimacy gains risked being superficial and short-lived.

Learning from cultural shifts

Several sites reported that working in close partnership with non-statutory organisations shifted attitudes among statutory professionals, particularly among police officers. A programme team member reflected on how engagement with lived-experience navigators challenged entrenched assumptions:

"Understanding that the behaviour, really abhorrent, terrible and everything, but actually, there's a person behind it, and if you max out on those relationship elements of stuff, then actually, you can build trust, and that's good for any organisation, whatever your remit or mission is." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

This illustrates how exposure to diverse perspectives has influenced professional practice. Police officers began to recognise the value of relational work and became more comfortable collaborating with non-traditional partners. These changes in professional culture were seen as a potentially lasting benefit of the programme.

Balancing difficulty with success

Finally, sites emphasised the importance of celebrating achievements to counterbalance the difficulties of working with high-risk cohorts. Teams reported that it was easy to become absorbed by challenges, such as capacity pressures, disengagement or system failures, but that sharing success stories helped sustain morale and demonstrate value to partners. This lesson underscores that sustaining partnerships is not only a technical matter but also an emotional one: partners need visible reminders that their collective work is making a difference.

Overall, teams learnt that effective partnerships require investment in technical capacity, a willingness to adapt professional cultures and deliberate practices of recognition. These lessons also highlight broader implications for violence reduction: sustainable multi-agency work relies as much on relational and cultural change as it does on structural design.

Conclusion

Programme teams universally felt that the long preparation period – compared to typical Home Office projects – was essential in allowing the sites to build on existing networks, co-design interventions and warm up partners. They underscored that strong preparation and a long(er) lead-in time can reduce potential issues down the line. To support the establishment of this early trust between the programme teams and wider stakeholders, sites frequently organised workshops and engagement sessions with partners and promoted the transparent communication of programme aims and partners' roles. The YEF framework, which will be discussed in more detail later, provided structure and legitimacy to the early programme design while allowing adaptation to local contexts. However, funding uncertainty and late changes undermined the original momentum that sites built with their partners and, in some sites, created tensions with operational partners that were reluctant to commit to the partnership without contracts in place.

Site leaders reported that strong governance, co-location of stakeholders and frequent meetings with partners supported collaboration and accountability within the partnerships. Dedicated funding enabled sites to have ring-fenced staff and enforcement budgets and to work with higher-risk individuals. Yet barriers persisted: disconnected data systems, staff turnover (particularly in policing) and cultural differences between statutory and voluntary partners slowed the delivery. Equally, procurement processes sometimes clashed with local priorities.

As the programme continued into delivery, programme teams noted that sustaining the enthusiasm of partners was challenging. One of the ways this was mitigated was by having regular in-person meetings to keep partners motivated. This also enabled sharing of information so stakeholders would have a holistic view of participants. Where present, co-location further strengthened relationships and, conversely, physical distance risked teams becoming out of sight, out of mind.

Sites stressed the need for adequate preparation, patient design and the early integration of evaluation to strengthen their programmes. Dedicated analytical and business support capacity was vital for information governance. Authentic community involvement required persistent effort to avoid tokenism, while sharing success stories helped balance the challenges of working with high-risk cohorts.

Overall, the establishment of strong partnerships and systems with shared accountability and continued investment in the emotional, cultural, administrative and technical elements of the partnerships increased the likelihood that separate parts of the programme would work together.

F4. How was data used in delivery?

This section documents how data and intelligence were used across the trial. In particular, analysts were essential to the coordination and targeting of the intervention as well as to the efficient

randomisation and throughput of the trial cohort. Shared systems, where available, also allowed data privacy to be maintained while facilitating a shared understanding of cohort members' needs and activities. 'Soft intelligence', often provided by community and voluntary sector partners, gave valuable context for understanding how best to approach cohort members, but requirements around data privacy sometimes led to these organisations being excluded or not having sufficient information to successfully engage individuals.

Sample

Secondary data sources were reviewed and examined for relevant data on the subtopic of defining the violence problem. First, information submitted by programme teams applying to or, subsequently, involved in the Another Chance Fund project was reviewed. This included information on violence problems, race equity plans, programme monitoring and community engagement plans. In addition, primary qualitative data was collected with the programme management team and/or programme analysts to gain a more detailed understanding of the use of data in shaping the eligibility criteria. Finally, interviews with navigators provided additional knowledge on the most common strategies used to share intelligence with those third-party providers (predominantly) and voluntary sector partners responsible for the delivery of the support offer.

Findings

For this section, the sites predominantly defined data as "*any information we hold about a person, their offending and more*" (Programme team member, VRU-led site). This was primarily grounded in local police/crime data, often including specific information about offending and victimisation, followed by the data from the PINS system (a regional system with prison-related data) and Police National Computer data for out-of-area offending. Sites also relied on intelligence received from various sources, including community members, but one of the issues with intelligence was that it was more difficult to export such information and analyse it en masse. As such, police/crime data was often used to understand the bigger picture, especially to support the creation of local area problem profiles, while intelligence assisted in getting a more nuanced understanding of individuals' (cohort's) behaviours.

Defining the violence problem

One of the first steps in deciding whether focused deterrence was a suitable intervention for an area was to have a clearly identifiable and definable problem, in this case, (group) violence against a person. Most sites used their strategic or local needs assessments, serious violence needs assessments and/or risk assessments done by their partners to create their initial problem profiles. These were supported by the crime data, multi-agency partnership data and, to an extent, intelligence from the community to identify areas with emerging risks of violence as well as to understand the types of crime most prominent in different areas. These profiles would look at a range of nonpersonal indicators, such as the number of violent incidents, violence rates against the population, change in violence patterns over time and/or a comparison with the same time a year ago, or they could even use predictive tools to identify the likelihood of something happening in the next quarter, for example. They would also map hotspots to narrow down areas of interest. These

assessments could focus on specific age groups, too; for this project, most sites were predominantly looking at the violence problem for under-25-year-olds. As part of the bid submission for the ACF1 funding, each site prepared a local violence profile, specifying the types of violence, the prevalence of violence and the localities where violence was most prominent, as well as the cohort most commonly involved in these types of offences.

Already in this early stage of the project, the role of the multi-agency partnership and the importance of having a range of data sources to better inform the programme rose to prominence. While most information came from the police/crime data, health services made a significant contribution, too (e.g. health data, ambulance data, and accident and emergency data), as did youth justice services and community safety partnerships. Some sites also used census data and other big public data sets to get a more comprehensive picture of the problem. One aspect where having access to data was crucial was in mitigating potential bias because having a human inputting and sense-checking the information was seen as helpful. For example, a police-led site stated:

"The fact that now we will use not just [the] police system, we corroborate that with schools, children's services, etc., and having to fill in or actually extract further information into the police system then helps with the biases. So, it's not purely based on one system alone or one agency alone. It's in a combination with other local authorities and systems just to reconfirm and collaborate what we're actually trying to achieve and why we try and do it in the first place." (Programme team member, police-led site)

A VRU-led site shared a similar experience when it came to understanding its local problem. The site had a specific team in charge of writing serious violence local area profiles for each of the local authorities, as violence could look quite different across this county. These profiles were based on multi-agency data and increased the programme team's understanding of the local issues, as indicated below:

"[This] helps us understand the picture (…) so you get things on exclusion data down to [the] school level, which is pretty useful, and Fingertips, public health data. We get data from [regional ambulance service] on callouts, (…) like a, what was the reason for the call? So, you can kind of understand it a bit more, rather than just the categories, so we get that data, so that again helps us understand the wider problem. We get data from the [name] and [name], the slavery and exploitation team. So they, it's not person-level data, but it kind of helps you to understand, but it's like the number of referrals, the location of where the people that have been referred live, the nature of why they were referred and then whether that was crime or not crime. Yep, and then we also sit at, like, partnership boards." (Programme team member, police-led site)

While police and crime data played a big role in identifying and defining the violence issue, the input from wider partners supported the creation of a more comprehensive problem profile, providing a deeper understanding of the local area's needs.

Identifying eligible populations

As focused deterrence is a resource-intensive intervention and only suitable for individuals with a significant history of violence in areas with a clear violence problem, identifying and defining the

eligible population was the next crucial step. This was achieved by first identifying the problem that the programme was aiming to address, as discussed above, and setting up eligibility criteria that reflected the cohort involved in that problem. In the trial, eligibility criteria revolved around the age of the individual, their residency, the types of offences they had been involved with and the recency of those offences. This was primarily informed by police/crime data, but information from multi-agency partnerships was used to supplement that data and provide a more nuanced and holistic picture of the cohort member. As one VRU-led site commented:

"But, I guess that's why we still had these panels because it's still very important and relevant, the intelligence, but also the full picture of it, so we don't appear purely data-identified and then we sort of ball in there and then find out they're [the prospective cohort member] not suitable. The idea of that [multi-agency] panel is to actually have that sound checking amongst all the partners." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

While such an approach worked well most of the time and assisted with limiting potential bias by relying on multiple data sources, occasionally, initially identified potential programme participants no longer fitted the criteria when it came to the programme delivery stage. Reasons for this included, for example, that they aged out of the programme, moved away from the area or did not offend in the preceding 12 months, which could indicate that they desisted. Here, too, the relevance of multi-agency partnerships emerged strongly, as they often shed more light on an individual's or their family's circumstances.

Some sites also offered a referral pathway into the trial, whereby any individual (e.g. a professional, a member of the public, the prospective programme participant themselves or a concerned parent) could refer someone into the programme and provide evidence as to why they believed that person would benefit from it. This information would then be taken to the referral panel, and that individual would be discussed by the panel in the same way that individuals suggested through police data would be. Most often, the individual would already be on the police's radar, and the panel would be aware of them. Occasionally, it would be clear that this person should be referred to some other service, rather than the programme, and the team would help facilitate that. Finally, there were instances in which a referred individual would be eligible for the programme. This was usually the case when there were some intelligence gaps, whereby their behaviour did not trigger any one system alone, so having them referred by a professional or a community member would enable the panel to look into this individual in more detail and decide on their eligibility. This pathway enabled the inclusion of individuals who might have been missed if relying solely on police data, emphasising the importance of diverse data sets and sources of intelligence for a complex programme like this one. As one VRU-led site clarified:

"There can sometimes be gaps, so it might be that there are things that have been in the police data, but actually their organisation [youth justice] isn't aware that that's going on. So there can be gaps between either understanding, and sometimes, we present police data, but because they have got gaps here, they may have previously thought maybe they're not suitable [for the intervention], but actually, [combining] them or [filling] in the gaps makes them kind of have a better all-round picture of what might be going on with that person." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

A team member from one of the police-led sites explained their referral process:

"So, the referral can come in from any person. It could be self-referrals from out and agencies, police, etc. (…) This information is then looked at on the internal police information first. That information is, like, all collated and [corroborates] what we know. We then do a visit. So, then further data is then collected. (…) So it might be the fact that someone who's dealing drugs or involved in robberies, etc., (…) parents saying there's a lot of signs of this taking place but not reported. So, unreported data. So, we pick that up, then we feed that back in, in the police data and update our reports. And then we take it to the [name] triage process, (…) whereby all partners are present. And when I say all, I'd say [the] majority, such as schools, (…) colleges (…). We've got a youth offending service, we've got children's services, social care, and we did have NHS turn up as well." (Programme team member, police-led site)

It is worth noting that both police-led sites had the referral-only pathway (trial 2), which is slightly different to what some VRU-led sites defined as a referral pathway (referral by exception), and might have been somewhat wider reaching, especially in this first step of receiving a referral from anyone in the community. For comparison, most VRU-led sites would only take referrals from members of their multi-agency panel meetings (i.e. professionals).

Apart from the partners mentioned in the quote above, multi-agency meetings often included housing, mental health providers and social workers. Housing emerged as especially important in getting the accurate address for the prospective programme participant, as this seemed to have been one of the most unreliable pieces of information the sites had on individuals. This could be either due to the transient nature of programme participants (e.g. no stable abode or frequently moving addresses) and/or the lack of up-to-date information on their most recent address, which often led to a waste of resources and frustration for the navigators attempting to initiate first contact. Housing would also assist in finding out who else might be at a specific address, which could be useful for navigators making the first contact.

"They might have one address, but they're [housing] like, 'No, they don't stay at that address'. It's a useful one. Like, if there's any challenges to engaging them, like, I say, 'We know the mum's there, and she won't be helpful', something like that." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

So, including them in multi-agency meetings was important for mitigating some of these emerging issues.

Finally, when monitoring the individual's progress, all sites had designated dashboards and data-systems (as has also been explained in the section on multi-agency partnerships), where the programme team could log relevant updates, assess one's progress towards set targets, consider referring the individual to different support services or the enforcement arm, and/or decide that the individual was no longer benefitting from the programme and should either be disengaged (i.e. if they kept offending or stopped engaging with the support side of the programme for prolonged periods) or graduated from the intervention (i.e. if they successfully completed the prearranged goals and demonstrated desistance from offending). Usually, sites ran daily (police) queries on their cohort members, updating the wider team during their weekly meetings.

The role of third-party providers

Most Another Chance programmes involved third-party providers as part of their support offer or as providers of the community voice. The latter was mostly done through one's lived experiences of violence, serving as an example of desistance and advocating for the maintenance of the community's prosocial norms and values among programme participants. Third-party providers' pre-existing links to the community and their ability to create a range of opportunities for cohort members, such as engagement with sport services, gym memberships or attendance at a recording studio, was seen as a strength of the support intervention. Within this aspect of the programme, data was used primarily to identify relevant partners who could enrich individuals' experiences in the intervention and lead by example. Business support people and data analysts were crucial here too, as they made sure that every navigator was connected to a number of services in their area, which could be particularly relevant towards the end of the programme. As one VRU-led site stated:

"We've had examples where we've connected with, like, religious, kind of, regular sessions, and that has helped them [the cohort members] get interested back into the community. So, support with [the] transition out of the programme can be really embedding them in their local area."
(Programme team member, VRU-led site)

It was important to include those partners in the design stages too to capitalise on their knowledge of community violence and violence intervention strategies, as well as their own experiences of violence and the criminal justice system. Including them could assist in creating a programme that was more relatable to cohort members and different from what they have experienced so far with business-as-usual provision.

Third-party providers played a significant role in identifying eligible individuals by providing 'soft' intelligence on potential programme participants, supplementing the often-rigid and quantitative data from the police by adding nuance to the overall picture of an individual. In some sites, third-party providers were also the primary providers of the support package (i.e. navigators), highlighting again how different this programme was intended to be from what cohort members might have experienced before. Using their own knowledge and experience to get through to programme participants created a relatability that often assisted in encouraging the participant to sign up for the programme and other services and aided in building stronger relationships with individuals, which enabled the programme participants to open up to their navigators and see potential avenues to desistance. When it came to programme monitoring, third-party providers often used informal intelligence on cohort members that they gathered through their links with various communities to supplement the individual's profile and offer additional insight that could lead to an improved support offer for that person, referral to the enforcement arm or termination of their involvement (e.g. due to successful graduation).

Overall, while the level and type of involvement of third-party providers in the intervention varied by site, their participation provided nuanced insights into programme participants and their family members. These insights often could not be gathered through data from the police or statutory services. The insights they could offer were made possible by providers' embeddedness in the communities and their pre-existing relationships within their local areas, which have been

invaluable for the programme and enabled sites to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding programme participants, their families and the wider local context.

Engaging communities in the delivery of the programme

Communities are one of the three main pillars of focused deterrence programmes, along with to enforcement and support, but they tend to be the least articulated pillar. In Another Chance programmes, each site has the flexibility to interpret this concept and engage communities in the way they think is best for their local context.

The role of the community rose in prominence in the design stages, when some sites involved community representatives in the co-production of the programme design. These representatives provided invaluable insight into problems they were experiencing locally and advised sites on opportunities for reintegration and prosocial life that could be created for programme participants. Yet, it was important that this relationship went both ways – that the community became as integrated into the programme as possible and that the programme maintained its visibility and presence in those very communities. As a police-led site explained, communities can help in providing additional information, but only if programmes are out there:

Well, with [programme name] here, what I've also found is, with the community engagement part of it, so, having held events or going to colleges and being part of police operations, so having stalls, etc., has also helped us gather data. Because we then [sat] ourselves in the community, embedded ourselves, explained what we do, and then from that conversation, you might find [community member's name] telling us further information, whether that's about an individual or an area. So it's, again, putting ourselves out there, I think, is really helpful." (Programme team member, police-led site)

Communities also often provided neutral spaces for navigators and programme participants to meet and/or for aspects of the programme to be delivered. In the cohort identification stages, as well as the programme implementation and delivery stages, communities' roles further revolved around community navigators, who were directly supporting programme participants. As mentioned in the previous sections, navigators were important for gathering soft intelligence on cohort members and their families. This information assisted in defining eligibility criteria and creating a whole picture of prospective participants. This was quite important when considering someone for enforcement, as it could help the team decide which deterrent/enforcement method to choose or to understand whether someone's behaviour might be a consequence of exploitation and, if so, to target the adult exploiting the child.

Furthermore, as representatives of the community, navigators were more relatable to cohort members and had firsthand experience with the criminal justice system. As such, they could provide credible advice and nudge individuals towards desistence while understanding the struggles they might have been going through. Finally, communities often provided feedback to the programme on its overall standing in the community or any potential changes they may have seen in their immediate area due to the programme, and they provided another avenue for the intervention to gather data on different aspects of its delivery. Thus, building strong partnerships with communities

enabled the programmes to understand and identify the problems around violence they may have been experiencing, to provide support in identifying the eligible cohort, to seem more credible to prospective programme participants and to monitor the unofficial yet tangible impact the programme may have had in their local area.

Sharing intelligence with the delivery team

Once a prospective cohort member had been identified, and if they were randomised into the treatment group, the delivery team would attempt the first contact. This was predominantly done by the navigators, be they police officers, community navigators or a combination of community and statutory workers. However, to enable them to make this first approach, some data about the participant had to be shared with the navigators. As discussed earlier in this section, most offending data would come from the local police systems, PINS (often used for the last known/release address) and the Police National Computer. Some personal data could also come from youth justice, depending on the individual's age. However, as noted in the earlier section on multi-agency partnerships, data sharing came with a range of barriers, from uncoordinated systems to difficulties accessing the most up-to-date information about an individual and uneasiness about sharing personal data with third-party providers, especially individuals with lived experience of violence. As a navigator from the VRU-led site stated:

"There's not much information at all. So, in terms of the referral coming through, I know the name of the young person, the address [where] they live and also the offence which they've committed." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Regardless of the slight pushback on sharing relevant data with third-party providers, all sites were aware of the importance of navigators knowing who they were meeting and what situation they may be walking into. This was mostly important to assess and manage any potential risks the navigator might be exposing themselves to, especially during that first contact, and to gain some context about the person they would be approaching. A member of a police-led site explained:

"So, police research would be checking information such as crime, intelligence, custody and how they fit or do not fit the criteria. We will not put exact details, so there might be references on there, purely for data protection, but we will certainly do police research. And, partly, the reason for that is also a risk management point of view for the police officers when they're attending [participant's address] or partners." (Programme team member, police-led site)

Most VRU-led sites already had data-sharing agreements with their youth justice services, making this process a little easier. Youth justice tended to be relatively comfortable with the programme team sharing information, such as a child's arrest details, the date and type of offence committed and the other people involved in the offence, with the delivery team partners. Police, on the other hand, were less happy to do so. As one VRU-led site mentioned, *"It's a lot harder to get police forces to sign off on sharing information with voluntary sector providers."*

In general, voluntary sector providers (i.e. delivery partners) would receive a summary of individuals' offending in the preceding 12/24 months, any outstanding bail conditions and any known (mental) health diagnosis. Navigators representing statutory services or youth justice would

probably get a bit more detail about the offences than community navigators but overall, a similar amount of data to start with. One site specifically used the need-to-know basis, whereby all navigators (statutory and community) received only the information they needed to know, rather than statutory services navigators automatically getting more access because of the agency they worked for.

"I think stressing the importance that it does need to be quite fluid, and making sure that people have the information they need. So, if [name] gets intel that might cause risk for people going to visit them the next day or something, it's important that she's [programme team member] sharing that and passing it on. If any other agencies [have] that information, it's important that it's shared [timeously] with the team, but also proportionately. So, the quality of things that so-and-so's done this or whatever. It's very much on a need-to-know basis, but important whether they need to know the information [that] is shared." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

It would not be uncommon either for someone from third-party providers to reach out to the programme team and ask for an up-to-date contact number, the most recent address or any further information they might hold about an individual. If known, navigators would also receive information about a probation, youth justice or social worker a prospective cohort member might have already been collaborating with, which could be a starting point for the navigator preparing for the first contact. It is then on the navigator to reach out to this professional and gain a greater understanding of the person's offending history, as well as any advice on how best to approach them.

"Just helps to build up a bigger picture, so maybe you can decide who's best to do the approach, the initial approach, which, if the family already has a social worker, then you'd maybe go with them because they already know the family." (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

Following the first contact, and any subsequent contact, navigators and other support providers would feed intelligence back to the programme. This could be related to the contact itself or any additional soft intelligence gathered through engagement with the individual and their social circle. Everything would be updated on the programme's system and combined with other police intelligence *"to build a wider understanding of that person, and also, we use it once a month when monitoring someone who's on our cohort so that we could identify any new risks that we might be seeing through intelligence that we're not seeing in the actual data."* (Programme team member, VRU-led site)

While there are clear benefits of data-sharing and providing an adequate amount of information to the navigators, not just from a risk-mitigation perspective but also to increase their chances of successfully engaging a participant, there was still a general uneasiness about providing personal information to third-party providers and voluntary sector organisations. This was more prominent in some sites than others, yet all sites found ways to make it work: some invited navigators to their panel meetings, sharing most of the information verbally; some shared data with managers of the delivery providers, who could then ask for more information if required; and some shared information on a need-to-know basis, regardless of the occupational background of their navigators.

Conclusion

For this report, we focused on the three significant knowledge gaps surrounding the data and intelligence aspect of the intervention. Those were uses of data in:

(1) Defining the violence problem
(2) Identifying eligible populations
(3) Delivering the support side of the programme

Data and intelligence played a crucial role in the trial, and the contribution of data analysts to the smooth running of the programme was very strongly supported by the data. This is backed up in the preceding section (F3. How did the multi-agency nature of the programme influence its delivery?), which showed the benefits of shared systems and the importance of various organisations having responsibility for contributing to discussions. It is important to acknowledge the value of using 'hard' and 'soft' data/intelligence to identify a cohort and to maintain awareness of their activities within the programme and their offending in the community. This section discussed the value of multi-agency partnerships, third-party providers and communities in delivering the soft data/intelligence. No single agency possessed a sufficient routine data set to deliver the programme effectively: soft intelligence gathered through local knowledge and through rapport with cohort members was invaluable in facilitating efficient deterrence and support offers to be made and sustained.

F5. What influenced engagement and disengagement from the support offer?

In the Another Chance programmes, the typical navigator's objective is to communicate consequences, determine the causes of a cohort member's involvement in violence and match those with available resources, including the navigator's skills as a mentor. Whether the navigator aims to act as a direct mentor for the young person or to support them in accessing other available services, these objectives can only be achieved if the navigator is successful in engaging that young person and maintaining some form of relationship with them. This section seeks to understand, from the perspectives of navigators and cohort members who engaged with support, the factors that influence acceptance and rejection of the support offer and engagement with navigators and how cohort members come to disengage.

The results have been organised sequentially in four phases, reflecting the dynamic and complex nature of the intervention and the relationships between navigators and cohort members. These phases are as follows:

Initial attempt at engagement: this refers to the initial efforts to get in touch with the potential programme participant, either at their home address, in the community or during a *reachable moment* (College of Policing, 2023), in custody, or in a hospital setting.

Initial expression of interest: this describes individuals who initially accepted the offer of support or indicated that they would consider programme participation, then later, either stated they were no longer interested in it or failed to respond to the navigators' further engagement efforts.

Initial engagement: this includes participants who were engaged with the intervention for a short period (<1 month) and met with their navigators multiple times, either at home, in the community and/or at programme offices, before voluntarily disengaging or being removed from the support side of the programme due to non-engagement/reoffending.

Continuing engagement: this denotes participants who engaged with the intervention for longer than one month. They typically formed a relationship with their navigators and were accessing the support package before voluntarily disengaging from the programme or being exited by the programme due to non-engagement (to better support the programme's resource allocation). Yet, they were not classified as having graduated from the programme (i.e. no longer needing support) but were passively monitored and could be re-engaged if they reoffended/asked for help.

Sample

This section is based on interviews with 12 community navigators who attempted to engage over 400 young people and adults in the focused deterrence intervention throughout the course of the programme. Their accounts were cross-referenced with cohort members' interview data. As sampling for the cohort member interviews was tied to their engagement with support, cohort members' accounts are more prevalent in the later stages.

Results

Five major themes emerged from the data: mistrust in services, entrenchment in criminality, family influence, unstructured lives and challenges in service provision. These were overlaid onto the four phases and are addressed in order, with their identified subthemes summarised below.

While each of these themes was present in all stages of the programme, their relevance fluctuated. However, the findings also revealed that most themes were interlinked, adding a layer of complexity to understanding this topic.

Phase one: initial attempt at engagement

The navigators perceived first contact as the primary source of attrition; this was the initial moment when they would try to introduce the programme to prospective participants and had to find the initial hook for engagement in a very short, often ad hoc, introductory meeting.

Most prominent themes at this stage were 'mistrust', 'family influence', and 'entrenchment in criminality'. Unfortunately, due to the nature of this stage (i.e. the programme being immediately rejected), those individuals never became a part of the formative study cohort and, as such, were ineligible for the interview. Here, we present views from the navigators, as well as some reflections from engaged participants on their apprehensions during that first contact.

Mistrust and distrust

Mistrust emerged as the most prominent theme at first contact, capturing participants' suspicion towards the intervention. Here, participants were often presented with a stranger – in some cases, a police officer – informing them that they were known to the police, liable to face serious

consequences if they continued to be involved in violence and eligible for support to desist. For many, this cold approach was met with suspicion. This assertion is backed up by data from the participant flow (see Figure 1), which indicates that 69% of respondents who received the intervention rejected the offer of support.

Within this theme, the subthemes were 'invasive approach', 'aversion to service involvement' and 'anti-police sentiment'.

Invasive approach

While navigators described home visits as a preferred and more comfortable first-visit environment than custody, some participants found this invasive. The structure of home visits, whereby the navigators returned to the same address multiple times to talk to a prospective cohort member or left leaflets to recruit hard-to-reach participants, further exacerbated this invasiveness.

"Well, one lad, we just, we really struggled to get hold of him, so we didn't have a phone number for him, and we had one address for him. And we kept going to this address; we tried, like, once a week, a couple of times a week, and it was always his mum that answered. And we kept giving our cards (…) and then it turned out one time, I actually did make contact with him, and he leant out of the window, and he was like, 'Oh, you're the guy who's been giving all these cards to my mum'. And I was like, I was like, 'No', and he was like, 'Look', he was like, 'I'm going to be really straight with you, don't want the support, please go away now. Don't come back'. And I was like, I said to him, 'Look, will you just give me, like, two minutes just to explain it?' And he was like, 'No', and then started to, I could tell he was going to start to get irate, so we, kind of, removed ourselves." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

Some individuals, as shown in the extract above, perceived the frequency of visits as excessive and, in some cases, bordering on harassment. These 'slammed door' rejections typically occurred during home visits, so they were also attributed to individuals' pre-existing aversion to both the police and services. In situations where individuals had an initial conversation with the navigators, these interactions were often through ajar windows and doors, at least at first, further demonstrating the levels of suspicion towards navigators.

While both navigators and participants reported a negative effect this could have on engagement, such an approach had a net benefit for recruitment, as it enabled them to meet (sometimes elusive) participants. The benefits of this thorough approach can be seen when discussing initial contacts with the existing engaged cohort members. A high number of participants recalled not being available on the first contact attempt, and without the repeated attempts from the navigators, they would not have engaged. Thus, while some prospective participants saw this approach as intrusive, navigators' persistent attempts to engage did yield results with others.

Aversion to service involvement

Another reason for rejecting the support offer was the perceived association between navigators and social services, which most individuals were averse to and distrusting of. Participants often reflected on this, drawing from their prior interactions with, primarily, social workers. Several

participants reported feeling like they were treated like a number and passed around multiple services without consideration for their individual needs and wants. These experiences increased individuals' mistrust of the support offer, with many participants initially believing that it was just another service which would enter and soon exit their lives. As evidenced below, this sometimes triggered negative feelings, making the establishment of trust difficult.

"That's what I said to [navigator's name] when she first [came] here. I said, '[Name], promise me you are not going to come into my life and the children's lives and just leave us'. She was like 'No, I won't'. And I said, 'Everyone has said that, and no one has stuck around'." (Participant, VRU-led site)

Participants were used to business as usual, which they described as accessing multiple services and having to retell their story to different practitioners (Robards et al., 2018), form relationships and disclose difficult issues, only for these to change with minimal warning.

"You go down there [services] and start talking and opening up to them [practitioners] or da, da, da. Whichever way, there's some people that go down there and say, 'Oh, my life's a mess' and start crying to them or open up a little bit to them, then they go down the next week after they made that little fucking connection with them and start telling them, 'Look, this [is] what I want to be doing'. Then, "Oh, what do you want to do now?' Like a new woman there. It's like, 'Fucking hell, I have to start again. Well, I ain't been told any of this'." (Participant, VRU-led site)

The above quote effectively summarises the effect that staff turnover can have on trust in social services and shows a general distrust of being helped. It highlights participants' apprehension about engaging in the arduous process of disclosure to yet another professional, seemingly to no avail. Nevertheless, with the support package dependent on accurate needs assessment, navigators, like other services, required participants to disclose to them, which could be a daunting and re-traumatising experience.

"Like, we know that they've had services involved for probably most of their lives. So, they're just tired of talking to professionals. And we're just showing up at their house."(Navigator, VRU-led site)

When navigators aimed to convince participants that their intentions were different, several participants were confused as to why someone would want to help them, resulting in further feelings of mistrust. As will be discussed later, once engaged, most participants were positive about the programme and navigators; they could see the difference compared to previous services. These findings highlight that while mistrust was prominent when meeting participants, once it was confirmed that navigators were not associated with social services and relationships with participants were established, the relevance of this theme diminished.

Anti-police sentiment

While only Coventry, Wolverhampton and, to a lesser extent, Leicester utilised police in the support component of the programme, navigators were often suspected of being the police, especially during first contacts. Likewise, the intervention was (accurately) assumed to be police-associated, so many prospective participants immediately demonstrated anti-police sentiments. Police, to some participants, represented a threat and were seen as authority figures and outsiders whom

participants would not usually reach out to for support or protection. This presented a significant barrier to engagement in first contacts and was most pronounced in this phase. It was seen across all five sites, even those without police navigators, as indicated by this participant's response to a hypothetical situation in which their navigator might be police:

"I wouldn't even have a second session with them [navigator]. It would have just been, as soon as the first session, once he told me he was a police officer, I would have been gone." (Participant, VRU-led site)

As the above quote highlighted, close links to the police could completely prevent participant engagement, and when a police navigator disclosed their status as a police officer, participants would often become suspicious or even hostile:

"I was suspicious about what's going on because, like, why [does] the police just want to work with me, know what I mean? I was a bit suspicious. I was a bit, like, off the edge, like, I was just, you know, trying to keep my cool, trying to understand what I'm saying to him before, you know, I get in trouble like my friends get in trouble."(Participant, police-led site)

Police navigators found that communicating their police officer status needed to be done early to build strong relationships with participants who were expected to be averse to them. Once this issue was broached, navigators were sometimes able to foster engagement with participants, although engagement rates in police-led sites were low.

Family influence

Families played a significant role in onboarding participants onto the programme, particularly for those under 18 years of age. Parents often acted as gatekeepers for engagement and could outright reject the support offer even without the young person's knowledge.

Regardless of participant age, if a family was averse to a navigator's approach, it would often be due to broader issues surrounding distrust of services, negative prior experiences or simply not wanting strangers to invade their privacy and potentially disrupt the family unit. For example, navigators often described parents as being concerned about the ramifications of a visit from services, which could result in sanctions (e.g. children being taken into care):

"You'll go in some homes, and you can see a lighter on the table, you can see stuff, and there's lot of things where I know, 'Oh, this is a safeguarding issue'. Like, for example, the young lady that you interviewed, they wouldn't let me in their home at first, which I fully respected. And then the social worker told me the first time that she saw them, mum was saying that she's clean off drugs, she's not done drugs in, like, two months. But there were foils of, like, heroin; there were wraps in the kitchen physically to see. And it's just like, wow. And that's probably why they may not have wanted me to see because if I don't see it, I can't say it." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

While navigators were not social workers, they would still need to disclose information and break confidentiality if something was deemed a safeguarding risk, which they felt would impact the trust-building process.

Navigators also stated that their approach, and sometimes the way they dressed (e.g. wearing official lanyards), could be associated with social workers or other statutory services. In fact, family members were said to often mistake or associate them with those services and rejected the support offer for this reason; they did not want police or social services "snooping around" (Navigator, Leicester). As a result, navigators often chose to avoid wearing lanyards and opted for more casual clothing to increase their chances of establishing rapport. Once they were able to speak to family members and demonstrate that they were not social workers and, in some cases, not police officers, family members were more likely to listen to and even accept the support offer outright.

Entrenchment in criminality

Linked to the programme's eligibility criteria, many of the cohort were frequently involved in a range of crime types. At first contact, then, participants faced a dilemma: by accepting the programme offer, they would be expected to cease any criminal involvement (e.g. drug supply), which would represent a significant drop in personal (and sometimes family) income. The cohort members, therefore, faced a decision:

"So, I told him, obviously, the deterrent side of it, how he needs to be on the programme for a minimum of three months; if he keeps out of trouble three to six months, then he'll be exited if we have no intel to say that he did otherwise. So he said, he didn't decide then, he said to me, 'Let me think about it'. And then he disappeared, yeah, and then he didn't get back in contact." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

Almost all programme participant interviewees came from areas of high deprivation, and many alluded to this as a factor in their involvement in criminality. This was supported by the navigators too, who often raised deprivation as a key component in participants' decision-making processes. Older participants (over 25) were further perceived as less likely to accept the programme offer due to the perception that they were more entrenched and had lower motivation to desist.

A further practical obstacle to disengaging from offending in order to accept the support offer was the experience of deprivation:

"But then, he didn't carry on with [name of the programme]. And like I say, I think that was probably due to the poverty side of things in terms of not being able to; he would have had a drug debt and would have still been working to try and feed the family. Because there was no dad in the picture, so it was just mum and younger siblings." (Navigator, police-led site)

Phase two: initial expression of interest

During first contacts, participants would frequently accept the support offer or indicate that they would consider engagement. However, once navigators left the participant and they had the time to privately reflect on everything, many disengaged and re-establishing contact with them proved challenging. Some of those who disengaged informed their navigators of their decision, while others simply did not respond to their efforts to set up a follow-up meeting.

Peer influence

While families were the main driver of an immediate rejection of the support offer, peers played a more prominent role in ending support engagement before it developed. These were often childhood friends also involved in offending or organised crime groups, so disassociating from them was a requirement for programme participation.

These influences were both intrinsic and extrinsic. Where a cohort member's friendships were strongly linked to their offending (and co-offending), the thought of leaving these, sometimes longstanding relationships, led to feelings of loneliness, increased safety risks due to less protection and boredom.

At the same time as these intrinsic influences, some peers would even actively discourage individuals from engaging.

"It's almost like, 'Well, why are you doing that?' Do you know what I mean? So, it's like they don't want their friend to get better; they want their friend to come back and join them, to do things that they shouldn't be doing." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

In this stage too, if family members were involved in criminal activities, parents would often exercise their right to reject the programme at the earliest opportunity or influence their child to do so.

"We were hopeful when we left; we were hopeful, but we knew that there were other factors involved. He had other people who were close to him. I think it was like a family network; there were at least two family members, I think, who were involved in it, in the actual alleged crimes, so that was the problem." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

It is important to note that family criminality ceased to be a subtheme in the later stages, as those participants typically disengaged early on. This indicates that family might have a significant role in individuals' initial engagement with violence prevention interventions, acting as barriers to participants' involvement.

Transactional relationships

Specific to the police-led intervention, when cohort members engaged with the offer while in custody, navigators felt that some participants viewed the support offer transactionally, suggesting that participants often accepted the programme to influence their sentencing outcomes, to end the interaction with navigators or because they gained momentary motivation to desist when confronted with their situation. However, once they were back in their environment and with their peers, participants would be less eager to engage. Navigators interpreted this as participants realising they could not instantly benefit from programme engagement (e.g. by gaining leniency in court), so deciding not to engage.

"Ssome of the time, we can be thought of as, 'Oh, they can help me get a lower sentence' or something like that. And then when they realise that, you know, we're not here to offer them an easy win, they'll be like, 'Oh, I'm alright actually'." (Navigator, police-led site)

Unlike the navigators, participants never stated that their initial acceptance of the programme was intended to positively influence their ongoing court proceedings. However, some indicated that they contemplated leaving the programme immediately after the first contact when they realised the extent of the commitment required.

Overall, the findings indicate that rejection of the support offer/disengagement at this stage tended to be influenced primarily by peers and, to a lesser extent, by family, as well as the broader challenges of leaving behind a life of crime and adhering to the structure and requirements of programme participation.

Phase three: initial engagement

At this point, participants had typically been engaged with the intervention for some time, had met their navigators on multiple occasions and had initiated the needs assessment process, and some had already accessed the available support. However, most were still adjusting to the programme's requirements and had not yet fully established their relationships with the navigators. Within this stage, three subthemes emerged: 'unstructured lives', 'family influence' and 'entrenchment in criminality'.

Unstructured lives

At this stage of programme engagement, many participants continued to have relatively little structure in their daily lives, which emerged as a key factor contributing to participant attrition. This was typified by habitual substance abuse, unorthodox sleeping patterns, absence from school in the case of children and long periods of time spent away from their home address. While individuals signed up for the programme and had been attending for some time, many still struggled with motivation and missed appointments with navigators or other support providers. Ultimately, this led to disengagement.

Unstable routines

From the perspectives of both navigators and cohort members, a lack of routine made regular participation in the programme challenging. Navigators identified participants who infrequently attended school or were unemployed as being at a greater risk of disengaging.

"But the one common thread through them all is that they self-medicated with smoking weed. But it's just a lack of, I don't know how else to explain it, they just can't be bothered with anything, not even school. Like, school stopped with them getting in trouble more." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

Such individuals would often have an abundance of free time and be more frequently out of the house, and their families found it difficult to instil discipline or structure. However, engagement with the support offer required participants to be disciplined and structured within an otherwise unstructured day. Those who did engage complained about boredom and a lack of adrenaline that comes with a more prosocial life; these were the most frequent issues that contributed to participants' reoffending at this stage.

"I've literally got so much spare time on my hands; it's so easy just to get stuck back in the cycle." (Participant, police-led site)

As a result, these individuals would attend their sessions irregularly and often fail to be assessed for their needs or be provided with the appropriate support package, which again led to their disengagement.

Family influence

At this engaged stage, families were typically less averse to navigators and their efforts, as they had met prospective participants on multiple occasions, and most of the initial barriers to engagement had been overcome. However, a small number of individuals were still not supported by their families, which a navigator interpreted as apathy, rather than antagonism to the programme or the navigators.

"And it's almost one of them where I know where family don't really care about the support either. It's very good when families do care because they're almost working in my favour to remind them of appointments and stuff. But a lot of families really don't care. And that's the difficult thing." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

Familial apathy could hinder navigators' efforts. For example, these parents would fail to wake up participants for appointments, remind them of their requirements or discuss their programme involvement in a positive manner. Furthermore, participants who had parents with substance issues often faced chronic familial instability, which was seen as another factor in programme disengagement. Navigators frequently stated that participants needed their parents' support, and without it, they struggled to engage.

Intervention and lifestyle incongruence

A significant number of participants were still involved in criminal activity at this stage, too, despite the programme requiring them to cease these involvements and their initial agreement to do so.

As participants learned about the opportunities of the programme, they began to access support services and considered the prospect of employment opportunities arising from the intervention. Due to this impending support, those who were still involved in criminality were once again faced with the dilemma of continuing this lifestyle and facing its associated risks or fully committing to the intervention and desisting from crime. Yet, there were challenges associated with stopping crime involvement, as this individual explained:

"Even if I don't, even if I don't make money, yeah, or no one wants to help me get a job within the next couple of weeks, bro, then I'm just going to find a bigger and better crew that ain't dumb, you get me?" (Participant, police-led site)

Navigators stated that while the intervention offered employment support and a chance to earn a living legally, this was not guaranteed, and the income derived from those jobs was often far lower than what could be earned on the streets. This presented an everyday temptation for programme

participants and often weighted the cost–benefit analysis towards disengagement. It was also at this stage that some participants contemplated their ability and desire to move away from crime, as they felt unable to do so for financial reasons.

Phase four: continuing engagement

At this stage, participants who were still engaging had established relationships with navigators and were typically accessing support packages. However, a few strong themes still emerged for those who did disengage.

Delivery shortcomings

Participants who engaged with the support package for some time often expressed frustration at delivery shortcomings. For example, failure to find employment for a participant in a timely manner led to some cohort members feeling let down. As discussed, those who had previously profited from criminality needed to sacrifice their lucrative income:

"Yeah, that's what I'm saying, like, and then it (robbing) will have to start again unless I've got another job securing my back. That's what the guys are trying to help me with as well, they're trying to get me a job at [fast-food restaurant] and that, but that ain't going to help me much, is it? I need to get an apprenticeship or something that's paying weekdays and that." (Participant, police-led site)

Participants were sometimes frustrated with some employment providers not being able to give them a job due to their age (for under-16s) or not offering them employment despite support from the navigators. Some were also simply dissatisfied with their jobs. Certain employment offers were deemed unsuitable by some participants (e.g. a public-facing job for someone with severe anxiety) or did not provide enough work hours to ensure financial stability.

The importance and difficulty of finding suitable work were exacerbated for individuals with criminal records, as they faced increased challenges in the job market. Frustratingly for them, the pool of available opportunities tended to be limited to lower-paid jobs in areas such as fast food and warehousing. However, the programme supported participants in upskilling and gaining qualifications for higher-paid employment too (e.g. Construction Skills Certification Scheme [CSCS] cards[6]), and some participants saw the value of legal employment:

"Working's really like a big thing here because without work, I'd probably need the [Focused Deterrence] project. But with work, I don't really need the project, I'd say, because I'm working, I'm not doing anything illegal. I'm just living my life." (Participant, VRU-led site)

[6] The potential to earn a CSCS card was, for many cohort members, an attractive feature of the support offer. This tiered accreditation, which requires the completion of a training course and test, is necessary to work in construction.

In some cases, the inability to gain suitable work was challenging for other reasons. For example, participants who complied with the programme but still did not receive what they were promised (e.g. a suitable job offer) became disillusioned with the programme and wanted to disengage; the perception of broken promises reintroduced the previous themes of mistrust around social service provision.

Transactional relationships

In this stage too, some participants seemed to view the programme transactionally, where they could use it to quickly benefit and improve their current situation (e.g. gain employment). Once they got what they wanted, they considered leaving or, indeed, disengaged from any further support.

"Something that he wanted to do, for example, CSCS card, where you've done part of it and then, like, because he'd done it, he doesn't turn up to his next meeting." (Navigator, police-led site)

This created an unforeseen dilemma for the programme in which both the shortcomings and successes of the support package could influence one's disengagement. However, navigators were sometimes able to use recreational aspects of the support package (e.g. time at the recording studio) as a lever to encourage further engagement with other aspects of the support package**.**

Unstructured lives

Participants who were engaged with the intervention for a longer period typically had a level of structure imposed upon their lives by it. However, this structure was fragile and could be affected by a number of events.

Many participants in this stage of the programme experienced significant life events (e.g. bereavement, relationship breakdown, birth of a child or moving school) during the intervention. These moments presented a challenge to engagement: participants might return to criminality following a negative life event or have less time to engage with the programme following a positive one:

"I thought he would always be engaged to a certain level, and especially because he'd been so strongly engaged for, kind of, like, four months really, four or five months almost; it was kind of at the point I was thinking, 'Right, we'll kind of probably get him ready for exit fairly soon'. And then I think life threw a couple of curveballs at him, and then he was kind of, yeah. So, at the minute we kind of are disengaged with him, I guess." (Navigator, VRU-led site)

As articulated by a cohort member:

"I can't lie, it [being attacked] caused uproar, like, I was ready to (…) make a war. I was ready to cause a war, like, differently to the point where [they] would have sent me to jail, 100% sent me [to] jail, not, no remand, straight jail." (Participant, VRU-led site)

Despite the intervention's efforts to support cohort members through adversity, these incidents could lead individuals to withdraw from people around them, temporarily break contact with navigators or re-engage in crime or could trigger complete disengagement.

Peer influence

Some participants who had been engaged with the programme for a longer time were able to leave behind their criminal peers. With distance, some participants began to reevaluate their relationships. Some stated that they had moved on or saw these associates as a risk to their progress with the programme:

"It was hard leaving my old group of mates – but once I stopped seeing them, it all got a bit easier." (Participant, police-led site)

However, this change of social circle often led to participants feeling isolated and spending more time at home, which many associated with boredom. Furthermore, those participants who were living in areas with high levels of deprivation, reflected by high levels of crime in their locality, faced barriers to maintaining engagement:

"Where I live, see, the neighbourhood, there's people [who] can get you into anything so's you can make money. It won't be hard, just go over to [name of person] and say you want to make a grand, and they sort it for you." (Participant, police-led site)

Conclusion

Navigators described a challenging set of circumstances when attempting to engage and sustain the engagement of cohort members in the programme. At the initial meeting, they had to establish the credibility of the programme, overcoming a history of distrust of services. Depending on whether the intervention was police-led or not, navigators had to negotiate different identity issues, either as credible community members who were working with police or as a different type of police officer who was genuinely keen to help cohort members. Families played an important role at this stage in whether a person did or did not engage. During this phase, navigators had to delicately balance engagement attempts with the risk of harassing the cohort members.

Once a cohort member had expressed an interest in support, peers played a stronger role in a person's disengagement, and examples of peers supporting engagement were rare. At this stage, too, mismatched goals of cohort members and navigators became apparent, such as when cohort members expressed an interest in some perceived short-term benefit (e.g. release from custody) or simply wanted to get the navigator to leave them alone.

Following initial engagement, the risk of disengagement arose when cohort members came to understand the programme's requirements, which included a commitment to attending support opportunities and desisting from offending. Committing to the support opportunities was challenging for some, as it required embedding structure and discipline in otherwise unstructured days. Desisting from offending also required leaving peer groups and missing out on crime-related financial

opportunities. Where drug-related debt was involved, or cohort members were being exploited, this desistance was often not feasible.

In the final stages, disengagement from the programme was influenced by unfulfilled promises: the perception that navigators had let the cohort member down or that the support simply did not sufficiently replace their old lives or because they relapsed into offending.

The results demonstrate the dynamic nature of support. Consistent influences were identified, such as families, peers, routines, finances and aspirations, but the importance of each varied across the course of the support offer. These findings highlight the challenges faced by cohort members who wish to desist from offending, as well as the skills required of navigators to respond to the changing circumstances of engaging with this cohort.

Conclusion

This report coincides with the closure of the Another Chance Fund Focused Deterrence multi-centred trial and the final months of programme delivery. Preparation for the trial began in April 2022, with study entry beginning in May 2023 and ending in August 2025. During this time, 2,976 individuals were randomised into two arms of the intervention across seven trials and five cities in England. This sample size and multi-centred nature make this trial among the largest violence intervention trials ever undertaken in the UK. Furthermore, with almost 100 interviews and more than 70 days of field observations, the corpus of qualitative data promises unprecedented insight into how the focused deterrence programme was created, delivered and received.

The interventions delivered were based on the YEF's nine-point focused deterrence framework, which required delivery sites to develop a programme that combined deterrence, support and community norms delivered by a multi-agency team, including police, to a defined sample of individuals (aged 14 years and over) who lived in their area and had a history of violent crime and group offending.

Delivery of the intervention began with a visit from a programme delivery team member, who could be a police officer, statutory worker or community/voluntary sector navigator. At this meeting, they conveyed a message to the cohort member about the potential consequences of continuing to be involved in violence and also offered to provide person-centred support to desist from offending.

There is a sizeable body of literature on the impact of focused deterrence on violence, and there is evidence that this is effective. This has resulted in enthusiastic adoption of focused deterrence in the US and, increasingly, in Australia and Europe, particularly the UK. Despite the wealth of evidence on effectiveness, many of the components of this complex intervention are not well documented. Furthermore, the US origins of the intervention may not translate directly to a UK context, meaning that the programme may not translate well to a UK context.

In order to address this uncertainty and to effectively document the Another Chance Fund trial, our evaluation included a substantial process evaluation, including dozens of interviews with cohort members, delivery team members, managers and local stakeholders. The process evaluation was informed by a realist design that seeks to understand how the intervention works, for whom and under what circumstances. The process evaluation was underpinned by a CMO framework and a comprehensive logic model.

This report focused on seven research questions that were agreed with the YEF: summative (S1 and S2) related to the flow and characteristics of cohort members through the trial and formative 1 to 5 (F1–F5) five related to (F1) the evolution of the deterrence mechanism, (F2) differences between police-led and VRU-led interventions, (F3) the role of multi-agency partnership in the intervention, (F4) how data was used and (F5) factors that influenced engagement and disengagement with the programme support offer.

This section provides the main conclusions of the report. First, we summarise and interpret the findings in relation to the research questions before noting the limitations of our conclusions and discussing the implications of the findings for the overall trial.

S1: What was the flow of participants through the trial?

By the end of August 2025, 2,976 individuals had been randomised. Although data cleaning and reconciliation were required, which would likely reduce the sample size slightly, the trial appeared to have reached its predetermined required sample requirements to give 80% power to detect a 20% reduction in the number of violence against the person offences.

Of the 1,485 individuals allocated to the intervention, 13% were subsequently identified as ineligible. Approximately 27% of those allocated to treatment did not receive the intervention. The majority of this compliance failure occurred during the early implementation period, and actions taken to increase compliance rates during 2024 and 2025 were successful. Nonetheless, there is a risk that, if the intervention is proven effective, these early compliance issues could dilute the overall observed effect. The statistical analysis plan (Sutherland and Brennan, 2025) will account for this through the registration of a Complier Average Causal Effect methodology.

Of those who received the intervention, one in five accepted an offer of support. Acceptance rates varied considerably across sites. Data on the enforcement plan across the study period are not yet available, but 17% of the cohort had an active enforcement plan in summer 2025. These statistics are both indicative of fidelity to the YEF focused deterrence framework, but further analysis will be required when process data is available in Spring 2026.

S2: What were the demographic and offending characteristics of the trial cohort?

The trial contained a young but varied cohort. The average age of cohort members was 21 years (median 19 years), about 40% of whom were children or young people (under 18). A slightly higher proportion of children were randomised to the intervention group (53%), but this will be accounted for in the analysis (as per the statistical analysis plan). Age profiles differed across trials: Manchester and Nottingham had notably younger cohorts, Wolverhampton trial 1 had a considerably older cohort, much of which is attributable to local eligibility criteria.

On average, participants had about six offences in the preceding two years (median 3), with two-thirds having five or fewer. A small number had very high offence counts. This is accounted for in the baseline covariates, as the number of offences is mapped onto tertiles of risk, but adjustment may need to be considered if such variance is observed in the follow-up outcome. As with age, offence frequency differed by trial: in Manchester, Nottingham and Leicester, almost everyone had at least one recorded offence (as required); in Coventry and Wolverhampton, ~20% had none, owing to eligibility criteria for trial 2.

As anticipated, the trial cohort was dominated by males (~81% overall; ~91% if ‘unknown’ is removed). Some missing gender data is tied to police-sourced records and will be cleaned later.

White participants were the largest group (~40%) but were under-represented relative to the general population. Black (~21%), Mixed (~11%) and Asian (~11%) ethnicities were over-represented in the cohort relative to national ethnicity patterns, reflecting a combination of urban sampling and the age profile. Ethnicity data is incomplete for police-led trials and will be refined in subsequent analyses.

F1: How did the deterrence component of the intervention evolve over time?

As the programmes matured, enforcement became more efficient as a result of strong management-level collaboration, creative use of statutory and police consequences, and shared organisational priorities. Some challenges persisted on the frontline, with navigators reporting limited resources, patchy sharing of information and a misalignment of values. In particular, navigators reported a practical and personal challenge of providing a credible deterrence message and an offer of support concurrently, which they felt undermined their main goal of establishing rapport with cohort members. Navigators adapted by reframing the deterrence message, using first-hand or vicarious experiences to deliver deterrence while keeping trust and supporting engagement. While these adaptations were observed in both police-led and VRU-led sites, the contextual factors inevitably affected how the components of the intervention were received by the cohort: how these translate into outcomes will be assessed in subsequent reporting.

F2: How did the delivery vary between police- and VRU-led sites

Consistent with the project's realist framework, we observed that mechanism delivery differed by context. VRU-led models (e.g. Manchester) used longer, relationship-based engagement, which suited people deeply involved in crime or mistrustful of services. Leicester's hybrid model (community navigators plus statutory staff) balanced access to harder-to-reach groups with stricter compliance.

Police-led sites suited people on the criminal periphery, stressing behaviour change and adherence, though some mistrust was expected. These approaches reflected criminological debates: police-led sites followed a rational, goal-focused model that required compliance from cohort members. VRU-led sites were more driven by a theory of structural disadvantage, which is reflected in a less agentic approach to reducing future involvement in violence and greater acceptance of blips.

Our CMO framework emphasises that who delivers the intervention is likely to affect how the intervention is delivered and received and, consequently, what the outcomes will be. Our analysis plan accommodates this quantitatively and qualitatively. An important implication of these observations for the future application of focused deterrence and other person-centred interventions is to match the values and theories of the delivery team with those of the intervention. Furthermore, in multi-component interventions, the sequencing of component delivery should take into account how the components might interact. This would be amenable to small-scale experimentation in future trials.

F3: How did delivery teams navigate the multi-agency nature of the intervention

Programme teams valued the unusually long lead-in time. They reported that this was useful for building networks, allowing the intervention to be truly co-designed with partners and community stakeholders. Gaining this strong buy-in gave the sites the social capital that allowed them to navigate complex discussions around randomisation and the use of enforcement.

Sites reported that workshops, the clear communication of roles and the YEF focused deterrence framework gave the activity structure and legitimacy while allowing for local adaptation. However, funding uncertainty between the early implementation and full implementation phases disrupted

momentum and created anxiety about job precarity for skilled community and voluntary sector partners.

As the programme matured, in the early stages of full implementation, strong governance, co-location and frequent meetings supported collaboration, and dedicated funding allowed ring-fenced staff and the ability work with higher-risk individuals. However, challenges with data sharing, staff turnover and cultural differences between statutory and voluntary sectors impeded delivery, and procurement sometimes conflicted with local needs.

During delivery, sustaining partner enthusiasm required regular in-person meetings and, where possible, co-location. Sites highlighted the importance of early evaluation, solid information governance, genuine community involvement and sharing of success stories. Overall, well-resourced partnerships with shared accountability made integrated delivery more likely.

The requirement for multi-agency partnerships has been a downfall of other violence interventions, and the sustainability of partnerships is a notable success of this project. The qualitative data demonstrates the immense effort and leadership required to make the programme work and underlines the need for future programmes to incorporate long lead-in times, ring-fenced funding, sufficient management resources and well-respected leaders supported by dedicated and competent colleagues if they are to be successful.

F4: How did delivery teams use data throughout the project?

The relevance of data and soft intelligence for this project has been highlighted since the design stages, when sites were preparing their documentation for the ACF1 bid, identifying and defining the violence problem in their respective areas and creating problem profiles. The inclusion of information beyond just police and crime data helped provide a greater understanding of the bigger picture and narrowed down the focus to a more specific offence type and age group of interest.

During the programme implementation and delivery phases, data was used to identify eligible individuals and discuss the best potential approach for first contact. Here too, input from relevant partners, such as health, housing, education or even the wider community, proved invaluable for gaining a comprehensive view of prospective programme participants. These partners were also important when it came to monitoring one's progress through the programme and feeding back relevant information. This was all collated on the sites' data systems and was crucial when revising programme participants' support offers, considering referral to enforcement or simply aiming to better understand an individual and their behaviour.

Finally, there were still quite a few issues with sharing relevant data with the programme delivery team, especially individuals working for third-party or voluntary sector organisations. While all five sites understood, from a risk management perspective and to increase the chances of successfully engaging an individual, the importance of relaying information to navigators , the information shared was still quite scarce. With time, the sites found a way to make it work, and some sites and their partners started feeling more comfortable sharing information with their (community) navigators; for others, there was still a level of discomfort around this, yet there was an overall understanding that it had to be done for the programme to work as intended.

F5: What factors affected engagement and disengagement with the support component of the intervention?

Within the engagement component of the intervention, four phases were identified. All required different information, skills and rapport to ensure programme retention: initial attempt at engagement, initial expression of interest, initial engagement and continuing engagement.

In the early phase, reluctant cohort members did not see the relevance of the programme to them: in many cases, this was understandable, as the intelligence on which their recruitment was based was out of date. Trust in services, by individuals and their family members, played an important role in the immediate rejection or acceptance of a support offer. At this stage, navigators had to use a range of interpersonal skills and exercise caution in their words.

It was common for cohort members to accept the offer of support at the first meeting but not attend a follow-up meeting. In some cases, this was probably a tactic to get the navigator to leave. In the case of police-led programmes, it could have the added benefit of facilitating a release from custody. At this stage, peers also became influential, generally to the detriment of engagement.

Some cohort members engaged temporarily if they saw little benefit from the programme, if their navigator changed or if they achieved some short-term goal, such as having someone accompany them to court or advocate on their behalf in court. Other peer influences, including group offending, also leveraged cohort members away at this stage. Finally, more structural factors, such as poverty, substance misuse or major life changes, led to cohort members disengaging after relatively sustained periods of support. In addition, scepticism over the effectiveness of the programme and boredom also limited some cohort members' engagement.

At each of these stages, navigators reported having to tailor the deterrence and support messages in order to maintain cohort members' engagement and interest. This required considerable skill, and, as observed in earlier sections, this was often achieved at initial engagement with only minimal information about the cohort member.

The rejection of support by family members is an important observation. In some cases, this rejection was likely the result of distrust of services. In others, rejection of support was on cultural grounds, where the community, rather than the state, is viewed as the legitimate source of problem-solving. A conclusion from this is that support should not be viewed as a universal good by services, nor should the rejection of support be viewed as a rejection of desistance opportunities. Here, robust race equity strategies, particularly staffing, have the potential to navigate differing perceptions of support.

Limitations

The qualitative data in the report, obtained from interviews and observations, were all obtained under conditions of informed consent and voluntary participation. In a trial of a violence intervention, where services and authority may be distrusted, it is highly likely that the sample was a more engaged subgroup of the cohort. Indeed, there is a clear bias in sampling because only cohort members who accepted the support offer were available for sampling. In our analysis of

cohort member interviews, we sought to adjust for this by critically interpreting the data, but there is no way to know whether the views of our respondents reflected those of cohort members who refused the offer. Furthermore, in understanding how the mechanism connected to the outcome in our CMO framework, our data can offer little primary insight into how deterrence worked independent of support and community influence.

Contextual differences in sampling also likely affected our understanding of the Mechanism (M) and Outcome (O) as navigators, and programme leads only had insight into their own activities and, like the research team, only had insight into the experiences and opinions of engaged cohort members. As a result, this group was susceptible to survivor bias. As with the cohort member sample, we sought to acknowledge and mitigate this wherever possible.

Future outputs

This report is the final annual report for the Another Chance Fund Focused Deterrence project. The study has closed for enrolment, and delivery concluded in March 2026. Site teams are expected to provide final process data to the research team in spring 2026, and the follow-up period will end on 31 August 2026. Outcome data through the Police National Computer will become available approximately nine months later, but local police data will be available around the end of 2026. The final report is scheduled for delivery in 2027.

In the meantime, we have begun to produce a series of academic publications that expand on the following:

- Documenting baseline conditions and treatment as usual
- The programme theory of change
- Experience of translating the US-focused deterrence model to a UK context
- Factors influencing engagement and attrition in navigator-led violence interventions

Further potential outputs will be developed in due course.

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Appendix 1 Case-level process data

Initial screening

Unique programme ID

Month and Year of birth

Gender

Post code (first three digits only)

Ethnicity (White, Black, Asian, Chinese, Other)

Date of referral (if applicable)

Source of referral (if applicable)

Date of eligibility assessment

Trial-specific eligibility criteria

Eligibility criterion 1: aged 14yrs or over [y/n]

Eligibility criterion 2: Resident in area [y/n]

Eligibility criterion 3: Violent offence in past two years [y/n]

Eligibility criterion 4: Involved in group violence [y/n]

Outcome of eligibility assessment [eligible/not eligible]

Number of violence against the person offences (agreed list of outcomes) per referred individual in 12 months preceding referral

Review

Case reviewed [y/n/NA]

Date of review panel

Programme selection decision

Randomised [treatment/control]

Accepted into programme [y/n]

Contact

Case worker ID

First contact attempted [y/n]

Date of first contact attempt

Total number of contact attempts (includes f2f, phone, text, leaflet)

Any in-person contact made [y/n/NA]

Date person-to-person contact first made

Type of first person-to-person contact [individual/family member only/phone]

Contact was leaflet/letter only [y/n]

Awareness and consent

Participant was directly contacted (in person/phone) and learned about the programme? [y/n]

Consented to programme [y/n/NA]

Date consented to programme

Engagement

Case worker ID

Engaged with support (e.g. attended a meeting; signed a consent form) [y/n/NA]

Identified need A..k (binaries; include 'other' option)

Accommodation [y/n]

Living skills and finance [y/n]

Health and wellbeing [y/n]

Peers, families and relationships [y/n]

Parenting and caring [y/n]

Substance use [y/n]

Personal development, skills and occupation [y/n]

Offending, crime and justice [y/n]

Referral and support

Support service allocation

Referred to another service [y/n/NA]

Referred service name

Date of first engagement with support

Date of last engagement with support

Number of support engagements [by medium: phone, text, in-person]

Referred to enforcement

Date put on enforcement plan

Highest stage of enforcement plan

Exiting the programme

Disengagement method [stopped engaging; voluntarily disengaged; custody; graduated; removed from programme]

Date of last engagement