

# Stockton-on-Tees Serious Youth Violence Strategy - 2026–2031

Stockton-on-Tees BOROUGH COUNCIL

Probation Service

CLEVELAND POLICE

NHS North East and North Cumbria

POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR CLEVELAND

Stockton-on-Tees BOROUGH COUNCIL

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# Forword



### From Majella McCarthy – Director of Children's Services

We are committed to ensuring that all children and young people in Stockton-on-Tees are safe, nurtured and able to thrive. We recognise that serious youth violence is an increasing concern both nationally and locally, and that addressing it requires sustained early intervention, trusted relationships and resilient communities.

This is an ambitious five-year strategy, recognising that preventing and reducing serious youth violence is a long-term endeavour that will require consistent commitment, partnership working and system transformation over time. Meaningful change will not be achieved quickly; it requires a whole-system, public health approach that tackles root causes, strengthens protective factors and embeds prevention at every stage of a child's life.

The strategy sets out how we will work collectively to prevent and reduce serious youth violence through a public health, whole-system approach. It is informed by local evidence and shaped by the voices of children, young people, families and communities. It outlines our shared vision, principles and priorities, the Stockton-on-Tees needs profile, our key actions, and how progress and impact will be measured over time.

Our strong multi-agency partnership has worked collaboratively to target action to disrupt adults and organised crime groups who exploit children. This includes problem-solving approaches with Cleveland Police, Community Safety, Youth Justice, Education and the voluntary sector, with a particular focus on hotspot locations and areas of concern alongside safeguarding-led responses to protect children.

This is a dynamic and ambitious strategy, developed in line with the Serious Violence Duty. It will be underpinned by an annual delivery plan to ensure it remains responsive to emerging risks, learning and evidence. The delivery plan will be regularly reviewed by the Board, to ensure the strategy remains aligned with the Cleveland Violence Reduction Unit's overarching strategy and the wider priorities of Stockton-on-Tees, while maintaining a clear long-term focus on achieving sustained reductions in serious youth violence and improved outcomes for children and young people.

**From Councillor – Clare Besford**

Every child and young person in Stockton-on-Tees deserves to grow up safe, supported and able to look to the future with confidence. As Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, I welcome this Serious Youth Violence Strategy as an important statement of our shared determination to prevent harm, reduce inequality and ensure that every child has the best possible start in life.

The impact of serious youth violence reaches far beyond individual incidents. It can leave young people feeling unsafe, limit their confidence and opportunities, and place additional pressure on families who are working hard to protect and support their children. It also affects wider communities, creating fear, damaging trust and weakening the sense of belonging that is so important to strong neighbourhoods. Recognising this harm is why our response must be compassionate, urgent and focused on lasting change.

That lasting change starts from the belief that serious youth violence is not inevitable. It is shaped by the circumstances children experience, the opportunities available to them, and the strength of the relationships and communities around them. This is why the strategy rightly focuses on prevention, early help and partnership working. It recognises that fairness means acting early, listening to children and families, and targeting support where it can make the greatest difference.

Our ambition is for Stockton-on-Tees to be a place where background does not limit potential, where children feel safe in their homes, schools and communities, and where young people are supported to learn, thrive and achieve. By working together across education, health, police, youth justice, community safety and the voluntary sector, we can build the conditions that help children make positive choices and raise their aspirations for the future.

# Welcome

## Our Principles:

Welcome to the *Stockton-on-Tees Serious Youth Violence Strategy 2026–2031*, which sets out how partners across the Borough will work together over the next five years to prevent and reduce serious youth violence and create safer communities for children, young people and families.

This strategy sets out our shared vision, ambitions and priorities for tackling serious youth violence through a whole-system, public health approach. It reflects our collective commitment to strengthening early intervention and prevention, addressing the underlying causes of violence, disrupting activity, supporting vulnerable children and families, and improving outcomes for children and young people across Stockton-on-Tees.

The strategy has been developed through extensive partnership working and co-production with organisations and individuals who share responsibility for safeguarding children and reducing violence. This includes:

- Children, young people and families
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
- Cleveland Police
- Safer Stockton Partnership
- Public Health
- Youth Justice Service
- Education providers, including schools and academies
- Health partners, including North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board and NHS providers
- Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations
- Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV)

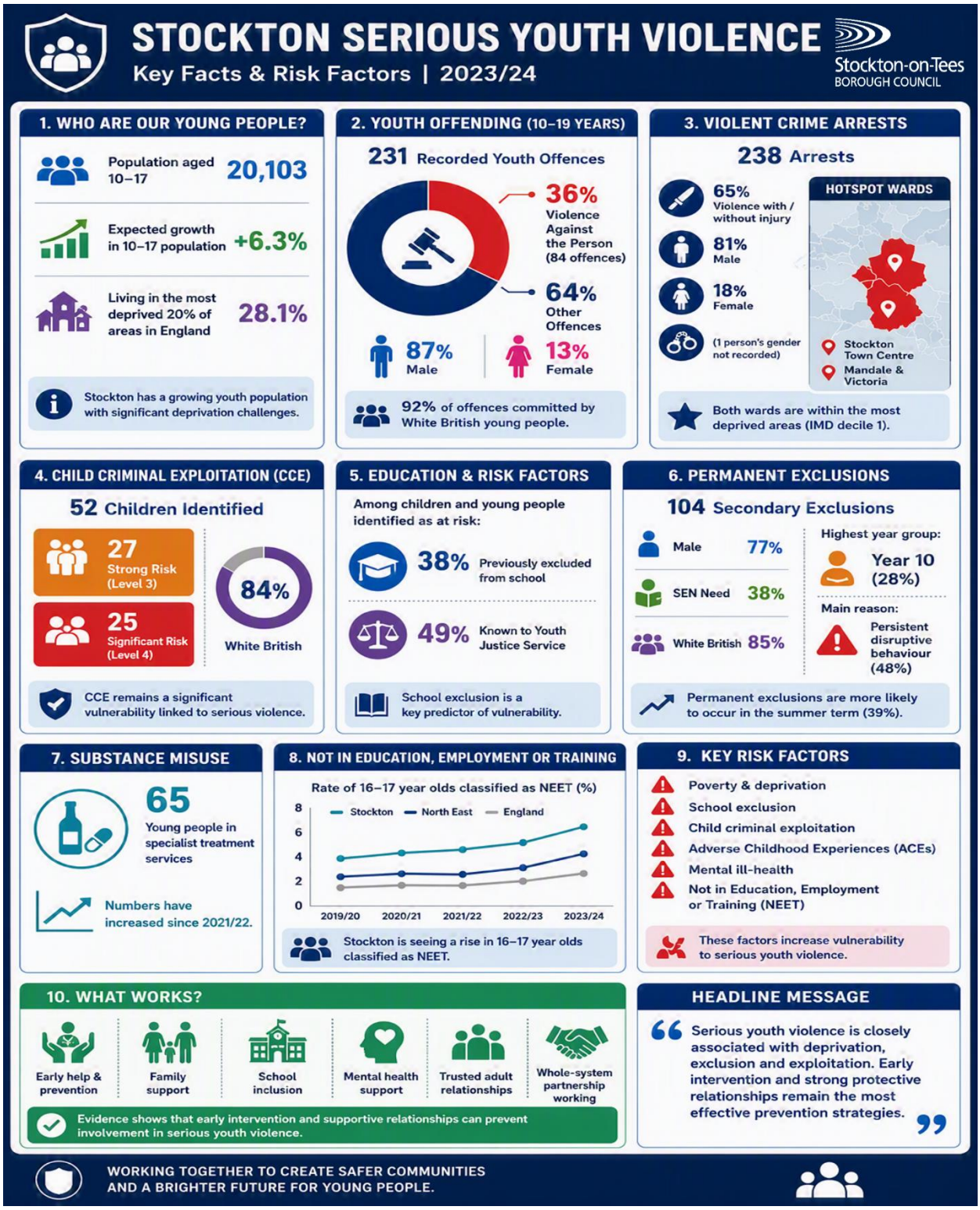
Partnership working and co-production are central to both the development and delivery of this strategy. No single organisation can prevent serious youth violence in isolation and meaningful change will only be achieved through sustained collaboration, shared accountability and a commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

The strategy has been informed by the Stockton-on-Tees Serious Youth Violence Needs Assessment, which brought together local data, intelligence and evidence from across health, education, voluntary services, police, youth justice, community safety and children's services. We also worked closely with partners through a series of multi-agency workshops, strategic development sessions and partnership discussions to identify and refine the priorities contained within this strategy.

The voices of children and young people have been at the heart of this work. More than 100 young people aged 10–18 shared their views, experiences and ideas about serious youth violence, safety and prevention. Their insights have strengthened our understanding of both the factors that contribute to violence and the protective factors that help keep children safe.

Together, this evidence, engagement and partnership collaboration have shaped a strategy that reflects what matters most to children, young people, families and communities whilst setting a clear direction for collective action over the next five years.

# Serious Youth Violence – Health Needs Assessment:



*Source: Stockton-on-Tees Serious Youth Violence Rapid Health Needs Assessment, May 2025*

# What our children told us:



# The Vision

By 2031, partners across Stockton-on-Tees are collectively committed to making the borough one of the safest places in the North East for children, young people and young adults aged 10–24.

We will achieve this through a shared, whole-system approach that:

- Strengthens the protective conditions that enable children, families and communities to feel safe, supported and able to thrive
- Reduces the number of children and young people who experience or are affected by violence
- Prevents children and young people from entering and re-entering the criminal justice system

This vision has been shaped through partnership collaboration and informed by the voices of children, young people and communities. It reflects a collective commitment to sustained, evidence-informed action that addresses the root causes of harm, not just its consequences.

**Our Goals:**

- ✓ **Reduce harm from serious youth violence -** *We will reduce the number of children and young people who are victims of, or affected by, serious youth violence by strengthening prevention, identifying risk earlier and targeting support where it is most needed.*

- ✓ **We will strengthen partnership intelligence -** *We will strengthen partnership intelligence and continue to build on our Serious Violence Dashboard to monitor, evaluate and better understand the nature and impact of serious violence across our communities. The Dashboard is an interactive strategic digital tool that provides access to anonymised and restricted police and partnership data relating to the nature, scale and drivers of serious violence across the Cleveland Police Force area. This will enable us to better understand need, identify emerging risks and trends, target resources more effectively, and measure the impact of our interventions. By using high-quality data, research, partnership intelligence and the voices of children, young people and families with lived experience to drive continuous improvement, we will ensure services remain effective, evidence-informed and responsive to local need, leading to improved outcomes for children and young people.*

- ✓ **Prevent entry to and escalation within the justice system -** *We will strengthen early help and universal prevention by ensuring all children and young people understand the risks of violence and have access to timely support before harm occurs. This includes improving pathways into services and embedding prevention across education, youth provision and community settings.*

- ✓ **Strengthen the conditions that prevent harm -** *We will improve the protective factors that underpin positive outcomes, including school attendance, inclusion, attainment, emotional wellbeing and family stability, so that children and young people are supported to thrive.*

- ✓ **Build resilient children, families and communities -** *We will empower children, families and communities to play an active role in preventing violence. This includes building confidence, strengthening relationships, and increasing access to safe spaces, positive activities and trusted support networks.*

**Our Priorities:**

A substantial programme of work is already underway across the partnership. This strategy brings together existing activity aligned to each priority, alongside new and emerging workstreams to strengthen impact over time.

Our priorities are closely aligned with the Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV) and the Safer Stockton Partnership and are informed by the Stockton-on-Tees Rapid Needs Assessment. They have been shaped through engagement with the Youth Justice Management Board, partner agencies, practitioners, and the voices of children, young people and local communities.

Central to this approach is our commitment to co-production, ensuring children, parents, carers and communities are actively involved in shaping solutions. This includes recognising the importance of safe spaces, positive activities, meaningful opportunities and clear pathways into education, training and employment, ensuring our work reflects lived experience and delivers sustainable, positive change.

# Our Four Priorities

## Early Intervention and Prevention:

*We will strengthen early, proactive and universal prevention and intervention so that children and young people receive the right support at the right time, before needs escalate and risks increase. This will be delivered through improved early identification, increased capacity across services, a strengthened universal youth offer, and coordinated multi agency action informed by high quality data, evaluation and community insight.*

## We will achieve this by:

- **Youth Support:** We will continue to provide targeted early help and prevention, offering timely and flexible interventions for children, young people and families experiencing vulnerability, exploitation, missing episodes, anti-social behaviour and emerging risks of harm. Through strong relationship-based practice, targeted early help teams will undertake assessments, coordinate whole-family support, lead multi-agency planning and develop safety plans that strengthen protective factors and reduce risk.

- **Family Hubs:** We will continue to strengthen the Family Hub offer, providing accessible, community-based support for children, young people and families from pregnancy through to adulthood. Delivered in partnership with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, health providers and

voluntary sector organisations, Family Hubs will offer a wide range of activities, groups, advice, information and targeted support designed to promote positive family relationships, emotional wellbeing and resilience. By strengthening family stability, reducing isolation and building protective factors, the Family Hub network will play a key role in preventing escalation of need and improving outcomes for children, young people and their families.

- **Holiday Activities Fund:** We will continue to deliver the Holidays Are Fun (HAF) programme, providing enriching activities, healthy meals and positive experiences for children and young people during school holiday periods. Targeted primarily at children eligible for benefits-related Free School Meals, the programme will help reduce inequalities, tackle holiday hunger and increase access to safe, supportive environments. Through a wide range of sport, creative, recreational and educational activities, HAF will promote physical and emotional wellbeing, strengthen social connections, build resilience and provide positive opportunities that help reduce vulnerability to exploitation, anti-social behaviour and serious youth violence.

- **YUSA:** We will continue to support and strengthen the Youth United Stockton Alliance (YUSA), bringing together key partners to deliver sustainable, high-quality open access youth provision across Stockton-on-Tees. Through a coordinated and community-based approach, YUSA will provide safe spaces, trusted relationships, positive activities and early intervention opportunities that build resilience and reduce vulnerability to exploitation, offending and serious youth violence. By aligning resources and delivering targeted support within youth settings, the Alliance will help identify and respond to emerging needs at the earliest opportunity, contributing to better outcomes for children and young people while reducing longer-term demand on public services and strengthening the local youth sector.

## Deter, Disrupt and Divert:

*We will work with partners to target and disrupt the pathways, behaviours and environments that enable serious youth violence, reducing opportunities for harm while increasing safety for children, young people and communities. This will be achieved through intelligence led, trauma informed and safeguarding focused approaches that identify and respond to emerging risks, exploitation, harmful peer influences and locations associated with violence. Strong multi agency partnership working, effective information sharing and timely intervention will be central to preventing escalation and protecting those most vulnerable to involvement in serious youth violence.*

## We will achieve this by:

- **Custody Navigators:** We will continue to provide Custody Navigators to ensure children and young people entering custody receive timely, trauma-informed support at a critical point. Navigators will provide emotional and practical assistance, support engagement with services, and work with partner agencies to inform sentence planning and early resettlement, with a focus on continuity

of care, maintaining family links where appropriate, and effective release planning to improve outcomes and reduce reoffending.

- **Youth Justice Turnaround Programme:** We will continue to deliver the Youth Justice Turnaround Programme, providing targeted, voluntary interventions for children arrested but not charged. The programme will offer timely, child-centred support to address the underlying causes of offending, including education, wellbeing, family circumstances and exploitation. Through early intervention, restorative and diversionary approaches, and multi-agency working, the programme aims to prevent escalation into the formal youth justice system and reduce further offending.

- **Youth Justice Team:** We will ensure the Youth Justice Team completes comprehensive, high-quality assessments for all children, including those arrested for knife possession, and deliver timely, mandatory interventions in line with statutory requirements. Interventions will be proportionate and trauma-informed, addressing factors such as exploitation, safeguarding risks, peer influence and unmet needs, with the aim of reducing reoffending and increasing safety for children and communities. Collate and utilise contemporary resources, including virtual-reality headsets, to support intervention work with children and maximise positive outcomes and impact.

## Strengthening Family Support:

*We will strengthen family support by providing effective, coordinated help to parents and carers facing challenges including mental health needs, substance misuse, poverty and difficult home circumstances, reducing risk and improving outcomes for children. We will also equip parents and carers with the knowledge and confidence to understand the risks of serious youth violence, recognise early warning signs, and play a key role in supporting and safeguarding their children.*

## We will achieve this by:

- **Family Help Point:** We have recently launched a new integrated Front Door to Children's Services, designed to ensure early identification of families' needs and swift access to the most appropriate support. Through this approach, we will ensure that families' needs are identified quickly and that they are connected to the right help at the earliest opportunity, enabling timely, coordinated intervention and preventing the escalation of need.

- **Providing an established offer of support:** Through our established Early Help services, we will continue to provide practical and emotional support to families. This support will focus on parenting, routines, healthy lifestyles and overall wellbeing, helping families to build resilience, address challenges early and improve outcomes for children.

- **Youth Justice Health Hub:** Through the Youth Justice Health Hub, we will provide timely CAMHS and Speech and Language Therapy screening and support for children working with the Youth Justice Team. This will support early identification of mental health needs and speech, language

and communication difficulties, enabling appropriate intervention, improved engagement and better outcomes for children.

- **Upskill the Workforce:** We will upskill the workforce across Children's Services, education, health, youth justice and partner agencies to strengthen our collective response to serious youth violence. This will include training to improve understanding of contextual safeguarding, exploitation, trauma, adolescent development and the drivers of violence, alongside building confidence in identifying early warning signs and responding effectively. A shared, trauma-informed approach will support practitioners to engage children and families in a consistent, strengths-based way, addressing risk while promoting protective factors. By strengthening skills, knowledge and professional collaboration, we will improve early identification, reduce escalation and deliver more effective, preventative support for children and young people at risk.

## Improve Educational Support:

*We will work across Children's Services and with our educational partners to reduce exclusions and improve attendance and engagement through strengthened educational support, trauma-informed practice and improved alternative pathways for excluded young people. This will include access to high-quality alternative provision, better system integration, and targeted tutoring and mentoring to ensure children and young people are supported to achieve their full potential.*

## We will achieve this by:

- **Prevention Panels:** We will introduce Prevention Panels within Stockton, utilising the SBC Education Attendance, Behaviour and Concerns (ABC) model to identify emerging issues early and ensure timely, proportionate intervention. These panels will incorporate cases where there has been no further action from Police and will be integrated within existing educational panels to consider all relevant factors and determine the most appropriate support. Working closely with schools and multi-academy trusts, this approach will reduce exclusions and improve school attendance and engagement through coordinated early help, improved system integration and targeted support for children and young people at risk.

- **Working in partnership and maximising resource:** Working with Cleveland Police Early Intervention Officers, schools and other organisations we will strengthen early identification and support for children at risk of serious youth violence. This will include contextual risk awareness, preventative and proportionate interventions, and the use of Pol-Ed resources to support education on personal safety, the law, healthy relationships and wellbeing, helping to reduce escalation and improve safety and outcomes.

- **Youth Support within Schools:** We will work with partners to develop targeted, age-appropriate emotional and life-skills resources for primary and secondary schools, supporting children and young people to build resilience, manage emotions and make safe, positive choices. Resources will

support emotional regulation, confidence, healthy relationships and decision-making, complement existing PSHE and wellbeing provision, and be informed by trauma-informed practice. Through early intervention, this approach will help prevent escalation of need and improve engagement and long-term outcomes.

- **Community Safety Partnership:** We will strengthen post-16 pathways by increasing access to education, training and employment opportunities for young people, particularly 16–17 year olds already known to services. This will include referrals to the Tees Valley Trailblazer scheme to support engagement in skills development, employment pathways and sustained progression. We will also deliver the *Skills to Success* pilot, providing targeted support to build employability skills, confidence and readiness for learning or work. Through coordinated partnership working, this approach will improve participation, reduce the risk of disengagement, and support positive transitions into adulthood.

## We will achieve this by:

# What success looks like

### How will we measure this?

Success will be demonstrated through a sustained reduction in serious youth violence and improved safety, wellbeing and life chances for children and young people. Progress will be measured through a shared performance framework drawing on data from police, health, education, youth justice, safeguarding and community feedback.

Key measures will include:

- **Police:** A reduction in the number and rate of child and young person victims of violence; fewer knife enabled offences and weapons possession; and positive changes in hotspot and trend data.
- **Health:** Reduced A&E attendances and hospital admissions for assault and knife-related injuries among under-25s.
- **Youth Justice:** Fewer first-time entrants, reduced reoffending rates, appropriate use of out-of-court disposals, reduced custody levels, and improved disproportionality outcomes.
- **Education:** Improved attendance and reduced persistent absence; fewer suspensions and permanent exclusions; improved quality and outcomes within alternative provision; increased use of managed moves; and successful reintegration into mainstream education.
- **Safeguarding:** Reduced HOTH and child criminal exploitation referrals, fewer missing episodes, improved stability for looked-after children, and reduced exposure to domestic abuse.
- **Wellbeing and Perception:** Improved perceptions of safety and trust, measured through youth and parent/carer surveys, alongside positive school climate and wellbeing measures.

- **Participation and Progression:** Increased access to positive activities and improved engagement in education, employment or training, reflected in reduced NEET levels for 16–18 and 16–24 year olds.

This framework will support regular monitoring, learning and accountability, ensuring that our approach remains responsive and focused on achieving meaningful, long-term change.

# Governance and Accountability

Strong governance arrangements are essential to ensure that the Serious Youth Violence Strategy is effectively implemented, regularly reviewed and delivers measurable outcomes for children, young people and communities across Stockton-on-Tees.

Overall governance and strategic oversight of this strategy will sit with the Youth Justice Management Board (YJMB), which will act as the lead partnership body responsible for monitoring delivery, scrutinising performance and ensuring partners fulfil their commitments. The YJMB brings together senior representatives from key statutory and voluntary sector agencies and is therefore well placed to provide oversight of the multi-agency response required to prevent and reduce serious youth violence.

The Board will maintain responsibility for:

- Strategic oversight of the Serious Youth Violence Strategy and associated delivery plan.
- Monitoring progress against agreed priorities, objectives and performance measures.
- Reviewing emerging risks, trends and intelligence relating to serious youth violence.
- Ensuring appropriate partnership engagement and accountability across agencies.
- Identifying barriers to delivery and agreeing corrective actions where required.
- Overseeing the use of resources and ensuring activities remain aligned to identified need and evidence-based practice.

Recognising that serious youth violence is a whole-system issue, governance arrangements will be aligned with existing partnership structures to avoid duplication and strengthen accountability. Progress against the strategy will be reported through the Safer Stockton Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board, ensuring that community safety, public health, safeguarding and wider wellbeing considerations are fully reflected in implementation. This reporting structure provides assurance that serious youth violence remains a strategic priority across the local partnership landscape.

The Serious Youth Violence Strategy is also reflected within the Youth Justice Plan, ensuring alignment with broader youth justice priorities and providing a clear line of accountability between strategic objectives and operational delivery.

# Annual Delivery Plan

Delivery of the strategy will be supported by an Annual Serious Youth Violence Delivery Plan, which will set out the specific actions, milestones, responsibilities and performance measures for the forthcoming year. The annual plan will be reviewed and refreshed each year to ensure it continues to respond to local needs, emerging evidence, changing risk factors and the lived experiences of children and young people.

The annual delivery plan will:

- Identify lead agencies and named officers responsible for each action.
- Include measurable outputs and outcomes linked to the strategic priorities.
- Set clear timescales and milestones for delivery.
- Identify resource requirements and opportunities for joint commissioning.
- Reflect findings from local needs assessments, intelligence and performance data.
- Incorporate feedback from children, young people, families and communities.