

ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

25 February 2025

Title: Substance Misuse

Presented by: Assistant Chief Constable Claire Bell

Cover Report

Police and Crime Plan

1. This report outlines the strategic efforts of the West Midlands Police (WMP) to reduce the crime, cost, and harm associated with substance misuse, in alignment with both the Police and Crime Plan 2021-2025 and the broader government strategy. Our comprehensive approach is structured around the 4 P plan: Prevent, Prepare, Protect, and Pursue, targeting specific aspects of alcohol abuse, drug-related harm and supply reduction. The strategy sets key priorities using a 4 P plan;
2. **Prevent** - We focus on pre-arrest drug and alcohol diversion, maximising protection for vulnerable groups, particularly children. By developing early warning schemes in partnership with commissioned and Blue Light Services, and engaging youth in educational initiatives, we aim to curb the initial exposure and use of drugs.
3. **Prepare** - Our strategy includes compiling a Drug Market Profile to better understand demand and dependency patterns. We enhance the training of officers and staff regarding illicit drugs and emerging trends and leverage lived experiences to foster a whole-system approach. The implementation of the WMP forensic Drug Testing facility and proactive use of Drug Expert Witnesses further equip our team to address drug-related challenges effectively.
4. **Protect** - Ensuring the safety of the public and our officers is paramount. We provide safety kits for encounters with dangerous substances and collaborate with safeguarding partners to shield children and youth from exploitation, particularly from county lines activities. Proactive safety messaging about emerging threats, such as synthetic opioids, is disseminated in partnership with statutory and third-sector organisations.
5. **Pursue** - Our enforcement strategy aggressively targets the disruption of high-harm Organised Crime Groups (OCGs). We employ specialist capabilities and partnerships to dismantle drug networks, fast-track offenders through our review processes, and fully utilise legislative powers to seize and confiscate assets linked to economic crimes.

Achievements and Challenges

Proactivity & Impact

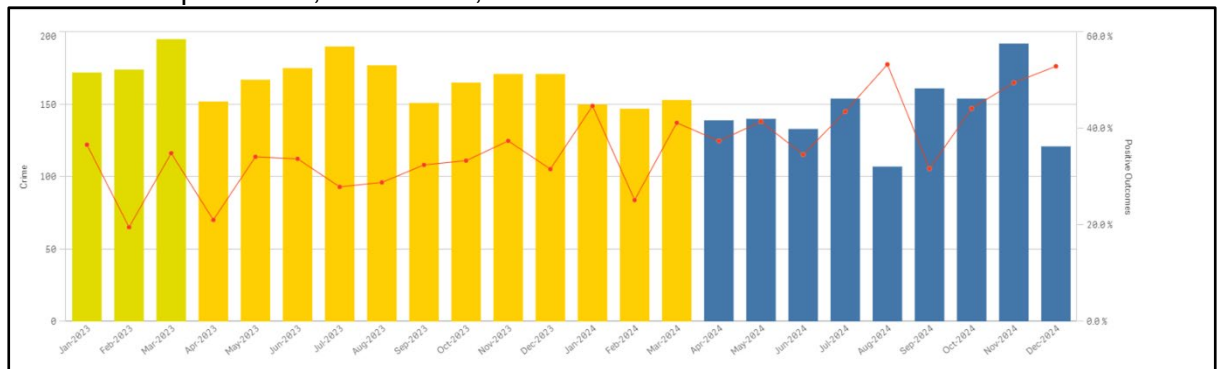
6. WMP's strategic use of regional and local capabilities has been crucial in proactively targeting high-impact nominals and organised crime groups involved in the supply of drugs. Embedded tasking processes like the Regional Tactical Tasking and Coordination Group (RTTCG) and Serious Organised Crime and Exploitation (SOCEX) tasking meetings enhance these efforts.
7. Since April 2022, Home Office funding has enabled the force to have a designated resource focused on identifying and disrupting County Lines activity running across the region. An effective process of drug line identification, supported by a threat assessment, has been developed in conjunction with Local Responsible Officer's (LRO's). This is supported by regional colleagues to identify those trafficking drugs who present the greatest risk of harm to communities.
8. This County Lines Taskforce (CLTF) is able to deliver prompt, focused and dedicated investigative resources to tackle the problem. A WMP and Regional Threat Grid, underpinned by a weekly governance structure, ensures that wider local and force capabilities are co-ordinated. The County Lines Intelligence Matrix (CLICM) indicates that Birmingham and Coventry account for 48% of County Lines export locations within the region. Birmingham remains the single biggest exporter of county lines regionally, with the WMP force area continuing to be one of the biggest exporters nationally.
9. Since April 2024, 254 'Type 1' outcomes have been delivered by the CLTF. A 'Type 1' Drug line is a line that sends out bulk messages offering Class A drugs for sale. The force then recovers the phone line where the drugs activity is being conducted. The holder of the line must be charged with a relevant drug supply offence. As of 16 December, 85 people have been charged with drug supply matters and 95 people engaged with statutory or funded safeguarding services. In addition, the CLTF has made positive enforcement impacts, with 111 arrests resulting in 289 charges over the same period, underscoring their proactive approach in tackling high-risk drug trafficking activities.

Drug Trafficking

10. The positive outcomes, where we have had a positive result such as charge or satisfactory resolution, following the investigation have shown a marked improvement, increasing from 610 (30.7%) in 2023 to 711 (41.7%) in 2024. This significant rise in the success rate indicates not only a reduction in overall drug trafficking activities but also an enhancement in the quality and effectiveness of our investigations and operations.

11. Year	12. Drug Trafficking Offences Recorded	13. Positive Outcomes
14. 2023	15. 1,989	16. 610 (30.7%)
17. 2024	18. 1,706	19. 711 (41.7%)

20. In 2023, (January-December), there were 2060 recorded drug trafficking offences compared to 1,763 in 2024, a decrease of 297 offences.



21. In 2024, there have been 152 individuals submitted to the National Referral Mechanism with links to County Lines criminality in the WMP force area. This is a 27% increase in referrals from 2023 which highlights an increasing crossover between County Lines, and Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking criminality. Referrals are predominantly males from Birmingham and Coventry, with the youngest being a 10-year-old male from Wolverhampton.
22. Further enhancing their operational scope, the CLTF has addressed the recognised vulnerability to Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) within drug lines by implementing 'Operation Skyclash'. This dedicated initiative focuses on the exploitation aspect and collaborates closely with Local Policing Area (LPA) leads, the Locate programme, and Catch 22, a national education and diversion support service. This collaboration has been instrumental in mitigating the risks to children and young people drawn into CCE linked to county lines, effectively reducing the incidents of children going missing due to these criminal networks.
23. The Major Crime Unit (MCU) operate a whole system response to Serious Organised Crime (SOC) threats as there is a recognised cross over within OCGs linked to County Lines drug dealing, Criminal use of Firearms and serious violence. Therefore, by taking a proactive targeted approach MCU are driving disruptions and mitigations to OCG activity across all SOC led criminality to safeguard communities and the vulnerable. The SOCeX threat grid and CLTF Threat Grid are used to identify and tackle threat, harm, and risk.
24. WMP has developed its own drug testing and reporting capability to an evidential standard. This removes the need to rely on the private sector forensic Service Providers for evidential testing. The Drugs Lab is in the final phase of accreditation and conformance testing with a plan to go live in early 2025. This will significantly speed up processing and reporting to drive the speed in which criminal justice cases can progress to CPS charging advice whilst delivering significant cost savings for WMP.

Preparedness

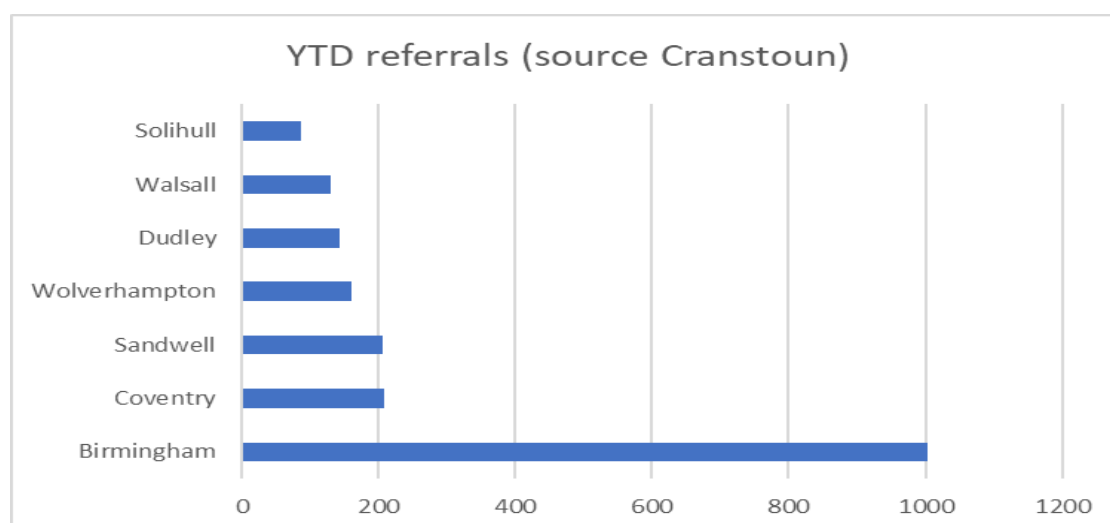
25. A completed and redacted version of the illicit drug market profile was shared with partners to enhance collaborative efforts. This initiative enables our partners to better understand the nuances and current dynamics of the illicit drug market, fostering a unified approach in strategizing interventions. By sharing these

insights, we facilitate a more coordinated and effective response across agencies, leading to improved alignment of resources and strategies.

26. Naloxone has now been successfully integrated into the first aid kits of over 200 officers across the force, significantly enhancing our operational preparedness. This strategic deployment allows for swift, life-saving interventions during overdose incidents, reinforcing our commitment to public safety and health.

Divert

27. The Divert programme continues to be an effective approach for addressing drug-related offences, with 84% of referrals in 2023–2024 relating to cannabis, a slight decrease from 90% in the previous report. Between July 2023 and March 2024, 2,403 referrals were made, including children, with Birmingham accounting for the highest proportion, followed by Coventry and Sandwell.
28. The majority of referrals remain pre-arrest, facilitated through Community Resolutions and the Cranstoun app, which has streamlined the process for officers. Post-arrest referrals also occur when drugs are found in custody searches. However, WMP currently lacks direct access to data on app-based referrals, and work is ongoing with Cranstoun to enable better data sharing for improved tracking and oversight.



29. The Divert programme continues to demonstrate significant positive impacts. Between July 2023 and March 2024, 78.6% of individuals referred engaged with the 1:1 assessment, reflecting a 10% increase from previous periods. This increase highlights enhanced opportunities to educate and support individuals, offering a viable alternative to criminalisation.
30. For simple drug possession offences (excluding intent to supply), the use of cautions has decreased compared to 2022, while charges have seen a slight increase. However, both remain over 50% lower than pre-project levels in 2019, highlighting the sustained impact of the Divert initiative in shifting outcomes *toward more supportive intervention*

31. Outcome July 2023- Dec 2023	32. Total
33. Charged	34. 305
35. Community Resolution	36. 1516
37. Caution	38. 47

Arrest Referral Service

39. The Cranstoun Arrest Referral Service (CARS) continues to operate across all six custody blocks in WMP, an increase from four in the last report due to the opening of additional custody sites. Last month we disposed of 441 possession offences by way of OOCd compared to 85 charges, this is the highest amount of OOCd we have done since connect started. Last January we disposed of 274 possession offences by way of OOCd compared to 82 charges. So far this year we have recorded 16% more offences but positive outcome rate has increased from 69.5% to 79.5% with charge rate increasing to 15% from 12%. The service provides vital support for individuals in custody with drug and alcohol issues through three referral routes:

Route 1: Drug DIP Testing Referrals

- Between March 2023 and November 2024, there were 5,677 referrals into treatment.
- 79% (4,506 referrals) followed a positive drugs test.
- 21% (1,167 referrals) were voluntary referrals following a negative test.

Route 2: Custody Risk Assessment and RADAR Referrals for drugs

- On 2nd May 2024, WMP launched a new custody risk assessment that allows detainees to request to see a drug worker regardless of a positive or negative test. If they consent, an automated RADAR referral is sent to Cranstoun, enabling timely intervention.
- Between 2nd May 2024 and 31st December 2024, 1,456 RADAR referrals were made for drug-related issues.

Route 3: Custody risk assessments and voluntary assessment in relation to alcohol:

- All custody blocks have staff on site completing mandatory Drug Testing on Arrests (DToA) assessments, and also voluntary assessments from 7am-8pm Monday to Friday, as well as the three higher activity blocks having full weekend cover. Cranston staff review all people brought into custody who have 'alcohol markers' and visit them to offer support. Also, as part of the custody risk assessment the person may raise that they have issues with alcohol and a referral will be completed by custody for Cranston staff to visit that person. With regards to alcohol the main challenge is that due to it being legal any engagement by a person is voluntary.

Alcohol Harm

40. West Midlands have a Safe Space located in The Arcadian centre within Birmingham City Centre, supported by St Johns Ambulance. The benefits are that Police colleagues are able to take vulnerable people under the influence of alcohol or drugs to the Safe Space for medical intervention. This has been running since 2018 and is proven to be successful having been used as a template for safety in night time economy's (NTE's) across the country. There are funding considerations in relation to the safe space and there is currently no plans to expand this to other areas.
41. West midlands police licensing teams conduct regular checks with licensed premises. This is to ensure compliance in relation to legislation. The licensing teams take a proactive approach when venues are associated with 'both serious crime and

BAR ONE : LICENCING CASE STUDY

In April 2022 in Dudley Town Centre, an incident was attended where it was apparent that Bar One a licenced premise was operating outside their hours. Between this time and February 2024 there were 11 incidents of violence or disorder outside the premises or within the immediate vicinity but never any evidence to link them directly to Bar One, albeit the perpetrators could usually be seen to be patrons of Bar One on CCTV. Late 2022 a series of "Round Robin" events took place on Sunday nights these events eventually became subject of Op Atilt as they were all linked to violence with a particular DJ being a common denominator. This extended across the force with Walsall and Birmingham being linked to the same DJ.

On 5 February 2024 there was a firearm discharge outside the premises and CCTV showed that the offender had been inside Bar One. WMP worked to suspended the licence. The closure of Bar One was instrumental in a 70% reduction in SYV within Dudley town centre. The Round Robin story then moved to a different venue Grand 8 in April & May 2024. WMP immediately took them to licence review on 16/07/24 for non-compliance of their licence and operating beyond permitted hours. The Licensing Committee suspended their licence for up to 3 months to enable them to become compliant with their licence; they reduced their hours of licensable activity to 0000hrs with a closing time of 0030hrs & added 27 additional conditions to their licence. This meant that there were no premises in Dudley with large enough capacity that could legally host a Round Robin event, preventing further youth and alcohol related violence in Dudley.

serious disorder'. A recent example of this positive work was in relation to the tragic death of man outside a nightclub in Walsall on 7th December 2024. Thanks to our licencing team they took immediate action. A full hearing was held on 12th December 2024 and the committee agreed with their submissions and deemed that the most severe sanction available to them was the appropriate course of action, revoking the licence.

42. The licencing team have also been working within Birmingham city centre in support of the Ask for Angela campaign. This has resulted in delivery of promotional material to venues by licensing staff and a proactive enforcement night in December 2024. Plain clothes staff attended licensed premises to check for Ask for Angela awareness in venues within the night time economy and provide appropriate feedback.
43. The Junior PCSO scheme (delivered to year 5 in primary school – ages 9 to 10) addresses road safety and parking issues outside of the school, litter picking in and around the school, and supports in the school's anti-bullying / Respect Programme. At a secondary school level there are no specific inputs delivered by SIPOs, but

SIPOs would respond to emergent issues at specific locations and support in the delivery of assemblies intended to divert young people from substance misuse, under the wider theme of criminal exploitation / county lines exploitation. On request of individual secondary schools there is also a vaping input that can be delivered due to evidence that indicates children and young people who vape are more likely to be associated with gang activity.

Actions undertaken

44. The Home Office has approved continued funding for the CLTF until April 2026, acknowledging the taskforce's effectiveness. With a potential extension to 2028. The PCC's support for securing these resources will be pivotal in ensuring continued success.
45. The Home Office have stated that the continued funding of the County Lines Task Force (CLTF) will require greater coherence to the force's 4P strategies to tackle knife crime, exploitation and anti-social behaviour. The force is still awaiting clarification around ongoing funding for Serious Youth Violence and Anti-Social Behaviour. When this is understood the force will work to ensure connectivity between different activities, strategies and funding streams, ensuring delivery against any additional metrics required.
46. The distribution of the Serious Organised Crime (SOC) profile to relevant partners has been ongoing as planned. This quarter, further engagement with partners using the distributed SOC profiles has fostered deeper collaborations. This has led to more targeted interventions and an enhanced understanding of drug market dynamics, supporting a proactive response to SOC activities.

Future Work

47. In line with our ongoing efforts to refine our early warning systems for identifying emerging drug trends, particularly synthetic opioids, WMP is taking proactive steps to align our operational strategies with broader analytical needs. This is exemplified by the implementation of a new quarterly approach to our Linked Series of Death Report, which now includes detailed analyses of drug-related deaths. This initiative not only responds to the HMICFRS recommendation for more frequent and thorough reporting but also enhances our understanding of death patterns related to drug use, aiding in the formulation of targeted interventions.
48. Looking ahead, the insights gained from these quarterly reports will directly inform our preparedness strategies. We are planning a multi-agency workshop in the upcoming summer to further equip our partners with the knowledge and skills necessary to address synthetic opioid trends effectively. This workshop will serve as a critical component of our strategy to stay ahead of these trends, ensuring that our response is both informed and adaptive. By continuing to integrate our analytical findings with front-line training and response initiatives, we aim to enhance our overall effectiveness in preventing and mitigating the impact of drug-related incidents within the community.
49. Efforts to further embed the Divert programme will continue into 2025, focusing on increasing officer engagement, expanding accessibility across teams, and enhancing collaboration to maintain its positive impact on reducing the criminalisation of drug possession offences.

50. As the Offending to Recovery (O2R) programme transitions into its post-pilot phase, it continues to evolve and expand its reach to more communities. Currently operational in Birmingham LPA and just beginning in Coventry LPA, the programme is poised to become fully operational in Wolverhampton shortly. Looking ahead, there are strategic plans to initiate the programme in Dudley LPA and Walsall LPA by early 2025. This planned expansion is aligned with our commitment to enhance multi-agency collaboration and improve access to rehabilitation services across the region. By scaling up the programme to include these new areas, O2R aims to replicate its success in Birmingham, extending vital support to a broader spectrum of individuals affected by drug-related issues and related criminal activities.
51. October to December 2024 inclusive, saw a total of 32 referrals, 25 referrals were male and 7 were female. During this period Q2R actively managed a total of 27 clients who have signed enrolment forms. As of 31st December 2024, O2R staff had 18 active clients total on their case load. However, it is important to note that this number can fluctuate daily/weekly due to new enrolments and un-enrolments. During this period 3 clients were admitted into residential rehab and a total of 13 clients have entered residential rehab in 2024/2025. These numbers suggest the programme is on course to equal the last financial years admissions (16).

Financial Implications

52. The O2R programme has demonstrated notable cost-effectiveness, particularly using charity beds for rehab, which cost £3,500 per admission compared to £15,000 for regular admissions. Continued financial support is crucial as post-deselection costs have increased due to challenges such as relapse. These findings underscore the importance of sustained funding to maintain the benefits of the programme and support its expansion into new areas like Dudley and Walsall LPAs in early 2025.

Legal Implications

53. There are no relevant legal implications to report currently

Equality Implications

54. O2R promotes equality by employing staff with lived addiction experiences, enhancing the program's relevance and inclusivity. The expansion ensures equitable access to affordable rehab services across multiple LPAs, supporting social inclusion and providing opportunities for those often marginalized in employment sectors.

Background Report

55. The summer of 2023 saw a big increase in the number of drug-related deaths in Birmingham due to the presence of nitazines in the local heroin supply. The response to this incident was Op Mabble. Following this Operation, a lessons learnt document was produced which gave rise to a number of proposals to improve the forward work of partners including the police, the OPCC, local authority Public Health Teams, and coroners.
56. In response to the surge in drug-related deaths, caused by nitazines in the heroin supply, Operation Mabble identified critical areas for improvement in intelligence

sharing, collaboration, and operational response. WMP has since implemented a series of measures to address these issues and prevent future drug-related deaths.

57. To enhance intelligence sharing, WMP actively contributes to Local Drug Information Systems (LDIS), a platform that enables multi-agency collaboration. This system allows partners, including local authorities and public health teams, to issue timely drug alerts and respond proactively to high-risk drug supplies. Intelligence gathered from police operations, toxicology reports, and community feedback is shared with partners to ensure informed and coordinated responses.
58. Building on the lessons from Op Mabble, WMP has strengthened its early warning systems to better detect and monitor synthetic opioid trends. A real-time tracking system is being developed to identify emerging threats, allowing for quicker interventions. These efforts are complemented by WMP's collaboration with partners to implement Synthetic Opioid Preparedness Plans, which outline risk assessments, rapid response protocols, and resource coordination. West Midlands Police has actively collaborated with local authority leads by detailed feedback and enhancements to the preparedness plans. We have integrated practical law enforcement insights to improve the plans' effectiveness and compliance, particularly in the areas of rapid response and inter-agency coordination.
59. WMP has established regular multi-agency meetings with local authorities, coroners, and public health teams to review data on drug-related deaths and identify patterns linked to synthetic opioids. These meetings facilitate the sharing of insights from investigations and toxicology results, enabling all partners to plan coordinated interventions and allocate resources effectively.
60. In addition to intelligence and coordination efforts, WMP has focused on targeted enforcement to disrupt the supply chain of synthetic opioids. Operations are directed at high-risk individuals and organised crime groups linked to the distribution of contaminated drugs. Collaboration with forensic teams ensures that information on drug adulterants is shared with partners, further supporting public safety initiatives.
61. To complement enforcement efforts, WMP engages with the community through public awareness campaigns and harm reduction initiatives. These campaigns, often delivered in partnership with third-sector organisations, aim to educate vulnerable populations about the risks of synthetic opioids like nitazines and provide support to individuals at risk of drug misuse.
62. The lessons learnt from Op Mabble have been pivotal in shaping WMP's approach to preventing drug-related deaths. By prioritising intelligence sharing, enhancing early warning systems, strengthening multi-agency coordination, and balancing enforcement with harm reduction, WMP continues to work closely with partners to safeguard communities and address the ongoing risks posed by synthetic opioids.

Offender to Recovery

63. WMP is working with the OPCC to expand Offending to Recovery (previously known as Offender to Rehab) across the force area to other LPAs beyond Birmingham. This expansion work is currently taking place in Coventry, Wolverhampton, Dudley, and Walsall.

64. Each LPA where O2R is expanding is allocated resources based on specific local needs assessed through consultations with Drug and Alcohol Commissioners. The staffing model varies, indicating a scalable approach to resource allocation:
- **Birmingham:** 2 PCs and 2 CGL Drug Services staff.
 - **Coventry and Wolverhampton:** 1 PC and 1 drug services staff each, reflecting the initial stages of their operations.
 - **Dudley and Walsall:** 1X PC and 1x CGL Drug services staff
 - **Sandwell and Solihull are not being considered at this stage:** While they explore relationships with their local authorities and drug providers
65. In alignment with the core values of O2R, all new staff undergo comprehensive training, including shadowing at established delivery locations, engaging with past participants, and understanding the community dynamics by meeting with local retailers and authority commissioners. This thorough induction process ensures that the values foundational to O2R are consistently embedded across all regions.
66. Furthermore, the O2R Supervisor plays a crucial role in maintaining these standards by regularly visiting all delivery locations, holding one-on-one and full team meetings to reinforce best practices, and addressing any discrepancies in the application of the programme's principles. These gatherings often feature guest speakers with lived experiences of addiction and retail crime, enhancing the relevance and impact of the training.
67. Regular engagements with local stakeholders, including retailers, security staff, and community members, are instrumental in addressing local issues related to retail theft, violence, and antisocial behaviour associated with substance abuse. This proactive community engagement ensures that the programme not only adapts to local conditions but also remains aligned with its core mission of recovery and rehabilitation.
68. As WMP expands the O2R programme, it faces challenges, particularly in recruiting drug service staff and accessing residential rehab facilities in new areas. The vetting process, crucial for maintaining program integrity, can deter candidates with valuable lived experience. To address this, WMP has adjusted its recruitment strategies to better support potential staff through the vetting process and has implemented interim measures allowing candidates to begin work under supervision while their vetting completes.
69. Additionally, the availability of residential rehab facilities in new LPAs is limited. WMP has responded by securing charity beds at established facilities at reduced costs. These beds are used for the Birmingham programme and there is an agreement that these can be used by other local authorities providing immediate, affordable rehab options. This stopgap solution allows continuous support as WMP negotiates with local providers to increase facility availability.
70. Through these strategic and adaptive measures, WMP ensures that the O2R programme is not only expanded efficiently across the force area but also retains its essence and effectiveness, reflecting the unique needs of each community it serves. This approach highlights WMP's commitment to a flexible, responsive, and community-focused implementation of the O2R programme.

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