

BOROUGH / PROJECT :

Lewisham Council

– A partnership approach to addressing violence and vulnerability



PROBLEM :

Concerns around the number of young people involved in serious youth violence, drug dealing and gang-related crime.



SOLUTION :

There are several strands to Lewisham's approach to violence and vulnerability and peer on peer abuse, and it is this combination of approaches, each with their particular aspects and strengths, that enables effective holistic action to deliver improved outcomes - that include a 67 per cent reduction in repeat victim assaults.

BACKGROUND :

Lewisham has, since 2008, invested significant partnership focus and resources in tackling the issue of Serious Youth Violence. Its four year strategy (2014-2017) has identified Serious Youth Violence as a priority, as well as ensuring its annual Safer Lewisham Plan 2016/17 refreshes the partnership's understanding of the issues and current action plan.

In the past year the partnership has completed the following analysis and reports:

- Local Assessment Profile – Serious Youth Violence (February – December 2015).
- The Safer Lewisham Partnership Plan 2016 /2017.
- Navigate – online dangers.
- Lewisham's response to Baroness Young's review on the impact of the Criminal Justice System on Black and Muslim men.

BACKGROUND :

All these reports have identified the key features of the Lewisham landscape and outlined a tactical programme of options to tackle serious youth violence.

Summary of the 'Lewisham landscape':

- Gang problems concentrated in particular postcodes.
- Young age profile.
- Overwhelming dominance of drugs markets as predictor of violence.
- County Lines (groups based in Lewisham involved in drug markets outside London).
- Short-medium term increase in key age groups in borough may be aggravating factor.
- Partnership examples – integration achieved by Missing, Exploited, Tactical / Serious Youth Crime Prevention Panel / Self Assessed Violence and Vulnerability Matrix (SAVVY – which is used by a few county police forces) / Focused Deterrence / communications/ schools/ parents and trusted adult/ trauma informed approach.

Violence and young people

Lewisham has a reputation associated with its gang-youth violence problem and it is important to not only assess this problem with the right proxy indicators, but also to factor in demographic differences between London boroughs. In terms of formulating a considered strategic response to the problem, the impact of future demographic changes – for example the number of people at the peak offending age – has to be taken into account. It has already been noted that the growing youth bulge in Lewisham may be conducive to future rises in such violence.

Lewisham had particularly severe problems around 2010/11, which is when the peak levels of Serious Youth Violence were experienced. Violence was predominantly territorial and had only a marginal connection with the supply of drugs in the area. It could also be described as predominantly 'expressive' and 'identity-based'.

Violence began to dip after this point and there was large scale diversion by a range of people into drugs supply, particularly 'county lines' (groups that establish and operate a telephone number in an area outside of their normal locality in order to sell drugs directly to users at street level.) Figures in the table provided below illustrate this trend. It is important to note that changes in GBH recording definitions (from 2012) mean the figure for 2016 is even lower than might be indicated. In the calendar year 2011 there were 352 incidents.

Rolling 12 months to May	Serious Youth Violence	Knife Crime Incidents Under 25s
2012	269	82
2013	225	70
2014	279	58
2015	243	73
2016	228	81

During the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016, 294 offences were committed by young people resident in Lewisham. Of these offences, 40 per cent were for Violence Against the Person, of which 70 were knife crime offences. Thirteen of those offences resulted in custodial sentences, with the remaining 57 offences being supervised in the community via a Referral Order or a Youth Rehabilitation Order.

The lack of an established and coherent gang structure makes the Metropolitan Police Service's Gangs Matrix a less effective predictor of future violence than in other boroughs that have clear postcode gangs and known boundaries. There are no knife crime or gang hotspots per se and criminal groups have fluid memberships.

The modus operandi of county lines and the profile of children (predominantly boys between 14-17 as per the National Crime Agency profile) matches the London experience. The geographical range is very wide. The principal drug type is Class A non-recreational – overwhelmingly heroin/crack cocaine.

ACTIONS :

There are several strands to Lewisham's approach to violence and vulnerability and peer on peer abuse that enables effective holistic action to deliver on improved outcomes. A number of these strands are outlined below:

MET (Missing, Exploited and Trafficked)

In view of the acknowledged crossovers between the most vulnerable cohorts (e.g. missing persons/ drug trafficking, Child Sexual Exploitation, gangs/ Organised Crime Network membership), the partnership has moved towards greater integration and merged several of the formerly separate risk management forums into a combined MET (Missing, Exploited, Trafficked) model. As part of the new operational model the police, Children's Social Care, Youth Offending Service, Crime Reduction and key statutory agencies meet on a weekly basis to share intelligence and co-ordinate safeguarding responses against one shared list in order to avoid any duplication or intel gap. This meeting is also coupled with the Serious Youth Crime Prevention Panel, which incorporates the gangs matrix meetings and takes a wider role in ensuring a joint enforcement approach against serious group offending. Both meetings in turn report to strategic boards which monitor the effectiveness of existing processes and feed into the safeguarding Children board and Safer Lewisham Partnership.

SAVVY Matrix

The SAVVY (Self Assessed Violence and Vulnerability) Matrix is a system introduced in Lewisham to consider risk and vulnerability collectively; and to assess the impact of county lines drug supply and the risk posed by gangs emanating from London. It is focused more on the impact than the mapping of organised groups. The matrix allows us to assess the Organised Crime Groups aspect of the issue, but it has a specific focus on the risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, victims and a weighting for drugs intelligence.

Data is extracted from Merlin and Crime reports in order to make professional judgement for inclusion on to SAVVY. Subjects are then flagged on the Police National Computer and where they come to notice is mapped. Active partnerships exist between Hampshire and Kent. Subjects and organisers from SAVVY and GANGS Matrix go into the Serious Youth Crime Prevention Panel. Victims and those that need safeguarding go into the MPS meeting. Further work is ongoing with METSTATS to further amalgamate at-risk groups and ensure a combined risk management approach.

Focused Deterrence

This approach originated in Boston, USA. The strategy aims to target specific criminal behaviour committed by a small number of chronic offenders who are vulnerable to sanctions and punishment. Offenders are directly confronted by the multi-agency Serious Youth Violence Team and informed that continued criminal behaviour will not be tolerated. The deterrence-based message is reinforced through crackdowns on offenders, or groups of offenders (such as gang members), who continue to commit crimes despite the warning. Key priorities are to increase the percentage of nominals subject to Criminal Justice restrictions (the Serious Youth Crime Prevention Panel is the consultation/preparation forum for Criminal Behaviour Orders) and to ensure the full range of civil remedies are applied. Given the connection between drugs supply and so much of the violence, a zero tolerance approach is applied to tenants where properties are implicated in the production and supply of drugs (there is a vulnerable adults angle to much of the 'cuckooing'). Every s23 Misuse of Drugs Act warrant is shared with the Serious Violence Team and cross-referenced with council tax and land registry records to identify follow up actions. Over the past three months, 21 possession orders have been obtained by this method.

Accident and Emergency

Links with Accident and Emergency (A&E) paediatrics and Redthread (youth led organisation) in King's College Trauma Unit are seamless and provide early intervention options in the case of knife/gunshot injuries. Similarly the Serious Violence Team forms a co-located team with Trilogy (police gangs unit) dedicated to providing follow up support and safeguarding interventions to those referred via this route. The work with A&E consultants and staff has enabled greater understanding of the context and risks, improving our collective information sharing and approach.

Communications and campaign

Using key young people to share key messages/ existing YouTube videos/ Tryife (choose your own adventure interactive film) etc. via social media used today.

In addition, the borough is developing key messages for EVERY child and EVERY adult in the borough to use – a single message which helps everyone to have the same conversation ensuring no mixed messages about serious youth violence.

Hotspot/schools

Changing a place can reduce the risk – police have completed some work to map victims/ perpetrators/ missing persons/ gangs/ Computer Aided Dispatches/ ASB/ crime in schools to help identify any key institutions and locations. This is shaping areas to be targeted with the allocation of resources including schools, police, YOS support and additional interventions with the schools.

Parents/ family work – trusted adults

Friends and family first – do you know how to help? Two years ago the borough launched Parents Standing Together, intended to be a peer support programme for parents. Some elements included:

- Use the Youth Service to build on their model of parents forums to reengage and deliver the intended model (peer support model).
- Roll out the key messages for parents as above.
- Deliver in schools/ intake years in secondary schools at parents evenings.

Providing holistic support to the wider family network is a priority as we recognise that a systemic approach to reducing offending behaviour is required. The Functional Family Therapy team is an evidence-based family therapy intervention which is targeted at families who have a young person engaging in persistent anti-social behaviour, youth offending and/or substance misuse. The programme content reflects the needs of the family, impacting positively on family conflict, communication, parenting and youth problem behaviours. Lewisham YOS have commissioned the South London and Maudsley hospital to deliver the Functional Family Therapy programme to Lewisham residents. Four Family Therapists have delivered interventions with up to 80 families across a 12 month period.

Trauma-work through South London Resettlement Consortium

At its core the work we are doing with Youth Offending Teams across South London recognises that exposure to violent behaviour is associated with a range of psychological problems including post-traumatic stress disorder. The MOPAC-funded project was informed by the Bradley report which highlighted that the current prison population represents a huge diversity of individuals with a range of very complex needs, including a high number who are suffering from mental health problems or learning disabilities. The first step to the effective management of offenders is the existence of good early identification and assessment of problems, which can inform how and where they are most appropriately treated. The MOPAC-commissioned Middlesex University Report to inform the programme concluded:

- Up to 50 per cent of Young People in YOS services have mental health and emotional needs and a lack of provision and/or the provisions were not reaching the people that needed it.
- The report identified that there was a cohort of young people who were particularly difficult to engage due to their complex needs.
- Young people were not willing to engage with the traditional clinical services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services despite needing the intervention.
- Staff requested more clinical supervision to support these complex young people.
- The report identified a growing evidence base of third sector organisations working in this area but no joined-up work with statutory services.

In the South sub region with Lewisham as lead borough at its core the iCoN programme supports the South London Resettlement Consortium to implement a structured workforce development programme designed to enable participant staff to identify and include post-traumatic stress and other psychological difficulties in young people who have offended as a basis for addressing offending behaviour and planning interventions.

Psychological perspectives provide a basis to understand and shape services for traumatised young people involved in serious youth violence. It recognises the hugely significant impact of early life trauma (for example a baby's brain grows from 20 per cent to 80 per cent in the first two years) and how exposure to domestic violence and abuse will result in fear, stress and difficulty in expressing emotions easily other than through aggression and violence. In early adulthood the young people affected by SYV are experiencing flashbacks, panic attacks and nightmares relating to previous and current exposure to life threatening experiences.

Staff working for long periods in this field will by its very nature suffer secondary or vicarious trauma; services should be designed to recognise and support trained professionals to manage and perform effectively, paying attention to their own health and well-being.

NEXT STEPS :

This holistic approach is essential to having short and long term impact. The collective partnership response has enabled this work to be shaped and adopted. There will be ongoing review of the process and interventions and changes made as required.

Some of the key next steps include:

- Peer on peer abuse is a current priority within the Crime and Disorder Plan and an independent audit of peer on peer abuse is currently being undertaken by Dr Carlene Firman from the MsUnderstood Project / Bedfordshire University.
- Development of Open Source Unit Intel gathering capacity and co-working with community partners in the process. Developing a range of community engagement vehicles aside of the usual models is important.
- Greater reach of community embedded mentors, who live in the areas/estates to provide sustainable approaches and wider community development.
- Consideration of a standard approach in primary and secondary schools in respect of Peer on Peer abuse including Serious Youth Violence, knife crime, domestic abuse, Child Sexual Abuse, healthy relationships and safety.

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