



# SaferCentral

Community Safety Partnership



## Strategy 2024-2027



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# The Community Safety Partnership

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is made up of five responsible authorities.

- Bedfordshire Police
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Offender Management Services<sup>1</sup>
- Bedfordshire, Luton, and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board

## Our Aim

- Safer Central aims to reduce crime, disorder, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and other behaviour affecting the local community, as well as reduce the misuse of drugs, alcohol, and other substances, reduce the fear of crime, and increase public confidence.

## Partnership Strategy

Each CSP is required to produce a strategy which builds on the Partnership Strategic Assessment<sup>2</sup>, it sets out information about crime and disorder in the local area and identifies the priorities that will be the CSPs focus for the period between April 2024 to March 2027. The strategy sets out CSP expectations, what the CSP will deliver and how the partnership will work together and with the community to deliver its aim.

This Partnership Strategy will help to develop and plan our activities and projects to meet the needs of our residents. It is about providing an intelligence led approach to community safety, ensuring that we get the right resources in the right place at the right time, to continue to reduce crime and disorder in the area.

## Our Vision

Community safety is a high public priority and one that can affect the quality of life for individuals and entire communities.

Partnership approaches to tackling crime and disorder are largely built on the principle that no single agency can deal with, or be responsible for dealing with, complex community safety and crime problems. This is why we work as 'Safer Central', a partnership that tackles issues together, for sustainable improvements and better outcomes for the community.



Central Bedfordshire  
**Community Safety  
Partnership**

<sup>1</sup> Offender Management Services include the National Probation Service and BeNCH CRC

<sup>2</sup> The Partnership Strategic Assessment is an annual statutory requirement of every CSP. Using partnership data, information and intelligence, risks and vulnerabilities are highlighted, priority areas identified, and recommendations made.

# Central Bedfordshire Overview

## Demography

Central Bedfordshire is a mainly rural location in the East of England and is a desirable place to live and work. It covers 716 square kilometres and is the 11<sup>th</sup> largest unitary<sup>3</sup> local authority in England and the 15<sup>th</sup> largest by population size. The most recent population estimates indicate that there are approximately 294,300<sup>4</sup> people living in Central Bedfordshire.



21% of households are pensioner households in Central Bedfordshire

51% of Central Bedfordshire's population is female, with 21% of households being 'pensioner households', which is in line with the national average. 14%<sup>5</sup> are 'one person households', 19.5% 'lone parent families, and 35% 'married or civil partnership couple'.

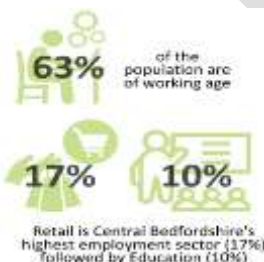
Overall, levels of deprivation in Central Bedfordshire are low with many areas in the least deprived areas in England. Out of a total of 157, three lower super output areas (LSOA)<sup>6</sup> are in the most deprived 10-20% in England and a further ten are in the most deprived 20-30%.

The majority of Central Bedfordshire's population is 'White British', with a slightly higher proportion of 'White Gypsy' and 'White Irish' than the rest of England. Central Bedfordshire has a much lower black and minority ethnic (BME) population than the rest of England, and also a lower number of residents who were born outside the UK.



84% of the population are White British

Central Bedfordshire has a slightly higher Gypsy & Traveller population compared to England



63% of Central Bedfordshire's population are of working age, and just 2.2% of the population are claiming unemployment benefits. Central Bedfordshire's highest employment sector is retail at 17%, followed by education at 10%. 5% of the population are unemployed and claiming unemployment benefits.

<sup>3</sup> A type of local authority that has a single tier and is responsible for all local government functions within its area

<sup>4</sup> ONS Census Data 2021

<sup>5</sup> Local Insight Central Bedfordshire – August 2023

<sup>6</sup> Lower super output area – a geographic area used by the Office of National Statistics for the purpose of reporting small area statistics. Each LSOA will have a population of around 1,600

# Crime & Anti-social Behaviour

In the last three years recorded crime in Central Bedfordshire has increased by 6%. This includes a 20% increase in shoplifting, 7% increase in vehicle offences, a 7% increase in violent crime and a 23% increase in sexual offences.



Decreases were seen in domestic burglary offences which decreased by 23% over the last three years. Criminal damage also reduced by 7%, possession of drugs by 20% and business robberies by 60%.

Central Bedfordshire continues to experience seasonal crime patterns, such as increases in domestic burglaries during the winter months and anti-social behaviour in the summer months. Reports of nuisance motorcycles increase significantly in the spring and summer months and levels are increasing on a yearly basis.

We also know that there are crimes that remain under-reported and have significant impact on those involved. Rape Crisis, a national charity reports that five in six women and four in five men do not report sexual offences to the police. Women's Aid, a leading domestic abuse charity advises that domestic abuse is a largely hidden crime and data shows that only 18% of women who had experienced partner abuse in a 12-month period reported the abuse to the police.

ASB continues to reduce, with a 30% decrease in reported incidents over the three-year period. Around 20% of all reported incidents relate to nuisance vehicles, this includes cars, motorcycles, and e-scooters.



Central Bedfordshire continues to experience fly tipping with 6845 fly tips reported to Central Bedfordshire Council between 01/04/2020 and 30/01/2022. A large proportion of fly tipping cases are the result of a resident paying someone who does not have the correct Waste Transfer Notices to remove and dispose of their waste.

## What we will do in 2024-2027

- We will continue to work in Partnership to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour
- We will continue to work together to tackle re-offending
- We will continue to promote crime prevention advice

# Achievement Against our Priorities 2021-2024

Between 2021-2024 our priorities were:

- Priority one – Identifying and disrupting county lines/drug dealing and cuckooing
- Priority two – Raising awareness of domestic abuse
- Emerging issue - Cybercrime

## Priority One – Identifying and disrupting County Lines/drug dealing and cuckooing

County lines is where drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries, usually by the coercion of children and/or vulnerable adults. The 'County Line' is the mobile phone line used to deal drugs. Exploitation of the vulnerable is integral to the county lines business model and can extend to criminals taking over the homes of vulnerable people, known as cuckooing.

The last Central Bedfordshire Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment 2021-2024 identified that:

- Urban street gangs and county lines networks were increasingly involved in the supply of Class A and B drugs at street level.
- County lines presented a threat to vulnerable young people entering and exiting the area.
- Almost half of all residents identified drug use and dealing as a moderate or big problem in their local area.
- There had been an increase in drug related anti-social behaviour and in suspected cases of cuckooing.

### What we achieved

- A 3% decrease in drug related anti-social behaviour
- The police regularly promoted good news stories relating to county lines/drug dealing
- Professionals were trained on how to share information or concerns with the police, and the information supported proactive policing operations including warrants and arrests
- The regular communication campaigns raised awareness of cuckooing and how to report which led to an increase in reporting by residents
- The Council created a cuckooing process to support vulnerable residents. On average 3-4 potential victims are referred each week
- A cuckooing training package was created and delivered to professionals, raising awareness of cuckooing, how to spot the signs and how to make a referral

- Pan Bedfordshire Child Exploitation toolkit training was delivered to 125 professionals in Central Bedfordshire, providing tactics on how to tackle and disrupt exploitation
- Three briefings were delivered to 165 General Practitioners (GPs) on exploitation and safeguarding
- The Office of Police Crime Commissioner (OPCC) ran a Youth Conference for Year 9 students which covered topics including how to report crime, county lines, knife crime and exploitation.
- The police arrested two key gang nominals in relation to the exploitation of children. They have since been sentenced to 15 years each in prison.
- The police stopped 60 lorries at Toddington Services as part of an ongoing crackdown on organised immigration crime and human trafficking and joining forces with Gangmasters Labour Abuse Authority for two days of action visiting nail bars in Biggleswade and Dunstable.
- The partnership was involved in an “End Child Exploitation” campaign. Young people were advised of apps to help and support them. The Council undertook engagement in Biggleswade, Flitwick and Leighton Buzzard providing advice on county lines and cuckooing and what signs to look for and where to report.
- In January 2022, The TREE Project (Tackling, Reducing and Ending Exploitation) was launched, various partners such as police, the Council, Bedfordshire Youth Offending Service undertook outreach work in various areas, speaking to young people and the wider community and signposting to support services.

## Priority Two – Raising awareness of Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse can take a wide variety of forms including physical violence, degrading and coercive behaviour, economic control, stalking and harassment, and online/digital abuse. It is a devastating crime which creates long term impact on victims, their children, and the wider community.

The last CSP Strategic Assessment identified domestic abuse as a continuing priority for the partnership due to the continued high volumes of incidents, low levels of reporting and the potential high for victims.

### What we achieved

- Creation of material and weekly updates about all aspects of domestic abuse on social media pages and websites to continue to raise awareness with residents
- Domestic Abuse Responder programme continues to expand, responders are trained to be able to provide support and advice to anyone living with, or who knows someone that is living with domestic abuse. The scheme was launched in 2019 and now has 150 responders across Central Bedfordshire.
- The Council have engaged with local businesses promoting the Support Hub scheme. This scheme asks local businesses to provide a safe space for someone who needs to

access support for domestic abuse. There are 117 BDAP Support Hubs across Central Bedfordshire. This include a range of establishments such as schools, banks, Children’s Centres, pubs and libraries.

- The Council regularly shares domestic abuse literature at engagement events.
- The police launched a Male Violence Against Women and Girls strategy. The strategy work includes specific operations to tackle perpetrators, raising awareness and encouraging reporting from schools and Night-Time Economy venues as well as from women from diverse backgrounds.
- The police created a toolkit as part of ‘Everyone’s business: Creating a Safe Space for Women in the Workplace’, the toolkit includes a series of practical measures employers can take to keep their employees safe and root out inappropriate, predatory behaviour. As part of this the police ran online webinars for business representatives to talk through some of the measures and how they can launch these.
- The Fire & Rescue Service created Red Bell, which aims to create an internal support system for their staff.

## Emerging Issue – Cybercrime

The United Kingdom is a digitalized society and is one of the world’s leading digital nations. With increasing reliance and use of digital devices globally, cybercrime has been become a national security issue. Cybercrime is increasing in volume and becoming more increasingly complex in nature and is significantly under-reported and therefore, the true scale and impact is not possible to assess.

The Community Safety Partnership Strategy 2021-2024 identified that we did not know the true prevalence of cybercrime in Central Bedfordshire or understand if local trends were like those seen nationally.

### What we achieved

- The council regularly delivers Friends Against Scams sessions to Community Groups, these are always well received and there have been a few disclosures during these sessions and victims are signposted to where they can report and access support.
- A small multi-agency Cyber Crime Group was formed, and a short survey was produced to understand the prevalence of cybercrime in Central Bedfordshire, but responses were lower than expected. Those that were received showed residents regularly receive email/text scams/phishing emails.
- Our knowledge has increased, and we are now confident that local trends and issues mirror those seen at a national level.



# Safer Central Survey

As well as analysing data and consulting with key stakeholders, we make sure that the views of our residents are understood and addressed. The Safer Central Survey is available all year round, is quick and simple to complete and provides the opportunity for residents to share their thoughts on crime and community safety in their local area.

Survey responses continue to increase annually. In 2021 1486 responses were received, this increased to 3548 in 2023, an increase of 2062 responses.

The map to the right shows surveys by respondent's home address, responses are spread across Central Bedfordshire, but there is a need to improve responses from more rural areas.



## What you told us

The 2023 survey tells us that 75% of respondents feel Central Bedfordshire is a safe place to live. This number decreases to 45% when asked if they feel safe at night.

When asked what makes them feel safe, most respondents said good lighting, police presence and CCTV.

Females were more likely to feel unsafe at night than males and many respondents said that the constant smell of cannabis reduced their feelings of safety.

When it came to ASB, 40% of respondents felt that it had increased in their area, which is in contrast to the decrease that has been seen in reported incidents. Fly tipping, nuisance motorcycles and dog fouling were considered the most serious issues.

37% of respondents felt crime had increased in their local area, which is an increase of 6% when compared to the last strategy period. 45% of people said their biggest concern was people using and/or selling drugs and 45% reported vehicle crime as their biggest concern.

When given the opportunity to discuss any other issues not covered by the survey residents flagged speeding, vehicle nuisance, use of e-scooters and burglary as a concern.

Friendly neighbours who would always help you.  
Never had any issues.

Male, 60yrs

### What we will do in 2024-2027

- We will continue to identify further opportunities to share our survey with residents
- We will focus on increasing responses from residents in rural areas

# Safer Central Priorities – 2024-2027

## Deciding the priorities

The CSP Strategic Assessment is an intelligence led process that identifies key crime, disorder and ASB issues affecting the residents of Central Bedfordshire. It considers what needs to be achieved to help improve community safety, including how the local community can feel assured and confident that their concerns are being addressed.

Part of the Strategic Assessment process involves horizon scanning<sup>7</sup> to understand the overall community safety environment, both locally and nationally and any changes or issues that could affect community safety in the next few years. A variety of sources of information are used in the process including new/amended legislation, government publications, research publications, local or national plans, trends in community views and local and national policies and strategies.

To ensure a targeted approach, a risk matrix is used to identify the most significant community safety issues in Central Bedfordshire. It uses a variety of data sets to identify crimes with the demands and considers the harm to individuals, the community, the environment, and the economic and financial implications. The likelihood of each issue is also considered in terms of the frequency and volume.

By using the matrix and the results of the Safer Central Survey we can identify those issues which are high risk as well as addressing public perceptions on crime and community safety.

This process has identified the three priorities for Safer Central for the next three years.

## Priorities 2024-2027

### Priority One

- Identifying and disrupting cuckooing

### Priority Two

- Fly-tipping

### Priority Three

- Serious Violence Duty

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<sup>7</sup> Horizon scanning – a formal process of gathering, analysing and sharing information to support decision making

# Strategic Assessment 2024-2027 Executive Summary

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Strategic Assessment is an intelligence led process that is used to identify key crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour issues that affect Central Bedfordshire.

The strategic assessment will inform a three-year strategy to make Central Bedfordshire a safer place to live and work. A thorough refresh will be completed on an annual basis to identify if there has been any significant changes.

Partner consultation has taken place and views have been gained throughout the strategic assessment process to ensure that the work being undertaken currently is understood and data from across the partnership is fed into the analysis and development of priorities and recommendations.

## Priority One – Identifying and disrupting cuckooing

Cuckooing is where criminals or gangs target and take over the homes of vulnerable adults to use the property for their own criminal activities.

The property may be used for criminal activity such as:

- Dealing, storing, or taking drugs
- Sex work
- Somewhere to live
- Financial abuse of the tenant
- To store weapons

The most common form of cuckooing is where drug dealers take over a vulnerable person's home and use it to store or distribute drugs, often linked to county lines.

Victims can often be exposed to other forms of abuse such as:

- Modern slavery and trafficking
- Physical abuse
- Neglect
- Psychological abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Financial abuse

Cuckooing also affects the wider community, causing anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance linked to the properties.

## What we know locally

- Following the pandemic drug dealing moved off the streets and into the homes of vulnerable residents.
- There has been an increase in identified county lines in Central Bedfordshire
- There has been an increase in intelligence submissions for cuckooing
- In the past three years 99 suspected cuckooed locations have been referred to Central Bedfordshire Council
- Many cases do not fall under the 'typical' cuckooing definition, often properties are taken over by supposed "friends" rather than a gang or unknown individuals
- It is common in Central Bedfordshire that the offenders exploiting the vulnerable resident are also vulnerable
- In just under 10% of cases the exploiter is a family member
- 66% of victims are male
- 11% of addresses identified have been targeted more than once
- Cases are evenly spread across Central Bedfordshire
- In the last three years Bedfordshire Police have obtained 11 full closure orders and six partial closures on properties where there was suspected cuckooing

### What we will do in 2024-27

- Will agree a Pan Bedfordshire cuckooing definition to reflect the local issue
- We will work closer with Housing Associations to tackle cuckooing in their properties and safeguard more vulnerable residents
- Partners will work together through the Cuckooing Sub-Group to proactively tackle cuckooing and safeguard residents
- Promote Crimestoppers to enable increased anonymous reporting
- Create a multi-agency communications campaign to raise awareness of signs to spot and how to report
- Create a victim care package to provide potential victims with details of support services available
- Provide cuckooing training to key front-line workers who regularly attend the homes of vulnerable residents

## Priority Two – Fly-tipping

Fly tipping is defined as the illegal deposit of waste onto land that does not have a licence to accept it, such as roadsides, lay-bys, or private land. The nature and quantity of waste that is fly tipped varies from rubbish bags, garden waste through to large domestic items such as mattresses or commercial waste.

Uncontrolled illegal waste disposal can be hazardous to the public, as it may contain toxic materials such as asbestos, they may also be a risk to watercourses and soil quality.

### What we know locally

- The rural setting of Central Bedfordshire provides ideal opportunities for illegal dumping of waste
- Whilst many fly-tips are reported to the Council, the number of known offenders is low
- In many cases residents have paid someone to remove their waste, without checking they have a license to do so, and the individual has then illegally dumped the waste.
- Often waste illegally dumped in the area has come from Luton or London Boroughs
- Although the owner of the waste may be identified, and receive a Fixed Penalty Notice they often have no details of the offender to trace them with and they escape any sanctions.
- Education is key, residents need to understand their responsibility for their waste
- Hotspots identified link to areas where there are high numbers of council owned properties.

### What we will do in 2024-27

- Create and promote a communications pack advising residents' duty of care if paying someone to remove their waste.
- Promote how to report fly-tips and what information is needed to residents to get the best evidence opportunities for enforcement
- The police to ensure that there is a standard procedure for responding to fly tipping and sharing reports with the Council
- The Council to improve the recording of fly tips to ensure meaningful data is captured to enable robust performance reporting and analysis
- All Council housing residents to be provided with information on how to report fly tips and the removal of bulky items
- Work closely with local businesses to ensure they are aware of the legal way to dispose of their waste
- Use covert opportunities to tackle the issue in hotspot areas
- Regular partner operations to undertake waste carrier stop checks in hot spot locations to ensure appropriate licenses in place.

## Priority Three – Serious Violence Duty

In July 2019, the Government announced a new Serious Violence Duty which made tackling serious violence an explicit priority for Community Safety Partnerships. It requires specified authorities to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence.

Serious violence has a devastating impact on lives of victims and families and instills fear within communities. Incidents of serious violence have increased in England and Wales since 2014<sup>8</sup>.

The Duty is part of a programme of work to collaborate and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence: taking a multi-agency approach to understand the causes and consequences of serious violence, focusing on prevention and early intervention.

In addition to tough law enforcement, we need to understand and address the factors that cause someone to commit violent crime. The Duty aims to ensure that agencies focus their activity to prevent and reduce serious violence, whilst also providing sufficient flexibility so that the relevant agencies will engage and work together in the most effective local partnership.

### What we know locally

- Almost a third of all reported crimes in Bedfordshire in 2022 were violence and/or sexual offences
- The highest counts of violence and sexual offences mainly align with the more deprived areas
- Most victims are females, particularly where domestic abuse is a factor
- Almost 4 in every 10 recorded violence and sexual offences recorded by the Police relate to domestic abuse
- In the last three years there has been a 7% increase in violent crime in Central Bedfordshire
- Increases have been seen across the whole of Central Bedfordshire not just in the larger towns
- Violent and sexual offences are more likely to occur during the night-time and over a weekend
- The night-time economy plays a significant part in the levels of serious violence
- Locally there has been a small increase in knife crime.
- Professionals are reporting seeing an increase in young people carrying knives
- Sexual offences have shown a 23% increase over the last three years

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<sup>8</sup> Home Officer Serious Violence Duty – Preventing and reducing serious violence Statutory Guidance for responsible authorities – England and Wales – December 2022

## What we will do in 2024-27

- Increase accuracy of crime and incident data to enable robust analysis
- Launch of Operation Firefly in Central Bedfordshire. This is the Police's operation providing dedicated officers in nighttime hotspots at the weekend. The project has been previously rolled out in Luton and Bedford.
- Continued communications campaigns promoting safety
- Continued education in schools regarding the risks of carrying a knife, healthy relationships, and consent
- Increase opportunities for parents to engage with professionals regarding knife crime
- Work with local retailers to promote the safe selling of knives and ensure they adhere to rules
- Partners will work with hotspot locations to consider what preventative measures could be implemented
- Regular patrols of hotspot areas by uniformed officers
- Upskill frontline professionals on phone apps – how they are using to exploit young people and how to engage with young people on safe use
- A Pan Bedfordshire survey to be created to enable analysis and comparison across the three local authority areas
- All partners to actively promote the survey to ensure maximum reach

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# SaferCentral

Community Safety Partnership



## SaferCentral Website

[www.safercentral.org](http://www.safercentral.org)



## SaferCentral Email

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## Facebook

[@safercentral](https://www.facebook.com/safercentral)



## Twitter

[@safercentral](https://twitter.com/safercentral)



## Instagram

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## SaferCentral Community Safety Survey:

<https://www.safercentral.org/community-safety-survey/>