

Serious Violence Strategy

Gravesham Borough Council

Document Control

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Foreword

Serious violence is something that has the potential to affect 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 one of the highest priorities for all public services that work together to improve community safety.

As partners that provide frontline services and listen to the communities we serve, members of the Gravesham Community Safety Partnership (CSP), understand the destructive influence that violence and serious violence has on the perception of the sense of safety and security felt within our local communities. While reports and statistics show that the perception of serious violence in the Borough is greater than reality, any serious violence should be tackled. So as a CSP, we wish to ensure that all statutory and non-statutory partners work collaboratively and with equal commitment, to undertake this preventative work and seek to reduce any serious violence which in turn 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, to strengthen partnership working to better understand what causes serious violence and identify steps we could take to prevent and reduce it in future. Working very closely with the Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit in establishing the current level of serious violence in the Borough and identifying priorities, this Strategy has been developed with an approach that allows our Partnership to meet our new obligations fully whilst ensuring that our work is tailored to meet the needs of our diverse communities at a local level. There will be factors that contribute to violence that are key in our area rather than elsewhere – in delivering this Strategy we will endeavour to make sure that these local issues are prioritised and given the attention they require.

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 violence can help to break cycles of violent behaviour 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 also recognise the important role that voluntary sector organisations and communities must play. Essentially, there will need to be a collective effort in co-designing and delivering the solutions that will help to make our streets safer. Finally, we also know too well that criminals do not work within geographical boundaries, and we will be very open to joint working with neighbouring Districts and Boroughs as that can only be mutually beneficial and help to bring about positive change.

Councillor Shane Mochrie-Cox

**Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Strategic Environment
Chair, Gravesham Community Safety Partnership**

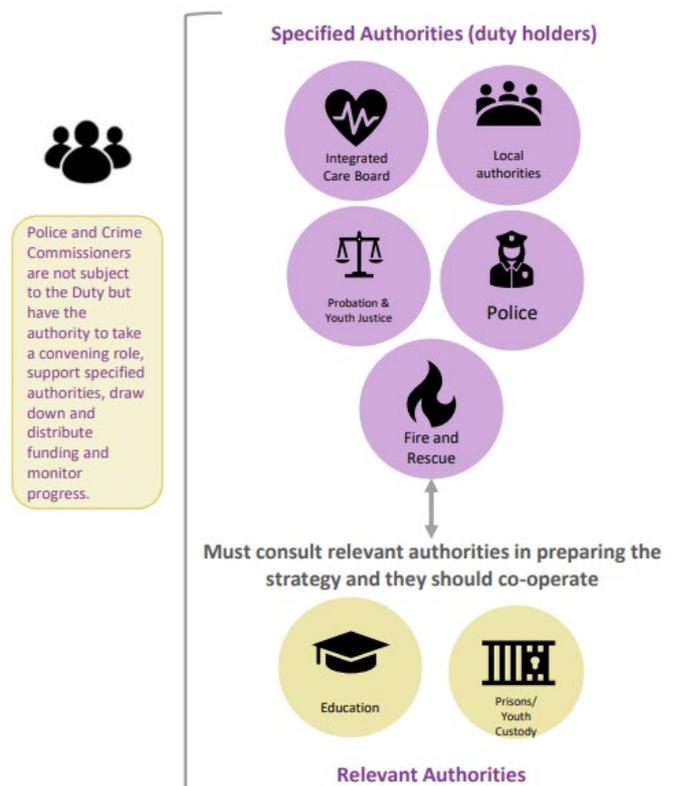
Introduction

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.

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 fulfilling the Duty
- Produce a partnership agreement outlining how the specified authorities are going to work together
- Adopt the World Health Organisation public health approach based on the following key principles:
- 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



Gravesham's Serious Violence Strategy adheres to these fundamental principles. It is acknowledged that greater law enforcement alone will not achieve the required long-term solutions to reduce serious violence. We must continue to focus on prevention and early intervention and find ways of providing support and protecting those who we believe to be at risk of serious violence within our communities.

This Strategy sets out the framework for how we will coordinate our efforts to help reduce the scale and impact of serious violence, specifically around the following 6 key priority strands which will each include preventative work, activity to minimise impact, support for those affected by violence, reducing offending and empowering communities to work alongside partner agencies:

- Places and Spaces
- Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)
- Youth Safety
- Adults (protecting vulnerable adults and preventing adult offending)
- Organised crime
- Drugs as a driver of serious violence

Serious Violence in Gravesham

As part of Gravesham CSP's Annual Strategic Assessment 2023 process, data and supporting evidence has been provided by partner agencies and in particular by the Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) and Kent Police, to provide a clearer picture of the current level of serious violence in the Borough.

A considerable amount of this information is classified as 'Official Sensitive' and therefore, cannot be fully disclosed in the public domain. The following summarises the key findings and outlines what is possible to share publicly as an illustration of what we understand about serious violence in Gravesham and why the strategic approach that we are taking has been adopted.

Violent crime

- In the 12 months ending 30 September 2023, violent crime (violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery) in Gravesham decreased by 11.5% compared to the previous year and to an average reduction across Kent of 9.0%.
- Gravesham's rate of violent crime per 1,000 population is now the fifth highest in the county (compared to being the third highest rate last year).
- Over 90.0% of violent crime relates to violence against the person offences but just over 45.0% of these are offences *without* any injury having been sustained by the victim.
- Victims and suspects (Kent-wide unless stated and on average, across all ages)

Violence with injury

- Almost 70.0% of suspects causing violence with injury are male and approximately 30.0% are female.

- Approximately 61.0% of victims of violence with injury are male and 39.0% are female.
- Approximately 61.0% of victims of violence with injury are male and 39.0% are female.

Robbery (Personal and Business)

- Over 90.0% of all suspects carrying out robberies are male and approximately 10.0% are female.
- Approximately 85.0% of victims of robbery are male and 15.0% are female.
- In the year ending 30 June 2023, Gravesham had the second greatest proportion of suspects in respect of robbery in the 18–24-year age group (15.1%) in Kent.

Weapon-enabled violence as a proportion of all serious violent crime

- A higher proportion of all serious violent crime in Gravesham is weapon-enabled and a higher proportion of both victims and suspects locally are aged 25/+.
- Gravesham also experiences a higher proportion of victims and suspects in the Under 18-year cohort for weapon-enabled serious violence as a proportion of all serious violence.

Robbery

- Robbery offences have decreased by 26.0% in Gravesham compared to an average countywide reduction of 16.9% although the rate per 1,000 population locally at 0.9 offences is slightly higher than the county average rate of 0.6 offences.

Locations

- Violence and serious violence in particular is very heavily concentrated in the area of and immediately surrounding Gravesend town centre.
- 34.5% of all serious violence takes place in the road/on the street.
- 20.8% of all serious violence occurs within dwellings.

Sexual offences

- Sexual offences have reduced by 6.5%, the rate per 1,000 population locally now being just below the county average rate.
- The number of sexual offences of rape in Gravesham has remained virtually unchanged (-0.5%) and rapes account for about a third of all sexual offences.
- Serious sexual offences locally have fallen by 14.5%

Most serious violence

Most Serious Violence offences remain rare and have fallen by 17.9% in Gravesham (the greatest reduction recorded in any Kent District and Medway in the year ending 30 September 2023 compared to the previous year). The average countywide reduction over the same period is 5.0%.

Possession of weapons offences

- Most Districts and Medway have recorded an increase in weapons possession offences; the average increase across Kent is 6.1%.

- Possession of weapons offences stand at 1.0 offence per 1,000 population locally.
- The number of weapons possession offences in Gravesham is still small (104 offences).

Increases in these offences (as with drug offences) are very likely the result of proactive Police activity which has led to a greater identification of offences.

Domestic abuse

- Domestic abuse crimes and serious incidents have reduced in Gravesham by 12.3% compared to a Kent-wide decrease of 7.5%.
- The rate of domestic abuse crimes and serious incidents per 1,000 population locally remains the third highest in the county.
- Stalking and harassment offences have continued to reduce, falling by 15.6% this year, although these offences still account for 28.0% of all violent crime.

Drug offences - trafficking

- Tackling drug trafficking has clearly been a Police priority and significant increases have been recorded across Kent. Gravesham has recorded an increase from 99 to 379 offences in the 12 months ending 30 September 2023 compared to the previous year, but this is primarily as a result of intensive Police and other law enforcement operations.
- The rate of offences per 1,000 population locally is more than double the average county rate.
- Monthly pattern analysis clearly illustrates that the increase in drug trafficking offences this year is unprecedented. Positively this is a demonstration of considerable disruption caused to organised drug networks.
- Drug possession offences have increased in Gravesham by 7.4% compared to an average increase of 6.2% across Kent.
- The rate of possession offences locally of 1.7 offences per 1,000 population is very closely aligned to the Kent average rate of 1.6 offences.
- Changes in the tactics of suppliers towards providing an online ordering and delivery service direct to users' homes will be having an impact on detection.

Youth offending

- In Gravesham only 0.6% of 10–17-year-olds are offenders within the criminal justice system.
- The proportion of female young offenders has been increasing in recent years (from 18.2% in 2020-21 to 36.1% in 2022-23).
- Data suggests female young offenders begin offending at an earlier age than males; the most common ages at outcome for females are 13 and 15 years compared to 14 and 17 years for males.
- The most common offences committed by young people remain violence against the person, theft and handling stolen goods and motoring offences.
- First Time Entrants (FTEs) to the criminal justice system are very few in number and have increased from 14 to 17 young people in Gravesham in 2022-23.

- The number of FTEs in Gravesham in the most recent year is 41.4% less than the 29 FTEs in the Borough in 2020-21. This contrasts with the average position across the county which has seen an average increase of 15.1% comparing the same periods.

Vulnerable adults and safeguarding

- The number of Safeguarding (SG) Concerns reported in Gravesham has increased by 18.3% although the rate of SG Concerns reported per 1,000 population remains below the average District rate.

A higher-than-average percentage of both Gravesham Learning Disability clients and Mental Health clients of Adult Social Care live in the community.

Hate crime

- Hate crime has fallen by 18.0% in Gravesham compared to an average decrease across Kent of 1.1%.
- Gravesham has the third highest rate of recorded hate crime per 1,000 population (compared to having had the second highest rate last year).
- 69.7% of recorded hate crime in Gravesham is motivated by racial/ethnic prejudice. Despite reductions, violent crime continues to account for the largest proportion of all crime in Gravesham and the physical safety of people has to remain the greatest priority. Whilst recorded domestic abuse crimes have begun to reduce locally, this and violence against women and girls remain national and local priorities and together with tackling serious violence, are issues which CSP partners have statutory duties to address.

Even whilst the levels of violence experienced in Gravesham are certainly considerably below those seen in London Boroughs and in many other parts of the country, they remain above the Kent average. In addition, violence, and serious violence occurring in *public spaces* is locally very heavily concentrated in Gravesend town centre. The impact of this on a relatively small town centre and a Borough with the smallest District population in the county is significant: it affects public perceptions of Gravesham - both those of local people and of those outside the area, influences business investment and negatively affects ambitions to grow and develop a strong local economy (both day-time and evening/night-time).

Vulnerable adults and young people are at greater risk of experiencing violence. Vulnerable adults are often targeted specifically because of their perceived vulnerability e.g. adults with learning disabilities, and they are less likely to report the crime or abuse they have experienced to seek help. Younger vulnerable people are at greater risk of being exploited e.g. as part of drug trafficking activities or being drawn into organised acquisitive crime which can involve violence. CSP partners have a statutory duty to try to safeguard both vulnerable adults and young people from harm. Working with local residents and communities to build confidence in reporting and encouraging them to work with us will also be central to achieving sustainable change.

Community consultation

As part of the process of completing Gravesham CSP's Annual Strategic Assessment, a Public Consultation exercise was conducted over 8 weeks closing just before Christmas 2023.

A survey was made available on the Gravesham BC's website, promoted via social media and at engagement events and links were circulated as widely as possible to encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to give their views. Anyone living, working, studying, or visiting Gravesham was invited to take part.

Some of the details provided in 149 responses received relate specifically to perceptions of violence in the Borough, the issue of violence particularly in respect of Gravesend town centre and the key issues that are felt to be features of violence.

Tell us how you feel about **Gravesham**
...and help us shape our
Community Safety Partnership Strategy 2024-2027

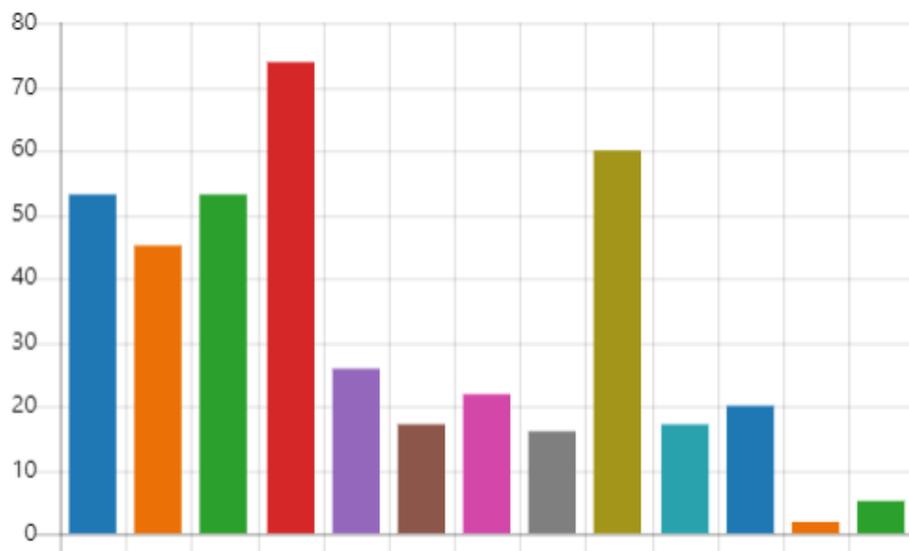
Gravesham Community Safety Partnership Strategy
Public Consultation
SCAN THE QR CODE OR GO TO:
<https://forms.office.com/e/rxgqdfszvF>

Top issues affecting community safety

Respondents were asked to prioritise 5 different issues based on the impact that they felt these most had on community safety. 46.3% of respondents identified ASB as having the most significant impact and 32.4% selected ASB as their second choice, making this very clearly the primary concern. 27.9% of respondents selected town centre safety as their first choice and 23.5% made this their second choice. Whilst nationally and locally, public surveys generally suggest there are growing concerns about violence, particularly violence involving young people and weapons, a smaller percentage (15.4%) selected violence as their first choice for impacting community safety. This suggests that in general, those surveyed are not overly fearful of being a victim of violence, rather they are made to feel unsafe because of people (individuals and groups) behaving in an anti-social manner that is intimidating or causing a nuisance, with a seeming lack of respect for others and for the environment.

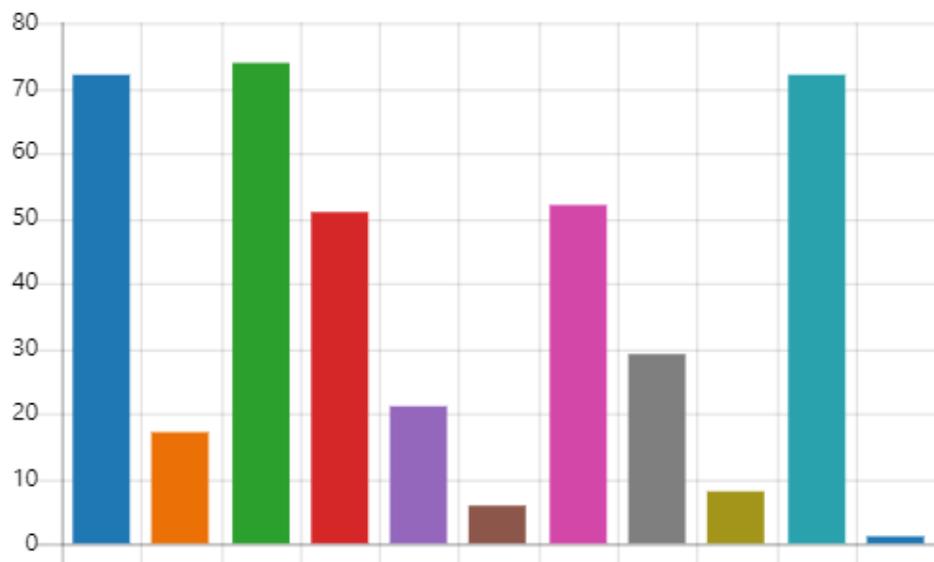
Analysis of the responses concerning town centre safety indicate that 'groups gathering' was the most commonly cited issue (74 responses) that people felt needs addressing. However, violence specifically linked to the evening and night-time economy (although unclear whether this is an opinion based on fact/actuality or due to a perception of the risk of violence occurring) was the second most frequently selected issue (60 responses).

● Alcohol misuse/street drinking	53
● Drug misuse/drug dealing	45
● Feeling unsafe - low footfall	53
● Groups gathering	74
● Homeless/rough sleeping	26
● Aggressive begging	17
● Street harassment/stalking	22
● Public space violence	16
● Violence - evening/night-time...	60
● State of street lighting	17
● Robbery	20
● Burglary - business	2
● Other	5



Of the respondents who did select violence as the main issue affecting community safety, Substance misuse, drug-related activity, and alcohol misuse, were predominantly cited as features of violence (74 and 72 respondents respectively). Amongst these respondents, there is also real concern regarding youth violence (72 responses), weapons being used as part of violent behaviour (51 responses) and concern about violence linked to the night-time economy (52 responses).

Alcohol-related violence	72
Domestic abuse	17
Drug-trafficking/drug-related ...	74
Gun/knife-crime	51
Hate crime	21
Modern slavery/human traffic...	6
Night-time economy violence	52
Robbery	29
Sexual violence	8
Youth violence	72
Other	1



Defining serious violence

Violence is clearly a broad category and encompasses many different strands of violent offences. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSC) does not define serious violence for the purposes of the Serious Violence Duty but Government guidance indicates that specified authorities must take into account the following factors:

- the maximum penalty which could be imposed for any offence involved in the violence
- the impact of the violence on any victim
- the prevalence of the violence in the area
- the impact of the violence on the community in the area.

The Act also makes clear that violence is not limited to physical violence against the person. It provides that, for the purposes of the Duty, violence includes domestic abuse, sexual offences, violence against property and threats of violence but does not include terrorism. The purpose behind this flexibility is to allow specified authorities the opportunity to include the types of violence that are most relevant and important in their local area. As a rule of thumb, strategies should include a focus on public space youth violence, 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 in county lines drug dealing.

The Kent and Medway VRU have completed a Serious Violence Needs Assessment, the findings of which have been shared with District Councils and Medway UA. In Gravesham, the scope of our definition of serious violence considers information shared by the VRU and other CSP agencies and includes particular violent crimes alongside exploitative and criminal activities that are inextricably linked to violence. In taking a holistic approach to tackling serious violence, we are also acknowledging that the causes of violence are complex, that some people are at greater risk of experiencing and or perpetrating violence because of their life experience and/or personal characteristics and that other key elements e.g. organised crime, criminal exploitation influence serious violence. Therefore, the definition of serious violence for the purposes of this strategy includes the following categories:

- Homicide,
- Violence against the person (with injury) including weapon related crime,
- Organised crime, including county lines and drug trafficking,
- Serious youth violence,
- Domestic abuse and VAWG,
- Sexual offences,
- Robbery,
- Hate crime,
- Modern slavery, human trafficking including cuckooing.

Considering the above crime categories, Serious Violence in Gravesham is defined as:

The threat or carrying out of serious or violent criminal acts which have caused or have the capacity to cause serious injury which may be physical or mental or which may have other significant adverse impact on people, organisations, or property.

Our Approach to Preventing and Reducing Serious Violence

The recommended approach for tackling serious violence through preventative work, activity to minimise impact, supporting those affected by violence, reducing offending and empowering communities, can be effectively addressed through the following areas of focus:

Places and Spaces

Some locations within Gravesham are known to be areas of 'high harm' or 'hotspots' with a higher-than-average level of violence or crime as defined by reports to Kent Police. Information and intelligence shared between our CSP partner agencies has already enabled us to work collaboratively in some locations that we know are more susceptible to violence

e.g., parts of the town centre, transport hubs, specific areas in which there is trading during the twilight and night-time economy. By focussing on Places and Spaces we will continue to monitor, review and safeguard high harm locations to try to reduce crime in the wider geographical area. This will include (subject to resources) practical preventative work such as designing out crime through environmental improvements and working with residents and other stakeholders to take ownership of public and greenspaces in the Borough. In addition to concentrating attention on hotspot locations, we know from public consultation and community engagement that how safe people feel is influenced by many things including their personal characteristics of age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and external factors such as poor lighting, lack of uniformed presence or feeling isolated because of low footfall. We also know that the risk of harm is not just present in the physical world but also takes place increasingly in online spaces. Irrespective of personal identity, whether it is daytime or night-time or how busy areas are, everyone should be able to feel safe when out and about in our town centre or in their local neighbourhoods. We also need to build resilience against the risks of harm in online environments which those promoting violence choose to exploit as opportunities to target vulnerable people of all ages.

Safer places and spaces

We will continue to improve intelligence-sharing between partner agencies in identifying locations where violence occurs and where people feel unsafe. Better understanding and evaluation of these areas will help inform appropriate action to reduce the level of crime generally as well as prevent or reduce violence. In town centre locations, we will need to extend our partnership working with local businesses and in primarily residential neighbourhoods, we will need to engage on a regular basis with local residents.

Evening and night-time economy

A well-developed local twilight, evening and night-time economy is seen as a fundamental part building a prosperous Borough and provides opportunities to improve people's quality of life. However, there can be links with issues such as, violence that is alcohol-related, sexual harassment and assaults and public disorder, that feed negative perceptions of safety, particularly in the town centre after dark. We will continue to work with local businesses to encourage more of them to participate in Best Bar None to improve standards operating within licensed premises; develop and extend the Gravesham Safe Space Initiative and deliver a rolling programme of Bystander Effect training that is available to partner agency, business and retail staff as well as members of the public free of charge. These steps will all contribute to creating a safer socialising environment for everyone to enjoy. We will continue to ask for the additional resources of partners to support this including those that have powers under legislation to deal with acts of serious violence.

Working with retailers

CSP partner agencies already work closely with local businesses in addressing retail crime such as theft and shoplifting. However, we also know that retail and security staff are often on the receiving end of violent behaviour perpetrated against them. We will work to improve communication and information-sharing with retail staff, particularly those working in business premises trading in the evenings and late at night to inform preventative steps that we can take collectively recognising that alleged and actual criminal offences are for Kent Police, the Crown Prosecution Service, and the Courts to action.

Cross border criminality

We know that when violence occurs locally it is frequently not perpetrated by individuals who live in Gravesham and that those involved in violence do not restrict their movements within Borough boundaries. Equally violent offenders in our area are as likely to be travelling outside of Gravesham. One of our aims will be to improve information and intelligence-sharing with CSP partners in neighbouring Boroughs, particularly with Dartford, Bexley and Medway as well as London Boroughs, the Metropolitan Police and British Transport Police to identify cross-border offenders more quickly and hopefully, bring them to justice sooner.

Online Spaces

Online spaces are increasingly used to facilitate certain criminal activity such as drug supply, fraud, and scams and this is likely to continue. We will aim to reduce harm caused in online spaces by focussing on identifying the tactics and avenues used for exploitation and grooming, particularly of young people and vulnerable adults and improving support for those who have been victims. Although Gravesham is a proudly diverse community with a strong record of community cohesion, hate crime (in all forms) is still a serious issue for some members of our community. Online forums and social media are used to foster hatred and, in some cases, promote violence. We know that hate crime also suffers from under-reporting and will continue to work to improve confidence amongst victims and third parties to report all incidents to help identify those responsible, support victims appropriately and strengthen a 'zero tolerance' message in respect of all crime motivated by hate.

Places and Spaces Headline actions

- Targeting activity in high harm locations for violence (both town centre and local neighbourhood hotspots).
- Evening/NTE economy violence and key premises/locations.
- Working with local retailers and security staff.
- Cross-border activity – working with neighbouring Boroughs to improve intelligence-sharing regarding perpetrators of violence operating across Borough boundaries.
- Tackling violence facilitated using online spaces, particularly where these are used to target vulnerable adults and young people.

Domestic Abuse and VAWG

Whilst men disproportionately represent victims (and perpetrators) of violent crime, women are significantly more likely to experience gender-based violence in the home and sexual assault or harassment in public places. Tackling domestic abuse and VAWG has been a key priority for our CSP for a number of years and Gravesham has been an active partner working with the Kent Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, the commissioned Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service and with local service providers. Partner agencies provide a One-Stop Shop on a weekly basis whereby victims are able to get support from different services and all CSP community engagement events taking place make available information and advice on how to access services. Activities throughout the 16 Days of Action each year in the lead up to Christmas is now part of standard CSP business whilst external funding has frequently been used to run events targeted at encouraging greater reporting by victims who may face particular challenges and barriers in coming forward. Several CSP partner agencies are White Ribbon accredited and Gravesham Borough

Council has a dedicated Tackling Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategy and is working towards Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation to improve responses to victims' accommodation needs.

Our work to improve women's safety has focussed on providing those experiencing or who feel that they are at risk of violence with the support they need to protect them from harm or from being a repeat victim of abuse. This ranges from safety planning to improving security measures to enable victims to stay in their own home to being supported through temporary accommodation or refuge provision.

Gravesham Borough Council has a Tackling Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategy in place which encompasses a range of actions to prevent and reduce all forms of domestic abuse and VAWG. This specifically includes improving services across the board for victims and their children working with partners, service providers and voluntary groups and holding to account perpetrators who commit these acts.

Making public spaces safer

We have developed a number of initiatives to improve the confidence and safety of the people in general when using public spaces, but which also particularly contribute towards enhancing safety for those who may feel vulnerable and for women and girls. These include Gravesham's Safe Space Initiative, Best Bar None, and delivering Bystander Effect training to local businesses to promote women's safety in clubs, pubs and other night-time economy premises.

VAWG 'Walk and Talk' events in the town centre have also been arranged by Kent Police and supported by partner agencies as opportunities to talk to women and girls about their experiences and seek their views on what improvements could be made. We also invest in a CCTV Partnership maintaining a suite of cameras across the Borough including temporary cameras to help prevent crime and gather evidence.

Headline actions - Domestic Abuse and VAWG

- Continuing to target activity to increase reporting of DA from under-represented groups and overcome barriers to accessing support.
- Improving how we hold people who use violence and abuse to account.
- Addressing gaps in services to support perpetrators of violence to change their behaviour and prevent reoffending (where possible).
- Support work with children and young people affected by DA to counter the normalisation of violence and prevent cyclical violence.

Youth safety

Addressing youth safety is particularly important as we understand that some young people are more vulnerable to being exploited into certain types of violence and crime e.g. through drug trafficking and county lines activity and that they may be at higher risk of other criminality such as child sexual exploitation. CSP partner agencies all have safeguarding responsibilities to protect young people from harm and in Gravesham there is a strong history of joint working, particularly between Kent Police, Local Authorities, Kent and Medway VRU and both statutory Youth Services and youth engagement providers in the community and voluntary sector.

In continuing to develop this work, our priorities for improving safety for young people will be built into the action plan that will underpin this Strategy with an emphasis on:

Prevention and early identification

Prevention is about endeavouring to maximise the protective factors that will keep young people safe. Whether a young person is a victim or perpetrator of violence (or both), protective factors within their families, schools, peer groups and local community can reduce risk. We want to ensure that we are able to provide tailored support to our children, young people and families as soon as their problems emerge, rather than when they reach a crisis point and are in need of more specialist interventions and services. Many families are facing increasing financial pressures and when these are combined with other issues e.g. drug or alcohol dependency, mental and or physical health problems or domestic abuse within the household, children and young people are more vulnerable to risks. Earlier identification and intervention will help to safeguard them against and minimise the risk of harm.

Diversion and Positive Activities

Gravesham CSP already works closely with partner agencies to deliver youth work and youth engagement activities that aim to educate and divert young people away from being drawn into violence. We will continue to focus attention on providing activities that are attractive to young people to give them constructive opportunities using the youth work curriculum as outlined by the National Youth Agency and the statutory duty and youth work methodologies for how young people spend their free time whilst simultaneously developing their confidence and resilience against being drawn into criminal behaviour.

Support

Our aim is to protect young people from exposure to violence and exploitation both in areas identified as high-risk physical environments and through online activity. This will involve working with families, parents/carers as well as young people themselves to increase their understanding and awareness of risk and of services available to assist them. This work will be particularly important for those young people who are more vulnerable e.g. if they are outside mainstream education/persistently absent from school or alternative educational provision, are not in education, employment or training or are in Local Authority Care and repeatedly go missing.

Enforcement and prosecution

Enforcement and prosecution may be a necessary measure to reduce reoffending for those young people who have become persistent in their offending behaviour and when offers of engagement and support are repeatedly met with a negative response. Our primary responsibility is to protect people from physical violence and partner agencies will work together to maximise enforcement opportunities if required for offenders of serious violence including young offenders. However, there also should be support available for those perpetrators who want to change their behaviour and move away from serious violence.

Youth safety - headline actions

- Preventing and Protecting young people from violence and exploitation (including online activity).
- Supporting families, parents and carers in safeguarding children and young people from violence.

- Working to reduce the reoffending of young people persistently involved in crime and prevent their behaviour from escalating to violence (recognising young people involved in violence may be victims as well as offenders).
- Using Prevention, Identification, Engagement, Diversion, Support and Enforcement/Prosecution in delivering the above.

Adults (victims and offenders)

Some adults, including those who are homeless/rough sleeping, with learning disabilities, substance addiction problems and mental health issues, are more vulnerable to being affected by or becoming involved in violence than others. Vulnerable adults may be targeted by perpetrators of violence precisely because of their perceived vulnerability and because they are less likely to report their experience or seek help. We also know that the impact of the incidence and media reporting of serious violence affects public perceptions generally and can make them feel unsafe - the impact on vulnerable adults is likely to be even greater.

Whilst the focus on adult offenders of serious violence will be to bring them to account and provide justice for their victims, the ultimate objective even following successful prosecution is to prevent them from reoffending on release. This will necessitate close working between partner agencies, particularly those working directly with offenders, to establish the causal factors contributing to their violent behaviour and how these can be addressed.

Vulnerable adults

There are 4 key vulnerability factors that increase the risk of adults being affected by or becoming involved in serious violence: a learning or developmental disability, drug or alcohol addiction, poor mental health, and personal circumstances such as domestic abuse or historical/unidentified trauma. As the delivery of this Strategy progresses, further workstreams will be identified but as a starting point, work will focus on developing partnership responses in tackling:

Cuckooing – (whereby a person’s home is taken over by organised criminals and used to facilitate exploitation or other criminal activity e.g. cannabis cultivation);

Online exploitation of vulnerable adults

Modern day slavery

DA and VAWG

Adult offenders

Understanding and addressing the root causes of violence is fundamental to our efforts in predicting, preventing and breaking down patterns of violence behaviour. Whilst holding adults who perpetrate violence to account, it is also necessary to support offenders as well, to move away from repeating their behaviour in future. Effective rehabilitation will protect the wider public whilst also enabling offenders to change their behaviour and play a positive role in their communities. Their experience can often be invaluable in educating others against becoming involved in violence in the first place.

As a CSP, all partners will work closely with our colleagues in Kent Probation and with voluntary sector support services helping adult offenders deal with other issues in their lives that have been contributing to their offending behaviour. We will look to:

- Hold offenders to account
- Support adult offenders to move away from offending behaviour
- Work together to stop adult offenders exploiting and grooming others as an introduction to violence
- Use the Integrated Offender Management framework to proactively network local, priority offenders and make the best use of shared resources and intelligence
- Support Probation as much as we can to provide tailored community sentence interventions and opportunities for training, employment, education, recognising that addressing these will help to reduce the risk of violence and improve the outlook for offenders and the communities into which they will inevitably return.

Headline actions – adults

- Protecting vulnerable adults from being targeted by perpetrators of violence particularly safeguarding them against practices such as cuckooing, online exploitation, DA and VAWG and radicalisation and modern slavery.
- Whilst holding adult offenders of violence to account, work collaboratively to identify drivers of their behaviour to support adult offenders to move away from violence.

Organised crime

Gravesham is fortunate in that compared to many nearby London Boroughs we have few Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) operating within our area. However, when we have had to deal with OCGs there has frequently been a connection to criminality that is linked to violence whether that be drug-related or organised acquisitive crime. Although Kent Police and law enforcement partners clearly lead on tackling organised crime, other statutory partners can have a valuable part to play too. Not only do Local Authority officers, for e.g., have access to a considerable amount of information on their systems, they also know their local areas at grass roots level very well, with many officers regularly interacting with the public, with businesses and/or working directly within neighbourhoods and with community groups. Other partner agencies can assist Police in identifying repeat locations, providing local intelligence and support multi-agency operations that can effectively disrupt OCG activity and protect communities affected.

Only a small number of individuals may be directly involved in OCG activity but their influence can be significant, particularly where local neighbourhood residents feel nervous of reporting incidents or coming forward for fear of reprisals. Through this Strategy we will focus on:

Improving our understanding of organised crime locally

This should include working with residents in their communities to cultivate local intelligence and build confidence and trust in the authorities to report concerns.

Improving our understanding of local predictors of methods used to recruit people into criminality

Understanding these predictors more clearly will enable earlier intervention and prevention and help individuals targeted for recruitment to build their own resilience, seek help and support and resist peer pressure.

Disrupting organised criminal networks and prolific offenders

It is naïve to suggest that we can eliminate criminal networks, however, using shared intelligence and the various tools and powers held by different partner agencies can severely disrupt OCG activity. Disruption and forcing offenders to change their tactics and methods of operation may help to build evidence against those involved or reduce the level of risk of harm that they pose. This should be done as swiftly as possible and communication with the communities is key to ensuring that justice is seen to be done as well as done.

Empowering local people in their neighbourhoods to work alongside partner agencies

Local people are often most knowledgeable about what takes place on their doorstep. Educating and raising awareness amongst local residents about how they can confidentially report information can be key to building intelligence. Vulnerable people (of all ages) are often also well-known in their local area; building stronger communities and helping them to understand what steps they can safely take to support local people at-risk can form an important part of preventative work.

Supporting individuals wanting to leave organised criminality

The reasons for which vulnerable young people and adults are drawn into criminality are often very complex and linked to their personal characteristics and life experience that frequently make them victims of organised crime whilst simultaneously being perpetrators. Partner agencies should seek to work together to identify how best to support those individuals who are committed to changing their behaviour and want to leave street groups and criminal networks, through appropriate interventions.

Headline actions – organised crime

- Working collectively to tackle organised crime involving violence and the use of weapons e.g., drug-related crime, organised acquisitive crime, such as robberies and exploitation.
- Whilst Police will by necessity lead work to tackle organised crime, partners can assist in identifying hotspots, building intelligence, and supporting enforcement activity to disrupt criminality.
- Work to safeguard residents in neighbourhoods in which organised crime involving violence is more prevalent by empowering communities to work with agencies to support local people at-risk.

Providing tailored support and positive opportunities for young people who have been drawn into organised criminality to leave.

Drugs as a driver for serious organised crime

It is generally acknowledged that the illegal drug market is often a driver of violence and that that the use or presence of weapons is a common feature of drug supply. Drug dealing is often visible on our streets which causes concern and fuels fear of crime and risks to personal safety within local communities. It is also a main economic driver causing conflict between rival groups engaging in drug supply that ends in violence.

Drug dependency is a global health issue, with use of certain substances known to detrimentally affect both physical and mental health as well as being a contributory factor to offending and reoffending when crimes are committed as a means of funding an addiction. Individuals who are drug dependent are often more vulnerable to becoming victims of violent crime themselves and unfortunately, this cohort experiencing violence often do not report their experience.

Tackling drugs as a driver for serious organised crime is a recognition that it cuts across or intersects with all of the other themes within this Strategy and therefore, this deserves a separate strand of work that will aim to understand and address how drugs impact local communities, how drug supply fuels criminality and the impact that it has on people made vulnerable by and through this trade. This work will concentrate on reducing the harm that drugs cause to individuals and communities by supporting those with drug dependency issues to recover and protect them from both becoming victims of or perpetuating violence.

In this strategic priority, there 3 key areas to which we will give attention:

Reducing demand

Reducing demand by working with partner agencies, particularly Public Health and education providers, to change the appeal and image of drug dealing and drug taking through a preventative and early intervention approach to reduce the number of people using drugs for the first time. Subject to resources, this work could involve commissioning the support of 'lived experience' services that can better communicate the adverse impact of drug dependency on quality of life longer-term, the inequalities of impact and the consequences on the individual and their families.

Reducing supply

This work will include working with communities to better understand drug-related activity in their area and joint problem solving which may include practical interventions e.g., designing out crime by changes to the physical environment and target-hardening. All partner agencies will support the work of colleagues involved in taking enforcement action against those engaging in drug supply. This may be as simple as acting as a conduit between Police and local communities or ensuring that, where appropriate, agencies that have enforcement tools and powers to take formal action against offenders including evictions, do so and in a timely manner.

Reducing harm

As a CSP, we will extend our working in partnership with organisations and services providing support to individuals wanting to recover from drug dependency and reintegrate into local communities.

Headline actions - Drugs as a driver of Serious Violence

- The illegal drug market drives many issues related to violence and safety. Profits from drug dealing often facilitate other criminality whilst drug use/dependency can often result in cycles of re-offending.
- Partnership work in this area should be built on:
 - Reducing demand through prevention and early intervention
 - Reducing supply through enforcement and disruption

- Reducing harm by supporting recovery from dependency and reintegration back into local communities

Reducing drug-related crime through wide engagement with local communities to increase information-sharing and reporting.

Governance and Multi-Agency Partnership Arrangements

Whilst Gravesham’s Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has developed this Strategy as a response to the Serious Violence Duty tailored to meet the needs of our Borough, it is recognised that we will need to work closely with the Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit that is leading activity at county level working with the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).

The PCC is the receiver of funding for the Duty from the Home Office and has responsibilities for reporting progress to Government associated with that and maintaining clear oversight of local delivery, although not subject to the duty. Therefore, in line with this approach it is suggested that our CSP works with but does not report to the Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit on a quarterly basis so that the Serious Violence Prevention Board at a county level can be kept apprised of Gravesham’s work in this matter.

For operational purposes, Gravesham CSP has within its structure an existing sub-group, the Serious Organised Crime Panel, which reports back to the Partnership on a quarterly basis. The Panel already meets monthly and deals with a number of issues linked to serious violence and identified within this Strategy as priorities for action. The Panel also benefits from attendance from a range of partner agencies and by extending the membership to address broader issues of serious violence, it will be well-placed to act as the coordinating group for progressing this work.

