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# Overview and Scrutiny

**Violence Against Women and Girls: awareness raising and prevention review**

**Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee**

**Spring 2015**

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**Membership of the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee in 2014/15:**

Councillor Pauline Morrison (Chair)

Councillor David Michael (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Andre Bourne

Councillor Colin Elliott

Councillor Alicia Kennedy

Councillor Pat Raven

Councillor Luke Sorba

Councillor Eva Stamirowski

Councillor Paul Upex

Councillor James-J Walsh

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## **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 At the beginning of the 2014/15 municipal year the Committee agreed to carry out a review into the issues affecting gang associated women and girls. Members were concerned about reports in the press, which detailed the dangerous and troubling situations some women and girls encountered because of their association with gangs. During the course of the review, the Committee heard that violence against women and girls was regularly used as a means of conflict and/or retaliation between groups of boys and men. The Committee also heard about the secretive nature of this type of violence and the damage it could cause in the lives of women and girls it affected.
- 1.2 One of the Committee's key concerns was about the concealed nature of violence and abuse. On various occasions, the Committee has heard about the historically high levels of domestic violence in Lewisham and has recognised that there is a general problem with underreporting. The Committee has also heard about the development of Lewisham's violence against women and girls strategy, which highlighted the need for additional information and intelligence in a number of areas. The implication, in the evidence received for this review, that violence against women may also be affecting the lives and life chances of young women and girls was of deep concern to Members.
- 1.3 In Lewisham there are targeted multi-agency approaches to disrupting youth violence and protecting women from domestic violence. Partners organisations in Lewisham share information about the most difficult cases and put in place processes to disrupt the influence of violence and abuse in the lives of affected women and girls.
- 1.4 A range of different approaches are being deployed across London to raise awareness of gang violence and to prevent young people from becoming victims. The Safer London Foundation is at the forefront of this work. The Committee was encouraged to hear that workers from the Foundation would soon be supporting Lewisham's efforts to protect women and girls from gang violence. However, the Committee also heard that there was no single offer of awareness raising or prevention activity being provided to schools in Lewisham, or in London as a whole.
- 1.5 The role of schools in supporting awareness raising and prevention activities was discussed on a number of occasions at Committee. Members were concerned that, with the competing priorities for time on each school's curriculum for issues relating to personal, social and health education, that the issue of gang related violence might not be given priority. The Committee felt that the stigma associated with gang violence and the likelihood of underreporting also meant that this issue might not be given proper attention. The Committee resolved to explore this issue further as part of its future work.

## **2. Recommendations**

- R1. Further work is required on mapping the scale of the issues highlighted in this report. It is clear that the Council and its partners hold information about issues relating to gang associated women and girls in the borough who are at the highest level of risk, however, Mayor and Cabinet should task officers with developing a coordinated approach to mapping and monitoring the extent of violence against gang associated women and girls in Lewisham.
- R2. Officers should work with neighbouring boroughs to review ideas for best practice in preventing violence against gang associated women and girls - and to share information, where appropriate.
- R3. The Council should write to the Head Teacher and Chair of Governors of every school in the borough to highlight the issue of violence against gang associated women and girls and to make schools aware of sources of information, support and advice available.
- R4. Working with partners in the support and advice sector, the Council should ensure that it maintains a comprehensive record of services and support being offered in the borough's schools.
- R5. The Committee notes the important work being carried out by the Safer London Foundation and requests that the Council and its partners give full consideration to securing future funding of the Empower programme in Lewisham.

### 3. Purpose and structure of review

- 3.1 At its meeting on 15 July 2014, when deciding on its annual work programme, the Committee discussed its concerns about the prevalence of violence against women and girls. Members of the Committee highlighted information published in the national press (and reported by the Safer London Foundation<sup>1</sup>) about the dangers posed to women and girls by gangs<sup>2</sup>. Members were alarmed at these reports and sought to further understand the actions being taken by Partner organisations in Lewisham to protect women and girls from gang violence.
- 3.2 In response to the Committee's concerns, officers provided additional information about the development and delivery of Lewisham's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy at the Committee's meeting on 10 September 2014. The Council's Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People and the Lead Police Sargent for Lewisham's gangs unit also answered questions about the Safer Lewisham Partnership's approach to tackling violence against women and girls, including its work with gang associated women and girls.
- 3.3 After consideration of the information provided and questioning of officers, the Committee resolved to carry out a review into the issues facing gang associated women and girls in the borough, which would focus on preventative work, awareness raising and early intervention.

#### Meeting the criteria for a review

- 3.4 At its meeting on 3 November 2014, the Committee received a scoping report for the review, which set out the background, proposed key lines of enquiry and suggested key questions for the review.
- 3.5 It was agreed that a review of prevention work for gang associated women and girls would meet the criteria for carrying out a scrutiny review, because:
- it was a strategic and significant issue
  - it affected a number of people living in Lewisham
  - the Council was in the process of tendering a service for the provision of services to prevent, and reduce the impacts of, violence against women and girls
  - the Council was required to make a major reduction to its budget, which would reduce resources available to community and voluntary organisations, public health, supported housing, youth offending and schools improvement services.

#### Key lines of inquiry

- 3.6 In order to successfully complete this review, the Committee agreed that it would seek answers to the following questions:
- What data is available about the extent of issues affecting gang associated girls and women in Lewisham?

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<sup>1</sup> *Gangs draw up lists of girls to rape as proxy attack on rivals* in the Guardian (19-07-14), accessed online at: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jul/19/gangs-rape-lists-sex-assault>

<sup>2</sup> Sexual Violence in parts of UK as bad as warzones, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/nov/26/gangs-sexual-violence-warzones>

- What services exist to prevent women and girls from becoming associated with gangs?
- What is the pattern of take up of prevention services?
- What is the current level of resource for prevention services in Lewisham?
- Are there examples of effective practice in other areas?
- What are the future challenges to delivering successful prevention and awareness raising work?

#### Review questions:

- How do Lewisham and its partner organisations work to prevent women and girls from becoming associated with gangs?
- What could be done to enhance the effectiveness of work in this area?

#### 3.7 Issues agreed to be outside of the scope of the review:

- Dealing with individual cases or casework

#### Timetable

#### 3.8 The review was carried out over a series of meetings:

10 September 2014

- The Committee heard from the Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People about the process of developing and delivering the borough's Violence Against Women and Girls strategy. A senior officer from the Metropolitan Police in Lewisham, the Strategic Community Safety Services Manager and Lewisham's Violence Against Women and Girls Coordinator were also present.

3 December 2014

- The Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People provided information about prevention services in the borough, including work with girls and gangs.

22 January 2015

- Representatives of the Safer London Foundation presented information about the Empower programme.

10 March 2015

- Lewisham's Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People provided information about work taking place in schools to raise awareness and prevent violence against women and girls.

20 April 2015 and 14 May 2015

- The Committee considered its draft final report and agreed recommendations

## 4. Gangs and gang association

4.1 There are different definitions of gangs, groups and criminal networks. Their activities, their membership and their areas of operation may change over time. Researchers, policy makers and practitioners may use inconsistent definitions, leading to differing policy approaches to tackling gang violence, exploitation and anti-social behaviour. However, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) accepts the Centre for Social Justice definition of a gang as:

'A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who (1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, (2) engage in a range of criminal activity and violence, (3) identify with or lay claim over territory, (4) have some form of identifying structural feature, and (5) are in conflict with other, similar, gangs.' (Centre for Social Justice 2009, p21)

4.2 Data used to develop the Mayor of London's '*strategic ambitions for London on gangs and serious youth violence*' notes that the Metropolitan Police believe that there are 224 recognised gangs in London made up of about 3495 people<sup>3</sup>.

4.3 Some commentators (see Runnymede Trust 2008, Rethinking Gangs) believe that the difficulty in developing an enduring definition of a gang stems from a fundamental failure to understand the significance of the involvement of young people in violence and anti-social behaviour. This interpretation is built on the idea that the usual explanations for gang and group behaviours erroneously merge young people's associations, behaviours and peer groups indiscriminately.

4.4 At its meeting on 10 September 2014, officers reported that there was no straightforward definition of a gang. The Committee also heard that there had been a shift in Lewisham from street gangs of school age children (who fought over territory and status) to looser groupings of young adults that operated as 'criminal cliques'. It was reported that these loser groupings of young adults focused primarily on running drug businesses and that they used violence to support their businesses as part of their association with wider criminal networks. (Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee, 10 September 2014).

4.5 The complicated nature of gangs and groups was highlighted in evidence to the Committee about recent and on-going enforcement action in Lewisham. Officers provided an update on the work being carried out to disrupt drug dealing by criminal organisations operating from the borough to deliver drugs outside of London. The information provided to the Committee concerned on-going police operations so the discussion and the detail made available was limited for reasons of secrecy. Nonetheless, the discussion with officers and representatives of the police demonstrated the changing nature of gang activity in the borough.

4.6 MOPAC has developed a strategic framework<sup>4</sup> in London for responding to violence against gang associated women and girls. The framework sets out the strategic direction for London Boroughs to tackle the dangers faced by gang associated girls and women across the city. Its aim is to:

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<sup>3</sup>Mayor of London (2014) – Gangs and Serious Youth Violence :

[http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Ambitions%20for%20London\\_%20Gangs%20and%20SYV%202014\\_0.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Ambitions%20for%20London_%20Gangs%20and%20SYV%202014_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> MOPAC strategic framework for responding to gang associated women and girls (2013):

[http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Gangs%20and%20girls\\_strategic%20framework.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Gangs%20and%20girls_strategic%20framework.pdf)

‘...support London boroughs and agencies in devising their strategic and operational responses to young women and girls involved in or associated to criminal gangs.’

4.7 The Framework builds on the Centre for Social Justice definition of gang activity by interpreting the territorial element of the definition to include economic territory. It also recognises that gangs need not be street based. Building on this definition, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) defines a gang member as someone who:

- Identifies themselves as being a member of a gang and this is corroborated by information from more than one independent source
- Is identified as being a member of a gang and this is corroborated by information from more than one independent source

#### Gang associated women and girls

4.8 Despite the inherent difficulties in defining gangs, all of the available information about gang membership demonstrates that gangs are almost all entirely made up of boys and men. Nonetheless, at the Committee’s meeting on 10 September, it was reported that there had been an increase in the numbers of women associated with gangs as perpetrators. Officer stated that the changing activities of gangs indicated a more prominent role for female members:

‘Lewisham mirrors a trend across the capital where drug dealing, mostly outside London, is supplanting conflicts over territory and vulnerable females have a high value as couriers.’ (Report to Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee, 10 September 2014)

4.9 The Committee did not consider any published data about the demographics of gang members. However, it was reported that recent operations in Lewisham indicated that gang members were increasingly using girls and young women to safe house drugs and weapons. It was also reported that gangs involved in so called ‘County Lines’<sup>5</sup>, drug dealing were using young women and girls who may previously not have had any contact with the local authority or the Police. It was recognised that this made it exceedingly difficult to predict the numbers of girls and women involved in gang related activity.

4.10 MOPAC recommends that community safety partnerships (in Lewisham this is the Safer Lewisham Partnership) should adopt the ACPO definition of gang-associated women and girls to assist with the identification and assessment of women and girls at risk. The definition is as follows:

‘...a woman or girl who is a family member of or in an intimate relationship with a gang nominal’. (MOPAC 2013, p6)

4.11 This definition is important because of its scope. The initial information and reports discussed by Members at the start of the review noted that there was evidence that women and girls affected by gang violence may be unaware family members (or

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<sup>5</sup> County lines drug dealing describes the practice of London drug dealers selling drugs outside of the city, where London drugs might be perceived to be more valuable and police enforcement less targeted.



men/boys they were associated with) were involved in gang related activity. In the evidence reviewed by the Committee about the scale of the situation in Lewisham, Partner organisations were using this definition to identify women and girls associated with principal gang members or 'nominal'.

4.12 Gang association can be defined in a number of different ways, at the Committee's meeting on 3 February 2015, representatives of the Foundation drew on the Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups (2013) to describe the different risks faced by gang associated women and girls as well as the different gangs and groupings that were thought to be involved violence against women and girls. The presentation from the Safer London Foundation highlighted the following distinctions between sexual exploitation, victimisation and abuse by gangs, groups and peers:

- **Gang-associated sexual exploitation, victimisation and abuse**  
Involves one or multiple perpetrators, who are themselves gang-associated and takes place as a form of intra or inter gang-related violence.  
*Sexual exploitation is not the main reason why a gang is formed*
- **Group sexual exploitation, victimisation and abuse**  
Carried out by multiple perpetrators who are connected through formal or informal associations or networks between themselves or between victims. 'Group' refers specifically to the numbers of perpetrators involved in the violence.  
*Group exists in person or online for the purpose of sexual exploitation*
- **Peer-on-peer sexual exploitation, victimisation and abuse**  
Exploitation of children and young people by other children and young people; in some, but not all, cases the children and young people who perpetrate this abuse are exploited by adults to do so.

#### The dangers of gang association

4.13 It was reported by representatives of the Safer London Foundation that there were common features to the pattern of sexual violence and exploitation by gangs.

- Perpetrators are predominantly male, victims predominantly female;
- It often takes place between people who are known to each other;
- Used as a means of boys and young men exerting power and control over girls and young women.

4.14 There have been a number of published articles and pieces of research which detail the negative impacts of violence and exploitation on gang associated women and girls. In 2012 a study by Bedfordshire University<sup>6</sup> found that violence, rape and sexual exploitation were common place in gangs. The study detailed the disordered relationships that are able to develop between gang members and gang associated women and girls. It drew on accounts from women and girls to highlight the destructive and violent behaviours, which appeared commonplace in gangs and came to be accepted as the norm. The Committee reviewed some of the key pieces of information from this study when planning the scope of this review.

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<sup>6</sup> Beckett, H with Brodie, I; Factor, F; Melrose, M; Pearce, J; Pitts, J; Shuker, L and Warrington, C. University of Bedfordshire, 2012

4.15 MOPAC's strategic framework for responding to gang associated women and girls utilises the results of the Bedfordshire University study, highlighting that both inside and outside of gangs the patterns of violence are similar, in that women and girls are most often the victims of sexual violence and exploitation and that the perpetrators are most often, if not always, men. The Framework highlights the following areas of particular concern in the context of gang associated women and girls:

- pressure to engage in sexual activity;
- engagement in sexual activity due to fear of force, violence (physical and/or sexual) and intimidation;
- the recording and distribution of images of sexual activity via mobile technology;
- sex as initiation into the gang;
- sex in return for (perceived) status or protection;
- sex as a means of achieving material gain;
- young women "setting up" people in other gangs; and
- cases of rape (single and multiple perpetrator) and other sexual assaults – as punishment, a weapon in conflict and/or for sexual gratification  
(University of Bedfordshire, cited in MOPAC 2013, p17)

4.16 At the Committee's meeting on 3 February 2015 Members heard some stark and disturbing descriptions of the violence and trauma inflicted on gang associated women and girls. As reported in the initial newspaper articles identified by Members of the Committee, information collected by the Safer London Foundation indicates that girls and women associated with gangs are at risk of being targeted for sexual assault as a means of conflict between boys and men in rival gangs. It was reported that some gangs operated in a perceived culture of impunity because of the low levels of reporting, arrest rates and convictions for sexual assault.

4.17 The Committee also heard about the following common situations of exploitation and violence experienced by gang associated women and girls:

- Line –ups – forced or coerced oral sex carried out by multiple perpetrators
- Women who are expected to have sex with many members of the same gang, called battery chicks
- Multiple perpetrator rape
- Sexual activity in return for (perceived) status or protection
- Sexual assault as a weapon in conflict and retaliation
- Young women 'setting-up' people in other gangs
- Establishing a relationship with, or feigning sexual interest in a rival gang member, in order to set up an 'entrapment'

(Office of the Children's Commissioner child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups, Interim Report 2012; reported by Safer London Foundation to meeting on 3 February 2015.)

4.18 Case work and research reported by the Safer London Foundation demonstrated that some women and girls were viewed by gang members as being inferior to others. The Committee heard that some victims were perceived as having lost their rights to withhold consent to sexual activity through their association with the gang. The disturbing implication of the information provided to the Committee was that sexual violence and abuse were normalised in some situations to the extent that the girls

and women, as well as boys and men, involved came to view threats of violence and abuse as everyday occurrences.

- 4.19 Members also questioned Council officers about the sexual exploitation of young men and boys by gangs and groups. The Committee was particularly concerned about the dangers to young men and boys posed by online grooming. It was reported that further work needed to take place to understand the dangers of online grooming. Representatives of the Safer London Foundation reported that information about violence against boys and men was even less readily available than information about violence against gang associated women and girls.
- 4.20 Officers also recognised that further work needed to take place to raise awareness of the dangers of online grooming and exploitation of young people, whether they were considered to be vulnerable or not. The recurrent issue in all of the information and evidence gathered by the Committee was that of underreporting. This was recognised by officers, representatives from the Safer London Foundation and in all of the reports to the Committee.

#### The situation in Lewisham

- 4.21 The Committee was informed that the data surrounding gang associated women and girls was not in the public domain and that therefore, it would not be possible for officers of the Council or for the Police to disclose the details of their current intelligence. However, the processes in place for identifying and supporting gang associated women and girls were reported to the Committee.
- 4.22 Each London borough maintains a gangs/serious violent offending matrix (list of key violent individuals) collated by the Met Police Trident Gang command. Officers reported that this list provided the key focus for police and partnership interventions in relation to gang activity.
- 4.23 The Committee heard that this list of principal gang members (or gang nominals) was used to focus on risk and did not provide a comprehensive collection of all of the people involved in gangs and groups in the borough. It was also reported that intelligence provided from this source about women and girls tended to highlight women and girls involved in offending behaviour rather than those at risk from sexual exploitation, abuse and victimisation.
- 4.24 In the report from officers to the Committee on 3 December 2014, Members heard that, whilst the gang and serious violent offending matrix provided the basis for action, work was also undertaken by officers to identify women and girls at risk of sexual exploitation and violence as part of the Council's broader risk management approach. The Council's Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People told the Committee that Lewisham's Serious Violence Team and Trilogy Police officers collated sibling information for gang members, identifying further female family members under 18 who were of concern. The Committee heard that Lewisham's partnership approach allowed these names to be shared in order that future safeguarding notifications could be prioritised.
- 4.25 Officers reported that, apart from those identified as at risk through the Serious Violence Team process, it would be difficult to speculate on numbers affected by sexual violence, victimisation and abuse by gangs, not least owing to the secretive

nature of this world and the under-reporting of sexual violence. The Committee discussed the low levels of reporting and the hidden nature of violence against women and girls in all its forms. It was recognised that the level of risk posed to potential victims was a significant barrier to improving disclosures and securing convictions against perpetrators.

## **5. Work to tackle violence against women and girls**

5.1 The Mayor of London has committed that, as part of its work to reduce youth violence, the London Crime Reduction Board will ensure that by 2017:

‘Access to prevention programmes in all London state schools and educational establishments will be available, enabling children and young people to make positive life choices. Every ‘at risk’ child will receive targeted support for a positive transition to secondary school Troubled Families, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs and other family support and safeguarding mechanisms should understand and address gang issues’

(Mayor of London; strategic ambitions for London (2014); gangs and serious youth violence, p26)

5.2 The MOPAC strategic framework for responding to gang associated women and girls recommends that services in boroughs for girls and women affected by gang violence should include:

- Prevention work/healthy relationships that covers gang-association and violence against women and girls (VAWG) delivered in schools, pupil referral units and in out of school youth-based settings.
- Early intervention and diversionary work such as mentoring and peer support to support young women on the peripheries of gangs.
- Crisis support such as advocacy, exit provision that is safe and provided by women that addresses the holistic needs of young women and girls (as above).
- Longer-term support such as specialist counselling to support young women and girls to overcome the trauma of gang-associated VAWG. Counselling services should be specialised as inappropriate responses can exacerbate the effects of sexual violence as they can damage the victim’s positive sense of self or lead to higher levels of psychological symptoms and poorer recovery.
- Interventions to promote self-esteem and confidence.
- Education, training and employment opportunities tailored for young women and girls. A women-centred approach to education, training and employment should be about ensuring young women and girls have access to a broad and diverse range of opportunities and that appropriate systems and support are put in place to address their specific needs.

### Lewisham’s violence against women and girls strategy

5.3 The Committee reviewed the consultation on and implementation of Lewisham’s violence against women and girls strategy. Officers reported that previously, violence against women and girls services operated in a fragmented way, with potential problems of overlap or gaps in service provision. The Safer Lewisham Partnership’s new coordinated VAWG plan sets out four objectives for action, these are:

- To develop a better understanding of VAWG and its impact in Lewisham;
- Early intervention and prevention of VAWG
- To ensure an improved access to the support and protection services offered to women and girls in our borough;
- To hold perpetrators to account.

5.4 The strategy was subject to consultation with stakeholders between November 2013 and January 2014. Officers reported that:

- The consultation sought to obtain the perspectives of women and girls on their experiences of accessing support services across the voluntary, statutory and community sector, how current services could be improved and recommendations for how VAWG should be tackled in the future.
- There was consultation with professionals and partners through Lewisham's local violence against women and girls professional networks.
- And - an on-line consultation with professionals and service users

5.5 49 women and girls were consulted, a quarter of whom were young people between the ages of 13 and 25. One of the recommendations from the consultation with local women and girls was that Lewisham should consider a single combined co-located service, where women and girls could access a variety of needs such as counselling, outreach support or crisis management. Targeted work was also carried out to develop a greater understanding of the experiences of survivors.

5.7 Following from the consultation and work with stakeholders, the Council has commissioned a single violence against women and girls service to develop a coordinated approach to violence against women and girls in the borough. The service will provide a single point of contact for services in the borough. The ambition is that this increased level of coordination will improve the following outcomes:

- An increase in the number of referrals to the service.
- Increasing the number of victims and families made safe and who stay safe.
- A reduction in repeat reports of domestic violence and abuse.
- Increased interventions and therefore reductions in risk and cases of significant harm.
- Successful work with perpetrators, such as change in the behaviour of perpetrators and an awareness of the impacts of their behaviour.
- Improving outcomes for individuals and groups in other areas of their lives.
- Increased and improved service user involvement

5.8 Lewisham's new combined violence against women and girls service will begin in April 2015. The intention is that the service will increase the number of referrals and work to develop Lewisham's approach to early intervention. At its meeting on 10 September 2014, the Committee heard that some of the broader expected outcomes of the new VAWG service might include;

- Reduced repeat victimisation.
- Reduced repeat perpetrators and positive changes in perpetrator behaviour.
- Increased reports and criminal justice outcomes e.g. sanction detections
- Increase in the number of referrals to the service for support.
- Improved safety for children and young people

- Reducing the risk of children and young people becoming a future victim / perpetrator of domestic abuse

### Multi-agency work in Lewisham

- 5.9 At the Committee's meeting on 10 September 2014, Members heard that the Safer Lewisham Partnership ensured that there was information sharing and advice between the different agencies to deal with violence against gang associated women and girls.
- 5.10 One of the key ways in which Lewisham partners identify and protect girls and women at risk of sexual violence and exploitation is through the Youth MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) which receives referrals about youth (under 25) victims of serious violence, including girls involved with gangs. The MARAC is made up of more than 30 relevant partner organisations.
- 5.11 Of the referrals in the year preceding the report to the Committee, it was identified that three-quarters of the cases to the Youth MARAC had been highlighted in relation to sexual exploitation, drug dealing or involvement with those known to lead a gang lifestyle. The Committee heard that all of the people identified through the MARAC process had been offered a range of support. It was also reported that youth MARAC officers attended case conferences, strategy groups and child sexual exploitation meetings as required.
- 5.12 Lewisham's Youth MARAC also combines referrals from Lewisham Hospital A&E and Kings College Hospital A&E departments for a variety of issues relating to violence, although these are not always gang related. The Committee heard that a number of these meet the criteria to go to MARAC conference. Those which are known to be involved in gang related activity are referred to Serious Violence Multi-agency Team, and others are passed directly to Children's Social Care or other officers as appropriate.
- 5.13 Officers noted that Lewisham's Ending Gang and Youth Violence team was working with the Youth MARAC to develop good practice in strategic and operational planning. Members also heard that the Serious Violence Team worked with the Early Intervention Child Sexual Exploitation leads to ensure that there was a uniform approach by school safeguarding leads in responding to the needs of gang associated girls<sup>7</sup>.
- 5.14 Numbers of women and girls supported by the Council's current multi-agency work were not available for analysis by the Committee. Nor was it clear what proportion of women and girls were currently being reached by Lewisham's approach. It is recognised in Lewisham's VAWG strategy that there may be gaps in the information available about issues of violence against gang associated women and girls in Lewisham. The VAWG strategy highlights this as an area for future consideration by the Safer Lewisham Partnership, noting that it should:

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<sup>7</sup> Report to Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee, 10 September 2014:  
<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s31046/04%20Violence%20against%20women%20and%20girls%20100914.pdf>

'...consider commissioning a piece of research to address any evidence gaps to better understand the extent, profile and needs of gang-associated girls in Lewisham.' (Lewisham VAWG plan 2014-17)

## **6. Awareness raising and prevention**

6.1 Representatives of the Safer London Foundation reported their increasing concerns about sexual exploitation, victimisation and abuse in schools. They also highlighted the vulnerability of school age children inter gang conflict between boys and men. The Committee heard about the Safer London Foundation's work across London to tackle issues of sexual exploitation, violence and abuse. 'Empower' is a programme delivered by the Safer London Foundation to support women and girls affected by gang violence. Members heard that the Foundation had officers embedded within multi-agency teams in local areas, including Community Safety, Children's Social Care, Youth Offending Teams, in order to:

- provide consultation, advice and guidance to professionals who had concerns for young people through consultation 'surgeries' and over the phone.
- work closely with the Metropolitan Polices' Child Abuse Investigation Team units, Sapphire Unit, Missing Persons Units, borough gangs teams & Trident Command.

6.2 The Committee was supportive of the approach taken by the Safer London Foundation to build the resilience of women and girls. It was noted that the Empower programme engaged young women on their own terms in mutually agreed space spaces. It was a voluntary programme that enabled women and girls a stable basis to access other services and support. The Committee also heard that the Safer London Foundation utilised a holistic support model with the aim of delivering confidential, non-judgemental and service user led support.

6.3 The Committee was interested to understand how women and girls were enabled to escape from situations of abuse and violence. It was reported that removing women and girls from their circumstances was not always the best approach. Rather, the Foundation worked to create resilience and end violence in the lives of women and girls.

### Schools

6.4 Home Office guidance on addressing youth violence and gangs<sup>8</sup> in schools and colleges states that (for Ofsted inspections): 'In order for a school to be judged 'outstanding', all groups of pupils must':

- feel safe at school all the time;
  - understand very clearly what unsafe situations are; and
  - be highly aware of how to keep themselves and others safe.
- (Home Office 2013, p4-5)

6.5 The guidance highlights the importance of assessing the likely effectiveness of prevention programmes and recommends varied approaches to delivering preventative work and carrying out targeted activity.

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<sup>8</sup> Home office (2013) addressing youth violence and gangs: practical advice for schools and colleges:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/226293/Advice\\_to\\_Schools\\_and\\_Colleges\\_on\\_Gangs.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/226293/Advice_to_Schools_and_Colleges_on_Gangs.pdf)

6.6 As noted above, there is limited information available about violence against gang associated women and girls. The Committee did not hear how many women and girls might be expected to be affected by violence and exploitation by gangs. Nonetheless, the Committee recognised that as part of the agenda to tackle violence against women and girls, awareness raising and prevention were vital parts of the approach to early intervention.

6.7 As part of the consultation into the new strategy, the Council commissioned Imkaan to work with women in order to develop a more coherent picture of their experiences. The review, 'a consultation with survivors on Lewisham's approach to addressing violence against women and girls' by Imkaan made a number of recommendations for improvements to Lewisham's approach to tackling violence against women and girls, including:

'Lewisham should develop an integrated prevention strategy for consistent work in schools, further education and other youth based settings and which also recognises the need for embedding prevention-based targets across health and social care' (Imkaan 2014, p6)

6.8 The report also recognised the importance of developing whole school approaches to awareness raising and prevention that would reach all young people. Such approaches would be designed to improve understanding of violence against women and girls, as well as informing young people about their rights and providing direction to sources of support and advice.

6.9 The Safer London Foundation advocates a whole school approach to awareness raising and prevention of sexual exploitation and violence, which incorporates work with professionals, parents and community leaders. Initiatives by the foundation are delivered across all school year groups are designed to engage boys and girls in consideration of issues about consent, health relationships and sources of support, information and advice.

6.10 At its meeting on 10 March 2015 and in the report to the Committee, officers provided evidence about work taking place in London schools, a breakdown of the delivery of these initiatives in Lewisham was not included:

Safer London Foundation:

- This is commissioned by the Home Office. The early intervention group work programme from years 8 and/or 9 is creative, interactive and flexible. Over the course of 10 weeks, the group programme aims to provide the participants with the skills and awareness to make informed decisions and to give them practical tools to enable them to stay safe, understand their behaviour and potentially change it in the long term. Sessions focus on topics including healthy relationships, risk management and consent, gangs and crime and self-esteem and aspirations.
- In addition to the 10 week programme the service offers one-off sessions for whole school years groups on consent and healthy relationships.



#### Tender Arts:

- Commissioned by London Council's to deliver to one primary school in every borough in London. The Healthy Relationships Primary Schools Project is a two day project with one form of Year 6 students (approximately 25-30 students) who will become Ambassadors for healthy relationships within their school. Their aim is to help students develop skills for building healthy and respectful relationships, through open, creative workshops that explore the healthy and unhealthy aspects of friendships, empowering students to consider their attitudes and behaviour in an age appropriate way.
- The culmination of the two day project is a presentation, where students can share their knowledge to their peers from year 4, 5 and 6 (approximately 180 students), with the support of two facilitators. The project can also include a 1 hour CPD accredited Staff INSET training session for 20 or more staff, enabling them to become more confident around these issues and the safeguarding practice surrounding these topics.

#### Safe Date:

- This Project has an emphasis on Domestic Violence, covering young people's own relationships, including LGBT relationships, and also parental and familial violence. Hate Crime and VAWG issues feature, including female genital mutilation and forced marriage. The issues are approached sensitively to encourage young people to seek help whether as victim, perpetrator, witness or friend.

#### Growing Against Gangs & Violence (GAGV):

- Growing Against Gangs and Violence (GAGV) is an early intervention and prevention partnership with London's Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). GAGV delivers police inspired gangs resistance education to young people with three goals: (a) to reduce gang membership and association, (b) to reduce serious youth violence, and (c) to improve confidence of young people in police. As of July 2014, GAGV had been delivered in 15 London boroughs to more than 70,000 young people, in over 400 schools. This equates to over 250,000 pupil hours of positive, academically prepared and evaluated preventative engagement.
- GAGV is unlike other gang resistance education and training programmes
- Sessions are universally delivered to everyone within the school year group
- Delivery of GAGV does not imply a school has a "gang problem", but rather the school is committed to tackling gang culture and building community cohesion. It does not pick and choose who goes through the programme, alienating and labelling already vulnerable "at risk" youth. Instead, it educates and informs the widest population possible to achieve the "tipping point" at which overall school climate and culture can change. For the vast majority of young people who will never be involved in gangs and serious youth violence, exposure to the curriculum simply provides the confidence necessary to collectively reject gang or

rape myths and apply positive peer pressure to support others around them to not become gang involved.

- Specially trained facilitators, many with backgrounds in education and youth work, support accredited uniformed police officers in delivery, thus ensuring lessons are engaging and messages are effectively and meaningfully delivered. Sessions are dynamic and incorporate adaptable drama, debate, and discussions, which educate and inform. Key messages throughout the curriculum are supplemented and reinforced by bespoke visual media— including live action drama and documentary style interviews with academics, bereaved families, and leading practitioners in the field.

Rape Crisis Centre:

- Deliver sessions in schools around London in relation to Consent, self-esteem, trust etc. This is a 6 weekly programme and is funded by the London Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC).

CLAY – Cyber Learning and Attitude for Youth:

- Deliver sessions in school regarding cyber bullying; funded externally for delivery in a number of boroughs in London.

6.11 Members heard that prevention and awareness raising work in schools relies on the amount of time available in curriculum and is dependent on the priority that this work is given over other issues related to health and wellbeing. Reflecting on the information provided by officers, the Committee highlighted its concerns about the availability of resources; the multiple demands on schools and the hidden nature of violence against gang associated women and girls.

6.12 It was recognised that whole school approaches to building resilience, educating about healthy relationships and supporting professionals were all important parts of protecting young people and children against the risks of gang violence, sexual exploitation and abuse. Nonetheless, the Committee could not identify a consistent approach to tackling issues in schools and it was concerned about the variable levels of support available from external sources to support this work.

6.13 In the report to Committee on 10 September 2014 the potential future pressure on the budget was also identified. The Committee was concerned about the potential reductions in external funding. Given the reliance on grant funding for the delivery of a number of the on-going initiatives in schools and youth settings, the Committee was concerned about future levels of provision.

	15/16	16/17	17/18
Total value	£678,877	£678,887	£485,887
			Potential Reduction of £192,990 in external funding

## 7. Monitoring and on-going scrutiny

- 7.1 The Committee intends to carry out a follow on review about VAWG awareness raising and prevention work in schools. Members will seek to determine what the barriers are to developing a comprehensive offer to schools in the borough and will invite a head teacher to give their views about the barriers to delivering effective awareness raising and prevention work through the school curriculum.
- 7.2 As with all scrutiny reviews, the Committee will review the implementation of its recommendations six months after the receipt of this report by Mayor and Cabinet.

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Practical Prevention

<http://www.preventionplatform.co.uk/media/Practical-Prevention.pdf>

End Violence Against Women factsheet for schools

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## **Background papers**

Available at:

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=189&Year=0>

Violence against women and girls including girls and gangs report, Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee 10 September 2014

Minutes of the meeting of Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee held on 10 September 2014

Gang associated women and girls – prevention and awareness review: scoping paper, Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee 3 November 2014

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Minutes of the meeting of Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee held on 10 March 2015