



Serious Violence Strategy

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

2020 – 2023

“Violence can be prevented. Governments, communities and individuals can make a difference.”

Nelson Mandela 2002

Foreword

From children to the elderly, serious violence can affect people across all stages of life. Many survive serious violence but suffer ongoing physical, mental or emotional health problems.

We are committed to stopping serious violence before it begins. By approaching the issue as a public health problem, we aim to achieve sustainable reductions in serious violence and improve the health and quality of life of all people in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

This means properly understanding the issue and local needs; addressing the risk factors that increase the likelihood of somebody becoming an offender or a victim of serious violence. As such, prevention will be central to our approach.

It will require the involvement of a range of partners including health, public health, all clinical commissioning groups, education, local authorities, police, criminal justice agencies, the voluntary sector and, importantly, the communities of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Only with this joint effort can we prevent the loss of life and physical and psychological damage that serious violence can cause.

We have an opportunity to make a really positive impact; to change the fortune of some of the most excluded in our county and improve their outcomes.

With this in mind, we are determined to end the misery serious violence can cause individuals, families and communities. We will prevent serious violence from occurring, intervening early to prevent it damaging lives.

What is serious violence?

Serious violence, as defined in the National Serious Violence Strategy, includes

“...homicide, knife crime and gun crime, and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as in county lines drug dealing... and other forms of serious assault”. It does not currently include domestic abuse, sexual abuse and alcohol, but this is under review.

Our aim

We aim to:

Work together to strengthen the visibility, early identification and partnership response to prevent serious violence and its associated harms.

By doing this, we will protect people from harm and help to create diverse and safe communities, living fulfilling lives.

Serious violence in context

National context

Serious violence is a national priority due to its growing prevalence and impact. There has been a significant rise in serious violence, with increases in homicide, knife and gun crime in virtually all police force areas since 2014. Robbery has also risen significantly since 2016. The violence is often gang related and the association with drugs markets, particularly crack cocaine, is evident. Too frequently, children are the victims of gun crime, knife crime and exploitation, in many cases by organised criminal groups running ‘county lines’.

In response, the government published ‘Ending Gang and Youth Violence: Community Engagement’ in 2014, and its Serious Violence Strategy in 2018. Both documents advocate an end-to-end approach, from prevention and early intervention to law enforcement, and a strengthened partnership response involving statutory and non-statutory partners, including the local community and businesses.

Local context

Over the last five years, serious violence in Staffordshire has steadily increased. We have seen an increase in the use of weapons (such as knives), an increase in violent gangs and organised crime groups (OCGs), and an increase in the severity of violence used or inflicted.

This has led to sustained and high levels of demand across partner agencies, growing in seriousness and complexity – particularly the increasing numbers of vulnerable children involved in serious violence as both victims and offenders (such as ‘county lines’ drug dealing) and the linked children’s safeguarding concerns.

It is predicted that serious violence and the exploitation of the vulnerable will continue to grow and will remain a significant challenge for local services. Staffordshire, however, does not have the same levels of serious violence as many other areas and, as such, it is important that we take this opportunity to improve this position through intervention and prevention. Violence is unacceptable and preventable.

Our approach

Our strategy, while retaining clear links to related national strategies, is based upon a public health approach. As such, we will work in partnership with a broad range of agencies to understand the causes and consequences of serious violence, focusing on early intervention and prevention, and informed by evidence and evaluation of interventions. A wide range of agencies will be involved including law enforcement, education, local authorities, offender management, health and public health, as well as expertise from communities and the voluntary sector, all taking joint action.

As this approach seeks to address the root causes of serious violence, it is anticipated that the actions taken will address not only this issue but also other challenges we face, as the underlying factors can frequently be similar.

Also, due to the nature of the approach, the majority of the actions planned will not have an immediate impact or be a short-term fix; while the effect of enforcement or disruption actions may be experienced in the short term, preventative actions are more likely to be seen in the medium or longer term.

As such, we will:

- Have a multi-agency strategy supported by strong partnership governance and delivery arrangements;
- Provide effective leadership, ensuring an integrated approach, with partners held accountable for their contribution;
- Understand the risk and profile of serious violence within our communities;
- Base our interventions on this data and intelligence;
- Develop a public health approach that understands and addresses the root causes of serious violence;
- Root our response in evidence of effectiveness, from intervening at a preventative or early stage where possible, through to targeted, specialist and enforcement actions;
- Break the cycle of serious violence within families;
- Address risk factors that can impact on an individual's vulnerability and susceptibility to becoming a victim or offender of serious violence, targeting interventions to help mitigate and protect against these factors;
- Involve communities in shaping and delivering responses to serious violence;
- Create attitudinal change concerning serious violence, where communities take responsibility for helping all members feel safe and connected;
- Generate a combination of short, medium and longer-term solutions;
- Adopt a framework of continuous learning;
- Implement robust workforce and community development;
- Ensure synergies with related strategies and services, to avoid duplication and maximise efforts.

Our priorities:

To deliver our strategy, we will foster robust partnership working to deliver five priority areas:

1

Primary prevention – seeking to prevent the onset of serious violence or to change behaviour so that serious violence is prevented from happening

2

Secondary prevention – halting the progression of serious violence once it is established. This is achieved by early identification followed by prompt, effective support

3

Tertiary prevention – rehabilitating people with established serious violent behaviour, or supporting victims

4

Enforcement and criminal justice – developing innovative criminal justice practices that reduce offending behaviour and recidivism

5

Attitudinal change – changing attitudes and behaviours towards all types of serious violence at a societal, community and personal level

Primary prevention

Our ultimate aim is to prevent serious violence before it occurs. Gathering data to identify new trends is core to prevention and changing outcomes in the longer term. Also critical is support for the development of a range of programmes which help children and families to be the best they can be.

With this in mind, we will:

- Recognise serious violence as a shared strategic issue and priority;
- Establish a resourced, multi-disciplinary prevention approach to serious violence (this could include an alliance / unit);
- Ensure relevant bodies are sharing timely information to understand and respond to local needs and prevent serious violence;
- Work with a range of early intervention services to identify potential victims and potential offenders;
- Maximise opportunities to work with children and families before issues arise and when they do arise, respond in a swift and co-ordinated way;
- Work with parents and communities in designing and delivering safer communities;
- Advocate the importance of equitable, respectful relationships and being a good citizen;
- Develop a strong and consistent approach to PSHE with schools and other educational establishments to reduce impulsive and aggressive behaviour and to increase social competence and resilience;
- Ensure parents, businesses, professionals and communities are knowledgeable about support services;
- Equip professionals with the skills to identify and respond to Adverse Childhood Experiences;
- Support the development of peer mentoring, encouraging people who have previously accessed serious violence-related services to become mentors;
- Promote a whole-system approach to serious violence-related issues.

Secondary prevention

By developing prevention mechanisms that specifically target those at risk of either committing serious violence or being the victim of serious violence, we will reduce both the number of future assaults and make a sustainable positive change.

With this in mind, we will:

- Work with the licensed trade to help reduce serious violence;
- Work with schools to agree a standardised approach to partner and police support and input;
- Establish asset-based policing as a way of co-producing better outcomes in communities;
- Support families experiencing serious violence to stop the intergenerational cycle of violence from continuing;
- Work with voluntary and faith groups in developing and supporting the mentoring of our most at-risk young people as a way to change behaviour;
- Commission a range of effective, joined-up related services able to meet the needs of potential victims and potential offenders;
- Develop and deliver targeted education and prevention programmes and support to those more vulnerable to, or at risk of, serious violence;
- Divert children away from harm through positive activities;
- Deliver conflict, anger management and self-defence techniques to children;
- Introduce mentors into targeted schools;
- Work with higher education establishments to prevent sexual assault;
- Support education in reducing exclusions and off-rolling from school.

Tertiary prevention

By providing effective support for victims and interventions for those who have previously committed serious violence, we will reduce re-victimisation and reoffending. We will capitalise on 'teachable moments' in order to change behaviour.

With this in mind, we will:

- Commission a range of effective, joined-up related services, able to meet the needs of victims and offenders (children, adults and families);
- Provide training so all public services are able to identify and respond to serious violence;
- Establish a sustainable employment scheme for those with convictions;
- Develop a 'Brief Intervention' programme and train appropriate staff to deliver it;
- Establish a 'Navigator' programme in A&E and Custody facilities to interrupt serious violence and prevent further injury;
- Build a network of women and men with 'lived experience' who volunteer to mentor and support those who seek to change their lives.

Enforcement and criminal justice

While prevention is our focus, we remain committed to swift, visible justice for those committing serious violence.

With this in mind, we will:

- Operate MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) for high-risk violent offenders;
- Process map the 'no proceedings' and 'no further actions' decisions in cases of serious violence;
- Ensure victims receive justice which is not hindered by procedural or training issues;
- Promote an increased range of effective, evidence-led sentencing options;
- Support police to undertake enforcement and innovative practice to tackle emerging or persistent serious violence;
- Support policing in taking targeted enforcement and disruption action (county lines, drug markets etc);
- Work with prisons to develop and change outcomes for those with violent offending histories;
- Maximise enforcement opportunities through effective partnership work across the Criminal Justice System and through Integrated Offender Management, prisons and probation.

Attitudinal change

By challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster serious violence, we can help prevent it from happening. If we are to reduce serious violence, it will take all community members and professionals to change mind-sets and believe that it is preventable.

With this in mind, we will:

- Champion the agenda;
- Inform and educate to help change society's views about the nature and causes of serious violence;
- Seek to influence public opinion and the role of the media;
- Facilitate a more positive relationship between communities (members and leaders) and the service providers;
- Advocate the role of everyone in preventing serious violence;
- Develop a widely accessible knowledge base for serious violence prevention;
- Design a more targeted media approach to more vulnerable or at-risks groups;
- Engage with traditional and non-traditional media to promote a positive image of the county as well as promoting children more positively.

Measuring our impact

Given the nature of the approach being taken, and the intention to address the root causes of serious violence, it is anticipated that while there will be some short-term progress, the main impact of the strategy will be seen over the medium to longer term. In order to demonstrate improvement, a performance framework relating to the strategy and priority areas will be developed, including a mixture of inputs, outputs and outcomes to be measured.

Working in partnership

We recognise that activities to address the root causes of serious violence overlap with many related agendas and strategies, both nationally and locally (such as drugs and alcohol, county lines, child exploitation, domestic abuse etc). We also acknowledge that a significant amount of related work is underway. As such, we will seek to co-ordinate, support and complement, rather than duplicate, existing activity. We will ensure the strategy and supporting action plan builds upon this existing activity and, where possible, is delivered through established partnership arrangements.

Implementing the strategy

The implementation of the strategy will be overseen by a multi-agency board, who will ensure that planning and programmes are delivered effectively, in a structured, coherent manner, in the appropriate communities. It will govern the agenda, establish strategic priorities and aligned commissioning intentions, challenge and manage performance, share good practice, champion achievements and identify and manage risks.

