

17th January 2025

To: His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services

CC: Home Secretary

Dear Chief Inspector

Response from Oliver Coppard, South Yorkshire's Mayor, to the Joint Inspection report: Multi-agency responses to serious youth violence: working together to support and protect children.

I welcome the findings from the six joint targeted inspections carried out by Ofsted, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services, the Care Quality Commission, and HM Inspectorate of Probation.

Whilst the report contains no specific recommendations, the findings will help ensure the approach in South Yorkshire takes account of good practice found during the inspections and takes account of the areas for action that inspectors identified.

The inspectors acknowledge the role knife crime plays in serious youth violence including the injuries sustained by young people from knives. As South Yorkshire's Mayor I have made knife crime a priority and committed to taking a zero-tolerance approach to knife crime in the County.

I was fully supportive of Operation Sceptre, the week of national action in tackling knife crime in November. Locally, Op Sceptre saw South Yorkshire Police working with partners across the County, stepping up activities to tackle knife crime. As well as conducting police operations, it also involved increased community engagement, pro-active communications, and delivery of educational materials on the dangers of carrying knives.

The report talks of those young people disproportionately at risk of harm from serious youth violence. This includes those young people with special educational needs, those who are neurodivergent and those from specific ethnic groups. South Yorkshire Police have recently published their Police Race Action Plan which acknowledges that young Black people are more likely to become a victim of serious violent crime than those from other ethnic backgrounds. During the first part of 2025/26 the force will launch a multi-agency prevention plan to tackle the issue, and I look forward to tracking the progress of this over coming months. I am the Chair of the South Yorkshire Integrated Care Partnership (SYICP) where

we can consider those wider issues around health including mental health which are included in our ICP strategy.

Inspectors have raised the issue of the varying provision of support for children and young people linked to the fact that not all police force areas receive funding for a Violence Reduction Unit. South Yorkshire is one of the police force areas with a specific Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), and I am pleased that the Government has continued to fund this unit into the new financial year 2025/26. The VRU has been instrumental in using a public health approach to address serious youth violence. The report refers to the issue of short-term funding impacting on the ability to plan long term and evaluate effectiveness. Whilst I am pleased that the annual funding for the VRU has been continued, I am engaged in active conversations across government on the issue of multi-year funding settlements. The financial certainty of a longer-term funding settlement would result in improved efficiency and effectiveness by both police services and others funded by police grant allocations particularly in the early intervention and prevention space.

Two key initiatives provided by the South Yorkshire VRU are the Hospital Navigators Programme including provision at Sheffield Children's Hospital and the Police Custody Navigators (18–25-year-old) Programme providing a support service for young people who find themselves either in hospital or police custody due to violence. Navigators provide non-judgemental support and help with problems which are preventing young people from living a safe and positive lifestyle.

The VRU work with Learn Sheffield and the Lifewise Centre in Rotherham in educating and informing young people around serious crime prevention focussing on violence against women and girls and knife enabled violence. This includes educational sessions in schools covering themes such as 'Sexual Harassment & Consent', 'Misogyny & Homophobia' & 'One Punch Can Kill'.

The report highlights that in some areas, not all partners are focussing on serious youth violence despite an expectation in the Serious Violence Duty to do so. Our Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) has been instrumental in developing arrangements to meet the Serious Violence Duty (SVD), working with key partners across the county to implement the Duty. The resulting Violence Reduction Strategy for South Yorkshire includes a focus on youth violence, with SVD partners working collaboratively to take a "prevention" approach, aiming to engage and influence young people before they get involved in violence.

Inspectors raise the issue of partners needing to have a joint understanding of children and young people's needs as well as an understanding of their backgrounds and experiences, including trauma and abuse. In South Yorkshire, the VRU has provided funding and support to Sheffield City Council and Sheffield Hallam University to develop and deliver a programme of training to organisations and professionals aimed at raising awareness of, and encouraging improved ways of, working around childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences.

I also provide funding for the four Community Safety Partnerships (CSP) in South Yorkshire to develop and implement a violence reduction plan – each of the South Yorkshire CSPs has a focus on addressing the most serious violence.

Finally, Inspectors touch on the fact that the risk of serious youth violence is reduced when statutory partners and the education and voluntary sectors work well together. They also raise the issue of a lack of focus by some Local Safeguarding Partnerships. I welcome the Government's plans to introduce a new Young Futures Programme focused on intervening earlier to stop young people being drawn into crime. The creation of hubs that bring together local services including youth workers, mental health support workers and careers advisers to support young people is welcome and needed. I look forward to working with Ministers on this important work here in South Yorkshire.

I have copied this letter to the Home Secretary for her information.

I look forward to working with you both to keep people safe across South Yorkshire.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oliver Coppard'.

Oliver Coppard
South Yorkshire's Mayor