



Gangs in Brent: An assessment of gangs in Brent and services for at-risk young people and gang members to exit

An Overview and Scrutiny Task Group Report

March 2013

Membership

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Chair's Forward

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Executive Summary

This task group was set up following a report commissioned by Brent's Community Safety Partnership entitled *Establishing the reality of gangs in Brent*.¹ This report identified that for young people involved in gangs and gang related activity, there was insufficient activity in Brent to divert them away from involvement. Subsequently, in the summer of 2011, riots engulfed London and other cities across the UK. And, in order to gain a greater understand of the extent of the problem in Brent and what could be done to intervene, and help young people exit such a destructive and wasteful lifestyle.

The task group undertook research from the world of academia as well as those in Government and practitioners. We also heard evidence from members of the Metropolitan Police Service, voluntary and community organisations working with gang members and statutory services within the Council, such as the Youth Offending Service.

In the course of the task group's investigations, we discovered that whilst some good work on this issue is being done in Brent, it is largely being done in isolation. Through the discussions with Brent's partners and with those from other local authorities, the task group have concluded that the work around tackling gangs in Brent is both uncoordinated and fragmented. Given this position, and the fact that none of the problems are too great to overcome, the task group is pleased to present its findings.

The task group's key findings are as follows:

Defining 'gang' and developing a strategy

From the myriad ways to define what a gang is, how it is organised and what it is not, the task group discovered that there is no one agreed definition. We concluded that Brent Council should prioritise this area of work and that it needs to develop an overarching strategy which clearly defines what a gang is.

Key risk factors for gang membership

Brent is a young borough. The 2011 census data shows that roughly 25% of the total population in Brent is under 19 years old. This means that this issue, if not dealt with effectively, could leave many more young people in Brent at risk. Research on the drivers of gangs and youth violence point to a number of factors, which are most common to this group. As one researcher pointed out, 'gang members are youth for whom everything is going wrong.'² Though not exhaustive, the following is revealing about gang membership in Brent:

- Being young and male;
- Being a victim of bullying or violence;
- Discrimination and stereotyping;
- Having a member of the family or friends circle who is a gang member;
- Family breakdown and dysfunction (including domestic violence);
- A lack of positive role models (including an absent father);
- Poor educational attainment;
- Having a drug or alcohol misuse problem;
- Mental and emotional health problems;
- An absence of aspirations;

¹ Produced by the Centre for Social Evaluation and Research, London Metropolitan University

² Greene, Judith and Pranis, Kevin. 2007. *Gang Wars: The Failure of Enforcement Tactics and the Need for Effective Public Safety Strategies*. Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute.

- Having a perceived need for protection;
- Unemployment or underemployment and the need for money;
- Living in a culture that strongly identifies success with material wealth; and
- Poverty or growing up in social housing.

Girls in gangs

This was an area the task group as keen to investigate. Although there is little evidence to suggest that Brent has a girl gang problem, there is anecdotal evidence that there is a developing problem, across London, of sexual exploitation of young women by males associated with gangs. This is an area which the task group believes must be researched further so as to fully understand the nature and scope of the problem in Brent.

Gangs in Brent

The report, *Establishing the reality of gangs in Brent* was a good starting point for the task group's investigations. Its research provided key insights into the organisation of groups and how young people feel about those groups. In the course of further research, we were told that gangs are a problem across London and that Brent is one of 19 priority boroughs the Met have identified as a 'Trident borough'.

There are 15 recognised gangs in Brent. These gangs are most commonly geographically located on or near social housing estates and in areas of relative deprivation. Based on arrests and convictions, the main types of offences committed by Brent's street gangs are: firearms offences, drug dealing, robbery burglary, violence and anti-social behaviour. Recent Police statistics also highlight that despite London-wide reductions in gun crime, Brent is seeing a 10.8% increase and is also experiencing increases in knife crime, well above the London-wide figures.

Prevention, intervention and exit services

It is clear from the evidence that the task group has heard and research available that any gangs strategy must include these three levels of service. More prevention work is needed, particularly in schools and PRUs to educate young people on making healthier life choices and rejecting gang membership. Robust intervention services also need to be developed; these programmes should offer gang-involved young people a clear alternative which allows them to stop offending and choose a more positive lifestyle. Exit services, similar to interventions, are required for high risk gang members who cannot simply quit their gang because of an imminent danger to their own lives or to their close family.

Recommendations

1. Prioritise gangs and commit to working closer with partners and the community to reduce gang membership and violence in the community. This issue must be seen as both a Safeguarding and Public Health issue.
2. Develop a robust, gender-proof, multi-layered gangs strategy that focuses on three core areas: prevention, intervention for those affected and exit programme pathways (for existing gang members) for each of the identifiable cohorts listed above.
3. Adopt a single, working definition of gangs.
4. Development of an integrated gangs unit to analyse and manage changing profile and risk of gangs in Brent and to effectively manage the PMAP and all associated partnership working.
5. Develop a greater partnership with local schools with a view of developing and training a lead from each school to act as Single Point of Contact (SPOC) and liaise with colleagues within the Partnership.
6. Consult with community partners and organisations to develop an Independent Advisory Group (IAG) to work with the Partnership. A similar consultation and IAG should also be created for young people in Brent.
7. Align processes with Working with Families initiative to identify and manage cohorts to reduce duplication.
8. Develop a robust, multi-agency identification and assessment methodology that uses a traffic-light system for targeted support and interventions. Any such approach must also include reporting of incidents from hospital A&Es within the West London area.
9. Develop a scoping and mapping project to understand the extent of the problem for women and girls who may be involved or affected by gangs and vulnerable to sexual abuse. A gendered approach must also be undertaken regarding any victim support, intervention and exit strategy. This must also be consistent with recommendation 2.

1. Introduction - Scope of the Task Group's Work

Since the task group started meeting in September 2011, issues relating to gangs and serious youth violence have risen in the national political agenda resulting in a rapidly changing landscape within which evidence has been gathered. New initiatives and funding streams relating to gangs and serious youth violence have been introduced by the government and, in some cases, have already come to an end. In addition the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner and the new Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) have made strengthening the Met's response to serious youth violence and getting tough on gangs a priority.

The national discourse around gangs and gang related activity is frequently emotive, particularly since the riots in August 2011 when the Prime Minister declared a 'concerted all-out war on gang and gang culture'. Indeed, the Home Office have reported that one in five people arrested during the course of the riots had a known gang affiliation. However, there is a danger that all urban crime is identified as gang related, increasing fear amongst residents and labelling young people who may be undertaking what they view as mundane activities as gang members. Equally, where gangs do exist, the impact on local communities and the life chances of those involved or associated with gangs and gang related activity can be devastating. Therefore, understanding what is and is not gang related is essential for the police and the wider Community Safety Partnership to tackling gangs without further alienating young people in the process.

This task group was set up following a report commissioned by Brent's Community Safety Partnership entitled *Establishing the reality of gangs in Brent*.³ This report identified that for young people involved in gangs and gang related activity, there was insufficient activity in Brent to divert them away from involvement.

The key findings of the task group are as follows:

- Defining gangs and developing a strategy;
- Key risk factors for gang membership;
- Girls in gangs;
- Gangs in Brent; and
- Prevention, intervention and exit services.

2. Task Group Membership

Councillor Zaffar Van Kalwala, Chair
Councillor Harshadbhai Patel
Councillor Hayley Mathews

Policy support has been provided by Jacqueline Casson, Acting Corporate Policy Team Manager and Christopher Young, Policy Officer.

³ Produced by the Centre for Social Evaluation and Research, London Metropolitan University

3. Methodology

The task group reviewed a range of literature in the course of their research, and drew in particular from the following publications:

1. HM Government (2011) *Ending Gang and Youth violence: A Cross-Government Report including further evidence and good practice case studies*. London: Crown.
2. The Centre for Social Justice (2009) *Dying to Belong: An In-depth Review of Street Gangs in Britain*. London: The Centre for Social Justice.
3. Hallsworth, S. and D. Brotherton. (2011) *Urban Disorder and Gangs: A Critique and a Warning*. London: Runnymede
4. Pitts, J. (2008) *Reluctant Gangsters: The Changing Shape of Youth Crime*. Cullumpton: Willan Publishing.
5. Hallsworth, S. and K. Duffy (2010) *Confronting London's Violent Street World: The Gang and Beyond*. London: Routledge.

In order to complete the work identified in the scope the task group gathered evidence from a number of sources. We would like to thank the following people for speaking to us about this issue:

- Genny Rennard, Head of the Integrated Community Safety Team (Brent Council)
- Anita Dickenson, Head of Brent Youth Offending Service (Brent Council)
- Matthew Watkis, Youth Offending Service Gang Co-ordinator (Brent Council)
- Chief Inspector Stuart Smith (MPS, Brent)
- Christine Topping, Violence Against the Person Focus Desk (MPS, Brent)
- Andy Brown, Head of Substance Misuse (NHS Brent)
- Helena O'Connell, Service Manager (Young Addactions)
- Kiran Vagarwal, Neighbourhood Crime and ASB Manager & Project Co-ordinator (Brent Council)
- Inspector Heidi Tubby, Partnerships (MPS, Westminster)
- Pat Green, Divisional Manager for Westminster City Council (Victims Support)
- James Salter, Principal Officer (Brent Youth Offending Team)
- Helena O'Connell, Service Manager (Young Addactions)
- Jennifer Shaw, Youth Worker (Brent Youth Service and Connections Service)
- Matthew Watson, Service Manager NW Locality Young People's Service (Westminster City Council)
- Jennifer Oogle, DJ (Bang FM) and Junior Reid, Recording Artist from Brent
- Dr Charlie Alcock, CEO (MAC UK)
- Bethan West, Gangs Prevention Programme Coordinator (London Borough of Waltham Forest)
- Professor John Pitts, Academic and author of 'Reluctant Gangsters'
- Rob Owen, CEO and Dave Evans, Partnerships Manager (St. Giles Trust)
- Rena Sodhi, CEO and Claire Hubberstey, Director of Projects and Partnerships (Safer London Foundation)
- Chief Inspector Timothy Champion, Trident Gang Command Unit (MPS)

Members of the task group heard from a number of other local authorities, including Westminster City Council and Waltham Forest to try to identify areas of best practice that could be brought back to Brent.

Members of the task group visited the Monday Club at Young Addaction which works with young people, referred by the Youth Offending Service and Community Safety Team, who are on the periphery of gang related activity.

The task group spent an evening on the Youth Bus when it was operating in South Kilburn as part of the CAGGK project.

Members of the task group visited St. Giles Trust, who specialise in offering ex-offender led exit programmes who have recently begun taking referrals from Brent.

In addition to using Professor John Pitts' academic work as key reference material, members of the task group met with Mr Pitts to hear about some of the work he is currently researching and ask about recent trends.

The task group heard from organisations such as Safer London Foundation and MAC UK who are providing services identified by partners as best practice, the former in relation to young women in gangs or gang affected and the latter, who engage gang involved young people to think about their mental health through their Music and Change programme.

Lastly, the task group visited New Scotland Yard to hear from Chief Inspector Timothy Champion, who led the Trident team carrying out operations in Brent. Mr Champion gave the task group an up-to-date account of the changing nature of gang activity in Brent and across London.

4. Background and Policy Context

In their 2009 report, *Dying to Belong – an in depth review of street gangs in Britain*,⁴ the Centre for Social Justice highlighted the nature and scale of gangs in Britain. Some key findings include the following:

- Up to 6% of 10-19 year olds self-report belonging to a gang;
- Police in London and Strathclyde have each identified 171 and 170 gangs respectively;
- Between 600 and 700 young people are estimated to be directly gang involved in the London Borough of Waltham Forest alone, with an additional 8,100 people affected by gangs;
- In both Manchester and Liverpool around 60% of shootings are gang related;
- At least half of the 27 murders of young people perpetrated by young people in London in 2007 were gang-related;
- In the past 5 years there has been an 89% increase in the number of under-16s admitted to hospital with serious stab wounds, and a 75% increase amongst older teenagers; and
- The percentage of school children reporting having carried a knife increased by more than 50% between 2002 and 2005.

Building on this report, and in response to the August 2011 riots, the government published a cross government report, *Ending Gangs and Youth Violence*⁵. The report, launched in November 2011, was jointly presented by the Home Secretary, Theresa May, and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Ian Duncan Smith, who, while in opposition founded the Centre for Social Justice, the authors of *Dying to Belong*. In his foreword, the

⁴ The Centre for Social Justice (2009) *Dying to Belong: An In-depth Review of Street Gangs in Britain*. London: The Centre for Social Justice.

⁵ Ending Gangs and Youth Violence: A Cross Government Report, HM Government, November 2011

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions stated that tackling gangs and serious youth violence will take a fully coordinated, multi-agency response, and full and public local authority leadership.' The approach set out in this report included:

- Providing support to local areas to tackle their gang or youth violence problem;
- Preventing young people becoming involved in serious youth violence in the first place;
- Pathways out of violence and gang culture for people wanting to break with the past;
- Punishment & enforcement to suppress violence; and
- Partnership working to join up the ways in which local areas respond.

As part of the report, the government announced £10m funding for early intervention work, including the Communities Against Guns, Gangs Knives (CAGGK) funds and funding for young people's advocates for young people at risk of sexual violence and exploitation. Brent, along with Westminster, was successful in bidding for work to be carried out through both of these funds.

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 abolished the Metropolitan Police Authority and replaced it with the Mayor's Office for Policing & Crime (MOPAC). Through MOPAC, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor will be directly accountable for police performance in the capital, setting the Metropolitan Police's strategic direction and allocating resources. Two of the key priorities of the Mayor's office are:

- Strengthening the Met's response to serious youth violence, including knife crime ;
- Getting tough on gangs and tackling re-offending rates.

A new Metropolitan Police Commissioner Bernard Hogan-Howe was appointed in September 2011, just after the August riots. He has advocated 'total war on crime' and tackling gang crime in the capital is a key plank of his approach with the formation of a Trident Gang Crime Command. According to the Metropolitan Police there are an estimated 250 active criminal gangs in London comprising of around 4,500 people. The gangs they have identified range from organised crime network to street based gangs involved in street-based violence and robbery. The Metropolitan Police say that gangs exist in all parts of London and Brent is one of the 19 boroughs that will have dedicated gang task forces to deal with local gang crime and work with local partners on diversion and prevention activities. Given the total population of young people in London, the Police Commissioner does acknowledge that the vast majority of young people in London are law abiding but goes on to say:

There are still too many young people who are, or could get involved in gangs. We want to prevent young people from getting involved in gang offending so we and other agencies are offering ways out to support them. However, those who refuse our offer of help will be pursued and brought to justice. Getting involved in gangs can ruin a young person's life. With a criminal record it can be harder to get a job or into further education, while being involved in violence can lead to someone being arrested, sent to prison, seriously injured or even killed. We're not concerned with peer groups or just friends who may 'hang around' and we have no intention of criminalising an entire generation. Our focus is on violence and criminal behaviour associated with gangs and gang members.⁶

⁶ Metropolitan Police Service in major crackdown on gang crime – Press release 9th February 2012

5. Local Context

Protecting the public from crime and reducing the fear of crime is one of the council's highest priorities⁷. In spite of an overall reduction in crime in the borough, there are still areas of the borough where violent crime including the use of guns and knives is still a concern.

In response to local concerns and the perception that gang activity had increased in Brent, a report entitled *Establishing the reality of gangs in Brent*⁸ was commissioned by the Brent Community Safety Partnership to establish the actual situation in relation to the following concerns:

- That gangs have increased in prevalence in Brent
- That gangs are territorially based, are violent and are attracting young people, and
- That gangs pose a serious threat to public order

The key findings published in 2010 highlighted a number of issues. Firstly that the definition of the term gang varies significantly, what some people might term a gang others might see as a group of friends. The use of the term gang particularly by the media can stigmatise young people, create fear amongst some residents and fear among young people in general. Secondly there is little evidence of US style gangs in Brent, though some street based groups of young people, mostly boys, do exist in the south of the borough. Lastly, for young people involved in these groups there is insufficient provision to divert them away from involvement. Given these findings, the Crime Prevention Strategy Group agreed to support the establishment of an overview & scrutiny task group to investigate these issues and look at how effective diversion and exiting provision could be developed.

6. Key Findings

6.1 Defining 'Gangs' and Developing a Gang Strategy

One of the most basic yet difficult things that the task group wanted to do was to establish what was meant by the term 'gang'. There are a myriad of definitions in existence none, of which is universally accepted and used. Indeed within the world of academia and practicing criminology, defining the term 'gang' is a contentious issue⁹. The lack of consensus around the definition of a gang is problematic in a number of ways, particularly:

- Being sure that when gathering evidence about gangs in Brent that everyone has a common understanding
- Generic use of the term may lead to everyday activities of a group of young people and even criminal activity as being labelled as gang related when they might not be

As Hallsworth and Duffy point out, 'a group of eleven year old lads 'hanging around', for example, is very different from an armed, territorially affiliated group of eighteen year olds looking for trouble; and this differs in turn from a group of adult criminals planning a heist¹⁰'. In 2005, Hallsworth and Young provided a definition that separates out peer groups, gangs and organised criminal groups as a three-tiered system of 'urban collectives'. This typology consisted of three groups, including:

⁷ Brent our Future 2010-2014

⁸ Produced by the Centre for Social and Evaluation Research, London Metropolitan University

⁹ Brotherton, D.C. (2007) Beyond Social Reproduction: Bringing Resistance Back into the Theory of Gangs', *Theoretical Criminology* 12(1):55-77; Klein, M.W. (2001) *The Eurogang Paradox: Street Gangs and Youth Groups in the US and Europe*. Dordrecht and Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

¹⁰ Hallsworth, S. and K. Duffy (2010) *Confronting London's Violent Street World: The Gang and Beyond*. London: London Councils.

Peer Group: A small, unorganised, transient grouping occupying the same space with a common history. Crime is not integral to their self definition.

Gang: A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the group's identity.

Organised Criminal Group: Members are professionally involved in crime for personal gain operating almost exclusively in the 'grey' or illegal marketplace.

The Hallsworth and Young typology is still used by a number of agencies, including the Brent Youth Offending Service. This definition of gang, however, has been refined further by the Centre for Social Justice in their 2009 report *Dying to Belong*. The definition used by the Centre for Social Justice has also been adopted by the Brent Community Safety Team, The Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers and defines a gang as:

A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who (1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, (2) engage in a range of criminal activity and violence, (3) identify with or lay claim over territory, (4) have some form of identifying structural feature, and (5) are in conflict with other, similar, gangs.

In *Reluctant Gangsters*, Professor John Pitts defined the term 'youth gang' as:

A social group composed of children, young people and, not infrequently, adults who see themselves, and are seen by others, as affiliates of a discrete, named, group; variously described as a crew, 'fam' (family), massive, posse, or as brerrs (brothers/'bredderin'), cousins, soldiers, sabbos (saboteurs), boys or mandem¹¹.

When we talked to Brent Police, they told us that they define a gang as:

A group of individuals involved in persistent criminality for some form of personal gain (this includes profit and/or to gain or demonstrate status) which is causing significant harm to the community and/or is of cross border concern.

Section 34(5) of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 Act provides the nearest thing to a legal definition of gang by defining gang-related violence as:

Violence or a threat of violence which occurs in the course of, or is otherwise related to, the activities of a group that:
a) consists of at least 3 people;
b) uses a name, emblem or colour or has any other characteristic that enables its members to be identified by others as a group; and
c) is associated with a particular area.

Based largely on Hallsworth and Young's 2005 definition and that of the one used by the Centre for Social Justice, the task group recommend the following definition of a gang be adopted by the Community Safety Partnership:

Recommended definition of 'gang':

A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who:
(1) See themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, and

¹¹ Pitts, J. (2008). *Reluctant Gangsters: The Changing Shape of Youth Crime*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.

(2) Engage in a range of criminal activity and violence.

They may also have any or all of the following features:

(3) Identify with or lay claim over territory

(4) Have some form of identifying structural (or labelling) feature

(5) Are in conflict with other, similar, gangs.

Based on the research, which has highlighted the problems associated with not having a clear definition of gang, the task group has omitted from this definition the delinquent peer group and organised crime groups.

A critique of labelling

There are, however, problems with all definitions. In the Ministry of Justice report, *Understanding the Psychology of Gang Violence*¹², Harris *et al.* states that 'practitioners need to be careful about making assumptions about an offender's own sense of their gang affiliations' and labelling someone as a gang member. In the research, this caution manifested itself clearly as several of the 'participants refused to proceed until the interviewer acknowledged their rejection of this label'.

On a visit to the Monday Club at Young Addaction for gang-involved and affected young people, one young person told the task group that just because a group of friends is gathered together, they are not necessarily a gang or gang members, even if the police can't make such a distinction.

Developing a strategy

During the course of this investigation the task group talked to a number of partners across Brent and London Boroughs such as Waltham Forest and Westminster to find out about the work being undertaken and how partners worked together. The two London boroughs told us they had set up a dedicated gangs team to analyse data and coordinate work within the partnership to effectively tackle gangs in the borough. They also told us that strong leadership and patience is required and that the key to effective partnership working is to involve all with stake in its success, including those often overlooked, such as local community members, health care providers and housing providers.

Bethan West, from the London Borough of Waltham Forest, said that it is important to make sure that any work is aligned to the Troubled Families work as many of the same families involved will also have a member of the household involved in serious youth violence or anti-social behaviour. Moreover, the task group was told that at Waltham Forest the gangs programme was so successful, the Council decided to use it as a model for their Troubled Families programme.

When we spoke to Tim Champion, of the Trident Gang Command Unit, he told the task group that the single biggest way of combating gangs is to involve community members as an Independent Advisory Group (IAG). He also recommended developing a critical incident review group, which would ensure all partners are aware of what has happened and enable them to develop a unified response in cases of fatal gang violence. In doing so, Mr Champion said that the police, Councillors, Council officials and community leaders will be able to assure the public that an appropriate response is being coordinated.

¹² Harris, *et al.* (2011). *Understanding the psychology of gang violence: implications for designing effective violence interventions*. Ministry of Justice Research Series 2/11.

The evidence we received has led the task group to conclude that work being undertaken in Brent is fragmented and uncoordinated. Therefore, it is the task group's belief that Brent would benefit from the development of an overarching gangs strategy and that the strategy be agreed by the Community Safety Partnership. This would not only provide a commonly used definition of a gang that is used by all partners but ensure that a coordinated approach is taken to use available resources effectively in the delivery of the exiting services outlined later in this report. Involving community partners and organisations to be involved throughout this process, a more grassroots approach will engender local solutions to local problems. The strategy should include:

- An agreed definition of 'gang';
- A robust, multi-agency identification and assessment methodology that uses a traffic-light system, based on risk. Any such identification must also include girls in gangs and those vulnerable to sexual exploitation and referral pathways from hospitals in the Brent and west London area;
- The continued use of PMAP as forum for case management to ensure targeted support and interventions;
- Appoint a lead from each relevant Council department to act as Single Point of Contact (SPOC) and liaise with colleagues within the Partnership. A similar approach should be taken for schools to have lead for gangs;
- The development of planned prevention services in schools and PRUs, early interventions and specialised services for high risk gang members to exit;
- Gendered services for girls in gangs and those vulnerable to sexual exploitation;
- Greater partnership working with the community and voluntary sector;
- An approach which involves community leaders as part of an Independent Advisory Group (IAG). This should also be replicated for young people; and
- The development of a critical incident review group to ensure a unified response to high profile incidents are coordinated and inclusive of communities.

In order to implement the strategy as recommended above, the task group recommends that the Council develop an integrated gangs unit within the Community Safety Team. The role of the unit will be to implement the strategy, analyse intelligence and trends, coordinate partnership working and commission services, when required. The unit will also assist in working to align the approach to those families identified under Brent's Working with Families (WWF) initiative that are gang-involved or affected.

6.2 Risk factors for gang membership

The task group took evidence from across the Community Safety Partnership, including the Metropolitan Police, Youth Offending Services (YOS) and the Community Safety Team. We also visited community and voluntary sector organisations dealing with gangs and gang members on the frontline. Although there is never a clear-cut set of factors which always determines gang membership or the potential for a young person to engage in serious violence, a pattern seems to have emerged. The following risk factors have either been highlighted in research or have been stated as risk factors by the experts we have taken evidence from:

- Being young and male;
- Being a victim of bullying or violence;
- Discrimination and stereotyping;
- Having a member of the family or friends circle who is a gang member;
- Family breakdown and dysfunction (including domestic violence);
- A lack of positive role models (including an absent father);
- Poor educational attainment;
- Having a drug or alcohol misuse problem;

- Mental and emotional health problems;
- An absence of aspirations;
- Having a perceived need for protection;
- Unemployment or underemployment and the need for money;
- Living in a culture that strongly identifies success with material wealth; and
- Poverty or growing up in social housing.

In the 2010 report, *Establishing the reality of gangs in Brent*, an interview was conducted with 16 'gang involved' young men who, when asked what risk factors are most relevant to them, they said:

- Living in an area with an established gang problem;
- Reputation (to be had) and excitement;
- Being a victim; and
- Opportunity to make money.

'Reluctant gangsters' as a risk factor

In our discussion with Professor Pitts, it was suggested that for some young people growing up on estates across London – including Brent – where gangs are prevalent, simply turning a blind eye or disassociating with gangs is not possible. Professor Pitts told the task group that for some young people to even survive, they will make friends with local gang members because they provide at least some protection from gangs operating from nearby estates. As shown above, by the young men interviewed on risk factors, this highlights the ever-present need for young people to secure their personal safety.

A similar story was told when we visited a representative from the Trident Gang Command. He told the task group of a young man who being beaten up by two gangs operating near his home. The boy joined one of them, just to avoid being beaten up by both.

Mental health as a risk factor

Mental health is one of the risk factors mentioned above that the Home Office has singled out as an area of particular concern. In the Government's *Ending Gangs and Youth Violence* report, mental health is singled out as one of the recurrent themes at every stage in a person's development and often critical as a predictor of future outcomes (if not treated). This is also one area which is most commonly overlooked in devising strategies to deal with gangs and gang crime.

As the Graham Allen report on Early Intervention¹³ puts it, 'when the environment is impoverished, neglectful or abusive, this can result in a child who doesn't develop empathy, learn how to regulate their emotions or develop social skills, and this can lead to an increased risk of mental health problems, relationship difficulties, anti-social behaviour and aggression.'

Dr. Alcock, of MAC UK, told the task group that 1 in 3 gang members has an undiagnosed mental health problem, and whilst the remaining 2 may not have an undiagnosed 'problem', many suffer other issues such as a deep-rooted lack of confidence, low self-esteem and self-belief. Added to this problem, says Dr. Alcock, is the almost universal use of drugs by this cohort, most commonly cannabis, which exacerbates mental health problems. Moreover, Dr. Alcock went on to say that many violent young men, grow up in a households where domestic violence is the norm; in seeing this, their only way to calm down or release frustrations is through violence.

¹³ Allen, G. (2011) *Early Intervention: The Next Steps – An Independent Report to HM Government*. London: HM Government

Music and social media and 'gang culture' as risk factor

The task group was also keen to explore what effect music and the use of social media had in what has been described as 'gang culture'. The task group met with Bang FM DJ Jennifer Ogoogle and Junior Reid, a recording artist from Brent. When asked if certain types of music encouraged gangs, membership or lifestyle, Ms Ogoogle argued that music may have played a part in gang culture some years ago but that now its role had reduced and that urban music is now mainstream and not a sub culture. When asked if urban music encouraged violence and gang membership, Ms Ogoogle said that 'stable young people are not going to hear a tune and then join a gang. Real musicians are not members of gangs, not if they want a career. A number of factors lead to a young person being at risk of becoming involved in a gang but music was not one of these factors.' When asked if YouTube¹⁴ aggravates gang rivalry, Mr Reid thought it did but not directly act as an aggravator of violence saying that 'videos usually don't mention areas or names, just post codes'.

6.3 Girls in gangs

The task group was keen to investigate the role of girls in gangs and was particularly concerned about issues relating to sexual exploitation and violence. Our starting point was the Race on the Agenda (ROTA) report, *Female Voice in Violence*¹⁵, on the impact of serious youth violence and criminal gangs on girls across the country. This said that 'female involvement in serious youth and gang-associated violence is nothing new. For as long as there have been issues of *weapon-enabled crime*, drugs markets and gang conflict in the UK, women have played roles and have been victimised.'

Women and girls can be involved in gangs in a number of ways, all of which impact significantly on their lives, including:

- As foot soldiers, setting up rival gangs;
- As carriers, holding and hiding weapons and drugs'
- As mother figures; and
- Most commonly as girlfriends or to perform sexual acts. They are often passed around gang members and rape is not uncommon.¹⁶

ROTA's research also found that risk indicators for girls are similar to that of boys, for example:

- Living in a gang-affected area;
- Having a family member or sibling involved in serious offending;
- Non-attendance at school – either through exclusion, truancy or simply non-attendance; and
- Disengagement from family and services.

However, the research suggests that there are additional risk factors for those girls and young women who have become entrenched in gangs and violence. These additional risk factors include:

- Social services and the police had been involved in their lives from the ages of 8-13 in relation to their behaviour;
- While they were not attending school, not all had been excluded; some had simply stopped attending and disengaged; and

¹⁴ Gangs often post activity and reprisals against rivals on You Tube, either for provocation or as evidence that they were responsible.

¹⁵ ROTA, *Female Voice in Violence Project: A Study into the impact of Serious Youth Violence and Gangs on Women and Girls*, February 2010.

¹⁶ From *Dying to Belong*. See above for full citation.

- They had early sexual experiences that they regretted and had either been victims of sexual violence or exploitation under the age of 18.¹⁷

The task group asked a number of local agencies about the evidence they had on girl gang activity and the impact on women and girls. The task group was told that there is little evidence that girl gangs exist in Brent. Evidence we received around sexual exploitation was largely anecdotal. However, Victim Support told us that there was a big link between domestic violence and women and girls associated with gangs. They said that they are seeing enough cases to make them concerned about this issue. Westminster Council told the task group that they were concerned about the level of sexual violence and abuse towards women and girls associated with gangs. Their concern was that this was a significant source of hidden harm that had led them to engage a female worker to undertake a mixture of research and one to one assessment work in gang affected areas.

The task group visited the Safer London Foundation, who has developed a number of gender-specific education and intervention programmes. They told us that Croydon Council's partnership had a similar situation to Brent. However, once the organisation was able to reveal the extent of the problem, there were more than 40 girls waiting for assistance. We also heard that a developing trend, in other boroughs where they are working, was that gang members are using rape and multiple perpetrator rape, not just on girls known to gang members or girlfriends of gang members but also targeting women from rival gang areas for the purpose of attacks as reprisals or retaliation.

Ms Sodhi, from the Safer London Foundation, told the task group that to tackle this issue, all agencies, including schools, YOS and Community Safety need proper training to deal with the complex set of problems young women in gangs are exposed to. Moreover, Ms Sodhi stated that this issue must be seen as a safeguarding issue so that measures are taken to ensure that young women are referred into appropriate, gendered services.

Professor John Pitts told the task group that many of London's gang members are regularly travelling to coastal cities, such as Brighton and Bournemouth, to sell drugs. Whilst they are staying there, young women would usually be there for the gang to use as sex slaves or in part-payment in drug deals.

The task group recommends that Brent conduct a mapping exercise in order to understand the nature of the local problem, from which the findings may inform the gangs strategy, recommended above.

6.4 Gangs in Brent

One of the task groups aims was to build on the research undertaken for the *Establishing the reality of gangs in Brent*¹⁸ report, which stated that there is little evidence of US style gangs in Brent, though some street-based groups of young people, mostly boys, do exist in the south of the borough. The task group received evidence from experts in the Police, academia and those practitioners working across London to help gang members exit who consistently state that the gang problem in London (and Brent) cannot be described in the same way as in some US cities.

According to the Metropolitan Police Service¹⁹, there are 250 recognised gangs and criminal networks in London, comprising of more than 4,500 people. These range from organised

¹⁷ ROTA, *Female Voice in Violence Project: A Study into the impact of Serious Youth Violence and Gangs on Women and Girls*, February 2010.

¹⁸ Centre for Social and Evaluation Research (2010) *The Reality of Gags in Brent*. London: London Metropolitan University.

¹⁹ Figures from a presentation on Operation Connect in 2011.

criminal networks involved in Class 'A' and Class 'B' drugs supply and firearms to street-based gangs involved violence, personal robbery and, on occasion, murder.

Of the 250, more than 100 are thought to be the street-based gangs with over 2,000 members. 80% of these street-based gang members are thought to be involved in street-based drug dealing and 88% are also thought to be involved in violence. A report from the Metropolitan Police's Operation Connect shows that individuals who have links to gangs are believed to be responsible for:

- 16% of London's total drug supply;
- 22% of serious violence (including 17% of stabbings and 50% of shootings);
- 17% of personal robbery;
- 12% of all residential burglary (including 26% of aggravated burglary); and
- 4% of all sex offences (including 14% for rape).

The task group met with Tim Champion from the Trident Gang Command Unit, who was recently involved in a three-month assignment in Brent. Mr Champion told the task group that gangs are an issue across London but there are 19 priority London boroughs, and Brent is one of them.

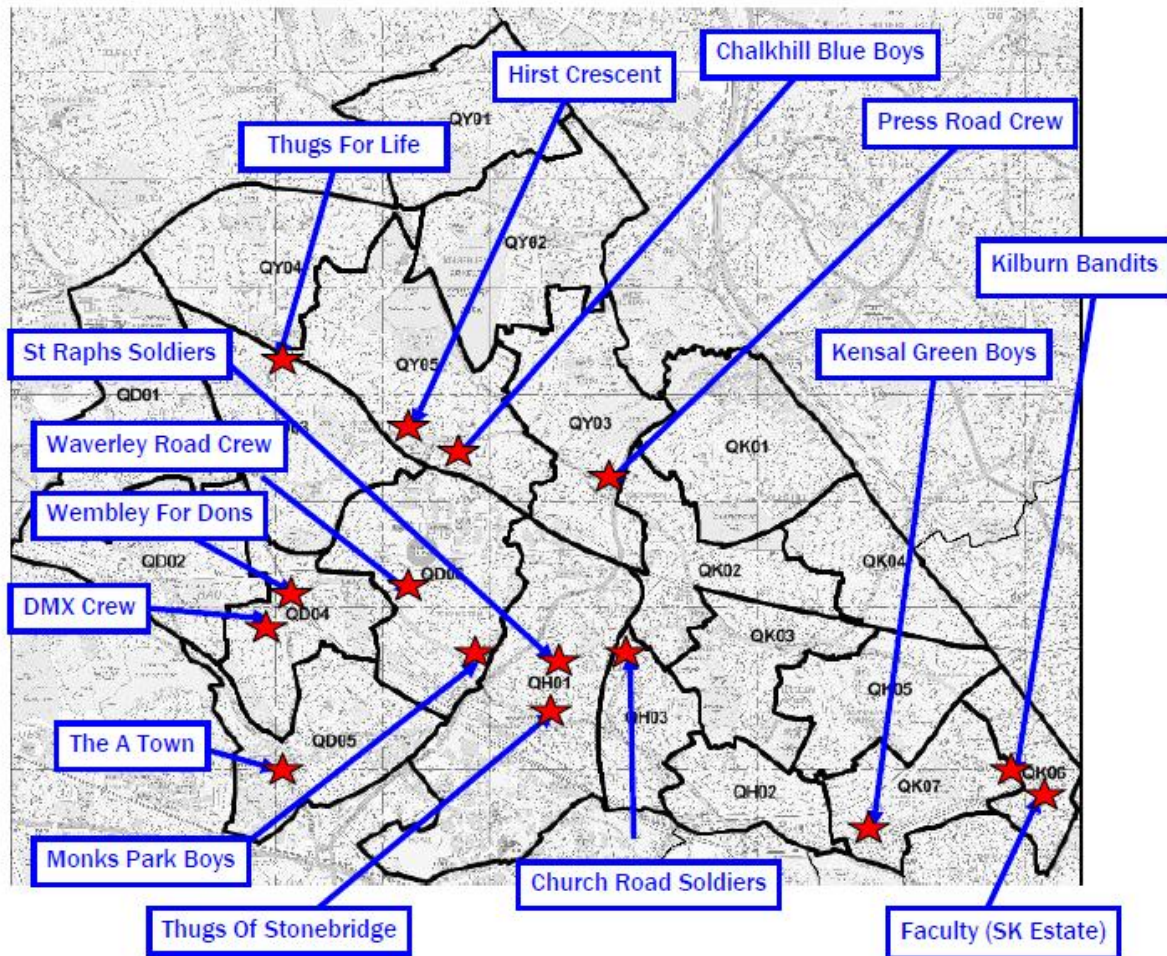
When looking at the prevalence of gangs in Brent it is important to remember that Brent is a relatively young borough, with a quarter of the population under 19. The 2011 census shows that figure represents an increase of 39.8% from 2001 figures. When adding this to the other figures which illustrate Brent's high unemployment rate (10.9%), high levels of deprivation and the increasing strain on public services, the problem becomes even more acute.

Representatives from the Youth Offending Service told the task group that the gang problem in Brent was less serious than elsewhere in London, however there was evidence that the instances of gang affected young people had risen over the previous 18 months. The Youth Offending Service has developed the Gang Affected Database (GAD) which contains corroborated and uncorroborated intelligence.

Brent Police told us that Brent's gangs, like many of London's gangs, are largely based on geographical boundaries, usually associated with specific estates in areas where social housing and deprivation levels are high. This characteristic is particularly relevant to the presence and location of the Church Road Soldiers and the Thugs of Stonebridge, both in areas linked to low incomes and social housing. However, a recent report from a Metropolitan Police analyst pointed out that other gangs are also established across 'broader geographical areas and in areas of comparative affluence, such as the Kensal Green Boys and Thugs For Life'.

Whilst some gangs use colours, bandanas, scarves, hats and jackets to identify themselves, some do not. There is also some debate as to how aligned they are to colours. The Brent Police have said that 'these particular identifiers have been evident in videos that have been uploaded to the internet.' In a departure from what has been known about gangs' territorial allegiances, the Youth Offending Service told the task group that there is some evidence of waning gang allegiances with some individuals moving from one gang to another. They also told us that some gangs, as a unit, have developed ties with other gangs in neighbouring areas.

The map below identifies the 15 active gangs in Brent:



Research, published in 2008, by the Home Office's Tackling Gangs Action Programme (TGAP)²⁰ on the make up of gangs demonstrates that London has an entirely different narrative compared to the other TGAP areas²¹ in the UK, making gang profiles heavily dependent on the make up of local populations. This research stated that in London, 86% of gang members are Black African-Caribbean. According to Metropolitan Police data²² this seems to be fairly consistent in Brent. When we met with a representative from the Metropolitan Police's Trident Gangs Command Unit, he told us that offenders of gang-related crime, including knife and gun-enabled offences, tend to be male and between 14-15 years old.

Based on arrests and convictions, the main types of offences committed by Brent's street gangs are: firearms offences, drug dealing, robbery burglary, violence and anti-social behaviour.

Drug offences

Brent Police told us that drug supply was an integral part of gang activity for most of the gangs in actively operating in Brent. When we spoke to Mr Champion about the nature of drugs supply among gangs in Brent and London, he said that gangs are now grooming boys as young as 10 years old. These younger boys would be used as runners or scouts for the

²⁰ Dawson, P. (2008) Monitoring data from the Tackling Gangs Action Programme. London: Home office.

²¹ West Midlands, Merseyside, Greater Manchester

²² MPS Report on Gangs in Brent, based on victim and offender (and suspect) information.

teenaged boys in local, who, sometimes, would be used by older people with links to organised crime.

Violent Offences

Violent offences are typically classed either as offences of 'Most Serious Violence'²³ and 'Serious Youth Violence'²⁴. The table below highlights such offences as a percentage of those two classes:

Offence as % Most Serious Violence	Offence as % Serious Youth Violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wounding / Grievous Bodily Harm – 86%; • Other Violence (unspecified) – 5%; • Assault with Injury – 4%; • Common Assault – 3%; and • Murder – 1%. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Robbery – 49%; • Wounding / Grievous Bodily Harm – 34%; • Assault with Injury – 10%; • Other Violence (unspecified) – 3%; • Common Assault – 3%; and • Harassment – 1%.

A Metropolitan Police report says that Brent saw a rise in Gun Crime from 2010/2011 to 2011/2012²⁵ of 10.6%.²⁶ This figure stands in contrast to Brent's long term reduction of 10.9%, regional²⁷ reductions of 18.3% and MPS-wide reductions of 11.8% in the same period. The same report stated that there were 575 knife-enabled offences in 2011-2012, representing a 12.3% year-on-year increase. As with gun-enabled offences, this figure is also in excess of the regional increase of 6% and the MPS-wide increase of 6.3%. In total, robbery accounted for most (62.3%) of the knife-enabled offences.

The task group had expected to be able to make more exit strategy recommendations but now believes that further mapping, and on-going analysis mapping of gang activity is required. As part of this, life cycle mapping may be useful to track an offender through the various 'touch points' and statutory services he or she has engaged with. This will help to inform what services may need improving to prevent others in choosing such a lifestyle.

6.5 Prevention, intervention and exit services

The task group believes that within any gangs strategy, three main levels of service need to be developed: Prevention, Intervention and Exit.

Prevention services are vital for educating young boys and girls, from the age ten, on the harms of joining a gang and the likely path a gang members' life will follow. The task group heard consistent calls for further work to be done in schools. Three schools programmes the task group heard about are:

- Growing Up Against Gangs and Violence (GAGV) – This is an adaptable programme that can be delivered in schools on various themes to a number of age groups.
- Only Connect – The programme starts with a theatrical presentation that can be delivered to around 250. Only connect offer follow up sessions with hard to reach or at-risk pupils for 12 weeks thereafter.
- Safer London Foundation's Youth Engagement – These projects work with young people at risk of or involved in criminal activity within wards identified by the police as

²³ Figures from Met Police and based on Financial Year rather than calendar year.

²⁴ Serious Youth Violence is defined as any offence of Most Serious Violence or Weapon Enabled Crime, where the victim is aged 1-19.'

²⁵ Years as financial years, not calendar years.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Meaning North West Cluster of local authorities.

having active gangs. Projects include youth panels and youth training of the police to encourage young people who would not normally join such forums to share their experiences, knowledge and views about local crime issues with the police and work together to identify local solutions to reduce crime.

Intervention services will need to be considered when gang members in the community are deemed to be a 'risk' but not necessarily a 'high risk'. Many of the young people will already be known to the Youth Offending Services or Probation. Some may also have an alcohol or drug problem. Others will be involved in gang activity but only doing so because of a lack of options. Most interventions will fall under this category. Whilst we accept this list is not exhaustive, the following are capable of being offered in Brent:

- Addaction – This is a specialist alcohol and drug service delivered to gang involved or affected young people. They engage in one-to-one goal setting, counselling, rehabilitation and gang mediation. They also encourage healthy lifestyle choices and help young people into education, employment or training.
- MAC UK's 'Mini MAC' – The programme combines a Youth outreach worker with a mental health practitioner to engage young people to promote mental health to vulnerable and at risk young people through music in schools and pupil referral units. Mini MAC is open to students of all ages with an interest in DJing, MCing, lyric writing, music production and music performance. It is a great way of improving self-esteem, confidence and creativity.
- Pathways to Progress' Endz United Gang Mediation – The programme offers a 12 week social and life management training programme for conflict mediation whereby gang members learn about their chosen lifestyle and how to resolve the underlying issues that lead them serious youth violence. At the end of the training, an exit strategy called an Ending Youth Violence Consultation is offered.
- GOALS UK – The GOALS programme consists of an intensive three, full-day workshop designed to prepare the young person for work and arm them with the skills to succeed in getting and retaining employment. After the workshop, support is offered for 4 weeks or until education, employment or training has been found.
- Safer London Foundation's Empower- This programme delivers intensive 1:1 support and targeted group work to young women and girls who are at risk of or already experiencing sexual violence, including those involved in gang related activity. The projects are based within co-located multi-agency gangs units and are delivered by highly experienced specialist Young Women's Workers who ensure the project is gendered and accessible to those most at risk. Also delivers group work with young men, workshops for parents and training for professionals.

Exit programmes will represent the last chance a gang member may have in leaving his or her lifestyle behind. The gang members being referred into such programmes will be those who represent a 'high risk' to the community or they and/or their family members are in imminent danger. If the gang member does not engage at this level, enforcement may be the only recourse. The following two programmes are already being delivered in Brent:

- St. Giles Trust's Project SOS – This programme is the first ex-offender led exit programme, whereby a case worker will engage a gang member either in a Young Offender's institution, Prison or in the community. Using their own experiences as credibility, the caseworker will engage and support the young person to exit their lifestyle and re-engage in a positive lifestyle. The caseworker also assists in helping them to access housing, employment or training.
- Safe & Secure – This programme is designed to help gang members and or family members to move away from an imminent danger that being in a gang has put them in.

The task group have also heard from representatives from other local authorities who developed partnership agreements with St. Giles Trust, MAC UK and Safer London Foundation to embed personnel within their partnerships. The task group believes such integrated programmes need to be evaluated to determine if Brent is a suitable place for such programmes in the future.

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