



BEDFORDSHIRE
VIOLENCE &
EXPLOITATION
PREVENTION
PARTNERSHIP

SERIOUS VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION STRATEGY

2025 - 2027





Bedfordshire Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy

2025 - 2027

**Our commitment to reducing and preventing serious violence and
exploitation**

We, as conveners and specified authorities under the Serious Violence Duty (the partnership), are committed to working together to prevent and reduce serious violence in Bedfordshire, as set out in this strategy.

Conveners



John Tizard
Police and Crime Commissioner
for Bedfordshire



Cara Gavin
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Foreword

As Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire, I am pleased to endorse Bedfordshire's Serious Violence and Exploitation Response Strategy.

The VERU, which is based in and core to my office, brings together partners from the public and community sectors, to address complex issues of serious violence and exploitation in our county.

I am very pleased to support the transition of the VERU to the VEPP. This signals a step change in ambition and approach.

Tackling these serious issues are core missions in my Police and Crime Plan to make Bedfordshire safer and fairer.

They are also in the plans and strategies of all our VERU and soon to be VEPP partners.

The scale and nature of serious violence cannot be addressed by any one agency alone and requires us to act together with greater purpose. The focus must be on prevention and early intervention tackling the underlying causes of violence not just the symptoms. This requires shared ownership of the strategy, joint working and pooling of resources.

We start to build the future on a strong foundation. Bedfordshire VERU has paved the way to address both the symptoms and the root causes of these challenges from its innovative, trauma informed, and community led approach. The VERU has helped to shape the way we think about but more importantly address violence and exploitation, moving beyond enforcement and towards prevention, early intervention and long-term resilience. We owe much to the VERU team as well as to our partners.

The VERU receives funding from the Home Office but given the impact of the crimes and the causes of the crimes it addresses; I am calling on partners to make additional contributions both financial and in kind. This would demonstrate the strength of the partnership and the commitment to our VEPP.

Let us commit to turning this strategy into action to make Bedfordshire safer and fairer.



John Tizard
Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire

Our serious violence and exploitation strategy on a page



Priority 1	Priority 2
Understanding the picture of serious violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire	Engaging communities with a focus on young people
Outcomes	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Data and information sharing in Bedfordshire is routine, underpinned by clear processes and platforms, and clear in its expectations from partners B. All specified and relevant authorities participate in data and information sharing C. Risk and threat assessments, commissioning, and priorities are evidence-based, leading to a more effective and targeted response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Local communities feel informed and involved in the partnership's response to serious violence and exploitation B. Children and young people are able to feed into the design and delivery of the serious violence and exploitation strategy and the next iteration of the Strategic Needs Assessment, as well as the next iteration of the strategy C. Engagement is tailored to localities, with alignment and exchange of good practice between local areas
Priority 3	Priority 4
Supporting and strengthening local multi-agency partnerships	Prioritising early intervention and prevention
Outcomes	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. The governance for this strategy is clear and well-defined, resting with the SHPB and with clear responsibilities for and agreed by partners B. The governance systems in each of the three local authority areas speak to each other and share information, good practice, and data frequently to support a pan-Bedfordshire response C. All specified and relevant authorities are involved and engaged in partnership arrangements to respond to serious violence and exploitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Referral levels of children and young people into statutory services/interventions and programmes are increased, particularly referrals from education settings, particularly through the implementation of Young Future Prevention Partnerships (YFPP) Panels B. Permanent and 'hidden' school exclusions are reduced through working with pupils around identified needs C. Children not in education have identified and robust intervention points that enable them to access statutory support D. The education sector is mobilised and engaged in multi-agency working

How do we work together?



Introduction

This section sets out why we have a serious violence and exploitation strategy in Bedfordshire and the overarching public health approach that we are taking.

Why are we focusing on serious violence and exploitation?

Serious violence and exploitation have a significant impact on victims, their families and wider communities. A multi-agency approach is essential to understanding the causes and consequences of serious violence, focusing on prevention and early intervention approaches, which are informed by evidence. We increasingly understand the causes of serious violence and exploitation, as well as what works to prevent it, and therefore, a preventative approach is an essential component of this response.

Who is delivering this strategy?

This strategy sets out our pan-Bedfordshire strategy for preventing and reducing serious violence and exploitation, particularly focusing on children and young people under the age of 25 who are affected, led by the Violence and Exploitation Prevention Partnership (VEPP).

Our partnership involves a range of public sector partners. We have committed to working together to deliver this strategy. This partnership comprises the Serious Violence Duty partners (specified and relevant authorities) and the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) team. Together, we will facilitate the Young Futures Prevention Partnerships (YFPP) pilot as part of a policy programme the Government is pursuing to fulfil its ambition to halve knife crime within the decade.

- **What is the Serious Violence Duty?**

Introduced as part of the Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, the Serious Violence Duty requires specified authorities to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence in their local area. This Duty is supported by [national guidance](#), finalised in December 2022.

- **Who are the specified and relevant authorities?**

The specified authorities (responsible for delivering the Duty) are the police, Fire and Rescue Authorities, Integrated Care Boards, Youth Justice Services, Probation and Local Authorities. Relevant authorities (educational settings, prisons and secure estates) are included within the Duty as relevant authorities integral to the local response. We have set out that education are particularly important in the context of this strategy and, therefore, will look to ensure that our colleagues in the education sector are fully engaged and involved.

The voluntary sector, businesses and communities are also wider critical stakeholders. Given our definition of serious violence, we know that working with children and young people will enable us to get a better understanding of how serious violence and exploitation affects them, particularly those with lived experience, and how we can best respond.

- **What is the Violence Reduction Unit team?**

In 2019, the Home Office announced that 18 police force areas (PFAs) would receive funding to establish Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) as part of the Serious Violence Fund, one of which was Bedfordshire. As a result, the Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit was established. VRUs are a key part of the Home Office's Serious Violence Strategy, which was published in April 2018. VRUs aim to provide leadership and strategic coordination to a preventative, whole-system approach to violence reduction, including:

- Multi-agency working
- Data sharing and analysis
- Engaging young people and communities
- Commissioning (and delivering) evidence-based interventions.

- **What are Young Futures Prevention Partnerships?**

The Government has also announced the creation of Young Futures Prevention Partnerships as part of its key policy to offer young people a pathway out of crime. These partnerships, to be piloted first in VRU areas, will bring together the 'right services' to help young people lead safe and healthy lives and provide young people with a safe space where they can be diverted into positive activities.

What is a public health approach?

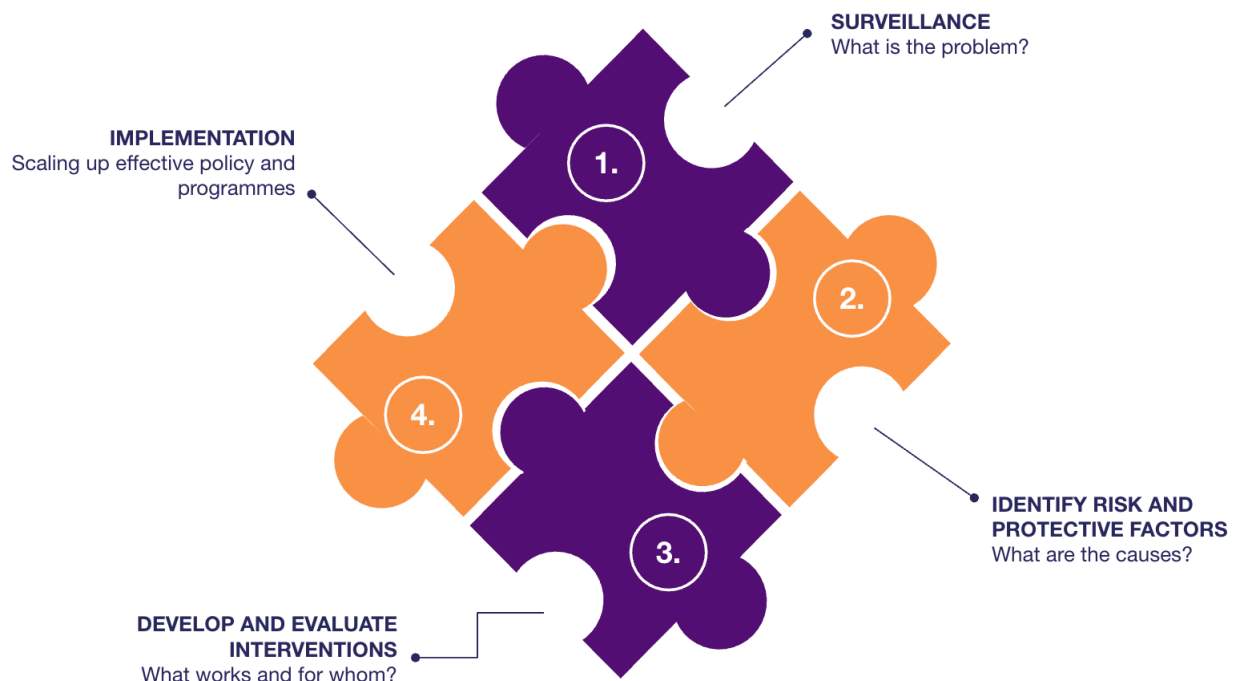
We are taking a public health approach which encourages a whole-system multi-agency approach to preventing serious violence, in a manner that is place-based and evidence-led. This means using data and insights to understand serious violence and its causes locally. It requires collaboration with communities and other partners to generate short and long-term solutions which draw on the evidence of effectiveness. Importantly, this approach focuses on tackling the causes of violence and, as such, focuses on prevention and early intervention activity as well as deploying criminal justice responses where necessary. The underlying principles of a public health approach applied to serious violence are:

- Violence is preventable
- Interventions are guided by evidence where available and developing the evidence base where it is absent, and informed by data
- Focused on a defined population, often with a health risk in common. Victims, perpetrators and sometimes bystanders are all vulnerable to further involvement in violence
- The approach is with and for communities, reflecting the voices and experiences of the communities served. This should also involve taking a trauma-informed approach
- Commitment to a system-wide approach underpinned by mature and committed partnership arrangements
- Focused on long-term impact, acting on the root causes of the problem as well as short-term consequences and emphasising early intervention

A public health approach is underpinned by five key partnership ways of working:

- Collaboration
- Co-production
- Co-operation on data and intelligence sharing
- Developing a counter-narrative response
- Gathering community consensus

The public health process involves a cyclical process of four stages.



Source: Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, 2023 / World Health Organisation

The response to serious violence in Bedfordshire: progress to date

Establishment of the Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU)

In 2019, the Home Office announced that Bedfordshire would receive funding to establish one of 19 Violence Reduction Units VRU. This VRU became Bedfordshire's Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) in 2020. The VERU set a mission to prevent violence and exploitation, reduce the harm caused and thus improve health and wellbeing in Bedfordshire. Bedfordshire VERU produced a response strategy covering 2020 to 2025 (which was then refreshed in 2023). This strategy sets five priorities:

1. Attitudinal change
2. Primary prevention
3. Secondary prevention
4. Tertiary prevention
5. Criminal justice, enforcement, and rehabilitation

Evolution into the Violence and Exploitation Prevention Partnership (VEPP)

In the past year, Bedfordshire's Violence Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) has embarked on a journey to strengthen partnership leadership and collaboration around the response to serious violence and exploitation. A decision has been made to move away from delivering an in-house youth support service to strategic commissioning, including engaging local organisations that complement the work of our statutory partners and respond to identified needs by plugging gaps in service provision. This move will underpin a collaborative, whole-systems approach to addressing serious violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire.

The VERU have therefore played a pivotal role in commissioning targeted interventions that support local and grassroots organisations with deep local knowledge to deliver a range of primary, secondary and tertiary interventions to address serious violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire. The aim of this work has been to foster strong ties with our communities, empowering them to feel supported in addressing the issues they face.

Understanding 'What Works' in violence reduction will be key to the success of this work. The VERU continues to be data-driven and evidence-led, utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods to build a reliable evidence base that not only demonstrates impact but also guides future practice. This focus goes beyond our commissioned services with the publication of Bedfordshire's most recent Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA). A dynamic tool built from partnership data, the SNA provides a complete picture of local needs and challenges, which enables our stakeholders to work with a shared, up-to-date understanding of serious violence in Bedfordshire and be targeted in our response. This will be refreshed to keep the partnership's

understanding of serious violence and exploitation up-to-date so that it can inform commissioning decisions and delivery.

Recognising that no single partner can tackle serious violence and exploitation alone continues to underpin this work, particularly in the context of the Serious Violence Duty. Working as a partnership, supported by a dedicated team, will allow us to streamline efforts, reduce duplication and co-ordinate the delivery of a whole-system response to addressing serious violence and exploitation.

As we continue to evolve and strengthen these partnerships, including identifying how we can influence other areas of work (combatting drugs, domestic abuse, violence against women and girls, safeguarding, etc), the publication of this strategy signifies our joint commitment to collaboration and our collective work to creating safer communities, free from the threat and fear of serious violence and exploitation as the Violence Exploitation Prevention Partnership (VEPP).

The Serious Harm Partnership Board

The accountability of this strategy rests with Bedfordshire's Serious Harm Partnership Board, which was formed in December 2022. This group already consists of partners from all of the specified authorities as laid out in the Duty, including health partners and local authorities in Bedfordshire.

The Serious Harm Partnership Board provides the oversight and governance for four pillars of Pan Bedfordshire activity:

- (1) The Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU)
- (2) The Serious Violence Duty (SVD),
- (3) The 10-year drug strategy
- (4) Organised Crime Gangs and County Lines

The rationale for having a single board, rather than multiple boards, is to ensure that these interlinked strategic agendas are considered together in a whole systems manner.

Progress to date in meeting the Serious Violence Duty requirements

In March 2023, Bedfordshire was assessed as 'ready' to meet the Duty's requirements. This means that Bedfordshire was meeting the expectations set out in the Duty guidance. To progress further, the assessment identified that while there was acceptance in Bedfordshire that the area must exercise functions concerning the Duty, the partnership was not yet sufficiently enabled by a whole-system partnership approach to reducing serious violence. The move from VERU to VEPP should allow us to embrace a more collaborative approach.

To meet the requirements of the Duty, Bedfordshire produced a Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) that was considered 'mature', providing a clear picture of serious violence and exploitation in the area and detailed discussion of risk factors and the evidence base on drivers of violence.

Since then, Bedfordshire VEPP has refreshed its SNA in 2023/2024 in partnership with the Duty's specified authorities and will continue to do so to ensure the picture of serious violence and exploitation is up-to-date. This strategy refresh meets another part of the Serious Violence Duty.

Strategic refresh

The pan-Bedfordshire strategy for serious violence and exploitation was most recently refreshed in 2023. This 2024/2025 strategic refresh is based on engagement with partners across Bedfordshire and a Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy Development workshop held in February 2025 that brought together all specified authorities to determine the partnership's key priorities in tackling serious violence and exploitation moving forward.

Data and Intelligence Group on Violence and Exploitation in Bedfordshire

The Data and Intelligence Group on Violence and Exploitation in Bedfordshire (DIGVERB) was created in 2023 and has facilitated multi-agency data sharing across the partnership in relation to violence and exploitation, the Serious Violence Duty, and drugs and alcohol. There is a Data Sharing Agreement in place with all agencies represented in the group (the police, local authorities, public health, Community Safety Partnerships, and His Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service) to underpin the DIGVERB. It works towards achieving 3 key aims:

1. Bringing all relevant partner agencies in Bedfordshire together and adopting a collaborative approach in data and intelligence
2. Overcoming the barriers to effective data and information sharing
3. Creating a Common Recognised Information Picture (CRIP) – a “one version of the truth”, which can be used to mobilise effective preventative and operational interventions

Key interventions

2024/2025 Serious Violence Duty funding was utilised to support the roll-out of the Accident and Emergency (A&E) Navigators Programme in Bedfordshire. St Giles Trust has embedded specialist youth workers in Emergency Departments in Bedfordshire hospitals which have been identified, via hospital admissions data, as treating high numbers of violent crime victims under the age of 25. The navigators offer support to young people presenting at A&E with concerns relating to serious youth violence and exploitation or where staff believe there is a harm-related vulnerability. This includes onward referrals for support and signposting, as well as an offer of long-term support post-discharge.

With the 2025/2026 funding, The Children's Society will develop sophisticated relationships and effective referral pathways with the key agencies involved in the reduction of criminality and/or exploitation of children and young people in Bedfordshire. Navigators will work intensively with the young people referred by these organisations to achieve and overcome whatever factors may be holding them back from leading a pro-social lifestyle. This project is being match-funded by the Probation Service and will provide a direct referral pathway for under-25s completing Community Payback Orders. In addition, the Navigators will be working closely with Bedfordshire

Police's Missing Person team to provide direct intervention to those young people who have gone missing, as well as our multi-agency serious violence/gangs panels.

Moving forward in line with the new Government priorities

Beyond the Serious Violence Duty requirements, we are looking to align ourselves with upcoming national priorities to pursue sustainability and adapt to the new Government's commitments. In particular, the Government is committed to halving knife crime and violence against women and girls (MVAWG) over the next decade.¹ To future-proof our activities against these incoming policy initiatives, we must continue to look ahead and see where partnership working can be aligned and collaborative.

The government has also announced the creation of Young Futures Prevention Partnerships as part of its key policy to offer young people a pathway out of crime. These partnerships, to be piloted first in VRU areas, will bring together the 'right services' to help young people lead safe and healthy lives and provide young people with a safe space where they can be diverted into positive activities.

The Crime and Policing Bill (introduced 2025) also contains key provisions that will support us in our response to serious violence and exploitation and should consider how to integrate within our local response. Some of these include:²

- Tackling antisocial behaviour by giving police and others stronger powers and strengthening existing ones
- Tougher action on knife crime, by enhancing policing's ability to clamp down on offences including increasing the maximum penalty for the sale of dangerous weapons to under 18s
- Creating a new specific offence for 'cuckooing' and child criminal exploitation
- Tackling violence against women and girls by criminalising taking intimate images and spiking

Furthermore, there is the duty to collaborate under the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, which will require local policing bodies, local authorities and Integrated Care Boards to collaborate in the commissioning of community support services in England for victims of domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and serious violence.

¹ BBC (2024) Labour on a mission to halve knife crime, Cooper says. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3e9vv3jzzxo>

² Home Office (2025) Crime and Policing Bill: Overarching factsheet. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crime-and-policing-bill-2025-factsheets/crime-and-policing-bill-overarching-factsheet>

Definition of serious violence in Bedfordshire

We have agreed to focus our response to serious violence on violence and exploitation affecting children and young people under the age of 25 – in particular, focusing on four key themes:

- Knife crime
- County lines
- Child criminal and sexual exploitation
- Male violence against women and girls (MVAWG)

The Serious Violence Duty guidance allows flexibility for us to agree on our definition of serious violence locally and requires that we set this definition based on evidence. However, the guidance does require that we focus on public space youth violence - we have chosen to do so by setting out a definition as serious violence and exploitation that affects children and young people under the age of 25. This definition is based on evidence around what most affects communities in Bedfordshire, as well as perspectives on where we can align and collaborate most effectively. These priorities, however, will change and evolve in response to new information, strategic priorities, and best practice.

For data collection, monitoring, and evaluation, the following crime types where the victim or the suspect is under the age of 25 will be analysed:

- Homicide
- Violence with injury
- Violence without injury (threat to kill offences only)
- Weapon-enabled robbery
- Rape
- Other sexual offences (sexual assault offences only)

Domestic abuse, all forms of exploitation including criminal, sexual, and modern slavery, and weapon flags will also be recorded to understand the context of the offence.

What other data will we look at? Crime data supports a downstream understanding of serious violence and exploitation. We know it is essential to understand a range of data to be able to respond to the causes of serious violence. Where data-sharing arrangements allow, we will look at the following:

- **Risk/protective factors:** While tackling violence and exploitation affecting adults is the focus of this strategy, we are motivated to address the roots of serious violence ‘upstream’, focussing on prevention and early intervention efforts
- **Disproportionality:** We are interested in building our understanding of how serious violence and exploitation disproportionately impact certain communities in Bedfordshire. The disparate experiences of sections of communities of children and young people when engaging with statutory services will also be considered when coordinating response efforts to tackle serious violence and exploitation

Serious violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire

This section provides a brief overview of evidence around serious violence and exploitation and its drivers in Bedfordshire. This does not seek to replace the most recent Strategic Needs Assessment, which provides a more comprehensive insight document.

Key findings

Scale of serious violence and exploitation

Some violence has been increasing since 2016, but this is likely due to improved reporting and recording practice

- Violence against the person offences, sexual offences and domestic abuse crimes have all increased between 2016 and 2024; however, these offence groups have largely been affected by changes in reporting and recording practices

Bedfordshire compares favourably to other areas in terms of serious violence and exploitation

- While the number of violent offences has increased in recent years (between 2016 and 2024), in part driven by better reporting and recording practices, Bedfordshire's level of violence is lower than the national average and the average for the East region
- Police-recorded knife-enabled crime has increased since 2016. We are concerned about young people previously unknown to services being involved in knife crime
- Luton as a local authority area has particularly high rates in comparison to Bedford and Central Bedfordshire but still sits in and around the national average. The most recent SNA links higher rates in Luton with more deprived areas
- Violence is more likely to occur in May, June and July as well as part of the night-time economy

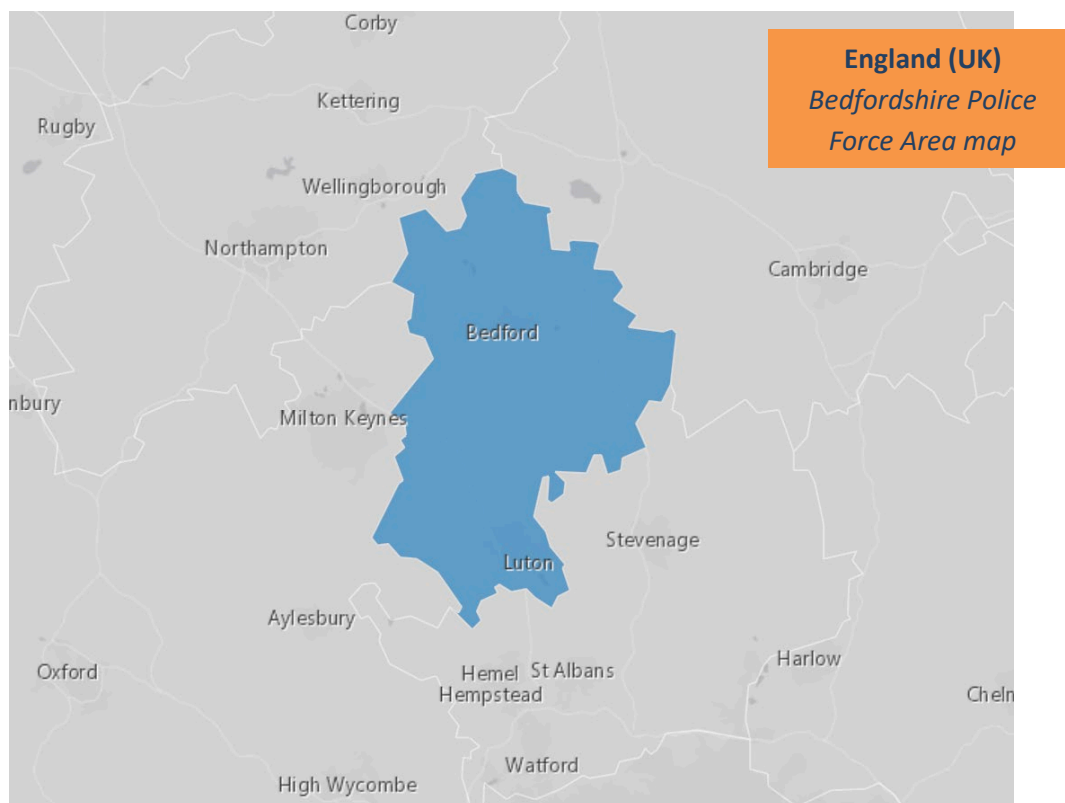
Risk and protective factors

There is a complex ecosystem of risk and protective factors around individuals that increase or decrease their likelihood of being involved in serious violence and exploitation.

In Bedfordshire, these individual, relational, community, and societal risk factors are experienced differently in each local area. Across Bedfordshire, children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) needs, who have been excluded, who are not in education, training, or employment (NEET), and who are care-experienced may be disproportionately vulnerable to serious violence and exploitation.

Place and population

Bedfordshire is the local area in the East of England region, comprising three unitary local councils: Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council.



729,221 people are living in Bedfordshire, with Central Bedfordshire being more populated in comparison to Luton and Bedford.³ Central Bedfordshire is mainly rural and is one of the largest unitary authorities in England. Luton has the more densely populated area. The most deprived areas in Bedfordshire are also located within Luton, with other small areas in Bedford and Central Bedfordshire.⁴

The most recent SNA found that Bedfordshire has more people from ethnic minority background compared to England and the East of England region.⁵ This is mainly due to the diverse population in Luton, where over half of the population (55 percent) are from an ethnic minority group. Bedford also has a diverse population. The 2021 Census reported that 34.9 percent of the population was from ethnic minority groups (non-‘White British’) compared to 26.5 percent nationally.⁶

Scale of serious violence and exploitation

Over 5 years, about three in ten crimes which occurred in Bedfordshire and were handled

³ Office for National Statistics (2024), Estimates of the population for England and Wales (mid-2023)

⁴ Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) and Serious Violence Duty (SVD) (March 2024), Strategic Needs Assessment 2023/24

⁵ Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) and Serious Violence Duty (SVD) (March 2024), Strategic Needs Assessment 2023/24

⁶ Bedford Community Safety Plan, 2024 to 2027

by the Bedfordshire Police Force were violence and sexual offences – this is a significant element of police demand.⁷ Analysis also stated that areas with the highest counts of violence aligned with the most deprived areas of the county, representing almost half of overall violence and sexual offences.

Violence against the person offences

Violence against the person contains a number of offences within Bedfordshire’s definition of serious violence and exploitation, specifically homicide, violence with injury and threat to kill offences.

Within the last year, these offences have increased by 7 percent. Between 2016 and 2024, these offences have increased by 68 percent.⁸ This increase can be in part attributed to improved reporting and recording practices around violence without injury offences.

Bedfordshire has a rate of violence against the person offences that falls below the rate across England and Wales and the East region. By comparison, West Yorkshire has 47.8 violence against the person offences per 1,000 population (the highest police force area in England and Wales) and Bradford in West Yorkshire has 54 offences per 1,000 population.

Recorded violence against the person rate per 1,000 population, year ending September 2024

Bedfordshire	England and Wales	East
25.7	32.4	27.0

Luton has a rate of violence against the person offences that is more comparable to the rate across England and Wales.⁹ Central Bedfordshire experiences substantially fewer offences.

Recorded violence against the person rate per 1,000 population, year ending September 2024

Bedford	Central Bedfordshire	Luton
26.2	18.8	31.2

Violence with injury

Violence with injury contains offences where the crime results in an injury, including some fatal injuries, such as attempted murder, causing death by dangerous driving, wounding and actual bodily harm.

Within the last year, these offences have increased by 7 percent. Between 2016 and 2024,

⁷ Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) and Serious Violence Duty (SVD) (March 2024), Strategic Needs Assessment 2023/24

⁸ Office for National Statistics (2025), Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables (year end September 2016 and 2024)

⁹ Office for National Statistics (2025), Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables (year end September 2024)

these offences have increased by 6 percent.¹⁰ Bedfordshire has a rate of violence with injury offences that falls below the rate across England and Wales and the East region.

Recorded violence with injury rate per 1,000 population, year ending September 2024

Bedfordshire	England and Wales	East
7.0	8.9	7.3

Luton has a rate of violence with injury in line with the national average.¹¹ Central Bedfordshire has a considerably lower rate comparatively.

Recorded violence with injury rate per 1,000 population, year ending September 2024

Bedford	Central Bedfordshire	Luton
7.9	4.9	8.9

Sexual offences

Violence against the person contains a number of offences within Bedfordshire’s definition of serious violence and exploitation, specifically rape and sexual assault. Male violence against women and girls is a key theme of the serious violence and exploitation definition in Bedfordshire.

Within the last year (ending 2024), these offences have increased by 17 percent. Since 2016, these offences have increased by 67 percent.¹² This increase can be in part attributed to improved reporting and recording practices around sexual offences. Bedfordshire has a rate of sexual offences that falls below the rate across England and Wales and the East region.

Recorded sexual offence rate per 1,000 population, year ending September 2024

Bedfordshire	England and Wales	East
2.7	3.3	2.9

Luton has a rate of violence against the person offences that is more comparable to the rate across England and Wales but still falls below the national average.¹³ Central Bedfordshire experiences substantially fewer offences.

Recorded sexual offence rate per 1,000 population, year ending September 2024

¹⁰ Office for National Statistics (2025), Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables (year end September 2016 and 2024)

¹¹ Office for National Statistics (2025), Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables (year end September 2024)

¹² Office for National Statistics (2025), Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables (year end September 2016 and 2024)

¹³ Office for National Statistics (2025), Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables (year end September 2024)

Bedford	Central Bedfordshire	Luton
2.7	2.0	3.0

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse-related offences cover a range of offences, not just just serious violence and exploitation. Male violence against women and girls is a key theme of the serious violence and exploitation definition in Bedfordshire.

Since 2016, these offences have increased by 71 percent.¹⁴ This increase can be in part attributed to improved reporting and recording practices around domestic abuse. Bedfordshire has a rate of domestic abuse crimes below the national average. 34 percent of violence against the person offences in Bedfordshire were domestic abuse-related.

Recorded domestic abuse-crimes rate per 1,000 population, year ending March 2024

Bedfordshire	England and Wales	East
11	14	11

Knife crime

Knife-enabled offences, covering a large part of the serious violence and exploitation definition, have increased by 72 percent since 2016.¹⁵ Knife-enabled threats to kill have increased nearly fivefold and make up a large part of the increased number of offences. We believe young people who were previously unknown to services are becoming increasingly involved in knife crime. Knife crime is a key theme of the serious violence and exploitation definition in Bedfordshire.

Bedford has noticed an increase in severity for knife crime and serious youth violence - as well as a significant number of victims and offenders in knife crime offences being under the age of 25.¹⁶

Luton noted in its Youth Justice Plan that in the past 6 years, they have seen increasing numbers of our children referred into the Multi-Agency Gangs Panel (MAGPan) with no previous recorded offending but presenting extremely risky behaviours and sometimes complex education and health needs.¹⁷

Drug supply and violence

¹⁴ Office for National Statistics (2024), Domestic abuse in England and Wales – Data tool (year end March 2016 and 2024)

¹⁵ Home Office, Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables: offences involving knives or sharp instruments open data, year ending March 2009 onwards

¹⁶ Bedford Community Safety Plan, 2024 to 2027

¹⁷ Luton Youth Justice Plan, 2024 - 2025

Drugs and wider substance misuse are a key driver of serious violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire. The most recent SNA found that drug crime offenders are aligned with youth violence offenders.¹⁸ Between June 2018 and September 2022, half of all homicides were driven by drug supply (six) or substance misuse (eight).

It also stated that Luton accounts for half of all drug crimes in Bedfordshire, which is where the majority of organised crime groups (OCGs) are based. Over one in three OCGs use county lines as a business model, which is likely to exploit vulnerable individuals, including children both criminally and sexually. County lines and exploitation key themes of the serious violence and exploitation definition in Bedfordshire.

Exploitation

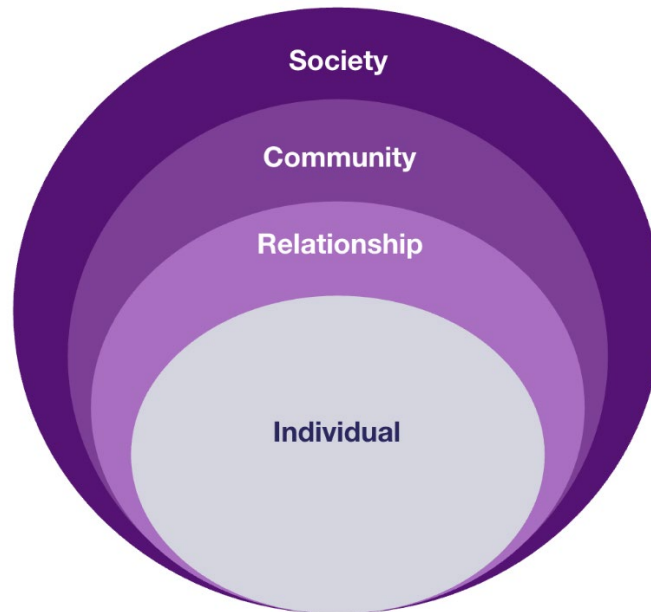
A recent assessment of child exploitation found nearly 2,000 distinct children and young people up to 25 years old who were victims or at risk of child exploitation.¹⁹ This represents 86 per 1,000 children and young people. More than half was child sexual exploitation, followed by nearly one quarter being child criminal exploitation. 17 percent involved both criminal and sexual exploitation. Luton had more victims or children and young people at risk than other areas. Seven in ten were known to individual partner agencies.

Bedford has noticed increasing numbers of crimes and non-crime incidents with a CSE marker.

¹⁸ Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) and Serious Violence Duty (SVD) (March 2024), Strategic Needs Assessment 2023/24

¹⁹ Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) and Serious Violence Duty (SVD) (March 2024), Strategic Needs Assessment 2023/24

Risk and protective factors



Socio-ecological model of violence

Risk factors may increase the likelihood of an individual being involved in serious violence and exploitation. These factors affect individuals at societal, community, relationship, or individual level and are based on the World Health Organisation's classification. It is critical to understand risk factors to understand the expected prevalence of serious violence and exploitation and to inform prevention efforts. Conversely, 'protective factors' decrease the likelihood of an individual becoming involved in violence or exploitation and frequently are the opposite of risk factors

Society and community risk factors: Factors such as inequalities, poverty, and availability of housing all affect residents at a community and societal level, and may render them less easily engaged by statutory services. Data on deprivation shows that Bedfordshire is generally a relatively affluent area. In fact, about a quarter (25.7 percent) of the small areas in Bedfordshire are in the most affluent fifth in England.²⁰ However, most of the affluence is in Central Bedfordshire. 13 percent of the small areas in Bedfordshire are in the most deprived quintile in England. These are mainly located in Luton.

Risk factors within close relationships: Relationship-level risk factors include parental substance misuse or criminality, unemployment in the family, dislocation in the family, exiting care and returning back to families, and gang association.

Individual risk factors: There are several individual-level risk factors, including special educational needs, involvement in drugs and alcohol, care experience, and school exclusions.

²⁰ Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) and Serious Violence Duty (SVD) (March 2024), Strategic Needs Assessment 2023/24

There is a consistent increase in special educational needs (SEN) provisions across England and Wales, as well as in Bedfordshire. This is in part attributable to increased awareness and identification of SEN needs. Central Bedfordshire (49,159) has a higher headcount of pupils with SEN provision than Luton (42,413) and Bedford (36,558).²¹

Bedford has the highest rate of permanent exclusions; Luton has the lowest; Central Bedfordshire recorded their highest rates on record in 2022/23*. Bedford has a higher rate of permanent exclusions than its statistical neighbours.²²

Bedfordshire's Drug and Alcohol Needs Assessment identified that there is a significant overlap between drugs and violence and that drug crime hotspots overlap with violent crime hotspots as well as Bedfordshire's highest harm hotspots. Alcohol is marked as an aggravating factor in more violent crimes than drugs, with alcohol linked to 8 percent of violent crime and drugs accounting for up to 3 percent.²³

1.5 percent of 16 to 17 year olds in Bedford are not in education, training, or employment (NEET), compared with 2.7 percent in Luton and 3.4 percent in Central Bedfordshire. This is lower than the East of England (3.7 percent)²⁴

²¹ Home Office (2024) Special educational needs in England, academic year 2023/2024

²² Home Office (2024) Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England, autumn term 2023/2024

²³ Bedfordshire Police, Public Health Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, and Milton Keynes, Public Health Luton Borough Council (2023) Drug and Alcohol Needs Assessment 2022/2023

²⁴ Home Office (2024) Participation in education, training and NEET age 16 to 17 by local authority, academic year 2023/24

The Bedfordshire vision

We are working as partners towards a sustained reduction in serious violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire. This section sets out how we will achieve this through a whole-system multi-agency approach that engages all specified and relevant authorities, as well as the voluntary sector, community and children and young people who reside in Bedfordshire.

Priority 1: Understanding the picture of serious violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire

We will improve data and information sharing between partners to better understand the scale, nature, and profile of serious violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire. We will do so by leveraging assets that already exist in the partnership, such as DIGVERB (The Data and Intelligence Group on Violence and Exploitation in Bedfordshire), and looking to innovate, streamline, and automate data sharing through innovative approaches.

Priority 2: Engaging communities with a focus on young people

We will work with communities and children and young people to formulate solutions to tackle serious violence and exploitation. We will incorporate their views as partners into commissioning, service design, and evaluation.

Priority 3: Supporting and strengthening local multi-agency partnerships

We will consolidate and refine our system of governance across the partnership to create an ecosystem of strategic, operational, and tactical groups that deliver clear and actionable responsibilities in alignment with each other and with scrutiny and oversight.

Priority 4: Prioritising early intervention and prevention

We will prioritise working to address offending behaviour before it occurs, particularly using education as a key intervention opportunity – in particular, by improving the way we identify high risk and vulnerability in children and young people by sharing information across services. We will adopt a public health approach to look at and address the reasons behind offending.

Priority 1: Understanding the picture of serious violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire

Data sits at the heart of the success of this strategy. Our understanding of the picture of serious violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire supports us to ensure our response is effective and tailored. Due to the diversity of rural, semi-urban, and urban areas, Bedfordshire has unique profiles of serious violence and exploitation. Therefore, building our understanding of the differences between these areas is a critical consideration to better understand the scale and nature of these issues.

The centrepiece of our evidence base is our most recent Strategic Needs Assessment. The Strategic Needs Assessment looks at local and pan-Bedfordshire data on violence and exploitation, perceptions of violence and exploitation, and risk and protective factors. We will continue to update this assessment to ensure our understanding is up-to-date and use it to validate and challenge our direction as a partnership. We will also ensure that all partners have an opportunity to contribute – whether it be through data, information, or feedback – to future iterations of the SNA.

A key principle behind our approach to this priority is acknowledging the profiles of serious violence and exploitation and its drivers across localities in Bedfordshire – key analytical products produced across the partnership highlight where experiences of serious violence and exploitation diverge between the local areas. It is also clear that there are crime types and drivers that are shared across these local footprints. Therefore, the partnership has opted to adopt a bespoke approach that takes local problems into account while driving towards a pan-Bedfordshire approach to tackling serious violence and exploitation.

We want all partners to feel enabled to contribute to our understanding of the problem, including contributing to the next iteration of the Strategic Needs Assessment, ensuring it maps onto agencies' priorities and experiences. We will aim to use existing arrangements, namely DIGVERB (The Data and Intelligence Group on Violence and Exploitation), to clarify the purpose of sharing and take forward specific projects to make the best use of available data.

What are we already doing?

DIGVERB (The Data and Intelligence Group on Violence and Exploitation in Bedfordshire) is a strong asset in Bedfordshire's ability to understand the profile of violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire. Its data-sharing agreement between Bedfordshire Police, local authorities, public health, CSPs, and HMPPS goes some way to coordinate data and information sharing between these partners.

DIGVERB is well-attended and collates, analyses, and interprets data from diverse sources to inform the work of the partnership. This includes identifying emerging trends and areas requiring intervention. The DIGVERB has successfully integrated data from across the partnership (including health, social care, education & CJS) and facilitates information sharing across

stakeholders, creating a flow of intelligence. DIGVERB further tracks outcomes, evaluates effectiveness of current work and identifies gaps in provision.

We will build on the work of DIGVERB, using the forum to encourage further contributions from partners. This will be done through setting a clear remit for the group, inclusive membership and providing clearer direction and oversight from the Serious Harm Partnership Board.

There are also currently pockets of robust data-sharing arrangements between partners on an individual and case-by-case basis. This was not necessarily embedded in processes and did not extend to all relevant partner agencies.

There are several evidence-based needs assessments and strategies in the partnership, including:

- Strategic Needs Assessment
- Child Exploitation Needs Assessment
- Luton and Bedfordshire Youth Justice Plans
- Community Safety Partnership Plans

What are we trying to achieve?

Outcomes
A. Data and information sharing in Bedfordshire is routine, underpinned by clear processes and platforms, and clear in its expectations from partners
B. All specified and relevant authorities participate in data and information sharing
C. Risk and threat assessments, commissioning, and priorities are evidence-based, leading to a more effective and targeted response

In the next year, we want to take forward two or three projects involving data sharing to help support the partnership response to serious violence and exploitation. These will be led by the DIGVERB who will also lead the process of refreshing the Strategic Needs Assessment. We also want to scope out requirements for a common data-sharing environment to support the partnership in the long term. These will be accompanied by clear requests with associated purposes for partners to improve clarity on the need for data sharing around these issues. There is an opportunity to align with national policy here – the Government has committed to introducing Prevention Partnerships as part of its overall commitment to halve knife crime in the next decade. We know that targeting prevention is particularly important and requires good data – we will identify if one of the data projects in the next 12 months can help the partnership to identify individuals/ contexts where prevention can be targeted around knife crime.

Short-term actions

- The VEPP will work with DIGVERB and the Serious Harm Partnership Board (SHPB) to set out an action plan for Priority 1, working with DIGVERB and SHPB members to identify two to three projects that can be taken forward in the next 12 months, supporting the strategy and partnership response to serious violence. This could be achieved through a specific data-sharing workshop to set out expectations and objectives for the group and identify clear asks of partners. These projects should aim to further the understanding of serious violence locally, particularly the cohorts most affected, as well as to set commissioning intentions as a partnership.
- The VEPP will set out a timeline for a refresh of the Strategic Needs Assessment, which will be incorporated into the Priority 1 action plan. This SNA will:
 - Be aligned to the new definition of serious violence and exploitation
 - Use relevant data from partners, including, where possible, engagement with communities (especially children and young people)
 - Identify gaps for partners in the response, with recommendations on how these gaps could be met
 - Commentary on the effectiveness of the ongoing response
- The VEPP and partners will scope and set out the requirements for a common data-sharing environment. The SHPB will decide whether this is in the partnership's interests, and if so, DIGVERB will be tasked with setting out a long-term plan for this for the partnership.

In the long term, we want to create a common data-sharing environment that supports our response to serious violence and exploitation and creates a Common Recognised Information Picture. This includes sharing of aggregate, hotspot and case-level data where there is a clear and identified need, in line with our data protection obligations. One such strategic use for this environment will be using multiple data sources to understand need across Bedfordshire and where to target resources, potentially using bivariate mapping to understand the relationships between the drivers and incidents of serious violence and exploitation. There could also be more operational use which will support the implementation of the Young Futures Prevention Partnerships.

Long-term actions

- The VEPP, with support from DIGVERB, will develop a multi-agency data-sharing environment such as a clear process and/or common platform – such as a central system or shared drive. Once set up, this will be managed by DIGVERB and will offer partners a dashboard and repository of data around the partnership's definition of serious violence and exploitation, as well as the ability to share other datasets where there is a clear and identified need
- The VEPP will identify uses for the data-sharing environment based on analysis of shared data, in agreement with partners, which could include:
 - Creating a serious violence and exploitation dashboard
 - Supporting ongoing insight between iterations of the Strategic Needs

<p>Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expanding capabilities in bivariate mapping ○ Developing a common threat and vulnerability assessment framework across local areas and partners to improve the policies and processes for the sharing of intelligence on vulnerable children and young people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The VEPP will allocate appropriate resources to frequent and robust analysis of this data, transforming evidence into insights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The VEPP and partners will use this data and information to draft and iterate its commissioning intentions and to support the identification of effective commissioned services, as well as gaps in commissioning and service provision

Priority 2: Engaging communities with a focus on young people

We have ensured that specified partners are involved and engaged in the response to serious violence – our priority in this strategy is to expand the ways in which it engages with local communities, in particular focussing on children and young people, aligning with our definition of serious violence.

Individually, agencies involved in the partnership commission a suite of interventions and programmes delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector to better support local communities. We want this process to be more collaborative, involving the service users who will access interventions and programmes, particularly co-design with children and young people.

We want to ensure engagement with communities on understanding serious violence and its drivers becomes business as usual, and will look to ensure engagement moves beyond informing and consultation, toward co-design and co-production in the Ladder of Co-production.²⁵

What are we already doing?

Individual partners deliver a range of community engagement offers. Partners, in particular, highlighted the importance of the following programmes:

- **Youth Clubs** are considered an important asset in local authorities’ ability to engage children and young people
- **The TREE project**, which sees youth and charity workers collaborate with Bedfordshire Police to conduct joint outreach work across Bedfordshire
- **Bedford and Central Bedfordshire’s Youth Parliament**, which gives a voice directly to young people to explore solutions to issues which impact them and their communities

²⁵ Think Local Act Personal (TLAP) (2024), Ladder of Co-production, available at: <https://thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/resources/ladder-of-co-production/>

- **Luton’s Young People’s Council**, set up in 2019 and comprised of elected youth councillors who feed into planning

The Partnership should also capitalise on the work of the pan-Bedfordshire Voice of the Child group, which has mapped existing services and groups that work directly with children and young people across Bedfordshire.

What are we trying to achieve?

Outcomes
A. Local communities feel informed and involved in the partnership’s response to serious violence and exploitation
B. Children and young people are able to feed into the design and delivery of the serious violence and exploitation strategy and the next iteration of the Strategic Needs Assessment, as well as the next iteration of the strategy
C. Engagement is tailored to localities, with alignment and exchange of good practice between local areas

In the next year, we will look to build an engagement strategy with a focus on children and young people, looking at how to use existing assets to do so. There is a particular opportunity around how to engage children and young people via social media and online spaces.

Short-term actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The VEPP will set out an action plan for Priority 2, setting out how they will use existing assets and consultations to engage with communities, including children and young people. To complete this action plan, the VEPP should seek to map existing assets and highlight gaps where there are no assets to engage with certain groups. The action plan should set out methods of engagement, which might include surveys, focus groups and town halls - we will identify who will deploy these methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partners will lead on plans to use social media and online spaces, particularly on how to engage children and young people around key messaging on serious violence and exploitation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The VEPP will scope out and set requirements for interventions that might support children and young people with healthy use of social media, empowering them to respond to risk in online spaces

In the long term, we will look to identify barriers to engagement and update the strategy to focus on boosting engagement from groups that are typically less involved. The long-term engagement should focus on engagement to inform planning and commissioning around serious violence, building on an understanding of the key issues to communities.

Long-term actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the barriers to community members and young people engaging in interventions, and consider monitoring programmes' ability to engage these groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using engagement from the first year of the strategy, the VEPP should set commissioning intentions for how the partnership can better respond to potential harms of social media and empower children and young people to better navigate risks in online spaces.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The engagement strategy should orientate towards utilising the results of community engagement and consultation to inform the commissioning of services in local areas, building on an understanding of the key issues for communities affected by serious violence and exploitation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities and interventions should deliver evidence – including qualitative input from service users – on the impact of these programmes, looking to services like St Giles Trust's data and information for good practice

Priority 3: Supporting and strengthening local multi-agency partnerships

Governance structures are the vessel through which the actions set out in this strategy and others that work to tackle serious violence and exploitation are delivered. Alongside those structures – including meetings, boards, and groups – that are statutorily required, it is critical to have a range of multi-agency structures that allow partners to come together at a strategic, operational, and tactical level to guide the delivery of the Duty's requirements.

To experience the benefits of this comprehensive ecosystem of structures, we must be well organised, with discrete and mutually exclusive purposes and terms of reference, with the right attendees, feasible priorities and actions, and a body that provides scrutiny and accountability. Alongside these robust strategic groups that provide oversight to deliverables, we are motivated to focus on building up a robust offering of tasking and operational groups with clear responsibilities with corresponding resources from each associated partner.

The partnership in Bedfordshire is driven to better organise this ecosystem of governance structures and develop greater consistency between local areas. We are looking to the VEPP to step into a convening role in coordinating Bedfordshire’s approach to tackling serious violence and exploitation, which is well aligned with the VEPP’s refreshed strategic priorities.

What are we already doing?

There is a wealth of multi-agency activity at strategic, tactical, and operational levels in Bedfordshire. Partners are in consensus that activities related to serious violence and exploitation must be done with a whole-partnership approach at their core.

The SHPB leads the partnership in Bedfordshire. There are strong relationships between agencies across the partnership, and these relationships are nurtured through the governance structures. Additionally, the partnership has strong relationships with the active voluntary and community sector in Bedfordshire. In particular, partners have spotlighted links with St Giles Trust, Chrysalis Centre, and Link to Change.

What are we trying to achieve?

Outcomes
A. The governance for this strategy is clear and well-defined, resting with the SHPB and with clear responsibilities for and agreed by partners
B. The governance systems in each of the three local authority areas speak to each other and share information, good practice, and data frequently to support a pan-Bedfordshire response
C. All specified and relevant authorities are involved and engaged in partnership arrangements to respond to serious violence and exploitation

In the short term, we will work to ensure our partnership is set up to deliver this strategy effectively without unduly burdening the partnership landscape. This will involve understanding alignment to other areas of work and spending time to influence and work with other partnerships and partners. The VEPP will work with the Serious Harm Partnership Board to ensure the strategy has appropriate strategic direction, with clear accountability and oversight.

Short-term actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VEPP will draft and own a delivery plan associated with this Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy with clear actions and responsible partners - responsibility will be agreed collaboratively with partners to ensure that contributions are realistic and achievable. The Serious Harm Partnership Board will use the delivery plan to hold the partnership accountable for progress against the priorities in this strategy. We will

review whether a task and finish group is necessary to progress the delivery plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The VEPP will set out how it will align with other partners, ensuring two-way flows of information. A dedicated point of contact will be identified within the partnership to ensure the serious violence strategy is integrated into the wider landscape
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In setting partnerships commissioning intentions, we will look to establish joint opportunities with other partnerships with overlapping agendas to ensure effective pan-Bedfordshire commissioning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the data project around the Prevention Partnerships, the partnership should review how to use MAGPans and Serious Youth Violence Panels in order to build alignment between the three local areas and the ways in which partners assess the risk and vulnerability of children and young people, particularly around knife crime. Pan-Bedfordshire mapping and commissioning may identify an intervention that all of these panels can refer to regarding knife crime.

In the long term, we will look to assign clear responsibilities to partners to align the serious violence and exploitation priorities to our internal strategies. We will also consider innovative approaches to partnership working that create greater opportunities for collaboration.

Long-term actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The dedicated point of contact will be responsible for ensuring that the Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy aligns with upcoming strategic plans, such as the Police and Crime Plan, Youth Justice Plan, CSP Plans, and Combating Drugs Partnership Plan to this pan-Bedfordshire serious violence and exploitation strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The partnership will consider opportunities for closer partnership working, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Joint commissioning and joint funding ○ Consistency between local areas, such as in threat and risk assessment frameworks and panels ○ Co-location, such as through secondments between agencies, multi-agency hubs, a 'departure lounge' from HMP Bedford
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future evaluation will focus on developing a culture of demonstrating shared value across local areas and agencies for interventions and services commissioned as well as delivered by partners

Priority 4: Prioritising early intervention and prevention

Under the Public Health Approach statutorily required by the Serious Violence Duty, it is critical to work preventatively to look at and address the reasons behind offending behaviour. This focus is of paramount importance to us in Bedfordshire. We are particularly motivated to focus our support on vulnerable cohorts who are most prone to victimisation or perpetration.

With a targeted focus on children and young people in our definition of serious violence, we will focus our efforts 'upstream' on preventing violence and exploitation before it occurs. To do so, we are driven to build our relationship with schools and the education sector more broadly. In doing so, we are looking to improve the two-way exchange of information and data relating to at-risk children and young people, and to improve early identification and intervention efforts of these children and young people.

We are also motivated to better understand the needs of:

- Young people unknown to services, especially those excluded by mainstream schools
- Those transitioning from nursery into primary school, primary school into secondary school, and secondary school into education, training, employment, or becoming NEET.
- Those transitioning from youth offending services into probation
- Those with speech and language needs
- Care-experienced children

There is a specific need to work at a pan-Bedfordshire and multi-agency footprint to improve its identification of children and young people vulnerable as a result of care experience.

The need for multi-agency working to deliver this priority is well understood across the partnership; we will adopt a whole-family approach, which also involves children and siblings of those affected by violence and exploitation or parental imprisonment.

What are we already doing?

Some interventions are considered good practice in prioritising early intervention and prevention, such as the A&E and schools navigator programmes.

The Education and Diversion Team in the Bedfordshire Police is viewed as a substantial asset in the partnership. This team works with schools and young people to raise awareness of support offers and educate them on vulnerability. With strong links to education, as well as other statutory partners, it is clear that this team will play a vital role in facilitating prevention and early identification efforts.

The partnership also commissions a range of support available to those in schools, including:

- **Young Person's Wellbeing Navigator Service** in Central Bedfordshire, offering wellbeing support to young people going through life transitions or in a challenging time
- **Schools Navigators**, commissioned by the VEPP and delivered by local organisations, works with schools across Bedfordshire most in need to support students at risk of exclusion
- **The Rise Above Project**, funded by Bedfordshire OPCC and co-delivered by St Giles Trust and Hear2Listen, helps young people understand the impact and consequences of bullying.

There are some pockets of joint commissioning, such as return home interviews currently joint commissioned by Luton, Bedford, and Hertfordshire.

What are we trying to achieve?

Outcomes
A. Referral levels of children and young people into statutory services/interventions and programmes are increased, particularly referrals from education settings, particularly through the implementation of Young Future Prevention Partnerships (YFPP) Panels
B. Permanent and 'hidden' school exclusions are reduced through working with pupils around identified needs
C. Children not in education have identified robust intervention points that enable them to access statutory support
D. The education sector is mobilised and engaged in multi-agency working

In the next 12 months, we will seek collaboration with the education sector to understand and map how to intervene with cohorts at risk of being involved in serious violence and exploitation. One particular point of interest is supporting those working in the sector to work with children and young people, especially around identifying risks.

Short-term actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VEPP will seek to engage stakeholders to represent the education sector at a strategic level, utilising relationships with the Pan-Bedfordshire Safeguarding Education Group and Heads of Education at local authorities to ensure they are represented and can support the delivery of the strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners will engage stakeholders from the education sector to map existing opportunities and gaps in partnership working to identify interventions to support those at risk of being involved in serious violence and exploitation. This includes understanding relevant data that could be shared to support the work of the partnership, as linked with Priority 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VEPP will assess the feasibility of a training offer to the education sector to build relationships and professional curiosity around preventing serious violence and exploitation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the next year, partners will commission a one-off insight piece on the needs of children and young people in Pupil Referral Units in order to better understand this cohort's risk, vulnerability, and support needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VEPP will work with stakeholders to support the pilot for Young Futures Prevention Partnerships

In the long-term, the VEPP will look to work with other partners to commission interventions, particularly in the education sector, to reduce the risk of individuals being involved in serious violence and exploitation. Care will be taken to avoid overburdening schools by working with existing provision and adding new interventions and obligations only where a gap has been identified.

Long-term actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The VEPP and partners will work with evidence of what works to commission interventions that align with clear gaps in provision, particularly with regard to the education sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partners will develop and agree to an Inclusion Charter, modelled after good practice from the London VRU, in collaboration with children and young people to reduce school suspensions and exclusions by promoting belonging, identity, and safety in schools. We will deliver strategic guidance for education leaders to embed these principles

Reviewing the strategy & monitoring and evaluation framework

Annual strategy review

We will review this strategy annually with all specified and relevant authorities within our partnership, in line with the Serious Violence Duty Requirements. This will be done in coordination with the annual update of the Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA). The updated strategy will be based on updated analysis from the SNA and any other relevant contextual, funding or demographic changes to the picture of serious violence in Bedfordshire. This will involve updating each strategic priority and any key short or long-term actions where necessary.

