

## The response of London Children's Services to serious youth violence and knife crime – May 2018

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Context**

Serious youth violence, including knife crime, is a significant issue in London at the moment and a priority area of work for children's services. The capital is currently experiencing a spike in knife and gun crime related incidents and an increase in the severity of crimes, with a number resulting in deaths over the last few months.

The Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) is committed to further understanding both the causes of serious youth violence, and how to best respond to prevent incidents and intervene when they do happen.

ALDCS hosted a seminar in March 2018, focussing on the response of children's services to serious youth violence, including knife crime. The seminar sought to give practice leaders – predominantly in social work, youth work, and youth offending – an opportunity to share their current practice approaches and to consider how London borough children's services can work more effectively with one another and with partners across the capital to tackle this issue. The seminar also brought together representatives from the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), Ofsted, and Redthread, the youth work charity that provides a large amount of support for young offenders in the capital.

The key aims of the ALDCS seminar were to:

- Understand current research evidence
- Share emergent and good practice approaches to responding to issues of serious youth violence, including knife crime
- Ensure mutual understanding of priorities, approaches and goals across LAs, MOPAC, Ofsted, and the voluntary sector
- Consider where cross-capital working could better help and protect children and young people, and lever increased capacity across partner organisations

### **1.2 Methodology**

Each London borough that attended the seminar was asked to submit a form summarising its current and emerging practice in responding to serious youth violence. The following boroughs submitted evidence to inform this report: Barnet, Bexley, Brent, Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith & Fulham, Haringey, Harrow, Hounslow, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Redbridge and Southwark. A response was also received from the University of Bedfordshire, which has carried out some work with London local authorities in this area. Several respondents focussed specifically on their response to knife crime.

This report summarises the key themes and trends in these submissions in relation to current and emerging practice, challenges, and opportunities and priorities for the future.

External literature is used as additional context at some points and to highlight evidence for the effectiveness of certain approaches.

### **1.3 Core principles**

Directors of Children's Services have a crucial role to play in acting as systems leaders to ensure that responses to serious youth violence and interconnected issues are effective, collaborative, and multi-faceted. Responses highlighted that children's services does not categorise young people affected by serious youth violence as victims and perpetrators, but rather views all those involved as vulnerable young people. Victims can become perpetrators and vice versa, and the system needs to engage with vulnerable young people in the round and address previous experiences, fears, assumptions, and risks that could lead to them being affected by serious youth violence and interrelated issues. As the respondent from Kensington and Chelsea put it, there is a policy of, "child first, offender second."

The responses focussed predominantly on wider prevention activities and targeted interventions with at-risk young people, which prioritise strengths-based, relationships-based approaches, rather than enforcement approaches. Several respondents highlighted that young people often carry knives due to fear, and enforcement alone will not remove the underlying motivation for knife carrying or the accessibility of knives. Therefore, this report focusses on children's services practice responses, rather than on enforcement approaches.

A balance needs to be struck between a longer term public health approach and the imperative to deliver targeted and effective interventions at pace to address the immediate issue. Disproportionality is an area that needs to be better understood and tackled, as violent crimes continue to disproportionately affect and involve young black men.

It is crucial that a robust evidence base is developed on this topic, but at the same time there is a need for partners across the board to understand the need for hyper-local approaches to tackling this issue that are designed and implemented with communities. The drivers for, and nature of, violent offences are extremely diverse, and different approaches will need to be taken in different boroughs, and even in different areas within one local authority. This report presents some practice that has been seen to be effective in certain situations, but caution should be exercised in considering what might be transferable to other areas of the capital.

## **2. Current and emerging practice**

### **2.1. Multi-agency working**

#### **2.1.1. Multi-agency forums and risk management**

In all of the boroughs that submitted a response, activity around serious youth violence and knife crime was guided by multi-agency forums of some sort. These boards involved different combinations of: youth offending teams (YOT), children's social care (CSC),

community safety, gangs, housing, child sexual exploitation (CSE), missing, police, violence against women and girls, education, health, and the voluntary sector.

Some local authorities, including Bexley, Brent and Harrow, have multi-agency panels that look more broadly at vulnerable adolescents, and have found these to be an effective way of considering a range of interconnected issues in the round. Other boroughs are moving in this direction. Most boroughs indicated that multi-agency forums considered a range of issues relating to serious youth violence, such as CSE, child trafficking, county lines, gangs, anti-social behaviour, missing, and radicalisation.

Several boroughs have incident-led meetings, or risk management panels, as well as strategic multi-agency boards. One example is Greenwich, which has recently formed the Greenwich Risk Adolescence Safeguarding and Prevention (GRASP) Panel. This meets weekly for incident-led discussions which take into account the multiple contexts in which young people are at risk, including peer networks, venues and geographical locations, including online spaces such as social media and websites.

Some local authorities, including Camden, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Brent, and Lambeth have daily risk briefings involving multiple services and agencies. These boroughs highlighted the briefings as an effective way of facilitating information sharing and understanding the link between serious youth violence and other areas.

While partnerships between various services within the local authority and the Police were common, fewer respondents mentioned the presence of education and health partners on the Board, and the third sector was only mentioned twice in relation to involvement in forums (in responses from Hammersmith and Fulham, and Kensington and Chelsea). Greenwich offered an example of effective working with the voluntary sector, where 22 groups were involved in projects to improve the way BME voluntary and community sector organisations work on issues around gangs, youth violence and CSE (this ended in March 2017).

Several boroughs mentioned a positive link between YOT and CSC services. For example, Islington employs a specialist social worker for gangs, serious youth violence and county lines, who chairs strategy meetings and skills up other social workers to intervene with these young people and their families. In Bexley, joint home visits take place between community safety, CSC, and YOT as part of the borough's engagement planning. Bexley also has a point of contact in children's social care for CSE and missing.

Youth offending teams across London tend to be multi-disciplinary by design, or at least to utilise support from specialists such as Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs), CAMHS or parenting supporting workers. Hackney has a SLT placed within the YOT, as well as a forensic psychologist to offer specialist support relating to mental health and wellbeing.

### **2.1.2. Links with gangs, substance use and county lines**

There is significant work underway to link up activity relating to youth violence and activity relating to gangs. For example, Merton's multi-agency forum combines a youth justice led risk panel with a police led gangs panel. Haringey has developed an integrated, multi-

agency gangs unit, funded by MOPAC, which offers a range of support from one to one outreach work to gangs prevention programmes for prisoners and those on remand at HMP Pentonville. There has been a significant reduction in reoffending as a result of this activity. Islington is also being supported by SOS to develop an integrated gangs team.

Other boroughs wrote about their work in relation to those involved in the drugs economy, due to the clear link between drug dealing, including county lines, and serious youth violence, and the fact that early intervention with young people can prevent drug dealing and use escalating into violent crime. For example, Greenwich funds a dedicated Violence and Organised Crime Unit, which is run by the Police and targets the exploitation of vulnerable people perpetrated by those involved in the supply of Class A drugs in the borough. Haringey's family and young people's substance misuse service (which offers support to friends, siblings and parents so that they can support the substance misuser if he or she is unwilling to engage) co-works cases with partners when they come across instances of involvement in serious youth violence. Haringey also has a peer led adult substance misuse service which engages with residents on estates affected by substance misuse and serious youth violence.

## **2.2. Prevention**

Within a multi-agency context, the first pillar of boroughs' response to serious youth violence is prevention activity. In some cases, this activity is universal. In others, it is targeted towards children living in areas affected by serious youth violence, or those whose siblings or friends have been involved or affected.

### **2.2.1. Prevention work in schools**

While some interventions take place in youth hubs and centres, the submissions suggest that schools are very often the focus for both universal and targeted prevention activity. This includes weapons awareness sessions, workshops focussed on building resilience, and one to one intervention sessions.

The process evaluation of the Knife Crime Prevention Programme, carried out by the Youth Justice Board in 2013, highlighted that personal accounts of knife crime by victims and their families, and materials on the health implications of knife crime wounds, are effective in terms of prevention.<sup>1</sup> Weapons awareness sessions are widely used by boroughs as part of the prevention agenda. Key elements of these programmes are around understanding legislation, challenging social perceptions, learning about the impact of injuries including knife crime injuries and first aid – with the ultimate intention of challenges young people's thought processes and decisions around weapon carrying. Greenwich is now a piloting a trauma-informed version of the weapons awareness programme, delivered to students identified through mapping carried out with schools.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/395990/knife-crime-prevention-programme.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/395990/knife-crime-prevention-programme.pdf)

Some boroughs have put in place widespread prevention activity for some age groups. For example, Lewisham has piloted a universal schools safety programme to all year 7s in every school in the borough, which includes knife crime, online safety, substance misuse, healthy relationships and bullying alongside traditional topics such as fire safety. Lewisham also have youth workers embedded in a number of secondary schools to act as a consistent role model and provided ongoing support within the school environment. Haringey has recently piloted transition workshops for vulnerable year 6 pupils, to build their resilience and confidence – an intervention which is being expanded to 25 schools this year. Greenwich delivered its Growing Against Violence Programme, a positive life skills programme, to at least 2,000 school pupils a year. In a review of a range of literature relating to work that is effective in preventing youth violence and crime, The Early Intervention Foundation identified skills based programmes, with a focus on problem solving, self-control, anger management, conflict resolution, and socio-emotional skills, as effective, especially for at-risk children and young people.<sup>2</sup>

A common approach is to use ex-gang members to support prevention programmes, which the evaluation of the Knife Crime Prevention Programme also found to be an effective approach.<sup>3</sup> For example, ex-gang members in Haringey facilitate workshops aimed at violence reduction and supporting personal development as part of the Aspire Higher programme. Greenwich also uses ex-gang members as facilitators for a programme including workshops on areas such as identity, pressures and relationships. Ex-gang members can also be used as mentors (see Section 2.4.1).

There was some mention of supporting school staff as part of prevention work. For example, Haringey has developed a multi-agency offer, entitled 'Team around the school', for schools concerned about gangs, CSE or serious youth violence, which includes interventions and sessions for staff and parents as well as young people. Greenwich's Growing Against Violence programme can include sessions for parents, school staff and frontline practitioners. Harrow has regular intervention slots with PRUs to help them better understand the needs of young people referred to them and in receipt of intervention support.

### **2.2.2. Outreach work in the community**

Several boroughs employ detached outreach workers, or commission street outreach services, to engage young people in their own environments. This includes Southwark, Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Hackney, Barnet (who are commissioning a street outreach service through MAC-UK) and Kensington and Chelsea (who are piloting a similar service from May this year).

Haringey has run a trauma-based project called Project Future, targeting vulnerable and/or violent young men in one of the estates in the borough. There has been a very high reduction in re-offending among individuals engaged through this project.

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<sup>2</sup> Early Intervention Foundation – What works to prevent gang involvement, youth violence and crime, Robyn M. O'Connor and Stephanie Waddell (2015)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/395990/knife-crime-prevention-programme.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/395990/knife-crime-prevention-programme.pdf)

Many boroughs run weapons awareness sessions with schools, but Redbridge carries out group work on this topic in the community, in conjunction with London Ambulance Service. Merton has run projects (include Rhyme and Reason, a music mentoring project, and Gym Box) at two youth hubs in local serious youth violence hotspots. These programmes engage around 100 known gang members and young people at risk each year.

### **2.2.3. Supporting children in care and care leavers**

Research has highlighted the links between vulnerability and being exposed to offending either as the victim or perpetrator, particularly in the case of children looked after,[1]. Looked after children in England are five times more likely to be cautioned or convicted than children who are not looked after, and 37 per cent of children in young offender institutions have a history of being looked after.[2] Incidents of being missing suggest an increased risk of becoming involved or affected in crime (including violence). Similarly, the placement of children out of borough, where monitoring and supervising require greater levels of multi-agency and cross-boundary working, is an important factor to consider in the case of children looked after. While some children are placed out of borough to remove them from a situation in which they are exposed to harm, local authorities also acknowledge that this response does not affect historic vulnerabilities, experiences of trauma or underlying fears that may lead to weapon carrying, and does not necessarily remove the ties and relationships that children and young people have developed with their peers.

Local authorities place a focus of intervening early and supporting children looked after in a relationships- and strengths-based way to increase resilience and positive outcomes, and work in a strategic way to ensure that solutions are appropriate to the child's needs. Effective multi-agency working with criminal justice agencies, where shared goals and effective communication channels are established, has been seen to reduce the proportion of children looked after entering the criminal justice system.

### **2.2.4. Considering extra-familial risk**

Alongside statutory safeguarding roles, local authorities and other partners have a responsibility to help and protect young people in their local area. It is important that the system as a whole develops an approach to working with the community to prevent, identify, assess and intervene with different forms of extra-familial risk, as well as fulfilling statutory safeguarding duties. This approach is often referred to as 'contextual safeguarding'. London local authorities are in the relatively early stages of implementing contextual safeguarding approaches. Some respondents highlighted examples of the steps they had taken to implement a contextual safeguarding approach; others spoke of this as a priority for the future.

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[1] <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/institutional-care-and-poverty-evidence-and-policy-review>

[2] <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Care%20review%20impact%20report%20Jan%202017%20UPDATE%20FINAL.pdf>

For example, the University of Bedfordshire is supporting Hackney to embed contextual safeguarding across the Children and Families Department, funded by the DfE Social Innovation Fund. Hackney has put in place processes to promote practitioner identification and consideration of risks outside of the home at the earliest opportunity. This includes modifying assessment guidelines for the Children and Families Assessment and the Young Hackney Prevention and Diversion service, and using Contextual Safeguarding case consultations as an opportunity for practitioners to reflect and consider harm and protective factors in the different social spaces young people spend time.

Lambeth has recently established new Young People's Safety Planning meetings, which are multi-agency and involve the young person and their parents. These are chaired by IROs or Child Protection Chairs who have been trained to address contextual risk. They do not substitute child protection plans or procedures, but complement them by creating an environment in which young people can engage and entrenched issues can be more easily addressed. The early evaluation of the approach found evidence of some risk reduction in 7 out of the 10 cases considered.

Hackney has also developed and implemented a safety mapping exercise as part of its contextual safeguarding project, where practitioners use a map of their local area to open up a discussion with young people about where they feel safe/at risk and to develop safety plans from this. The borough is also piloting a contextual safeguarding assessment in a secondary school, which will involve exploring students' feelings around safety in school (and staff responses to them), within their peer relationships and within their local community. This information will be used to design and deliver interventions in the school. In Lewisham, the Mizen Foundation has also worked with schools to map 'safe spaces' from children's and young people's perspectives. Bexley's youth hubs are open one evening a week as a 'safe place to be'. This service, to which young people can self-refer, has proved effective as a contextual safeguarding approach.

Brent has used peer mapping as part of its contextual safeguarding approach to establish how children are linked and to think about how to protect the group around the child as well as the child at the centre. Brent is looking to strengthen this approach and roll out training to support it.

Another key strand of contextual safeguarding is around maximising the community's capacity to help prevent youth offending, in particular serious youth violence. This is covered in Section 2.5.

#### **2.2.5. Education, employment and training**

Boroughs highlighted that supporting young people to access education, training and employment was a key element of prevention activity, and this was an area that was discussed in relation to the role of the keyworker and/or mentor. Similarly, there was mention of the need to support young people to avoid permanent exclusions. Only Harrow highlighted activity in relation to this (through one to one interventions in school settings), several boroughs indicated a need to look at this in the near future.

### **2.2.6. Social media**

The HM Inspectorate of Probation published a report in October 2017 summarising the findings from a review of the work of YOTs, specifically in relation to working with young people that pose a risk to the public. One of the key areas highlighted in this report was in need of further work was supporting and responding to the use of social media by young people. The research found that social media was directly related to the offence in one in four cases, and had been a catalyst for some of the most serious and violent offences (particularly in relation to gang involvement). The report suggested that conventional material aimed at managing risk and vulnerability are unsuited to the online world, and recommended that local policy frameworks for monitoring online activity need to be further developed and staff need updated guidance to make good quality assessments.

While some respondents raised social media as an area that needed further work (see Section 4), it is a theme that was notably absent across the submissions. Barnet mentioned the promotion of digital security as part of its prevention activity, and Greenwich highlighted that one of the workshops run in local schools includes a session on social media usage.

### **2.2.7. The public health approach**

The 'public health approach', which sees youth violence as a public health issue, rather than merely a police matter, is known predominantly from work in the USA and in Scotland (particularly Glasgow). The Scottish approach focused on a partnership between police, social services, education, housing, and community safety, who worked in collaboration to design and implement a systematic approach to tackling the root causes of youth violence. This combined a strict enforcement approach (with the average sentence for carrying a knife tripling between 2005-06 and 2014-15)<sup>4</sup>, with the design and offer of a clear alternative to gang involvement and offending. The Violence Reduction Unit used police intelligence to map and contact at-risk young people involved in gangs, who were given a clear message that violence would not be tolerated and offered services and programmes that would support them with exiting gangs. There was help and support in terms of relocation, health services, housing, employment and training.<sup>5</sup>

The impact of this approach has seen to be positive. The number of children and young people killed with knives in Scotland fell from 40 in the period 2006-2011, to 8 from 2011 to 2016. In Glasgow, where the activity was concentrated, the number of young people who died as a result of knife crime fell from 15 in 2006-2011 to zero in the 5 years up until 2016.

Lambeth undertook a Serious Violence Needs Assessment in 2015, which took a public health approach to look at the context in which violent offences are committed and considered the potential role for parents, charities, businesses, and the wider community in addressing the underlying causes of youth violence.<sup>6</sup> However, in the responses to the

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/02/6001/13>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.actiononviolence.org.uk/sites/default/files/CIRV\\_2nd\\_year\\_report.pdf](http://www.actiononviolence.org.uk/sites/default/files/CIRV_2nd_year_report.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/serious-violence-in-lambeth-needs-assessment-june-2015.pdf>

ALDCS survey, Hackney was the only borough that referred to its prevention activity in terms of a 'public health' approach. Hackney uses this approach by identifying hotspot areas and causes of violence through data and analysis, and using this information to target prevention activity.

#### **2.2.8. Women and girls**

The MOPAC Knife Crime Strategy highlights that 10 per cent of knife crime offenders are girls or young women.<sup>7</sup> Several respondents highlighted work with women and girls as a priority for the future. The involvement of girls as offenders as well as victims must be recognised and a differentiated approach should be taken to responding to knife crime amongst this cohort. Some gave examples of work that was currently happening in relation to this. For example, Hammersmith and Fulham run a Women and Girls Network to educate girls and young women and give them a voice in terms of approaches to knife crime. Haringey's public health department commissions Solace Women's Aid to deliver a prevention programme around all forms of violence against women and girls. This involves carrying out one to one work with young people affected by CSE and gangs, and training some young people to be peer facilitators. Greenwich is planning on rolling out Abianda training to various professionals, looking specifically at how to work with gang affected young women.

#### **2.2.9. Disproportionality and race**

The Lammy Review highlighted the disproportionate representation of BAME children and adults in the criminal justice system.<sup>8</sup> The MOPAC Knife Crime Strategy highlights that this is also the case amongst children involved in, or affected by, knife crime in the capital. Looking at data from the twelve months to March 2017, the Knife Crime Strategy highlights that 6 in 10 young male victims were recorded as being from BAME backgrounds. Almost half of young male victims of knife crime were of black ethnicity. The strategy also recognises the overlap between victims and offenders, and the disproportionate number of offenders who are from a BAME background.<sup>9</sup> In their responses, local authorities highlighted the need to develop nuanced strategies to work with ethnic minorities (one referenced young black men; another spoke of working with vulnerable latino-american boys).

#### **2.2.10. Supporting young people affected by domestic violence**

Some respondents highlighted the link between experiences of domestic violence and engagement in serious youth violence, and emphasised the need to provide more effective support to young people who had experienced by domestic violence. In 2018/19, Hackney is rolling out training for practitioners to intervene in families affected by domestic violence, supporting staff to repair relationships between non-abusive parents and their children.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mopac\\_knife\\_crime\\_strategy\\_june\\_2017.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mopac_knife_crime_strategy_june_2017.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.actiononviolence.org.uk/sites/default/files/CIRV\\_2nd\\_year\\_report.pdf](http://www.actiononviolence.org.uk/sites/default/files/CIRV_2nd_year_report.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mopac\\_knife\\_crime\\_strategy\\_june\\_2017.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mopac_knife_crime_strategy_june_2017.pdf)

## 2.3. Targeted intervention

### 2.3.1. Strengths-based approaches

The approaches to targeted intervention across London place considerable emphasis on understanding and harnessing the strengths of young people and their families, and providing meaningful alternatives to involvement in gangs and serious youth violence. This fits with the findings of recent Early Intervention Foundation research on effective prevention activity in this context, which highlighted the potentially harmful consequences of predominantly deterrence or discipline-based approaches.<sup>10</sup> In the responses, successful interventions were identified as those that supported the young person in a range of areas of their lives, often through a keyworker approach with relevant agencies being brought in to support as necessary.

One example of such an intervention is the Integrated Offender Management programme in Southwark, which provides intensive support and surveillance to the top 12 identified serious offending young people in the borough. This is carried out in partnership with the MPS, National Probation Service and London Community Rehabilitation Company, and comprises specific services that supports the individual with a range of areas, for example, housing issues, healthy relationships, substance use, benefits and debt advice, mental, physical and sexual health, and education, employment and training.

Other boroughs, including Brent, Haringey, Merton, Islington, and Bexley offer mentoring programmes to support young people with a variety of issues. For example, Brent commissions Air Network and St Giles Trust to run a mentoring programme for young people involved in offending behaviour and at risk of becoming involved in serious youth violence, which has seen good levels of engagement from the young people concerned. Mentors are ex-offenders who work one to one with young people to support them with positive activities; visit their homes and talk to their parents; and support young people with education, training or employment. The mentor acts as a bridge and facilitator between the YOS worker and the young person in instances where engagement may have been resisted.

Merton is running a project funded by the Home Office, targeted at those arrested either for firearm offences, or for possession with intent to supply Class A drugs. The project involves mentors helping young people to access education, training or employment. This support is also accompanied by vouchers for families for petrol, transport or food to remove some of the barriers to young people's engagement.

### 2.3.2. Trauma informed practice

The HM Inspectorate of Probation highlighted trauma informed practice as another priority area for development amongst the local authorities it inspected in 2017. Looking at a sample of 115 case files, it was found that at least three out of four young people involved in harmful

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<sup>10</sup> Early Intervention Foundation – What works to prevent gang involvement, youth violence and crime, Robyn M. O'Connor and Stephanie Waddell (2015)

offending behaviour had experienced emotional trauma or distress. The research suggested that some YOTs are effectively managing emotional trauma and other adverse events, but that relevant strategies, policies and materials are limited.<sup>11</sup>

Trauma informed practice is a strengths based framework which acknowledges the significant impact of physical, emotional or psychological trauma and provides a space in which survivors of trauma feel safe and can rebuild a sense of control. Several local authorities have embedded, or are in the process of embedding, trauma informed practice into their work with young people who have been involved in serious youth violence. These include Greenwich, Islington, Merton, Lewisham, Bexley, Brent, and Redbridge. This tends to include training of staff (though the scale of the training and the staff included varies in different organisations) followed by six to twelve months of clinical supervision or coaching. The authorities that have embedded this practice into their approach spoke positively of its impact. Several other boroughs report highlighted their intention to roll out training in trauma informed practice in the future.

In Greenwich, the practitioners in the Safer Communities Team are not only trained in trauma informed practice, but also provide training for other agencies delivered by commissioned services. This programme is funded by MOPAC.

Social workers in Islington have the opportunity to be trained in trauma informed practice skills as part of the 'Motivational Social Work' practice model. This model is based on the principle of relationships-based practice, where practitioners build consensus with the family around the problems and support them to identify goal-based interventions. This approach has three strands: trauma informed practice; motivational interviewing (a relationships-based approach to supporting people to change their behaviour, concerned centrally with understanding ambivalence to help); and motivational risk assessment and management (which involves developing a shared understanding of these concepts with the family). As part of this, Islington creates spaces in group coaching and supervision for practitioners to reflect and challenge their assumptions, particularly regarding assessing risk.

### **2.3.3. Restorative justice**

Restorative justice was widely viewed by respondents to be an effective approach to preventing serious youth violence. This is supported by the findings of the Lambeth Serious Violence Needs Assessment, which worked with focus groups of local children and adults to understand what strategies would be most effective as part of a public health approach.<sup>12</sup>

The boroughs that specified that they used interventions based on restorative practice principles were Greenwich, Hackney, Merton and Haringey – although several others referred to restorative justice as an effective approach.

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<sup>11</sup> The work of youth offending teams to protect the public, An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation (October 2017)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/serious-violence-in-lambeth-needs-assessment-june-2015.pdf>

Merton described a successful intervention the local authority implemented in 2016 in relation to an escalating gang rivalry between two groups. This included restorative justice processes of mediation with both groups and an offer of a residential for each group to consider future opportunities outside of the conflict. In the 12 months prior to the intervention the incidents of harm had totalled 16 (including stabbings, assaults and a shooting); however, following the intervention there were no incidents for 18 months.

#### **2.3.4. Working with victims**

Some boroughs highlighted the work that they are undertaking with victims, due to the number of victims who are, or become, involved in offending behaviour. Lewisham and Lambeth have found its link with A&E paediatrics and Redthread in King's College Trauma Unit to be an effective way of raising awareness and improving information with hospital staff. The Serious Youth Violence Team, which is collocated with Trilogy (the police gangs unit), is dedicated to providing follow up support and safeguarding interventions to those referred via this route. Lambeth highlighted the value of the role played by Redthread, particularly in bringing a different set of skills to their work with young people.

### **2.4. Involving communities, parents and young people**

#### **2.4.1. Involving communities**

Several boroughs highlighted the need to raise awareness in the community and amongst local businesses of safeguarding and local risks, and this was a key finding from the Lambeth Serious Violence Needs Assessment.<sup>13</sup> While many local authorities are at an early stage in this journey, there are some good examples of initiatives that are already taking place. Greenwich is working with specific businesses to raise awareness of exploitation. Hackney's contextual safeguarding project has also involved training local businesses (for example, a local McDonald's), enforcement officers and partners in health and education services in safeguarding and raising their awareness of contextual safeguarding. Next steps include working with organisations including Transport for London in order to engage all parts of the Hackney community.

Southwark undertook a project in Autumn 2017, in which YOS clinical practitioners worked with the parents of children affected by serious youth violence and the neighbourhood police in order to implement community resolutions on a particular estate (the Pelican Estate). The project succeeded on improving relationships between the police and the local community.

One of the next steps in the Hackney contextual safeguarding project will be to develop bystander approaches, which involves working with young people and the wider community to empower people to change normalised culture and behaviours within their own peer groups and communities.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

### **2.4.2. Involving parents and families**

Many respondents emphasised the need to work with the whole family, rather than just the young person as part of the prevention and targeted intervention activity. This echoes the finding of multiple sources of research which have highlighted the importance of involving parents and families in prevention activity.<sup>14</sup>

Some respondents discussed the use of family network meetings to draw upon the strengths of the family alongside those of the young person. Camden invests in a family group conference coordinator, who works with families to agree a plan of intervention that is designed and led by the family. This may involve the family supporting the young person to attend education, training or employment; to participate in positive activities at the weekend; and to engage with the YOS interventions.

Lewisham has been running a peer-support programme for three years entitled 'Parents Standing Together'. The aim is to build a community guardians model based on a trauma informed and restorative approach. Parents are engaged at events such as parents' evenings in schools. Lewisham also commissions South London and Maudsley Hospital to deliver functional family therapy, which targets families with a young person engaging in persistent offending, substance misuse, or Antisocial Behaviour. This intervention is targeted to the needs of each family with the aim of impacting positively on family conflict, communication and parenting.

### **2.4.3. Involving young people**

Several boroughs identified a need to work on involving young people more in service design. There are some examples of effective engagement. For example, Hackney is running a range of 'critical conversations' events with young people through all of the Youth Hubs and Adventure Playgrounds in the borough, to gather young people's thoughts on areas such as services for young people, crime and policing. Haringey held extensive consultation events with young people and the community to feed their views into its Weapon Enabled Violence Action Plan, including commissioning a tailored specialist engagement with young people at risk of becoming victims and or perpetrators of youth violence.

### **2.4.4. Communications strategies**

Several boroughs indicated a need to improve their messaging and communications with young people and communities regarding serious youth violence and knife crime. Lewisham has undertaken work on its communications strategy in this area. The Safer Lewisham Partnership has worked with young people to develop five key messages for every child or young person. They have also developed five key messages for adults. Key young people are used to share important messages, for example via YouTube videos and social media.

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<sup>14</sup> Early Intervention Foundation – What works to prevent gang involvement, youth violence and crime, Robyn M. O'Connor and Stephanie Waddell (2015)

## **2.5. Use of data**

### **2.5.1. Predictive analysis**

There were some examples given of good work around predictive analysis, but respondents highlighted this as a challenge and area for further worker and collaboration.

One example of the use of analysis to assess risk is in Lewisham, where a matrix has been introduced to consider risk and vulnerability collectively and assess the impact of county lines drug supply and the risks posed by gangs in London, which is used in conjunction with the GANGS Matrix. This matrix assesses the Organised Crime Groups aspect of the issue but has a specific focus on the risk of CSE, safeguarding and a weighting for drugs intelligence. Data is extracted from Merlin and Crime reports and include on the SAVVY if appropriate, and those involved are discussed at the appropriate multi-agency forum.

Merton has developed a 'Serious youth violence and criminal exploitation protocol', which includes a screening tool to identify those at risk and a proforma to use as the basis for a discussion at the multi-agency forum about a young person when he or she does not meet the threshold of significant harm. Brent is mapping data and networks to establish themes across the adolescent population. Hounslow uses localised 'Keep Apart' lists of young people who should not have contact with one another in professional settings. These have assisted practitioners to have greater awareness of the issues.

### **2.5.2. Evaluation**

While limited detail was given in relation to specific work on evaluation, several respondents referred to the positive impact of certain interventions and quoted evaluations to support this.

In terms of ongoing work on evaluation, Hackney is triangulating various data sources to look at what has been effective in terms of improving outcomes for young people at risk of becoming involved in serious youth violence and supporting them into education, employment and training. Camden has recently launched a Youth Safety Taskforce to evaluate and report on effective approaches to addressing and reducing serious youth violence. Camden is also currently recruiting to develop the analytical capacity of its serious youth violence and gangs response.

### 3. Challenges

Respondents were asked to identify their key challenges in responding to serious youth violence, including knife crime. The following areas were cited most commonly as challenges:

- **Nature of the violence:** Several boroughs referenced the frequency and nature of the violence itself as a key challenge. Some respondents highlighted the rise in knife crime and in particular the increase in the number of knife crimes with injury. Others spoke of the changes in the accessibility and use of weapons (for example, weapons of choice becoming bigger). The cohorts of young people involved in serious youth violence was another commonly raised topic. While some discussed the fact that children were getting drawn in at a younger age, often with a link to county lines, there was also mention of a growing cohort of 18-25 year olds committing serious offences, many of whom had not previously been known to children's services or the police.
- **Resources:** Nearly every respondent highlighted funding as a key challenge. Some highlighted that, in a context of growing social care costs and a climate of austerity, directing resources towards prevention activity is extremely difficult. The short term nature of some of the available funding was also cited as a restrictive factor.
- **Social media:** Many boroughs felt that there was more work to be done to understand the interaction between social media and offending behaviour, and how local authorities should respond.
- **Understanding the links between serious youth violence and other issues such as county lines:** As highlighted in Section 2.2, boroughs are responding in a more comprehensive and multi-agency way to serious youth violence, which considers wider vulnerabilities and interconnecting issues such as county lines. However, this is a work in progress, and some boroughs are further along than others. Some boroughs are concerned about the rapidly evolving county lines activity, and the involvement of younger children in drug dealing networks.
- **Cross-agency and cross-service collaboration:** Despite the work highlighted above, some boroughs believed that collaboration between agencies and local authority services was still not happening as efficiently and effectively as it could. There are still cultural differences that need to be bridged to ensure that true collaboration is taking place with a range of partners.
- **Analysis and evaluation:** Both predictive analysis and evaluation are challenges for local authorities. This is in part due to capacity issues; there is also a need to share information more across boundaries and understand more about causality and the links between different factors.
- **Exclusions:** A few boroughs highlighted that young people who had been excluded from school, and had therefore lost the protective factor of the formal education system, presented a particular challenge, and more work to support young people back into education, employment or training was critical to this agenda.

## 4. Priorities and opportunities for the future

This section captures respondents' perspectives about their next steps and priorities for the future. It also sets out gaps in the current and emerging practice in some boroughs (Section 2) and attempts to address the challenges set out in Section 3.

### 4.1. Framing the response

**Vulnerability:** There was widespread consensus around the need to frame responses to serious youth violence under a safeguarding lens and ensuring that there is a focus on understanding the vulnerabilities of young people involved in serious youth violence and seeking to address these through robust social work practice which is relationships-based. There is still some way to go in developing a shared understanding with partners around this.

**Strategies:** Some boroughs indicated that they do not have a strategy for serious youth violence, or a knife crime action plan, in place. Many will be working on these in the near future.

### 4.2. Multi-agency working

**Collaboration and joint understanding:** Multi-agency working is constantly improving, but there is a need to continue to work at this to ensure joint understanding and bridge cultural barriers between organisations and services.

**Engagement with the voluntary sector:** The responses suggested that engagement with the third sector tends to be limited to the commissioning of particular services, rather than to genuine collaboration and codesign. However, several boroughs indicated a need to harness the expertise and capacity of the voluntary and community sector, and some have plans to work more closely on this agenda in the future.

### 4.3. Prevention

**Working with schools and colleges:** There is lots of work happening *in* schools, but less work *with* schools. Responses suggest that collaboration with education can be patchy and that relationships with schools and colleges need to be developed, and it was acknowledged that the increasing fragmentation of the education system is making this more challenging. The need to work more with alternative provision settings is referenced specifically. One respondent discussed plans to work more with early years providers to support conversations and learning about conflict management and violence.

**Considering extra-familial risk:** Section 2.2 above highlights positive work around extra-familial risk and contextual safeguarding, but there is still far to go in this agenda and several boroughs plan to develop more contextual safeguarding approaches.

**Public health approach:** Only one borough referred to the use of a public health approach in prevention of serious youth violence, and few explicitly mentioned health as a partner within multi-agency meetings. The public health approach may be an area to explore as part of future prevention activity.

**Social media:** Boroughs indicated the need to better understand the role of social media in relation to serious youth violence and county lines, and how to respond to this.

**Women and girls:** As highlighted in Section 2.2, there is some work happening which is aimed specifically at supporting women and girls involved in serious youth violence. Some boroughs have indicated that this work needs to be further developed.

#### 4.4. Targeted intervention

**Trauma informed practice:** As highlighted above, many boroughs have embedded trauma informed practice into their work, and others are nearer the start of this journey. Many respondents indicated that this was a priority for the future.

**Restorative justice:** While restorative justice was mentioned in several responses, there were only a few examples of interventions using restorative justice principles. Several boroughs indicated this as an area for further work.

**Supporting practitioners:** There was also an acknowledgement that practitioners needed time to reflect on their practice, and regular clinical supervision to support continuous improvement and wellbeing.

#### 4.5. Engagement with young people, parents and communities

**Involving communities:** There was a strong feeling that more needed to be done to engage the community and harness the trust, relationships and experiences inherent within communities. Contextual safeguarding approaches are starting to involve greater engagement with and use of the community, but these need to be significantly developed in order to reach a point where engagement is systematic and effective.

**Involving parents and young people:** Several respondents highlighted that engaging more with young people and parents about services and approaches is something they are striving towards.

**Communications strategies:** There was little information submitted relating to communications strategies with parents and the community. Some respondents highlighted that they would appreciate learning from other boroughs in this area. Lewisham is an example of a borough that has done some good work on this.

#### 4.6. Use of data

**Predictive analysis and evaluation:** Respondents suggested that boroughs can work more collaboratively together to undertake more predictive analysis to better understand risk. Others indicated a need to better evaluate interventions, and to share best practice across local authorities and agencies.

## 5. Conclusion – what can we do together?

There are a number of areas that respondents and seminar attendees highlighted as being possible areas for cross-borough collaboration:

- Peer reviewing
- Workforce development, including joint training, support for staff wellbeing, and supporting practitioners to innovate (with appropriate clinical supervision). This might include developing a pan-London community of practice.
- Establishing the appropriate rhetoric, focused on vulnerability and relationships-based approaches
- Lobbying for funding for central government to equip children's services to deliver their duties while investing in prevention and innovating to improve practice
- Analytical work, including risk assessment and data analysis
- Collection of best practice and evaluation
- Developing a framework for responding to the social media environment

It is essential to understand the varying experiences and needs of different groups of young people in different areas of London, and to develop a hyper-local response to tackling serious youth violence across the capital. However, working together – across local authorities; across agencies – is critical. Directors of Children's Services have a vital role as systems leaders in this space; and as drivers for collaboration, improvement, and innovation.