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## **Serious violent crime**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion

### **Summary**

This paper provides a brief overview of the serious violent crime duty, as proposed in the forthcoming Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. It accompanies a presentation by Sara Featherstone, Policy Lead for the Serious Violence Duty, Home Office and Sarika Spagnulo, Serious Violence Unit, Home Office.

#### **Recommendation:**

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board are asked to note this paper and provide any further feedback.

#### **Action:**

Officers to take forward as directed.

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## **Serious violent crime**

### **Background**

1. Following the publication of the Government's [Serious Violence Strategy](#) in 2018 and a subsequent consultation on a new legal duty to support a multi-agency approach to preventing and tackling serious violence, in July 2019 the Government set out its intention to legislate to create a new legal duty to mandate local multi-agency working to tackle serious violence. The December 2019 Queen's Speech included a proposal for a Serious Violence Bill which would
  - 1.1 Create new duties on a range of specified agencies across different sectors, such as local government, youth offending, and health and probation, to work collaboratively, share data and information, and put in place plans to prevent and reduce serious violence within their communities.
  - 1.2 Amend the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to ensure that serious violence is an explicit priority for Community Safety Partnerships, which include local police, fire and probation services, as well as local authorities and wider public services.
  - 1.3 Ensure the police have the powers they need to keep weapons off the streets.
2. The Government outlined that the new Serious Violence Bill would complement the Government's investment in the 18 Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) established in the areas most affected by serious violence by ensuring that agencies work effectively together. Violence Reduction Units are expected to bring together different organisations, including the police, local government, health, community leaders and other key partners to tackle violent crime by understanding its root causes. The new units were responsible for identifying what is driving violent crime in the area and coming up with a co-ordinated response.
3. The LGA originally supported a non-legislative approach to strengthening multi-agency working in our response, and urged the Government to draw on the experience of VRUs before determining whether a duty was necessary. However, we have subsequently been working with the Home Office to contribute to the development of a duty that is practicable and helpful for local partners.
4. We have also consistently indicated our support for taking a public health approach to tackling serious violent crime, specifically focusing on additional funding for early

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intervention and prevention, and highlighted the importance of adequately funding any new statutory duties placed on local authorities to tackle serious violent crime.

### **Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill**

5. On 8 March 2021, the Government [announced](#) funding to tackle serious violent crime, including £30 million to support the police to take targeted action in parts of England and Wales most affected by serious violence and approximately £23 million for new early intervention programmes to help stop young people from being drawn into violence.
6. This funding followed an announcement in February that the 18 VRUs would [receive](#) a third year of funding (for the period 2021/2022), bringing total investment in them to approximately £105 million. The Home Office's [evaluation](#) of Violence Reduction Units (August 2020) found "good progress had generally been made by the VRUs over the first year of the programme, which had in most cases laid a foundation for a more evidence-based and targeted response to serious violence in year two of the programme".
7. Alongside the funding, the Government also announced the introduction of a major criminal justice bill, which will:
  - 7.1 Give police new stop and search powers to tackle known knife and weapons carriers.
  - 7.2 Place a duty on public sector bodies – including police, education and health agencies – to take a joined-up approach to addressing serious violence.
  - 7.3 Require local agencies to review the circumstances when an adult homicide takes place involving offensive weapons, such as knives, to ensure lessons are learnt and future deaths are prevented.
8. On 9 March 2021, the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill](#) has its First Reading in the House of Commons. The statutory duty to tackle serious violent crime is outlined in the Bill, alongside a wide variety of other measures, including (but not limited to):
  - 8.1 Amendment of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998
  - 8.2 Introducing Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews
  - 8.3 Criminal damage to memorials
  - 8.4 Imposing conditions on one-person protests
  - 8.5 Extending the positions of trust
  - 8.6 Criminal offences relating to unauthorised encampments
  - 8.7 Increased penalties for causing death by dangerous driving
  - 8.8 Minimum sentences for particular offences

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- 8.9 Amendments on cautions, custodial sentences and community sentences
- 8.10 Adding curfew and electronic tagging requirements to youth rehabilitation orders
- 8.11 Amendments to secure schools and secure children's homes
- 8.12 Introduction of Serious Violence Reduction Orders Management of sex offender and terrorist offenders

9. A number of these provisions are also expected to impact on councils' community safety work, in particular the creation of offensive weapons homicide reviews and measures to tackle unauthorised traveller encampments. We expect to bring these issues back to the SSCB at a future meeting.

### **New serious violence duty**

- 10. Part 2 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill places a duty on specified authorities for a local government area to collaborate with the other specified authorities for that same area to prevent and reduce serious violence.
- 11. The specified authorities are chief officers of police, specified health authorities, local authorities, probation service providers, youth offending teams and fire and rescue services. The Bill outlines that each specified authority must collaborate with every other specified authority in that area, although it recognises the scale, scope and nature of that collaboration are likely to differ, depending on local circumstances.
- 12. Duty holders will be expected to work together to establish a local problem profile/ strategic needs assessment and develop and publish a local strategy which will outline the collective action they intend to take.
- 13. Local strategies will need to be published and subsequently reviewed on an annual basis. In doing so, partnerships will be expected to be able to self-monitor and collectively evaluate the impact of the local strategy.
- 14. In addition to the proposed serious violence duty, Clause 19 of the Bill seeks to amend the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The 1998 Act introduced Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) (formerly known as Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships) to help tackle crime and reduce offending. This clause amends the 1998 Act to ensure preventing and reducing serious violence is a priority for CSPs.
- 15. Following the Bill's passage through Parliament, the Home Office expect that the duty will come into force no sooner than 2022. Statutory guidance is expected to be produced to support organisations and authorities subject to the serious violence duty. The

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guidance will be subject to a formal Government consultation once the legislation successfully passes its passage through Parliament.

**Possible questions (in response to the presentation from the Home Office)**

16. Members of the Board may wish to raise the following questions with the Home Office:

- 16.1 How is 'serious violent crime' defined, in terms of the new statutory duty? Does it primarily relate to tackling serious violent crime that occurs in a public space?
- 16.2 Will local authorities receive adequate funding for implementing the new statutory duty, in order to help prevent and tackle serious violent crime?
- 16.3 How will health and education partners be involved in the statutory duty? And will the Departments for Education and Health and Social Care be working with other Government departments on the passage of this Bill?
- 16.4 Has there been a review of Community Safety Partnership arrangements, in particular to assess whether they currently prioritise serious violent crime?
- 16.5 What does the Government think will be the impact of amending the Crime and Disorder Act 1998?
- 16.6 Given the apparent success of the 18 Violence Reduction Units, will the Government look to establish additional VRUs in the remaining police force areas?

**Implications for Wales**

17. The new statutory duty is expected to apply to councils in Wales.

**Financial Implications**

18. All work can be carried out using existing LGA resources.

**Next steps**

19. Officers to note any feedback from SSC Board Members and take forward any future work, as directed.