

# STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2022/23

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By

**Bedfordshire Violence and  
Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU)**

Ade Abitoye (Data & Analytics Lead, Bedfordshire VERU)

With contributions from multiple partners and sources

*(See Author and acknowledgements at end of document)*

March 2023



## FOREWORD

---

This landmark strategic needs assessment (SNA) provides a comprehensive overview of what violence and exploitation looks like in Bedfordshire. It is maintained by the Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) with the support of a whole host of other agencies. This will form the basis of the strategic response to these issues in the county, outlining how we can all work together collectively across Bedfordshire to provide a whole systems approach to these issues and keep young people in our communities safe.

When our VERU team first published a version of this SNA in 2020 with the assistance of colleagues from public health, the VERU was in its infancy. There were question marks about where the VERU would fit into the network of different agencies already working in this space, as well as uncertainty about the whole concept of violence reduction units and how long they would be around for. Three years have passed since that report was published and the journey I, my VERU colleagues and our partners have been on has been extraordinary. The VERU is now embedded in the collective response to violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire, providing a distinct, valued, and expert voice in different spaces, connecting with projects and communities that other agencies have previously struggled to engage with, as well as leading and coordinating multi-agency work to prevent violence and exploitation in areas such as data and communications.

While particular thanks go to our Data and Analytics Lead, Ade Abitoye, for his tireless work on the SNA, all our VERU staff have had a hand in shaping this document. This is a thoroughly and incredibly well researched report that lays bare the extent of the violence and exploitation, in a wide variety of forms, taking place across the county. There is a vast amount of insight and analysis in this report, which can inform work already taking place in different agencies across Bedfordshire. But what struck me in this refreshed SNA is the prevalence of sexual violence in the county, especially that committed by young male perpetrators against women and girls. The VERU's remit has traditionally been in areas such as knife crime, county lines and child exploitation, and our team is focused relentlessly on working with young people and their families affected by these devastating issues. However, the evidence suggests that tackling issues like domestic abuse is inextricably linked with violence prevention. Having been seconded into the national policing response to violence against women and girls (VAWG), I know all too well the enormous focus being placed on this matter – and the scale of reform still needed to keep women and girls in every community safe. I believe the VERU has a lot to offer to the fantastic work already underway to combat VAWG in Bedfordshire. Our team is

already involved in some of this work, and I hope we can embed ourselves further in this area over the coming months.

Other key recommendations focus on the need for us all to adopt a truly multi-agency approach. Whether it is closer sharing of data or pooling our knowledge, resources, and projects already underway in hotspot areas for violence, better coordination between different agencies can truly maximise our impact and ensure our outcomes match the collective will that undoubtedly already exists to keep children and young people in Bedfordshire safe.



**Kimberley C. Lamb**  
Director, Bedfordshire Violence and  
Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU)

## BACKGROUND

---

In August 2019, the Bedfordshire Office for Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) was awarded funding 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. Since its full operational take-off in 2020, the Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) has been working with partner agencies to prevent and reduce violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire by taking a whole systems multi-agency approach to violence and exploitation. The VERU and its partners aim to gain a deeper understanding of the drivers of violence and exploitation and how it can be prevented at a place-based level.

The Home Office Grant Funding requires the Bedfordshire VERU (and other VRUs) to produce a Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA), which identifies the drivers of serious violence in the local area and the cohorts of people most affected. The first SNA was produced by the VERU in March 2020. This version of the SNA is a complete rewrite and differs significantly from the previous version, mainly because of better availability and coordination of data mostly via the VERU-led Data and Intelligence Group on Violence and Exploitation in Bedfordshire (DIGVERB), which was created and developed as a technical multi-service group. Therefore, where possible, analytical products (such as needs assessments, problem profiles, etc.) completed by member agencies of the DIGVERB underpinned parts of this SNA. In addition, data from local, restricted, and public sources were analysed and information & evidence from authoritative sources were utilised to meet the objectives of this SNA.

The objectives of this SNA are to:

- Clarify the terminology and definitions around violence and serious violence.
- Provide an epidemiology of violence and exploitation (by time, place, and person).
- Highlight the geographical patterns of violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire and “hot spot” areas.
- Act as a mini-compendium of all the recently completed problem profiles and needs assessments related to violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire.
- Provide a narrative around the interplay between different forms of violence.
- Describe the relationships between victims and offenders.
- Highlight the experience of cohorts and inequalities.
- Describe the risk and protective factors related to violence and exploitation.

- Explore the perceptions and attitudes towards violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire.
- Outline the evidence for interventions relevant to the local need.
- Use the information identified to recognise areas for further research and/or analysis.
- Inform the Violence and Exploitation Reduction strategy for Bedfordshire and the action plan for Bedfordshire VERU.
- Potentially serve as – or form the basis of – the strategic needs assessment required as part of the Serious Violence Duty.

A total of twenty one (21) recommendations were made from this SNA. Before arriving at the recommendations, the SNA:

- provides a Demographic overview of Bedfordshire.
- presents a profile of Violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire
- uses local community safety surveys to consider the Perceptions of serious violence and exploitation in each of the three local authority areas of the county.
- briefly touches on Risk and protective factors for violence and exploitation.
- considers the various approaches used for Preventing violence and exploitation.

However, the produced SNA document contains some information deemed sensitive and it is a rather long document. Therefore, publishing this executive summary of the document as a standalone, which is below, may be found useful by all stakeholders including residents and other stakeholders in the public domain.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

## Introduction

Violence and exploitation are key public health issues influencing the health and wellbeing of populations and leading to significant inequalities within populations. Violence is “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation”.

Though drivers and root causes of violence and exploitation are extremely complex, often interacting and overlapping with one another, addressing them could help to improve health and wellbeing across our communities, and result in additional economic and societal benefits.

The Bedfordshire Office for Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) was awarded funding 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) has been working with partner agencies since its inception to prevent and reduce violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire by taking a whole systems multi-agency approach to violence and exploitation. Part of this agenda is to gain a deeper understanding of the drivers of violence and exploitation and how it can be prevented at a place-based level.

## Demographic overview of Bedfordshire

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.

The resident population of Bedfordshire is 706,128. This has grown by 14% in a decade (from 617,125 in 2011). Bedford Borough’s population grew the most within the decade – 18% percentage increase (from 157,840 in 2011 to 185,761 in 2021). The population in Central Bedfordshire and Luton grew by 16% (from 255,644 in 2011 to 295,541 in 2021) and 10% (from 203,641 in 2011 to 224,826 in 2021) respectively within the decade. Bedfordshire proportionally has more children aged 14 years and under and more people in their 30s and early 40s compared to the East Region and England. Within Bedfordshire, however, Luton generally has an even younger population when compared to the other two boroughs.

Bedfordshire has more BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) people compared to England and East of England region. This is mainly due to the diverse population in Luton where over half of the population (55%) are from a BAME group. Central Bedfordshire has the least diverse population in Bedfordshire, where about 9 in every 10 people are from a white ethnic group.

The most densely populated areas in Bedfordshire (with over 6,661 people living in every square kilometre) are in Luton and pockets of areas in central wards of Bedford and in the south of Central Bedfordshire (especially areas in Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable). About 13% of the small areas in Bedfordshire are in the most deprived quintile in England – these are mainly located in Luton but there are also pockets of deprivation in Bedford Borough (especially in some central wards) and Central Bedfordshire (in Flitwick and southern areas of the borough).

## **Violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire**

The scale of the problem of violent crime and exploitation in Bedfordshire, identified by this SNA, provides information that may be useful for providing a focus for further analytic assessment, prioritising operational work, identifying intelligence gaps, highlighting opportunities for prevention and enforcement, and providing justification for actions. This was identified using three broad sources: Police Recorded Crime data both from the publicly available police.uk and the local (Bedfordshire Police) system; Health data from the National Health Service (NHS) Hospital Episodes Statistics (HES) and the East of England Ambulance Service; and a variety of other data sources including locally produced profiles, needs assessments, and nationally curated data sources.

Almost a third of all reported crimes (32%) in Bedfordshire in 2022 were violence and sexual offences. Violence and sexual offences crime category covers many offences that include violence with injury, violence without injury, homicide, death or serious injury caused by illegal driving, rape, stalking and harassment, and other sexual offences. Over the most recent 5-year period (2018-2022), over a quarter (28%) of all crimes were violence and sexual offences. Similarly, at least a quarter of the reported crimes in the three individual boroughs were violence and sexual offences within the same period.

The main locations and communities at risk of violence and sexual offences are found in the South-central wards and other pockets (such as in Sharnbrook and Riseley wards) in Bedford Borough; Western areas (Cranfield and Marston Moretaine ward and most south-western wards) and some northern pockets in Sandy, Pottton, Biggleswade North in Central

Bedfordshire; Southern wards and other pockets spread across the north-western wards of Luton. The directly age standardized rates (DSR) for both Police-reported violence and sexual offences and health-recorded assaults show that the higher rates for Bedford Borough and Luton (compared to the Bedfordshire rate) are mostly statistically significant and the rate for Central Bedfordshire is significantly lower than Bedfordshire and the two other boroughs. Most of the small areas identified as having significantly higher rates than the Bedfordshire rate align with the most deprived areas of the county. The DSRs increase with deprivation and the most deprived decile has a significantly higher rate than (and generally about six times) that of the least deprived decile.

In terms of at-risk groups, there were generally more female victims than male victims, although there were more male victims in certain categories (such as in cases of violence with injury that were presented in hospital). The top age groups of victims were mostly teenagers aged 15-19 years and young adults aged 20-24 years, 25-29 years, 30-34 years old. The breakdown of victims by ethnicity is less useful and mostly difficult to make any conclusions from because the proportion of “unknown or unspecified” ethnicity is mostly too high. However, in some cases, it appears some ethnic minority groups were overrepresented (such the black ethnic group regarding hospital admissions due to violence). Where offender details were recorded, most of the offenders were identified as male.

The top 2 rape and sexual offences (sexual assault on a female and rape of a female aged 16 or over) constitute 6 in every 10 reported offences from the offences included in the “Rape and Serious Sexual Offences Problem Profile for Bedfordshire 2023”. The top three recorded vulnerabilities for all victims of rape and sexual assault were Age/Under 18, Domestic Abuse and Child Abuse. The most common vulnerabilities amongst the top repeat victims were poor mental health, drug use, alcohol abuse & Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Most of the other patterns for rape and sexual offences mirror those of the wider violence and sexual offences crime category. Where the relationship between the victim and the offender was recorded, the most common relationship between the victim and offender was Spouse/Partner/Ex-Partner (40%), followed by Friend/Associate (26%). Where the relationship was recorded as Spouse/Partner/Ex-Partner and Friend/Associate, the offenders were predominantly male (96%).

Violence and sexual offences in Bedfordshire are more likely to occur more in May and the summer months (of June, July, and August). Night-time (especially from 12 midnight to just before 4am over the weekend) is the most at-risk time period and this is why a separate section was dedicated to the night-time economy in this SNA.



One of the most important factors or circumstances related to violence and sexual offences in Bedfordshire is domestic abuse (DA). Almost 4 in every 10 recorded violence and sexual offences recorded by the Police were related to DA and it is the top aggravating factor for these crimes. This was particularly the case for violence against women and girls (VAWG) in private spaces. Some other factors or circumstances related to violence and sexual offences in Bedfordshire include drug and alcohol, harassment, child at risk, online crime, use of knife or other sharp instrument, etc. For instance, between June 2018 and September 2022, there were 28 homicides in Bedfordshire and of the 28 homicides, 6 were motivated by drugs supply and 8 involved the consumption of drugs or alcohol or involved substance abuse. Information on this, based on the cross-partnership Drug and Alcohol Needs Assessment required by the 10-Year National Drug Strategy – From Harm to Hope 2021 – is included in this SNA. It is estimated that there are over 30 Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) in Bedfordshire, and they are highly likely to be drug motivated with almost all of them being involved in drugs whether directly or as professional enablers. Just over a third of the OCGs use county lines business model. In addition, as of 2022, about 22 county lines and 346 cuckooed addresses have been identified in Bedfordshire, with over half being in Luton.

The estimated rate of children and young people up to 25 years old (CYP) who are victims or at risk of child exploitation (CE) in Bedfordshire is 86 per 10,000 CYP. Luton has the highest rate, followed by Bedford Borough. Overall, in Bedfordshire, the dominant age group of victims or those at risk of CE is 15-19 years old. The vast majority (75%) of the victims or those at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) are males and most of the victims or those at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (54%) are females.

The rate of first-time entrants into the youth justice system for 10-17-year-olds is significantly lower in Central Bedfordshire, and similar in Bedford Borough and Luton Borough compared to England. In addition, the rate of first-time entrants into the youth justice system for 10-17-year-olds has significantly decreased in a decade (from 2011 to 2021) in all the three local authorities. Furthermore, the rate of Children and Young people aged 10 to 17 years cautioned or sentenced per 1,000 population is significantly lower in Central Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough and Luton Borough compared to England. This rate has also decreased significantly from 2013/14 to 2020/21 in all the three local areas.

## **Perceptions of serious violence**

Each of the three Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) conducts a community safety survey and publishes a strategic needs assessment (which reports on public perceptions of

community safety) annually. This information has been used within this SNA to provide an overview of local perceptions of serious violence and exploitation. Each local authority collects and presents data differently. Hence, direct comparisons cannot be made between the data for each local authority, due to differences in the questions asked, and the survey methodology.

In Bedford Borough, most respondents (77%) said they felt safe or very safe during the daytime but only a third felt safe or very safe after dark in their local area. These percentages were lower for the town centre (62% during daytime and 16% after dark). Some of the common reasons respondents reported for feeling unsafe in their local area and the town centre include drugs issues, groups hanging around, lack of police presence, street drinking, and alcohol ASB. VAWG or harassment was provided as one of the top 10 reasons for feeling unsafe in the town centre.

In Central Bedfordshire, 80% of survey respondents believed that using or dealing drugs was a problem in their area – 73% for violent crime, 67% for sexual offences, and 54% for domestic abuse. Regarding online issues, about 4 in every 10 (43%) have been trolled on social media, more than half (52%) have been bullied online, more than 4 in every 10 (44%) have received unwanted photos, almost a third (31%) have been asked to send nudes, and more than a quarter (27%) have been contacted inappropriately online by an adult. More police presence and improved & working street lighting were highlighted as what the young people felt would make them feel safer.

In Luton, serious violence was the area that received the highest level of concern, expectation and was a top priority for the communities in Luton Borough. In addition, since 2015 when the survey has been conducted, the proportion of secondary students reporting that there are no adults they can trust is the highest to date; and there has been an increase in the proportion of secondary students reporting that they were 'not at all' satisfied with their life. There has been a decrease in the proportion of secondary students reporting that they rate the safety when going out after dark as good. However, there has been a decrease in the proportion of secondary students reporting they were 'fairly sure' or 'certain' that they or their friends carried weapons for protection.

## **Risk and protective factors**

There is a wide range of factors that could act as "risk" factors, which increase the likelihood of an individual becoming involved in violence and/or exploitation. Conversely, there are also

“protective” factors that decrease this likelihood. These factors may be at play at an individual, relationship, community, or societal level, as outlined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in their report “World report on violence and Health,” published in 2002.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma refer to sources of stress that children may suffer whilst growing up. Although there is no standardised definition of ACEs, they have historically included multiple forms of physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect, exposure to violence between parents or caregivers, and other serious household stressors such as parental substance abuse or mental illness. This SNA briefly highlights a state-of-the-art report on Tackling Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) which has just been produced in 2023 by WHO Collaborating Centres and the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The report brings together current research on ACEs, their immediate and life-long impacts, and the evidence on how to tackle ACEs through prevention, mitigation, and trauma-informed practice (TIP). It is an evidence-based guide for those developing policy, practice, or other interventions to reduce the prevalence and harmful impacts of ACEs. Those that have suffered from four or more ACEs (compared with those with zero ACEs) are about 8 times more likely to be victims or perpetrators of violence, 10 times more likely to be a problematic drug user and 30 times more likely to attempt to end their lives.

A provisional list of identified risk and protective factors from the Collated Violence Indicator (CVI) List was included in this SNA.

## **Preventing violence and exploitation**

Taking a “whole systems multi-agency approach” to reducing violence and exploitation, refers to how we view the issue and how we can work together to prevent violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire. At the core of this approach is partnership working – working across organisational boundaries and working as a whole system at a place level. We need to know what is driving the problem – that is, the “causes of the causes” and address the wider determinants (such as housing, education, employment) which have an impact on violence and exploitation. We need to focus on how we can *prevent* people in our community from being involved, or at risk of, violence and exploitation before it starts or detect it early. We should take a “proportionate universalism” approach, where services should ideally be available to all but weighted more heavily to those with the greatest need. Finally, every approach we take and every decision we make need to be driven by high quality data. We need to consider how we can best maximise the data that we have in the system, and how we can work across agencies to have a greater impact through the sharing of information.

Interventions to prevent serious violence and/or exploitation may target different aspects of prevention. They may be applied at a “universal” level, to a wider population or a “targeted” approach may be taken, specifically aiming to support those who are at increased risk of being involved. The three prevention types are as follows: Primary prevention (stopping violence and exploitation before it begins); Secondary prevention (early detection and intervention for those at higher risk of being involved in violence and exploitation); and Tertiary prevention (managing the risks and reducing harm in those already involved in violence and exploitation).

Using the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) Toolkit as the primary tool and combining it with the College of Policing Crime Reduction Toolkit (CPCRT), it shows that there is high evidence that relationship violence prevention lessons & activities and social skills training approaches, healthcare screening for domestic abuse, hotspots policing, and street lighting work currently have moderate or high impacts on violence as primary or secondary prevention interventions. There is some evidence that A&E navigators programmes have high impact as a secondary prevention approach. For secondary or tertiary prevention, the most impactful approaches are cognitive behavioural therapy, sports programmes, and trauma-specific therapies. For primary, secondary, or tertiary prevention, there is very strong evidence that problem-oriented policing works.

## **Recommendations**

Below are the key recommendations that have arisen from this SNA, highlighting areas for consideration, action, further research, and/or further engagement with partners.

### **1. Refreshing the SNA annually**

It is recommended that this SNA is a “live document,” which considers new and emerging trends and patterns and is refreshed annually. This does not necessarily mean a wholesale change every year but an update where necessary. As part of this ongoing annual update, ways of further simplifying the SNA should be sought and implemented.

### **2. Prioritising identified hotspots**

The VERU and partners should consider the hotspots identified in this SNA as high priority areas for future focus when planning local and country-wide violence reduction and prevention strategies, interventions, and activities. It is acknowledged that partners and stakeholders may already have a presence and be active and engaged in many of these areas. Reduction of

violent crime in these hotspot areas will have significant impact on the violence reduction aims of the VERU and partners.

### **3. Joining up interventions and approaches**

Partners should constantly seek joining up interventions and approaches in the identified hotspot areas for potential deduplication and amplification of efforts. They are areas that are mostly the same high priority areas for most – if not all – indicators and services. For instance, these hotspot areas are typically the most deprived areas that are also the main focus of Public Health teams across the county in terms of the inequality reduction aims and agenda of Public Health.

### **4. Prioritising young male violence against females**

The peculiarities of the offenders and victims of violent crime in Bedfordshire, identified in this SNA (and other problem profiles and needs assessments referenced in this SNA) should guide priorities for action and intervention. This is broadly young male violence against females. But this does not mean neglecting other categories of violence and exploitation.

### **5. Gaining better local understanding of specific risk factors**

It would be useful to gain better local understanding of the role of specific risk factors in being involved in violence and/or exploitation (including the role of absent fathers and gang membership). This may involve Public Health Services in the local councils supporting the local development of the Collated Violence Indicator (CVI) list as a standalone or as part of their Joint Strategic Needs Assessments. This may also involve working with academic partners, OHID and other partners to undertake a structured evidence review of the risk factors associated with specific types of violence and exploitation. Perhaps detailed multi-service profiles of current offenders and victims to help improve understanding of the risk factors associated with involvement in violence and exploitation may be useful. In the future, with the right data, there may be 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 would however need to be approached carefully and ethically.

### **6. Refreshing shared understanding of whole systems approach**

Partners may want to review, refresh, and gain greater shared understanding of what a “whole systems approach” could or should look like across Bedfordshire. This may include undertaking a stakeholder event (or events) to help map risk and protective factors, services, and assets across the system.

## **7. Mapping of existing interventions**

It is recommended that the VERU and partners undertake a mapping of interventions aimed at addressing, reducing, or preventing serious violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire. These should be mapped into primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention and by geographical area using the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) Toolkit principally but combined with the College of Policing Crime Reduction Toolkit. This piece of work should be useful in underpinning a gap analysis between need and service provision across the county. This can also be used to guide future allocation of community project funding.

## **8. Commissioning and/or creating evidence-based interventions**

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) Toolkit combined with the College of Policing Crime Reduction Toolkit should help guide future interventions commissioned through the Bedfordshire VERU and other partners. Thus, before any new community intervention is commissioned, the VERU and partners should map it to prevention type (primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention) and the type of approach that works, using the toolkits. However, innovation and trying new things that could work should not be stifled. Where a new community intervention to be commissioned is a new type of approach or an approach with low/no evidence of its impact, then a robust evaluation should be a requirement for that intervention.

## **9. Commissioning high-impact interventions before May**

The VERU and/or partners should consider commissioning some of the prevention interventions that have been shown to work but yet to be implemented locally in Bedfordshire. A key example is an A&E navigators programme, which has been shown to have high impact as a secondary prevention approach. Given that violence and sexual offences generally occur more in May and the summer months than other months of the year, the VERU and/or partners should consider wrapping the commissioning process in/by April.

## **10. Evaluating funded interventions and projects**

The VERU and partners should aim to implement rigorous, evidence-based impact evaluations of funded community projects aimed at reducing or preventing violence and exploitation. This could include both qualitative and quantitative evaluation. Evaluating community interventions within the UK is extremely important, to add to the evidence base. Evaluating prevention interventions could also improve our understanding of the role of specific risk and protective factors.

### **11. More hotspot policing**

The Police should do more hotspot policing. It is acknowledged that hotspot policing is already happening. However, more of police presence in hotspots identified in this SNA, especially in the town centres and during the night, is recommended. This is based on the evidence that hotspot policing has been shown to have high impact on violence and residents' feedback (from some of the results of the community surveys) that they want more police presence in the identified hotspots (especially the town centres) to feel safe.

### **12. More street lighting**

The local councils should investigate and, where needed, provide more street lighting. This is based on the premise that there is very strong evidence that street lighting works as one of the prevention approaches to violence and residents feel unsafe in certain areas because of lack of street lighting.

### **13. Better use of geodemographic data resources**

Partners (especially the Bedfordshire Police and the VERU) should consider acquiring geodemographic data resources (such as Experian's Mosaic) for better targeted work. The Mosaic data in this SNA seems to be a legacy resource from the Bedfordshire Police data system. A more up-to-date version is needed for better analytical insights and targeted interventions. For instance, though there seems to be no current evidence for media campaigns as a prevention intervention, a well-designed and targeted media campaign (with the aid of the geodemographic resource) could work (without contravening another, previous, recommendation).

### **14. Moving towards an integrated data infrastructure**

There are multiple individual sources of data providing a glimpse of violence and exploitation across Bedfordshire from individual services' purview. However, linked data is required to triangulate the information and gain a deeper understanding of hotspot areas and the cohorts affected (victims and offenders). Therefore, it is recommended that the VERU and partners should move closer to developing an integrated data infrastructure akin to the "Thames Valley Together" solution implemented in the Thames Valley Police Force area by their VRU.

### **15. DIGVERB and data sharing**

Pending the implementation of an integrated data infrastructure, the Data and Intelligence Group on Violence and Exploitation Reduction in Bedfordshire (DIGVERB) should be strengthened. The convener of the SVD in Bedfordshire should strengthen DIGVERB with use of the powers granted by the SVD to improve prompt data sharing across relevant partner

agencies in Bedfordshire. The existing Data Sharing Agreement (for the group) and a separate Information Sharing Agreement (with the Ambulance Service and the local hospitals for the A&E data) should be reviewed, strengthened, and (where appropriate) expanded to (and/or signed by) other partners to gain more local insight.

#### **16. Routine use and appreciation of multi-service data**

Partners should embed the use of intelligence and analytical insights into everyday work, and support and value linking various datasets between multiple agencies for a more holistic insight. These should include (but not limited to): social care services, acute healthcare, mental health services (including community mental health services), police, probation, youth offending services, education, adult care, and safeguarding team.

#### **17. Community safety survey co-ordination**

The three local CSPs should aim to co-ordinate and conduct their community safety surveys together. This will allow for the possibility of having the same set of survey questions for comparison and benchmarking purposes, better standardisation of their approaches, reduced susceptibility to any staff absences in any of the local CSPs and getting more value for potentially reduced costs. The community surveys are an important source of information regarding public perceptions of violence and exploitation, but they currently appear dissimilar from place to place.

#### **18. Strategy refresh/development**

The VERU should consider the key findings from this SNA to refresh the strategic objectives for the Bedfordshire VERU. The current strategy is for about 5 years (2020 – 2025) and may not substantially change but a refresh to include current realities would be important. Other partners may also want to refresh/develop their strategies based on the findings in this report.

#### **19. SVD strategic needs assessment & strategy development**

The three CSPs should consider using this SNA as the basis for fulfilling their responsibility of producing a strategic needs assessment and developing a strategy as part of the Serious Violence Duty.

#### **20. Other recommendations**

Quite a few problem profiles and needs assessments have been completed in the last year by the VERU and partners (Bedfordshire Police, Public Health, etc.) covering different aspects and drivers of violence and exploitation in Bedfordshire. These have all been referenced in this SNA. Each of them has multiple recommendations. The key recommendations from that



body of knowledge have been adopted by this SNA and appropriate partners should implement them. See some of these recommendations from Appendix 3 to Appendix 5.

#### **21. More in-depth recording for attempted murder crimes**

As an example for the previous recommendation, one of the recommendations from other relevant partners' pieces of work is for the Police to consider recording Attempted Murders in the same depth as Homicides. This will help to further understand how drugs and alcohol influence these crimes.

## AUTHOR AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

Author: Ade Abitoye  
Data & Analytics Lead, Bedfordshire VERU

Profound thanks to the following individuals, colleagues, and partner agencies for providing assistance, information and data for the production of this report (listed in no particular order):

- Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) – Kimberley Lamb (Director), Phil McCarthy (Manager) and all VERU staff.
- Bedfordshire Police Service – Analytical Team and others.
- Bedfordshire Youth Offending Service – Donna Anslow (Information Manager) and Pat Jennings (Team Manager)
- Luton Youth Offending Service – Troy Hutchinson (Performance, Systems & Information Manager) and David Collins (Head of Service)
- Public Health Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, and Milton Keynes – Alice McGushin, Lilli Peters (Public Health Practitioner), and others
- Public Health Luton Borough Council – Mark Sheldon, Jolene Jefferson, Elizabeth Bailey (Public Health Manager), and others
- Bedford Borough Community Safety Partnership – Sarah Stevens (Manager for Community Safety & Resilience)
- Central Bedfordshire Community Safety Partnership
- Luton Borough Community Safety Partnership
- Benita Branagan (Performance Analyst, YouTurn Futures) and Lisa Robinson (Strategic Lead – Exploitation & Missing, Bedfordshire Police)
- All organisational and individual members of DIGVERB
- Other colleagues and stakeholders

If you have any questions or comments about this SNA please contact:  
[VERU@beds.police.uk](mailto:VERU@beds.police.uk).