

Classification: Public
Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee
Date: 20 January 2022
Reporting officer: Topic Review Group
Subject: Knife and Serious Youth Violence Topic Review

Purpose and summary of the report:

This report provides the Committee with the findings of the Knife and Serious Youth Topic Review and recommendations for future Gravesham Community Safety Partnership (CSP) activity in its multi-agency approach to addressing this issue.

Recommendations:

The Committee is asked to:

- i) Consider and comment upon the findings of the Topic Review Group and on the following proposed recommendations to be submitted to the next Community Safety Partnership meeting in March 2022 requesting that partners:
 - a) Ensure that statistics and supporting contextual information is available to gain a clear understanding of the level and nature of knife and youth crime;
 - b) Review and agree the best means to communicate crime issues with the local community, to keep them informed as to the reality of violent crime locally, perhaps triggered by specific incidents, to build confidence and help to maintain perspective;
 - c) Understand the beneficial role of Neighbourhood Watch and explore opportunities to support the expansion of Neighbourhood Watch within Gravesham.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Terms of Reference for the Knife and Serious Youth Crime Topic Review were agreed in January 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the carrying out of the Review was unavoidably temporarily halted. An update was provided to this Committee in October 2021 and it was agreed that this work could resume under the chairmanship of Councillor Tony Rana. A meeting of the Topic Review Group was then held on 9 December 2021 with the following Members and Council officers in attendance:

Councillor Tony Rana (Chair)
Councillor Derek Ashenden
Councillor Gary Harding
Councillor Elizabeth Ashenden
Simon Hookway (Assistant Director, Communities)
Kath Donald (Strategic Manager, Community Safety, Community Safety Unit)

2. The Topic Review Process

2.1 Prior to the meeting in December the Terms of Reference for the topic review were circulated together with the following documents:

- Note of the Multi-Agency Round Table Topic Review meeting held 6 March 2020
- Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill - Serious Violence Duty Briefing Paper
- Perceptions – press vs reality case studies

2.3 The outcome of a Multi-Agency Round Table meeting that had been held pre-pandemic was noted together with the following actions/recommendations resulting from it:

- The need for closer working with schools;
- Establishment of a multi-agency operational group of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to which agencies could make referrals of young people coming to attention, becoming involved in ASB or who are vulnerable to being drawn into criminality to develop preventative plans for them.
- Creation of a survey/questionnaire for completion by young people to capture young people's views and what they feel would be useful preventative/signposting information for them.
- The value of detached youth work as an important means of engaging with young people on the street and that makes a valuable contribution to preventative work.

2.4 Kath Donald updated the Group on several actions that had taken place in the intervening period since that meeting, specifically:

- Kent Police have re-introduced Police Schools Liaison Officers. Officers for the Gravesham area are expected to be in post in January 2022.
- The Youth Engagement Panel (YEP) has been established as a multi-agency operational Group of the CSP and is now receiving referrals to allow for tailored interventions to be put in place for the young people raised.
- Survey/questionnaire – this could be recommended to be progressed in 2022.
- Gravesham Community Safety Unit successfully applied for funding from the Violence Reduction Unit which has enabled The Gr@nd to provide outreach workers who are directed to locations identified as hotspots by either the VRU, Kent Police or the CSU. This funding was for a 6-month period and would come to an end in December 2021.

2.5 Kath Donald outlined the Serious Violence Duty required by the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill proceeding through Parliament. That places a new duty on partners to work together to tackle serious violence. It requires the Gravesham Community Safety Partnership to develop a strategy that both fulfils statutory obligations and meets the needs of local communities when the Bill is enacted. The Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit is currently preparing a strategic needs assessment that will be reported to the Community Safety Partnership in March 2022. This assessment will provide additional data, including on violent youth and knife crime.

2.6 The group noted the work being prepared to assess the level and patterns of violent crime and specifically commented on the seasonal aspects of violent crime and the impact that Covid has had on the numbers of reported incidents over the last 2 years.

2.7 The group discussed what is regarded as a key issue – that of the perception of youth and knife crime and crime more broadly. It noted that this is very much a problem where the perception of crime is far higher than the incidents of crime indicate, notwithstanding the impact that those incidents that take place have on those involved. Invariably, the frequency of violent incidents is exacerbated by social media.

2.8 Examples of the reporting of knife crime incidents and the facts behind those were circulated prior to the meeting.

- 2.9 Discussion then centred on the best means to counter inaccurate or inflated reporting and the importance of engagement and better communication with communities. This included a discussion as to the role of meetings, such as PACT meetings that used to be held or alternative models of informing the public. The group requested that the issue of communication be explored further, including the potential to review methods used, especially those led by Kent Police to ensure that communities are kept informed. It was suggested that the CSP could review opportunities that could be taken to provide facts and to manage expectations in respect of what actions are being taken.
- 2.10 The group expressed the view that it is important for communities to receive information directly from the Police rather than via social media. There is a need to address that balance.
- 2.11 Kath Donald updated the review group as to the work that is currently being undertaken to prepare a Communication Framework for the Community Safety Partnership. (A final draft of this document is now due to be considered by the CSP at its meeting in January 2021).
- 2.12 Members of the group discussed the role of Neighbourhood Watch and requested information on the coverage of NW across the Borough, how the Watches operate in practice and opportunities for the setting up of additional networks.

3. Recommendations by the Topic Review Group to the Community Safety Partnership

3.1 In concluding the topic review, the following recommendations to the CSP are proposed:

- i) Ensure that statistics and supporting contextual information is available to gain a clear understanding of the level and nature of knife and youth crime.

Both the Annual Strategic Assessment (the 2021 Assessment will be presented at the CSP meeting this month) and the Strategic Needs Assessment currently being undertaken by the Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit, will serve to provide considerable information from across partner agencies and data sources. This will give the Partnership the best analysis of the experience and nature of violent crime that it will have had to date. It will be important to supplement the quantitative data with qualitative data and if possible, engagement or consultation with those perpetrating violent crime as well as victims should be sought. This element of building a clearer and evidenced intelligence picture will help inform the wider initiative of improving communications with the public.

- ii) Review and agree the best means to communicate crime issues with the local community, to keep them informed as to the reality of violent crime locally, perhaps triggered by specific incidents, to build confidence and help to counter a disproportionate fear of crime;

A draft Communications Framework for the CSP is now in the process of being finalised. This will be capable of including a variety of approaches to improve communication with local people tailored to best achieve engagement dependent on the subject and the target audience e.g., social media may be the most effective way of communicating with younger age groups whilst face-to-face or location-based/on-site engagement events may be more easily accessible to older age groups. There will also be a focus on ensuring that communication with local people is timely to maintain public confidence, particularly following any highly publicised incidents or series of incidents affecting a specific neighbourhood.

- iii) Understand the beneficial role of Neighbourhood Watch and explore opportunities to support the expansion of Neighbourhood Watch within Gravesham.

This work will include a mapping exercise to establish the number and distribution of active Watches across the Borough and promotional work in areas where there are gaps.

North Kent Neighbourhood Watch is already a non-statutory partner of our CSP and Kent Police have a Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator covering our area. The presence of Neighbourhood Watch can help to promote feelings of safety within local communities and Watches also a useful means of relaying information via members, effectively acting as another communication route.

4. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 4.1 Terms of Reference Topic Review Knife & Youth Crime -
<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/s63960/2.%20Terms%20of%20Reference%20-%20CD%20Sub%20-%20Knife%20Violent%20Youth%20Crime.pdf>
- 4.2 Note of the Multi-Agency Round Table Topic Review meeting held 6 March 2020.
- 4.3 Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill - Serious Violence Duty Briefing Paper
- 4.4 Perceptions – press vs reality case studies

Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS	
Legal	The Council has a statutory obligation to work with partner agencies to address crime and ASB through the Crime and Disorder Act (CDA) 1998. In addition, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill currently proceeding through Parliament, includes a proposed change to the CDA 1998 (in Part 2, Clause 19 of the Bill) to place a new duty on CSPs to ensure that partners work collectively to prevent and reduce serious violence as a priority.
Finance and Value for Money	None.
Risk assessment	Failure to work with statutory partners with the objective of reducing crime and ASB would mean non-compliance with our statutory obligations. The Crime and Disorder Scrutiny is also legally obliged to have review the activity of the Community Safety Partnership. Failure to meet either of these obligations would lead to lack of public trust and confidence and mean that benefits of multi-agency working to address community safety would be lost.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<i>A data protection impact assessment (OPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <u>personal data</u> or <u>special category data</u> or <u>criminal offence data</u> ? No.
	b. If yes to question a., have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/a
	c. If no to question b., please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk
Equality Impact Assessment	a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? No.
	b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? Yes – resultant work will make a positive contribution in improving personal safety particularly though not exclusively of younger people who are disproportionately affected by knife crime.
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
Corporate Business Plan	Recommendations for future work by the CSP will improve public safety and will contribute to priorities within People and Place in the Corporate Plan.
Crime and Disorder	Recommended actions will directly contribute to the CSP Community Safety Strategy in addressing the strategic priority of tackling violent crime.
Climate Change	None.
Digital/website implications	None.
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	The safeguarding of vulnerable young people and adults is a high priority for the Council and partner agencies; addressing violent crime and developing CSP activity to address knife and youth violence will be valuable reducing the risk of and protecting people against physical harm.