

Locality Review

Brighton

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1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

- The need to understand the relationship between serious group offending and local drug markets (including illegal, prescription drugs and new psychoactive substances)
- The links between vulnerable cohorts, locations and gangs e.g. care homes, missing young people, school absence and exclusions
- Making links between violence and vulnerability, the Prevent Programme and local secure estate.
- Vulnerabilities and exploitation experienced by gang-associated women and girls

- The exploitation of children by gangs and organised crime groups (sexual / physical exploitation or exploitation in order to commit crimes such as drug dealing)
- Gang members and associates moving into other areas, such as shire counties or seaside towns, to commit crime
- Links between street gangs and organised crime groups
- The use of social media to facilitate violence and intimidation
- The links between health, particularly mental health, and gang violence
- Youth offending services managing a more violent cohort than previously
- The ability to identify both dangerous gang nominals and young people at risk of involvement in gang crime when there is a lack of police intelligence
- Making sure that resources are effectively targeted, informed and that partnership structures are set up to respond quickly to the new threat without duplication

Often practitioners have many insights into how gangs and groups are operating and exploiting young people and vulnerable adults. This qualitative information, when triangulated across a number of interviews and linked with relevant quantitative data sets can show a richer picture of how gangs and groups work and help us to tackle them more effectively. It can also help us to identify and protect vulnerable people. This is the locality review (LR).

2 Purpose of the Locality Review

County lines is an evolving national issue involving the use of mobile phone lines by groups to extend their drug dealing business to new locations outside their home areas. This issue affects overtly and covertly most areas around the country.

A county lines enterprise almost always involves exploitation of vulnerable people, this can involve both children and adults who require safeguarding. The gangs will put the vulnerable individuals between themselves and the risk of detection, asking them to courier drugs, often “plugged” internally, and/or to sell drugs at the other end of the line in a “traphouse”, something known as “cuckooing”.

Cuckooing involves placing gang members into a property of a vulnerable person (often a drug user) either forcibly or by promise of free drugs. The property is then used as a

base from which to sell drugs, and mobile phones are used to order more drugs via couriers, who travel by train or car. This tactic is used across the country, with some organised groups using addresses for a matter of hours before leaving only to return sometime later thereby reducing the risk of detection even further.

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 The interviews

Focus groups

Focus Group 1 – Safeguarding Adults

The group were acutely aware of the subject of cuckooing and could relate cases where this had occurred not only as a result of county lines activity, but also by others seeking to exploit vulnerable people.

They also described how those from cohorts such as abused children and care leavers were particular groups vulnerable to exploitation. They were also aware that gangs had been renting out holiday lets in Brighton which were then used as brothels.

The word social isolation was frequently used by the group to describe those most at risk of exploitation with a combination of the following indicators; substance misuse, learning disabilities, loneliness and homelessness. These were described as connected issues often relating to a loss of a previous tenancy and/or ASB.

Closure orders have been used in response to identified cases of cuckooing with the vulnerable person being relocated. Partial closure orders have been considered but not utilised as the police have indicated they would be unable to monitor or respond to any breaches. Whilst this has been in the main effective, there have been examples where the vulnerable person has been further targeted and in one case relocated six times. It was felt that as Brighton is a relatively small place, moving people within the local area wasn't the answer. If they needed to be moved it should be out of area but with an appropriate level of support.

The group described how it was difficult in these circumstances to build trust and confidence, as challenges remained in encouraging vulnerable people such as those exploited to provide the necessary evidence to support a successful prosecution. The focus group identified gangs from Liverpool and Brixton as sources of supplying drugs in Brighton.

The group also identified how the exploitation of some people with learning difficulties begins through social media and also discussed the shortage of suitable emergency accommodation with support.

The group specifically asked for the following;

- A multi-agency outreach service and operating beyond office hours
- A MARAC for the most complex cases
- An early screening process
- A well-publicised strategy addressing violence, vulnerability and exploitation
- Improved communication and information sharing
- A clear emergency accommodation placement process

Focus group 2 – YJS and police

This was a very large group (16 plus) of police officers from a range of business areas who were knowledgeable, passionate and committed about the subject. A normal session size is 6-8 people, so the contribution was limited to allow all to contribute.

The group generally had an excellent knowledge of the gangs and county lines in Brighton and had seen this issue grow over the last 12 months to include exploitation and the targeting of vulnerable adults. They had seen an increase in use and availability of heroin, crack, opioids and were concerned about the significant and widespread use of cannabis in the area. The IOM does not currently cover gangs and is predominately focused on young people.

Sharing information on this agenda is crucial and appears to be a barrier with many of the group. There does not appear to be any weekly profile that maps violence hotspots or areas linked to drug markets and exploitation.

The group saw this agenda from a slightly different perspective depending on their individual role (or unit) and the lack of a clear strategy or plan has confused the overall priority.

Several unlinked operations were discussed that highlight the point above –

- Centora
- Stepping stone
- Rattle
- Hawke
- Cuckoo

The group were aware of Manchester and Merseyside gangs active in the area, along with a number of London gangs too. They are seeing more young people used by gangs and an increase in drug deaths with 14 over the last year that the group believed are

linked to county lines. They are aware that local schools are targeted by these groups with the intention of increasing the market and targeting new "clean skin" dealers. There was some confusion about the completion of a problem profile on gangs within the group which highlighted the need for improved communication within the policing family and external partners. Covert intelligence is a key tactic on this agenda but was not explored on this review. This is worth a review to ensure tasking of resources locally are linked to violence, vulnerability and exploitation and not just drugs.

The YOS multi agency hub in the city centre was seen as good practice with a number of key stakeholders attending the meeting and its co-location was seen as a strength. We heard about 14 + lines from a variety of areas outside Sussex which highlight the need to work collaboratively to tackle this issue and the need for a clear strategic and operational joint response. An action day/week was seen as a good way to work together and raise the profile amongst partners whilst still communicating good news to the wider community.

Focus group 3 – Safeguarding and early help initiatives

This group had an extremely well-developed sense of how gangs and county lines were operating across Brighton and had evolved over the past 5 years. This included –

- Numerous YOT interviews with local children described as entrapped within the culture, with gangs using debt as a tactic to keep children involved in running drugs
- An increase of local middle-class children involved with gangs
- A perception amongst some that London gangs were not recruiting local children anymore but carrying out the dealing and cuckooing themselves
- Others described how that there seemed to have been a change over the last 3 years with local children not talking to services about their involvement but staying quiet and aggressive
- An increase in people using heroin and crack, both young people and adults
- An increase in the use of Snowballs (mix of crack and heroin)
- An increase in the use of Spice
- A code of silence amongst service users due to fear of violence

- Local and external gangs using the cuckooing tactic
- A noted increase in the use of Xanax

It was also noted that there is no current drug profile in place (although we were told this work is underway). It was not clear to those present who actually owned the violence and vulnerability agenda locally – Safer Brighton or the Children and Young People Exploitation Strategy Group.

Current safeguarding practices and processes were discussed, with some practitioners feeling that although some of the activity warranted a safeguarding intervention, there might be a gender imbalance with agencies more likely to concentrate on girls rather than boys. Most felt that the current safeguarding process might not be meeting the needs of young people involved with gangs and might usefully be reviewed. Adult safeguarding was said to be problematic around mental health / substance misuse, as assessments regarding mental health could not be made until the substance misuse was addressed, which had led to delays.

Gang semantics was said to have been an historic problem across the area, with partnerships unable and unwilling to label some of the group offending as gangs or gang related.

Local co-located teams such as the adolescent teams were mentioned as working well, with good information sharing and joint working taking place, with the exception of some staff from voluntary and third sector groups present who felt that they were not necessarily in the loop and were missing out on crucial information (staff from the Family Coaches team in particular).

It was also thought that numbers of young people excluded from school or being educated at home were rising. Public Health locally had been working with schools in order to prevent exclusions, but individuals interviewed did not appear to be particularly well informed about or aware of this work.

Other issues and concerns raised included –

- A perceived disconnect between strategy, policy and practitioners on the frontline
- A lack of services for young people not necessarily known to services but who were caught up with gangs. A youth worker described how he had recently engaged with four boys who bluntly asked what could be done to help them, without services getting involved. This was recognised as a difficult subject, and

although it was stated that they could be referred to a confidential counselling service, it was pointed out that this had a 6-month waiting list

Focus Group 4 – Community Safety and Outreach Providers

Again, members of the group were all aware of county lines drug dealing, cuckooing and exploitation, providing an example where two males from London had cuckooed a female described as lonely and a substance misuser. Police had attended as a result of a complaint by a neighbour but found no evidence. The police were concerned and asked housing to visit but the neighbour had changed their tone. It was not clear why, but the implication was that the neighbour was in fear. Other examples were provided including a family groomed and exploited.

Members of the group described the influence of music crews, in particular those involved in trap and drill music and the negative influence this had on young people. Providers explained how difficult it was to compete with this without reviewing their own 'values'. Reference was made to a rapper recently arrested in Clacton, Essex for supplying drugs and how some young people felt that person should be released and not prosecuted.

The group described drug dealing as out of control and blatant across the city. They identified a number of locations in particular the Level, (a park area) and the lower, (a beach area).

Professionals involved in youth work described some groups of young people as increasingly challenging and disruptive, immersed in the drug dealing/using lifestyle and explained the need to be sensitive in managing these young people and not to ask too many questions as they might then disengage from services.

Some of the group were aware of a gang called HSG (Hillside gang) with some affiliation (although this was not clear) to the F & F gang in Croydon, South London. A wide range of drugs are readily available, including Xanax, some of which is believed to be fake and manufactured locally, sold on Instagram. There was also an indication that a couple of 16/17 year olds not attending school were selling drugs and encouraging others to take drugs into schools. Cannabis use is much more blatant and according to members of the group, Brighton has the highest rates of cannabis use among 15-year-olds in the country.

It was stated that there had been a significant increase in knife crime offences and injuries with minor stabbings not being reported. Brighton does not have a knife crime strategy. Concern was also expressed by the group regarding increased levels of violence including a recent attempted murder where a car drove over a person twice as a result of drugs issues.

The group specifically asked for the following;

- An educational strategy increasing awareness of drugs and exploitation
- Increased awareness in schools
- More work needs to be done to identify vulnerability
- Multi-agency targeted operation at the Level
- More information sharing between police, statutory partners and third sector providers
- Need for more joint training for front line practitioners regarding cuckooing
- More to be done by housing providers to identify those at risk and more early intervention support provided

Focus group 5 – Health

This was a mixed group with varying knowledge of gangs and county lines although there was a wealth of knowledge from a health and young person's perspective that needs to be captured to inform any future profile on this subject. The data captured in the frequent flyers meeting and shared at the local safeguarding children board is excellent and should be shared more widely.

They are aware of an increase in physical and mental health issues linked to drugs, county lines and exploitation with examples of young people being admitted for Xanax abuse on a regular basis. They are seeing an increase in spice, heroin, ketamine and cannabis use by young people in Brighton.

This is an issue that is growing in Brighton and the reluctance to name the issue as a "gang" issue is causing some confusion amongst the partners. The arrival of county lines and external gangs has focused attention on this topic and the development of a partnership and strategic approach is key to tackling the issues. A common theme was the lack of capacity for a place of safety and this was putting already vulnerable people in danger.

A number of vulnerable locations are driven by the growing issue of the homeless, rough sleepers, local hostels and these locations plus the Level should be subject to partnership attention. Implementing an action day/week would be a good way to bring a partnership and demand reduction event together.

The local VVE meeting is a bi monthly meeting which is new and well attended, having developed out of Operation Kite which focused on CSE. This new group appears to focus on all forms of vulnerability. The Adolescent Vulnerable Risk Meet

(VARM) runs every two weeks and focuses on under 19-year olds - there appears to be an overlap here and reviewing the terms of reference for each group to prevent duplication and silo working would be useful. The group also felt there are too many meetings held that seem to discuss the same people and locations.

The group discussed the value of engaging practitioners who are working with the PRUs in Brighton and sharing information on the young people not in full time education. The group felt on line targeting and influencing of young people into this type of exploitation was common and they all felt better training for their teams would help.

Operation Leader is a health meeting held for the clinicians, ambulance and other health safeguarding leads that shares information around health issues and vulnerable locations. It has picked up an increase in drugs like Xanax being taken into schools and universities.

Focus group 6 – Offender Management

CRC staff described how clients are being cuckooed across the town, with drug use, mental health issues or learning difficulties cited as a reason they were targeted by gangs. Police were said to be using closure orders to tackle cuckooing but not partial closure orders. Gangs were said to target chemists or housing offices in order to identify potential victims.

As a result of the cuckooing issue the police investigation unit were now said to be using a new category of suspect (vulnerable suspect), which reflected on the duality of some individuals being victims and culpable at the same time.

A lack of a pan agency response to adult victims was mentioned as a deficit, and it was also felt that culturally this was being recognised as an issue across the area (the implication being that attention was focused on young people to a greater degree).

The use of spice along with heroin and crack was thought to be rising, with some noting that they were coming across more women using heroin (not the usual suspects/long term users). Users were said to be shoplifting and/or resorting to prostitution to pay for the drugs. An example was given of a 40-year-old mother of 5 having sex with a 16-year-old gang member in return for drugs.

The county lines issue was also said to be moving to outlying areas such as Lewes, Newhaven and Worthing, and it was also thought that this was not being mapped or properly tracked.

Barriers to effective working included –

- A lack of early intervention services (especially youth workers, ASB officers). This had led to reduced contact with young people involved with lower level criminality and offending
- Drug testing on arrest apparently only detects heroin and cocaine – officers said they are not allowed to drug test children or carry out tests for other uncontrolled drugs. This was seen as a problem as it not only meant early and emerging issues regarding drug usage are not always detected, but also that an opportunity to make referrals into appropriate services is also missed too
- Health staff were said to be “tied up” around information sharing issues regarding personal data, which made it difficult for agencies looking to support or work with individuals as the full picture of drug use was not always known
- There was also said to be a complete lack of awareness and understanding regarding the shoplifting issue, which was one of the ways users were paying for drugs. Shops were said to be writing off losses due to a lack of police support and prioritisation

Emerging trends identified by the group included –

- An increased use by gangs of bed and breakfast and hotel accommodation in order to deal and distribute drugs from
- A noted increase in IOM/PPO clients carrying weapons, who wouldn't normally do so
- Violence against homeless CRC clients was said to be on the increase, although it was not known why

Focus Group 7 – Housing

Members of the group stated that the county lines situation had rocketed, and they had witnessed an “*industrialisation*” of the drugs market. It was clear from those present that there were inconsistencies in the use of tools and powers such as closure orders and the use of absolute possession relating to tenancy breaches such as drug dealing. Again, no use made of partial closures as the police do not have the resources to support this. Over the past 18 months one provider has undertaken 13 closures and 12 possession orders. There is some frustration that activities such as this are not publicised to demonstrate activity by partners is taking place.

Multi-agency partnership meetings take place and these are productive with good information sharing. It appears outside of this activity, general information sharing is not as good as it could be. There are no co-location arrangements for housing, police etc.

With regards to cuckooing, all had some experience of this but also found instances of complicity which made case management much more challenging. An organisation called Homeworks, a local voluntary organisation, is often called upon to provide early support to vulnerable people.

Similar to previously mentioned, engagement with young vulnerable people can be difficult as *"one minute they are engaging and the next minute closed off to us"* so building relationships is challenging, and it can also be difficult to identify when there is a specific safeguarding issue. There is also a concern how regarding information exchange is managed and impacts on the relationship in terms of trust and confidence. Where vulnerable people are moved into the area by private sector housing providers partners are generally not aware until issues arise.

One provider described how they accompany police on drug warrants in Hastings, which is not the practice in Brighton. This is seen as useful in terms of post incident support to the vulnerable occupant and evidence gathering in relation to the tenancy.

The group specifically asked for the following to be considered;

- Better information sharing between police and housing providers
- Sharing of good practice i.e. Lewisham and use of CPNs
- Better communication between housing providers (often lots of information missing)
- Some young people can't always attend appointments due to fear of violence by gangs etc, more thought needs to be put into alternative arrangements
- Integrating teams within housing projects

Focus group 8 – Education

This was a very well attended group with 13 educational professionals in attendance and like the previous police group it was so large it was difficult to get everybody's comments and information.

The group felt the Headteacher meeting was a good forum to share information and was well attended. There appeared to be limited police data sharing with this group since the school police officer support was withdrawn and there was a general concern regarding information exchange, local risk and referral pathways. The group were

concerned that there seemed to be no plan for the withdrawal of PSCO, youth work, schools officer support and this was a barrier to effective identification of safeguarding issues linked to this agenda.

Training was a common theme with most of the group requiring more around this issue. Broadening the training to include parents and young people was thought to be a worthwhile consideration, although taking a whole day out from the school/home was also a barrier to this request.

They had seen an increase in knife crime, drug activity and CSE linked to young people in schools and the group was committed to help address this growing issue. A truant bus was discussed as good practice to get young people back into school, but this was an additional resource paid for by the schools and capacity was an issue. They had heard of young people selling/taking drugs and being exploited by people involved in county lines.

The managed moves programme Behaviour Management Panel is well attended and deals with all exclusions, although there was a general feeling that this group could do more to support young people and keep them in school. The group had good contact with the local PRUs although general referral pathways are not as clearly linked to gangs and county lines as they are with CSE and the group felt this needs to be addressed. The group talked about not being told about student arrests or local drug/gang profiles that may impact upon their location and/or students. The teacher forum seems an ideal opportunity to improve this communication issue with the police. Currently an incident report has to go into the police 101 number and this is seen as a slow and often unanswered resource that does not encourage the exchange and sharing of information.

Social media is seen as a significant driver of this activity and no training is provided. Teachers are aware some students use social media excessively and a prevention message using this forum could reach many of the young people in Brighton.

Focus group 9 – Fire service (LAS did not attend)

The fire service had checked records and logs for signs of cuckooing issues but had not found anything. However, it was noted that the use of appointments for home visits would give gangs time to vacate premises and homes so unless staff were briefed and aware of what to look for, they may not be registering anything out of the ordinary. However, briefings around cuckooing were planned for crews and community safety advisers, and posters were being put up at stations.

Focus group 10 – Trading Standards/Environment/Licensing

Brighton has a Business Crime Reduction Partnership. The resources include access to a website, radios and intelligence briefings on behalf of police to a range of businesses and security companies which operate in the city centre and sea front.

The local bus company also provide a rapid response team which although is intended to primarily respond to incidents on buses will also assist where they can. The group described a number of incidents of concern involving drug misuse extending to spice and ketamine misuse and needles/blood found in toilets of restaurants etc. Any information/intelligence is collated by the business crime reduction partnership and relayed to the police. The security companies also wear body cameras and are seen as an essential resource in the light of reductions in police presence.

The group indicated that if you look down at the lower (beach area) you can witness drug dealing taking place. In the past wrist bands were used to indicate a dealer. The group also stated their concern at the increasing level of knives being involved, territorial issues and clashes involving groups from outside the area.

A safe space scheme is in operation to protect vulnerable young people, but the group expressed concern over the level of support being provided by police. On one occasion a 15-year-old was left in this area for over three hours.

CCTV operates across the city and at one time there were two re deployable cameras and some mobile CCTV to assist. It is not known by the group where these resources are or how to access them.

The group specifically asked for the following to be considered –

- More information sharing with police
- Joint working opportunities between police and security companies
- A multi-agency 24/7 task force in the city to deal with issues of homelessness, drugs and alcohol
- *"University needs to take more responsibility, students are users"*
- Some concern about the new policing model and whether it supports effective joint working
- More training on emerging issues/threats such as human trafficking/modern slavery and good practice

Focus group 11 – analysts

This was an interesting group who have seen an increase in this type of issue within their respective data sets. Although data is shared amongst the group it would be useful to review how the whole range of available partnership data could inform strategic assessments and help direct resource allocation. We discussed the role of analysts from a range of departments and establishing a forum for capability and capacity support would be useful.

There is a local problem profile completed on drugs but not gangs, and although the data collection for the drugs profile is wide, the group identified a number of data sets not currently taken into consideration. The drug and (when complete) gang profiles should also be shared wider with partner agencies.

All agreed that a regular meeting of this group (public health, local authority and police) would help identify emerging issues linked to gangs and county lines and build local capacity and capability. Inviting the local prison analyst from Lewes would help build better relationships with the safer custody team around reoffending, risk identification and reintegration of complex need prisoners released into Brighton and Hove.

Focus group 12 – Safeguarding children

This was another well-informed group who appeared to have a well-developed sense of the issue and how it is impacting on young people locally. Gangs were said to be targeting middle class children as well as looked after children in order to deal and distribute drugs, and a significant proportion of those interviewed felt that the current child protection process is “not fit for purpose” given how gangs are targeting children outside the home, and a lack of evidence given that children appear to be terrified into silence.

Social media was said to be a prominent enabler used by gangs to contact local children, as well as music videos used to promote a certain lifestyle.

The use of Xanax was reported amongst young people and it was noted that a batch of fake Xanax had recently hit the market, causing four young people to be hospitalised as a result.

The group were aware of parents with major concerns about their children’s behaviour who had resorted to going online (and joining Instagram for example) to find out more about what their children were looking at online. In one case where a child was missing a parent visited the YOT office but was unable to obtain any assistance (it was thought the young person was not a YOT client). However, on spotting a poster at the office that mapped out the location of free Wi-Fi spots, she then visited the locations handing out pictures of her son. Sure enough, she found her son after a day’s searching.

Debt entrapment was said to be a major issue with reports obtained from the support pod staff of children getting involved with gangs locally due to drug or gambling debts. Once they were involved it was stated that they could not get out of it without breaking every single social contact they had amongst their peers. Children involved with gangs were also said to talk about the “rungs of ladder”, using the metaphor to describe how they believed they could progress further. These children were said to have links with gang elders in London and had been seen with them.

The group also discussed what work the proposed county lines co-ordinator could undertake once in post, and came up with the following actions –

- A need to get full information and soft intelligence from children and families staff, youth workers etc in order to get a full picture of what’s happening. There was also said to be a need to build “a new relationship” between VCS and statutory agencies who needed to meet and share information
- Disclosure – a way of obtaining first point disclosure from young people is required – again a confidential advice line was thought to be a good idea
- A need to look at how parents could be made more aware of the problem and empowered to take action themselves
- A re-examination of child protection policies and what this means currently for Brighton
- Look at how girls and boys are responded to – there is a perception that girls get a different response to boys (who are seen as more likely to be offenders and culpable)

Good Practice

YOT Interviews and work

Some good work is underway by YOT staff, particularly the substance misuse worker who has a very well-developed sense of the challenges faced by young people, due to extensive non-attributable interviews.

The new VVE meeting is promising and the way to go in terms of linking this issue with other forms of exploitation.

Business Crime Reduction Partnership

This operates in the city centre and provides briefing information to businesses and private security companies in order to reduce crime and ASB. The team involved attend police tasking meetings and also support police by providing evidence bundles to secure post-conviction Criminal Behaviour Orders.

4 Summary

This was one of the most engaging locality reviews the team has participated in, due to the rich knowledge of those interviewed and their willingness to discuss the issues and their concerns. Most of the interviews could easily have taken place over 2-3 hours rather than the allocated hour, such was the richness of information, knowledge and level of debate and discussion.

Some of the groups noted a rise in class A drug usage over the last few years which is in line with other areas around the country, at least from a practitioner's viewpoint. The interviewees told us that from their experience there appears to be a cohort of new class A users feeding demand, alongside long term users.

Although gang activity appears to have grown in line with an expansion of local drug markets, a number of other issues were repeated during the day -

Lack of a needs assessment – a proper understanding of what exactly is happening in terms of drug usage, distribution, use of children, cuckooing etc is required. The activity around county lines is dynamic and although such an assessment will only provide a snapshot, this is crucial in terms of allocating resources and tackling the problem.

Children not talking and signs of accelerated criminal activity – again this is something that has been noted by practitioners from other parts of the UK and is most likely linked to gang violence (i.e. gangs using violence as a control mechanism to ensure young people are talking to the authorities about their activity), but also the loss of low level interventions such as youth work (particularly detached), ASB teams and other agencies/initiatives that signal early warnings for more specialised interventions.

A perceived disconnect between strategy and frontline staff – this is not uncommon but is something that hopefully any planned work can address, by involving practitioners from the outset and also ensuring they are aware of what is planned and their role.

Gangs – the g word. We understand from the interviewees that there has been a lot of debate within Brighton over the past few years about whether or not gangs are

active in the town, and around the use of the word gang, given the potential labelling implications. Many areas have had this discussion (and still do), and we find it tends to stifle activity that could actually tackle this problem. This has been a problem in the USA too, and the National Network for Safe Communities guide to tackle serious violence frames the debate like this -

*"All gangs are groups, but not all groups are gangs. Our experience shows that worrying about whether a particular area has gangs, or whether a particular group is a gang, is **an unnecessary distraction**. The simple fact is that many high-rate offenders associate in groups and that these groups drive serious violence. Many (and often most) such groups will not fit the statutory definition of a gang. Nor will they meet even the common perception of what constitutes a gang."*

You have certainly got serious group offending in Brighton. Some of these are street gangs, some are organised crime groups, some are groups of drug dealers, some specialise in the criminal exploitation of children. We use the word gang as a generic term, but you could call them groups or whatever. The point is, this debate only stifles activity and leads to inaction.

Use of debt entrapment to involve young people. This came up a number of times and appears to be something gangs all over the country are using as a tactic. Once young people get involved with these groups, they find they are in debt and have to keep working for the gang in order to pay the debt off or commit more crime (usually against other young people). Some of those we interviewed have talked at length with young people caught up in this dilemma, and services need to be provided to help these young people find a way out.

The need to make parents more aware of the issues and how they can seek support. A number of anecdotes came up during the interviews showing that some parents clearly need and want support, with some prepared to take things into their own hands. Consideration of how awareness and support could be provided for such parents, possibly geared around how to protect their children from criminal exploitation and who they should turn to would seem timely.

A clear profile on gangs, county line and drugs would help inform the 4 Ps tactics and the use of new legislative restrictions like the DDTR's can be used although we heard of an example where this was used and the line was up and being used again very quickly. A gang/VVE lead is needed to help coordinate a partnership response to this agenda, help share national practice and emerging trends. This would also improve the join up between intelligence and safeguarding information.

Additionally, the meeting structure requires a review of the terms of references to the plethora of established meetings to show up any duplication/silo working or opportunity to link agendas.

A re-consideration of safeguarding policies and processes. This is about the allocation of availability of resources as much as putting procedures in place. The message we heard loud and clear was that current procedures and policies are not meeting the current reality linked to gangs, county lines, violence and vulnerability matters that children and adults are facing in the area. Again, this is a national problem, not one confined to Brighton. However, we were struck by the suggestions put forward by the Adult safeguarding focus group (the first interview), who asked for a number of things to be considered that they feel could support their work and ensure that vulnerable people are better protected. These suggestions seem sensible and are some of the best we've seen from an adult safeguarding perspective.

There needs to be a **strategic framework** in place across the force area to tackle this issue, one that links to existing CSE and Modern Slavery/Trafficking work. The work needs to find a home within an existing partnership structure or meeting, rather than a new or standalone group. There is no silver bullet, and no single agency can deal with this – the police certainly can't arrest their way out of the problem – this is everybody's business.

5 Recommendations

- **Develop a clear strategy to tackle violence and vulnerability issues** and an operational delivery plan for all agencies. This delivery plan should cover enforcement tactics, activity to combat cuckooing and support vulnerable tenants, build on current prevention work (in schools and with young people and the wider community) and safeguarding issues. This could include the following actions –
 - Consider a desk top exercise to test local multi agency response and highlight data sharing protocols – especially between VCS groups and the hubs.
 - Implement and deliver a focused communication plan external and internal
 - Consider the implementation of some of the issues raised by practitioners in this report
 - Review the current meeting structure, there appear to be a number attempting to tackle the same issues
 - Consider the Gloucester Community Harm Reduction Team structure as a practice model (for more details contact us directly)
 - Raise awareness of local referral pathways and feedback process
 - Develop a tactical menu of judicial restrictions from each partner that can impact on this agenda

- Consider a bid to the Trusted Relationship fund for vulnerable linked to county lines and exploitation - TrustedRelationships@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk
- Consideration should be given to a **visioning event**, involving partners and communities from across the town. This event (perhaps half a day) could be used to map out areas and locations of concern (like a planning for real event) and share knowledge and information around the general problem. The event could build a rich narrative from participants regarding what's happening on the ground, who's being affected and what could be done to address some of the issues. It should also look to define the nature of what is occurring and how it is labelled (i.e. gangs). Such an event could begin to kick start some of the recommendations (*and also some concerns raised in the main body of this report*) outlined in this section. Single points of contact (SPOC) within each agency could also be considered at this event.
- **Consider a week of multi-agency action** with stated outcomes for each partner on this agenda. Work to look at and tackles issues around the Level and lower would be a good starting place.
- **Establish a local multi agency analyst forum** (we can provide draft terms of reference for this if required) and then.....
- **Consider the production of an informed needs assessment** that charts the current status of the drug market and gang activity in the town and surrounding areas using a wider range of partnership information. This could utilise any information collected in mapping events (see above). Public Health have a major role here in terms of understanding the nature of the drug demand locally (and the implications on resources going forward), as do housing agencies, local schools etc. A key to this work will be utilising the YOT work already in place to gauge what is actually happening and why.
- **Use current legislation around Modern Slavery and Trafficking**, if appropriate, against gangs and offenders who exploit vulnerable people. Rather than arresting gangs/groups for drug dealing, they should be charged with trafficking and modern slavery legislation. These carry sentences of 15 years to life and should be used to deter the use of vulnerable children. Consider a menu of enforcement options across the partnership including partial closure orders for example.
- **A programme of multi-agency training** in the area of county lines and the associated vulnerability subjects would be useful and desirable, in order to ensure that most practitioners across a range of agencies are aware of the problem and how to report it. The Violence and Vulnerability Unit currently offer online training around this matter for a range of practitioners. <http://vvu-online.com/#training>

- **The Children and Social Work Act 2017** provides for the replacement of LSCBs with a stronger and more flexible system of multi-agency arrangements. It removes the requirement for local areas to have LSCBs, replacing it with a requirement for three key partners – the police, local government and health services – to work together to agree the necessary strategic decisions to underpin effective practice.

The LSCB Reform process could be a way to start debate around vulnerability and statutory thresholds, and the possible need for additional support. The current Adult safeguarding boards should also be involved in this work around adults subjected to cuckooing and targeted by gangs because of a vulnerability. As outlined above, focus group 1 has outlined a number of options for consideration.

6 Ongoing support

Support for areas and partnerships to implement report recommendations is available from the VVU, funded via the Home Office.

Learning from the gang and youth violence programme is shared via the Gang and Youth Violence Special Interest Group and can be access by the Home Office tackling crime unit and Basecamp online site.

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

Contacts to discuss the recommendations and support any future work are -

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