

## **DORSET POLICE & CRIME PANEL – 14 DECEMBER 2023**

### **VIOLENT CRIME AND PREVENTION**

#### **REPORT BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

#### **PURPOSE**

*This paper provides an update on the work to tackle and prevent violent crime, with a focus on knife-enabled violence, within the Police and Crime Plan. This paper also seeks to address the following four Key Lines of Enquiry as provided by the Dorset Police and Crime Panel:*

- I. What is the PCC's strategic approach to fighting violent crime? How does the PCC hold the Chief Constable accountable for delivering on this strategy? How is effectiveness monitored?*
- II. What further measures is the PCC taking to reduce knife crime, including discouraging young people from carrying knives? What assurance does the PCC have that this approach is effective?*
- III. How is the PCC working in partnership to deliver a reduction in violent crime, both within Dorset (local authorities; campaign groups etc) and with neighbouring counties?*
- IV. What further support can be delivered in partnership, and how is the PCC proactively driving this forward?*

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. Every day, lives are forever changed or lost through serious violence. Whilst Dorset remains a comparatively very safe place to live, work and visit, the number of knife crime occurrences show an upwards trend over the past several years.
- 1.2. Across the country, ever increasing numbers of young people are carrying knives, many out of fear rather than nefarious or criminal intention. Some may find themselves drawn into a position where they reach for that knife without thinking or understanding the consequences.
- 1.3. The sad reality is that young people often learn far too late that carrying a knife is neither cool nor glamorous. That carrying a knife does not make you respected or feared, it makes you a target. That a knife does not offer the carrier protection. Statistics show that those who carry a knife, and those whom they are with, are more likely to be hurt, particularly by the very weapon being carried.
- 1.4. This is not to suggest that it is only young people who carry knives. Far from it in fact. But it is young people who are disproportionately impacted by knife crime and therefore, whilst we should remember that 99% of our young people do not routinely carry knives, the challenge is to better understand the complex reasons why a very small number choose to.

- 1.5. Of course, by the time a young person has decided to carry – and potentially use – a knife, it is already too late and therefore it is widely recognised that greater law enforcement on its own cannot reduce serious violence. Thus, a strong and, with partners, joint focus on early intervention and prevention is needed to break enduring cycles of violence – what policing terms ‘hard-edged prevention.’

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. The Government’s Serious Violence Strategy<sup>1</sup> was published in 2018 and sets out the national response to serious violence and increases in knife crime, gun crime, and homicide. As Dorset is not subject to the kinds of criminality that occur in other areas, the focus of Dorset Police and its partners on tackling serious violence has, and continues to be, around reducing and preventing knife crime.

- 2.2. Following the publication of the strategy, Dorset Police began the development of a local knife crime strategy and associated action plan to drive delivery.

- 2.3. OPCC suggested that it was appropriate to consider a wider partnership approach, given that whilst activity might often coalesce around the immediate threat to safety that is associated with knife crime, a holistic response is needed to ensure all aspects contributing to the increase in knife crime were addressed.

- 2.4. This public health, or harm reduction model, was by then well established in policing. Popularised by Scotland’s Violence Reduction Unit – which spearheaded a halving in the number of homicides in Glasgow over a ten-year period from its formation in 2005, thereby eliminating its reputation as the ‘murder capital of Europe’ – the model takes a public health approach typified by the following:



- Taking a population approach (universal) rather than one just focusing on those at-risk (targeted) or high-risk individuals (specialist);
- Shifting focus towards upstream risk factors and prevention, not consequences;
- Placing statistics and a strong evidence-base at the core of any initiatives; and
- Employing a system-wide, multi-agency approach.

- 2.5. In 2019, the Home Office allocated significant funding<sup>2</sup> to 18 police force areas to create Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), in line with the Scotland model. The funding was allocated according to the volume of violent crime (specifically the volume of hospital admissions for assault with a sharp object), meaning that geographically larger forces, whom had higher volumes of crime, benefited more than smaller forces.

- 2.6. The OPCC has, for many years, highlighted the unfairness of the funding methodology, and attempted to secure national funding to create our own VRU. To support this, OPCC produced an alternative funding methodology, that split national funds in a fairer way and addressed the local impact knife crime was having.

- 2.7. This proposal would have, not only better accounted for police force size, given that smaller forces have lesser numbers of hospital admissions, but also, better addressed the fact that hospital admissions do not always occur in the same police force area where the incidents took place. For example, some knife and sharp instrument injuries that occur within Dorset are treated in Southampton General Hospital.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-strategy>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/100-million-funding-for-police-to-tackle-violent-crime>

- 2.8. At the same time, recognising that securing national funding was not a certainty, and that a local solution would most likely need to be found, OPCC took steps to ringfence some of its financial reserves to support the future creation of a Dorset VRU. At the time, VRUs were emerging as national best practice in preventing and tackling knife crime, which was later confirmed through independent academic evaluation<sup>3</sup>.

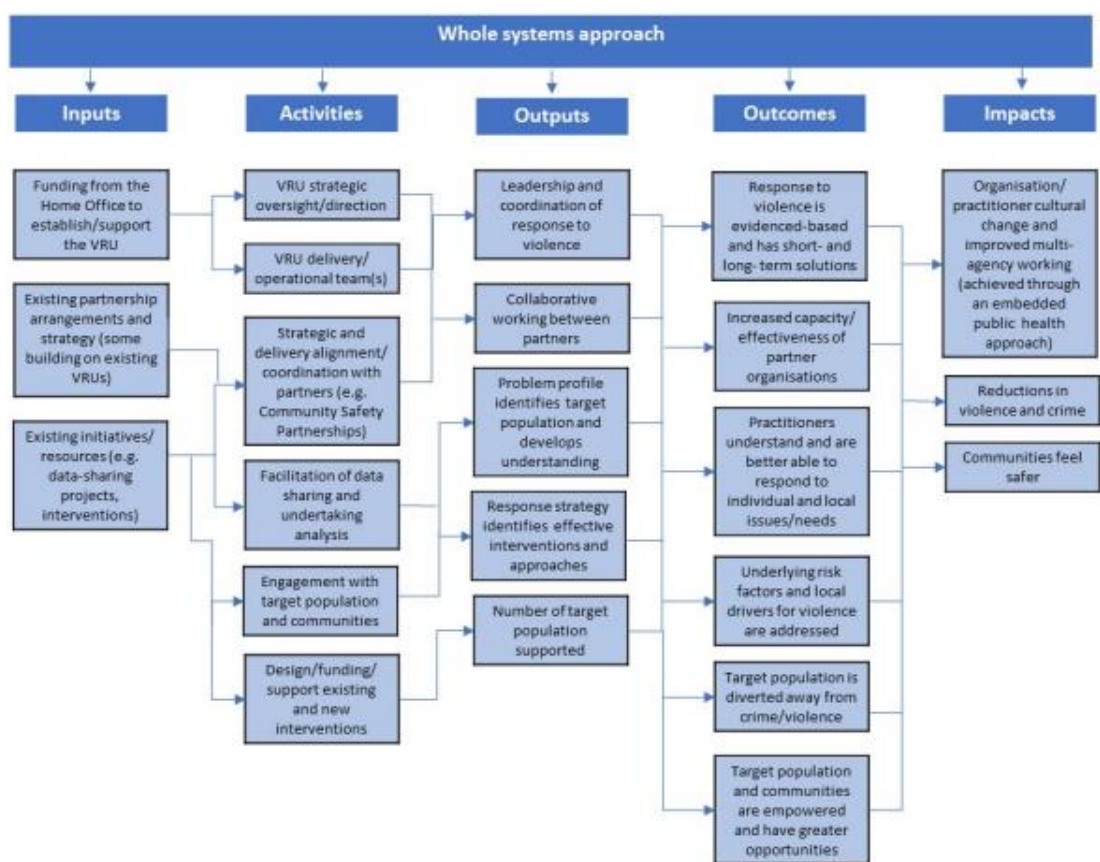
### Violence Reduction Units

Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) are partnership structures designed to bring together the relevant local statutory and non-statutory agencies who can act to reduce and prevent violent crime.

These agencies include those already having a responsibility for community safety – namely police, fire, local government, health, and probation services – but also include other statutory partners such as education and Police and Crime Commissioners, as well as representatives from the community and key voluntary sector partners.

An effective VRU will work to identify the local drivers of serious violence and agree the necessary actions needed to tackle these. This includes being responsible for driving local strategy both through the VRU and through individual organisations as needed, plus embedding cultural change alongside their commissioning role as a means to make violence reduction sustainable.

VRUs will typify a broad programme-level ‘theory of change’ encompassing a range of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and longer-term impacts:



Source: *Process evaluation of the Violence Reduction Units, Home Office (2020)*

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/violence-reduction-unit-evaluation-2019-to-2020>

### 3. STRATEGIC APPROACH

#### Priority Setting

3.1. Upon his election in 2021, the PCC immediately took up this mantle, and made fighting violent crime and high harm a priority within the 2021-29 Police and Crime Plan. This priority comprises six themes, including one on violence reduction, where the relevant commitments include:

- Explore opportunities with partners, develop processes and strategies, and identify funding sources for the formation of a Violence Reduction Unit in Dorset so that evidence-based interventions and diversionary work can be introduced to prevent violence, including the use of knives, in the first place.
- Support all relevant agencies to reduce the number of people killed because of serious violence.

#### Funding

3.2. In recent years, the PCC has undertaken significant lobbying of government to highlight the inequity of national funding, but unfortunately the inaccurate funding methodology remains. As a result, the PCC has steadfastly worked with statutory partners to identify opportunities to align local funding to support the creation of a VRU, albeit, again with limited success.

3.3. A good win, however, in terms of achieving local funding, was the Serious Violence Duty, a function arising from Part 2 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022<sup>4</sup>, and which commenced on 31 January 2023.

3.4. The Duty, and associated guidance<sup>5</sup>, sets out the requirement for specified authorities (police, fire, health, local authorities, youth offending teams and probation services): *“to work together to plan to prevent and reduce serious violence, including identifying the kinds of serious violence that occur in the area, the causes of that violence (so far as it is possible to do so), and to prepare and implement a strategy for preventing, and reducing serious violence in the area”*. The Duty also requires the specified authorities to consult educational, prison and youth custody authorities.

3.5. Local policing bodies are not specified authorities under the Duty. However, they are: *“strongly encouraged to take on a role as lead convener for the local partnership arrangements for the Duty in order to support the development and implementation of the local strategy”*.

3.6. The Home Office allocated grant funding to each police force area to ease the bureaucratic burden of delivering the Duty<sup>6</sup>, as it comes with a raft of additional reporting requirements. Without dwelling on the disparity of these funding arrangements, the (now) 20 police force areas that receive central funding to support VRUs were awarded £76.6m. At the same time, £12.5m was shared amongst all the 43 police forces to support the management of the Duty.

3.7. Dorset was awarded £292,301.57 to support the delivery of the Duty in 2023/24, with comparable allocations confirmed for subsequent years.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/part/2/chapter/1/enacted>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-duty>

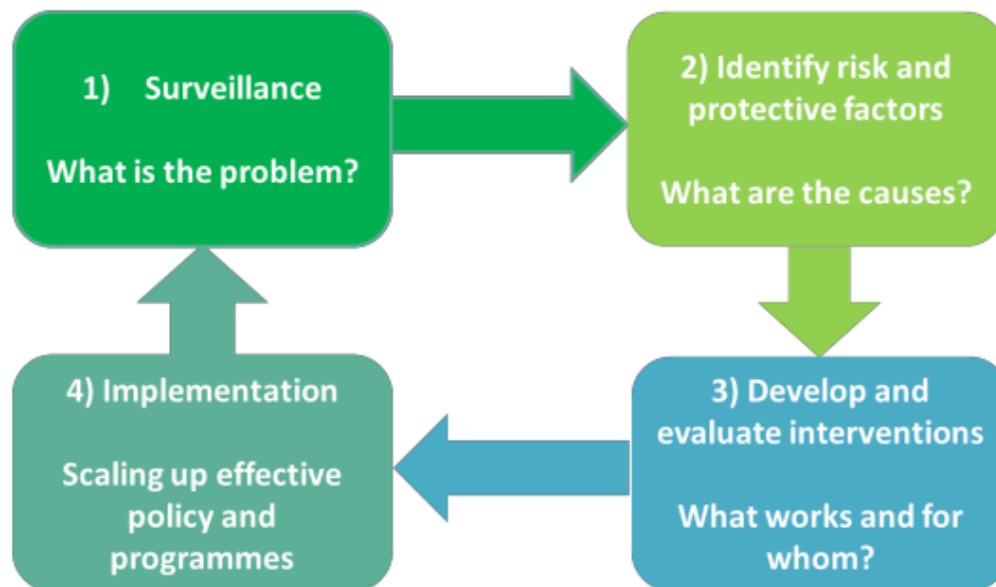
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-funding-allocations/serious-violence-funding-allocations>

## Partnership Working

- 3.8. The PCC has taken several steps to deliver the 'lead convener' role, and ensure best value is driven from the Duty fund. Aside from attending Community Safety Partnership meetings, where the delivery of the local authority-led violence reduction and prevention strategies are managed, chairing both the Combatting Drugs Partnership and Dorset Criminal Justice Board, which manage a variety of strategies and action plans which are closely aligned with violence reduction and prevention, and submitting the Home Office returns setting out the use of the Duty fund, the PCC has also convened a quarterly meeting to formally consider the delivery of the Duty.
- 3.9. The first of these meetings was held on 23 June 2023, and initially considered the scope of the Home Office definition of serious violence as "*homicide, knife crime, and gun crime and areas of criminality where serious violence of its threat is inherent, such as in gangs and county lines drug dealing.*"
- 3.10. Recognising that, as previously stated, Dorset does not have the kinds of serious violence seen elsewhere, it was agreed that locally both the BCP and the Dorset strategies and action plans for reducing and preventing violence would also consider other areas of violent crime including manslaughter, grievous bodily harm, rape and sexual assaults, aggravated burglary, robbery, and domestic abuse, for example.
- 3.11. Following this meeting, the work to further develop strategic needs assessments for each area continued, including using the Duty fund to recruit and train staff working against the Duty, and draft delivery plans were shared, discussed through the relevant Community Safety Partnerships, and signed off by partners including the PCC.
- 3.12. The second meeting was held on 26 September 2023, and heard a more detailed update from the BCP and Dorset Duty leads on their current work. Again, scope was considered, and it was recognised that collectively policing and local authorities had a good understanding and grip on wider domestic violence and sexual violence, but the shared understanding around the antecedents to knife carrying and knife crime was not as developed.
- 3.13. This demonstrated the need for the detailed local needs assessments to continue, but at pace, to inform the commissioning of intervention activity by the end of the financial year. The PCC's clear challenge was around the additionality – what deeper insight has the activity linked to the Duty identified, compared to what was known previously through the Community Safety Partnership and other pre-existing structures? And what interventions might be commissioned as a result of that further insight?
- 3.14. This question will be picked up at the third meeting, scheduled for 15 December 2023, where the BCP and Dorset strategies will have had the opportunity to go through their own internal governance, and proposals for interventions to be commissioned through the Duty fund would have been set out.
- 3.15. The PCC remains assured that local delivery, against the national timetable as set out in the Duty guidance, is on-track. For example, the specified authorities are working together to identify the common risk factors driving violence, and the protective factors preventing violence, before identifying relevant local interventions that might be taken to address the issues identified, and then testing to ensure these are having the right effect before scaling up the collective approach across the wider partnership. This accords with the World Health Organisation 4-step approach for implementing a multi-agency approach to serious violence prevention<sup>7</sup>:

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-serious-violence-a-multi-agency-approach>



Source: *A whole-system multi-agency approach to serious violence prevention*, Public Health England (2019)

- 3.16. A collective approach is critical in making a difference. Without joined-up effective communication and shared objectives, tackling the scourge of knife crime and protecting our young people from harm will not be successful. It is only through a broad church of expertise and multi-agency working, that the tide can be turned for the future generations of Dorset residents.

### Leadership

- 3.17. In the interim period of delivery against the Duty, whilst partnership interventions have yet to be determined, the PCC has continued to ensure that the OPCC and Dorset Police approach to tackling and preventing knife crime is robust. Some highlight activity, for brevity just over the past few months, includes:

#### *Safer Schools and Communities Team*

- 3.18. The Safer Schools and Communities Team (SSCT) is a partnership between Dorset Police, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Dorset Combined Youth Offending Service, with a remit to provide targeted interventions to prevent and reduce ASB, and crime amongst children and young people and to help keep them safe in a digital world.
- 3.19. SSCT has collated several in-house produced resources and those from national and local services to offer specialist support and advice on a wide range of needs, concerns, and topics<sup>8</sup>. These resources can be used to educate, guide and support children and young people in keeping safe.
- 3.20. On the topic of weapons, SSCT has made available two ‘click-and-play’ presentations to educate young people around the subject of weapons to safeguard and protect them and to prevent young people entering the criminal justice system, and to give students a clear understanding of the legal consequences of carrying items such as catapults, BB guns, and sharp, pointed objects in schools and public places.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dorset.police.uk/police-forces/dorset-police/areas/about-us/local-support-and-guidance/ssct-young-people/supporting-young-people/>

- 3.21. Additionally, a toolkit is available, designed for professionals to use with children and young people who are at risk or carrying or using a knife. This is often used in youth offending or other secure settings.
- 3.22. SSCT also deliver in-person talks to students – as part of the Firearms and Knife Education (FAKE) inputs to schools. SSCT officers (often firearms officers as they have the greater experience in managing incidents involving knife injuries) deliver an uncompromising and straightforward message – carrying a weapon puts you in more danger of serious injury or worse<sup>9</sup>. This powerful interactive talk includes real life examples, videos and interactive engagement, and typically receives very positive reviews from the most important people in the room – the students.

#### *Fix the Future*

- 3.23. It is recognised that enforcement alone cannot combat the crimes affecting our communities. To truly tackle the root cause, we must also have clear prevention and education pathways. The PCC's Fix the Future Fund aims to help create more prevention and diversion schemes across Dorset by supporting projects and initiatives which will benefit young people and their local community.
- 3.24. The first round of the fund was hugely successful with over £40,000 being awarded to nine community projects across Dorset, including a youth outreach project in Sherborne, and a skills and capability building project for at-risk young people in Portland, by way of example. The recipients of the second round of the Fix the Future fund are currently being finalised and will be communicated by the OPCC shortly.
- 3.25. Related to this is the BCP Council conference on 'Keeping Our Young People Safe', which was held during the knife crime week of activity in November, and which was opened by the PCC. Attendees heard powerful personal testimonies along with expert findings on the best ways to help vulnerable young people in Dorset. The event provided a welcome opportunity to hear about the work that key partners, charities, and voluntary organisations do to help local children, teenagers, and young adults.
- 3.26. The event also heard about the devastating impact of knife crime as told through the moving testimony of Cameron Hamilton's grandmother, Tracy Jose. Cameron, 18, died after being stabbed in Bournemouth town centre in August this year, and in describing the impact of the family's tragic loss, Tracy's powerful words and determination to stop this happening to another family struck a chord with every person in the room.
- 3.27. Similarly, the PCC continues to offer his platform with those who have an important message to share, and at the beginning of December, the words of the mother of Tom Roberts, Dolores Roberts-Wallace, were published<sup>10</sup>. Tom, 21, died after being stabbed in Bournemouth in March 2022 whilst acting as a peacemaker in a fight between his friend and his killer. His killer was jailed for life earlier this year and will serve a minimum term of 29 years. Dolores continues to call for knife crime education, and better support for young people both in terms of diversionary activities and targeted interventions for those at higher risk.

#### *Police Operations and Patrols*

- 3.28. During August, hundreds of residents came together to march against knife crime, a campaign wholeheartedly supported by the PCC. Over the same weekend as the 'No

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bournemouthcho.co.uk/news/23931726.police-bring-knife-crime-education-bournemouth-school/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.dorset.pcc.police.uk/news-and-newsletters/dorset-pcc-news-blog/2023/12/the-devastating-impact-of-knife-crime/>

More Knives' march, officers proactively patrolled Bournemouth seafront, the Lower Gardens and The Square as part of Op Fireglow, which happens every summer and Op Nightjar which was a shorter-term 'surge' operation.

- 3.29. Both operations have the specific intent to apprehend those individuals looking to cause serious violence and carrying dangerous implements or offensive weapons, and over the Summer led to 28 arrests, 47 Section 35 dispersal orders (individuals directed to leave the area and not return for up to 48 hours) and 21 stop and searches.
- 3.30. Dorset Police also invoked the use of increased stop and search powers under Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. These powers allowed officers to stop and search anyone in the area for weapons, without needing to explain why. Fourteen people were stopped and searched, including two youths under the age of 18, who were found in possession of a quantity of suspected drugs. No weapons or knives were found during any of the searches that were conducted.

#### *Op Sceptre and Knife Wands*

- 3.31. In May and November, the national biannual operation to tackle knife crime, Op Sceptre, took place, and Dorset officers focused, not only on apprehending those who carry knives and using intelligence gathered to target those who are known to be habitual knife carriers, but also, took the opportunity to raise awareness of the issues surrounding knife crime to assist in its prevention as well.
- 3.32. In the latest operation, which ran from 13 to 19 November, Dorset Police arrested 14 people on suspicion of knife-related crimes and removed 28 knives from circulation.
- 3.33. In order to prevent and detect knife carrying, the PCC agreed to fund the purchase of additional knife wands and a knife arch, enabling a wand to be placed in every police vehicle, to be deployed operationally to enhance officers' ability to search for weapons, both keeping them safe whilst also providing every opportunity to locate concealed weapons being concealed.
- 3.34. The wands will not replace the requirement for a physical search but be used as a screening device available to officers already conducting a lawful and justified physical search of a person following their arrest.

#### *Violence Reduction Unit*

- 3.35. Whilst these measures are having a positive impact, the PCC has set out his continued campaign and ambition for a VRU in Dorset. As has been seen in other parts of the country, the model is effective as VRUs understand the local needs of the area and can identify where and how interventions would be most effective.
- 3.36. The PCC continues to call on the local authorities to support setting up a VRU, and continues to meet with local officials, politicians, and Parliamentarians to further that aim. However, given to financial constraints and competing demands for resources within the wider public sector, it can often be helpful for one partner to show clear leadership and determination to make a difference.
- 3.37. To that end, the PCC has agreed to fund two roles within his office to directly support violence reduction and prevention, and pump-prime the creation of a Dorset VRU. At the beginning of December, therefore, two newly created permanent roles have gone live<sup>11</sup>, for a Head of Violence Reduction and Prevention to lead the OPCC's new violence reduction function, and for a Performance and Insights Manager to provide data insight and analytical support to support the function, and the wider OPCC team.

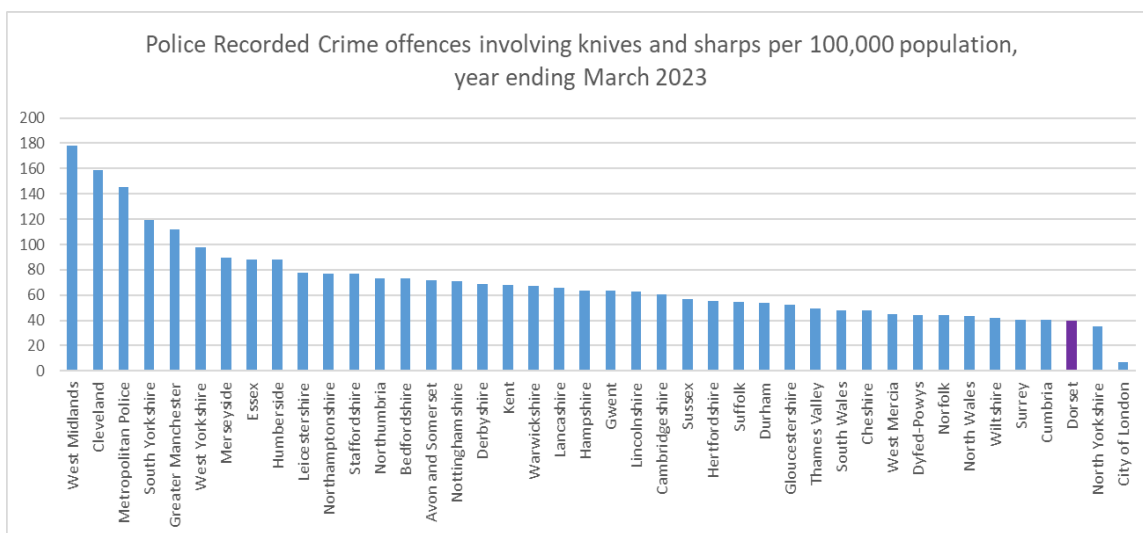
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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.dorset.pcc.police.uk/get-involved/recruitment/>



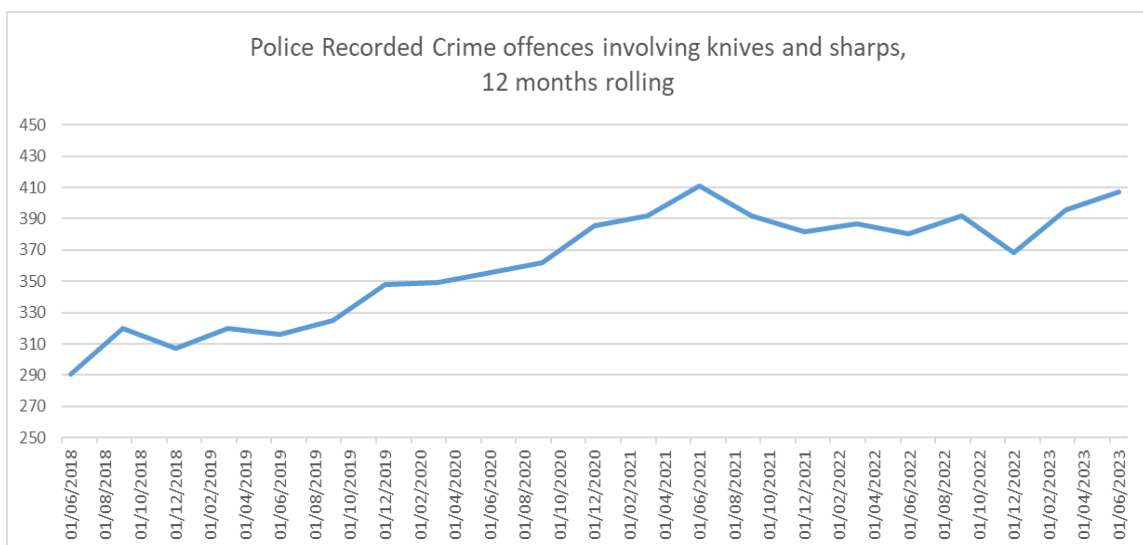
#### 4. EFFECTIVENESS

- 4.1. Knife crime has a profound impact on families and communities, and collectively the partnership agencies in Dorset are determined to work together to reduce and prevent future tragedies.
- 4.2. That said, Dorset has the second lowest rate of knife crime across England and Wales. Specifically, this is based on police recorded crime data involving the use of knives and sharp instruments, for the year ending March 2023<sup>12</sup> (excluding the City of London due to its low resident population). This position is an improvement on the year ending March 2022, where Dorset was third lowest (excluding City of London):



Source: HMICFRS (2023)

- 4.3. At the same time, it is important to not become complacent, and to recognise, that although the incidence of knife crime remains very low in Dorset, the longer-term trend is increasing. This is based, again, on police recorded crime data involving the use of knives or sharp instruments, but this time shown on a rolling 12-months basis to smooth out month-on-month variation and provide a more reliable measure of trend:



Source: HMICFRS (2023)

<sup>12</sup> <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/our-work/article/digital-crime-performance-pack/#serious-violence> (tab 5)

## **5. PCC SCRUTINY**

- 5.1. Reducing and preventing the incidence of knife crime and knife-related violence is clearly an important matter, and the PCC and his office apply considerable scrutiny to Force and partner activity and performance. This is to ensure that the commitments within the Police and Crime Plan are being progressed and, crucially, that public expectations are being met.
- 5.2. Overall force performance – which includes violent crime performance and other relevant areas – is monitored by the Performance Board, which is attended by the Chief Executive. Key updates from this forum are provided to the Joint Leadership Board for further discussion and scrutiny as needed.
- 5.3. Likewise, as a cross-cutting area, the reduction and prevention of violence is also discussed at other strategic boards – including the Combatting Drugs Partnership and the Dorset Criminal Justice Board. As outlined above, the PCC has also used his convening power to bring together relevant specified authorities to outline progress against the Serious Violence Duty.

## **6. NEXT STEPS AND CHALLENGES**

- 6.1. The PCC is determined to further reduce and prevent violence crime within Dorset, and the commitments and strategies set out above outline how he, and his office, are working hard to accomplish this. Over the past two and a half years, considerable progress has been made against the commitments within the Police and Crime Plan.
- 6.2. In the short-term, by the end of the calendar year, both BCP Council and Dorset Council will have signed off their own local plans and strategies for violence reduction. Furthermore, by the end of the financial year, the associated needs assessments and indicative commissioning activity to be undertaken to address the issues found will also be made available.
- 6.3. The OPCC will be recruiting its two new violence reduction and prevention roles early in the new year. Assuming successful recruitments, those roles will be staffed around the beginning of the 2024/25 financial year. OPCC will work closely with the Duty specified authorities to ensure clear alignment of effort, information, and objectives, and set out how it can contribute to the wider partnership delivery landscape.
- 6.4. Funding, inevitably, will be an enduring challenge. Dorset Police is amongst the lowest funded forces in England and Wales and the PCC continues to lobby for additional investment, arguing that imported crime and disorder (through county lines, for instance) should be accounted for within the national funding formula calculations. The PCC will continue to raise these issues at a national level.
- 6.5. Nevertheless, the PCC is confident that positive changes are being made and he, along with his office, will continue to deliver the commitments within the Police and Crime Plan.

## **7. RECOMMENDATION**

- 7.1. Members are asked to note the report.

**SIMON BULLOCK**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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