

## Briefing Note Impact of COVID 19 on Community Safety and Crime Reduction Strategy 2020-2023

Full Council 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020

The Community Safety and Crime Reduction Strategy was agreed at the Tourism Equalities Culture and Communities Committee in May 2020. As part of the discussions at committee, the Conservative Group tabled an amendment asking for a briefing note to accompany the report and the strategy to full council providing an update on the impact of COVID 19 on the strategy. Following discussions with partners and the lead officers for each section of the strategy, the following should be noted.

The general view of officers and partners is that the strategy itself will not be impacted by the pandemic. Each of the main strategic themes set out in the paper will remain the same, following the work undertaken with partners in December 2019 and the development of the strategic assessment. However, it is recognised that the action plans that are being developed that will sit under each of the strategic objectives may be affected especially with regard to timeframes of actions being started or completed by.

Please note that the exploitation section of the strategy has had some minor amendments made following consultation with the city's Safeguarding Children Partnership to ensure that children and young people are recognised as a specific group of people that are vulnerable to exploitation. The governance structure of the exploitation subgroup has also been clarified.

- **Serious Violence**

There has been a delay in receiving the crime statistics for the period covered by lock down and the gradual re-opening that we are starting to see, so it is difficult to fully understand the extent to which serious violence has been impacted. However proactive prevention work regarding knife crime undertaken by police colleagues has continued during the period and further funding from the Home Office will ensure that this continues going forward. Again following Home Office funding the local Violence Reduction Unit has been established in the City and terms of reference have been drawn up. The majority of the funding has been used to commission the Trust for Developing Communities to deliver additional detached youth work in priority hot spots in the city. Additional funding has also been used to support smaller charities providing services to vulnerable children over the Summer. The statement of licensing policy will also be going out to consultation imminently.

- **Exploitation**

The exploitation action plan and associated key performance indicators were due to be signed off by the Brighton & Hove Safeguarding Children Partnership exploitation subgroup on 12<sup>th</sup> March. This meeting was cancelled and has been rescheduled for 22<sup>nd</sup> July. This meeting will dictate the prioritisation of the key activities within the plan including developing a multi-agency communications strategy to be led by the local authority, police and Clinical Commissioning

Groups (CCGs); the development of an exploitation data analyst group and a review of the need for a specialist gang violence and exploitation service for adults.

- There were plans for a number of conferences, learning events and publicity campaigns that had to be postponed either due to social distancing or the people involved being required to prioritise COVID-19 related activity.
- However, COVID-19 has had an unexpected positive impact on the activity of the exploitation action plan in that the Exploitation Coordinator has been able to pull forward on other activity such as introducing the modern slavery referral pathway, reviewing how the city responds to reports of cuckooing and how to involve the wider community in safeguarding vulnerable locations such as The Level and Brighton central seafront.
- **Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse and other forms of Violence against women and girls**

Work is underway to review data and insight from during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown and to ascertain evidenced trends in both levels of demand, and the type of crimes/incidents reported during the pandemic. However, weekly review meetings with all partners have identified the following:

- An initial drop in the number of domestic abuse crimes and incidents reported to Sussex Police, but over the period of lockdown data shows that reporting reverts to near comparable numbers to the same period in the previous year. An initial significant drop in referrals to specialist domestic abuse support organisations (RISE in Brighton and Hove) with a swift return to comparable referral numbers to the previous year, and most recently exceeding anticipated numbers of referrals, as lock down measures are eased.
- From the outset of the pandemic and lockdown, an increase to 2 to 3 times the usual weekly number of calls to the RISE helpline.

The type of abuse has reportedly changed during the pandemic. Services reported increases in reports from older victims, particularly citing child to parent violence. Younger families also report child to parent violence and abuse. During the period of lockdown, services report anecdotally that the type of abuse experienced was more likely to be non-physical, coercive, and/or include stalking and harassment. However, the same services report that since lock-down measures were eased, there has been a return in prevalence of physical abuse.

It should also be noted that services were already reporting a rise in the number of complex cases presenting for support, in particular victims with multiple and complex needs including mental health and substance misuse issues. This prevalence continued and rose during the period of lockdown, where services have reported it has been difficult to provide appropriate support due to service restrictions/ability to work with other agencies.

During the period of lockdown, partner agencies have worked proactively together to problem solve often complex issues to ensure that victims can still receive the support

they need. Flexibility in response across sectors has been essential. Services have also actively modified their delivery to ensure contact with victims and support is provided. There is significant positive learning from this, and organisations will continue to use some of the online contact methods that have worked well.

Looking forward, there are anticipated further pressures on services as lock down is lifted. Nationally, domestic abuse agencies leading the national response are indicating that there will be a further uplift in demand for services. Locally, the number of MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conference) referrals for those at high risk of harm or death remained consistent throughout lockdown, and since lockdown measures were eased, have increased beyond current resource capacity. The MARAC team is working with partners to consider options for working differently to accommodate the demand.

- **Anti -Social Behaviour and Hate Incidents and Crimes**

The implications of COVID-19 on the ASB and Hate Incident strategies is that it is almost certain to take longer for us to achieve our objectives. BHCC officers and key partners are very busy in responding to the immediate challenges that COVID-19 presents to both services and our communities. Many organisations and services are currently taking on roles outside of their usual remit, therefore capacity to implement various strands of the strategy are reduced at this time. Officers have been regularly communicating with key partners in order to plan for the future and have amended the timescales on the action plans accordingly. Two significant objectives within the Hate crime action plan i.e. developing third party reporting mechanisms and developing a campaign to address the under-reporting of hate incidents have not been affected and a working group involving BHCC, Police and third sector partners continues to develop these pieces of work.

Officers and partners continue to attend the monthly Partnership Tactical Tasking and Co-ordination Group where particular issues of concern in the City are discussed and resources allocated to deal with those concerns.

A small number of hate incidents directed at Chinese and South-East Asian community members in the context of Covid have been reported, and anecdotal information suggests these are more widespread. The perception and fear of hate incidents occurring may cause further isolation to these communities and the Hate Crime lead and Community Cohesion Co-ordinator are looking at the best way to engage this community.

- **Challenging Extremism**

The work to deliver national counter-Extremism Strategy locally continues during the pandemic. The Upstanders Workshop planned for March was postponed due to Covid; however, the Communities Coordinator continues to maintain links with groups and facilitate the Upstanders network through online meetings and activity, developing new ways of working. It is noted that the capacity of some groups to collaborate on this work has been impacted due to Covid related demands on them, the Communities Coordinator continues to maintain appropriate links. In the context of Covid, issues relating to hate and extremism, conspiracy theories online and promoted by some groups have been noted and are being monitored. The Communities Coordinator provided reassurance messaging to a wide range of community groups concerned about increased hate and prejudice in this context and this has

received a positive response. Work to promote positive messages on line or through social media particularly lends itself to the lockdown restrictions.

- **Prevent**

The Prevent Board Meeting in March 2020 was cancelled due to Covid-19, therefore the Counter Terrorism Local Profile i.e. the City's threat, risks and vulnerability picture is yet to be discussed with the Prevent Board Partners. This will enable the Board to steer resources, set priorities and direction of work for this financial year. Work to safeguard and support individuals from being drawn into or supporting terrorism has continued with innovative ideas, including virtual and some face to face sessions for vulnerable individuals. Monthly Channel Panel meetings and casework support has been prioritised and continued through the pandemic. Online risks have emerged prominently during the lockdown period and these are being responded to with appropriate resources for communities and professionals. Work to understand community sentiments to prevent escalation of any community tensions and work to reassure communities has continued around critical incidents e.g. Reading Terrorist Incident on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020. Some public facing work, particularly training, and support to sectors (e.g. educational sector) has been delayed to coincide with easing of the lockdown restrictions and the sectors ability to manage competing and increased demands on them. Prevent Round Table for Members and some learning events will be rescheduled due to Covid-19.