

# Locality Review

## Bromley

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## 1 Introduction

Since the Gang and Youth Violence programme started in 2011, several challenges have emerged from the peer/locality reviews, and our understanding of the way in which gangs or groups use violence and exploit vulnerable individuals to commit crime has evolved significantly.

Increasingly, crime is being committed in private spaces as well as the public sphere, this type of crime often involves the criminal exploitation of children and adults on a physical, sexual and/or financial basis. Groups of offenders variously labelled as street gangs, organised crime groups, dangerous drug networks and disengaged young people carry out this abuse, often via illegal drug markets and for the lucrative profits that can be made from them. Most of this violence and exploitation is not reported and won't always show up in recorded crime statistics.

Increasingly it also appears that vulnerable people, especially children, are subject and exposed to a range of risk factors, making them vulnerable to a range of perpetrators. How they are then subsequently exploited often appears to depend on who gets to them first. It seems to be the case that current partnership structures across the country aren't able to respond to this new threat, often working in silos or duplicating work and resources. There is evidence nationally to show local partnerships and various agencies are trying to support the same people or families or missing vulnerable cohorts altogether.

The UK Government definition of county lines is set out below together with a definition of child criminal exploitation, which is increasingly used to describe this type of exploitation where children are involved:

*County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move [and store] the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.*

*Child Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.*

Communities, who can hold the key to understanding the issues and tracking perpetrators, are not always properly engaged. Partnerships will want to engage with them to help effect cultural change and communicate myth busting messages regarding the glamour of gang life. We have found some of the key challenges for partnerships are:

- The need to understand the relationship between serious group offending and local drug markets (including illegal, prescription drugs and new psychoactive substances)
- The links between vulnerable cohorts, locations and gangs e.g. care homes, missing young people, school absence and exclusions
- Making links between violence and vulnerability, the Prevent Programme and local secure estate.
- Vulnerabilities and exploitation experienced by gang-associated women and girls
- The exploitation of children by gangs and organised crime groups (sexual / physical exploitation or exploitation in order to commit crimes such as drug dealing)
- Gang members and associates moving into other areas, such as shire counties or seaside towns, to commit crime
- Links between street gangs and organised crime groups
- The use of social media to facilitate violence and intimidation
- The links between health, particularly mental health, and gang violence
- Youth offending services managing a more violent cohort than previously
- The ability to identify both dangerous gang nominals and young people at risk of involvement in gang crime when there is a lack of police intelligence
- Making sure that resources are effectively targeted, informed and that partnership structures are set up to respond quickly to the new threat without duplication

Often practitioners have many insights into how gangs and groups are operating and exploiting young people and vulnerable adults. This qualitative information, when triangulated across a number of interviews and linked with relevant quantitative data sets can show a richer picture of how gangs and groups work and help us to tackle them

more effectively. It can also help us to identify and protect vulnerable people. This is the locality review (LR).

## 2 Purpose of the Locality Review

The LR is a one-day process for local areas as part of the national serious violence strategy. It works as a broad-brush set of interviews and focus groups with front-line practitioners to gather information, knowledge and perception whilst building a qualitative picture of the key issues and drivers around county lines, gangs, youth violence and vulnerability. It is a rapid evidential assessment process that focuses on violence and vulnerability. It should –

- Enable rapid assessment of issues around gang activity, serious youth violence and victimisation through drawing upon the experiences of practitioners, communities, victims and offenders
- Test the prevalence of issues identified through cross-referencing opinions/perception from interviewees/groups and relevant quantitative data
- Identify barriers to effectively understanding and tackling local priorities (in relation to threat, risk and harm)

It is crucial to understand that this is not a review of any single organisation's role, but a process that seeks to identify what local practitioners know or believe about vulnerability at an operational level, understand how the partner agencies are working together operationally to deliver the area's gang/group and youth violence priorities and examine what blockages are perceived to effect delivery at a frontline level. The review reflects the information gathered from the practitioner interview time table and may highlight communication issues where process exist as well as potential gaps and barriers to identification and effective intervention.

It does not test any local or countywide strategic frameworks or review local strategies - these can be reviewed via other separate products -

- Local/county strategic framework review
- Training programmes covering, county lines, modern slavery, gangs
- Town centre management plans and case studies
- 5-day local strategy peer review

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*You may wish to consider the implications of the Freedom of Information Act. Comments made in this report reflect the views and perceptions of interviewees, and the commissioning body may consider that it is not appropriate for public dissemination.*

### 3 The interviews

#### Focus groups

##### Focus group 1 - YOS

The group felt gangs and county lines was a growing issue and had got worse over the last 6 months, one reason being because of a reduction in front line staff. They are seeing and hearing about more young people going out of the borough who they believe are associated with county lines and are also seeing some young people being moved out of Bromley due to gang related drug debts.

It was stated that Bromley has home grown gangs and groups who sell drugs in open markets around local estates and in the town centre, and they were said to be regularly seen at vulnerable locations like MacDonald's.

The group are aware of a number of gangs that operate in Bromley and named a few that they had seen and heard of;

- M2o
- SMG
- M splash

Most of these gangs are said to be in direct conflict with Lewisham gangs, with the current placement of young people into Bromley from Lewisham also thought to be causing violence and concern.

The NRM process is a little confused with no apparent front door and a stated 6-8 months backlog. This is an area that requires reviewing to establish effective risk identification and management in this area (Thames Valley Police trafficking unit is worth visiting in this respect).

The MEGA meeting looks at criminal exploitation as well as gangs and discusses all ages of young people linked to gangs. This meeting was seen as having real potential to identify broader risks linked to this agenda. The MEGA is a new meeting and worth reviewing in the near future for impact.

The group agreed that mapping meetings would be a useful exercise as there appeared to many taking place that discussed similar themes and the MEGA may help to co-ordinate these. The old-style MAP meetings have morphed into the MEGA panel meeting, which is seen as successful and well attended, although the group felt it needed to be more focused on this agenda and track its actions/taskings. The membership should consider including the BID and council resilience team.

The Atlas team carry out some return home interviews and support safety plans aligning their support to the theme of violence, vulnerability and exploitation (VVE), and the fact that this group sit with the MASH team seems to work well. Information from this group would indicate that a number of other counties are linked to Bromley with local young people said to be found in Norfolk, Bedford and Kent.

No current social media training is delivered for staff in Bromley, a common occurrence across the country. The YOS team have a dedicated serious violence and gang SPOC who was well informed and capable of helping train YOS staff to recognise current trends and emerging issues. This appears to be good practice and should be developed to be a key communication route to the police gang team as a two-way sharing process of effective practice and emerging risk.

Currently information sharing between the gang team and the YOS is not clear and although a recent new member of the police team has helped build relationships, she is currently focusing on community-based support. All agreed this needed to be reviewed. Rather worryingly there appeared to be some confusion in this group and a number of others if the police gang team still existed after recent restructures and staff changes.

The local Glade shopping centre was said to have seen increases in this type of activity with knife crime linked to gangs mentioned as increasing over the last 12 months. This has been seen via local patrol staff (15 members) and CCTV. The centre enforcement team are seeing young people involved in this activity and should be part of any operational response, needs assessment and local strategy.

All felt more training was needed on this subject although many had been trained by Barnardo's on CSE but not on the wider gangs and modern slavery links.

The group expressed a desire to hold a workshop to help share experience in this field and map current interventions like mentoring and mediation that could help grow the capability of the borough to respond to this growing issue and identify teachable moments for intervention.

### **Focus group 2 – Community Safety**

The community safety unit do not at present contribute towards tackling any gang agenda in the borough. This was not the case a few years ago when a gang's panel existed, but gangs, CSE and missing now sit under Children's Services (it was thought – no one was sure).

There are 4 hotspot areas within the borough and the CS team contribute to community impact days, working with a range of agencies. These CID have been occurring for 5 years, partly funded by MOPAC. It was said that reports of cuckooed properties in these areas come through to RSLs, although the tenants were said to be very frightened and reluctant to talk.

It was believed that the police have a gang lead, but not a gang unit, and it was not known if violent crime in the borough is increasing or not due to gang activity. The CS team said that burglaries is one of the main issues they were currently dealing with, as criminals were targeting affluent areas and homes. They were not aware of gangs running lines out of the borough (i.e. the traditional county lines model) but knew that gang members from other boroughs were being placed into Bromley by social care agencies. This was said to be an ongoing problem, as Bromley were usually not aware of any placement from external boroughs involving gang related young people until problems started to occur as a result of gang links.

Issues and concerns raised –

- A reduction in staff numbers has led to community safety staff not being involved with the gang agenda – for example it was said there is now 1 ASB caseworker, as opposed to 6 previously.
- There appears to be an increase in rough sleepers in the borough. Given their disproportionate use of class A drugs, this could mean more local drug dealing.
- There was not felt to be enough engagement with RSLs, and the perception of the group was that they are not taking enforcement activity seriously enough.
- There needs to be a clear strategy around gang related work in the borough, and ownership – "*it's not clear to us who owns this agenda locally*".

### **Focus Group 3 – Education/Housing**

Gang members were said to live mainly in the Annerley and Penge areas (and are characterised locally as predominantly Black). However, it was pointed out that there are members of the Traveller community in the Crays and near Biggin Hill who operate in a gang-related way in terms of violence and criminality and have clashed with local gangs.

Partners are now more knowledgeable about young people running county lines and this is more prevalent. The young people involved are attracted by the money they think they can make. Girls and boys said to be caught up in CSE. Some have learning needs and don't fully comprehend what they are doing. Music videos are used to threaten others. Those involved are getting younger, with 10-year-olds running drugs whereas support is targeted at secondary schools. It is important to educate young people about being exploited by the drug business. There was a question of how to provide support in primary schools and whether children of that age would understand the consequences of gang involvement or see it as glorification.

A lot of children “*don’t survive in academies*” and are sent to the PRU (Bromley Trust Alternative Provision Academy). Children have been labeled as gang members by their school even if this was not the case, with negative consequences for the individual including exclusion. In addition, some young people known to the YOT are not accessing education or are on significantly reduced timetables as low as one hour a week. Gang affiliation is a challenge faced by the PRU, including some very challenging young people and “*big players*”. Staff are aware of who is gang affiliated and manage risks, such as young people coming from different parts of the borough (with potentially different gang affiliations). Some young people who are not gang affiliated are targeted because they have a sibling who is. There are very few incidents of violence in the PRU. Every child is wanded on arrival and searched physically. Phones are removed for the school day. Two lockdowns have occurred in the past in response to youths turning up outside, and staff have water canisters and medical packs in case of an acid attack close to school premises (which has not happened). Truancy sweeps in public spaces no longer happen because the police do not have time.

The weekly MEGA meetings are evolving and working well. It was said to be better and faster than the previous MAPS and more responsive to potential trends. The PRU works closely with the YOS and the police. Information is requested from the police and shared, if relevant, whenever a young person comes to the secondary PRU or secondary SEMH school (Bromley Beacon Academy); three police officers are assigned to the schools (not full time). However, there is a lack of information about what the local authority and police are doing about the drug dealers the young people are working for.

Girls go from “*zero to 100*” in terms of not being known and then being involved in serious criminality or harm. When girls are identified, the police will look at their connection to gang members. Educational Welfare are working with Barnardos on issue of girls sending inappropriate pictures of themselves, have good links with the police CSE SPOC and multi-agency groups/teams (e.g. the MASH, MARAC, CAF team and YOS), and have provided talks to health professionals, probation workers and landlords. Girls who attend the PRU are particularly vulnerable and can be violent and aggressive and are extremely damaged. There are around 6 to 7 boys for every girl. Women’s Aid deliver CSE workshops to all girls in the PRU secondary school. However, girls are being groomed at a younger age and it was suggested that interventions be extended to younger children.

There was concern that young people caught offending do not receive the appropriate intervention/punishment at an early enough stage and go on to become more serious repeat offenders. An example was given of a teenager who had been caught carrying a machete a number of times without serious youth justice consequences and whose reputation and levels of criminality had increased as a result. There was concern that “*he will end up dead*” because the attitude is “*I can do what I want*”. In another case, a serious assault was viewed as a triage issue within the YOS.

It was seen as important to hold parents to account, however they invariably have a host of problems themselves, such as debt, and are unable to control their children. Taking them to court simply increases their debt levels, if fined, and there was doubt about whether what was learnt on parenting courses was implemented at home. The parenting centre had been closed down.

#### **Focus group 4 - Police teams - schools, YOS and cadets**

The schools' team are seeing the risk of gangs and drugs more across the area and although resources have been cut in this area, the small team still provides support to all secondary schools and some primary schools, and also cover the PRU. The group are seeing more criminal investigation for malicious communications via the use of social media to shame and sexual exploitation. The use of social media pictures to coerce young people in the community and in prison into doing things linked to gangs, county lines, debt and drugs was thought to be growing.

The group were concerned that local interventions to support this agenda were not available and struggled to identify support for young people around gangs and county lines, and the group also recognised an growth in local drug markets through the supply of cannabis, cocaine and heroin. It was said that although there were not many diversion and prevention interventions currently operated in Bromley, the 8-week WIPERs programme run by YOT was seen as an effective intervention. All agreed more programmes focused on knife crime and gang related crime were needed.

Local schools were said to be trying to engage other around this agenda, although the group were not aware of any head teacher's forum feeding into the MEGA or any planned interventions across schools. Local initiatives like the use of search wands and arches have been used to good effect and increasing the knowledge for teachers, young people and parents on the use of social media on this agenda was believed to be crucial.

A significant risk expressed was the imminent closure of Camberwell Green Court, which will mean some 6 other boroughs sending their court cases to Bromley youth courts, with the potential to cause significant risk and become a violence/gang conflict hot spot. Highbury Court had a very similar issue and has seen an increase in gang and youth violence.

The group has seen gang activity grow in Penge and believed a number of LAC young people who have been moved into Bromley are involved in some of the recent conflict, but little information is known or shared between agencies on these individuals.

They have seen local cuckooing in the town centre and have used closure orders to help tackle the issue. The local Bromley BID have two officers that work the town centres, but this group are unsure of the town centre officer involvement with the gang's unit or links to MEGA.

Prison links with local police were said to have been disrupted and all agreed these links needed to be redeveloped to help build resilience and share practice between the

community and secure estate. The group felt that using appropriate ex-offenders to help deliver a deterrent message would work well for Bromley young people.

The group were not aware of any assessment on this agenda being completed or shared with partners. All agreed this was a key gap. The local police gang matrix is not shared with this group and it was said that no support from the local intelligence team was supplied around this agenda. The group used to attend the gang meeting, but this meeting appears to have stopped.

Reflecting national feedback, the local 101 system was not thought to be an effective way to encourage community information.

#### **Focus group 5 – Health (including CAMHS and school nurse)**

The group noted that schools were using managed moves in order to remove non-academic children, in order to keep attainment results high. Academic pupils exhibiting behavioural issues were said to get help and schools would try to keep them rather than move them. The result of this was said to be a concentration of children outside of mainstream provision, who were vulnerable to gang influence and grooming.

All agreed that their teams needed to know more about gangs, violence and vulnerability issues, and that greater parental awareness was also required. The YOS was said to have an awareness of this agenda, but agencies such as CAMHS did not to the same extent, although CAMHS staff are aware of local children who would be vulnerable to gang influence. Some of the group had heard of the MEGA meeting but were unsure of how health agencies fed into it.

Other issues and concerns raised –

- High levels of deprivation within the borough are masked by general affluence
- Bromley have previously held multi agency partnership events and it would be useful to hold one around this agenda

#### **Focus Group 6 – Community**

A survey of 700 young people in the town centre and deprived areas found that young people are desensitised to violence. When they are victims, they may tell their parents but do not report incidents to the police or other authorities. They shared examples of intimidation, robbery and violence, with the attitude, "*it is what it is*". Many feel ostracized and don't identify as part of the local community. There was a lack of trust in adults and a feeling of being judged. A big concern is the increase in weapons. Young people voice their concerns on social media. Young people in the disability youth group are particularly vulnerable – they aren't able to tell when they are in danger and are taught to understand friendships, safety and issues such as sexting. The service also has good relationships with parents. Youth workers previously had the advantage of

knowing young people from primary school age through the junior club, which has now closed. Now they form relationships with children from age 13. However, there is a youth forum which involves counsellors.

Knife and youth violence are more prevalent in the last two years. Young people do not realise they are being groomed and see their involvement as free will, but very quickly get into debt. They need to be educated about the consequences. The number of young people missing is high – “*we know they are doing county lines*”. Local young people were said to be involved in county lines to Scotland, Manchester and Margate. Children as young as nine and 10 years old carry knives. This was seen as useful for gangs due to them being younger than age of criminal responsibility or at the lower end. There was concern about children reported missing and being in the 24hour MacDonald's in the early hours of the morning.

Children of around 10 to 12 years old move drugs around the borough. Young people are transported around borough in taxis, and the police are working with taxi companies and hotels to identify vulnerable young people. Young people leaving care move around borough, which changes the dynamics. Penge and Mottingham young people have joined together to form the M20 gang. Such changes are easy for professionals to miss if they don't know the language young people are using and this knowledge is not in the partnership. “*For these young people, criminal behaviour is a fact*” – they grew up together, went to school together and may be related, which makes it difficult not to have social interaction “*what is going on is 10 steps ahead of the agencies*”. A youth conference will be held on 21 September with key speakers including the Mizen family, police and street doctors, with CSA and counselling advice. The message is ‘*there is a way out*’. In addition, there is an awareness campaign for parents on the signs to look out for which could mean a young person is gang-involved.

Exploitation, including sexual exploitation, is an issue and girls living in supported housing are particularly vulnerable. Girls have been caught with weapons and drugs. Sometimes illegal items are given to them or stored at their homes without their knowledge. A case was cited of a teenager who said she was raped by a young man who is gang affiliated living close to her.

Gang strategy meetings do not include frontline staff (who could provide greater insight into the problem). MEGA meetings are yet to be embedded and there is a challenge of having lots of interim senior managers. Clear accountability was said to be needed. Training and skills development were recommended for partners working with young people including those with statutory and customer service duties.

Social workers were said to be not aware of the terminology used by young people and not responding to signs of risk in 16 and 17-year-olds, such as smelling of cannabis, wearing very expensive clothing, or having mental health issues. Police and social care thresholds for intervention were seen as too high. However, vulnerable young people in

the PRU are supported. The borough is not using the contextual safeguarding approach to enable young people to stay safe in public areas.

Housing and benefits services was seen as an area requiring improvement, including a better join up with social services. It was said to be important to understand the danger that young people face moving into an area where they may be targeted by other young people, and that they are not deemed to be intentionally homeless if they do not occupy a place they feel unsafe in. Examples were given of a young person sleeping on a night bus who was not deemed as homeless; care leavers placed in housing with much older adults where they don't feel safe; and a young person told they would risk losing their housing for returning late after being beaten up (they had previously been sleeping on the streets). The same issues were raised in relation to benefit sanctions which are threatened or imposed when a young person has difficulty getting to a job centre due to safety concerns. An additional factor is that young people from outside Bromley come into the area due to the closure of job centres and youth courts in neighbouring areas.

There was previously good information sharing and partnership with the police. This was said to have reduced as a consequence of police cuts and restructuring. It is now difficult to get a police response. In one example, a 999 call was made following an incident at a youth centre, but no one came so contact was made with a police officer who had left the borough and he was able to arrange for a police response. Police may not be aware of incidents unless a young person is in A&E. It was stated that confidence is low and there needs to be more stop and search.

### **Focus group 7 – Safeguarding / LAC**

This group were well aware of issues and problems concerning gangs within the borough. There are also issues with young people from outside of the borough presenting to Bromley as homeless and victims of crime, along with gang affiliated young people being placed into the borough by social care teams from other London boroughs (something that was said to have started a few years ago and is still ongoing).

Local gangs and groups were said to operate in Bromley, although these were not thought to be as violent as external groups from inner boroughs. Looked after children ran county lines out of the borough, and some children ran drug lines within the borough (a fast food outlet at Penge was said to be particularly problematic). It was thought that the parents of most of the children within the borough involved with groups and gangs worked, but initiatives to raise parental awareness were missing from the borough.

Some of the children would talk to services about their gang involvement, and it was said this cohort didn't see themselves as vulnerable, or aware that they could be targeted by gangs. Other young children were said to be frightened and would not talk at all to services.

The involvement of girls was noted, with some girls taking up a recruitment role to identify other young girls – this was said to a protective mechanism, so that they wouldn't be subject to violence or sexual abuse if they could provide other girls for groups.

The group noted that the area used to have a gang panel but doesn't anymore, and that there is confusion about who owns this agenda within Bromley.

Children's services had developed the MEGA meeting (missing, exploited, gang affiliated) and had also identified 69 local children involved or at risk of gang involvement. There was said to be an issue too with young people wanting to exit gangs, as it was said there was 6 months waiting list for the Safer London Gang exit scheme.

Other issues and concerns raised included –

- Academies are not engaging and there is an issue with fixed term exclusions and managed moves locally
- "*Bromley is in denial about the problem it has with gangs and has been for years*"
- "*Bromley has no idea how to engage with the afro Caribbean community around this issue*"
- "*There is still silo working with in the borough – in other boroughs staff know who to speak to, and they know who leads this agenda*"
- "*Are we identifying children too late?*"
- Work to raise parental awareness is required, and the use of Xanax amongst young people in the borough was also thought to be prevalent.

#### **Focus Group 8 – Targeted Youth Support (TYS)**

There was a desire for information to be shared appropriately and systematically in relation to who is involved in violence and/or at risk, and for young people involved in gangs to be mapped so it is known who is coming to the youth clubs. At present, there is a lack of formal information sharing between partners, including about incidents which would help youth workers support young people and safeguard staff. Staff are using social media to find out what is happening. An example was given of an acid attack which TYS staff were not formally told about even though it

was in a location where the TYS bus delivers interventions and the young person involved had previously used the bus service.

There was a recognition that "*affiliation on the street is constantly evolving*" and "*what was safe a month ago is no longer safe*". Information sharing was seen as a challenge across departments and agencies. Information is shared with the college, for example, at the start of term however no protocol is in place for sharing when circumstances change.

The MEGA panel brings partners together including CSA and missing. It is fast paced and better than the previous arrangements. It is too early to say how effective it is. Training is needed across departments and agencies on gangs, including what works and how to prevent issues.

There was a desire to work alongside the police to keep young people safe and for young people to see that TYS have a good relationship with the police. However, it is difficult to get through to the police gangs' team, SNT, or 101 which meant opportunities are being lost. TYS staff have been advised to phone Crimestoppers so that information is collected. There was a recognition that police capacity is limited. TYS staff are reluctant to call 999 in situations where young people are "*kicking off*" because it can be seen by young people the staff losing control and could risk making the situation worse if the police do not respond. As a result, TYS staff "*front it out with the kids*".

Girls and young women were said to be involved in carrying and storing weapons, and subject to intimidation and victimisation. Some have sexual relationships with young men in a group and there is a "*question of whether [this is] by choice*". There were seen to be "*no off-limits*" in the way gang-associated young men will use girls, with examples cited of setting up a sister and a pregnant girlfriend to have sex with other gang members. TYS staff make referrals to CSE meetings, however training is needed on these issues.

Housing and Social Services were seen as key services with responsibility for supporting young people who are homelessness, however there were examples of young people without accommodation – including on the streets – not being helped. There was the view that some young people "*get into gangs to get a roof over their head*". A protocol with Housing, Social Services and TYS will be worked on. Housing and other customer service staff also needed training to deal with conflicts/fights in waiting areas etc., which are becoming normalised. There was also deep concern about the imminent re-housing of looked after young people under 18 years old from Lewisham into Bromley. The concern was that these young people, including young women, could be vulnerable and at risk from exploitation, yet no information had been provided about them.

## Good and promising practice

- The MEGA is seen as a good meeting with the capability to allocate actions and track actions, although some felt it needed to focus on this agenda and have clear ownership/reporting processes (Ofsted were said to be impressed by the MEGA).
- YOS dedicated SPOC for gangs and county lines

## 4 Summary

This summary is based on the interviews with those we talked to throughout the day and does not therefore necessarily represent the full picture in the borough. We did not speak to anyone from the police gang unit for example. Nevertheless, a number of re-occurring themes were present and are summarised below.

It was not clear to most of those we talked to who owns this agenda and roles of various partnerships and agencies. This indicates an issue around communication and leadership that will need resolving in the form of a clear recognition of the problem, a strategy to tackle it and a clear operational plan shared between police, the local authority, social landlords, schools, health agencies and the voluntary and community sectors. Most of the groups also described a number of exploitative behaviours linked to gangs and groups including CSE and CSA, and it may be worth considering how these concerns link to gang related violence and exploitation.

Despite this, there is clearly some good pockets of work ongoing, especially around the recent MEGA meeting, the YOT gang SPOC and the work of social care staff to identify at risk young people. This is an evolving issue that needs to be addressed, so establishing a cross agency approach is essential to tackling this issue. There is no silver bullet, and no single agency can deal with this – the police certainly can't arrest their way out of the problem – this is everybody's business.

We heard criticism made by some of the focus groups during day, particularly regarding communication between agencies and how data and information is shared between agencies. This perceived lack of information and intelligence between agencies requires further work, as most groups felt that communications could be better. Internal communication between police units and with external services appeared ad hoc and uncoordinated (at least from the perception of those we talked to).

A number of groups had a perception that the borough has a historical reluctance to acknowledge the existence of a problem with gangs and violence. Allied to this there is also an obvious need for training and awareness across the partnership. Bromley does not appear to have had a traditional or historical problem with gangs and group

offending, but the increase across the country in county lines activity and associated exploitation means that towns, boroughs and regions in a similar position are now having to reassess how they understand and tackle gang related issues.

As much as anything, violence and vulnerability linked to gangs and group offending is a safeguarding issue, although safeguarding concerns linked to this agenda tend to be around personal and locational safety, and not necessarily the traditional safeguarding areas of domestic neglect. This is a national problem that is still ongoing in terms of solutions of thresholds and child protection legislation, but social care departments across London and nationally are now starting to reassess their approach in the light of gang exploitation. Social care staff interviewed during the day clearly appear to recognise the issue and are putting in place measures locally (such as the MEGA meeting), but this will need the support of senior leaders locally.

However, in order to perhaps realign resources and deploy different approaches, senior leaders at a local level will need to fully understand the nature of the threat, so a comprehensive needs assessment is required urgently, as outlined below in the recommendations.

## 5 Recommendations

- **There is a perceived lack of governance and overarching strategy for the partnership.** Most of the groups we talked to could not really pin point who exactly owned or led this agenda, and this was borne out by the groups describing a disjointed approach with poor information sharing and a lack of a common picture of what is actually happening in the borough. Clear leadership linked to a cross agency strategy/action plan should be in place, supported and informed by the recommendations outlined below -
- **Consideration should be given to a visioning event,** involving partners and communities from across Bromley. This event (perhaps half a day) could be used to map out areas and locations of concern (like a planning for real event) and share knowledge and information around the general problem. The event could build a rich narrative from participants regarding what's happening on the ground, who's being affected and what could be done to address some of the issues. Such an event could begin to kick start some of the recommendations (*and also some concerns raised in the main body of this report*) outlined in this section and start work around an operational plan. Single points of contact (SPOC) within each agency could also be considered at this event.

Such an event could consider –

- Review and update information-sharing arrangements to appropriately engage all partners coming into contact with gang-associated young people.

- Review the approach used to school exclusions in the borough and whether this is proportionate given the potentially damaging consequences to the child.
  - Consider which partnerships and initiatives could be included in any work going forward – CSA/CSE work for example, and additionally the local IOM cohort is based on acquisitive crime only and could include violent and gang's offenders to help develop the picture of gang/county line activity in Bromley.
  - Review the approach/policies used for housing young people to ensure that there is awareness of the implications of gang affiliation and vulnerability.
  - How to use opportunities such as the forthcoming conference with young people to educate them about grooming and the harm they face as a consequence of gang involvement.
  - Impact days run by the fire service who deliver to a whole year group could be linked and included within any new strategy for this agenda under a disruption and prevention strand (Thames Valley fire support has effective community interventions, we can supply contact details if required).
  - *Feed the above into a local strategy and operational plan*
- **Establish a local multi agency analyst forum** (we can provide draft terms of reference for this if required) This should lead to.....
  - **Consider the production of an informed needs assessment** that charts the current status of the drug market and gang activity in the town and surrounding areas using a wider range of partnership information and the young persons voice. This should also examine and seek to find how many young people and adults are at risk from gang related exploitation. This could utilise any information collected in mapping events (see elsewhere). Public Health have a major role here in terms of understanding the nature of the drug demand locally (and the implications on resources going forward), as do housing agencies, local schools etc. There is an opportunity here to involve a young person's group (who could be identified via some of the focus group) who could provide a rich narrative around the type of threats of enticements on offer from groups.

- **Use current legislation around Modern Slavery and Trafficking**, if appropriate, against gangs and offenders who exploit vulnerable people. Rather than arresting gangs/groups for drug dealing, they should be charged with trafficking and modern slavery legislation. These carry sentences of 15 years to life and should be used to deter the use of vulnerable children. Consider a menu of enforcement options across the partnership including partial closure orders for example, along with CRASBO, GI, public protection orders, modern slavery legalisation and exclusion orders.
- **Set up a regular dialogue with the youth courts and the CPS** to discuss sentencing of young people involved in gangs, county lines and knife crime. Utilise this as an opportunity to brief youth and criminal justice partners on how the local picture is developing and changing.
- **A programme of multi-agency training in the area of county lines and the associated vulnerability subjects would be useful and desirable**, in order to ensure that most practitioners across a range of agencies are aware of the problem and how to report it. The Violence and Vulnerability Unit currently offer online training around this matter for a range of practitioners. <http://vvu-online.com/#training>
- **The Children and Social Work Act 2017** provides for the replacement of LSCBs with a stronger and more flexible system of multi-agency arrangements. It removes the requirement for local areas to have LSCBs, replacing it with a requirement for three key partners – the police, local government and health services – to work together to agree the necessary strategic decisions to underpin effective practice.

The LSCB Reform process could be a way to start debate around vulnerability and statutory thresholds, and the possible need for additional support. The current Adult safeguarding boards should also be involved in this work around adults subjected to cuckooing and targeted by gangs because of a vulnerability.

## 6 Ongoing support

Learning from the gang and youth violence programme is shared via the Gang and Youth Violence Special Interest Group and can be accessed by the Home Office tackling crime unit and Basecamp online site. **The VVU can also provide additional Home Office funded support to assist with the introduction and implementation of any recommendation.**

<https://basecamp.com/2308334/projects/12421689>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/county-lines-criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults>

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## In their Pocket

**“Once you have started you are in their pocket and lose control over your own life. You become a slave.”**

