

Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee			
Title	Gang Associated Women and Girls – Prevention and Awareness		
Contributor	Executive Director for Community Services	Item	4
Class	Part 1 (open)	3 December 2014	

1. Purpose

- 1.1 At its meeting on 15 July 2014, when deciding on its 2014/15 work programme, the Committee raised interest 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 and detailed discussions about Lewisham’s current issues were had with the Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People for the Council, the Service manager for Crime reduction and the Lead Police Sgt for the gangs unit. 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 aims to set out current information about Lewisham in relation to women and girls associated with gang violence and outlines work currently underway to tackle this issue. It is important to note that actual figures and detailed data is not in the public domain and therefore cannot be included in this report.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Members of the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee are asked to note the content of the report.

3. Policy context

- 3.1 The 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, including¹:
 - 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 the 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;

¹ Ending gang and youth violence: cross government report - <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 plan², 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. The 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 Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) has developed a strategic framework³ 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. 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 The Safer Lewisham Partnership (SLP) which is Lewisham's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) brings together agencies in Lewisham to develop a coordinated

² 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

³ MOPAC strategic framework for responding to gang associated women and girls:

http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Gangs%20and%20girls_strategic%20framework.pdf

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.

3.7 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.

4. Group/gang related violence in Lewisham

4.1 Though there is not currently an agreed definition of gang associated women and girls the local partnership uses the ACPO definition of "a woman or girl who is a family member of or in an intimate relationship with a gang nominal".

4.2 Historically, approaches to tackling gang violence have centred on the experiences of men and boys and neglected the specific needs of gang associated women and girls, many of whom are at heightened risk of violence and sexual exploitation. Public authorities have a legal duty to eliminate discrimination and promote equality under the Equality Act 2010, and the Partnership is committed to ensuring there is no discrimination in the provision of services to men and women. Recent MOPAC guidance such as the Strategic Framework for Responding to Gang Associated Women and Girls is intended to help address this oversight and local partnership work is also informed by the findings of the Children's Commissioners Report into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups. One of the principal areas of concern in this field is the hidden nature of the problem, and it remains a key priority to effectively profile at risk groups and ensure timely sharing of information.

4.3 Changes in the modus operandi of gangs across London point to a more prominent role for female nominals. Lewisham mirrors a trend across the capital where drug dealing, mostly outside London, is supplanting conflicts over territory and vulnerable females have a high value as couriers. Gang members are also increasingly using girls/young women to safe house drugs/weapons. The MPS's Trident unit are currently leading on co-ordinated enforcement against gangs involved in the exploitation of children in particular, and safeguarding protocols are being actively reviewed in light of updated intelligence profiles.

4.4 Current Funding from MOPAC resources the Serious Violence team, which works to assist both perpetrators and victims from exiting a violent lifestyle. This funding will continue until 2017 when it will be reviewed.

5. Mapping the current situation in Lewisham

5.1 Each London borough maintains a gangs/serious violent offending matrix (list of key violent individuals) collated by the Met Police Trident Gang command and this list of nominals comprises the key focus for police and partnership interventions.

- 5.2 It should be noted that the matrix does not include all gangs or gang members as the matrix focuses on high risk of harm irrespective of links to identified groups. Hence most females on the Matrix will tend to be from the first category above – i.e. directly involved in offending behaviour. As part of its risk management plan, Lewisham’s Serious Violence Team and Trilogy Police officers have collated sibling information for each nominal and this flags up further female family members under 18 who are of concern. These names are shared with partners in order that future safeguarding notifications are prioritised. Beyond this core group it remains difficult to speculate on numbers involved in the other categories, not least owing to the secretive nature of this world and the under-reporting of sexual violence.
- 5.3 In the past twelve month period The Youth MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) has received a number of referrals regarding girls being involved with Gangs. From this number three-quarters of the referrals have been highlighted in relation to Sexual Exploitation, drug dealing or involvement with those known to lead a gang lifestyle. All have been offered a range of support and Youth MARAC officers have attended case conferences, strategy groups and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) meetings as required.
- 5.4 In the same time period, the Youth MARAC has received approximately three times as many referrals of young men with three-quarters of these referred for involvement in criminality and have been on the fringes of or already involved in a gang lifestyle. This includes some individuals that are on the gangs matrix and have required support from the MARAC.
- 5.5 In the past 12 months Lewisham’s Youth MARAC have had combined referrals from Lewisham Hospital A&E Dept and Kings College Hospital A&E Dept for a variety of issues relating to violence, although not always gang related. A number of these have met the criteria to go to MARAC conference and some have resulted in Team Around the Child (TAC) meetings. Those which are known to be involved in gang related activity have been referred to Serious Violence Multi-agency Team, and others are passed directly to Children’s Social Care or other colleagues as appropriate.
- 5.6 **Early Identification** - Safeguarding women and girls is reliant on identifying at risk females through ensuring that current intelligence on high risk individuals is shared between key agencies. One of the most important priorities is to ensure effective interventions with missing persons. Most young people exploited by gangs, and/or victims of CSE will have featured on police reports as repeat MISPERs (Missing persons) and the partnership has committed itself to ensuring the social care needs of affected children are thoroughly assessed.
- 5.7 In Lewisham a local arrangement is in place between Children’s Social Care and the MASH (Multi agency Safeguarding Hub) to ensure that vulnerable MISPERs (missing children) are prioritised for safeguarding interventions, and where appropriate referred to the Youth MARAC and the local gangs partnership team. Where Child Sexual Exploitation is indicated referrals are also made to Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation Meetings. Ongoing work is underway within the partnership to better isolate ‘at risk’ females by collating police intelligence held on vulnerable females and female co-defendants.

5.8 It is also important that frontline practitioners have the expertise to identify 'at risk' children and the gangs partnership has coordinated training through the Local Safeguarding Children's Board to ensure key professionals including schoolteachers and children's services have the requisite skills. Guidance and information on referral pathways for at risk children has also been circulated to Head Teachers in response to the growing problem of county lines.

6 Interventions

6.1 Safeguarding women and girls from the threat of violence places an emphasis on identifying at risk females, and ensuring that current intelligence on female partners and siblings is shared with relevant safeguarding agencies, represented on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), MASE (Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation) and Youth MARAC panels. Intelligence is constantly reviewed in order to ensure at risk individuals are known and that safeguarding decisions are taken with full disclosure of information between key agencies.

6.2 The Youth MARAC and MASE remain key forums for co-coordinating interventions and enforcement in the area of gang connected CSE. Intelligence gained from referrals is also used to inform the strategic profiling of sexual violence; this meets MOPAC's best practice guidance in ensuring effective needs mapping within the Community Safety Partnership of domestic and sexual violence. Such panels also act as early warning alerts for at risk females – e.g. many girls involved in the 'county lines'. Given the reduced repeat victimisation rates attested to by external audit, forums such as Youth MARAC offer a solid foundation for reducing the harm to vulnerable females. The partnership will continue to work with the Home Office Ending Gang and Youth Violence (EGYV) team to drive down levels repeat victimisation.

6.3 The EGYV team are also working with the Youth MARAC to further develop good practice in strategic and operational planning in this area, and the Serious Violence Team is working with the Early Intervention CSE leads to ensure a uniform approach by school safeguarding leads in responding to the needs of gang associated girls.

6.4 The Youth MARAC was formally audited by the Bright Ideas Partnership in 2011 which concluded with following observations:
Overall the project has been successful in meeting its key aims as it has made young people feel safer and more secure; reduced the likelihood of repeat victimisation (the 25.9% repeat victimisation rate reported in this project is considerably lower than the normal re-victimisation rate of young victims of 58%); addressed the risk factors which can lead to offending, and as a result is likely to have reduced the number of young victims adapting offending behaviour; and has increased young victims' confidence in different agencies, such as the police, increasing the numbers of young people accessing services and reporting crimes.

6.5 The Serious Violence Team tasked with working with gangs is the primary coordinator of the Youth MARAC and also sits on MASE as well as the Domestic Violence steering groups. This will ensure key recommendations by MOPAC and Home Office are implemented through joint strategic planning.

- 6.6 The Safer Lewisham Partnership has also merged the Strategic Assessment and The Public Health Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and will adopt an integrated approach to Violence with Injury and ensure linkages with wider VAWG specific targets.
- 6.7 The partnership regularly delivers training under the auspices of the Local Safeguarding Children's Group to frontline practitioners on gangs and these events will be used to disseminate a consistent safeguarding approach.
- 6.8 The Crime Reduction Service is working with a number of key partners and parents, alongside the Cabinet Member for Community Safety to support the pilot of '**Parents Standing Together**'. This initiative is based in the community and is aimed at providing a forum for parents for discussion and information where they are worried about their young people becoming involved in gang activity. This will support parents of girls and boys, and aim to inform by sharing experiences, helping parents to support each other and their young people, as well as signposting to other services as appropriate in a non-judgemental way to prevent harm where possible.
- 6.9 **MASE (Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation)** - The European-funded HEART programme was delivered over two years (2010-12) in 3 London Boroughs including Lewisham and when evaluated was shown to have some important and clear recommendations for future work with young people in relation to healthy relationships. This is linking in to the current work which the Crime Reduction Service are leading on with police, social care and probation colleagues in relation to child sexual exploitation; Lewisham piloted a provision called MASE (Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation) group which will seek to look at networks and themes/ links regarding this issue and seek to protect young people against CSE (Child Sexual Exploitation) in the future.
- 6.10 **Effective Enforcement and Safeguarding** -Increasingly the Metropolitan Police are serving child abduction notices and involving the Met's Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT) in concerted enforcement against criminals using children. Operation Pibera provides a concrete illustration of this revamped focused deterrence approach and has been mainstreamed into current practice. There is zero tolerance approach to the grooming of children for criminal purposes and there is an explicit recognition in this approach that young offenders are also victims. Similarly the Local Authority is committed to using ASB powers and other civil remedies against perpetrators.
- 6.11 **Effective Pathways**
As previously indicated Lewisham was one of the first boroughs to pilot the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the routing of safeguarding notifications through this assessment process ensures that children are less likely to slip through the net owing to an inadequate exchanges of information. In Lewisham the capacity of MASH has recently been increased and it has moved away from a more limited triage function to that of multiagency team taking an active role in the development of cases and risk management plans. Similarly MASE has developed streamlined referral procedures to ensure more CSE cases are brought within the formal oversight of the public protection desk and Children's Social Care.

6.12 **Strong Outreach Capabilities**

In Lewisham the police Trilogy plus team and the Local Authority's Serious Violence Team remain the cornerstone of the partnership's approach to dealing with gangs and multi-agency interventions are co-ordinated through the Youth MARAC which includes delegates from Children's Social Care, Early intervention, youth services and sexual health leads. The Local authority has enhanced its capability in this area by recently recruiting a dedicated CSE worker for the Serious Violence Team.

6.13 An Officer from the **Safer London Foundation Empower** programme will soon join Lewisham's Crime Reduction Service. Empower is a support programme addressing young women's experiences of sexual violence and exploitation, primarily through gangs. It places vulnerable young women aged 11-18 at the core of its support framework.

6.14 As a gang member, the partner, relative or friend of someone actively involved, young women are in danger of serious sexual abuse including rape and coercion to commit criminal offences such as carrying weapons or drugs. Tragically for those living within this environment, it has led to the widespread normalisation of exploitative and violent behaviour resulting in these young women becoming hidden victims.

6.15 This is a prevention and intervention programme to empower young women to make positive life choices. There will be elements of training involved for schools and other relevant agencies.

6.16 Central to the delivery model is to have Empower workers embedded within Local Authority co-located multi-agency teams to ensure that identification of young women at serious risk of or experiencing sexual violence, is clear and robust and that we can use our specialist expertise to advise and support operational and strategic planning.

7. **Financial Implications**

7.1 The SLP currently monitors the spend in relation to the MOPAC funding Resource allocation for tackling gangs and VAWG. External funding is heavily relied upon in the delivery of this agenda currently.

8. **Legal Implications**

8.1 The Council is under a number of statutory obligations to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires the Council to formulate and implement a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder; the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 requires the Council as a local housing authority to have policies and procedures for dealing with anti-social behaviour and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places the Council under a duty to have, when carrying out its functions, due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between persons of different racial groups.

8.2 The Local Government Act 1999 places a duty on the local authorities to secure continuous improvement in the way its functions are exercised having regard to the combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

8.3 Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 empowers the local authority to do anything which it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of all or any persons within the local authority's area.

8.4 These statutory duties amongst others feed into the Council's Safer Lewisham Strategy.

9. Equalities implications

9.1 Developing safe and secure communities is central to the work of the Council as a whole and in particular to the Community Services directorate. Reducing and preventing crime, reducing fear of crime and supporting vulnerable communities is critical to the well-being of all our citizens.

10. Crime and disorder implications

10.1 Section 17 places a duty on partners to do all they can to reasonably prevent crime and disorder in their area. The level of crime and its impact is influenced by the decisions and activities taken in the day-to-day of local bodies and organisations. The responsible authorities are required to provide a range of services in their community from policing, fire protection, planning, consumer and environmental protection, transport and highways. They each have a key statutory role in providing these services and, in carrying out their core activities, can significantly contribute to reducing crime and improving the quality of life in their area.

11. Environmental implications

11.1 The Council lead for environmental related issues is an advisor to the SLP and makes representations as appropriate in relation to impact.

12. Conclusion

12.1 The SLP will continue to review its practice and that of the sub groups to ensure that all activity in relation to crime and disorder and drugs and alcohol is in line with the sustainable communities strategy, and the Safer Lewisham Strategy as well as having links to children's and young persons board and the health and wellbeing board.

12.2 Lewisham is leading on a number of initiatives in relation to the work on gangs, county lines drug dealing, Child Sexual Exploitation and work with young victims of serious youth violence. Work continues to establish regional, national and international links to further develop, share and collaborate with others in these areas.

For further information on this report please contact Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney Head of Crime Reduction & Supporting People, Directorate for Community Services on 020 8 314 9569