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| Cabinet 11 September 2024 |  TOWER HAMLETS |
| Report of: Ann Corbett, Director for Community Safety | Classification: Unrestricted |
| Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy | |

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| Lead Member | Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities |
| Originating Officer(s) | Leo Hutchinson, Strategy and Policy Manager |
| Wards affected | All wards |
| Key Decision? | Yes |
| Reason for Key Decision | This report has been reviewed and determined as meeting the Key Decision criteria. |
| Forward Plan Notice Published | 4 June 2024 |
| Exempt information | N/A |
| Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome | Priority 6: Empowering communities and fight crime |

Executive Summary

The Serious Violence Duty came into effect in January 2023. Serious violence has a devastating impact on the lives of victims and families. It creates a climate of fear within communities and is extremely costly to society. The legislation requires collaboration between key authorities in a local government area, to prevent and reduce serious violence in that area. Those specified authorities include the Council, the Youth Offending Team, The Metropolitan Police, the Fire Authority, Probation Services and Integrated Care Boards. These agencies are required to work together to share information and target interventions to prevent and reduce serious violence. The agencies responsible are required to form a relevant partnership, agree a local definition of serious violence, produce a serious violence needs assessment and use this evidence base to inform a strategy for the partnership to tackle serious violence. In addition to robust law enforcement to tackle violence the aim is to ensure there is a holistic multi-agency approach to understand the underlying causes and consequences of serious violence, focusing on prevention and early intervention, and informed by a public health led evidence base.

This cabinet report presents the Partnership's Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy. It has been formulated using the evidence base and findings from the Public Health serious violence needs assessment, the recommendations and engagement with professionals and wider consultation with our residents (including children, young people and young adults).

A Partnership Serious Violence Plan on a Page was initially produced in Jan 2024. This plan sets out the key strategic themes as agreed by partners. It has been used to consult with the public, third sector agencies and professionals on the proposed approach to tackling violence and exploitation in Tower Hamlets. This consultation was used to inform the development of the full strategy (Appendix 1).

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy (Appendix 1) which is being brought to Cabinet for adoption by the Council as a "duty holder" and a member of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP).
2. Advise the Community Safety Partnership that robust governance arrangements for the new strategy are put in place to oversee delivery and to ensure there is accountability for all the "duty holders", involved.
3. Advise the Community Safety Partnership that an effective data set is developed to assess performance and will enable constructive challenge across the system.

It is further recommended that the Mayor in Cabinet notes:

4. The existing Violence and Vulnerability Reduction Action Plan (Appendix 2). This plan encompasses the broad spectrum of partnership work and operational delivery that will form the local response to serious violence and exploitation. This will be further developed as part of this range of work.
5. The governance arrangements for the Strategy will be through the statutory Community Safety Partnership Board. However, there are a number of other statutory boards that have responsibility and play a critical role in the delivery of this strategy across the wider system e.g. the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Safeguarding Adults Board and the Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The Council is required as a "duty holder" to fully comply with the legislative framework (Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Act 2022). This sets out the duty for "specified authorities to work together to prevent & reduce serious violence".
- 1.2 Duty holders: local authorities, the Police, youth offending teams, Integrated Care Systems (NHS), probation, and the fire service. Other organisations have a "duty to cooperate" e.g. education establishments.

- 1.3 The new Serious Violence Duty sets out the requirement for localities to develop and implement a partnership strategy to prevent & reduce serious violence in their area.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Failure to adopt the Strategy developed and agreed by all the partners as set out within the statutory duty would mean the Council as a duty holder would be non-compliant with the legislation.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 There are a wide range of violence reduction initiatives, commissioned services and operational activity to tackle serious violence across the system currently. This new strategy acts as the public facing document that captures the breadth of this activity and illustrates the robust local approach to addressing violence, exploitation and vulnerability.
- 3.2 To ensure compliance with the legislation, the Partnership implemented a task and finish working group. This provided leadership and professional expertise to ensure compliance with the serious violence duty and was responsible for the development of the Public Health Needs Assessment, the Strategy and Action Plan. As part of this development work there was a wide range of engagement and consultation with other statutory Boards across the system. Progress was regularly reported to the Community Safety Partnership Board.
- 3.3 A local definition of serious violence was formally agreed at the Community Safety Partnership Board on 20th February 2024. This definition is as follows: *“Any violence and exploitation affecting young people under the age of 25yrs, domestic abuse, sexual violence and hate crime. Within the context of these types of violence, it encompasses homicide, grievous bodily harm, actual bodily harm, rape, assault by penetration, sexual assault, personal robbery, threats to kill and violence against property caused during the commission of one of these offences.”*
- 3.4 A Serious Violence Needs Assessment (Appendix 4) was developed by Public Health to ensure the future strategy and action plan was fully evidence based and incorporated an understanding of serious violence and exploitation at the hyper local level. Some of the key findings from the strategic assessment demonstrated:
 - There are high demands for drugs and drug markets in the borough that are driving violence and exploitation in the borough.
 - Education is a protective factor. School exclusions are a risk factor - our local data showing that those excluded from school are more likely to be boys, and in secondary school particularly in year groups 8-11.
 - There are strong links between speech, language and communications needs and recidivism, with a lower percentage of children achieving school readiness for communication and language skills in Tower Hamlets compared to London and England.

- Most victims of child criminal exploitation (CCE) demonstrated experience/exposure to several risk factors. For example 75% of victims had additional vulnerabilities including poor mental health, learning difficulties or past experiences of abuse and trauma.
 - In 2023 serious violence offences saw peaks in the evening and in the wards of Bow, Mile End, Isle of dogs, and Poplar.
 - There is strong evidence linking deprivation¹, violence and exploitation. Tower Hamlets is the 6th most deprived borough in London based on the Crime Domain. This is data from the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IoMD).
- 3.5 A Serious Violence Plan on a Page was developed to provide a high-level summary of the Partnership's agreed strategic themes and activity to address serious violence. Both the Plan on a Page and the Public Health Needs Assessment were required to be submitted to the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) in January 2024. The London Mayor as Police and Crime Commissioner oversees the development and implementation of the duty across London boroughs.
- 3.6 Since then, a more detailed strategy has been developed to provide insight into what all the duty holders and partners will collectively do to address identified local violence and exploitation. The strategic themes, aims and objectives that have been developed and agreed are summarised below:
- Prevention and Early Intervention
 - Safer Spaces – taking a contextual safeguarding approach to risks outside the home for children.
 - Disrupting, pursuing and managing offenders who pose a risk to children and adults.
 - Supporting victims of violence.
 - Safeguarding those at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation.
 - Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls.
- 3.7 The Public (including children and young people), professionals and the voluntary and community sector have been consulted on:
- The local approach to tackling serious violence.
 - Their views on violence in Tower Hamlets.
 - The proposed approach professionals outlined is on the Plan on a Page (Appendix 3).
 - Personal experiences (or the experiences of those they know) within the context of violence and exploitation.
- 3.8 Those that were consulted and have had a chance to be involved in the development of this critical work, include:
- Stakeholders and partners on the Community Safety Partnership Board
 - The Safeguarding Adults Board
 - The Health and Wellbeing Board

¹ <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/crime-and-income-deprivation/> and <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/full-links-between-poverty-and-violent-crime>

- The Safeguarding Children’s Partnership
- The Youth Justice Partnership Executive Board
- Children and young people via the Youth Council, St Andrew’s Wharf Youth hub (3 sessions were run), a Hackathon Survey
- The Osmani Trust / the Tower Hamlets Island Community Network
- Duty Holders (the Police, the Youth Justice Service, the Youth Service (Young Tower Hamlets), Children’s Social Care Services, the NHS Northeast London Integrated Commissioning Board (NEL ICB), the London Fire Service, Probation)
- Services with a duty to co-operate – Housing Directorate, the Tower Hamlets Voluntary and Community Sector, the Education Division, London East Alternative Provision (LEAP), the Community Safety Division
- Those who live work and visit tower hamlets – Let’s Talk consultation platform, resident’s survey.

3.9 As part of the consultation, we collected qualitative feedback on violence and exploitation, how prevalent it was thought to be and perceptions on how services were doing in their efforts to address these challenging social issues. Some examples of comments, concerns and feedback are set out below:

- “it’s crucial that we advocate for systemic changes that address the root causes of youth violence, including addressing socio-economic disparities, improving access to mental health services, and investing in education and employment opportunities for our youth. Together, we can create a safer and more inclusive environment where our youth can thrive without fear of violence.”
- “Disconcerting that often, nobody is identified after criminal justice investigations for sexual violent crimes.”
- “I think that there aren’t enough spaces for young people to go. On top of that, I think there needs to be more opportunities for young people to gain practical experience and skills, so that they are more likely to work rather than chase money from criminal activity.”
- “On numerous occasion I have had attempts for people trying to steal my bike. And more than often they will be carrying an offensive weapon so you will have no choice but to give them your property. What will be done about this?[...]”

3.10 The combined insights from the online consultation, face-to-face sessions, the youth council engagement, and the Hackathon survey provided a comprehensive understanding of the local views on serious violence and exploitation. Despite the disappointing lower-than-expected online participation, the quality and depth of feedback from “in-person” engagements and the Hackathon survey highlighted the key areas of concern and some potential solutions. More details of the consultation can be viewed in the Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy.

3.11 The Strategy seeks to achieve a number of high-level outcomes. Some of these include:

- Children and young people at risk are effectively protected from harm through prevention and early intervention.
- Less children are criminalised and enter the criminal justice system
- Partners understanding of organised crime groups that affect the local violence and exploitation profile will be better understood and robust law enforcement measures will be taken against them.
- All criminal activity will be disrupted using the full range of available powers, including civil orders, to prevent perpetrators from exploiting vulnerable children and adults.
- There will be fewer victims of violence.
- Victims of violence will be confident in reporting to the Police and statutory agencies.
- A holistic whole-system approach will be taken to tackling violence, working together with residents and communities to foster a shared sense of responsibility towards those most at risk
- Recidivism will be reduced.
- Disproportionate outcomes and drivers for the overrepresentation of people of a black and global majority background in the criminal justice system will be addressed.
- A dedicated stand-alone new Tower Hamlets Council Violence Against Women and Girls and Womens Safety Strategy will be developed and implemented.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Whilst the work that sits underneath this strategy could have potential equalities implications with regards to those who come into contact with enforcement services and the criminal justice system, this is a partnership document focused on ensuring compliance with the statutory requirements set out in the Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Act 2022.
- 4.2 There are no negative or disproportionate impacts arising from the decisions as part of this report for any of the groups listed under protected characteristics. However, there is a recognition that key groups, including boys, those of black and global majority background heritage and those living in deprived communities, are more vulnerable to being either a victim of serious violence or a perpetrator. The strategy aims to strengthen our practice around tackling serious violence by addressing these inequalities. This work will be overseen by the Community Safety Partnership Board and will encompass actions and outcomes that address the disproportion outcomes for women and black and global majority children and adults that have contact with the criminal justice system.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
 - Consultations,
 - Environmental (including air quality),
 - Risk Management,
 - Crime Reduction,
 - Safeguarding.
- 5.2 **Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment** The financial costs of crime in England are substantial, encompassing direct and indirect expenses. Direct costs include law enforcement, judicial processes, and incarceration, while indirect costs cover property damage, healthcare for victims, and lost productivity. The Home Office estimates that crime costs England approximately £50 billion annually. Through implementation of violence and exploitation reduction strategies and preventative work, these financial burdens can be significantly reduced. Effective prevention reduces crime rates, leading to lower costs for law enforcement and the judicial system. It also decreases the need for expensive incarceration and rehabilitation services. Socially, preventative measures improve community cohesion and safety in localised neighbourhoods, enhancing residents' quality of life. Interventions/support, detailed within the strategy, like education, training and employment programs for those who have become involved with violence divert them from criminal activities: reducing long-term costs associated with repeat offending. Additionally, successful prevention efforts result in safer communities, which attract businesses and investors, stimulating local economies. Ultimately, the benefits of implementing a strategy to address violence and exploitation which adopts a whole system approach, not only impacts cost savings, but also fosters a more stable, prosperous, and cohesive society.
- 5.3 The consultation undertaken as part of this work is addressed from paragraphs at 3.8 of this report.
- 5.4 This work has beneficial implications for crime and disorder reduction and safeguarding both children and vulnerable adults given the nature of serious violence and exploitation and those who are most impacted. These are the fundamental principles guiding all aspects of this work and the relevant considerations are contained throughout this report.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 Delivery of the Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy is funded from Public Health Grant (£2.1m) and other external grants (£3.6m). The external grant support is confirmed until March 2025 and if the grants are not renewed alternative funding will need to be secured.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (“the Act” requires collaboration between key authorities in a local government area to prevent and reduce serious violence in the area (s.8 of the Act). Those authorities include the Council, the Youth Offending Team, the Metropolitan Police, and the Fire Authority. This duty also requires them to plan together to exercise their functions so as to prevent and reduce serious violence in the area.
- 7.2 The authorities are required to identify the types of serious violence that occur in the area, identify (so far as possible) the causes of that violence, and prepare and implement a strategy for exercising their functions to prevent and reduce such violence.
- 7.3 In preparing the strategy, the Act requires consultation with each education authority, prison authority, and youth custody authority for the area. The Act does not preclude wider consultation, however.
- 7.4 Once prepared, the strategy must be published, kept under review, and revised from time to time.
- 7.5 In addition to the duty imposed on each authority under s.8 of the Act, s.9 allows that two or more such authority may collaborate with each other to prevent and reduce serious violence in a relevant area. This allows for the possibility of plans that cover more than one local authority area or for partnership working within one local authority area.
- 7.6 The prevention of serious violence also includes preventing a person from becoming a victim of serious violence. “Serious violence” is not specifically defined within the Act, however, which sets out a non-exhaustive list of what constitutes violence. This includes, but is not limited to, domestic abuse within the meaning of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, violence against property, threats of violence, and sexual offences, but specifically excludes terrorism. Whether violence amounts to serious violence requires the authority to take particular account of the maximum penalty that can be imposed for the offence, the impact of the violence on the victim, the prevalence of the violence in the area, and the impact of the violence on the community. It is for the authority to define “serious violence” within those statutory parameters and the touchstone should be that it should be more than trivial. The definition set out in the Strategy meets those requirements.
- 7.7 Section 14 of the Act allows a local policing body for a police area (in London the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime) to assist an authority in the exercise of its functions under s.8 or s.9. Further, s.15 allows for the education authority, the prison authority and youth custody authority to collaborate with the authority with a view to prevent and reducing serious violence in the area.

- 7.8 Section 18 provides that the Secretary of State, if satisfied that an authority has failed to discharge its duty under s.8, may give directions to the authority for the purposes of securing compliance with the duty. This is enforceable, if required, by a mandatory order issued by the High Court.
- 7.9 The authority must have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State pursuant to s.19. Guidance was published on 12th December 2022. As statutory guidance, the Council may depart from it where it considers it appropriate to do so but must have good reasons for so doing.
- 7.10 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the authority, in the exercise of its functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the 2010 Act, to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not, and to foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not (the public sector equality duty (PSED)). The relevant protected characteristics for this report are age; disability gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation. The duty must be complied with at the time that the decision under consideration is made and must be conducted with rigour and with an open mind. It is not, however, a duty to achieve a particular result and there will be decisions that do not give rise to any specific PSED issues. This draft strategy addresses matters and issues that assist in meeting the PSED.
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Violence and Vulnerability Reduction Action Plan
- Appendix 3 - Serious Violence and Exploitation Plan on a Page
- Appendix 4 – Serious Violence Needs Assessment

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- Public Health Serious Violence Needs Assessment
- Equalities Impact Assessment Screening Tool

Officer contact details for documents:

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