

Serious Violence Strategy 2024-27



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What is the Serious Violence Duty?

National picture

Serious violence has a devastating impact on lives of victims and families, instils fear within communities and is extremely costly to society. Incidents of serious violence have increased in England and Wales since 2014. Since June 2014, offences involving knives or sharp instruments have increased by 84% to the year to June 2020.

The Duty is a key part of the Government's programme of work to collaborate and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence: taking a multi-agency approach to understand the causes and consequences of serious violence, focusing on prevention and early intervention, and informed by evidence.

The Duty covers the requirements set out in Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. It requires specified authorities for a local government area to work together and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence, including identifying the kinds of serious violence that occur in the area, the causes of that violence (so far as it is possible to do so), and to prepare and implement a strategy for preventing, and reducing serious violence in the area. The Duty also requires the specified authorities to consult educational, prison and youth custody authorities for the area in the preparation of their strategy.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (legislation.gov.uk) also has key context for the Serious Violence Duty, given the overlap of agendas and requirements for local authorities, the police and the NHS working together through new Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Boards.

Local picture

Demographics: West Mercia covers the areas of Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire. The area covers 2,868 square miles and covers a diverse range of environments such as densely populated urban areas including Worcester, to sparsely populated rural areas including Herefordshire. There are areas of both deprivation and affluence. The 2021 Census showed that the population of West Mercia was estimated to be 1,299,900 people, an increase of 6.3% from the 2011 Census.

Age: Compared to England and Wales, West Mercia has more of an ageing population, with 28.4% of West Mercia's population being over the age of 60 compared with 23.1% for England and Wales. However, some areas within West Mercia have a younger population. For example, Telford & Wrekin has a larger percentage of its population under the age of 30 (38.2%), which is similar to the national average (37.1%). Other areas in West Mercia have a much lower percentage of people under 30, in particular, Herefordshire (30.5%) and Shropshire (31.1%). This highlights the importance of taking local contexts into account when commissioning regional strategy as local areas look very different in terms of population structure.



Ethnicity: The ethnic profile of our community appears to differ across the five local areas. For example, in Telford & Wrekin, there is a higher percentage of Asian, Black and Mixed ethnic groups in comparison to the other areas which see fewer numbers for each of these groups. However, although Telford & Wrekin records the highest numbers for these groups, the figures sit below the national averages for England and Wales which are Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh (9.3%), Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African (4%) and Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups (2.9%). These factors highlight the importance of taking local contexts into account when commissioning regional strategy as our local areas vary in terms of population, density, age and ethnic profile.

Partnerships: West Mercia is served by one police force, three unitary authorities (Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin) and six district authorities within Worcestershire. There are two fire and rescue services, two Integrated Care Boards, and two Probation Delivery Units cover the area. There are three prisons and one approved secure premises in the area.

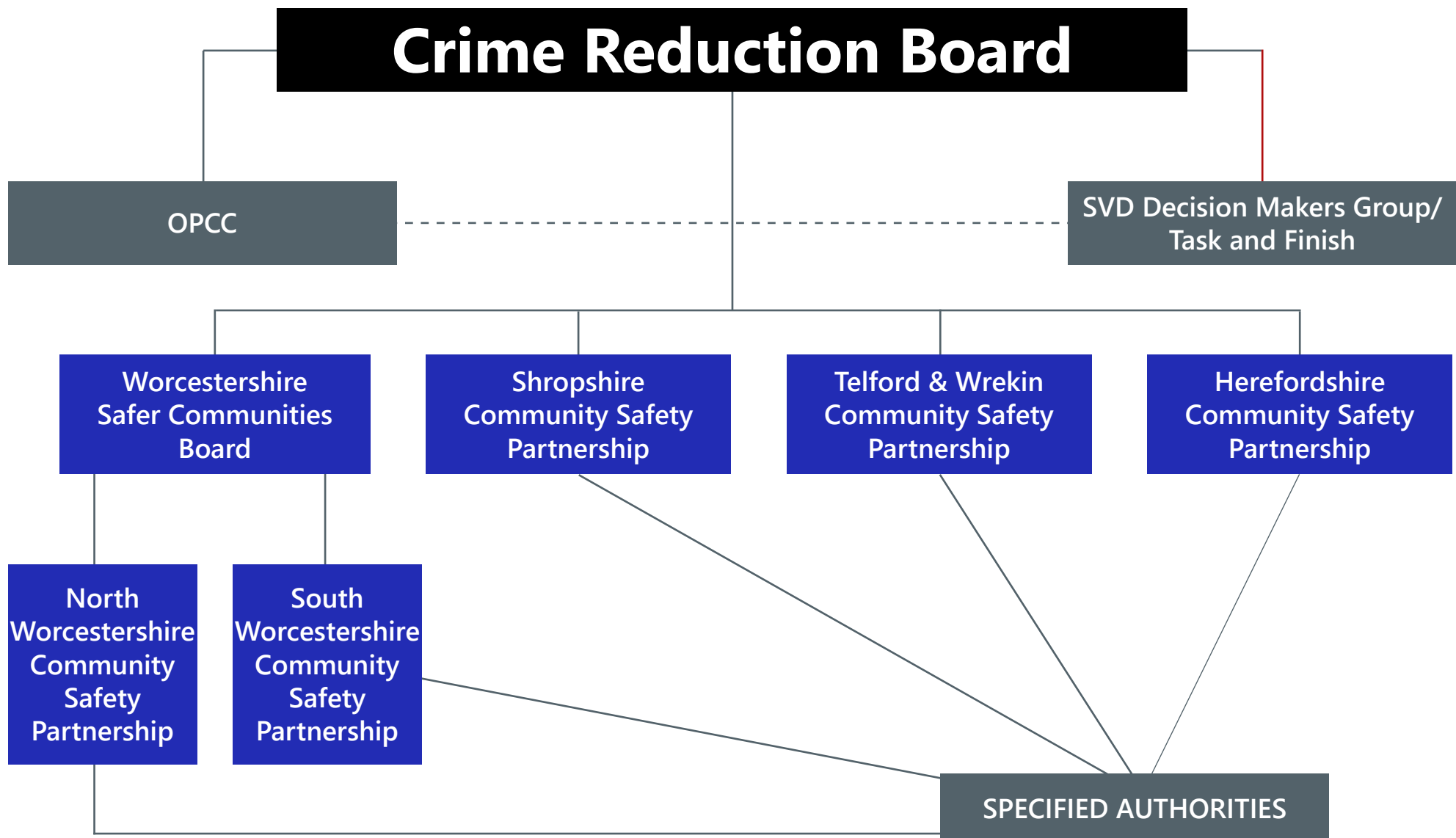
The specific authorities in the Act are:

- West Mercia Police.
- West Mercia Probation Service.
- West Mercia Youth Offending Teams.
- Fire and Rescue – Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin.
- Integrated Health Board for Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin.
- Local authorities – Worcestershire County Council, Shropshire County Council, Herefordshire County Council, Telford & Wrekin Council.
- District councils – Bromsgrove District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Worcester City Council, Wychavon District Council and Wyre Forest District Council.



Serious Violence Duty: The five Community Safety Partnerships (CSP), (Herefordshire, North Worcestershire, Shropshire, South Worcestershire and Telford & Wrekin) will deliver the Duty locally. Governance arrangements exist at the local CSP level to support the delivery of the Duty, and West Mercia Office of the Policing Crime Commissioner (OPCC) will oversee the delivery via the Crime Reduction Board (CRB). Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Boards also report to five CSPs and there is strong commonality and overlap on the work programmes for domestic abuse and serious violence, e.g. the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) agenda.

The CRB brings partners together to reduce offending and reoffending by ensuring that adults and young people who offend are challenged and supported to desist from crime. The CRB meets quarterly and the OPCC has briefed local partners on the requirement to develop a response strategy which outlines how the Duty is being met, who the lead agency/coordinator is, and how the strategy should respond to the findings from the strategic needs assessment (SNA) and considers the views of relevant authorities.



Public health approach

Violence is a public health issue because living without fear of violence is a fundamental requirement for health and wellbeing and much of it can be prevented. It's also a public health issue because violence is a major cause of ill health and poor wellbeing and is strongly related to inequalities. The poorest fifth of people have hospital admission rates for violence five times higher than those of the most affluent fifth. It affects individuals and communities and is a drain on health services, the criminal justice system and the wider economy.

Interventions to prevent violence, especially those in early childhood, prevent people developing a propensity for violence. They also improve educational outcomes, employment prospects and long-term health outcomes. Addressing the issue of violence and its root causes can improve the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities and have wider positive implication for the economy and society.

We will follow a public health approach and the recommendations from the 2019 government publication - 'A whole systems multi agency approach to serious violence prevention'. This approach considers that serious violence is not inevitable and is preventable but cannot be tackled in isolation. The relevant partners are aware of the Offensive Weapon Homicide Review pursuant to section 32(3) of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and they await the result of Home Office review of the pilot projects and related further consultation as to how this will be taken forward.

It must be addressed through prevention strategies that consider the multiple risk factors that cause and perpetuate violence such as deprivation, early life trauma and emotional and physical health, and promote the protective factors that mitigate against the growth and victimisation of violence. This approach means violence reduction interventions are not constrained by our organisational or professional boundaries and remain focused on generating long term reductions as well as short term solutions.

At the core of the approach, data and intelligence is used to identify the burden on the population, including any inequalities, meaning actions responding to the problem are rooted in evidence of effectiveness.

With prevention as an underpinning aim, we will adopt the five key principles of the public health approach:

Collaboration

We will engage with a diverse range of partners to successfully work together towards the shared goal of tackling and preventing violence.

Co-production

We will work towards a partnership that listens and reflects all local partners perspectives as well as those of the residents and communities, and meaningfully involves the community in solutions.

Cooperation in data and intelligence sharing

We will establish a data sharing process that enables an evidence-based response to tackle serious violence.

Counter-narrative development

We will work to develop a delivery plan that creates credible and trusted alternatives for all and celebrates the strength of our communities.

Community consensus

Lies at the heart of place based public health approach and we will work with communities and groups most at risk to empower them to become involved in developing solutions.

Serious violence definition

Following consultation and discussion, a definition has been agreed by all five Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to represent serious violence within the counties of Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire.

Violence, both physical and sexual, causing lasting psychological or physical harm, or where lasting harm was intended. This includes offences where there is an inherent threat of physical harm, such as county lines or offences involving use of an offensive weapon, blade or pointed article or any corrosive substance.

To include:

- Violence with injury resulting in serious harm, with a threshold of Section 20 grievous bodily harm (GBH).
- Homicide including attempt murder.
- Serious sexual harm – rape and sexual assaults.
- Robbery.
- Violence, including threats and aggravated offences, involving use of an offensive weapon, blade or pointed article or any corrosive substance.
- Violence, including threats and aggravated offences, involving use of a firearm.
- Offences with a county lines marker.
- Violence with injury marked as domestic abuse.
- Violence with injury marked as hate crime.
- Modern slavery offences.



Key achievements in West Mercia so far

- The Community Safety Partnership summit, chaired by the Police and Crime Commissioner, demonstrates clear commitment to preventing and tackling serious violence, prior to the introduction of the Serious Violence Duty guidance. From a West Mercia Partnership perspective, the Crime Reduction Board is considered as a suitable forum to bring the CSPs together.
- A partnership manager role was established in February 2023 to move the programme forward over the next year. A partnership analyst role has also been funded to support the delivery of the Duty.
- Several events took place over the summer of 2023 to enhance and support data sharing practices between partner agencies to help produce improved strategic needs assessments (SNA).
- All five CSP areas have completed a serious violence needs assessment incorporating data from a wide range of sources. The PCC has also commissioned a force-wide SNA.
- There are agreed governance structures in each CSP area to support the local response to the Duty.
- Each CSP area also has its own strategies and plans which respond to their Domestic Abuse Act duties.



Crest Advisory

The Home Office commissioned Crest Advisory to work with local areas to assess their readiness to deliver the Duty and provide tailored support. After thorough consultation, Crest Advisory produced a Joint Readiness Assessment (JRA) which assessed West Mercia as 'preparing' towards meeting the requirements of the Duty, with enhanced refreshed SNAs being expected by 2024. Crest stated that West Mercia needed to further prepare and mature as a partnership and recommendations were made with regard to enhanced data sharing practices and the production of best practice SNAs.

They also commented on the clear motivation for partners within West Mercia to work collaboratively and the only challenge or barrier to this motivation was limited resources. The joint readiness assessment highlighted that the existing collaborative arrangements worked well and would facilitate partnership working going forward, as this will provide accountability and coordination.

The JRA also stated that each SNA was compiled using data from partners including West Mercia Police, Herefordshire A&E departments, The Children's Society, Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre, Department for Education and Children's Services. It went on to state that each SNA included information on the following areas:

- Broad recommendations for future work.
- Local risk and protective factors, vulnerable localities.
- Trends of violence, offence breakdown by area and time.
- Profiles of victims and perpetrators.
- Serious violence through thematic areas such as domestic abuse, exploitation, hate crime, mental health.
- Approaches and current initiatives to tackle serious violence.

What does the Strategic Needs Assessment data tell us?

Crest Advisory states that while their assessment of public space violence and other violence indicates the scale of serious violence is comparatively low within West Mercia, the vulnerability indicators being high suggests that this could change. There is a clear opportunity therefore to focus on prevention and early intervention in order to reduce risk factors, specifically in the production of the Strategic Needs Assessment and the strategy.

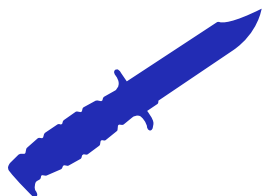
Key findings from The West Mercia wide Serious Violence Needs Assessment produced in April 2023:

- As may be expected, areas considered to be urban within the force area saw the most Serious Violence offences whilst the more rural areas saw fewer recordings.
- Pubs and other licenced venues tend to see more offences where serious injury is inflicted. This is more than likely associated with the consumption of alcohol that the night time economy incites.
- Violence Against the Person accounted for 62% of Serious Violence offences in West Mercia across three financial years. However, the two highest harm offences are murder and manslaughter. There were 22 recordings of murder overall, with 14 taking place within private spaces whilst eight were in public spaces; in 19 instances, the suspect(s) were known to the victim. For manslaughter, five offences took place in private settings whilst one offence took place in a public space; in five instances, suspect(s) were known to the victim.
- Key markers applied to Serious Violence offences were public places (62%), intimidation (32%) and use of a knife or other sharp instrument (26%).

- Knife crime - In West Mercia, there is a stable trend in the reported volume of knife crime across the two years to 31 March 2022, with 580 offences in 2020/21, and 590 in 2021/22. The greatest proportion (57%) comprise violence with injury offences. North Worcestershire saw the most offences with 25%, followed by South Worcestershire with 23%, Telford & Wrekin with 22%, Shropshire with 19% and Herefordshire with 11%.

All offences with a sharp instrument marker 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022, excluding non-recent offences.

Behaviour breakdown



Sharp instrument used in an offence

1,743 offences - 82%



Possession of, or threats with a sharp instrument

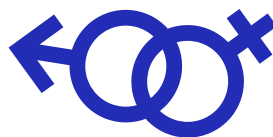
387 offences - 18%

Severity by key offence groups



Violence with injury

Severity score 740,948
71% of total severity
572 offences



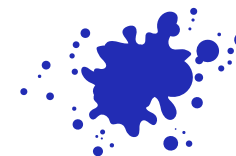
Rape and sexual offences

Severity score 45,150
4% of total severity
21 offences



Personal robbery

Severity score 202,306
9% of total severity
254 offences



Homicide

Severity score 79,734
8% of total severity
10 offences

The SNA tells us that the picture of serious violence differs across each CSP area, with the following features identified by area:

Herefordshire

- Serious violence levels in Herefordshire decreased by 13% in the year to 31 August 2023 compared to the previous year.
- 52% of serious violence over the three year period was linked to domestic abuse whilst 31% of serious violence was of a sexual nature.
- 30% of serious violence was youth related which has increased over the three year period.

North Worcestershire

- Serious violence levels in North Worcestershire has remained relatively stable over the last three years with an average of 149 per month.
- 51% of serious violence was linked to domestic abuse, however the overall number of domestic offences has decreased slightly over the period.

Shropshire

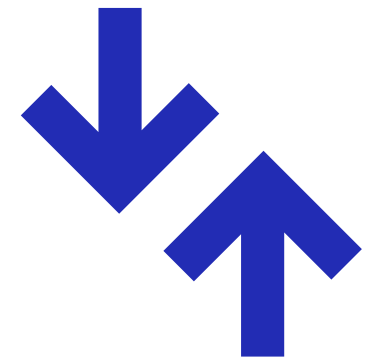
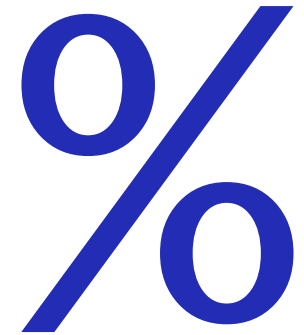
- Whilst serious violence in Shropshire has increased over the three year period, over the last year to 31 August 2023 it has decreased by 7%.
- 48% of serious violence was linked to domestic abuse.

South Worcestershire

- In the year to 31 March 2023, the number of recorded serious violence offences has decreased from the previous year.
- Assault occasioning actual bodily harm accounted for 37% of total serious violence offences.
- Domestic abuse offences accounted for 50% of serious violence and is made up primarily of violence with injury (85%).
- Sexual violence accounted for 47% of youth serious violence by suspects under 18 years old. Rape accounted for 14% of serious violence and 43% of violence committed by youths under 18.

Telford & Wrekin

- Serious violence levels in Telford & Wrekin have increased by 10% over the three years to 31 August 2023.
- 53% of serious violence was linked to domestic abuse where 37% of serious violence was youth related.
- When considering youth violence there has been a 4% decrease in offences from 2020 to 31 August 2023.



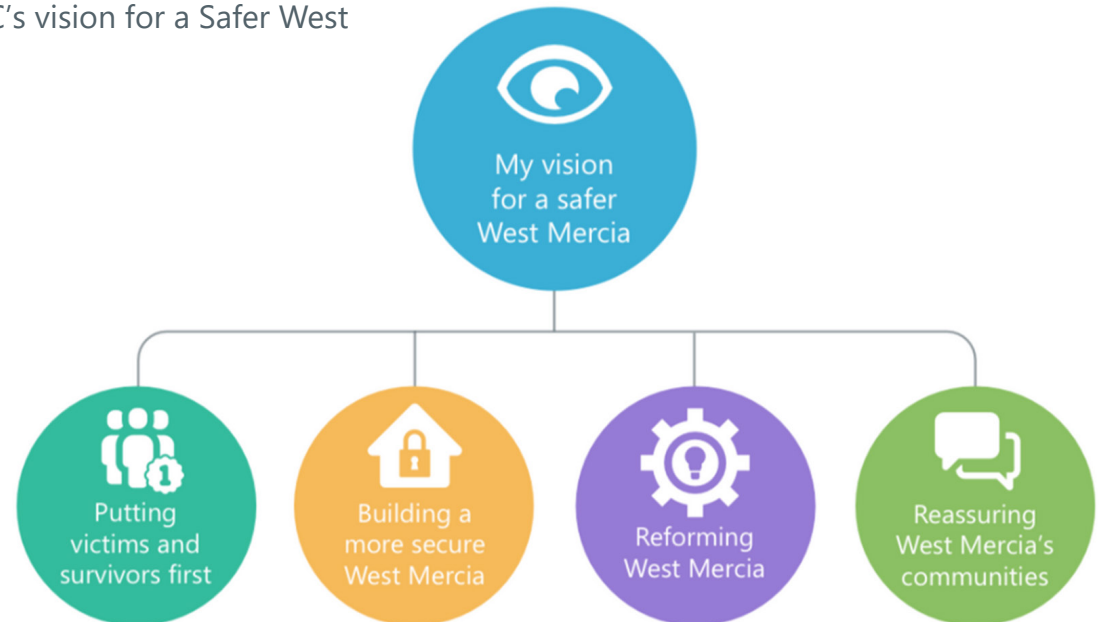
Safer West Mercia Plan

Whilst West Mercia PCC John Campion is reassured that serious violence in West Mercia is lower than pre-covid levels, in order to tackle serious violence he supports a range of projects and schemes that help to support the problem at the root cause. One of the many schemes includes the Steer Clear project, which helps to educate and support people to stay out of crime. Whilst West Mercia is seeing fewer incidents than the national average, it is clear that more needs to be done to tackle the problem.

John Campion states “I will ensure to continue to support projects that tackle serious violence at the root cause. Prevention is integral. Through education we can prevent crime from happening and ultimately make our communities safer.”

The PCC has set out how a plan on how he will deliver his promises made to make a Safer West Mercia. There are four components to the PCC’s vision for a Safer West Mercia.

- Putting victims and survivors first.
- Building a more secure West Mercia.
- Reforming West Mercia.
- Reassuring West Mercia’s communities.



West Mercia-wide interventions

Initiative	Where	Who	Description	Referral Pathway
CLIMB	Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin, Worcestershire	Children	Targeted towards 11-17 year old juveniles in order to divert from criminality. Climb offers sports, dance, arts music and more. We work with young people who are missing school or college, starting to be reported as missing, or at risk of being drawn into criminal activity.	Referral form via The Children's Society
Steer Clear	Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin, Worcestershire	Children whom we hold intelligence for carrying, possessing or being associated with knife related crime (public or private premises)	An intelligence led project aimed at engaging with under 18s who are believed to be in some way connected to knife crime. Officers will work with their families or carers and refer them to the Get Safe scheme, run by Worcestershire County Council. From here, the children will be invited to monthly workshops held in the local community, in order to safeguard them and prevent criminal activity in the future.	Parent/carers, education, health, local authority, voluntary sector, social services
GETSAFE	Worcestershire	Children and young people	Juveniles identified as being at risk of exploitation, gangs, sexual exploitation, trafficking, modern day slavery, absent or missing, forced marriage, and criminal exploitation.	Via police, direct referral
Parents Against Child Exploitation (PACE)	National	Parents and carers of children and young people who have been exploited	PACE works nationally alongside parents and carers of children who are, or are at risk of being, exploited by perpetrators external to the family. Their aim is to enable parents and carers to safeguard and stop their children being exploited. They offer guidance and training to professionals and parents on how child exploitation affects the whole family.	Self-referral

Key success measures and outcomes

West Mercia Partnership's vision for the Serious Violence Duty is to reduce violent crime across our three counties. The Duty itself states that there are three key success measures for the prevention and reduction of serious violence which are a reduction in the following areas:

- Homicide rates.
- Hospital admissions for knife/sharp object assaults.
- Police recorded knife/sharp object crime.

However West Mercia Partnership is also striving to reduce offences in the following areas:

- Violence with injury resulting in serious harm, with a threshold of Section 20 grievous bodily harm (GBH).
- Homicide including attempt murder.
- Serious sexual harm – rape and sexual assaults.
- Robbery.
- Violence, including threats and aggravated offences, involving use of an offensive weapon, blade or pointed article or any corrosive substance.

- Violence, including threats and aggravated offences, involving use of a firearm.
- Offences with a county lines marker.
- Violence with injury marked as domestic abuse.
- Violence with injury marked as hate crime.
- Modern slavery offences.

The Duty goes on to say that in establishing success measures for local serious violence strategies they expect specified authorities to include a focus on serious youth violence in public spaces and they may wish to include a focus on domestic abuse and sexual offences.

The West Mercia Youth Justice Service (WMYJS) works with young people aged 10-17 years old who have got into trouble with the police. It works in partnership with the four local authorities based within West Mercia, as well as three Clinical Commissioning Groups, the National Probation Service, West Mercia Police and the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner.

The WMYJS will work with the child and their family and anyone else supporting them to initially think about why the offence was committed, what triggered it or caused it including all the aspects the child's life and current circumstances. We will want to work in partnership with any other agencies and organisation who are already working with the child or their family to ensure that we have a coordinated multi-agency plan.

We will help with:

- Understanding the harm – helping young people repair the harm (Restorative Justice).
- Reparation – paying back for the harm the young person has caused.
- Education, employment and training – helping people get back into education or work.
- Drugs and alcohol work – helping understand drug use and how it affects offending.
- Offending behaviour work – what leads to young people committing offences.
- Communication support – lots of young people have unrecognised communication issues.
- Support from CAMHS (mental health) – help with managing emotions and trauma.
- Creative Arts to Communication – helping young people improve communication through different mediums.

Other key success measures will include reducing the following:

- Levels of recorded crime/crime types within a targeted area.
- Levels of anti-social behaviour.
- School participation (attendance, exclusion, not in education, employment or training).



- Strengthening families (numbers of child protection plans or looked after children).
- Offending (numbers of adults or juveniles receiving criminal sentences, rates of domestic abuse).
- Economic activity (levels of youth unemployment, levels of all age unemployment).
- A&E admissions (linked to knife crime).
- Increased levels of drug treatment referrals.
- All aspects of crime and exploitation, including acquisitive crime, business crime or rural crime.
- Public perceptions (public confidence and victim satisfaction).
- Levels of police demand (calls to 999 or 101).
- Demand for victim services within a targeted area.

How are we going to achieve this?

- We will continue to deliver successful outcomes through effective partnership working, including the sharing of good quality data and intelligence, by regularly reviewing our data collection techniques and seeking opportunities to enhance working relationships with partners. Training and guidance has been provided to partners which has improved the quality of the data. This is an ongoing and medium term objective of the Partnership.
- We will continue to identify interventions based on an assessment of need and evidence of cost, we will use our current updated strategic needs assessments to guide us in our decision making. We will use evidence based tactics backed by national research. A commitment has been made by the Partnership to ensure that this is an ongoing and evolving process by using the funding to secure an intelligence analyst to focus on the work falling under the Serious Violence Duty to provide a strategic overview.
- We will continue to review how effective interventions are using national or local research and promote innovation where appropriate. We will utilise the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) to ensure interventions commissioned to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence are based on evidence.
- We will determine interventions at a preventative or early stage where possible, through to targeted, specialist and enforcement actions and continue to review their effectiveness. We will ensure the commissioning of more primary prevention approaches within schools across West Mercia. We will also consider the implementation of school based interventions on drug, alcohol and resilience that are not led by a broad range of occupational backgrounds such as teaching, health, social and youth work.



- We will put interventions in place to break the cycle of serious violence within families; we will create a support package that is child or young person orientated, which will guide victims through the process of coping with serious violence.
- We will address risk factors that can impact on an individual's vulnerability and susceptibility to becoming a victim or offender of serious violence, targeting interventions to help mitigate and protect against these factors and ensure all our partner agencies are taking ownership collaboratively. Operation Freya will oversee this activity, ensuring a partnership approach to reducing the prevalence of homicide/ serious violence across West Mercia. Multi-agency shared data analysis is ongoing to identify those 'most at risk' of either being a victim of homicide or serious violence, or a suspect involved in homicide or serious violence, with those most at risk being reviewed in order to reduce the perceived risk by implementing interventions where necessary.
- We will use established community engagement practices to identify a range of methods in which we will seek out public feedback for the development of this strategy. This will ensure that the role of different partners will be carried out with agencies who have not yet engaged with the Serious Violence Duty Partnership arrangements, including education and the voluntary and community sector. Existing links with the community and children and young people will be mobilised to support collaborative arrangements to tackle serious violence. Crest Advisory has presented workshops to a wide range of partners within West Mercia to cascade learning about the Duty, the role of partner agencies and how to engage.



Our future

We want West Mercia's communities to be safe and feel safe. We want to have fewer victims, less serious violence and to deliver a public health approach, working together with partners and communities to create a safer West Mercia.

We will work in partnership to identify shared priorities, informed by data and evidence, and work collectively with a wide range of statutory and third sector partners and understand their direction and focus, to address issues, causes and harms by aligning strategy, leadership, resources and commissioning.

We will develop our evidence base, utilising shared data, intelligence and analysis capabilities to ensure prevention provides the most beneficial outcomes to our communities. We will record and share best practice, utilising this as the core base of our decision making model. We will embed evaluation into all activity, to assess impact and ensure we are trialling new approaches.

Sources

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- Serious Violence Duty Preventing and reducing serious violence Statutory Guidance for responsible authorities England and Wales December 2022, Home Office
- Joint Readiness Assessment: West Mercia, April 2023, Crest Advisory
- SV - SNA November/December 2023, WMP
- West Mercia Police and OPCC Prevention Strategy 2022-2025
- Preventing serious violence: summary: gov.uk - 21 October 2019
- College of Policing, DCC Julian Moss
- Safer West Mercia Plan, 2021-2025, PCC
- West Mercia Youth Justice Service