

Serious Violence Strategy 2019



Keeping Bexley Safe

Contents

Foreword	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Executive Summary	4
3. A Public Health approach to violent crime	5
4. Our Community	6
5. Knife Crime & Serious Violence Action Plan	7
6. School 'inclusion' policy	8
7. Co-ordinated Communications	9

Foreword

Councillor Alex Sawyer, Cabinet Member for Communities and Chair of the Bexley Community Safety Partnership

Serious Violence affects us all, one way or another. This could be because of being a victim, knowing a victim of serious violence or witnessing the increasing reports of violent incidents through the media.

We know intervening early can help us catch young people before they go down the wrong path, encouraging them to make positive choices. This strategy and its action plan stresses the importance of early intervention to tackle the root causes and provide young people with the skills and resilience to lead productive lives free from violence.

This strategy sets out how we will work with local people to support the people and places that they care about. It is about recognising that some of our biggest challenges as a borough - such as the threat from serious violence - are beyond the scope of what a Council can do alone. These challenges require the pooled knowledge, skills and ideas of local people, voluntary community groups and other public sector bodies – all working together for Bexley. That's why we're committed to doing everything we can to turn the tide and provide the next generation with the brighter future they deserve. We can only achieve this by getting everyone who has a stake in that future to come together in coordinated way, led by the evidence.

The Bexley Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) have been carrying out work related to serious violence over the last few years, some of which includes a gang's profile that assisted with directing partnership resources. We also successfully developed the Serious Violence Prevention Panel (SVPP) and Missing meeting, linking in with adults and children's safeguarding. This sharing of information and multi-agency approach toward individuals susceptible to becoming victims and/or perpetrators, is vital to recognising and tackling serious violence in the borough.

As a partnership we will not be complacent on this issue and will continue to commit to prioritising this area of work to remain one of the safest London boroughs.

1. Introduction

1.1. This is the Serious Violence Strategy for the Bexley Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) for 2019. It outlines the BCSPs response to the rise in serious violence in the London Borough of Bexley. The strategy will remain a fluid document being reviewed annually and updated with emerging serious violence issues taken from both the Joint Strategic Assessment (JSA) and intelligence from partners.

1.2. The overarching aim of this strategy is to reduce serious violence incidents in the borough and help support those victims, offenders and communities involved. This will increase resilience, promote better life choices and empower residents to take more ownership of their neighbourhoods.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. The Home Office published their Serious Violence Strategy on 9 April 2018; it sets out the government's response to serious violence and recent increases in knife crime, gun crime and homicide. It also gave the following overview stating:

2.2. 'Law enforcement is a very important part of the Serious Violence Strategy, but it also looks at the root causes of the problem and how to support young people to lead productive lives away from violence. Helping to catch young people before they go down the wrong path, encouraging them to make positive choices'.

2.3. Bexley's Serious Violence Strategy and the associated action plan incorporate the ethos of the themes in the national strategy, whilst recognising that we need to deliver a bespoke response in the borough. It is recognised that 'one size doesn't fit all' and actions should be tailored correspondingly to the risks posed.

2.4. To help to understand and tackle the rise in violence against the person offences in the borough, this BCSP response encompasses four main themes:

- Gangs
- Serious Youth Violence
- Weapon Enabled Violence and
- Organised Crime Networks

2.5. Each of these areas will receive a similar approach and recognises that serious violence originates from various sources for different reasons. However, there is still a degree of cross-cutting behaviours and criminality between these themes which need to be understood to understand how serious violence is tackled holistically.

2.6. We will build on the excellent partnership working between statutory and non-statutory organisations (including the voluntary/community sector) within the BCSP. Maximising these links and working more collaboratively on serious violence at a time when partners are facing a reduction in resources will be a challenge for all.

2.7. Communities and local partnerships will be at the heart of our response. This issue must be understood and owned locally so that all the relevant partners can play their part, galvanising the local response to tackling serious violence and ensure that we are reflecting local challenges within our plans. Cross-referencing to the Councils 'Connected Communities Strategy' will help us to thread this way of thinking and engagement into our partnership work.

2.8. Commissioning innovative projects from specialist providers that support victims, perpetrators, and their families; is key to help prevent future victims and offenders. Peer on peer mentoring for example will be explored as a better way for young people to engage, form positive relationships and make better life choices.

2.9. We stress the importance of early intervention to tackle the root causes of serious violence and steer young people away from crime in the first place, while giving the police the support they need to tackle violent crime.

2.10. The strategy includes a knife crime & serious violence action plan tailored to the specific issues in the borough and any emerging threats from other boroughs. It focuses on early intervention and prevention, enforcement, support and information sharing. The plan is 'owned' and monitored in Bexley by a newly formed Strategic Violent Crime Delivery Group. It's led by a CSP board member and comprises of both statutory and non-statutory members.

2.11. The newly formed South East Police BCU from the Metropolitan Police Service brings Greenwich, Lewisham & Bexley boroughs together into one Basic Command Unit (BCU). This has already demonstrated itself as a useful format in which to further share information, best practice and emerging trends in the three boroughs around all crime issues including serious violence. It also ensures that resources are deployed across the BCU based on threat, risk and harm to individuals and the community.

2.12. Bexley has sat within the top 6 of the 'safest' London boroughs based on total crime offence statistics since 2011. This is an enviable position that we don't wish to fall from, despite the current challenges that all boroughs face around serious violence. This strategy aims to keep us in that position by tackling all aspects of serious violence in collaborative and innovative ways and will very much include the local community on that journey.

NB: Background information on crime data, associated links referenced in the strategy and a glossary are in the attached appendices.

3. A Public Health approach to violent crime

3.1. We will be developing a 'public health approach' to tackling violent crime. This term has various interpretations but essentially means an approach that is evidence, partnership, community and long-term based.

3.2. The approach was implemented in Scotland where they tackled alcohol related serious violence. It resulted in a 60 per cent decline in the murder rate in Glasgow. Between 2011 and 2016, not a single person under the age of 20 was killed with a knife in Glasgow. In 2017, not one fatality involving a knife took place anywhere in Scotland. The Glasgow-based Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) has proven that long-term strategy plans are required to have an impact on the reduction of knife crime.

3.3. Several boroughs have adopted a public health approach to tackling serious youth violence and the aims will include:

- a focus on harm reduction, primary prevention & early years
- collaboration from different fields including police, local authority, health, education and voluntary sectors
- analysing underlying causes, examining what works & developing solutions

3.4. It is recognised that the ‘Glasgow model’ is not simply a ‘lift and shift’ approach that will work instantly in London due to the differences in the two cities. It is however, one that has been championed by the London Mayor as good practice and a long-term strategic approach to tackling serious violence. It is therefore a way of working that will be developed through the knife crime & serious violence action plan for delivery in Bexley.

3.5. This approach aligns closely with the new Public Health ‘Prevention Strategy’ by tackling these serious violence issues with a whole system approach, using evidence based interventions over a prolonged period.

4. Our Community

4.1. Working more closely and collaboratively with the local community will play a crucial part in the success of this strategy. Whether this is greater communication through community meetings or organised joint weapon sweeps with the police, it is important to include residents on our journey to tackle serious violence in our borough.

4.2. By invoking a community-led response, we seek to empower and support communities to tackle (where appropriate) the issues in their own communities through discussion and collaboration; there is no issue of buy-in or the feeling that the council owns the work – they own it from day one. The council only enables the discussions to happen and supports with learning opportunities and advice for further funding.

4.3. Because the prevalence and sources of serious violence can vary across different boroughs, it is important to understand the ‘local picture’ and plan how to tackle it accordingly. That’s another important reason to have more connected and meaningful conversations with the community than we may have had previously, and certainly prior to a serious violent incident occurring rather than generally only afterwards.

4.4. The residents within our community often know what the trigger points are for tension and violence, why a minority of young people gravitate to gangs and what is lacking within the area that could help mitigate those triggers.

4.5. Serious violence is not an issue that will be greatly reduced overnight because of several factors (some simply out of everybody’s control). But by including local communities from the beginning of our approach, we can start that journey together with a clear path of what will help and why. Having that clear local picture will assist strategic planning and resourcing for all partners involved and make best use of the public resources that are being made available to us to tackle serious violence.

5. Knife Crime & Serious Violence Action Plan

5.1. [The London Knife Crime Strategy](#) was launched on the 27th of June 2017 and within it was a commitment for every London borough to have a bespoke knife crime action plan created in partnership with the Met Police.

5.2. With the recent launch of the [Met Police Violent Crime Task Force](#), there was an opportunity to refresh local plans to achieve a single consistent action plan format across London. The refresh sought to achieve a current position statement, an ability to understand the gaps and areas of commonality\purpose across each BCU.

5.3. Three 'minimum standards' have been included with the intention of seeking a commitment from the BCSP to undertake the following:

- CSP Board meeting agendas to include Knife, Gun and Serious Violence Performance, habitual knife carriers, community tension monitoring and stop and search as standing items.
- Monthly Violent Crime Partnership Tasking Meetings with Violence Intel Briefing. Tasking of partnership services to target offenders and hotspot locations; maintain and/or review Events Tracker to identify and manage events of risk, monitor and review community tensions.
- Analysis - Community Safety Joint Strategic Assessment to include

5.4. A template action plan has been developed to support the refresh and encompasses seven themed areas:

- Governance
- Targeting lawbreakers
- Keeping deadly weapons off our street
- Protecting and educating young people
- Standing with communities, neighbourhoods and families against knife crime
- Supporting victims of knife crime
- Offering ways out of crime

5.5. Each of these themes contains associated actions and outcomes alongside named CSP leads and the lead organisation/s including the Police, Local Authority, National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC).

5.6. The plan explains what actions are currently being done by the CSP and what can be introduced easily and quickly in addition. Some actions are generic across the new Police BCU, whilst some will be bespoke to CSPs.

5.7. As the intention is to gain an understanding of the gaps that currently exist, CSPs have been asked to also include potential 'developing actions' to provide an indication of any local bespoke aspirational approaches that could be further developed in time and following consultation with partners.

5.8. The plan is essentially the delivery arm of this strategy and is 'owned' and monitored in Bexley by the newly formed Strategic Violent Crime Delivery subgroup. They report quarterly with 'RAG' rated action plan updates to the BCSP Board where risks and issues can be raised further. These updates are also monitored by the Mayor's Office for Police & Crime (MOPAC).

6. School 'inclusion' policy

6.1. There is a clear link between school exclusions and vulnerability/propensity to youth violence. Having a school 'inclusion' rather than 'exclusion' policy in relation to violence/weapon carrying in schools is currently being developed.

6.2. This approach will seek to keep young people involved in carrying knives (for example) in mainstream education where it is deemed appropriate and safe to do so. To achieve this, robust risk assessments and bespoke action plans would be put in place and this approach is working well in other boroughs.

6.3. One local authority study into a cohort of school age knife crime perpetrators showed that none of the young people were in mainstream education. Neither did they have access to a positive role model.

6.4. The risk of a zero tolerance approach can inadvertently place the young person involved in greater risk. For example, if a child caught in possession of a knife (even if it's for their own protection) is excluded and placed in alternative education provision; they could then be schooled alongside known perpetrators and be susceptible to grooming or potentially be a victim of violence.

6.5. The CSP will agree a joint programme of action with schools to include knife crime and safeguarding plans as no schools are immune to the risk of this form of violence. A strong focus on primary aged young people in the transitional stage between years 6 and 7 is a key point at which to embed a positive narrative against violent crime and risk taking behaviour before they become subject to greater peer pressure and influence from others.

6.6. Further intervention will be targeted toward local colleges where a small proportion of the cohort is of an age where they can be/already be deeply involved with gangs, serious violence or organised crime. The prevalence of 'County Lines' is not currently large in the borough, but is an issue that we should be aware of to try and avoid the area becoming a more established base or destination for organised criminal networks.

6.7. With County Lines comes the risk of 'cuckooing' where vulnerable people can be exploited by criminal gangs in their own homes. We are mindful of the safeguarding issues relating to this and sharing of information on those vulnerable people that could be susceptible to cuckooing is a prevention tool that will help reduce further victims of crime. This would also be the case for potential victims of [Modern Day Slavery](#) (MDS) where circumstances can be similar when vulnerable people are exploited.

6.8. As a local authority, Bexley will map out our current response and co-ordination to County Lines and those children that are 'missing' because of their exploitation into criminality. Many of those young people involved are known to Children's Social Services, will have several Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and be subject to involvement from more than one department/organisation. This mapping exercise will give a clearer picture of what resource, management and training implications the authority and wider partnership face when case working these individuals.

6.9. Because of the prevalence of ACEs in both victims and perpetrators of serious violence, it is recognised that a [Trauma Informed Approach](#) (TIA) is an important means to assisting with their personal 'recovery' and diversion away from further criminality or victimisation. This is increasingly being used when assessing young people (and adults) with complex needs, resulting in more bespoke action plans and greater understanding of potential triggers that the individual is susceptible to.

7. Co-ordinated Communications

7.1. The success of any Community Safety Partnership and the co-ordination of crime reduction messages can be greatly enhanced with an inclusive and planned communications approach. We need to promote the successes of the partnership, ensuring that residents who are traditionally part of harder to reach/engage cohorts; receive the consistent messages that the partnership are trying to promote (especially those most vulnerable in society).

7.2. Similarly, we need to reach those involved in criminality to try and challenge their behaviour, offering ways out of crime and show that there are alternatives to what is/could become an entrenched lifestyle. This communication needs to be done using a variety of different media appropriate to the targeted audience. This could include, but not be restricted to:

- social media
- press releases,
- newsletters,
- leaflet drops,
- assertive outreach,
- community engagement events and
- community meetings.

7.3. A more collaborative communications approach from the BCSP will be developed over the coming months and will be a fundamental (yet underused) tool at our disposal for tackling serious violence and countering the negative narrative and perception on this subject. Moreover, an open and transparent information sharing process between partner agencies and crucially communities; should be fostered and encouraged to promote mutual trust and confidence across all priorities.

Appendix A – Serious Violence crime data and context

This appendix will be refreshed annually and contributed to in part by the JSA. Annual comparable data will be compared to gauge the direction of travel of serious violence offences and provide evidence on the impact of the strategy.

Total knife crime offences in Bexley have increased by 21.9% in the 12 months between November 2017 – November 2018 from 178 to 217 offences. This compares to a London wide increase of 1.2% to 14,560 offences in the same period. The percentage increase in Bexley is partly skewed by the relatively low numbers.

Knife crime ‘with injury’ offences in Bexley have increased by 7.1% from 56 to 60 offences over the period. This compares to a London wide reduction of 10.1% to 4,402 offences.

To put both offence figures for Bexley into context, they represent just 1.5% of the total London knife offence figures in that 12-month period. Not be complacent however, this is a percentage that the CSP don’t wish to see increase and will monitor closely.

Major Crime Category	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	No. Difference on previous year	% Difference on previous year	No. of detections and % 2018	Detection rate % change on previous year
Burglary	1544	1084	1126	1330	1640	+310	+23%	65.4%	-43%
Drugs	790	696	680	511	583	+72	+14%	302.52%	-41%
Robbery	209	175	218	293	323	+30	+10%	31.9%	-25%
Violence Against the Person	3381	3965	4558	5032	5172	+140	+3%	713.14%	-17%

The table above shows year on year comparison data for offences that have a crossover into the serious violence strategy themes. All have seen a rise on the previous year whilst sanctioned detection rates have reduced, so again these will be monitored to gauge the direction of travel.

As mentioned, Bexley is not a named ‘gang borough’ where extra resources have been provided to tackle gangs and serious violence. A consequence of this is that gang activity can be displaced to ‘quieter’ neighbouring boroughs.

However, since the South East BCU was created; Bexley has benefitted from improved joint working with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). This includes enhanced information sharing, data collection and the deployment of resources across all three boroughs based on threat, risk and harm.

Appendix B - Useful Links

[National Serious Violence Strategy](#)

[National Serious Violence Strategy Overview](#)

[Public Health Approach](#)

[Violence Reduction Unit \(Scotland\)](#)

[MOPAC Knife Crime Strategy](#)

[Serious Violence Taskforce](#)

[MOPAC Crime Dashboard](#)

[County Lines](#)

[Cuckooing](#)

[Modern Day Slavery](#)

[Trauma Informed Approach](#)

Appendix C – Glossary of terms

ACES – Adverse Childhood Experiences

BCSP – Bexley Community Safety Partnership

BCU – Basic Command Unit

CRC – Community Rehabilitation Company

CSP – Community Safety Partnership

JSA – Joint Strategic Assessment

MDS – Modern Day Slavery

MOPAC – Mayor’s Office for Police & Crime

MPS – Metropolitan Police Service

NPS – National Probation Service

TIA – Trauma Informed Approach