

Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee			
Title	Gang associated women and girls – prevention and awareness review: scoping paper		
Contributor	Scrutiny Manager	Item	5 – appendix D
Class	Part 1 (open)	03 November 2014	

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 At its meeting on 15 July 2014, when deciding on its 2014/15 work programme, the Committee raised concerns about violence against gang associated women and girls.
- 1.2 Additional information about Lewisham’s violence against women and girls (VAWG) strategy was provided by officers at the Committee’s meeting on 10 September 2014. Following consideration of the information provided and questioning of officers, the Committee resolved to carry out a review into the issue of gang associated women and girls in the borough, which would focus on preventative work and early intervention.
- 1.3 This paper sets out a rationale for the review<sup>1</sup>, provides background information about violence against gang associated women and girls and puts forward terms of reference for discussion and agreement by the Committee.

## 2. Recommendations

The Select Committee is asked to:

- note the content of the report
- consider and agree the proposed key lines of inquiry for the review, outlined in section 8 and the timetable, outlined in section 9.

## 3. Policy context

- 3.1 Government’s *ending gang and youth violence programme* includes the ambition to reduce violence against gang associated women and girls. The Government report in 2011, which forms the basis of this approach, set out a range of actions to reduce youth violence, including<sup>2</sup>:
  - providing support to local areas to provide solutions;
  - preventing young people becoming involved in violence in the first place through early intervention and prevention;
  - developing pathways out of violence and gang culture for young people wanting to make a break with the past;
  - punishment and enforcement to suppress the violence of those refusing to exit violent lifestyles;

<sup>1</sup> The in-depth review process is outlined at Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> Ending gang and youth violence: cross government report (2011) - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-gang-and-youth-violence-cross-government-report>

- partnership-working to join up the way local areas respond to gang and other youth violence.

3.2 *A call to end violence against women and girls* is the Government's violence against women and girls strategy. It also includes actions to tackle the dangers faced by gang associated women and girls. The Government's ambition, through the strategy, is to change attitudes, pursue prosecution against offenders and encourage targeted local action. The most recent update on the plan is set out in the 2014 action plan<sup>3</sup>, which details Government progress against its priorities across four key areas:

- Preventing violence
- Provision of services
- Partnership working
- Justice outcomes and risk reduction

3.3 Boys and men are disproportionately represented as both perpetrators and victims of gang violence, so it is often the case that the focus of interventions and activities to deal with youth violence centre on boys and men. Government recognises that:

'In focusing on the male perpetrators and male victims of gang violence it can be easy to lose sight of the role that young women and girls may have in gang-related activity, and the hidden impact of serious youth violence on them.'

(Ending gang and youth violence: cross government report, 2011 p18)

3.4 The Mayor's Officer for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) has developed a strategic framework<sup>4</sup> in London for responding to violence against gang associated women and girls. The framework sets out the strategic direction for London Boroughs to tackle the dangers faced by gang associated girls and women across the city. Its aim is to:

'...support London boroughs and agencies in devising their strategic and operational responses to young women and girls involved in or associated to criminal gangs.'

3.5 The framework recognises that most interventions and activities to support gang associated women and girls are still in the early stages of development and it directs local areas to consider '...a range of different interventions targeted around different needs when commissioning services for gang-associated young women and girls.' Furthermore, it states that local authorities should consider working together to develop cross borough partnerships to provide specialist services (MOPAC 2013, p28-29). The framework provides a checklist of actions for consideration by London authorities and their crime reduction partners to coordinate and focus actions on reducing violence against gang associated women and girls.

3.6 Lewisham's sustainable communities strategy (2008-2020) sets out the vision of a borough where people feel safe and live free from crime, anti-social behaviour and abuse, where young people are protected and where communities live without the fear of crime.

<sup>3</sup> A call to end violence against women and girls: action plan (2014)

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/287758/VAWG\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/287758/VAWG_Action_Plan.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> MOPAC strategic framework for responding to gang associated women and girls (2013):

[http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Gangs%20and%20girls\\_strategic%20framework.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Gangs%20and%20girls_strategic%20framework.pdf)

3.7 The Safer Lewisham Partnership (SLP) which is Lewisham's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) brings together agencies in Lewisham to develop a coordinated approach to tackling crime and antisocial behaviour. The Safer Lewisham Strategy sets out multi-agency plans to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in the borough, which are reviewed annually. The Partnership's 2014-15 priorities include the ambition to:

- Reduce key crimes with particular reference to VAWG and serious youth violence.

3.8 The Safer Lewisham Partnership has also developed a *violence against women and girls strategy* (2014-17) which sets out the following priorities:

- Tackling and reducing incidents of domestic violence and abuse year on year;
- Tackling and reducing rape and sexual violence year on year;
- Tackling sexual exploitation with specific focus on children.

## 5. Meeting the criteria for a review

A review of prevention work for gang associated women and girls meets the criteria for carrying out a scrutiny review, because it is:

- a strategic and significant issue;
- it affects a number of people living in Lewisham;
- the Council is in the process of tendering a service for the provision of services to prevent, and reduce the impacts of, violence against women and girls.
- the Council is required to make a major reduction to its budget, which will reduce resources available to community and voluntary organisations, public health, supported housing, youth offending and schools improvement services.

## 6. Gang associated women and girls

### Definitions

6.1 Gangs, criminal networks and groups involved in antisocial behaviour may all have different features. Their activities, their membership and their areas of operation may change over time. Researchers, policy makers and practitioners may use differing definitions, leading to differing policy approaches. Some commentators (Runnymede 2008) believe that the problem of defining gangs stems from a fundamental failure in the definition of groups of young people and youth violence, which erroneously group together the behaviours and associations of too many different young people. Nonetheless, data used for the Mayor of London's '*strategic ambitions for London on gangs and serious youth violence*' indicates that the Metropolitan Police believe that there are 224 recognised gangs in London made up of about 3495 people<sup>5</sup>.

6.2 The Mayor of London uses the Centre for Social Justice definition of a gang as:

'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

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<sup>5</sup>Mayor of London (2014) – Gangs and Serious Youth Violence :

[http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Ambitions%20for%20London\\_%20Gangs%20and%20SYV%202014\\_0.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Ambitions%20for%20London_%20Gangs%20and%20SYV%202014_0.pdf)

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.' (Centre for Social Justice 2009, p21)

- 6.3 At its meeting on 10 September the Committee heard from officers of the Council and Lewisham Police. It was reported that gang activity in Lewisham had largely moved beyond street gangs, which use violence in order to control territory, into looser criminal networks, which use violence and exploitation to drive the goals of their illegal businesses. This complicates the definition used by the Centre for Social Justice, which includes territory and street based activity as defining gang features.
- 6.4 The MOPAC strategic framework builds on the Centre for Social Justice definition by interpreting the territorial element of gang behaviour to include economic territory. It also recognises that gangs need not be street based. The Framework uses the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) definition of gang members as someone who:
- Identifies themselves as being a member of a gang and this is corroborated by information from more than one independent source
  - Is identified as being a member of a gang and this is corroborated by information from more than one independent source

6.5 All of the available information about gang membership demonstrates that, by these definitions, gangs are almost all entirely made up of boys and men.

6.6 MOPAC recommends that community safety partnerships (in Lewisham this is the Safer Lewisham Partnership) should adopt the ACPO definition of gang-associated women and girls to assist with the identification and assessment of women and girls at risk; the definition is as follows:

'a woman or girl who is a family member of or in an intimate relationship with a gang nominal'. (MOPAC 2013, p6)

6.7 The scope of this definition is important because there is some evidence that there are women and girls affected by gang violence who are unaware those family members, or men/boys they are associated with, are involved in gang related activity. Throughout the research and policy documentation it is recognised that there is a lack of information and accurate data about the number of women and girls affected by gang violence. This makes it unclear how much of the violence and exploitation of gang associated women and girls is hidden, or only partially reported.

### **The dangers of gang association**

6.8 There have been a number of pieces of research which detail the negative impacts of violence and exploitation on gang associated women and girls.

6.9 In 2012 a study by Bedfordshire University found that violence, rape and sexual exploitation were common place in gangs. The study detailed the disordered relationships that are able to develop between gang members and gang associated women and girls. The research drew on accounts from women and girls to highlight the destructive and violent behaviours, which appeared commonplace in gangs and came to be accepted as the norm. The MOPAC strategic framework reports on this

study, highlighting that both inside and outside of gangs the patterns of violence are similar, in that women and girls are most often the victims of sexual violence and exploitation and that the perpetrators are most often, if not always, men. The Framework highlights the following areas of particular concern in the context of gang associated women and girls:

- pressure to engage in sexual activity;
  - engagement in sexual activity due to fear of force, violence (physical and/or sexual) and intimidation;
  - the recording and distribution of images of sexual activity via mobile technology;
  - sex as initiation into the gang;
  - sex in return for (perceived) status or protection;
  - sex as a means of achieving material gain;
  - young women “setting up” people in other gangs; and
  - cases of rape (single and multiple perpetrator) and other sexual assaults – as punishment, a weapon in conflict and/or for sexual gratification
- (University of Bedfordshire, cited in MOPAC 2013, p17)

6.10 Furthermore, the Safer London Foundation<sup>6</sup> reports that the effects of gang violence reach a broad number of women and girls who are associated with gangs. The Foundation’s work highlights the dangers for women who are targeted for sexual assault as a means of conflict between boys/men in rival gangs.

## **7. Prevention**

7.1 Government sets out its achievements<sup>7</sup> in dealing with violence against gang associated women and girls since 2011 as:

- the creation of 13 Young People’s Advocates nationally to provide direct support to young people;
- funding to Against Violence and Abuse and the Women and Girls Network, to develop specialist services and training to 58 practitioners working with girls and young women affected by gang-related sexual and domestic violence, including the 13 Young People’s Advocates;
- a workshop for practitioners and an academic roundtable
- regional practitioner’s workshops with the Youth Justice Board to address the specific needs of gang-associated girls in the youth justice system

7.2 The Mayor of London has committed that, as part of its work to reduce youth violence, the London Crime reduction board will ensure that by 2017:

‘Access to prevention programmes in all London state schools and educational establishments will be available, enabling children and young people to make positive life choices. Every ‘at risk’ child will receive targeted support for a positive transition to secondary school Troubled Families, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs and other family support and safeguarding mechanisms should understand and address gang issues (Mayor of London – Gangs and serious youth violence, p26)

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<sup>6</sup> Safer London Foundation, Gangs and Sexual Violence: <http://www.saferlondonfoundation.org/news/?p=445>

<sup>7</sup> Gov.uk; women girls and gangs: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reducing-knife-gun-and-gang-crime/supporting-pages/women-girls-and-gangs>

- 7.3 The MOPAC strategic framework for responding to gang associated women and girls recommends that services in boroughs for girls and women affected by gang violence should include:
- Prevention work/healthy relationships that covers gang-association and VAWG delivered in schools, pupil referral units and in out of school youth-based settings.
  - Early intervention and diversionary work such as mentoring and peer support to support young women on the peripheries of gangs.
  - Crisis support such as advocacy, exit provision that is safe and provided by women that addresses the holistic needs of young women and girls (as above).
  - Longer-term support such as specialist counselling to support young women and girls to overcome the trauma of gang-associated VAWG. Counselling services should be specialised as inappropriate responses can exacerbate the effects of sexual violence as they can damage the victim's positive sense of self or lead to higher levels of psychological symptoms and poorer recovery.
  - Interventions to promote self-esteem and confidence.
  - Education, training and employment opportunities tailored for young women and girls. A women-centred approach to education, training and employment should be about ensuring young women and girls have access to a broad and diverse range of opportunities and that appropriate systems and support are put in place to address their specific needs.
- 7.4 It is also recommended that work takes place in primary schools to identify young people at risk of becoming involved in youth violence.
- 7.5 Initiatives in Lewisham to tackle violence against gang associated women and girls are linked to broader violence against women and girls work. At the Committee's meeting on 10 September 2014, Members heard that the Safer Lewisham Partnership ensured that there was information sharing and advice between the different agencies to deal with violence against gang associated women and girls. Specifically, it was noted that the Ending Gang and Youth Violence team were working with the Youth Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference to develop good practice in strategic and operational planning. Members also heard that the Serious Violence Team worked with the Early Intervention Child Sexual Exploitation leads to ensure that there was a uniform approach by school safeguarding leads in responding to the needs of gang associated girls<sup>8</sup>.
- 7.6 The Council is in the process of commissioning a violence against women and girls service. The service will be responsible for providing support to women and girls who are affected by gang violence – but this will not form a separately defined strand of its work.
- 7.7 Prevention and awareness raising work in schools relies on the amount of time available in curriculum and is dependent on the priority that this work is given over other issues related to health and wellbeing.

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<sup>8</sup> Report to Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee, 10 September 2014:

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s31046/04%20Violence%20against%20women%20and%20girls%20100914.pdf>

7.8 Home Office guidance on addressing youth violence and gangs<sup>9</sup> in schools and colleges states that (for Ofsted inspections): 'In order for a school to be judged 'outstanding', all groups of pupils must':

- feel safe at school all the time;
- understand very clearly what unsafe situations are; and
- be highly aware of how to keep themselves and others safe.

(Home Office 2013, p4-5)

7.9 The guidance highlights the importance of assessing the likely effectiveness of prevention programmes and recommends varied approaches to delivering preventative work and carrying out targeted activity.

7.10 As part of the review it is recommended that the Committee should consider effectiveness initiatives used in other areas to tackle violence against gang associated women and girls, which might include:

7.11 Empower: <http://www.saferlondonfoundation.org/projectfull.php?p=14>

The Safer London Foundation runs a project called 'Empower' out of hubs in Hackney and Croydon. The project has six strands of activity:

- Young women's 1:1 intensive support
- Specialist advice & case consultations
- Young women's group education programme
- Young men's group education programme
- Parents & Foster Carers workshops
- Professionals training & events

7.12 Growing Against Gangs and Violence <http://www.gagv.co.uk/about>

An early intervention educational partnership with the Met Police that is provided to schools. It uses drama, debate, and discussions with young people in order to enable them to think critically about gangs.

7.13 Girls in Gangs: <http://girlsingangs.org/>

A school led approach to educating young people about the dangers of becoming involved in gangs, based in Manchester.

## 8. Key lines of inquiry

8.1 In order to successfully complete this review, the Committee will need to ascertain the following information:

- What data is available about the extent of issues affecting gang associated girls and women in Lewisham?

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<sup>9</sup> Home office (2013) addressing youth violence and gangs: practical advice for schools and colleges: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/226293/Advice\\_to\\_Schools\\_and\\_Colleges\\_on\\_Gangs.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/226293/Advice_to_Schools_and_Colleges_on_Gangs.pdf)



- What services exist to prevent women and girls from becoming associated with gangs?
- What is the pattern of take up of prevention services?
- What is the current level of resource for prevention services in Lewisham?
- Are there examples of effective practice in other areas?
- What are the future challenges to delivering successful prevention and awareness raising work?

## 8.2 Review questions:

- How do Lewisham and its partner organisations work to prevent women and girls from becoming associated with gangs?
- What could be done to enhance the effectiveness of work in this area?

## 8.3 Issues outside of the scope of the review:

- Dealing with individual cases or casework

## 9. Timetable

The Committee is asked to consider the outline timetable for the review as set out below.

3 December 2014

- Data from the Police Service on the number of women and girls affected by gang violence;
- Information from Council officers about prevention services in the borough.

22 January 2015

- Invitation to third party organisations (to be agreed) to share examples of best practice

4 March 2015

- Recommendations based on evidence collected and final report for submission to the Safer Lewisham Partnership and Mayor and Cabinet.

## 10. Further implications

At this stage there are no specific financial, legal, environmental or equalities implications to consider. However, each will be addressed as part of the review.

### Sources

Beckett, H with Brodie, I; Factor, F; Melrose, M; Pearce, J; Pitts, J; Shuker, L and Warrington, C. (2012). Research into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence. University of Bedfordshire:

<http://www.beds.ac.uk/news/2013/november/research-highlights-extent-of-gang-related-sexual-violence-towards-children-and-young-people>



Centre for Social Justice (2013); girls and gangs:

<http://centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20reports/Girls-and-Gangs-FINAL-VERSION.pdf>

Centre for Social Justice (2009):

<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/publications/dying-to-belong>

Ending gang and youth violence (2011); cross government report:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-gang-and-youth-violence-cross-government-report>

Government VAWG action plan (2014):

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/287758/VAWG\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/287758/VAWG_Action_Plan.pdf)

Home Office (2013); addressing youth violence and gangs – practical advice for schools and colleges:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/226293/Advice\\_to\\_Schools\\_and\\_Colleges\\_on\\_Gangs.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/226293/Advice_to_Schools_and_Colleges_on_Gangs.pdf)

Mayor of London; strategic ambitions for London (2014); gangs and serious youth violence:

[http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Ambitions%20for%20London%20Gangs%20and%20SYV%202014\\_0.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Ambitions%20for%20London%20Gangs%20and%20SYV%202014_0.pdf)

MET Police; Trident FAQs (2014):

<http://content.met.police.uk/Article/FAQs/1400014987691/gangcrime>

MOPAC (2014); strategic framework for responding to gang associated women and girls:

[http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Gangs%20and%20girls\\_strategic%20framework.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Gangs%20and%20girls_strategic%20framework.pdf)

Runnymede (2008); rethinking gangs:

<http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/RethinkingGangs-2008.pdf>

Runnymede (2011); gangs revisited:

[http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/GangsRevisited\(online\)-2011.pdf](http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/GangsRevisited(online)-2011.pdf)

### **Other information**

Catch 22: <http://www.catch-22.org.uk/expertise/gangs/research-projects/>

Ms Understood: <http://www.msunderstood.org.uk/>

Empower programme: <http://www.saferlondonfoundation.org/projectfull.php?p=14>

Redthread: <http://www.redthread.org.uk/>

### **Background papers**

Minutes of the meeting of Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee held on 10 September 2014

Violence against women and girls including girls and gangs report, Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee 10 September 2014

For further information please contact Timothy Andrew, Scrutiny Manager on 02083147916.

# How to carry out an in-depth review

