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**Police and Crime Commissioner**  
**West Mercia**



# **Serious and Organised Crime Strategy**

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# 1. Foreword

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Serious and organised crime is crime that is planned, coordinated and committed by groups of people working together to acquire profit, power and influence. This term covers a wide range of activities including trade in drugs, child sexual abuse, cyber crime, modern slavery and human trafficking.

Organised crime groups operating across West Mercia routinely target and exploit the most vulnerable children and adults within our society. The impact of this is devastating and is felt not only by the individuals victimised, but also entire communities who live in fear of the extreme violence and intimidation that goes hand in hand with this kind of offending.

Serious and organised crime now affects more of our citizens, more often, than any other national security threat. The threat from serious and organised crime continues to grow in volume and complexity, impacting our communities on a daily basis.

There is no single solution to tackling serious and organised crime. I firmly believe that a holistic approach is needed. Police and partner agencies must utilise all available powers to relentlessly disrupt and dismantle organised crime groups. However enforcement activity is just one aspect of how we tackle organised crime.

We need to understand the pathways into serious and organised crime, and wherever possible, prevent young and vulnerable people from being drawn into criminality. We also need to work with vulnerable communities to build resilience against the threat from serious and organised crime;

empowering these communities to be part of the solution and reducing future victimisation.

This strategy outlines how I will deliver on my responsibilities as Commissioner in a policing and crime context, and how I will continue to actively work with local and national partners to embed a single whole-system approach within West Mercia.

This strategy clearly demonstrates my commitment to tackling serious and organised crime, and I set out my vision for delivering a more effective and coherent response across a range of objectives.

We are comparatively fortunate that the scale of damage caused by serious and organised crime is much smaller in our communities than in some other areas across the country. However, when and where it does occur here, there is no doubting the harm it causes. I am committed to doing everything that I can to effectively reduce harm within our communities and deliver a safer West Mercia.



**John Campion**  
West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner

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NB: This strategy needs to be read in conjunction with other Police and Crime Commissioner strategies.

## 2. Introduction

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The Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC) Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) strategy sets out the impact and scale of SOC locally and nationally; the latest government response and associated evidence base; and the PCC's vision for tackling SOC in West Mercia.

SOC is the biggest threat to national security in the UK, and it is estimated to cost society at least £37 billion annually. As a result, SOC has been identified as a priority locally, regionally and nationally.

A large amount of SOC remains hidden and unreported, making it difficult to estimate the true scale of the challenge facing law enforcement agencies and partners.

The impact of SOC can be seen through the increasing threat and harm associated with serious violence, the illicit drug trade, child exploitation, cyber crime and economic crime.

The national Serious and Organised Crime Strategy (2018) is the government's latest response to the full range of SOC threats impacting on the UK. The national strategy sets out four main objectives:

- relentless disruption and targeted action;
- building the highest levels of defence and resilience;
- stopping the problem at source; and
- establishing a single whole-system approach.

West Mercia Police have developed a local SOC strategy to ensure delivery of the national objectives, and to reduce the level of SOC affecting communities. The objectives within the local and national strategies are closely aligned to the PCC's Safer West Mercia Plan.

The local and national objectives have been used by the PCC to develop an overarching Commissioner's SOC strategy. The alignment across strategies should encourage greater buy in from partners, and help to establish a single whole-system approach.

The PCC has set out a number of clearly defined aspirations in relation to each objective. These include establishing a multi-agency enforcement response to SOC, improving pathways for victims, and commissioning an effective prevention and early intervention network.

The aspirations for each objective have been informed by extensive policy and research which is summarised in the final chapters of the strategy.

Recommendations to support the delivery of the PCC's aspirations are made throughout the chapters, and are highlighted in bold. A summary of all recommendations can be found in Chapter 11.

### 3. Purpose of the strategy

SOC is the biggest threat to national security in the UK, and it is estimated to cost society at least £37 billion annually<sup>[1]</sup>. The National Crime Agency (NCA) assesses that the threats from SOC are increasing in both volume and complexity. As a result, SOC has been identified as a priority locally, regionally and nationally.

This strategy has been produced to set out the PCC's response to tackling SOC in West Mercia. The strategy aims to:

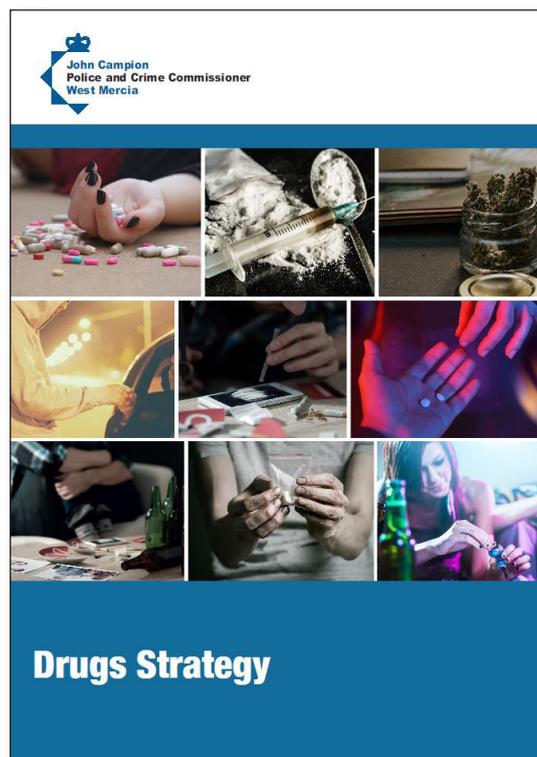
- detail the scale and impact of SOC locally and nationally;
- provide an overview of the objectives and delivery framework set out in the national Serious and Organised Crime Strategy (2018);
- demonstrate how the objectives in the national strategy will be delivered locally;
- provide recommendations to the PCC to enhance the response to SOC in West Mercia.

For completeness, this strategy should be considered alongside other relevant PCC policy documents and strategies, (e.g. the Drug Strategy, the Rural Crime Strategy).

#### Definition

The Home Office (HO) define SOC as:

**“Individuals planning, coordinating and committing serious offences, whether individually, in groups and / or as part of transnational networks. The main categories of serious offences covered by the term are: child sexual exploitation and abuse; illegal drugs; illegal firearms; fraud; money laundering and other economic crime; bribery and corruption; organised immigration crime; modern slavery and human trafficking; and cyber crime<sup>[2]</sup>.”**



## 4. Impact of serious and organised crime

A large amount of SOC remains hidden and unreported, making it difficult to estimate the true scale of the challenge facing law enforcement agencies and partners. However, the indicators outlined in this chapter begin to demonstrate the nature and impact of SOC locally and nationally.

Given the breadth and complexity of criminal activity falling under the banner of SOC, it has not been possible to provide an overview of all serious offences set out in the HO definition. This chapter focuses primarily on data related to organised crime groups (OCGs), violent crime, the illicit drug trade, child exploitation, cyber crime and economic crime, (reflective of the national strategy).

### Organised Crime Groups (OCGs)

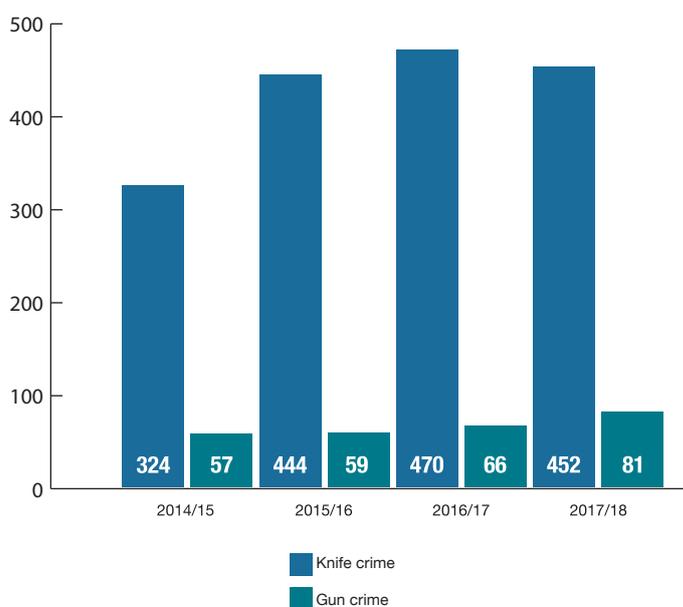
As set out in the 2018 National Strategic Assessment of SOC, the NCA is aware of over 4,600 mapped<sup>i</sup> OCGs operating in the UK<sup>[3]</sup>. Around a third of these OCGs are involved in drug trafficking. A significant number of these groups will also be involved in the commission of other serious offences, including violence, modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT), child exploitation and economic crime<sup>[4]</sup>.

As of January 2019, there were 42 mapped OCGs within West Mercia. The majority of OCGs in West Mercia are primarily involved in drug supply; reflective of the wider West Midlands region. The OCGs active within West Mercia have also been linked to child sexual exploitation (CSE), violence, acquisitive crime and economic crime<sup>[5]</sup>.

### Serious violence

Since 2014, national police recorded crime and NHS data shows an increasing trend in low volume, high harm offences including knife crime, gun crime and homicide. Whilst these offences are primarily concentrated in London and other metropolitan cities, the increase in violent crime has also been seen locally in West Mercia:

- 452 knife crime offences were recorded in 2017/18; an increase of 40% compared to 2014/15<sup>ii</sup>;
- 81 gun crime offences were recorded in 2017/18; an increase of 42% compared to 2014/15 (an increase of only 24 offences)<sup>iii</sup>;
- 18 homicide offences were recorded in 2017/18; a small volume increase compared to previous years (average of 12 homicides 2014/15 – 2016/17).



<sup>i</sup> Organised Crime Group Mapping is a law enforcement tool which maps characteristics of individuals and groups involved in SOC. Whilst the number of OCGs can be a useful indicator of the scale of SOC in the UK, it does not capture individual offending and therefore the full scale of the threat.

<sup>ii</sup> HO define knife crime as violent and sexual offences involving the use of a knife or sharp instrument (including needles, broken glass and scissors).

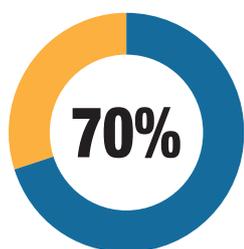
<sup>iii</sup> HO define gun crime as an offence where a gun is fired, used as a blunt instrument or used as a threat.

It should be noted that the increase in serious violence is not exclusively linked to SOC. It is acknowledged that a significant proportion of serious violence (most notably knife crime) occurs in domestic settings<sup>[7]</sup>.

Despite these increases, rates of knife crime, gun crime and homicide in West Mercia remain below the national average. The evidence set out in a number of recent HO strategies suggests that the increase in serious violence is in part associated with the illicit drug trade.

### Drug trade

International production and trade in drugs is a global business controlled by organised criminals.



Almost 70% of all OCGs operating in West Mercia are involved in the illicit drug trade<sup>[8]</sup>.

The drug trade is a key driver for violent offending. Evidence suggests that the emergence of new psychoactive substances, the increased purity and availability of crack cocaine, and the county lines<sup>iv</sup> model of drug supply have contributed to the recent rise in serious violence<sup>[9]</sup>.

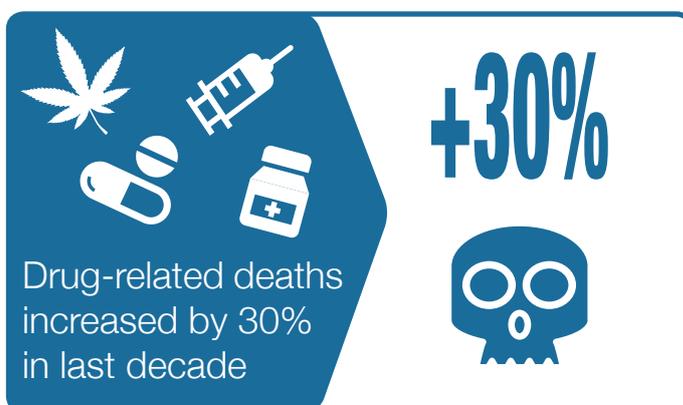
Groups involved in county lines are now reported to affect all 43 police forces in England and Wales; exploiting young and vulnerable people and resulting in an increase in drug-related violence<sup>[10]</sup>.

There are an estimated 82 county lines currently impacting West Mercia<sup>[11]</sup>. These lines are linked to OCGs in the West Midlands, Merseyside and London<sup>[12]</sup>.

The harm caused by drugs, both to individuals and communities is significant. Often the organised criminals involved in drug supply are involved in other high harm offences; many of which involve the exploitation and criminalisation of vulnerable children and adults.

Those who become dependent on drugs sold by OCGs can themselves become drawn into a life of criminality to service their addiction. Drug users report engaging in more criminal activity than non-drug users<sup>[13]</sup>, and it is estimated that 45% of all acquisitive crime in England and Wales is committed by regular opiate and crack cocaine users<sup>[14]</sup>.

Drug-related deaths<sup>v</sup> in England continue to increase and are amongst the highest in Europe. The number of drug-related deaths in West Mercia has increased by 30% compared to a decade ago, exceeding the number of fatalities from road traffic collisions<sup>[15]</sup>.



<sup>iv</sup> County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of 'deal line'.

<sup>v</sup> As registered on the death certificate. This includes deaths related to drug misuse, intentional and accidental drug poisoning.

## Child exploitation

Children and young people are victims of SOC, and often through exploitation, can take part in organised criminal activity.

County lines drug networks typically involve the exploitation of vulnerable children. Criminals involved in county lines use children and young people as runners to move drugs and money to and from the urban area. This often involves grooming, exploitation, debt bondage, intimidation and violence<sup>[16]</sup>.

The children exploited through county lines are vulnerable not only because of their age, but many have mental health issues, have experienced previous traumas and come from chaotic homes<sup>[17]</sup>. Once involved in county lines, these vulnerable children are then at further risk of extreme physical and sexual exploitation, violence and human trafficking<sup>[18]</sup>.

Since 2012, there has been a significant increase in the recording of CSE both locally and nationally. Some of this increase has been attributed to high profile CSE cases, and increased public confidence to report offences to the police<sup>[19]</sup>. In 2017/18, 888 offences in West Mercia were flagged as CSE-related; an increase of over 350% compared to 2014/15<sup>vi</sup>.

Whilst not all of these offences are linked to SOC, it is acknowledged that criminal networks involved in the sexual exploitation of children do exist within the force area<sup>[20]</sup>.

The threats against children and young people are further heightened by the prevalence of cyber-enabled exploitation. Serious organised criminals are becoming more sophisticated in their use of technology. The huge growth in the number of children with access to the internet has made the sexual exploitation of children online easier and more extreme<sup>[21]</sup>. The number of referrals to the NCA relating to online CSE has increased by 700% in the last four years<sup>[22]</sup>. This increase has also been observed in West Mercia where the number of referrals has increased by 112% compared to 2014/15<sup>vii</sup>.

Referrals relating to online CSE increased by 112% compared to 2014/15



Nationally, there is a growing need to focus attention and resources on the technological elements of child exploitation and other serious offences.

CSE related offences increased by over 350% compared to 2014/15



<sup>vi</sup> Based on offences recorded on West Mercia Police systems. CSE offences are identified by way of a marker, and therefore caution should be taken when interpreting this data.

<sup>vii</sup> Based on referrals recorded on West Mercia Police systems 2014/15 compared to 2017/18. The figures provided are based on initial referrals to demonstrate demand. Not all of these referrals will result in investigations where enforcement action is taken.

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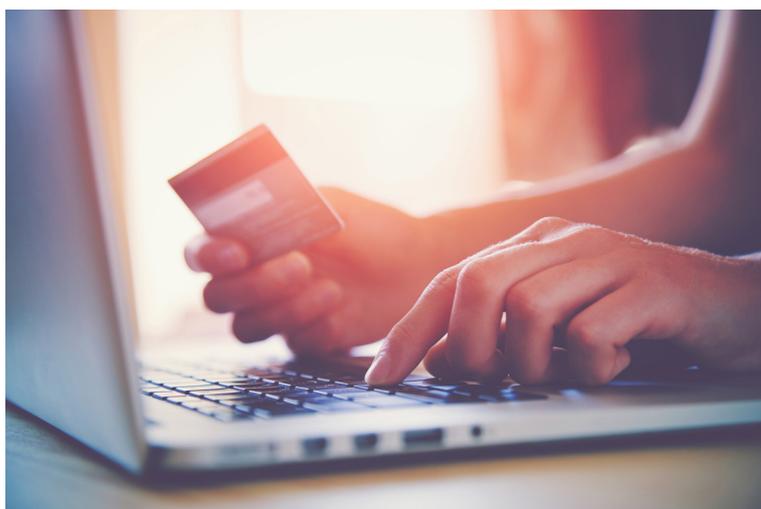
## Cyber crime and economic crime

Serious organised criminals are utilising cyber technology to target and exploit vulnerable individuals and organisations. Cyber-attacks from criminals damage our economy and are a significant threat for organisations of all sizes. The majority of organisations are now reliant on online services, making them vulnerable to cyber security risks<sup>[23]</sup>.

43% of all businesses in the UK identified at least one cyber security breach or attack in 2017. This figure increased significantly for larger businesses (72%). Such breaches are disruptive and impact businesses in a variety of ways. Where breaches have resulted in lost assets or data, the financial implications are significant<sup>[24]</sup>.

Technology is also utilised by criminals to commit economic offences such as fraud. It is estimated that fraud offences now account for almost a third of all crimes<sup>[25]</sup>. The National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) estimate that in the six months to September 2018, fraud offences led to victim losses of over £900 million. The estimate for West Mercia is £9.9 million. At least a quarter of these fraud offences were cyber enabled through online sales and email<sup>[26]</sup>.

In addition to targeting individuals and businesses, serious organised criminals are involved in a range of other economic offences including the holding, movement, concealment or use of monetary proceeds of crime<sup>[27]</sup>. Many organised criminals launder the proceeds of crime to fund their lavish lifestyles and reinvest in criminality. Professional enablers such as lawyers and accountants are key facilitators in this offending behaviour<sup>[28]</sup>.



£9.9 million lost in  
fraud offences in  
West Mercia

## 5. Prioritisation of SOC

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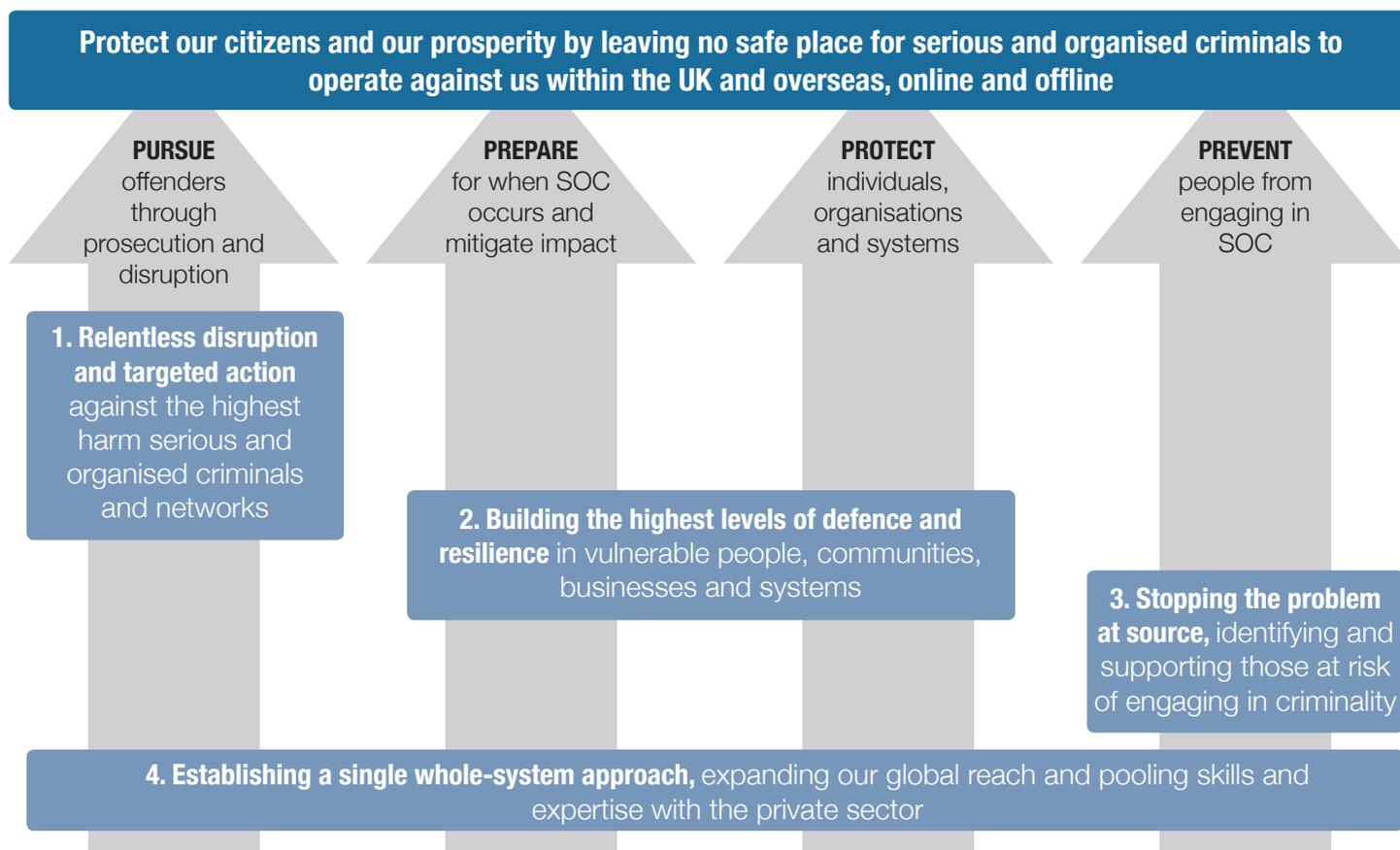
Tackling SOC has been identified as a priority locally, regionally and nationally as set out in the following strategic documents:

Strategic Policing Requirement (2015)	National
NCA Annual Plan (2018-19)	
Regional Organised Crime Unit Control Strategy (2018-19)	Regional
West Mercia PCC's Safer West Mercia Plan (2016-2021)	Local
West Mercia Police Strategic Assessment (2018-19 & 2019-20)	
West Mercia Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessments (2018-2019)	

The HO's revised Serious and Organised Crime Strategy (2018) is the government's latest response to the full range of SOC threats impacting on the UK. The national strategy is intended to provide a coherent approach for all partners involved in countering SOC <sup>[29]</sup>.

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The infographic below sets out the aims and objectives of the national strategy, which are to be delivered across the Pursue, Prepare, Protect and Prevent framework, often referred to as the four Ps.



HM Government, 'Serious and Organised Crime Strategy', (2018).

The national objectives and the four Ps framework have been used by West Mercia Police to develop a local response to SOC. In January 2019, West Mercia Police produced a SOC strategy and action plan to ensure local delivery of the national strategy, and to reduce the level of SOC affecting communities.

The table on page 12 illustrates the overlap between the objectives and delivery framework set out in the national and local strategies, and the priorities within the PCC's Safer West Mercia Plan<sup>[30]</sup>.

Strategy	Home Office SOC Strategy (2018)	West Mercia Police SOC Strategy (2018-19)	Safer West Mercia Plan (2016-2021)
<b>Objectives:</b>	<b>Relentless disruption and targeted action</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proactively target, pursue and dismantle groups.</li> <li>Use new and improved powers to deny criminals access to their finances, assets and infrastructures.</li> <li>Better understand serious and organised criminals and their vulnerabilities.</li> </ul>	<b>Pursue offenders through prosecution and disruption</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate, prosecute and disrupt organised criminals.</li> <li>Utilise available legislation (civil and criminal) to actively target those involved in SOC.</li> <li>Improve the intelligence picture and develop understanding of threats and vulnerabilities.</li> </ul>	<b>Putting victims and survivors first</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support more cases through the criminal justice system.</li> </ul> <b>Building a more secure West Mercia</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on the most serious crimes, including those hidden from public view whether online or in communities.</li> <li>Understand and tackle the causes of these crimes so threats are identified and targeted before they escalate.</li> </ul>
	<b>Building the highest levels of defence and resilience</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build strong communities that are better prepared for and more resilient to threat, and less tolerant of illegal activity.</li> <li>Identify those who are harmed faster and support them to a high standard.</li> <li>Remove vulnerabilities in systems/ organisations, giving criminals fewer chances to target and exploit.</li> </ul>	<b>Prepare for when SOC occurs and mitigate impact</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empower communities affected by SOC to be part of the solution.</li> <li>Reduce the attraction and acceptability of SOC as a lifestyle by highlighting realities.</li> <li>Increase resilience in individuals, businesses, law enforcement and private sector organisations.</li> <li>Continue to support victims and witnesses.</li> </ul> <b>Protect individuals, organisations and systems</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce vulnerabilities within products, systems, processes and infrastructure.</li> </ul>	<b>Reassuring West Mercia's communities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create more opportunities for communities to play a leading role in resolving local issues.</li> <li>Work with businesses and partners to improve prevention and ensure business and cyber crime is addressed effectively.</li> </ul> <b>Building a more secure West Mercia</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build a more secure West Mercia by improving community resilience and cohesion.</li> </ul> <b>Putting victims and survivors first</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure improved and more consistent services for victims, survivors and witnesses who suffer most from crime.</li> </ul>
	<b>Stopping the problem at source</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and use preventative methods and education to divert more young people from a life of SOC and re-offending.</li> <li>Use government's reach overseas to tackle the drivers of SOC.</li> </ul>	<b>Prevent people from engaging in SOC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Widen understanding of pathways into SOC and identify opportunities for diversion.</li> <li>Develop targeted interventions aimed at those most at risk of being drawn into SOC.</li> <li>Establish an effective offender management framework and rehabilitate known SOC offenders.</li> </ul>	<b>Building a more secure West Mercia</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure partners work together and use early intervention to prevent victimisation.</li> <li>Ensure officers/staff effectively identify and support people with vulnerabilities, understanding and managing the associated risk.</li> <li>Reduce harm as a result of fewer repeat victims and offenders.</li> </ul> <b>Putting victims and survivors first</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a seamless pathway of commissioned activity from the PCC's office, dovetailing into existing provision from other partners.</li> </ul>
	<b>Establishing a single, whole-system approach</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Align local, regional, national and international efforts to respond as a single system.</li> <li>Improve governance, tasking and coordination to ensure an effective response against SOC.</li> <li>Integrate with the private sector, co-designing new capabilities and designing out vulnerabilities.</li> </ul>	<b>A whole-system approach runs throughout all four Ps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote a whole-system approach by mapping capabilities across the system.</li> <li>Ensure cross-agency tasking and coordination is as efficient as possible.</li> <li>Ensure local agencies and organisations understand the value of their contribution to partnership working.</li> <li>Leverage the private sector to design out vulnerabilities.</li> </ul>	<b>A whole-system approach runs throughout all PCC objectives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with regional and national partners on threats and areas of policing that go beyond a single force's boundaries and capabilities.</li> <li>Work more effectively with partners and local communities to prevent, resolve and reduce crime.</li> <li>Ensure partnership commitments are fully implemented and delivering results.</li> <li>Give leadership to the force and partners in forging new collaborations.</li> </ul>

## 6. The PCC's vision for tackling SOC

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The local and national objectives outlined in Chapter 5 have been used by the PCC to develop an overarching Commissioner's SOC strategy. The alignment across strategies should encourage greater buy in from partners, and help to establish a single whole-system approach to SOC.

This chapter sets out the PCC's vision for tackling SOC and aspirations in relation to:

- relentless disruption and targeted action;
- building the highest levels of defence and resilience;
- stopping the problem at source; and
- establishing a single whole-system approach.

### Relentless disruption and targeted action

The PCC will:

- collaborate with local, regional and national partners to ensure a borderless approach to effectively tackle SOC;
- ensure West Mercia Police deliver their SOC strategy and reduce the damage done by SOC in our communities;
- ensure West Mercia Police strip criminals of illegal assets and money and reinvest it back into communities;

- improve information sharing between partners to fully understand the picture of SOC and provide a more effective response;
- prioritise and reduce SOC offending that causes the most harm in our communities, including serious violence, drugs, MSHT and child exploitation;
- ensure effective action to tackle county lines operations within West Mercia<sup>viii</sup>.

### Building the highest levels of defence and resilience

The PCC will:

- ensure West Mercia Police and partners protect the people in our communities who are most vulnerable to SOC;
- increase awareness of SOC and empower communities to be part of the solution;
- ensure victims of SOC are identified faster and receive the support they need to cope and recover;
- jointly commission specialist services for victims of SOC wherever it is appropriate and in the best interests of local communities.

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<sup>viii</sup> This aspiration also forms part of the Commissioner's Drug Strategy.

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## Stopping the problem at source

The PCC will:

- ensure West Mercia Police and partners protect the children and young people most at risk of SOC;
- commission an effective prevention and early intervention network to reduce the number of young people involved in or falling victim to SOC;
- collaborate with local and regional partners to tackle SOC within prisons;
- ensure West Mercia Police and partners have a joined up, effective approach to reduce re-offending in our communities;
- ensure effective rehabilitation pathways and services are available to offenders wishing to break the cycle of SOC;
- jointly commission services for SOC offenders wherever it is appropriate and in the best interests of local communities.

## Establishing a single whole-system approach

The PCC will:

- ensure SOC is maintained as a key focus and priority area for the PCC as well as police and other partners;
- collaborate with public and private sector partners to deliver a holistic approach to tackling SOC in West Mercia;
- invest in and utilise interventions, training and tools available from central government where appropriate and available.

The aspirations for each objective have been informed by extensive policy and research which is set out in the remainder of this strategy. Recommendations to support the delivery of the PCC's aspirations are made throughout the chapters and are highlighted in bold. A summary of all recommendations can be found in Chapter 11.

## 7. Relentless disruption and targeted action

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Relentless disruption using all available powers and legislation is central to the government's response to SOC. Data and intelligence must inform and drive this disruption activity, ensuring action is targeted and effective. Local, regional and national efforts to pursue, prosecute and disrupt must be understood and aligned, to ensure the relevant law enforcement agencies are responding as a single system<sup>[31]</sup>.

The NCA is the lead law enforcement agency for SOC in England and Wales, leading, supporting and coordinating activity across all levels. The NCA is able to use tasking powers to direct other law enforcement agencies in regards to strategic priorities. Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU) are the principal link between the NCA and local police forces. ROCU are regional policing units with specialist capabilities to investigate and disrupt SOC. Whilst national and regional capabilities exist, the response to SOC often remains with local police forces. This is particularly the case in respect of local policing across the four Ps, identification and management of local threat, and safeguarding of vulnerable people<sup>[32]</sup>.

The PCC has a clear and established governance role in overseeing and scrutinising the local and regional response to SOC. These PCC functions are exercised through a number of different mechanisms including holding to account meetings with the Chief Constable, regional governance meetings, and investment in regional policy officers to enhance oversight and scrutiny of regional and national threats.

PCCs are not only responsible for their force area and region, but must exercise their statutory functions, notably setting strategic direction and holding to account, across the entirety of UK policing. **As such, the PCC should consider how best to utilise these functions in relation to the NCA and other national bodies.** This is critical to ensure the PCC is able to:

- ▶ influence the response to SOC nationally;
- ▶ articulate local and regional needs to inform future funding;
- ▶ review and scrutinise activity being led or tasked by the NCA which impacts on West Mercia Police and the ROCU.

**The regional policy officers should use existing mechanisms to facilitate the liaison between the PCC and the NCA. Engagement with the national PCC leads for SOC through the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) is also recommended.**



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There are a wide range of criminal and civil powers available to law enforcement agencies. Relatively new legislation such as the Serious Crime Act 2015, Modern Slavery Act 2015 and Criminal Finances Act 2017 have been introduced to empower agencies to relentlessly disrupt and dismantle OCGs. The HO is particularly keen for law enforcement agencies to increase the use of powers to locate and seize money made by organised criminals<sup>[33]</sup>.

Within their SOC strategy, West Mercia Police have made a commitment to utilise all available legislation to actively target those involved in SOC. The force is in the process of developing a performance framework to evidence their use of powers and disruption activity. **The PCC should routinely monitor and scrutinise this performance information to effectively hold the force to account for delivery of this objective.**

It is recognised that a wide range of other agencies play a key role in pursuing and disrupting SOC threats. Partners have access to a wealth of powers that can disrupt and prevent activity of local OCGs, (e.g. fire and safety orders, licensing powers etc.) It is therefore critical that the police routinely engage with partners to establish an effective multi-agency response to SOC.

The local partnership response to SOC is currently co-ordinated through four Serious Organised Crime Joint Agency Groups (SOCJAGs) in Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. The purpose of the SOCJAGs is to focus multi-agency activity on the prevention, disruption and dismantling of SOC across local authority areas. Monitoring, scrutiny and review of SOCJAGs is

provided through the PCC's Crime Reduction Board (CRB)<sup>[34]</sup>. **The PCC should retain strategic oversight and governance through the CRB, to ensure the partnerships are working effectively to respond to local SOC threats.**

The national strategy reiterates the importance of putting data and intelligence at the heart of any response to SOC. As such, a key objective for the SOCJAGs is the development of local profiles containing information from all agencies<sup>[35]</sup>. The local profiles should provide police and partners with a single, comprehensive picture of SOC threats within a local policing area. **The profiles should be used to drive localised activity across all agencies, including activity funded by the PCC. This will ensure that activity effectively targets the specific SOC threats within each local policing area.**

The local SOC profiles are produced for each area, and are refreshed biannually by Community Safety Partnership (CSP) analysts who are funded by the PCC. Due to constraints related to data protection, the current profiles predominantly focus on police data. Where partners have provided data, they have significantly enriched the intelligence picture<sup>[36]</sup>.

All of the local profiles produced in 2018 included a recommendation to ensure information sharing agreements were developed between police and partners. Such arrangements would facilitate the sharing of critical data and enhance future SOC profiles. **The PCC should use his influence through the CRB to ensure these multi-agency information sharing agreements are established. The CRB should also be used to engage and challenge agencies and organisations who remain reluctant to share information.**

## 8. Building the highest levels of defence and resilience

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Vulnerable individuals, communities and organisations who are most likely to be exploited by organised criminals need protection and support.

The concept of building resilience to SOC within communities is still developing. However, it is understood that local policing teams play a key role. Local policing teams should use the intelligence contained within local SOC profiles to ensure community policing is focused on areas of greatest risk<sup>[37]</sup>. Meaningful engagement with at risk communities will in turn result in a richer intelligence picture to better target interventions and support.

SOC can often be hidden in plain sight, with criminal enterprises disguised as legitimate local businesses. It is not always apparent to members of the public that paying for illicit goods or services puts money in the pockets of OCGs. Any successful approach to tackling SOC is reliant on citizens becoming less tolerant and less willing to use illicit goods and services. The HO suggest that targeted marketing and communication campaigns should be created to help citizens spot the signs and understand the harm associated with SOC<sup>[38]</sup>.

As part of their SOC strategy, West Mercia Police have launched Op Protect. This marketing and communication strategy will be used to educate communities about the threats from SOC.



The aim is to ultimately reduce the attraction and acceptability of SOC within communities. Op Protect will also provide the force with an outlet to reassure communities and improve confidence in the police response to SOC. **The PCC should engage with the force to ensure that Op Protect is supported and endorsed through various PCC platforms including online, with the media and via partners.**

A key to building defences against SOC is to 'design out' vulnerabilities within products, systems and organisations. In some circumstances, this will require leveraging the private sector<sup>[39]</sup>. **The PCC should work with partners to encourage local organisations to build resilience against physical and cyber SOC threats. The PCC should use his influence to engage with businesses at all levels, particularly those targeted by OCGs, to promote crime reduction, prevent re-victimisation and reduce demand on the police.**

The PCC has more than doubled funding for rural and business crime, strengthening and enhancing resources to tackle harm in these areas. A dedicated team of police officers and Rural and Business Officers (RABOs) will be tasked to increase public confidence; promote crime prevention; provide advice and guidance, and work with the public and partners to reduce crimes that most impact rural and business communities. **The PCC should ensure that the work of this team has an explicit focus on building resilience against SOC in vulnerable rural and business locations. Where relevant this should include advice and guidance in relation to cyber security.**

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The final tenet of building defences and resilience relates to supporting victims. Identifying and supporting victims of SOC to a high standard is an objective in the local and national SOC strategies. The local and national objectives clearly align to the PCC's priority of putting victims and survivors first.

The Victims' Code of Practice sets out the information, services and support that must be provided to victims of crime by organisations in England and Wales<sup>[40]</sup>. The code also sets out enhanced entitlements for victims of the most serious crimes; those who are persistently targeted, intimidated or vulnerable; and victims aged under 18. These enhanced entitlements are particularly relevant for victims of SOC.

The PCC's Victims Board brings together partners from across the Criminal Justice System to improve results for victims of crime. As part of this work, the Board ensures compliance with the Victims' Code of Practice. **The PCC should commission analysis through the Victims Board to determine compliance against the enhanced entitlements set out for vulnerable victims of SOC.**

Alongside the minimum standards set out in the Victims' Code, the national strategy focuses on the provision of victim support within three key areas of highest harm: CSE, MSHT and fraud. The PCC currently commissions a range of services for victims. This includes the Victim Advice Line (VAL) and specialist support services for child and adult victims of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence. The PCC is in the process of procuring a number of updated needs assessments for West Mercia. **The needs assessments will cover key crime types including CSE, MSHT and SOC, and should be used**

**to inform future commissioning of services for these victim cohorts.**

Nationally, reforms are underway to improve the identification and provision of support to victims of MSHT through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)<sup>[41]</sup>. Understanding of MSHT in West Mercia continues to develop, and there is a requirement to ensure that local support services are in place for victims. This is particularly important where victims are not referred into, or recognised as victims within the NRM, and for victims exiting centrally funded support. **The PCC should ensure that suitable referral pathways exist for victims of MSHT, enabling access to specialist services and advice.**

The government is committed to improving the response to victims of fraud and cyber crime. Whilst the majority of fraud offences are dealt with centrally by Action Fraud, there is a need for victim services at all levels. The HO is working in partnership with the private sector, law enforcement agencies and victim care providers to establish national to local support for fraud and cyber victims. The national pilots are in their early stages, and if successful, could be rolled out across policing<sup>[42]</sup>. **In the interim, the PCC should ensure that local victims of fraud and cyber crime are able to access support, advice and guidance through VAL.**

## 9. Stopping the problem at source



HM Government, 'Individuals at Risk of Being Drawn into Serious and Organised Crime', (2015).

The national SOC strategy sets out the importance of prevention and early intervention to reduce the number of young and vulnerable people engaging in SOC. This is part of a wider government focus on early intervention to prevent crime and improve outcomes for young people<sup>[43]</sup>.

Local partners should understand the pathways into SOC, to target those most at risk of engaging in serious criminal activity. Academic research has highlighted a number of factors that may make an individual more susceptible to being drawn into SOC. Some of these factors are outlined in the infographic above. It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list of factors as there is no single pathway into SOC. Furthermore, it must not be assumed that these characteristics and experiences will necessarily lead an individual to become involved in SOC<sup>[44]</sup>.

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Trauma in childhood is increasingly recognised as a risk factor for victimisation and perpetration of serious offences. Academic research shows a correlation between an individual's exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)<sup>ix</sup> and chronic offending as a juvenile and adult<sup>[45]</sup>. This is supported by evidence in the HO Serious Violence Strategy, which identifies ACEs and school exclusions as key risk factors for gang-related violence<sup>[46]</sup>.

The Serious Violence Strategy states that the recent increase in violent offences is related to an increase in vulnerable child and adult cohorts. This includes children excluded from schools. The strategy outlines evidence to suggest that exclusion from school is a marker for increased risk of victimisation and perpetration of serious violence. Exclusion from school is also associated with increased risk of substance abuse<sup>[47]</sup>.

The number of children excluded from schools has increased dramatically since 2011/12. Across England there has been a 49% increase in children permanently excluded from state-funded primary, secondary and special schools. In West Mercia, this figure has increased by 55%<sup>[48]</sup>. Despite the increase, the number of permanently excluded children in West Mercia remains low (171 in 2016/17). **The PCC should work with partners, (particularly education and Ofsted) to engage with and support as many of these children as possible.**

The above risk factors should be used to identify those most vulnerable to being drawn into SOC. Targeted diversionary activity with these at risk individuals can prevent involvement in SOC and deter re-offending. Partners will have a key role

to play in identifying and intervening with these individuals; many of whom will present to other organisations such as schools, local authorities and health, before they come to the attention of the police.

The PCC currently funds a number of diversionary initiatives across West Mercia, designed to prevent offending. **It is recommended that these initiatives are reviewed to ensure that:**

- **they are focused on identifying and supporting young people most at risk of SOC;**
- **there are appropriate referral pathways in place for police and partners;**
- **they reflect the wide range of SOC pathways and offences, and that interventions can be tailored accordingly<sup>[49]</sup>;**
- **diversionary activity is expanded to include children and young people who have been, or are at risk of being excluded from school.**

**The PCC should involve the West Mercia Police leads for SOC in this review, to support the force in meeting the Prevent objectives set out in their local SOC strategy.**

It is acknowledged that for those deeply entrenched in the SOC lifestyle, preventative interventions alone are unlikely to deter offending. In these cases, it may be more appropriate to use Pursue tactics and offender management techniques<sup>[50]</sup>. This is relevant not only to perpetrators in our communities, but also those who are in prison.

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<sup>ix</sup> There are 10 ACEs: physical abuse; emotional abuse; sexual abuse; physical neglect; emotional neglect; household substance abuse; household domestic abuse; parental separation/ divorce; household mental illness and having a household member incarcerated.

In line with the national strategy, the PCCs in the West Midlands have made a clear commitment to tackling organised crime in prisons. In 2018, the four PCCs in the region funded a six month research project to consider the issue of ongoing criminality in prison custody<sup>[51]</sup>. The findings from this research were published in January 2019 and have led to the development of a five point plan and a series of recommendations.

**The regional PCCs should lead on a number of these recommendations, as well as providing an oversight function to ensure other partners are progressing key actions. In West Mercia, the PCC should utilise existing criminal justice partnerships, (such as the Local Criminal Justice Board), to disseminate the work undertaken by the region, and to understand and address local issues in respect of SOC in prisons.**

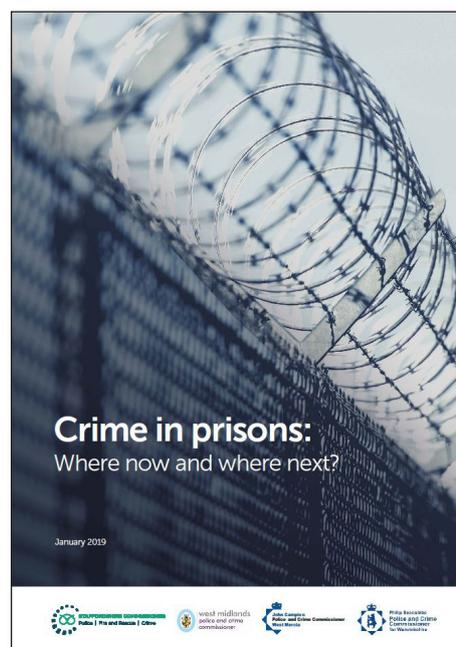
The rate of re-offending for the SOC cohort is significant, with almost half of all serious and organised criminals re-offending within a year of release from custody<sup>[52]</sup>. Where criminals released from prison are unwilling to cease their involvement in SOC, the police must establish an effective offender management framework.

This is a key objective within the West Mercia Police SOC strategy. The force have committed to working with partners such as HM Prisons and Probation to ensure lifetime management of priority offenders. The force also aim to utilise existing offender management protocols such as Integrated Offender Management (IOM) and Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) to monitor and manage high risk SOC offenders. **The PCC should use existing governance arrangements such as the CRB to scrutinise and hold**

**the force to account for their approach to offender management.** This will ensure that the force are effectively delivering the actions set out in the local SOC strategy and reducing the harm caused by SOC offenders.

Offender management is not just about 'catch and convict'. Any approach to offender management should also identify opportunities for rehabilitation. The rehabilitation of SOC offenders is a key objective within the Prevent strand of the West Mercia Police SOC strategy. **To support the force in meeting this objective, the PCC should work with partners to ensure that appropriate services are in place to assist individuals who wish to leave SOC.**

**It is recommended that the SOC needs assessment referred to in Chapter 8 includes an assessment of SOC nominals as well as victims. This should then inform future PCC commissioning decisions around rehabilitation.**



## 10. Establishing a single whole-system approach

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A single whole-system approach is required to tackle SOC. Law enforcement and partner agencies must work together, informed by a single comprehensive picture of threat, to tackle SOC through shared capabilities and powers. This collaborative approach will ensure that there is a clear end-to-end response to SOC. This should include preventative activity to mitigate risk factors for offending, through to enforcement activity to bring offenders to justice<sup>[53]</sup>.

The local partnership response in West Mercia is currently coordinated through SOCJAGs. SOCJAGs are predominantly comprised of public sector partners. The national and local SOC strategy outlines the importance of leveraging the private sector in the response to SOC. Greater engagement with businesses through the SOCJAGs could give the partnerships a more comprehensive understanding of threat; reduce vulnerabilities within products, systems and organisations; and increase resilience across all sectors as set out in Chapter 8<sup>[54]</sup>. **The PCC should engage with SOCJAG chairs through the CRB, to determine the most suitable approach to involving private sector partners in the SOCJAG process.**

The HO's Violence and Vulnerability Unit (VUU) have produced three interventions to support local partnerships to respond to SOC<sup>[55]</sup>. These interventions focus predominantly on exploitation, youth and gang-related violence and county lines. West Mercia is one of few force areas that has taken up all three interventions available from the VUU. This includes the commission of locality reviews in Worcestershire and Shropshire (including Telford), and the purchase of 500 licenses for partners to complete the VUU Gangs

and Drug Networks online training course. The funding for the training licenses was provided by the PCC.

The PCC has also provided funding for the Strategic Framework Review commenced in spring 2019. This is the most comprehensive intervention offered by the VUU, and includes extensive consultation with senior leaders and practitioners from partner agencies. The consultation will be used to produce a West Mercia specific Strategic Framework for tackling county lines, gangs and violence; providing partners with a common approach to responding to these issues.

**Once published, the PCC should use the Strategic Framework to steer the partnership response to SOC locally, to inform any future PCC commissioning intentions in relation to SOC, and where relevant, to hold the force to account.**

The national strategy outlines a number of 'strategic levers' (agencies and processes) that will drive the whole-system approach to SOC. This includes the use of NCA tasking arrangements referenced in Chapter 7. Much of the focus is directed at local forces who are key to the operational response to SOC. The strategy highlights the role of PCCs and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) as key levers in setting the strategic direction, facilitating partnership working and driving improvements in the local response to SOC.

In the 2017 HMICFRS PEEL Effectiveness Report, West Mercia Police received a grading of inadequate for their approach to tackling SOC<sup>[56]</sup>. Since the inspection, significant progress has

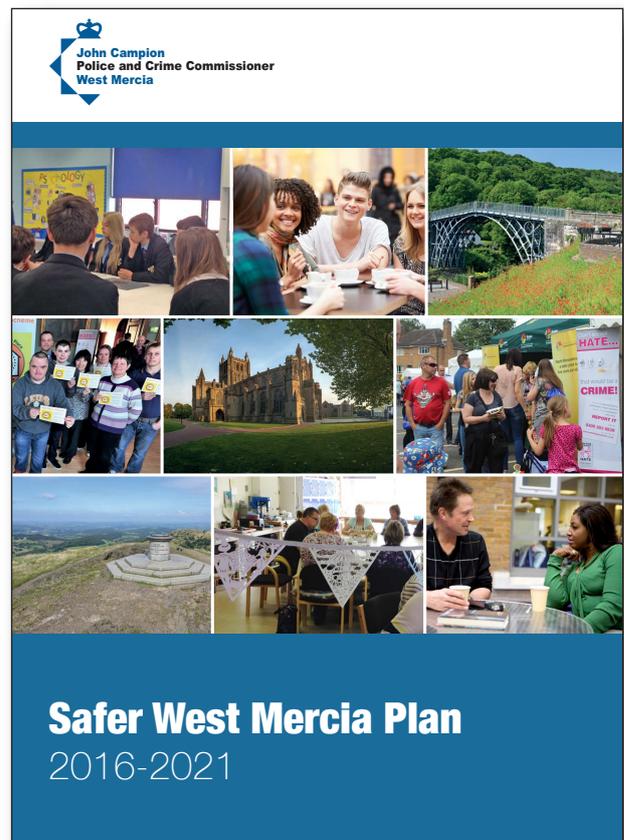
been made in relation to a number of areas for improvement. The force has also set out its commitment to tackling SOC through the publication of its policing priorities, with SOC falling under the banner of 'safer people' (see page 24). The force's progress has been closely monitored by the PCC, and has been subject to a number of formal holding to account meetings with the Chief Constable. **It is recommended that the PCC continues to raise SOC through formal holding to account processes to ensure that the force's focus on SOC is sustained.**

The PCC's Police and Crime Plan sets the strategic direction and priorities for West Mercia Police. The plan must be informed by national threats such as SOC, which are outlined within the Strategic Policing Requirement (SPR). Chief Constables must have regards to both the PCC's Police and Crime Plan and the SPR when exercising their functions. It is the PCC's role to hold the Chief Constable to account for doing so.

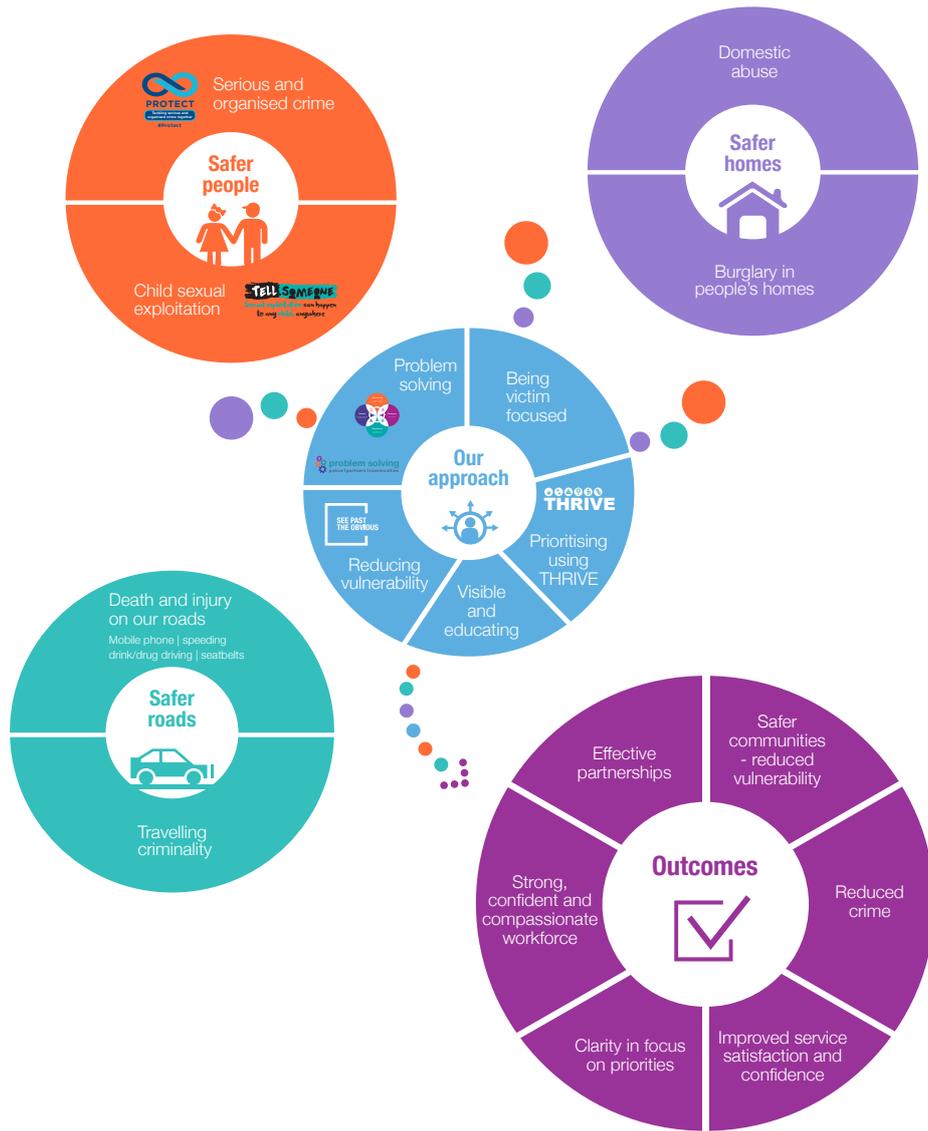
**Whilst the current Safer West Mercia Plan makes a commitment to tackling the most serious crime affecting communities, the PCC should consider including SOC as a distinct priority.**

This would ensure:

- alignment between local, regional and national priorities;
- clarity around the PCC's commitment to tackling SOC within West Mercia;
- West Mercia Police's approach to tackling SOC remains a key area for holding to account as set out above.



# Our policing priorities



# 11. Summary of recommendations for the PCC

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## Relentless disruption and targeted action

1. The PCC should consider how best to utilise statutory functions in relation to the NCA and other national bodies. The regional policy officers should use existing mechanisms to facilitate the liaison between the PCC and the NCA. Engagement with the national PCC leads for SOC through the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) is also recommended.
2. The PCC should routinely monitor and scrutinise the performance of West Mercia Police in regards to disruption activity and use of powers, to ensure the force is effectively delivering against the objectives in the local SOC strategy.
3. The PCC should retain strategic oversight and governance of local SOCJAGs. Through the CRB, the PCC should ensure that the partnerships are working effectively to respond to local SOC threats.
4. The local profiles should be used to drive localised activity across all agencies, including activity funded by the PCC. This will ensure that activity effectively targets the specific SOC threats within each local policing area.
5. The PCC should use his influence through the CRB to ensure multi-agency intelligence sharing arrangements are established. The CRB should also be used to engage and challenge agencies and organisations who remain reluctant to share information.

## Building the highest levels of defence and resilience

6. The PCC should engage with the force to ensure that Op Protect is supported and endorsed through various PCC platforms including online, with the media and via partners.
7. The PCC should work with partners to encourage local organisations to build resilience against physical and cyber SOC threats.
8. The PCC should use his influence to engage with businesses at all levels, particularly those targeted by OCGs, to promote crime reduction, prevent re-victimisation and reduce demand on the police.
9. The PCC should ensure that the work of the dedicated team of police officers and RABOs has an explicit focus on building resilience against SOC in vulnerable rural and business locations. Where relevant this should include advice and guidance in relation to cyber security.
10. The PCC should commission analysis through the Victims Board to determine compliance against the enhanced entitlements set out for vulnerable victims of SOC.
11. The needs assessments being procured for West Mercia should be used to inform future commissioning of services for key victim cohorts.

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12. The PCC should ensure that suitable referral pathways exist for victims of MSHT, enabling access to specialist services and advice.
  13. The PCC should ensure that local victims of fraud and cyber crime are able to access support, advice and guidance through VAL.

### Stopping the problem at source

14. The PCC should work with partners (particularly education and Ofsted) to engage with and support as many excluded children as possible.
15. The PCC should review diversionary initiatives across West Mercia to ensure that:
  - they are focused on identifying and supporting young people most at risk of SOC;
  - there are appropriate referral pathways in place for police and partners;
  - they reflect the wide range of SOC pathways and offences, and that interventions can be tailored accordingly;
  - diversionary activity is expanded to include children and young people who have been, or are at risk of being excluded from school.
16. The PCC should involve the West Mercia Police leads for SOC in the review of diversionary initiatives, to support the force in meeting the Prevent objectives set out in their local SOC strategy.
17. The regional PCCs should lead on a number of the recommendations set out in the Crime in Prisons report, as well as providing an oversight function to ensure other partners are progressing key actions.
18. The PCC should utilise existing criminal justice partnerships, (such as the Local Criminal Justice Board), to disseminate the work undertaken by the region, and to understand and address local issues in respect of crime in prisons.
19. The PCC should use existing governance arrangements such as the CRB to scrutinise and hold the force to account for their approach to offender management. This will ensure that the force are effectively reducing the harm caused by SOC offenders.
20. The PCC should work with partners to ensure that appropriate services are in place to assist individuals who wish to leave SOC.
21. The PCC should ensure that the SOC needs assessment includes an assessment of SOC nominals as well as victims. This should then inform future PCC commissioning decisions around rehabilitation.

### Establishing a single whole-system approach

22. The PCC should engage with SOCJAG chairs through the CRB to determine the most suitable approach to involving private sector partners in the SOCJAG process.

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23. The PCC should use the Strategic Framework to steer the partnership response to SOC locally, to inform any future PCC commissioning intentions in relation to SOC, and where relevant, to hold the force to account.
  24. The PCC should continue to raise SOC through formal holding to account processes, to ensure that West Mercia Police's focus on SOC is sustained.
  25. The PCC should consider including SOC as a distinct priority within the Safer West Mercia Plan.

## 12. End notes

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