

Decision Pathway – Report



PURPOSE: Key decision

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 05 April 2022

TITLE	Permission to bid for Violence Reduction Unit Grant Funding		
Ward(s)	All		
Author: Charlene Richardson and Becky Lewis	Job title: Safer Options Manager and Strategic Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Manager		
Cabinet lead: Cllr Asher Craig	Executive Director lead: Hugh Evans		
Proposal origin: BCC Staff			
Decision maker: Mayor Decision forum: Cabinet			
Purpose of Report: To seek approval from Cabinet to bid for 3-year grant funding from the Home Office as part of the Avon and Somerset Regional Violence Unit to maintain the Bristol spoke of the Violence Reduction Unit known as Safer Options			
Evidence Base:			
Background to the Bid			
<p>In April 2018, the UK Government introduced a Serious Violence Strategy to address national increases in knife crime, gun crime and homicide. The Serious Violence fund was created to establish and develop Violence Reduction Units (VRU) around the country. The VRUs remit is to respond to the rising levels of violent crime and to identify a common set of perceived key drivers of serious violence. These included adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), deprivation and austerity, which had manifested in a variety of ways that had made individuals more at risk of becoming involved in violent crime.</p> <p>The Home Office funds Violence Reduction Unit on constabulary footprints in the areas with the highest levels of serious violence in the country. Avon and Somerset Constabulary's Violence Reduction Unit is run through a devolved model with each local authority in the constabulary holding devolved responsibility for their part of the constabulary's force-wide violence reduction unit. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) coordinates this regional partnership bring together a unified but locally-tailored approach to violence reduction.</p> <p>Safer Options is Bristol's Youth Violence Reduction Unit. It was established by the local authority and constabulary a few month prior to the Home office's introduction of the Serious Violence Fund. In April 2019 Safer Options was scaled up to a citywide response and became an incorporated part of the Avon and Somerset constabulary-wide violence reduction unit whilst maintaining its own city identity following the award of grant funding to the OPCC for a constabulary-wide violence reduction unit. Safer Options also benefits from other funding streams and grants, including investment from the local authority, BNSSG Clinical Commissioning Group, and OPCC. These fund other projects and programmes aligned to the Safer Options 10-year violence reduction strategy (Appendix 1).</p> <p>For the last three financial years Bristol City Council has been grant funded by the OPCC to deliver the Bristol element of the Home Office funded Serious Violence Grant. The OPCC provides some constabulary-wide response to coordinate some of the requirements of the grant including some data gathering; evaluation and impact. In each of the last three years the grant has been a single year grant. This has been a significant barrier to the delivery of a long-</p>			

term strategy, not least with the challenges of building community confidence in the programmes of work and ensuring a stable multi-agency skilled workforce to deliver them given the insecurity of the funding. Throughout this period Bristol City Council and the OPCC have lobbied the Home Office for a multi-year funding settlement recognising the long-term approach needed to address the root causes of violence in the city.

Bristol City Council were informed at the end of February 2022 that the Home Office would be offering the Avon and Somerset violence reduction partnership a three-year financial settlement. In addition this financial settlement has included an uplift on previous years recognises other aligned grant funding streams which were introduced in 2021-22 in response to national rises in serious violence through the second half of the pandemic. The OPCC have asked Bristol City Council to maintain the lead for Bristol's violence reduction unit and strategic approach and to be a co-signatory of the OPCC's grant bid covering the 22/23, 23/24 and 24/25 financial years (please see Appendices 2 & 3). The grant agreement would be held between the OPCC and Bristol City Council in line with previous year's arrangements whilst OPCC would be the lead for the grant agreement with the Home Office. This arrangement is well established and has been supported by the Home Office and through independent process evaluation by Cordis Bright in 2021.

Bristol City Council and the OPCC are yet to receive the finalised grant application from the Home Office however the Home Office has already provided an indicative funding settlement for the constabulary. Once the application documents have been received Bristol City Council will have less than four weeks to submit our part of the grant application to the OPCC and then to the Home Office.

The OPCC are offering Bristol a **minimum core settlement in 2022-23 of £567,943** for 22-23. It is possible that there will be opportunities for bolt on or increased funding over the year through aligned Violence Reduction specific project grants or re-prioritisation of central resource held by the OPCC.

The Home Office have announced an intention for some matching funding to be required by the OPCC. This requirement is across the whole grant and not just Bristol.

Year	Match funding required £
22-23	116,000
23-24	174,000
24-25	232,000

The OPCC have confirmed that they will meet the full match funding requirement of Year 1 (22-23). In future years some match funding from the five local authorities may be required, however Bristol City Council already invests additional core budget and reserves in projects related to serious violence such as Barnardo's ROUTES Service, Reducing Offending of Children in Care Practitioner, Golden Key Call-in and the Missing Engagement Workers for children in care and so we are confident that any ask of the council for match funding could be met through these existing commitments.

Bristol City Council have requested a three-year core settlement from the OPCC to enable stability and reduce administration of the grant. The OPCC have indicated that they would be favourable to this approach. In 2023-24 and 2024-25 our settlement may be lower reflecting the tapering of the grant however this will be confirmed in the final grant agreement should cabinet give permission to bid. Commissioning and procurement of contracts and projects aligned to this funding will take into account this tapering. We are therefore seeking Cabinet approval to bid for the grant on the basis of a three-year settlement recognising there may be some additional in-year resource. We are anticipating grant in the region of £1.4-1.6million over a three-year period which will be vital in sustaining our approach to reducing serious violence and exploitation in the city.

Context – identification of Need

Safer Options is an established approach with mature projects which have begun to demonstrate positive impact across the city. Since April 2019 we have worked to consolidate the existing good practice, build capacity across a citywide response, and improve integration between safeguarding and prevention approaches. We have scaled up

our citywide response and developed our practice framework in respect of Contextual Safeguarding and Public Health response integration. However, violence and conflict in Bristol remains high mirroring the challenged faced by other core cities. The public health approach recommended for violence reduction units provides the evidence base for the long-term investment needed to tackle the root causes of conflict and violence.

With this bid we want to secure three-year funding for some existing projects and commitments, including Bristol City Council staff specifically employed for this project. We aim to build on the success of existing programmes of work and amend to improve them as well as develop and pilot some new initiatives to respond to the needs of young people. The prioritisation and decision-making about which initiatives to continue and which to decommission are informed by impact data provided over the lifetime of the Safer Options Hub, information from the Avon and Somerset VRU annual strategic Needs Assessment and consultation from young people and the community through the Mayoral youth violence summit.

The current posts within Bristol City Council are reliant on this ongoing funding to be continued:

- 1FTE BG14 Safer Options Manager coordinating the city's response to serious violence
- 3FTE BG13 Education Inclusion Managers running early intervention projects focused on reducing educational inclusion as the leading cause of vulnerability to serious violence
- 4casual BG4 Peer Influencers running peer led projects, peer research on the quality of projects and programmes commissioned by the team
- 0.5FTE BG7 Business Support Officer within ABS

Serious violence and child criminal exploitation affects all parts of our city, although the most deprived neighbourhood are also those most affected by it. Individuals involved, particularly children, can experience significant harm including life-changing injuries and death. Tragically between December 2019 and December 2021 two young people aged 17 and 18 have lost their lives to conflict and knife violence. In addition without support young people can often experience long-term mental distress and trauma, exclusion from education and employment, criminalisation and custody. The impact of conflict, violence and exploitation stretched far beyond just those directly involved including:

- Fear and areas of exclusion within communities
- Anxiety and distress for peer groups, wider family networks, siblings and school communities
- Lack of confidence between communities and authorities
- Street-violence and robberies
- Increase in weapons in the city
- Visible drug-dealing and drug-paraphernalia
- Wider organised crime
- Damage to businesses and physical property

The scale of need for this work is well-evidenced. The 2021 Bristol Strategic Needs Assessment update (Appendix 4) into child criminal exploitation and serious violence evidenced an increase in reported knife crime and serious GBH coded offences over 2020 by young people aged 14-19 although this was in the context of a reduction in total serious violence recorded crimes overall. Avon and Somerset Police reported this occurring in the context of an increase in drug related crimes (see Appendix 5 Avon and Somerset Violence Reduction Unit 2021 Strategic Needs Analysis) where drug supply in the city and region are a significant driver in increased of serious violence and child criminal exploitation between under 18s. Avon and Somerset police have identified that 51% of young people in the whole force area where there are concerns about them being criminally exploited live in Bristol. These children are concentrated in beats which are commensurate with the city's class A drug markets and areas identified as those with high levels of multiple deprivation; high numbers of problematic adult drug users; higher density of adults involved in organised crime gangs and serious offending. This highlights the need for a systemic approach to reducing child criminal exploitation recognising the context in which the exploitation occurs.

Over the last year from April 2021 there has been a slight increase in the number of recorded violent offences when compared to the previous two years. The data shows there was a peak towards the end of the summer coming out of COVID-19 with reports escalating to this point and then reducing. This data includes domestic abuse incidents as well as serious violence.

In Bristol children and young people who experience serious violence and child criminal exploitation are very likely to have experienced other forms of child abuse and parental neglect in their lives. In 2021 there were 521 contacts to First Response relating to 726 children (under 18) for reasons of Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation or Serious Youth Violence. 198 of these children had had a referral in the previous 2 years and 35 had previously been on a child protection plan at some point in the past 2 years. Many others had a history of involvement with children social care as a result of their experiences of adversity and harm further back in childhood.

Several of the incidents of serious youth violence have been linked to two particular rival co-offending peer groups in the Bristol area and the attacks were often retaliatory in nature. Examples include reprisals for previous incidents of peer-on-peer violence, the online posting of videos linked to previous attacks or debt recovery associated with drugs trafficking. There is also considerable evidence of the young people's involvement in robbery, violence and intimidation in schools and community settings; activities which were also linked to peer groups. These are large groups, comprising up to thirty young people at the core with extended peer networks reaching wider peer cohorts across the city and these groups are predominately males.

Progress of work done

Through the last three years of partnership with the OPCC, the Serious Violence grant has enabled significant progress and developments in this area for us to build on. Including:

- To coordinate this approach we brought together a central team in the council who are responsible for coordinating new initiatives, intelligence products and approaches to responding to extra-familial harm. They work with an extended virtual team across VCSE; Health; Education and Police coordinated through Social-care chaired weekly meetings in each locality. This has increased identifications of children and young people at risk and the majority of these young people now have key workers compared to the minority in 2019.
- We are proud that this year we have launched and delivered our first year running Safer Options as an integrated response to exploitation, missing and serious violence as the team now covers child sexual exploitation, trafficking and missing as part of our response. This is in line with the evolving government definition of serious violence which is now inclusive of serious sexual and domestic offences. This more integrated approach has reduced duplication and increased the reach and impact of services. We have better integrated the service with statutory safeguarding teams this year recognising the national position of serious violence and exploitation as a child safeguarding issues.
- We have led on developing Contextual Safeguarding and our response to locations of concern has been recognised as nationally innovative and best practice including presenting at the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner's event.
- We are proud to have developed the Peer Influencer role and successfully recruited 4 young people with relevant lived experience to deliver peer research and act as strategic advisors. We think this will significantly enhance our model in 2022-23.
- We led on the BNSSG-wide Thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review into Peer-on-Peer Abuse and Child Criminal Exploitation providing an excellent evidence base for improving multi-agency services across the system to better protect young people at risk.
- We are pleased to have launched our Drugs in School Pathway and have scaled up our Education Inclusion Project across six secondaries, trialling a different model for identifying children at risk of exclusion due to concerns in the community and in school. We think this will provide an opportunity with the cordis bright evaluation to determine the evidence based for different diversion from exclusion models.
- Our increasingly strong model of late night outreach is also a strength. Two examples of this stand out – our development of the Adult Sex Workers initiative where one of our team goes out with Operation Topaz officer

from 10pm-4am in hot spot areas engaging with adult women who have begun to provide key intelligence on the exploitation of children in those areas. Secondly our VRU funded 9-11pm detached outreach in the city centre delivered by Horn Youth Concern which has been crucial in identified organised abuse of children in the context of high levels of serious violence in the area leading to police investigation and disruption of perpetrators.

- We won funding through the Integrated Care Framework to fund a new Clinical Psychology post for children affected by exploitation with complex needs and two community mental health workers who will work with peer groups and communities to build capacity in supporting each other, improve access to culturally appropriate trauma-informed services, and improve health and wellbeing targeting the health inequalities caused by violence and exploitation.

These are in addition to the Safer Options Hub coordinating development of interventions across the city trying to intervene effectively across the system to contribute to turning the curve on serious violence. A summary of interventions can be found at Appendix 6.

Cabinet Member / Officer Recommendations:

That Cabinet:

1. Authorise the Executive Director Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet member and Deputy Mayor - Children Services, Education and Equalities to submit a bid for funding (in partnership with the Avon and Somerset Constabulary's Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner) to the Violence Reduction Unit and any associated Home Office VRU grant initiatives and if successful, to accept and spend the funding (including procuring and awarding contracts) of up to £1.6 million as outlined in this report.

Corporate Strategy alignment:

1. The Corporate Strategy 2022-2027 Theme 1: Children and Young People identifies a measure of success being that 'Children and young people are safer from harm and violence'. It also sets out that one aim is to achieve a Child-friendly City where children are '...kept safe from and supported to overcome violence, abuse, and other adverse childhood experiences, whatever the circumstances of their birth'. This project aims to contribute to this ambition with projects focused on children and young people up to the age of 25.
2. Theme 5: Homes and Communities of the Corporate Strategy commits us to 'tackling violent crime and violence against women and girls, promoting a safer night-time economy, and addressing anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood crimes like burglary and vehicle crime. Alongside this will be continuing engagement, education, and early intervention to help prevent crime and divert people from this path as early in their lives as possible.' Again this project is a vital part of our ability to do this as a council.
3. This is a Mayoral Priority. The Mayor is holding a violence reduction summit and violence reduction youth summit in March 2022 which has been designed and is being delivered in partnership between Safer Options and the Mayor's Office.

City Benefits:

Aim: Children, young people and communities are supported to be safe from harm and violence

1. Reduction in the numbers of children & young people involved in knife crime or gang related activities or being criminally exploited.
2. Reduction in serious violence reoffending and children receiving custodial sentences
3. Reduction in child deaths and serious injuries
4. Improved population health
5. Improved population safety
6. Improve community cohesiveness and inclusion

Consultation Details:

1. The strategy for the Bristol violence reduction unit (Safer Options Approach) was widely consulted on with

young people, families, voluntary and community groups and statutory partners in 2020. This strategy will drive our grant application and focus.

2. Connecting Communities is quarterly meetings of 25 voluntary and community groups who come together across the city to discuss the issue of serious violence and exploitation and work with Safer Options to develop new initiatives and agree priorities areas for intervention.
3. Mayoral Summit and Mayoral Youth Summit in March 2022 on serious violence will inform our plans for spending the grant
4. Bristol City Council are partnered with Barnardo's Innovation Hub undertaking extensive service redesign project in consultation with families, young people and key stakeholder groups redesigning the city's specialist adolescent exploitation services. The findings of this consultation will inform the grant.
5. The Avon and Somerset VRU Strategic Steering Group and Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership Prevention of Serious Violence will be consulted on proposals for the grant in late March informed by the newly completed Strategic Needs Assessment

Background Documents:

1. Bristol Safer Options Approach [syv-bristol-approach-2020-2030.pdf \(bristolsafeguarding.org\)](#)
2. VRU funding settlement letter
3. Avon and Somerset VRU funding 22-23 to 24-25
4. Bristol Problem Profile – Serious Youth Violence and Child Criminal Exploitation 2021 update [bristol-problem-profile-2021-data-update.pdf \(bristolsafeguarding.org\)](#)
5. Avon and Somerset Violence Reduction Strategic Needs Assessment 2021 [final-as-sna-redacted.pdf \(bristolsafeguarding.org\)](#)
6. Summary of interventions tackling exploitation and violence in Bristol
7. Home Office Violence Reduction Unit Statutory Guidance [Serious Violence Duty: draft guidance for responsible authorities \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
8. Avon and Somerset Violence Reduction Unit Annual Report 2021 [PowerPoint Presentation \(bristolsafeguarding.org\)](#)

Revenue Cost	£	Source of Revenue Funding	Insert specific service budget name
Capital Cost	£	Source of Capital Funding	GRANT
One off cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Ongoing cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Saving Proposal <input type="checkbox"/>	Income generation proposal <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Required information to be completed by Financial/Legal/ICT/ HR partners: Sent on 7.3.2022

1. Finance Advice: This report seeks approval for the Children, Families and Safer Communities service to bid for the Violence Reduction Unit Grant and any associated Home Office VRU grant initiatives, to accept the grant and seeks delegated authority to spend the funding to the Executive Director for People and the Lead Member for Children and Families.

Finance support this request to apply for grant funding from the Home Office via the OPCC and notes that the anticipated 2022/23 allocation of c£568k is £144k more than that received in 2021/22. Funding for three years will provide greater stability and increase the chances of being able to recruit staff to posts. There is a risk that BCC will be asked to provide a contribution towards match funding in 2023/24 and 2024/25 although we are confident that additional serious violence provision met through existing Bristol City Council's general fund and reserves funding will meet any obligations. However, clarity on the level of any future contribution should be obtained before any commitment is made.

Finance Business Partner: Denise Hunt 15.3.2022

2. Legal Advice: The submission of a bid for funding does not raise any specific legal issues. If successful, any procurement process must be conducted in line with the 2015 Procurement Regulations and the Councils own procurement rules. Legal services will advise and assist officers with regard to the conduct of the procurement process and the resulting contractual arrangements.

Legal Team Leader: Husinara Jones, Team Leader/Solicitor 7 March 2022

3. Implications on IT: No implications on IT in regards to this activity

IT Team Leader: Gavin Arbuckle 14.3.2022

4. HR Advice: The report is seeking approval from Cabinet to bid for 3-year grant funding from the Home Office as part of the Avon and Somerset Regional Violence Unit to maintain the Bristol spoken of the Violence Reduction Unit known as Safer Options. The funding will continue to support the posts within the team including three BG13 roles which already have employment rights as they have been with us in excess of two years which means the fund will need to find contingency within the grant to pay redundancy, although they may also have rights to enter the redeployment scheme dependent on their contract. The other roles in the team do not have employment rights as four are casual staff and the other has just been appointed, it is important to be mindful of them accruing employment rights to avoid any further redundancy situations.

HR Partner: Lorna Laing 23.3.2022

EDM Sign-off	Hugh Evans	14.3.2022
Cabinet Member sign-off	Asher Craig	17.03.2022
For Key Decisions - Mayor's Office sign-off	Mayor's Office	24.03.2022

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal	YES
Appendix B – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	NO
Appendix C – Summary of any engagement with scrutiny	NO
Appendix D – Risk assessment	NO
Appendix E – Equalities screening / impact assessment of proposal	NO
Appendix F – Eco-impact screening/ impact assessment of proposal	NO
Appendix G – Financial Advice	NO
Appendix H – Legal Advice	NO
Appendix I – Exempt Information	No
Appendix J – HR advice	NO
Appendix K – ICT	NO
Appendix L – Procurement	NO