

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING:	Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing Panel	
MEETING DATE:	19 January 2021	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	Violence Reduction Unit	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		

1 THE ISSUE

This report outlines the progress made in establishing a Violence Reduction Unit to help address serious violence in Bath and North East Somerset and the plans for taking this work forward in support of a new ‘serious violence duty.’

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to:

- 2.1 Note the progress made to date in establishing a local Violence Reduction Unit with its ambition that children and adults lead lives free of serious violence at home and in their communities;
- 2.2 Note that this work will continue to be a priority within the Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership in readiness for meeting the obligations of a new ‘serious violence duty.’

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 Whilst levels of serious violence in Bath and North East Somerset are comparatively low, these offences have a significant impact on the individuals directly involved and on their communities. The drivers for this offending are varied and complex but with a growing awareness of criminal exploitation and recognition of the disproportionate impact of the current pandemic on families who already experience a level of disadvantage, there is every reason for agencies to work together to keep levels as low as possible.
- 3.2 There is no universally adopted definition of serious violence. The national serious violence strategy (2018) focused on knife and gun crime and homicide and included drug dealing and robbery. A broader Avon and Somerset definition, developed in response to stakeholder feedback, added serious domestic abuse, serious sexual assault and rape. Locally, the focus to date has been on domestic

abuse, youth violence, including knife crime and violence associated with the street community.

- 3.3 Bath and North East Somerset initially bid for funding to establish a Violence Reduction Unit in 2019 as part of the wider Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner's bid to the Home Office. The 'hub and spoke' model adopted, with a central strategic group and the five Local Authorities each developing their own approaches and receiving a proportion of the grant funding is particular to Avon and Somerset. Local governance arrangements support a joined-up approach, with a multi-agency steering group overseeing delivery of the work plan and reporting principally to the Exploitation Sub Group of the Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership but also to the Youth Offending Service Management Board, the Domestic Abuse Partnership and the Early Help and Intervention Sub Group. This is fitting as its ambition that children and adults lead lives free of serious violence at home and in their communities is a cross-cutting agenda.
- 3.4 The core requirements in the first year of operation were to complete an all-age serious violence problem profile with a focus on under 25s and a response plan that in turn contributed to the wider Avon and Somerset submission to the Home Office. The problem profile was undertaken by Crest, drawing on publicly available and local data from a range of partners, together with qualitative information from young people and professionals, facilitated by Youth Connect South West and Lemon Gazelle respectively. It concluded that although Bath and North East Somerset has a low overall rate of recorded violence relative to its population size, certain serious violence offences had increased significantly in the last five years, with some levelling off in the fifth year. This is interesting where children are concerned as there is evidence of a number of known risk factors associated with serious violence including an increasing rate of fixed-term school exclusions, a consistently high rate of fixed term exclusions of children in need and those with special educational need, a high attainment gap between disadvantaged children and all pupils, and an increase in reported missing episodes. It has been suggested that as the overall rate of serious violence is relatively low, there must be strong protective factors at play. Particularly vulnerable groups included parents with multiple needs living in the most deprived areas, the street community, a small group of children known to the Youth Offending Service who had experienced adverse childhood experiences and children who have witnessed domestic abuse. The profile also highlighted that the demand for drugs is comparatively high in Bath and North East Somerset and that county lines are in operation, with their known links to exploitation and serious violence.
- 3.5 Serious violence is concentrated in Bath city centre with increases in Keynsham, Twerton and Somer Valley. Robberies and hospital knife attendances are mainly in the after-school period, whereas violence and knife injury admissions are more often in the early hours of the morning, suggesting links with the night time economy and domestic abuse. Victims of knife crime at hospital are mainly in the 25-34 age group and usually male. Most children who have been violent are aged 15-17 and almost all male. Of concern is that those harmed often refuse to support further action and so a low proportion of serious violent offences lead to charges/summons. Domestic abuse offenders are mainly ex or current male partners, under 34 years old and with a high incidence of mental health and

substance misuse issues; survivors are almost all female, likely to be aged 21-50, with disability a known risk factor.

- 3.6 Based on this, the response plan for 2020-21 identified key strategic and operational actions to address the risk of serious violence. At the outset, a recruitment drive failed to appoint a manager and so the lead was undertaken jointly by the Head of Young People's Prevention Service and the Inclusive Communities Manager. This freed more of the grant to be spent on interventions and when the second tranche of funding at the same level was confirmed at a late stage for 2020-21, it was decided not to attempt again to recruit to a short-term post but to maintain the lead as part of the responsibilities of the Head of Young People's Service. This has the advantage of integrating the work within wider service delivery and alongside the Youth Offending Service whilst maximising investment in additional interventions. A virtual team including Community Safety and Police staff, supported by an administrator, have supported the activity. Work is underway to produce a logic model and/or pathway framework to identify the services available to address the risk of serious violence against known risk factors and to identify gaps. This will include consideration of early years' needs and build on the Early Help pathway.
- 3.7 A key development has been the establishment of a multi-agency Serious Violence Operational Group to identify individuals, networks and places of concern. The Police Serious Violence App is used to identify individuals at high risk of involvement in serious violence as victims or perpetrators (and often, both) and direct notifications can also be received from any agency. The group meets monthly to build a fuller picture of the risk posed and seek assurance that it is being addressed or to agree actions to provide or strengthen the necessary support. The group has recently extended its focus from under 18s to under 25s and the intention is to eventually consider all age groups. The work interfaces with the bi-monthly Exploitation Operational Group and every effort is made to avoid duplication. The methodology is developing and the activity depends on a continuing strong partnership with Police. It is supported by the following interventions which in turn relate directly to findings of the problem profile. Some of these have been directly commissioned and some have been awarded as grants through a local Community Fund established to involve the wider voluntary and community sector and others eligible in proposing initiatives to address issues described in the problem profile:

Year 1: 2019-20	Year 2: 2020-21
Youth Connect South West: Work with young people to produce posters and information cards to support reporting of knife crime (in response to a request from the Youth Forum)	No new commission for this but materials delayed due to Covid-19 are now ready to be issued to education settings.
B&NES' Trading Standards: Campaign to educate 50 retailers on the law relating to sale of knives and corrosive substances	Planned follow-up 'mystery shopper' work discontinued due to Covid-19
Southside Family Centre under 25's domestic abuse support programme	Continuing in Year 2
Street Doctors: trained medics' provision of first aid/awareness raising workshops for young people known to the Youth Offending	Continuing in Year 2, Covid-19 restrictions permitting (their offer is currently online and we have been waiting for the opportunity of

Service	face to face workshops)
Connecting Families: Teen Talk parenting programme with parallel group for young people at risk of serious violence within the home or community	Completion of initial group, delayed by Covid-19. A second, virtual group is being provided in Year 2.
	DHI Project 28 and Youth Connect South West: 4 x 2.5 hours per week of detached youth work in hotspot areas
	Youth Connect South West: Street to Studio targeted music workshop programme
	DHI Project 28: Knife crime awareness workshops for Year 7 pupils (plus some provision for Bath College), together with workshops for parents/carers and staff
	Stand Against Violence: trusted adult workshops for Year 6 pupils as part of building resilience to grooming by county lines
	Julian House and DHI: Research into the impact of serious violence on the street community and development of a co-produced toolkit for professionals (separately funded through an additional grant provided by the Police and Crime Commissioner)

3.8 Continuing priorities for the rest of 2020-21 include;

- Refreshment of the problem profile to also take account of the impact of Covid-19 on serious violent offending and on planned activity. Crest has been commissioned to undertake this work;
- Based on the refreshed problem profile, completion of a work plan for 2021-22;
- Participation in the external evaluation of the 'hub and spoke' model adopted in Avon and Somerset;
- Work with local service providers to understand and support best delivery arrangements under Covid-19 restrictions including the current lockdown;
- Work with providers to evaluate service effectiveness, including feedback from participants, and identify learning for the wider partnership;
- Identifying options for taking the work forward, with or without continued funding.;
- Consolidation of the methodology for the Serious Violence Operational Group. This activity will continue as it is not dependent on external funding but the partnership will need to decide whether it is to remain as a stand-alone group;

3.9 Further Home Office funding has not been confirmed, but in anticipation of another grant being made available via the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Violence Reduction Unit is now:

- Recruiting a part-time co-ordinator to increase capacity for development of this work to meet the new duty (guidance on this has yet to be published);
- Working with Crest to identify priority areas for future funding; currently funded initiatives will not necessarily benefit from continued funding.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 The Home Office intends to bring forward legislation which will require local agencies and bodies to work together and share data and information to prevent and reduce serious violence in their local areas. This will be known as the 'serious violence duty.' There will also be an amendment to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which will include a requirement for serious violence to be made an explicit priority for Community Safety Partnerships. The Home Office is currently drafting statutory guidance which will support local areas to meet the requirements of the new duty.
- 4.2 The re-introduced Domestic Abuse Bill includes a new duty to provide support for those harmed and their children within safe accommodation. If this is approved, the new duty will begin in April 2021. To help Authorities to plan for this, they are each receiving £50,000 from a capacity building fund. It is anticipated that the refreshed serious violence problem profile/needs assessment will contribute towards a shared understanding of the level of need and mapping of existing services. The preparation is being undertaken by a task and finish group of the Domestic Abuse Partnership.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 5.1 The Violence Reduction Unit is a virtual team made up of Local Authority and Police staff with directly relevant roles;
- 5.2 It benefits from a proportion of a dedicated Home Office grant of £1.6 m for Avon and Somerset. Bath and North East Somerset receives £114,884 representing 10% of the overall allocation, based on population and level of reported serious violence. The same level of funding was available for 2019-20 and 2020-21.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

7 EQUALITIES

- 7.1 Those involved in perpetrating and being harmed by serious youth violence are overwhelmingly male and the Youth Crime Prevention Board helps to promote the message that this needs to be reflected in the offer of youth crime prevention services.
- 7.2 Those harmed by domestic abuse are overwhelmingly female and it is recognised that children's witnessing of controlling and abusive behaviour in the family home is an adverse childhood experience that can cause them long-term harm. Preventative services such as the Crush programme for teenagers help children develop trusting, respectful relationships and understand what is unacceptable.
- 7.3 People from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups are generally over-represented in the criminal justice system with mixed/dual heritage backgrounds particularly over-represented in the local youth justice system. The Youth

offending Service is currently supporting the Local Criminal justice Board's Lammy Review to help understand drivers and remedies and make recommendations. The completed report will be considered by the the Violence Reduction Unit and its Serious Violence Steering Group. The Youth Offending Service Management Board has agreed this topic for its next development day.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

- 8.1 People sentenced to community Orders within the criminal justice system will often be ordered to undertake unpaid community work or reparation. This helps them to redress the harm they have caused but many projects also have a direct positive impact on the environment. Post pandemic, the Youth Offending Service will be returning to community reparation work within local charities, farms and parks

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

None

10 CONSULTATION

- 10.1 In March 2020, B&NES published its first serious violence problem profile which was informed by an independent consultation with young people and focus groups with staff from across relevant agencies.
- 10.2 In accordance with Home Office requirements associated with receipt of serious violence funding, the Violence Reduction Unit has commissioned a refreshed problem profile to include particular focuses on young people's involvement in serious violence, domestic abuse and the impact of the pandemic on offending and agencies' ability to address it. This work is currently underway and will be completed by mid-February 2021.

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Background papers	B&NES Serious Violence Problem Profile, February 2020 (here)
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	