



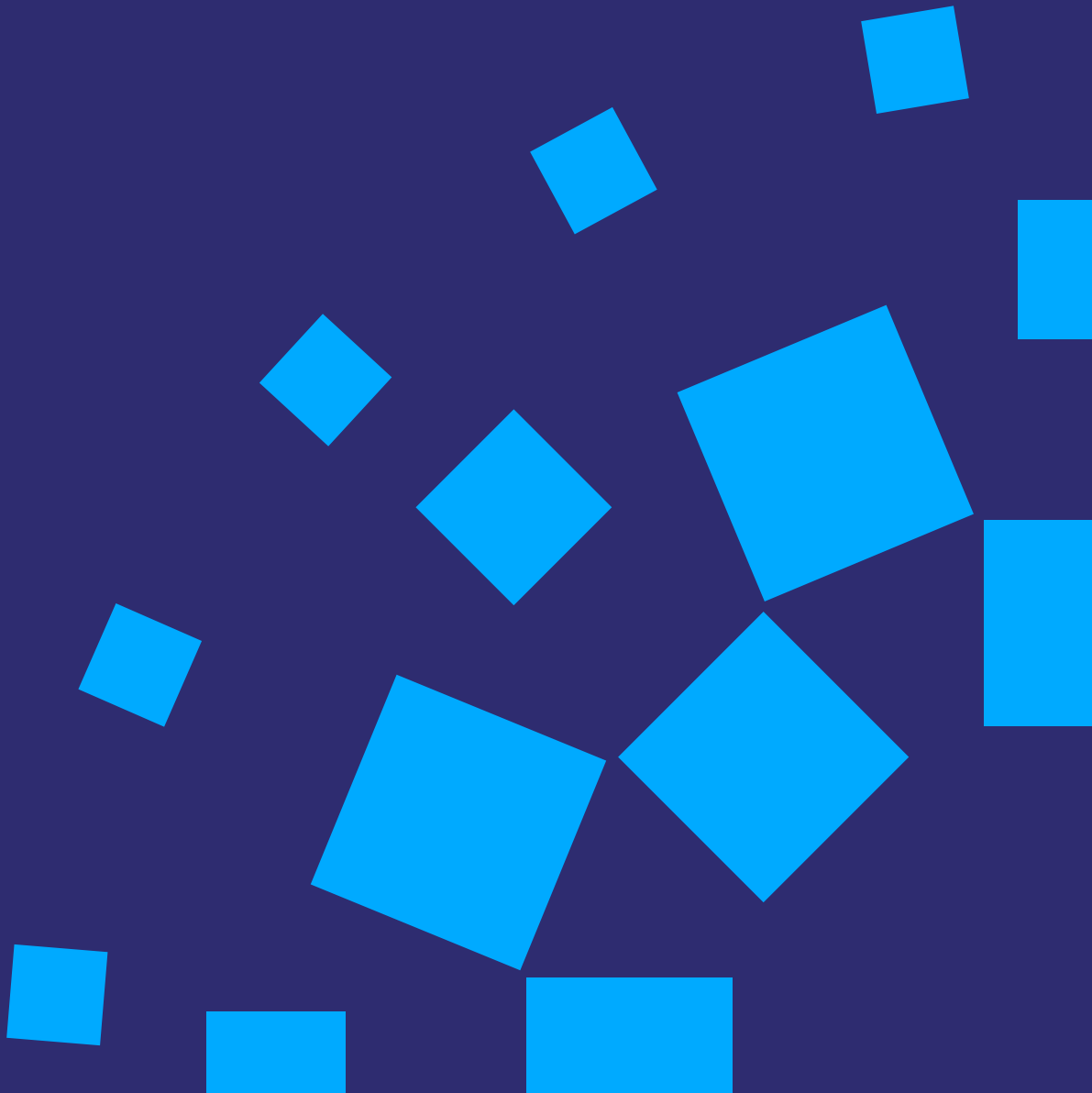
College of  
**Policing**

Working together  
to keep people safe

**Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme**

# Evaluation of Operation Divan

**Key findings and implications for practice**



© College of Policing Limited (2021)

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence v1.1 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [college.police.uk/non-commercial-college-licence](https://college.police.uk/non-commercial-college-licence)

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned. This publication may contain public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0 at [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3)

This publication is available for download at [college.police.uk](https://college.police.uk)

If you have any enquiries regarding this publication, please contact us at [research@college.pnn.police.uk](mailto:research@college.pnn.police.uk)

This document has been created with the intention of making the content accessible to the widest range of people, regardless of disability or impairment. To enquire about having this document provided in an alternative format, please contact us at [contactus@college.pnn.police.uk](mailto:contactus@college.pnn.police.uk)

## Contents

<b>Overview</b>	<b>4</b>
Does it work?	4
Background	4
How was the intervention evaluated?	8
Impact evaluation – does it work?	8
Process evaluation – how does it work?	8
Cost analysis – how much does it cost?	10
<b>How did the intervention perform?</b>	<b>10</b>
Effect – what was the impact of the intervention?	11
Mechanism – how did it work?	12
Moderator – where did it work best?	12
Implementation – how to do it	13
Economic cost – how much is it?	15
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>16</b>

### Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme (VVCP)

The College of Policing was awarded a grant through the Home Office Police Transformation Fund to develop the evidence base on vulnerability and serious violence. The programme focused on key areas of interest to policing, including knife crime, gangs, county lines, criminal exploitation of young people, and child sexual abuse and exploitation. This is one of nine summaries accompanying ten reports delivered as part of the VVCP.

If you have any questions about the VVCP, please email:

[research@college.pnn.police.uk](mailto:research@college.pnn.police.uk)

## Overview

Operation Divan (Op Divan) is an intervention run by North Yorkshire Police (NYP) that aims to educate and support young people where information suggests that they may be carrying a knife or other weapon. Police receive information about young people who may be involved in knife crime and, if they meet certain criteria, young people are allocated a NYP officer who will deliver an Op Divan meeting within 72 hours. In the meeting, officers outline the process of Op Divan to the young person and their parents, issue an official notice, explain the risks and consequences of carrying a knife or other weapon and signpost further support where appropriate. If the young person has additional needs, referrals to other agencies are made.

### Does it work?

Most findings come from interviews and capture individuals' perceptions of the intervention. In-depth interviews conducted with NYP officers and operational staff indicate that they felt Op Divan was successful for the majority of participants; 89.3% did not come to police attention again. However, 10.7% of participants were involved in knife crime-related incidents after being involved with Op Divan up until the end of July 2020. Interviews with the police, young person and their parents suggested an improvement in young people's understanding of the consequences of carrying knives or other weapons, and an improvement in how young people viewed the police and other agencies.

## Background

### About this report

This report summarises the findings of the full independent evaluation of Op Divan, undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research as part of the College's Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme (VVCP). This summary describes how Op Divan works in practice and outlines key findings from the impact, process and cost analysis aspects of the evaluation. Emerging implications for practice are also discussed.

[Read the full Operation Divan report](#)

## What is Op Divan?

Op Divan is an intervention that aims to educate and support young people under the age of 18, where there is information or intelligence to suggest that they may be carrying a knife or other weapon. NYP, alongside the Youth Justice Service (YJS) and Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) have delivered Op Divan since May 2018. Op Divan was set up after a number of young people were found with knives (or were reported to be carrying knives) in local schools and in the community.

The intervention focuses on early prevention. Its overarching aim is to help prevent the criminalisation of young people, keep them safe and promote culture change around attitudes to carrying a knife. Op Divan is designed to educate young people and raise awareness of the consequences of carrying a knife and reduce the number of young people carrying a weapon.

Young people must be under the age of 18 to be eligible for Op Divan. Young people are not eligible for Op Divan if they have previously been convicted of weapon possession or if they have received Op Divan before and continued to carry a knife/weapon.

The police receive information about young people thought to be carrying knives or weapons through a number of routes, including schools, community and family members. These include:

- Submission of a 'partnership information sharing form' from agencies such as schools or the Early Help Service. A report would state the individual's past behaviour and flag any indicators of concern or vulnerability, such as mental health, truancy or connections to known offenders.
- Information from NYP. Police records management systems STORM and Niche were proactively searched for potential Op Divan participants. The majority of referrals came from this route.
- Non-emergency 101 calls.
- Information from Crimestoppers, where a member of the public does not want to contact the police directly.

The NYP intelligence department reviewed the information and graded it<sup>1</sup> according to the reliability of the source, whether it was believed to be malicious, whether the young person was known to them, and the risk of retribution or harm posed to the source if action was taken. Once reviewed, the intelligence was put onto Niche and an associated 'intelligence action log' specific to Op Divan.

---

1 The source is evaluated to establish its credibility. There are three source gradings: reliable; untested; and not reliable. The intelligence is also assessed according to its reliability. The grades are: known directly to the source; known indirectly to the source but corroborated; known indirectly to the source; not known; and suspected to be false. See [app.college.police.uk/app-content/intelligence-management/intelligence-report/](http://app.college.police.uk/app-content/intelligence-management/intelligence-report/) for more information [Accessed 23 March 2020]

Intelligence officers used this information to populate a 'daily intelligence summary' which was then taken to a daily management meeting<sup>2</sup>. Op Divan cases were discussed and, if they met the eligibility criteria<sup>3</sup>, were allocated to an officer from the local area to carry out the Op Divan meeting within a 72-hour timeframe. Officers could be a NYP school liaison officer, NYP police officer or YOT officer (where the young person is currently involved with the YJS for other offences). The officer would not know the source of the intelligence.

The meeting takes place at home, in school or in YOT offices. An appropriate adult needs to be present but not necessarily directly involved in the conversation, as this could hinder young people's engagement. It was felt that having parents directly involved in the meeting could be problematic. For this reason, some police interviewees felt that school was the optimum location, but if the young person had been excluded for carrying a knife, the meeting would take place in the home.

In the meeting, officers introduce Op Divan, explain the process and ask for the parent and young person's consent. The length and content of the meetings averaged an hour, but depended on the young person's needs and circumstances. Meetings would typically focus on the intelligence received, giving the Official Notice (for educational purposes only; it is not legally binding)<sup>4</sup> and explaining the risks and consequences of carrying a knife or weapon. Meetings could also branch into other areas such as mental health, e-safety and substance misuse.

The intelligence action log was then updated after Op Divan meetings were completed. This included whether the young person had engaged in the process, to confirm if a Notice was given, and the outcome, including any further work required or referrals made to other agencies.

---

2 This meeting, usually a conference call, is chaired by the deputy commander for each of the three basic command areas in NYP (typically a chief inspector). Therefore, three meetings are held simultaneously across the NYP force area.

3 There is some ambiguity over Op Divan's eligibility criteria, which is discussed later in this summary. However young people who have a previous conviction for weapon possession are not eligible for Op Divan.

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

## How was the intervention evaluated?

An evaluation was designed that would capture evidence on Op Divan's effectiveness, using (where feasible) impact, process and cost analysis approaches.

The research team reviewed documentation relevant to Op Divan and facilitated a workshop with key stakeholders involved in setting up and delivering the programme in North Yorkshire, to develop a logic model (Figure 1) which captured the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and the programme's intended impacts. There are several short and medium-term outcomes that are anticipated to contribute to these longer-term impacts, as outlined in the logic model.

The evaluation used qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the set-up, delivery and perceived impacts of Op Divan, and to contribute to an evidence base for knowledge sharing across police forces in England and Wales.

## Impact evaluation – does it work?

NYP records Op Divan participants' characteristics in their management information (MI). The MI was available for 84 Op Divan participants identified between June 2018 and September 2019 and additional data concerning further knife crime incidents following the Op Divan meeting were provided for these 84 individuals up until the end of July 2020. Incidents included possession of a blade and assault, among others.

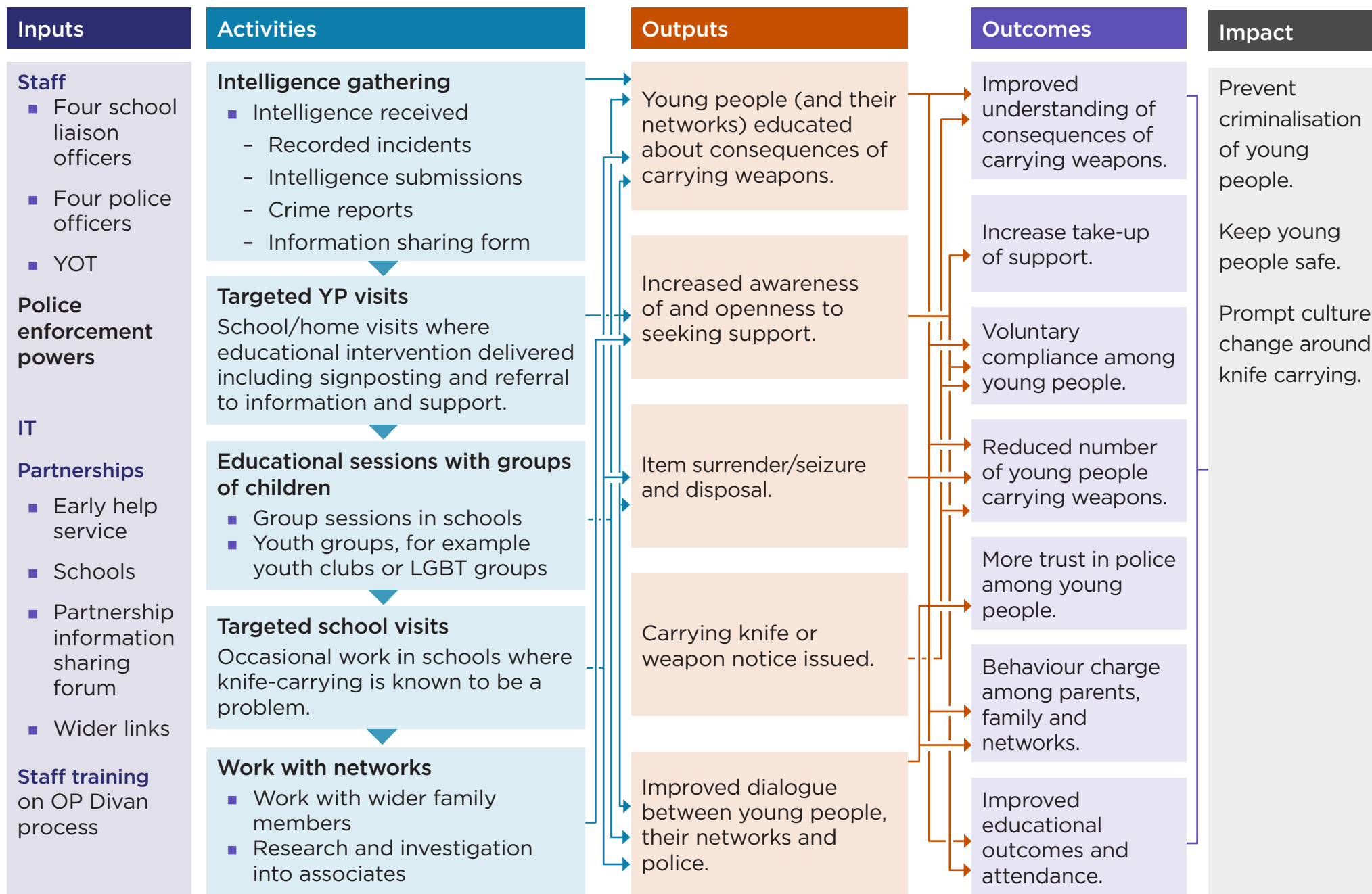
## Process evaluation – how does it work?

The process evaluation included in-depth interviews with Op Divan strategic and operational staff and delivery partners. Interviews were also conducted with a young person who had engaged in the programme and their parents/carers.

In total, nine in-depth interviews were conducted with four strategic staff and five operational staff and partner agencies. They focused on interviewees' views and experiences of Op Divan set-up and delivery, and perceived impacts and outcomes of the programme.



**Figure 1: Divan logic model**



Parents/carers gave permission for the research team to contact either themselves and/or the young people. Recruitment was challenging so in-depth interviews were conducted with one young person who had taken part in Op Divan and another with their parents (a paired interview).

## Cost analysis – how much does it cost?

A full cost benefit analysis was not possible in this evaluation. However, Op Divan does not receive any external funding and there are no dedicated Op Divan officers. Police staff described Op Divan as operating within existing resources and police practice and was therefore ‘self-sufficient’.

## How did the intervention perform?

Evidence is presented using the EMMIE framework, which was developed to help practitioners and decision-makers to understand and access the evidence base quickly and easily. The EMMIE framework describes findings across five dimensions.

<b>Effect</b>	Impact on crime or offending	Does the evidence suggest that the intervention led to an increase or decrease in crime or offending, or that it had no impact?
<b>Mechanism</b>	How it works	What aspect(s) of the intervention could explain this effect?
<b>Moderators</b>	Where it works	In what circumstances and contexts is the intervention likely (or unlikely) to work?
<b>Implementation</b>	How to do it	What conditions should be considered when implementing an intervention locally?
<b>Economic cost</b>	How much it costs	What direct or indirect costs are associated with the intervention, and is there evidence of cost benefits?

## Effect – what was the impact of the intervention?

Evidence on the overall impact of the intervention is limited by both the duration of the evaluation period and available data sources. In the absence of longer term data, the best available measures of change were used to give an indication of potential impact. Future follow-ups using longer term data would help us to understand better the overall impact of the intervention.

A systematic long-term follow-up was not routinely conducted on the outcomes for young people involved with Op Divan. However, findings from the evaluation of the MI about knife crime incidents indicates that nine of the 84 (10.7%) Op Divan participants committed further knife crime offences by the end of July 2020, meaning that 89.3% of participants did not come to the attention of Op Divan again over this period. This appears to be a promising approach to engaging young people involved in, or at risk of being involved in, knife crime. But further testing with a bigger sample and comparison group is needed before strong conclusions are made about its effectiveness at reducing weapon carrying.

Nonetheless, all interviewees defined ‘success’ as a young person **not coming to the attention of the police, YOT or school for carrying a knife/weapon again** after receiving Op Divan. Police, YOT and school staff interviewees were confident that most young people had not carried a knife/weapon since receiving Op Divan and so considered the intervention a success.

The analysis demonstrated that there were key areas in which it was **perceived** by interviewees that the intervention had an impact:

- whether the young person came to police attention
- whether the young person stayed in school
- whether the young person had increased understanding of the consequences of carrying knives
- the young persons’ perception of the police
- The police’s perception of young people

Findings from the interviews indicated that police, the young person and parents perceived an **improvement in young people's understanding of the consequences of carrying knives/weapons**, and that this had encouraged some young people to think about consequences of actions more widely.

A final impact, reported by police officer and school staff interviewees, was an **improvement in how police and other organisations in a position of authority were perceived by young people**.

## Mechanism – how did it work?

A key factor underpinning perceived impacts on young people is Op Divan's **early prevention focus** and not criminalising young people 'unnecessarily'. Police interviewees in particular spoke of the importance of 'getting in early' before carrying a knife/weapon or using language relating to using knives was normalised. That Op Divan is an intelligence-led intervention was seen as key to this.

Another factor underpinning impacts on young people is **the 'shock factor' and it being a 'wake-up call'**. Police, YOT, school staff and parents all described how young people are shocked to be contacted about Op Divan, both with the visit itself and by the specific messages the intervention conveys: that carrying a knife/weapon is an offence; and the consequences of that offence, including having a criminal record and the implications of that. These feelings of shock appeared to be exacerbated when the young person had no previous experience with the police.

The final factor was felt to be the **personal qualities of the YOT or police officers conducting the visits**, including being patient, having a friendly, supportive and reassuring approach, and communicating clearly and transparently. Delivering Op Divan quickly laid the 'groundwork' for success and was considered to be important in building trust between the officer, parent(s) and young person.

## Moderator – where did it work best?

As robust quantitative analysis was not feasible, there is no data on moderator effects.

## Implementation – how to do it

Strategic and operational police and school interviewees described Op Divan operating as ‘part of the working day’ and forming part of a ‘toolkit’ of crime prevention interventions. Since Op Divan was felt to ‘fit into an existing picture’ of partnership working, staff interviewees reported that it had no real impact on their role or capacity.

The findings from the interviews with police officers and operational staff indicate that the following changes could be made to ensure the sustainability of Op Divan.

- **Ensuring the referral process, allocation of cases to officers and the meeting with the young person is as simple to deliver as possible.** Ensuring cases were allocated to individual officers rather than the team would help ensure cases did not ‘fall through the cracks’ and, for example, YOT officers carrying out meetings with young people without a police officer present helps speed up the delivery of meetings.
- **Improving awareness and engagement among other partners,** such as the Early Help Service, Children’s Services and a wider range of schools (primary, SEND, private schools and pupil referral units). Awareness-raising meetings were being planned for Early Help Service staff and NYP school liaison officers, with a longer-term aim for the Early Help Service to deliver Op Divan meetings without police involvement.
- Due to its perceived success, suggestions were made by all staff groups to **broaden the intervention’s scope to include different offences** (low-level drug use, peer-on-peer abuse, theft) **and different demographics, including adults** where they have no previous convictions. Using Op Divan with adults was seen as ‘common sense’ by police interviewees, as ‘early intervention isn’t just about children’.
- However, the suggestion of extending Op Divan to adults should be explored with caution, given the impact of the programme with young people has not been proven.

In addition, findings suggest that there are some **challenges that may need to be addressed** to facilitate a better intervention. These include the following.

- Anti-police views and attitudes among some communities. It was felt these views and attitudes could potentially be overcome by an approachable manner, clear explanations at an appropriate pace and opportunities for questions.
- Maintaining engagement from young people with SEND. Suggestions for overcoming this barrier included shorter meetings, flexibility with regards to the meeting space (such as a larger space in which to have a walking meeting for a young person with ADHD), or using a speech and language therapist to facilitate communication.
- High staff turnover in other agencies (for example social care) resulting in a lack of awareness of Op Divan.
- A perception from school staff is that if the young person is involved in gang and county lines activity, and lacks pro-social influences, their peers may reinforce the idea that Op Divan is a 'soft' option and therefore the young person may be less likely to engage.
- Towards the end of the fieldwork evaluation, senior police leadership decided that all police constables and police community support officers could facilitate meetings with young people. Management need to ensure consistent training so the relevant skills, including being patient, supportive and gaining trust, are maintained in the programme.

### **Eligibility**

- There was at times a lack of clarity around the eligibility and suitability of young people for Op Divan. These included cases where the young person was under the age of criminal responsibility and the young person was over the age of 18.
- There was also a lack of clarity around whether to include young people who were talking about using knives, even if they were not suspected of carrying one. School staff also described the decision of whether or not to refer a young person to Op Divan as challenging, particularly in the event of so-called 'minor' incidents.

- Further clarity around these ambiguities is important to ensure consistent delivery of the programme and to make sure the intervention is available to those who would benefit from it. Clarity around the intervention needs to begin at the senior police leadership level and cascade to operational staff.

### **Transferability**

- An important consideration in seeking to transfer Op Divan to other forces (and in sustaining the approach more generally) is how the approach is dependent on the personal qualities of those delivering it. Force-wide training in relevant communication skills might be worth considering<sup>5</sup>.

### **Economic cost – how much is it?**

Op Divan does not receive any external funding and there are no dedicated Op Divan officers. Police staff described Op Divan as operating within existing resources and police practice and was therefore ‘self-sufficient’. They also felt that the delivery of Op Divan represented a ‘big cost-saving exercise’, on the assumption that it is effective and prevents (re)offending and its associated costs. Op Divan was perceived to be less costly and resource intensive than conducting a stop and search, and/or arresting a young person and taking them into custody. These are interviewees’ accounts and there is no robust quantitative impact or cost data carried out for this evaluation to support or refute these views, apart from the MI data on outcomes discussed earlier.

---

5 Findings about the importance of the personal qualities of those delivering Op Divan align with the procedural justice model, which suggests that the police should be able to help reduce crime by ‘winning hearts and minds’. A randomised controlled trial tested the impact of procedural justice training on the quality of interactions between the police and crime victims in Greater Manchester, with findings indicating that the training had a positive impact on outcomes (Wheller et al., 2013).

## Conclusion

A robust impact evaluation of Op Divan was not feasible, so evidence on impact comes from the perspectives of interviewees from the qualitative process evaluation. According to the Op Divan logic model, the three (linked) longer-term impacts that Op Divan hopes to have in North Yorkshire are to: (i) keep young people safe, (ii) prevent criminalisation of young people and (iii) promote culture change around carrying a knife.

Findings from the MI indicate that nine of the 84 participants committed further knife crime offences by the end of July 2020. This shows early signs that Op Divan may be an effective approach for engaging young people who are involved in or at risk of being involved in knife crime, but would warrant further evaluation. Findings from the interviews also highlight that Op Divan is perceived to have helped young people's understanding of the consequences of carrying weapons, police perceptions of young people and young people's perception of the police.

Op Divan operates within existing resources and was therefore considered 'self-sufficient' by interviewees. As such, they believed Op Divan represented a 'big cost-saving exercise' on the assumption that it is effective and prevents (re)offending and its associated costs.

The findings are promising that Op Divan is an effective and low-cost approach to help young people involved in, or at risk of being involved in, knife or weapon-related offences. The Metropolitan Police Service have used Op Divan to develop Op Met Divan, which is an early intervention approach for young people involved in or at risk of knife crime and other weapon related offences.



---

## 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.

[college.police.uk](https://college.police.uk)



Follow us  
**@CollegeofPolice**