



## **Knife Crime**

*An inquiry into knife crime in Brent*

*A report of the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee*

**September 2019**

**Knife Crime Task Group – Membership**

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The Knife Crime Task Group was set up by Brent Council's Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee on 23 January 2019.

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## Chair's Foreword



This is not a time for complacency or platitudes. Too many lives have been lost or blighted by knife crime. Both offenders and victims are becoming younger and younger. Individuals, families and whole communities are facing the risks and consequences of violent crime.

I welcomed the news that a task group on knife crime was going to be set up, to examine the problem in detail. Brent Council is committed to tackling knife crime and working in partnership, both internally and externally, to understand the problem and enable a targeted response. The goal for us was to put forward a series of recommendations which would add something significant towards the fight against knife crime, and the group has worked very hard from the beginning to achieve this.

The task group has made recommendations for the council and its partners, all of whom have a moral, legal and statutory obligation to make resources available and to take impactful action to reduce knife crime.

This report must be the spur for further urgent action to be taken by the council and its partners to reduce, if not end, the scourge of knife crime in Brent.

I would like to thank the many individuals and organisations that have contributed to the work of the task group and formation of the recommendations. This report would not have been possible without their time, experience and insight. This collaboration is very much in the spirit of what we are trying to achieve going forward – knife crime is not a problem for organisations to tackle on their own; real progress will come through working together.

The causes of knife crime are multi-faceted and we know that finding a solution will be far from easy. However, if this report could contribute towards saving the life of only one person, then we can consider this work a success.

**Councillor Sandra Kabir, Chair**

## Methodology

Task group members held a series of meetings and evidence-gathering sessions with a wide range of internal and external partners. This included meetings with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), the Violence Reduction Unit/ Greater London Authority (VRU/GLA), London Community Rehabilitation Centre (CRC), the NHS, local schools and voluntary organisations. This work was supplemented by desktop research, interviews, surveys and visits to community-based projects. The task group convened regularly for feedback sessions, to share their findings.

The group's recommendations were drafted and sent to partners for review. Following this, the final recommendations were determined. These were developed in accordance with the existing legislation for local authority scrutiny.

The task group notes that an external body or local authority executive is not compelled to act on a recommendation; however, an executive must respond within two months, and NHS organisations are expected to give a meaningful response within 28 days of the recommendations being agreed by a scrutiny committee.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

A multi-agency, contextual safeguarding approach must be taken by the council to address knife crime, and to overcome barriers in information sharing and collaboration between agencies.

### Recommendation 2

The Brent Knife Crime Action Plan and the Brent Knife Crime and Serious Violence action plan should be refreshed to join up actions and strategies across early health, family solutions and other children and young people's services with community protection to derive one action plan going forward.

### Recommendation 3

The council to support and encourage community projects that aim to prevent 'at risk' young people from being drawn into knife crime, and are set up with measureable evaluation outcomes.

### Recommendation 4

A graphic and hard-hitting media project be funded, which involves ex-offenders, role models and victims and focuses on knife crime's impact on individuals, families and communities.

### Recommendation 5

The MPS must improve relations with local communities. This may be achieved by providing a more visible presence in neighbourhoods and adopting a more empathetic method of stop and search.

**Recommendation 6**

Brent CCG to work with statutory partners (including the council) to enable the provision of more services at hospital A&E departments at the 'teachable moment', such as RedThread. Stakeholders in primary and tertiary care should be educated in how to approach knife crime issues.

**Recommendation 7**

The council to 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 deterred from crime.

**Recommendation 8**

The council to work with Brent primary and secondary schools, the Brent School Partnership (BSP) and the Safer Brent Partnership, to develop and implement a Schools Safety Charter.

**Recommendation 9**

The council must enhance the way it works with Brent youth offending services, London CRC and the National Probation Service in order to support offenders who can be rehabilitated, and continue to manage and assess risk.

**Recommendation 10**

The council to facilitate more collaborative working between the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and religious organisations, to raise funds for projects and training to prevent knife crime.

**Recommendation 11**

The council to make representations to Government to put guidance in place on the handling of housing needs cases for those at risk of violence (through gangs/ county lines) and reconsider the threshold at which someone who is deemed to be at sufficient risk gets re-housing support.

**Recommendation 12**

The council to make representations to the GLA/ Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime/ Violence Reduction Unit advising that the county lines programme is running at full capacity with an increasing unmet need. More intensive, longer-term funding needs to be provided.

**Recommendation 13**

The council to further explore bids for external funding for innovative council and CVS projects, to tackle the risks associated with young people becoming involved in crime.

## Chapter 1: Knife Crime

### Background

1. It was acknowledged by the task group that it is not only knife crime which blights communities. There are other, equally serious forms of weapons-based crime – such as gun crime and the use of corrosive substances – which are prevalent in Brent. However, knife crime is having a unique, considerable impact: Approximately 37 per cent of homicides over the last decade involved the use of a knife or other sharp instrument, compared to (amongst men), 8 per cent involving firearms and another 8 per cent using blunt instruments (ONS, 2018).
2. Whilst the task group's findings may be applicable across other forms of weapons-based crime, knife crime was the group's focus. 'Knife crime' is used as a collective term throughout this report and may refer to a number of different offences; for example, knife possession. As defined by the London Knife Crime Strategy, knife crime is "Any offence which satisfies both of the following criteria:
  - Is classified as an offence of homicide, attempted murder, assault with intent to cause harm, assault with injury, threats to kill, sexual offences and robbery
  - Where a knife or sharp instrument has been used to injure, used as a threat, or the victim was convinced a knife was present during the offence."
3. Whilst the problem of knife crime in the capital is nothing new, it is generally accepted that the current situation is more serious than ever before. London is in the midst of an endemic cycle of violence, with rising murder and violent attack levels across the city. There are genuine concerns that for many young people, violent crime and possession of a knife are now a way of life.
4. In England and Wales, knife crime has been steadily on the rise since 2014. There were 43,516 knife crime offences in the 12 months ending March 2019. This is an 80% increase from the low point in the year ending March 2014 – when there were 23,945 offences – and is the highest number since comparable data was compiled. (BBC News; Figures exclude Greater Manchester).
5. The year ending March 2019 saw 22,041 knife and offensive weapon offences formally dealt with by the CJS. This was a 34% increase since the year ending March 2015, and the highest number since March 2010.

Knife and offensive weapon sentencing statistics, England and Wales – Year ending March 2019 (Ministry of Justice, 2019)

## The Pan-London picture

Figure 1: Number of knife offences across London (Met Police Data, accessed Nov 2018)

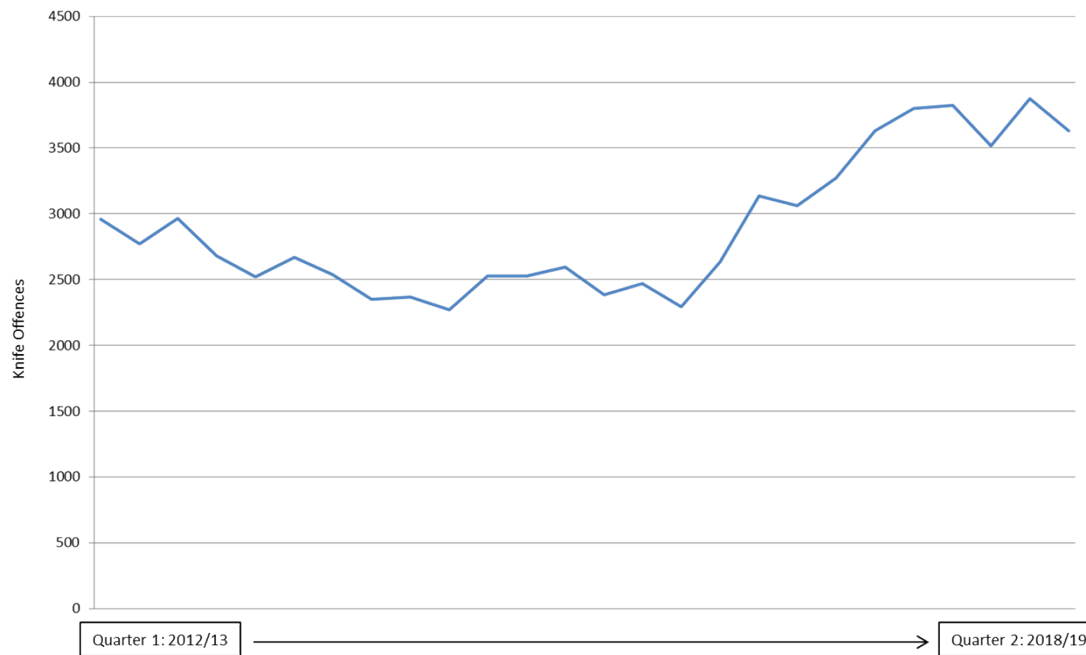
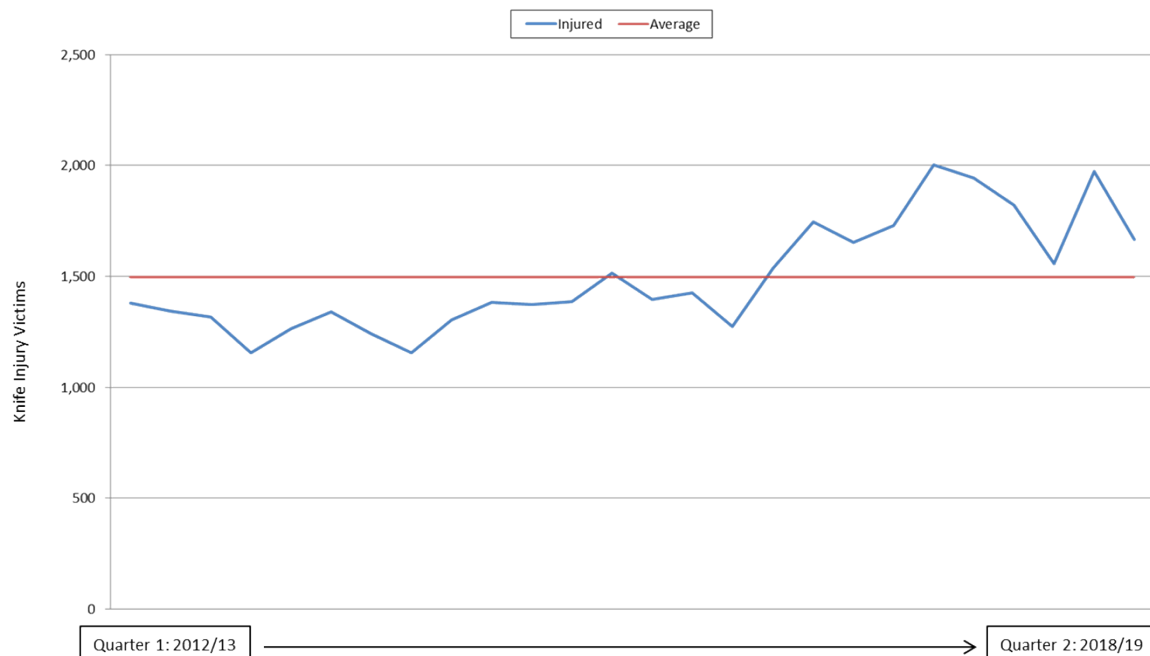


Figure 2: Number of London knife injury victims – non-fatal (Met Police Data, accessed Nov 2018)



6. In the period November 2017 to October 2018, the highest number of knife crime offences in London was recorded in Southwark. This was also the borough with the highest numbers of victims injured as a result of knife crime,



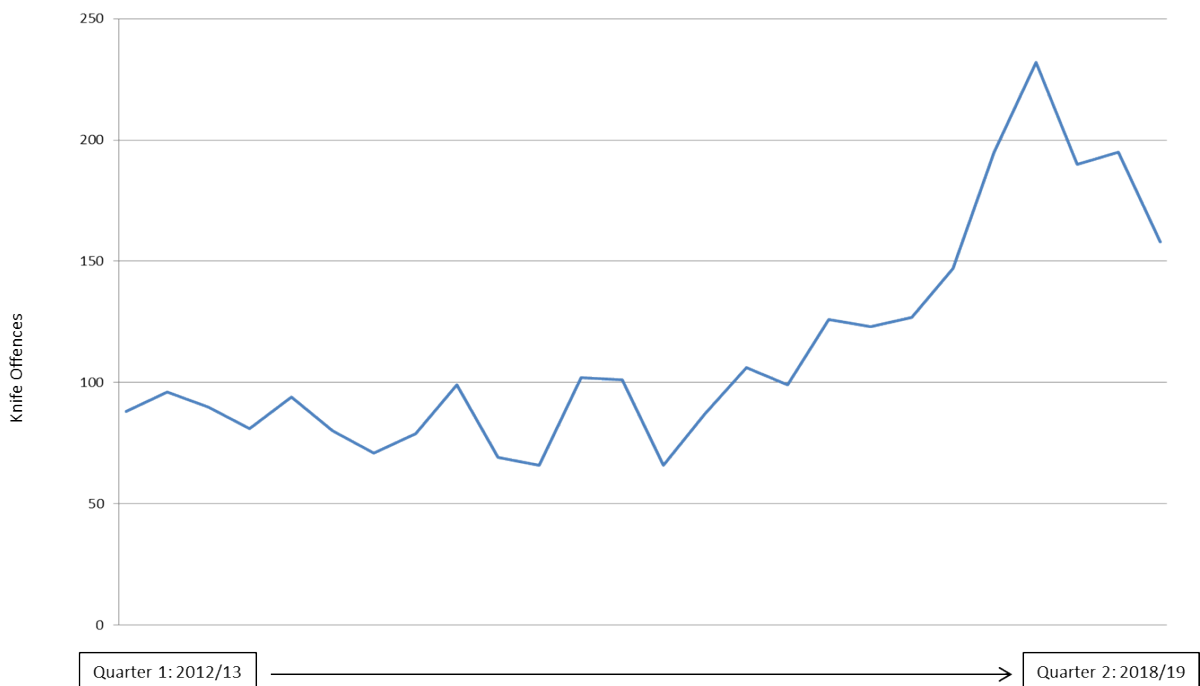
and knife-related murders. The total number of offences involving knife crime increased by 4% in this period compared with the previous period.

7. The London Crime Poll (2018) focused on a sample of 1,005 Londoners aged 18-plus, and was undertaken on behalf of the think-tank The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ). It is referenced in their report 'It Can Be Stopped: A proven blueprint to stop violence and tackle gang and related offending in London and beyond'. The number of victims of serious youth violence in London has grown by more than 50 per cent since 2012, with more than 8,150 victims of serious youth violence in 2017. This means that almost 680 young people each month and 2 young people each day become victims of serious youth violence (CSJ, 2018).
8. In London, nearly half of homicide victims killed with a gun or knife are aged 15 to 24 years old, despite this age group only accounting for twelve per cent of London's population. The harsh reality is that young Londoners aged 15 to 24 are more than six times as likely to be fatally stabbed or killed than other Londoners (CSJ, 2018).
9. 3 in 4 Londoners believe the streets of London have become less safe in the last few years. A majority of Londoners (52 per cent) state "gangs and serious youth violence negatively affects people like me" with almost as many (46 per cent) report a "no-go" area near where they live: "there are some areas near where I live that I cannot safely go to or travel through" (CSJ 2018).
10. The consequences of knife crime can reach beyond the immediate victims, deeply affecting family, friends and communities. This is not something which only a small minority have to contend with – more than one in 10 Londoners say they know someone who has been killed in the capital with a knife or gun in the last year. The proportion increases to more than one in five over the last two years, one in four over the last three years, and almost one in three Londoners at any time in the past.
11. Knife-related fatalities are occurring in a growing number of distinct neighbourhoods. This increased geographic spread is likely to drive up the number and proportion of individuals aware of a murder in their local area or where they may even know the victim. It will also further drive up fear of crime.
12. Much of the knife crime experienced in the capital is related to gangs, and the task group considered some of the factors which can lead to gang membership. The MPS defines a 'gang' as: "A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who: See themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group and engage in a range of criminal activity and violence. Gangs may also have some or all of the following features:
  - identify with or lay claim over territory
  - have some form of identifying structural feature
  - are in conflict with other, similar, gangs."

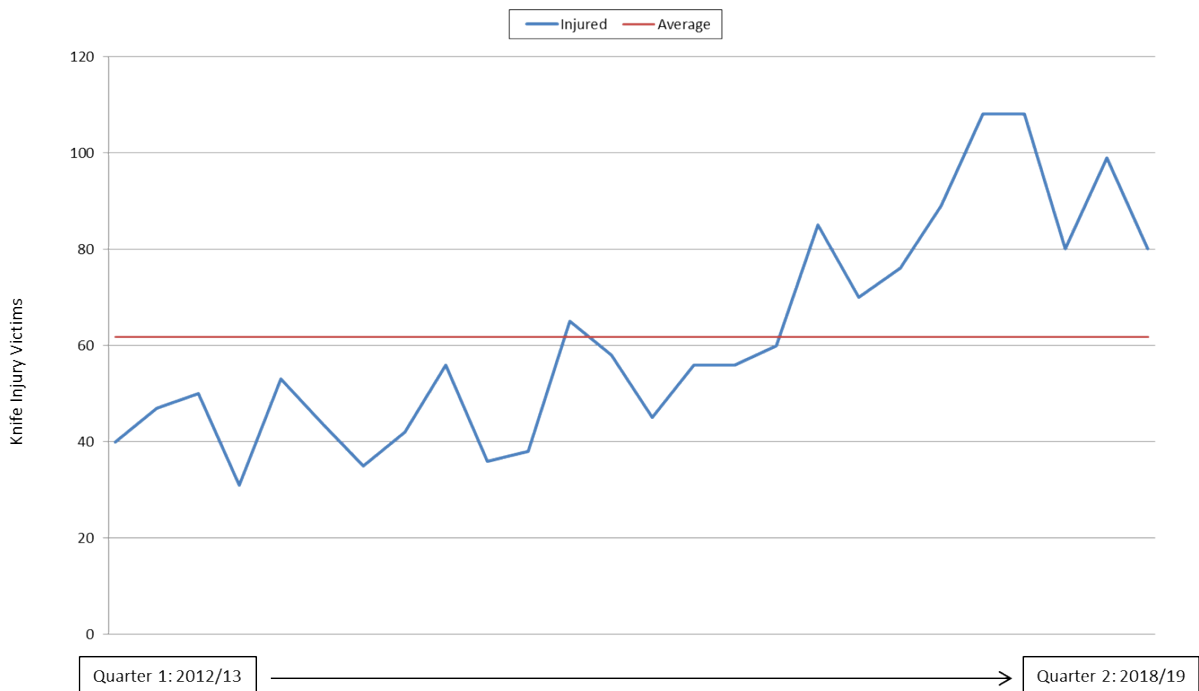
13. Young vulnerable people are particularly susceptible to gang exploitation. Gangs have begun to recruit potential members from residential children’s homes. Also, research from MOPAC shows a link between gang involvement and young people missing from their homes.
14. Reducing gang activity remains a high priority. But whilst gangs are undoubtedly responsible for a significant amount of serious violence, there is more to knife crime than gang activity. For instance, the fear of being attacked leads to young people – who are not necessarily in a gang – carrying knives for protection. There is also a connection between knife crime and drug dependency. Perpetrators may have been victims in their own right, or have been bullied into committing an offence. It is seldom clear cut.

### The Brent Picture

Figure 3: Number of knife offences across Brent (Met Police Data, accessed Nov 2018)



Over page: Figure 4: Number of Brent knife injury victims – non-fatal (Met Police Data, accessed Nov 2018)



15. Between 2017 and 2018, Brent had 755 knife crime offences. This was the third highest level of knife crime amongst the London boroughs, and an 18% increase on recorded offences from the previous period. There were 355 injured victims of knife crime, the second highest of the boroughs. Knife-related murders reduced from five in 16/17 to one in 17/18 – this was below the London average.

Metropolitan Police, November 2018 (last 12 months – 01/11/2017 to 31/10/2018, previous 12 months 01/11/2016 to 31/10/2017)

16. More recent police figures have shown that, despite a number of high-profile incidents, knife offences are actually falling in Brent. Whilst this is encouraging, it is important to remember that the chart above – and others like it – tend to show knife crime occurrences as a succession of peaks and troughs.

#### Knife crime and the borough plan

17. The Resident Attitudes Survey 2018 was a face-to-face survey of over 2,000 Brent residents, asking for their views on a range of topics such as their neighbourhood and the council. “A safe area, free from crime and bad behaviour” was overwhelmingly top in a list of ‘What are the things that you most value locally?’ and ‘What are the things you would most want to see money spent on?’ in the survey. Crime levels and gangs are the main reasons why Brent residents feel unsafe in their local area alone after dark. Reflecting this, the reduction of violent crime, including gang and knife crime, is a key element of Brent’s Borough Plan 2019-2023 – to ensure a borough where people feel safe, secure, happy and healthy. A range of measures are in place to help deliver on this outcome.

## Calculating the cost of knife crime

18. The costs of knife crime in London are huge and extend beyond the present into the future. The reality is that even those who survive such attacks can be left with life-threatening and life-changing physical and mental injuries. The nature of the violence and victimisation can contribute to post-traumatic stress and related mental ill-health.

The Guardian. 2018. A surgeon's view on London violence. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/apr/05/a-surgeons-view-on-london-violence-weve-an-obligation-to-do-something](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/apr/05/a-surgeons-view-on-london-violence-weve-an-obligation-to-do-something) Accessed March 2019.

19. In terms of monetary cost, calculating the single agency cost of knife crime is complicated – many different agencies are involved in preventing and responding to those affected. The Trauma Audit Research Network (TARN) at the University of Manchester has done some analysis in this area and found an average cost to the NHS of £7,196 per victim.
20. There were 385 knife injuries and three fatalities recorded in Brent in 2017/18. This puts the estimated cost of Brent knife crime to NHS England at £2,792,048 in 17/18. Taking into account inflation costs and general underreporting of offences it is clear that knife crime is a significant cost to the health economy as well as other public sector bodies.

## **A public health approach to knife crime**

21. From its inception, the task group advocated the public health approach to knife crime, as per the recommendation of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) committee.
22. The public health approach is something which has received a lot of media attention in recent times. It is open to interpretation and indeed has been defined a number of ways. Essentially, it involves **treating violence as a preventable public health issue, using data and analysis to identify causes and focusing on prevention through multi-agency systemic approaches**. We mean to look at violence as a preventable consequence of a range of factors and experiences – such as early-life, social and community experiences. The public health approach is concerned with long-term as well as short-term effects, and draws upon many disciplines including medicine, epidemiology, sociology, criminology and psychology.
23. As determined by Cure Violence – a major proponent of the public health model – violence displays all the characteristics of an epidemic disease: Clustering, Spread, and Transmission (Cure Violence, 2018). For example, geographical data mapping has revealed clear crime hotspots. Furthermore, mental trauma from exposure to violence has been scientifically shown to increase a person's risk of adopting violent behavior themselves, meaning violent behavior transmits and spreads based on exposure – just like an epidemic.

24. The public health approach has been proven to be successful in areas where it has been deployed to tackle the causes of violence. A Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) was set up by Strathclyde police in 2005 in an attempt to tackle a problem that had seen Glasgow dubbed 'the murder capital of Europe'. The unit adopted a public health approach, believing violence to be preventable and treating it as curable infection. The VRU teamed up with agencies in the fields of health, education and social work to create long-term attitudinal change rather than a quick fix. The VRU also focused on enforcement, seeking to contain and manage individuals who carry weapons and are involved in violent behaviour.
25. To tackle gang crime, the unit imported successful approaches from the USA such as the Boston approach, offering gang members an alternative to the violent lives they were living. The VRU also successfully lobbied for increases in maximum sentences for carrying knives.
26. Glasgow's VRU was a resounding success, as levels of violent offending and weapons possession fell drastically. It is now considered to be a national centre of expertise on violence.
27. In September 2018 the Mayor of London announced the set-up of a London VRU, to work to reduce violence through a public health approach. The VRU formally began in London in January 2019.
28. The public health approach emphasises collective action – cooperative efforts from health, education, social services, justice and policy are necessary to solve knife crime. Each sector has a vital role to play and collectively the approaches taken have the potential to bring about important reductions in violence. The public health approach focuses on a defined population, rather than individuals. Solutions must therefore involve cooperation with communities. TARN research director Dr Fiona Lecky said "Public health initiatives that aim to reduce the incidence and severity of penetrating trauma are likely to produce significant savings in acute trauma care costs."
29. The focus of the task group was therefore to review the council's partnership-working arrangements with a range of partners including the police, the NHS, CCG, probation services and the voluntary sector.

## **Chapter 2: Task Group Findings**

### Brent's approach

30. The council is already working very hard to minimise the impact of knife crime. Teams across the breadth of the council – community protection, children and young people, public health - are involved in a range of initiatives to tackle the problem. There is already a great deal of partnership working in place to prevent offending and re-offending.

31. In January 2019, Brent Council's Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee established a Knife Crime Task Group ("the task group"), in order to gain a better understanding of knife crime in Brent, how interventions could reduce it, and which interventions might work locally. In particular, the task 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.
32. The members of the task group were:
  - Councillor Sandra Kabir – Chair
  - Councillor Robert Johnson
  - Councillor Erica Gbajumo
  - Councillor Tom Stephens
  - Councillor Elliot Chappell
  - Councillor Liz Dixon
33. Those providing oral and written evidence to the group 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.
34. A full list of the participants in the work of the task group can be found at Appendix A of this report on page 27.
35. The task group advocated the public health approach to tackling knife crime as set out in the previous section of the report. This involves using data and analysis to identify causes and focusing on prevention through a multi-agency approach.
36. Work was undertaken in the knowledge that resources are finite and must be focused on the people and communities that are most at risk. Evidence-based practice was a vital component of this work. Those involved in knife crime are often vulnerable and in need of support from a variety of agencies.
37. Through the course of their work the task group heard evidence around some of the main drivers of knife crime: gangs, the drug market, school exclusions and domestic violence. The forces affecting these drivers are levels of deprivation, perceptions of exclusion, and mental health.
38. 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.
39. After careful consideration of the evidence received during the inquiry, the knife crime task group arrived at 13 recommendations, which it puts to Brent Cabinet and the Safer Brent Partnership to affect significant change.

## **Recommendation 1**

**A multi-agency, contextual safeguarding approach be taken by the council to address knife crime, and to overcome barriers in information sharing and collaboration between agencies.**

### Contextual safeguarding

40. The principle of contextual safeguarding stipulates that a safeguarding approach must go beyond the influence of the direct family and also consider an individual's locality, community and social networks. In terms of analysing young people who are at risk of being drawn into violent crime, it means looking at what neighbourhoods they are from, what schools, linkages with school absenteeism, vulnerable families and other known factors – and targeting specific resources around those risks. Through the course of their work, the task group heard about the importance of all of these contextual factors.
41. A separate Brent task group had convened in October 2018 to look in detail at the issue of contextual safeguarding. It made the following five recommendations:
- CS1:** To support bringing together representatives from Transport for London, bus companies, and employee representatives within schools, further education colleges, the council and statutory boards to address concerns about adolescents on the transportation and bus network.
- CS2:** To further support organisations working with young people to promote and develop extra-school activities, particularly in the summer months, for Brent's adolescent children.
- CS3:** Brent's approach to contextual safeguarding should specifically develop its work with further education colleges to help address risks faced by adolescent children in this context.
- CS4:** A future social media strategy should include how the local authority can work in partnership with external organisations to address areas of concern in adolescents using social media and being online, which are identified by Brent Council's approach to contextual safeguarding.
- CS5:** To develop a one-off public information campaign working with partner organisations and the community to support the development of contextual safeguarding in Brent.
42. The Knife Crime Task Group fully supports these five recommendations. It is clear that approaches to the knife crime problem must focus on the wider context of young people at risk of being drawn into violent crime – school, environment and neighbourhoods – as well as family contexts. It follows that this will be a multi-agency approach.
43. Partnership working takes on added importance when considered against council funding – core funding has fallen by 63% in real terms since 2010.
44. The task group heard from several partners that more could be done to share information between stakeholders. Brent CCG in particular cautioned that

Brent's partners are not properly sharing information and it is a missed opportunity. Ostensibly one of the barriers was seen to be data protection and the GDPR. An example given was where an under-18 attends hospital having been stabbed. Those dealing with the case may not refer the individual for further support due to concerns around data protection. 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. This must be made clear amongst all partners and professionals. The task group recommends that safeguarding information protocols are clearly applied to knife crime to overcome any barriers.

45. The group heard that GPs often have no professional contact with schools in Brent. This could be another missed opportunity for information sharing. The local GP is an integral part of community life and if, for example, a child was excluded from school, they should be informed. GPs have known some families their whole lives and discuss all areas of concern with them. GPs may be acutely aware if there are mental health issues within the family and can make the appropriate referral.

## **Recommendation 2**

**The Brent Knife Crime Action Plan and the Brent Knife Crime and Serious Violence action plan should be refreshed, to join up actions and strategies across early health, family solutions and other children and young peoples' services with community protection to derive one action plan going forward.**

46. It is essential that the actions and interventions of different agencies and departments are joined up to share resources and knowledge. Following publication of the Mayor of London's Knife Crime Strategy in 2017, every London Borough was mandated to produce a local knife crime strategy, to be led by the police and involve other partners. The MOPAC Knife Crime and Serious Violence Action Plan was developed to help all London local authorities combat the surge in knife crime, by providing a central set of clear action points. It was launched in September 2018 and was agreed by the Safer Brent Partnership. The plan is significant in scope and involves the council, the police, LFB, National Probation Service, London Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC), magistrates, the NHS, CCG and voluntary sector organisations.
47. The plan is split into six main themes:
- Governance
  - Targeting lawbreakers
  - Keeping deadly weapons off the streets
  - Protecting and educating young people
  - Standing with communities, neighbourhoods and families against knife crime
  - Supporting victims of knife crime
48. Brent's plan is one of the top-performing action plans in London. Things are working well, but there are still high levels of robbery with knives, for example, and one of the highest volumes of crime in London. The planned actions for



2018/19 all achieved 'green' RAG status. This is commendable but also may suggest that more stretching targets are needed. The plan was reviewed further in May 2019 with additional heightened targets set for 2019/20, and again received good feedback from MOPAC for being an example of best practice.

49. There is also a Gangs and Knife Crime Action Plan contained within the council's 2018-21 Community Safety Strategy. The objectives identified here are:
- i) identifying those affected by gangs or knife carriers and encouraging improved life choices through prevention and awareness, diversion or enforcement
  - ii) disrupting and dismantling criminal networks
  - iii) identifying, targeting and tackling violent crime linked to knives and/or gangs
  - iv) reducing serious youth violence
50. Over the past 18 months there has been a reduction in knife crime achieved in Brent. This action plan is currently being reviewed and new targets are being set, as per good practice for annual monitoring.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The council to support and encourage community projects that aim to prevent 'at risk' young people from being drawn into knife crime and are set up with measurable evaluation outcomes.**

51. As stipulated by the public health approach, prevention is paramount. Once young people are drawn into a life of violence, irreparable harm has been done. Assistance becomes more intensive and expensive than the preventative work at an earlier stage. However, traditionally crime and social services are more reactive. Identifying groups and individuals who are most at risk of being involved in violent crime is important, to focus limited resources on prevention.
52. Young people are often drawn into crime by their peers and older people who persuade them to make the wrong choices. Young people often look for respect and self-esteem in the wrong places. They may also often be promised a 'shortcut to success' i.e. told that they can make money and live a 'rock star' lifestyle by engaging in gang activities.
53. Being in a gang or group can bring perceived benefits to young people who feel disconnected or misunderstood, with no sense of security in their relationships with others. Gang membership can provide a sense of belonging – especially for those young people who feel least safe at home – and a promise of safety and security, even if that promise goes unfulfilled. Young people may finally have an adult male role model who takes an interest in them, stands by them and supports them.

54. The task group heard that one of the most effective methods of prevention is by direct engagement in effective and constructive alternatives. This isn't about providing supervision, but about engaging with young people to improve their lives. The task group made contact with an extensive number of projects, both local and nation-wide, which attempt to divert children who are at risk of being drawn into offending. The group also conducted several visits to see some of these first hand.
55. The United Borders project uses music as a 'pathway to engagement' and to enable young people to express themselves. United Borders travels across Brent in an old London bus, the upper deck of which has been converted into a music studio. The bus provides a safe space for young people to be creative and connect through music. The project has been credited with uniting formerly hostile members of rival gangs in Church Road and Stonebridge. When the project initially got started, the council gave United Borders a short-term contract and funding for its cross-border initiative. Subsequently, founder Justin Finlayson – himself an ex-gang member – has had to source private funding. He has urged that gang activity has clear links with both government cuts and expulsions.
56. Onside is a national charity which focuses on building a network of state-of-the-art youth zones, each providing young people with a safe environment and range of activities to get involved in seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. Youth zones are based in the areas where they can have the greatest impact. Their reports suggest that for every £1 spent on operating costs, £2.03 of social benefit is generated. There is currently no youth zone in Brent, though one was recently set-up in Barnet.
57. St Giles' Trust were commissioned to provide their Gangs Intervention Programme between 2017 and 2019 in Brent. The scheme looks to challenge and work with those involved in gangs to change their behaviour, while holding them to account to take responsibility for their actions. Individuals are encouraged to exit the gang lifestyle and stop carrying knives. Early intervention is provided to those identified as being on the periphery of gang offending. Educational programmes are offered to Brent schools to increase awareness of the consequences of joining a gang, and there is also a 'peer training' project offered to those who have successfully exited the gang lifestyle.
58. St Giles' caseworkers develop a support plan which is always agreed with the service user and is reviewed regularly. Caseworkers are reliant on referrals from local authority teams. There are two caseworkers in Brent, one of whom is a Brent resident – and this local knowledge is important. Caseworkers have advised that services users are tending to get younger, 16 rather than 18 years old. Kids from affluent backgrounds are being affected too, not just those from deprived areas.
59. The Young Brent Foundation (YBF) is committed to developing a diverse, vibrant youth voluntary sector in Brent. YBF was founded to bring together

small, local charities and community organisations that were faced with funding cuts and provide 'one voice' for them all.

60. There are still a significant number of small-scale organisations in Brent. Many of these will have similar aims, but be unaware of each other's existence. The council has a role to play, much like that of YBF, in bringing these organisations together.
61. The task group commends the work of all the community projects it made contact with. Whilst very different, the golden thread running through all of them is the desire to harness and nurture the creativity of young people.
62. The task group is keen to see all community projects thrive and deliver results for the people of Brent. However, the council is not able to support all voluntary organisations in the borough – there are simply too many of them. Programmes must therefore be evaluated to ensure that resources are provided to those that can have the greatest impact.
63. The task group is aware that £400k in savings has been identified from the changes to the Met Patrol Plus scheme. The group would suggest these funds could be re-deployed into youth community projects and crime prevention programmes.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**A graphic and hard-hitting media project be funded, which involves ex-offenders, role models and victims and focuses on knife crime's impact on individuals, families, and communities.**

64. It is important to get the message across to young people that violence, and knife crime in particular, can have devastating consequences. Even where knife injuries are not life-threatening they are often life-changing, leaving victims disabled or suffering from mental ill-health. A hard-hitting media campaign should be jointly promoted with partner agencies to drive forward this message.
65. The council's communications team have delivered a number of local campaigns and their experience in this regard will be invaluable. Past campaigns have included '#brentneedsyoualive' which was in response to a previous knife crime spike. This consisted of a press launch, a YouTube video, posters across the borough and video interviews with some of those affected by knife crime. The campaign attracted significant interest and had a wide reach.
66. According to MOPAC's Youth Voice Survey, young people have expressed a desire for more education about the consequences of knife crime. They stress this should include schools, the police, previous offenders and victims. (MOPAC, 2018).
67. It stands to reason that those with direct involvement in knife crime – victims, perpetrators, ex-offenders – are best placed to deliver meaningful teaching on

the subject. These people could become positive role models in this campaign.

68. The task group met with several ex-offenders who had spent considerable time in prison, had turned their lives around and were paying back to communities by being exemplary role models. The best example of a role model may well be the reformed offender, someone who has learned a valuable lesson and is able to talk to young people on their level.

### **Recommendation 5**

**The MPS must improve relations with local communities. This may be achieved by providing a more visible presence in neighbourhoods and adopting a more empathetic method of stop and search.**

69. The task group met with a Chief Inspector from Neighbourhood Policing in Brent. It was acknowledged that some excellent work is being undertaken, especially in the context of well-documented issues of lack of funding and shrinking police numbers. More offenders are receiving custodial sentences and these are increasing in length. It was stated that communication between partners needed to be improved. Importantly, the group also heard that police training does not teach recruits how to speak and interview. In other words, they are not being taught how to be empathetic.
70. Research has documented that the stop-and-search process can cause a great deal of mistrust and resentment between young people and the police. It may be the manner in which stop-and-search is undertaken that is the problem – by nature, it is an intrusive process. Problems may also arise where the same individuals are targeted. Research has also shown that officers conducting the stop-and-search come across as overly aggressive. Where an individual is searched and nothing is found, this may create an atmosphere as the person being searched thinks *why have I been singled out?* The unintended consequence may be that these people feel yet more disaffected and are pushed further away.
71. “Only half of people nationally held positive views about the police...lack of confidence builds a barrier that prevents young victims from seeking police help” (Youth Voice Survey, 2018). We need to build back trust and relationships. There needs to be more collaborative communication between young people and the police, who need to have more of a visible presence locally. They have expressed a desire to be more involved with local schools and this is something the council should help facilitate.
72. School Safety Officers are police officers who work in schools and are responsible for any issues involving fights, drugs, and gangs. They also provide education about drugs, alcohol and safety issues. Having a known Schools Safety Officer can benefit young people’s feelings of safety at school, and in some cases improve wider opinions of the police (Youth Voice Survey, 2018).

## **Recommendation 6**

**Brent CCG to work with statutory partners (including the council) to enable the provision of more services at hospital A&E departments at the ‘teachable moment’, such as Redthread. Stakeholders in primary and tertiary care should be instructed in how to approach knife crime issues.**

73. Northwick Park is a major hospital in Brent and part of the London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust. They have seen admittance figures steadily increase in recent years, as well as increases in mental health problems and violent assaults.
74. In discussion with the task group, Northwick Park advised that actions such as spotting signs of trouble or vulnerability, and signposting patients to further sources of help, are ‘alien’ to their staff. There are many community services available which staff simply don’t know about.
75. “You can give a leaflet out, but will it have an effect? We haven’t really worked out what to do and how best to engage (with young people).” Ultimately, Northwick believe they do a good job but also that they could do more. They can stitch up someone who has been stabbed but can’t refer them on, so haven’t been as helpful as they could have been. Partners must be able to help out. The council can use its influence here and be a facilitator. The police can instruct care workers on how to deal with knife crime issues. There could be a shared agreement of practice, with a key contact for each service.
76. The Redthread violence intervention programme runs in hospital emergency departments, in partnership with the major trauma network. Every year thousands of people come through hospital doors as victims of assault and exploitation. It is at this point of crisis that the Redthread youth workers use their unique position embedded in emergency departments to engage these young victims. This moment of vulnerability – ‘the Teachable Moment’ – when young people are out of their comfort zone, alienated from their peers, and often coming to terms with an injury, is a time of change. Many will question their own behaviour and the choices that led them to hospital, and with the help of a specialist youth worker they may pursue change that they haven’t felt able to before. Redthread focuses on this, helping to disrupt the cycle of violence that can often lead to re-attendance and re-injury.
77. The task group has seen through research and heard first-hand that Redthread is doing excellent work across London. Almost half of those engaged by the service had reduced their involvement in crime (MOPAC, 2018). Northwick Park advised they would like to see Redthread have an enhanced, permanent base at the hospital but of course funding is a significant obstacle.
78. The task group advocates a push for more funding for services like Redthread but acknowledges that funding is a major issue – there is not an endless pot of money available. Therefore, it will be beneficial to ensure that we work best with what we already have, and this means helping stakeholders in primary and tertiary care become better-prepared in how to deal knife crime issues.

The health service needs greater clarity on who can be contacted to provide one-on-one support to victims.

### **Recommendation 7**

**The council to 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 deterred from crime.**

79. Schools have a pivotal role in both social education and prevention, as well as often finding themselves on the front line of dealing with youth violence and the problem of knives. School-based interventions are viewed as crucial, not least because this is where young people spend the majority of their time.
80. An interview was held with Newman Catholic College (NCC) – a Brent secondary school. Surveys were undertaken in several others to analyse the different approaches taken within secondary schools in the borough.
81. NCC identified various approaches to keeping children safe, both before and after school. They stated that the time children were most vulnerable was after school between the hours of 3:30pm and 6:30pm, where parents or guardians are usually returning home from work. This time correlates with figures which show this is when a high proportion of knife crime incidences occur. It is the period between school and home where there is a lack of supervision. NCC has a rota for teachers to wait at bus stops within a 100-metre vicinity of the school and has other employees patrol the high street between the hours identified, to ensure that children get on the school buses safely.
82. Other measures taken by NCC include:
  - Use of knife arches and wands to detect and prevent knives on school property
  - Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) lessons to bring in ex-offenders to dissuade young people from entering a life of crime (the Your Life, You Choose prevention programme)
  - Reduction in external exclusions but use of internal exclusions to assist and support those children with challenging behaviour
  - ‘Safe Havens’ within the Harlesden area, with the support of Brent Citizens, to assist children who fear for their safety. In the event of a dangerous situation they can use the area to be protected until the police arrive. (The Safe Haven programme in Brent is one of London’s largest)
  - Ensuring a good relationship with local police – so much so that a room is available on site for officers to work in if needed.
83. Enquiries were made as to whether NCC works with other schools to tackle knife crime. Whilst there is discussion amongst secondary school partners, there is no borough-wide school network to tackle weapons-based crime. At Head Teacher level this is not discussed in any detail. A view raised in the

interview was that having measures in place specifically to deal with knife crime may not make the school attractive for the parents of prospective students, hence some schools do not have knife arches or wands.

84. Seven questions were asked through the survey of schools, ranging from the extent of the problem (knife carrying) in the school and how they dealt with it, to what support was given to parents in helping to deal with the fact that their child was carrying a knife. Outcomes were varied. It was noticeable that some of the schools admitted that they did not have a strategy for dealing with this issue and in some cases did not communicate with the parent unless the child was to be excluded. Respondents were also asked for suggestions on what the council could do to tackle knife carrying. Several suggestions were made, including working in partnership with the police to implement curfews in problem areas; and holding a conference for parents and schools to talk specifically about the problem.
85. Some schools have discussed knife carrying with parents, who acknowledge that it is a problem of the wider society and that parents, schools, the local authority, the police and statutory agencies need to work together to stem the tide of children being caught up in criminal activity.
86. NCC were one of several participants to link the problem of knife crime with the distinct lack of community and youth centres in Brent, the result of 20 years of closures and loss of funding. Resources must and are starting to go back into these services, but in the meantime schools have excellent facilities that could be made available in the evenings or at weekends for youth-based activities.
87. After-school activities can play an important part in providing interests that engage young people and deter them from knife crime. There are issues to be explored here: Could schools remain open longer, e.g. at evenings and weekends? Could youth workers be deployed at schools to proactively engage with those who are 'at risk'?
88. There would naturally be costs to be met from schools keeping their facilities open. The prospect of the council part-funding these activities would need to be explored. Given that prevention is a shared goal, schools may be obligated to arrange reasonable hire rates for their spaces.
89. It is not enough to simply offer more activities; students must also be enticed to actually attend them.

### **Recommendation 8**

**The council to work with Brent primary and secondary schools, the Brent School Partnership (BSP) and the Safer Brent Partnership, to develop and implement a Schools Safety Charter.**

90. Evidence heard by the group revealed there is little in the way of inter-school networking and communication on issues relating to knife crime in Brent.

Some institutions have introduced a range of measures to combat knife crime – archways, knife wands – whereas others have done nothing at all. In cases where a school has no measures in place, it was heard anecdotally this may be due to the stigma associated with knife crime and fears that any anti-knife measures implemented would negatively impact on the school (e.g. through a reduction in the number of places applied for). It may also be that the school doesn't perceive themselves as having a knife problem.

91. The lack of a borough-wide school network on knife crime is a significant oversight. The bottom line is that all schools should take direct, effective action against knife crime, regardless of their perceptions of the problem. There needs to be a united front and support should be available for children and parents.
92. One possible method to achieve this could be a Schools Safety Charter – a document which the council could help create and coordinate; a proposal to be put to every school in the borough to be more collaborative in the fight against knife crime.
93. Essentially the document would set out what schools can be doing by way of a pro-active response to knife-carrying. The underlying message is that there is no stigma in putting measures in place which could save lives, and no stigma in being seen to take a stance against knife crime.
94. Getting all schools across the borough actively involved in a Schools Safety Charter represents a significant challenge, but one that should be met head-on.
95. The task group learned of the correlation between knife crime and school exclusions. The link between school exclusions and the idea of the 'disconnected' youth was regularly mentioned. The task group strongly believes that school exclusions are not an appropriate means of dealing with knife crime issues. Exclusions 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 actively engaged by an organisation to address issues.
96. Suspensions (fixed-term exclusions) are on the rise in Brent. Repeated suspensions have been flagged as a concern by the Children's Commissioner as these children face the same risks as those who are permanently excluded, such as exploitation by criminal gangs.
97. It is not for this report to determine the exact make-up of a Schools Safety Charter – this would be a collaborative piece of work. It could be a model with clear targets and outcomes, something which sets out a clear approach to knife crime. It might be something that the school children themselves help to shape. This work could be linked to the media campaign as mentioned in Recommendation 4.



## **Recommendation 9**

**The council must enhance the way it works with Brent youth offending services, London CRC and the National Probation Service in order to support offenders who can be rehabilitated, and continue to manage and assess risk.**

98. London Probation Services play a vital role in challenging offender behaviour and reducing reoffending. Given the rise in knife-related offending, probation services have developed new interventions, rolled out training and developed assessment toolkits around knife crime.
99. The Safer Streets programme was developed by the London CRC in collaboration with MOPAC. It is a targeted intervention for people who have been convicted of knife offences. It is delivered as part of a community order, suspended sentence or licence and is a combination of one-on-one and group session which aims to deliver positive changes in thinking and actions towards knife crime, thus reducing the likelihood of future offending.
100. Skills training is provided to staff to help them break down barriers and improve engagement with service users who do not feel safe on the street without a knife in their hand.

## **Recommendation 10**

**The council to facilitate more collaborative working between the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and religious organisations, to raise funds for projects and training and prevent knife crime.**

101. The task group heard from a range of voluntary and religious organisations and noted the good work being undertaken by them in the community. Religious institutions have an important presence in the borough and provide a wide range of activities and guidance for their members, often incorporating whole families, at important stages of their lives. All the institutions spoken to by the task group were passionate about helping local people. They were also all concerned about safety of their members and those of people living in their communities, in the context of knife crime.
102. Some institutions (predominantly Christian faith-based) are working together to launch a 'Street Pastors' initiative, which focuses on disenfranchised young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The aim of the initiative is for the street pastor to listen, direct them to help and support them in all aspects of their lives until they became self-sufficient. Some of the street pastors are ideally placed to help, as they have had the same life experiences as some of the people they support.
103. Pastor Yinka (Brent Council of Churches) met with members of the task group. He felt that the help and support of street pastors would make a big impact in difficult areas such as Harlesden, Stonebridge and South Kilburn. Pastor Yinka suggested a database of support services, which street pastors could have access to – and be included on – so that the appropriate

referrals can be made if necessary. The street pastors are also looking to implement 'Safe Spaces' in at least five areas of the borough.

104. More can be done to make full use of this community work, especially as this can aid prevention at grassroots level. Enhanced communication and collaboration between organisations working on knife crime would minimise duplication, have greater impact on reducing violence and enable more effective fundraising. The council is well placed to act, as it can help signpost to sources of funding and training, such as through CVS Brent.
105. The task group proposes that street pastors are supported to receive safeguarding training, and to find and implement 'Safe Spaces' which can be used to meet with vulnerable people.

### **Recommendation 11**

**The council to make representations to Government to put guidance in place on the handling of housing needs cases for those at risk of violence (through gangs/ county lines) and reconsider the threshold at which someone who is deemed to be at sufficient risk gets re-housing support.**

106. The task group met with the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal, a London-wide programme covering councils and Registered Providers, which is available for any household in social housing at risk of violence, or in vulnerability, who need to move borough. This includes people threatened with gang violence and exploitation, and also cases of domestic violence.
107. Brent is a part of this programme, and has made 13 referrals to it. However, the only successful moves have been domestic violence cases. There are difficulties in gang-related referrals, reflecting the complex nature of the cases.
108. The group has heard of considerable issues in identifying whether someone is at 'imminent risk', and of meeting the requirements to show the level of risk. There are fundamental issues with the way in which housing needs cases are reviewed. Clarity is needed. The group asks that the Cabinet Member for Housing writes to Government, urging them to consider putting some guidance in place. In the absence of such a move, the council should develop its own set of guidance in this area.
109. The task group believes that housing circumstances must be recognised as a key part of the public health approach. The housing setting in which people are placed can have an effect on the likelihood of them committing and being a victim of crime.

## **Recommendation 12**

**The council to make representations to the GLA/ Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime/ Violence Reduction Unit advising that the county lines programme is running at full capacity with an increasing unmet need. More intensive, longer-term funding needs to be provided.**

### County lines

110. "County lines" criminal exploitation occurs where gangs and organised crime networks groom and exploit children and young people to sell drugs. Young people travel across counties and use dedicated mobile phone 'lines' to supply drugs. The task group heard that violence and knife-carrying are synonymous with county lines exploitation.
111. Young people are groomed with promises of money, friendship and status. Once they've been drawn in they are controlled using threats and violence, leaving them living in fear and trapped in criminal exploitation.
112. 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. Law enforcement 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.

## **Recommendation 13**

**The council further explore bids for external funding for innovative council and VCS projects, to tackle the risks associated with young people becoming involved in crime.**

113. The task group is also recommending that the council and partners step up work on submitting bids for funding to the Home Office, MOPAC and other external agencies to fund targeted prevention programmes. Funding may be available from a range of different pots according to the voluntary sector grants programme, including some that are less obvious like the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). There should also be consideration of the 400k from the Met Patrol Plus scheme and the 500k pledged from MHCLG.

### Other findings

114. The task group recognised that a significant step in tackling knife crime would be to convene a conference of all the partners, to share knowledge and experience, raise awareness, encourage collaborative working and attract funding. This was one of the group's initial recommendations, before it emerged that a conference called Build a Safer Brent for Young People, had already been arranged with Brent partners for 22 July 2019. Initial feedback

received from this event was very positive. There will not be another conference planned, at least for the remainder of the municipal year.

115. The London Crime Poll asked respondents “Which of the following agencies do you think are most important in tackling the problem of gangs and violence”? 40% of respondents chose ‘parents and families’; this was a more popular answer than ‘police’, ‘school’, and ‘youth organisations’ (CSJ 2018). It is crucial for parents, families and communities to take on more responsibility in terms of getting involved in knife crime prevention. But often parents struggle to have an impact with their children, and poor parenting practice may exacerbate things. More must be done to support them – such as an offer of training in parenting skills. There is much that can be achieved, working together with the support of local partners.
116. Just prior to the closure of the task group it was noted that there is increasing evidence and instances of girls and young women becoming involved in county lines operations, due in part to the perception that they are less likely to be stopped by the police. This matter must be looked at urgently.

## Appendix A – Participants

The task group would like to thank all those who have taken part in the discussion, contributed evidence to the inquiry, and allowed us to come and see some of their programmes in action. Thank you to all of the expert witnesses who have given their time and contributed their valuable expertise.

1. Dr Ethie Kong, GP and ex-Chair Brent CCG
2. Dr M C Patel, Chair Brent CCG
3. Otis Roberts, Hanson Roberts Foundation
4. Dominic Smallwood, PLIAS
5. Lincoln Beswick, ex-councillor and prominent in the West Indian community
6. Lorraine Knight, London Community Rehabilitation Company
7. Robert Banton, DJ, Beat FM Radio
8. Ace Ruele, ex-offender
9. Donald Palmer, Reach Society
10. Dr Pastor Noel & Mrs Siam Noel, counsellor
11. Jasmine Dale, The Brent Factor
12. Dr Angela Herbert MBE, Chair Violent Crime Prevention Board and BIAG
13. Tahmid Islam, London Citizens UK
14. Cllr Luke Patterson, Assistant Head Teacher
15. Cllr Tom Miller, Cabinet Member for Community Safety
16. Sandra White, Young Brent Foundation
17. Steve Bending, VRU, GLA
18. Cllr Harbi Farah, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services and Chair HWB
19. Cllr Mili Patel, Cabinet Member for Early Intervention and Children Services
20. Justin Finlayson, United Borders
21. Pastor Yinka, Street Pastors and member BIAG
22. Cllr Ernest Ezeajughi, Mayor with interest in knife crime
23. Karina Wane, Head of Community Protection, Brent Council

24. Desmond Edward, Safer London
25. Esther Sample, Pan-London Housing Reciprocal Programme
26. Ark Academy
27. Danny Coyle and Susan Grace, Newman Catholic College
28. Jamie Masraff, Onside Youth Zones
29. David Evans, St. Giles Trust
30. Troy Francis, Brent Emergency Housing Unit
31. Patricia Wharton, Drop the Blade
32. Cllr Margaret McLennan, Deputy Leader Brent Council
33. Tara Benham, Communications Account Manager, Brent Council
34. Roy Croasdaile, College of North West London
35. Lauren Fraser, Consultant A&E, Northwick Park Hospital
36. Brent Youth Parliament
37. CI Adrian Needley, Met Police Brent
38. Carolyn Downs, Chief Executive, Brent Council
39. Cllr Tariq Dar, Pakistan Welfare Centre and Mosque
40. Melanie Smith, Director Public Health Brent Council
41. Helena O'Connell and Tariq, Westminster Drug Project
42. Cllr Muhammed Butt, Leader Brent Council
43. Pascoe Sawyers, Strategy and Partnerships Manager, Brent Council

## **Appendix B – Terms of reference**

### KNIFE CRIME IN BRENT MEMBERS TASK GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

#### **CONTEXT**

In London, the total number of offences involving knife crime has increased by 4%, and in the last year in Brent, it increased by 18% to 755 knife crime offences. This was the 3rd highest level of knife crime of the 32 London boroughs.

Knife crime is not only an offence; it impacts on the health of victims, and their families and peers. The cost to the NHS of each stabbing is upwards of £7,200.

Violence acts like an epidemic disease, and can be tackled using a multi-agency public health approach. This involves treating violence as a preventable public health issue, using data and analysis to identify causes and focusing on prevention through multi-agency systemic approaches.

In Brent there are a number of interventions already in place for older children and teenagers, while early intervention programmes for younger children are currently being developed.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

The aim of the task group is gain a better understanding of knife crime in Brent and how interventions can reduce knife crime, and which ones will work locally. With this knowledge

the task group can make recommendations that will help in reducing rates and mitigate negative impacts on Brent residents.

According to the constitution and the 2006 Police and Justice Act the group can make recommendations to the Community Safety Partnership through Full Council when discharging their duties as the Crime and Disorder Committee.

**The task group will:**

- Review the links between knife crime and gangs in Brent
- Review partnership working arrangements
- Review what can be done locally to complement the wider London public health approach, including:
  - The use of RedThread and other violence interrupter schemes
  - Street based interventions
  - Education and employment opportunities for ex-offenders
  - Using education for nurturing children to prevent crime
  - Early intervention schemes for different ages, including younger children

**GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

The task group will report to the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee, and keep other relevant committees informed as appropriate.

There should be at least three members present at each meeting. The task group will meet once a month, from January 2019, until the final report is presented at the April scrutiny meeting.

**MEMBERSHIP**

1. Cllr. Sandra Kabir (Chair)
  2. Cllr. Erica Gbajumo
  3. Cllr. Robert Johnson
  4. Cllr. Elliot Chappell
  5. Cllr. Thomas Stephens
  6. Cllr. Liz Dixon
- Richard Harrington – Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer

**Other key stakeholders would be invited as appropriate which will include:**

1. Representative from the MET
2. Representative from the CCG
3. Representative from the LNWH
4. Representative from St Giles

The London Borough of Brent

September 2019

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