

## Performance and Resources Scrutiny Programme 2024

Report to: the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex

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### 1.0 **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to provide the Chief Officer Group and PFCC Performance and Scrutiny meeting with an update on Homicide Prevention activity since the last report to the November 2023 meeting.

### 2.0 **Recommendations**

The Board to note the report and progress updates.

### 3.0 **Executive Summary**

This report provides an update on Homicides in Essex and includes analysis of Homicide trends as well of an assessment of Homicide prevention activity and investigation performance.

An update since the last quarter is provided on the four key areas of Domestic Abuse, Mental Health, Gangs and drugs lines and Serious Violence.

An update on the latest Homicide Prevention work across Essex is provided, as well as references to the national Homicide Prevention Framework and the links to Essex through the highlighting of the Essex Rapid Debrief Process as best practice.

This work is completed in conjunction with the Essex Homicide Prevention Strategy

## 4.0 **Introduction**

Homicide Prevention continues to be a clear priority for Essex Police, with the force leading the way nationally in terms of its analysis and rapid debrief initiatives.

Our approach is incorporated into the Homicide Prevention Strategy 2022-26. The overarching aim of the strategy is *“To reduce homicide in Essex by tackling serious violence and the contributing factors that lead to homicide”* and is underpinned by four main themes in line with the National NPCC approach:

1. Domestic Abuse
2. Mental Health
3. Drugs – including County Lines and drug enabled violence
4. Serious Violence: including Knife Crime, Serious Youth Violence, alcohol related violence and the Night Time Economy

The strategy articulates the strong governance arrangements that support our focus on Homicide Prevention and signpost the other significant areas of scrutiny and oversight that are linked to the four main themes.

Essex Police have continued to engage with the NPCC and College of Policing around the development of their ‘What Works Toolkit’ which launched in October 2022.

## 5.0 **Current Work and Performance**

### 5.1 **Overview of Performance Analysis**

**Previous whole year overview (for context)** - There were 15 homicides recorded from April 2022 to March 2023. This is a reduction in homicide from 2021/22 where there were 23 recorded (and a reduction from 2020/21 where 17 homicides were recorded). Two of the offences recorded within this timeframe occurred in previous years, bringing the total amount of homicides committed in 2022/23 to 13 (although Home Office figures will show the official figure of 15).

**Reporting Quarter Overview (Q3)**- In the reporting quarter (October 2023 to December 2023), there were 2 recorded homicides. In both, suspects have been identified and charged and are progressing towards trial.

**Calendar Year 2023 (Q4, Q1, Q2, Q3)** – There have been 14 homicides recorded from Jan 2023 - December 2023. The homicide solved rate for 2023 to date is 85.7% (12 from 14).

Investigation of homicide remains strong and thorough, leading to successful convictions at court. Court results from Q3 (October - December 2023):

**Op Melrose** – In November 2023, Caolan Gormley was the eleventh and final person to be convicted in relation to the 39 deaths of Vietnamese migrants in 2019. He was convicted of immigration offences and sentenced to 7 years imprisonment.

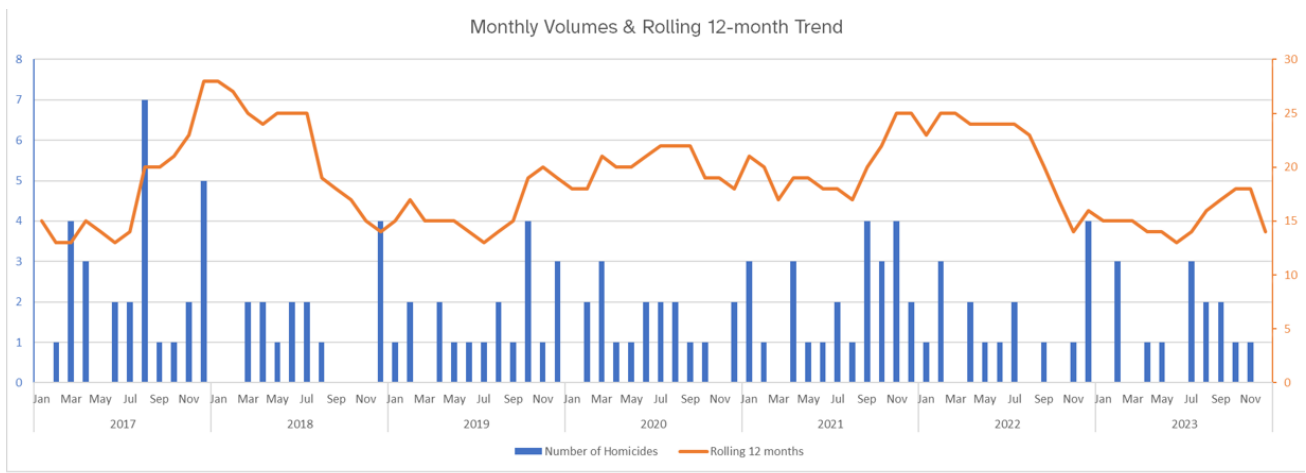
**Op Jura** – In February 2023, 85-year-old John Berry murdered his wife at their home in Clacton before phoning police to tell them what he had done. In November 2023, John Berry admitted murder prior to the trial taking place. On 5<sup>th</sup> January 2024, he was sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum of ten years.

**Op Monument** – In June 2022, Ertan Ersoy murdered his wife in their dwelling in Colchester. He tried to maintain he was defending himself against her; however in October 2023 was found guilty of her murder and was sentenced to a minimum of 25 years imprisonment.

**Op Earl** – was the complex investigation into an attempted murder involving a 14-year-old boy in Southend in October 2022. This investigation was thwart with challenges, but in November 2023, two men were sentenced for GBH with intent and received sentences of 12 and 15 years.

**Long-Term Homicide Trends:**

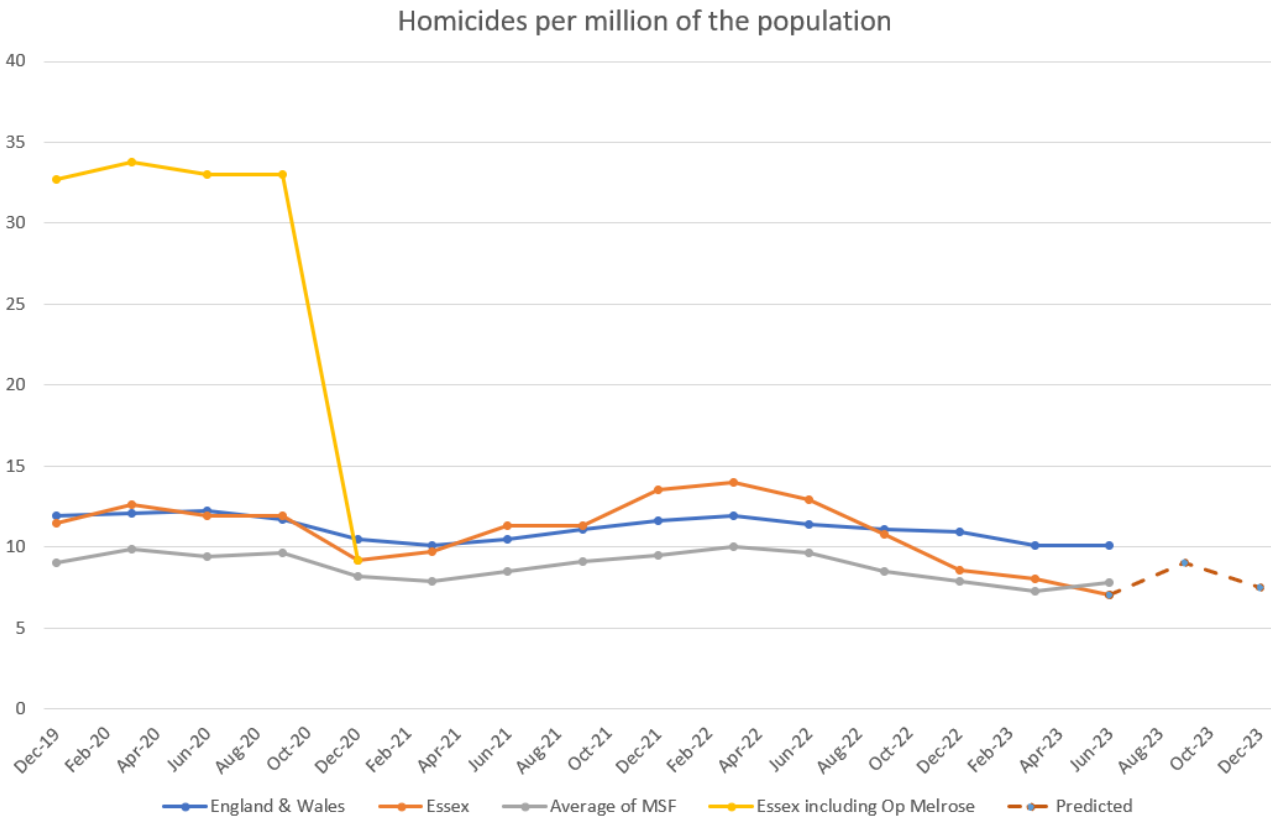
The long-term homicide trend is slightly decreasing, generally being less than two homicides per month. There were no homicides in January, March, June or December 2023. However, July, August and September saw a total of seven recorded homicides, which is a peak when considering the last rolling year, but when considered over more historic data is not as significant and this has reduced again.



The overall rolling 12 month rate of homicides (orange line) shows a steady decrease in the second half of 2022 and a gradual decline of that line to reflect the lower number of recorded homicides in 2022 and into 2023, and reflects a drop in this reporting period after the rise in the last period.

When comparing the 12 month rolling homicide rate with most similar forces and the national average, since September 2019, Essex follows the trend of the most similar force group (not including Op Melrose), but consistency sits above it. However, for the first time, it has fallen below the most similar force line. When compared to the national average, since October 2019, Essex has more closely following this national rate but has dropped below this since Oct 2022. Predictions (using local

rather than HO data) indicates the homicide rate within Essex will rise slightly, before falling back down, and will still sit below the national average.



*Office National Statics published figures (most recent release Jun 2023)*

Using local data, the number of homicides in the rolling 12 months (to September 23) is 17 and the number in the rolling 12 months to December 23 reduces to 14. This equates to a rise to 9.1 homicides per million in September, reducing to 7.1 in December. This rate would be below the current national rate (10.1) and the same as the MSF. This is reflected above in the dotted 'predicted' line.

In the reporting calendar year (Jan 2023 Dec 2023), there have been 14 homicides (3 in Q1 and 2 in Q2 and 7 in Q3 and 2 in Q4). This is the joint lowest number of homicides since 2013 (there were also 14 homicides recorded in 2016 and 2018).

**Disparity Data**

The victim gender picture continues to change. The portion of male victims in 2021 was 70%. This increased to 75% in 2022 and has decreased to 50% in the 12 months to December 2023. Interestingly, this coincides with a higher proportion of Domestic Abuse related homicide offences seen in 2023 with 36% (five offences) compared to 19% and 28% in the two previous calendar years.

As reported previously, work has been completed to compare victim ethnicity. Data between 2016 and the end of December 23 shows that:

- 82% of homicide Victims in Essex were White (population in 2021 census - 88.8%)
- 8% of homicide Victims in Essex were Black or Black British (population – 3.4%)
- 4% of homicide Victims in Essex were Asian or Asian British (population – 4.2%)

Volumes are very low, so taking homicides recorded in 2023 (total 14) there have been no black victims; however, there is one Asian victim and one Middle Eastern victim – causing large percentage swings – as this would equate to a 7% of homicide victims being from an Asian or Middle Eastern background.

**Primary Influencing Factors**

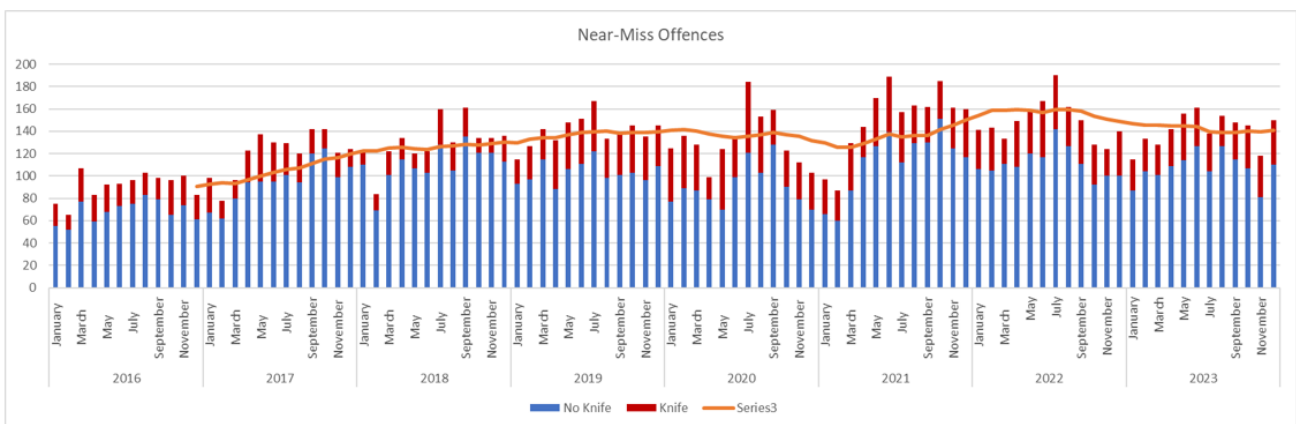
So far in 2023, Essex has seen some more unusual homicides when considering influencing factors:

- Domestic Abuse x5 (2 of which involved the death of parents)
- Acquaintance x3 (all of which were in or around a dwelling)
- Drug Driven x1
- Spontaneous Altercation x3 (all in the street, one was Night-time economy related)

The primary influencing factors remain unchanged with the largest influencing factor being Domestic Abuse, followed by Spontaneous Altercation. Mental Health is featuring less frequently, as is County Lines.

When considering ‘near-miss’ offences (consisting of GBH with intent, GBH, and attempted GBH, the below graph highlights these offences since 2016. The rolling 12-month trend increased consistently during 2021 but stabilised and has decreased towards the end of 2022 and into 2023, which continues to decrease.

There is no notable change in the proportion of knife related near-miss offences. This is a significant proportion of 24-25% of offences but does remain consistent.



## **5.2 Home Office Homicide Data**

As part of the Beating Crime Plan measures, Essex is closely reviewing our position against the Home Office outlier criteria.

The latest data shows Essex continues to not meet any of those criteria (which is the continued position since the last report) and are therefore not considered an outlier as they have been in previous periods due to the lower homicide rate in 2022, which has continued into 2023.

## **5.3 Essex Police Homicide Prevention Approach**

### **5.3.1 Homicide Prevention Strategy**

The Essex Police Homicide Prevention Strategy 2022-26 remains in place and is used to underpin our homicide prevention approach.

The overarching aim of the strategy is to “*To reduce homicide in Essex by tackling serious violence and the contributing factors that lead to homicide*”. Key prevention activity is completed in conjunction with the strategy.

### **5.3.2 Homicide Prevention Rapid Debrief Process**

The Homicide Prevention Rapid Debrief process is now well established.

There has been a total of 19 debriefs (one de-brief since the last report).

In total 155 actions have been raised as part of the debrief process to date, of which 127 have been completed. Of the 28 outstanding, 21 are from two recent de-briefs. The working group ensures traction and completion of these actions and meets 6-weekly.

### **5.3.3 Homicide Prevention Activity**

#### **Domestic Abuse**

#### **Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS)**

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS – Clare’s law) is a key prevention tactic around Homicide reduction. The scheme falls under 2 parts; the ‘Right to Know’ and the ‘Right to Ask’. An internal review highlighted concerns with how Essex Police were managing DVDS, due to a low number of disclosures being made and the sense of ‘missed opportunities’ by not maximising the use of this valuable tool. To address this, a scheme was picked up as a workstream within the DARA project, with all the new processes ‘going live’ on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023. Since this date, Essex Police has significantly improved both the number of disclosures being made, enhanced the content of those disclosures, and is now actively checking all High and Medium risk DA cases for the opportunity to proactively conduct a disclosure (Right to Know) to victims.

Prior to the changes, Essex Police was disclosing in around 5% of cases and the disclosure was previous convictions only. This equated to around 40 disclosures per year. Between 1<sup>st</sup> August – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023, Essex Police made 264 disclosures (around 60 per month). This is 65.7% of all processed applications.

The information now contained in the disclosure follows the new Home Office guidance and includes previous convictions, allegations and any relevant intelligence, which ensures the recipient is receiving enough information to make an informed decision about continuing in the relationship with a potential abuser.

**DA Threat to Life Cohort.**

Essex Police has been working with iteration 2 (Op Puffin) of this cohort over the last year and seeking to enhance the design to continue to identify those perpetrators most at risk of committing a DA Homicide. Due to the number of different data points and risk indicators required, the creation of ‘iteration 3’ was proving problematic. Thanks to Home Office funding through the STAR bid, Essex Police is now working with BAE systems to progress the design iteration 3 of this cohort, using AI technology (inference and reasoning) to capture a range of risk indicators (identified through academic research and previous Domestic Homicides) to identify those perpetrators most in need of proactive offender management by our Domestic Abuse Problem Solving Teams.

The cohort design should be completed by March 2024, at which point this will be taken to an independent Ethics Board for consideration.

**Serious Violence**

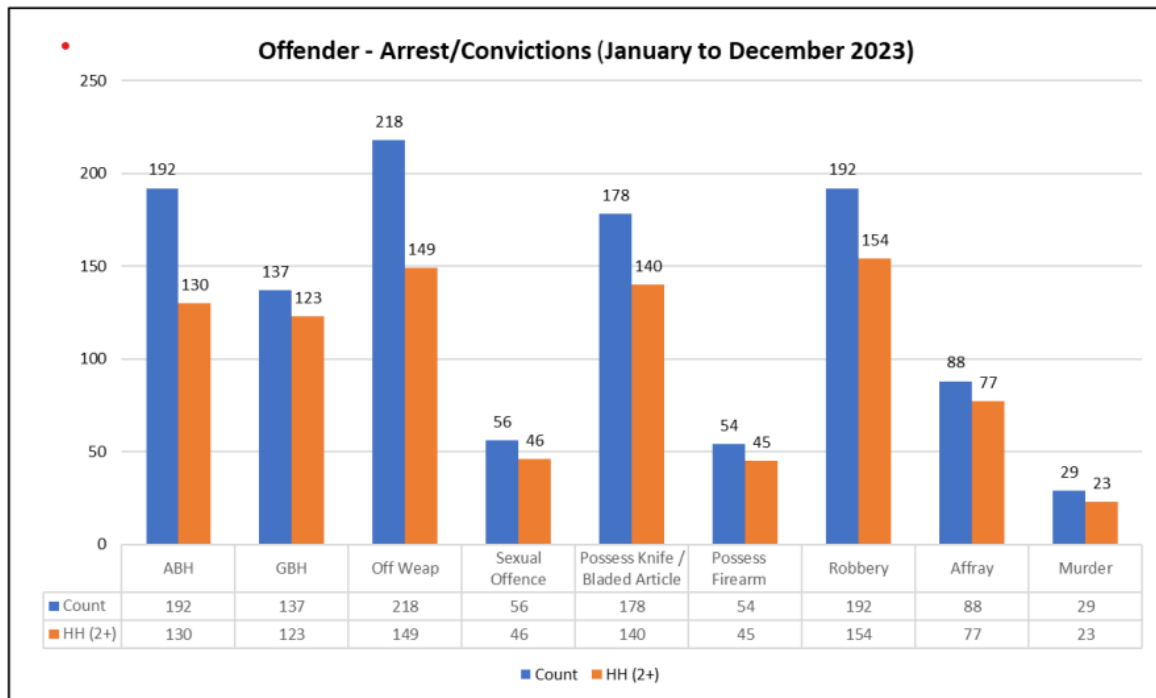
Essex Police continues to tackle the threat posed by County Lines and associated exploitation through the work delivered by the Serious Violence Unit. The Serious Violence Unit is made up of two elements that focus on County Lines and associated exploitation. The Op Raptor and Op Orochi teams investigate, pursue, disrupt, and dismantle County Lines that operate in Essex. The Prevent, Protect and Prepare Team (PPP Team) conduct work to safeguard, prevent and provide diversion opportunities for those involved in County Lines and associated exploitation. The team also delivers several measures designed to prevent crime and those that are vulnerable to exploitation.

SVU Performance Oct - Dec 23	Total	Yearly Total Jan to Dec 23	Average Quarterly 2023	Average Quarterly 2022
Arrests	112	497	124	148
RIC - 68%	82	336	84	62
Searches	69	350	88	100
Weapons Seized	18	92	23	31
Cash Seized	£35k	£287k	£72k	£190
Vulnerable People Safeguarded	120	393	98	24

Performance data shows a slight reduction throughout 2023, this is due to several reasons. The reduction in funding from the National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) saw Essex Police receive £250k less than the previous year, which impacted upon the team’s ability to continue to perform to previous levels. However, the levels of performance through 2023 are impressive.

As a result of the work above, the team closed 70 County Lines across Essex and seized 137 deal phones, further impacting upon the criminal networks throughout 2023. The biggest reason for the slight reduction in performance figures is the change in approach throughout 2023. The goal of the SVU in 2023 was to focus on those County Lines and offenders that cause the greatest harm and who pose the greatest threat, this was a move away from solely targeting low level street dealers throughout 2022. It was felt that this approach would have the greatest impact on reducing homicides linked to County Lines across Essex.

The SVU has recently conducted an evaluation of the 497 arrests conducted in 2023, to establish their antecedents prior to SVU intervention and what levels of high harm or risk that posed to the community.



The above chart shows the number of offenders that were arrested who had previous antecedents for relevant High Harm offences, and of those who had two or more high harm markers. This is broken down into the different High Harm categories. Of the 497 that were arrested in 2023, 399 had one or more High Harm markers. This is an impressive statistic and demonstrates that the SVU is targeting those that cause the greatest harm.



The below chart shows a comparison to 2022, which clearly shows the increase in high harm offenders targeted in 2023.

Offence	2022		2023		Difference	
	Count	HH (2+)	Count	HH (2+)	Count	HH (2+)
Offenders (arrested/convicted)	559	124	497	337	-62	213
ABH	67	51	192	130	125	79
GBH	36	31	137	123	101	92
Off Weap	85	63	218	149	133	86
Sexual Offence	17	15	56	46	39	31
Possess Knife / Bladed Article	111	83	178	140	67	57
Possess Firearm	24	22	54	45	30	23
Robbery	82	67	192	154	110	87
Affray	37	33	88	77	51	44
Murder	5	1	29	23	24	22

Of note, 29 of the offenders arrested in 2023 had previous arrests, or markers to suggest they were involved in previous homicides. The number of offenders arrested in 2023 who had two or more High Harm markers was a 172% increase compared to 2022.

**OP Firefly** – is the identification of County Lines nominals that exploit missing children to commit criminal offences. Through collaboration with the Missing Persons Team, the SVU analyses phone data where concerns are raised around exploitation. This approach has continued to develop and has seen some great success in Essex. This approach has identified missing children that have been exploited and has resulted in the charge of Modern Slavery offences, a first in this approach across the region. This has also led to new processes introduced across Essex which has resulted in seven live Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders obtained in Essex. This approach has now been adopted by regional forces.

**OP Pester** is a national tactic designed to prevent the activity of County Lines. Historically this tactic was used to deter suspects from supplying controlled substances. The tactic would see a text message being sent to the phone number responsible for supplying controlled substances to prevent further offending. Nationally this tactic was largely unsuccessful.

SVU has developed this tactic to send messages to those that are buying controlled substances from County Lines, providing information of support agencies and treatment services, and links to their websites designed to prevent further offences being committed. From October to December 2023, SVU sent 499 messages to vulnerable people offering support. In total the team sent 1140 messages in 2023.

**Project Housebuilder** is the national response to deaths caused by contaminated heroin, through substances such as Nitazene. To date there have been 67 deaths across the UK connected with heroin contamination. Essex has five recorded deaths linked to Nitazene, with the first being in August 2023. SVU worked with Public

Health and HM Coroner Service to introduce measures to identify and respond to such incidents, with a view of reducing the threat posed. To date the SVU has identified, arrested, and charged and remanded several offenders connected to the supply of the substances connected to these deaths. This has been supported by bespoke public messaging to raise awareness to vulnerable people. The SVU response has led the national approach and has been identified as national best practice.

### **Alcohol and Night-Time Economy (NTE)**

Being the busiest quarter (October-December), all districts developed and executed proportionate local plans to ensure visibility, licence compliance and safety awareness within their respective NTE. The four primary NTE areas, Southend, Chelmsford, Clacton and Colchester all updated their respective 4P plans ahead of this period. The NTE was also supported by our Operational Support Group who had their own plans in place to support visible policing under Op Mistletoe.

During the last quarter, the 'Safe Space' in Southend was continued, as well as one in Basildon and Colchester, funded from the Op Grip budget. These Safe Spaces have been incredibly well received by the public. In October and November combined officers working as part of the safe spaces within the NTE engaged with over 18,000 people. Due to the success in Southend, the local authority is sourcing funding to make this a permanent fixture.

Work to highlight VAWG within the NTE has continued and intensified. Discussions about VAWG offences and preventative opportunities such as 'Ask Angela' are now built into our licensing checks across the county. We are actively encouraging NTE venues to become white ribbon accredited, with one venue in Harlow successful in achieving accreditation. We are exploring ways to learn from this through the NTE Harm Reduction Group to assist other venues in achieving the same. This drive around promoting VAWG awareness has been helped by the increase in licensing check compliance. In October we achieved 89% compliance across the force, the highest it has been for several years. We continue to push for 100% across the board through the NTE Harm Reduction Group.

The licensing team continues to support the policing of the NTE well. One highlight is a problem premises in Tendring whose licence was revoked after the licensing officer remained in his vehicle within the car park, witnessing all kinds of activity in breach of the licensing principles, including open drug dealing.

Operation Gerberra was launched in December with funding from the Home Office as part of their Winter Homicide Prevention campaign. Essex Police deployed plain clothes officers alongside uniformed officers into the NTE in Southend, Colchester and Clacton, every weekend from December (and will continue until the end of February). The purpose of the deployments is to identify indicators that people are angry or agitated and intervening before escalation. This is being supported where possible, by Disruptive Effects Officers, who have had additional training in identifying small changes in body language, which might be indicative of nervousness or agitation.

Crime within the NTE continues to follow a downward trend. Last year, up to 31/01/2023, there were 1866 offences within the NTE. This year that has reduced to 1455, equating to a 22% reduction. For the quarter October-December 2023, total crime fell from 137 in the previous quarter to 98. This is a 28% reduction, which is impressive considering this quarter contained the festive period.

One of the biggest contributors to harm within the night-time economy is violence with injury. This offence type has seen a 26% reduction year on year for the same period, falling from 695 offences, to 514. 181 fewer offences. In the last quarter, we again saw a significant reduction of 28%, compared to the previous quarter. There were 98 violence with injury offences this quarter, compared to 137 in the one before.

As well as the overall number of offences reducing, we are also seeing a reduction in the harm score which provides a proven analytical assessment. The combined harm score for the NTE in October and November 2023 was 43,312, compared to 63,760 for the same period in 2022, equating to a 32% reduction.

### **Vulnerability - Mental Health**

The C&PP Mental Health team (MHT) is now fully established having been fully recruited to in October 2023 with an establishment of seven officers and staff.

The role of the team is to provide the holistic overview of MH across Essex aligned to the three areas of Response, Investigation and Prevention.

Response – Responsibilities in this area include S136 compliance which has led to a 28% reduction in S136 detentions being carried out in the last 12 months signposting to more suitable pathways. There has also been a reduction of wait times for S136 handovers by half which has been achieved through an agreed escalation process, comms and training to officers and staff. There is also a daily governance process, that sees the MHT reporting into Gold around ongoing s136 detentions. This provides opportunity for early feedback and learning, as well as senior level oversight to assist in coming to resolutions at a partnership level. In reducing these detentions, ensures those in crisis are signposted to the correct care service, and prevents unnecessary criminalisation. This has seen approximately 2000 officer hours saved, which can be focused on dealing with core crime, and keeping people safe.

Investigation – The team has been working closely with the criminal justice process, looking at developing suspect and victim feedback panels within MH. Work has been ongoing with EPUT to develop training videos on how and when to report violence to police, including hate crime. An eastern region board, led by Essex Police, has been developed, looking at how we can improve the response to violence within health care settings, working closely with the CPS to improve the victim experience under the banner of Op Cavell.

Prevention – One of the core functions of the MHT is to develop a cohort of individuals under the Mental Health Risk Management Board (MHRMB) subgroups. These individuals are those identified as having indicators of homicide or serious violence within MIH. A simple referral process was developed internally through the

MHT1 form which has seen around 250 referrals since its inception in April 2023. Partners are also able to refer into this process, which looks at identifying a multi-agency meeting, to discuss and agree tactical plans to reduce the risk of harm.

These subgroups are fed into the overarching MHRMB which acts as the strategic forum to manage risks involving MH across pan Essex.

The MHT have been heavily focused on the delivery of Right Care, Right Person (RCRP) across Essex. This has been set out across four phases:

- Concern for welfare – live from September 2023.
- Section 135/136 and voluntary patients – live from November 2023.
- Absent without leave – due to commence January 2024.
- Transportation of patient – due to commence January 2024.

The principles of RCRP which have been agreed at a national level, through a national partnership agreement that has been set up and agreed by the:

- Department of health and social care
- NHS England
- Home Office
- National Police Chiefs Council

RCRP is a model that allows Essex Police to better meet its core policing duties and importantly improves the service provided to those in need of medical and social care assistance, preventing the inappropriate criminalisation, particularly of those in a MIH crisis.

This has seen the need for:

- Partnership briefings.
- Tactical and Strategic Governance
- Changes to policy and procedure underpinned by legal guidance.
- Development of MOUs.
- Force wide training.
- Data tracking and governance.

This has already seen a reduction in over 50% of the volume of concern for welfare calls attended, which allows Essex Police to focus on preventing serious violence and harm, whilst also ensuring those in need receive the right care, from the right agency from the outset.

#### **5.4 NPCC Homicide Prevention Framework**

The NPCC prevention framework continues to be developed, and now has eleven areas of best practice. Essex Police continues to engage with this national framework and has recently submitted the Mental Health Risk Management Board as an example of best practice.

The Homicide Prevention board includes a standing agenda item where nationally highlighted best practice can be reviewed by the key strategic leads to understand if this can be adopted into Essex.

## **6.0 Implications (Issues)**

There are no implications or issues identified in this reporting period.

## **6.1 Links to Police and Crime Plan Priorities**

This work continues to contribute to the police and crime plan in relation to tackling and preventing all kinds of violence resulting in homicide – including domestic abuse and drug driven violence.

## **6.2 Demand**

This report does not link to the PA Consulting Demand Analysis Report.

## **6.3 Risks/Mitigation**

There are no new risks identified.

## **6.4 Equality and/or Human Rights Implications**

There are no specific identified impacts on equality, diversity or human rights. Homicide analysis continues to monitor ethnicity and gender to ascertain any levels of disproportionality on homicide victims. The homicide prevention strategy works in conjunction with the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Strategy and will do so and be refreshed in line with the new census data.

## **6.5 Health and Safety Implications**

None.

## **7.0 Consultation/Engagement**

D/Supt Gary Biddle – Serious Violence lead  
D/Supt Matt Cornish – Domestic Abuse lead  
C/Insp Paul Hogben – Night Time Economy lead  
D/Supt Natalia Ross – Mental Health Lead  
PSE Mike George – Analyst  
PSE Mark Hall – Review Team

## **7.1 Scrutiny and Governance**

The strong governance processes remain in place through the Homicide Prevention board and quarterly reporting, and has been bolstered with the Rapid Debrief working group. This is underpinned by the Homicide Prevention Strategy.

## **8.0 Actions for Improvement**

In order to monitor and track the recommendations, best practice and future work that touches upon the area of homicide prevention, we continue with our use of the action tracker which contains areas of work from the following sources:

- National recommendations from the Vulnerability, knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP).
- HMICFRS recommendations to the Metropolitan Police following the murders committed by Stephen Port.
- National recommendations from the HMICFRS following report into preventing homicide.
- Best practice identified in the HMICFRS report into preventing homicide.
- Recommendations from Essex Police's homicide profile.
- Other recommendations or areas of best practice.

These will be tracked and monitored via the Homicide Prevention Board.

## **9.0 Future Work/Development and Expected Outcome**

In line with the new strategy and national best practice, we continue to develop our preventative approach to the four key areas (domestic abuse, mental health, drug driven violence and serious violence).

Work is on-going with HM Coroner service to digitalise the form police currently complete when attending an unexpected death in the community. This digitalisation will help analysts to understand patterns in community deaths which will assist in prevention and homicide detection.