

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Community Advice and Support
Date



COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2025 - 2028

AUTHORS: SARAH PATEMAN
CONTRIBUTOR:
LEAD OFFICER: KERRY CLIFFORD

KEY DECISION

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the draft Community Safety Strategy 2025-28, which outlines the emerging priorities of the SoSafe partnership for the next three years. **The previous Community Safety Strategy governed the work of the SoSafe Partnership and resulted in securing £2,247,000.00 worth of funding as well as delivery of successful projects including “Build a better Bedwell,” and Safer Streets funding that complimented this initiative designed to reduce organised crime and improving the quality of life for local residents.**
- 1.2 It is a statutory requirement under the Crime and Disorder Act 1988 (as amended by the Police and Justice Act 1996) for responsible authorities for an area to formulate and implement a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder (including anti-social behaviour adversely affecting the local environment); combatting the misuse of drugs, alcohol, and other substances and for the education of re-offending in the area.
- 1.3 The Council’s Constitution includes the Community Safety Strategy as a Budget and Policy Framework item and as such requires the final strategy, to be considered by the Cabinet and then, when approved, recommended on to Council for adoption.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Cabinet:

- a) Approves the Community Safety Strategy (the Strategy) accompanying this report for onward transmission to Council and;
- b) Notes the work of the SoSafe Partnership in both the development and delivery of the Strategy.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Community Safety is about feeling safe whether at home, in the community or at work. Stevenage is changing at speed with new homes being built and investment being made in the town to develop its commercial, food & beverage and leisure / cultural offers.
- 3.2 Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) were introduced by Section 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and brings together local partners to formulate and implement strategies to tackle crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour in their communities.
- 3.3 The responsible authorities that make up a Community Safety Partnership are the:
 - Stevenage Borough Council
 - Hertfordshire Constabulary
 - National Probation Service
 - Hertfordshire County Council
 - Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service
 - Local voluntary services
- 3.4 CSPs work on the principle that no single agency can address all drivers of crime and antisocial behaviour, and that effective partnership working is vital to ensuring safer communities.
- 3.5 SoSafe is a strategic partnership working to reduce crime and offending. During 2021 and 2024, the overarching aims of the partnership were:
 - to consult with the community and work co-operatively with partners and residents
 - promote reporting of crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 3.6 Over the last 3 years, the partnership has implemented “Build a better Bedwell”, a local initiative designed to reduce crime, support, and raise awareness of Hate Crime and Third-Party reporting centres and introduce youth interventions within local schools, focussing on reducing peer pressure and county lines activities. The project is due to end March 2025; however, partnership work will continue with Hertfordshire Constabulary, Housing Services, and the Community Development team to explore how the successes, which include the reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour, can continue.
- 3.7 Stevenage is a safe place but like most towns there are occasional peaks in crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB), sometimes due to a spate of connected incidents. The Council is aware through the engagement that has taken place as part of the review of the SoSafe Strategy that some residents remain concerned regarding the use of drugs, fraud, Violence Against Women and Girls and with regards to feeling safe generally. The Community Safety Partnership – SoSafe will continue to strive to address these and other crimes/ASB related issues as and when they occur by working co-operatively with partners and local communities.

Crime and anti-social behaviour negatively impacts on individuals, families, businesses, and communities. Feeling unsafe can cause anxiety, depression, stress, economic decline, and result in an increase in community tensions. That is why the SoSafe partners are committed to identifying and tackling the community safety issues which affect the town.

SoSafe is committed to working co-operatively with partners to ensure there is sufficient access to information and data to help identify the key issues and prioritise where and how resources are deployed. Priorities will be reviewed regularly to ensure appropriate action is taken quickly in response to emerging issues and trends thereby reducing crime, anti-social behaviour, violence in all forms, abuse, and exploitation.

The development of a strategy is a core function of SoSafe. The strategy is summarised in the diagram Appendix B.

- 3.8 This Strategy will ensure that SoSafe utilises its resources in the most effective manner possible to deliver meaningful crime reduction outcomes. SoSafe is committed to building on progress achieved in recent years and will strive to continue to drive down crime and disorder in Stevenage. In the last three years, partners have continued to work to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime. SoSafe has introduced initiatives that have supported some of the most vulnerable people in the town making best use of partners' resources and targeting them effectively.
- 3.9 Between 2021 and 2024 SoSafe secured external funding of circa £2,245m to support delivery of the previous strategies objectives. This funding supported the delivery of a number of innovative projects including:
- Op educ8, an engaging educational and safeguarding programme to enable local students to attend training sessions warning of the dangers of County Lines, Peer Pressure, and gang cultures.
 - No More Service Youth, a service that provides intensive 1-1 support to young people to change their behaviours and make positive choices.
 - Weekly Drop-ins, which have been set up at Ward level and support some of our more vulnerable residents. The drop-ins are an essential part of many of our client's recovery programmes and provide them with the chance to talk to others, have a hot meal and in the winter, keep warm.
- 3.10 SoSafe has worked collaboratively on a number of complex cases which have resulted in successful enforcement action being taken. This has included: the renewal of the town-wide Injunction to stop car cruising, which is in force until 2028, and the re-possession of a property following reports of drug use and dealing.
- 3.11 Numerous partnership operations with the Police were undertaken such as: regular residents' surgeries in tower blocks where there had been reports of anti-social behaviour and crime, street-meets, and local community engagement events. Police Priority Setting meetings have continued with the support of Ward Councillors – the outcomes from which have helped reassure Members and residents as well as encouraging local people to report nuisance behaviour.
- 3.12 During the last three years the Partnership has engaged with residents on several occasions including the Domestic Abuse 16 Days of Action and early morning operations working with the police and partner agencies to support rough sleepers in the town. Events such as these provide opportunities for shared learning with partners across a range of important areas including Violence Against Women and Girls, Anti-Social Behaviour (supported by the Home Office), Police Accreditation, Modern Slavery, Domestic Abuse Awareness and Safeguarding Adults & Children.

- 3.13 SoSafe actively engages with residents and facilitates co-production of interventions through consultation sessions, various forums, and satisfactions surveys. Working with members of the community enhances the profile of the Partnership and co-operative working.
- 3.14 During April-October 2024, the SoSafe Partnership engaged with key local partners to shape the draft strategy. The themes for the strategy were further developed through engagement with residents and visitors to the town through social media consultations, surveys with clients and data collected from the police Echo platform. The Council has engaged with over 1,200 residents and partners through various consultation channels. Information gained from consultations, along with data from annual strategic assessments and information shared at both Partnership and client led meetings has been analysed and used in the development of the Strategy.
- 3.15 The 2025/28 Strategy proposes the continuation of the work of the SADA service, which will expand its remit to support women and girls who have experienced violence.
- 3.16 Our Safeguarding team will work co-operatively with partners to talk to our communities about the effects of online fraud and how to get help, support and how to report such crimes.
- 3.17 The proposed Strategy accompanies this report. It is suggested that, subject to Members approving the Strategy for implementation, it should be adopted by the SoSafe partnership at the next appropriate SoSafe meeting.
- 3.18 The key points for consideration are set out in the following sections of the report which outline the rationale upon which the recommendations are presented.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 Local priorities for Stevenage

- 4.1.1 The draft Community Safety Strategy has been compiled based on evidence obtained from Police Performance Reports including strategic assessments, engagement with members of the public, partners and customers, surveys completed by service users and those affected any nuisance. The priorities identified are those that ranked highest, following the consultation and engagement.

Public consultation was completed in the form of an online survey. Whilst many residents highlighted the strong Police presence and effective response to anti-social behaviour as positives that make Stevenage a safe place to work and visit, drug use/drug dealing, and youth nuisance were noted as contributing factors to making some people feel unsafe.

The partnership continues to collect data with service user surveys and resident surveys to help understand residents' thoughts, understand gaps in service provision and future resourcing requirements.

As well as an assessment of local data and information from the public and elected Members, targeted consultation was undertaken with partner services to secure insight on the proposed aims and priorities for 2025-2028.

For the period **2021/24** the identified priorities were:

- Divert young people from becoming involved in crime and ASB.
- Provide safe reporting and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery.

- Promote reporting of hate crime and further promote equality in the community.
- Tackle the harms caused by drugs and alcohol.
- Work with partners to encourage reporting of crime and address perceptions of crime.

These priorities were underpinned by two overarching objectives to:

- Consult with the community and work co-operatively with partners and residents.
- Promote reporting of crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

The six key priorities identified and proposed for **2025-2028** are:

<p>Highlight the risks to the community of drug possession and crime.</p>	<p>Determined as a result of the community views collected anonymously through the Police's Echo system. It has been identified that the biggest concern in Stevenage relates to drug use or dealing. This is followed by anti-social behaviour including noise and vehicle nuisance drug and parking.</p>
<p>Provide safe reporting and support to victims of Violence Against Women and Girls, including Domestic abuse.</p>	<p>After review of Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment and consultations with the community, we are aware that Violence Against Women and Girls, including domestic abuse is a point of concern. The SADA service records 1551 referrals for 2023-2024.</p> <p>For this reason, Violence Against Women and Girls, including domestic abuse has been made a priority and the SoSafe Partnership have created a Violence Against Women and Girls action plan.</p>
<p>Promote awareness of Cuckooing and the support available to victims.</p>	<p>Cuckooing has been determined as a local priority as part of the Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment. Hertfordshire County Council have released a Cuckooing Pathway and Practice Guide to support agencies in relation to victims of cuckooing.</p>
<p>Divert individuals from becoming involved in Anti-Social Behaviour.</p>	<p>Determined because of the community views collected through resident consultations, street-meets and the Police's Echo system identifying that anti-social behaviour; including noise and vehicle nuisance, drug dealing and parking is of great concern to residents.</p>
<p>Collaborate with Partners and Young People regarding the risks around County Lines and associated Anti-Social Behaviour.</p>	<p>As a result of The Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment and feedback from partnership working with local schools, we have identified County Lines as a local priority. Local intelligence also highlights concerns around gang culture and peer pressure.</p>
<p>Raise awareness around online fraud and the warning signs to the community.</p>	<p>As a consequence of concerns raised by the community at various resident feedback sessions and partnership agencies, it has been agreed that online fraud will be a local priority.</p>

The priorities above are underpinned by two proposed overarching objectives:

- Engage with the community and work co-operatively with partners/residents and those that visit the town.
- Work with the community to increase the reporting of crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).

4.2 Rationale for priorities

4.2.1 This strategy provides a framework for the activities and initiatives that the Partnership delivers to improve community safety and confidence. Whilst some of the priorities are, understandably, similar to those in the previous strategy, the focuses on tackling concerns around drug possession, supporting and diverting young people away from County Lines / anti-social behaviour and supporting victims of violence against women and girls have been broadened. Working co-operatively with partners and our communities across the town remains the overarching ambition across all objectives.

4.2.2 Alongside the Strategy, a detailed action plan is produced each year, which identifies how SoSafe will achieve its aims and objectives. A copy of the action plan is attached at Appendix C. The action plan contains specific targets and is monitored, updated, and reviewed regularly ahead of each SoSafe meeting. The Action Plan is a working document that is updated as crime trends change and problem-solving strategies to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour are implemented.

4.2.3 The Community Safety Strategy has been developed with due regard to the following:

- National developments and changes to legislation
- Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) plan Everybody's Business
- Annual Strategic Assessment for Stevenage 2023/2024
- County Community Safety Unit (CCSU) domestic abuse strategy and the Survivors Against Domestic Abuse Strategy
- CCSU drugs and alcohol strategy
- Hertfordshire's Criminal Justice Board Strategy 2022-2025
- Historical and Current Crime Data.
- Customer Surveys
- Police Echo data
- Partnership Consultation

4.3 Strategic fit and context

4.3.1 The profile of the SoSafe partnership is growing and it is increasingly being called upon to share best practice within the county. The desire to make Stevenage a safe place to live, work and visit is of paramount importance to all SoSafe partners.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 The Council will utilise existing resources to support implementation of the strategy. There is a recognition that a number of existing activities that are securing positive impacts are reliant on time-limited funding which includes that from external sources. Given budgetary constraints within local government and the wider public sector, some of these activities will remain at risk unless sufficient core or external funding can be identified. SoSafe will continue to work with other commissioners and funders to help lever in investment wherever possible, this includes match-funding or pump priming opportunities related to specific initiatives and projects. Stevenage Borough Council have previously committed to funding internal services including Survivors Against Domestic Abuse, The No More Service and The Welfare, Benefit and Debt Advice team to enable residents and customers to access continued support.

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 Production of the strategy is a statutory requirement under the Crime and Disorder Act 1988 (as amended by the Police and Justice Act 1996). This act requires the responsible authorities for an area to formulate and implement a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder (including anti-social behaviour adversely affecting the local environment); combatting the misuse of drugs, alcohol, and other substances and for the education of re-offending in the area.

5.3 Risk Implications

- 5.3.1 The strategic commitment of key stakeholders in the development and implementation of the strategy will help mitigate key risks such as focussing on the wrong priorities or those over which the partners have little impact or influence. Risks will continue to be considered as interventions develop through the ongoing work of the SoSafe Partnership.

5.4 Policy Implications

- 5.4.1 The Strategy links into other key SBC policies and Strategies including the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and the health and wellbeing strategy, and SADA Domestic Abuse Strategy.

5.5 Staffing and Accommodation Implications

- 5.5.1 Community Safety is an overarching commitment. Officers in various positions across Community Advice & Support and Housing and Investment support implementation of the Strategy and the SoSafe Action Plan and other related policies and procedures.

5.6 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.6.1 The Council is committed to providing high quality services that are relevant to the needs and responsive to the views of all sections of the local community, irrespective of their race, gender, disability, culture, religion, age, sexual orientation, or marital status. The General Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) requires the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in the exercise of its functions.
- 5.6.2 A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed, considering the implications of the Strategy for all communities. A copy of this Assessment is

attached at Appendix D.

- 5.6.3 There is recognition that crime and anti-social behaviour can disproportionately impact upon those with protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act. The emphasis on Hate Crime as part of the Strategy highlights the potential for this to happen at a local level. The partnership will be working with the community to encourage reporting of Hate Crime and further promote equalities across our communities. SoSafe strives to engage the community in the design and delivery of the interventions which tackle crime and drive down disorder and anti-social behaviour. Relationships will continue to be built with groups around the town, including those from different faiths, different communities, women, girls, and older people. It will be essential to ensure interventions meet specific needs for different parts of the community and are delivered in a meaningful and empowering way. The SoSafe Partnership works with the Equalities Commission and other partners to set up to explore the particular challenges facing people living in Stevenage and seeks to pro-actively tackle community safety issues as they emerge.

5.7 **Service Delivery Implications**

- 5.7.1 The Strategy will influence and shape the work of the SoSafe Partnership and its delivery strands are clearly aligned back to the outcomes that are sought. This will also apply to the function of the Responsible Authorities Group that will oversee delivery of the strategy reporting to Stevenage Together.

5.8 **Information Technology Implications**

- 5.8.1 The Team have established understanding and use of the REACT system, as well as Jigsaw and NEC .

6 **APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Draft Community Safety Strategy 2025/28
Appendix B – So Safe Diagram
Appendix C – SoSafe Action Plan
Appendix D – EQIA