

On 22 May I was invited to represent the Association of Police & Crime Commissioners at the Home Secretary's Taskforce on Serious Crime and to contribute on the basis of our experience in South Wales of trying to understand and prevent violence of all sorts.

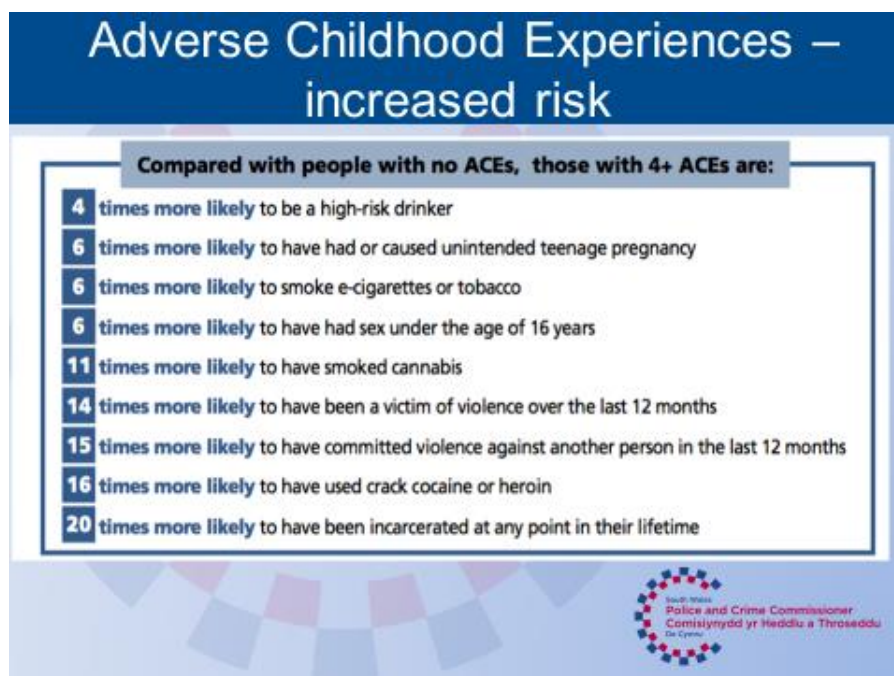
I acknowledged the importance of tackling the current and real threat posed by the increase in serious violence across the country and the connections to "County Lines" and organised crime, and I welcomed the Home Secretary's focus on tackling this immediate issue. But I pointed out that there is a long-standing track record of tackling violence in South Wales over the past 25 years, which includes detailed systems for collecting and understanding the evidence – going beyond reports to the police to analyse NHS experience.

The starting point was the work of Professor Jon Shepherd, who came to see me in the mid-1990s when he recognised that violent injuries were going up in hospitals at a time where traffic related injuries were going down due to incremental improvements over decades, from seat belts to better tyres and brakes and from the breathalyser to speed limits and traffic calming. Why not take an incremental approach to violent behaviour? The Council and the Police in Cardiff were persuaded to get involved and year on year we still build on the foundations laid at that time. In safeguarding students, explaining the impact of alcohol as a contributor of violence, or our DYFODOL programme that targets people in the criminal justice system with drug & alcohol dependency, the issues are inter-connected so solutions have to be evidence-based and joined up too.

I explained that since I became Police & Crime Commissioner we have built on that initial work for example through the Help Point in Swansea (it saves 1,300 ambulance journeys per year and 1,100 admissions to A&E) and the Joint Strategy to tackle Violence against Women and Girls developed by myself and the Chief Constable. Ours has been a joined-up, long-term, evidence-based journey with partners. Not only does this fit with the "Public Health approach to Crime, Disorder and Anti-Social Behaviour" that I have long advocated, but it is based on the inter-connected nature of contemporary challenges to policing and health alike. The collaboration to analyse NHS data was established in April 2014 between Public Health Wales and South Wales Police, with local Health Boards and the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust, and seeks to use evidence to prevent violence at the source by identifying and mapping communities, specifically police beats, which have the highest numbers of presentations to health care as a result of violence. This allows for targeted intervention to prevent violence in communities that are most at-risk. Regular routine reports are produced for Local Violence Prevention Groups and provide evidence-based advice for intervention and prevention.

More recently, what has motivated and mobilised the partners in recent years is the stunning report from Public Health Wales that quantified the impact of four or more incidents of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) – showing that the same causes drive being a perpetrator of violence, a victim of violence, ending up in prison, as well as driving bad health, social issues, familial issues and self-harm. While we all knew that bad things early in life lead to bad things later in life, the graphic quantification of the impact grabbed the attention of Welsh Ministers, Police & Crime Commissioners, Chief Constables and others and has proved compelling to many with whom we work.

The key graphic that sets out the quantification is worth repeating and drawing to the attention of the Home Secretary’s Task Force, although the members of the Panel will be familiar with it



Central to our Public Health approach is to give police officers and their partners a “trauma-informed” understanding of the root causes of behaviour. Our successful police-led ACEs - Early Action Together - is receiving international attention because it applies a systems-wide approach to transforming the way police and partners work together to break intergenerational cycles of crime by recognising and responding to vulnerability. Early work in Maesteg proved the value and has provided the basis for an almost industrial approach to rolling out the lessons across all four Welsh Forces – again, with Public Health Wales and Welsh Government as key partners. The programme was recognised in the UK Government’s Serious Violence Strategy (2018) and we receive pleas from across the UK and around the world to share the early learning of this long-term transformational change.

I pointed out that this is one of the most fundamentally innovative change programmes to happen to policing and we were delighted to be asked to put forward plans to further develop the work and roll it out to Forces in England. Sadly the recent cut in funds available to the Home Office Transformation Fund from £22.5m to around £7m means that this possibility has been put on hold. Given the crucial contribution to the long-term benefit of policing and public safety it is important to stress that it has the potential to have an impact on all forms of violence, whether within the Night Time Economy, in domestic settings or in street related violence.

I added that it is also important to recognise the impact ACEs have in creating the very vulnerabilities that are at the heart of exploitation through the county lines model, so we are hoping against hope that the Home Office will find a way to reopen the door before the current progress and momentum is dissipated..

Taking a long-term approach does not involve neglecting the current and pressing challenges that are with us today. Recently we seized the opportunity to engage with the other Welsh forces to tackle the county lines threat together and led a successful collaborative bid to the Home Office Early Youth Intervention Fund to tackle the immediate issues through the development of a Serious Violence Prevention Project. This sits within the long term collaborative approach as we aim to ensure that young people in Wales live a life free from serious violence. Interventions will be tested in different settings to identify what works, with emphasis on tackling the drivers of serious violence through early intervention and prevention, combining an all-Wales approach and local targeted interventions by key delivery partners based on local crime profiling.

As a member of the Home Secretary's Serious Violence Task Force Tracey Cooper, Chief Executive of Public Health Wales, has been asked by the All-Wales Criminal Justice Board to chair the all-Wales Serious Violence Group while Prof Mark Bellis adds a wealth of experience as her Vice Chair. The purpose of this group is to align the Home Office Serious Violence Strategy to the ambitions set out in the Partnership Agreement between Public Health Wales, Policing and the other Criminal Justice Agencies operating in Wales. It's a forum for developing consensus, setting direction and providing advice and provides a conduit for information to flow between the Home Secretary's Serious Violence Taskforce and stakeholders in Wales. An early focus for the Working Group has been to develop a jointly agreed cross-sector strategy and action plan for tackling serious violence in Wales, through a public health approach, and oversee its implementation. The aim is for this to focus on serious violence including reducing knife and gun crime, tackling county lines and improving the data exchange between health, policing, criminal justice and other partners.

With the agreement of all Welsh Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables we have undertaken a strategic review of the whole of Wales to produce a framework for tackling serious violence across the country. The Violence and Vulnerability Unit established by the Home Office was commissioned to conduct this work and over 200 people from 80+ organisations have been consulted and following a series of recommendations we are developing a strategy that will ensure the Serious Violence Strategy is fully implemented in Wales taking the devolved picture into the equation and enable a consistent approach across the police forces and our partner agencies.

I am encouraged to hear the Home Secretary advocating a Public Health approach to tackling serious violence because we have demonstrated that it works. Partnership working is crucial but it's not enough on its own – and in any event it is already a requirement under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. What is needed in addition is the methodology and resource for shared analytics and joint actions. We are helped in Wales by the Well-being of Future Generations Act that asks public bodies to focus on the long term, to work better with communities and each other, and to take a joined-up approach, coordinated through multi-agency Public Service Boards. Community safety is currently being refreshed in Wales, through joint activity between Policing, Welsh Local Government and Welsh Government, with Serious Violence as a central theme.

As the evidence shows, everything is connected to everything else, and our responses must be too - for the short term and the long term alike. Other speakers at the Task Force were also emphasising the need for a long-term approach, which is encouraging. It is to be hoped that the progress we have made with ground-breaking police-led work on ACEs through Early Action Together and enhancing data sharing through the NOMADs programme led by my Deputy Emma Wools will not be cut short by the shifting of money from the long-term to the short-term. The evidence to the Panel in January that South Wales Police provide £0.5billion of benefit to the economy of South Wales demonstrates that the benefit of a long-term preventative approach is significant – but it has to be long term.

Rt Hon Alun Michael,

Police & Crime Commissioner for South Wales

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