

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Report Title Serious Violence Strategy: A partnership approach to keeping our young people safe from violence

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Cabinet portfolio Councillor Limbajee,
Portfolio Lead Member for
Community Safety



Report author/
Contact details Dan Greaves, Corporate Director of Community Safety
(Daniel.Greaves@walthamforest.gov.uk)

Cheryle Davies, Assistant Director for Community Safety
(Cheryle.Davies@walthamforest.gov.uk)

Rebecca Teers, Community Safety Strategy Manager
(Rebecca.Teers@walthamforest.gov.uk)

Neighbourhoods and Environment Directorate

Wards affected All

Public access Open

Appendices Appendix 1: Serious Violence Strategy [DRAFT]
Appendix 2: Equalities Screener

1. **Summary**

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to introduce our public-facing ‘Serious Violence Strategy: A partnership approach to keeping our young people safe from violence’. This strategy sets out how we are taking a cross-cutting, integrated approach to tackling serious violence, particularly knife crime among our younger residents, to build safer communities and neighbourhoods for all.

1.2 This strategy follows the publication earlier this year of our [strategic response](#) to the government’s Serious Violence Duty (SVD). This duty legally requires public sector organisations to work together to tackle and prevent serious violence. Our response included a Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) which provided in-depth analysis of the patterns and trends of violence in Waltham Forest and set a clear direction for the focus of our new, public facing strategy.

2. **Recommendations**

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1.1 Note the commitment and actions to tackle serious violence, particularly knife crime, among our younger residents; and
- 2.1.2 Agree the draft 'Serious Violence Strategy: A partnership approach to keeping our young people safe from violence'.

3. **Proposals**

Background

- 3.1 Earlier this year we published our strategic response to the government's Serious Violence Duty (SVD) which legally requires public sector organisations to work together to tackle and prevent serious violence. This included a Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA), providing in-depth analysis of the patterns and trends of violence in Waltham Forest, and a Serious Violence Duty Strategy, clearly setting out our ambition to work with partners to drive down violence and build safer neighbourhoods and communities for all.
- 3.2 Our SVD strategy was developed in partnership with the police, VCS and a range of statutory and non-statutory partners, and involved extensive engagement with residents, including our young people with lived experience of the criminal justice system. It set out our shared commitments to prevent and respond to serious violence in Waltham Forest, which, for the purpose of the duty, was defined by the Mayor's Office Police and Crime (MOPAC) as "any violence and exploitation affecting young people under the age of 25, including domestic abuse, and sexual violence".
- 3.3 Our SVD Strategy, published in January 2024, responded directly to the national legislative requirements set out in the duty. Since then, we have taken the content and translated it into a more succinct, accessible, impactful resident-facing strategy which we are sharing in draft at Appendix 1.
- 3.4 Our public-facing serious violence strategy goes beyond the legal obligations, setting out for residents our partnership commitment to driving down serious violence, and clearly articulating the change they can expect to see, and how we will achieve it.
- 3.5 The strategy will be professionally designed and the final version will be shared with Cabinet in early September ahead of publication.
- 3.6 The specific focus of our resident-facing strategy is to reduce serious violence, particularly knife crime, among our under 25 years olds. This focus is informed by detailed analysis of local patterns of violence and its impact on residents and communities.

Serious Violence in Waltham Forest

- 3.7 In Waltham Forest, crime and violence are consistently reported as a top concern by our residents, with knife crime, the crime type residents are most worried about locally.
- 3.8 While we have lower rates of recorded violent offences overall than most similar boroughs, knife crime is a critical exception, with levels of

knife crime with injury among under 25s (our key metric) stubbornly above the average of statistical neighbours.

3.9 Through in-depth analysis of local data and insight, we have developed a rich understanding of how serious violence is experienced locally, which is critical in enabling us to develop a tailored response that is targeted at the specific local issues we are seeking to solve. For example, in Waltham Forest we know from our SNA that:

- The rate of knife crime among young people under 25 years, and especially those under 18 years, is increasing at a faster pace than in similar boroughs.
- Violence is clustered in known 'hot spots' across the borough which include locations within our town centres, and for young people, around and between schools.
- Risk of violence increases at specific times and on particular days of the week. For school age children, violent incidents peak in the two-hour period after the school day finishes.
- Violence is not experienced equally. In the 12 months ending July 2024, young black boys accounted for more than half of knife crime victims despite only making up 20% of our under 18 year old population. We know from national data, that those who live in deprivation or experience childhood adversity such as abuse or neglect, are far more likely to become involved in violence, as victims or as perpetrators.
- Research has also repeatedly shown that gangs and drugs are an important factor in driving the most serious violence, and that tackling gang exploitation and activity must be central to any response if we are to achieve sustained reductions in knife incidents among our younger residents.

3.10 A key finding from our SNA was that while Waltham Forest has a relatively low rate of serious violence overall, knife crime among our younger residents is a particular concern. We have therefore made this the key focus of our new strategy, to reduce serious violence or exploitation among young people under the age of 25, particularly offences involving knives or other weapons.

Our resident-facing Serious Violence Strategy

3.11 Our resident-facing Serious Violence Strategy is built on the premise that it is far better to prevent violence from happening than to react to it after it has. And that by treating violence as a public health issue, our priority is to intervene early to address the underlying risk factors that affect people's likelihood of being impacted by violence, while also taking preventative action when a problem starts to emerge, and responding effectively to mitigate the damaging effects when violence occurs.

3.12 It is structured around four core domains:

- **Strengthen:** Building the resilience of our communities and young people to prevent them being drawn into violence or exploitation.
 - **Support:** Providing early, targeted support to those most vulnerable to violence and exploitation to reduce the risks they face.
 - **Treat:** Ensuring those exposed to violence receive high quality, timely support to aid recovery and divert them from violence
 - **Curtail:** Predicting, preventing, deterring and disrupting acts of violence, responding swiftly when violence occurs to reduce its harmful consequences.
- 3.13 Within each domain, we set out the change we want to see for our communities and how we will get there, with clear outcome-focused statements in a format that is easily accessed by our residents.
- 3.14 The content of our strategy was co-developed with partners. Together, we developed a robust approach to identifying a package of interventions that would have the greatest potential to impact quickly and effectively on driving down serious violence among our younger residents. The process for identifying these initiatives involved:
- Sophisticated mapping and analysis of the data and intelligence in our SNA to clearly define our local problem, in terms of where serious violence occurs, when it occurs and which residents and communities are most 'at risk', so we can develop a response that addresses the causes of violence as well as its consequences.
 - A systematic review of the best available research, including interrogation of the 'gold standard' Youth Endowment Fund's youth violence toolkit, and the findings from LBWF's commissioned research on gangs and serious violence, to build a programme of initiatives founded in evidence of what works, where, and for whom, to maximise the impact of our response.
 - Extensive engagement with partners and residents, particularly young people, to understand their key concerns and work alongside them to design and develop solutions that meet their diverse needs.
 - A comprehensive review of existing interventions across all four domains of our Public Health approach which identified key gaps in our provision in the 'curtail' and 'treat' domains which need bolstering to address the key areas identified in the SNA.
- 3.15 To achieve the aims set out in our SVD Strategy we have secured additional investment to support the delivery of a number of new, key initiatives that will build on our existing package of interventions and help us to achieve sustained reductions in serious violence among our young people. This includes:
- A new dedicated, multi-agency, expert team of specialist case workers to work alongside the police, probation, youth services and VCS partners to address the root causes of violence, and drive

coordinated enforcement activity, curbing gang violence while simultaneously offering gang involved members a safe way out.

- Employing trained chaperones to create 'Safer Routes' for children walking to and from secondary school, present at times and in areas identified as having a heightened risk of violence, helping children to feel safer and mobilising the local community and businesses to provide support.
- Extending and promoting our network of 'safe spaces' to locations across the borough so young people have places they can go to if they feel worried or unsafe, with friendly, welcoming staff trained to provide support and signpost them into relevant services.
- Embedding trained mentors in police custody to engage with young people arrested for violence-related offences and link them into supportive services.

- 3.16 Our existing package of funded initiatives provides us with the critical framework and levers we need to tackle violence in all its forms and drive sustained change for our residents. While we operationalise and embed these strong foundations, we will continue to work across services and with external partners to consider opportunities for pooling resources and securing additional funding to deliver the additional preventative, evidence-based initiatives proposed in our serious violence duty strategy published earlier this year. This includes our ambition to: install CCTV in violence hotspots around schools and colleges; provide bleed control kits and first aid training to young people in community settings; and delivery of a bespoke evidence-based school mentoring programme for children and young people exposed to violence.
- 3.17 Tackling inequality to create a more equal borough where everyone has the opportunity to thrive is a core mission for Waltham Forest. At the heart of our strategy is a commitment to address the entrenched inequalities in how our communities experience serious violence, and make sure the needs of all our residents are heard and considered. Their voices and needs inform the initiatives we have prioritised, and how and where we direct resources to ensure they reach individuals, families and communities who are most deeply affected.
- 3.18 The strategy is underpinned by a detailed action plan which will ensure progress can be routinely monitored and reported on. In addition, we are building review and evaluation across our programmes, enabling us to understand efficacy and impact against clear outcome measures, redesigning or discontinuing those that are under-performing or not delivering value for money.
- 3.19 This thorough monitoring and evaluation framework will allow us to track progress over time and ensure accountability for delivery against our longer-term ambitions: to reduce serious violent crime among our young people, tackle inherent inequalities in how violence is experienced and build a safer borough for all our residents.

4. Options & Alternatives Considered

- 4.1 Our ambitions to address serious violence were published earlier this year in accordance with the legal requirements set out in the government's Serious Violence Duty. The report followed the duty template and serious violence definition provided by MOPAC, detailing our partnership approach, needs assessment, resident engagement and activity already underway to prevent and reduce serious violence.
- 4.2 We know that serious violence, and particularly knife crime, is a key concern for our residents. And while our SVD template met the statutory requirement of the Duty, as a Council, we wanted to go further and design a more impactful strategy for our residents, clearly setting out our shared commitment to tackling serious violence, and the actions we are taking to achieve it.

5. Council Strategic Priorities (and other National or Local Policies or Strategies)

- 5.1 Building safer neighbourhoods where residents feel safe and secure is one of our core borough missions, and a key outcome for this strategy. Embedded at the heart of our strategy are four core principles which are intrinsically linked to our wider borough and council missions: prioritising prevention; adopting a whole system approach across services and partners; being data-led and insight-driven; working with partners and our communities to take whole-system approach violence reduction; and putting equality at the heart of our response.
- 5.2 The Strategy also builds on our legal response to the SVD.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 The Serious Violence Duty Strategy was developed in partnership with a wide range of statutory and non-statutory partners, including the council, police, probation, fire, health and the VCS, engaged through our Violence Reduction Partnership and our strategic community safety partnership board, SafetyNet. Through the publication of our joint strategy, partners have demonstrated their commitment to share data, knowledge, skills and resources to deliver the ambitions set out in the strategy.
- 6.2 We have engaged extensively with residents throughout the development of the strategy, including the demographically representative Citizens Panel on Community Safety, which held discussions to deepen our understanding of residents' concerns; discuss potential ideas and solutions; and to comment on and prioritise proposals. Young people have been pivotal in shaping our response, and through the Youth Independent Advisory Group, Voices in Partnership and Children in Care Council, we have gathered a rich

understanding of the experiences and insights of young people with lived experience of the criminal justice system and the care system, which has directly informed the development of our serious violence programme.

- 6.3 We are also engaging with colleagues across the council to consider opportunities for working more closely with internal services to co-design and commission programmes and activities which will address the known risk factors associated with violence. Consolidating operations across the council around shared priorities and investing in longer-term preventive work is acutely aligned to our public health approach to violence reduction.

7. Implications

7.1 Finance, Value for Money and Risk

- 7.2 There is no financial implication from this paper. The strategy will be delivered within current available budget and the £0.258 million one off funding agreed by Senior Leadership Team on the 30 July 2024.

7.3 Legal

- 7.3.1 Under Section 8 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 the local authority has a duty to collaborate with specified authorities for a local government area to prevent and reduce serious violence in the area and plan to exercise their functions so as to prevent and reduce serious violence in the area. The Serious Violence Duty Strategy complies with the legislative requirements set out in the national duty.

7.4 Equalities and Diversity

- 7.4.1 An initial screening exercise of the equality impact of this decision was undertaken and determined there was no / minimal impact on the Council's equality duty (see Appendix 2).
- 7.4.2 There are stark inequalities in how serious violence is experienced in Waltham Forest, as there are across the UK. In terms of knife crime, we know that residents from black minority groups are disproportionately affected, and that these ethnic disparities are even more pronounced for our young people. We also know from research that people living in areas of high deprivation are significantly more likely to be affected by violence as well as those exposed to adversity and trauma in early life.
- 7.4.3 Consideration of equality and diversity is at the heart of our response to addressing violence. It has informed the initiatives we seek to prioritise, and how and where we direct resources to ensure they reach individuals, families and communities who are most affected by it.
- 7.4.4 We have engaged extensively with young people, including looked after children and those with lived experience of the justice system, to make sure that our approach is led by communities, and that those

most at risk of violence are able to access the support and opportunities they need, helping to keep them safe and secure.

7.5 Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)

7.5.1 **Climate:** N/a

7.5.2 **Health:** Our serious violence strategy is built on a public health approach to reducing violence. With a firm focus on prevention, our approach seeks to improve the health and safety of residents by addressing the underlying risk factors that increase the chances that someone will become the victim or perpetrator of violence. For example, we know that residents who live in deprived areas are at a greater risk of violence, and that by ensuring parents and families have access to the support they need at every stage of their child's development we are building their resilience and reducing the risk of offending in future life.

7.5.3 Our ambition is to develop a trauma informed workforce across our services that understands the impact of trauma on individual's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, and ensures that those who are exposed to violence receive the high quality, timely support they need to aid recovery and divert them from violence.

7.5.4 To mitigate the risks when violence occurs, we will continue to invest in our Accident and Emergency navigator programme that places case workers in Whipps Cross Hospital to develop trusting relationships and provide ongoing support to children and young people with a violence-related injury.

7.5.5 These are just a few examples of how our approach to serious violence is rooted in the consideration of public health and prevention. As we move forward, we, as partners, are committed to continuing to prioritise prevention of the root causes of violence, to drive the long-term reductions in serious violence we are committed to.

7.5.6 **Crime and disorder:** Reducing serious violence is at the heart of our Council approach to community safety. It is a top priority for our residents, and a top priority for our partnership. The link between our Serious Violence Strategy and preventing crime is inherent.

7.5.7 Our vision is to reduce serious violence and exploitation in Waltham Forest, protect our communities from harm, and create safe and secure homes and neighbourhoods. Through the implementation of the comprehensive package of evidence-led initiatives included in our strategy, we will intervene early to reduce residents' risk of being affected by violence, while also taking preventative action when a problem starts to emerge, and responding effectively to mitigate the damaging effects when violence occurs.

7.5.8 Effective review and evaluation is critical to understanding what does and doesn't work. We are embedding evaluation and monitoring across our work programme so we can monitor and report on effectiveness, redesigning or discontinuing projects that are underperforming and identifying opportunities to scale up those that are to maximise our

impact in driving down violence and supporting or residents to feel safer and more secure in their neighbourhoods.

7.6 Council Infrastructure:

7.6.1 There are no direct council infrastructure implications.

Background Information (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

None