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Our reference: 2024-00620

Councillor Adam Hicken

Sent by email only:

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03 July 2024

Dear Councillor Hicken,

Thank you for your letter, regarding resourcing of exploitation hubs in the region. I am grateful to you and your local partnerships, for the excellent work being delivered in Walsall, to protect our children from violence and exploitation. I want to reassure you, that this is a key priority for both myself, my office and West Midlands Police.

West Midlands Police created SOCEX hubs and rolled them out within the West Midlands Police force area, between September and December 2020. They were created by the Chief Constable at the time, Sir Dave Thompson and were established, using posts from the police uplift programme.

They were focused on exploitation and were created as a One Stop Shop for intelligence development, partnership safeguarding, National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals and investigations. They were made up of a mixed economy of detectives and non-detectives.

They were created in the three cities, Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton which, through the use of data and intelligence, clearly presented the Force with the greatest threat and risk. The hubs did not operate in isolation and were part of the old operating model, operating alongside a range of other force-wide and local resources, operations and roles.

Apart from the hubs, all of the other Force assets operated force-wide, including in Walsall. As an example, Operation Skyclash and Operation Liberate, were force-wide operations and all Local Policing Areas (LPAs) have Early Help and Schools Intervention and Prevention Officers, who work to identify children and young people at risk of exploitation, amongst other matters.

In addition, LPAs received additional officer posts, as part of the uplift for gangs' teams. Additional resourcing under Operation Guardian (Serious Youth Violence) and County Lines, have also brought additional support and resources to Walsall.

In December 2022, I appointed a new Chief Constable. In April 2023, the Force changed its operating model, to align with the new Chief Constable's vision and values. This model essentially took the Force from a centralised to a local policing model. The Chief Constable was clear, that he wanted to maximise the number of police officers and police staff working locally. The SOCEX hubs remain in the three cities and the broader force assets and local resources described above, have remained the same.

Twelve months into the new operating model, a review has commenced, to look into the Force response to SOCEX and in particular exploitation. This includes looking at the hubs. It is too early to comment further at this stage, although we can ensure that the LPA provides an update when this is available.

I also want to take this opportunity to set out the work the Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) has been supporting and leading on in Walsall.

The VRP has been working closely with the Safer Walsall Partnership since 2019 and intensively since 2022, on the implementation of the Serious Violence Duty. We have supported the development of the violence strategic needs assessment and the delivery plan for the Borough.

Over the last year, we have also been working with local charities and CICs, to strengthen the provision of youth focused interventions and activities in Walsall, recently developing bids alongside the James Brindley Foundation, that have resulted in over £150,000 of additional funding for the Foundation, to continue their critical work in the schools within Walsall. Our VRP Navigator in Walsall, is also working closely with the partnership on a consortium bid that, if successful, would bring an additional £1 million funding to Walsall, for youth focused activity and intervention.

Over the last couple of months, we have been supporting the partnership, led by Early Help, on a plan to mitigate the risk of summer violence spikes in Walsall, during the school holidays. This is traditionally a period when nationally, we experience peaks in violence impacting young people and therefore mitigation planning is really important. The plan is multi-agency and brings together a range of activity, to meet the needs of young people in Walsall, including targeted interventions as well as youth work in key areas.

Local delivery funding provided by the VRP, supports the Walsall Violence and Harm Prevention Group, chaired by Supt Pervez Mohammed, to meet needs identified in the violence strategic needs assessment and respond to emerging issues.

In addition to the local delivery funding, the VRP also provide funding to support local areas to respond to incidents of serious violence, aiming to both address the trauma experienced by communities when violence occurs and also reduce the likelihood of further incidents.

In May 2024, two allocations were made through the response budget, to incidents that had occurred in Walsall, in both cases supporting schools that had been impacted by violence.

This year, the local delivery budget will be allocated as follows:

Project/Intervention	Lead	Allocation	Detail
CARE Project	Walsall Council Early Help	£35,000	To provide support for young people aged 11–16, who have additional needs, either diagnosed or undiagnosed and who due to their vulnerabilities are at risk of and/or showing early warning signs of low-level exploitation, and who fall beneath the threshold for an EHCP or for statutory and specialist service intervention and support. This protects young people from exploitation/violence and has been running for two years, one of which was a successful pilot. Provision is also part funded by Children’s Services and delivery model has been amended to

			target areas of greatest need (North and South Walsall).
Modern Slavery Response	Walsall Council	£5,000	To support Walsall's response to findings of recent modern slavery pathway review. This will improve the collective response and the support offered to vulnerable victims.
ASB/Violence Response funding	Walsall Council	£7,981.29	Funding will be used to respond to known/emerging anti-social behaviour/violence issues through detached/youth outreach and other interventions. This will support work delivered through and be aligned to interventions delivered through the holiday activity fund programme and Operation Eternity.

I trust the above information set out in this letter is useful, in providing the context and current position. If you require any clarification or further information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Sara Roach, Director, West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership: sara.roach1@westmidlands.police.uk

Yours sincerely,



Simon Foster
Police and Crime Commissioner