



RAPID STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT

PRODUCED FOR THE HOME OFFICE – MARCH 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By

*Bedfordshire Violence and
Reduction Unit (VERU)*

INTRODUCTION

In August 2019, the Bedfordshire Office for Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) was awarded funding by the Home Office to set up a Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). VRUs are multi-agency units, bringing together partners across the county to tackle and prevent serious violence. The Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) aims to prevent and reduce violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire (Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough) by taking a whole systems multi-agency approach to violence and exploitation. It aims to gain a deeper understanding of the drivers of violence and exploitation and how it can be prevented at a place-based level.

In March 2020, the VERU produced a strategic need assessment (SNA) – as required by & for the Home Office – within a very challenging timescale. Given the timescale for producing the SNA and lack of access to some data, a pragmatic approach had to be taken. This meant combining information from pre-existing documents (e.g. Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessments, Bedfordshire Police Problem Profiles), with publicly available data (e.g. data from data.police.uk) and high-level summaries of local data (e.g. recorded crimes from the Bedfordshire Police Intelligence reporting system – INSPIRE). It was not possible to perform a more in-depth analysis of local data, a gap analysis of services related to violence and exploitation (either victims or offenders) or undertake a full consultation process for the document within the timescale. These are all recommendations for the Phase 2 of the SNA.

To arrive at the recommendations, the key findings & gaps from the following were considered:

- Demographic overview of Bedfordshire
- Problem profile of violent crime and exploitation (local overview; violence with injury; violence without injury; knife crime; firearms; drugs; organised crime groups, gang-related violence and county lines; homicide; sexual abuse; domestic abuse; child exploitation; etc.)
- Risk and protective factors for violence and exploitation
- Perceptions of serious violence and exploitation
- Evidence for preventing violence and exploitation

However, the produced SNA document contains some information deemed sensitive. In addition, it is a rather long document. Therefore, publishing the executive summary of the document, which is below (and a separate accompanying “Infographic Summary”) may be found useful by all stakeholders. It should be noted that any of the information in this document is subject to change, especially after the recommended Phase 2 or change in underlying data.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Violence and exploitation are key public health issues, influencing the health and wellbeing of populations, and leading to significant inequalities within populations. Violence and exploitation can have an impact right across the life course, with potentially devastating consequences.

In August 2019, the Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation (VERU) was set up. Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) are multi-agency units, bringing together partners across the county to tackle and prevent serious violence. The Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) aims to prevent and reduce violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire (Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough) by taking a whole systems multi-agency approach to violence and exploitation. It aims to gain a deeper understanding of the drivers of violence and exploitation and how it can be prevented at a place-based level.

In line with the WHO model for violence prevention, Home Office Grant Funding requires the Unit to “produce a Strategic Needs Assessment, identifying the drivers of serious violence acting in the local area and taking steps to identify the cohorts of people most affected.” This rapid Strategic Needs Assessment aims: to provide a descriptive epidemiology of violence and exploitation (by time, place, and person); highlight the geographical patterns of violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire and “hot spot” areas; describe the prevalence of risk and protective factors related to violence and exploitation and explore the perceptions and attitudes towards violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire. Additionally, it provides a summary of a rapid evidence review of interventions to reduce violence. The Strategic Needs Assessment highlights areas for further analysis and research, and will be used to inform the Violence and Exploitation Reduction Strategy for Bedfordshire.

Bedfordshire: demographics

Bedfordshire is a ceremonial and historic county in the East of England. Three unitary local councils cover the area: Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, and Luton Borough Council.

According to the 2018 Mid-Year Estimates of Population published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 26 June 2019, the total population resident in Bedfordshire is 669,338 (171,623 in Bedford, 283,606 in Central Bedfordshire and 214,109 in Luton). Bedfordshire proportionally has more children aged 14 years and under and more people in their thirties,

compared to the East Region and England. Overall, Bedfordshire is generally a relatively affluent area. However, most of the affluence is in Central Bedfordshire. 13% of the small areas in Bedfordshire are in the most deprived quintile in England and these are mainly located in Luton. However, there are also pockets of deprivation in Bedford and Central Bedfordshire.

Violence and Exploitation: Problem Profile

A broad definition of terms has been included in this Strategic Needs Assessment including knife and firearms crimes, residential burglary, robbery, homicide, sexual assault, domestic abuse, child sexual and criminal exploitation. Multiple data sources have been synthesised to provide a high-level overview of the scale of violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire. Key findings are summarised in the table below. The number of recorded violent crimes (including sexual offences) appears to be increasing across the county. However, great caution is required when interpreting these statistics because there has been a change in the recording of police recorded crimes and victims are now more likely to come forward for specific crimes (sexual assault and domestic abuse) than previously. Additionally, confidence intervals are not available, so we cannot determine whether the trends are statistically significant.

Violence and Exploitation: Risk and protective factors

We know that there is a wide range of factors that could act as “risk” factors, increasing the likelihood of an individual becoming involved in violence and/or exploitation, but also “protective” factors that decreases this likelihood. These factors may be at play at an individual, relationship community or societal level. Data from Public Health England has been used to provide prevalence estimates for these risk and protective factors, where available (see key findings).

Violence and Exploitation prevention: the evidence base

Due to the timescales of this rapid Strategic Needs Assessment, a full structured evidence review of the impact of different interventions at preventing violence for this Strategic Needs Assessment was not feasible. However, the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit have recently conducted and published a rapid “review of reviews”, focused on the prevention or reduction of violence, particularly youth violence, knife and gang related violence. The interventions summarised in the Table below outline those with the strongest evidence (1).

Primary prevention <i>To avoid involvement in violence in individuals not already involved</i>	Secondary and Tertiary prevention interventions <i>To lessen harm and reduce future risk of violence in those already involved in violence*</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting programmes • Good quality early education • Life and emotional skills training • Bullying prevention programmes • Therapeutic approaches for young people at greatest risk of becoming involved in violence • Changes to firearms policy • Hotspots and community or problem-oriented policing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Therapeutic approaches for young people already involved in violence • Hotspots and community or problem-oriented policing • Restorative justice

* Secondary and tertiary prevention have been grouped together given the overlap between these approaches

Key findings and recommendations

This needs assessment provides a high-level summary of the scale of violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire, and the cohorts affected. It outlines some of the “risk” and “protective” factors and provides a rapid review of the evidence base behind primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. This section presents some key findings and recommendations that have arisen from this rapid review, highlighting areas for further research and further engagement with partners. It is a key recommendation that this SNA is a “live document,” which considers new and emerging trends and patterns and is refreshed annually.

Theme	Key findings/gaps	Recommendations	
Consultation and engaging with stakeholders	This SNA did not have a consultation phase for partners or wider stakeholders (including those involved with violence and/or exploitation) to outline key priorities, or “unmet need”.	1.1	Undertake 1:1 interviews and stakeholder engagement event(s) to discuss findings from this rapid SNA, and explore priorities, especially “unmet” need across key stakeholder groups in more depth (Phase 2).
Crime type	Overall violent offences (including sexual offences) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime rates mapped relatively closely to deprivation across Bedfordshire and the overall crime rate per 1,000-weighted population is higher in Luton. • The greatest proportion of violence related hospital admissions was in 20-29-year olds. • A large number of violence related hospital admissions also had a "mental health" specific ICD code listed in the diagnostic field. 	2.1	Further analysis is required to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the demographic profile of both victims and offenders for each specific type of crime. • Produce age-standardised rates of admissions for violent related injuries using HES data, alongside the PHE Local Knowledge and Intelligence Service. • Map the hot spots of violent offences against the night-time economy, working with licensing teams across the three councils to obtain data on the night-time economy.
		2.2	Bedfordshire VERU should work with the three CSPs to achieve the key recommendations outlined in their respective Strategic Assessments
	Knife crime, gun crime, OCGs, drugs market <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing number of recorded knife and firearms crimes (may be partly due to changes in recording). • Strong association between OCGs, firearms and drugs supply. • Regionally significant drugs market. • Bedfordshire is a key exporter of County Lines from Luton into neighbouring towns and Counties further afield. • Drugs misuse strongly associated with mental health conditions and alcohol dependence. • Anecdotal evidence that there is an association between an individual having an absent father and gang involvement. 	2.3	The VERU should work collaboratively with the three CSPs and the Drug and Alcohol Board to support the recommendations highlighted in the Drug Market Profile and within the Drugs and Alcohol Health Needs Assessment.
		2.4	Further analytical work to understand the injury rates associated with knife crime and the pattern of other violent crimes associated with knife crime (e.g. homicide, SAC, domestic violence).

Theme	Key findings/gaps	Recommendations	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of understanding about the demographics and role of females who are involved with gangs and county lines. 		
	<p>Homicide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to small numbers, the data on homicide at a local level was not presented. 	2.5	Further analytical work to understand method of homicide, and other crimes associated within homicide (e.g. knife crime, domestic violence, sexual assault).
	<p>Serious Acquisitive Crime (SAC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in recorded robbery crimes and residential burglaries across Bedfordshire. For both robbery crimes and residential burglaries, there were lower numbers (and rates) recorded in 2015, followed by substantial increases in recorded crimes in the following years. 	2.6	Further analytical work to understand crime patterns associated with SAC, including knife crime, gun crime, serious youth violence, single offences and re-offending. In addition, an investigation into why there were lower numbers (and rates) recorded in 2015, followed by substantial increases in recorded crimes in the following years.
	<p>Sexual assault and domestic abuse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing number of recorded crimes, which may be due to more victims coming forward and improved recording of offences. Extremely underreported crimes, with only a very small proportion of crimes being recorded. <p><i>Recommendations as per Central Bedfordshire Sexual Abuse Profile (2)</i></p>	2.7	Undertake work to understand why these offences are underreported, and encourage victims to report sexual and domestic abuse crimes and receive the support they need.
		2.8	Further work is required to understand the pattern and of underreporting of these offences, and interpret the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault statistics at a local level, using multiple sources of data.
		2.9	Where possible, CBC CSP and other CSPs should work with partners to undertake an analysis looking at the underreporting of sexual abuse in their area, and build up a more detailed picture of victims, offenders and outcomes for SA cases reported to the police.
	<p>Exploitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recent increasing trend in number of Child Sexual Exploitation crimes recorded (may be due to increasing multi-agency referral form) 	2.10	Increase the awareness of multi-agency information form/reporting across Bedfordshire.
		2.11	Encourage victims to report child sexual exploitation.
		2.12	Improve appropriate recording of Child Sexual Exploitation.

Theme	Key findings/gaps	Recommendations	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to develop a greater understanding of the link between Child Sexual Exploitation, Missing and County Lines. 		
	<p>Intergenerational violence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of local data, and national research about intergenerational research 	2.13	Further research is required looking at the scale and nature of intergenerational violence across Bedfordshire, but also methods to reduce and prevent intergenerational violence. Working with academic partners is recommended to complete an evidence review into the effectiveness of prevention interventions to reduce intergenerational violence.
	<p>Youth Offending, violence in schools and pupil exclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is anecdotal evidence from partners about involvement of children from affluent families becoming involved in County Lines. This SNA has not included data from Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) or from the two local Youth Offending Services (YOS) 	2.14	Obtain further data and intelligence from the local Youth Offending Services and Pupil referral units, to enhance and strengthen our understanding of the geographical pattern and demographic understanding of offending in youths, violence associated with schools, and risk factors for violence (e.g. school exclusions).
		2.15	Explore the level and patterns of violence and exploitation in home schooled children and children of affluent families.
Risk factors	Understanding the role of specific risk factors in being involved in violence and/or exploitation (including the role of absent fathers and gang membership).	3.1	Work with academic partners and Public Health England to undertake a structured evidence review of the risk factors associated with specific types of violence and exploitation e.g. serious youth violence, knife crime, organised crime involvement and identify commonalities and differences between these risk factors.
		3.2	Undertake detailed profiles of current offenders and victims to help improve our understanding of the risk factors associated with involvement in violence and exploitation. Use learning from thematic review processes.
		3.3	Undertake a stakeholder event to help map risk and protective factors across the system, to provide a greater understanding of what a “whole systems approach” could look like across Bedfordshire.

Theme	Key findings/gaps	Recommendations	
		3.4	In the future, there is a potential to develop algorithms using modelling techniques to identify those who are at increased risk of being involved in violence and exploitation and therefore targeting interventions. This needs to be approached carefully, to prevent increasing stigma and acknowledge that it is not a predictive tool.
	<p data-bbox="450 448 707 475">Learning Difficulties</p> <ul data-bbox="450 483 1122 858" style="list-style-type: none"> • Significantly higher proportion of pupils with Learning Disability (% of school aged pupil) and rate of children with moderate learning difficulties in Bedford Borough and Luton Borough. • Significantly higher rate of children with severe learning difficulties in Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough. • Significantly higher rate of children with Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty known to schools. • Significantly higher rate of children with autism known to schools in Central Bedfordshire. 	3.5	<ul data-bbox="1240 448 2007 751" style="list-style-type: none"> • Local context is needed to understand these findings. These findings need to be discussed with key relevant stakeholders to understand whether these reflect the actual situation, and determine future recommendations and actions in collaboration with partners. • Ensure that the Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Strategy highlights the importance of taking a whole-system multi-agency approach to reduce risk factors and promote protective factors.
	<p data-bbox="450 887 584 914">Education</p> <ul data-bbox="450 922 1122 1394" style="list-style-type: none"> • Significantly lower proportion of children achieving 5 or more GCSEs at 5A* across all three local authorities and Average Attainment 8 score is lower in Bedford Borough and Luton. • School readiness (good level of development at the end of reception) is significantly lower in Bedford Borough and Luton Borough, and school readiness at the end of reception in children with free school meal status is significantly lower in Central Bedfordshire. • Significantly, higher rate of pupil absence in Central Bedfordshire. • Significantly higher rates of fixed period exclusion due to persistent disruptive behaviour 		

Theme	Key findings/gaps	Recommendations	
	<p>in Central Bedfordshire and significantly across all three Local Authorities.</p> <p>Risk taking behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively high proportion of risk-taking behaviours in young people (secondary school) across the county: including taking/trying illegal drugs, alcohol and smoking • Relatively high proportion of young people who know someone/think they know someone who takes drugs and access to alcohol from parents/carers and their homes • Significantly, higher percentage of 15-year olds (responding to the YOUth Survey) who have ever tried cannabis and tobacco in Bedford Borough compared to its deprivation decile. • Significantly, higher percentage of 15-year olds (responding to the YOUth Survey) who are regular drinkers in Central Bedfordshire compared to its deprivation decile. <p>Looked after children and child protection plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significantly, higher rate of children under age of 18 in need due to abuse or neglect across all three Local Authorities compared to their respective deprivation deciles. • Significantly higher percentage of looked after children where there is a cause for concern in Luton. <p>Income deprivation and housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher proportion of children living in income deprived households in Bedford Borough and Luton Borough. 		

Theme	Key findings/gaps	Recommendations	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significantly higher rate of homeless young people (aged 16-24) and family homelessness in Bedford Borough and Luton Borough. <p>Mental health and wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significantly, higher proportion of the population aged 16 and over with common mental disorders in Luton Borough. Average wellbeing score of 15-year olds is similar to deprivation decile average for all three local authorities. 		
Understanding the protective factors	Limited evidence-base for “protective” factors for violence and exploitation	4.1	<p>Work with academic partners and Public Health England to undertake of the protective factors associated with specific types of violence and exploitation.</p> <p>Undertake a stakeholder event to help map risk and protective factors across the system, to provide a greater understanding of what a “whole systems approach” could look like across Bedfordshire.</p>
Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There has been no recent mapping of the preventative services available for reducing violence and exploitation across the whole of Bedfordshire. Rapid reviews of the evidence base for prevention interventions are available but further systematic review of the evidence base is required. Many of the intervention studies that have been evaluated have been conducted in the US, further studies are required within the UK population. 	5.1	Undertake a mapping of interventions, aiming to address and reduce serious violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire. Map services into primary, secondary and tertiary prevention and by geographical area. Use this piece of work to perform a gap analysis between need and service provision across the County. This can be used to guide future allocation of community project funding.
		5.2	Work with academic partners and Public Health England to undertake a structured or systematic review of the evidence base for prevention interventions, focusing primarily on studies published within the United Kingdom. There needs to be ongoing horizon scanning for emerging, new, relevant literature, especially from within the United Kingdom and across Violence Reduction Units.

Theme	Key findings/gaps	Recommendations	
		5.3	<p>Implement rigorous, evidence-based impact evaluations of community projects funded by the Bedfordshire VERU and alternative funding sources, aiming to reduce or prevent violence and exploitation. This should aim to include both qualitative and quantitative evaluation.</p> <p>Evaluating prevention interventions could also improve our understanding of the role of specific risk and protective factors.</p>
Data sharing	<p>There are multiple individual sources of data providing a snapshot of violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire. However, linked data is required to triangulate the information and gain a deeper understanding of hotspot areas and the cohorts affected (victims and offenders).</p>	6.1	<p>Establish agreements for improved data sharing across multiple agencies throughout Bedfordshire, including between Bedfordshire Police, local Hospitals and the Ambulance Service.</p>
		6.2	<p>Establish the “Cardiff Model” across the county. Ask additional questions about Drugs and Alcohol intake, to gain a greater understanding of drug and/or alcohol related violence.</p>
		6.3	<p>Create a linked data set between multiple agencies including: social care, acute healthcare, mental health services (including community mental health services), police, probation, youth offending, adult care, safeguarding team</p>
		6.4	<p>Embed the use of intelligence and analytical insights into everyday work.</p>
Public perceptions	<p>Public concern about drug dealing, alcohol, knife crime, gangs and youth ASB affecting perceptions of community safety</p>	7.1	<p>Work with the three local CSPs to co-ordinate activities to raise awareness about violence and exploitation across our local communities</p>
	<p>Lower levels of knowledge and awareness of exploitation in the local area</p>		
Strategy development		8.1	<p>Use the key findings from this SNA to guide the strategic objectives for the Bedfordshire VERU. Refresh the strategy after the consultation process of the SNA has been completed.</p>

Theme	Key findings/gaps	Recommendations	
Limitations	A key limitation in this SNA was lack of access to some key secure data resulting in some gaps	9.1	Gain access to – and use – appropriate data to fill the identified gaps (such as Recommendation 2.1; and understanding the experience of particular cohorts and inequalities).
		9.2	Work with local partners (such as Education, Pupil Referral Units, Youth Offending Services and the Probation service) to gain more local insight.

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