

Dudley Serious Violence Needs Assessment 2022

Executive Summary

Introduction

The requirements of the Serious Violence Duty on local systems are to:

- a) Identify the kinds of serious violence that occur in the area.
- b) Identify the causes of serious violence in the area, so far as it is possible to do so.
- c) Prepare and implement a strategy for exercising their functions to prevent and reduce serious violence in the area.

The duty requires the following specified authorities within a local government area to work collaboratively to prevent and reduce serious violence:

- Police
- Justice
- Fire and Rescue
- Health
- Local authorities

Consultation must also take place with educational, prison and youth custody providers.

For the purposes of this duty, serious violence includes a) Violence against the person b) Domestic abuse c) Sexual offences d) Violence against property e) Threats of violence

The Serious Violence Strategy sets out specific types of crime of particular concern, including homicide, violence against the person which may include both knife crime and gun crime, and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as in county lines drug dealing. However, there is flexibility within the duty to consider other types of serious violence such as domestic violence, alcohol related violence, sexual abuse, modern slavery, or gender-based violence.

Public Health England also define violence as a public health issue. Living without fear of violence is a fundamental requirement for health and wellbeing. Violence is a major cause of ill health and poor wellbeing and is strongly related to inequalities, with the poorest fifth of our society suffering rates of hospital admissions for violence five times higher than those of the most affluent fifth. It impacts on individuals and communities and is a drain on health services, the criminal justice system, and the wider economy.

The Dudley Serious Violence Strategic Needs Assessment has been produced in response to the requirements of the national Serious Violence Duty and uses evidence from a wide range of sources, including criminal justice and health.

What the Data Tells Us

Violence against the person offences recorded by the police in Dudley increased by 42% between 2020 and 2021. This was driven by increases in violence without injury and stalking and harassment offences, possibly in part due to improvements in crime recording practices. Violence with injury offences increased by 10% during the same period. The rate of violent offences in Dudley was below that for the West Midlands region in both 2020 and 2021. We would expect the trend in violent crime to be affected by COVID-19 e.g. through the closure of the night time economy for during various periods of 2020 and 2021.

Rates of reported violence and sexual offences were highest in the north of the borough in 2021–22 with the highest rate observed in Brockmoor & Pensnett, followed by Brierley Hill and St. James's wards.

In terms of knife crime, incidents were highest in the North East of the borough. The three neighbourhoods (MSOAs) with the highest number of incidents recorded were New Dock & Eve Hill, Dudley Priory & Wrens Nest and Kates Hill.

Many of the factors that affect individuals' risks of violence arise through their circumstances and experiences in early life. For example, children can be at greater risk of maltreatment if they are born to parents that are young, single, who suffer from mental health conditions or substance abuse, or that have violent relationships. The links between these early life risk factors and child abuse can arise from poor bonding between parents and children and poor parenting skills and resources. The experiences that children have early in life also impact on their risks of involvement in violence in adolescence and adulthood. Particularly during the first few years of life, children's brains are shaped by their experiences and the environments in which they grow up. Exposure to abuse or severe neglect can cause the brain to develop with a focus on short term survival, at the cost of longer-term well-being. Abuse and neglect in childhood can contribute to children having lower self-esteem, poorer social skills, poorer mental wellbeing and to consider violence as a normal way of resolving conflict.

A wide range of studies have shown that children who suffer violence and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are at increased risk of further victimisation and of becoming perpetrators of violence in later life.

ACEs include:

- Emotional, physical, or sexual abuse
- Emotional or physical neglect
- Violence against household members
- Living with household members who were substance abusers, mentally ill, suicidal, or imprisoned
- Having one or no parents, or experiencing parental separation or divorce
- Bullying, or exposure to community or collective violence

In Dudley, ACEs identified by children's social services have increased in several categories between 2019 and 2021. The most common types of ACEs recorded were parental drug/alcohol abuse, parental mental health issues and parental domestic abuse. There were also increases in reports of neglect, involvement with gangs and trafficking. In order to tackle violence in the long-term, the risk factors and root causes (including adversity in childhood) must be identified and responded to effectively.

Headline recommendations

- Ensure development of Child Friendly Dudley considers the needs of adolescents and addresses potentially negative stereotypes about Young People.
- Promote wider use of a "child first" approach when working with children and young people with challenging behaviour. This approach is already embedded across the Youth Justice Service, and other organisations may benefit from considering children and young people as children first and foremost when making decisions around discipline and exclusion.
- Improve data access, timeliness, sharing & linkage for serious violence and underlying risk and protective factors. System partners collect significant data, but this is not always linked, and is not always shared with partner organisations.
- Regular review and update of the needs assessment, to ensure any emerging issues are addressed. Create an action plan to ensure scheduled data review and update.
- Facilitate system wide decisions regarding requirements for long term funding for evidence-based programmes. This may require lobbying, as some elements of funding are dependant on Home Office funding decisions.
- Further public consultation around violence and perceptions of violence, specifically with young people who may be least likely to engage with police surveys.
- Undertake or commission detailed mapping of current service provision, including accessible information for young people, families, and professionals. This should include, as minimum, details of services offered, client group, contact details and referral mechanisms. This would require regular updating due to the frequent changes in provision.