



Knife Crime

An inquiry into Knife Crime in Brent

**Interim Report
for consultation**

A Report of the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

3rd July 2019

Members of the Task Group

Councillor Sandra Kabir (Chair)

Councillor Robert Johnson;

Councillor Erica Gbajumo;

Councillor Tom Stephens;

Councillor Elliot Chappell;

Councillor Liz Dixon

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

In January 2019, Brent Council's Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee established a Knife Crime Task Group in order to gain a better understanding of knife crime in Brent, how interventions could reduce knife crime, and which interventions might work locally. In particular, the group was to look at partnership working arrangements and review what could be done to complement the wider public health approach. The ultimate goal was to make recommendations that would contribute towards a reduced rate of knife crime, and mitigate negative impacts on Brent residents.

Since its inception on 23 January, the Knife Crime Task Group has held meetings and evidence-gathering sessions with an extensive range of internal and external partners. This work has been supplemented by a considerable amount of desktop research, interviews, surveys and visits to community-based projects. The Task Group has convened regularly for feedback sessions, to share their findings.

Members of the Scrutiny Task Group

The members of the Knife Crime Scrutiny Task Group were:

Councillor Sandra Kabir (Chair)
Councillor Robert Johnson
Councillor Erica Gbajumo
Councillor Tom Stephens
Councillor Elliot Chappell
Councillor Liz Dixon

Witnesses to the Inquiry

Those providing oral and written evidence to the group have included a wide range of stakeholders and expert witnesses, including Councillor Tom Miller, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Councillor Mili Patel, Cabinet Member for Early Intervention and Children Services, the Metropolitan Police Force, the Violence Reduction Unit/GLA, London Community Rehabilitation Centre (CRC), the NHS, local schools and voluntary organisations.

For a full list of witnesses see Appendix A – List of Witnesses.

The Task Group fully supports the public health approach focused on prevention and partnership working. A public health approach is a premise of this report and the Task Group noted that this approach is already accepted by the Local Authority and partners. Whilst it is clear there are no easy or short-term solutions, the Task Group's investigations have revealed some potential avenues for improved partnership working which it believes could yield very positive results.

The Task Group believes that it is essential that resources are focused and targeted on young people and communities most at risk as far as possible, realising that the underlying issues are both complex and huge and that resources are finite and

inadequate to the problems at hand. Making use of evidence based practice, both from local feedback and from the literature is a vital component of policy formation.

The Task Group believes that a multiagency strategic safeguarding approach is essential to prevention, recognising that the young people involved in violent crime are both vulnerable and in need of support from a variety of agencies, as well as communities and families in order to prevent falling into harm and harming others.

This is therefore recognized as an issue that requires a partnership with a range of local, as well as regional and national agencies. Locally schools have a pivotal role to play, as do local health services, working in partnership with Brent Council, the Metropolitan police and the voluntary sector.

The draft recommendations and key findings are herein summarised in this interim report for the purpose of wider consultation before a final report is submitted in September 2019 and the Chair of the Scrutiny Task Group would welcome any comments at this stage which may help to inform and join up the public health partnership approach being advocated here.

Summary of Recommendations

Multiagency Strategic Safeguarding Approach

Recommendation 1

That a new multi-agency contextual safeguarding strategic approach be taken to knife crime that focuses on the wider context of young people at risk of being drawn into violent crime: the school, the environment, neighbourhoods; as well as family contexts.

Recommendation 2

That the Brent Knife Crime Action Plan and the Brent Knife Crime and Serious Violence plans should be refreshed to join up actions and strategies across early health, family solutions and other CYP services with community safety to derive one action plan going forward.

Recommendation 3

That the safeguarding approach be taken to knife crime to overcome barriers in information sharing and collaboration between agencies working on knife crime.

Recommendation 4

That the Council invest in further youth diversionary projects aimed at preventing young people identified from the research literature and evidence as being at risk of being drawn into violence and knife crime, set up with measureable evaluation outcomes.

Recommendation 5

That a graphic and hard hitting media project involving ex-offenders should be funded to deter people from knife crime and its impact on individuals, families, neighbours and friends.

Working with Partners

Recommendation 6

That Brent Council convene a conference on weapons-based crime, to be held during the 2019-2020 municipal year, to discuss and launch a whole-systems multi agency approach and attract new and additional funding.

Recommendation 7

That the Met Police establish a single point of contact specifically prioritising knife crime, similar to the Brent Front Door facility, to be available 24/7 to provide wrap around support.

Recommendation 8

That Brent NHS CCG work with statutory partners, including Brent Council, for more provision of services at the 'teachable moment' such as advice and sign posting, at hospital A&E Departments, similar to Red Thread.

Working with Schools

Recommendation 9

That Brent Council support and encourage schools and other community organisations to make their facilities available for youth-focused activities after school hours and during holidays to keep young people engaged in positive activities and diverted from crime.

Recommendation 10

That Brent Council work with Brent primary and high schools, the Brent School Partnership (BSP) and the Safer Brent Partnership, to develop and implement a Schools Safety Strategy/Charter and an improved exclusions scheme.

Working with Voluntary, Community and Religious Organisations

Recommendation 11

That Brent Council facilitate the voluntary and community sectors and religious organisations to work more collaboratively to prevent knife crime and raise funds for projects and training.

Housing

Recommendation 12

That Brent Council make representations to the Government to put guidance in place on the handling of housing needs cases for those at risk of violence and reconsider the threshold at which someone is deemed to be at sufficient risk, to get re-housing support.

Knife crime and County Lines

Recommendation 13

That Brent Council make representations to the Government that the county lines programme is running at full capacity with an increasing unmet need. It is funded by

MOPAC and receives no funding from the Home Office. More intensive, longer-term funding needs to be provided.

Recommendation 14

The Council further explore bids for funding for the LA and partners to external organisations (including the Early Intervention Youth Foundation) to fund projects to tackle the risks associated with young people becoming involved in crime.

1. Multiagency Strategic Safeguarding Approach

- 1.1. In evidence the Task Group heard about the importance of young people's contextual life circumstances as a precursor to being drawn into violence. The recommendations of the contextual safeguarding Task Group was also taken into consideration. In particular, an awareness of this that goes beyond the direct family and also considers locality, communities, social networks, schools etc. as part of a more strategic approach to safeguarding young people. This may involve an analysis of the young people who are most at risk of being drawn into violent crime and finding out what neighbourhoods they are from, what schools, the linkages with school absenteeism, vulnerable families and other known factors and then targeting specific resources around those risks.
- 1.2. For this reason, the Task Group has recommended that the Council and the Safer Brent Partnership employ a multi-agency contextual safeguarding strategic approach that focuses on the wider context of young people at risk of being drawn into violent crime, including, the social environment, neighbourhoods; the school as well as family contexts.

Recommendation 1

That a new multi-agency contextual safeguarding strategic approach be taken to knife crime that focuses on the wider context of young people at risk of being drawn into violent crime: the school, the environment, neighbourhoods; as well as family contexts.

- 1.3. Identifying groups and individuals who are most at risk of being involved in violent crime is important to focus limited resources on prevention. The Task Group heard in evidence that one of the most effective ways of making sure those groups and individuals can stay away from violence is by direct engagement in effective and constructive alternatives.
- 1.4. It is also essential that the actions and interventions of different agencies and departments are joined up and work coherently together, including the strategies across early health, family solutions and other CYP services with community safety that we have reviewed during the Task Group inquiry.

Recommendation 2

That the Brent Knife Crime Action Plan and the Brent Knife Crime and Serious Violence plans should be refreshed to join up actions and strategies across early health, family solutions and other CYP services with community safety to derive one action plan going forward.

- 1.5. The Task Group heard in evidence that not enough is being done to share information between stakeholders, because of safeguarding concerns. For example, if a 16-year-old comes into hospital having been stabbed people may assume data protection rules apply, but the law is very clear on this; 'necessary and proportionate' personal information can be shared with other organisations for legal purposes and to protect children and adults at risk. To make this clear among partners and professionals in different organisations the Task Group is recommending that safeguarding information protocols are clearly applied to knife crime to overcome any barriers in information sharing and collaboration between agencies.

Recommendation 3

That the safeguarding approach be taken to knife crime to overcome barriers in information sharing and collaboration between agencies working on knife crime.

- 1.6. Getting the message across to young people who may be naively drawn into youth violence is also an important part of the prevention approach. As part of this the Task Group are recommending a hard hitting media campaign to be jointly promoted with partner agencies.
- 1.7. The Task Group believes that prevention programmes are essential to tackling this problem, especially as once young people are already drawn into a life of violence then irreparable harm has already been done and solving issues are actually more intensive and expensive than the preventative work at an earlier stage in young people's lives. However, traditionally crime and social services have been reactive and predictive programmes rely upon a complex set of evidence and assumptions for problems that may yet to have arisen and in a context of funding shortages in local government, policing and education, large scale funding can be difficult to justify unless there is clear and demonstrable evidence and political will.
- 1.8. The Task Group is recommending that the Council invest in further youth diversionary projects aimed at preventing young people and communities risk of being drawn into violence and knife crime and making sure that such programmes are set up in a way that shows measureable evaluation outcomes to inform future funding programmes and targeting resources effectively.

Recommendation 4

That the Council invest in further youth diversionary projects aimed at preventing young people identified from the research literature and evidence as being at risk of being drawn into violence and knife crime, set up with measureable evaluation outcomes.

- 1.9. The Task Group has heard, by way of example, that £415k has been identified from the changes in the Met Patrol Plus, which the Task Group suggests should be re-deployed in youth crime prevention programmes.

Recommendation 5

That a graphic and hard hitting media project involving ex-offenders should be funded to deter people from knife crime and its impact on individuals, families, neighbours and friends.

2. Working with Partners

- 2.1. Tackling and preventing knife crime involves different agencies working together, as well as local communities, schools, and families. The Task Group has reviewed these arrangements and has made a series of recommendations to suggest further enhancements in the partnerships' approach.
- 2.2. It is suggested that a significant step in taking the strategy forward is a conference of all the partners and the Task Group has considered and discussed this in evidence and has recommended that that Brent Council convene a conference on weapons-based crime to discuss the multi-agency approach and raise awareness of the seriousness of this issue, encourage collaborative working and attract funding for this work.

Recommendation 6

That Brent Council convene a conference on weapons-based crime, to be held during the 2019-2020 municipal year, to discuss and launch a whole-systems multi agency approach and attract new and additional funding.

- 2.3. The Task Group has also recommended further enhancements to join up how services work together, including that the Met Police establish a single point of contact specifically for knife crime, and provision of services to young people at the 'teachable moment' such as advice and sign posting, at hospital A&E etc.

Recommendation 7

That the Met Police establish a single point of contact specifically prioritising knife crime, similar to the Brent Front Door facility, to be available 24/7 to provide wrap around support.

Recommendation 8

That Brent NHS CCG work with statutory partners, including Brent Council, for more provision of services at the 'teachable moment' such as advice and sign posting, at hospital A&E Departments, similar to Red Thread.

Working with Schools

- 2.4. Schools often find themselves at the front line of dealing with youth violence and they have a pivotal role both in social education and prevention as well as too often having to combat the problem of knives in and around school.
- 2.5. Young people can sometimes be at risk of being drawn into antisocial behaviour in the time between the end of school and going home, a period where there is a lack of supervision and guidance. After school activities can play an important role in providing activities and interests that can divert young people away from dangerous activities.
- 2.6. The Task Group has added a series of recommendations to suggest enhancements to working with schools and other community organisations on knife crime

prevention, including for youth-focused activities after school hours and during holidays, a Schools Safety Strategy/Charter and an improved exclusions scheme

Recommendation 9

That Brent Council support and encourage schools and other community organisations to make their facilities available for youth-focused activities after school hours and during holidays to keep young people engaged in positive activities and diverted from crime.

Recommendation 10

That Brent Council work with Brent primary and high schools, the Brent School Partnership (BSP) and the Safer Brent Partnership, to develop and implement a Schools Safety Strategy/Charter and an improved exclusions scheme.

- 2.7. Evidence heard by the Task Group revealed that there is little in the way of inter-school networking and communication in Brent on issues relating to knife crime. Some institutions have introduced a range of measures to combat knife crime – such as archways, knife wands and so on – whereas others have done nothing at all. In cases where a school has no measures in place, this is usually due to a perception that their institution does not have a knife problem, or it is due to the stigma associated with knife crime and fears that any anti-knife measures will negatively impact on the school (e.g. through a reduction in the number of places applied for). Getting all schools across the borough actively involved in a Schools Safety Charter represents a significant challenge.
- 2.8. The Task Group heard from several sources about how a high proportion of knife crime occurs in the after-school hours i.e. between 4 and 7pm – the period between school and home is where young people are most vulnerable. Provision of a range of after-school activities would have a positive effect, supporting young people and keeping them engaged. There are issues to be explored here – could schools remain open longer, e.g. evenings and weekends? Could youth workers be deployed at schools to proactively engage with those who are ‘at risk’ of being perpetrators and victims.
- 2.9. The Task Group believes that school exclusions are not the appropriate means of dealing with knife crime issues; in fact they are contrary to a public health approach. Interventions and referrals must be preferable. There should be no exclusion of any young person who is being engaged by an organisation to address issues.

Working with the Health Sector

- 2.10. The Task Group has also considered possible ways to enhance working in the health sector. This has included the suggestion of a single point of contact, similar to the Brent Front Door facility, be available twenty-four hours a day by the Met specifically for knife crime to provide wrap around support.
- 2.11. The health service needs access to a single point of contact to refer people to get one-on-one support. At present there is a lack of clarity on who can be contacted for expert support.

2.12. The Task Group heard that GPs often have no professional contact whatsoever with schools in Brent. This seems to be a missed opportunity for information sharing. GPs could for instance be kept informed of school exclusions as and when they occur, so that they are able to better support the families of those affected. Individuals involved in county lines crime are registered with GPs, but it was not clear if this information is shared by professionals. If we are taking a public health approach, GPs should be more involved.

Working with Voluntary, Community and Religious Organisations

2.13. The Task Group has heard from a wide range of community organisations in evidence and has noted the good work being undertaken in the community by voluntary and religious organisations. The Task Group felt that more could be done to make full use of the community work being done by this sector, especially as this reaches into communities and aids prevention at a grass roots level. Enhanced communication and collaboration between organisations working on knife crime would minimise duplication, have greater impact on reducing violence and enable more effective fund raising.

Recommendation 11

That Brent Council facilitate the voluntary and community sectors and religious organisations to work more collaboratively to prevent knife crime and raise funds for projects and training.

2.14. All of the religious institutions contacted by the Task Group showed concern for the safety of their members and those in the wider community. Some of these (predominantly the Christian faith-based institutions) are working together to launch a 'Street Pastors' initiative – with a focus on young people not in employment education or training (NEET). The aim is to provide a friendly ear to them and direct them towards sources of help.

2.15. The Task Group suggests that street pastors are supported to find and implement 'safe spaces' which can be used as an appropriate place to meet with vulnerable people and to receive safeguarding training.

Housing

Recommendation 12

That Brent Council make representations to the Government to put guidance in place on the handling of housing needs cases for those at risk of violence and reconsider the threshold at which someone is deemed to be at sufficient risk, to get re-housing support.

2.16. The Task Group believes that housing circumstances must be recognised as a key part of the public health approach, as the housing setting in which people are placed can make them more likely to both commit and be a victim of crime.

- 2.17. The Task Group has heard of considerable issues with identifying whether someone is at 'imminent risk', and of meeting the requirements to show the level of risk. This needs to be reviewed.
- 2.18. The Task Group asks that the Cabinet Member for Housing writes to the Government, urging them to consider putting such Guidance in place . In the absence of such a move, Brent Council should develop its own set of guidance in this area.

Knife Crime and County Lines

- 2.19. The Task Group heard of a link between knife crime and criminal exploitation often known as "county lines". Criminal exploitation known as 'county lines' is when gangs and organised crime networks groom and exploit children and young people to sell drugs. Young people are made to travel across counties and use dedicated mobile phone 'lines' to supply drugs.
- 2.20. Criminals groom children and young people into trafficking their drugs for them with promises of money, friendship and status; once they've been drawn in, children and young people are controlled using threats and violence leaving them living in fear and trapped in criminal exploitation and violence.
- 2.21. Tackling county lines, and the supply gangs responsible for high levels of violence, exploitation and abuse of vulnerable adults and children, is a priority for the police locally and nationally and law enforcement collectively has been stepping up its response, working to identify and take effective action in areas of the country with the most significant problems. However, the Task Group has heard that the county lines programme is running at full capacity with an increasing unmet need and so is recommending that Brent Council make representations to the Government that the county lines programme needs further longer-term funding needs.

Recommendation 13

That Brent Council make representations to the Government that the county lines programme is running at full capacity with an increasing unmet need. It is funded by MOPAC and receives no funding from the Home Office. More intensive, longer-term funding needs to be provided.

- 2.22. The Task Group are also recommending that the Council and partners step up work on funding bids to the Home Office and other external agencies, as well as MOPAC to fund targeted prevention programmes.

Recommendation 14

The Council further explore bids for funding for the LA and partners to external organisations (including the Early Intervention Youth Foundation) to fund projects to tackle the risks associated with young people becoming involved in crime.

APPENDIX A – List of Witnesses

The Task Group would like to thank the following members of staff who contributed to the report, took part in the themed discussion or advised it on policy:

1. Dr. Ethic Kong, GP and ex Chair of CCG Brent.
2. Dr. M C Patel, Chair CCG, Brent.
3. Oti Roberts, Hanson Roberts Foundation
4. Dominic Smallwood, PLIAS.
5. Lincoln Beswick, ex Councillor and prominent in the West Indian community.
6. Lorraine Knight, London CRC.
7. Robert Banton DJ Beat FM Radio
8. Ace Ruele, Ex offender
9. Donald Palmer, Reach Society
10. Dr. Pastor Noel
11. Mrs Siam Noel, Counsellor
12. Jasmine Dale, Brent XFactor.
13. Angela Herbert, Co-founder VCP and Chair BIAG
14. Tahmid Islam, London Citizens
15. Cllr. Luke Patterson, Assistant Head Teacher.
16. Cllr. Tom Miller, Cabinet Member for Community Safety.
17. Sandra White, Young Brent Foundation.
18. Steve Bending, VRU, GLA.
19. Cllr. Harbi Farah, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services and Chair HWB.
20. Cllr. Mili Patel, Cabinet Member for Early Intervention and Children Services.
21. United Borders., Brunel Johnson?
22. Pastor Yinka, Street Pastors and Member BIAG.
23. Cllr. Ernest Ezeajughi, Mayor with interest in knife crime.
24. Karina Wane, Head of Community Safety.
25. Desmond Edward, Safer London.
26. Esther Sample, Pan London Housing Reciprocal Programme.
27. Ark Academy.
28. Newman College, Danny.
29. Onside Youth Zones, Jamie Masroff.
30. St. Giles, David Evans.
31. Troy Francis, Brent Emergency Housing Unit
32. Patricia Wharton, Drop the Blade.
33. Cllr. Margaret McLennan, Deputy Leader.
34. Tara Bentham, Manager Brent Communications Unit.
35. Roy Croasdaile, CNWL.
36. Lauren Fraser, Consultant A&E, NPH.
37. Brent Youth Parliament.
38. CI Adrian Needley, Met Police Brent
39. Carolyn Downs, Chief Executive, Brent.
40. Cllr. Tariq Dar, Pakistan Welfare Centre and Mosque.
41. Melanie Smith, Director Public Health Brent.
42. Cllr. Muhammed Butt – the Leader of Brent Council.

The London Borough of Brent

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