

# MAYOR OF LONDON

**Steve O'Connell**

Chairman of the Police and Crime Committee  
City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
More London  
London SE1 2AA

**Our ref:** MGLA131218-0666

**Date:** 08 MAR 2019

Dear Steve,

**Re: A new model for preventing violence in London**

Thank you for your letter dated 13 December 2018. I read your comments and recommendations with interest. I am very sorry for the delay in replying.

I share your concerns about the increase in violence since 2014. The causes and drivers are highly complex and include not only the Adverse Childhood Experiences you refer to in your report, but also over a decade of sustained Government cuts, resulting in disinvestment in youth provision, policing, education, and other public services. Government policy on rehabilitation and probation has also been highly damaging.

I am committed to reducing violence in London. I am pleased that my £15m investment in the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Violent Crime Task Force (VCTF) is recognised as having an impact. I am also pleased that longer term activity to change mindsets like London Needs You Alive, and investment in community responses to violence like the Knife Crime Seed Fund, are seen as valuable in the response to violence.

My £45m Young Londoners Fund aims to go some way to addressing the woeful lack of investment from central Government in London's young people, alongside my existing commissioned services such as youth work in major trauma centres and A&E departments, London Gang Exit, the Whole School approach, CSE services such as Empower, pan-London domestic abuse service, the Child House, Rape Crisis Centres and more.

However, the London Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) cannot only be doing more of the same. It must be about making changes at the community, local, regional, and structural level to embed the public health approach which I established in my Knife Crime Strategy across the capital.

I have dealt with each of your recommendations in turn below.

**Recommendation: The VRU explicitly focuses on tackling Adverse Childhood Experiences**

This is an important issue to address, and I can confirm that it will certainly be an area of focus for the Unit. As the work programme, focus and strategy develop, this will be taken into consideration.

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Our initial thinking in relation to the delivery model includes building in the reduction of ACE's, and building resilience in children and young people, families and communities as well as frontline services.

## **Recommendation: The VRU focuses on exclusions at an early stage in its work programme**

This is also an area of interest and was highlighted during the visit to Glasgow undertaken by my Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime and the Commissioner in February of last year. Whilst the legislative and governance infrastructure in Glasgow means that, unlike in London, regional and local partners can develop policy for schools, this doesn't mean that the London VRU should not explore this as an issue.

The total number of pupils in London secondary schools is set to increase over the next six years. If pupils continue to be excluded at the current rate this will mean a significant rise in the numbers of young people who are out of school. I will continue to work with Ofsted and other education stakeholders like the London Education Officers Group (Regional Schools Commissioners, Association of London Directors of Children's Services, Teaching Schools and London Councils) as well as community groups like Citizens UK to identify practical solutions to help support pupils and schools and minimise the need for exclusions. I also await the Timpson review into school exclusions with interest.

The role of education providers more broadly to reduce violence is crucial, which is why under my Knife Crime Strategy, in 2017, I lobbied for Ofsted and the Department for Education to take action on schools responsibility to safeguard against knife crime. I am pleased that, as a result, Ofsted announced a thematic review for London which is due for publication shortly. I expect this to show that whilst there are pockets of good practice in London schools, there is also more that can be done at both an institutional level and a systematic level to ensure that young people attending school are safeguarded. I ensured a discussion was held with Ofsted on emerging findings from this review at the VRU Partnership Reference Group on 6 March and I intend to continue pressing forward on this issue.

As you will be aware, I recently wrote to the Prime Minister, highlighting evidence which shows that children excluded from school are overrepresented in Young Offender Institutions and more likely to be victims of serious violence.

## **Recommendation: The Mayor and VRU call on social media providers to take down all content that explicitly calls for the use of violence**

I am pleased that my Office for Policing and Crime has made progress in this area already, pushing for content which glamourises knife crime and incites violence to be removed from online platforms such as YouTube.

I have secured £600,000 investment from Google, which will be used to train youth workers to be confident in dealing with issues relating to social media and enable young people to use social media for good. I will be building on this success through the work of the VRU.

## **Recommendation: The VRU explore how critical thinking skills can be best delivered via schools and elsewhere**

This is certainly an area of interest and relevance and as the work programme, focus and strategy develop this will be taken into consideration. As we are considering these, one of the areas of

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interest we are exploring is asset-based community development, which is to say building on the existing assets of communities and residents rather than importing services. Developing critical thinking, for example in tackling conflict or dealing with emotions is one aspect which could be considered here.

This is complemented by the Healthy Schools London core focus on social and emotional wellbeing and the Schools Mental Health toolkit and the Mental Health First Aid training for schools.

## **Recommendation: The VRU takes positive action to alleviate frustrations with commissioning processes**

Through community consultation, I have established that commissioning practices can be extremely difficult for community organisations, particularly smaller ones. Developing a commissioning plan will be one of the tasks of the VRU, which will aim to ensure best practice in commissioning, for example learning from the excellent work on the Young Londoners Fund which included market warming events, a clear prospectus, young people involved in scoring and interviewing applicants, and an open and transparent process.

The Committee will be aware that there are occasions when timescales are outside of my control. An example of this was the Government's Early Intervention Youth Fund, which was announced on 30 July with six weeks to create multi-agency bids to be submitted via Police and Crime Commissioners. A paper on commissioning principles for the VRU was presented to the Partnership Reference Group on 22 January and is available online.

## **Recommendation: The VRU enables mediation at a community level**

This is certainly an area of interest and relevance and as the work programme, focus and strategy develop this will be taken into consideration. My staff have met with representatives from the Chicago Cure Violence initiative, which is of interest, though success in US cities may not translate to success in London. It will be essential to develop practice based on effectiveness in the UK.

The Mayor has invested an additional £15m into the VCTF, which in turn is used to fund Capital Conflict Management.

## **Recommendation: The Met should ensure that local officers are at the forefront of communications with their residents about violence**

We will continue to work closely with the MPS as we develop the VRU and work together to tackle violence. These discussions include the work of specialist officers, the VCTF, as well as officers working in local communities who already do significant local community engagement on these issues. I have prioritised neighbourhood policing, investing in dedicated ward officers across London to strengthen community relations.

## **Recommendation: The Mayor examines what more can be done to make people aware of how they can report concerns or incidents anonymously**

I am pleased that the Committee recognises the importance of this. There is already a commitment for this within my Knife Crime Strategy, and I fund Crimestoppers to provide a dedicated London Regional Manager to support anonymous reporting. This post has already been effective in achieving additional investment in *Fearless*, supporting young people to anonymously report, as



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well as targeted campaigns and partnership working in a number of London boroughs. I am keen to explore digital solutions in this area.

**Recommendation: The VRU is set up as a dedicated team with specific objections and deliverables**

This will be the case. One of the initial priorities for mobilisation has been to recruit a Director of the VRU. I am pleased that Lib Peck has been appointed as the Director and started this role on 4 March. She will bring valuable leadership and expertise, building on her background working with London boroughs, community groups and partner organisations across London.

Efforts are underway to develop a staff structure and ensure that this is recruited to. I can also confirm that through the budget setting process I have set aside £1.8m per annum between 2019/20 – 2022/23 to ensure sustainable investment in the VRU to allow a lean central unit, with £5m investment in 2019/20 alone allocated for work to take place across London.

**Recommendation: You report back to the committee on how you plan to fund the VRU to ensure it is fit for purpose over many years, including how you intend to secure financial support from other partners, such as public health bodies**

I have made available £1.8m in baseline funding for the VRU, which is sufficient to ensure that a small core team can be recruited to lead the work of the VRU for the future. It will also fund a trial for new ways of working at a more local level that are being developed in conjunction with front line practitioners. An additional £5m has been provided for 19/20 and further decisions on future funding will be taken as part of next year's budget process. The Unit is working actively with a number of partners to secure contributions. The MPS and probation have already made in principle offers of staffing while other partners are exploring options. We are actively working through these various offers of staffing from partners.

**Recommendation: The VRU must tackle all forms of violence**

When I announced the creation of a VRU for London in September 2018, I specified it was to address all forms of violence. This is to recognise that incidents of violence do not take place in a vacuum. A public health approach means that we shouldn't look at violence as a single isolated incident. When a young man is stabbed on a street in London, that stabbing didn't come out of nowhere. It is often the product of trauma, of lack of opportunity, of a lifetime of incidents which take place in a whole system.

For example, as you note in your letter, evidence demonstrates that being exposed to domestic abuse is one of several adverse childhood experiences which can impact on the likelihood of getting involved in violence later in life.

A paper outlining the draft VRU Delivery Model was presented to the Partnership Reference Group in January.

**Recommendation: A pan-London commitment to a model for violence prevention is needed alongside local delivery.**

Development of the operating model is underway through a series of practitioner workshops, and discussions with community representatives.

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**Recommendation: The VRU needs to demonstrate independence, transparency and openness, and build trust.**

This is indeed essential, and the initial focus on discussion with community members and practitioners aims to begin the process of co-design at the earliest possible stages, to achieve this. This is why I have been clear that the VRU will be a partnership unit, and why I created a Partnership Reference Group to advise on the mobilisation and work of the VRU. Information about the PRG, papers and minutes are available online.

Work to date includes the following:

## Community Stakeholder Mapping

The cross-GLA Serious Youth Violence Working Group (officers from MOPAC, Team London, Sport, Education and Youth, Health, External Affairs and Community Engagement) recently did an initial mapping of community networks that they are in touch with.

The mapping covered:

- Community and Voluntary Services
- Community activists
- Youth Sector/ Youth Voice
- Community Organisations
- Faith organisations
- Concerned citizens

## Community Workshop Session 20 December 2018

GLA/MOPAC held a community workshop session focussed on the target operating model, the overall approach to community involvement, and planning the forthcoming engagement session. A summary of that session is included in the appendix. Two further sessions in the spring will be hosted by this group to shape ongoing engagement plans.

## Community Event – 14 January 2019

Over 200 community representatives signed up to attend this event. Speakers included Sophie Linden, the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, along with Debbie Weekes-Bernard, the Deputy Mayor for Social Inclusion, Social Mobility and Community Engagement. Attendees were invited to shape the development of Community Involvement in the VRU.

Thank you again for your letter. Sophie, Lib and I look forward to continuing to work with your Committee as we tackle and reduce violence in London.

Yours sincerely,



**Sadiq Khan**  
Mayor of London