

# Preventing and Reducing Serious Violence

Policy Statement – March 2023

## 1. Foreword

Serious violence is something that affects us all, either as having been a victim, knowing a victim, witnessing violence directly or through the impact of the reporting of violent offences through the media. Serious violence and our growing awareness of it as a society, makes it the highest priority for all public services that work together to improve community safety.

As a Council we understand the destructive influence that violence has on the sense of safety and security felt within our local communities. Equally, perceptions of levels of violence can have consequences for how our Borough is seen as a place in which people want to live and work and in which new businesses might want to invest. Essentially, ensuring that we all work together, partner agencies and local residents, to prevent and reduce serious violence can only have positive consequences for our future prosperity and ambitions for Gravesham.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 has created a new Duty on all specified authorities, of which Gravesham Council is one, to strengthen partnership working to better understand what causes serious violence and identify steps we could take to prevent and reduce it in future. We take the responsibilities created by the Duty very seriously and are committed to ensuring that the approach adopted to meet these new obligations fully reflects the diverse needs of local people and local communities.

We know that intervening early to tackle causes of violent behaviour is crucial in helping to prevent young people from entering the criminal justice system in the first place and preventing adult offenders from reoffending. Tackling the 'drivers' of violent behaviour can help to break cycles of violence and enable individuals to lead positive lives free from crime. We also know that supporting victims of violence and their families is fundamental to improving quality of life for those who have been directly affected. Work will by necessity need to be across the board – from prevention and education through to bringing offenders to justice.

In tackling serious violence, we are committed not just to working with statutory partner agencies but also voluntary sector organisations and communities – we all have a role to play. As a Council, we want to ensure that local people's priorities are at the forefront and that they have a voice in co-designing the solutions that will help to make our streets safer.

At the centre of our work will be a commitment to understand and address how and why, particularly young people, get drawn into violent crime. This is a 'golden thread' that will need to be present throughout any joint action plans that are developed if we are to build safer and stronger communities for future generations.

This Policy Statement has been prepared to reassure our residents of the Council's commitment to working in collaboration to shape a coherent, consistent and

innovative approach to preventing and reducing serious violence that serves the needs of our Borough. We understand that criminals do not work within geographical boundaries and there will be plenty of joint working with neighbouring Districts and Boroughs that will be mutually beneficial. However, there will be particular factors that contribute to violence that are key in our area rather than elsewhere – as a Council we will endeavour to make sure that these local issues are prioritised and given the attention they require.

**Councillor Shane Mochrie-Cox, Cabinet Member, Community and Leisure and Chair, Gravesham Community Safety Partnership**

**Stuart Bobby, Chief Executive, Gravesham Borough Council**

## **2. Introduction**

Gravesham Borough Council is committed to working with all our partner agencies in making our Borough a safe place by preventing and reducing crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB). Whilst Gravesham itself is not a high crime area, serious violent crime has increased at a national level and the Council recognises that public concern locally in respect of personal safety is a natural outcome. Serious violent incidents may not occur frequently but they have hugely damaging consequences for the victim directly affected and their families whilst instilling fear within communities and being extremely costly to society as a whole.

In July 2019, the Government announced that it would bring forward legislation introducing a new Serious Violence Duty on a range of specified authorities, including District Councils. The purpose was to ensure that relevant services would be required to work together to share information, collaborate and identify interventions to address serious violence priorities in their local area. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSC) received Royal Assent in April 2022 and following a period of public consultation, the Home Office released final statutory guidance for responsible authorities in December 2022 detailing the expectations of the new Duty.

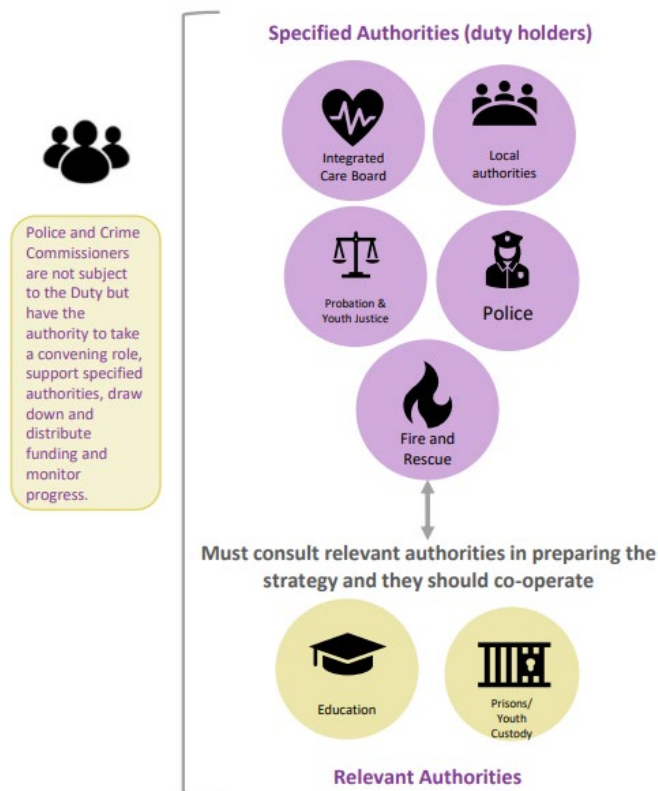
This Policy Statement outlines the steps that Gravesham Council will be taking to ensure that it fully meets its obligations under the new legislation, how the Council intends to work with partner agencies to address serious violence and how it will keep local people informed of work being delivered in the Borough to improve community safety both in our town centre and in our local neighbourhoods. The Council will publish an updated Policy Statement in March each year that will highlight key work that has been completed in the previous 12 months and any new or emerging priorities that have come to light that require attention.

## **3. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSC)**

### **The Duty**

The Duty created by the PCSC Act requires specified authorities to work together and develop a plan to prevent and reduce serious violence. This includes the identification of the types of serious violence that occur in the area, the causes or 'drivers' of that violence as far as it is possible and to produce and implement a strategy (PCSC Act Ch 1 Pt 2).

S.6 of the Crime and Disorder Act also requires Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to have serious violence as an explicit priority in their strategies and plans.



### The Requirements of the Duty

The specified authorities are required to work together to:

- Identify and define serious violence locally (which must include a focus on public place 'youth violence' with an option to include other types of violence that are prevalent in the local area).
- Agree the geographical coverage and the local partnership model for delivering the Duty.
- Produce a partnership agreement outlining how the specified authorities are going to work together.
- Adopt the World Health Organisation public health approach:
  - Focussed on a defined population
  - With and for communities
  - No constrained by organisational or professional boundaries
  - Focused on long term as well as short term solutions
  - Based on data and information to identify the burden on the population including any inequalities
  - Rooted in the evidence of effectiveness

## Public Health Principles



- Produce a Strategic Needs Assessment (collating information on serious violence across agencies to inform a strategy).
- Produce, publish and implement a strategy.
- Review the strategy each year (and complete a 'refreshed' Strategic Needs Assessment if considered necessary).

The Duty came into effect on 31 January 2023. Specified authorities have until 31 January 2024 to produce their Strategic Needs Assessment and Strategy.

The Home Office has set three key success measures for the prevention and reduction of serious violence which are:

- A reduction in hospital admissions for assaults with a knife or sharp object.
- A reduction in knife and sharp object enabled serious violence recorded by the Police.
- A reduction in homicides recorded by the Police.

At a local level and dependent on the priorities included in the local Strategy, partner agencies may identify other measures by which they will want to monitor the impact and success of work carried out.

### **How will the Council meet its legal obligations in respect of the Duty?**

Specified authorities are expected to define serious violence.

A definition is not imposed by Government, but local areas must include a focus on public place youth violence including: homicide, violence against the person which may include both knife crime and gun crime, and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as county lines drug dealing. S.13 of the

PCSC Act makes it clear that violence is not limited to physical violence against the person e.g., local areas can include domestic abuse, sexual offences, violence against property and threats of violence in their definition. The only exception is terrorism, which cannot be included.

Gravesham Council is committed to working with partner agencies in ensuring that the crime categories included within our definition of serious violence includes the offences as required by the legislation as well as those offences that are most prevalent and/or are most relevant in our Borough and to local people.

### **Defining the Local Area**

Specified authorities should agree the local partnership model (and its geographical area) for discharging the duty.

The legislation is flexible to allow specified authorities to determine the geographical extent of their collaboration, which can be a District Local Government area. It is also not necessary to create a new partnership to deliver the necessary work to meet the requirements of the Duty as many areas already have existing multi-agency partnerships which include representatives of the specified authorities and that are well-placed to take this work forward.

Gravesham Council is committed to working with representatives of other specified authorities in our area and with the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner's Office to ensure that the Strategy produced to discharge our Duty clearly reflects the serious violence issues identified through the Strategic Needs Assessment process as being the most prevalent and, through consultation with local communities, most relevant to our Borough.

The Council recognises that there will be serious violence issues that are cross-border and that also affect neighbouring Districts and neighbouring Boroughs. The Council is keen to be an active partner in working in collaboration to prevent and reduce cross-border violence and in supporting the development and delivery of countywide initiatives where there are advantages in taking a broader approach that will also be beneficial to Gravesham.

The Council will be tenacious in working with other agencies in identifying the best partnership model for meeting both our shared statutory obligations and addressing the needs of local people. It is our priority, with a duty of care to our residents, that the focus of this important work will be on preventing and reducing serious violence in our Borough and building safer neighbourhoods throughout Gravesham.

Gravesham Community Safety Partnership (CSP) already exists as the primary multi-agency vehicle in the Borough delivering a range of initiatives through an agreed Community Safety Strategy to reduce crime and ASB. The specified authorities that now have the Serious Violence Duty are all active members of the CSP. The Council is committed to continuing to work with CSP partners and other service providers as appropriate in carrying out operational work to prevent and reduce serious violence.

A Partnership Agreement outlining the geographical area to be included in the Strategic Needs Assessment process, the roles and responsibilities of each partner should be submitted to the Home Office by 31 March 2023.

### **Understanding Local Issues**

The partnership should work together to establish the local Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA).

The local partnership should produce an SNA based on an evidence-based analysis of information relating to the violent crime types, the drivers of crime within the partnership area and the cohorts most vulnerable through the gathering and analysis of data from specified and relevant authorities. The SNA will also draw on qualitative data gathered by the partnership and should identify any gaps in data or intelligence. The SNA has to be submitted to the Home Office by 31 January 2024.

Gravesham Council will share data and intelligence held by the Authority to support the SNA process in determining the serious violence issues affecting the Borough in order that they are included within the definition of serious violence adopted locally, and is committed to working with partners in developing as full an intelligence picture as possible of the strategic priorities to be addressed.

### **Preparation, Publication and Implementation of a Strategy**

3.4.1 The partnership must collectively develop a strategy which should outline the multi-agency response that will be taken to prevent and reduce serious violence in the local area.

The strategy should comprise a range of new and existing actions that the partnership will take forward to prevent and reduce the issues and drivers identified in the SNA. The strategy should be published on the website of a specified authority or local policing body (Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner) by 31 January 2024 and submitted to the Home Office within 7 days of publication. The strategy will also need to be reviewed and updated on an annual basis as a minimum.

As a key member of the Gravesham CSP, Gravesham Council will take an active role in the development of a strategy to prevent and reduce serious violent crime in the Borough. The Council will publish the strategy on the Council's website together with any revised/refreshed versions on an annual basis.

## **4. Specific responsibilities of the Gravesham Community Safety Partnership**

Under the amended Crime and Disorder Act, Gravesham CSP is required to formulate and implement a strategy to prevent people from becoming involved in serious violence, both as victims and perpetrators, and to reduce instances of serious violence in the local area. The CSP may be deemed to be the most appropriate structure locally by which partner agencies can meet their responsibilities under the new Duty, complete the SNA and develop a shared strategy. If an alternative partnership structure is used to deliver the requirements of the Duty, Gravesham CSP will need to be satisfied that the serious violence strategy is being effectively delivered.

As a lead member of the Gravesham CSP, Gravesham Council is committed to ensuring that the partnership structure adopted to meet the requirements of the new duty is fit for purpose, is able to effectively address serious violence issues at a local level and will be able to withstand scrutiny.

The Council's Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee is also required (following the amendment of s.19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006), to scrutinise the work of the CSP in addressing serious violence. The Council will ensure that Members of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny are aware of this amendment to their responsibilities and that CSP activity is reviewed and monitored accordingly.

### **Resourcing work to meet the responsibilities of the Duty**

The Home Office has stated that Government will be providing funding to support the work that specified authorities will be required to carry out in meeting their new obligations. This funding will be issued by Government to Local Policing Bodies i.e., Police and Crime Commissioners, who will oversee the process by which this funding is allocated in our area.

The Council is committed to ensuring that an equitable share of financial resources available are secured to support local partnership work to prevent and reduce serious violence and will actively pursue any funding opportunities as they arise.