

Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme Evaluation of Operation Met Divan

Full technical report

July 2021

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About

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This report details work commissioned by the College of Policing as part of the Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme, funded by the Police Transformation Fund. It has been independently fulfilled by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). The report presents the views of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the College of Policing's views or policies.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Abigail McNeill and Levin Wheller at the College of Policing for their support and guidance throughout the study. Our thanks also go to the academic advisors, Professor Eddie Kane from the University of Nottingham and Professor Betsy Stanko OBE, for their valued insight and support across the programmes evaluated.

At NatCen Social Research, we would like to thank the rest of the NatCen team including Martina Vojtkova and former colleagues Katariina Rantanen, Hannah Piggott, Ailyn Sierpe and Bethany Thompson.

Finally, we are extremely grateful to the staff who participated in this research, as well as those who helped to organise the fieldwork. Without their contributions and assistance, this research would not have been possible.

1. Executive summary

1.1. Introduction

1.1.1. Background

Op Met Divan is an early intervention programme based in south London, delivered by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), which seeks to identify and support young people under the age of 18 suspected of carrying knives or other weapons. Its design and implementation were based on a pre-existing programme called Op Divan, delivered by North Yorkshire Police (NYP) since 2018.

The intervention typically involves a meeting between a Safer Neighbourhood Officer (SNO) or Safer Schools Officer (SSO) and the young person, where the SNO/SSO explains the risks and consequences of carrying a knife or weapon. The discussion is reinforced by the SNO/SSO providing an Official Notice¹. The young person is also referred or signposted to other support services or engagement activities as appropriate. Op Met Divan was implemented in Croydon in April 2019, and rolled out to Bromley and Sutton (the other boroughs in the south Basic Command Unit) in October 2019.

Op Met Divan uses intelligence gathered from three databases (Merlin, CRIS and Crimint) to identify young people under the age of 18 who have come to the attention of the police for knife or weapon possession, or that may be in possession of a knife or other weapon.

To be eligible for Op Met Divan, young people must: (1) be under the age of 18, (2) not have previous criminal convictions for weapon possession, (3) reside in the London boroughs of Bromley, Croydon or Sutton and (4) either have been in possession of a knife or weapon, or there is intelligence suggesting they have been or intend to carry a knife or weapon. All individuals identified from intelligence databases who are eligible for the intervention are discussed at weekly selection meetings.

¹ The Notice is a two-page document, 'Carrying a Knife or Weapon: is it worth the risk?'. It describes what is meant by a knife or weapon-related crime and its consequences, and provides details of who to contact if they are concerned about their or someone else's safety. See Appendix A.

When a young person is selected for inclusion into Op Met Divan, team members agree when and where to have the meeting; typically the young person's home or school. How and where the intervention should be delivered is decided based on where the incident took place and ease of access to the young person. For example, if the knife/weapon possession had occurred in school, an SSO would likely lead the discussion. If it occurred in the community, this would fall to an SNO or, if deemed appropriate, a Youth Engagement Officer (YEO). These roles represent some of Op Met Divan's core team (additional roles are discussed in chapter 3). Op Met Divan also operates with delivery partners such as youth offending teams (YOTs) who assist Op Met Divan by providing information about young people and their families; feeding into case selection at the weekly meetings; and identifying ongoing support following a home or school visit. Wider partner agencies including but not limited to statutory services (children's social care) and third-sector organisations are also involved. They provide support for young people's wider needs (such as mental health) or activities for them to participate in.

The College of Policing commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to scope, design and deliver an independent evaluation of Op Met Divan. It forms part of a series of work evaluating interventions tackling youth violence and gangs as part of the Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme. This summary sets out the findings of the process evaluation and cost analysis. The findings have implications for the delivery of Op Met Divan and provide an evidence base for other forces considering similar initiatives.

1.1.2. Methods

The first phase of the evaluation involved a scoping study, in which the NatCen research team reviewed programme documentation and facilitated a workshop with the Op Met Divan leads, academic advisors and College of Policing representatives. These activities informed the development of a logic model, which captured Op Met Divan's inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and intended impacts. The logic model was revised at a second meeting later in the evaluation, following the decision to introduce the intervention to Bromley and Sutton.

The process evaluation included in-depth interviews with Op Met Divan programme leads and delivery staff and explored their perceptions of programme set-up, delivery

and its impacts. Interviews with young people (programme participants) and their parents/carers were also planned, however these were not undertaken due to recruitment challenges, which is a limitation of the evaluation. The research team also observed two 'selection meetings' where potential programme participants' suitability for the intervention was discussed by the Op Met Divan team.

Finally, cost data was collected from the programme leads. This was used to estimate the cost of the programme. Given that the programme is in its early stages and the lack of information on what 'average' programme caseload would be, it was not possible to collect information to estimate the average per-participant cost of the programme.

An impact evaluation of the intervention was not possible in the available time frames due to the limited number of individuals who received the intervention. College of Policing researchers have undertaken [additional research](#) to look at the characteristics of the cohort of individuals coming to the attention of Op Met Divan.

An experimental approach to measuring the impact of Op Met Divan was ruled out during the scoping study, due to concerns about statistical power and insufficient time to effectively measure pre- and post-intervention outcomes.

1.2. Key findings

Table 0-1 Summary of the key findings presented under the EMMIE framework

Evaluation element	Findings
Effect	A robust impact evaluation (experimental or quasi-experimental) was not feasible. Therefore, the data gathered on impact is qualitative in nature.
Mechanism	<p>Early key benefits of the programme included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved safeguarding for young people who took up the programme, including the identification of wider issues they might be facing (such as neglect, abuse, learning difficulties)

Evaluation element	Findings
	<p>and signposting to wider support services when needed. Parents/carers were also given advice and support where appropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Raising awareness about the consequences of knife crime among young people including how carrying a knife/blade increases risk of being a victim of knife crime and criminal trajectories (for example a criminal record, prison sentences). ▪ Improving relationships between young people and the police. Police officers and staff involved in delivering Op Met Divan described how speaking to a police officer in the context of an Op Met Divan intervention might improve the young person's view of the police. Officers and staff suggested young people might feel increased trust and confidence in the police to protect them/their communities, and may be more likely to seek out police support when in need (such as reporting a crime). <p>The in-depth interviews identified features of Op Met Divan that may underpin successful outcomes. These centred on communication and information sharing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clear communication between police staff and the Op Met Divan team and delivery partners was perceived to facilitate decision making about selection into Op Met Divan and caseload management. ▪ Pre-existing relationships and networks between team members and wider partner agencies facilitated effective information sharing, needs assessments and support provision.

Evaluation element	Findings
Moderator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderator analysis was not possible as quantitative analysis was not feasible.
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information was shared among the team using a system called Box². Ease of accessing information from various data sources (such as the Police National Computer (PNC)) meant all team members could develop a holistic understanding of potential participants. ▪ Sharing knowledge and information across team member roles (such as gangs team, YEOs, SSOs) meant that those delivering the intervention could continually develop their understanding of young people's needs and risk levels. Regular information sharing could improve how police, the Op Met Divan team and delivery partners identified subsequent support needs. ▪ Using YEOs was felt to widen access to Op Met Divan for young people in the community because of their remit in communities as opposed to just schools. ▪ The current volume of cases was felt to be manageable, however it was felt that any increase would require additional staff and resources.
Economic cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Op Met Divan does not receive any external funding for delivery. ▪ It is delivered by the police as part of their existing roles within the MPS.

² Box is a cloud content management and information sharing system. Available from: box.com/home [Accessed 12 June 2020]

Evaluation element	Findings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="459 353 1377 712">▪ At this early stage in implementation, staff costs were estimated to be approximately £23,000 each year. The intervention lead, sergeants and the Intelligence Officer were all assumed to spend approximately 5% of their contracted hours working on Op Met Divan. SSOs and SNOs were assumed to spend 3% and YEOs were assumed to spend 2%. <li data-bbox="459 745 1342 947">▪ Increases in cost were expected if staff spent more time working on Op Met Divan as a share of their total responsibilities. This would be the result of police spending less time on their other policing duties.

1.3. Conclusions and implications

Overall, police officers and staff interviewees were optimistic about the impacts Op Met Divan would achieve for programme participants and wider policing. The programme was felt to have addressed a gap in police-led services for early intervention with young people.

The following factors were identified as critical to ensuring the successful delivery of Op Met Divan in the future:

- **Open and clear communication** between the wide network of police, the Op Met Divan team and delivery partners (such as YOTs) was felt to have led to increased collaboration when dealing with young people at risk of knife/weapon possession. Improved collaboration also expanded the range of support services or engagement activities that young people could be referred to. However, some interviewees were concerned about how police-led some opportunities were, and others were confused about referral routes.
- **Using a wide range of staff to deliver the intervention with young people** (for example SSOs, SNOs, YEOs) was felt to facilitate access to young people in different settings, such as in schools and the wider community. Team members

conducting home and school visits presented the same content to young people around the risks and consequences of knife/weapon possession (such as injury or criminalisation) using the Official Notice, but the range of staff offered two additional elements of support:

- a range of services for onward support, through connections with wider partner agencies following programme delivery
 - an alternative, non-criminal justice-oriented perspective of the young person (for example, they may be perceived as vulnerable, or at risk of exploitation), which YEOs and SSOs believed offered a more holistic understanding of young people's risks and needs.
- **A central and streamlined information hub.** Rigorous examination of different databases was time consuming but believed to assist with targeting the most appropriate young people for intervention. Combining databases in a centralised, easy-to-use format could support future delivery.

2. Contents

Acknowledgements	3
1. Executive summary	4
1.1. Introduction.....	4
1.2. Key findings	6
1.3. Conclusions and implications	9
2. Contents	11
3. Background	12
3.1. Context and rationale	12
4. Methods	21
4.1. Aims and objectives.....	21
4.2. Phase 1: scoping study	22
4.3. Phase 2: mainstage evaluation	23
4.4. Cost analysis approach	24
4.5. Methodological limitations	26
5. Findings	27
5.1. Op Met Divan set-up.....	28
5.2. Considerations during expansion	34
5.3. Op Met Divan delivery	35
5.4. The Op Met Divan meeting.....	45
5.5. Onward referral and follow-up	46
5.6. Longer-term follow-up.....	47
5.7. Reported impacts of Op Met Divan.....	48
5.8. Lessons learnt	49
5.9. Sustainability and cost.....	51
6. Discussion	53
6.1. Key implications.....	53
6.2. Methodological challenges	54
7. Conclusions	56
8. References	59
Appendix A – Official Notice	60
Appendix B – Qualitative methodology	62
Topic guides	62
Analysis	65
Observation proforma	65

3. Background

Op Met Divan is an early intervention programme based in south London (specifically the boroughs of Croydon, Bromley and Sutton), delivered by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). It seeks to identify young people under the age of 18 suspected of carrying knives or other weapons and divert them from doing so. Its design and implementation are based on Op Divan, delivered by North Yorkshire Police (NYP).

This section provides background information on Op Met Divan and the rationale for its creation and implementation. It concludes with the intervention's logic model, which presents its inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts.

3.1. Context and rationale

National figures for the year ending December 2019 showed a 7% rise in offences involving knives or sharp instruments recorded by the police from the previous year. The total of 45,627 offences was the highest on record (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2020). London recorded the highest rate of knife crime across England and Wales, with an estimated 174 knife or sharp instrument offences per 100,000 people recorded by the MPS in 2019, higher than the national average of 81 per 100,000 (ONS, 2020). The Mayor's Police and Crime Plan reported how high-harm crime and protecting vulnerable people from a range of crimes, including knife crime, should be a priority across the London boroughs (Greater London Authority, 2017).

Between 2018 and 2019, the MPS underwent structural changes to the police areas across London. Borough-focused policing areas were merged into 12 Basic Command Units (BCUs), one of which combined the boroughs of Croydon, Bromley and Sutton (the south BCU). These three boroughs have different population sizes and compositions, and their own challenges in terms of community safety.

Table 3-1 provides a comparison across the three boroughs comprising the south BCU. Data was taken from the 2011 census (including population projections) and official MPS statistics on crime in these areas.

Table 3-1 Descriptions of borough-specific demographics, crime and strategies

Key information	Bromley	Croydon	Sutton
Demographics (data taken from 2011 census and projections)	330,909 population 48.1% male 24.5% 18 and under 15.6% Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME)	385,346 population 48.1% male 26.7% 18 and under 44.9% BAME	211,297 population 48.8% male 25.6% 18 and under 27.3% BAME
Social/ community issues	Safer Bromley Partnership (2016) describes weapon possession and gang violence among young people on Bromley's boundaries, particularly Lewisham	Croydon's Community Safety Strategy (2017-2020) states that violent crimes have increased	Safer Sutton Partnership (2017) describes borough as one of safest in London with crime and disorder below average for London Not perceived to have a serious problem with youth violence or gangs; or a notable risk from neighbouring areas
Violence/knife crime/gangs (data taken from met.police.uk for period April 2018- March 2019)	Drug offences: 809 (32.41% increase on previous year) Possession of weapon: 196 (12.89% decrease on previous year)	Drug offences: 1,814 (8.17% increase on previous year) Possession of weapon: 386 (3.74% decrease on previous year)	Drug offences: 372 (10.58% decrease on previous year) Possession of weapon: 109 (14.74% increase on previous year)

Key information	Bromley	Croydon	Sutton
	Violence against the person: 6,028 (3.08% increase on previous year)	Violence against the person: 9,231 (4.43% increase on previous year)	Violence against the person: 3,891 (13.94% increase on previous year)
Intervention/ prevention work	Local authority implemented a strategy stating that early intervention was a priority and that support referral pathways for vulnerable young people were available	Youth Crime Prevention Plan (Croydon Community Safety Strategy 2017-2020) focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ deterring children and young people from carrying weapons ▪ reducing the risk of victimisation through knife crime 	Coordinated approach for early intervention, triage and diversion with other services such as the local youth offending teams (YOTs), was seen as a priority in the borough, to prevent vulnerable young people from entering the criminal justice system

3.1.1. The intervention

Op Met Divan's delivery model originated from Op Divan, operating in North Yorkshire. Op Divan aimed to educate young people at the earliest opportunity about the consequences of carrying a knife or weapon and signpost to services that could offer support around other issues, such as mental health or substance misuse.

Referrals are made based on police intelligence to 'daily management meetings', where the case is considered. If the case is considered suitable for Op Divan and the young person is willing (with consent from their parent/carer), educational visits are delivered by police officers or YOT officers, at home or in school as appropriate. At these visits, an Official Notice is given (for educational purposes only; it is not legally binding). The overarching aim is to help keep young people safe and to reduce the

likelihood of them offending, and therefore reduce the criminalisation of young people.

The programme leads for Op Met Divan visited NYP to review the Op Divan model. They explored which aspects were transferable to the London context and where there would be differences in delivery. The MPS implemented Op Met Divan in Croydon in April 2019, rolling it out across the wider south BCU in October 2019. The focus of Op Met Divan was on low-level incidents (rather than more complex gang-related issues) and cases identified through 'soft' or (at times) uncorroborated intelligence.

Police working within the Op Met Divan team searched three police databases on a weekly basis (Merlin³, CRIS⁴ and Crimint⁵) to identify young people eligible for Op Met Divan. The searches aimed to identify anyone under the age of 18 residing in the BCU who has come to the police's attention, using key words such as 'blade', 'knife' or 'stab'. Any individual who met these criteria was flagged by team members and discussed at a weekly case selection meeting dedicated to Op Met Divan⁶. These selection meetings were attended by a combination of police, members of the Op Met Divan team and delivery partners who had agreed to use Op Met Divan as an early intervention service. Weekly attendance at these meetings varied (more detail is provided in Chapter 5).

To be eligible for Op Met Divan, the young person: (i) could not currently be under investigation for other offences (they could still be included following completion of the investigation), (ii) could not be known to be involved in gangs and (iii) could not have already received a conviction linked to weapons possession (but they could still be eligible if they had a conviction for other low-level offences). However, there was

³ A safeguarding system operated by the MPS that records every instance where a child (under 18) 'comes to notice'. Other services (such as social services) also have access to the database. The information can include but is not limited to victimisation, truancy, running away, being arrested, bullying and child welfare.

⁴ The Crime Reporting Information System (CRIS) is a database that collates and records the actions constituting the allegation of a crime. Police input data into CRIS following any visit to a reported crime, including information on suspects, witnesses, victims and type of crime.

⁵ A database operated by the MPS that stores information on all criminals and suspected criminals.

⁶ This differs from the approach used in NYP for Op Divan, where intelligence leading to Op Divan referrals was integrated into existing daily management meetings, which included a range of other issues such as criminal investigations and domestic abuse cases.

variability in the application of these criteria (discussed further in Chapter 5). At the weekly selection meeting, for each individual being considered, a decision would be made to follow one of the pathways set out below:

- A Safer Schools Officer (SSO), Safer Neighbourhood Officer (SNO) or Youth Engagement Officer (YEO) conduct a home or school visit with the young person concerned.
- Case handled by the school (ie, SSO liaises with the head teacher).
- Further intelligence to be gathered.
- Referral to another part of the police (for example, YEOs but external to Op Met Divan).
- Referral to another agency (such as the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) because of safeguarding concerns).
- Keep monitoring the individual.

If the decision was made to conduct a home or school visit, a SNO or SSO met with the young person to explain the risks and consequences of carrying a knife or weapon. The discussion was reinforced by the SNO/SSO providing an Official Notice, a two-page document describing what is meant by a knife/weapon-related crime and its consequences. They also provided details of who to contact if they are concerned about their or someone else's safety (see Appendix A)⁷. The young person was also referred or signposted to other support services or engagement activities, provided by wider partner agencies, as appropriate. These included, but were not limited to, statutory services (children's social care) and third-sector organisations.

A key aim of the intervention across the south BCU was to improve multi-agency cooperation and streamline the approach for supporting young people that come to the attention of various agencies. Op Met Divan team members also discussed how the home visits could offer a further source of intelligence to the police, where additional information on the family and home environment could be gathered.

⁷ The Notice replicates the document used in NYP.

The Op Met Divan delivery team across the south BCU is summarised in Table 3-2, which represents all available resource for tasking.

Table 3-2 Op Met Divan's delivery team and responsibilities

Team member background	Number of staff	Role description
Programme lead	1	Inspector: leads programme
Youth engagement team	3	Includes sergeant who manages cases referred to their team and YEOs who conduct visits to young people in the community (usually at their homes, but also repeated visits at other venues, such as youth centres)
School team	10	Sergeants (4) and SSOs (6). The latter deliver the programme in schools and may conduct home visits when appropriate. They provide information in selection meetings on any young person/family they are familiar with (even if they are not directly delivering the intervention with them)
Antisocial behaviour (ASB) team	1	Sergeant who manages weekly case selection meeting
Intelligence Officer	1	Officer responsible for screening databases for evidence/information; assisted with development of data collection processes and bespoke training to all other members of the team

Team member background	Number of staff	Role description
Safer Neighbourhoods Team	6	Officers who conduct home visits

These individuals spent a small percentage of their time on the management and delivery of Op Met Divan, alongside their other responsibilities.

3.1.2. Logic model

The logic model for Op Met Divan is provided in Figure 3.1. It is based on discussions with Op Met Divan and a review of project documentation. The logic model methodology is provided in section 4.2.

Figure 3.1: Op Met Divan logic model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
<p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Safer school officers. ■ Youth engagement team. ■ Dedicated ward officers (from safer neighbourhood teams). ■ Dedicated Intel team. ■ ASB team. ■ YOT officers. <p>IT</p> <p>Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Partnership information sharing. ■ Wider links, for example, ASB IOM gangs, YOS, housing and education, social services). <p>Staff training on Met Divan process.</p>	<p>Intelligence gathering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Searching of 3 databases (MERLIN, CRIS and CRIMINT). 	<p>Identifying young people unknown to police.</p>	<p>Improved understanding of consequences of carrying weapons.</p>	<p>Prevent criminalisation of young people.</p>
	<p>Management/ administration of intelligence by ASB team.</p>	<p>Young people educational about consequences of carrying knives/weapons.</p>	<p>YP engages with partners and takes up support.</p>	<p>Improved internal processes around intelligence on knife crime and wider information sharing with partners.</p>
	<p>Weekly meeting to discuss intelligence results and identify potential Met Divan beneficiaries.</p>	<p>Increased awareness of and openness to seeking support.</p>	<p>Voluntary compliance amongst young people.</p>	<p>Reduce (re)offending.</p>
	<p>Targeted YP visits/ discussions</p> <p>Home visits (by SSO/DWO /YET) where educational intervention delivered including signposting and referral to information and support.</p>	<p>Item surrender/seizure and disposal.</p>	<p>Reduce number of young people carrying weapons.</p>	<p>Prompt culture change to keep young people safe.</p>
	<p>Refer YP to partner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Case is referred to another part of the police/wider agency, for example, children’s social care, other local services. 	<p>Carrying knife or weapon notice issues.</p>	<p>More trust in police among young people.</p>	<p>Increase safety and security for the wider community.</p>
	<p>Refer YP to partner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Case is referred to another part of the police/wider agency, for example, children’s social care, other local services. 	<p>Dialogue between young people and police instigated.</p>	<p>Change behaviour of parents and family and networks.</p>	<p>Divan is rolled out to all front-line officers and becomes fully integrated into suite of programmes available.</p>
			<p>Improve educational outcomes and attendance.</p> <p>Create a safer environment in schools and the community.</p> <p>Better stakeholder/multi agency co-operation/ information sharing and response to YP.</p>	

The five key impacts that Op Met Divan hoped to achieve were:

1. **Preventing the criminalisation of young people, including a reduction in (re)offending.** One of the aims of Op Met Divan is to raise awareness about carrying knives or weapons among young people. This includes clarifying the laws behind weapon possession. It was felt that increased knowledge and awareness of the legal consequences could help reduce the likelihood of offending and reoffending where the young person had committed a less serious offence prior to receiving Op Met Divan.
2. **Improved gathering, management and sharing of intelligence about knife crime and wider information sharing between partners.** Op Met Divan aims to improve the quality and reliability of intelligence related to knife crime in the south BCU. The aim is to help police and other professionals identify risk earlier, as well as target interventions before offending or victimisation occurs. Improving these processes should also support better communication and data sharing with delivery partners outside the immediate team (such as YOTs) and wider partner agencies about the needs of and risks facing young people.
3. **Improving community safety**, including reducing the risk of harm among young people and potentially the level of crime being committed in the community.
4. **Prompt a culture change to 'keep young people safe'.** Linked to the first aim, Op Met Divan aims to change the way in which the police approach and perceive young people at risk of gang involvement, considering them as potential victims as opposed to taking a more punitive, enforcement-focused approach.
5. **Wider roll-out of Op Met Divan.** This includes awareness of the programme among all frontline police officers and staff to increase awareness of the intervention, and to integrate into a wider portfolio of intervention programmes in relevant areas. A broader intention is that the intervention becomes a component of regular policing duties, and any serving MPS officer could administer the intervention.

There are several short and medium-term outcomes that are anticipated to contribute to these longer-term impacts, as outlined in the logic model.

4. Methods

4.1. Aims and objectives

NatCen was commissioned by the College of Policing to scope, design and deliver an independent evaluation of Op Met Divan. It formed part of a series of work evaluating interventions tackling youth violence and gangs as part of the Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme (VVCP). The overall objectives of the VVCP are to evaluate which interventions currently being trialled by forces have a causal impact on outcomes, to understand effective practice in this area and share learning across forces, enabling effective resourcing decisions to improve outcomes for the public.

The findings from the evaluation aim for conclusions to be drawn across the following domains of the EMMIE framework⁸:

- **Effect** – whether the intervention had a causal impact on specified outcomes.
- **Mechanism** – what it is about the intervention that could explain any effect.
- **Moderator** – the circumstances and contexts in which the intervention is likely (or unlikely) to work.
- **Implementation** – the conditions that should be considered when implementing the intervention.
- **Economic cost** – costs associated with the intervention, both direct and indirect, and whether there is any evidence of cost benefit.

This evaluation uses qualitative approaches and a quantitative cost analysis, as described below, to explore the delivery and perceived effectiveness of Op Met Divan, and to contribute to an evidence base for knowledge sharing across police forces in England and Wales.

⁸ EMMIE is an evidence appraisal framework. It was developed by academics at University College London. One aim is to help practitioners and decision-makers interpret evidence easily and quickly. EMMIE rates evidence against five dimensions: effect, mechanisms, moderators, implementation and economic cost. Available at: [whatworks.college.police.uk/toolkit/Pages/About the CRT.aspx](https://whatworks.college.police.uk/toolkit/Pages/About_the_CRT.aspx) [Accessed 28 January 2020]

4.2. Phase 1: scoping study

The first phase of the evaluation involved a scoping study. This comprised a logic model workshop, an assessment of available data sources and consideration of possible evaluation designs.

The research team reviewed documentation relevant to Op Met Divan and facilitated a workshop with the police officers involved in setting up Op Met Divan in Croydon and its wider roll-out to Bromley and Sutton; academic advisors⁹; and College of Policing representatives. The findings from the document review and workshop informed the development of a logic model for Op Met Divan, which captured its inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and intended impacts. The logic model was revisited at a second meeting later in the evaluation, due to the intervention being rolled out to Bromley and Sutton. The aim was to incorporate additional inputs and activities, and to adapt the intended outcomes and impacts as a consequence of wider delivery.

An experimental approach to measuring the impact of Op Met Divan was ruled out during the scoping study. This was due to concerns about statistical power and insufficient time to effectively measure pre- and post-intervention outcomes.

Quasi-experimental designs, such as propensity score matching, were also considered. These designs tend to be more data intensive than experimental approaches. While administrative data on Op Met Divan participants would have been available, there was no comparable dataset of sufficient breadth, depth and quality for comparison areas. Consequently, counterfactual evaluation designs were ruled out.

The scoping phase concluded that quantitative analysis of Op Met Divan's management information was feasible. This would facilitate estimates around the volume of available intelligence, characteristics of Op Met Divan service users, their offending background and the intervention approach undertaken. However, it became apparent that the volume of Op Met Divan service users would be

⁹ The College of Policing appointed three academic advisors to support the Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme. Advisors undertook a range of activities, including visiting interventions, acting as critical friends to the College of Policing and independent evaluators, and providing feedback and peer review throughout programme delivery.

insufficient to facilitate robust quantitative analysis of management information. At this stage, the evaluation was redesigned as a formative evaluation, with a greater focus on the process evaluation. College of Policing researchers have subsequently undertaken [additional research](#) to look at the characteristics of the cohort of individuals coming to the attention of Op Met Divan.

4.3. Phase 2: mainstage evaluation

4.3.1. Process evaluation

The process evaluation included in-depth interviews with Op Met Divan team members and wider delivery partners. Two selection meetings, where individuals were considered for inclusion in the intervention by the Op Met Divan team, were also observed.

4.3.1.1. Team members and partners

In-depth interviews were carried out with the following people:

1. **One programme lead.** Views and experiences were captured from the perspective of a lead/line manager responsible for YEOs.
2. **One analyst/Intelligence Officer.** Views and experiences were captured from a team member responsible for collating and analysing intelligence data. This data is used in selecting young people appropriate for the intervention.
3. **Seven team members and wider delivery partners.** Views and experiences were captured from the perspective of the wider team responsible for delivery. This included SNOs, SSOs, YEOs and a YOT representative.

The programme leads supported NatCen with recruiting staff and partners to take part in the evaluation. Information leaflets about what participation in the evaluation involved were sent to these individuals by the programme leads. On agreeing to participate, individuals were contacted by the research team to arrange a suitable time for a telephone interview.

Nine in-depth interviews were conducted with Op Met Divan team members, averaging 45 minutes in length. They focused on interviewees' views and experiences of Op Met Divan set-up and delivery, and its perceived impacts and outcomes on team members, wider policing and the young people they engaged

with. The original intention was to interview 12 Op Met Divan team members, including wider partner agencies such as local authority representatives. However, recruitment challenges meant this was not possible (due to workload and a view that they had not had sufficient involvement in Op Met Divan). The plan was also to interview four young people who had taken part in Op Met Divan and two parents/carers, but again recruitment challenges prevented this. Issues faced during recruitment are discussed further in section 4.5.

4.3.1.2. Selection meeting observations

Observations of two weekly selection meetings provided a more detailed understanding of Op Met Divan delivery and specifically the referral pathway. A proforma was used to take notes during these observations (see Appendix B).

4.3.1.3. Interview conduct and analysis

The qualitative fieldwork took place between January and March 2020. A topic guide was developed for the interviews to ensure a consistent approach across encounters while allowing the research team a degree of flexibility. The research team used open and non-leading phrasing to ensure they responded appropriately to interviewees' accounts. More information on the topic guides and an overview of key themes covered is included in Appendix B.

With interviewees' permission, the interviews were recorded on encrypted digital recorders and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were analysed using the 'Framework approach' (Ritchie and others, 2014), a systematic case and theme-based approach to qualitative data management that was developed by NatCen (see Appendix B). Verbatim interview quotations are used throughout this report to illustrate themes and findings where appropriate.

The findings in this report show the range and diversity of views and experiences among those interviewed. However, as this is qualitative research, the prevalence of views and experiences cannot be estimated.

4.4. Cost analysis approach

To assess the sustainability of Op Met Divan, NatCen collected cost data from the programme team to provide an initial estimate of its cost.

4.4.1. Data collection

Cost data was collected from the programme leads using a proforma. Cost was divided into four categories:

1. 'One-off' implementation costs
2. Staff time costs
3. Marginal financial costs
4. Other variable costs

Implementation costs were defined as a fixed cost associated with the set-up or early roll-out of the programme. This could include but was not limited to training costs for new staff, development of a website, developing outcome indicators or raising awareness about the intervention.

Staff time costs were estimated using the mid-point of staff pay bands, accounting for the proportion of time they spent each month delivering the intervention. This reflects how there was no additional funding or resources for the delivery of Op Met Divan; it was delivered by existing officers and staff.

Marginal financial costs included equipment, expert advice, rent, utilities and bills and any other goods or services purchased on a regular basis. Other variable costs include printing, events, other services purchased externally, ongoing training and support.

In practice, all of Op Met Divan's costs could be attributed to staff costs, though all cost categories were considered when cost data was collected.

4.4.2. Analysis

The costs were estimated as a three-year average. Given that the programme was still within its first year of operation, the costs provided were based only on police time spent on Op Met Divan. Data was also requested on specific implementation and set-up costs, but information returned by Op Met Divan suggested that all costs were absorbed as part of their normal policing roles. A breakdown of the estimated costs for each of the four categories outlined above is provided in Chapter 5, alongside an estimate of the total cost. Costs are presented at 2019 prices and have not been adjusted for inflation.

Given that Op Met Divan is at an early stage of implementation, costs are not presented as a 'per-participant' cost, as volumes may change significantly as the intervention becomes established (without a significant change to the intervention's overall costs). At the time of writing, the intervention lead felt that the programme was not burdening the Op Met Divan team and delivery partners in policing roles beyond their regular duties.

4.5. Methodological limitations

As with all research and evaluation, the methodology had limitations, and it is a marker of high-quality research to acknowledge them.

The main methodological challenge associated with the process evaluation was the recruitment of programme participants. The original intention was to carry out four interviews with programme participants who had taken part in Op Met Divan. Despite the best efforts of Op Met Divan team members to invite young people to participate, it was not possible to recruit any programme participants to interview. As a form of mitigation, we attempted to ensure the perspective of the programme participants was represented in the research through the Op Met Divan programme leads approaching programme participants' parents/carers to take part in an interview towards the end of the fieldwork period (a quota of two was set by the research team). Again, it was not possible to recruit participants for these interviews. A small number of young people and parents opted into the research, but various personal problems meant that it was not possible to arrange interviews with them.

While the team member interviews provided valuable insight into their perceptions of programme participants' experiences, the evaluation did not directly capture the experiences of those receiving Op Met Divan. This is a clear limitation of the evaluation.

5. Findings

Key findings summary

- Op Met Divan was set up following a rise in youth knife crime nationally, but with a focus on the south London borough of Croydon. The model was adapted from Op Divan, an early intervention programme for young people operating in North Yorkshire.
- Police described a range of circumstances that led to young people being offered Op Met Divan, including young people carrying a weapon for 'fun', for protection from harm, to intimidate, because of peer pressure and impulsivity.
- The Op Met Divan meeting took place at home, in school or in any venue deemed safe and appropriate by the Op Met Divan team. The meeting itself varied in length, lasting between 10 minutes and one hour. Discussion focused on the risks and consequences of weapon possession. Where additional needs were identified, discussions could include suggestions for involving other support services.
- Facilitators to delivery included ease of access to intelligence from police databases; positive working relationships between different police roles; clear and transparent communication between the Op Met Divan team, delivery partners and wider partner agencies; and pre-existing networks with services to ensure holistic support was provided where appropriate.
- Barriers to effective delivery included limited intelligence/data on specific cases due to the varying quality of data collected in Merlin, CRIS and Crimint; lack of capacity among police team members to deliver the intervention; and young people's unwillingness to engage (the programme was voluntary).
- Op Met Divan team members reported early impacts of the programme to include better awareness among young people about the consequences of knife/weapon possession and improved relationships between young people and the police.
- Police officers and staff also felt that Op Met Divan enhanced understanding of the importance of early intervention, as well as young people's vulnerabilities.

- Key elements of the programme that underpinned the perceived impacts on young people (according to Op Met Divan team members) were Op Met Divan's early prevention focus, improved safeguarding options within schools and a wider network of police and non-police professionals feeding into programme delivery.
- Police team members described Op Met Divan delivery as part of their roles, and as forming part of a 'toolkit' of interventions aimed at responding to knife crime among young people.

This chapter provides the findings of the evaluation. Findings from the process evaluation are discussed first (set-up, delivery and reported impacts) followed by the cost analysis.

5.1. Op Met Divan set-up

Upward trends in knife crime and youth violence, both nationally and at the borough level, led to a need to identify new approaches to tackle crime and ASB, with a focus on youth crime, victimisation and weapon carrying.

'[Local agencies are] not doing enough for early intervention or working in the pre-crime space. Police need to consider innovative approaches for responding to these challenges.'

(YEO)

The MPS lead for Safeguarding was involved in a national meeting of violence and public protection leads where an early intervention programme tackling knife crime and suspected weapon carrying that was operating in North Yorkshire (Op Divan) was under consideration for inclusion in the VVCP. The decision to run a similar programme in London was partly based on reaching a greater number of young people than the North Yorkshire equivalent, but also to observe how the programme might operate in an area with a more pronounced issue with knife crime. With agreement from the Safeguarding lead within the MPS, a small team from the MPS visited North Yorkshire to better understand their initiative, including its delivery and its overarching aims and objectives, with the intention of implementing the programme in Croydon. The MPS team felt that Op Divan's use of schools and school liaison officers was an effective model that could be successfully replicated in

Croydon. Some interviewees were not aware of these earlier discussions as part of the background to Op Met Divan.

Op Met Divan team members agreed that Croydon had a very different problem profile to that of North Yorkshire. There were an estimated 39 knife or sharp instrument offences per 100,000 people in North Yorkshire recorded by the police in 2019, compared to 174 per 100,000 in the Met police force area (the national average is 81 per 100,000 (Office for National Statistics, 2020)). It was felt that these differences could mean added financial and human resource would be needed to effectively implement the programme at scale, because more staff would be needed to respond to higher volumes of weapon possession. More team members working with a larger number of young people meant that more time in total would be needed in considering cases and delivering the intervention. To adapt to this local context, Op Met Divan team members were clear that the programme needed to operate in a different way to reach a greater volume of individuals in various settings.

‘We very much recognised [...], we had a higher issue than maybe North Yorkshire. I think it is a national problem, but certainly in London, around serious youth violence and the habitual carrying of knives – not just knives, we’re talking about weapons overall – and raising awareness around that was definitely a problem.’ (Police lead)

5.1.1. Leadership and governance

The initial Op Met Divan team included an inspector who ultimately became the Op Met Divan intervention lead. The inspector was supported by a police sergeant responsible for youth engagement across the south BCU, who worked as the deputy lead and was responsible for the management of referrals. Eventually, the youth engagement sergeant was assisted by two school sergeants to manage the caseloads of the YEOs, SNOs and SSOs and their delivery of the intervention.

Police interviewees identified the intervention lead as providing direction and leadership, support for and endorsement of the intervention, through both the initial set-up and delivery in Croydon and the wider roll-out across the BCU to Bromley and Sutton. Interviewees across police roles highlighted the programme lead’s

enthusiasm for Op Met Divan and its importance within the 'toolkit' of available early intervention programmes.

SSOs and SNOs were initially reluctant to take on additional work in delivering Op Met Divan, as the intervention was expected to be absorbed into their existing roles. These officers were concerned that the additional work may distract them from their core duties, which meant they might not be able to serve the public in ways that were expected. There were also concerns this additional work might make them less 'visible' to the community, which could have an impact on community relationships. Lastly, there was a perception by Op Met Divan team members that some police in more junior roles delivering the intervention may be overburdened and need to work above their hours. However, interviewees said they felt reassured due to the lead providing them with the support they felt they needed, such as guidance on how to embed the intervention within their wider police duties.

'I think the message and the actual point of doing it was quite well received and I fully understood why we did it and was really on board and I still am. I think it could work.' (Intelligence Officer)

The programme lead described rolling out Op Met Divan to additional boroughs within the South BCU. Several conversations were held between the intervention leads and the local authorities in Bromley and Sutton to facilitate this. Many local authority representatives were reportedly initially apprehensive about the programme for three reasons:

1. Concern that delivery of the intervention, no matter how minimal the effort required, would result in more work for any organisation agreeing to contribute and work with the Op Met Divan team.
2. A perception of increased competition for funding (even though that may not have been the case given the funding structure of Op Met Divan) meant that support organisations unrelated to Op Met Divan may feel they are being 'squeezed' out of the area.
3. Perception that a police-led initiative could discourage young people at risk of victimisation and offending from engaging, due to their attitudes and opinions of the police.

Despite these concerns, Op Met Divan team members agreed that through continued discussions with local authority representatives and other services associated with the local authority (such as housing, children's social care), these organisations came 'on board' with delivery of Op Met Divan in their boroughs.

5.1.2. Training and development

Informal training was delivered to Op Met Divan team members who would go on to deliver the programme. Initially the NYP team provided advice and shared their own content, processes and documentation (for example, Official Notice template) from the delivery of Op Divan. Subsequently when Op Met Divan was rolled out across the south BCU, the implementation team in Croydon shared relevant information about the programme with other operational police, and with their wider networks of colleagues in the Youth Offending Service, school officers' network, and health and social care sector.

Training came in a range of formal and informal mediums, including informal discussions between police team members; PowerPoint presentations by Intelligence Officers and programme leads; new police officers having shadowing opportunities on home/school visits with the youth engagement sergeant or the schools sergeants; and one-to-one discussions with the leads. Some officers felt that additional training was not necessary, as the intervention's aims, objectives and delivery process were relatively straightforward.

'Training, yes. Well, I was sat down, I was told what Met Divan was, I was told a bit about the trial with North Yorkshire, what the remit was. I got a briefing note around what it was, roles and responsibilities, what we're trying to achieve. No, I've not had any formal training centrally, but I feel like I've received enough of an insight to know what I'm doing.' (Intelligence Officer)

However, some interviewees described how the information they received was lacking detail and that they would have welcomed more in-depth training about how to run the home visits with young people. The lack of training might have been a result of the programme only being recently implemented at the time of data collection.

‘We just got an email that explained that they were starting it up, and our supervisor explained that obviously it was a new project that was taking place [...] To be honest, I didn’t really understand what it was. They didn’t say too much about it really, but yes, it seems all right [...] We got some forms emailed through that we could follow, sort of like guidelines and stuff. Not physically or anything like that, just guidelines that were emailed over [...] Probably a training day on it [would have been useful].’
(SSO)

Training was delivered by those currently serving in particular roles. For example, the Intelligence Officer working on the Op Met Divan team in its set-up phase stated that they were happy to provide training on data identification and collection processes to both new analysts and wider team members who were interested. As such, training was undertaken ‘on the job’ and delivered as and when needed.

Training content comprised information on accessing datasets and how to interpret and synthesise the evidence in a meaningful way from across the sources (for example, identifying useful information from Merlin to scrutinise cases); engaging with young people, mentoring and youth work; safeguarding; and academic content such as theories and research about desistance from offending, effects of victimisation and wider behavioural research about knife/weapon possession.

Interviewees suggested that the training was adaptable and dynamic, such that if the leads perceived a ‘gap’ in content that would provide added value, they would raise this with the wider team and this would be addressed. Op Met Divan team members stated their willingness to provide training material for new members of the team on any aspects of programme delivery. Information on the importance of early intervention; the risks and consequences of knife/weapon possession; database analysis and management; and general safeguarding were included as part of this offer, as well as developing bespoke training on any aspect of delivery. Any Op Met Divan team member with experience or expertise in a particular area of interest from the wider team was happy to deliver a session or produce content on the topic, both formally and informally.

'I've done a PowerPoint training package which I've sent to everyone. It's not complex by any means, but if [project lead] asked me today, can you do it to someone else, I would happily, of course I would and I would adapt it.' (School officer)

5.1.3. Early intentions and expectations

Op Met Divan team members perceived there may be a more negative relationship between communities and the police in the MPS than in other forces. As such they believed they needed to do more community outreach work highlighting that the programme's intentions were supportive rather than punitive. These concerns also meant 'selling' the intervention to other police, young people and community members as a proactive early intervention that treated young people as vulnerable to victimisation and exploitation rather than as potential offenders.

'If I'm frank and honest, probably we weren't doing anything with this sort of information around dealing with people that are on the cusp of maybe getting involved in criminality. We tend to be in the business of dealing with people when they have committed offences and they're going through the criminal justice process, where this was going to be quite a different approach for us in terms of that robustly unpicking low-level intel, which we weren't maybe necessarily doing much with at the time, to do some proactive engagement work.' (School officer)

Police interviewees who were involved with implementing Op Met Divan in Croydon acknowledged how the MPS had more information available to them, across different data sources (Crimint, CRIS and Merlin), compared to NYP (NYP reacted to intelligence being given to them as well as proactively searching Niche and STORM databases). The range of data sources available to the MPS facilitated a more detailed understanding of potential participants because the Op Met Divan team had access to additional information about the young person's background, circumstances and engagement with other services. However, it also meant that a large amount of work was needed in pulling the evidence together. Police

interviewees described the challenge of fitting in Op Met Divan work alongside their existing duties.

‘It’s something we, as a south area, have had to adapt and incorporate into our own resourcing really, which has made it a challenge, if I’m totally honest. Without a budget to throw additional officers, [police officers and staff] have other jobs, so we’ve had to balance the demands of our other roles, whilst obviously, we’re fully supported and committed to Met Divan because we see the value in it [...] We would like to obviously be in a position where we could give more dedication to this in terms of officers, but we seem to have found something that is workable and is delivering what is, in essence, the ethos of what Met Divan is about.’ (YEO)

5.2. Considerations during expansion

Police interviewees discussed some of the challenges that had arisen following the implementation of Op Met Divan in Croydon and its roll-out to the other two boroughs. The Op Met Divan team reported needing to be aware of how different local authority services operated. This included where they were located. For example, the police and YOT are co-located in Sutton but housed separately in Croydon and Bromley, which had implications for information sharing within the boroughs. Another consideration was being careful not to undermine other police investigations and programmes that were already under way locally. This included ongoing programmes to tackle violent crime and gang involvement; and other knife crime prevention and diversion schemes, particularly in Croydon.

‘With bringing in something new, there can be a lot of apprehension because a lot of these departments are working very, very hard, dealing with very high volumes. They are like, ‘Hang on a minute, is this going to create a lot of work?’ We had to tread carefully around, whilst we all had good intentions, but we didn’t want to undermine other programmes and investigations that were going on...’ (YEO)

As a consequence of the wider roll-out across the south BCU, concerns were raised about the complexities of different local authorities working together to deliver a programme. The initial conversations held in Croydon were perceived by the implementation team to have been ‘challenging’, due to the perception that the programme could create additional work for staff; draw finances away from pre-existing work; and be ineffective if seen as ‘police-led’. Having those conversations across local authority boundaries was felt to bring additional difficulties, including:

- **Competing Community Safety Plan aims and objectives:** Op Met Divan team members suggested that their remit may not have been seen as a priority by the borough’s local council.
- **Existing statutory service processes:** Other civil society organisations may have already been partnered or working with statutory services, or services may have had a preferred referral partner. As such, it was possible that Op Met Divan was seen as imposing on these relationships and processes.
- **Local politics and perceptions:** Bromley and Sutton were not considered to have the same crime problems as Croydon, and there was a perception by Op Met Divan team members that partners and local services may not have wanted to be associated with it due to the potential for reputational risk.

5.3. Op Met Divan delivery

5.3.1. Wider delivery team and partner agencies

Op Met Divan team members came from a range of different operational policing backgrounds. Table 3-2 provides a description of these roles. A large number of additional roles within policing, as well as organisations providing wider support, were also involved. These included representatives from YOTs and officers working across the BCU and MPS gangs’ teams. Wider partner agencies included those associated with statutory services such as housing and social care. Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) were also cited by Op Met Divan team members as being important for delivery, but their involvement with Op Met Divan was unclear when speaking to interviewees. Information on the nature of the relationships Op Met Divan had with wider partner agencies was limited due to the sample size and the lack of partner agency representatives included in the evaluation. However, all police

interviewees spoke positively about the ease of working in their local areas, and their wider networks of professionals in other policing roles (such as gangs' team), as well as external partners (such as social care).

Accounts from police interviewees reflected the importance of information sharing agreements between these agencies and the Op Met Divan delivery team, which facilitated the sharing of information about specific young people. Interviewees also highlighted the added knowledge about young people and their families that these agencies could contribute, both in selection meetings and to intervention delivery, and the benefit of wider partner agencies' professional judgements for ongoing support following intervention delivery. Due to the recency of the project being rolled out across the wider BCU, many of these partnerships were still being built, and formal processes for involvement being discussed, such as memorandums of understanding.

'Getting [partners] involved – they're all on board with it. Some maybe have taken a bit longer than others to understand it and get buy-in, which is totally fine, but yes, it seems to be working now and we have a clear information-sharing process. That was, it's something we can go on to as a real challenge actually, that was quite challenging around, particularly social care, social services, around getting them involved and what we wanted initially to get from them.' (Police lead)

Generally, the involvement of either a wider delivery partner or partner agency for a home/school visit or extended support respectively was on a case-by-case basis. Op Met Divan team members highlighted the following benefits of partnership working:

- Efficient and expedited lines of communication between Op Met Divan and wider partners.
- Suggestions and discussions around specific cases of young people eligible for the programme (ie, case identification).
- Quicker and easier access to additional detail/information about young people.
- Awareness of alternative support mechanisms for young people.

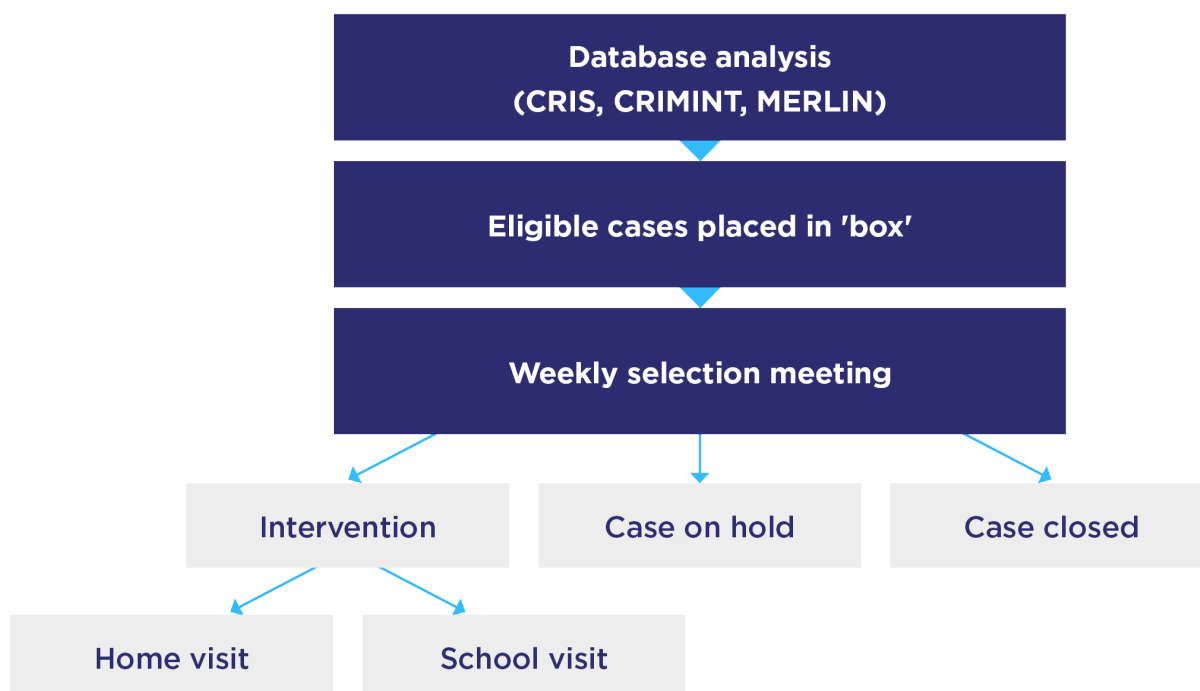
However, there was a lack of clarity on what partnership working constituted, beyond attendance at weekly selection meetings and telephone discussions about specific cases.

5.3.2. Referral process

5.3.2.1. Procedure

The following section outlines the main approach to identifying young people eligible to receive Op Met Divan. Figure 5-1 illustrates this process, with the different stages then described in more detail.

Figure 5-1 Process for case identification



Step 1: Analysts undertake a weekly review of the three key databases:

- CRIS (reporting of all crime)
- Crimint (criminal intelligence)
- Merlin (safeguarding and welfare)

Records are searched using the following filters:

- Under 18
- One of the three boroughs

- Key words such as 'blade', 'knife' or 'stab'

The results were manually reviewed by analysts to identify named young people under 18 that were believed to be carrying a weapon.

Step 2: Analysts place all returns that meet these criteria in Box, a cloud content management and information sharing system adopted by the Met in 2017. This permits the whole team access to all cases.

The quality of the intelligence feeding into any particular case was loosely assessed by applying two risk assessment frameworks common within wider policing:

- **THRIVE+ (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability, Engagement, Prevention and Intervention).** The elements listed within the tool (discussed in section 5.3.4) are typically used within operational policing to assign a grade that directs investigative officers towards a course of action (for example, arrive on scene immediately; resolve by telephone call). In the case of Op Met Divan, it was used to assist with deciding whether to deliver the intervention to a young person, and as guidance to assess overall need/risk.
- **National Decision Model (NDM).** A decision-making process used across all police forces in England and Wales to facilitate and standardise decision-making. Community expectations of the police and their duties should be central to the model and how decisions are made. The model follows five key steps:
 - Collect as much information as possible, including what information is missing.
 - Assess the threat of the situation to decide on the urgency of action.
 - Determine policing options to tackle the problem.
 - Produce a list of options, choose most appropriate.
 - Implement plan.

These frameworks were used in combination by the Op Met Divan team to assess the information collected on each young person/case. These frameworks were not discussed directly by interviewees but instead were presented in Op Met Divan's internal 'process map'.

Step 3: A weekly selection meeting is chaired by the sergeant for the ASB team. Two hours are set aside for the meeting, which in practice would last between one and two hours. Attendees include representatives from different policing roles in the Op Met Divan team including YEOs, SNOs, SSOs and the programme leads who are serving police officers. Other delivery partners and wider partner agencies attend if necessary, including representatives from other police and offender management roles such as YOTs, gangs teams and ASB teams. Statutory services send representatives such as social workers, youth workers or individuals from the local authority working in housing and accommodation if required. To maximise efficiency, team members, delivery partners and wider partner agencies would only be requested to attend if they were felt by the lead to have information to contribute or could be involved in delivering the intervention. Additionally, they would only need to join the part of the meeting relating to their borough.

Each borough was taken in turn and all cases were considered for suitability, with a collective decision made about each case based on knowledge held by team members; professional judgement; and the evidence collated from the database analysis. Any other information deemed 'useful' for the case categorisation would also be considered, such as knowledge of the family's background, or information from an SSO about the young person's behaviour at school.

5.3.2.2. Case categorisation

All cases that were discussed at the weekly selection meetings were categorised as either:

1. Included in Op Met Divan
2. No further action
3. Case remained open

Observations of the weekly selection meetings suggested that decision-making was relatively fluid, meaning there were no 'hard' boundaries when considering how cases were categorised. Discussions centred on the data and insight various team members had about each individual, including evidence available on their weapon possession (for example, blade/weapon type; source of reporting; context of being stopped by the police) and a consideration of their wider needs (for example,

learning difficulties, mental health, education attendance records). Across most cases, any team member could recommend how to categorise a particular case, whether it was to arrange for a home or school visit; close the case as ineligible; or put the case on hold for future consideration. In the rare cases where consensus could not be met, a collective decision was made to either include the case in Op Met Divan, or to keep the case open so further information could be gathered to feed into decision-making the following week.

A range of factors were considered when deciding to not take further action with a young person. For example, if the young person identified was part of a wider ongoing police investigation, that case would be kept open until it was complete. Individuals who were known or suspected to have gang links would not be taken forward but could be revisited in the future if their circumstances changed. Young people with lengthy criminal records were unlikely to be referred to Op Met Divan as the programme leads felt to do so would be an ineffective use of resources, and would be inconsistent with Op Met Divan as an early intervention programme aimed at preventing young people being involved in serious offending. In addition, the young people concerned would likely benefit from other more suitable programmes or services. Programme leads also wanted to keep the focus of the intervention clear and protect its remit. Cases requiring additional information from, for example, the young person's school, would be kept open.

For those cases where a decision was made to conduct a visit with the young person, the team decided whether a school or home-based visit would be most appropriate, based on the following factors:

- Whether problem behaviour had taken place in school or home (if in school, then the intervention was more likely to take place in school).
- Who the team thought would be most effective at positively engaging the young person and their family (for example, if SSO then the intervention was more likely to take place in school).
- Whether information about the young person's family situation (for example, attitude of parents, criminal affiliations) was already known to members of the team.

- Whether the young person had additional needs that may require support (such as accommodation and housing).
- Whether police being seen to visit the young person put that young person at risk of harm.

Combined, these factors would then determine who was allocated to visit the young person, whether that be a SSO, SNO or YEO.

‘We would make a collective panel decision around, yes, we will go and do a home visit. We would then allocate that to the respective School Officer or a Safer Neighbourhood Officer, depending where it best sat, or we would say, no, that just isn’t suitable, and we would document a clear rationale for why that would be. Or we would, in some cases, have to review it because there was other matters that needed to be dealt with first, such as a live investigation, which then, once that’s resulted, it may be deemed suitable for Met Divan, or in some cases, it wouldn’t, but we would still not just cancel those off.’
(YOT officer)

5.3.3. Facilitators and barriers to decision making

Interviewees discussed a range of facilitators in the selection meeting when coming to a decision about cases:

- **Ease of consensus:** team members were perceived to be open to each other’s suggestions and respectful of them. Interviewees suggested this was due to team members being respectful of others’ professional experience.
- **Access to PNC data for additional information:** it was relatively easy to check the criminal records of the young people in real time if more information was needed.
- **Networks and connections:** wider partner agencies or services, such as youth groups, may be in contact with the young person or have worked with them in the past. For example, if someone at the selection meeting knew that the young person attended a school for children with special educational needs and

disabilities, this could inform decision making about the most appropriate location for the meeting.

Interviewees also discussed a range of barriers that impacted on decision making in the selection meeting:

- **Availability of police and statutory services data on the person:** if data was limited, interviewees felt it could be difficult to make an informed decision. Additionally, if the Intelligence Officers were not present to answer questions about the intelligence data, the remaining team members sometimes found it challenging to comprehend and therefore decide about case inclusion. Evidence was considered along the THRIVE+ risk assessment model previously discussed, and included an understanding of:
 - **Threat:** communicated or perceived intent to do harm to others.
 - **Harm:** cause harm to another, physical or psychological.
 - **Risk:** probability of the event occurring (such as being stabbed, harmed, injured).
 - **Investigation:** process of considering the evidence/information and devising a course of action.
 - **Vulnerability:** situation or circumstance meant that individual is at risk of harm or exploitation.
 - **Engagement:** building a positive relationship with the vulnerable individual.
 - **Prevention and Intervention:** identification of opportunities for preventing future harm.

However, the quality of the information provided by analysts could be affected by two factors. Firstly, the data needed was not always available, leading to 'gaps' in the assessment. Secondly, the data was not always presented clearly enough for those making assessments, and if specific details were needed (such as names of peers, additional detail not provided in free text summaries) then the case would need to be put on hold until that information could be gathered.

- **Wider individual risks and needs:** team members felt they were not always aware of how the risk and needs of young people were perceived by delivery team members or wider partner agencies. For example, a social care provider

and YOT officer may perceive their needs differently based on their individual assessments. Disagreements would sometimes require further discussions between team members and partners, which could delay delivery of the intervention.

- **Ongoing investigation:** the team did not want to interfere with an ongoing investigation so decisions were not made around inclusion or exclusion until cases had an outcome. SSOs noted that the intervention could be delivered in the future. There were concerns this delay could 'lessen the impact' of the visit for the young person if their circumstances had improved or, in some cases, a more serious incident had occurred in the interim. One example included a young person who no longer wanted to receive the intervention because too much time had passed and they wanted to 'move on' with their life.
- **Resource constraints:** as staff must deliver Op Met Divan alongside their everyday roles, there were not always felt to be sufficient resources to conduct a visit quickly after referral. One SSO described how home visits were preferred by young people and their parents/carers, but due to the SSO's 9am to 5pm working pattern and the young person usually being in school during the day, it was difficult to carry out visits at young people's homes.

5.3.4. Profile of Op Met Divan cases

Interviewees described deviations to the eligibility criteria described in section 3.1.1. For example, the criteria that they could not be under investigation for other offences or could not have already received a conviction linked to weapons possession were not always implemented in practice as each young person was considered on a case-by-case basis. Police interviewees explained that young people who were not identified as being in possession of a weapon or knife, but for whom intelligence was available about their intent to carry a weapon (such as a report from a community member, or informal discussions between teachers and schools' officers), could also be suitable for Op Met Divan (as is the case for Op Divan in North Yorkshire). If a young person had received Op Met Divan before but was found to be in possession of a weapon again, alternative routes not linked to Op Met Divan would be pursued.

Data provided by the Op Met Divan team in October 2019 provides outcomes for the 91 cases that had come to their attention through MPS intelligence systems in the six-month period since April 2019:

- 13% (n=12) were part of an open police investigation (and were therefore not eligible for the intervention at the time).
- 66% (n=60) had other challenges/difficulties and so were not deemed appropriate for the intervention. This included unsubstantiated criminal allegations; associations with gangs/known gang member(s); or had other support in place such as social care or from the YOS/YOT.

‘[Young person] started to come to notice for having fights at school, making comments about bringing knives in. He’s never been arrested. It never got that far where he was arrested and he kept coming up week after week and I kept flagging him up week after week [...] [Social services] didn’t deem [a home visit] suitable because they basically didn’t want any extra police involvement. They didn’t want it to seem that we were targeting the family.’ (Police lead)

- 14% (n=13) had agreed to a home visit but this did not occur due to lack of an appropriate adult/carer present; young person or parents/carers being hostile towards the Op Met Divan team; or the home visit was cancelled for another (unknown) reason.
- 7% (n=6) engaged with the home visit and signed the Official Notice.

For those that did come to notice, the Op Met Divan team members stated that there was a range of reasons for young people carrying a weapon. Although it was not possible to interview young people as part of this evaluation, police and YOS interviewees suggested five key reasons as to why they believed young people carry a weapon, below. These are in line with the wider literature on reasons for knife carrying (Brennan, 2017; Lemos, 2004).

1. **‘For fun’**: as an activity to pass the time and discuss with/show to peers. Often, they reportedly ‘forgot’ they had the weapon with them.

2. **Peer pressure:** their friends were also carrying weapons. There may be overlap here with protection from harm and intention to harm, if this was common in the peer group (see below).
3. **Protection from harm:** young people feared for their own safety, either when at school or when socialising or out in the community. This may or may not be associated with gang activity.
4. **Intention to harm:** weapons were carried by young people who intended to use the weapon on someone else. This may or may not have been associated with gang activity.
5. **Impulsivity:** they knew it was wrong and dangerous to carry a weapon but did it to be 'risky'.

Further analysis of a larger cohort that came to the attention of Op Met Divan has been included in an [additional College of Policing report](#).

5.4. The Op Met Divan meeting

The officer carrying out the meeting would first phone or email the young person's parent/carer to get their consent for the visit. The meeting then took place between a SNO, SSO or YEO and the young person, where the SNO/SSO/YEO explained the risks and consequences of carrying a knife or weapon, including around the potential impact on their future aspirations such as university places, employment prospects and travel. Some SSOs spoke of talking to the young person about their hobbies and interests to help 'build bridges' between the police and young person, to then facilitate talking about any wider problems the young person was having. They also described the importance of conversations being honest, transparent and 'not blaming'.

'It's having an open conversation with the young person when they're not in trouble. So, you're not pointing the finger, and you need to be going in with the right mind-set as an officer. You need to be going in and having a conversation as opposed to talking at somebody.' (SSO)

The discussion was reinforced by the SNO/SSO/YEO providing an Official Notice (see Appendix A). Some interviewees suggested making the Official Notice more

user friendly could encourage young people's engagement, as it was currently 'a bit of A4 paper'. The young person was also referred or signposted to wider partner agencies, such as support services or engagement activities as appropriate. A young person would attend one meeting, which interviewees described as lasting between 10 minutes to an hour, depending on the young person's engagement, needs and circumstances. SNOs and SSOs described how parents and young people had generally been receptive to Op Met Divan, though some had declined. One SSO highlighted how young people's engagement was crucial to the programme having a positive impact.

'I guess if you get a kid that's interested then yes, it will have a positive impact, but most of the time I think it kind of goes over their head a little bit.' (SSO)

5.5. Onward referral and follow-up

Interviewees spoke of a number of programmes that young people could be referred into, such as Volunteer Police Cadets, Local Intervention Fire Education (LIFE)¹⁰, Premier League Kicks¹¹ and the Palace for Life Foundation¹², as well as other (unnamed) programmes to do with mechanics, driving and 'boot camps' to build confidence. However, interviewees were not always clear about the referral process that should be followed and so approaches could be inconsistent. For example, some SNOs, SSOs and YEOs would arrange for the young person to be called/visited by the relevant service directly, while others provided signposting via an information leaflet for the parent/carers and young person to pursue.

The programmes noted above were viewed positively by interviewees. However, concerns were raised about the limited range of programmes available more generally, with one police interviewee suggesting that young people be provided with a more comprehensive booklet with resources available in their area.

'I do genuinely feel that when we go there and give them their talk we don't really have a lot more to offer them and although

¹⁰ A four-to-five-day programme delivered by the London Fire Brigade for 14-17 year olds.

¹¹ Community programme delivered by the Premier League and MPS.

¹² Crystal Palace Football Club's community programme for young people in south London.

they're saying would it be worth engaging with the youth officer, yes, it would, but that officer hasn't got the resources really for that either. So maybe if we're going to do Divan, having a specified Divan officer who can give you other leads into other things like CABs [Citizens Advice Bureaus] or charities or knife awareness, something like that. Something that would actually benefit the young person.' (SSO)

An additional concern from interviewees was that too often referral opportunities involved the police in some form, and so could inadvertently exclude young people with negative views of the police.

'I think it [referral opportunities] might work if it wasn't something that the police were offering, if it was something more neutral, because nobody sees us [the police] as neutral. Obviously, kids getting involved with things to do with the police, automatically the [other] kids are going to take the mick and rib them about it [...] I think it would be nice if we had more referral schemes for them, but again that comes down to financing.' (SSO)

Some police interviewees questioned the extent to which young people were referred to the most suitable programme or support for them. One SSO described how the young person they had conducted a home visit with was referred to Volunteer Police Cadets but never attended. This led to some police interviewees feeling that the signposting/referral aspect of Op Met Divan was a 'tick box exercise' and a 'toothless tiger'.

'He was happy to talk to us but he didn't really have too much to say. We referred him to the Youth Cadets [...] I don't think it made a massive impact; I've never seen him at Cadets so I don't think he ever came.' (SSO)

5.6. Longer-term follow-up

Whoever delivered the meeting would enter into a spreadsheet the outcome of the visit, including whether the young person engaged in the meeting and any programmes or services they were referred to. This would be added to Merlin so if

the young person came to the attention of the police again, there would be a log of them having received Op Met Divan.

5.7. Reported impacts of Op Met Divan

All interviewees defined success as the young person not coming to the attention of the police or school for carrying a knife/weapon again after receiving Op Met Divan. As the number of young people taking up Op Met Divan was low at the time of data collection, interviewees could not say whether Op Met Divan was having this impact yet, or would have in the future. Despite this, interviewees from the Op Met Divan team suggested they were starting to see the early impacts of the programme described below.

- **Increased awareness about the risks and consequences of carrying a knife/weapon**, including the risk of being a victim of knife crime and criminal trajectories (such as a criminal record, prison sentences) for young people. This awareness was felt to come from the discussion at the Op Met Divan meeting alongside the Official Notice given to young people.
- **Improved safeguarding** for young people, including the identification of wider issues they may be facing (such as neglect, abuse, learning difficulties) and signposting to further support where needed. This included support for parents/carers too, where appropriate. Interviewees across roles felt Op Met Divan raised awareness among the wider south BCU of viewing young people involved with Op Met Divan as being vulnerable and potential victims, rather than suspects.
- **A shift in police perspectives** of the young people who were in possession of a weapon/at risk of carrying a weapon. Interviewees described how changing their view of a young person from criminal to vulnerable led to a different approach in style and manner, by being non-confrontational and more conversational when interacting with young people.
- **Efficiencies in information gathering** were cited by Op Met Divan team members as a benefit to its delivery across the south BCU. As additional police roles (for example YEOs) were associated with the programme, existing information (such as about young people and their families) could be more easily acquired. Information that had not been available through police databases was

now attainable by discussions with the wider network of officers. According to interviewees, clearer and quicker access to information was occurring as part of Op Met Divan's delivery.

- **Reduced interactions with the police** for young people. Op Met Divan team members discussed how once the home or school visit was made, the young person would often not come to their attention again (either in person or flagged in the databases). Interviewees saw this as promising evidence of the intervention's success.
- **Increased trust, confidence and cooperation between young people and the police.** Interviewees felt that speaking to a police officer in the context of an Op Met Divan intervention could improve the young person's view of the police. They might feel increased trust and confidence in the police in protecting their community and be more likely to seek out police support when in need (for example, reporting a crime).
- **Expanded skillset** for police officers both on the Op Met Divan team but also across delivery partners and policing roles in the south BCU. Being part of the Op Met Divan team was felt to allow officers to apply principles of the intervention in their daily work/engagements with at-risk young people. Op Met Divan team members suggested they felt this benefit themselves, and that there may be similar skills development occurring for colleagues not involved with Op Met Divan, but this was untested.

These views on outcomes and impacts broadly reflected those identified in Op Met Divan's logic model (see Figure 3.1). A key difference between the logic model and interviewees' accounts of outcomes and impacts was that interviewees focused on criminal justice outcomes and impacts (such as victimisation, offending, police-youth relationships) as opposed to wider ones. For example, interviewees did not mention educational outcomes and impacts. This may be due to the sample being entirely composed of serving police officers.

5.8. Lessons learnt

As previously discussed, although Op Met Divan saw value in the ethos and principles underpinning Op Divan in North Yorkshire, there were fundamental differences (and challenges) in the implementation of Op Met Divan. Key lessons

learnt through the implementation of Op Met Divan in Croydon, and its wider roll-out across the south BCU included:

- **Importance of establishing strong partnerships:** Developing effective working relationships and clear communication between the different local authorities in the BCU, various YOTs and the wider network of school officers was felt to be critical. Activities to support partnership working included: more regular communication between partner agencies and the Op Met Divan team; development of shared aims and objectives for the delivery of Op Met Divan across delivery partners and wider partner agencies (for example signing an agreement for collaboration or to be an 'official' partner); and engagement activity such as information sessions for staff across both current and potential partner agencies. This was felt to assist with the visibility of Op Met Divan among police staff across the south BCU.
- **Clear communication and processes:** Due to the larger scale of Op Met Divan compared to NYP's Op Divan, a wide network of professionals (such as school officers) needed to be involved in and informed about the programme, its perceived benefits and its outcomes on a regular basis to ensure high-quality delivery. Information sharing agreements were developed to help facilitate communication through the programme.
- **Flexible approach for engaging young people:** Early delivery in Croydon suggested much of the risky behaviour associated with knife/weapon possession was occurring outside of schools and so a flexible and responsive approach was needed to engage young people in the intervention. It was found that using SSOs for home visits was not always possible, due to their working patterns (9am to 5pm) and primary role of working within schools. To enable more home visits to be conducted, the decision was made to use YEOs to ensure wider reach to young people in various locations. SNOs were also used for home visits.
- **'Bolt-on' support:** Op Met Divan aimed to refer young people into organised activities where appropriate, to provide support beyond the initial face-to-face meeting. For example, Op Met Divan had positive relationships with the Volunteer Police Cadet programmes in south London, and could refer participants to these units. However, most of these relationships were in their infancy, meaning that more work was needed to establish formal networks and

connections. While specific team members who had connections with support services would share this information with the young person and their families, some team members sometimes found it challenging to organise referrals with representatives at other organisations.

5.9. Sustainability and cost

Given that Op Met Divan was at an early stage of implementation, providing an estimate of the intervention's costs was challenging. The overall volume of participants could increase substantially as the intervention becomes more established.

The costs associated with Op Met Divan are entirely attributed to staff time costs. Op Met Divan's delivery model was directly incorporated into MPS standard practice within the BCU. Op Met Divan formed a small part of the listed staff's overall responsibilities and this was accounted for in the cost analysis.

Table 5.1 provides the roles and responsibilities of the available Op Met Divan team alongside the approximate percentage of their contracted hours spent working on Op Met Divan.

Table 5-1 Percentage of time working on Op Met Divan by role

Role	Responsibilities	Approximate % of contracted hours on Op Met Divan
Programme lead (One inspector)	Leads Op Met Divan	5%
Youth engagement team (one sergeant, two YEOs)	Conduct visits to young people in community	Sergeants – 5% YEOs – 2%

Role	Responsibilities	Approximate % of contracted hours on Op Met Divan
School team (four sergeants, six SSOs)	Provide information in selection meetings and conduct home visits when appropriate	Sergeants – 5% SSOs – 3%
ASB team (one sergeant)	Manages weekly case selection meeting	5%
Intelligence officer (one)	Collates intelligence on young people to be discussed at weekly case selection meeting	5%
SNOs (six)	Conduct home visits	3%

At this early stage in implementation, staff costs were estimated to be approximately £23,000 each year, based on the proportion of staff time spent on Op Divan work as presented in Table 5.1. However, these costs could increase if staff spent more time working on Op Met Divan as a share of their total responsibilities. Staff may also spend more of their time on Op Met Divan activities if the number of individuals referred into the programme increases.

The programme also required an existing network of school officers to be in place. In other areas of the country, there may be fewer or no school officers available. These factors should be considered when considering Op Met Divan's replicability and scalability, as this would substantially increase the cost of implementing the intervention in its current form.

6. Discussion

Findings from this evaluation have important implications for early intervention around knife/weapon possession and youth violence, and how to engage young people. Additionally, the findings provide some early insight on how delivery of Op Met Divan may impact on young people's safety and wellbeing in the community. This section explores the implications and key learning arising from the evaluation to inform the ongoing delivery of Op Met Divan across the south BCU. The findings, combined with those from the evaluation of NYP's Op Divan (Turley and others, 2021), also provide an evidence base for other areas to draw on when considering setting up an Op Met Divan type approach elsewhere.

6.1. Key implications

Although the programme has evolved since both its origins in North Yorkshire and its implementation in Croydon, there are important considerations for future delivery of Op Met Divan, and wider interventions with programme participants, to consider. These are outlined below.

- Interviewees' descriptions of training and information materials suggest that provision was relatively ad-hoc and fluid, rather than based on a centralised set of resources. This might partly explain the variations in implementation and delivery described. For example, around eligibility criteria and referral routes to wider support services.
- While some partnerships were already in place, Op Met Divan's set-up, implementation and delivery provided opportunities for increased partnership working among a wider network of police and local support organisations. In some instances, increased partnership working provided Op Met Divan team members with a broader range of post-intervention support for young people. Partnership working also provided clearer lines of communication between the partners than if they were not working together.
- The wide range of delivery partners such as YOTs and statutory partners (for example children's social care) meant various sources of expertise could feed into decisions made at weekly selection meetings. For example, information on mental health issues or learning difficulties could be included in discussions if

practitioners from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services were involved. With a wider range of partners and experts involved with the programme, further insight and interpretation of case details (such as behaviour at school; feedback from arresting officers; social worker home visit) could be included in the discussion and decision-making process. For example, the different professional experiences of team members (both police and partners) meant that the young person could be referred into a range of support organisations following programme delivery. However, it was not always evident which referral options were available, and the process applied also seemed to be inconsistent.

- Using a wide range of staff to deliver the intervention with young people (such as SSOs, SNOs, YEOs) could facilitate access to young people in different environments and a wider range of settings, including outside of schools. Different team members conducting home and school visits used the Official Notice to present content around the risks and consequences of knife/weapon possession (such as injury, criminalisation).
- Engagement with Op Met Divan was voluntary and not all young people selected or targeted for the intervention wanted to participate. Responses to cases where young people had chosen not to take up Op Met Divan included sending material in the post for the young person/family; and reapproaching them in the future if they came to the attention of the Op Met Divan team again.
- Rigorous examination of different databases was time consuming but assisted with targeting the most appropriate young people. Combining databases in a centralised, easy-to-use format could support future delivery, but would likely prove resource intensive.

6.2. Methodological challenges

The process evaluation aimed to represent the views of a range of individuals involved in the set-up and delivery of Op Met Divan. As with all research, the methodology had limitations, and it is a marker of high-quality research to acknowledge them. The main methodological challenge associated with this research involved the recruitment of programme participants.

At the outset of the research, Op Met Divan's implementation was to be explored within the evaluation of Op Divan in North Yorkshire. After discussion with the

College of Policing research leads, and the expansion of the pilot from Croydon to Bromley and Sutton, the evaluation was redesigned to capture Op Met Divan's set-up and implementation separately from Op Divan. After ascertaining team member roles within Op Met Divan through conversations with the programme lead, the redesign included a series of qualitative interviews and observations, intended to capture the views of strategic and operational staff, young people who received Op Met Divan and their parents/carers. However, the key challenge was that the research team could not speak with programme participants and their parents and therefore no evidence has been presented from their perspectives. The original intention was also to interview wider partner agencies such as local authority representatives, but recruitment challenges again meant this was not possible. Data collection included nine interviews, two observations and cost analysis.

7. Conclusions

Op Met Divan is an early intervention programme based in south London, delivered by the MPS, which seeks to identify and support young people under the age of 18 suspected of carrying knives or other weapons. Its design and implementation are based on Op Divan, a programme delivered since 2018 by NYP.

The qualitative evidence showed that Op Met Divan team members were generally enthusiastic and positive about the delivery and perceived benefits of the intervention, including the impacts it was felt to have had on programme participants in its early stages. Police interviewees felt the programme addressed a key gap in police-led services for early intervention with young people. Three key (perceived) benefits of the programme were identified:

1. Benefits for young people

a. Raising awareness about the risks and consequences of knife crime

including victimisation, serious harm and criminal trajectories for young people. Information was provided to young people and their parents/carers through the home or school visit, which included discussion with the Op Met Divan team member and sharing of the Official Notice and any signposting information that was considered relevant to the young person.

b. Reduced interactions with the police for young people. Op Met Divan team members discussed how the young person would often not come to their attention again once the home or school visit was made, which they saw as promising evidence of the intervention's success. The outcome of the visit was logged in a spreadsheet and added to Merlin. If the young person came to the attention of the police again, there would be a record of them having received Op Met Divan.

2. Benefits for the wider community

a. Improved safeguarding for young people, including the identification of wider issues they may be facing (such as neglect, abuse, learning difficulties) and providing signposting or referrals to wider support where needed. Signposting or referrals were available for parents/carers too, where appropriate.

b. Improving relationships between young people and the police. Speaking to a police officer in the context of an Op Met Divan intervention could also improve the young person's view of the police. Police interviewees suggested that young people might feel increased trust and confidence in the police to protect their community and be more likely to seek out police support when in need (for example reporting a crime).

3. Benefits for policing/police

- a. Shift in police officer perspectives** of young people who were in possession of a weapon or at risk of carrying a weapon. Specifically, interviewees described how changing their view of a young person from criminal to vulnerable led to a different approach in style and manner when interacting with young people. This was achieved in part through team members signposting wider police colleagues across the south BCU to Op Met Divan.
- b. Efficiencies in information gathering** were cited by Op Met Divan team members as a benefit to its delivery across the south BCU. As additional police roles (such as YEOs) were associated with the programme, anecdotal information (for example about young people and their families) could be more easily acquired. This information was often not available through the databases but was now attainable by discussions with the wider network of officers.
- c. Expanded skillset** for police officers both on the Op Met Divan team but also across delivery partners and policing roles in the south BCU. Being part of the Op Met Divan team allowed officers to apply principles of the intervention in their daily work/engagements with at-risk young people. Op Met Divan team members suggested they felt this benefit themselves, and that there may be similar skills development occurring for colleagues not involved with Op Met Divan, but this was untested.

The following factors were identified as critical to ensuring the successful delivery of Op Met Divan:

- **Open and clear communication** between the wide network of police and delivery partners (such as YOTs) was felt to have led to increased collaboration when dealing with young people at risk of knife/weapon possession. Improved

collaboration also expanded the range of support services or engagement activities that young people could be referred to. However, some interviewees were concerned about how police-led some opportunities were, and others were confused about referral routes.

- **Using a wide range of staff to deliver the intervention with young people** (such as SSO, SNO, YEO) was felt to facilitate access to young people in different settings (for example in schools, the community). Team members conducting home and school visits presented the same content to young people around the risks and consequences of knife/weapon possession (for example injury, criminalisation) using the Official Notice, but the range of staff offered two additional elements of support:
 - A range of services for onward support through connections with wider partner agencies following programme delivery.
 - An alternative, non-criminal justice oriented perspective of the young person (for example they may be perceived as vulnerable, or at risk of exploitation), which YEOs and SSOs believed offered a more holistic understanding of young people's risks and needs.
- **A central and streamlined information hub.** Rigorous examination of different databases was time consuming but was believed to assist with targeting the most appropriate young people for the intervention. Combining databases in a centralised, easy-to-use format could support future delivery.

Further research is needed to provide stronger evidence around the impacts of Op Met Divan, especially from the perspectives of its target group: young people. More information about their experience would provide some clarity on the effects of the intervention.

Since its implementation in Croydon, Op Met Divan has expanded, and there is additional interest across London boroughs. As cases continue to be referred and undertaken, further opportunities to assess the intervention will become available.

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Appendix A – Official Notice

Official - Notice



Carrying a Knife or Weapon

Is it worth the risk?

If you carry a knife or weapon to protect yourself or make yourself feel safe **YOU** are committing a crime - whether or not you intend to use it. **YOU** are also more likely to become a victim of crime as your own knife/ weapon can be used against **YOU** or **Someone Else**

If you are worried or feel you are in danger, tell a trusted adult (family member, teacher, Police officer, PCSO). We will listen and help you feel safe.

Knife and/ or Weapon involved crimes include.....

Carrying or trying to buy a knife under the age of 18

- Threatening someone with a knife/ weapon
- Being in possession of a knife (including folding knife if the blade is 3 inches /7.62 cm or more)
- Murder, manslaughter or assaults using a knife/ weapon
- Robbery and burglary using a knife/ weapon

The Consequences could be.....

- Possible imprisonment
- Serious injuries or death
- Criminal Record
- Restrictions on employment and travel

DO NOT carry a knife and/ or weapon. If you are thinking about it, you are concerned about your safety or someone else's safety, or have been threatened then contact Police on 101 or 999 in an emergency. You can also ask to speak with a Force Youth Officer, Youth Justice Officer or contact your local Prevention Service Worker.

We can then support you, provide personal safety advice to help you feel safe. This ensures communities are safe and prevents **YOU** entering the criminal justice system.

Remember - the law is clear - if you choose to carry a weapon, you put your future in danger. If you don't take it with you, it won't be used. If you are caught illegally carrying a knife or weapon, including a gun, even an imitation one you will be arrested and prosecuted. It is no excuse to say it was for your own protection or you were carrying it for someone else.

It is illegal to carry an article with a blade or point or an offensive weapon in a public place

The Prevention of Crime Act 1953:

Prohibits the carrying of any offensive weapon in a public place without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. A public place includes private premises to which the public have access. An offensive weapon is defined as any article made or adapted for use for causing injury to the person, or intended by the person for such use. These include items designed to cause serious injury, for example knuckledusters, hand claws and certain Martial Arts equipment, or those which can be easily concealed, including swordsticks and batons. Maximum penalty: Six months imprisonment and/or £5000 fine.

Having or Possessing an offensive weapon or bladed article in a public place

Section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 provides for the offence of possession of a bladed or pointed article in a public place. Any person who has an article to which this section applies with them in a public place shall be guilty of an offence.

Possession of an offensive weapon or bladed article on school premises

Under section 139A of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 it is an offence for a person to have with them on school premises:

- An article to which section 139 of the 1988 Act applies (i.e. an article with a blade or sharp point other than a small folding pocketknife); or
- An offensive weapon within the meaning of section 1 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953

Offensive Weapons Act 1996 - amended the 1988 Act

Prohibits the sale of knives and certain articles with a blade or point to persons under the age of 16. Maximum penalty: Six months imprisonment and/or £5000 fine.

Offensive Weapons Act 1996

This makes it an offence to sell to anyone under the age of 18 any knife, knife blade or razor blade, axe or any other article which has a blade or which is sharply pointed, and which is made or adapted for use for causing injury to the person.

Stop and Search

The law gives police officers powers to stop and search you, including anything you are carrying, any vehicle you are in and can use reasonable force to do this. This includes searching for bladed articles, knives and any article made or adapted for use for causing injury to any person, or intended by the person for such use.

Advice for young people and parents is available: www.stop-watch.org

To report an incident or information please **contact 101 or 999** in an emergency.

The following advice and support is available:

www.childline.org.uk info-advice

www.knifecrimes.org

www.victimsupport.org.uk

crimestoppers-uk.org



Appendix B – Qualitative methodology

Topic guides

The main headings and sub-headings from the topic guide used for interviews with strategic and operational staff and partner agencies is provided below.

Staff interview topic guide

Introduction

- Introduce self and NatCen, and who is funding the evaluation (College of Policing)
- Introduce research, aims of evaluation and interview process
- Overview of topics to discuss
- Explain voluntary nature of interview
- Explain reporting process
- Length
- Permission to record interview
- Confidentiality, anonymity and potential caveats, including disclosure
- Check if any questions before starting
- Consent

Background

- Participant role
- Brief overview of how participant became involved with Op Met Divan
- Nature and profile of local area
- Crime types, especially among younger offenders
- Key priorities for knives/other weapons/crime reduction/offender management

Early understandings

- Early awareness and understanding of Op Met Divan
- Initial/early views of Op Met Divan

Set-up and implementation

- Role in set-up and implementation
- Their role/broader awareness of how Op Met Divan was initially set up
- Funding and resources available for Op Met Divan
- Training and guidance offered/received
- Governance – overview of how Op Met Divan is managed
- Partnership working
- Recent expansion of Op Met Divan to additional boroughs
 - Reasons for the expansion
 - What the expansion looked like in practice
 - Implications for wider intervention delivery
 - Key facilitators/barriers to expansion
 - Consistency of implementation across the boroughs; reasons for any differences
- Any other key facilitators/barriers to set-up

Delivery

- Intelligence process
 - Intelligence about young people
 - Process of checking and grading intelligence
 - Identifying potential eligibility and suitability for Op Met Divan
 - Selection meetings
 - Pathways/interventions considered that are part of Op Met Divan
 - Other interventions/pathways considered instead of/in addition to Op Met Divan
- Initial engagement
 - Initial engagement(s) with young person during school/home visits
 - How Op Met Divan is introduced
 - Nature of discussion

- Facilitators and barriers to initial engagement
- Continuous engagement and support
 - Educational sessions with children
 - Targeted visits to schools (eg, to show carrying a knife is a problem)
 - Engagement with wider networks including family members
 - Relationships with partners, including schools and headteachers
 - Length of engagement/provision of support
 - Range of delivery partners involved (if not already covered)

Perceived outcomes and impacts

- Key outcomes Op Met Divan aims to achieve
- What constitutes a successful/unsuccessful outcome for
 - Early intervention
 - Awareness and education for young people and their family
 - Possession of knife/other weapon/knife crime/reoffending rates
 - Preventing criminalisation of young people
 - Wider society, including victims and local communities
- Perceived impact of Op Met Divan
 - On staff
 - Other criminal justice system stakeholders and partners
 - On young people taking part in Op Met Divan
- What part(s) of the intervention underpin impacts on young people
- External factors underpinning impact
- Wider impacts
- Facilitators and barriers to achieving impact
- Facilitators and barriers to a young person staying engaged with Op Met Divan
- Alternatives and added value

Recommendations

- Reflections on whether/how Op Met Divan is currently meeting expectations
- Is it targeting the right people
- Views on sustainability
- Lessons for implementing and delivering Op Met Divan going forward
- Any suggestions for improvements

Next steps and close

- Final closing comments – anything else to raise
- Any questions
- Thank participant and reaffirm confidentiality and anonymity, including any caveats

Analysis

Interviews were managed and analysed using the Framework approach developed by NatCen. Key topics emerging from the interviews were identified through familiarisation with the transcripts to develop a thematic framework for data management. All members of the NatCen research team were given a thorough briefing about the analytical framework and a detailed description of what should be included in each sub-theme, to ensure consistency of approach.

The Framework method has been embedded into NVivo version 10. The software enabled the summarised data from the research to be linked to the verbatim transcript. This approach meant that each part of every transcript that was relevant to a particular theme was noted, ordered and accessible. The final analytic stage involved working through the charted data, drawing out the range of experiences and views, identifying similarities and differences and interrogating the data to seek to explain emergent patterns and findings.

Observation proforma

The following document was used by the NatCen research team to collect data during observations of the weekly selection meeting by Op Met Divan.

Details

Session identifier	
Observer	
Date	

Observation

Role of attendees and how they joined the meeting e.g. job or role, how this is introduced, whether there is anyone present in observational capacity, anyone whose role is unclear, expectations of input/involvement, clarity around role	
Discussion immediately before meeting (if applicable) e.g. when and how people arrive and are seated for the session, interactions with each other	

<p>Discussion during meeting including who contributed, order and content of discussion and how decisions are made (factors considered e.g. risk assessment, offending history). This should include information on who makes the final decisions on course of action (e.g. intervention lead or joint decision). Also consider barriers/facilitators to decision making. This can also include how decisions are taken (e.g. majority, need for items to be seconded) and the type of evidence/information being made in support or against a decision. Consider whether any cases discussed are already known/well-known to those at meeting (e.g. are social services, or the police already familiar with a particular case from previous experience). What, if any, other information about young people is discussed in the meeting not present in the reports/data presented (e.g. family background, previous offences)</p>	
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<p>Sources of information e.g. reports, databases consulted during the meeting, any gaps in information and impact on decision making. Consider whether there is 'weighting' attached to any evidence (e.g. what evidence is considered more/less important in the decision-making process) and if the process is guided by inclusion/exclusion criteria. If so, is this done in a consistent way? Consider discussion around the quality or robustness of information sources.</p>	
<p>After meeting e.g. if there are any additional tasks that are undertaken, informal follow-up meetings. Consider if action points are well-articulated and ownership of said tasks are clear.</p>	

Environment and setting

<p>General observations e.g. atmosphere (level of formality, nature of location, positioning of attendees)</p>	
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Nature of interactions

<p>Interactions among staff e.g. whether the meeting is led by a particular staff member, how decisions are agreed, pace of discussion etc. This can include tone, language used, openness of discussion to entire group or between specific individuals</p>	
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Reflections / other

Other reflections / observation points	
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About the College

We're the professional body for the police service in England and Wales.

Working together with everyone in policing, we share the skills and knowledge officers and staff need to prevent crime and keep people safe.

We set the standards in policing to build and preserve public trust and we help those in policing develop the expertise needed to meet the demands of today and prepare for the challenges of the future.

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