Devon Preventing Serious Violence Strategy 2024-29

Foreword

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Introduction

Our Preventing Serious Violence Strategy outlines Safer Devon's framework for preventing and reducing serious violence in Devon. Our strategy is grounded in a public health response to violence; recognising that addressing the root causes of violence is crucial for prevention.

Our strategy acknowledges that violence prevention is a long term ambition requiring sustained preventative focus, system leadership and commitment, and investment. Our strategy therefore outlines a 5 year framework for initial action, laying the ground for continued long term focus on prevention.

Our strategy recognises the complexity of violence and its causes, of people's lives and needs, and the complexity present in our systems. In developing a Devon response to serious violence, it is important for us to consider how we can develop holistic, flexible and bespoke responses that take account of and work for our communities and our local context.

Devon has strong foundations in place to support a preventative response to serious violence. We can build on work initiated over recent years by the Safer Devon Partnership, Devon's District Community Safety Partnerships and our wider partners to build resilience to harms taking place in the home, between peers and in communities, including Community Bystander work, Healthy Relationships education in schools, and whole family recovery support from domestic violence and abuse.

Additionally, there is potential to link into activities taking place across the wider partnership landscape in Devon and our neighbouring geographies; through building on our existing relationships, we can work across these partnerships to consider how violence prevention can be best supported through our local systems.

Our strategy outlines our overall vision and priorities for our work to prevent violence. A delivery plan exploring how we will work towards these priorities will sit underneath this strategy and provide detail about our specific actions and activities and the impacts we aim to see in our communities.

Our strategy is iterative and will evolve through learning and reflection, recognising that our understanding of violence and its drivers, the experiences and strengths of our communities, opportunities for prevention, and the maturity of our responses will evolve over time.

What do we mean by serious violence?

There is no single definition of serious violence. When explaining what we mean by this term it is important to consider which harms and actions we are referring to, their impacts, and the factors that contribute to their occurrence.

Our strategy follows the Safer Devon Partnership's definition of violence:

> **The intentional use of physical, sexual or psychological force or power (including threats of violence, and including coercive and controlling behaviour).**

Within this, we have defined 'focus areas'. These are in keeping with the Serious Violence Duty's focus on 'public space youth violence', weapons-related violence and criminal activities where

serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as drug related activities, and are reflective of the findings around serious violence identified in our Needs Assessment:

- Violence linked to specific contexts and factors, including domestic abuse, sexual violence and violence against women and girls, weapons related violence, violence linked to drugs and alcohol, violence in the context of exploitation, and violence linked to specific places and spaces.
- Peer to peer harms, including physical violence, harmful sexual behaviour and violence taking place online.

Within these focus areas, our attention has been given to violence in young people (under 25s) . However, we have also considered adults in the context of the harms they can cause towards young people (for example sexual and criminal exploitation) and adults who are more vulnerable to involvement in or victimisation through violence, including adults experiencing multiple disadvantages.

These focus areas have informed the groups and priorities we give attention to in our strategy, which are discussed further below.

Why are we focusing on serious violence?

Our strategy has been developed in response to the Serious Violence Duty, introduced in 2023, which requires specified authorities in local areas to 'work together to prevent and reduce serious violence'.[1] This strategy builds on existing work being delivered in Devon around preventing and reducing youth violence and wider offending, including through the Devon Youth Crime and Violence Prevention Partnership.

In line with the Duty requirements, we have carried out a Needs Assessment to understand what serious violence is happening in Devon and its drivers. We have drawn on local and national datasets, partner insights, academic findings and lived experience insights from young people living in Devon about their experiences of violence. We have identified a significant number of key findings and also areas where additional exploration would further strengthen our understanding.

We have summarised headlines from our findings below. When we refer to 'serious violence' in these findings, we are referring to a suite of crimes that we have agreed are in scope for our Needs Assessment. This includes domestic abuse and sexual violence, following the findings of our previous Community Safety Needs Assessments.

These findings should be read in conjunction with our Serious Violence Needs Assessment [LINK], which provides more detail about the offence groups included within the scope of serious violence, and which provides a full list of caveats.

Our initial findings show that whilst levels of serious violence taking place in Devon are low compared to national comparators, **serious violence is a growing concern within Devon's communities with indications of increasing trends in recent years.**[2]

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[1] The Serious Violence Duty was introduced through the Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. The full statutory guidance can be read here: Home Office (2023), Serious Violence Duty statutory guidance.

[2] Unless stated, all police crime data for serious violence relates to the period from November 2018 to October 2022.

There has been an **overall increase** in the level of total serious violence crime in scope, **by around 12%.**

Domestic abuse is consistently associated with serious violence; around a third of serious violence crime in scope were tagged with a domestic abuse flag.

Violence with Injury comprises the majority of serious violence offences in scope.

There are indications that **violent crimes being committed may be becoming more severe in nature**; 'most serious' Violence with Injury offences (e.g. GBH) have risen by 33%.[3]

Victims and offenders of **'most serious' Violence with Injury offences are most likely to be adult males** between the ages of 26-55.

Our evidence indicates that a significant cohort of vulnerable adults **carry out serious violence as a result of complex needs and drivers,** and that adults experiencing multiple disadvantages are **vulnerable to being victims of violence and exploitation.**

Adults are responsible for the majority of serious violence offences recorded in Devon within police crime data. Offences carried out by under 18s account for less than 20% of total offences.

Provisional Devon Youth Justice data indicates **serious youth violence appears to be increasing.**

Substantial overlap is being seen between young person victims and those carrying out harm.

Qualitative data indicates a **normalisation of violence** between young people. **Exposure to and use of violence online appears commonplace,** including threats, physical violence, bullying, pornography and harmful sexual behaviour.

Violence appears to be a concern for young people in Devon, including concerns about **violence taking place between peers and feelings of safety in their local areas.**

Young people have identified **peer pressure, being cool and fitting in** as important factors for involvement in violence.

Knife crime is an area that would benefit from further research. Whilst police crime data does not suggest young people are at risk there may be limitations with this data.

Lived experiences and partner insights indicate that **the number of young people in Devon carrying a knife may be increasing.**

Available evidence indicates drug related serious violence is increasing.

Drug business models are likely to present risks to children and adults, including child exploitation and risks of violence and exploitation, including cuckooing, towards vulnerable adult drug users.

Child criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation are often interlinked and co-occur with violence. Generally considered to relate to drugs, **CCE is an important factor within young people who have carried out serious violence offences.** CSE is seen at lower levels in this cohort, however it is likely to be underreported.

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[3] 'Most serious' serious violence crimes include offence descriptions such as Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH). A full list is published alongside the Needs Assessment.

Serious violence is gendered. Around **60% of serious violence victims are female.** Over 45% of serious violence crimes with a female victim are **also related to domestic abuse.**

Females are disproportionately impacted by serious violence, as victims, overall; around ¼ of all female victims of all ages were victimised 2 or more times within the 4 years of data.

Women are more likely to experience sexual violence than men. Young females are particularly vulnerable to becoming a victim of a sexual offence. 50% of female victims of Rape and Other Sexual Offences from Nov 2018 – Oct 2022 were under 18.

Females are infrequently recorded as offenders in crime data. **Where females carry out serious violence, evidence indicates they are likely to have a higher prevalence of vulnerabilities.**

Males make up around 40% of identified victims of serious violence. Most victims are within **younger cohorts** (26-35, followed by under 18s, then 18-25).

Males between 18-45 make up the majority of all serious violence offenders.

We have identified a number of needs and drivers throughout our Needs Assessment as relevant to people's involvement in serious violence in Devon. Our findings are weighted towards young people; however, they are likely to be relevant to adults too.

The below diagram presents these needs and drivers through an 'ecological lens', demonstrating how they are interlinked across the four spheres of the 'individual', 'relationships', the 'community' and 'society'. We provide further insights about these needs and drivers in our Needs Assessment.

Individual
- Mental health needs
- Special Educational Needs
- Substance misuse
- Neurodiversity
- Complex lives
- Speech, Language and Communication Needs
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Prior offending

- Childhood trauma and adversity
- Being a child open to social care, or being care experienced

Compounding and intersecting needs and vulnerabilities

Relational
- Abuse and neglect
- Adults/siblings involved in violence, crime, imprisonment
- Parents/carers' needs
- Violence in the home, domestic abuse
- Peer groups and peer influence

Community
- Educational challenges, absence, exclusion, disengagement
- Exploitation
- Online, social media
- Transitions (Year 7, adults)
- Safety of the environment

Societal
- Poverty and deprivation
- Inequality
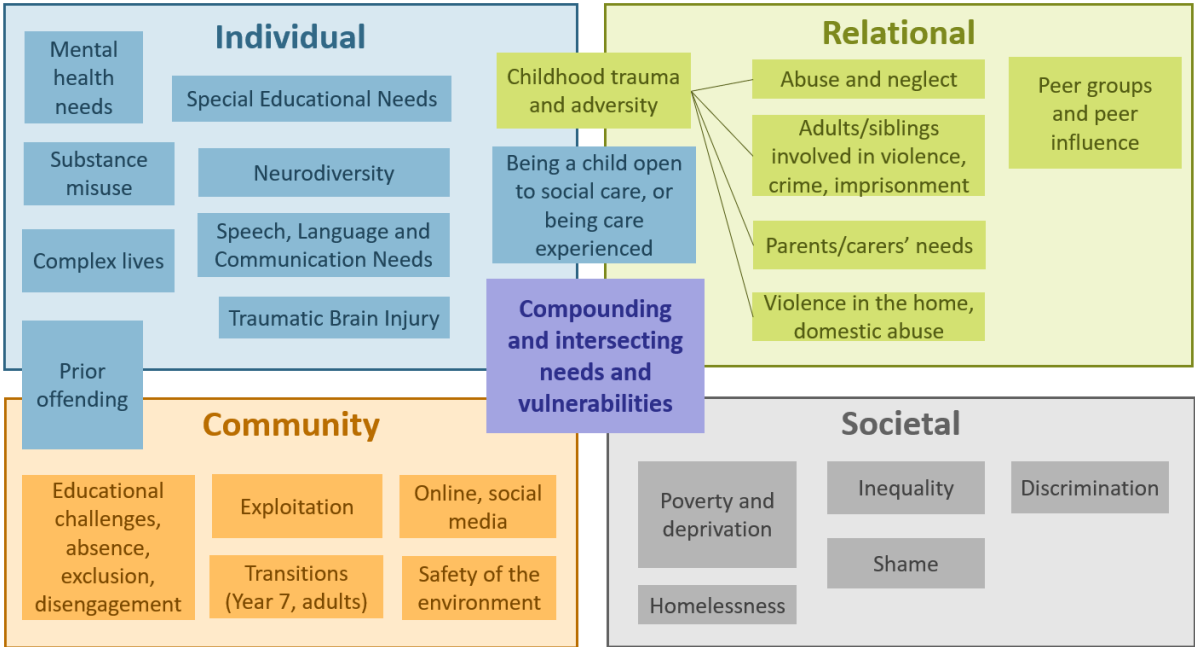- Discrimination
- Shame
- Homelessness

Figure 1: Ecological model of needs and drivers relating to serious violence

Who is involved in our response?

The Serious Violence Duty requires a number of agencies (specified authorities) to work together as part of a local response. These are: local authorities, the police, Integrated Care Boards (NHS), probation services, youth justice services, and fire and rescue services. The Duty also requires

relevant authorities (educational institutions, prisons and the Children and Young People's Secure Estate) to be consulted with and involved in partnership arrangements for the Duty.

A separate amendment to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 has made preventing people from becoming involved in, and reducing instances of, serious violence a new statutory duty for Community Safety Partnerships. This includes preparing strategies in relation to this requirement.[4]

Our partners have collectively agreed that the Safer Devon Partnership, which includes senior representatives from specified authorities as well as the Chairs of Devon's four District-led Community Safety Partnerships, will lead on the Devon response to the Serious Violence Duty. This encompasses the responses of Devon's four District Community Safety Partnerships.

To have greatest impact, our work to prevent serious violence requires bringing together partners from across our systems and connecting with our communities. Alongside specified and relevant authorities, we have therefore brought together a varied range of local partners to inform our strategy development. This includes a core group of partners involved most closely in this work and representatives with key roles across our wider partnerships and systems with whom we can identify opportunities to connect around activities and priorities already playing, and which have potential to play, an important role in violence prevention.

Given the reach of our partners across the Greater Devon and in some cases peninsula geographies, collaboration with Torbay, Plymouth and Cornwall, and with the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner, is important. This will provide opportunities to agree shared priorities and create possibilities for joint working across a range of geographies, including at a peninsula level.

Additional to this, the Police and Crime Commissioner is taking a convenor role for the Duty across the Devon and Cornwall geography. Responsibilities will include chairing the Peninsula Strategic Serious Violence Prevention Partnership, a group bringing together representatives from across the peninsula to provide strategic overview and monitoring of the Serious Violence Duty. The Police and Crime Commissioner is also responsible for the distribution and monitoring of Home Office serious violence grant funding to specified authorities.

How will we respond?

The core aim of our strategy is developing a public health response to serious violence which focuses on prevention through addressing the multiple underlying factors (root causes) that contribute to the occurrence of violence in society.[5]

Factors influencing vulnerability and resilience to violence are experienced across the life course and in many different contexts and circumstances. This includes influences occurring at individual, relational, community and societal levels. These influences are likely to intersect and compound one another, creating greater challenges and complexities over time.

Preventing serious violence requires holistic, flexible and bespoke responses. These should take account of the complexity of violence and its causes, people's lives and needs, and complexities within our systems, and create approaches that work for our communities and local context. This follows the principles of Human Learning Systems.[6]

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[4] Home Office (2023), Serious Violence Duty statutory guidance, Chapter 6.
[5] Word Health Organisation (2020), 'Violence Prevention Alliance: The VPA Approach'.
[6] For more information see: Human Learning Systems

Prevention also requires a layered approach, stretching from a universal population-wide focus to a more highly targeted focus on groups experiencing the most immediate risk of violence.

This layered approach allows us to take steps to prevent violence at the earliest possible opportunity and before vulnerability factors have emerged, whilst also responding where concerns are developing, are accumulating, and where risk and vulnerability have heightened. By focusing on prevention throughout our responses we can reduce the risk of harm to people, families and communities and work with them to strengthen wellbeing and resilience.

The diagram below shows an adapted version of the public health model of violence prevention, showing the three stages of prevention that we will build into our response.
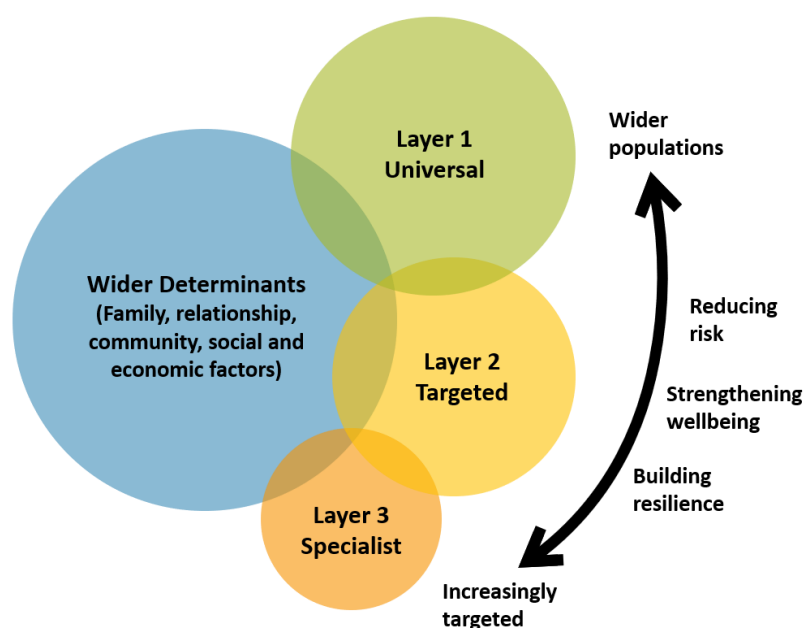

Figure 2: Public Health Model of Violence Prevention, adapted from Public Health Devon

Layer 1: Universal (Primary Prevention)

Prevent vulnerability factors from emerging by strengthening protective factors.

Target groups: groups with no or few vulnerability factors, focus on whole populations (e.g. adolescents).

Examples: Healthy Relationships education for young people in schools.

Layer 2: Targeted (Secondary Prevention)

Early intervention where vulnerability factors are emerging or accumulating, with focus on reducing risk and harm and building wellbeing and resilience at the earliest opportunity.
Target groups: groups where concerns are starting to emerge, grow or become more complex with likely impacts on wellbeing and life chances – children experiencing domestic violence and abuse, children with a family member in prison, children and young people excluded from school.

Examples: whole family recovery support for domestic violence and abuse.

Layer 3: Specialist (Tertiary Prevention)

Specialist support where risk is heightening or there is a risk of immediate harm.

Target groups: groups at heightened risk of becoming involved or victimised by violence, who are on the periphery of the criminal justice system, or who may be at risk of re-offending.

Examples: work with young people experiencing exploitation, Turnaround, Young Person's Behaviour Change Project.

It is important to consider how we can create a shared understanding and commitment to violence prevention across our partnerships and systems and develop opportunities for joint working. Collaboration is best grounded in common approaches and principles, commitment to leadership, and shared responsibility and accountability.

Co-production with people, families and communities will allow us to place their voices, experiences and expertise at the centre of our response. Identifying opportunities for co-production, including involvement in decision making, and building trust and confidence in this approach within our systems is an area we intend to prioritise.

Our strategy will have a two-fold focus: firstly, to consider how our core partners, led by the Safer Devon Partnership, can respond to serious violence through building on existing work and utilising opportunities such as the Home Office-devolved Serious Violence grant. Secondly, to explore how we can embed focus on preventing violence and our strategic priorities across our wider partnerships and systems within Devon and the peninsula, influence opportunities for joint working and encourage the adoption of approaches and practices across a wider footprint.

In many cases we believe our priorities and approaches will have benefits beyond the scope of preventing violence, given their focus on building resilience and wellbeing in our families and communities and adopting ways of working that are inclusive, compassionate and take account of people's lived experiences, for example through adopting trauma informed and shame competent approaches.

We are developing our strategy and delivery plan with this dual focus in mind, bringing partners from across our systems into our conversations and taking opportunity to align our vision, priorities and activities.

Our strategy

Our areas of focus: people and places

In line with the ecological approach to preventing violence, we have identified three key areas of focus for our response. Within these, we have identified groups and places where we feel specific focus would be beneficial due to their significant representation in our Needs Assessment.

Given the attention of the Serious Violence Duty on public space youth violence and its causes, we have focused predominantly on children, young people and families, although we have also identified adults with multiple disadvantages as a group of focus given their prominence within our Needs Assessment.

Me (my experiences and needs)	The people around me (families, friends and relationships)	My community and society
Children who have care experience, and children who are open to social care	Young people and families who are affected by imprisonment or involvement in crime or violence	Education settings (schools, alternative provision and colleges)
Children with Special Educational Needs (SEND), Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and neurodivergence, particularly where there are compounding risk factors, and including where needs are undiagnosed and unidentified	Young people and families who are affected by the needs of parents and care givers, for example substance misuse and/or mental health	Communities experiencing the greatest levels of violence, harms and factors known to influence this, for example deprivation, poverty, presence of drug activities, concerns around the Night Time Economy
Children and young people who are at risk of contextual harms (risks from outside of the family)	Young people and families who are affected by domestic violence and abuse	All young people, focusing on safety and exposure to violence and harmful behaviours in adolescence
Adults who experience multiple disadvantages		

These groups are listed in the table below along with evidence from our Needs Assessment explaining the rationale for their inclusion.

Me (my experiences and needs)	Why we are focusing on these groups
Children who have care experience, and children who are open to social care.	• Young people who have care experience are disproportionately represented in the youth justice system.[i] They often face intersecting needs, such as adverse childhood experiences and trauma and SEND, and may have heightened vulnerability to exploitation. • Children open to social services who are not 'Looked After' are also likely to have experienced childhood trauma and adversity, creating a potential level of vulnerability to becoming involved in serious violence. • Devon Youth Justice data shows that in 21/22, 39% of serious violence offences were committed by children open to social care. In 22/23 this figure was 44%. These figures are inclusive of Looked After Children.
Children with SEN, SLCN and neurodivergence, particularly where there are compounding risk factors, and including where needs are undiagnosed and unidentified.	• There is an overrepresentation of young people with SEND, neurodivergence and SLCN within youth justice cohorts, including young people who have carried out serious violence offences.[ii] • The prevalence of young people with SEND in the Devon Youth Justice serious violence cohort is greater than the prevalence in cohorts who have carried out other offences. In 2022-23, 29% of all serious violence offences were carried out by a young person with identified SEND needs, compared to 17.5% of all other offences. • The underdiagnosis of SEND, SLCN and neurodiversity is well recognised.[iii] Partner insights highlight a lack of diagnosis and support as a potentially important factor increasing vulnerability for young people. National research evidences this in relation to Developmental Language Disorder, which comes under the umbrella of SLCN.[iv]
Adults who experience multiple disadvantages.	• Multiple and complex needs are a prominent theme for adults where concerns are greatest around serious violence. • A high number of needs are seen in adults in Devon who have committed serious violence offences and are on Probation (females were attached, on average, to 5.9 needs per offence and males to 5.4 needs per offence). Homelessness and indications of a chaotic living condition were also prevalent. 20% of the Probation cohort were registered to No Fixed Abode or had no recorded address. • Partner insights suggest that adults with multiple disadvantages are at greater risk of being victims of a range of violent harms, including drug related violence and exploitation. The risk of sexual violence and sexual exploitation towards women is a particular concern.
Children and young people who are at risk of contextual harms (risks from outside of the family).	• Exploitation has been identified as a significant area of concern for children and young people involved in serious violence. • Devon Youth Justice Service data shows in 21/22 there were concerns regarding Child Criminal Exploitation for 28.9% of young people who committed a serious violence offence, whilst in 2022/23 this figure was 19.2%. In 22/23 11.5% of children who committed a serious violence offence were believed to have previously been sexually exploited. In 21/22 this was 0%, however it is likely that Child Sexual Exploitation is underreported. • Young person peer groups present particular harms, with anecdotal partner evidence highlighting concerns around certain peer groups who carry out violence and a range of interlinked and wider harms within a group context.

The people around me	Why we are focusing on these groups
Young people and families who are affected by imprisonment or involvement in crime or violence	• Familial imprisonment and involvement in crime can be a potential risk factor for children becoming involved in violence and crime. Children who experience parental imprisonment are more likely than their peers to experience multiple adverse childhood experiences, have complex behaviour and emotional needs, and be arrested and imprisoned later in life.[v] • Local lived experiences research by Space Youth Service indicates parental imprisonment has a significant impact on young people's mental and physical wellbeing, their home life and behaviour. 44% of 36 children consulted had experienced family going to prison. Whilst these figures relate to a very small sample and their generalisability is unclear, they highlight the need in Devon that is currently being unmet.
Young people and families who are affected by the needs of parents and care givers, for example substance misuse and/or mental health	• Partners have highlighted the importance of the needs of parents and caregivers in heightening vulnerability for young people, especially needs around substance misuse and/or mental health. • Local data from the first cohort of young people in Turning Corners in 2019/20 (who were identified as at risk of crime and anti-social behaviour) indicates that 39% grew up in a household with adults who experienced alcohol/drug needs and 16% had a parent living with a mental health condition.[7] The Devon Young Person's Behaviour Change Project, which works with young people who display harmful behaviour, has reported that of 28 children in the service from 1/4/22-31/3/23, 46% had a parent with a mental health need.

Young people and families who are affected by domestic violence and abuse	• National research evidences a relationship between witnessing and/or experiencing domestic violence, alongside other adverse childhood experiences, and youth violence.[vi]
	• Our understanding of the prevalence and importance of childhood domestic violence and abuse in young people and adults who carry out harmful behaviour is emerging and would benefit from further research.
	• Domestic abuse makes up a third of all serious violence crime, but it is unclear what proportion of this is witnessed by children. Local data suggests a high prevalence of childhood exposure to domestic abuse in certain groups:
	    o 49% of First Time Entrants within the Devon Youth Justice Service within a 12 month period had experienced domestic abuse either as a victim or witness.[8]
	    o 83% of young people in Turning Corners in 2019/20 had experienced domestic abuse as a victim or witness.
	    o On average, 85% of adults displaying harmful behaviours that engaged in community behaviour change programmes report having experienced domestic abuse as children.

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[7] Turning Corners was an early intervention programme for young people in South Devon at risk of carrying out anti-social behaviour, crime and violence.

[8] Note – this research was carried out against police crime and intelligence reports. It is possible that data around the experience of domestic abuse in First Time Entrants may not have been entered into the system, due to the unreported nature of this crime.

My community and society	Why we are focusing on these groups
Education settings (schools, alternative provision and colleges)	• Evidence indicates that children involved in serious violence in Devon have experienced multiple educational challenges. • Children who were cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence in Devon were found to have low educational attainment, a high number of absence periods before the offence, a high number of suspensions or exclusions before the offence (88% had previously been suspended) and a high number of alternative provisions.[vii] • Exclusion is a particular concern as a factor increasing risk around involvement in violence. Devon YJS data shows in 21/22 37% of serious violence offences were committed by children with at least one prior exclusion. In 22/23 this figure was 44%. • There has been national recognition about the importance of disengagement from education, including through suspension and exclusion, in creating conditions for exposure to exploitation, criminality and violence and in escalating risk.[viii] • International evidence indicates a link between violence taking place in schools and later criminal justice involvement.[ix] Local qualitative insights highlight concerns around bulling, racism, homophobia, transphobia, harmful sexual behaviour, misogyny and violence in schools, and indicate a rise in violence between peers and towards staff.
Communities experiencing the greatest levels of violence, harms and factors known to influence this, for example deprivation, poverty, presence of drug activities, concerns around Night Time Economy	Whilst further work is required to understand the occurrence and experience of violence across our communities in Devon, evidence indicates the occurrence of serious violence is influenced by local factors: • Local data shows the highest levels of serious violence crimes take place in urban areas; these are busy and usually densely populated areas that often have prominent Night Time Economies. • Insights from young people and partners suggest certain places and spaces may present greater risks around violence and associated harms. Lived experience work with young people highlights concerns around the safety of their local areas. • The presence and nature of drug business models is likely to influence the occurrence of violence linked to drug supply. • Poverty and deprivation can combine with other factors to heighten the risk of young people becoming involved in violence. Socio-economic factors have been identified as a core foundation of violence, and child poverty as a key drive r.[x] • 67% of young people cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence in Devon were eligible for free school meals (this is less than 2% of the total children on free school meals).[xi] Local police data indicates that drug possession and trafficking offences are more likely to occur in more deprived postcodes.
All young people, focusing on safety and exposure to violence and harmful behaviours in adolescence	• Lived experience insights from young people in Devon tell us that exposure to violence as a witness or victim, online or in person, appears normalised for young people. Online spaces and social media appear to be an important facilitator of violence. Harms young people are exposed to include bullying, pornography, sexual violence and physical violence and fights. Peer to peer violence is also a key concern. • Harmful sexual behaviour in young people appears to be normalised, including sexual harassment, harmful sexual behaviour, the sharing of explicit images and online sexual abuse. The online space, social media and pornography are key concerns. • Knife crime is a concern for young people, and the number of young people in Devon carrying a knife may be increasing.

	• Peer pressure, fitting in, safety and protection appear important to understanding young people's involvement in violence.

Our vision

> Our vision is for people, family and communities in Devon to thrive, safe from the risk and experience of violence.

Our priorities

Our priorities outline our overarching statements of intent, informed by our Needs Assessment. We have separated these into 'core priorities' and 'cross-cutting priorities'. Our 'cross-cutting priorities' are priorities in their own right and will have work attached to them, but will also help to inform our approach to carrying out work against our 'core priorities'.

Core priorities

Priority 1: We will shape a series of preventative responses to young people and adults who are at greatest risk of involvement in violence based on their individual needs and experiences, taking account of intersecting needs and the individual ways needs may present.

Priority 2: We will strengthen our understanding and response to contextual harms, reducing exploitation and peer group related risks.

Priority 3: We will strengthen our early years and early help targeted offer for families where risk and vulnerability factors in relation to violence are present.

Priority 4: We will challenge the normalisation of violence, particularly in relation to young people - supporting them to develop healthy and respectful relationships, both intimate partner and peer to peer.

Priority 5: We will work towards creating inclusive, supportive education environments where all young people can thrive, with a focus on strengthening their wellbeing, resilience and opportunities.

Cross-cutting priorities

Priority 6: We will work towards trauma-informed, shame-competent and neurodivergence-aware systems (see appendix 1 for our definitions of these terms).

Priority 7: We will strengthen our learning about serious violence, needs and drivers, and what works well as prevention.

Our priorities will be supported by actions, outputs, outcomes and impacts detailing the work we plan to carry out, our expected results and the subsequent long-term changes we aim to see in our communities. This information will be included in our delivery plan, and will be developed during 2024 following publication of this strategy.

The below diagram summarises how each of the steps described above will follow on from each other to achieve our intended impacts, with opportunities for learning and review.
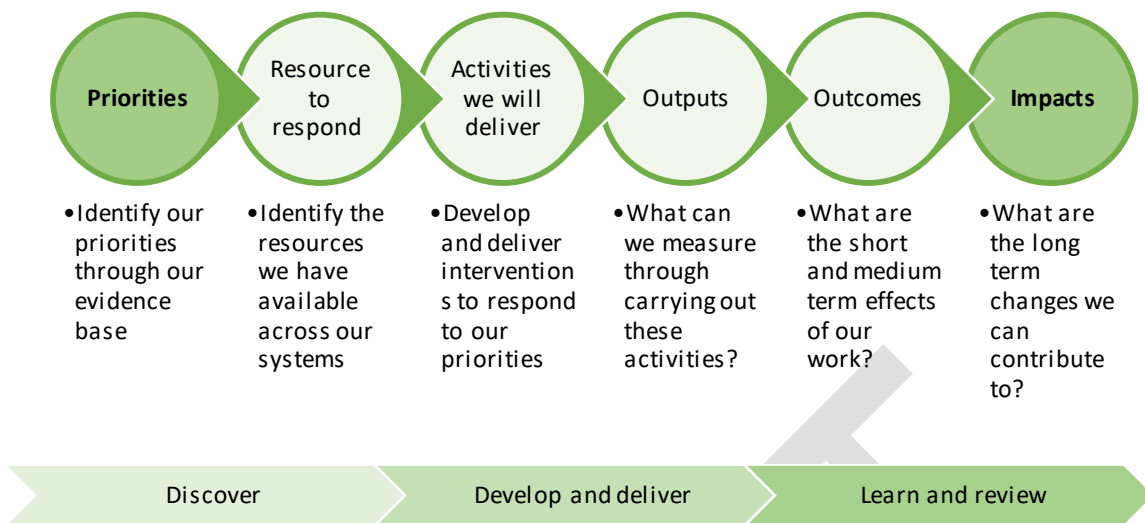
Figure 3: Diagram showing a model theory of change for our strategy, outlining how our priorities will lead to activities that we deliver, in turn leading to outcomes and impacts for communities.

Further details about our priorities are included on the following pages, including our rationale for selection. Whilst we recognise there is more to do to achieve these priorities, we have included a small number of examples of some of the ways in which, as a system, we are currently working towards them. These examples should not be taken as exhaustive.

Our core priorities	Our evidence	Examples of work are we already doing
Priority 1 **We will shape a series of preventative responses to young people and adults who are at greatest risk of involvement in violence based on their individual needs and experiences, taking account of intersecting needs and the individual ways needs may present.**	Young people and adults at greatest risk of involvement in violence are likely to experience multiple, intersecting and compounding experiences and needs. It is important when working with people that we take account of the breadth and complexity of their experiences and needs. This involves taking person-centred, holistic and flexible approaches that can adapt to people's needs, and exploring inclusive and wrap around models of support that reduce the need for multiple services and remove inclusion criteria. It is also important that services are aware of how presenting (primary) needs (e.g. substance misuse) can mask underlying (secondary) needs and experiences such as past or ongoing trauma.	We are continuing the Young Persons Behaviour Change Support 'test and learn' project, working with young people at risk of harmful behaviours. Y-Smart (young person's substance misuse service) has introduced Dialectical Behaviour Therapy training, which teaches people how to live in the moment, develop healthy ways to cope with stress, regulate their emotions, and improve their relationships with others. Together (Humankind) are strengthening pathways between Police Custody suites and those arrested as a result of a substance related needs to encourage them into treatment. People presenting to court where their offending is linked to a mental health need, and the Judge deems it appropriate, can receive a Mental Health Treatment Requirement through Together (Humankind).
Priority 2 **We will strengthen our understanding and response to contextual harms, reducing exploitation and peer group related risks.**	National data and local insights highlight exploitation as a factor within violence taking place in Devon, and as a feature of Youth Justice cohorts. Anecdotal insights have highlighted risks within young person peer groups, with indications that certain peer groups are carrying out violence and wider harms within a group context. Evidence about these areas is limited and would benefit from further exploration. The Adolescent Safety Framework has provided a framework for responding to contextual harms in young people in Devon. A review of the ASF has identified opportunities to strengthen the existing contextual safeguarding response.	The Adolescence Safety Framework is undergoing review, including recommendations for future work. The Devon Youth Justice Service is carrying out work with partners to increase the understanding of young people experiencing exploitation and how they present across different services.

Priority 3 **We will strengthen our early years and early help targeted offer for families where risk and vulnerability factors in relation to violence are present.**	Evidence indicates that familial experiences can heighten vulnerability in relation to violence for children and young people. Our needs assessment has identified the importance of focus on childhood trauma and adversity, including domestic violence and abuse, parental and caregivers' needs (including substance misuse and mental health) and families affected by imprisonment or involvement in crime or violence. Adverse childhood experiences are associated with vulnerability to violence throughout the life course, and can transmit intergenerationally, creating potential for cycles of violence in families. Research shows a significant proportion of justice-involved children, and adults in prison, have experienced adverse childhood experiences. [xii] Traumatic experiences during the early years of life, including the first 1,000 days, are particularly crucial for later outcomes. [xiii] This highlights the importance of early years as a focus for work with families. Further evidence for the above areas can be found on page 13.	We have introduced a 12 month whole family domestic violence and abuse recovery support 'test and learn' pilot, working with families, including children, who have experienced domestic abuse.
Priority 4 **We will challenge the normalisation of violence, particularly in relation to young people - supporting them to develop healthy and respectful relationships, both intimate partner and peer to peer.**	Local evidence indicates there is a growing culture of normalised violence and harmful behaviour in young people. Lived experience insights from young people in Devon show that online violence is commonplace with 52% of young people viewing violent content on social media. Misogyny and harmful sexual behaviour is frequently perpetuated and observed both online and offline. Bullying, racism, misogyny, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia have all been noted to occur in schools in Devon and seem normalised. Further work is to be done to understand the extent of serious violence experienced by people with protected characteristics. International evidence indicates links between school violence and later criminal justice involvement. [xiv] Therefore, preventative, education and bystander approaches focused on young people, parents and carers at	South Devon and Dartmoor CSP has developed and expanded its Let's Talk Programme of online support sessions for parents and carers of teenagers and pre-teens. We are rolling out the Mentors in Violence Prevention bystander initiative to secondary schools.

	the earliest stage are likely to address the root of these issues and promote healthy and respectful behaviour and relationships.	
Priority 5 **We will work towards creating inclusive, supportive education environments where all young people can thrive, with a focus on strengthening their wellbeing, resilience and opportunities.**	Educational challenges, particularly exclusion as well as disengagement from school, have been identified as important factors heightening risk around involvement in serious violence.[xv] Devon Youth Justice Service data shows that in 22/23, 44% of serious violence offences were committed by children who had at least one prior exclusion. Exclusion disproportionately affects certain groups, including children and young people with SEND, children and young people on free school meals and children and young people open to social care. These groups are also overrepresented in cohorts involved in serious violence.[xvi] Partners have also highlighted concerns around bullying, violence and harmful behaviour taking place in schools. Partners have indicated that more could be done to ensure education environments are inclusive, supportive and safe places where all young people feel supported, including young people with additional needs.	

Cross-cutting priorities	Our evidence	Examples of work we are already doing
Priority 6: **We will work towards trauma-informed, shame-competent and neurodivergence-aware systems (see appendix 1 for our definitions of these terms).**	A significant number of young people and adults in the criminal justice system have experienced childhood trauma and adversity.[xvii] This is in addition to traumatic experiences that may have taken place later in life. The experience of shame is closely linked to trauma, and it is likely that many people who have encountered trauma also experience shame. Experiencing shame can lead people to behave in ways that mask the shame they feel. These responses vary depending on the individual, and can include anger, aggression, hostility and violence.[xviii] A high number of young people and adults in the criminal justice system are understood to be neurodivergent, and may have differences in how they process and learn information, function, and communicate.[xix] Being trauma-informed, shame-competent and neurodivergence-aware in our approaches across our organisations and systems is crucial for ensuring we can work with people in a compassionate, inclusive and person-centred way that can take account of their past experiences and meet their present needs, and address current barriers in the way our services and systems operate.	Devon Integrated Care System is providing trauma stabilisation for adults who have experienced sexual violence and abuse. Devon Integrated Care System is providing 'Putting the pieces together' training on complex trauma and language and communication development for professionals working with children and young people and their families in Devon, Torbay and Plymouth. The Youth Justice Service is receiving the National Autism Trainer Programme, facilitated through the Anna Freud Centre. The programme is co-designed and co-delivered by people with lived experience of neurodiversity. Professionals will be trained as trainers to upskill staff in the needs of young people with autism.
Priority 7: **We will strengthen our learning about serious violence, needs and drivers, and what works well as prevention.**	Our Needs Assessment has developed a detailed picture of violence taking place in Devon and factors influencing its occurrence, and has highlighted where we can build further insights. However, the prevalence and scope of some kinds of violence in Devon is unknown, including knife crime, violence within peer groups, exploitation, modern slavery-related violence and the role of Organised Crime Gangs and the level of harm they may cause to communities.	We are currently working with Space Youth Service to collect data from peer led lived experience projects about young people's experiences – including young people's experiences of violence, and young people affected by familial imprisonment. We are working to strengthen the sharing of data around serious violence, using the findings from our Needs

There are currently gaps in our understanding of the experiences of violence of people with protected characteristics, including ethnically diverse people and LGBTQ+ people, and the intersection between hate crime and violence.

Evidence suggests that many people involved in serious violence may have multiple and intersecting needs, however conclusive local evidence is lacking. We need to strengthen our understanding about how intersecting personal characteristics, including protected characteristics, experiences and needs can combine to create unique experiences of violence and in some cases heighten vulnerability and risk.

We can build on our existing 'test and learn' approach to strengthen our understanding of what works well as prevention – using evaluation, quantitative data and qualitative insights from people accessing services and those involved in delivery.

Assessment and gaps in our understanding to identify areas for future work.

Our underlying themes

A number of themes run throughout our strategy and will be used to inform work against all our priorities.

1) **Relatable moments** - identifying opportunities to engage with young people, families and adults to build resilience and wellbeing and support change.

   Relatable moments can include times and places where there may be greater opportunity for engagement, such as during early years and through education settings. They can also be moments when risk is heightened, such as at the point of exclusion, when a child comes into social care, or when they first come into contact with the police.

2) **Breaking cycles of harm in families and communities** – working to break intergenerational cycles of harm and violence in families and cycles of harm in communities.

   This involves taking account of needs and drivers taking place at individual, familial/relational, community and societal levels, and considering the impacts of trauma and shame within families and communities. Through using whole family and whole community approaches the root causes of these needs and drivers can be addressed, and protective factors and resilience can be strengthened.

3) **Transitions** – supporting young people during times of transition, for example primary to secondary and child to adult, and with particular focus on 18-25s.

   Key life transitions have been highlighted by our partners, Devon Youth Voice and in research as critical times for young people, being potential times of challenge and creating opportunities to build resilience. These include the transition for child to adult services, including the transition from youth justice to probation, and transitions within safeguarding, mental health and the care system. Transitions from primary to secondary, from school to college, from education to employment, and into housing have also been identified as important.[xx]

4) **Equality, diversity and intersectionality** – consideration needs to be given to protected characteristics, understanding and taking account of the intersecting identities and experiences that can shape vulnerability and resilience to harm.

   Given the prominence of gender-based violence within our Needs Assessment, it is important that our responses consider a gendered lens where appropriate.

Our guiding principles

How we work matters as much as the work we carry out. We have developed a set of guiding principles that are grounded in public health, trauma-informed and human learning systems approaches to working.

They will inform how we work together with our partners, how we work with people, families and communities, and how we seek to prevent violence. As system leaders we will undertake a commitment to work in line with these principles and to use our example and influence to encourage their adoption across our systems.
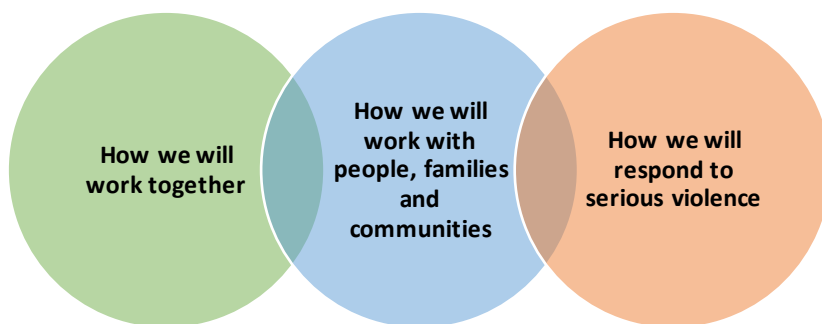
Figure 4: Diagram showing our guiding principles and how they interlink.

How we will work together

1) Working together across our organisations, partnerships and systems to prevent serious violence, with focus on strengthening leadership, creating shared responsibility and accountability and addressing barriers to change.
2) Taking a co-production approach to our work, valuing and maximising the voice, expertise and role of young people, families and communities in our actions, including in decision making.
3) Empowering our practitioners – giving them the time, opportunity and support to work with our communities in new ways and embed new approaches in their practice.
4) Making the most of the unique value each partner can bring to our work and maximising opportunities for involvement from across all specified authorities and Community Safety Partnerships, and from the wider statutory and voluntary sector.

How we will work with people, families and communities

1) Being strengths based - focusing on wellbeing, resilience and opportunity and building on the assets of our people and communities.
2) Being relationship based – building trusted relationships within families and peer groups and with professionals.
3) Being inclusive, compassionate and non-judgemental – respecting people's lived experiences and circumstances.
4) Taking a holistic approach - thinking whole person, whole family and whole community.
5) Recognising and respectfully challenging harmful norms, inequalities, exclusion and discrimination.

How we will respond to serious violence

1) Addressing the root causes of violence through long term and sustainable prevention and early intervention.
2) Taking a life course approach - focusing on factors that influence vulnerability and resilience from early years and throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood.
3) Recognising complexity (in violence and its causes, in people's lives and needs, and in our systems) and the importance of creating bespoke, considered responses that foster connection, value relationships and work for our communities and our local context, focusing on learning through the journey.
4) Being curious and evidence informed – building our existing understanding and taking account of what we don't know.
5) Focusing on continuous learning and challenge.

Appendix 1: Definitions

Trauma-informed

Trauma-informed practice is an approach to interventions that are grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual's neurological, biological, psychological and social development. The purpose of trauma-informed practice is not to treat trauma-related difficulties, which is the role of trauma-specialist services and practitioners. Instead, it seeks to address the barriers that people affected by trauma can experience when accessing services.

Trauma-informed practice aims to:

- Increase practitioners' awareness of how trauma can negatively impact on individuals and communities and their ability to feel safe or develop trusting relationships with services and their staff.
- Improve the accessibility and quality of services by creating culturally sensitive, safe services that people trust and want to use. It seeks to prepare practitioners to work in collaboration and partnership with people and empower them.
- Acknowledge the need to see beyond an individual's presenting behaviours and ask, 'What does this person need?' rather than 'What is wrong with this person?'
- Avoid re-traumatisation, which is the re-experiencing of thoughts, feelings or sensations experienced at the time of a traumatic event or circumstance in a person's past.

Trauma-informed practice involves 6 principles: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and cultural consideration.[xxi]

Shame competence

Shame is a complex and negative emotional experience that can take many forms. It occurs when we feel negatively judged or 'less than' others, when we feel unworthy, unloved or as though we might be rejected, or if we feel we have transgressed the standards and expectations we set for ourselves or that are set by others.[xxii] Shame is closely linked to trauma; emerging research indicates that events such as traumatic experiences and/or societal inequalities can cause an individual to experience shame.[xxiii]

'Chronic' or 'toxic' shame can result in behaviours and responses that mask the shame that people feel. These responses vary depending on the individual and can include anger, aggression, hostility and violence.[xxiv] Shame has also been identified as an important barrier to seeking and receiving support. Shame-sensitive practice is important to overcoming this barrier and avoiding further shaming and stigma when engaging with services.[xxv]

Shame competence is a set of skills, principles and practices that can be learned by individuals and applied within teams and throughout an organisation. Shame competent individuals, teams, and organizations are able to constructively engage with shame to advance well-being, dignity, and inclusion.[xxvi]

Neurodivergence-aware

Neurodiversity is the concept that everyone varies in terms of our neurocognitive ability. This includes the way we think, learn, communicate and function. The term neurodivergence is used where someone processes, learns or functions differently from what is considered average or typical. Neurodivergent people can find some things very easy and other things incredibly hard.[xxvii]

The social model of disability states that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. Barriers can be physical or they can be caused by people's attitudes to difference. Removing these barriers creates inclusion, equality and opportunity, and amplifies diverse abilities.[xxviii]

Being neurodivergence-aware involves taking an inclusive, accessible and non-judgemental approach to the way we work with people and design and deliver services, and recognising where barriers exist in the current ways that our services, organisations and systems operate. This involves listening to and accommodating peoples' individual preferences and needs around language, processing, learning and communication and ensuring our approaches to support are flexible and inclusive of these preferences and needs.

Ableism refers to the belief that 'typical' abilities or ways of being are normal and superior, including being 'neurotypical'. An ableist attitude defines people who are neurodivergent as lesser and can lead to harmful stereotypes and discriminatory beliefs, attitudes and actions.[xxix] Neurodivergence is in no way 'lesser' than any other way of being. Being neurodivergence-aware involves accepting neurodivergence as equal to any other way of thinking, learning, communicating and functioning, and actively challenging ableist beliefs and practices.

Some important components of a neurodivergence-aware approach are training relating to neurodiversity and ableism, accessible practical tools for staff, and cultures that promote inclusion, accessibility and diversity.[xxx]

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