

Serious Violence Strategy 2022 (refresh)



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Foreword

Councillor Sue Gower, 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 assist young people before they enter the criminal justice system further, encouraging them to make positive choices. This strategy and its action plan stress the importance of early intervention and a trauma informed approach 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 developed the Children at Risk of Exploitation Safeguarding Task group (CREST) Panel which focuses on adolescent vulnerability and risk and includes all aspects of contextual safeguarding.

The CREST panel itself replaces the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation Panel (MASE) and links 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 refresh of the Bexley Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) Serious Violence Strategy for 2022. It updates the BCSPs response to the rise in serious violence in the London Borough of Bexley. The strategy remains 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 increases resilience, promotes better life choices, and empowers 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 set 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 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 better 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 could 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' and

‘Community Champions’ 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 communities, victims, perpetrators, and their families; is key to help prevent future victims and offenders. One to one 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 is supported by a Violence & Vulnerability Reduction Action Plan (VVRAP) tailored to the specific issues in Bexley and any emerging threats from other boroughs. It focuses on early intervention and prevention, enforcement, support, and information sharing.
- 2.11. The plan is ‘owned’ and monitored in Bexley by the BCSP Delivery Group. This group reports to the BCSP Board, comprises of both statutory and non-statutory members and is led by a CSP board member (see 6.8).
- 2.12. The Southeast Police BCU from the Metropolitan Police Service brought Greenwich, Lewisham & Bexley boroughs together into one Basic Command Unit (BCU) in 2018. This has 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.
- 2.13. 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. Highlights from 2021

- 3.1. Crime figures fluctuated substantially over the past twelve months, loosely mirroring the shifts in governmental advice around the pandemic, and the gradual shift back towards a post Covid “new normal.” Some increases have been seen around crime types normally associated with the night-time economy, in particular some rises in violence and alcohol aggravated offending. Overall, however, crime continues to be down across London when compared to 2019 pre Covid levels.
- 3.2. Perhaps predictably, offending trends have also reflected the re-opening of London post pandemic, shifting to respond to the renewed opportunities mentioned above. County Lines activity and the associated gang related violence that results have continued despite MPS and Home Counties forces uniting under Op Orochi to combat this developing risk, which reaches into a number of other areas such as Safeguarding, as those involved continue to target, traffic and exploit children and young people.

- 3.3. The MPS continues to respond to this and other threats to the local community to continue to deliver the overall reduction in serious violence across London, down 17.5% overall on the same year to date offence figures from 2019. Knife crime in particular shows the effect of this continued push, demonstrating a 30.3% reduction overall, and highlighting the benefits of the more holistic, partnership focused, and intelligence drive approach undertaken by the VSU's and other local and pan London units. Examined more locally, Bexley has seen an overall reduction in serious violence, down 17.9% on 2019 figures, and a reduction on knife crime of 24.7% percent.
- 3.4. From a community safety team perspective, the prevalence of county lines activity continued from 2020 into 2021 but there was a reduction in this in the second half of 2021; this may be due to increased cross-borough working across the Southeast of England allowing for early detection and intervention, in addition to the more wide-spread use of Modern Slavery legislation to pursue offenders at the top of the chain.
- 3.5. 2021 allowed more focus on community and victim engagement due to successful funding for a Violence, Risk and Exploitation Co-ordinator as well as a Hate Crime and Modern Slavery Officer. This increased capacity within Community Safety Services lead to a refreshed community offer for victims, as well as a focus upon perpetrators, of serious violence.
- 3.6. The involvement of the community in the response to serious violence and the disruption of CCE, particularly in LSOA areas, has led to more joined up work between statutory services and the third sector as well as an increased intelligence flow allowing for earlier intervention. A Parent/Carer Network has been implemented in order to better support families dealing with the complexities of young people at risk of contextual harm and this has been well received.
- 3.7. Ongoing work with commissioned third sector providers has allowed a widening of the scope of offer for victims of CCE. During 2021, we changed provider, and this has allowed for greater diversionary work to take place to prevent serious violence. A commissioned, deployable outreach bus has allowed for increased and focused youth work in areas of greater risk as well as providing flexibility to respond to community incidents.
- 3.8. Increased resources in the borough, including two full-time police officers dedicated to LBB, has been greatly welcomed.
- 3.9. The Borough's MACE protocol, CREST, is working well in terms of providing scrutiny and advice for high risk cases but there is still work to be done around referral pathways and professional understanding of the purpose of the meeting.
- 3.10. As restrictions were eased further and all but removed, we saw the amount of offences and the seriousness of them increase (especially ASB reports). With more individuals being worked with by the ASB team in Community Safety and referrals to the Children at Risk of Exploitation Safeguarding Task group (CREST) Panel; which focuses on adolescent vulnerability and risk and includes all aspects of contextual safeguarding. The CREST panel itself replaced the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation Panel (MASE).
- 3.11. Whilst the physicality of face to face interaction with clients and professionals has been greatly reduced, limited engagement has continued using innovative ways of working. Information is still shared, and multi-agency case management of those people involved with serious violence also continues.
- 3.12. Project proposals put forward to MOPAC for the 2022-25 funding round of the London Crime Prevention Fund (LCPF) again strongly reflected the risks posed to individuals and the community

around serious violence. This remained a broad whole system approach by funding projects that spanned education, prevention, early intervention as well as enforcement and support.

3.13. The quarter 2 VVRAP update was submitted to MOPACs Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in December and continues to be promoted as best practice as an example of a collaborative approach with realistic and deliverable outcomes.

3.14. There has been a number of funding opportunities successfully bid for in the past 12 months through the VRU and their performance will be reflected in next year's refresh. These include:

- £5,000 for a preventative critical incident fund used for an art project and outreach work
- £50,000 for the continuation of the Violence, Risk & Exploitation (VR&E) Coordinator role
- £31,000 for evaluation of the Parent/Carer network programme run by Bexley Moorings
- £68,000 for a Capacity Building to Support Incident Response in the Community project

We were unsuccessful in our bid for the Safer Streets 3 Fund, but the 4th round bidding window is due to be open across March/April 2022.

3.15. The BCSP Delivery group will work closely with the Public Health to formulate a coordinated response to the governments recently published 10 year drug strategy. The drugs market is widely recognised as one of the main drivers for serious violence and organised criminality.

3.16. With regards to further implementation of this strategy, the priority for 2022 is firmly linked to the continuation of the excellent work commenced by the VR&E role earlier in the 2021. This focussed on embedding the new CREST arrangements ensuring that the cohort previously serviced by the Serious Violence Panel were integrated into it. It also ensured that community engagement was commenced with the intention to engage with local community groups, gathering evidence on the local issues around violent crime and promoting multi-agency working and access to support services for families, victims, and perpetrators of serious violence.

3.17. Community engagement was the final, but one of the most important aspects of the strategy yet to be realised. This had been hampered by a reduction in resources as well as complications brought about due to Covid-19. However, during 2021 improved links have been made, and conversations had, that resulted in a greater understanding of the 'local picture' working more collaboratively with communities and groups in Bexley to help tackle serious violence.

4. A 'Public Health' approach to violent crime

4.1. We have developed a 'public health' or 'whole system' approach to tackling violent crime. This essentially means an approach that is evidence, partnership, community and long-term based. This is commonly also referred to as a 'Public Health' approach, but it does not place a responsibility on Public Health teams to take the lead on tackling violent crime.

4.2. The blueprint for this approach can be seen broadly across the thematic areas of the VVRAP which was very favourably reviewed in both July and December 2020 by MOPACs (VRU) as an example of a collaborative approach with realistic and deliverable outcomes.

4.3. 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.

- 4.4. Many boroughs have now adopted a whole system approach to tackling serious youth violence and the aims 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
- 4.5. 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 has been developed through the VVRAP for delivery in Bexley.
- 4.6. This approach aligns closely with the Public Health ‘Prevention Strategy’ by tackling these serious violence issues with a whole system approach, using evidence based interventions over a prolonged period.

5. Our Community

- 5.1. Working more closely and collaboratively with the local community plays 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.
- 5.2. 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 then no issue of buy-in or the feeling that the council owns the work – they own it from day one. The council enables the discussions to happen and supports with learning opportunities and advice for further funding.
- 5.3. 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.
- 5.4. 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.
- 5.5. 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.

- 5.6. Community engagement is the last remaining area of this strategy now being implemented and is being driven through the BCSP Strategic Delivery Group. By discussing with all partners how best to engage with existing community groups such as faith leads and resident forums, a picture can be produced that will help evidence local issues, target resources and commission appropriate projects while working with and taking the community on this journey.

6. Violence & Vulnerability Reduction Action Plan

- 6.1. 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 violence reduction action plan created in partnership with the Met Police.
- 6.2. With the 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.
- 6.3. 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 Serious Youth Violence, Knife and gun enabled crime (to be refreshed annually)
- 6.4. A template action plan has been developed to support the refresh and encompasses seven themed areas:
- Governance
 - Targeting lawbreakers
 - Keeping deadly weapons off our streets
 - Protecting and educating young people
 - Standing with communities, neighbourhoods, and families against knife crime
 - Supporting victims of knife crime
 - Offering ways out of crime
- 6.5. Each of these themes contains associated actions and outcomes alongside named CSP leads and the lead organisation/s including the Police, Local Authority and National Probation Service (NPS).
- 6.6. The plan explains what actions are currently being done by the CSP and what can be introduced easily and quickly. Some actions are generic across the Police BCU, whilst some will be bespoke to CSPs.
- 6.7. As the intention is to gain an understanding of the gaps that currently exist, CSPs have also been asked to 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.

- 6.8. The plan is essentially the delivery arm of this strategy and is 'owned' and monitored in Bexley by the BCSP Strategic Delivery group. They report quarterly with 'RAG' rated action plan updates to the BCSP Board where risks and issues can be raised further. These updates which are monitored by the Mayor's Office for Police & Crime (MOPAC) are regularly reviewed and best practice shared among other local authorities.

7. School 'inclusion' policy

- 7.1. There is a clear link between school exclusions and vulnerability/propensity to youth violence. School behaviour policies can be very powerful when supporting inclusion, particularly in relation to violence/ weapon carrying in school. A focus on robust risk assessment which can enable schools to keep young people involved in carrying knives in mainstream education where it is deemed appropriate and safe to do so.
- 7.2. 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.
- 7.3. 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 is excluded this increases their risk of disengagement from education and the development of potentially new associations with other at risk children, recognising that the distinction between perpetrator and victim can be blurred and inconsistent over time.
- 7.4. The BCSP has agreed a joint programme of action with schools to include knife crime in 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.
- 7.5. Service providers have been commissioned through the London Crime Prevention Fund (LCPF) to deliver at primary school level in Bexley and VRU funding has helped tackle risks associated with fixed term and permanent exclusions in some secondary school settings.
- 7.6. 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.

8. Key considerations

- 8.1. The prevalence of '[County Lines](#)' is not currently large in the borough but is an increasing issue that we are aware of and try to avoid the area becoming a more established base or destination for organised criminal networks. With County Lines comes the risk of '[cuckooing](#)' where vulnerable people can be exploited by criminal gangs in their own homes.
- 8.2. 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 Slavery](#) (MS) where circumstances can be similar when vulnerable people are exploited. The Community Risk

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (CR MARAC) is an appropriate panel where some of those identified are best referred to for support services.

- 8.3. 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 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.
- 8.4. 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.

9. Co-ordinated Communications

- 9.1. 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 aim 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).
- 9.2. Similarly, we aim to reach those involved in criminality to assist with challenging 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.
- 9.3. A more collaborative communications approach from the BCSP has been developed and is a fundamental 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 is 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 remained relatively stable over the past two years with a total of 165 offences in 2021 and 164 offences in 2020. This is a reduction on the 207 knife crime offences in 2019. There has been a decrease of knife crime offences in London of 9.3% in 2021 (10,761 offences) compared to 2020 (11,864 offences).

Knife crime ‘with injury’ offences in Bexley have reduced by 9.4% over the past three years from a total of 53 offences in 2019 to 48 offences in 2021. We have seen a 4.0% decrease in the past year (48 offences in 2021 compared to 50 in 2020). In London, the number of knife crime ‘with injury’ offences have remained relatively stable with 3205 offences in 2020 and 3208 offences in 2021.

To put both offence figures for Bexley into context, they represent just 1.5% of the total London knife offence figures in 2021. Not being complacent however, this is a percentage that the CSP don’t wish to see increase and will monitor closely.

| Major Crime Category | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | No. Difference on previous year | % Difference on previous year |
|-----------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Burglary | 1616 | 1967 | 1761 | 1030 | 757 | -273 | -26.5% |
| Drugs | 511 | 593 | 741 | 826 | 905 | +79 | +9.6% |
| Robbery | 293 | 323 | 383 | 309 | 188 | -121 | -39.2% |
| Violence Against the Person | 5032 | 5176 | 5308 | 5309 | 5346 | +37 | +0.7% |

The table above shows year on year comparison data for offences that have a crossover into the serious violence strategy themes. In 2021, we have seen the highest percentage change for Burglary and Robbery offences with a reduction of 26.5% and 39.2% respectively (compared to 2020). This marked reduction in Burglary for 2020 & 2021 is due to less people leaving their homes during lockdown and there has been an increase in Stop & Search which would explain the rise in Drug offences. We have seen a slight increase in Violence Against the Person offences in 2021 with 5346 offences, compared to 2020 (5309 offences) and 2019 (5308 offences).

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 Southeast 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 Slavery](#)
- [Trauma Informed Approach](#)
- [London Datastore](#)
- [10 year drug strategy](#)

Appendix C – Glossary of terms

- ACEs – Adverse Childhood Experiences
- BCSP – Bexley Community Safety Partnership
- BCU – Basic Command Unit
- CCE – Child Criminal Exploitation
- CREST – Children at Risk of Exploitation Safeguarding Task Group
- CSP – Community Safety Partnership
- JSA – Joint Strategic Assessment
- LCPF – London Crime Prevention Fund
- LSOA – Local Super Output Area
- MASE – Multi-agency Sexual Exploitation
- MS – Modern Slavery
- MOPAC – Mayor’s Office for Police & Crime
- MPS – Metropolitan Police Service
- NPS – National Probation Service
- TIA – Trauma Informed Approach
- VRAP – Violence Reduction Action Plan
- VRU – Violence Reduction Unit
- VSU – Violence Suppression Unit