# VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNITS AT A CROSSROADS – A POSITIVE FUTURE?

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# *About the Author*

Professor Niven Rennie was a police officer for over 30 years.  In that time, he had a varied career and concluded his police career at the rank of Chief Superintendent in 2016 having served a term as President of the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents.

Following a two-year term as the Chief Executive Officer of a charity that provided support to individuals who became homeless or impoverished, he became Director of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit in July 2018.

On leaving the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit in December 2022, he became chair of the Hope Collective, a body that aims to support young people by providing a platform for them to comment on issues that affect their lives and development. Membership of the Hope Collective is drawn from numerous youth organisations across the UK, the Violence Reduction Units and related bodies. Thus far the Hope Collective have held in excess of 30 'hope hacks' across the United Kingdom in partnership with many of the Violence Reduction Units.  These events have enabled over 3000 young people from the length and breadth of the country to express their views on many of the social challenges we face as a society.

In 2022 he was appointed as a Visiting Professor of Policy by the University of East London and has provided advice and guidance to bodies across the UK and beyond on the principles of violence prevention and the public health approach.  In addition, he is a consultant attached to Oxon Advisory, an organisation that specialises in public safety, and has undertaken this report in conjunction with Smart Social, an organisation that specialises in social impact.

# *Methodology*

This report follows its predecessor 'Violence Reduction Units at a Crossroads, a Potential Road Ahead' and outlines in more depth a model for future development.

To undertake this report, the author drew upon his own knowledge and experience of the subject matter and, in particular, his period as Director of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, the first organisation in the world to apply public health methodology to the issue of inter-personal violence.  In addition, he utilised a range of methods to gather additional evidence, including:

➢ An analysis of documentation relevant documentation and reports alongside statistical and objective assessments of some of the successful projects that have been providing benefit in respect of youth intervention.

➢ Interviews (n=20) with VRU Directors and team members, partners, community leaders, young people and academics which provided insights about the future opportunities to build on the success of the VRU programme to date.

➢ The author undertook research and gathered documentation relevant to potential funding opportunities which were not solely reliant on public sector grants or procurement.

➢ Finally, the contributions of over 3,000 young people during Hope Collective 'Hope Hacks' provided an essential element to this process.

# *Summary*

## TOUGH ON CRIME

Since the early 1990's crime levels and penal policy have become central issues in both public and political debate in the United Kingdom.  Prison has been used more regularly as a deterrent measure and 'penal populism' has tended to overlook the social and economic factors that contribute to criminality.  Approaches that appear to offer welfare-based alternatives are often accused of being 'soft on crime'.  Added to this, these alternative approaches often rely on significant investment in social measures which is hard to achieve when public budgets are stretched.  They also require public agencies to share agendas and co-operate in service delivery, a consensus that has also proved problematic for a variety of reasons

## COST OF CRISIS

The irony of this approach is that it comes with significant cost.  Criminality continues to flourish whilst society fragments.  The impact of austerity and the cost of living crisis sees greater inequality across our communities.  Young people require to navigate a range of social problems without the level of support that is required to assist them in this endeavour.  The funding that may have been utilised for this purpose is now spent in meeting rising costs in statutory service requirements or inflated costs in alternative provision in education or imprisonment.

## VALUE OF PREVENTION

As a society we need to offer more to our young people.  A compassionate response is required, one that recognises the value in providing appropriate levels of support, a preventative approach that is based on social justice, hope and opportunity.   A departure from the failed policies of reaction and punishment that have been dominant for many years and a move towards policies of primary prevention that address the root causes of our social challenges.

## ALTERNATIVE FUNDING

Such a change in approach also comes with a cost.  With public sector finances already committed, this cost will require to be met by alternative means by engaging the private sector and philanthropic investors.  The savings that will result from reduced reactive costs can then be reinvested to ensure that progress continues and that our young people thrive.

## ROLE OF VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNITS

In many parts of the United Kingdom, Violence Reduction Units have commenced on such an approach and the benefits are being derived.  By expanding their focus from merely 'violence reduction' they could become 'prevention partnerships' and deliver to a wider localised prevention agenda which will enable our communities to flourish.

# 1. Why this report? – 'The violence issue'

1.1     The issue of inter-personal violence is one that continues to significantly impact young people across the United Kingdom and is particularly prevalent in our larger towns and cities.

> *'In 2023 the Youth Endowment Fund surveyed 7,500 children in England and Wales finding that one in four had either been a victim of violence or had perpetrated violence themselves. Almost half (47%) had witnessed violence in the last 12 months and 60% had seen 'real world' act of violence on social media''* (Multi-agency responses to serious youth violence, Ofsted et al November 2024).
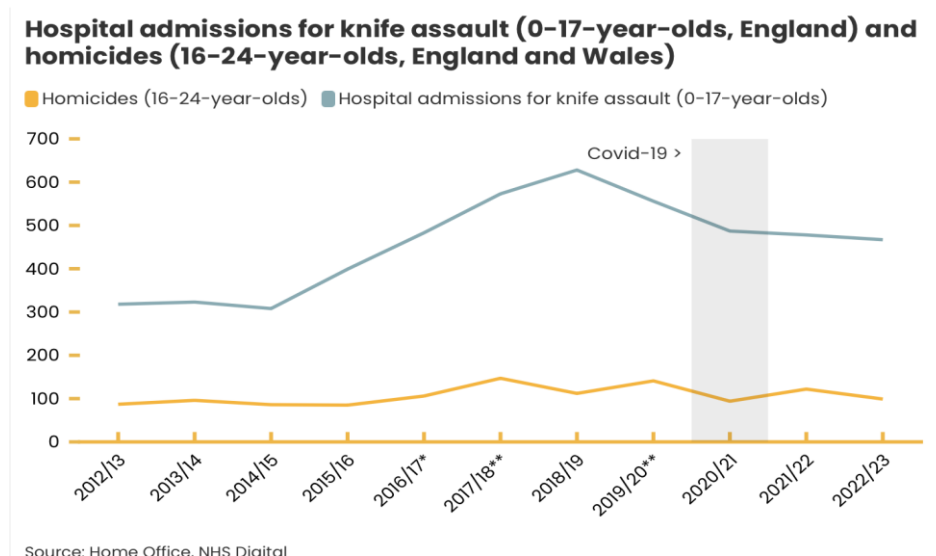
1.2     Despite widespread concern about violence as it affects our young people and continued political and media coverage, the number of violent incidents being recorded remains stubbornly high.

> *'Over the past decade, violence has worsened.  The number of children and young people who lost their lives to violence last year is higher than 10 years ago as is the number of children admitted to hospital for knife assaults.  In 2022/23, 99 young people aged 16-24 were victims of homicide compared to 87 in 2012/13.  In the same year 467 children were treated in hospital for knife or sharp object injuries, a 47% increase from 2012/3's 318 instances'* (Beyond the headlines, YEF, 2024).

1.3     "Knife Crime" has become the catch all phrase for this activity due to a bladed weapon being prevalent in the majority of these incidents.

> *''In 2022/23, 82% of violent incidents where young people aged 12-19 years of age were the victim, a knife was used as a weapon'* (Beyond the headlines, YEF, 2024).

1.4     Whilst data collated from hospital admissions in England and Wales, indicates a slight decrease in the number of violent incidents over recent years, these statistics also underline that the scale of this problem remains greater than it did 10 years ago.  It is a problem that refuses to go away and one that continues to perplex our politicians whilst communities suffer.

**Hospital admissions for knife assault (0–17-year-olds, England) and homicides (16–24-year-olds, England and Wales)**

■ Homicides (16–24-year-olds)   ■ Hospital admissions for knife assault (0–17-year-olds)

Covid-19 >

Source: Home Office, NHS Digital

**(FIGURE 1 – levels of knife crime)**

1.5     Consequently, the concerning levels of 'knife crime' have resulted in detailed analysis from numerous academics, reports from a variety of organisations and the identification of many factors and causes.

1.6     A report from the social justice charity NACRO, 'Lives not Lives', published in January 2020 is merely one example of many which identified that levels of fear amongst the younger population was one significant factor and that the traditional response of 'tougher sentences' was unlikely to produce the desired reduction that was being sought.

> *''Our students have told us that fear of being attacked leads to the belief that carrying a knife is their only option to protect themselves. The threat of prison does nothing to stop this……we need urgent investment to ensure that young people get the support they need to be diverted away from crime before it's too late"* (Campbell Robb, Chief Executive, NACRO)

1.7     Violence Reduction Units (VRU's) were introduced to England and Wales in 2018 in response to these rising levels of violence and indicated a desire to take a fresh approach to the issue.

1.8     Following the success of the Violence Reduction Unit in Scotland which was established in 2005, the model adopted in England and Wales also sought to adopt a 'public health approach'.

> ''A Violence Reduction Unit is a multi-agency partnership with a specific remit for the prevention and reduction of violence within a defined geographical area. Units focus on a combination of primary, secondary and tertiary services including short and long term preventative work, efforts to change attitudes to violence in society and criminal justice interventions' ('Safe Space' Fraser, Irwin et al, 2024).

1.9     The progress of the VRU's was examined in the initial report. It highlighted that Home Office analysis in 2022/3 had shown 'statistically significant' reductions in 'more serious forms of violence in VRU areas when compared to 'non-funded' areas. This report also underlined the fact that long term improvement would require continued investment.

1.10    Despite this, the levels of violence recorded and the public outcry that accompanies the tragic loss of young lives places politicians in a difficult position. They require to evidence to the electorate that they have policies and plans that will address this issue and improve safety within communities. Unfortunately, this often leads to the re-introduction of measures that appear to be taking the matter seriously but which have never previously brought about sustained improvements in this regard.

1.11    The Labour Party manifesto for the parliamentary elections of 2024 contained commitments to such policies.

> ''Labour will ensure knife carrying triggers rapid intervention and tough consequences. Every young person caught in possession of a knife will be referred to a youth offending team and will receive a mandatory plan to prevent re-offending, with penalties including curfew, tagging and custody for the more serious cases'. ('Labour Party election manifesto, 2024).

1.12    A further commitment within the manifesto underlined a determination to focus on the weapon in a hope that such action would reduce levels of violence:

> *'To get knives off our streets Labour will ban ninja swords, lethal zombie style blades and machetes and strengthen rules to prevent online sales.  Executives of online companies that flout these rules will be personally held to account through tough sanctions'.* ('Labour Party election manifesto, 2024).

1.13    Whilst these measures may not reflect the evidence of numerous reports on this issue and the steps taken since 2018, there was also a welcome commitment to invest in a better future for young people:

> *'Labour will introduce a new 10-year young futures programme bringing together services and communities to support our young people, including a new national network of young futures hubs, with mental health workers and youth workers, to tackle the crisis in youth mental health, to give teenagers the best start in life and to stop them falling into crime'* ('Labour Party election manifesto, 2024).

1.14    It is this commitment that offers the greatest opportunity for addressing many of the issues that young people face in the UK today, of which levels of violence is merely one.

1.15    That said, the relationship between the youth futures hubs and the VRU's remains to be defined. The potential for them to develop in harmony offers the greatest opportunity.

> *'In terms of the futures hubs, I don't really care what they call it, I just don't want five years of learning to be jettisoned.  We spent more than £100K evaluating what we have achieved thus far and its proved more than useful.  We know what works, relational practices work, basic human kindness works. The ultimate focus has to be on the causes of the causes'.* (VRU, Director).

1.16     It is that relationship and the opportunities to develop a strong preventative approach against a backdrop of limited public sector funding that this report seeks to examine.

## 2. The challenges facing the youth sector

2.1    Although violence captures much of the attention, both in the media and in political discourse, there are many significant challenges for young people to navigate in the UK at present.

2.2    Many people involved in the youth sector believe that there are links between these issues and that the focus on one particular problem to the exclusion of others is unhelpful.

> *'I suppose the word 'violence' in VRU is the ultimate misnomer. Loads of social harm issues need resourcing but the violence reduction issue dominates.  There are competing agendas – these also include youth gambling, sexual health, healthy eating but the resource available is small.  We must invest in wider prevention to make real progress'.*   (Lead, Youth Engagement Charity).

2.3    The decline in spend for youth services in England and Wales since 2010 is viewed as a major contributory factor in the increase in demand from young people in recent years.
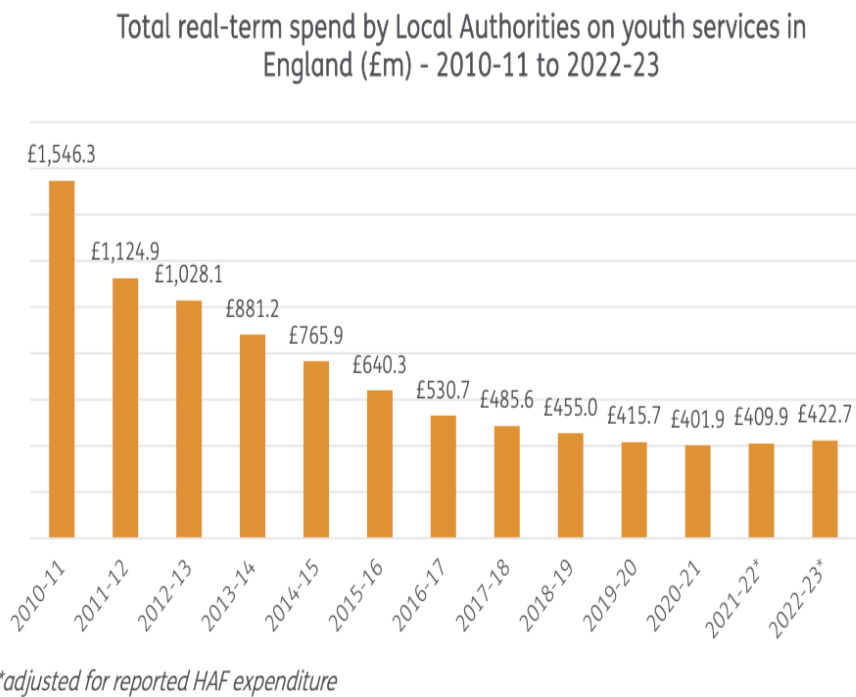


**(FIGURE 2 – "on the ropes' YMCA, 2024)**

2.4      The 60% reduction in youth service provision since 2010 has seen the number of youth clubs operated by local authorities cut by a half over that period.  The loss of this level of preventative spend exposes young people making them more vulnerable to criminality and other anti-social behaviour.

2.5      The charity UK Youth identified in their report 'the economic value of youth work, 2022' that real term spending by local authorities had fallen from £158 per head in 2010/11 to £37 per head in 2020/21.   This they claimed was against a backdrop which saw spending on older people double over a similar period.

2.6      The institute of Fiscal studies analysis of this situation identified that there was a direct correlation between the removal of youth club provision and an increase in criminality.

> *'Young people who lost access to a youth club were 14% more likely to engage in criminality in the 6 years following closure…..with particularly high increases in acquisitive crime, drugs and violent offences'.*   (IFS, 'transforming justice' 2024).

2.7      The UK Youth report also highlighted that the need to access youth services had increased during this period, particularly mental health demand:

> *'During the COVID-19 pandemic the number of vulnerable young people (aged 8-19 years) in England rose from an estimated 1 million to 3 million.  The number of young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health increased by 10% between 2017 and 2020, a total of 1.1m (over 1 in 4 of the population aged 11-16)'.* (UK Youth report, 'the economic value of youth work' 2022).

2.8      Many youth workers view social isolation as a significant cause of this increase in demand for mental health services.

> *'Social isolation is a real issue, a real contributor to this problem. Kids spend more time at home where their parents are often stressed. So the kids interact with less people, spending more time scrolling on social media.  They decide their lives are not as good as the lives of the people they follow and insecurities develop'.*  (VRU Youth Lead)
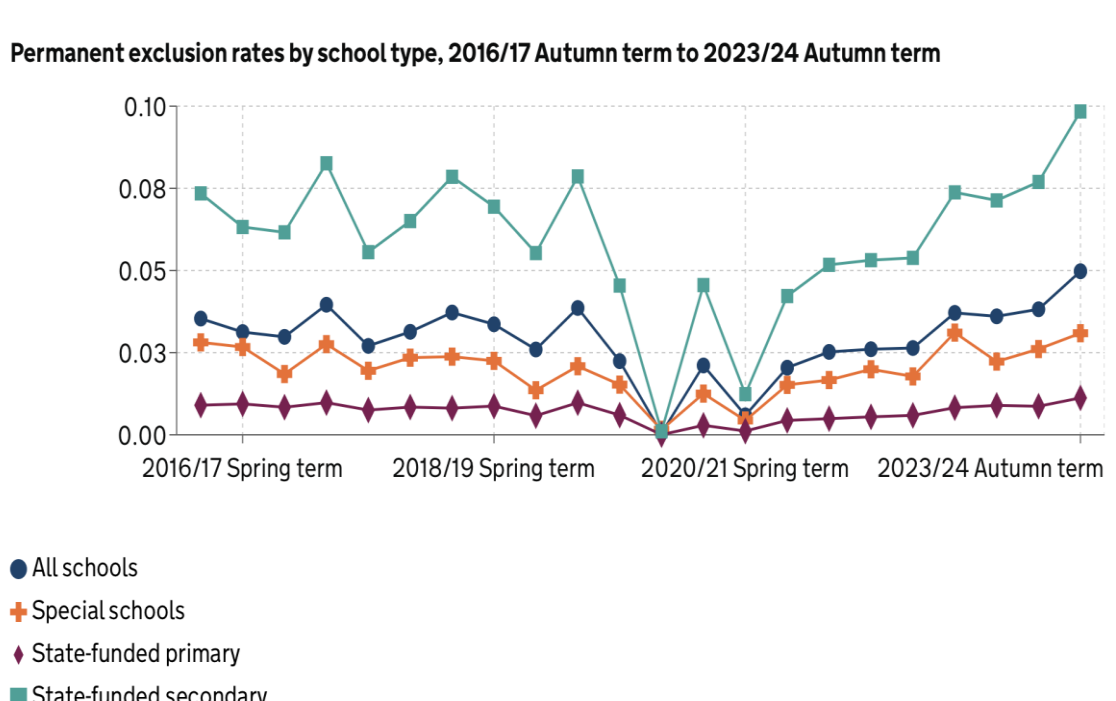
2.9     Others see fundamental issues in the home as a key contributor to a rise in mental health demand:

> *'Many of our young people go home to an environment which is just a powder keg. Nobody sees the issues that young people face in the home. They go to bed with anxiety and they wake up with anxiety. By the time they go to school they are exhausted.'*
> (Charitable Sector Youth Worker)

2.10    It has long been recognised that young people who suffer trauma at home can become problematic at school through poor attendance or behavioural issues. Very often this can lead to 'alternative provision'(AP), most commonly this would be provided at a pupil referral unit (PRU).

2.11     In 2018 a Government Social Research report identified that local authorities in England and Wales utilise AP for multiple reasons identifying excluded pupils and mental and physical health related issues as the most common.

2.12    Government statistics published for the Autumn term of 2023/24 listed 346,279 suspensions in England and Wales, an increase from 247,366 for the same period the previous year. There was also an increase in permanent exclusions for 2023/24 rising from 3,104 to 4,168. The steady rise in these statistics should be a cause for concern.



Permanent exclusion rates by school type, 2016/17 Autumn term to 2023/24 Autumn term

Legend:
- All schools
- Special schools
- State-funded primary
- State-funded secondary

**(FIGURE 3 – HM Govt Education)**

[12]

2.13    This increasing trend in suspension and exclusion from mainstream school has resulted in an increase in alternative provision of 16% to 47,600 in 2022/23, a rate that has more than doubled since 2017/18.  71.3% of the pupils receiving AP are boys.

2.14    In addition, there were 84,300 suspensions of pupils in primary schools in 2022/03, a rate which has also doubled over the past 10 years.

2.15    The link between school exclusion and criminality has also been recognised for many years.  The recent 'Child North' report produced by the Centre for Young Lives amongst others estimated that 85% of boys in young offender institutions (YOI) had previously been excluded from school.

2.16    The Nuffield Trust report that there were 11,494 people under the age of 25 in YOI's in England and Wales as of 31 December 2022, 14% of the total prison population.

2.17    Added to this, in January 2025, the Guardian newspaper reported that 10% of the children in YOI's are being housed in institutions that are more than 75 miles from their homes.  The newspaper quoted the Children's Commissioner concerns about this situation contributing to further violence and offending.

> *'Children in the youth justice system need stable, positive relationships in their lives, if we are serious about offering them a real chance for rehabilitation. Placing them many miles away from their families and homes, often in facilities where the standard of care falls woefully short, does not create the conditions for these children to become happy and successful adults'.*   (Rachel De Souza, Children's Commissioner, Guardian Newspaper, January 2025).

2.18    Family breakdown, mental health issues and poverty are cited as the key reasons for a rise in youth homelessness in the UK in recent years.  In January 2025, Action for Children reported that an estimated 136,000 young people aged between 16 and 24 were homeless or at risk of homelessness in 2022/3.

2.19    In producing that figure the charity recognised that measuring homelessness is difficult due to the phenomena of 'hidden homelessness' where young people utilise informal arrangements – 'sofa surfing', sleeping on floors or staying with friends or strangers.

2.20    In 2023, the Charity Centrepoint estimated that youth homelessness was increasing by 6% per annum.  This is a youth related problem that extends across the UK.

## Regional focus
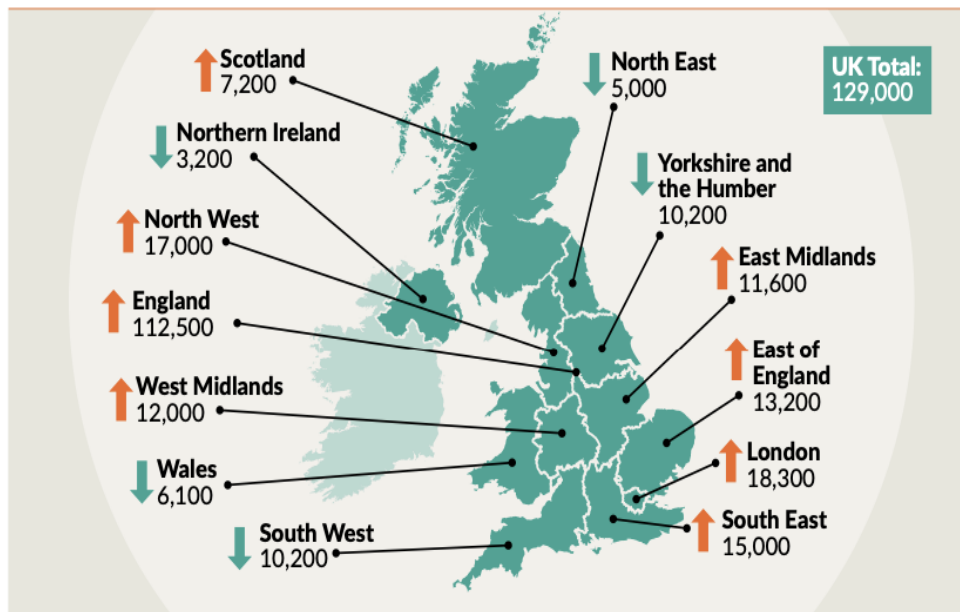


**(FIGURE 3 – Centrepoint, Unaccounted, 2023)**

> *'Many of the young people who enter the homeless sector also enter the criminal justice sector.  They are exploited, often because they were raised in poverty – they grew up in unsafe, insecure overcrowded accommodation and it was inevitable that they would become homeless by the time they were 18.  It makes complete sense that the person offering them the next step, the next option, would be tempting them with an offer they could exploit'. (Youth Worker, homeless sector).*

2.21    A large proportion of the homeless young people in England and Wales have been members of the care system.  In October 2024, the charity 'Become' reported that 4,300 young care leavers in England and Wales were facing homelessness, an increase of 54% over 5 years.

> *'For young people leaving care there is little support. The housing teams and homeless teams don't work together, although often they are located in the same building. They know that a care leaver will turn 18 on a certain date but there is no forward planning. They know that money is tight and every penny counts so the lack of preventative work is the dumbest thing ever. 1 in 3 care leavers end up homeless and that has significant costs'. (Youth Worker, homeless sector).*

2.22    The Centre for Young Lives report 'Child of the North' estimated that while 94% of 'looked after children' in England and Wales 'do not get into trouble with the law, approximately half of children in custody have previously been in care at some point'.

2.23    The links between the numerous issues facing the youth sector become more apparent as each is examined in turn.

2.24    In 2024, the Charity 'Missing People' estimated that over 170,000 people go missing in the UK every year.  Of these, 75,000 are children.  'Looked after children' are at a high risk of being reported missing at 1 in 10 compared to 1 in 200 of other children.  A 'looked after' child will be reported missing 6 times on average.

2.25    They state that most people that go missing will exhibit some form of vulnerability or risk which is exacerbated by the fact that they have gone missing.

> *'There is undoubtedly over reporting in the care sector but you cannot get away from the fact that this results in criminalisation and trauma. 7 out of every 10 young people who have been sexually exploited have been reported as missing. 1 in every 4 trafficked children have been looked after in local authority care and have gone missing'. (*Youth Worker, missing people).

2.26    The Hope Collective has held 36 Hope hacks across the UK since 2022.  Over 3000 young people have attended these events and have been asked to identify and discuss the challenges they face in society at present.  Very rarely is violence raised as a specific issue:

> *'For the first time young people are being asked to say what the problems are in their communities and talk about them. The common themes are poverty and inequality, every group talks about the levels of it. Racism always comes up, education, policing in the major cities, transport, the impact of social media and mental health is a huge topic on its own'. (*Youth Management Lead, Hope Collective).

2.27    The contribution of poverty and inequality to the increase in service need is constant across all topics.

2.28    In 2023, the Child Poverty Action Group reported DWP figures that indicated 4.2 million children were living in poverty in the UK in April 2022 (29% of all children), an increase from 3.6 million in 2011.

**Children** have consistently had the highest poverty rates, while **pensioners** along with **working-age adults without children** now have the lowest
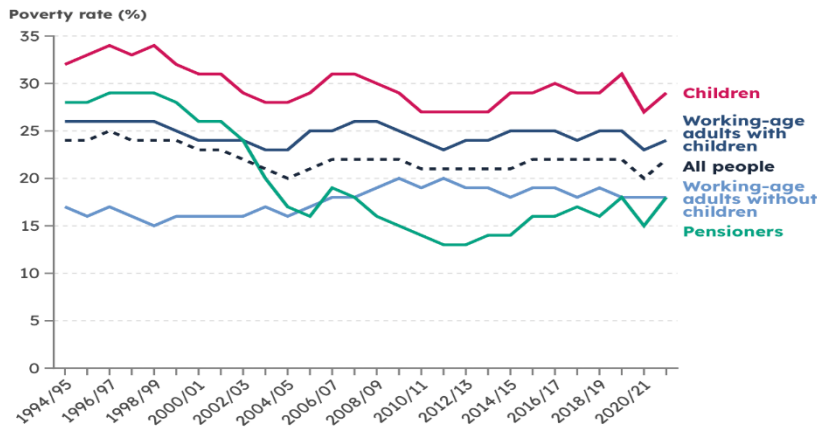
Poverty rate (%)



Source: Households Below Average Income, 2021/22, DWP

**(FIGURE 4 – poverty rates)**

2.29    It is at this time when children's requirement for appropriate support is most acute that the reduction in youth spend is having the greatest adverse impact.

> *'We are told that there are 4.2 million young people living in poverty in the UK at present, it's an old figure, I reckon it may be 5 million by now. In the main they have poor educational attainment, poor mental health and a poor diet. Their neighbourhoods have poor service provision and no health infrastructure. Many local authorities are on the verge of bankruptcy but they have a statutory requirement to deliver in respect of social care and education so that's where their budget goes. Who is going to be responsible for long term planning and decision making in respect of the services that young people need now?'* (Charitable Sector Youth Worker).

2.30    A long term failure to address these issues and look to the criminal justice system for solutions comes at a heavy price.  It is not a cheap option and does not address the problems that young people face.

# 3. The cost of a crisis response

3.1     In March 2024, the House of Lords produced a report on the impact of funding cuts to local authorities.  This report quoted the national Audit Office and stated that total spending power for local authorities fell by 26% between 2010/11 and 2020/21. During this period spending funded by government also fell by 50% on a 'real terms like for like basis'.

3.2     The report concluded that councils had responded to the resultant funding pressures by redirecting available funding to their statutory funding responsibilities such as social care.

> *'In local authorities with social care responsibilities, their spending on social care rose from 52% to 80% of their spending power'. (*House of Lords Library Report – Local government finances, 2024)

3.3     As a result, the report stated that there has been a general reduction in preventative services and a greater focus on reactive, demand led provision as councils have focussed their spend on meeting their statutory obligations.

3.4     Many councils reported their intention to make further cuts to local neighbourhood services after the publication of the final local government finance settlement for 2024/5 due to lack of funding.

3.5     Most worryingly, the Institute for Fiscal Studies is quoted in the report as stating that 'the real pain looks set to be from 2025/6 onwards'.  Given the impact on youth services in the previous 10 years this could indicate a potential for further increases in demand in the years to come with fewer available services to meet that need.

> *''Many young people have become marginalised and get involved in a system that only reacts when a crisis occurs. It is a system that only provides services when things go wrong. The system invests in failure due to its crisis response prioritising its statutory obligation of safety. Young people do not want to be part of such a system. It is a system that allows them to develop serious problems and our responses do nothing to address these'. (*CEO, Social Impact Charity).

3.6     This is an approach that, in itself. makes little fiscal sense.  As outlined previously, the lack of preventative spend has seen an increase in crisis response across a range of youth led issues. This type of response is expensive.

3.7    In each area of increasing spend, the cost of a crisis alternative is much greater than the cost of mainstream service provision.

3.8    In October 2018, the Department of Education quantified the cost of alternative provision in education. Based on data from the preceding financial year it estimated that the average cost per annum for a full-time post in AP for an academic year was £18,000. This figure will have increased substantially since that time. Government funding statistics for 2024/25 base per pupil costs at mainstream schools at £7,690. At modest estimates, it would appear that educating a child at an AP costs 3 times as much as mainstream education. As previously stated, the number of pupils at AP's has doubled since 2017/8 and show a continued rise each academic year along with the resultant cost.

3.9    Despite the cost, many of the children who receive AP do not achieve the level of positive destination of their mainstream peers. The value of this approach to addressing the problems faced by young people can therefore be questioned.

> *'Despite having struggled in mainstream schools these children tell me that they see the importance of education, they understand the value of working hard and many are desperate for the chance to have a real job. Despite the same ambition, the post 16 outcomes for this group of children are not as good as those of their mainstream peers. 29% do not sustain a positive destination after leaving in year 11 compared to 5.2% of pupils in mainstream schools…often they are not getting the support they need to succeed….many are battling issues in their personal lives that make it more difficult for them to engage with education'.* (Children's Commissioner, 'An alternative route', 2024).

3.10    In 2023, the homeless charity 'Centrepoint' estimated that the total cost of homelessness amongst young people in the UK amounts to £27,347 per person per annum, a total of £8.5 Billion a year.

**Annual cost of youth homelessness by component type, in absolute and per-head terms (2021/22 prices)**

| Cost Type | Total Cost (per annum) [nearest £1,000] | Per-Head Cost (per annum) [nearest £1] | Share |
|---|---|---|---|
| Output Loss due to Inactivity/ Unemployment | £5,534,844,000 | £17,711 | 64.8% |
| Criminal Justice | £845,956,000 | £2,707 | 9.9% |
| Homelessness Services | £492,648,000 | £1,576 | 5.8% |
| Lower Productivity | £478,094,000 | £1,530 | 5.6% |
| Social Security | £472,744,000 | £1,513 | 5.5% |
| NHS Health Services | £456,179,000 | £1,460 | 5.3% |
| Mental Health Services | £140,886,000 | £451 | 1.7% |
| Substance Misuse Services | £124,540,000 | £399 | 1.5% |
| Total* | £8,545,891,000 | £27,347 | 100% |

(**FIGURE 5 – cost of homelessness**)

3.11 A house of commons report on youth homelessness produced in April 2024 quoted the Centrepoint research. It stated that local authorities in England required an additional £332m to help them meet their legal obligations to assess and potentially support young people that had not been assessed the previous year.  These are costs that could be greatly reduced if we engaged appropriately with young people who are at risk of homelessness.

> *'Homelessness will always exist and therefore it is an issue that needs long term funding and planning.  The release of little bursts of money every year or two is stressful and so short-sighted.  The 3rd sector steps in and does what the government doesn't do and as long as that continues to be the case the government don't learn'.* (*Youth Worker, Homeless Sector').*

3.12 Ultimately, the destination for many of the young people who have experienced AP or homelessness is to find themselves in a secure placement or a YOI.  A political focus on custody as a deterrent envisions the use of such an option.  It is an option that is accompanied by significant cost.

3.13 On 11 January 2024 in response to a parliamentary question, the Justice Minister outlined the costs of incarceration:

> *'The average annual cost for a child or a young person in youth custody, inclusive of educational services is:*
> *Secure Children's Home     £299,459.47*
> *Secure Training Centre     £305,892.40*
> *YOI                        £129,333.58*
> *There is no difference in cost whether the child or young person is placed on remand or is in custody for other reasons'.*
> (*Edward Argar, Justice Minister).*

3.14 The value of this approach has been questioned on numerous occasions, most recently in October 2024 by HM Inspector of Prisons:

> *'This review sets out a bleak picture of steadily declining educational opportunities and quality, reduced work experience and work opportunity and sharply reduced time out of cell for children.  In the worst case some children only had half an hour out of their locked cell per day. Children are poorly prepared for their release and generally lack the skills and training that might help them secure employment'.  (*HM Inspector of Prisons, 'A decade of declining quality of education in YOI's').*

3.15    Very often, a young person leaving the secure estate enters the homeless sector from where their return to prison can be inevitable and the cost continues.

> *'We still have massive issues with young people coming out of prison with no support and nowhere to go.  The guidelines say 'don't release on a Friday' but they still do, very often at 4pm when everything is closed. The young person goes back to the community they left, to the same vulnerabilities and from there straight back to prison.  They also face the prospect of violating their bail conditions, for example, 'don't go to Brixton' when Brixton is the only place they know', (Youth Worker, Homeless Sector).*

3.16    Wherever the 'crisis response' is examined evidence uncovers little beneficial product resulting from high levels of public expenditure.  In this model preventative spend would provide significant saving for highly stretched public services whilst offering young people more stability, support and opportunity.  This is where we should invest, failure to do so is failure to provide our children with a positive future.

> *'What kind of system would help them? One that was more outcome focussed. A system that provides young people with hope, confidence and opportunity, safe spaces, trusted adults and someone to connect to'. (*CEO, Social Impact Charity).

## 4. What is a 'Safe Space'?

4.1     When interviewing contributors of views to frame this report the vast majority identify a need for young people to have access to 'safe spaces' in order to thrive.

4.2     For many, a safe space may be a school or a youth club, even the family home. Others find this definition too simplistic and highlight challenges that arise as a result.

> *'A safe space is a lot more than a school or a youth club, many young people would not recognise a school as being such a place. A place becomes safe because it has value for you, you attach a meaning to it and can be your whole authentic self, accountable for your actions but viewed as an individual, a human being'. (Youth worker, homeless sector)*

4.3     In 2008, the charity 'Onside' opened its first 'Youth Zone' in Bolton. The charity now has a network of 15 multi-million pound youth centres in some of the most deprived areas of the UK. The money to fund these projects is raised through a unique partnership of charitable giving, local business contribution and contributions from local authorities. They provide a safe space.



**(FIGURE 6 – Onside funding model)**

4.4      With dedicated youth workers 'Onside' aim to 'be there for young people with the tools and resources they need to thrive….to navigate the difficulties in life with resilience'.

4.5      Onside has had a major impact in the communities in which their zones have been established and reporting 650 thousand visits to youth zones per annum and high levels of success amongst multiple outcome measures.

4.6      Not every young person benefits from this type of 'place of safety', however, and those involved in the sector highlight a need for alternatives to be available.

> *''Where they have been established they have drawn a lot of support money from the local authorities for work that is based in one municipal building. Many young people go there and derive benefit from it. Many cannot though for a variety of reasons and they are left on the fringes, left behind. This model requires a hub and spoke approach but rarely is the spoke discussed'.* (Lead, Youth Engagement Charity)

4.7      For many young people a safe space can be simply a place where they meet friends, have a coffee, feel comfortable. The provision of safety is found in that familiarity.

> *'Ask a young person why they go to McDonalds and they will say 'a burger, a coffee, a conversation, warmth or safety'. The last 3 are the most important, the first 2 are the excuse. Ask McDonalds what they do and they will say 'we serve burgers', they won't say 'we provide a place of safety'.* (Charitable Sector, Youth Worker).

4.8      This point is reinforced by numerous workers in the sector who highlight that the loss of traditional places of safety has required young people gravitate to other places where safety might be found.

> *'As libraries and youth clubs are no longer available in the main young people tend to gravitate to other places they would call 'safe'. Very often you find missing young people in fast food places where they can access wi-fi. They are also found in large scale hubs like train stations but these are places where they can also be exploited too so many train stations employ safeguarding teams'.* (Youth Worker, Missing People).

[22]

4.9     In 2019, UK Youth produced a 'safe spaces framework', a set of standards that were consistent with operating an organisation which provides a safe space for children and young people.  It offered a 'UK Youth Safe Spaces Mark' to organisations that achieved these standards.

4.10    The aim of this process was to give children, young people, parents and guardians confidence that certain organisations or premises had received a nationally verified recognition for the safety that they provide to young people.

4.11    In many respects, this development recognises that safety for young people can be found in a multitude of places.

4.12    Added to this, online safety for young people is a subject that has been in the spotlight for some time with no clear answers forthcoming.  In many respects safety is harder to achieve for young people when they engage with others online and this can be due to a generational barrier.  For many the answers lie in engaging with young people to find the solution to this problem.

> *'There is a lack of understanding and corresponding fear of young people's use of social media.  Changes in society have led to increased use of technology and the opening up of digital communities for children and young people that are not understood by practitioners. There is a need for youth practitioners and social media platforms to learn from young people about how to maintain 'safe spaces' across community and digital sites'* (Safe Spaces, Fraser, Irwin et al, 2024).

# 5.  Who is a 'trusted adult'?

5.1    It is clear that engaging with young people in a place of safety requires imagination and a willingness to utilise a variety of opportunities.  Similarly, different views are expressed about how this engagement should be achieved but most respondents utilise the term 'trusted adult' as the person who should undertake this task.

5.2    This is again a difficult term to define.  Some local authorities have defined the term trusted adult for statutory purposes:

> *'A trusted adult is someone that you have a good relationship with. It is someone who has your best interests in mind.  You have a right to choose whether you want a trusted adult and who that person should be'.*  (East Lothian Council, Looked after children and young people).

5.3    Other organisations have also defined the term.  For example, UK Youth produced a report 'someone to turn to, being a trusted adult for young people' which aimed to produce a 'youth led' definition of a trusted adult.

> *'A trusted adult is chosen by the young person as a safe figure that listens without judgement, agenda or expectation but with the sole purpose of supporting or encouraging positivity within that young person's life'. (UK Youth)*

5.4     The consistency in these definitions is that the responsibility for identifying a person of trust rests with the young person themselves and the basis of that selection is the relationship that is established.  Thus, it follows that it is not merely the role that the trusted adult is engaged in that is important (teacher, youth worker, even family member) but rather the manner of the engagement with that individual that is the essential criteria.

> *'In many ways the decision about who is an adult that a young person can trust is one that only the young person can decide upon.  Many of the school disclosures received from young people are not made to a teacher but to janitors, playground supervisors and the like - the young person picks the adult that they can trust'.* (Charitable Sector, Youth Worker).

5.5    It follows that when considering an applicant for recruitment in a role where youth engagement is an essential element, an ability to build a relationship with a young person in order to offer the requisite support and encouragement should be the main priority for appointment.

> *'I believe that there is a link between a trusted adult and someone who spots your potential, maybe shares a similar outlook or interest. The young person may meet that trusted adult on a fairly regular basis and the relationship develops through this continuity. It should not be the role that they perform but the fact that they can display empathy and understanding that forms the basis of that relationship'.* (Youth Worker, charitable sector).

5.6    With this in mind, numerous agencies that engage with young people have the opportunity to provide them with the support and encouragement that may make a difference in that young person's life. This may be in housing support, social services, employability schemes, youth justice and numerous other areas of public life. Whilst many employed by organisations in these sectors may recognise that they have such a role, a great many do not. Improved training in this respect or changes in employment and promotion practices may provide a future dividend.

> *'These skills can be spotted and nurtured. Within the right workplace culture these are skills that can be recognised and developed. This could be achieved by making small changes such as making youth engagement and support part of the job description. Ironically, largely due to safeguarding, we have a risk adverse attitude to youth engagement at present which presents obstacles'.* (Youth Worker, charitable sector).

## 6. Youth hubs

6.1    As previously outlined the Labour Party manifesto for the 2024 General Election contained a proposal for the allocation of £93m to establish a 'Young Futures Programme'. This proposal envisages the establishment of a network of hubs which would reach every community.

6.2    The hubs will provide youth workers, mental health support workers and career advisors with the aim of assisting to address the mental health issues that young people face and to prevent them being drawn into crime. Referrals to the hubs are to come from 'local prevention partnerships'.

6.3    Further detail is awaited on the location and operation of these hubs. Many in the sector welcome these proposals but have expressed concerns about the location of the hubs, their method of operation and their proposed engagement with existing service provision such as family hubs and VRU's.

6.4    In 2023, HM Government intimated that a network of family hubs and start for life programmes would be established across 75 eligible local authorities throughout the UK. The aim was to enhance services for parents and carers in order to support them in nurturing and caring for their babies and young people with a view to providing improvements in health and education.

6.5    In September 2024, the family hub network reported that children and young people up to the age of 19 can access a 'broad and integrated range of early help to overcome difficulties and build stronger relationships'. They confirmed that hubs had been established in co-located premises such as children's centres but could also be found in schools, community centres and 'other places where parents feel welcome'. The programmes stated intention was to build on the legacy of the 'SureStart' programme introduced by the last Labour government.

6.6    This report provided more detail on the service provision at family hubs and the reasons for their establishment:

> *'Raising children in the midst of other challenges is far from easy and families do not just need support when children are young. When early help is not available and parents have to struggle alone children often have more physical and mental health problems, under perform at school and are much less likely to fulfil their potential. Every year increasing numbers of children are taken into local authority care. More effective early intervention is needed in every community to reverse this trend'.* (family hubs network report, September 2024).

6.7     In establishing the young futures programme, the family hubs may provide a basis that can be built upon, focussing as they do on early intervention and prevention.

6.8     Notwithstanding, some youth workers have expressed concern at the lack of detail that is currently available with regard to this development:

> *'At present everyone is in the dark.  Youth futures hubs currently sit within the Home Office and there is a fear that they will therefore be all about reducing violence when youth work is about so much more.  Potentially they will re-purpose old buildings for youth to meet workers, maybe re-purpose the family hubs but the family hubs are already struggling.  What we need to do is provide things for young people to do'.  (Lead*, Youth Engagement Charity).

6.9     Some believe that the youth futures hubs may deliver services in schools such as mental health support.  Their concern here being the level of demand that such a service may face and their ability to address the underlying causes of the problem:

> *'It would be good to see the introduction of mental health support workers in every school, in the end though they may just tackle the symptoms without addressing the causes.  In my opinion it's the lack of control and agency that young people have in their lives that contribute to mental health ailments.  They have fear and live in poverty, this worsens their mental health.  The paradigm is let's treat the issues that present when we could create conditions that address the issues that are causing the problems'.   (CEO,* Youth Engagement Charity).

6.10     On this there is widespread agreement across the sector:

> *'There is talk about mental health services and perhaps stationing mental health workers in schools.  I believe that this would be wrong. If a person fell and broke their arm on the pavement you wouldn't fix the pavement by mending their arm. Young people need connections and continuing consistent support.  I don't know many young people that get that support outside a family dynamic but it is essential particularly at transition age'* (Youth Worker, Mental Health Charity).

6.11     It is apparent that those who work in the sector welcome the development of additional youth and family support but believe that locally delivered services, tailored to meet individual need are essential.

> *'I believe that support workers would be best deployed in communities. They could perform relationship based practice with trauma informed people undertaking the task. A solution orientated place-based service that prioritises relationships. The youth hubs would be an addition. I would base the hubs in places where young people are to be found - gyms, leisure centres, parks or shopping centres, young people are not hard to find'.* (Youth Worker, Youth Engagement Charity).

6.12     The need for local adaptation of any youth futures programme is highlighted by a great many respondees. Some have developed a clear vision of what may be possible.

> *'I am of the opinion that VRU's may continue but should become a service delivered by local authorities rather than PCC's. This would tie in nicely with the youth futures programme. The discussion around this is developing all the time. The prevention partnerships will be the umbrella body and will largely replicate the VRU's, they may be the key to success. They must look at wider prevention not just violence and vulnerability but should operate like the VRU, pulling people together and progressing a public health approach. They can identify the people that are most at risk and address that need through the hubs and locally delivered services'. (VRU Director)*

6.13     Potentially a national body might provide oversight of this prevention approach. This is a proposal that has some support from VRU Directors.

> *'I think that a central body should be established to oversee the delivery of prevention strategies that support our young people. Even a national directive that each local authority area should introduce programmes aimed at delivering prevention strategies in this respect would be welcome. At the end of the day, we need to address the causes if we are to get a return on investment'.* *(VRU, Director)*

## 7. Prevention programmes

7.1      The consensus of those involved in the sector is clear. Young people need a variety of services and support in order to prevent them from encountering many of the social hurdles that are apparent across the country and which currently prove so costly to society in so many ways.

7.2      These services require to be tailored to individual need and may vary from location to location.

> *'The services we provide cannot be the same for each community. There is a huge divergence of need. An obvious example is the contrast between urban and coastal areas. Geographically the coastal areas are harder to service and they too are in real need. Infrastructure is often limited and many have a seasonal economy which is largely dormant for almost 6 months of the year. People feel left behind and there is a great deal of poverty. The challenge there is different from an urban area'. (Youth worker, youth engagement charity)*

7.3      By adopting a public health approach, VRU's have engaged other organisations in tackling some of these issues in partnership with the need to address violence being the catalyst. Those involved would stress that violence is only one issue that these programmes address. Indeed, in the main, the development of these programmes and projects are designed to support young people and divert them from behaviour that puts them at risk from a range of challenges.

7.4      Many of these programmes have been evaluated and have been shown to produce excellent results. They offer opportunity for expansion and can be tailored to the individual needs of specific communities.

7.5      External investment in such programmes by private sector funding would provide these projects with long term stability, the charitable bodies that deliver these services with an ability to structure and plan for the future without fear of loss of income and the young people utilising the services with greater hope and opportunity. Oversight, expansion and delivery of such programmes could be the responsibility of the prevention partnerships with independent governance structures established ensuring that each contributor plays their part to achieve the intended outcomes.

7.6      Through the use of Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) these preventative programmes could reduce the drain on public funds that is increasing continually through the current 'crisis response'. Some of the proceeds from the resultant savings could then be utilised to sustain the programmes and bring about lasting improvement.

7.7     The public health approach defines three main levels at which such interventions can be implemented – primary, secondary and tertiary. Each of these interventions plays a different role when addressing a public health problem.
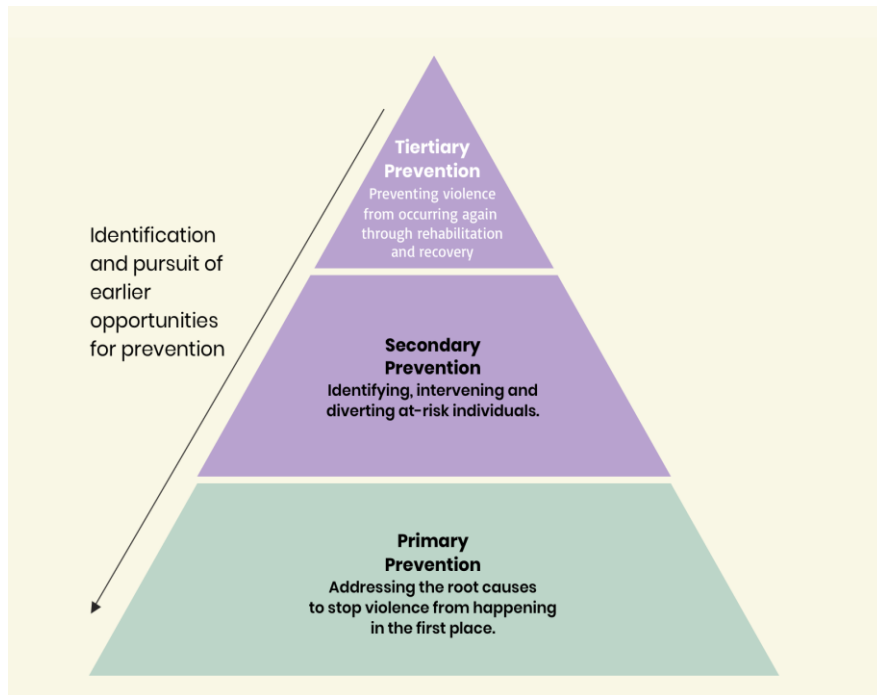


**(FIGURE 7 – VRU prevention model)**

7.8     Many VRU's have implemented projects in each area of the public health model. Some have found primary and secondary prevention harder to sustain although these are essential in addressing need.

> *'Many VRU's have primary, secondary and tertiary projects but I find that some tend to concentrate on the tertiary. If you can't support primary and secondary it's not public health, it's just repetition of the same old, same old'. (Lead, Youth Engagement Charity').*

7.9     Some examples of successful programmes are summarised below, Each of these could be adopted in a variety of communities and adapted to meet specific community need. They offer alternative, positive outcomes for participants. They offer value for money.

## Brighton Streets Project

7.10    The Brighton Streets project which started in 2019 is a unique example of innovation in the provision of youth services. It is a programme that involves the delivery of services by detached youth workers in the streets and not within offices.

7.11    Concentrating on primary prevention the project sought to co-ordinate numerous pockets of youth activity that were being undertaken across the city by a variety of organisations.  Through funding provided by the local VRU, partnerships were extended to link statutory and voluntary services who work in tandem towards joint goals. Youth work undertaken in schools was joined with similar work in communities, criminal justice and health also participate to target preventative activities in areas where young people were known to come to harm.

7.12    Members of the team are included in strategic management meetings convened by a variety of participating organisations including social work and have assisted to formulate new approaches to problems of long standing.

7.14    By 2024 Brighton recorded a 35% reduction in youth violence against the 2019 baseline – an outlier for the surrounding area where youth violence statistics over the period had deteriorated in general.

7.15    An independent evaluation conducted by the centre for Education and Youth in 2021 found a 'clear and plausible causal link between youth workers support and a reduction in young people's involvement in negative, risky and potentially violent behaviour'.  Based on this evaluation a similar project was commissioned in Nottingham.

## Lancashire Youth Champions Programme

7.16    The champions programme is a trauma informed intervention programme that was introduced by the Lancashire Violence Reduction Network and which works in partnership with nine football community trusts across the county.  It is a programme which aims to divert young people between the ages of 10 and 25 from criminal activity and prevent those who have experienced the justice system from re-offending.

7.17     The programme was launched in January 2020 under the title 'divert' with a desire to become an intervention scheme for young people in custody with a view to reducing re-offending rates.  The Covid-19 pandemic required a re-appraisal and the champions programme developed.  The initial programme which had a single referral source is now a community programme for children and young adults offering a range of support and receiving referrals from a wide range of services and organisations.  This expansion indicates an ability to adapt the service to multiple areas of youth need.

7.18    Each participant in the programme is paired with a mentor who is employed by the football community trust.  The programme is flexible and client centred allowing participants to progress through its 3 stages at their own pace.  Mentors provide ongoing support whilst the client remains committed and engaged.  The mentors

are expected to take an interest in the participant, foster trust and promote personal and social development.

7.19    An independent evaluation by Lancashire University in 2023 highlighted the success of the programme and the fact that it was addressing a significant gap in support services for young people at risk in the Lancashire area. The increasing demand and growing waiting list to take part in the programme underlined its relevance and necessity due to lack of alternative provision.

7.20    The evaluation also highlighted significant positive outcomes for clients that extended well beyond the criminal justice system. These included improved mental health, better behaviour and enhanced school engagement. Over 2000 young people have participated in the programme thus far.

## The Reach Programme

7.21    With £1m of funding provided by the YEF, the reach programme is another example of primary prevention that was developed and led by the Leicestershire and Rutland Violence Reduction Unit. Its aim is to prevent young people at risk of school suspension from becoming involved in criminal offending.

7.22    The six month intensive mentoring programme utilises a team of 8 highly skilled mentors to deliver 1 to 1 support in key areas such as:

- Relationship building
- Understanding behaviours
- Social skills
- Confidence, wellbeing and resilience
- Positive relationships and
- Goals and aspirations.

7.23    In addition, the programme also works with the young person's wider family and their friendship group to enhance the support network around them.

7.24    Independent evaluation by Sheffield Hallam University found many positive aspects to the programme. In particular, it identified that there was an important gap in support for young people when they were suspended from school or at risk of suspension from school, a gap that the project addressed. The flexibility of the delivery model including its ability to be implemented outside of school hours was also highlighted for praise.

## Street and Arrow

7.25    Heavily influenced by the extremely successful 'Homeboy Industries' project in Los Angeles, Street and Arrow was a tertiary intervention project that was operated by the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit from 2015 until 2022.

7.26    For over 30 years, Homeboy Industries has successfully provided employment, training and hope to former gang members and previously incarcerated individuals to help them redirect their lives. Likewise, Street and Arrow was a social enterprise designed to create jobs for individuals with a history of offending.

7.27    Training, mentoring and employment experience was given to people with convictions who wanted to gain employment.  Being in employment is identified as a significant factor in preventing re-offending.  In an airstream caravan on the streets of Glasgow, trainees learned the skills of the trade and how to work as a member of a team.  Allied to that they learned how to establish a routine, become reliable and develop self-discipline.

7.28    Many young people changed their lives having been involved in the street and arrow project which unfortunately closed due to overhead costs.  The ethos of the programme proved to be a success, however, and it could be replicated in numerous locations.



**(FIGURE 8 – 'Street and Arrow')**

## *'In Your Corner' Monkstown Boxing Club*

7.29    This scheme is based in Monkstown and Rathcoole both being areas within the 10% most deprived in Northern Ireland with increased educational attainment a strategic priority for the local authority.  The project is a joint collaboration between the Monkstown Boxing Club and the nearby Abbey College.

7.30    The catchment area is characterised as high poverty, low educational attainment, social and economic deprivation and ongoing paramilitary linked violence.  The Jordanstown ward, one mile away, is one of the four least deprived wards in Northern Ireland.

7.31    An independent evaluation of the scheme investigated links between the legacy of the 'troubles' and low educational attainment.  The evaluation found that young people growing up in Monkstown and Rathcoole are disproportionately exposed to transgenerational trauma and continued paramilitary linked violence.  Ongoing paramilitary assaults and shootings are part of daily life.  It was identified that

through paramilitary conflict, poverty and a selective educational system, pupils in these areas faced compound educational disadvantage.

7.32    'In your corner' is a relationship based educational programme.  Each year a group of pupils aged 15-16 who are at risk of disengaging from school are selected to participate in the scheme.  They spend some time at the boxing club where they have breakfast before teachers arrive to deliver some of their educational input.  They also spend some time at school to receive core subjects.

7.33    A variety of funding bodies contribute towards the costs of the scheme which enables the boxing club to employ dedicated youth workers to deliver the programme.  The educational attainment of the participants has been transformed with the most recent group achieving a minimum 7 GCSE passes at grades 1-3.

> *'The boxing club here has been rooted in the community for years. The staff are seen as role models.  The experience of the young people who participate has been nothing short of transformational'.* (Principle, Abbey Community College)

## Thrive at Five

7.34    Thrive at Five has no connection with violence reduction units but was introduced in 2018 with a view to addressing unmet social and emotional need impacting the cognitive and physical development needs of babies and young people.

7.35    Currently in England and Wales half of all children receiving free school meals reach the expected level of development (social, emotional, communication and language).  This compares with almost three quarters of their peers in 2023.  The gap grows as they get older and the impact continues into adulthood.  Half of all children who fail GCSE's at 16 were left behind when they were 5.

7.36    Thrive at Five has been established in two areas of England and is seeking to expand across the United Kingdom. This primary prevention programme operates in neighbourhoods where families face the greatest difficulties and require to navigate a 'fragmented early years system'.

7.37    The aim is to join the dots, to recruit local teams that link the early years system with parents and carers.  Each programme has an intention of delivering place based services for at least 7 years in order to make a real and sustained difference in the community.  Early results are promising, in one area the number of children with severe language delays was halved.

# 8.    Support for communities

8.1    Criminality and related social problems disproportionately affects marginalised and disadvantaged communities.  A great many of the population of these communities have complex and varied needs and this requires successful multi-agency cooperation to address.

8.2    The communities themselves must also be engaged in finding the solutions to these issues including the problems associated with criminality which have significant adverse impact on victims but also on the community itself.

8.3    Many see a recent significant reduction in community policing as a contributory factor to the problems that many communities face.  Decreasing police budgets through the years of austerity had played a role in this situation.

> *'Neighbourhood policing was seen as something nice to do rather than essential. As a result, the approach to community policing increasingly diverged between forces although generally it diminished. The service now accepts that neighbourhood policing isn't something that's nice to do. It is fundamental to the police's relationship with the public and to preventing crime'.*  (State of Policing, HMICFRS, 2024)

8.4    The decline in police presence in communities is most apparent in the number of police community support officers deployed over this period.  Without all the powers of a police officer PCSO's were introduced in 2002 to provide additional support and address anti-social behaviour in communities.



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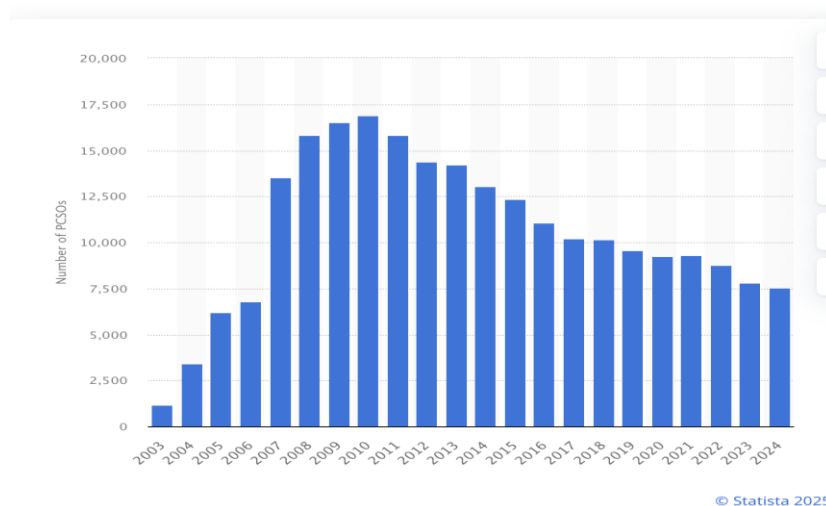
**(FIGURE 9 – PCSO Number in England and Wales 2003-2024)**

8.5     In December 2024, the Labour Government pledged to increase police support to communities by 13,000 through a neighbourhood policing guarantee.

8.6     In welcoming this pledge to support policing and communities, there is also an allied requirement to recognise that community policing must evolve beyond the simplistic perspective that policing should be focussed on law and order.  Whilst essential for maintaining public safety, a focus on enforcement leads to a cycle of arrest and imprisonment placing even greater strain on budgets and on the criminal justice system.

8.7     Police officers in communities must play their role in regaining the trust of the public that they serve and build relationships based on respect and mutual understanding.  They are often the first point of contact for individuals in crisis and are therefore uniquely placed to pull partners together and promote a whole systems response to the problems that the community encounters.

8.8     Similarly, PCSO's could be encouraged to develop a wider focus.  A more supportive and encouraging role which is not merely enforcement related.

> *'They could be deployed to create a web of support, a web of safety, an emotional infrastructure.  They could become community caretakers who could be present in schools and youth clubs perhaps finding kids who are outside the system and building relationships with them, ensuring they ate, had they slept? Are they safe?  They could be locally built, community based and even funded through a social enterprise model'.  (Charitable sector, youth worker).*

8.9     Over the years the role of the police in our communities has continually evolved.  In a time of complex and multi-faceted need they can become trauma informed system navigators helping to build stronger, healthier and more resilient communities.

# 9. Conclusion

9.1    Levels of violence remain significant and the tragic loss of life that often results necessitates a political response and media comment.  This discourse tends to focus on the violent acts and the weapons used rather than the causes of the violence.

9.2     In reality, however, young people have a multitude of challenges to navigate and violence is just but one.  Many people believe that these issues are connected and are often fuelled by poverty and inequality.

9.3    Our young people face these challenges at a time of financial hardship when the support that was previously there to assist them has been greatly reduced.  Youth clubs have been closed and youth workers have been removed whilst local authorities seek to meet their statutory obligations with diminishing resources.

9.4    The consequence of this approach has led to the adoption of a crisis response where services are only provided when things go wrong. This is an expensive approach to adopt as the costs incurred are significantly greater than the costs of establishing a more preventative and supportive system.

9.5    Despite this there are examples of outstanding initiatives to be found around the United Kingdom from which young people are benefitting.  These preventative programmes are being delivered in safe places by adults whom they trust.

9.6    In many areas, Violence Reduction Units have introduced such projects and the lesson they have learned has been that prevention works.  Moreover, whilst violence may have been the catalyst for intervention, proper support for young people addresses a host of social problems.

9.7    There is a proposal for violence reduction units to develop a wider remit, the role of 'prevention partnerships' envisaged by the incoming Labour government.  In this role they could oversee preventive activity in local authority areas and could be aided in this by a national oversight body created for that purpose.  A political instruction for local authorities to undertake appropriate preventative work would certainly be greatly welcomed.

9.8    Added to this, alternative sources of funding could be sought to alleviate the pressure on public finances through engagement with the business sector and philanthropic investment.  The resultant savings could be re-invested to establish an ongoing programme of prevention which allows our young people to flourish with hope and opportunity.

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