

ACT Now crime prevention pathway

The ACT Now pathway offers under 18s intensive intervention by the relevant Youth Justice Service (YJS) which begins while the young person is still in custody.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Independently evaluated
Purpose	Diversion
Topic	Knife and gun crime Criminal justice Custody
Organisation	Thames Valley Police
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Thames Valley Police
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Region	South East
Partners	Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services)

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2023
Scale of initiative	Regional
Target group	Children and young people

Aim

To prevent young people under 18 being placed through the criminal justice system and minimise the impact of an arrest for knife possession, by working with the young person to understand their reasons for carrying a knife and to work with them to prevent a further occurrence.

ACT Now seeks to initiate a comprehensive intervention led by the youth offending team together with a referral programme for young people, designed to address the root cause of the problem behaviour.

Intended outcome

- increased number of youths engaged on the programme
- increased number of those arrested receiving out of court disposals
- decreased number of those arrested that then go on to re-offend

Description

In receipt of Home Office homicide prevention funds and Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), worked with Youth Justice System (YJS) and police custody leads to set up the ACT Now programme.

ACT Now (under 18) approach

ACT Now applies to persons under the age of 18 arrested for possession of a knife or bladed article or knife enabled violent crime and entering the custody suites at Slough or Milton Keynes.

ACT Now seeks to initiate a comprehensive Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) led intervention and supported referral programme for young people, designed to address the root cause of the problem behaviour. When an eligible young person enters Slough or Milton Keynes custody ACT Now enables face-to-face conversation with them in the presence of an appropriate adult.

These meetings take place after the criminal interview between the hours of 9am and 10pm. A member of the Youth Justice Service (often a qualified youth worker or worker with child focused/youth training and experience) will work with young people, parents and carers. The initial conversation outlines a description of the ACT Now scheme to the young person. They also gain their voluntary participation and agreement to receive a home visit within 48 hours of their release from custody.

Additionally, ACT Now staff attend custody within 90 minutes of being requested. An additional requirement is for ACT Now to have a follow up face-to-face home visit within 48 hours. The follow up will include a person focused needs assessment including home life, school and education, and peer influences.

All children and young people are offered a speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) assessment to identify any underlying and unidentified needs.

Examples of follow up input include:

- weapons awareness – including work around the law and knife carrying, understanding what weapons are illegal and why, vulnerability to arrest, consequences of harm and knife carrying, discussions around knife carrying and Milton Keynes specifically, impact on direct and indirect victims, including the victim, families and local communities and exploring the intention of knife-carrying
- exploring the consequences of further offending
- work around emotions and feelings including anger management
- exploring the dangers and impact of social media within knife-crime
- exploring the consequences of knife-crime as an adult
- exploring the harm caused to affected individuals

- exploring the financial costs of knife-crime
- supporting emotional and mental health, and building resilience
- exploring the impact of peer influence/pressure and peer coercion
- work around gangs, gang membership and child exploitation
- discussions around the National Referral Mechanism and support afforded under this initiative
- education, training and employment support – including addressing reduced school-timetables, supporting children and young people who refuse to attend education and supporting those young people with complex relationships with education
- explore communication strategies – including assertive, passive and aggressive communication, and the impact of each approach
- work around resolving conflict without aggression and violence
- exploring the experiences of young people who have been victims of crime
- supporting parents and carers – including supporting parents/carers to access the ‘who’s in charge’ peer-supported programme and one-to-one work with the family intervention worker

The ACT Now worker also makes referrals and keeps in contact with the young person and their appropriate adult throughout the criminal justice journey. An ACT Now intervention can lead to an ‘outcome 22’ case closure but does not have to do so.

Operation Deter (adult)

Operation Deter applies if an adult is arrested for possession of a knife, or bladed article or knife enabled violent crime. Operation Deter seeks to have a more robust approach to this type of crime in order to have a more effective deterrent. The Operation Deter goals are faster charging of suspects, sending more people in custody to court and ‘severing’ cases (separate trials for each offence) so that the knife possession cases can appear at court faster while more complicated linked cases progress through a slower route.

Operation Deter started in July 2022 in Milton Keynes and Slough, and rolled out across the Thames Valley Police custody suites. Rollout was concluded in July 2023.

Evaluation

In September 2025 The Cambridge Centre published an evaluation report on [Thames Valley Police's ‘ACT Now’ youth knife crime initiative](#). The evaluation looks at the impact of the

intervention. The evaluation does not track how measures change over time.

Evaluation methods:

There will be both a process and impact evaluation, the impact evaluation will be a mixed-methods approach. This would use quantitative data and statistics to identify the impact of reoffending, identify what interventions work and for whom, as well as understanding demographics and risk factors associated with this cohort.

The initiative appears to have a positive impact according to emerging findings from the evaluation.

The evaluation also looks at how it is implemented, how and why it works or doesn't work, for whom it works or doesn't work and how much it costs or saves.

Overall impact

- ACT Now commenced in January 2023 in Milton Keynes and in March 2023 in Slough
- ACT Now became business as usual in November 2023
- there are additional areas being added to the programme. Wokingham Local Authority started in November 2024
- there is a wider rollout across the remaining seven local authority areas of Thames Valley commencing November 2024 through to early 2025
- all the Thames Valley areas will have the scheme live by early 2025
- by March 2025, there will be nine YJS operating the model

Learning

Strong relationships between YJS and the custody staff is key as it requires the custody staff to contact YJS whilst the young person is still in custody. Introducing regular delivery group meetings support has been effective for the set up and roll out of ACT Now.

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