

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	18 September 2023	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE
TITLE:	Serious Violence Duty update	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: None		

1 ISSUE

- 1.1 Bath and North East Somerset continues to be an area of comparatively low reported serious violence. Nevertheless, the impact of serious violence when it occurs is devastating for individuals, families and communities. The local ambition remains that people in this area should lead lives free of serious violence at home and in their communities.
- 1.2 Under the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act 2022, the Local Authority is now a specified authority for the Serious Violence Duty. Partner agencies are continuing to work together towards this local ambition under revised arrangements being established to meet this Duty.
- 1.3 The Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel held a Scrutiny Day in January 2021 to consider readiness for the Serious Violence Duty. An update was brought to the Panel on 14 March 2023 and this report provides a further update, 6 months on.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to:

- 2.1 Note the progress made in transitioning partnership arrangements from a Violence Reduction Unit to a Violence Reduction Partnership that works to fulfil the Serious Violence Duty.
- 2.2 Note the local initiatives being undertaken to address concern about serious violence including knife crime.

3 THE REPORT

Background

- 3.1 Avon and Somerset was one of twenty policing areas to be awarded Home Office funding to establish non-statutory Violence Reduction Units following publication of the national Serious Violence Strategy in 2018. The intention was to develop a public health approach to reducing serious violence, focusing on under 25 year olds. Funding was 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.
- 3.2 A 'hub and spoke' model was 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 was made available to each of the five Local Authority 'spokes' to appoint Co-ordinators and Administrators and develop their own needs assessments and response plans, introduce new processes for addressing risk and for procuring services. These outputs are monitored and reported to the Home Office by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- 3.3 In Bath and North East Somerset, 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 for addressing extra-familial harm, drawn on effective practice elsewhere, have been informing this work.¹
- 3.4 On 31 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 Justice and Integrated Care Boards) to collaborate to prevent and reduce serious violence. They share a legal responsibility to share relevant data and information to support a strategic needs assessment and by 31 January 2024, to publish a strategy for preventing and reducing serious violence. Local Authorities and Police are expected to support prevention and early intervention activities as part of a public health approach. Community Safety Partnerships must ensure the Duty is met.
- 3.5 Partnerships will monitor and evaluate the impact of their work through three key metrics and may develop other local measures:
- Homicide rates
 - Hospital admissions for knife or sharp object assault
 - Police-recorded knife crime

¹ Based on the work of Professor Carlene Firmin, Durham University

Update since March 2023

- 3.6 **Leadership:** Police and Crime Commissioners are not Duty holders but the statutory guidance names them as possible lead conveners for this work. At the end of March, the specified authorities in Avon and Somerset notified the Home Office that they would like to fulfil the Serious Violence Duty by building on existing arrangements, as part of a wider partnership continuing to be led by the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- 3.7 **Implementation support:** The Home Office then awarded a contract to Crest Advisory to deliver national implementation support for the Serious Violence Duty. This began with a review of all Police areas and in Avon and Somerset, Crest reported that partners were “ready and engaged to deliver on the Duty.” Tailored implementation support is now being received here and in all areas through thematic workshops to ensure suitable partnership arrangements are in place.
- 3.8 **Avon and Somerset transition:** At the same time, recognising that specific work was needed in Avon and Somerset to move from Violence Reduction Unit arrangements to new Serious Violence Duty arrangements, Crest Advisory was appointed following a competitive process, to support the transition. The purpose of this was to understand how the new arrangements should work both strategically and operationally and review the respective roles and responsibilities between the Police and Crime Commissioner ‘hub’ and the five Local Authority ‘spokes.’ This work is just concluding with the production of a Memorandum of Understanding, clarification of the necessary posts needed at Avon and Somerset level including advertising a new Director role, and a new strategic Board with more senior representation. The role of local Co-ordinators has been reviewed and a new delivery group will be established including Local Authority leads. Crest has made other recommendations including a shift to strategic commissioning which are still under review. Work has also been underway with communication leads to re-launch as Violence Reduction Partnerships.
- 3.9 **Refreshed definition:** It has been agreed by the specified authorities that there will be a “priority focus on the prevention and reduction of public space violence for under 25’s (children and young people) including homicide, attempted homicide, robbery, wounding, grievous bodily harm, knife and gun crime, alcohol and drug related violence and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as county lines and modern slavery. We also recognise and commit to supporting a joined-up response to existing partnership work to tackle serious violence across the whole pathway and in the broadest sense, including domestic abuse, rape and serious sexual offences and violence against women and girls more generally.”
- 3.10 **Bath and North East Somerset focus:** In keeping with this and in light of recent critical incidents, the local focus remains on addressing public space violence involving under 25s. Domestic abuse continues to be addressed through the Domestic Abuse Partnership and the partnership approach to addressing serious sexual assault and the broader violence against women and girls agenda are being considered as part of the review of governance for the Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership.

3.11 Bath and North East Somerset Strategic Needs Assessment: the involvement of a Public Health Registrar has enabled recent production of the first draft of an updated strategic needs assessment. It incorporates the latest data currently available and some initial reflections from local professionals. In October and November, the Violence Reduction Partnership will facilitate a number of consultation exercises and focus groups with children, parents/carers, professionals and community groups as part of the local commitment to co-produce this assessment and the Strategy that will follow. There will be a focus on knife crime and consideration of why children travel across county borders and offend, the extent to which this is county-lines related and what more can be done to help keep them and others safe.

3.12 Bath and North East Somerset Serious Violence Strategy: Together with the updated strategic needs assessment, this also needs to be published by 31 January 2024. At the same time, parallel work will be underway involving local partners to update the Avon and Somerset needs assessment and produce an Avon and Somerset Strategy. It is likely that the initial Strategies will be high level documents that include more detail in future years as they will be subject to annual review. There will be a continuing commitment to develop a public health approach to serious violence, and including four key stages:

- Identify vulnerability – who is at risk?
- Agree on appropriate support – what can be done to reduce the risk?
What is effective elsewhere?
- Evaluate approaches – did the support make a difference?
- Develop and learn – what can be learned about what did and what did not work and how will this be taken this forward?

3.13 Continuing work to identify and address risk: The Violence Reduction Partnership continues to convene a monthly meeting to review children and young adults up to age 25 years who are notified as being a concern relating to serious violence. A multi-agency partnership looks for assurance in the current support available and how this can be strengthened, sometimes by including additional agencies. For example, Police have an Early Intervention Team that undertakes direct work with children and the Partnership commissions a lived-experience mentoring service. Where concern is identified about networks of children, then Children's Social Care's Adolescent and Criminal Exploitation team may convene a complex strategy meeting to map connections and understand how best to intervene and provide support. The Partnership also meets to review 'hot-spot' areas where there is considered to be a particular risk of serious violence, in order to understand whether any of the concern can be 'designed out,' review what trusted adults could be brought in to work in the area at any given time and what support can be offered to retailers, for example. There are no straightforward, single agency answers to addressing the complexity and harm caused by serious violence, and it takes a concerted, multi-agency effort to understand and tackle root causes as well as respond to need and risk as it comes to light.

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)

- 5.1 As lead convener locally, the Police and Crime Commissioner administers funding for the Violence Reduction Unit and for preparing for the Serious Violence Duty, on behalf of the Home Office. For 2023-24, B&NES received a grant of £117,936, made up of the annual Violence Reduction Unit grant plus an additional 'non-labour' amount of £5,433 towards making arrangements to meet the Duty. This is used to employ a full-time Co-ordinator and a part-time Development Officer, and to commission detached youth work in, lived-experience mentoring and other interventions. A contribution will also be made towards the costs of a Data Analyst to support understanding of comparable data across neighbouring Authorities.
- 5.2 The Partnership was recently notified of an additional in-year payment of £38,468.30 and is currently consulting with specified authorities about how this is to be used. The broad intention will be a focus on staff training and direct interventions, likely to include Street Doctors,² the roll out of workshops for parents/carers on how to keep their children safe, harmful sexual behaviour training, a third annual professionals' conference and individual support packages for children at high risk of exclusion. A further grant of £9,699 will be drawn down to support work to address exploitation and serious violence by 31 March 2025.
- 5.3 The Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership has been advised that current external funding for this work is confirmed until 31 March 2025 and that specified authorities may need to work together to resource this work after then.

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

Whilst anyone can be affected by serious violence, past strategic needs assessments have highlighted how children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic heritages and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, are particularly impacted by serious violence, and are over-represented amongst those harmed and 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. Work to tackle serious violence needs to take full account of

² First aid training for children about how to keep themselves and others safe in the event of knife injuries, and workshops for professionals.

the experience of more vulnerable children when they are still very young and help strengthen early help and prevention services 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 Violence reduction work is regularly discussed by Bath and North East Somerset's Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership's sub groups and other multi-agency partnerships, including those that met following local serious incidents. Learning from these discussions continues to be incorporated into the work of the Violence Reduction Partnership and the emerging latest strategic needs assessment.

10.2 Consultation with children, families, professionals and community groups is being planned for October – November 2023 to contribute to the strategic needs assessment and local Strategy.

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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
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