

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Children, Adults, Health & Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	14 March 2023	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE
TITLE:	Serious Violence Duty	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: None		

1 ISSUE

Following a Children, Adults and Wellbeing Scrutiny Day in January 2021 to consider local readiness, national guidance for the introduction of a Serious Violence Duty was eventually issued in December 2022. This report presents an update on arrangements being made for the Local Authority to fulfil the Duty.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to:

- 2.1 Note the introduction of a Serious Violence Duty on Local Authorities, Police, Fire and Rescue, Probation, Youth Offending Teams and Integrated Care Boards as of 31st January 2023.
- 2.2 Note that B&NES Council has indicated it would like to fulfil this Duty by building on existing arrangements, as part of a wider partnership led by the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner.
- 2.3 Note that B&NES Council has asked the Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership Executive to review its definition and governance arrangements for addressing serious violence in light of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, including governance arrangements for tackling violence against women and girls and serious sexual violence.

3 THE REPORT

3.1 Serious Violence Strategy

National concern about an increase in serious violence led to publication of the government's Serious Violence Strategy in April 2018. This defined serious violence as 'specific types of crime such as homicide, knife crime, and gun crime and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as in gangs and county lines drug dealing.' The Strategy promoted a public health approach to improving the health and wellbeing of all members of a defined community by first analysing need and then using an evidence-based approach to addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood of individuals becoming involved in serious violence.

3.2 Local Violence Reduction Units

Avon and Somerset is one of twenty policing areas to have been awarded Home Office funding to establish non-statutory Violence Reduction Units. The intention was to respond to the national Strategy by embedding a public health approach to violence reduction with a focus on under 25s. Funding was first made available in Avon and Somerset towards the end of 2019 and then re-allocated in 2020, 2021 and again in 2022, as part of a three-year funding settlement which continues until March 2025.

3.3 A 'hub and spoke' model has been adopted, with the lead 'hub' role being undertaken by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner who convenes an Avon and Somerset-wide multi-agency strategic Board. Delegated funding has been made available to each of the five Local Authority 'spokes' to appoint Co-ordinators and develop their own needs assessments and plans and procure services. These are monitored and reported to the Home Office by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

3.4 The ambition of B&NES' Violence Reduction Unit is that all children and adults lead lives free of serious violence at home and in their communities. This cross-cutting agenda is overseen by a multi-agency Serious Violence Steering Group which reports to the Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership's Exploitation sub-group via quarterly reports which are also sent to the Prevention and Early Intervention sub-group, the Domestic Abuse Partnership and the Youth Justice Partnership Board. There is a particular focus on sharing information at a multi-agency level about individuals, networks and places of concern in relation to exploitation and the risk of serious violence. Contextual safeguarding insights are beginning to be used in this work.

3.5 Reported crime in B&NES remains comparatively low and there was a welcome decrease in knife crime between October 2020-21 and October 2021-22. Nevertheless, overall reported crime including serious violence appears to have returned to pre-pandemic levels and the lived experience of individuals including local children who continue to be affected by this issue, informs the continuing local commitment to this agenda.

3.6 Serious Violence Duty

On 31st January 2023, the Serious Violence Duty was implemented under the

Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, necessitating a review of these voluntary arrangements. The Duty requires specified authorities (Local Authorities, Police, Fire and Rescue, Probation, Youth Offending Teams and Integrated Care Boards) to collaborate to prevent and reduce serious violence. Relevant authorities (education, prisons and youth custody establishments) must participate with local arrangements as requested.

3.7 Specified authorities are required to familiarise themselves with the guidance, agree the partnership arrangements through which the Duty will be delivered and let the Home Office know their preferred approach by 31st March 2023. They all have the same legal obligation to share relevant data and information to support a strategic needs assessment and the development, publication and implementation of a strategy to prevent and reduce serious violence in their area. The Strategy, which needs to be in place by 31 January 2024, needs to be based on a theory of change and include clear lines of accountability. There are also specific expectations for each specified authority. For example, Local Authorities (and Police) are expected to support prevention and early intervention activities; Fire and Rescue should deliver, alongside other partners, trauma informed interventions.

3.8 Partnerships are expected to monitor and evaluate the impact of their local Strategy. The three key metrics are:

- Homicide rates
- Hospital admissions for knife or sharp object assault
- Police-recorded knife crime

3.9 Police and Crime Commissioners are not Duty holders but the guidance encourages them to take on the role of lead convener for local partnerships. Bath and North East Somerset Council recognises the value of building on existing arrangements and would be in support of this. Discussions are underway locally to identify the most effective division of responsibilities between the spoke Violence Reduction Units and the Police and Crime Commissioner. They are also responsible for administering funding for specified authorities on behalf of the Home Office and may monitor how the Serious Violence Duty is exercised.

3.10 **National Support**

The Home Office has awarded a contract to Crest Advisory to deliver the national implementation support offer. Crest will offer support to the 43 local policing body areas in England and Wales to ensure each area has suitable partnership arrangements and plans in place to deliver the Duty. They will also offer tailored support to local areas in delivering the Duty itself in terms of development of each area's local strategic needs assessment and local strategy. B&NES has participated in an initial consultation and attended the first of three preparatory workshops. We were pleased to hear of Crest's involvement, having ourselves appointed them to compile B&NES' first two serious violence strategic needs assessments.

3.11 **Reviewing the Definition**

The legislation does not define serious violence for the purposes of the Duty but asks specified authorities to take into account the following when determining

what amounts to serious violence in their local area: the maximum penalty which could be imposed for any offence, the impact of the violence on any victim, prevalence and victim and community impact. It adds to the original Serious Violence Strategy's focus on so-called street violence by also considering public space youth violence, domestic abuse, sexual offences, violence against property and threats of violence. The flexibility of the 'hub and spoke' model has enabled B&NES to adopt its own working definition which has not included domestic abuse, as there is already a well-established approach through the Domestic Abuse Partnership, or sexual assault (or indeed violence against property). The local definition is likely to continue to focus on violence against the person and on knife crime, particularly when related to exploitation and to child on child/peer on peer violence. A paper to the Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership Executive will seek confirmation of this and clarity about arrangements for addressing serious sexual violence.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

The Serious Violence Duty was implemented under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 on 31 January 2023. It is accompanied by statutory guidance.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

B&NES currently receives a Home Office grant via the Police and Crime Commissioner of £114,000 per annum. This is used to employ a full-time Co-ordinator and a part-time Development Officer and to commission detached youth work, lived experience mentoring and other interventions. This funding will continue until March 2025. The government has made additional funding available to Police and Crime Commissioners to support specified authorities and allocation of this will follow a local review of respective roles and responsibilities.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

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

Local strategic needs assessments have highlighted how children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic heritages and those with special educational needs, are particularly affected by serious violence, and are over-represented amongst those harmed and in turn, harming others. Generally, serious violence disproportionately affects people living in areas of greater social deprivation and can be targeted against people with particular protected characteristics, including those from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning and intersex communities, and women and girls. In this all-age agenda, work to tackle serious violence needs to particularly take account of the journey of vulnerable children and contribute towards early help and prevention for them and their families.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

No climate issues have been identified in the production of this report.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

None

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 Information about the Violence Reduction has been regularly discussed with the Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership's Sub Groups and other multi-agency partnerships, in anticipation of the Serious Violence Duty.

10.2 The issues addressed in this report have recently been brought to the attention of the Council's Senior Leadership Team and discussed with Mary Kearney-Knowles, Director of Children and Education, Samantha Jones, Inclusive Communities Manager and Lynda Deane, Head of Service for City and Town Centre Management.

Contact person	Sally Churchyard, Head of Young People's Prevention Services Sally_churchyard@bathnes.gov.uk
Background papers	The national Serious Violence Strategy and the Serious Violence Duty Statutory Guidance can be found here: Home Office – Serious Violence Strategy, April 2018 (publishing.service.gov.uk) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1125001/Final_Serious_Violence_Duty_Statutory_Guidance_-_December_2022.pdf
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	