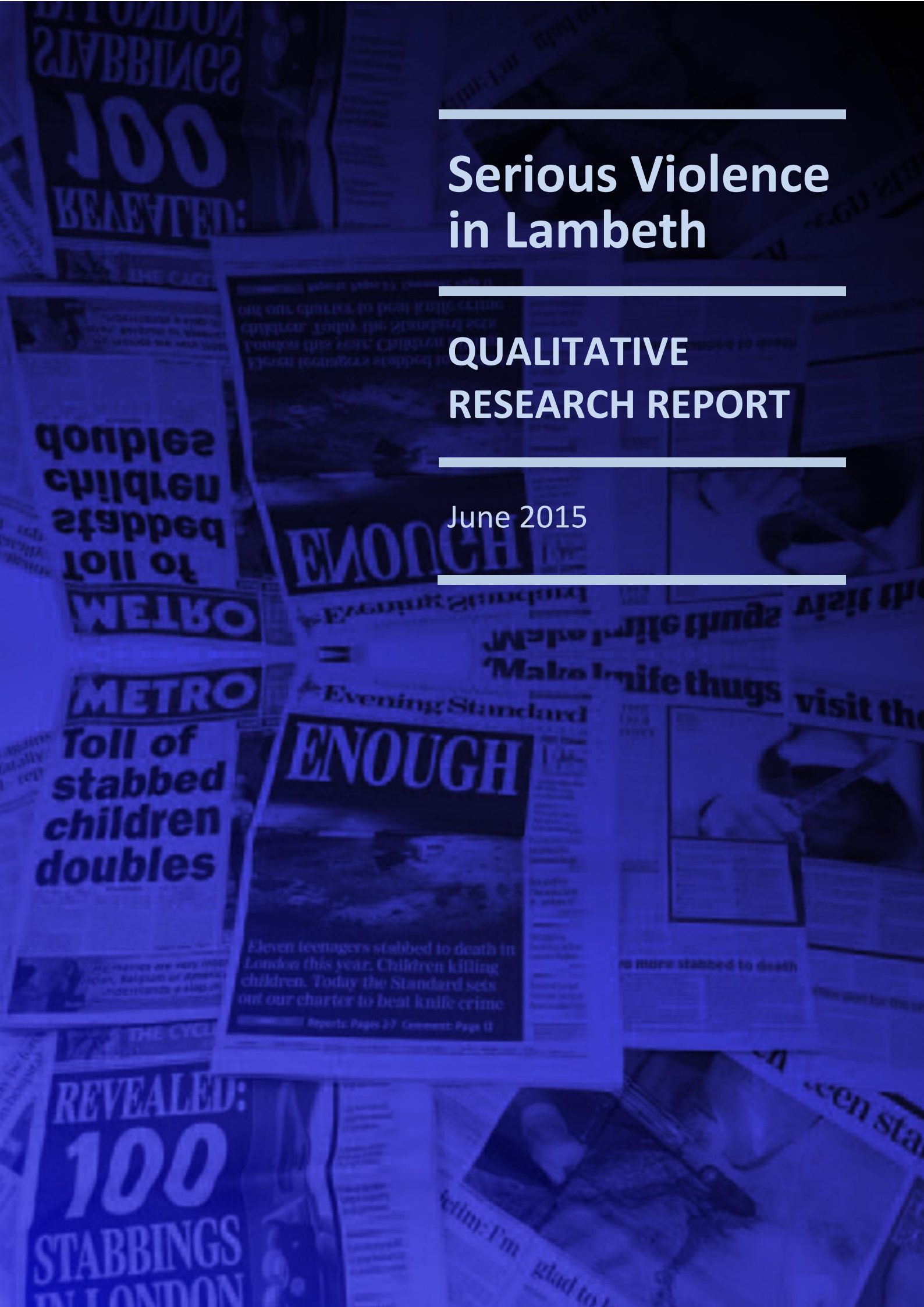

Serious Violence in Lambeth

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

June 2015



Introduction

1. Introduction

1.1 This report represents the findings from Wave One of a qualitative study which has been conducted to feed into the Lambeth Violence Needs Assessment Strategy. The work was commissioned jointly by the Community Safety and Public Health teams, and undertaken by Sara Butler, Senior Researcher for the PEP team at Lambeth Council.

1.2 The author would like to thank all who helped with the study, from advising on participants to providing venues and administrative support. Thanks also go to participants who gave up the time to share their views and experiences.

2. Why qualitative research?

2.1 Where quantitative research and surveys aim to measure or count, qualitative research seeks to understand. It aims to get underneath peoples' opinions and behaviours, and explore the reasons behind them.

2.2 Typically, qualitative research deals with small sample sizes and uses focused, one to one or small group methods of discussion. It cannot claim to be 'representative' of anything other than the views expressed by participants, but what it can do is give an indication of the range of views and experiences, an idea about how strongly some opinions are held, and offer insights into what influences and affects attitudes.

2.3 Qualitative research also allows participants to 'set the agenda' for the discussions, meaning that it can focus on the issues that are of real importance to participants, rather than setting discussion parameters for them. The subjects involved in this study are sensitive and some people can be uncomfortable talking about them. A one to one and/or face to face approach enables the researcher to build rapport with participants, reassure them and encourage openness.

2.4 In a local policymaking context, qualitative research can provide individual illustrations and examples that can help bring experiences to life and help policymakers understand the challenges facing residents in the Borough.

2.5 For this study, a qualitative approach was recommended to provide flavour and depth to other quantitative work already being undertaken. It meant that we could tailor the method and the content to suite the different audiences and ensure we captured a broad range of perspectives

2.6 It is important to note though, that qualitative research often deals in perceptions, rather than facts, but to those who hold those views, they *are* facts.

3. Aims of the research

3.1 The key aim of this study was to fill gaps in knowledge about the experiences of perpetrators and victims of violence in the Borough, and to feed new learning into the Lambeth Violence Needs Assessment Strategy.

3.2 The objectives were to explore, from a number of perspectives:

- perceptions and experiences of violence in Lambeth
- ideas around prevalence of different kinds of violence

- ‘triggers’ for violent behaviour
- how young people can become involved in violence
- how people can become a ‘victim’ of violence
- how best to help prevent violent offending, and to deal with young offenders

4. Methodology

4.1 The study involved:

- 1 discussion group with male residents of Lambeth
- 2 discussion groups with female residents of Lambeth (one with African-Caribbean women)
- 5 interviews with ex-gang offenders
- 3 interviews with youth offenders
- 5 interviews with victims of violence
- 6 interviews with professionals in health, policing and business.

4.2 The residents were recruited via a specialist fieldwork agency, included people in the age group 20-50, and were a mix of those with children and those without, from across the Borough. The first two groups had a mix of people from different ethnicities, but one of the female groups was undertaken with African-Caribbean women only. The discussions were moderated by the lead researcher and took place in local venues.

4.3 The five ex-gang offenders were asked to participate via the community safety team, and were interviewed face-to-face by the lead researcher at a local youth centre and in the community safety team office. The three youth offender interviewees were also asked via their case worker, and took place in the Community Safety team offices.

4.4 The victims and the professionals were interviewed over the telephone by the lead researcher; permission was given by the participants for Victim Support to pass on their contact details. Names and contact details for the professionals were provided by the Public Health and Community Safety teams.

4.5 All fieldwork was conducted between 14th May and 1st August 2014

5. Limitations of this study

5.1 It should be recognised that this was a highly targeted piece of work, focusing on audiences felt to be the most important, at this stage, in beginning to develop a clearer understanding of violence in Lambeth. The nature of the sample here means that the focus has been very heavily geared towards young people and gang and youth violence.

5.2 Whilst this is obviously useful and important, it does mean that there are some key areas where further targeted research will need to be undertaken to give us a broader view of other, specific types of violence. For example, we have not heard views from elderly residents, from LGBT people, from people with disabilities or mental health issues. Likewise, whilst housing is mentioned throughout, it would be extremely useful to do a wider piece of research focusing on the challenge posed by housing estates in tackling youth and gang violence.

- 5.3 With both the victim and the professional audiences, the small sample sizes mean that there are limitations to how widely the findings can be seen to be applicable across the board. At a later date there is certainly scope for interviewing people with a wider spectrum of experience of different types of violence.
- 5.4 It may also be considered that this report is often quite Brixton/Clapham-centric, and there may well be an argument for widening the remit at the next stage to explore attitudes and challenges in different parts of the Borough.

6. Structure of the report

- 6.1 The first section of the report explores the views and experiences of each individual audience; the second section looks at recurring themes and factors, and suggests some areas where further research may be done, or possible interventions considered.

Section One: key findings by audience

(A) Residents

7. Living in Lambeth

- 7.1 Residents mentioned many positive aspects about life in Lambeth. Almost everyone appreciated its cultural diversity, access to good shops, markets and nightlife, and its accessibility to other parts of London.
- 7.2 There was a sense for some that, especially around but not restricted to Brixton, it is an up and coming area, and that Lambeth has seen positive changes over recent years that are helping the Borough to 'realise its potential'.
- 7.3 However, there are definitely some social and economic challenges; unsurprisingly these affect some residents more than others and provide some context for the discussions around violence in particular.
- 7.4 Whilst almost all group participants mentioned 'some young people' as a problem, for the African-Caribbean women in the group, who mainly lived on or around estates, Lambeth life was notably less positive than in the other two discussions. They spontaneously raised concerns around having young sons in gang areas, anti-social behaviour on the streets, drug use, poor housing and environmental conditions. Likewise this group spontaneously raised visible mental health issues as a particular challenge in Lambeth. These variations in expressed priorities may partly be due to the areas from which the participants were drawn and their different experiences of daily life.
- 7.5 Almost all participants agreed that Lambeth is undergoing fast demographic change, and that this is having an impact on the area. This is positive for some; there is an appreciation that Brixton in particular has become more upmarket, with different people moving in and many areas being renovated. However, there was a strong view for some participants that many people at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum are being 'pushed out' and not benefitting from these improvements; property prices, for sale and rental, are felt to be extremely prohibitive, many new bars, shops and restaurants are felt to be out of reach, and there was general agreement that the disparities between the well-off and the less so are becoming increasingly apparent.

8. Perceptions of violence in Lambeth

8.1 Initial discussions around violence in Lambeth immediately focused on the issue of 'street' 'gang' and 'youth' violence as being the main concern. Other types of violence were not especially on the radar for these residents, so much of the discussion was centred around what they see as the key violence challenge in the Borough.

8.2 Participants in the mixed residents' groups had markedly more positive views about the levels of violence in Lambeth, probably reflecting their day-to-day experiences. Participants in these groups felt that whilst Brixton is still perceived as a 'hub' for street violence, it has improved a great deal recently, and the Borough was felt to be relatively peaceful.

8.3 Key factors in this change are felt to be major renovation and improvement to the street scene outside of and around Brixton tube station and around the Coldharbour Lane and market areas including refurbishment of shops, improved lighting, more security cameras (including on public transport) and a more visible policing/PCSO presence.

'It seems like it's calmed down a lot, it's easier to walk down the street at night' (Male)

8.4 Participants in the Afro-Caribbean women's group, however, did not agree that there had been any improvements to the levels of street violence in their areas, and this again may reflect where they lived. (Estates and housing are mentioned throughout for the role they are seen to play in facilitating youth violence).

8.5 Whilst the high proportion of estates and the large young population of the Borough are both recognised, and are felt to contribute to the levels of street violence, surrounding Boroughs (Southwark, Lewisham, Croydon) are also described as sharing similar problems, and on the whole Lambeth isn't seen as relatively any worse.

8.6 Whilst there is some agreement that street violence is now more confined to smaller pockets, particularly to certain estates (Angeltown, Summerleyton were mentioned), there is still a strong perception that gang-related violence is the main type of violence affecting the borough and that the perpetrators (and victims) are mainly young black men.

'The area codes all fight each other...Loughborough Junction fight with Angeltown, Stockwell fight with Tulse Hill, and Brixton, Peckham and Lewisham are all involved' (Female)

'Specifically in Lambeth...there is still a very underlying issue of gang culture' (Male)

8.7 It is generally noted though, that Lambeth and Brixton in particular, has a very high African-Caribbean population, which may lead disproportionately to crime and violence affecting young black men, and that gang culture is a risk for others too.

8.8 Participants generally didn't feel at risk of violence themselves, but parents, especially those with sons, worried about their potential to become involved in gang-related violence, as young people and children are often felt to be exposed to many risks outside of the family, no matter how settled an upbringing.

8.9 In the African-Caribbean women's group however, whilst there was still much agreement that youth violence is a challenge, much more concern was spontaneously expressed about the high number of people with visible mental health issues who

seemingly are not getting the help they need, who they feel are left on the streets instead of being cared for. Whilst there was sympathy and acknowledgement that mental health services are being reduced, there was also a sense of vulnerability because

'you just don't know what they are going to do' (Female)

- 8.10 Likewise, this group also expressed greater awareness of and concern around visible drinking and other substance misuse leading to violent behaviour, with a view that street dealing is commonplace and the police do little to combat it

'I walk down the street daily and I can tell you every dealer' (Female)

- 8.11 Having said that, most residents felt that on the whole, Lambeth is not necessarily any better or any worse than other London boroughs, and there is a view that Brixton has a lingering reputation for being 'unsafe' which doesn't necessarily match the reality.

'As soon as you say you live in Brixton people say 'oh, gosh!' but I don't think it's as bad as people think' (Female)

- 8.12 Where people do believe that levels of street violence have reduced recently, there are a number of reasons for this. Social media is felt to have played a part in driving violent crime into certain geographical areas – it is easier for groups to organise and contact each other more effectively and discreetly. A young black male resident suggested that in recent years a number of 'key players' have been imprisoned or moved on and that this has led to some reduction in gang activity – a view echoed by two ex-gang offenders – and finally, in some areas there is seen to be a better/more high profile policing presence. This doesn't mean to say though that residents feel it is no longer a problem, and it is still a priority for violence prevention.

9. What can lead to involvement in violence?

- 9.1 It is unsurprising to note that a number of **domestic, educational and social/environmental factors** are all believed to have a role to play in potentially leading to involvement in violence. The key risk factors driving young people towards violence are felt to be experiences in early childhood, school years, and exposure to poverty and inequality – these are clearly linked, and are felt by some to have more of an impact on young black men living on the poorer estates particularly because of their exposure to gang culture – and whilst poor influences at any stage do not necessarily lead to a person becoming violent, (or indeed becoming a victim of violence) they can be seen as potential indicators. These contributing factors of course can't be taken in isolation, and the general view is that a number of these circumstances *can* combine in certain cases to lead to involvement in violence, although they don't automatically do so.
- 9.2 Perhaps because of the demographic make up of Lambeth, there is an underlying thread that many of these issues can have a disproportionate effect on young black men in the Borough, in terms of leading to an increased risk of involvement in violence – from growing up in single parent or difficult homes in deprived areas, through a lack of positive role models, to low educational and employment aspirations.
- 9.3 **Domestic factors**
Early experiences are believed to have a huge impact on a child's development. Whilst there is agreement that it is possible to, and that many people do, overcome a

bad start, the early role that parents (or any services) play is obviously vital in a young persons development.

9.4 Abandonment in early childhood, fostering and care homes, or having generally ill-equipped parents are all seen as potentially poor starts for children, and participants believe that these experiences can sometimes set a pattern for later life.

9.5 How a child sees its parents (or carers) behave, whether there is an absent parent (or no parents), what support is on offer if needed, and pre-educational experiences such as witnessing domestic violence, are felt to be key influences. Growing up in an atmosphere of violence, of any kind, is felt to be a significant precursor to someone becoming violent themselves. It is important to note however that most participants agree (as do professionals) that it is perfectly possible to be born into poor domestic circumstances and not become violent.

9.6 A lack of communication and literacy skills at an early age is felt to be a contributory factor in leading to anger and aggression later on, for example poor behaviour at school, and participants agreed on the importance of these basic skills in a child's development

"Having that basic level of being able to articulate yourself properly from your formative stages influences how you go and interact with the world" (Male)

9.7 Boys and young men growing up with no positive male role models at home is seen as a factor in encouraging gang membership, in particular, and there is a view that young black men can be more vulnerable to this;

"It's hard for young black men, they probably feel more threatened by gang culture" (Male)

9.8 However, the view was also expressed in the African-Caribbean women's group that this can be as much of a problem for young men more generally, as in her view some groups have more control over their children at home

'Boys need a strong male figure...Asian people don't seem to have the same problem, they have a strong family, they're strict, but black, white, mixed race...anything goes' (Female)

9.9 Another agreed that

'It's not confined to young black people, but they can often tend to live more unstructured lives...the kids are freer to do what they want' (Female)

9.10 Rightly or wrongly, most participants felt that young black men are less likely to have a father at home, or a male role model, and are therefore potentially more likely to look to gang membership to fill the gap.

9.11 As children grow up, domestic factors continue to be an influence (as well as school and peer group relationships), and the presence or otherwise of parents or carers who are supportive of education, exposure to alcohol or other substances, and parental employment and housing situation can all affect a young person's vulnerability. There is felt to be a high level of unemployment and deprivation in the Borough, and much of the housing is felt to be dense and 'cramped'.

'you have whole groups of young boys who live on these estates with not a lot to do, and they form friendships in the same place – if you live in houses its not the same, they're not just going to hang out on the main roads but on estates it's easy for them to hang out and stay in enclosed spaces' (Female)

- 9.12 Housing can be both a domestic and a social/environmental factor. Cramped or poor housing, especially on some estates can lead to a difficult home life, perhaps especially for young people who then may go and 'hang around' together outside....and so on. Equally, the cleanliness, condition and bad design of some of the estates, whilst definitely seen as contributing to fostering gang culture, was also felt by some to affect the general attitudes of people on a day to day basis

'when young people get up and look out, what do they see? They need that positive visualisation first' (Female)

9.13 **Educational factors**

Education is seen to be crucial in keeping young people away from street and gang violence. Most participants agreed that a common driver towards becoming involved in violence is low literacy and communication skills, and lack of educational attainment.

- 9.14 Early school years are felt to be the time when 'early interventions' can be the most effective, if a child is showing signs of difficulty – inability to read and write, anger issues, bullying etc – and at this stage teachers are believed to be in a position to intervene, though it is acknowledged that they are already dealing with a heavy workload

'so many kids mess about at school and don't get the attention and support they need...classes are too big, and teachers are dealing with too much to notice if some kid needs extra support' (Female)

- 9.15 There is agreement that, if a person is involved in violence by the age of 17 or 18, there were probably signs earlier in life and points at which 'professionals' could have made a difference. There is an acknowledgement that teaching is becoming a difficult career and a view that some schools are becoming more unruly and less disciplined, with larger class sizes and more pressure on staff, but most feel schools have an extremely important role to play in managing behaviour, including maintaining good communication with parents and other services, cracking down on bullying and providing support for a wide range of educational needs.

- 9.16 There was a view that it is very easy now to become excluded from school rather than helped, and this, along with consequent attendance at pupil referral units, was described as the beginning of a downward slope; if a child is already perhaps experiencing problems at home, these can be compounded, and a young person may look for support elsewhere. Some parents felt that schools need to be better equipped to offer alternatives.

"(you need) trained people in schools, not just teachers, and better ways to keep kids in school if they are troubled" (Female)

'Kids from poor backgrounds with low self esteem can behave destructively at school, but they don't get understood...and then the gang makes them feel confident, like a family' (Female)

- 9.17 Most residents cited better support for teachers and in schools more generally as a key need for the future.
- 9.18 Peer-pressure in school (as well as in outside peer-groups) is agreed to be a major risk factor for older children, as is exposure to a bullying environment. Even young people who come from supportive home backgrounds are felt to be vulnerable; it is important for young people to feel they belong, and participants felt that young (mainly, but not exclusively, black) boys who may already be vulnerable are often the most susceptible to this, especially in relation to gang culture.
- 9.19 Parents in the groups were particularly concerned about their own children being exposed to violence at school.
- “The major concern for me as a mother is the kids – the gangs, that’s massive, it’s terrifying” (Female)*
- “My biggest fear is he goes to a school where he sees bullying and violence” (Male)*
- ‘There’s lots of young boys, hanging around in groups – my daughter gets intimidated on the way home from school’ (Female)*
- 9.20 Participants felt that, for all young people, the role of early interventions via education, where there are problems, is key; children demonstrating educational or social difficulties, absences, early signs of mental health issues or ADHD, were all felt to be ‘early indicators’ which, with support, schools can pick up on to identify children at risk.
- 9.21 **Social/Environmental Factors**
Whilst Lambeth has always been a borough where wealthy areas (eg Dulwich) and the less well-off (eg Loughborough) live within close proximity to each other, the recent increases in property prices and rents, and the borough’s changing demographic, are felt to be fuelling an increasing sense of the ‘haves and have nots’.
- 9.22 The diversity of Lambeth is seen as a very positive aspect of living there, and for most people the regeneration of parts of the Borough is extremely positive. There is however some concern that previously mixed areas – of wealthy and less so, black residents and white – are become more homogenised, with poorer people who may have been raised in certain areas no longer able to afford to live there
- “We have some of the most affluent areas in London, but then the other extreme...people are getting pushed out of Brixton, a lot people who were born here and grew up here and should be enjoying (the regeneration) are being pushed out” (Male)*
- 9.23 In Brixton in particular, residents believe that more middle class professionals and young families are moving into the area, and as it becomes ‘gentrified’, and more expensive, the sense of disparity is growing, leading to an increasing perception of inequality for some people. There is a view that ‘traditional’ residents are not reaping the rewards of the regeneration of a vibrant place which they and their families have helped to create, and are instead being priced out
- “(they) knock down X amount of council houses and build half a million pound flats – where’s the sense in that? (Male)*
- ‘they want to make it new and modern, but it’s not going to be for us’ (Female)*

'they are getting the benefits of what our parents have worked so hard and helped to create, and we don't get nothing from it, and our children don't get nothing from it – it makes me angry sometimes' (Female)

'A lot of that tradition is moving out, and yuppies moving in'

- 9.24 For some participants, this growing inequality is felt to be driving divisions between communities rather than bringing people together; some groups becoming resentful of others, other groups feeling excluded or 'pushed out'.

- 9.25 Visible inequality, rather than poverty in itself, was discussed as a key issue, particularly given these recent social changes. Participants from all groups mentioned closures of local amenities for young people, and local meeting points that have made way for new private housing builds or local cafes that have made way for chain coffee shops

"If you keep seeing local shops and restaurants closing down and things like niche coffee shops or tesco metro open.. you see stuff like that and you are going to get resentful" (female)

'There are lots of kids who aspire to the money and the jobs (in the area), but they don't think the opportunities are going to be there for them, and they want it now" (Male)

You see a lot of people who look like they are struggling, and you go around the corner and they see these really nice houses and really nice cars' (Female)

- 9.26 This is connected to the view that much gang-related crime and youth violence is driven in part by a perceived lack of opportunity for the young people involved to improve their own lives; low educational aspiration and/or opportunity, lack of access to good employment, negative role-models combining to make joining a gang or becoming involved in violent crime seem a reasonable route to income as well as belonging.

"What is your inspiration in life? And they are not looking at teachers and parents, they are looking at people they feel connected to, and they are going to feel inspired by that" (Male)

"There used to be a gang called PDC – Poverty Driven Children – and they were driven to it through poverty" (Male)

'you're 15 years old and you're looking at the Dad across the road with the nice Merc and every opportunity, and then these kids are not even looking to next year..' (Male)

- 9.27 In this context some participants discussed the more general idea that as a society we are becoming more 'quick-fix' and 'instant gratification', with 'people' becoming 'greedier'. Many felt that current role models held up by the media for young people can be an important influence, and that the focus on 'celebrities and footballers' as aspirational figures is not especially positive.

- 9.28 Participants also described how difficult finding good employment, apprenticeships or work experience can be, particularly for those with low educational attainment. There is a view that the recent recession has had an impact on employment opportunities for young people, and that there seems to be fewer opportunities to

develop skills or find further training or qualifications. One male participant mentioned that he had had to gain a certificate costing £500 to apply for work as a security guard, which he ultimately didn't get.

9.29 Lambeth overall is felt to have a relatively good sense of 'community' in some pockets, and a solid identity as a Borough, as well as having a good mix of different 'communities'; Portuguese, Colombian etc, and this is seen as a good thing. However, there is a view that a growing perception of inequality in some areas is leading to communities becoming less cohesive.

9.30 Whilst schools and churches were described as good community focuses, in some areas, there is a view that there are far fewer local, cheap/free social facilities, particularly but not exclusively for young people, than there have been in the past. It is common to hear 'there's nothing for people to do' in discussions like this, but there is a feeling that in Lambeth youth clubs, sports groups, and other young peoples' services are thin, and there are few opportunities for groups of people to mix (that don't involve retail)

"That lack of a social environment that doesn't involve spending money" (Male)

'There used to be much more free stuff to do, youth clubs, after school clubs, but now you have to pay for everything' (Female)

9.31 The accessibility of drugs and alcohol were seen as key to a lot of street violence in one or two Hotspots (Brixton, Clapham High Street), and Lambeth is felt to still have an underlying 'drug culture'. Interestingly in the two mixed residents groups, this was felt to now be 'mainly off the streets', but some participants in the African-Caribbean women's group cited obvious and unchallenged drug dealing in their neighbourhoods as a daily occurrence. The real fuel of much street violence is thought to be alcohol, but most agree that this is no different from many other places across the country. Lambeth does have a young population, and the street life reflects that. Whilst some felt that late night licensing, a greater number of betting shops and a large social scene does create the potential for alcohol related violence, for others this is just part of living in a busy urban area. A more visible policing presence over recent years was felt by some participants to have improved around many local hotspots.

9.32 As previously mentioned, mental health issues were felt by some, particularly in the African-Caribbean women's group, to be a strong contributor towards violent behaviour. Participants mentioned that a high proportion of prisoners have mental health problems, and that there is seemingly fewer mental health services in the Borough. Some describe seeing people with clear mental health issues alone on the streets, and there is definite concern that there is a lack of support for those who need it. Picking up on early indications of mental health problems, particularly in young people, is felt to be an important step in preventing and reducing violent behaviour.

10. Becoming a Victim

10.1 In terms of becoming a victim of violence, most participants felt that, as the biggest issue with violence is gang-related, the people most at risk of becoming victims are those associated with them. There is felt to be an issue with knives associated with young people and gangs – guns as well, but apparently this is now seen as less of a problem – and that stabbings among young people are relatively common. There is a

view though that much of the violence that takes place on estates is unreported and hidden, and unless you are part of that world you are not especially likely to become a victim. Even those who lived on estates did not feel especially 'at risk'. There is a more general risk perceived in the potential 'random' attack that could happen to anyone, but that aside, given the overall diversity of the Borough, there was no particular group believed by participants to be more at risk than any other. Race, sexuality, ability and background etc. are not thought to have a particular impact on the likelihood of becoming a victim of violence.

"Its so multicultural here, all the communities live together, compared to other cities we do really well" (Female)

10.2 There was of course some discussion about domestic and other hidden violence that goes on 'behind closed doors', but most participants struggled to think of why this could be more of an issue in Lambeth than any other place, nor with any one community more than another. It was mentioned in the Africa-Caribbean women's group, however, that domestic violence is potentially a bigger problem in the Asian community than any other, as many women remain largely indoors and/or covered, and often are subservient to their husband. Equally there is felt to be a bigger stigma here, and women more likely to be fearful of coming forward

10.3 Cultural differences can of course have a role to play in shaping certain attitudes. Participants felt that some communities have differing attitudes towards sexuality, for example; there was a view that within the African-Caribbean community there is much less tolerance of LGBT people and that this might make them more vulnerable to persecution, but being LGBT in itself is no more likely to make you a potential victim of violence.

'We've become more accepting in society, gay people don't have to go to gay bars, they go where everyone else goes" (Female)

'They may get laughed at rather than abused' (Female)

11. Who is responsible?

11.1 Whilst parents are ultimately believed to be responsible for their kids' development and behaviour, there is a view that no matter how good a parent you are, your child can still be exposed to the risk of getting in trouble, and this can affect anyone from any background

"A lot of mums are working now, while they are at work their kids are out, so it's not the poor background, it's who they hang around with or what school they go to, or what opportunities they have to be out doing things" (Female)

11.2 For some people, women in particular, fathers need to be encouraged to take better responsibility for their children and importantly, there needs to be better services aimed at young fathers, as well as young mothers, to help facilitate this.

11.3 There is also the view though that parents do have a responsibility to work with schools and other service providers when needed, but that some parents can be hostile and unreceptive to the interventions of other adults. Other participants felt that parents and parental choices can only be held responsible to a degree, and that a sense of personal responsibility is more important

"You can't blame your parents...everyone says 'role model, role model' all the time but you've got to be your own person, you know what's right and what's wrong" (Male)

- 11.4 However, schools, support services, outreach, in particular mentoring and youth work, and the provision of opportunities for young people at risk are all felt to play a role in helping prevent them getting into trouble.

'young parents do need support sometimes, places like SureStart need to be accessible to all parents, especially if they don't have any other family around'

- 11.5 There is definitely a view, however, that services such as these are dwindling across the board, and that there are becoming fewer services and support networks for young parents and families.
- 11.6 Charities and businesses can contribute by helping to improve opportunities for young people in their area. One participant described an organisation in a neighbouring borough set up by local businesses to improve study and work opportunities for local young people as having a positive impact,
- 11.7 There is a general view that early interventions, wherever they may come from, are key to preventing violent behaviour later in life. As discussed above, early educational or social indicators may be (but may not necessarily be) a precursor to later involvement in violence and the earlier problem behaviour can be identified the better.

"As soon as you pick up on problems with troubled young people, you have to figure out what's going on and try and help them" (Female)

'Issues need to be dealt with early, not wait until they are full blown criminals to say they need help' (Female)

- 11.8 There is a strong view that teachers in particular are in a good position to identify early signs of problem behaviour and respond appropriately, although it is acknowledged that education services are as stretched as others and that it is easy for kids to slip through the net. Early diagnosis of ADHD and other mental health issues, and access to appropriate help, is felt to be at least in part reliant on early identification of problematic behaviour in school.

12. Managing violent offenders

"(For young people) putting them away won't necessarily have a long term benefit" (Female)

- 12.1 Most participants agree that, once someone becomes a violent offender, a custodial sentence should be the last resort, particularly for young people and/or a first offence. There is a sympathetic view that many young people involved in violence are victims themselves, and that there should be better opportunities to rehabilitate based around education, work experience and other support. Equally, it is felt that for some young people, a custodial sentence is a 'badge', a mark of their status, unlikely to prove effective

'they want to go in, they want to get that' (Female)

- 12.2 YOIs and prisons are not felt to be especially good at rehabilitation; they are seen as places where people will be more vulnerable to negative influences, and not offered any educational or other opportunities. Mental health needs are not felt to be well recognised in many institutions.

- 12.3 There was a view that support offered to young offenders needs to be more 'holistic' and integrated, from recognising potential mental health issues early, to being aware of difficult home lives; this is seen as a general issue and not particular to Lambeth. Some participants in fact agreed that Lambeth does have some good work going on with young offenders, but that it is not widely known about.
- 12.4 Community service, literacy and other educational programmes, and mentoring by others with similar experiences are felt to be the most effective means of dealing with youth violence among first time offenders, but it is agreed that for repeat offenders, sometimes a custodial sentence is inevitable. That said, opportunities offered to people in prison to either improve their education or learn a skill are also considered significant in reducing violent offending – people are much less likely to re-offend if equipped with better life skills.

(B) Ex-gang offenders

13. Interviewees

- 13.1 The five ex-offenders interviewed, ranging in age from 17 to 43, were all in broadly similar circumstances in that they were currently engaged with the community safety team in one way or another, were more or less removed from gang culture, and were now themselves working with other young people through different programmes and particularly Marcus Lipton youth centre, to help reduce gang related violence.
- 13.2 All interviewees felt that Lambeth overall – but in particular the 'problem' areas including estates and the streets surrounding central Brixton - is a less violent place than it used to be, and that while gang culture is still a major problem, it has improved. This is believed by two interviewees to be partly due to a number of high-level gang members either being in prison or moving on, while two mentioned more effective, or at least higher profile, policing. One felt the increased use of social media among young people has led to more of them staying indoors and conducting their business via their iPhone

"Police have taken a part in it, a lot of people are in jail now and that's played a part"

"people are gangs on the internet now rather than be there in person. Internet gangsters! No-one knew then about going on Youtube and making stuff about this postcode or that postcode, you'd go out on the street yourself, you had to be a bit brave...now the worlds turned into a big coward place"

14. What leads young people in to gang culture?

- 14.1 Despite coming from different social backgrounds, all interviewees felt that the potential for getting involved in gang violence is mainly an issue for young black boys, and that it is largely dependent on the area you grow up in.

"I was around the estate a lot, and around Brixton a lot, you'd see the older lot and they looked cool to us"

- 14.2 All of the interviewees had grown up on or near a local estate known for gang culture, and early exposure via older siblings, peers or relatives in the same area is often the route in. Many gangs are postcode based, so location loyalty is a major pull even for ex-gang members. For one, proximity to his old area represents a risk in terms of re-offending. He is currently trying to move out of the borough, and another two were already living away from the areas where they had previously been involved in violence.

“Round here you can get in trouble easily, if you’re not smart you can get in a lot of trouble. I can see myself staying out of trouble but not if I’m round here”

“I just wanted to live a quiet life out here, keep my head down”

- 14.3 Poor early childhood experiences were felt to be key influences, both for some of the interviewees and for other young people – one young man had lost his mother at a very young age, three had grown up without a father figure, and two had also experienced early problems and/or interventions either by school or social services.

“I didn’t have no-one to look up to in my household, my mum and stepdad split up, there was a lot of violence between them”

“I had a social worker at the time, she would take me out, I wouldn’t say it was helpful but it was fun”

“I couldn’t read and write, I was dyslexic, so didn’t have a lot of confidence reading books and that... and then everyone else started to make progress, and I was slow, so I was stuck there while my friends started to go to the library...so I was like, alright then, I’ll look for different social circles’

- 14.4 A perception of exclusion, inequality and the peer-pressure that is associated with gangs puts vulnerable young people at risk. It is not news to say that the pull of gang culture lies mainly in being able to offer a sense of community and belonging, security and power, and a way to make some money, for those who may be otherwise feeling disenfranchised socially or economically.

‘What happens to young people to get into this? They’ve got no self-belief, no self-esteem, no self-respect’

“I just wanted to blend in after a while, people would respect you and it was nice and you’d think yeah about time’

“When I got expelled from school I started to look for different social circles, and my friends were the ones who were bunking off, smoking, drinking”

“I was into money, I was making money and I didn’t care, so for me it was all about financial gain”

- 14.5 It is felt to be easy to start ‘hanging around the wrong people’ in these circumstances, and it is hard to get away from gangs once involved. They can fill many of the perceived gaps in young men’s development – someone to look up to, a ‘safety’ net, friendships and opportunities to ‘feel like someone’, and there is a view that younger boys can be particularly vulnerable to being drawn in.

“I felt on top of the world, I felt like a millionaire”

“I started hanging around with a crowd that I wasn’t supposed to, it just happened – it was around the area, and everyone was just hanging out, so you’d hang around”

“with no role models, they wake up every day and there’s no role models, no solicitors, no doctors, no MPs, the only people they see with nice things on the streets are people selling drugs, the so-called gangsters’

“most of it starts from an early age, and it’s a lack of knowledge, a lack of knowing what you’re doing, what life’s about”

- 14.6 All interviewees felt that drugs are an integral part of gang culture and that the drug trade fuels a lot of gang related violence, but for all but one of the interviewees, this is currently a problem that is ‘mainly underground’.

“Drugs are involved, because everyone wants to make quick money so everyone is selling drugs...and it’s good money”

- 14.7 Despite all of this, interviewees agreed that even coming from a stable background, with education and employment being both demonstrated and valued, is not necessarily a defence against the pull of gang culture. Two interviewees explained that their background had nothing to do with their involvement in gangs, and that in certain cases, there is nothing that can be done to counter the initial attraction

‘It was a happy, happy family; I loved my parents. I had good parents to raise me, they did everything they could...’

- 14.8 This interviewee had been a victim of bullying at school, and while his home and school lives were supportive, the appeal of belonging to a gang, which would apparently offer support and an escape, was great.

“some people crumble, self harm, commit suicide or move on...some people snap, and I was one of those people that snapped...”

- 14.9 Fear, loyalty and not wanting to ‘let down your friends’ were mentioned as reasons boys and young men can become increasingly involved in violence once they have joined a gang, and all interviewees said that they had never had any intention of becoming involved in violence when they initially joined, but that the pressure from gang peers and elders, and other gangs can be unbearable.

“you get straight abuse, and you go ‘I don’t want to go’ and your hearts beating and you just want to go home, but you don’t want to let your friends down. It’s a lot of stress man”

“I’m not saying I’m an angel, but I’m not a bad person. I have (used violence) in defence, like if someone is coming to attack me I will defend myself, if someone is coming to fight me I will fight them back...but I would never just go out thinking I’d do that”

“the peer pressure when you are in a gang, if you don’t do what you’re supposed to do, rumours spread, people might threaten you or even attack you, and after a while you just explode”

- 14.10 Interviewees all now felt that violence should never be necessary, but the threat of violence against themselves or their families was seen as a circumstance when violence would be, if not acceptable, at least understandable. That aside, all of them have found a way out of gang violence, and are now helping to improve the lives others as well as improving their own.

15. What has helped them to change?

15.1 A number of key 'turning points' were described as being crucial in moving away from gang culture and violence, some personal, and some of which relate to experiences with the criminal justice system and the accessibility of training and educational opportunities, including during custodial sentences.

15.2 Three of the interviewees describe the sense of shame, or the embarrassment of family during appearances in court, or during prison visits, for example.

"I watched my mum look at me in that situation, and it was an insult, the shame"

"My grandmother came over from Jamaica, country lady, didn't know much, came to visit me with my mum and daughter...and I went out to see her and she was crying and I'm going come on Grandma, what are you crying for? Thinking you can't do that I'm a hard man now...and she was saying look what you're doing to me – they'd stripped her naked looking for drugs, that was my grandmother! And I was like, you know what, I can't do this, I'm killing her"

"it's very easy (to have the wrong influences around you) – and I'm just lucky that my family is not like that – I could see another way"

15.3 Interviewees also mention how important learning to understand their victims' perspective, as well as that of others affected by their crime, has been in helping them to become more empathetic and aware of the consequences of violence, and feel that this is a vital part of rehabilitation.

"You start thinking about peoples' lives who've been ruined, people you've hurt, and memories of the reactions of the people you've harmed"

"I deserve every single day I've done and more, and that's the truth – I took someone's life!"

"I started thinking about the community, which I had never done before, about the ambulance man who came and found the body, and stuff like that, and I never did think like that"

"I just saw the youth of today and I felt sorry for them, I've been through enough for me to make a decision in my life, sometimes I see other guys like that and I want to help them make a change"

15.4 Gaining or improving literacy skills, and access to other training and education opportunities, have played a fundamental role for all interviewees, and most can't state highly enough the importance of access to a range of options in preventing reoffending. One was currently being supported to train for work in the construction industry, one was being supported through a job application with a bank, and one long-term prisoner felt that learning to read and write, and access to education later in his sentence had helped him make a massive change.

15.5 One interviewee mentioned close personal experiences of the consequences of violence, such as the loss of a friend, as a wake up call.

"my friend who died outside Brixton police station, he ain't going nowhere man, he got stabbed in the chest. Like, how can you just die when you ain't seen nothing?"

- 15.6 Whatever the other contributory factors, all interviewees felt that than an individual's own realisation that involvement in gang culture is a choice, and that there are other options available, is key to changing behaviour, and that people must ultimately take responsibility for their own actions

"It's up to me to decide if I want to misbehave or not"

16. What can happen in the future to reduce gang violence?

- 16.1 A combination of better services and increased opportunity for young men (not necessarily just those felt to be 'at-risk') alongside a willingness for people to take advantage of the opportunities offered, is felt to be key to countering gang involvement. It is acknowledged that support services are available, but it is question of presenting them in a way which will appeal to gang members or potential gang members

"I can sit here and say things like more youth clubs, more apprenticeships and stuff like that for young people... but I see people pushing things like that but its up to the young people if they want to take it, so I don't know"

- 16.2 The participants involved naturally all expressed an appreciation of the Marcus Lipton youth club, the services associated with it and the role it plays in helping them as well as giving them the means to help others. In particular, the mentoring of younger potential offenders by people like themselves who have credible, relevant experiences to share is thought to be extremely valuable

"Parental advice is boring after a while, but when you hear it from someone else who has been on that path..."

"I try to help the youths understand that this way of life will get you nowhere, it leads to two things, incarceration or death, and they don't want either, so I try to help them focus on something positive, whether it's football or the gym, and help them see there is more to life than the postcode they belong to"

"that's why we need more people like me, coming back into the community, showing them how to be strong individuals and that they can be successful"

"I can say give out more jobs, open up more youth clubs, help start new activities...but to slow down the crime of youths you have to know what's going on, you have to have a bit of knowledge to engage with certain people"

- 16.3 Just the fact of having a local venue as a focus, that young people can use for sports and music activities, meetings with case workers, getting help with training and employment, that provides sessions for people with learning and physical disabilities, and generally acts as a hub for a cross section of the community is felt to be valuable.

"I do activities for young people in the area, like football and basketball and social things, they have nights where kids from the local community just come in and socialise"

- 16.4 The centre is felt by all interviewees to be important in providing opportunities to engage young people who might otherwise become involved in gang crime, and is the kind of model that they would like to see replicated.

- 16.5 Good social and other support workers can be integral, but a couple of interviewees felt there can be a lack of understanding of the reality of gang culture and its appeal for young people

“youth offending workers like the one I had can help, but not every youth offending worker tries their best for you, some of them you go and they don’t care, it’s just their job and they just judge you straight away, but there are some that go beyond and actually help people change their life”

“If I was a social worker I would say find something, anything to keep that child occupied, something beneficial, something proper”

“I’d get them from the age of ten with early interventions, I’d be giving them confidence in education, the key thing I always say is education is the key to success, and I’d get people who have been successful to talk to them and show them what they can achieve”

- 16.6 There was also a view that that once a child or young person is in need of intervention, this must be consistent and ongoing – two interviewees felt that educational, social services or health worker interventions can be sporadic and inefficient, and often non-existent after a certain age

“workers need to be on their backs, and when you get hold of a young person you need to hold onto them”

“The way the system works is that when you hit a certain age you don’t get no more help – that’s it, done. Whatever you’ve done in your childhood that’s going to affect you, done, we’re working on these lot, the younger ones now and when you do that to a person it’s like, rah, I’m out of here, they don’t care no more when they feel there’s no opportunity, no chance”

- 16.7 Pupil referral units and young offenders institutions were described by two interviewees as not especially effective at preventing youth violence – it can be easy to avoid education or training if you want, drugs are easily accessible and indeed for some, referrals or sentences can carry a certain amount of kudos at the time.

“I didn’t want to learn how to read and write, I spent the year smoking weed, going to the gym, getting a bad boy reputation...but it was for all the wrong reasons...I had all that respect as a youngster, I was one of the youngest but everyone looked up to me, it made me feel really good”

- 16.8 One man had recently completed a lengthy sentence in a number of institutions, and believed that educational opportunities in prison are vital to rehabilitation, but not always accessible for many prisoners. He describes one of his key turning points happening when an understanding and encouraging prison officer agreed to transfer him to a different wing offering opportunities for learning, and that the continued educational support he was able to access throughout the final years of his sentence was extremely important.

“I never looked back since. I was reading the Cat Sat on the Mat...and everyone was going we’re proud of you, we’re proud of you, and that made me feel good, so I got more confident, did maths and English, got access to higher learning and long distance courses, and that was it, I said this is me...and I just went from strength to strength”

- 16.9 Custodial sentences are on the whole agreed to be a last resort, but where they are inevitable, the role that institutions play in equipping offenders with better literacy and communication skills and the possibility of further education or training is important in preventing reoffending..
- 16.10 Communication and engagement between the police and young people involved in gangs was described by one interviewee as being in need of improvement, although there was recognition of low levels of trust in policing
- “people don’t co-operate with the police, they think the police are against them”*

(C) Youth offenders

17. Interviewees

- 17.1 The three interviewees for this element of the study were 14, 17 and 18 year old young men, two of whom were part way through their reparations programme with the Youth Offending Team, and one who had just finished. It should be said that none of them had committed a violent offence, but two of them had been caught with a knife on them.

18. What can lead young people into violence?

- 18.1 None of these young men would have described themselves as being ‘in a gang’, but all were in some way on the periphery or ‘knew’ some ‘people in gangs’. Two had been caught with a knife, and one had been caught in a stolen bicycle sting. For each this was the first offence, and none had been in trouble with the police before, although one was engaged with social services after poor attendance at school. In terms of backgrounds, like some of the ex- gang offenders, these young men were from relatively stable home lives, with good maternal relationships, but one did describe the experience of his father leaving as a turning point in his attitude and behaviour

‘I was very angry inside about a lot of things...that’s sometimes how life is’

- 18.2 This boy was not currently attending school regularly, but two of the three described themselves as good kids and students and had been doing relatively well at school

‘I was a good boy – I had my fights but I was hard working’

‘It’s a decent background, I’ve never been in trouble, I love my mum’

- 18.3 A common thread through these interviews was that their initial arrest had been ‘unfortunate’, or a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. None of the young men say they had any intention of trouble, although one of the knife carriers admits it was his and he was carrying it for confidence. Many young people still apparently don’t realise that even carrying a knife for self-defence is dangerous. However in this case, the young man had witnessed the stabbing of a friend, and felt he needed to protect himself

‘I didn’t want that to happen to me, so I brought a knife....not to defend myself but to make them know, to get them scared’

- 18.4 In the other knife case, the young man had taken the knife from a friend, apparently shocked when he found out that his friend was carrying it, with the intention of throwing it away, but he ‘got distracted’; because of the attention they attracted

partly by the way they looked (hoodies, low trousers), and in part because they were smoking cannabis, he was caught with the knife in his pocket. In the bicycle case, the young man had been talked into helping sell a (stolen) bike by a friend.

18.5 The circumstances of their arrests are relatively innocuous – no fighting or violence was actually involved in any incident. There is no sense however in which any of these young men ‘blame’ anyone but themselves. They do cite unfortunate circumstances, but all agree that being where they were in the first place was their choice, and they regret it. These cases illustrate how easy it is for young men on the periphery of gangs to find themselves in unexpected situations.

18.6 Reflecting other views throughout this study, the young men talk about the appeal of being in a gang (or fear of *not* being in a gang) and how hard it is for them even to just stay on the edge

‘at the beginning I thought it was nice, the attention basically, girls and all that’

‘if you join it it’s better than being against it, there’s more people in it than out – Stockwell is a small place, if I don’t join, I’m gonna see these guys every day, they are going to look at me weird, get into fights with me, bully me, they might take my stuff – there’s lots of things’

‘people want a reputation, people want a name’

‘if you’re in this area and older people are telling you what to do and you don’t do it, you’ll get backlisted in the area and bullied’

18.7 Whilst Lambeth is felt to have a strong gang culture, surrounding Boroughs are also mentioned as having problematic areas. Life in Lambeth is described as *‘scary but sometimes nice at the same time’*, but there is a definite sense for all of these young men that ‘anything can happen at any time’ and they need to be aware

‘you never know what might happen, people might walk round the corner and try and mug you’

‘sometimes you just have to be ready for the worst’

‘you can just be talking to someone and someone can hit you – you have to know how to speak to some people’

19. What has helped them change?

19.1 All describe their short, reparative YOT sentence as a ‘wake-up’ call, and a very strong lesson in terms of wanting to stay out of trouble. As described, none of them had been in trouble before and their experience with the court system has made them realise how serious the consequences can be

‘It made me not carry a knife – I don’t want to go to jail’

‘I ain’t going in a cell again – I’d go mad’

19.2 Witnessing the death of a friend is also mentioned, as with one of the ex-gang offenders, as a watershed moment

‘It made me realise, I don’t want to do this no more’

- 19.3 Family is the other key factor in enabling change – in all cases the young men have solid relationships with at least one parent, and other family members, and they provide a major motivation for wanting to stay out of trouble

'I'm spending time with my family to make up for it...to make up for everything I'm gonna go on the straight path'

'I do what she says now, like a normal mum'

20. What can help in the future?

- 20.1 Mentors and coaches are mentioned as important ways to provide young men with role models, particularly people that have relatable experiences. Two of the interviewees mentioned learning from ex-gang members or inmates to hear their stories as a 'warning' to young people, perhaps speaking in schools so that younger children are made aware early on. One in fact did have mentor with a gang background at one point, who had done running and boxing with him, and he is described as

'...like a Dad. I respect him'

- 20.2 One suggested that spending a day in a real prison and talking to inmates about the experience could have a deterrent effect for young people already at risk of committing violence.

- 20.3 Unsurprisingly, the subject of youth provision in terms of clubs, activities, opportunities to get involved in sports etc, was raised with the view that there are currently limited facilities in Lambeth

'right now young people aren't doing nothing, they are just out on the roads, just reckless, they just need stuff to do instead of being on the road bored'

(D) Victims of violence

21. Interviewees

- 21.1 The five interviewees for this element of the study were: a young asylum seeker who had been attacked by his neighbour, two young men who had experienced gang-related violence, and two young women who had experienced domestic and/or sexual violence. Violence spans a huge spectrum of course, and we should remember that these findings are based on the experiences of five individuals only, and there will be a number of perspectives on other kinds of violence that were not explored during this element of the study, and could be a consideration for further research.

22. Who becomes a victim?

- 22.1 Naturally with such a small sample and a range of individual and personal experiences, it is hard to draw parallels between the cases in terms of answering the question 'what leads to becoming a victim'. However, each of the interviewees in their own way can be described as 'vulnerable' to a degree, either because of exposure to gang culture, lack of family or any other support, or, in the case of the young women, inexperienced victims of manipulative men.
- 22.2 What is 'vulnerable'? Whilst these cases overall share few similarities, from these examples we can think about different types of 'vulnerability', and therefore the potential likelihood of becoming a 'victim' in different circumstances.

22.3 The young asylum seeker was 18 and living alone, estranged from his parents. Having been left for nine years in Iran and when he got back they had moved. He was currently getting some benefits and not allowed to work, has no qualifications and 'anger problems', which means his parents don't want him to live with them.

'I have a problem with the family'

22.4 He'd recently been attacked with an axe by a drunken neighbour when he asked him to turn his music down, and he has ongoing issues of threats. He's also waiting to see if the neighbour will be prosecuted. He felt very unsafe living next door to the man who attacked him and was scared after he had gone to the police as the neighbour continues to threaten him.

22.5 He didn't believe there was no special reason this was happening to him – he explained that the neighbour drank a lot, that he lived in an area of poor housing, and that he wanted to get away to another area, but it emerged that he had also experienced some gang-related trouble in another Borough that had led to a previous arrest, and he was struggling to get re-housed.

22.6 He is vulnerable in many ways. He has no family or other relatives, and no support network; no work, no education, and no real opportunity to change any of those things. He is reliant on limited contact with a social worker who is helping him find out his status with the Home Office, and in reality is as potentially likely to be a perpetrator of violence as a victim – he mentioned that he had fought 'in self defence' before and had obviously been on the periphery, at least, of trouble. The nature of his lifestyle means he may be more exposed to the potential to both commit violence and become a victim of it.

22.7 Though the stories are different in some ways, this could equally be said of the young male victims of gang-related violence; their stories were not that dissimilar to those told by the ex-gang offenders. Although neither of them would have described themselves as being 'in a gang' both were on the periphery and had their own 'groups of friends' – that they didn't call 'gangs' – and Lambeth was felt by both to be quite dangerous for young people, especially on the estates

'around any corner you can meet trouble, just standing there waiting for someone to come'

22.8 One had been the victim of a kidnapping and held hostage for 24 hours, and the other had been the victim of a serious knife attack. These cases do share similarities; both the young men at least associated with gangs, and both had witnessed violence before. Both said they themselves tried to keep out of trouble, but that 'somehow' they had become involved.

'my friend got stabbed in the chest when we were 16... violence has been around me for so long'

22.9 Both said that they came from pretty normal backgrounds, and were shocked by what had happened to them. What these interviews perhaps indicate is the fine line between becoming a perpetrator and a victim of gang related violence. As with the ex-offenders, there is a sense of being in the 'wrong place at the wrong time', and it illustrates the often expressed view that things can escalate extremely quickly in certain situations, especially where knives are carried, and even if you only carry a knife 'for self-defence', someone else might not be.

22.10 Obviously the presence of knives and other weapons makes young people associating with gangs especially likely to be the victims of those kinds of physical violence, but again, echoing the views of the ex-offenders, there is a more general low level violence that takes place within and among gangs of which any associated person can be on the receiving end. Both of these young men spoke of 'looking at someone the wrong way' or 'disrespecting' someone in a minor way as triggers for trouble, and we have already discussed the postcode-related issues that can be enough to spark a fight – both mentioned estates as being a focal point for gang activity, and just living in a particular spot can make you vulnerable

'it's easier for gangs to form on estates, there's a large concentration of youths'

22.11 These young men both felt that younger kids in particular are vulnerable to learning from an early age that violence is acceptable, and that younger and younger children are exposed to gang related violence, so it is becoming more normalised.

22.12 We have already discussed many of the reasons why young people are drawn into gangs in the first place, but it is probably the case that once in or associated with a gang, a young person becomes vulnerable to becoming a victim of violence on some level. In these particular cases, their vulnerability, and we can perhaps assume the same for many others like them, stems mainly from the fact that their lives are lived in close proximity to potential violence by virtue of where they live and who they associate with

22.13 The experiences of the two young women are of course very different in nature, and both represent circumstances of prolonged domestic and/or sexual violence, sustained over a period of time, over four years in one case. In both instances, the perpetrator had a history of violence, initially unknown, and the young women both described themselves as young, naïve, and unaware; one had a history of self-harm.

'I was 16 when I met him, it was my first relationship...he moulded me to how he wanted me'

22.14 These cases were quite different in many ways. One young woman was raped and sexually assaulted by her sports coach over a three month period at 17, and the other was in a physically and sexually violent relationship with her partner for over four years. However, there are some similarities. Neither had a father living at home, but both described their home lives as 'normal' and relatively stable and both were eloquent and confident, either working or studying. In both cases, participants' mothers' had met the perpetrators, and whilst one had expressed reservations, neither they nor any other family members had been aware of the real nature of the relationships, despite being otherwise relatively close

22.15 The women described themselves as being 'inexperienced' at the time, and a common thread across both stories is that they didn't realise what was happening to them was wrong at first, due to a lack of awareness of what constitutes 'domestic violence' or 'rape'. Both felt that these things 'happened to other people', and in part because they felt a degree of complicity, they didn't believe that such terms applied to what was happening to them. One young woman struggled to even say the word 'rape' throughout the discussion, and said that she only really realised it was rape in her police interview

'they said it was a bit more serious than what they thought and said, did I know it was rape? – I said 'let's not call it that, I don't want to hear that'

'I thought rape was only something that happened to people down a dark alley'

22.16 In both of these cases, the men involved are described as using varying degrees of manipulative tactics to get what they want, over a sustained period of time, sometimes with violence. In the case of the sports coach, who was much older, these included individual training sessions, flattery and 'sympathy' to facilitate his behaviour. In the other case, the male partner used physical and emotional violence and threats of harm to friends and family as means of control, in a familiar pattern where a woman is gradually isolated from her friends, work and family and in this case, subject to regular attempts to 'force me to have a baby'. There is also a very profound self-blame element here; if sexual activity has been consensual at any point in the relationship, it can then be hard to realise that it can also constitute rape and thus, report it

'It's unreal, you do not even realise what your brain does'

'Looking back now I was in such a vulnerable place that I didn't know it was wrong'

22.17 But whilst there are similarities, we can't really draw from these interviews whether there were specific 'indicators' for becoming a victim of domestic or sexual violence. There are other discussions around the heightened risks posed to some groups of young women and the indicators for that – those in care, sex workers, trafficked women, for example - but in these instances, apart from the women being young and inexperienced, there was nothing really to connect them. What does connect them is the role that predatory and violent men play in manipulating young women into such relationships, and the power that they can have once those relationships are 'established', but not necessarily that there is a 'type' more likely to be susceptible. Both young women do say, however, that raising awareness amongst young people early about what constitutes domestic and sexual violence is vital, and that more effort should be made in schools to encourage young people to learn about it.

22.18 What these two stories also have in common is perhaps missed opportunities to intervene, or at least to intervene earlier. One young woman was already in counselling for self-harm at the time of the event and struggling (and it was ultimately the counselling service that helped her engage with the police and support services), whilst the other had numerous interactions during the course of the relationship with the police, the ambulance service and refuge/housing staff that could perhaps have not only identified her circumstances earlier but could have led to someone taking action.

22.19 Although she was aware that the police in particular can't do anything if no charges are pressed, she did feel there could be some sort of early warning system to alert an appropriate agency after a certain number of calls to the home or visits to hospital following domestic violence. In both these instances the young women had been 'on the radar' in one form or another. That is not to say that there are many other reasons that these abusive and violent relationships can remain hidden for so long, from lack of awareness, fear of the repercussions of telling anyone through to fear of personal violence, but in one case in particular, it does seem like there were numerous situations in which she could have been helped.

22.20 Both these young women, in the end, managed to escape from their situations with family or other support, eventually reporting the perpetrator to the police, but not before they had both suffered serious physical and emotional harm. The young woman who had been abused by her 'coach' had suffered serious PTSD and panic attacks for some time afterwards.

22.21 Maybe it should also be said here that what also connects these two cases is the fact that although charges were brought in both, neither perpetrator was found guilty. Both the young women put this down to the fact that much of their evidence had been rejected as inadmissible – voicemails, photos – for a number of reasons, and that ultimately it had been ‘my word against his’, and that because at one stage the relationship had been ‘consensual’, their charges of rape weren’t believed (‘consensual’, because consent under coercion cannot really be called consent.). Both had seen the perpetrator around since the court case and felt that they had been extremely let down, and were reluctant now to engage with the criminal justice system. This is perhaps another way in which women can be vulnerable; in complicated domestic and sexual violence cases the criminal justice system is not always in women’s favour, and where women feel let down and unsupported, they are less likely to seek help.

23. What can be done?

- 23.1 This section cannot make any hard conclusions about a set of characteristics that make someone likely to be a victim of violence apart from the obvious - young men who are in, or in the periphery of gangs, are more likely to become a victim of violence because of their lifestyle. Young women from any background can become victims of domestic or sexual violence.
- 23.2 It can only describe why these particular people in these circumstances had the experiences they did, and draw out some suggestions for interventions that *may* have helped them or may help others in the future.
- 23.3 In terms of both gang violence and domestic and sexual violence, participants mentioned a need for better information in schools, and at a younger age. Both of the young women said that there had never been any discussion during their education about relationships and domestic or sexual violence, and both felt it is important to teach young kids (not just girls) what is and what is not acceptable, and what they can do about it. They both also said they didn’t know where to go for help once they were in the situation, and feel there is a need to make sure young women know of what help there is available to them. Equally, support for women once the ‘relationship’ is over is important in rebuilding. One in particular described the therapeutic work of Victim Support as extremely valuable to her recovery.
- 23.4 Not only is there perhaps a lack of awareness of support services, the issues bound up with cases of domestic and sexual violence – fear, shame, manipulation, coercion, the threat of violence etc – make it extremely hard for young women to seek help on their own. One of the women in particular mentioned numerous interactions where she felt she could have been helped – by the police, by a women’s refuge she approached, and by the housing department of the council. ‘Intervention’ by support services in these instances is difficult of course, as they rely on being made aware of the circumstances, but as discussed above, the woman with the abusive partner felt that there could have been a type of red flag system whereby a support agency was alerted even without her consent. Also, both perpetrators had been previously known to the police, one for domestic violence and the other, in fact, was already on the sex offenders register, yet in a position to be ‘coaching’ young girls.
- 23.5 The young men involved in gang violence also spoke of the need to ‘get them early’ in relation to educating children about the dangers of knives and gangs. Both said, and this is echoed throughout the study, that gangs are a big problem in schools and that

it is easy for even very young boys to fall into the lifestyle. Whilst there is almost certainly work going on to target young people with information, whether or not this is being delivered in the appropriate way, and by the most appropriate people is something to consider.

- 23.6 Mentoring and outreach are mentioned as effective ways of helping young men at risk of becoming involved in violence. As with the ex-offenders, providing 'role models' for young men who have had similar experiences, or have a credible story to tell, are seen as helpful in demonstrating that there is an alternative, and this applies equally to potential perpetrators *and* victims. Likewise, and reflecting many views across the study, key to helping keep young people 'off the streets' is seen to be far greater provision in local youth activities and services. Opportunities to take part in things that genuinely interest young men are perceived as being almost non-existent.

(D) Professionals

24. Interviewees

- 24.1 The interviewees for this part of the study were: an ex-policeman, currently working in a multi-agency risk-assessment capacity; a regional manager in the ambulance service; a consultant paediatric psychiatrist; the manager of a young peoples' sexual health outreach service; the manager of a service supporting victims of violence against women; and the manager of a long-established nightclub on Coldharbour Lane.
- 24.2 These are naturally six very different perspectives, and the findings reflect the diversity of their priorities when it comes to tackling violence. This is helpful in giving us a broad view of some of the Borough's challenges, but means there are a limited number of shared perspectives that can be drawn from these interviews; we discuss options for further research with this audience in the next section.

25. Working in Lambeth

- 25.1 Firstly, most of the participants were of the view that as a Borough, Lambeth overall is not necessarily any more violent than other similar London boroughs (riots notwithstanding). One had previously worked in Richmond, (which unsurprisingly she described as very different), but on the whole Southwark, Lewisham, etc are felt to have similar challenges to Lambeth. However, most participants also cite Lambeth's dense, young and high African- Caribbean population as perhaps reflecting adversely in the make up of both perpetrators and victims of crime. One interviewee, working in young peoples' sexual health, did however feel that violence in Lambeth is more widespread than in other Boroughs, and less easy to target with outreach

'In Wandsworth for example we could be more targeted as there were specific areas where you knew people were vulnerable, but in Lambeth it's very across the board. You can't do a bespoke outreach in one area and put everything into that one area because it's so broad'

- 25.2 From the perspectives of the ex-policeman, the ambulance manager and the club owner, there have in fact been successes in reducing certain kinds of violence in Lambeth, particularly in Brixton, in recent years owing to factors including regeneration of the area, improvements to security, more high profile but sympathetic policing, and better communications between stakeholders and agencies, for example local businesses and residents, or health workers and the police.

- 25.3 The club owner mentioned that she used to see a lot of ‘undesirables’ years ago up and around Coldharbour Lane, before the renovation of some of the pubs, the arrival of new restaurants and new residential areas, but felt that now Brixton has changed for the better mainly because there are fewer drug dealers,. She did, however, think that there is more low level anti social behaviour such as throwing up or urinating in the street, and general shouting and rowdiness.
- 25.4 This interviewee felt that the police have done a really good job in getting rid of the dealers, which she believes has had a major impact in reducing violence on the streets around Coldharbour Lane. Her positive working relationship with the police is described as one of the key factors in preventing violence and other crime in and around her club
- “they have to do their job and I appreciate it, if it hadn’t been for their help over the past few years Brixton wouldn’t be like it is”*
- 25.5 The ambulance man particularly cited an extensive campaign against violence towards ambulance workers as being successful in minimising the levels of violence experienced by his co-workers.

26. Features of violence in Lambeth

- 26.1 Across these interviews, there are different types of violence identified as being a particular challenge for those working in their field in Lambeth. Reflecting the views of other audiences in the study, as well as the professional fields of the interviewees, youth/gang violence and domestic/sexual violence emerge as priorities, although one interviewee felt that this can reflect much lower levels of awareness of other types of violence. Specifically in this case, awareness of domestic violence, and the fact that it is now a priority for government and agencies means that it gains a lot of attention, whilst other types of violence in this sector are much lower profile
- ‘Domestic violence is definitely the area that is most prevalent, and there has been lots of awareness raising about it. Now it is at the forefront of government and local authority minds, but other kinds of violence – female genital mutilation, honour based violence – compared to domestic violence, not much is known about them’*
- 26.2 Similarly, the interviewee working in outreach for young peoples’ sexual health believed that although she and her team were now much better trained in the areas (especially FGM), the number of cases they see are extremely low and still little is known by practitioners across the field about how to spot and deal with cases.
- 26.3 Gangs are mentioned by nearly all the participants as a contributing factor towards both youth violence and domestic/sexual violence, albeit from different perspectives. For example, the ambulance manager and the ex-policeman both mention gangs as playing a large part in the violence they see amongst young people on estates and on the streets, and that the most common victims and perpetrators of violence are young people, particularly boys, and often involving knives.
- “Young people being stabbed by other young people in the legs or bottom area”*
- 26.4 However, there is a somewhat sympathetic view that negative perceptions of young people can often lead to a group being seen as a gang when they are not.
- “when you go to a place initially if there’s been a stabbing there is a perception that it will be gang related”*

- 26.5 Gangs also feature highly in discussions around violence against women and girls, and for most participants there is an acknowledgement that there is a relatively high level of gang activity in the Borough. For our outreach sexual health worker, particularly, there was a strong view that violence and sex go 'hand in hand' for some vulnerable groups, and that sex is often used as weapon between gangs, as well as being used in initiations; she cites examples where, for example, young women in gangs set up members of other gangs by enticing them into sex, or male gang members forcing their 'girlfriends' to perform sexual acts on friends, at the risk of violence if they do not.

'I do think sex and violence go hand in hand in some of these vulnerable groups, the ones immersed in gangs or with no family unit at home and no boundaries'

- 26.6 From the point of view of the child psychologist, the victims she mostly comes into contact with are children who have been subject to violence from their parents, and she mainly attributes this type of violence to

'parents with alcohol or drug problems, or who have a personality disorder, people with difficult problems themselves'

- 26.7 She also believed that, where she does come across young perpetrators of violence (albeit rarely), this is often also down to similar challenges

'they are probably children that have problems themselves, they believe that they show their worth by superiority, maybe they are not able to show it in other areas...there are kids who start to be violent from a very young age, whether something is happening at home and they are learning to have less empathy and verbal ability, or some may have less developmental ability'

- 26.8 This participant also believed that there can be 'cultural' factors that lead to an increased likelihood of violent behaviour towards children, though not necessarily in any one ethnic group

'Cultural in a very broad sense – yes it does occur in different ethnic groups but it would be very difficult to say one group more than another. There are some within ethnic groups who believe that hitting children is the right thing to do, and there are some within the English population that still believe physical chastisement is ok'

- 26.9 The ambulance manager also believed that the main contributors to violence against staff are either alcohol or drug related, or caused by mental health issues. Mental health issues were described as being especially prevalent in Lambeth, and extremely visible. The ex-policeman believed that this is a leading factor in someone becoming a victim of crime, although not necessarily violence – vulnerable people are easy to manipulate and take advantage of, for example, and are more susceptible to this sort of low-level crime rather than becoming a victim of violence.

- 26.10 This participant, along with the ambulance manager and the club owner, felt that alcohol is also a major contributory factor in general street violence and associated anti-social behaviour. Both the ex-policeman and the club owner felt that relationships between traders in the night time economy and local police and other services need to be strong to help prevent anti-social behaviour in certain hotspots. This is again an area where Lambeth is already thought to do relatively well. Clapham is mentioned as possibly suffering from the displacement of some anti-social behaviour, crime and violence that previously may have taken place in Brixton. Much of this is felt to be alcohol related, but the joined up approach to dealing with it,

including the input of licencees, security personnel, local authorities, health and safety education, and the support of volunteers and St Johns Ambulance staff is described as extremely positive.

“there is lots of good work going on, by the council, by the police, licencees, businesses – very good work, working together”

- 26.11 Other social, economic and domestic factors, as discussed elsewhere throughout this report, are also felt to play their part. The child psychologist in particular, who in the course of her work comes across parents who are violent to their children, felt that stress – caused in part by poverty and deprivation – can be contributory, particularly if there are other underlying issues

‘when people are under stress they maybe have more of a tendency to be irritable, as we all know, but for some people, if they have issues with impulse control or verbalisation or negotiating, maybe they react with more violence’

- 26.12 However for one participant at least, violent behaviour is a ‘choice’

‘For me, and I say males for the purposes of ease, I believe men perpetrate abuse because they choose to, they make that choice to enable them to have power and control over the female so they can use violence, aggression, co-ercion, intimidation, threats and manipulation to have power, so they can isolate her and dominate her life completely’

- 26.13 She did, though, acknowledge that there are factors that can increase the risk – mental health issues, substance misuse, violent home life etc – but reflecting the views of others across the study, these can be

‘a cause, but violence is not a necessary consequence’

27. Who is ‘vulnerable’?

- 27.1 As described earlier in this report, and reflected by these professional participants, people can be vulnerable in a number of ways. In terms of street and gang violence, young people can be susceptible to becoming either perpetrators or victims of violence simply by virtue of their proximity to gang life, and as previously discussed, at the same time can be extremely reluctant to engage with services

‘kids who have been involved in gangs and things, they’re very reluctant to engage with mental health services – they might recognise there is a problem but they don’t want to engage...they come from a culture that doesn’t trust authority’

- 27.2 Looked-after children, young women in particular, are felt to be particularly vulnerable to grooming and manipulation by older (mainly) men, and again extremely hard to access from a support point of view, stressing the importance of outreach work with extremely hard to reach groups. There is also the view that increased sexualisation in the media etc has ‘normalised’ some behaviours, and that vulnerable young women are often at increased risk, and not aware that what is happening to them is unacceptable

‘some girls say they would rather be in a gang and feel safe than not be in the gang – they date some of the guys just to be safer because then they might not be used for sex...a lot of young people don’t realise they are being exploited, they normalise things’

- 27.3 Similarly, this particular professional reflected some of the issues raised by our two victims of domestic and sexual violence, issues which can often lead to the situation being unreported and the victim themselves not seeking the appropriate help

'A few vulnerable young women have said that their partner has hit them or pushed them against the wall, but they don't define that as violence and would blame themselves'

'They don't always understand what's happened is rape. They said yes even though they didn't want to, so they don't think its rape even if they would have been hit if they didn't do it'

- 27.4 Again, mental health issues feature highly here in terms of what can make a person vulnerable – poor attachment models in early childhood, poor communication and verbalisation skills, and personality disorders are cited by those working in the field as potentially leading to increased vulnerability of either becoming a victim or a perpetrator of violence. People with learning needs are also described by one participant as particularly at risk and very much 'left off the agenda'

'there is an inability to have concrete thinking around safety and things...they are extremely vulnerable and people pick up on that'

- 27.5 This participant also felt that young LGBT people, especially younger men can be especially vulnerable to becoming victims of violence, and she described the area around Vauxhall as being a particular hotspot for this, where young men are targeted by the social media app Grindr and set up to be attacked. This group is also described as being particularly at risk of alcohol and substance abuse as well as suffering from high rates of suicide. At the same time, services for this group are felt to be practically non-existent in Lambeth.

28. What work is being done and what are the challenges?

- 28.1 Broadly speaking, inter-agency working across Lambeth is described as mostly good, but for a couple of participants this can often be in 'pockets' of good practice but found to be less effective in other areas. Good inter-agency relationships and communications are seen to be vital, but the impact of cuts on services and increased pressure is felt to be putting this at risk

'It can be really good in some individual cases, but in some not work at all. When services are being cut so much people retreat into what is traditionally their group of clients...and you prioritise'

'There are pockets of really good practice in all the agencies, and some people work exceptionally hard to support victims,, but actually on the ground, the frontline workers, that work is very patchy and I think that's where the problem is'

- 28.2 All of the interviewees described examples of very good practice going on in their professional areas in Lambeth. Both of the interviewees dealing in issues relating to violence towards young women described some extremely positive work being done in the field. As mentioned earlier, domestic violence itself is seen to have become a much higher priority across all agencies, and the level of resources now being put into this is seen to have increased.

'More women feel able to come forward. The government is taking it seriously as an issue, it is out there and people are talking about it'

- 28.3 In this field, outreach is described as being particularly valuable in accessing vulnerable young girls and women, who for reasons already discussed, are often reluctant to seek support of their own volition. This is particularly the case for young women who are or have been in care, or are homeless or living in hostels, who may have increased exposure to violence.

'Outreach is a great way of doing it, because you are able to go into these sorts of communities where you can touch some of these young people and explore things with them – and they feel safer in their communities'

- 28.4 Similarly, in preventing youth violence, going out 'into the community' to raise awareness of issues around violence is seen to be useful, but again difficult to evaluate in terms of 'success

'We do events and fairs, we have a whole team that does that. We don't know how effective it is to be honest but at least we're reaching out to a small proportion of people – its something that's worth a try, the place to get these people is where they cluster'

- 28.5 Reflecting the views of many other participants, schools are seen to be at the forefront of work involving identifying children at risk. However, for at least one professional, if schools don't have the appropriate support available, or effective services that they can refer children to, their hands are often tied

'Schools are picking up problems early, but they are not necessarily able to refer or find willing services, or sometimes the help offered is not the appropriate help'

- 28.6 Given that much of the discussion in this report has been around supporting young people showing early signs of troubled or violent behaviour, it is a concern that work in this area could decrease

'Inter-agency working for kids with conduct disorders comes very low down the list. Socially it is a priority, but the services just don't have the capacity'

- 28.7 All of the participants in this element of the study were extremely concerned about cuts to local services across the board, and there are felt to be challenges ahead as funding continues to be cut and services depleted

'I'm sure other services are having the same problem, I'm not sure about education but I'm sure they are too, then it does become more difficult to work together. We know from our work that mental health services are so important but liaison with other agencies is being cut all the time'

'It's competitive out there unfortunately. You want to be seen as the best service, but its not about numbers, it's about the impact of the work and the quality of the communication'

- 28.8 This is felt to be of particular concern for smaller agencies working in the 'niche' areas of violence prevention who may be less well-known and more poorly funded, yet provide an invaluable service

'The council needs to be aware that there are little projects or good pieces of work that are going on that they are not aware of'

'Small specialist agencies are absolutely key'

- 28.9 Whilst levels of commitment to safeguarding children, including from the council itself, are felt to be high, it is often felt to be the case that the 'harder to reach' and more excluded young people can often slip through the net

'Looked-after children are better safeguarded as they have key workers and social workers – it's the ones that are hidden, the one's not attending school and no one is doing anything about it'

- 28.10 The most notable losses in service provision felt to have occurred over the last few years particularly relate to mental health, substance abuse, and support for young LGBT people, and this is felt to have left a profound gap in support for vulnerable groups

'Lots of drug and alcohol services that would have supported these groups have been decommissioned'

- 28.11 There is also the view that budget cuts are leading to corner cutting on assessments for young people showing troubled behaviour, and that this will have a long term impact on the potential for increased violent behaviour

'Because of the cuts, people do less thorough assessment, for example for children aged 6 or 7, who are expressing violence, and because services are stressed, they may not do assessments for cognitive ability or learning problems, and things are missed'

29. What can happen in the future?

- 29.1 Early interventions involving long-term strategies are described as the most effective tool in reducing violent and anti-social behaviour, but often the hardest to implement and measure and therefore often the least likely to happen

'they are expensive and difficult to measure, how do you show that one person didn't become a gang member, for example?'

'They try to do as short interventions as possible without doing a proper assessment, then when you look at cases later you think, well, someone could have realised that they had learning problems, or that they were angry this stage, or had communication problems'

'all agencies are measured yearly, and their funding is often yearly, so the whole system works against implementing long term prevention''

- 29.2 All professionals agree, however, that early intervention, wherever that comes from, is key to preventing violent behaviour later in life.

"the job in the police was about 60% on the street and 40% in partnership, and the job I do now, most definitely, it was the thing that we always spoke about, how do we stop these things happening and where should we be intervening first. A lot of agencies work is around trying to deal with a situation once its happened, whereas we reallyshould be looking at the signals in young people that are going to push them that way'

'Identification of children at risk is important, so when they start to have problems at school for instance, they are usually the first place that people notice, so there should be quite a lot of intervention there.'

- 29.3 As previously discussed, across the research it has emerged that intervention in schools is felt to be fundamental, but there is an awareness that cuts to services are having an impact on schools' ability to both identify young people at risk and refer them to the appropriate support.
- 29.4 Awareness raising at an early age is also felt to be a valuable role that schools can play in educating young people about different types of violence and where to go for support if needed – information around domestic violence and issues relating to FGM and honor based violence as seen as currently lacking for young people and schools are felt to be in a position to include education about such issues for example in PHSE classes.
- 29.5 That said, it is also acknowledged by one participant that this still leaves groups of vulnerable young people out of reach, if they are not attending school
'The biggest thing is around education, but some of the kids we are talking about aren't in education – if you are not in education where are you getting it? On the street'
- 29.6 Parenting programmes, particularly for young or otherwise vulnerable parents, are also described as valuable ways to help families at risk of violence, but again this is an area where cuts to services are having an impact, and that the resources to provide such programmes are becoming scarcer.
- 29.7 Youth programmes for teenagers at risk are seen as vital, reflecting findings across the study. However, there is a view that these programmes need to be carefully tailored and offer a real alternative to becoming involved in violent offending. One participant points out that risk and danger are appealing for a lot of young people, and there are limited opportunities for young people to take part in activities which may offer that kind of 'thrill'
'sometimes it's better to take them mountain climbing, things that are dangerous but that can be managed can help them to learn about good danger'
- 29.8 These are, of course, the kind of intervention that much of the media and indeed, the public, would balk at for 'rewarding' young people who may be in the early stages of troubling behaviour, but nonetheless, they can be seen by professionals as actually making a difference and altering outcomes for young people at risk.
- 29.9 Although there is some positive discussion about interagency working, there are still felt to be areas where this can be improved; key to this is not only improved communication between agencies, but between management and front line staff as well. One participant was of the view that managers are often the ones most up to speed with best practice as they attend interagency meetings, case meetings etc, but that often this fails to filter down to front line workers.
'There is a disconnect between managers and what the frontline staff are doing, and if they haven't been trained and given the appropriate awareness, how can you expect them deal with these issues appropriately?'
- 29.10 She also felt that, despite the raised profile of violence against women and girls specifically, there is still a lack of awareness and understanding, particularly within the statutory agencies, which can make it hard to tackle

'A massive failing for me is their lack of training and violence against women and girls issues, so people don't report, they don't come forward, they don't trust the system, they have been let down and they're terrified that that will happen again, and that affects their engagement with services like ours – they don't know who they can trust'

- 29.11 Given all of this, the overall view is that although parents have a responsibility towards providing positive role models and education for their children, all statutory services and properly funded, tailored support and outreach agencies, have a role to play in identifying children and young people at risk and providing the appropriate help. The underlying challenge here is, of course, the major concerns that participants expressed about current and future cuts to funding across the board.

Section 2: Overarching findings and recommendations

30. Overarching findings

- 30.1 It is clear that the focus during the course of this study has been mainly on youth and gang-related violence, which reflects both the expressed priorities of residents and the nature of much of the sample. In the next section we discuss possibilities for further research to incorporate 'harder to reach' perpetrators and victims, to explore other areas of violence in more detail.
- 30.2 These findings indicate that youth and gang-related violence is still as the key contributor towards violence in Lambeth, but that it tends to take place in particular pockets or locations, and Lambeth overall is not seen as any better or worse than any other borough; in fact for many participants across all groups, the level of violence has improved over recent years.
- 30.3 However, in terms of priorities for tackling violence, this is still felt to be the main issue. There doesn't seem to be a particularly heightened sense of 'risk' living in Lambeth generally, but there is possibly a far greater sense of potential violence for those who are in or on the periphery of gangs, some of whom feel that Lambeth is often an unsafe place where anything that can happen to them
- 30.4 There are a number of contributory factors seen to increase the likelihood of becoming involved in violence, but it is also recognised that the presence of some or even all of these indicators does not lead to involvement in violence as matter of course. These include domestic, familial, educational and economic factors, which can often interplay to exacerbate risk.
- 30.5 Mental health is also felt to be a major challenge for the Borough; amongst residents and professionals, there is wide recognition that mental health services are extremely stretched, while the need in the area is felt to be high. Unrecognised or untreated mental health challenges are felt to heighten the risk of becoming involved in violence as either a perpetrator or a victim, and there is sympathy rather than judgment that people are not getting the help they need

- 30.6 Education, in its broadest sense, is seen by almost all participants as being fundamental to preventing violence. Schools and teachers themselves are felt to have a key role to play, both by residents and professionals, particularly in early identification of children at risk. However in broader terms, gaining the appropriate literacy and communication skills at school, more effective education around some of the more difficult issues affecting young people, and offering alternatives for the less academic to develop career opportunities were all mentioned as ways in which schools can play a part it is acknowledged though that they are also very reliant on having effective support services where problems are identified, and indeed as stretched as other public services.
- 30.7 Education is obviously far wider than just school, and education and awareness raising via outreach and targeted approaches to particular issues are often felt to be more effective than passive blanket information provision, particularly where young people are attending school irregularly, or not at all. Ex-offenders describe education as playing a vital role in their rehabilitation; all of the ex gang offenders had increased their skills and qualifications either in basic literacy and reading, or in learning a new skill altogether.
- 30.8 'Early intervention', again using the term broadly, is described by almost all as being essential, though again there is an awareness of pressure on resources across the board. The concept of 'early intervention' can be interpreted to include picking up on indicators of aggressive or troubling behaviour, identification of learning difficulties, and awareness of difficult family or home circumstances. They do not necessarily need to be early; successful intervention can happen at any stage in the right circumstances. 'Interventions' of course vary in length, nature and effectiveness, and professionals particularly are aware that they can be hard to target and importantly, hard to measure in terms of success.
- 30.9 As we have heard throughout this report there is a strong feeling that there is 'nothing for young people to do' in the Borough. Whether this is technically true or not, the perception for many participants is that there are fewer venues and organisations providing 'cool' things for young people to do – music and sports were mentioned a couple of times – or that there are no spaces for young people to get together. The Marcus Lipton Community centre was extremely well regarded, and was seen as instrumental in helping the ex-gang offenders to change their lives.
- 30.10 Skills, training and employment opportunities are felt to be generally lacking in the borough both for young people generally, and especially for those who may not have good enough communication and literacy skills. Where young people may already feel excluded and haven't done well at school, alternative training options and support with finding and pursuing opportunities to get into the workplace are seen as crucial to preventing youth violence by almost all participants.
- 30.11 Professionals mainly agree that there is some good work being done in Lambeth, and in some areas there is good inter-agency working. There is a repeated refrain about cuts to local services, and naturally there are concerns about the continuing support of vulnerable groups in the Borough. There is much competition for funding amongst smaller agencies and organisations, yet these are often seen to be the ones providing the most effective, targeted work.

Recommendations

31. Further research

- 31.1 Whilst the initial brief for this project was to gain an overall view of violence in Lambeth, the nature of the sample and participants expressed priorities as well as the professionals' fields of expertise has meant that much of the focus has been on gang related violence, with some discussion of domestic and sexual violence.
- 31.2 In terms of further research therefore, it may be useful at some stage to hone in on other areas where this research has not been able to provide any findings, but are seen as a challenge in Lambeth. In particular, targeted work with 'harder to reach' young people could be illuminating, particularly thinking about young people who are not in education or training, young women from 'vulnerable' backgrounds as identified by some of our professionals, and other less 'mainstream' perpetrators of different kinds of violence.
- 31.3 It may also be interesting to do some focused work with specific groups identified as being 'vulnerable' in other ways – LGBT people, those with mental health or learning disabilities, and those with substance misuse issues.
- 31.4 A more indepth study with a broader range of professionals, likewise, would help to gain a broader view of specifically what types of intervention work, where and how they are best delivered and by whom.
- 31.5 Some of these audiences naturally represent a challenge in terms of being hard to find and to engage in research, and the consequent costs of funding such research. This is not to say it is impossible, and with appropriate resource allocation, more focused work could shed greater light on the breadth of the challenge facing Lambeth, and effective ways of preventing violence and supporting both perpetrators and victims.
- 31.6 From a services and intervention point of view, some desk research or a literature review about current practices across Lambeth would give us a much wider context to understand what is already happening on the ground, where the gaps are and 'what works'.

32. Future commissioning, services and interventions

- 32.1 Underpinning much of the discussion is the challenge facing service provision and interventions posed by current and future budget cuts. Professionals particularly are aware that many services are being drastically reduced, if not cut altogether, and this provides a difficult context for considering what can happen in the future with extremely limited resources.
- 32.2 There is a clearly expressed need for better services in some key areas, most notably mental health and substance misuse services are felt to have suffered a great deal from budget cuts, leaving a crucial support and intervention gap. Similarly, youth activities and opportunities are also felt to be lacking across the Borough, and it is felt across the board that greater provision in this area is fundamental in a Borough with such a high proportion of young people.

- 32.3 Outreach work, in its variety of forms, is described by participants across the board as being most effective in targeting young people who will otherwise not engage with services, in particular in terms of targeting potential gang offenders and with young people, particularly women, at increased risk of sexual violence.
- 32.4 That said, however, views indicate that there is a clear role for schools to play, and they are widely felt to be in need of far greater support and resources to help them raise awareness of risk, identify young people at risk and provide the appropriate support, whether this is within schools themselves or to outside agencies. It follows also therefore that agencies supporting children in schools or those being referred are equally in need of enhanced resources.
- 32.5 As discussed throughout, early intervention is felt to be key, and whilst there is much discussion to be had about the forms and types of intervention, statutory agencies are often felt to be in the best position to deliver. All of the professionals felt that more of a focus on longer term, sustained and properly evaluated interventions are vital.
- 32.6 The findings from this study are not sufficient on their own to describe exactly what, where and by whom the most effective interventions can be targeted, and this will require some discussion about what is possible.

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