Learning Hub: Gangs and Knife Crime Newsletter March 2019

The Hertfordshire Learning Hub

The Learning Hub is an important two way feedback loop between front line practitioners and the Strategic Safeguarding Partnership/Board, ensuring learning on priority local issues is shared and acted on at all levels in a timely way.

The first Learning Hub is running in March 2019 on the theme of gangs and knife crime. This newsletter provides key information about gangs and knife crime in Hertfordshire and how it is being tackled. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive overview, but it aims to stimulate discussion about the issues, what is working well locally and what could be improved.

Please respond to our online survey to feedback your views on gangs and knife crime in Hertfordshire.

1. The Problem of Gangs and Knife Crime

While overall crime continues to fall nationally, homicide, knife crime and gun crime have risen since 2014 across virtually all police force areas in England and Wales.

The Government published a national Serious Violence Strategy in 2018. The key message of the strategy is that tackling serious violence is not a law enforcement issue alone and it requires a multiple strand approach involving a range of partners across different sectors.

National trends and evidence

- There has been a shift towards younger victims and perpetrators.
- About half the rise in robbery and knife/gun crime is due to improvements in police recording. For the remainder, drug-related cases seem to be an important driver.
- Social media may be playing a role in spreading violence related to drug markets.
- There is evidence of considerable overlap between victims and offenders of serious violence. The rise may also therefore be related to increases in certain vulnerable groups like the homeless and excluded children.
- We still do not really know the most important causal drivers of serious violence at the individual level, nor the exact types of interventions that are most effective.

“Knife crime has increased in Hertfordshire by 44% in the last three years”

“One incident of violence with injury is estimated to have an economic cost of £13,900”
County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move [and store] the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.

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

Knife crime includes offences where a knife or sharp instrument has been used, as well as knife possession, where a person has an article with a blade or point in a public place, including school.

National recommendations and action being taken

- The national strategy recommends use of preventative interventions. There is evidence that these interventions can work and offer value for money, but they should be tailored to an individual’s needs and the intensity should match their level of risk.
- Interventions focused on the establishment of cognitive or character-based skills and/or non-violent norms seem to be more effective than punitive interventions.
- The Government has committed to funding preventative interventions, including through the County Lines Action Plan and grant funding for local initiatives.

2. The Hertfordshire Picture

What is happening?

- Hertfordshire has shown the largest proportional increase in knife crime in the UK, with a 44% increase in the last three years. The majority of knife crime in Hertfordshire is not considered to be gang-related.
- The majority of knife crime offences in Hertfordshire are committed by males aged 18-29. Similarly, the majority of victims are also males aged 18-29.
- Of current Hertfordshire knife crimes: 20% are domestic abuse related, 15% are alcohol related and 5% are drug related.
- There are currently 149 known gang members residing in Hertfordshire. Of these, 86 members are living in Broxbourne, Hertsmere and Watford.
- There are currently 118 known county line members in Hertfordshire with most residing in Stevenage, Watford and Welwyn Hatfield.
- The extent of serious violence that goes unreported to the Police is unknown and the level of exploitation of children and vulnerable adults is also a significant intelligence gap.

"There were 1,615 recorded knife crimes in Hertfordshire in 2017"
Spotting the signs of young people at risk of gang involvement:

- Child withdrawn from family; going missing from home or being found out-of-area.
- Sudden loss of interest in school.
- Decline in attendance or academic achievement.
- Being emotionally "switched off", but also containing frustration.
- Started to use new or unknown slang words.
- Excessive receipt of texts / phone calls.
- Holds unexplained money or possessions.
- Being found in possession of or using drugs.
- Stays out unusually late without reason.
- Leaving home / care without explanation.
- Dropped out of positive activities.
- New nickname.

Visit #knifefree to view the national campaign aimed at young people

**What are we doing locally?**

A Hertfordshire Serious Violence Strategy and Action Plan will be published shortly and will set out priority actions for the county.

The following countywide boards will be responsible for achieving the actions in the delivery plan: Community Safety Board, Domestic Abuse Executive Board, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Board, Integrated Offender Management Board, Safeguarding Adults Board, and Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Local community safety partnerships are also leading local activity to address these issues, alongside partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

**Knife Amnesty**

Hertfordshire Constabulary took part in a national knife amnesty in September 2018. The amnesty was part of a national campaign, Operation Sceptre, being run by police forces across the country to reduce the number of illegal knives in circulation. During the amnesty 200 knives were deposited in the bins at police stations in Hatfield (90), Stevenage (52) and Watford (47) which included swords, military knives, knuckle dusters and a large amount of kitchen knives.

**Theatre in Education Production: Breaking the Chain**

Over 5,200 young people in years 7 and 8 saw this hard hitting production in Hertfordshire schools in February. It focuses on the dangers of carrying knives and busting some of the myths around knife carrying; such as that people carrying a knife for protection are more likely to get injured themselves and that there is no safe place to stab someone.

**Herts Youth Justice Weapon Awareness Interventions**

Hertfordshire Youth Justice Service has seen a steady rise in the number of weapons-related offences and convictions (including knife crime). A range of group and individual based Weapons Awareness Interventions have been developed and offered to young people subject to a Court Order or Youth Conditional Caution in order to help reduce the level of risk that they pose to the community and themselves. These inventions are delivered in interactive ways and cover all aspects of knife and weapon crime:

- The physical impact and consequences of knife crime are discussed with young people by the Street Doctors, medical professionals who share their first-hand experience and knowledge of stabbings.
- Reformed gang members educate young people about the risks and dangers of criminal exploitation by gangs and county lines.
- The impact of knife crime on victims is driven home to young people by hard hitting victim impact presentations given by organisation such as the Ben Kinsella Trust.
- Each weekend Youth Justice Attendance Centres, run an offending behaviour group work programme including sessions on: weapon awareness, consequences of offending, substance misuse, victim empathy and peer group pressure.
Knife carrying…

The latest Hertfordshire Health Related Behaviour Survey (2016) showed that 25% of secondary pupils self-reported that they carry a weapon or something else for protection.

Knife crime in schools…

Year 9 students at a school in Welwyn were asked about knife crime in February 2019:

- They all remembered covering knife crime in PSHE lessons.
- They were enthusiastic about a session where an ex-gang member came to talk to them.
- Some were confused about what the punishment was for carrying a knife.
- Most knew that their school had a zero tolerance policy.
- They all said they feel safe and weren’t worried about knife crime.

Impact on Vulnerable Adults – ‘Cuckooing’:

Vulnerable adults can be affected by cuckooing. This is the term used when gangs establish a base in the location they are targeting, often taking over the homes of vulnerable adults by force or coercion. Those at risk include adults with mental health difficulties or learning disabilities. Signs of cuckooing include:

- Lots of different people coming and going from an address.
- Suspicious smells coming from the property.
- Windows covered or curtains closed all of the time.
- Cars pulling up to or near to the house for a short period of time.
- An increase in anti-social behaviour around the property.

Young People Feeling Safe:

YC Herts talked to a group of young people aged 15-18 who live in East Herts and Broxbourne in February 2019:

"What I hear in the news makes me worry"

"It depends where you hang out, it is more of an issue in certain areas"

"I know people in my area who have been stabbed" – Female, 15.

"I have seen people carry acid, which they say they carry in self-defence" – Male, 16.

"When I go to visit my brother I feel unsafe as lots of not very nice people around” – Female, 16

"I know people who have been stabbed, who are then doing home surgery rather than going to hospital”

If you have a big mouth and are loud and say the wrong thing in the wrong area then it’s going to kick off” – Male, 18

"It starts at bullying and those that are bullied start “shotting” to try and gain respect. They then carry knives in self-defence”

Families affected by child criminal exploitation (including county lines) and interviewed for research by Missing People in 2018 said:

- There are long term impacts of child criminal exploitation, on both the child and the family, particularly on mental health.
- Most children were treated as criminals from the start, and not as potential victims of exploitation.
- They felt like they were not listened to, and that they were not involved in decision making around their child.
- Attempts at intervention often came much too late, and only happened once their child had been groomed to such an extent that they were unlikely to engage in support attempts.
- They needed some support for themselves, but also support and strategies in order to understand what was happening to their child and how best to support them: most families did not receive this.
### Young people’s ideas on what could help:

- Parent sessions, making them aware of the issues.
- Peer talks in schools.
- Harsher punishments for carrying knives.
- Knowing what to do if someone is stabbed or has acid thrown on them.

### Prevention ideas from young people involved in gang activity:

- Education about gangs at a younger age.
- Support for cannabis use.
- Education about risks and fears.
- Family take notice of social media and friendships.
- Safety around youth clubs (which can be used to target young people).
- Education that is focused on needs.
- Activities like sport, boxing, martial arts.

---

### 4. Examples

#### Local practice

**Broxbourne Youth Intervention Programme**

Funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner, this multi-agency programme seeks to identify and support young people at risk of involvement in violent crime or the drugs trade. Using a methodology developed by criminologist Craig Pinkney and advocated by Steve Warner (Deputy Head Teacher, St Mary’s C.of.E High School), teaching staff are trained to review pupil’s vulnerability against a set of criteria. This is then shared with partners including Herts Constabulary, YC Herts, Targeted Youth Support and Broxbourne Council to build up intelligence on the level of risk. Those at highest risk then receive one-to-one mentoring from an outreach worker from the St Giles Trust or are referred to the TRAKS programme delivered by YC Herts. Other pupils are monitored and directed to other forms of support. This approach has identified young people at high level of involvement in this lifestyle who are now being provided with positive alternatives and support. All pupils also receive assemblies on keeping themselves safe and the dangers of involvement in this lifestyle. At present, two secondary schools are fully engaged in the programme with a further two having had awareness days in January. A community awareness event is being held in March to support parents and community members in spotting the signs and symptoms that young people are at risk.

**Targeted Youth Support (TYS) and YC Herts Case Study**

TYS are currently supporting a young person of Black British Caribbean background who has been known to Social Care sporadically throughout his life. He was groomed into gang involvement aged 11, has been stabbed on different occasions and currently has a life changing injury. Professionals felt in hindsight that he was an easy target for gangs as he is autistic and struggled within school, experiencing exclusions and isolation from peers. The main factors for this young person’s gang involvement were: he wanted to belong, his family had entrenched connections to older gang members in the area, he was attracted to the opportunity to earn money as his family was struggling financially and in housing arrears, he had inconsistent parenting and was able to be in the local area without parental supervision, he experienced domestic abuse and he smoked cannabis as an escape and was unable to control anger/aggression.

**Herts Sports Partnership Youth Intervention Project**

HSP will be creating 23 separate sports sessions in each district across the county, to target young people at risk or on the cusp of criminal behaviour; particularly gang and knife crime. The project is based on a referral process from a number of partner agencies including: Hertfordshire Constabulary, secondary schools, Families First, YC Herts and local community safety partnerships. The project is aimed at young people aged 14-19 with many sessions located in traditional sports clubs to build stronger links between community clubs and young people to try and establish continued participation in sport, as well as reducing criminal behaviour. As part of the holistic programme, the sessions will incorporate an informal education element which will include healthy eating, resilience, sexual education and substance misuse. Young people will also be provided with a mentor to allow an opportunity to share any concerns they may have and also improve their life prospects.
**National approaches and themes**

**Characteristics of effective programmes for young people:**
The Early Intervention Foundation (2015) found that effective programmes addressing youth violence tended to include the following characteristics:
- Seeking to create positive change in the lives of young people and families.
- Schools-based or family-focused programmes.
- Skilled facilitators who work regularly with children and/or families.
- Mentoring and community-based sports programmes.
- Implementation fidelity: sticking to the original programme specification.

**Trauma Informed Practice**
Trauma informed practice is a strengths based framework which acknowledges the significant impact of physical, emotional or psychological trauma. Several local authorities in London have embedded, or are in the process of embedding, trauma informed practice into their work with young people who have been involved in serious youth violence. This tends to include training of staff followed by six to twelve months of clinical supervision or coaching.

**Missing and Child Criminal Exploitation**
Child criminal exploitation (including county lines and associated knife and gang violence) can be both a cause and effect of going missing. Missing People has recently conducted exploratory research with a small number of families of those who have been criminally exploited, including through county lines. The key findings include:
- Early warning signs of exploitation and grooming were not well understood or recognised, so opportunities for early intervention were missed.
- Families were clear that they were very concerned about their child and intuitively knew that something beyond ‘teenage behaviour’ was happening, but these concerns were generally not taken seriously, or the families did not know who to approach for help.
- Missing was a common and constant theme throughout the child’s exploitation.
- Return from early missing episodes was felt by family members to be a stage at which possible intervention was missed.

**Contextual Safeguarding**...provides an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people’s experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. This approach is useful for children’s social care practitioners and encourages them to engage with individuals and sectors who have influence over/within extra-familial contexts.

**Joint Targeted Area Inspections**...now look at the effectiveness of the multi-agency response to young people at risk of involvement in gangs and criminal exploitation, with criteria focussing on how well agencies work together to assess risks and respond. There is a particular focus on children that have gone missing.

**Public Health**...offers a system wide approach that seeks to improve the health and safety of all individuals by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood of an individual becoming a victim or a perpetrator of violence. The approach focuses on primary prevention.