

Title of Report: Serious Violence Duty

Purpose of report

1. This report is largely reproduced from a report presented to Gateshead Community Safety Board (CSB) on 19 January 2024. Over the last 12 months the CSB has been pursuing a programme of 'deep dives' into the priorities identified in the most recent Community Safety Partnership Plan. Text added to the report for Families OSC is in red.
2. This is a dual-purpose report. Section 2 explains the background to the preparation of the Gateshead Local Action Plan for Serious Violence, and Sections 3 to 5 provide additional context, fulfilling the purpose of a 'deep dive' into violent crime.

2 Statutory requirements

2.1 Members of the Board will recall that the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSC Act) introduced a Serious Violence Duty, which applies to certain 'specified bodies', i.e. Chief Constables, the National Probation Service, Youth Offending Teams, Fire & Rescue Services, Integrated Care Boards and Local Authorities, supported by the 'relevant authorities', i.e. prison authorities, youth custody authorities and educational authorities.

2.2 A local agreement was reached across Northumbria that the process would be led by the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) within the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner (OPCC), in recognition of the expertise which it has amassed since its inception in 2019, and consistent with Paragraph 6 of the Statutory Guidance on the Duty issued by the Home Office in December 2022 which says that PCCs "may assist a specified authority for the purposes of the Duty". The Guidance also states that "CSPs have accountability for ensuring that a strategy to prevent and reduce serious violence is in place even if they are not the partnership arrangement chosen to deliver the Duty".

2.3 The Duty requires a Serious Violence Strategy to be agreed by 31 January 2024 and to be sent to the Home Office within seven days. Detailed guidance is set out on the contents of the Strategy, including that it should contain a section on Actions and that there should be consultation with educational authorities and prison and youth custody authorities, and that the voices and lived experiences of communities should be reflected in the work. The agreed interpretation in Northumbria is that the VRU will prepare the necessary Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) and most of the Strategy and that the six Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) will each prepare an Action Plan, using similar formats,

following the five key priorities proposed in the draft Strategy. The Guidance states that the Strategy should be reviewed at least annually.

2.4 The Guidance leaves it to local partners to define Serious Violence. The VRU has to date adopted the World Health Organization's definition, as "The intentional use of physical force or power threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. (WHO, 2002)". As part of the Serious Violence Duty guidance, areas were encouraged to agree on a definition that best meets local needs. It was proposed that the WHO definition should continue to be adopted and this was agreed by the Board and accepted by all Community Safety Partnerships. While this is a very broad definition, it has the advantage of being inclusive and allows partnerships to consider emerging issues. However, partners need to be mindful of the potential for spreading resources quite thinly against a broad target. It was agreed that this definition would continue to be reviewed annually to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. Some other localities have focused on crime types, e.g. 'assault with injury and above' or, even more tightly focused, 'grievous bodily harm (GBH) and above'. Clearly any experience of being a victim of violence in any form, even assault without injury, such as pushing and shoving, can be distressing or even traumatic, depending on individual circumstances and resilience. In the current iteration of Strategy and Action Plan it is far too late to re-visit the definition, but there may be merit in reconsidering it when these documents are next reviewed.

2.5 It is also noteworthy that the Home Office approach to funding VRUs to date has placed an emphasis on preventing and reducing public space violence amongst young people under 25 whereas, as set out in the next paragraph, this is a relatively small proportion of Serious Violence locally. Clearly any focus on deterring young people from engaging in violence will still have immediate benefits and may fully 'pay off' in approximately 10-20 years when they reach the peak offending age range, provided that the change in behaviour is long-lasting.

2.6 The latest version of the SNA runs to 113 pages in total and will be available on the VRU section of the PCC's website This includes a ten-page appendix relating specifically to Gateshead. Some of its key findings are that:-

(a) Levels of recorded violent crime have risen steadily over the last four years in Gateshead, as across most of Northumbria

2019/20 2,541

2020/21 2,673

2021/22 2,995

2022/23 3,174

(b) There were 149 recorded knife-related offences in Gateshead in 2021/22, and 180 in 2022/23, with 12 firearms offences in 2022/23

(c) The North East Ambulance Service had 235 call-outs to victims of violence in Gateshead in 2022/23, of which 21 (9%) were for young people under 18 and in the same year there were 84 admissions to hospital for assault injuries, of which 21 (25%) were for young people under 25.

(d) Across Northumbria, 56% of victims of violence were female and 75% of offenders/suspects were male, with 36% of Serious Violence being Domestic Abuse

(e) In Gateshead only 15% of victims were under 18 (482), with 51% being in the 25-45 age range, and only 13% (367) of offenders/suspects were under 18, with 53% being in the 25-45 age range.

2.7 The current draft Action Plan for Gateshead is attached as Appendix A. In view of the compressed timescale for preparing the Action Plan work will be continuing up to and possibly beyond the date of the Board meeting, with a view to arriving at a final version which reflects existing partner priorities in relation to Serious Violence and demonstrates 'joined up working'. This first Action Plan has been prepared on a 12 month basis but there may be merit in considering planning over a longer period, maybe three years, when the next version is prepared.

3. Strategic Needs Assessment

3.1 The SNA aims to provide an increased understanding of the types, distribution, and extent of serious violence across Northumbria, as well as an awareness of the prevalence of the underlying risk factors associated with the causes of violent crime.

3.1.1 Key findings

- A breakdown of serious violence offences shows reductions in sexual assaults (8%) and attempted murders (23%), with all other offences increasing, notably robberies (32.7%), threats to kill (19.5%), and rape (6.5%).
- As in previous periods a third of offences of serious violence in Northumbria were domestic related, with 7,367 offences. With levels of domestic abuse increased by 3.5%, with 26,527 incidents.
- The serious violence harm hotspots during the 12-months to September 2023 remain the same areas as identified in previous periods, with links to the NTE and areas of deprivation.
- Similar areas have been identified through data from both Northumberland Fire Service and Tyne & Wear Fire Service, as hotspot areas for deliberate fire incidents and attacks on crews.
- Data from NEAS (North East Ambulance Service) also shows an increase of 2% in attendances for assault incidents in Northumbria, with 1,989 call outs.
- The impact of deprivation continues to be a significant problem in Northumbria, impacted further by the current cost of living crisis. The data suggests that there is a correlation to higher levels of violent offences in neighbourhoods with the highest levels of deprivation.
- Young people growing up in deprived areas are more vulnerable to childhood adversity, poor mental health, and the risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence.

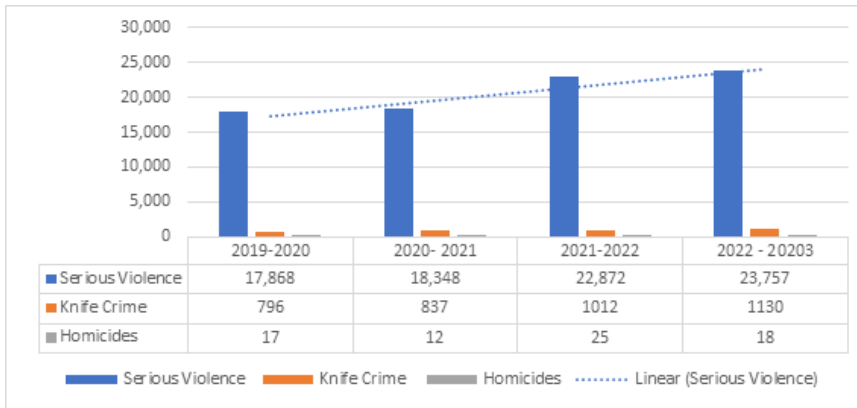
- Engagement in full time, quality education is a strong protective factor against the risk of a young person becoming involved in serious violence. However, the North East recorded the largest rate for both exclusions and suspensions in England for the 2021/22 academic year and was the second highest region for one plus suspensions.
- In Northumbria, rates of exclusions for all local authority areas were above the national rate, with four of the six areas recording a higher rate of suspensions.
- Alcohol is becoming an increasingly private harm as consumption is occurring more frequently in the home. With the number of adults in treatment for alcohol misuse above the national rate in four local authority areas. Half of local authority areas recorded an increase in young people in treatment for substance misuse.
- Whilst the levels of unemployment have decreased during the last two years nationally, in Northumbria, four local authority areas are above the national rate. The current cost of living crisis is increasing people's exposure to the risks of violence, evidenced by the increase in shoplifting and violence shown towards retail staff.
- Use of technology and social media is leading to an increased concern and risk of exposure to violence for young people, with six in 10 young people in a recent YEF survey reporting seeing real-world acts of violence on social media.
- The relationship between mental health and violence is complex. The mental health needs of children in Northumbria are higher than the national average, with self-reported well-being a cause for concern.

3.1.2 Key Performance Measures:

Over the last 12 months, serious violent crime has risen by 4 % and knife enabled serious violence has increased by 12%. Hospital admissions due to a sharp object has seen a decrease of 11% and there has been a 28% reduction on homicides.

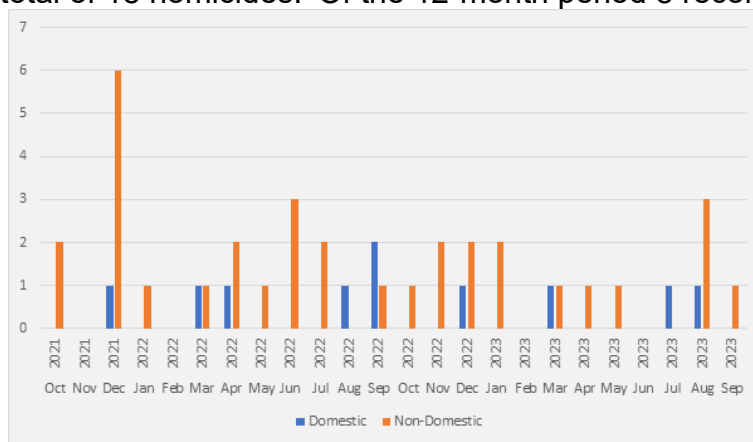
Measure	2022	2023	%Difference
Homicides	25	18	-28%
Serious Violence	22,857	23,757	+ 4
Knife Enables Serious Violence	1,012	1130	+12%
Hospital Admissions for assault with a knife or sharp object	148	131	-11%

The chart below shows trends in serious violent crime including knife crime and homicide rates across the Northumbria Police Force Area.



3.1.3 Homicides

Levels of homicides have decreased by 28% (7 offences) during 2022/23, with a total of 18 homicides. Of the 12-month period 8 recorded one or less homicides.



There were 14 non-domestic homicides, a reduction from 19 in the previous period (26%), with 4 domestic homicides accounting for 22% of homicides during the period. There was a reduction of homicides fell in half of the 6 local authority areas (Sunderland, South Tyneside and Newcastle), with Sunderland seeing the largest decrease (86%) during the period.

3.1.4 Serious Violence:

A breakdown of serious violence by crime types from 2019 – 2023 shows reductions in homicides, sexual assaults and attempted murders, with all other offences increasing, notably robberies, threats to kill and rape over the last 12 months. As in previous periods a third of offences of serious violence in Northumbria were domestic related, with 7,367 offences.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Homicide	17	12	25	18
Attempt Murder	14	11	13	10
Threats to kill	993	1,025	1,228	1,468
Assault with Intent	852	963	1,151	1,225

Assault with Injury	12,480	12,678	15,744	16,097
Sexual Assault	1,355	1,543	2,092	1,922
Rape	1,423	1,480	1,808	1,926
Robbery	763	692	836	1,109

3.1.5 Recommendations from the Strategic Needs Assessment

- Work locally with education colleagues to understand and enhance the strategies to reduce high rates of school exclusions and suspensions and increase attendance
- Work with Local Authorities and Education Leads to ensure the roll out and evaluation of the knife crime and offensive weapons protocol for schools
- Scope the prevalence of serious violence in school and other educational settings
- Work alongside the newly established Northumbria Police Prevention Team to develop shared understanding of individuals who go missing from home and associated risks
- Continue to invest in prevention through education and campaigns to raise awareness of the impact of serious violence
- Develop educational resources for BAME communities where English may not be their first language
- Work with partners to develop pathways into the newly established hospital navigator services and evaluate its impact on reducing attendances for serious violence, including those who present for substance misuse
- Continue to fund LJMU to work with partners to gain access to datasets such as ISTV (Information Sharing to Tackle Serious Violence) data for other LA (Local Authority) areas.
- Commission an independent review of the OOC process for all six youth justice teams
- Work alongside the homicide team and NEAS to develop processes around near misses
- Re-profile spend to commission services for individuals 25+ who are offenders and victims of serious violence
- Develop an outcomes framework for all commissioned interventions to measure impact.
- Work with education and health to overcome barriers to data sharing
- Work with organisations to ensure the service user voice is at the heart of policy, decisions, and new interventions, using co-production where practice allows
- Support the education sector to ensure they have adequate provision in terms of violence prevention and additional support where young people are more at risk of being involved in violence

4. Gateshead area profile and action plan

4.1 To complement and enhance the information in the Northumbria SNA, a local profile for Gateshead has been developed. This profile is attached at Appendix 1.

4.2 Key findings

- 6% increase in serious violence offending across Gateshead in 2022/23.
- 3,174 serious violence offences were recorded for all age groups, of which 1,158 (36%) were domestic related.

- 180 knife enabled serious violence, which is an increase of 20.8% in offences; 59 offences (33%) were domestic related.
- Assault with injury has the highest rates of offences for serious violence (2,032 Offences) during the 12-month period.
- Increases in rapes (7.7%), assault with injury (3%), robbery (49%), and threats to kill (30%).
- The top three knife enabled offences are also for assault with intent (52 offences) followed by assault with injury (47 offences) and robbery (42 offences).
- 49% increase in robberies.
- Threat to kill offences increased by 30%.
- Increase in both knife possessions and other offensive weapon possession offences.

4.3 Recommendations arising from this overview will be developed with partners and feature in the local plan, mentioned below.

4.4 Following the local workshop in September, an action plan has been developed with partners. Attached at Appendix 2, the draft plan outlines how Gateshead will tackle and prevent serious violence locally. In view of the compressed timescale for preparing the action plan, work will be continuing up to and possibly beyond the date of the Board meeting, with a view to arriving at a final version which reflects existing partner priorities in relation to Serious Violence and demonstrates 'joined up working'. **The final version is now attached for Families OSC.** This first action plan has been prepared on a 12-month basis but there may be merit in considering planning over a longer period, maybe three years, when the next version is prepared.

4.5 The CSB endorsed the Local Action Plan, agreed a delegation to approve final changes, and noted that the Local Action Plan will be incorporated within the overall Community Safety Partnership Plan for 2024-2026, and subject to performance management arrangements being developed for the CSB.

5. Serious Violence Response Strategy 2024 – 2029

5.1 The draft Northumbria Serious Violence Response Strategy is attached at Appendix 3. This strategy will be presented to members of the VRU Strategic Board for sign off on 29 January, prior to it being sent to the Home Office the following week.

Recommendations

6. OSC Families are recommended to:
- (a) note and comment on the information provided in the report.

REPORT OF: Interim Head of Community Safety and Violence Reduction Director

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