

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18 MARCH 2025
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (RESIDENT SERVICES AND CLIMATE
CHANGE)

REPORT OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP ON YOUTH ASB AND VIOLENCE

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 30 July 2024, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee determined that a task and finish group should be established to review the arrangements for youth violence and antisocial behaviour.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the report.
- 2.2 That Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to cabinet to consider the 4 recommendations set out this report.

3. Explanation

Introduction:

- 3.1 This scrutiny area was selected by OSC members because there was an interest in understanding the extent of youth ASB and violence in the borough and what provision, facilities and support there was in place for young people. It was recognised that whilst not the direct responsibility of the council, the council via the Community Safety Partnership has a key role with partners in addressing this matter.
- 3.2 The scoring matrix and the scope and aims and objectives of the task and finish group are listed in Appendix A.
- 3.3 A scope of the task and finish panel was to cover:
- The definition of youth ASB and violence and the level of youth ASB and violence in the borough
 - The roles and responsibilities of the council and other partners
 - The activities undertaken by the council to reduce and/or prevent youth ASB and violence
- 3.4 The objectives expected through this scrutiny were to determine if recommendations could be made:
- to understand the definition for and levels of youth violence in the borough
 - to understand what the community safety partnership are doing towards youth crime and violence
 - to feed into partners and make recommendations

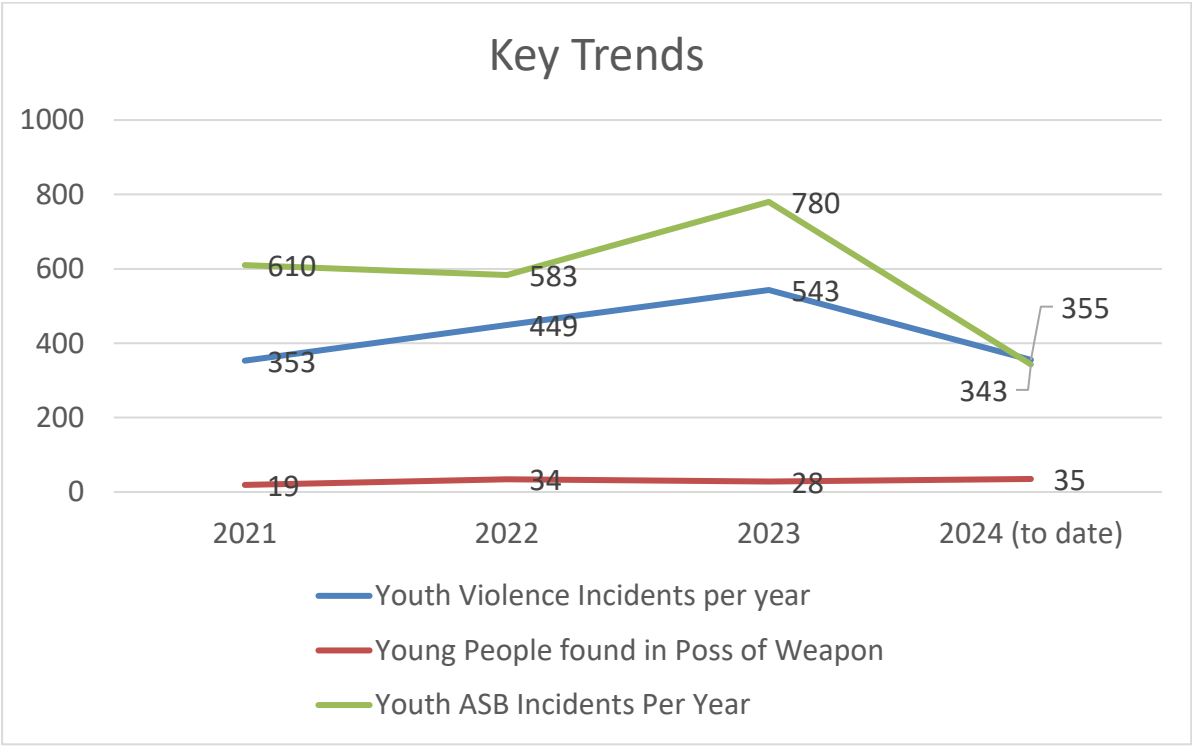
- to consider whether there are additional activities the council can do to support the reduction of youth violence
- 3.5 The task and finish group met on three occasions between November 2024 and February 2025 and received presentations and information from council officers, the Police and Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) Services for Young People (SfYP).
- 3.6 The following topics were explored during the meetings:
- Police data on youth ASB, violence and in possession of a weapon
 - Police data on cuckooing, county lines, missing children and child exploitation
 - Presentation by the Police to provide further context to the above data
 - The role of the Community Safety Partnership, particularly partnership working in relation to young people
 - Priorities in the Community Safety Action Plan for 2024/25
 - Responsibilities of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC) and HCC in youth ASB/violence
 - Local Youth Projects and diversionary activities supporting young people involved in ASB/Crime
 - Talks to schools by the Community Safety team funded by WHBC
 - Provision of extensive support and activities by the HCC SfYP service
- 3.7 Feedback was also sought from Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's Youth Council on the role of the Community Safety Partnership in youth violence and ASB.
- 3.8 The Chair and one of the members of the Task and Finish Group also attended one of the school talks on 25 February 2025 at Onslow St Audrey's School, Hatfield to observe a talk to Year 10 pupils. The talk was provided by Reach Every Generation/ Gavin McKenna and was about their personal experiences and the importance of making the right decisions, and making the wrong ones can have severe implications.

Task and Finish Objectives:

- 3.9 **Objective 1: To understand the definition for and levels of youth violence in the borough**
- 3.10 Antisocial behaviour is defined as 'behaviour by a person which causes, or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to persons not of the same household as the person'. Youth ASB is ASB perpetrated by young persons (persons under 18 years of age).
- 3.11 Violence against a person includes a range of offences from minor offences such as harassment and common assault, to serious offences such as murder, actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm.
- 3.12 Youth ASB and violence has decreased significantly in 2024 compared to 2023. Young people found in possession of a weapon had increased by 7 cases in 2024 compared with 2023. This is shown in Table 1 below.

3.13 In a presentation from the Police they explained that there had been a 22% reduction in ASB generally in 2024 compared to 2023, and a 52% reduction in youth ASB. The significant reduction in youth ASB was a considerable factor in the reduction in overall ASB. The police explained that the ASB caused by young people (around 300+ cases) was a small proportion of the overall ASB (total of about 2,700 cases). There was a discussion at the task and finish group that this is probably not the perception that the general public have of youth ASB.

Table 1: Youth ASB, violence and possession of a weapon in 2021-2024



3.14 Other key data¹ relating to young persons in 2023 in the borough was:

- 200 incidents involving a knife/sharp instrument in WHBC. *This is the second highest number compared to other Hertfordshire districts*
- 33 known County Lines² operating within the district. *This was higher than any other Hertfordshire district*
- 14 cuckooing³ incidents. *Joint second highest district compared to all Hertfordshire districts, alongside Dacorum*
- WHBC had the largest number of children at overall risk of exploitation compared to any other Hertfordshire district. This includes child criminal exploitation and sexual exploitation
- 233 children reported missing. *This is higher than any other Hertfordshire district.*

¹ Obtained from the HCC County Community Safety Unit
² County Lines is the name given to drug dealing where organised criminal groups use mobile phone lines and social media often using young people to move and supply drugs, usually from cities into smaller towns and rural areas.
³ Cuckooing is where the home of a vulnerable person is taken over by a criminal in order to use it to deal, store or take drugs, facilitate sex work, as a place for them to live, or to financially abuse the tenant.

- 3.14 The Police were asked how this reduction in youth ASB had been achieved. The police explained that close joint working with partners had been critical and involved a combination of factors as follows:
- Operation BRILLO – mapping out of associations between youth offenders and using this as a targeted approach to patrolling and detection of crime and offenders
 - Operation HOTSPOT – Home Office funded operation to fund additional patrols to tackle anti-social behaviour and serious violence in hotspot areas
 - Public Spaces Protection Orders – patrols and enforcement of street drinking, begging and rough sleeping
 - Focused work on known habitual knife carriers (reduced from 9 to 3 individuals during 2023)
 - Operation MANTIS – targeted work on county lines. Due to high levels of county lines reported in Welwyn Hatfield borough, the borough receives a high level of support from the Herts County dedicated Police team that deals with county lines
 - Operation SETIFORM – focused activity on cuckooing
- 3.15 There was concern and much discussion about the high number of children reported as missing in the borough. It was explained that the majority of these were young people placed in children’s homes in Welwyn Hatfield borough usually by councils outside of the borough, such as London Boroughs. This was to accommodate young people in a location away from the harm they were experiencing. However, young people often go missing and return back to where they originated from, and Welwyn Hatfield’s good transport links to London and locations north of Hertfordshire helps facilitate this.
- 3.16 The children’s homes were described as being unregulated (not registered with Ofsted). Unregulated homes, often known as semi-independent or supported accommodation, offer support and not care. Due to demand and pressure on local authorities to find appropriate secure accommodation, such unregulated homes are increasingly being used to house vulnerable children, many of whom are recognised as at risk of child sexual exploitation or from county lines criminal exploitation.
- 3.17 **Objective 2: To understand what the community safety partnership are doing towards youth crime and violence**
- 3.18 WHBC’s Community Safety Team covers matters including domestic abuse/violence, hate crime, youth ASB. The team also co-ordinates the Welwyn Hatfield Community Safety Partnership and prepares the annual Community Safety Action Plan.
- 3.19 The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is a partnership of local organisations to formulate and implement strategies to tackle crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour in their communities. They were introduced by Section 6 of the Crime & Disorder Act 1998. They comprise responsible authorities (those required to form the partnership by law), which are the Police, Fire and Rescue Service, Local Authorities, Health Partners and the Probation Service. Other organisations not required by law to be part of the CSP, known as non-statutory partners.

- 3.20 The statutory partners in the Welwyn Hatfield Community Safety Partnership are WHBC Community Safety Team and other WHBC teams, Hertfordshire Police, Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioners Office. Hertfordshire County Council (eg Public Health, Trading Standards, Road Safety Partnership, Youth Offending Team, Children's Social Services), Herts Fire & Rescue Service, Herts Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board, and the Probation Service. There are a range of non-statutory partners such as the University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield Town Council, WHBC Cllrs, Resolve, Herts Mind Network, CGL.
- 3.21 The Welwyn Hatfield CSP are required to produce an annual plan of joint priorities to action. The CSP Plan for 2024/25 includes a number of priorities, and priority 4 relates to 'working in partnership to prevent and tackle serious violence'. This comprises action to:
- Focus on dismantling drug lines and associated serious violence and criminality within the CSP by joint working with Operation Scorpion and Community Safety Units – Herts Police, WHBC, HCC
 - Protect young people from becoming involved in serious youth violence by taking a prevention first approach – WHBC, SASH, HCC SfYP, Herts Police
- 3.22 An update of activity from CSP partners at the end of December 2024 to address this priority included:
- Herts Police Operation Scorpion officers have recently been involved in a number of warrants and drug related disruption for county lines intensification week
 - WHBC continues to work closely with Police on supporting young people involved in County Lines. Information and data is shared and young people are offered support through local projects and monitored on Y-MARRG where possible
 - Herts Police continue to record and investigate suspected cases of Cuckooing within the Borough. Where appropriate Herts Police consider the use of necessary orders including Protective orders to be considered in conjunction with partners where possible.
 - WHBC ASB Team work robustly where a person is identified as being a victim of Cuckooing in order to safeguard and support them. WHBC works to rehouse the individual where necessary and signpost to any other relevant additional support
 - WHBC Community Safety Team continues to hand out relevant material on Cuckooing to members of the public, encouraging them to spot the signs and raise awareness. In addition, WHBC One Magazine will also include an article raising awareness on Cuckooing and how to report it
 - Herts Police Prevention work is continuing in local schools to help Prevention, Diversion for young people. Herts Police have also allocated a dedicated PCSO to local specialist secondary school
 - Ongoing close partnership work and problem solving is taking place via YMARRG Meetings. Where young people are identified the CSP are continuing to reach out and offer appropriate support to prevent re-offending
 - WHBC Community Safety Team attended local secondary schools and colleges during Operation Sceptre Week to raise awareness around the risks of carrying a knife to young people. This was also promoted on social media

- HCC’s Service for Young People (SfYP) continues to offer Social Inclusion workshops in Woodhall and Hatfield

3.23 There are a number of meetings between partners in particular which focus on tackling youth ASB and violence. This is shown in Table 2 below. The most relevant meeting is Y-MARRG which shares intelligence, monitors individual cases of young persons involved in crime and ASB and provides the necessary support to them.

Table 2: Some of the meetings of CSP partners which focus on youth ASB/Violence

<u>Youth Violence Partnership Working</u>		
Meeting	Attendees	Purpose
JAG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Partners on previous slide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for CSP Action Plan 2024 – 2025. • Exchange information on emerging issues/service updates
Y-MARRG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHBC Comm Safety/ASB Team, Herts Police CCE Team & NPT, Services for Young People, SASH, Turnaround Project, No More Service, Local Secondary Schools, Key Local Businesses, Housing Associations, CGL, NHS, HCC SASH & IFST Teams and Children’s Social Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor individual cases of young people involved in ASB/Crime. • Exchange intel/information • Arrange appropriate support for young people.
Bi-Weekly Catch Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHBC Comm Safety/ASB Team, Herts Police CCE Team, Services for Young People, SASH, Turnaround Project, No More Service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange information/Intel on concerning cases of young people involved in ASB/Crime.

3.24 There are a number of local support services available to young persons that become involved in crime and WHBC’s ASB and Community Safety team and other partners can refer them into these services. These include:

Positive Pathways Project

Free 1-2-1 support for local young people aged 11 – 19 who are at risk of or involved in ASB/Crime, illegal substance misuse, carry a weapon. Self or professional referral accepted.

Turnaround Service

Free 1-2-1 support for local young people aged 10 – 17 who have come into negative Police contact, received an out of court disposal or ABC. Self or professional referral accepted.

Herts Police Child Criminal Exploitation Team

Free 1-2-1 support for local young people aged up to 18 years old who are involved in or at risk of carrying a weapon, gang affiliation, county lines exploitation. Professional referral only.

No More Service

Free 1-2-1 support for local young people aged 11-21 who are involved in ASB/Crime, at risk of homelessness, family breakdown, mental health issues.

Funded by WHBC and 7 other Herts districts. Self or professional referral accepted.

- 3.25 When a young person is involved in crime or ASB, a two pronged approach is taken; support/assistance and enforcement. Young people are supported with awareness campaigns and talks in schools about various issues (eg exploitation, county lines etc). If involved in crime/ASB they may be referred into programmes of support such as Positive Pathways, the No More Service, the Police child criminal exploitation team. If necessary, they may also have enforcement action taken consisting of ASB warning, Antisocial Behaviour Contracts, Community Protection Notices, and youth injunctions.
- 3.26 The Task and Finish Group were given a presentation by the HCC Service for Young People (SfYP). They offer an extensive provision of youth work support and projects for young people 13-25 including targeted support for those at risk of crime, exclusion or exploitation, with special education needs, those in care and leaving care, home educated, LGBT+ and minority ethnic groups.
- 3.27 SfYP also offer independent career guidance, a traded offer for schools, various services for young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), young People's Centres including in Welwyn Hatfield Borough (11.00 to 17.00 walk in and appointments).
- 3.28 **Objective 3: To consider whether there are additional activities the council can do to support the reduction of youth violence**
- 3.29 WHBC Community Partnership Team contribute funding towards some of the programmes highlighted above, Positive Pathways and the No More Service.
- 3.30 There are a number of sports and other programmes that are funded/delivered by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council to support young people. All of these are additional free or low cost activities made available to local young people and can serve as a diversionary activity to prevent young people becoming involved in youth ASB/Crime. These activities include:
- Free Hair & Beauty Sessions at Link Drive, Hatfield - funded through the Police and Crime Commissioner grant funding. Aimed at 13-17 year olds at risk of becoming involved in crime and ASB
 - This Girl Can event– across Welwyn Hatfield borough
 - Big Summer event – across Welwyn Hatfield borough
 - A-Z Basketball – at Ridgeway Academy School
 - Kicks Football – at Ridgeway Academy School
 - Girls Dance Project – at Hilltop, Hatfield
 - Basketball – at Birchwood Leisure Centre
- 3.31 WHBC Community Safety Team also fund talks in schools about a number of issues and risks posed to young people. The purpose is to raise awareness of these issues and support them to make good choices when faced with them. The talks are delivered by persons with lived experiences of the subject matter which makes them particularly powerful and credible to young persons. Such school talks include:

- Crucial Crew – delivered to year 7 pupils offering interactive learning sessions on child criminal exploitation, healthy relationships, fire safety and other matters
 - Bold Voices Talks – delivered to years 9 and 10 exploring violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender-based violence
 - Gavin McKenna Talks – delivered to years 7 – 11 exploring child criminal exploitation and gang culture/violence
- 3.32 Crucial Crew is organised by WHBC every year and delivered by a number of partners including Herts Police, Herts Fire, Herts mind Network and Herts Young Homeless. The Bold Voices and Gavin McKenna talks was funded through Police and Crime Commissioner grant funding, and we are currently exploring offering this again if funding can be secured.
- 3.33 There are also support programmes which are funded/delivered by other organisations. These include:
- HCC SfYP Youth and Detached Youth Projects – at Woodhall and Hatfield
 - YMCA run project – at Hatfield

3.34 Objective 4: To feed into partners and make recommendations

- 3.35 The task and finish group invited attendance and heard from partners such as the Police and HCC Services for Youth Services. An officer from the Community Safety team also attended the Youth Council in February 2025 to discuss the role of the community safety partnership and youth ASB/violence. The Youth Council expressed a desire to have input into the annual Community Safety Plan, which will be facilitated.
- 3.36 The Chair and one of the members of the task and finish group also attended one of the talks to school organised by the WHBC Community Safety team on 25 February 2025 at Onslow St Audrey's School, Hatfield. They observed a talk to Year 10 pupils. The talk was by Reach Every Generation/ Gavin McKenna and was about their personal experiences and the importance of making the right decisions, and making the wrong ones can have severe implications. The Chair and member found the talk very enlightening and well worth attending.

Task and Finish Recommendations:

3.37 Recommendation 1: To recognise the excellent work undertaken by WHBC, Police and HCC Youth Services and other partners

- 3.38 The range of activities and support for young people involved in ASB and violence across many organisations is extensive, as well as the preventative and diversionary work that is undertaken. The task and finish group would like to acknowledge and express their appreciation for their dedication in supporting young people in the borough.

3.39 Recommendation 2: Working with partners, continue to seek opportunities for further funding

- 3.40 It was also recommended that the WHBC Community Safety Team continue to seek and bid for grant funding (eg from the Police and Crime Commissioner grant

funding) to continue to provide support and activities for the borough's young people.

3.41 Recommendation 3: The Community Safety Team to provide appropriate support to leading partners to investigate further with partners the issue around missing children and unregulated children's homes

3.42 The task and finish group heard about the high number of children that go missing from the borough from unregulated children's homes. The children are often placed in the borough for their safety by other local authorities. The group were concerned about the risks to and potential for exploitation to young people in going missing.

3.43 This issue was discussed at a recent meeting of the Responsible Authorities of the Community Safety Partnership who also share concerns. As a result, a meeting of relevant partners (eg Community Safety Team, Police, HCC Children's Services, Fire and Rescue Service) will be convened to investigate this matter further to establish what can be done to address this issue.

3.44 Recommendation 4: To utilise networks to increase awareness of the support and activities available to young people

3.45 The task and finish group also commented on how essential the collaboration of partners are in supporting young people. It is recommended that partners continue to seek ways to work together to make a difference, and get information out to young people, parents, schools, teachers and utilise their networks, about the prevention and the support available to those you need it.

3.46 The task and finish group discussed the importance of sport also in supporting young people and deterring them from poor choices. Sport can change people's lives. There are many sports clubs within the borough doing fantastic work with young people. The task and finish group recommend that the Community Safety Team or Partnership engage with the clubs and the Youth Council to ensure that information is cascaded about support services available to young people involved, or at risk of getting involved, in ASB and violence.

Implications

4. Legal Implications

4.1 Section 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1988 required that Councils set up Community Safety Partnership of statutory partners to look at strategies for crime and disorder in the borough. The Welwyn Hatfield CSP is constituted to meet the legal requirement.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no new financial implications as a result of this report.

6. Risk Management Implications

6.1 WHBC has a responsibility as a district council to set up and co-ordinate the Community Safety Partnership to have strategies to tackle crime and disorder and

are a statutory responsible authority. This complies with the Crime and Disorder Act 1988.

- 6.2 Statutory partners in the Community Safety Partnership have their own involvement, or in some cases, statutory responsibilities and duties towards preventing and enforcement youth ASB and violence. If the responsibilities are not fulfilled there is a risk of non-compliance but most importantly it could pose risks and harms to young people.

7. Security and Terrorism Implications

- 7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications arising from this report.

8. Procurement Implications

- 8.1 There are no new procurement implications arising from this report.

9. Climate Change Implications

- 9.1 There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

10. Human Resources Implication(s)

- 10.1 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

11. Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 11.1 ASB and violence perpetrated by or against young people can be fatal and cause serious injury and harm. It has a devastating impact on young people, their families, friend and the wider community. Services, talks and activities to prevent youth ASB and violence and to support those involved, are essential to seek to deter and reduce such harms.

12. Communication and Engagement Implications

- 12.1 The annual Community Safety Plan with priorities for the CSP is published on the website, alongside regular updates. In addition, there is a rolling campaign throughout the year via press releases and social media to promote awareness of issues around community safety such as domestic abuse, violence against women and girls, hate crime, ASB week etc.

13. Link to Corporate Priorities

- 13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priorities of Together, create opportunities for our communities and in particular making helping us feel safer where we live.

14. Equality and Diversity

- 14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been carried out in connection with the proposals that are set out in this report as the recommendation does not require a policy or service change.

Name of author(s): Sue McDaid
Title(s) Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change)
Date 6 March 2025

Appendices: Appendix A: The scoring matrix, the scope and aims and objectives of the Task and Finish group for youth ASB and violence

Appendix A:

The scoring matrix, the scope and aims and objectives of the Task and Finish group for youth violence and ASB

Scrutiny Scoring Matrix

Topic/area of interest: Youth Violence (Youth facilities/activities)

Public Interest + Strategic Value + Risk + Corporate Priorities + Financial Value = Scrutiny Value Score

	Numerical score			
Public Interest	low 1	medium 2	high 3	3
Risk to Council or service delivery	low 1	medium 2	high 3	3
Alignment to Corporate Priorities	low 1	medium 2	high 3	3
Financial Value	low 1	medium 2	high 3	2
Issue of concern for partners?	low 1	medium 2	high 3	3
Will the outcome of scrutiny review result in any meaningful impact on the Council service?	low 1	medium 2	high 3	2
Will the outcome of scrutiny result in any benefit for a significant part of the community / partners / stakeholders or the Council?	low 1	medium 2	high 3	2
Total Score				18

Decision:

Youth violence was debated at the committee workshop. It is recognised this is not a direct responsibility of the Council, although the Council does play a key role in overall community safety with the community safety partnership, anti-social behaviour activities and in the provision of some youth facilities such as campus west.

Based on the scoring it is recommended a **task and finish panel** be set up, to cover:

- The definition of youth violence and the level of youth violence in the borough
- The roles and responsibilities of the council and other partners
- The activities undertaken by the council to reduce and/or prevent youth violence

The objectives expected are:

- to understand what the community safety partnership are doing towards youth crime and violence; and,
- to feed into partners and make recommendations

- to consider whether there are additional activities the council can do to support the reduction of youth violence.

Task & Finish Terms of Reference

Scrutiny Review Title	Youth Violence (Youth facilities/activities)
Scoring Matrix Result	18
T&F Panel Members	
Co-opted Members	
Portfolio Holder (s)	Councillor Sandreni Bonfante
Officers	Sue McDaid, Emma Walker
Key Stakeholders	
Background Issue to review - the rational for scrutinising this issue	
<p>Youth violence was debated at the committee workshop. It is recognised this is not a direct responsibility of the Council, although the Council does play a key role in overall community safety with the community safety partnership, anti-social behaviour activities and in the provision of some youth facilities such as campus west.</p>	
Scrutiny Aims and Objectives	
<p>The objectives expected through this scrutiny are to determine if recommendations could be made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to understand the definition for and levels of youth violence in the borough; • to understand what the community safety partnership are doing towards youth crime and violence; • to feed into partners and make recommendations; and, • to consider whether there are additional activities the council can do to support the reduction of youth violence. 	
Review of Implications/Impacts/Risks	
<p><i>Failure to adequately work together to reduce youth violence can impact on community safety.</i></p>	

Methodology for Gathering Evidence

- Presentation of information and questioning of partners including Hertfordshire Police and Hertfordshire County Council
- Presentations from officers on council activities and the community safety partnership
- Presentation of youth provision from other areas / councils / community groups

Proposed time scales and meeting frequency (aim for 2 to 3 moths)

Start date	November 2024
Frequency of Meetings	6 weekly
End Date	February 2025

Reporting back to OSC/Recommendations to Cabinet

Date of OSC	March 2025
Date of Cabinet	April 2025