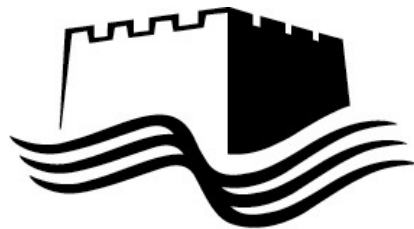


Gangs and Serious Youth Violence

Scrutiny Review Report



TOWER HAMLETS

March 2018

Chair's Foreword

The safety and wellbeing of all residents in our borough is of paramount importance and so I was pleased to be able to lead this review into how we can better keep our young people away from violence and make Tower Hamlets a safer place for everyone. I am grateful to the wide contributions made to this review; by Council officers, partner agencies, fellow Councillors and most importantly the Young Mayor and Deputy Mayor. It is only right that we listen carefully and respond to the concerns of young people in our borough.

Following the Ofsted inspection of children's services last year, it became clear that the work the Council and partners are doing needed to be further strengthened to ensure that we keep young people safe here. Since that time there have been improvements to our work in this area and this is most welcome. This review has helped to clarify what work still needs to be undertaken in relation to gangs and serious youth violence to ensure effective interventions to keep young people safe.

The review group has looked at the current work being done by the Council, partners and other agencies. We considered work undertaken by a number of different teams at the Council (social care, community safety and youth services). It is vital that this work is undertaken with strong partnerships both within the Council and with partners and residents in the community. Our responsibility is to provide effective, high quality service and interventions.

There was also a strong feeling that the approach of the Council in relation to gangs and youth violence should have the confidence of the local community and involve them in tackling this issue. Furthermore we should have a strong emphasis on listening to the views of young people and those who have been the victims of youth violence and their families.

Given the constraints of this work, it is inevitable that this review has not been able to explore all the areas that we might have wished. In particular further work needs to be undertaken to understand the effect of gangs and serious youth violence on women in the borough and services need to gain further insight into the lived experiences of young people in Tower Hamlets. This will ensure that we can achieve the ambition of making our borough a much safer place.

I hope that this report contributes strongly to the development of further work in this area.

Councillor Danny Hassell

March 2018

Summary of Recommendations

Approach and Focus

Recommendation 1:

Our approach to dealing with those involved in or victims of gangs and youth violence should consider the needs of the whole family and adopt a safeguarding approach.

Recommendation 2:

The Council should develop a new Gangs and Youth Violence Strategy which reflects the concerns of the community and young people and has a strong focus on the voices of victims and of empowering the community.

Recommendation 3:

Develop a more co-ordinated and holistic approach to address gangs and serious youth violence such as a wider 'exploitation' team.

Recommendation 4:

Our assessments of children entering the care system should more thoroughly consider the mental health needs, including an understanding of the specific impact of violence on their lives.

Recommendation 5:

Ensure that there is funding and coordination that covers interventions for young people over the age of 18.

Analysis, Knowledge and Understanding

Recommendation 6:

Undertake further analysis of the gangs profile in the borough. This should include, but not be limited to, the age, ethnic profile, education levels, disability and mental health needs of those involved.

Recommendation 7:

Improve and develop our understanding of the impact of County Lines and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) on our looked after children who are placed outside of borough.

Recommendation 8:

Further work needs to be undertaken to develop a more comprehensive understanding of impact on women as a result of gangs and gang activity in the borough, in particular Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). This should include the voices and experiences of those who have been victims of gangs and serious violence.

Communications, Joint-Working and Engagement

Recommendation 9:

Current engagement with Job Centre Plus should be expanded to include the Council's WorkPath as employment is considered an effective opportunity for gangs exit.

Recommendation 10:

Consider ways in which the risk and vulnerability of young people attending the London East Alternative Provision (LEAP) can be better understood and develop an effective support package for young people re-entering secondary school when moving from the LEAP.

Recommendation 11:

Engage with schools and the police to better understand their policies around exclusions in relation to carrying knives and/or drugs.

Recommendation 12:

Wider engagement should be undertaken with the local community and other stakeholders, including schools, faith groups and TRAs to increase an understanding of community concerns and how they might help contribute to our response.

Recommendation 13:

Consideration should be given to whether the Council should lead on delivering a social care/youth worker presence in A&E, including the paediatric A&E at Royal London in order to support early identification and intervention of those involved in gangs or subject to exploitation by gangs.

Recommendation 14:

The Council should work in partnership with the police in order to develop effective disruption activity in relation to gangs, drugs and CSE, ensuring that it utilises all of the tools and powers at its disposal.

Training and Capacity Building

Recommendation 15:

Current training being delivered to staff on gangs and serious youth violence should be offered to all staff, including agency staff in relevant roles and partner agencies in the future.

Recommendation 16:

Instigate a programme of training for local residents, where appropriate, to act as community advocates.

Recommendation 17:

Develop a peer led programme to raise awareness of risks and vulnerabilities and support peers through mentoring.

Recommendation 18:

Ensure that there are effective, reflective supervisions for staff to ensure that they can raise sensitive issues in a supportive setting.

Recommendation 19:

Provide training to youth workers in developing an understanding of youth courts and the youth justice system.

Recommendation 20:

The Council and partners should offer a quality assured preventative programme to schools, in order to spot early warning signs and develop the resilience of young people.

Introduction

- 1.1 Gangs and Youth Violence is a high profile issue not just locally but across the world. Although perception of gang related violence and offences often outweighs the actual number of incidents, there is an unacceptable level of gang activity within London and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets that needs addressing.
- 1.2 The Borough has a relatively high number of younger residents, an ethnically diverse population and high levels of deprivation. These are all factors that are frequently associated with gangs and related criminal and anti-social activity.
- 1.3 In 2017 the London Borough of Tower Hamlets underwent an Ofsted review of its Children’s Services and one of the recommendations that arose was that the Council should **“Urgently improve the quality and timeliness of services for children who are at risk of becoming involved in gangs and serious youth violence. Ensure the alignment of those services with those for children who go missing and those who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and radicalisation. Ensure that comprehensive and accurate intelligence and data inform service developments.”**
- 1.4 Recognising the national and local context, the aim of this review was to explore the work of the authority and its partners in tackling the problems of Gangs and Youth Violence and its effects on victims, the local community and those involved.
- 1.5 The review was underpinned by three core questions:
 - a) What is the true scale and impact of Gangs and Youth Violence issue in the Tower Hamlets?
 - b) What are common factors that lead to involvement in Gangs?
 - c) How can the Council and its partners work together more effectively to reduce the impact of gangs in the borough and help young people avoid or exit gang involvement?
- 1.6 The review was chaired by Cllr Danny Hassell, Scrutiny Lead for Children’s Services over two sessions held in January and February 2018. The first session was held at the Town Hall and looked at current approach and practices, existing research and findings and examples of good practice being delivered in other areas. The second at Spotlight youth centre and looked at real-life case studies, feedback and findings from reviews and the work of key partners in the borough.
- 1.7 Other members of the review panel included;

Cllr Dave Chesterton	Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Clare Harrisson	Overview and Scrutiny Committee Member
Cllr Rabina Khan	Overview and Scrutiny Committee Member
Cllr Shafi Ahmed	Overview and Scrutiny Committee Member (Substitute)
David Burbidge	Co-opted member of the Health Scrutiny Committee

1.8 Also in attendance for the review;

Fahimal Islam	Young Mayor
Shaiaam Islam	Deputy Young Mayor

1.9 The review was supported by;

William Tompsett	Senior Strategy, Police and Performance Officer
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1.10 The panel received evidence from members of the Executive, a range of officers and experts including;

London Borough of Tower Hamlets:

Cllr Amy Whitelock-Gibbs	Lead Member for Education and Children's Services
Claire Belgard	Interim Head of Integrated Youth and Community Services
Nikki Bradley	Service Manager Youth Justice, Children's Social care and Family Interventions
Debbie Jones	Corporate Director, Children's Services
Nancy Meehan	Interim Divisional Director, Children's Social Care
Adam Salmon	Ending Gang, Group and Serious Youth Violence Coordinator
Paula Wilkinson	Crime Reduction & Rapid Response Team Manager

Metropolitan Police:

Mike Hamer	Deputy Chief Inspector
Sean Drislane	Detective Inspector

External experts:

Maurice Mason	Community Safety and Partnership Manager, London Borough of Hackney
John O'Shea	Bow School
Daniel Rose	Director of Spotlight
Khalid Sugulle	St Giles Trust
Joe Williams	Spotlight, Poplar HARCA

2. National, Regional and Local Context

2.1 Although Gangs have a reputation for high level of crime and anti-social behaviour, reliable statistics and data are difficult to qualify and attribute. One major issue is that the definition of Gangs is constantly evolving. It is also an issue that crime data is not always directly connected to gang activity so a lot of the evidence is anecdotal or based on perception.

2.2 The current and generally accepted definition of a Gang is:

“A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who (1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, (2) engage in a range of criminal activity and violence, (3) identify with or lay claim over territory, (4) have some form of identifying structural feature, and (5) are in conflict with other, similar, gangs”

- Hallsworth and Young¹

2.3 The accepted definition has however become dated with gangs sometimes recognising the benefit of working together instead of in conflict and there being less evidence of being publicly identifiable through symbols, colours etc in order to reduce their visibility to the authorities.

2.4 There have been a large number of studies and reviews made into Gangs and youth Violence over the past looking at impact, factors for involvement, intervention activities and overall approach to understanding and tackling the issues.

2.5 A study of existing reports and published papers was made and presented to the Review Panel summarising the perceived key findings and common themes. Six documents were chosen for review offering different perspectives and highlighting varying aspects of gangs and youth violence. These were:

- **Dying to Belong - Centre for Social Justice, 2009 -**
<https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/DyingtoBelongFullReport.pdf>
- **Gang Prevention Programme - Waltham Forest, 2017 -**
<http://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/s55871/4a.%20Report%20on%20Waltham%20Forests%20Gang%20Prevention%20Programme.pdf>
- **Preventing Gang and Youth Violence - Home Office, 2015 -**
<http://www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Final-R1-Overview-Preventing-Gang-Youth-Violence.pdf>
- **Children’s Voices - Children’s Commissioner, 2017 –**
<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Childrens-Voices-A-review-of-evidence-on-the-subjective-wellbeing-of-children-involved-in-gangs-in-England-2.pdf>
- **What Works to Prevent Gang Involvement, Youth Violence and Crime – Home Office, 2015 –**

¹ Dying to Belong, Centre for Social Justice, 2009 -
<https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/DyingtoBelongFullReport.pdf>

<http://www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Final-R2-WW-Prevent-Gang-Youth-Violence-final.pdf>

- **Female Voice in Violence – Race On The Agenda (ROTA), 2011** - <http://www.rota.org.uk/content/rota-march-2011-female-voice-violence-project-final-report-it-my-life>

2.6 It was agreed that there are common themes identifiable from these studies/reports that should be kept in mind in developing future initiatives and approach.

- Social and economic triggers
- Family background
- Education
- Strong link to drugs
- Cross-boundary activities
- Perceived status and lack of options/opportunities
- Need for joined up working on early prevention and enabling exit

2.7 It was also noted that there is a definite need for quality information to be shared and used effectively in a joined up approach across services and geographical boundaries. Also, a balanced approach between safeguarding and enforcement, recognising the vulnerability of those involved is essential.

Trident Command Risk Matrix

2.8 Across London, the Trident Command Risk Matrix is used to identify and rank gang members and their propensity to perpetrate violence. It is the primary tool used to identify whether or not a young person is a member of a gang. Locally, matrix is managed by the police with input and consultation from partner organisations.

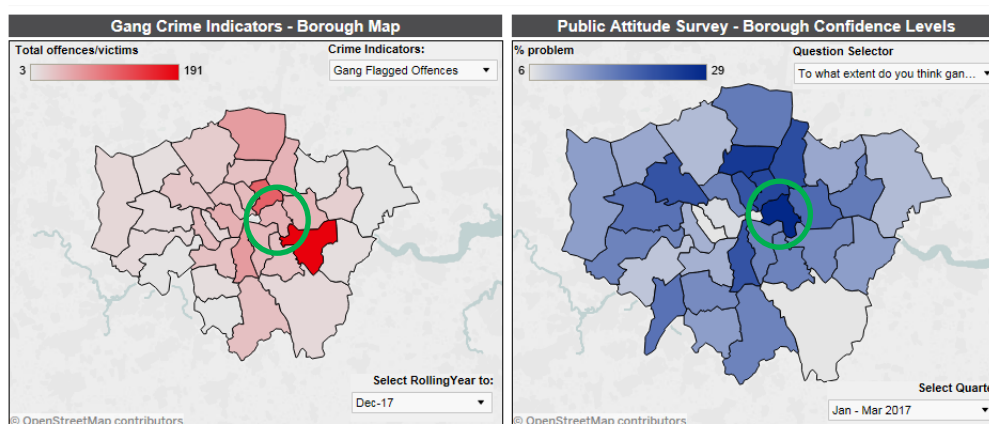
2.9 Decisions to remove individuals from the gangs matrix are jointly made by the police and partners and support is offered by the Youth Offending Team and St Giles Trust where possible to those coming off the matrix.

2.10 According to the matrix, at the time of the review there were 3,495 gang members and 250 gangs in London. 70% of these members were aged 17-23 years old and two thirds of these members had also been victims of crime themselves. 97.8% of these members were male and 77.6% were identified as BAME.

2.11 The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) ²manage a Gangs Dashboard showing the scale of gang flagged crime and perception of gangs as an issue for all boroughs. ^{Figure 1}

² MOPAC Gangs dashboard <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/data-and-statistics/crime%20gangs-dashboard>

Figure 1



- 2.12 The London Borough of Tower Hamlets currently has 8 identifiable gangs with a total of 73 nominals on the matrix (down from 119 over the past year). The local profile is one of the youngest of all London boroughs. Gang-flagged offences have reduced from 220 to just 45 since January 2016 and knife crime has remained relatively stable despite considerable increases in all other areas of London.
- 2.13 There are very strong links between gangs and the local drug trade with Tower Hamlets having the highest number of known heroin and crack cocaine users in London. Many young people are lured into drug-dealing for gangs by the promise of status and money or through bullying and coercion. Once part of the system, threats of violence against them and their families are used to keep them under control of the gang leaders and make it seem impossible to leave or approach agencies for help.

Co-Offending Groups

- 2.14 Co-Offending Groups (COGs) is a term adopted to refer to young people who may not be on the gangs matrix (either due to lack of evidence linking them to a specific gang or not having committed a serious violent offence) but who are affected by or at risk of involvement. The COG panel works in alignment with the Youth Offending Team and currently focuses on young people up to the age of 18 years old to identify and offer support and intervention activities. There are plans to expand the remit to include a wider age-range up to 25 and include habitual knife carriers.
- 2.15 COG partners work closely with schools, St Giles Trust and the Schools Police Officer. There is also a Youth Advisory Group setting up to work within Spotlight.
- 2.16 Gangs Awareness Training is being delivered to Tower Hamlets Social Workers to build understanding and awareness in direct response to the Ofsted report. This training is mandatory and the possibility of expanding access to other agencies and parents is being considered.
- 2.17 There are a number of local support structures in place and available to young people to help avoid and exit gang involvement. These include:
- Youth Offending team

- Police Gangs Team
- Youth Services
- Children's Social Care
- St Giles COG Intervention/SOS Services
- St Giles MTU Services (at the Royal London Hospital)
- Schools and London East Alternative Provision
- Voluntary and Community Services

County Lines

- 2.18 One of the growing areas of concern involving London Gangs is County Lines. This represents a move from the more saturated and violently competed drug market in the capital to enter drug markets of smaller towns outside of London, especially around the south coast.
- 2.19 Gangs often use young children to transport drugs and set up distribution and safe houses through coercion and human trafficking with a known link in some areas with looked after children.
- 2.20 County Lines presents a number of issues for enforcement agencies as most of the offences take place outside of London and the borough. Local police resources are limited and focused on reducing crime committed within the borough. Police outside of London often have difficulty identifying where to refer offenders back to. Previously, the young people being forced to transport the drugs have had little protection and were treated as the offenders whereas recent laws on human trafficking have enabled them to be treated as victims with the focus shifting to focus on identifying and stopping the organisers.
- 2.21 The Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime (MOPAC) are funding a £3million County Lines project to provide a single point of contact for London for regional police and agencies to refer children and young people back to, shared mapping of data across the capital and to support rescue and support services supplied by St Giles Trust.

Youth Services

- 2.22 The majority of the Youth Services at Tower Hamlets is an open access universal service, not primarily in place to address gangs. However, it is recognised that this is a relatively well resourced borough with protective factors such as access to positive activities, peer networks and adult role models. Preventative measures that are in place include access to safe spaces outside of school and the family.
- 2.23 Youth Services is a frontline community resource, well placed to work with local partners to address issues. They are also able to deliver outreach and work to address local problems.
- 2.24 A review carried out during 2016 highlighted poor/declining performance in the area and a relatively poor reputation. The offer from the services was considered dated with poor quality venues and a disjointed delivery that was not understood by young people.

- 2.25 The service has since been redesigned and relaunched in February 2018 with the following improvements made:
- Better quality hub venues, open for longer
 - Increased hours for front lone staff and more full time front line staff – able to plan, train and work more with communities
 - Mixed economy of delivery and commissioning
 - Significant investment in buildings and on-going investment in ICT and marketing
 - New outcomes framework
 - New branding and uniforms
- 2.26 There are now 8 directly delivered hubs open from 3.30 -9pm and 10 commissioned hubs opening 15 hours per week. These hubs offer:
- A safe place for young people to meet friends
 - Structured positive activities – sports, games, arts, music, informal education
 - Information, advice and guidance – health, relationships, education and employment
 - Facilities – ICT suite, training kitchen, hair salon, chill out space, dance studio, music studio, sports hall, climbing wall. Gym and football pitches
 - Individual assessment, intervention plan and signposting or onward referral
- 2.27 The Early Help and Transitions work of Youth Services offer referral through the Early Help Hub or Social Inclusion Panel. Early Help assessment considers the whole family unit and the team offer specialist experience with young people “Not in Education, Employment or Training” (NEET), Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Prevent and Gangs. They work with Children’s Social Care, edge of care and early help services such as parenting support.

Rapid Response Team

- 2.28 Tower Hamlets as an Inner London borough has challenges in key crime types, notably those linked to the workforce of drug markets and drug lines. These can include violent crimes and exploitation. The age range of the drug line workforce both inside and outside of London is usually varied, early teens through to middle aged people at the top responsible for importing drugs and weapons. Some have extensive criminal histories that began in their early teens.
- 2.29 Young adults known as “Olders” recruit younger people to distribute drugs including trafficking them within and outside of London. Olders use power and coercive control including grooming and exploitation techniques which are also evident in other forms of abuse such as domestic violence, child sexual exploitation or radicalisation to control their workers.
- 2.30 In the borough, visible drug dealing and monetary exchanges are evident despite CCTV cameras. Drug markets are also visible along the DLR and Overground transport routes which provide opportunities for customers to travel in, pick up their supply and continue with their journey.

- 2.31 People susceptible to being groomed can have limited critical thinking skills, inadequate education, additional educational and mental health needs, food poverty, lack of capable guardians and a negative perception of gaining legitimate employment opportunities.
- 2.32 The Rapid Response Team (RRT) work in conjunction with internal and external partners in specific geographical locations to decrease crime and antisocial behaviour. They attend operational and community safety, crime and anti-social behaviour problem solving meetings to deploy services as appropriate to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 2.33 RRT gathers and shares community information with partners and ensures younger residents' views are heard by professional to inform working practices. They make use of social media such as WhatsApp to be able to understand community tensions and provide information about risks to police and Council colleagues. The deployment of RRT teams allows them to respond to immediate or emerging community tensions by operating street-based outreach in community settings. They keep in regular contact with the borough control room and feed back to groups like the Tension Monitoring or Gold Groups.

- 2.34 Detached workers are deployed to areas experiencing crime and anti-social behaviour to reduce opportunities of people becoming victims and or perpetrators of crime or anti-social behaviour including:

- Violent crimes – knife crimes and gang associated violence
- Violence against women and girls – repeat victimisation and/or exploitation
- Community resilience against hate crimes and exploitation by extremists



- 2.35 RRT, police and other partners deliver a joint response, for example through home visits, Estate Awareness Days, Community Safety Walkabouts, Weapon Sweeps, programme delivery and use of resources in the area. The RRT mobile units provide medium to long-term (up to 12 weeks) tailored group sessions in accordance with identified risk and individual needs to ensure safe exit from offending and exploitation.
- 2.36 Based on identified needs, RRT provides outcome-focused interventions around learning, life skills and employment. These are designed using community information gathered through foot deployment and the mobile units. Young people vulnerable to being exploited can be identified by the school/Pupil Referral Unit as being at risk of exploitation and grooming by peers and/or older gang members and the RRT can promote specialist support services and refer young people when needed.
- 2.37 RRT are coordinating a pan-borough monthly outreach meeting with internal partners and local third sector partners to promote collaborative working, manage risk and coordinated work with victims and their families. This meeting links in with Child and Adult Social Care and other meetings arranged by police colleagues

- 2.38 In December 2017, RRT received comprehensive training from “Crying Son’s”, an organisation with a track record of training frontline police officers on how to understand and identify violence, vulnerability and exploitation attributed to drugs and county lines. This was followed by scenario training designed to increase practitioner implementation of risk management operational plans, in line with statutory safeguarding responsibilities and information sharing protocols. Both sessions are being repeated in March 2018 for a wider audience including Social Workers and third sector provision. It is hoped that this will build capacity in the borough.
- 2.39 In January 2018 the Safer London Foundation delivered Empower training focussing on Child Sexual Exploitation. The team are now working with St Giles Trust in relation to accredited NVQ Level 3 Key Working with young adults who are outside of mainstream services. RRT work in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Hackney and Tower Hamlets Gangs lead. DWP have developed this as a specialised area taking into account risk and clients being ‘job ready.’ There are implications to parent benefit entitlement for Housing and Council Tax for non-dependent children and young adults over 18 and living at home. RRT coordinate liaison with DWP and clients to resolve these issues.

3. The Hackney Model

- 3.1 The Community Safety Partnership Manager from the London Borough of Hackney presented the model and approach they have adopted.
- 3.2 Hackney's strategic priorities are focused on reducing violence and serious violent offences with their gang violence being recognised as a particular issue. Hackney has set up an Integrated Gangs Unit (IGU) made up of the Youth Offending Team, Probation, Victim Support, Police, St Giles Trust and a dedicated analyst all working together. The IGU have responsibility for managing their Gangs matrix and hold monthly tasking meetings looking at dynamic evidence. Having these different agencies working together in the same location encourages greater information sharing and a co-ordinated approach to delivering strategic and operational activity.
- 3.3 The IGU also hold weekly tasking process meetings which enables them to react quickly to new incidents and changes, They are closely aligned to internal Council based resources such as Trading Standards and parks teams to share information. There is currently a focus on developing stronger working relationships with head teachers to share information on matters such as knife seizures as well as to improve access to mentoring for young people.
- 3.4 Hackney currently have 20 active gangs and around 150 gang members on their matrix. They have become particularly aware recently of the emergence of online activity which leads to greater involvement between gangs. However, most of their recent conflict and violence is being caused by existing gangs moving their operations out of the area and leaving a power struggle between rival groups. They also have a profile of older victims but younger gang members.
- 3.5 Hackney focuses their gang related activity around three themes – Enforcement, Diversion and Prevention. There is an acceptance that there is no single activity that can fully tackle the issue and impact of gangs on its own so a combination of measures are in place including intelligence lead “Stop and Search” with the support of the local community.
- 3.6 Resources are continually becoming more limited and the need for realignment rather than increase is vital. Community policing is an area that Hackney have looked at refocussing alongside working with St Giles Trust and a scheme called Mentivation to deliver engagement with young people and promote involvement in positive activities including music and sport with the help of strong positive role models.
- 3.7 Empowering families and the local community has been a strong theme with training being provided for parent advocates through the Parents' Voice group and the support of a Borough Unite conference organised by the local community. The Community Safety Partnership also works closely with Empower Safer London to promote child safety and tackle exploitation.
- 3.8 Hackney have been successful in securing funding for safeguarding and neighbourhood working which will be used to focus on those at risk of involvement with gangs rather than those already on the matrix. Co-production is a strong theme going forward with the Community and Voluntary

Service bidding for funding to train parents and peers as mentors and to work closely with the local Faith Forum.

4. Partner Examples

- 4.1 Two partnership organisations were specifically featured during the review process.

Spotlight

- 4.2 Set up by Poplar HARCA, Spotlight is a youth focused facility whose vision is to create a place where young people could think creatively, gain confidence and pursue opportunities they may not have thought possible.
- 4.3 Opened in 2014, Spotlight was created in response to local young people saying they had nowhere to go that was just for them. The design and offer was based on research conducted by young people with over 200 respondents and secured £4million in funding.
- 4.4 Since opening, Spotlight has engaged nearly 6,000 young people of which 42% are female. The success in serving such a relatively high proportion of female users has been attributed to a mixture of offering safe and secure facilities, female focussed activities and plenty of female staff. There is also a balance between mixed use and female only spaces and services. There have been over 100,000 attendances in the various activities offered with a programme based around the three themes of Get Creative, Get Active and Get Inspired.
- 4.5 According to the Metropolitan Police's Annual Crime Count, Lansbury Ward saw a 40% reduction in all crimes from 1,153 incidents in 2013 to 693 in 2015. This is significantly higher than the 18% reduction recorded for the whole borough and most wards went down by 17-20% during the same period. This coincides with the opening and development of spotlight and it's positive work with young people.
- 4.6 As well as activities, Spotlight also offer access to specialist support to young people suffering from mental health issues, child sexual exploitation and drug and alcohol abuse all within a safe and non-threatening environment. They are also developing programmes of leadership including Youth Committee, Spotlight reps and Community Heroes.
- 4.7 Spotlight is now commissioned by the local authority to deliver a youth service contract covering a third of all youth service in the borough. They have expanded to deliver across 6 centres, 5 nights a week and engaging an additional 2,400 per year. They have also extended the target age range including in Poplar and Mile End through detached and late night centre based activities.
- 4.8 Poplar HARCA are fully aware of high levels of youth violence and tension/frustration in the local area and, wherever possible, look to find methods of resolution including mediation provided by youth workers from Spotlight. However, their housing management situation does allow for "last resort" options of evictions should they be needed.



- 4.9 For more information on Spotlight and the services they offer their website can be found at <https://wearespotlight.com/>.

St Giles Trust

- 4.10 St Giles Trust work with a number of authorities and agencies across London and further afield to provide a number of programmes that help young people who are either involved with or at risk from gangs.
- 4.11 Their SOS Project offers intensive help to young people exposed to or at risk of violence, vulnerability and exploitation. The work encompasses gangs work and family support as well as child exploitation and human trafficking.
- 4.12 In addition, the SOS+ Programme prevents disadvantaged young people becoming involved in gang crime and serious youth violence. It offers interactive sessions in schools, pupil referral units and colleges which offer practical tools and knowledge to young people on how to steer clear from violence and crime.
- 4.13 St Giles also work in The Royal London Hospital's Major Trauma Centre in Whitechapel, East London, to offer intensive support to young people who have been admitted as victims of serious youth violence and sexual violence.
- 4.14 One of the strengths of St Giles Trust is that they are considered "experts by experience" in that the workers who provide support and advice to young people have first-hand experience of the situations they are talking about. The young people the work with can relate to the workers through shared experiences and language.
- 4.15 For more information on the work of St Giles Trust visit their website at <https://www.stgilestrust.org.uk/>.

5. Approach and Focus

- 5.1 The underpinning aim of the Tower Hamlets Ending Gangs, Group and Serious Youth Violence Strategy 2015-18 is to reduce the harm caused by gang, group and serious youth violence in the borough and its associated forms of abuse. The work is guided by the following key principles based on prevention, intervention and enforcement:
- The authority and its partners will not tolerate gang, group and serious youth violence and its associated abuse in Tower Hamlets
 - Our work will be underpinned by a safeguarding approach
 - Young people (and families) who are at risk of involvement in gang, group and serious youth violence and the associated forms of abuse will be offered targeted interventions at the earliest point to discourage involvement with support from the appropriate partners
 - If young people (or families) continue to engage in gang, group and serious youth violence the partnership will use all the enforcement options available, while continuing to offer support with appropriate interventions
 - The partnership makes a strong commitment to data and intelligence sharing to reduce the harm caused by gang, group and serious youth violence and its associated forms of abuse.
- 5.2 Findings throughout the review and in existing reports and case studies all highlight the importance of understanding and supporting the needs of the family and young people caught up in gangs and youth violence. The psychological and physical impact of threats of violence and sexual violence against individuals and family members pose a significant risk to all involved.
- 5.3 Many of the young people involved in gangs are not doing so out of choice but through fear of violence and retribution. Protection for them and their families need to be built in to any strategy or activity to help facilitate gang exit or diversion.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Our approach to dealing with those involved in or victims of gangs and youth violence should consider the needs of the whole family and adopt a safeguarding approach.

- 5.4 The current Ending Gang, Group and Serious Youth Violence Strategy runs to 2018 and is based on historic data and evidence. The Gangs situation has evolved since the strategy was adopted in 2015 with greater understanding and intelligence available to help shape improvement and service delivery.
- 5.5 The delivery of the 2015-2018 Strategy has led to a greater understanding of key issues and a more integrated partnership approach involving the Council, police and key community partners including the commissioning of St Giles Trust and Spotlight.
- 5.6 The model of Hackney's Integrated Gangs Unit reinforces the benefit of developing a strong joined-up strategic approach to tackling Gangs and Youth Violence. The Council should look to ensure its new strategy is co-produced with partners and the community to strengthen delivery of priorities.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

The Council should develop a new Gangs and Youth Violence Strategy which reflects the concerns of the community and young people and has a strong focus on the voices of victims and of empowering the community.

- 5.7 Historically, tackling gangs and their impact on the local community has been viewed primarily as an enforcement issue. However, it is now universally agreed that many of those involved with gangs are themselves victims of abuse in many forms too. Also the nature of gangs is more complex than public perception so activity needs to be delivered in a way to support those involved or at risk to make positive life choices and have the confidence to move away from the gangs.
- 5.8 Additionally, the wider issues of exploitation, violence and the factors leading to gang involvement make a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach necessary in order to develop effective and holistic responses to this issue. Hackney's example of an Integrated Gangs Unit bringing together multiple agencies within one team has proved to be a successful approach.
- 5.9 The issue of County Lines (see 2.18), its direct relation to gang activity and its cross-boundary and multi-issue nature highlight how complex the subject of gangs and youth violence is. The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) is funding development work in this area to help provide more detailed intelligence and information sharing to enable the police, local authorities and partners to address the wider issues more effectively.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Develop a more co-ordinated and holistic approach to address gangs and serious youth violence such as a wider 'exploitation' team.

- 5.10 The Troubled Lives, Tragic Consequences³ thematic review conducted in 2014 highlighted the need to be aware of and understand the importance of the life experiences of young people brought to the attention of Children's Services. This includes violence and other forms of abuse they may have suffered from peers, social groups or families. The impact of these experiences over time played a significant role in the behaviour and life choices of the individuals in the review and it is understood that identifying and challenging these at an earlier stage may have led to more effective interventions.
- 5.11 The review concluded that a greater understanding educational, mental health and disability needs of young people and their links to potential gang

³ <http://www.childrenandfamiliestrust.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Troubled-Lives-Summary-Report-Final1.pdf>

involvement was needed in order to help early identification of vulnerable young people and more effective delivery of intervention work.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Our assessments of children entering the care system should more thoroughly consider the mental health needs, including an understanding of the specific impact of violence on their lives.

- 5.12 Gang involvement is spread across a wide age range and although Children’s Services and associated agencies are focussed on supporting and working with under 18 year olds, it is recognised that many vulnerable young adults involved with gangs and violence have lower educational and emotional ages and are equally at risk.
- 5.13 By concentrating efforts on young people, the Council and partners have managed to reduce the number and proportion of under 18s on the Gangs Matrix. Figure 2

Figure 2

Age	Current Matrix		Matrix A Year Ago	
	Number	%	Number	%
13	0	0.0	2	1.5
14	0	0.0	4	3.1
15	2	2.6	7	5.3
16	4	5.2	8	6.1
17	6	7.8	19	14.5
18	10	13.0	11	8.4
19	11	14.3	19	14.5
20	7	9.1	9	6.9
21	4	5.2	11	8.4
22-25	26	33.8	26	19.8
26-35	7	9.1	15	11.5
13-17	12	15.6	40	30.5
13-18	22	28.6	51	38.9
18+	65	84.4	91	69.5
Over 18s	55	71.4	80	61.1
Total	77	100.0	131	100.0

- 5.14 Some partner agencies are already extending their support work to include young adults and the Council’s Rapid Response Team is transitioning to be able to work with a wider age range. There is already coordinated work underway with Department for Work and Pensions (see 2.39). However, resources are limited and in order to offer services and support to a wider group, sourcing and securing additional funding is vital.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Ensure that there is funding and coordination that covers interventions for young people over the age of 18.

6. Analysis, Knowledge and Understanding

- 6.1 One of the key issues facing Tower Hamlets in its work with gangs and youth violence is the shortage of data and information currently available. In order to provide more robust intelligence in order to better focus resources, it is considered vital that dedicated analytical staff are in place and able to source, interpret and disseminate data effectively.
- 6.2 Although it is generally accepted that the local gang profile is predominantly male and matching the local ethnic population mix, there is not a full set of data to confirm this in detail. There are also currently gaps in information regarding the mental health needs of youths involved with gang activity and the possible scale of child exploitation that is usually linked to gangs.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Undertake further analysis of the gangs profile in the borough. This should include, but not be limited to, the age, ethnic profile, education levels, disability and mental health needs of those involved.

- 6.3 County Lines has quickly become a significant national issue but due to its cross-boundary nature it has been difficult to collect meaningful data and build up a full profile of its impact. Similarly, it is known that vulnerable young people are being used and exploited by older people involved in criminality in order to facilitate the drug trade in this way but increased research and data sharing with other authorities and police outside of the borough would enable a more detailed picture of the impact on looked after children placed outside of the borough in particular.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Improve and develop our understanding of the impact of County Lines and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) on our looked after children who are placed outside of borough.

- 6.4 Much of the focus of gangs and youth violence is on the male perpetrators and victims as these are the significant majority. However, studies show that there is a significant impact on females either through direct involvement with gangs and gang members or through family involvement.
- 6.5 The threat of physical, emotional and sexual violence against women from gangs was made evident in the Race On The Agenda study Female Voice in Violence⁴ highlighting child protection and safeguarding issues, a lack of confidence in traditional support services, the need for national and local responses and the need to address attitudes of boys and men towards

⁴ <http://www.rota.org.uk/content/rota-march-2011-female-voice-violence-project-final-report-it-my-life>

females. The improvement of local knowledge around the impact of gangs on females would enable strengthening the protection and support that can be targeted to this group.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Further work needs to be undertaken to develop a more comprehensive understanding of impact on women as a result of gangs and gang activity in the borough, in particular Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). This should include the voices and experiences of those who have been victims of gangs and serious violence.

7. Communications, Joint Working and Engagement

- 7.1 It has been noted that one major cause for gang involvement is the perceived lack of opportunity for success through legitimate work. Local young people who either struggle through the traditional education system or perceive cultural stereotyping to limit their choices can be vulnerable to promises of status and money obtainable through gangs involvement.
- 7.2 Similarly, young people who have been caught up in gangs often believe that they will not be given opportunities to find work and because of their past and so feel trapped in gangs and criminal activity in order to maintain an income and support themselves or their family.
- 7.3 Providing positive options for employment and training will give those wishing to avoid or leave gangs with the means to support their choice.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

Current engagement with Job Centre Plus should be expanded to include the Council's WorkPath as employment is considered an effective opportunity for gangs exit.

- 7.4 The work of London East Alternative Provision (LEAP - formerly the Pupil Referral Unit) to support young people outside of the traditional school system is an important and valued resource. The opportunities offered and support offered there are of a high standard however there is potentially a challenge for young people who move back into the school system to readjust and settle.
- 7.5 The LEAP currently takes pupils from 17 schools located across both borough and city with the proportion of pupils with minority ethnic backgrounds, English as a second language and special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) being above the national average.
- 7.6 In order to ease the transition back into schools and provide the best opportunity for young people to succeed, it is important to understand their individual needs and offer tailored support to suit them.

RECOMMENDATION 10:

Consider ways in which the risk and vulnerability of young people attending the London East Alternative Provision (LEAP) can be better understood and develop an effective support package for young people re-entering secondary school when moving from the LEAP.

- 7.7 During the review, it was recognised that there was a perceived understanding that all schools maintained a zero-tolerance policy regarding carrying drugs and knives that would lead to automatic exclusion. It was felt that such a policy could be detrimental to the development and education of the young person involved, potentially forcing them into more negative life choices.

- 7.8 This was proved to not be a universal policy and further investigation has been recommended to understand the policy of local schools in this matter in order to provide a joined up approach to supporting young people in education.

RECOMMENDATION 11:

Engage with schools and the police to better understand their policies around exclusions in relation to carrying knives and/or drugs.

- 7.9 A common theme that arose throughout the review was the need for greater involvement, engagement and support for the local community in empowering them in tackling gangs and youth violence or the circumstances that lead to this.
- 7.10 Faith groups, families, schools and resident associations all offer a local knowledge and are community stakeholders that can provide peer support and challenge in ways that may be more readily accepted than the police and local authority.
- 7.11 There have been good examples in the past of family based intervention and mediation work carried out within the community and local youth workers operating out of Spotlight show the benefit of positive peer role models.

RECOMMENDATION 12:

Wider engagement should be undertaken with the local community and other stakeholders, including schools, faith groups and TRAs to increase an understanding of community concerns and how they might help contribute to our response.

- 7.12 Many victims of youth violence who end up in hospital are still unwilling to give details of what they have been through to the police or authorities due to the fear they have of what might happen to them or their families. Also, the presentation of young people with certain conditions may help to identify those at risk of exploitation as a result of gang activity. It is believed that the placement of social care/youth workers with A&E departments would enable trained professionals to spot potential victims of gang and youth violence and provide specialist support where it is most needed.
- 7.13 In addition to the work done by St Giles Trust, the Rapid Response Team are due to recruit a new A&E Coordinator post to engage with victims of violence at the Royal London Hospital who receive treatment and are discharged.
- 7.14 St Giles Trust currently deliver a service with 2 caseworkers embedded in the Major Trauma Centre of Royal London Hospital offer support to young people who are admitted as a result of serious youth violence and sexual violence. When young people are referred to them by the hospital staff, they assess their needs then support them whilst they are still in hospital, on discharge and offer follow up services in the community to help them stay safe and reduce the likelihood of future admissions. Usually, this involves helping the young person find a safe place to stay as returning to their home area can often have risks of reprisals. Once the young person's situation is stabilised,

we will help them engage with services offering support around education, skills and training.

RECOMMENDATION 13:

Consideration should be given to whether the Council should lead on delivering a social care/youth worker presence in A&E, including the paediatric A&E at Royal London in order to support early identification and intervention of those involved in gangs or subject to exploitation by gangs.

- 7.15 Disruption activity forms a strong method of deterrent for gangs by making it harder for them to conduct their business. The visibility of police and other agencies on the street pro-actively tackling gangs and youth violence also serves to reassure local residents and manage the perception of crime and community safety.
- 7.16 The review was informed of activities such as intelligence led use of Stop and Search and vehicle searches had been effective in this and other boroughs and the coordinated focusing of police and Council resources in this area would help manage level of incidents. Whilst the Council have a role to play in this area, the work must be led by the police who have the tools and powers to undertake this.

RECOMMENDATION 14:

The Council should work in partnership with the police in order to develop effective disruption activity in relation to gangs, drugs and CSE, ensuring that it utilises all of the tools and powers at its disposal.

8. Training and Capacity Building

- 8.1 Tower Hamlets has recently rolled out mandatory training for its social work staff around gangs and youth violence in order to build resilience in this area. In order to provide a joined up and informed approach across the Council, it was felt that it would be beneficial to offer this training to staff in different departments and relevant agency staff.

RECOMMENDATION 15:

Current training being delivered to staff on gangs and serious youth violence should be offered to all staff, including agency staff in relevant roles and partner agencies in the future.

- 8.2 Training local families and community members to identify and help resolve issues within the local areas was seen as a key factor to empowering communities to tackle anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood problems. This has been used as a method for improving pride of place within other boroughs.
- 8.3 It was felt that many issues could be dealt with more effectively and less confrontationally if local people were trained to act as mediators and advocates rather than involving the local authority, police or other agencies that could be seen as more threatening or less approachable.

RECOMMENDATION 16:

Instigate a programme of training for local residents, where appropriate, to act as community advocates.

- 8.4 One comment made during the review was that “young people should be part of the solution”. It was also pointed out that positive role models from within the young people’s peer groups had had a significant impact on life choices.
- 8.5 Hackney have made a point of bidding for funding to offer training and support for young people to act as mentors as this is seen as an effective way to counteract the negative influences of gang members and groomers sending out influencing messages to recruit new members.

RECOMMENDATION 17:

Develop a peer led programme to raise awareness of risks and vulnerabilities and support peers through mentoring.

- 8.6 One area highlighted through case studies and the Troubled Lives, Tragic Consequences⁵ review in particular was the difficulty some staff had in challenging difficult or sensitive concerns particularly around cultural and family issues. Although this has improved significantly since the review, ongoing development and support is needed to ensure all staff feel

⁵ <http://www.childrenandfamiliestrust.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Troubled-Lives-Summary-Report-Final1.pdf>

comfortable in raising concerns such as these, putting the safety of young people first.

RECOMMENDATION 18:

Ensure that there are effective, reflective supervisions for staff to ensure that they can raise sensitive issues in a supportive setting.

- 8.7 It was raised at the review that there was a lack of understanding amongst many young people of the youth justice system and the consequences of certain actions and activities. In particular, it was noted that quite often young people when arrested were being advised not to answer police questions during interviews which proved to be detrimental to their case overall.
- 8.8 In order to offer accessible support to young people at risk of involvement with the youth court and youth justice system, youth workers should be familiar with the general processes in order to offer meaningful advice and guidance. An offer was made for Spotlight's youth workers to visit the youth court and receive training in this area.

RECOMMENDATION 19:

Provide training to youth workers in developing an understanding of youth courts and the youth justice system.

- 8.9 Case studies presented to the review highlighted where some young people had been evidencing signs of concern through their behaviour and actions that had not been picked up by their families or schools. Awareness in this area has improved but a coordinated and robust programme delivered in partnership with schools, the local authority and partners would help strengthen this key area further.
- 8.10 There is also a general acknowledgement that many vulnerable young people are not aware of their own vulnerability or feel able to make informed choices. It was considered appropriate that greater training in critical and consequential thinking was to be provided in schools particularly for those who may be at risk from gang influence, exploitation and grooming.

RECOMMENDATION 20:

The Council and partners should offer a quality assured preventative programme to schools, in order to spot early warning signs and develop the resilience of young people.