

Avon and Somerset Violence Reduction Partnership Strategy 2024-2025

By The Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP)



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VRP Director Foreword

Serious Violence destroys Lives. It irreversibly changes the lives of individuals, their families, and their communities. With this, I am honored to take up the position as first Director of the Avon and Somerset Violence Reduction Partnership, with one of my initial tasks to present this Strategy.

The intent of this strategy is to set out the priorities for the Avon and Somerset partnership and how we intend to respond at a strategic level.

Our response continues to be through a 'public health approach', which treats violence like an infectious disease. It involves multiple public and social services working together to implement up-stream interventions to prevent people from becoming involved in violent crime. We also search for a 'cure' by using evidence to both identify what causes violence and find interventions that work to prevent it spreading.

This document is a requirement under the Serious Violence Duty and has seen our specified authorities come together for the first time to approve the approach. I look forward to working with the partnership to build upon this strategy and develop our Avon and Somerset plan, which we will implement and deliver this year.

I fully support all the work that has gone into producing this document and would like to thank those who have been involved in the intense activity in ensuring its completion. Valuing our Violence Reduction Partnership network, I foresee further reviews in forthcoming months of this document and how we deliver it with our partners as part of my new role. These will be to ensure that the strategic needs assessment and this strategy best inform the partnership to enable effective prioritisation.

Natalie Lavis

Director, A&S VRP



1. Introduction and background to the Violence Reduction Partnership

1.1 Background

In March 2019, the (then) Home Secretary announced a £100million Serious Violence Fund to help tackle serious violence. Of this, £35 million was allocated for the development of Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) across England and Wales. Eighteen Police force areas worst affected by serious violence received this VRU funding. A VRU is responsible for driving local approach and strategy to tackling Serious Violence and embedding cultural change.

Bringing together Police, Local Authorities, Health, Fire, Education, Justice, and Community Representatives for a multi-agency response to the local drivers of serious violence and the delivery response to tackle them.

In June 2019, the Avon and Somerset (A&S) Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) was awarded £1.16 million from the Home Office to set up a Violence Reduction Unit. It was agreed locally that responses needed to be truly local and so a ‘Hub and Spoke’ model was the preferred approach, this resulted in the OPCC leading the strategic coordination from the Hub and the five local authorities driving the local responses through the Spokes.

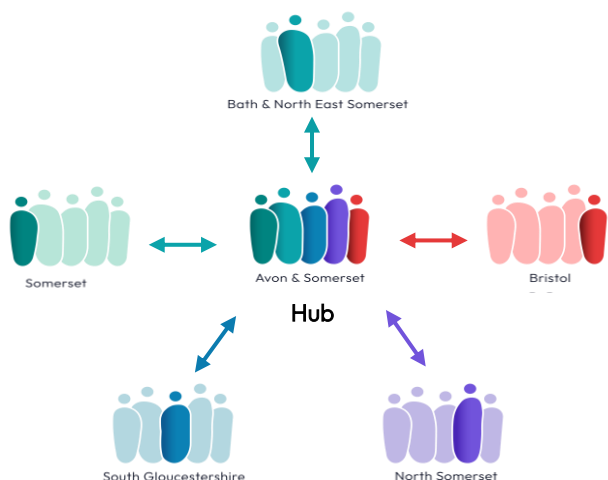


Figure 1: The Avon and Somerset Hub and Spoke model.

In A&S partners have come together since 2019 to shape this response. In 2023 it was agreed that the collaboration should be called the Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP), and this would encompass the Hub and Spoke model and the wider partners across the system. This partnership is overseen by the Serious Violence Reduction Partnership Board (SVRPB), which ensures that the collaboration is both efficient and effective in its plans to tackle serious violence.

Further to this, in January 2023 the Government launched the Serious Violence Duty, which placed legal responsibility on police, justice, fire and rescue, health, and local authorities (known as the “specified authorities”) to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence. They must work together in a local government area (section 8 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Police Act 2022 (“the 2022 Act”). Under section 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Community Safety Partnerships must also ensure that preventing and reducing serious violence is a priority.

The VRP is the collaboration in which local partners respond to this duty, it also sets out the importance of this strategy in delivering the VRP’s response to the requirement.





1.2 Why does this strategy exist?

This strategy is a legal requirement, as per the Serious Violence Duty. It outlines the VRP's core strategic priorities, our commitments, and subsequent responses to these. The strategy is set for an annual period and reviewed each year to ensure it is still fit for purpose. We do this by undertaking a **strategic needs assessment** (SNA), which looks at various sources of information and data across the partnership. This helps us to work to better understand serious violence and its root causes. We then use this evidence base to help us direct the strategy and response. See section 4 for more information on this approach.

The 24-25 Strategy is the first iteration of the VRP's collective strategy and so we aim to build and enhance on this tool as the partnership continues to develop.

Within the VRP structure there is a specific group – the Serious Violence Delivery Group, which is made up of key partners who will drive action and support delivery of the priorities within this strategy. The Hub VRP Director will lead this group and develop a plan to ensure the strategy is implemented. Progress on this work will be reported to the Home Office, as well as the SVRPB as the local overarching governance function.



1.3 Local focus of the partnership

The breadth and complexity of serious violence is vast, it can be challenging to describe where our partnership starts and finishes with how we try to understand and tackle these deep issues. To help, we have a **definition** of serious violence that we work to, this shows our priority focus:

Our **definition**: The A&S VRP embraces a priority focus on the prevention and reduction of public space violence for under 25s (children and young people); including homicide, attempted homicide, robbery, wounding, grievous bodily harm, knife and gun crime, alcohol and drug related violence and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as county lines and modern slavery.

We also recognize and commit to supporting a joined-up response to existing partnership work to tackle serious violence across the whole pathway and in the broadest sense, including domestic abuse, rape and serious sexual offences and violence against women and girls more generally.

2. Our Vision, Purpose and Mission

Our VRP is built on **3 core priorities** of which the VRP commits to deliver against, this is our collective **Vision, Purpose and Mission** which translates into the priorities of **People, Places and Partners**.



Our Vision is to eliminate serious violence, protect the vulnerable and create safer communities, through the opportunities provided by the evolving Violence Reduction Partnership. **People.**



Our Purpose is to create safer and more resilient communities for now and the generations to come, by reducing serious violent incidents across Avon and Somerset. **Places.**



Our Mission is to work collaboratively with partners, to understand and address the root causes of violence in Avon and Somerset, with a focus on education, prevention, and protection. **Partners.**



The VRP has developed a **theory of change** which sets out how we work to deliver against People, Places and Partners and the positive long term impacts we want to make for these priorities, it is this that provides the framework of this strategy.

3. Our Theory of Change

This is the full version of our Theory of Change (TOC), and it will be consistently used throughout the partnership to steer our SNA, this strategy and our performance framework. It demonstrates our key deliverables, how will work to achieve these and the positive impact we endeavor to make.

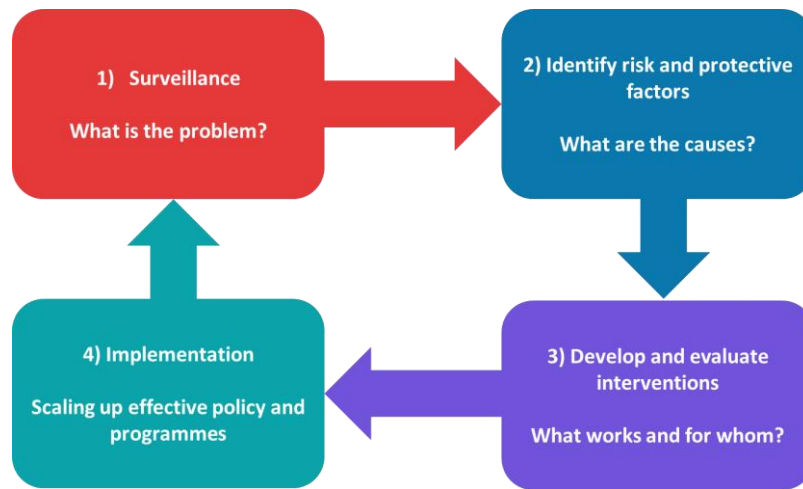
Figure 2. A&S Theory of Change



4. The public health approach and interventions

The VRP has adopted a public health approach into its ways of working both at a strategic and operational level. This follows four key steps¹

Figure 3. Public Health process model

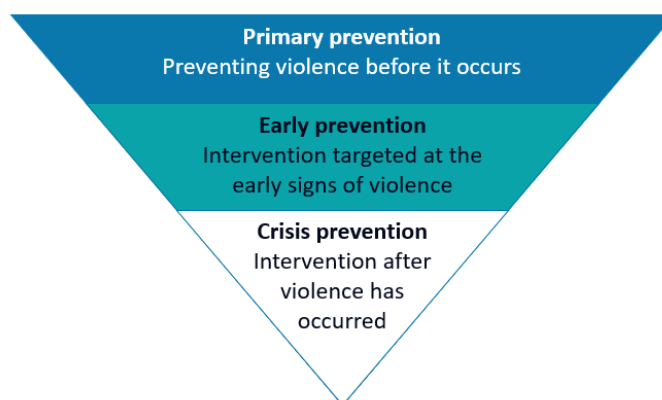


At a pan A&S level, our strategic needs assessment works to assist us in understanding stages 1 and 2 of these core steps. In doing this we can then influence stages 3 and 4. This strategy will therefore draw out areas for us to focus and drive across these 4 stages, this will direct us in making positive change.

At an operational level, the spokes use this approach in identifying vulnerable people and places at risk of serious violence, their local partnerships will respond to these specific needs and tailor the responses. This isn't always through interventions, it might be through existing statutory support services, police disruption or referring on to other more appropriate support pathways.

In terms of **approaches to intervention**, the public health model is built upon these 3 layers ²of intervening and eradicating a problem:

Figure 4. Public Health Prevention model



¹ [A whole-system multi-agency approach to serious violence prevention \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

² [\[PDF\] Reflecting on primary prevention of violence against women: the public health approach | Semantic Scholar](#)



The spokes within the local authorities apply local knowledge and assessment, as well as utilising the strategic needs assessment, in determining what sort of interventions they need locally. These will cut across the approaches above.

An example of a **primary prevention** is tailored awareness sessions in school settings. **Early prevention** may include mentoring or diversionary activities such as sports and art-based activities. **Crisis prevention** may potentially have a criminal justice outcome where the individual has perpetrated violence, such as focused deterrence, however it can also include therapeutic and trauma informed approaches, such as cognitive behavioral therapy and social skills development.

5. Influences of this strategy

There have been various influences in shaping this strategy. The primary being the **strategic needs assessments** over 22-23 and 23-24. Further to this, we have considered themes within **quarterly Home Office reporting** that is provided by VRP spokes, we have also considered the **independent review delivered by Crest Advisory** on the 2023 review of the A&S VRP model. Finally, influence from national guidance and policy has been considered throughout this strategy, namely the Serious Violence Duty³ guidance, VRU Home Office guidance⁴ and developments shared through the Youth Endowment Fund⁵.

5.1 Serious Violence prevalence

The full picture of serious violence in A&S is reflected in the 23-24 strategic needs assessment. In terms of national comparison, A&S has relatively low levels of serious violence as a whole and generally levels of serious violence have remained within stable measure. However, we are not complacent and continue to review data, looking at magnitude and trends. From this, knife crime is a priority in our area. Over recent years, A&S has experienced fatalities and serious incidents where weapons have been involved. These devastating instances are often involving children and young people or young adults. The VRP is dedicated to continuing work to eradicate this sort of violence, seeking to understand serious violence and its causes here in A&S.

³ [Serious Violence Duty - Statutory Guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

⁴ [Violence Reduction Units 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

⁵ [Homepage | Youth Endowment Fund](https://www.youthendowmentfund.org/)





6. Strategic Priorities, key themes, and commitments

This Strategy has 3 inter-related core priorities, which have been set out earlier as:



1. **People** - *eliminate serious violence, protect the vulnerable and create safer communities, through the opportunities provided by the evolving Violence Reduction Partnership.*



2. **Places** - *create safer and more resilient communities for now and the generations to come, by reducing serious violent incidents across Avon and Somerset.*



3. **Partners** - *work collaboratively with partners, to understand and address the root causes of violence in Avon and Somerset, with a focus on education, prevention, and*

Within these priorities, are a subset of **key themes** that have been identified through the evidence and knowledge that we have considered and assessed; these are set out below.





These key themes enable us to focus the proposed **commitments** and subsequent **responses to drive the activity** that the VRP will further collectively develop and deliver. **This the framework to our strategy.**



6.1 Summary of our 2024-25 commitments

9 Strategic commitments of the VRP

1. **Interventions** – Commission and fund interventions and responses that address the causes of serious violence, reduce known risk factors, and strengthen protective factors.
2. **Risk identification** – Ensure that the right people and places are being identified to access the right support through the VRP and beyond.
3. **Hotspots and contextual responses** – develop and embed multi-agency responses to serious violence hotspots, with the VRP building an evidence base for contextual safeguarding responses.
4. **Engagement** - Build and develop meaningful engagement approaches to offer co-production opportunities and ensuring that lived experience is a thread across VRP delivery responses.
5. **Local opportunities** - Contribute to building opportunities and tackling disproportionality within our most affected communities facing serious violence.
6. **Awareness and resilience** - Build awareness and drive community led counter-narratives to serious violence, which in time, will increase confidence and resilience around complex and generational issues.
7. **Leadership** - drive system changes through implementation of coordinated and shared responsibility of key partners, all of whom are working to prevent serious violence in the long-term.
8. **Data and evidence** – Develop and build multi-agency data, insights, and evidence to increase our ability to make an impact on serious violence in Avon and Somerset.

6.2 Our commitments explained and the response for 2024-25

This section outlines each core priority, the commitments against these and why they matter, as well as how as a partnership, we will focus our response and the key outcome we aim to achieve in delivering the responses.



1. People

1.1 Interventions: Commission and fund interventions and responses that address the causes of serious violence, reduce known risk factors, and strengthen protective factors.

Why it matters?

Prevention is at the core of the public health approach; it is more cost-effective and sustainable than responses which only respond to an individual when violence or harm has occurred. Therefore, Prevention must be at the heart of the VRP delivery, however it is also important to offer opportunities and responses at the ‘early intervention’ and ‘crisis’ point, so to prevent progression of violence and harm when the risks are evident. Consequently, VRP interventions and responses will cover from up-stream prevention, through to targeted diversion and rehabilitation.

Response

- Continue to deliver and develop evidence led existing VRP core interventions and awareness raising approaches.
- Develop evidence base and feasibility test wider roll out of local emerging good practice.
- Where there are gaps in particular areas of need, seek and develop intervention opportunities or collaborative approaches across the partnership to problem solve these.
- Build links to broader commissioning intentions and emerging initiatives that relate to prevention and diversion, outside of the VRP.

Key Outcome

1. Public space violence is prevented or reduced, particularly for under 25's (children and young people).
2. Positive life outcomes for young people are achieved.



1.2 Risk identification: Ensure that the right people and places are being identified to access the right support through the VRP and beyond.

Why it matters?

In effectively responding to serious violence and its inherent threats, we must ensure we are identifying and supporting the right individuals, groups and places. There are a number of tools that enable our ability to identify risk, primarily this is through mechanisms set up by local authorities and police. As a partnership we must ensure these mechanisms are consistent where possible, regularly reviewed and well-resourced to deliver. In ensuring local VRPs are set up effectively to do this, fewer people will fall through the gaps, resources can be more effectively targeted and risk of duplication across other services and statutory responses will be reduced. VRP risk identification processes must compliment and add value to other pre-existing safeguarding responses.

Response

- Ensure that VRP operational meetings are working to a set of key principles and processes.
- Develop a stronger ability to track individual journeys supported through the VRP, so to build a robust evidence base.
- Ensure key risk identification tools and software are reviewed for reliability and user training requirements.

Key Outcome

1. Those at risk are successfully identified and diverted from harm or negative behaviours.



1.3 Hotspots and contextual responses: Develop and embed multi agency responses to serious violence hotspots, with the VRP building an evidence base for contextual safeguarding responses.

Why it matters?

Much like identifying the right people who are at risk of serious violence, it is important to understand where risk is held in certain places. Across A&S there are a number of serious violence hotspots, which through developments around increased police presence and contextual safeguarding, we have begun to see a reduction in serious violence incidents. Not only does this way of working appear to be having a positive impact on crime, but it also builds confidence amongst the public as police and support presence is higher.

Furthermore, it builds relationships with local businesses and community leaders, who alone, cannot tackle crime related issues that affect social issues in their area. It is important that we continue to learn from contextual safeguarding approaches and build a strong evidence base to sustain their use.

Response

- Continue to work with Police GRIP leads on implementing and testing the police hotspot response.
- Become national leads in the adoption of contextual safeguarding and celebrate successes so far.
- Build evidence base and review local approaches to detached youth work.

Key Outcome

1. Reduced serious violence harm and risk in hotspot areas.



2. Places

2.1 Engagement: Build and develop meaningful engagement approaches to offer co-production opportunities and ensuring that lived experience is a thread across VRP delivery responses.

Why it matters?

Under the public health approach and guidance set out by the Home Office for the VRU and Serious Violence Duty, engagement and co-production are key principles of the work. The VRP should work ‘with and for’ the community, that is, by embedding views and voices of communities and children and young people. In doing this we build a VRP that is understood, trusted and delivering in a way that local people can see it making a difference to them personally or to those around them where needed.

Response

- Collaborate with communities and community based organisations to develop solutions.
- Build on peer mentor approaches and lived experience mentoring practice.
- Develop accessible and engaging VRP resources and documents to aid awareness reach.

Key Outcome

1. Reduced serious violence harm and risk in hotspot areas.
2. Communities and young people feel confident in the counter-narrative and more resilient to serious violence risks.



2.2 Local opportunities: Contribute to building opportunities and tackling disproportionality within our most affected communities facing serious violence.

Why it matters?

We know that across our most deprived areas in A&S, opportunities and positive life outcomes are limited, which in turn increases the risk of serious violence harm. Certain communities and demographics are also disproportionately impacted by serious violence. We must work collaboratively to build sustainable opportunities for these communities and young people, we must support the whole family and look at ways to develop safe spaces in these areas.

Response

- Identify ways to build local opportunities around education, training and employment in the most affected communities.
- Develop opportunities for the VRP to add value to the Tackling Disproportionality agenda at a strategic level.
- Develop use of bivariate mapping to understand where gaps in interventions and opportunities may exist across A&S

Key Outcome

1. Increased positive opportunities for young people and communities to drive for better futures.



2.3 Awareness and resilience: Build awareness and drive community led counter-narratives to serious violence, which in time, will increase confidence and resilience around complex and generational issues.

Why it matters?

Public understanding of serious violence and its risks is pivotal to the public health approach, in treating serious violence as if it were an illness, we must reach far and wide audiences in educating them on the signs, risks and counter-narrative. Universal interventions are critical to this, as well as pro-active communications approaches and campaigns. For our communications and education around serious violence to be clear and understood, the partnership must be clear in what serious violence means and looks like in A&S. Furthermore, as part of awareness building, we must endeavor to ensure that local communities are confident in who the VRP are and what the VRP does, in ensuring this, there is greater accessibility to support and subsequent opportunity. In building strong awareness, we in turn create a more resilient A&S.

Response

- Implement a robust VRP communications plan for 2024-25.
- Target communications approaches and tools in hotspot areas.
- Continue to develop universal awareness raising prevention.

Key Outcome

1. Communities and young people feel confident in the counter-narrative and more resilient to serious violence risks.



3. Partners

3.1 **Leadership:** Drive system change through implementation of coordinated and shared responsibility of key partners, all of whom are working to prevent serious violence in the long-term.

Why it matters?

Whilst the public health approach and Serious Violence Duty provide a framework and legal footing to deliver this work, for system change and true collaboration, there must be an understanding and commitment across all partners to respond. This approach and way of working is committed to within the partnership's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Resources to deliver must be considered across the partnership, looking beyond Home Office funding initiatives and likely needing to utilise existing resources in different ways to sustain this approach. Leadership development has been prioritised through 23-24 and will continue into 24-25 with the recruitment of a Director and a revised governance structure.

Response

- Continue to implement the Serious Violence Duty across the VRP, ensuring requirements and responsibilities are met.
- Empower all levels of the VRP to play a role in preventing serious violence.
- Ensure other cross cutting strategic priorities are aligned to VRP.
- Develop a trauma informed VRP.

Key Outcome

1. Strategic coordination through shared accountability to drive prioritisation of system change and sustainability.



3.2 Data and Evidence: Develop and build multi-agency data, insights and evidence to increase our ability to make an impact on serious violence in A&S.

Why it matters?

Data, evidence and evaluation are core elements of the public health approach, the Home Office also advocate these principles as part of their guidance in VRU delivery. Effective use of data provides new insights and a more complete understanding of the drivers of serious violence, moreover the pooling of partner data then provides opportunities to observe stronger correlations or anomalies, as well as supporting themes and trends. Evaluation is also critical to our way of working and requires both a commitment at national level to understand ‘what works’ in tackling serious violence and at a local level it must become part of our culture. It matters because it helps us understand how our interventions and ways of working are being implemented and whether they are effective and cost-efficient.

Response

- Support the partnership to improve data sharing and data quality, as well as considering opportunities around sophisticated data platforms.
- Further understand and deliver the required deeper dives into the 2023-24 SNA.
- Ensure a VRP information sharing agreement (ISA) is in place to support tier 1-3 data sharing.
- Build a culture of evaluation and impact.

Key Outcome

1. Understanding of serious violence and the VRP impact- via partnership data and analytical resource.



3.2 Sustainability: Drive cultural and financial sustainability consideration to continue the work of the VRP beyond 2025.

Why this matters?

Whilst a challenging concept to consider in the current climate, the partnership must consider ways to build in sustainable approaches and consideration to long-term commitment to the work of the VRP. Beyond 2025, the VRP may not be resourced under the 'as-is', so the VRP must work to agree on its agreed minimum standards and how this shall be supported across duty holders. There is a great deal of commitment already shown through funding contributions, resource contributions and staff embedded into core business in some places and organisations.

Response

- Demonstrate VRP impact and value for money.
- Continue to build on match funding and shared resources across the VRP.
- Develop a sustainability and VRU funding contingency plan for 2025+

Key Outcome

1. Strategic coordination through shared accountability to drive prioritisation of system change and **sustainability**.





7. Plan to deliver the strategy.

The VRP Director will work with the partnership through the Serious Violence Delivery Group (SVDG), which is made up of key partners and Duty holders, they will develop a realistic action plan that takes forward the responses into tangible deliverables. Some of the responses set out in this strategy will require local authority level action through VRP Spokes and their localised partnerships. Where this is the case, the SVDG and Director, will work with local VRP leads and their local partnership forums to feed this into their local plans.

Whilst the strategy provides the framework to the A&S serious violence response, the partnership will work in a responsive way to emerging needs and trends, consequently the plan to deliver, will be iterative and live. It will continue to develop and change over time.

Figure 6. The iterative cycle to the development of our response and how evaluation provides continuous improvement.



To formulate a high-level visual plan, a House Strategy model⁶ has been utilised to illustrate the key responses within this strategy. This aims to show how our Purpose, Vision, and Mission brings everything together in this strategy.

Figure 7. The VRP Strategy overview – House model



A refresh of the SNA will be delivered for January 2025 and may result in developments to this strategy document. Whilst funding is only committed to by the Home Office until April 2025, there is commitment for this Strategy to continue to act as the framework for the VRP response up until that point, where the partnership will then review its suitability and ability to deliver beyond 2025.

⁶ Model: House of Strategy - Goal Atlas



7.1 Communicating our approach and strategy.

We want to commit to ensuring that our communities and wider stakeholders understand who we are and what we are aiming to do, therefore in communicating out our approach and subsequent strategy, the VRP has worked to do this in a simple and accessible way. The below infographic has been developed to support this strategy and provide a simple oversight to our core priorities and approach.

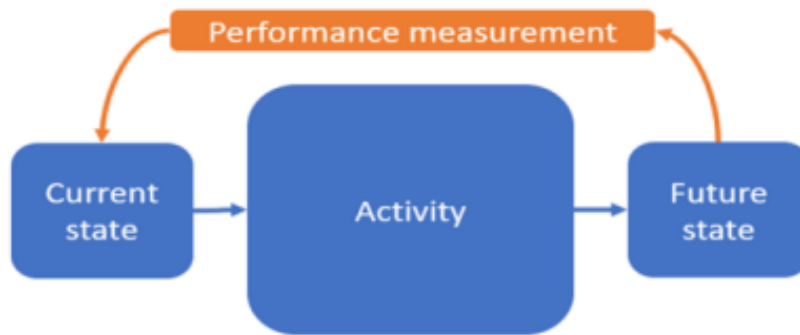
Figure 8. The A&S VRP Infographic



8. Evaluation, our impact and the importance of data

It is important that in delivering the response across the VRP, that we understand the effectiveness and positive impact of this. As such monitoring and evaluation is a key thread of the work that is delivered across the partnership. We are committed to continuous learning and improvement to ensure we are an effective partnership.

Figure 9. Performance measurement to inform how we learn and grow.



We have a performance framework that sets out activity against our priority areas, a set of measures have been agreed and continue to be developed to effectively measure impact.

The partnership reviews serious violence trends on a quarterly basis using police data. Local Authorities also regularly monitor police data against their internal data to correlate and further consider vulnerability and hotspots. This strategic view of trends provides opportunity to understand any new and emerging risk which could require a change of direction in planning and resource allocation.

A dedicated data group of data Analysts and Managers across the partnership comes together to ensure information is shared timely and legally across partners. They complete the annual Serious Violence Duty Strategic Needs Assessment and responsible for the Performance Framework, ensuring processes/outcomes are measured and monitored to enable effective evaluation.

Through work within local authority Spokes and support of a dedicated Senior Evaluation Lead within the hub, intervention monitoring approaches have been developed and continue to be improved, so to ensure providers and organisations delivering support and diversion, are able to demonstrate the good work and impact they are having on individuals, their families and communities. Supporting this work is key to partnership and empowers these organisations to build their evidence base and sustainability opportunities.

We also continue to improve robustness of evaluations conducted by the VRP, we have a dedicated independent evaluation partner working with us until April 2025 to deliver robust process and impact evaluation. The Senior Evaluation Lead will work with partners to develop evaluation plans for new or emerging practice, support Theories of Change and monitoring frameworks and develop evaluation resources for the partnership to develop in this space.

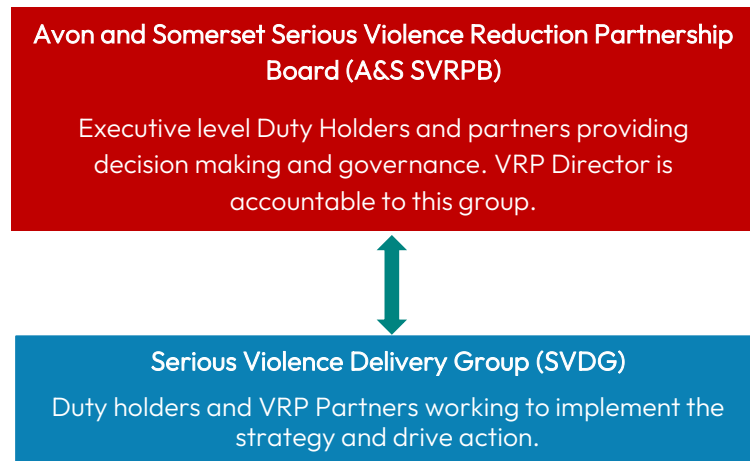


9. Governance and accountability

The A&S VRP Serious Violence Strategy and its delivery is overseen by Serious Violence Reduction Partnership Board (SVRPB).

The SVRPB holds the Director and the Serious Violence Delivery Group (SVDG) to account to drive the response plan aligned to this strategy (as outlined in section 7).

Figure 10. SVRPB and SVDG accountability of the strategy



More information on the SVRPB and its members can be found on the VRP website [here](#). In relation to this strategy the SVRPB hold the following responsibilities:

- Championing and applying the priorities and commitments of the VRP within their own organisation.
- Leading cultural and organisation change, which drives commitment and a shift towards early intervention and prevention, as well as developing organisational practice and thinking, such as trauma informed approaches, tackling disproportionality and collaborative commissioning.
- Ensuring their organisation contributes to this response strategy development and where relevant leading on areas of agreed activity.
- Monitoring and scrutinising performance.
- Providing governance and support of the VRP hub team and delivery in meeting both Home Office grant and duty obligations.



10. SVRPB sign off and support

This strategy has been shared with the SVRPB and supported by its members. The chair of the SVRPB and VRP Director have signed this document on behalf of the partnership and will take lead responsibility for its use and publication.



VRP Director
Natalie Lavis



SVRPB Chair & Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner
Claire Hiscott

This Strategy will be published on the VRP [website](#) and submitted to the Home Office by 31st January 2024, as per the requirements of the Serious Violence Duty.





Please contact the VRP Hub via
VRPHub@avonandsomerset.police.uk