

# Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Violence Reduction Strategy

2024–2029



**Violence  
Reduction  
Alliance**

Stoke-on-Trent  
and Staffordshire

## **Violence Reduction Alliance**

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C/o Staffordshire Police, Fire & Rescue and Crime Commissioner

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Copies of this Strategy are available at:

**[www.violencereductionalliance.co.uk](http://www.violencereductionalliance.co.uk)**

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

Nelson Mandela, 2002

This Violence Reduction Strategy (**‘Strategy’**) has been produced on behalf of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Violence Reduction Alliance (**‘VRA’**). The Strategy sets out our partnership approach to reducing violence, meeting the requirements of the Serious Violence Duty (**‘the Duty’**) and improving outcomes for communities.

The Strategy will be overseen and delivered by our established, multi-agency VRA which spans Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

# 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 all violence and improve the health and quality of life of 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, education, local authorities, police, criminal justice agencies, the secure estate, 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 city and county. With this in mind, we are determined to end the misery serious violence can cause individuals, families and communities.

Much has been achieved to date, including commissioning a support service for child victims of criminal exploitation, establishing a police-led Violence Reduction Team, developing and delivering numerous local campaigns, undertaking target hardening and environmental improvements in key locations, operating a pilot peer mentoring scheme and developing quality assured education resources. However, we recognise there is more to be done.

The Strategy builds on achievements made to date. It sets out our partnership approach to preventing and reducing serious violence, while meeting the requirements of the Duty and improving outcomes for communities. We will prevent serious violence from occurring, intervening early to stop it damaging lives.

## What is Serious Violence?

Based on the National Serious Violence Strategy, serious violence 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”.

While this will be the focus of this Strategy, we will build connectivity with aligned work streams such as domestic abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation and public place violence against women and girls (VAWG).

## What is our Aim?

Our VRA aims 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 prevalence and impact. Between 2014-2018 there was a rise in serious violence, with increases in homicide, knife and gun crime in virtually all police force areas.

Serious violence figures have seen a small steady decrease since 2018. COVID-19 impacted on figures throughout 2020/21 where all levels rapidly lowered (both nationally and locally). Since the removal of restrictions violence figures have seen a return to higher levels; with 2022 having marginally higher figures than usual. However, recent figures are now returning to previous patterns of lowering year-on-year. Serious 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.

The Government has since supported this approach further through the implementation of the Duty. Introduced as part of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, the Duty is a key part of the Government's wider programme of work to prevent and reduce serious violence, taking a whole-system approach to understand the causes and consequences of serious violence, focused on prevention and early intervention.

The Duty requires organisations (police, fire and rescue, integrated care boards, youth offending services, probation and local authorities) to work together to plan, share data, intelligence and knowledge, to generate evidence-based analysis of the problem and solutions to prevent and reduce serious violence in local areas.

## Local Context

In line with national rises and timeframes, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent observed a steady increase in serious violence. We witnessed increases in the use of weapons (such as knives) in violent gangs, organised crime groups (OCGs); and in the severity of violence used or inflicted.

This 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 (such as ‘county lines’ drug dealing) and the linked children’s safeguarding concerns.

Local data highlights serious violence accounted for less than 2.5% of all crimes within the Staffordshire Police Force area from 2018 to 2022. However, the distribution of where serious violence occurs and who is impacted by this is not evenly spread through the geographical areas. The data tells us that there are specific cohorts that experience, or are more at risk of becoming involved in violence such as under 18-year-old males, individuals at risk of exploitation and victimisation, 18 to 25-year old males, those with family links to criminality, children excluded from education, children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), children and young people with complex needs and children, young people and young adults living in areas of deprivation.

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

**Violence is unacceptable  
and preventable**

# What Our Communities Tell Us

## Children and Young People

Consultation with children and young people indicates a significant proportion of respondents feel violence is an issue locally, citing bullying, neglect, trauma (including mental health), substance misuse and peer pressure/negative friendship groups as underlying factors. Social media was also mentioned as problematic in promoting harmful behaviours; more could be done within schools to intervene early and respond to bullying and violence-related issues, and additional awareness is required on taking responsibility for actions and the impact of actions.

“I think that the media definitely uses negative representations of people in our local area.”  
Male, 15–16

“To tackle the issue, organisations need to address all factions of the issue. Such as police-shortage, lack of education in schools and the effect of a damaged home life.”  
Female, 15–16

## Parents and Carers

Consultation with parents and carers determined peer pressure was problematic and knowledge of what to do, and where to go for help was needed. Parents and carers suggested good employment options needed to be available as an alternative to crime and early help and support for children and families was required (mental health, drugs and alcohol, exploitation).

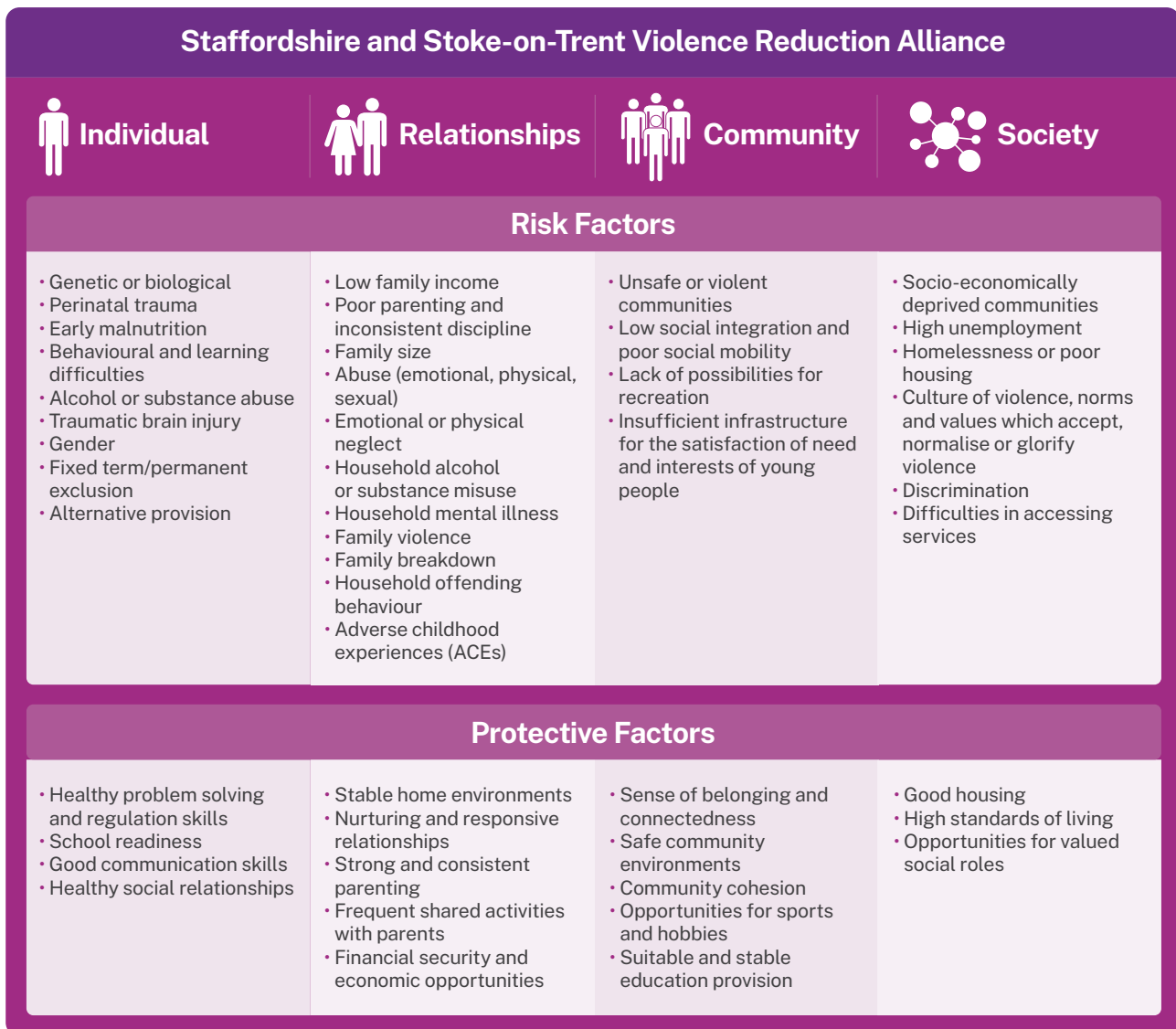
“The reason there is so much crime is because everyone is so poor, kids just want to make some money.” Parent/Carer

“When elders hurt the younger, of course they are going to influence my child more than me. What can I do? Take his phone? What good will that do?” Parent/Carer

Local data and the views of children, young people, parents, carers and stakeholders have been used to inform the actions within the Strategy.

# Our Approach

Our Strategy is underpinned by a public health approach. This means we will work in partnership to understand the causes and consequences of serious violence, focusing on early intervention and prevention, and be informed by evidence and evaluation of interventions. This approach seeks to address the root causes of serious violence (see diagram below), and is focused on whole system change.



This diagram was inspired by Public Health England’s Collaborative Approaches to Preventing Offending and Re-Offending in Children (CAPRICON).

Given our approach, it is anticipated the actions taken will address not only this issue but will impact other challenges positively (including physical and mental health, criminality, drug and alcohol use, domestic abuse), recognising the risk and protective factors areas are frequently similar.



## Core Principles

Due to the nature of our 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, our core principles will be to:

- Have a multi-agency strategy supported by strong partnership governance, information sharing 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; establishing our interventions based on this data and intelligence
- Develop a public health approach that understands and addresses the root causes and risk factors that can impact on an individual's vulnerability and susceptibility to becoming a victim or offender of serious violence (such as deprivation, education, housing)
- Root our response in evidence of effectiveness, intervening at a preventative or early stage where possible, through to targeted, specialist and enforcement actions
- Involve communities in shaping and delivering responses to serious violence
- Influence attitudes concerning serious violence, enabling communities to take responsibility for helping all members feel safe and connected
- Generate a combination of short, medium and longer-term solutions
- Ensure synergies with related strategies and services, to avoid duplication and maximise efforts
- Adopt a robust performance management framework and promote continuous learning across the workforce

# Our Priorities

The Violence Reduction Strategy has five priority areas:





- 1 Attitudinal change** | Changing attitudes and behaviours towards all types of serious violence, including violence against women & girls (VAWG), at a societal, community and personal level.
- 2 Primary prevention** | Seeking to prevent the onset of serious violence, including VAWG, or to change behaviour so that serious violence is prevented from happening.
- 3 Secondary prevention** | Halting the progression of serious violence, including VAWG, once it is established. This is achieved by early identification followed by prompt and effective support.
- 4 Tertiary prevention** | Rehabilitating people with established serious violent behaviour, or supporting victims.
- 5 Enforcement & Criminal Justice** | Developing innovative criminal justice practices that reduce offending behaviour and recidivism.

## ← Contextual prevention →

Contextual prevention aims to prevent and reduce the risk of violence and exploitation by creating the necessary conditions, including environmental, legislative, economic and social/cultural change.

### Key

Our priorities have been developed in partnership. The following images symbolise who has suggested that this should be a focus for the VRA.

-  **Data and previous learning**
-  **Parents and Carers**
-  **Children and Young People**
-  **Partners/Stakeholders**

## 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 mindsets and believe that it is preventable.

### With this in mind, we will:















- Champion the agenda, advocating everybody has a role in addressing serious violence
- Raise awareness about the nature and causes of violence, including developing a widely accessible knowledge base
- Develop a comprehensive communications, engagement and co-production framework to reach internal and external audiences
- Design a targeted communication approach to more vulnerable or at-risk groups
- Engage with media to promote a positive image of the geography, as well as promoting children more positively
- Create relationships and promote key points of contact with community and faith groups
- Promote the use of relevant personal safety applications, schemes and reporting tools



## Primary Prevention

Our ultimate aim is to prevent 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, families and communities to be the best they can be.





### With this in mind, we will:

- Ensure relevant bodies are sharing timely information to understand, respond to and prevent serious violence 
- Use contemporary data to assist strategic and operational decision making 
- Work with a range of earliest/early help services to identify and support vulnerable children and families  
- Maximise opportunities to intervene with children and families before issues arise and when they do arise, respond in a swift and coordinated way  
- Work with partners to ensure children achieve a good level of personal, physical, social, communication and language skills at each stage of their development 
- Embed an evidence-based, consistent approach to personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education with schools and other educational establishments to reduce impulsive/aggressive behaviour and to increase social competence/resilience  
- Develop and promote meaningful, pro-social activities for children  
- Work with parents and communities to design and deliver safer communities  
- Equip professionals with skills to identify and respond to trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) 

## Secondary Prevention

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

### With this in mind, we will:

- Utilise data to identify those vulnerable to violence and ensure referral into relevant support services 
- Develop and deliver targeted education and prevention programmes to those more vulnerable to, or at risk of violence 
- Support victims of violence to reduce the risk of them being affected by violence in the future 
- Work with schools to reduce exclusions, off-rolling and bullying 
- Ensure a range of effective, joined-up services are available to meet the needs of potential victims and potential offenders 
- Provide support to parents whose children are affected by/involved in violence 
- Support families experiencing violence to stop the intergenerational cycle of violence from continuing 
- Develop peer mentoring/buddying systems for those most at risk of violence 
- Work with the licensed trade and retailers to create safer public spaces 
- Establish safer routes to public transport, taxi marshals and safer places in night-time economies 
- Promote the Safer Places for Women and Girls Charter 
- Raise awareness of the indicators of serious violence and support services available across the workforce 

## Tertiary Prevention

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













### With this in mind, we will:

- Utilise data to identify individuals involved in violence and engage them in support 
- Ensure there is a range of effective, joined-up related services, able to meet the needs of victims and offenders 
- Establish a ‘Navigator’ programme in appropriate settings to interrupt violence and prevent further injury 
- Develop timely information sharing between education establishments and partners concerning violent incidents 
- Establish a sustainable employment scheme for those with violence convictions 
- Improve transitions between criminal justice-related services to assist rehabilitation 
- Work with the secure estate to develop initiatives for those with violent offending histories, to reduce serious violence in the secure estate and improve resettlement and outcomes for communities upon release 
- Undertake reviews of serious violence incidents to understand and apply any relevant learning 
- Support the development of multi-disciplinary teams to address the complex needs of children and families 
- Support intelligence-led, locality-based interventions such as target hardening, environmental measures and visible patrols 

## 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:

- Consider the extension of the Integrated Offender Management approach to violent offenders 
- Operate Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) for high-risk violent offenders 
- Promote an increased range of effective, evidence-led sentencing options 
- Process map the 'no proceedings' and 'no further actions' decisions in cases of serious violence to understand the circumstances of cases failing to progress 
- Utilise problem profiles and all available enforcement powers to disrupt emerging or persistent violence 
- Support police to undertake targeted enforcement and disruption action in relation to 'county lines', drug markets and organised crime 
- Strengthen the links between enforcement and safeguarding, ensuring all opportunities to protect vulnerable people are identified and progressed 
- Work with communities and partners to provide reassurance and resilience following a serious violence incident, to assist swift recovery 

## Implementing the Strategy - Governance

The implementation and annual review of this Strategy and the Duty will be overseen by the Violence Reduction Executive Board ('the Board') and the Violence Reduction Delivery Group ('Delivery Group'), both of which will meet quarterly. This structure forms the governance of the VRA. The Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) will convene the Board and Delivery Group, supported by a Violence Reduction Commissioning and Partnerships Manager.

The Board will ensure that planning and programmes are delivered effectively, in a structured, coherent manner and 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.

The Delivery Group will develop an action plan detailing how the Strategy will be translated. It will monitor progress and provide reports to the Board, escalating any concerns.

## 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 and others). 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 appropriate, is delivered through established partnership arrangements, such as Safeguarding Partnerships and Boards, Early Help and Prevention Boards and Community Safety Partnerships.

## Measuring 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.



## Other Supporting Information

The following documents compliment the work of the VRA, and provide further detail on our approach and working arrangements:

Operating Framework/Partnership Agreement

Strategic Needs Assessment Executive Summary

Children and Young People Consultation

Parents and Carers Consultation

Systems Analysis – Working with Children, Young People and Families with Complex Needs

Staffordshire Centre for Data Analytics Serious Violence Research

Visit [www.violencereductionalliance.co.uk](http://www.violencereductionalliance.co.uk) to learn more about these documents.

Our Strategy encompasses the geographical, Local Policing Body and Local Authority area boundaries of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.









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