

| | |
|---|--|
| Committee(s): Police Authority Board – For information | Dated: 13/12/2023 |
| Subject: Draft Serious Violence Duty strategy | Non-Public |
| Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly? | 1. People are safe and feel safe |
| Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending? | N (but note ‘funding’ section in paper) |
| If so, how much? | N/a |
| What is the source of Funding? | N/a |
| Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department? | N/a |
| Report of: Town Clerk | For Information |
| Report author: Charles Smart, Police Authority team | |

Summary

This is a covering report explaining the context and current status of the City of London’s draft strategy to reduce serious violence, a document required by recent national legislation. It is presented in draft for Member comment and input ahead of publication in January 2024.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to note the report and provide comments on the draft strategy.

Main Report

Background

1. Legislation passed last year¹ placed a new duty on a specified list of public sector authorities² in all local government areas to work together and plan to prevent and reduce local serious violence. It required local authorities to produce a strategy setting out how they would do this, based on a ‘strategic needs assessment’ of the risks and incidence of serious violence in their area.
2. The legislation is relatively prescriptive on the ‘what’ (i.e. the type of document and who must help develop it) but more flexible on the ‘how’ – local areas can decide on their own definition of what offences constitute serious violence, on their own strategic response, and on the governance and delivery mechanisms for its development and implementation.

¹ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022

² Chief Officers of police, fire and rescue authorities, Integrated Care Boards, Local Health Boards, local authorities, youth offending teams and probation services

3. This will be the City of London's first dedicated strategy on serious violence. The content of our needs assessment and the format of our strategy are based on templates issued by MOPAC's Violence Reduction Unit, as is our definition of 'serious violence' which is:

“homicide, grievous bodily harm, actual bodily harm, rape, assault by penetration, sexual assault, personal robbery, threats to kill and violence against property caused during the commission of one of these offences, any sexual violence and domestic abuse, and notifiable knife and firearms offences”

4. The 'City' definition differs from the wider 'London' definition in two respects: it does not use an age qualifier (the 'London' definition focusses on serious violence affecting those aged 25 and under), and it adds 'notifiable knife and firearm offences'. Both changes were made to capture more offences in the definition, given the very low volumes of serious violence in the City.
5. As the strategic needs assessment evidences in detail and the strategy summarises, the City has much lower volumes and rates of serious violence than other London boroughs (and indeed other local authorities) and a unique profile – with a very small and low-risk residential population and a very much larger transient population, with violence linked to the night-time economy being much the largest driver. The strategy reflects this, and explains additional areas of focus on sexual violence and on identifying and mitigating medium-term risks.
6. The strategy has been developed by, and will be implemented by, a dedicated 'sub group' of the Safer City Partnership (SCP). This approach avoids duplication of governance, as the list of SCP member organisations includes all the 'specified authorities' required to input into the strategy. The SCP is overseen by the Member-led Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee, so this also builds in direct Member scrutiny of delivery.

Current Position

7. The documents here are presented in draft for Member comment and input, and while edits to the detail of the text are ongoing they have both in large part been agreed by all the relevant 'specified authorities' (see footnote 2). The strategy is required to be published in January 2024, publication of the needs assessment is discretionary although it must be shared with the Home Office.

Note on funding

8. All of the measures in this strategy bar two have agreed funding – they are either already in train, have administrative costs that can be absorbed in existing budgets, or are funded from the Police Authority team budget or the Safer City Partnership's Proceeds of Crime Act grant. The first unagreed measure is expanding the use of 'touch DNA' to better identify sexual violence offenders, this would cost c.£15,000 a year and could be funded from the existing Police Authority team budget, subject to internal officer agreement (discussion is ongoing).

9. The second is the 'detailed assessment of the City's licensing landscape', which was proposed to but not approved at the time by the City's Licensing Committee earlier this year (as it was part of a wider proposal to look at 'cumulative impact assessments' for night-time economy areas). Funding for this is available from the licensing team's budgets, so this is subject to agreement by the relevant Committees to progress.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications – Beyond its core aim of reducing serious violence, this strategy should have two additional strategic benefits. First (as intended by the Duty legislation) it will promote closer collaboration between local City organisations on crime and disorder, and indeed one of the themes of the draft strategy is to improve data sharing between them. Secondly, in line with one of the strategy's stated priorities, it should ensure there is more understanding and discussion of how medium-term changes in the City may affect crime and disorder.

Conclusion

10. This report has briefly set out the background to, and current status of, the City's draft strategy for reducing serious violence, on which Members are invited to comment ahead of publication in January.
11. Lastly, Members should be clear that this strategy is not the 'final word' on serious violence in the City. By law, it must be reviewed at least annually, and its current measures are necessarily based on what the evidence currently demonstrates are the most prevalent risks and issues or (in the case of the 'changing City' priority) what are assessed to be the larger gaps in current understanding.
12. As the needs assessment makes clear, there are areas such as violence linked to mental health issues and violence against security personnel where available data does not currently show a significant issue but where more detailed monitoring and analysis is needed, and also that there is a general need for a more nuanced understanding of community views on serious violence (although available survey evidence shows that this is not a pressing concern for most).
13. As such, there is room for the strategy to alter its focus over time if subsequent reviews and ongoing improvements in forecasting identify emergent risks.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Serious Violence Duty strategy
- Appendix 2 – Strategic Needs Assessment

Charles Smart

Policy Officer, Police Authority Team

Charles.smart@cityoflondon.gov.uk

