

West Berkshire Partnership Serious Violence Reduction Strategy

2024-2025



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Background

Following the implementation of the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act 2022 a statutory duty is now in place to reduce Serious Violence. This duty requires specified authorities for a local government area to work together and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence. This includes preparation and implementation of a strategy for preventing and reducing serious violence that occurs in the area. For West Berkshire this area is agreed as the co-terminus Local Authority and Building Communities Together Partnership (West Berkshire's Community Safety Partnership) area. The expectation is that this duty will be upheld through working in partnership with both the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

Serious violence reduction will be delivered through a delivery plan which includes new interventions and activity, whilst embedding ongoing reduction into existing work streams. The approach to be taken is a public health approach ensuring that we identify and tackle the causes of serious violence, not just the symptoms.

West Berkshire's Serious Violence Reduction Steering Group, incorporating representatives from both statutory, voluntary and community sector partners, produced a strategy and plan upstream of the implementation of the duty. With additional input from Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit, the next iteration of the West Berkshire Serious Violence Reduction Plan now aligns this previous work with the new expectations of the duty.

The Strategy sets out West Berkshire's approach to tackling serious violence across the Local Authority area during 2024 and takes into consideration the following sources of information:

- **West Berkshire Building Communities Together Needs Assessment 2023**
- **West Berkshire Serious Violence Needs Analysis 2023**
- **Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit's Strategic Needs Assessment and Dashboard 2023**
- **Home Office Serious Violence Reduction Duty Guidance 2023**

Consultation for this strategy and plan has taken place through a variety of engagement opportunities, including but not limited to, the Building Communities Together Partnership (CSP); the membership of the Serious Violence Reduction Steering Group; the West Berks Child Exploitation Strategy Group; Community Conversations; West Berkshire IAG public meeting; the West Berkshire Violence Against Women and Girls group (with youth representation); Schools Heads and Safeguarding leads forums.

It has also been formed through public responses to a number of surveys (referenced in the needs analysis) to better understand the fears and concerns of the public in relation to safety and violence. Over 6000 of those responses came from children following a survey of 12000 local school pupils.

Serious Violence Definition

The duty guidance provided relative freedom to define serious violence in a way that enabled different areas to apply a definition that was appropriate for the demographics and needs of their area.

West Berkshire have agreed a core definition that corresponds with that used across the other areas within Thames Valley:

“Serious Violence includes specific types of recorded crime, such as homicide, grievous bodily harm, incidents that involve a knife, and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as in county lines drug dealing.”

This is based on the original Home Office definition and is inclusive of all ages and location types (public / private)

“Incidents involving a knife” relate to knife crime according to the Home Office Annual Data Requirement (ADR) 160 – and exclude simple possession.

To better understand the local precursors and risks associated with progression towards serious violence, a secondary category has also been adopted for analysis and necessary action. This is in line with West Berkshire’s historically low levels of serious violence and the local strategy being one focused on early intervention and prevention. These have been called Group B offences. Group B are recorded offences which contribute to the threat, inherent risk and understanding of the core definition offences. These are analysed for the purposes of understanding the correlation / relationship of the crime type, the persons involvement and the context:

- **All actual bodily harm**
- **All drug supply / trafficking (excluding simple drug possession)**
- **All sexual assault**
- **All rape**

Serious Violence Needs Analysis Summary

Data is gathered from partnership sources via the Serious Violence Reduction Steering Group and submitted to the partnership analyst who produces an annual needs analysis report specific to serious violence. Data was also gathered from the Building Communities Together Partnership Strategic Needs Assessment for West Berkshire which partially informed the current Serious Violence needs analysis report. The analyst is a shared resource across neighbouring areas which allows for discussion on cross border findings, and shared knowledge of some local issues which could be relevant across arbitrary borders.

West Berkshire is an area of low prevalence for serious violence which the Local Authority and partners strive to maintain through a focus on prevention.

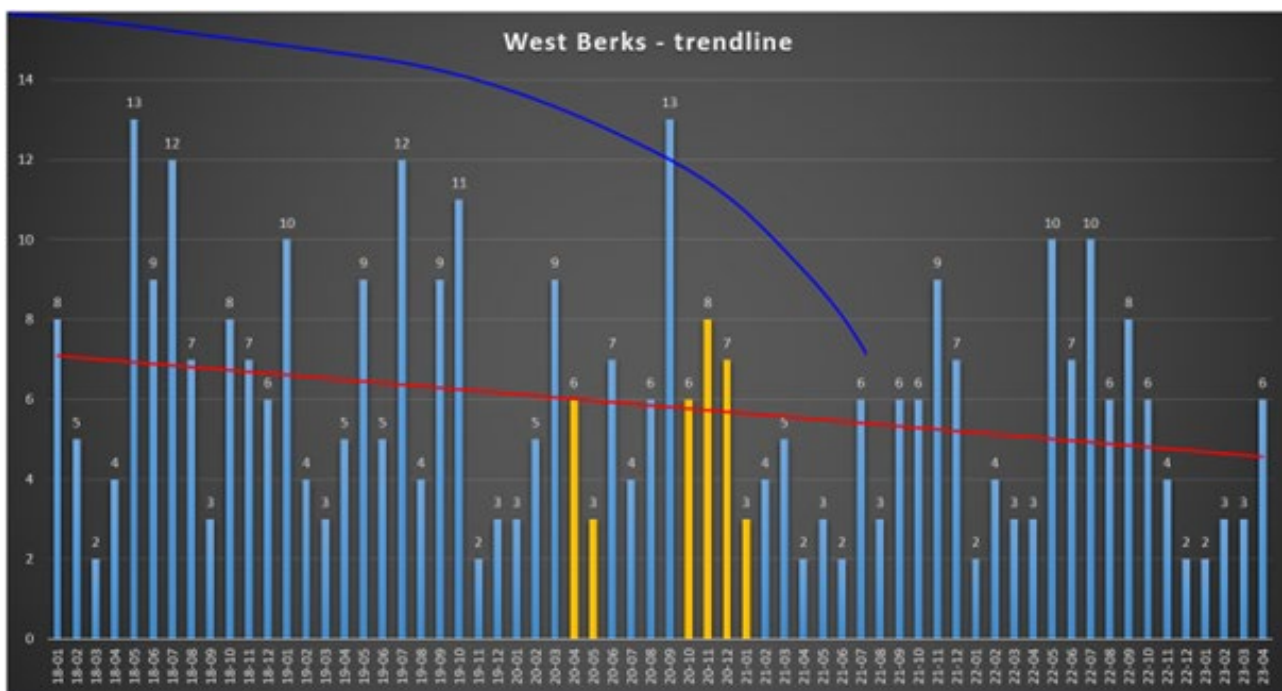


Figure 2 SV by month January 2018 to April 2023

- West Berks has significantly lower serious violence rates than other predominantly urban areas in Thames Valley (with the exception of one neighbouring area) and a 51% lower rate than the only other area in TVP which has the same classification in terms of urban and rural mix.
- There were 65 serious violence crimes recorded in 2022 across West Berkshire, compared to 56 in 2021, however there has been an overall steady decrease of 29% since 2018 and 2021 appears to be a year with significantly fewer offences for comparison.
- The rate of Serious Violence offences per 1,000 of the population for West Berkshire currently sits at 2.31 – again one of the lowest rates across Thames Valley.
- Whilst a possible trend was identified in monthly serious violence levels year on year (July), analysis has not identified an actionable pattern to this trend.

- Of the 373 serious violence occurrences across the last 5 years, 251 (67%) were knife related.
- 80 (21%) were also domestic abuse offences over the last 5 years. This figure compares appropriately with other districts in Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes and does not highlight any local anomalies.
- Of concern is the number of serious violence occurrences where suspects are under 24 years of age (over 30% of offences where an age is recorded).
- There are two concerns with "Group B" violence, one is the upward trend, the other is the young age profile of the offender.
- There are discernible peaks in seasonal and daily trends but serious violence outside of these peaks remains significant. July is the annual peak (but with no discernible pattern), and Friday night is the weekly peak.
- Suspects are overwhelmingly male and the majority under 30.
- The majority of victims are also male and tend to belong to the same age group as their alleged attackers.
- 57% of suspects are recorded as coming from West Berkshire and 82% recorded as from the TVP area but subsequent analysis has shown this figure could be higher.
- The four locational concentrations of serious violence for West Berkshire are Newbury town centre, Thatcham town centre, The Nightingales estate and Thornford Park hospital (for which a separate action plan is already in place).
- An increase in violence-based suspensions and exclusions was identified in relation to both local primary and secondary schools, with the violence being directed at both children and adults on an increased trajectory.
- Several local surveys across a variety of age ranges and demographics have continued to return results indicating that the public feel that West Berkshire is a safe place and that they would turn to the natural authority figures if they needed help or were concerned.

Vision and Aims

Vision

For residents, businesses, and visitors of West Berkshire to live, work and enjoy leisure time free from Serious Violence

There are four strategic aims:

1. To protect children and young adults from becoming victims or perpetrators of serious violence through early intervention and prevention.
2. To listen to and work with local communities and voluntary groups to harness their local skills and knowledge, and to identify activity that will be effective locally to reduce serious violence and its causes.
3. To make effective use of enforcement, investigation and criminal justice opportunities to reduce serious violence through successful prosecution, deterrence and risk management.
4. To use relevant data and analysis to inform our approach to the causes of serious violence.

Governance

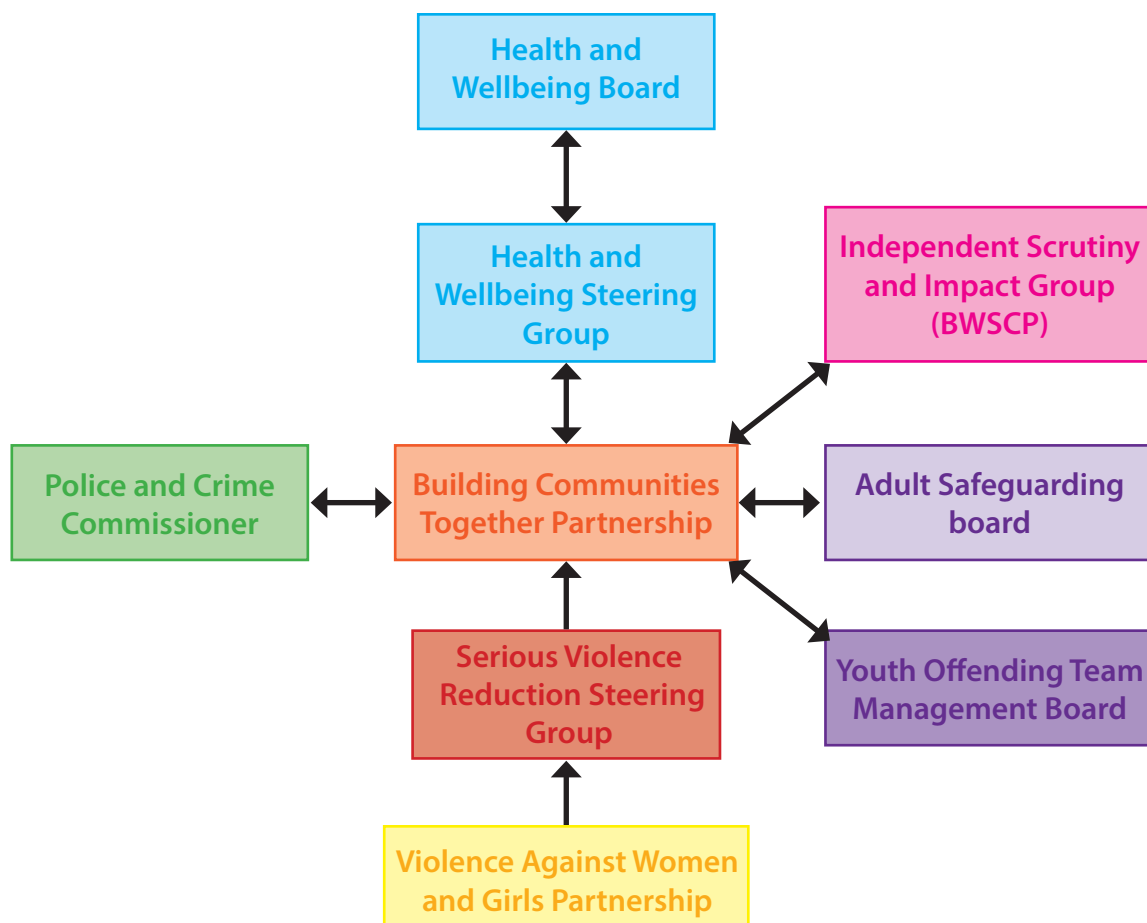
The structure chart below illustrates the strategic approach to addressing the reduction of serious violence in West Berkshire.

The progress of the strategy is reviewed and monitored quarterly through the West Berkshire Serious Violence Reduction Steering Group and is reported on quarterly at the West Berkshire Building Communities Together Partnership meeting. In addition ongoing updates and exception reports are presented at the West Berkshire Health and Wellbeing Board.

A formal annual review will take place following the annual refresh of the local needs analysis. A dashboard will assist with monitoring progress at the Serious Violence Reduction Steering Group.

The Serious Violence Reduction Steering Group is currently chaired by the Police, and regular membership includes representatives from each of the statutory specified authorities, together with decision makers from community and voluntary groups; education; children and youth services; Healthwatch; adult safeguarding and adults services; Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit; public health. Additional members are considered on a needs basis linked to current delivery requirements.

The delivery plan is co-ordinated by the partnership Serious Violence Reduction Co-ordinator.



West Berkshire strategic partnerships and boards which receive updates or which share and monitor analysis or actions include:

West Berkshire Building Communities Together Partnership

West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Board

West Berkshire Child Exploitation Strategic Group

West Berkshire YOT Management Board

Berkshire West Safeguarding Children's Partnership – Response to Extra Familial Harm / Serious Violence Group

West Berkshire LPA (Local Police Area) Preventing Homicide and Reducing Serious Violence Group

West Berkshire LPA Knife Crime Meeting

West Berkshire Head Teacher's Forums

West Berkshire EMRAC (Exploitation and Missing Risk Assessment Conference)

Independent scrutiny arrangements are through the reporting processes to the Building Communities Together Partnership, and then to the West Berkshire Independent Scrutiny and Impact Group.

Public scrutiny is also available through the West Berkshire Health and Wellbeing Board

Glossary of Terms

(Strategy and Delivery Plan)

VRU	– Violence Reduction Unit
SV	– Serious Violence
OPCC	– Office of the Police Crime Commissioner
PCC	– Police Crime Commissioner
TVP	– Thames Valley Police
LPA	– Local Police Area
CSP	– Community Safety Partnership
PSHE	– Public, Social and Health Education
HO	– Home Office
VAWG	– Violence Against Women and Girls
IAG	– Independent Advisory Group
NH/NHP	– Neighbourhood / Neighbourhood Police
ASB	– Anti-social Behaviour
BID	– Business Improvement District
YOT	– Youth Offending Team