

Merseyside's Violence Prevention Strategy



A ten year strategy
to create safer,
more connected
communities



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MERSEYSIDE POLICE
& CRIME COMMISSIONER



**MERSEYSIDE
POLICE**



Merseyside and Cheshire
Integrated Care Board



**MERSEYSIDE
FIRE & RESCUE
SERVICE**

**MERSEYSIDE
Violence
Reduction
Partnership**



**HM Prison &
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Sefton Council



**Liverpool
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North West



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Foreword



I am proud to introduce Merseyside's Violence Prevention Strategy - a long-term commitment to building a safer, fairer and more hopeful future for every person who calls our region home.

Across Merseyside, we know the harm that violence causes. It impacts individuals, families and whole neighbourhoods, leaving deep emotional, social and economic scars.

But we also know something else: **violence is not inevitable.**

With the right action, at the right time, and in the right places, it can be prevented.

This strategy sets out how we will do that together. It is rooted in evidence, shaped by our communities, and built on the strengths and resilience that define Merseyside. It recognises that no single organisation can solve this challenge alone. Prevention demands teamwork - from police and health services to schools, youth workers, community groups, businesses and residents.

By understanding the causes of violence, listening to those with lived experience, and investing early in people and places, we can reduce harm before it takes hold. We can support children and young people to feel safe, confident and connected. And we can create communities where opportunity outweighs vulnerability, and everyone has the chance to thrive.

The economic argument for prevention is also compelling. Research shows that preventing serious violence could save Merseyside more than £200 million every year, money that could instead be reinvested into the services, opportunities and support that strengthen our communities.

But beyond the financial cost lies the human one - the lives changed, the futures lost, the families grieving. Preventing that harm is a moral obligation we all share.

I want to thank all our partners for their leadership, collaboration, and unwavering dedication. Your commitment to fulfilling the Serious Violence Duty and to driving long-term change is vital. By working together - sharing data, insight and expertise, and by placing communities at the heart of everything we do - we can make a real and lasting difference.

Together, we will prevent violence, reduce harm and create safer, stronger communities for generations to come.

Emily Spurrell
Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner

Introduction



Violence is a preventable public health issue that affects individuals, families, and communities across all sectors of society. It contributes to physical and mental health problems, perpetuates inequality, and places a substantial burden on services. Violence undermines health, safety and wellbeing, and contributes to long-term social and economic inequalities. Preventing violence is not only a moral duty but also a strategic investment for healthier, more resilient communities.

In the year ending September 2025, the Crime Survey for England and Wales ¹ estimated that approximately 9.3 million incidents of headline crime had occurred, with 1.94 million violent offences recorded by police. While long-term national trends show a decline in some traditional crime categories, certain forms of violence remain high or are increasing. For example, nationally:

- ▶ Sexual Offences rose by 11%, with more than 209,000 incidents recorded by police.
- ▶ Offences involving knives or sharp instruments decreased by 9% (to 50,430 offences) compared with the year ending September 2024 (55,149 offences); decreases were seen across most regions in England and Wales.

- ▶ Offences involving firearms decreased by 9% (to 4,851 offences) compared with the year ending September 2024 (5,356 offences); this was the lowest figure since current police recording practices began in the year ending March 2003.
- ▶ Children and young people continue to be both victims and perpetrators of violence, with increasing concerns about youth violence and its links to poverty, school exclusion and exploitation.

These figures reflect the scale of the challenge and the urgent need for a coordinated, evidence-informed response. This Violence Prevention Strategy adopts a public health approach to violence prevention; one that seeks to understand and address the root causes of violence, reduce risk factors, and strengthen protective factors across the life course.

Our goal is to create a place where everyone, especially children and young people, can aspire to grow up free from violence and the fear it creates. Achieving this requires a shared commitment to prevention, equity, and partnership.

This strategy is a call to action for all partners to play their part in shaping a safer future for our communities. It outlines our shared priorities, guiding principles, and the actions we will take to prevent violence, support those affected, and build safer, more inclusive environments for all.

¹ [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

Vision

Our vision is:

“Everyone will work together across Merseyside to prevent and reduce violence and create safer and more connected communities.”

This is set alongside the purpose:

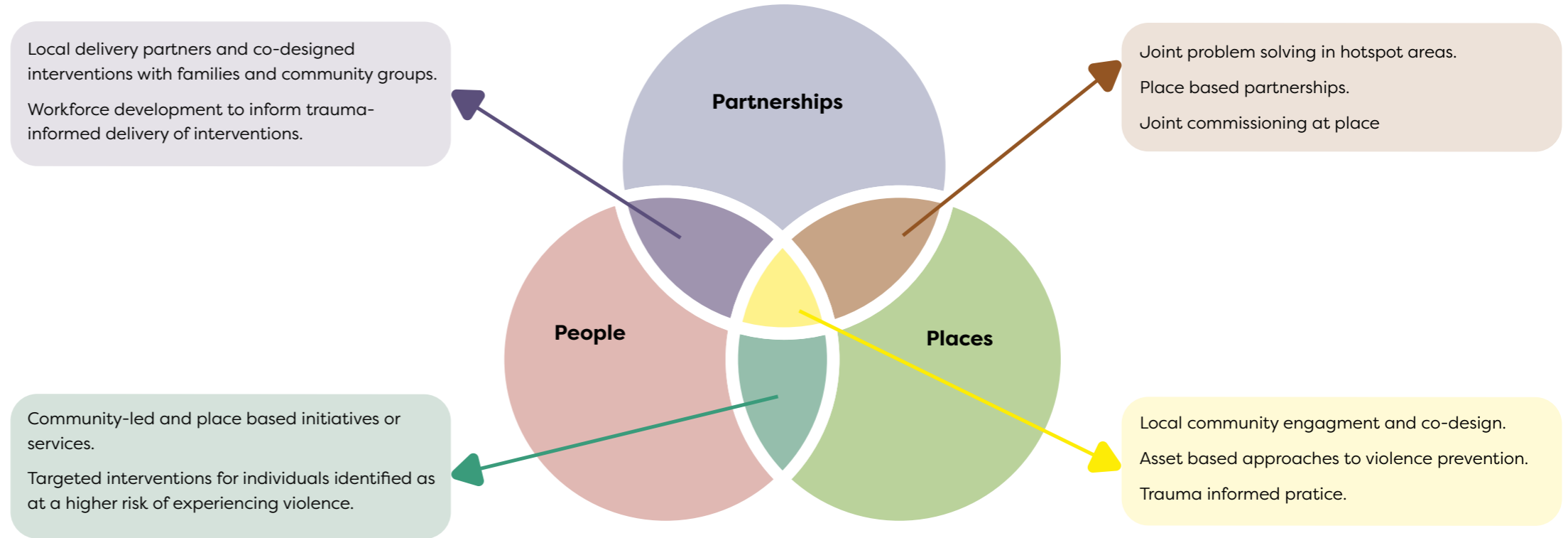
“To reduce and prevent serious violence through a coordinated and collective approach, which is based on evidence, where local voices are heard, and collaborative leadership is achieved.”

Our System Priorities

This strategy identifies three connected strategic pillars: **People, Place and Partnerships** (Figure 1).

These are underpinned by nine priorities which will guide a regional implementation plan and local place-based delivery plans.

Figure 1. Connection across the three pillars, People, Place and Partnerships



People

People have timely access to inclusive and trauma-responsive services and interventions throughout their lives.

Strengthen and build integrated support pathways

Partners will develop and strengthen prevention, intervention and recovery pathways, ensuring that support is integrated and that services are accessible, and trauma responsive. Shared intelligence will be used to ensure that individuals, families, and communities at risk of, or impacted by, violence are identified and supported across pathways.

Support individuals throughout their lives by promoting whole-family approaches

System approaches to violence prevention should respond to risk factors affecting whole families. They should recognise the impact of parental imprisonment, domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental ill-health on children and young people, and the need to support families as systems rather than individuals in isolation. This is best achieved by ensuring that preventative work is implemented at different transition points.

Work with community leaders to drive change

System leaders will ensure that individuals, families and affected communities with lived experience shape strategy, service design, commissioning, and governance as equal partners. This is important to build trust with communities and ensure that support reflects real need.

Places

Places across Merseyside are made safer and more connected, building on community assets and local intelligence. A place-based approach is taken to reduce silo working by bringing partners together to improve long-term outcomes for local areas.

Invest in local assets and community strengths

Local partners will use real time place-based intelligence to direct resources to those communities and settings experiencing the greatest cumulative impact of violence and its underlying drivers. They will prioritise investment towards need and invest in community assets that promote community connections, resilience, and violence prevention at all levels.

Design safer places, increasing feelings of belonging and public confidence

System leaders will address contextual risks by aligning community safety, regeneration, transport, and licensing activity to reduce fear, improve safety and prevent harm in public spaces.

Enable responsive local delivery models

Local leaders will ensure place-based plans are flexible and responsive to emerging risk, community feedback and system learning, while maintaining long term focus and stability. System wide intelligence function will strengthen understanding of serious violence by bringing together health, policing, local authorities and community insight at a local level.

Partnerships

Partners across Merseyside work together using shared leadership outcomes, and prioritising long-term investment in prevention, equity and joint outcomes.

Ensure partners are jointly accountable for the prevention of violence across communities

Partners will embed joint accountability for violence prevention across statutory, voluntary, community and faith sectors, ensuring that governance structures reflect shared responsibility for both prevention and reduction of harm across the violence prevention system. Governance should include local transparency mechanisms, as well as learning and improvement cycles. This strategy should be aligned with local and regional policies.

Promote fair and sustainable investment that is based on strategic commissioning

Partners will align strategies, commissioning and funding to prioritise long-term prevention and equity, with coordinated investment focused on people and places experiencing the greatest need. Where new interventions are designed, these should be focused on prevention and equity.

Embed a learning and improvement culture

Partners will use shared data, lived experience and evaluation to understand what is working, for whom and why and in what context, and to adapt responses as learning emerges. They will foster a learning and improvement culture, where responses to serious incidents inform system change and where communities and frontline practitioners are active contributors to improvement.

Cross-cutting enablers

The pillars described are interconnected and no one pillar stands on its own. Delivering this strategy requires coordinated action across sectors including health services, local authorities, community and voluntary organisations, policing, education, criminal justice, and other statutory and community partners. These sectors are committed to working to shared principles and approaches. Cross-cutting enablers support this collaboration and ensure that the priorities translate into meaningful action.

Visible System Leadership

Visible leadership supports shared accountability and collective ownership of violence prevention.

Prevention, Early Intervention, and a Life Course Approach

Partners consistently highlighted the need for visible prevention and early intervention, spanning pre-birth to early adulthood. Delivery must recognise transitions across the life course and prioritise long-term change over short-term responses.

Trauma Responsive and Strengths-Based Practice

Trauma informed and trauma responsive approaches recognise the impact of trauma on individuals, families, and communities. Partners need to move beyond awareness to action, embedding strengths-based practice that builds confidence, capability, and trust, while reducing stigma and harm.

Equality, Inclusion and Structural Change

Addressing inequality and structural disadvantage is essential to preventing serious violence. This strategy recognises the disproportionate impact of violence on some communities and the need to challenge systemic barriers, discrimination and exclusion as part of long-term prevention.

Community Partnership, Voice, and Empowerment

Strong community voice is central to effective and legitimate prevention. Communities should be supported to shape priorities, influence decision-making and build on existing strengths, ensuring that activity reflects local experience and need.

Workforce Capability and Capacity

A confident, skilled and supported workforce is critical to delivering this strategy. Developing workforce capability across sectors helps embed shared approaches, strengthen practice and support effective collaboration.

Data, Intelligence, Evidence, and Learning

Effective prevention relies on combining data, intelligence, and lived experience. A system wide intelligence function supports shared understanding, targeting, and oversight, while evaluation and learning enable continuous improvement.

Flexible, Sustainable and Aligned Delivery

Preventing serious violence requires delivery structures that are flexible, responsive and sustainable. Approaches should be able to adapt to emerging need while maintaining long-term focus and stability. Alignment with wider local, regional, and national strategies strengthens collective impact and supports long-term change.



Why is violence prevention a priority in Merseyside?

Merseyside is a proud and resilient region, known for its strong communities, rich cultural identity, and spirit of cohesion. Yet our communities continue to experience the deep and lasting impact of violence in its many forms. Violence, whether it occurs in homes, schools, workplaces, or public spaces, affects every part of our community. It fractures families, erodes trust, and limits opportunities for people to live, learn, and thrive in safety.

Working together across Merseyside to prevent violence is exactly what's needed.

From serious organised crime to youth violence, hate incidents, and online abuse, the harm caused is felt by individuals, families, neighbourhoods, and entire generations. While the forms of violence may differ, ranging from interpersonal harm and sexual violence to self-directed harm, the impact is shared and enduring. Preventing violence is not only a matter of policing or crisis response; it is a public health, social justice, and human rights necessity.

Violence threatens the safety, wellbeing, and confidence of our residents. It limits opportunity, fuels inequality, and damages the social fabric that binds Merseyside together². Preventing violence is a shared social mission that requires partnership, compassion, and long-term commitment.

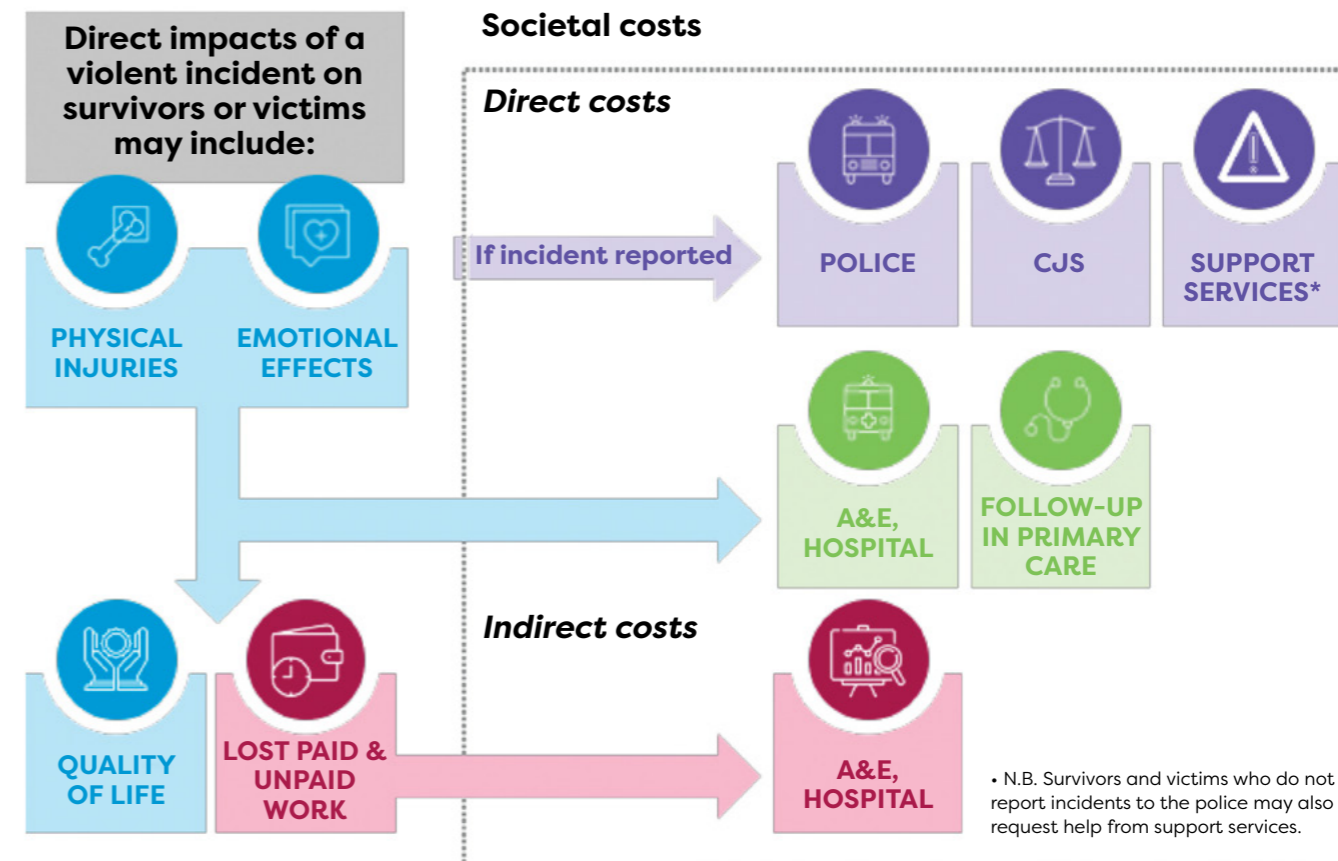
The human, social, and economic cost of violence is immense. Victims and survivors often live with lasting physical and psychological trauma. Children who witness violence are at greater risk of experiencing or perpetrating in adult life. Employers and schools see reduced engagement and productivity. Health, justice, and social care systems bear heavy and ongoing burdens (Figure 2, page 12). Yet behind these statistics are real people, families, neighbours, and colleagues, whose potential is constrained by cycles of fear and harm. Overall, in 2022/23, violence cost an estimated £210 million on Merseyside³, through costs to the healthcare system, police and criminal justice system and in lost productivity.



The socio-economic context across parts of Merseyside also plays a critical role. Some communities face high levels of deprivation, unemployment, and health inequality; conditions that increase vulnerability to both victimisation and offending. The legacy of inequality, combined with limited access to early support, means that too many people encounter services only after harm has occurred.

Reducing violence across Merseyside requires every sector to play its part: communities, education settings, youth services, businesses, faith groups, and statutory agencies all have a role in creating safer environments and positive pathways for our residents. This strategy builds on the strengths already present in our communities and acknowledges the commitment of frontline workers, educators, health professionals, policing, and community advocates who work daily to prevent harm and support recovery.

Figure 2. Impacts of a violent incident on survivors or victims and the scope of the societal cost³



Our partnerships recognise that enforcement alone cannot end violence⁴. Prevention, education, and opportunity must go hand in hand with justice. Lasting change requires shifting systems, attitudes, and opportunities so that violence no longer has space to take root. Early intervention, addressing the root causes of harm such as poverty, trauma, and social exclusion, delivers the greatest long-term impact⁵. It is important that community voice is at its heart, ensuring that those most affected by violence help to shape the solutions.

Merseyside's people have shown repeatedly the power of unity and shared purpose. By bringing together the strengths of our neighbourhoods, public institutions, and community organisations, we can create lasting change, reducing harm, supporting recovery, and helping every person to reach their full potential.

This strategy calls for investment in children and young people, support for families, and opportunities that steer individuals away from harm. It emphasises the importance of tackling inequality, strengthening protective factors, and ensuring that every organisation plays its part in building a culture of respect and safety.

By acting together across boroughs, agencies, and communities, Merseyside can lead the way in showing how violence can be reduced, lives can be transformed, and hope can be restored. Preventing violence is both a moral obligation and a shared opportunity to build a region where safety, dignity, and belonging are the foundations of every community.

Prevention works best when it's visible in communities, consistent, and relationship-led, not just reactive.

2. Quigg Z et al. (2025). The Merseyside Violence and Community Safety (MerVCom) Survey. A representative household survey of adults to understand community safety and cohesion, violence victimisation, and adverse childhood experiences. Liverpool: Liverpool John Moores University/Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership. [The Merseyside Violence and Community Safety Survey Report - Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership](#)

3. Jones L, Wilson & Quigg Z. March 2024. Economic & social costs of violence on Merseyside. Update for year ending March 2023. Collaborating Centre for Violence Prevention. Liverpool John Moores University. [New research reveals preventing serious violence could save Merseyside more than £200m a year - Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership](#)

4. Quigg et al (2023). Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership Whole System Evaluation Report: 2022-23. Liverpool: Liverpool John Moores University/Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership. [2024-01-mvpr-whole-system-evaluation-report-2022-23.pdf](#)

5. Snowdon, L., Quigg, Z., & Leavey, C. (2024). The role of public health in the primary prevention of interpersonal violence: A systematic review of international frameworks. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 9(4), 176-183. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.406>

What is serious violence?



A local definition has been agreed which aligns to the data recording parameters employed by Merseyside Police. This ensures consistency with our partners in relation to understanding demand and impact. The local definition is:

All knife crime or firearms enable offences, including the following categories:

- ▶ Attempt murder
- ▶ Assault with intent to cause serious harm (wounding with intent to do GBH (S18 Assault), causing bodily injury by explosion or torture)
- ▶ Business and personal robbery
- ▶ Threats to kill
- ▶ Assault with injury
- ▶ Racially or religiously and other form of hate aggravated assault with injury
- ▶ Assault with injury on a constable
- ▶ Rape
- ▶ Sexual assault against a female
- ▶ Sexual assault against a male
- ▶ Endangering life
- ▶ Homicide

And

Non-knife crime or firearms-enabled offences;

- ▶ Homicide plus attempt murder
- ▶ Assault with intent to cause serious harm (wounding with intent to do GBH (S18 Assault), Causing bodily injury by explosion or torture)
- ▶ Arson with intent to endanger life
- ▶ Assault with injury on a constable (only including cause GBH with intent to resist, prevent arrest, wounding with intent to do GBH and wounding with intent)
- ▶ All other robbery.

Violence Against Women and Girls

Whilst this Strategy is framed in line with the statutory requirements of the Serious Violence Duty, which currently prioritises public-space serious violence, we recognise that serious violence in Merseyside has clear gendered dimensions.



Men are disproportionately represented as perpetrators - and in some categories, victims - of violence in public spaces, whilst women and girls are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence and femicide. Although Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and domestic abuse are not explicitly included within the core data definition, they represent some of the most prevalent and harmful forms of serious violence experienced within our communities.

For the purpose of this strategy, “public space serious violence” is used in accordance with the Home Office definition under their Serious Violence strategy⁶. This includes specific high harm offences such as homicide, knife crime, and gun crime, as well as areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is central, such as gang associated violence and county lines drug dealing. We acknowledge, however, that VAWG **can and does** occur in public spaces, and that boundaries between public and private forms of violence are not always clear in lived experience.



6. [Serious Violence Strategy - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/614442/Serious_Violence_Strategy.pdf)

We have seen locally how violence in public and private spaces can interrelate and reinforce one another, including through child and adolescent to parent violence and abuse, where we continue to see significantly high rates of serious harm, including matricide.

This is just one example that underlines the need to understand serious violence as a continuum of harm shaped by trauma, inequality, and harmful norms, rather than as isolated categories of offence.

Our approach therefore adopts a gender-informed, trauma-informed public health framework that acknowledges the interconnected drivers of violence across private and public spheres. Evidence consistently demonstrates shared risk factors including Adverse Childhood Experiences, exposure to violence, inequality, deprivation, and harmful gender norms, which underpin both public-space serious violence and VAWG.



In applying the four stages of the public health approach, we will ensure that local statutory reviews, domestic abuse homicide data and VAWG intelligence inform our understanding of the problem; that shared risk and protective factors are recognised within prevention planning; that primary prevention activity aligns with existing VAWG and early help programmes; and that opportunities for joint policy development, commissioning and evaluation are actively pursued.

Governance and accountability will remain coherent and aligned to existing structures. Public-space serious violence will continue to be led through Serious Violence governance arrangements, whilst VAWG and domestic abuse activity will remain primarily within established Domestic Abuse and VAWG Partnership Boards.

However, formalised mechanisms for shared intelligence, learning from reviews, and joint evidence reporting will ensure strategic alignment and mutual reinforcement. In doing so, the Strategy does not expand the reporting definition of serious violence, but reflects our local evidence, values and commitment to preventing the most serious and fatal forms of violence affecting our communities.

Who is responsible for reducing serious violence in Merseyside?

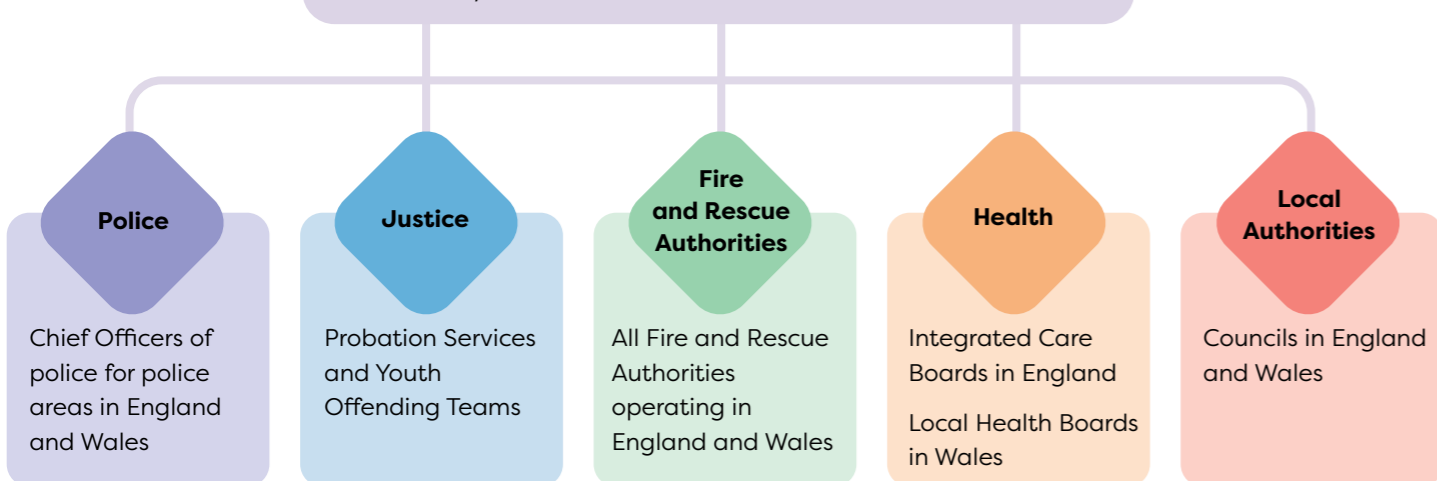


Serious Violence Duty

The Serious Violence Duty (the Duty) was introduced in January 2023⁷, under the Police, Crime and Sentencing and Courts Act (2022). It means that there is a requirement for partners to work together to reduce violence within their local communities.

Partners referred to as 'Specified Authorities' which are Chief Officers of police, fire and rescue authorities, integrated care boards, local authorities, youth offending teams and probation services, who must all work collaboratively and share intelligence to put in place a strategy to prevent and reduce serious violence. There is a secondary group known as 'Relevant Authorities' who should engage with the specified authorities as necessary and includes prison authorities, youth custody authorities and educational authorities.

Under the legislation, educational, prison and/or youth custody authorities will be able to co-operate with the Specified Authorities as necessary and are known as the Relevant Authorities.



Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership

Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) was established in 2019 when the Home Office provided funding for 18 Violence Reduction Units, now 20, to be established in certain areas across the country. MVRP chose to rename the team from 'unit' to 'partnership' to reflect its approach to tackling serious violence⁸.

The MVRP brings together partners from across Merseyside's five local authorities. The core team comprises representatives from various services including Merseyside Police, Local Government, Merseyside Fire and Rescue, National Probation Service, Public Health, Youth Offending Service, Department of Work and Pensions, Health, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Education. All partners bring expertise and knowledge to collectively address the underlying causes of violence and work with our communities to prevent it.



7. Serious Violence Duty. Statutory Guidance. [Serious Violence Duty - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114421/Serious_Violence_Duty_-_GOV.UK.pdf)

8. [Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership](https://www.merseyside.gov.uk/mvrp)

Governance

Strong governance is fundamental to the successful delivery of this strategy. It provides clear leadership and direction, defines accountability and responsibility, ensuring effective implementation, assurance, and escalation of risk, challenge and barriers. Robust governance turns collaboration from good intentions into sustained system-wide impact and enables partners to work collectively towards a shared vision of preventing serious violence.

Merseyside Strategic Policing and Partnership Board

The Merseyside Strategic Policing and Partnership Board (MSPPB), chaired by Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), is the primary governance mechanism for the delivery of the Duty across Merseyside. The PCC provides strategic leadership and oversight, supporting specified and relevant authorities in meeting their statutory responsibilities and ensuring compliance with the Duty.

The MSPPB brings together senior leaders from police, community safety, health, local government, and wider partners to focus on key policing and community safety priorities and to ensure the delivery of the police and crime plan. The Board provides strategic oversight of serious violence reduction activity, receives assurance on performance and risk, and oversees the sub-groups that support effective partnership delivery. Serious Violence Duty responsible owners are key members of the Board, working collaboratively to ensure a coordinated, whole system response to serious violence.

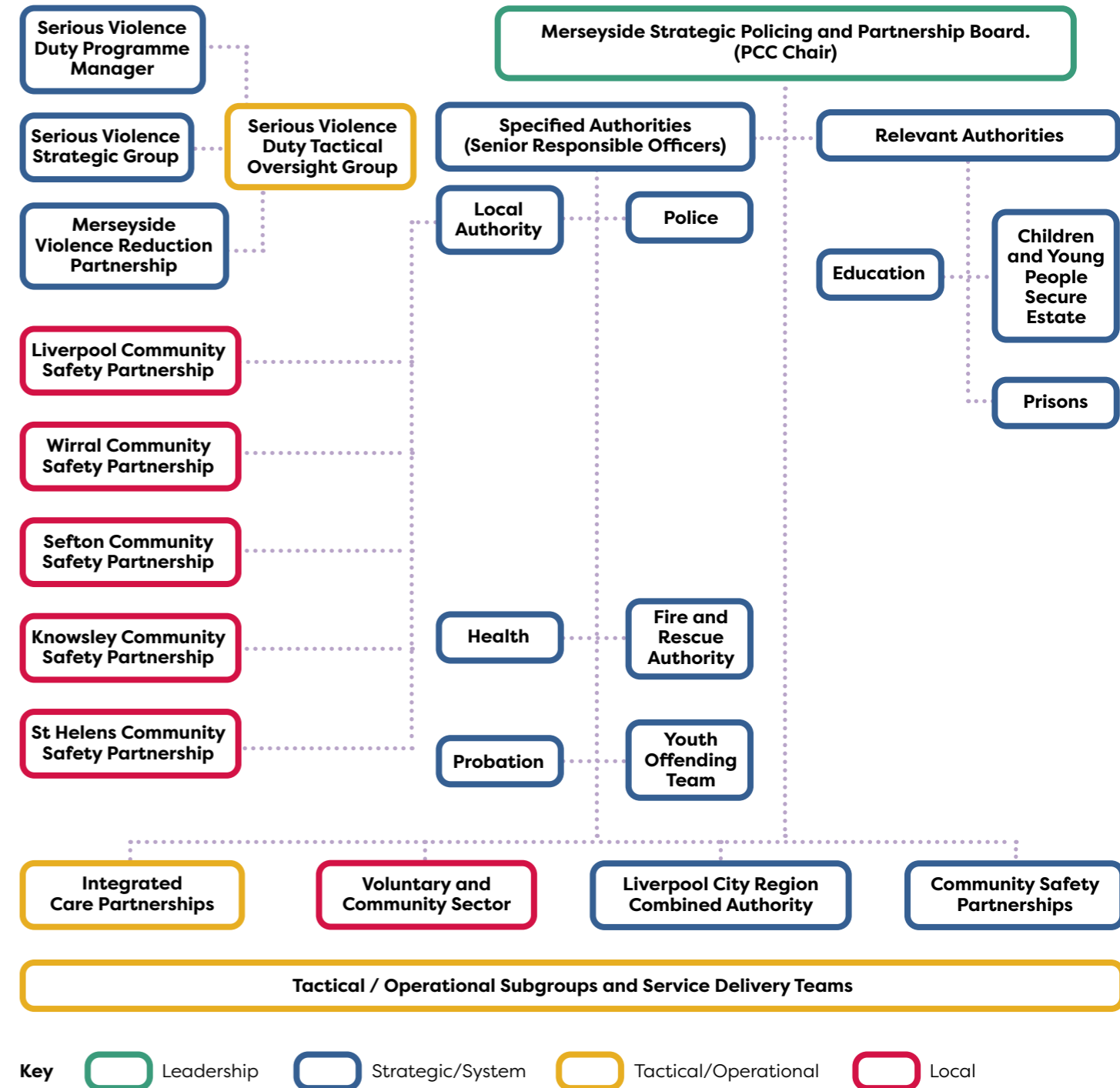
Serious Violence Strategic Group

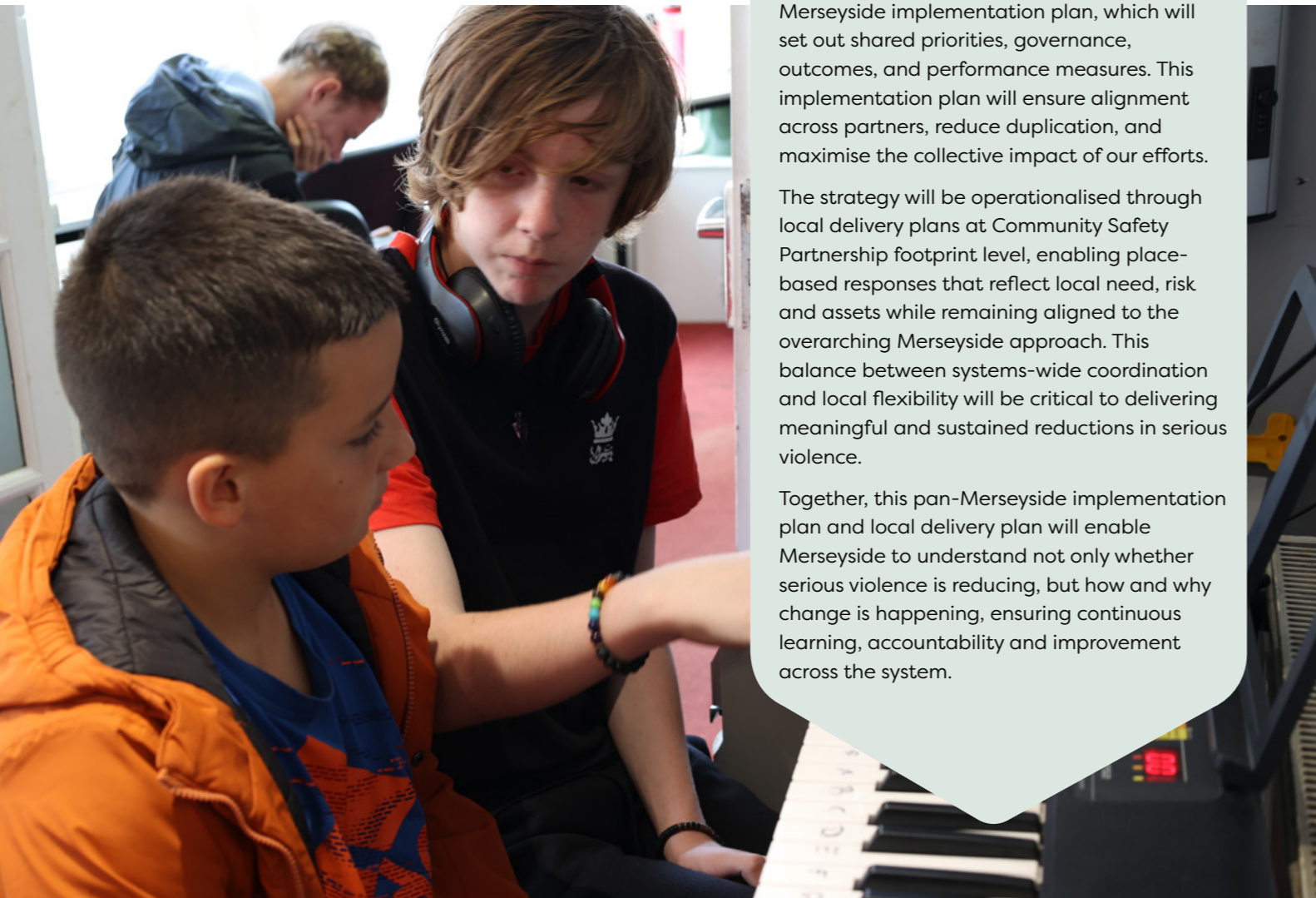
Reporting to the MSPPB, the Merseyside Serious Violence Strategic Group provides direction and leadership for violence prevention activity across Merseyside. The Group brings together senior decision makers to shape long-term vision, drive sustainable system change and embed a public health approach to violence reduction.

Serious Violence Tactical Oversight Group

The Serious Violence Tactical Oversight Group reports to the Strategic Group and provides operational assurance and coordination. Its focus is on translating priorities into effective day-to-day delivery across Merseyside. Membership includes representatives from Specified and Relevant Authorities and the wider partnership. The Group enables knowledge sharing, information exchange, dissemination of operational learning, and maximised opportunities for collaboration and co-commissioning. The Group also monitors implementation and impact to ensure activity is achieving intended outcomes.

Through this Group, all partners have an equal voice, address gaps in expertise, and support collective ownership of serious violence outcomes across delivery and governance.





Collective action, local impact

This pan-Merseyside strategy will be underpinned by a system-wide, pan-Merseyside implementation plan, which will set out shared priorities, governance, outcomes, and performance measures. This implementation plan will ensure alignment across partners, reduce duplication, and maximise the collective impact of our efforts.

The strategy will be operationalised through local delivery plans at Community Safety Partnership footprint level, enabling place-based responses that reflect local need, risk and assets while remaining aligned to the overarching Merseyside approach. This balance between systems-wide coordination and local flexibility will be critical to delivering meaningful and sustained reductions in serious violence.

Together, this pan-Merseyside implementation plan and local delivery plan will enable Merseyside to understand not only whether serious violence is reducing, but how and why change is happening, ensuring continuous learning, accountability and improvement across the system.

Interdependencies

This strategy sits within a complex landscape of national, regional, and local strategies that address violence, vulnerability and safeguarding. Local partnership arrangements have been designed to minimise additional complexity, recognising the strong and effective partnership structures already in place across Merseyside.

Serious violence does not occur in isolation and there are clear interdependencies with a range of thematic strategies led by statutory partners, including those focussed on domestic abuse, VAWG, safeguarding, community safety, health, and criminal justice.

These strategies retain their own leadership, governance, and accountability, reflecting the distinct statutory duties and priorities they address.

The partnership is committed to ensuring alignment and consistency across this landscape, reducing duplication and identifying opportunities for joint working where shared risk factors, cohorts or places are identified. This includes coordinating activity, sharing intelligence and learning, and developing complementary interventions where this adds value.

Community and partner insight: Expectations for effective governance and delivery

Through community engagement, multi-agency workshops, and partnership consultation, partners consistently emphasised that how this strategy is governed and delivered will be critical to its success.

Partners highlighted clear expectations for effective system leadership, including:

- ▶ Shared and transparent leadership across Merseyside
- ▶ A prevention-led, life course approach

- ▶ Trauma responsive and strengths-based practice
- ▶ Meaningful partnerships with communities
- ▶ Effective use of data and insight
- ▶ Sustainable and adaptive delivery arrangements

These expectations are embedded within the governance framework and are reflected in the deliverable enablers set out above.



No single agency can prevent serious violence alone, instead prevention is delivered through the combined and reinforcing actions of all partners. Police intelligence informs early intervention, safeguarding reduces enforcement demands, prisons and probation work links to community services and enables safe resettlement, and community insight shapes local place-based responses. The effectiveness of the strategy therefore relies not just on the strength of individual agencies, but on the quality of the connections between them – shared understanding of risk, coordinated pathways, and collective accountability for outcomes.



Key
● what the system does
● who contributes



Evidence underpinning our approach to violence prevention

Preventing serious violence across Merseyside requires a whole-system, public health approach that is led by our communities and recognises that violence is preventable and rooted in a complex interaction of individual, relational, community and societal factors. The World Health Organization (2017)⁹ defines a public health approach to reducing violence as one that:

“Seeks to improve the health and safety of all individuals by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a victim or a perpetrator of violence. By definition, public health aims to provide the maximum benefit for the largest number of people. Programmes for primary prevention of violence based on the public health approach are designed to expose a broad segment of a population to prevention and to reduce and prevent violence at a population-level.”

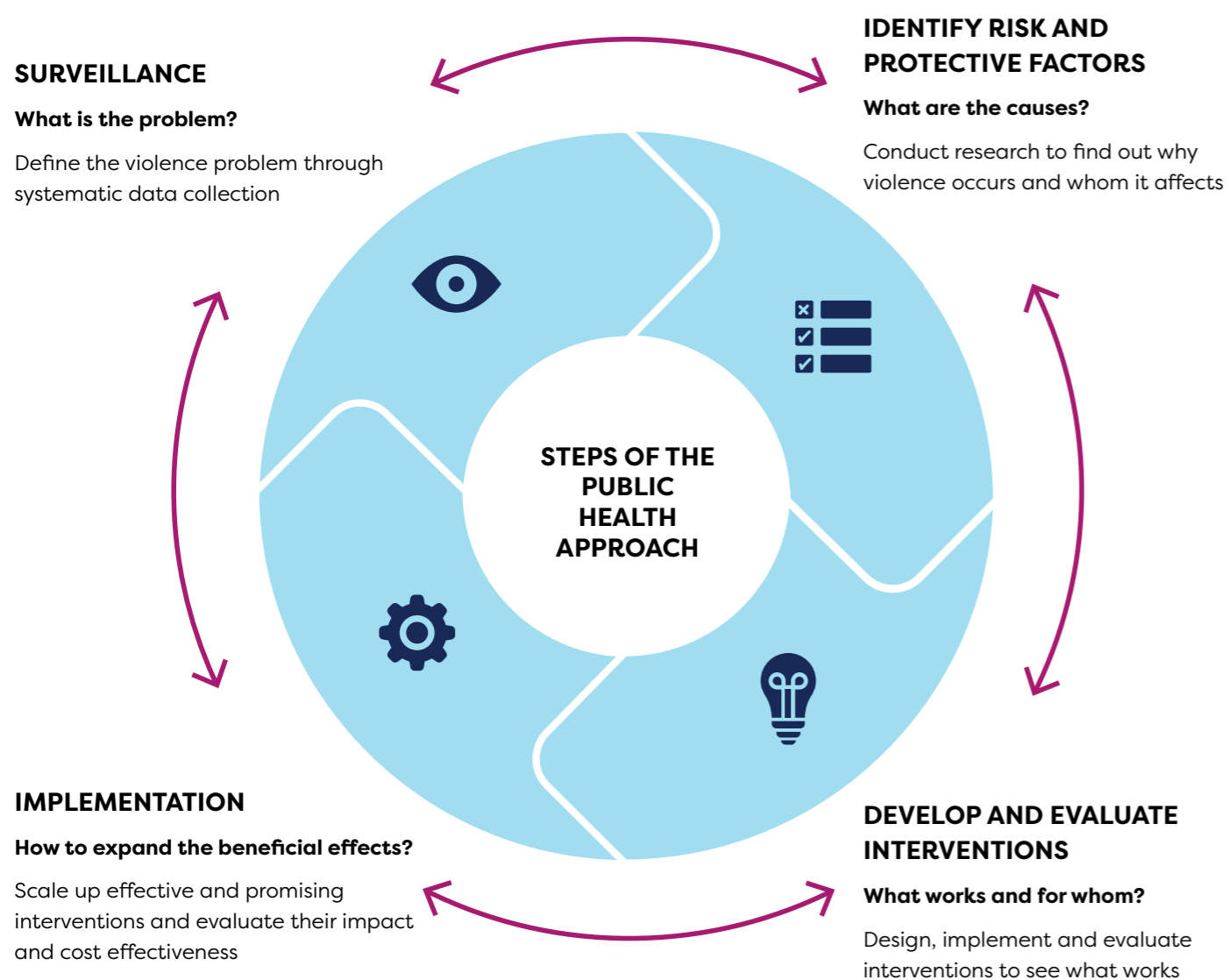
9. World Health Organization, 2017. Violence Prevention Alliance: The public health approach.

What we mean by a Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention

A public health approach to violence prevention focusses on improving the health, safety, and wellbeing of whole populations by addressing the underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a victim or perpetrator of violence. It is prevention-focused, evidence based, and population-centred, supporting sustained action across individuals, communities, and systems.

At the centre of this approach are four key steps (illustrated in Figure 3).

Figure 3. Steps of the public health approach¹⁰



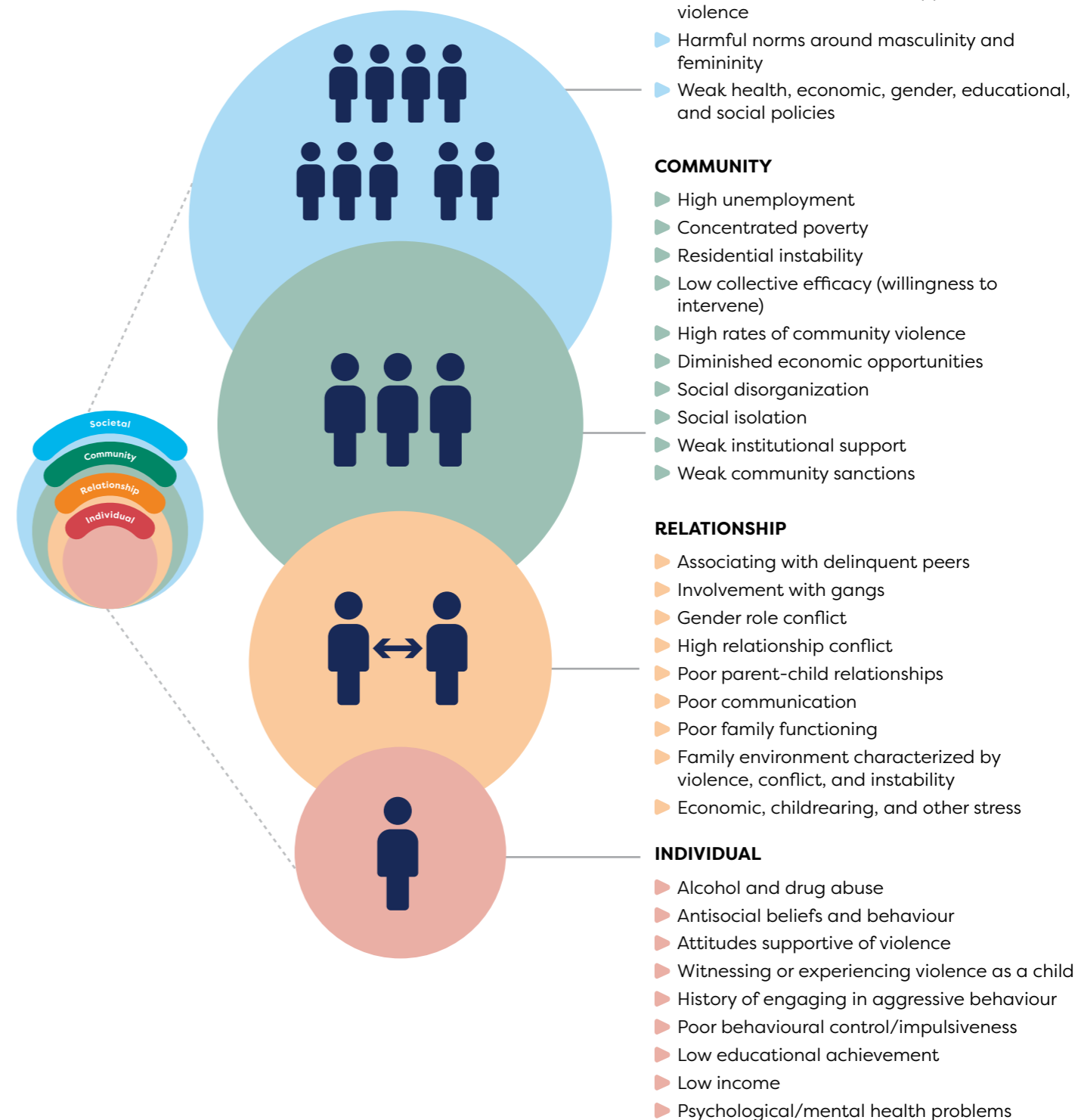
Together these elements provide a framework for planning, delivering, and evaluating activity that reduces violence, improves safety, and promotes resilience across Merseyside.

This process enables partners to take action that prevents harm before it occurs, reduce risk where it exists, and support communities to build protective environments.

Social Ecological Model

A public health approach also recognises that violence is influenced by factors at multiple levels – from individual circumstances, to relationships, communities, and wider society. This is addressed using the social ecological model of violence prevention (illustrated in Figure 4), a core public health framework that helps partners make sense of these different layers and use that understanding to guide effective action to prevent violence.

Figure 4. Social ecological model for risk factors for violence¹¹



This model underpins the public health approach, as it provides an effective framework which shows why action at all levels – from individual support to community building and policy change – is essential to preventing violence and promoting long-term safety.

¹⁰ WHO Violence Prevention Unit: Approach, objectives and activities 2022-2026. [WHO Violence Prevention Unit: approach, objectives and activities, 2022-2026](#)

¹¹ World Health Organization Violence Prevention Unit Approach, objectives and activities, 2022-2026. [who_2022_plv_strategy_2022-2026_finalfile.pdf](#)

Our Merseyside approach to violence prevention

Our approach to serious violence adopts a public health, layered approach to prevention, ensuring that action is taken early and sustained over time, whilst also responding decisively where harm is greatest. This approach enables partners to balance universal prevention with targeted and intensive interventions, and to tailor delivery to local context while maintaining a shared Merseyside-wide direction.

While this strategy sees violence prevention as a whole population responsibility, partners will apply greater intensity and focus within a layered model to those experiencing the highest levels of vulnerability, disadvantage and inequality. To achieve this, activity across all three strategic pillars: People, Place and Partnerships, is structured through a three-layered, needs led framework, which reflects how risk and resilience are experienced and addressed.

This model supports clear, tangible delivery at both regional and local levels. We operate across three levels of prevention:

Primary (Universal)

Prevent violence before it starts. The aim is to focus on whole populations to reduce people's tendency for violence and strengthen protective factors. Primary prevention of conditions for violence is our main goal.

Secondary (Targeted)

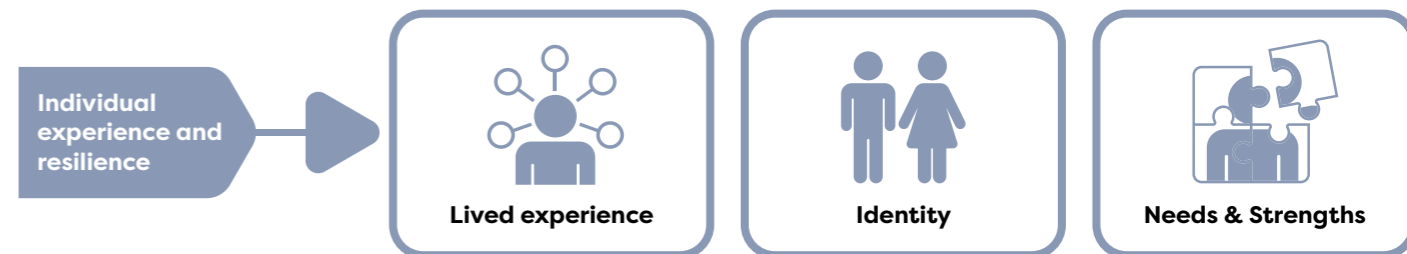
Aims to provide support early, when violence is happening and work together to mitigate further escalation and to stop it becoming established. This is often called Early Intervention and involves early warning and intervention at an early stage, de-escalation of violence and conflict handling alongside effective planning. This aims to lower the chances of those involved in violence being involved again.

Tertiary (Intensive)

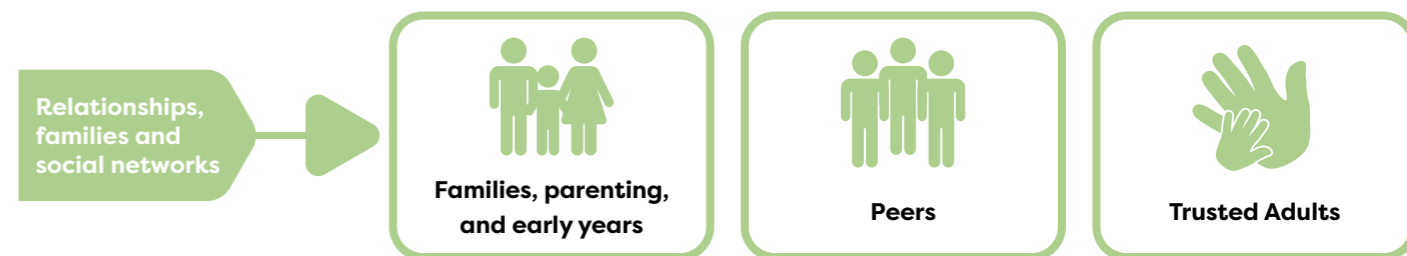
Looking to find ways to help people move away from a life of violence and includes criminal justice, enforcement and holding people to account for their actions. It involves response, treatment and rehabilitation as well as reconstruction and resolution. Tertiary prevention ensures that those affected by violence get the support that they need.

This layered approach ensures that prevention is embedded throughout and not limited to crisis response.

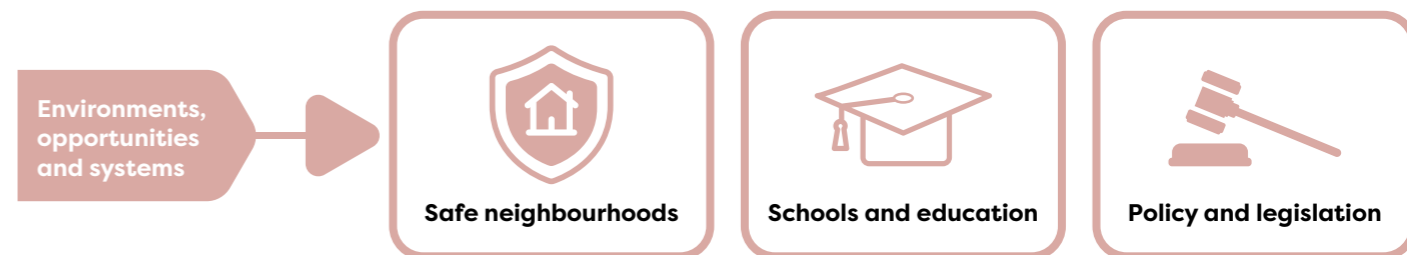
Across each level of prevention, activity is shaped through three interrelated lenses. These lenses are not separate groups or services, but dimensions of need that shape how violence is experienced and prevented in people's lives.



How violence is experienced and responded to at a personal level. This lens focuses on people's lived experiences, identity, needs and strengths across the life course. It recognises that some individuals face increased vulnerability to violence due to factors such as adverse childhood experiences, care experience, neurodivergence, exploitation, trauma or multiple disadvantages in adulthood. Responses at this layer prioritise early identification, trauma-responsive support and recovery, ensuring that individuals are not defined by risk alone but supported to build resilience and agency.



How violence is influenced by relationships and the people around us. This lens recognises the critical role of families, peers and trusted adults in shaping risk, protection and recovery. It reflects the reality that violence often occurs within a wider relational context, including where families are affected by domestic abuse, substance misuse, parental imprisonment or exploitation. This lens prioritises whole-family and relational approaches, ensuring that support addresses interconnected needs and reduces the likelihood of harm being transferred across generations.



How places, services and social conditions influence harm and safety. This layer focuses on the environments and systems in which people live, learn, socialise, and work. It recognises that violence is more likely to occur in places affected by deprivation, inequality, poor housing, limited opportunity, and unsafe public spaces. This includes education settings, neighbourhoods experiencing persistent harm, and parts of the night-time economy. Responses aim to strengthen protective environments, reduce contextual risks, and address the structural conditions that create vulnerability to violence.

Applying our approach to identify risk and protective factors in Merseyside

Taking a public health approach to violence prevention in Merseyside requires the identification and reduction of risk factors, and the strengthening of protective factors. We need to understand what factors increase violence in our communities, and what exists or can be put in place to reduce the risk of violence. Local and national research, as well as local strategic assessments provide a clear picture of the conditions that increase vulnerability and exposure to violence, as well as the individual, community and system assets that help keep our communities safe from violence and fear of violence.

What factors increase the likelihood that someone may experience, or be involved in, violence?

Boredom, exclusion and lack of belonging often sit underneath antisocial behaviour

Individual and Family Level - People

Research shows that experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), i.e. childhood abuse, neglect, exposure to parental substance misuse, domestic violence or imprisonment, significantly increases the likelihood of later involvement in or exposure to violence throughout the life course¹². The MVRP Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) highlights how ACEs are a key driver of vulnerability, noting that young people with multiple ACEs are disproportionately represented in youth justice and safeguarding systems¹³. Recent data also shows that Merseyside adults reporting exposure to ACEs, particularly in accumulation, are also significantly more likely to experience violence in adulthood^{14,15}. Therefore, family and peer group relations have a key role in shaping individual risk of exposure to violence. International evidence shows that as well as exposure to domestic violence, poor parental supervision and family conflict, increase the likelihood of involvement in violence.

Other risk factors for exposure to or involvement in violence include:

- ▶ School exclusion, which is strongly associated with later involvement in serious violence¹⁷
- ▶ Neurodiversity, such as ADHD or autism, which can increase vulnerability when support needs are unmet by clinical and other support services¹⁸
- ▶ Substance misuse, which is linked to both victimisation and offending¹⁹
- ▶ Merseyside Police have also identified peer exploitation, including grooming into criminal activity, as a growing concern in parts of the region²⁰
- ▶ Association with peers involved in offending may also increase pressure for individuals to become involved in risky and violent behaviours – this is particularly the case for individuals without trusted and stable support from adult role models.

Local Community Factors - Place

Young people living in areas of high deprivation are more likely to experience individual risk factors for vulnerability to violence. This means that those young people living in the most socioeconomically deprived areas are the most likely to experience violence²¹. Poverty and inequality are significant challenges in parts of Merseyside, as well as youth unemployment²².

The MVRP SNA highlights that serious violence is concentrated in specific neighbourhoods, often linked to organised crime, drug markets, and territorial disputes. These patterns reflect broader national trends in which violence clusters in areas with limited economic opportunity and social cohesion. In addition, certain communities may be at a higher risk of violence where access to youth provision, early help support and community safety interventions are limited. These community level challenges create conditions where violence can flourish, and this makes it harder for communities to access the support they need.

Living in deprived areas with established gangs means it's easier to end up involved in criminal activity

System-Wide Influence - Partnerships

To deliver effective interventions and approaches to violence prevention, it is essential that partners across the violence reduction system work together. Partners, including education, health, planning, communications and social care, must recognise their role in preventing violence from occurring in our communities. Without strong governance and data systems working across system-wide, violence prevention activities are unlikely to succeed, and local communities will face the burden of increased violence locally.

Sustainable change will come from early intervention, consistent youth work and genuine partnerships with local experts who understand the needs of those who they serve

12 Public Health England (2019) Violence Prevention Framework. London: PHE

13 Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (2025) Strategic Needs Assessment 2024-25. Liverpool: MVRP.

14 Quigg, Z., Bellis, M.A., Butler, N. et al. Adverse childhood experiences, and violence and criminal justice outcomes in adulthood—the moderating role of protective and compensatory childhood experiences. BMC Med 23, 632 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-025-04459-3>

15 Quigg, Z., Bellis, M.A., Butler, N. et al. Adverse childhood experiences, and violence and criminal justice outcomes in adulthood—the moderating role of protective and compensatory childhood experiences. BMC Med 23, 632 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-025-04459-3>

16 World Health Organization (WHO) (2022) Violence Prevention: Key Facts. Geneva: WHO

17 Department for Education (DfE) (2021) School Exclusions Review. London: DfE

18 NHS England (2022) Neurodevelopmental Conditions and Vulnerability. London: NHS England

19 Home Office (2023) Serious Violence Strategy Update. London: Home Office.

20 Merseyside Police (2024) Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment. Merseyside Police.

21 MVRP (2024) Serious Violence Duty Strategy. Liverpool: MVRP

22 Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (2023) Deprivation and Inequality Report. Liverpool: LCRC.

What might reduce the risk of being exposed to, or involved in, violence?

While risk factors highlight who may be more vulnerable to violence, protective factors demonstrate the strengths and assets that help individuals and communities thrive and avoid involvement in violence. Strengthening these protective factors is key to Merseyside's violence prevention approach.

Community Cohesion and Social Capital

Communities with strong social ties, active local groups, and shared norms of mutual support experience lower levels of violence²⁷. Local communities and residents are best placed to identify local issues and co-design solutions. This is important when designing interventions to prevent or reduce violence.

In our community, local, relationship-based youth work is highly effective. Projects who have built a long-term presence in the community are trusted by vulnerable people

Safe, Accessible Provision

Evidence shows that high-quality youth services reduce the likelihood of children and young people becoming involved in violence by providing safe spaces, trusted adults, and positive activities²³. Merseyside's Serious Violence Asset Directory lists more than 480 projects offering sports, arts, mentoring, and community engagement opportunities²⁴. These programmes help build resilience, confidence and social skills, while reducing exposure to risk factors for violence.

Safe places to go, safe places to be

Early Intervention and Trauma-Informed Practice

Early intervention is key

Early intervention is a cornerstone of violence prevention. Evidence shows that supporting children and families at an early stage with parenting programmes, mental health support, and early help services significantly reduces later involvement in violence²⁸. Merseyside is increasingly adopting trauma-informed approaches across care and support services. This approach recognises the impact of early adversity and trauma on behaviour and wellbeing. Trauma-responsive services help young people feel safe, understood, and supported, reducing the likelihood of harmful coping strategies.

Strong Relationships and Trusted Adults

Positive relationships with parents, carers, teachers, youth workers and mentors are among the strongest protective factors against violence^{25, 26}. Trusted adults provide emotional support, guidance, and stability, and this can help young people navigate challenges and avoid harmful influences that may increase their exposure to violence even into adulthood.

Relationships is not a buzzword, it is the product of long standing, trusted connections between the vulnerable and the real experts who understand their communities and the local needs

Education, Employment and Opportunities for Growth

Access to education, training and employment is a powerful protective factor. Young people who are engaged in school or work are significantly less likely to be involved in or exposed to violence²⁹. Merseyside's investment in skills programmes, apprenticeships and youth employment initiatives supports long-term prevention by improving life chances and reducing economic exclusion.

Creating community, positive role models, building confidence in all young people, laying foundations while they are young but being consistent in their lives especially as they become more vulnerable as teens

23 Youth Endowment Fund (2022) Youth Interventions and Violence Prevention. London: YEF.

24 Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (2025) Strategic Needs Assessment 2024–25. Liverpool: MVRP.

25 WHO (2022) Violence Prevention: Key Facts. Geneva: WHO.

26 Quigg, Z., Bellis, M.A., Butler, N. et al. Adverse childhood experiences, and violence and criminal justice outcomes in adulthood—the moderating role of protective and compensatory childhood experiences. BMC Med 23, 632 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-025-04459-3>

27 Public Health England (2019) Violence Prevention Framework. London: PHE.

28 Early Intervention Foundation (2021) The Case for Early Intervention. London: EIF.

29 Home Office (2023) Serious Violence Strategy Update. London: Home Office.

Community Voices and Needs Assessment

How did we Capture Community Insight and Assess Need?

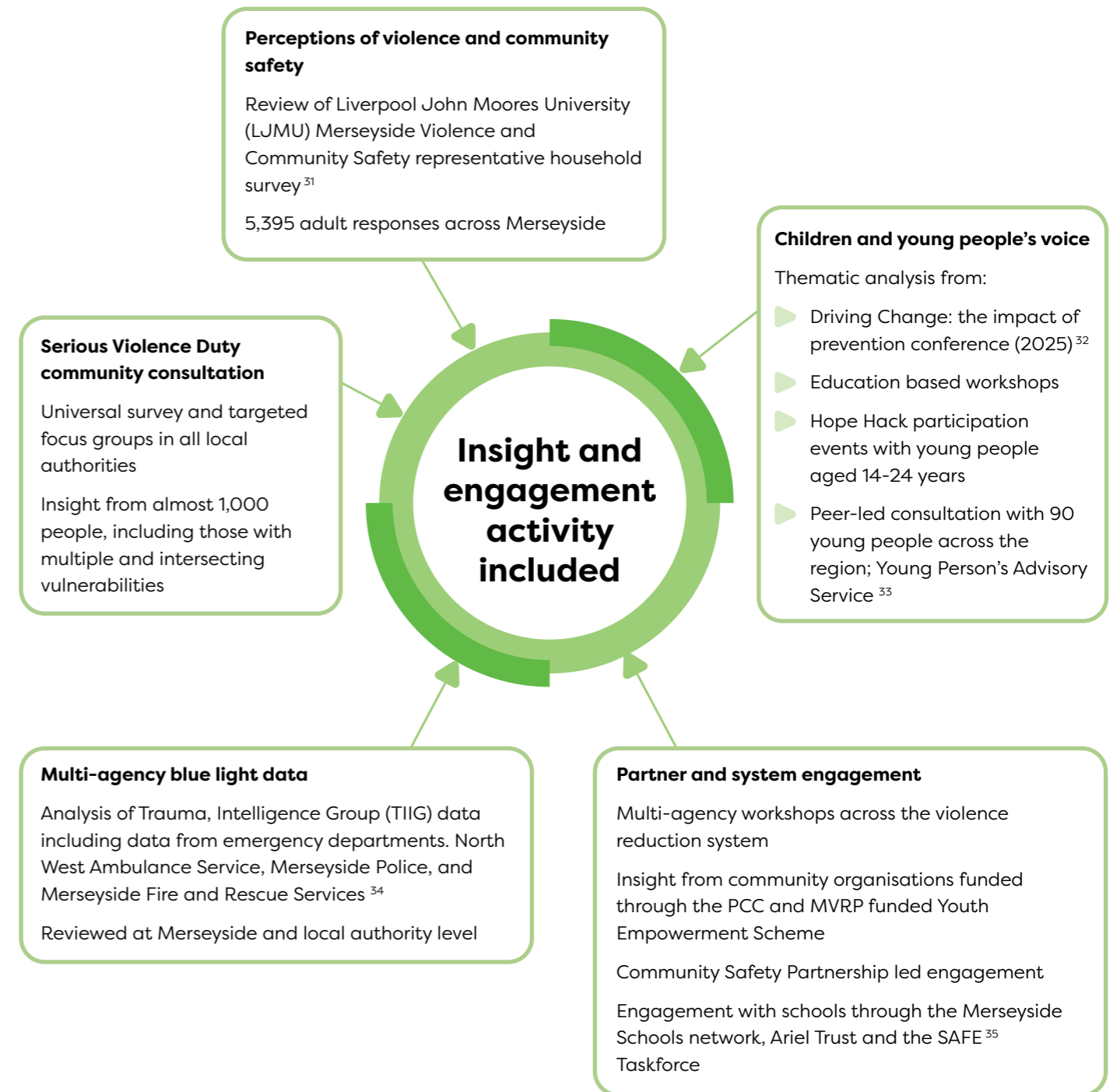
Strategic needs assessment – A snapshot

The MVRP published a Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA)³⁰ which underpins the Violence Prevention Strategy. The SNA combines data, intelligence, and insight from local communities to build a robust understanding of violence across Merseyside. Alongside the SNA, we also worked with community partners to gather feedback on the Merseyside prevention vision, purpose and wider priority setting.



What did we do?

We used a combination of data analysis, consultation, and engagement to understand experiences of violence, drivers of harm, and opportunities for prevention.



30 MVRP (2025) Strategic Needs Assessment 2024-25. Liverpool: MVRP.

31 Quigg, Z., et al. (2025). The Merseyside Violence and Community Safety (MerVCom) Survey. A representative household survey of adults to understand community safety and cohesion, violence victimisation, and adverse childhood experiences. Liverpool: Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)/MVRP

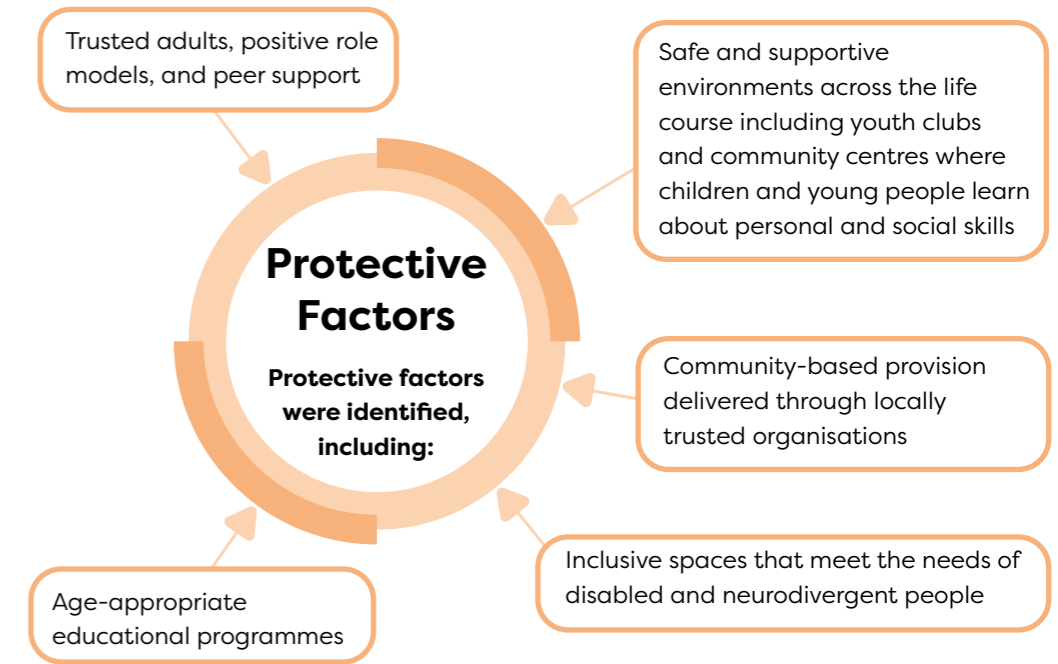
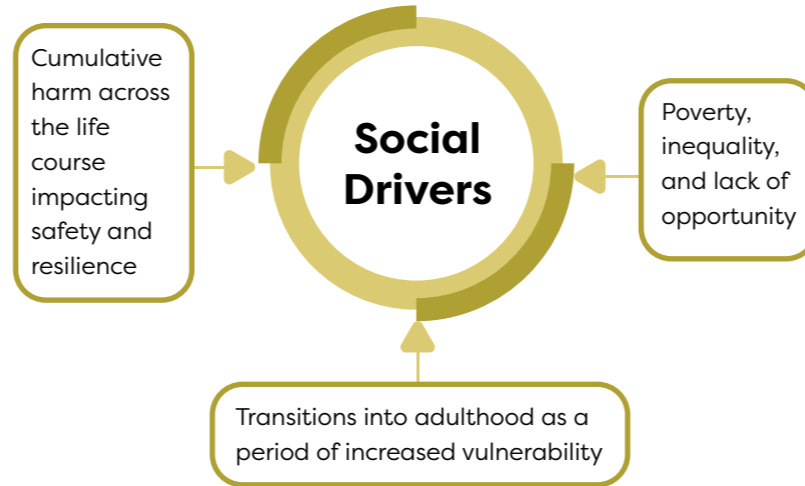
32 MVRP (2025). Driving Change: The Impact of Prevention. Available at <https://www.merseysidevrp.com/resources/vrp-conference/>

33 YPAS (2024). 2024 Hope Hack Reflection Report. Liverpool: YPAS and MVRP.

34 LJMU (2026). Trauma and Injury Intelligence Group. Available at <https://tiig.ljmu.ac.uk/>

35 The SAFE taskforce is a group of mainstream secondary schools working together with other multi-agency structures and local experts to support young people at risk of serious violence and re-engage them in their education.

What did we learn from engagement with communities and partners?



³⁶ YPAS (2024). 2024 Hope Hack Reflection Report. Liverpool: YPAS and MVRP.

³⁷ Butler, N., et al. (2025). Adulthood Violence Victimization Across Merseyside. Nature, prevalence, and associations with health and wellbeing, health risk behaviours, adverse childhood experiences, and community safety and cohesion. Liverpool: LJMU/MVRP.

From strategy to action



The 5Cs approach

The 5Cs approach sets out how partners and communities will work together to prevent serious violence. The five elements (Figure 6) are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, supporting a coordinated response across Merseyside.

Figure 6. The 5 Cs: a place-based multi-agency to serious violence prevention³⁸

Preventing serious violence in Merseyside requires a shared approach that translates strategic intent into consistent action across the system. This section sets out the 5Cs approach - these elements describe the way of working that underpins the strategy³⁸. They provide a common foundation for leadership, planning, partnership activity and local delivery, supporting a whole-system, public health approach to preventing serious violence.



Counter-narrative

Challenging harmful narratives and promoting positive alternatives is central to prevention. Work with children, young people and communities should support aspiration, opportunity and positive role models, while addressing the wider social determinants associated with violence.

Co-operation in data and intelligence sharing

Shared data and intelligence support a stronger understanding of serious violence and its causes. Collaborative approaches to data sharing enable partners to make effective use of information while protecting personal data. Multi-agency data, from health, policing, criminal justice, local authorities and other services, plays a key role in informing prevention and targeting support.

Collaboration

Preventing violence requires a whole-systems response, with partners working together around a shared purpose. Violence impacts outcomes across health, education, housing, community safety and the economy. Collaboration recognises these shared impacts and the benefits of collective action.

Co-production

Co-production ensures that violence prevention activity is shaped with communities and informed by lived experience. Partnerships with community and faith groups bring trust, insight and local capacity, supporting shared ownership and collective responsibility.

Community consensus approach

A community consensus approach ensures that prevention activity is locally grounded and informed by those most affected. Working with existing community networks strengthens legitimacy and effectiveness, with engagement that is purposeful, inclusive and transparent.

Engagement should balance universal approaches with targeted support for those most at risk or already affected. Methods will vary by local goals, but effective engagement has a clear purpose, links to decision making, is inclusive, builds trust, and provides regular feedback to show how community input drives change.

Monitoring progress and impact

Understanding impact

The Merseyside Violence Prevention Strategy adopts a public health approach to understanding, measuring and evidencing impact. In line with the Home Office guidance, we will monitor progress against three nationally mandated success measures:

- ▶ A reduction in hospital admissions for assaults involving a knife or sharp object
- ▶ A reduction in knife and sharp object enabled serious violence recorded by the police
- ▶ A reduction in homicides recorded by the police

These measures provide an essential and consistent basis for assessing trends in serious violence across Merseyside. However, we recognise that quantitative indicators alone do not fully capture the harm caused by serious violence or the impact of preventative action on individuals, families and communities.

A holistic approach to impact

We are committed to developing a more holistic understanding of impact by combining quantitative data with qualitative insight. This will include capturing the lived experiences of those most affected by serious violence, alongside the perspectives of practitioners, communities and the voluntary and community sector. Understanding what works, where it works, and for whom will be central to shaping effective and equitable responses.

Our approach to understanding the impact of violence will place a strong emphasis on community voice, particularly from communities disproportionately affected by violence. This will enable us to better understand changes in perceived safety, trust in services, and confidence in local responses, alongside changes in recorded crime and injury.



Short-, medium- and long-term outcomes

Serious violence prevention requires sustained, long-term investment and system change. While we anticipate some impact in the short term, particularly in relation to disruption and immediate harm reduction, the greatest benefits are expected to be realised over the medium to longer term. We will therefore adopt an outcomes framework that enables us to:

- ▶ Track short-term outputs and early indicators of change
- ▶ Understand how these contribute to medium- and long-term reductions in risk and harm
- ▶ Identify opportunities to adapt and strengthen interventions in response to emerging need

Reviewing short-term progress is critical to maximising longer-term impact. By understanding early signals of what is working within our local context, we can act quickly to refine delivery, respond to changing risk, and invest in approaches that demonstrate the greatest potential to reduce future harm and demand on public services.

Performance, learning and sustainability

Where possible, we will develop shared processes and systems that enable longer-term tracking of outcomes across Merseyside. This will support a robust performance and learning framework that considers both implementation and impact indicators, linked to a clear theory of change.

This approach will help us to:

- ▶ Understand the contextual factors influencing impact
- ▶ Strengthen the evidence base for prevention activity
- ▶ Demonstrate value for money through an “invest to save” approach
- ▶ Embed long-term financial, cultural and system sustainability in serious violence prevention work



Glossary

WORD	DEFINITION
Local Area	The primary area within which specified authorities will collaborate in discharging the Serious Violence Duty. This may be, as a minimum, a local authority area (e.g., Liverpool, Knowsley, St Helens, Sefton, Wirral) and, at a maximum, a police force area (Merseyside).
Local Policing Bodies	Local Policing Bodies in the context of this strategy refer to the Police and Crime Commissioner.
Life Course Approach	Adopting the life course approach means identifying opportunities for minimising risk factors and enhancing protective factors through evidence-based interventions at important life stages, from the perinatal period through early childhood to adolescence, working age, pre-conception and the family-building years, and into older age.
Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP)	Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), known locally as the MVRP, are non-statutory partnerships which offer leadership and strategic coordination of the local response to serious violence by bringing together police, local government, health and education professionals, community leaders and other key partners to identify the drivers of serious violence and agree a multi-agency response to them.
Public Health Approach	A Public Health Approach seeks to improve health and safety for all individuals in a population by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a victim or a perpetrator of violence.
Partnership	An arrangement through which specified and relevant authorities will work together to meet the requirements of the Serious Violence Duty.
Primary Intervention	Interventions to prevent violence from happening in the first place.
Protective factors	Factors that decrease vulnerability to violence.
Place Based Approach	Place is a physical setting and social context. It means different things to different people but always relates to somewhere meaningful to the individual. A place-based approach crosses organisational boundaries and is intended to reduce silo working by bringing partners together to focus on improving long term outcomes of the 'whole place' and not just individuals.
Relevant Authorities	A secondary group of authorities who are able to co-operate with the specified authorities as necessary. This includes prison authorities, youth custody authorities and educational authorities.
Risk factors	Factors that increase vulnerability to violence.
Serious Violence	Serious Violence in the local area is violence that is serious in that area. The scope of the strategy is concerned with specific types of crime set out within the definition. It does not include Violence Against Women and Girls or Domestic Abuse.
Serious Violence Duty ('the Duty')	A Duty placed on local organisations to collaborate and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence. As set out in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act 2022.
Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA)	An analysis of current and long-term issues relating to serious violence and the cohorts most vulnerable to involvement in a local area undertaken to provide a greater understanding of established and emerging serious violence trends, priority locations or other high-risk issues.
Strategy	A high-level plan outlining the multi-agency response that the partnership will take to prevent and reduce serious violence in the specified local area.

WORD	DEFINITION
Specified Authorities	All authorities to whom the Serious Violence Duty applies, including police, fire and rescue, youth offending teams, probation, health, and local authorities.
Secondary Intervention	Interventions to address risk factors and prevent an emerging problem becoming established.
Strengths Based	A strengths-based approach focusses on what is good in our communities, meaning that partners will assess the needs of communities and make plans that build on their strengths. This strengthens the positive aspects of a person's life – including people's skills, interests, and assets, instead of focussing on what is missing.
Trauma Informed Approach	According to the concept of a trauma-informed approach, "A program, organisation, or system that is trauma-informed: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Realises the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery. 2. Recognises the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system. 3. Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and 4. Seeks to actively resist re-traumatisation. A trauma-informed approach can be implemented in any type of service setting or organisation and is distinct from trauma-specific interventions or treatments that are designed specifically to address the consequences of trauma and to facilitate healing.
Targeted	This involves working only with specific individuals or groups.
Tertiary Intervention	Managing an ongoing problem to reduce harm, focussed on reducing offending and reoffending.
Universal	This includes opportunities open to all members of the population, regardless of risk factors.
Whole Systems	A Whole Systems Approach is a term used to show that there is no one organisation, person, or part of the system that can achieve a reduction in serious violence. It means that all organisations, people, and parts of the system must work together to achieve this.
5 C's Principles	The 5 C's principles are principles which local partners can adopt to work together to prevent violence. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration – A collaborative approach requires those who understand the broader implications of violence to generate a collective understanding across all partners within the local system. • Co-production - The approach and workstreams undertaken locally to prevent and tackle violence should be informed by the multi-agency perspectives of all partners. • Co-operation in data and intelligence sharing – Data and information sharing is a key enabler for all multi-agency approaches. • Counter narrative development – Work with community members to create opportunities for development and the option to pursue alternatives to criminal activities. Partnerships should help to support positive aspirations and promote positive role models. • Community consensus - Community consensus lies at the heart of a place-based multi-agency approach to serious violence prevention. The approach must be with and for local communities, it should empower them to actively participate and get involved in tackling issues that affect them collectively. This is essential for legitimacy and for any 'new' work being carried out by partners (particularly statutory work) to be seen as valid by communities.

