Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

Site Visit to the IGU, 22nd January 2019 - Records of discussion

Members in attendance:

Cllr Sharon Patrick (Chair); Cllr Sade Etti (Vice Chair); Cllr Anthony McMahon and Cllr Ian Rathbone

IGU staff in attendance:

Brendan Finegan, (Service Manager, Youth Justice Service); Steve Gowen (Integrated Gangs Unit Researcher); Kate Meyler (Young People's Advocate, Safer London); Damion Roberts (Case Worker, SOS Project, St Giles Trust, Integrated Gangs Unit); Jan Stout (Integrated Gangs Unit Manager)

1.1 The meeting opened with a presentation by Steven Gowen, Gangs Researcher, IGU.

1.2 He made the following key points:

● He worked for the Intelligence Team based within the unit, managing an analyst and an administrator.

● He highlighted a slide with a map of the borough, marked by 123 red, amber and black dots. This slide depicted the recorded gang-flagged violent incidents in the last year, coded by the characteristic of the violence.

● The map also showed the geographical locations of criminal gangs in the borough, and their names. There were an increasing use number-based gang names, following a trend originating in the USA and then South London.

● Gangs on the map were coded as red or blue. This helped to highlight gang allegiances and conflicts. Intelligence showed the gangs coded in red and blue to be friendly to those coded the same colour whilst being hostile to those coded the other colour.

● The slide also depicted some gangs operating in a neighbouring borough but which had allegiances and or rivalries with Hackney-based gangs.

- A slide showed weapons which evidence showed some of these gangs to use. There had been a movement in recent years towards the use of longer knives.

- In response to a question of where gang Members sourced these knives, the Integrated Gangs Unit Researcher advised that all of the types pictured were easily available on the internet.

- In terms of the reasoning for violence and conflicts between gangs, intelligence pointed to this being substantially down to instances of 'disrespect' being afforded by one person to another. This was expressed and escalated – substantially - through social media channels.

- A section of a video posted by one gang showed a group of them assaulting a member of another gang in a takeaway. This was one example of many. Videos of these forms tended to be seen by thousands of people before they were ever taken down

- A slide showed images or stills of music videos of young people in poses or places intended to taunt members of other gangs. These included images of young people making symbols with their hands and or standing close to text displays depicting that they were 'killers' of those in particular gangs. In this way these images celebrated or stated collaboration and involvement in, violent incidents. These in turn could prompt violent retaliation.

- There was potential for people to make money from drill or other music videos which threatened or celebrated violence against others, through posting and receiving views on social media.

- There were also high profile examples of drill artists earning millions of pounds. Music was being played on mainstream media. To those unversed in street terminology, this could go unnoticed.

- Gang culture was increasingly celebrated in youth culture more broadly, and in marketing by brands. Slides showed advertising by sports brands linking their products with drug dealing.

- These factors were thought to be part of the explanation of why more of those in very young age groups were getting involved in dangerous activities, compared to in previous years.

- They were doing so without full realisation of the risks and dangers they were facing. One group of young people - while not having been identified as a gang - had been seen in music videos saying things that could make them a target by others. They were loosely affiliated with an older gang in the same area. This could make them a target for other gangs.

- Conversely, young people could make affiliations with gangs outside of the area without full appreciation of the risks which this could cause in terms of making them a target for local gangs.

- Another slide showed CCTV footage of a violent incident which had occurred between rival gang members, in a court setting. Footage showed the disturbance, the intervention of an IGU staff member, and also later footage of other gang members arriving to seek to become involved.

- A slide showed the journey in terms of interactions with statutory and non-statutory services and other experiences which a young person had gone through before a final outcome of receiving a custodial sentence for a serious offence.

- This flagged events by red, amber or green as to the severity of the event. The service was reviewing these and other cases to explore what learning might be applied to live prevention and diversion cases. The slide also listed risk signifiers for involvement in violent offending; these included witnessing domestic violence, experiencing neglect, and parental substance misuse.

- The next slide showed a list of street gang terms.

- The intelligence above was being used to deliver training to Social Work Practitioners and in schools. The co-location of the IGU was a key strength. His intelligence team operated independently and could share information across services.

- He said there were challenges with competing needs around not labelling people, and safeguarding them. His view was that the gang term was an irrelevant and sometimes unhelpful term.

1.3 A Member understood that the IGU targeted its work according to the Met Police's Gang Violence Matrix.

1.4 From reports on this tool, she understood that individuals on it were scored and assigned a likelihood of harm banding. She asked what types of interventions were delivered at individuals on the different levels.

1.5 The Gangs Researcher, IGU said that the Gangs Matrix was only one small tool. It was irrelevant to the work of the Intelligence Team.

1.6 The Integrated Gangs Unit Manager said the Gangs Violence Matrix and the banding systems used within it were old fashioned police terms. The IGU did not use the banding systems to inform its approach.

1.7 The simple aim of the IGU was to reduce serious violence among people which evidence showed were associated with street gangs, and to stop harm happening to them and others.

1.8 A Member noted the map slide showing the different service contacts and events which occurred prior to an individual being accused of a serious crime. He asked whether – under the current model operated by the IGU – the IGU would have received data which might have flagged the need to work with the person.

1.9 The staff member said that this was not the case. The situations that different people were in were not binary; there were no set steps which would be followed on a path to serious violence. The ability to identify those needing support was about experience and instinct.

1.10 Elaborating on this, the Integrated Gangs Unit Manager advised that the IGU received referrals from Social Workers, flagging where there were concerns around potential gang association. St Giles Trust workers based in the unit would then be asked to speak to the person to determine whether there was an issue in this regard and if so what was needed to address it.

1.11 The Case Worker, SOS Project, St Giles Trust, Integrated Gangs Unit in attendance added to this. On the referral being made, he or another worker would visit the person to determine what the problem was. An example of an issue reported via Children's Social Care was that a young person and or their family was at risk of attack (by a gang) in their home.

1.12 Upon investigation. in 9 out of 10 cases it was found that gang affiliation or a threat from street gangs was not in evidence. Where it was in

evidence, St Giles Trust and other relevant agencies in the IGU worked with the person to address issues.

1.13   Examples of action which could help were to put special measures in place in homes, to change the location of where a person needed to report to Probation Services, and to move Youth Worker visits to the person's home. A red nominal would be under police enforcement but youth workers would still be involved.

1.14   The Integrated Gangs Unit Manager said it was important to note the co-located nature of the IGU. The IGU also worked closely with Social Work, and was getting better at doing so. It worked closely with colleagues in the Hackney Learning Trust in order to achieve closer relationships with schools. It worked with parents to help improve parenting skills.

1.15   The Young People's Advocate, Safer London said that the IGU work was focused on safeguarding. The aim of the unit was to make people safe by working through the practical issues they were facing.

1.16   In response to a question around whether parents were supportive of interventions for their children when they were engaging in harmful behaviour, the Gangs Researcher, IGU said that the response varied. In some cases there was a lack of belief and or a view that it was a case of mistaken identity. In others parents engaged fully and drew on all support which was available.

1.17   He added that the response of schools was also mixed. There was sometimes a lack of acknowledgement of there being a gang issue despite – for example – 40 young people waiting outside a school for someone at the end of a day.

1.18   The Case Worker, SOS Project, St Giles Trust, Integrated Gangs Unit said that work with schools was crucial. Often, violent knife crime offences involving young people took place during school hours, away from the school. He asked the rhetorical question why these young people were not in school at these times and said that it was due to exclusions, and the enforcement of (in his view) over-punitive polices by schools. When you looked back at the reason for exclusion by a school of a pupil who went on to become involved or more involved in gang activity, it was often for quite a minor misdemeanour.

1.19   As an additional note, he said that a lack of engagement by schools in some cases could lead to movement of pupils from one school to another (due to behaviour reasons) which was managed without an understanding around the areas of the borough where it may be unsafe for the young person.

1.20   The Gangs Researcher, IGU agreed with these points. The IGU was working with the Hackney Learning Trust to seek better access to schools. They were working together, exploring data for 2017/18. Exclusions and poverty appeared to be key risk indicators for gang involvement.

1.21   Asked a question, the Gangs Researcher, IGU confirmed that there was greatest concern around the approaches of academy schools in terms of a lack of engagement.

1.22   The Young People's Advocate, Safer London confirmed in response to a question that reasons for exclusion among the young people in the cohort could have been something that happened outside of school, where the young person had been deemed to have brought the school into disrepute.

1.23   A Member asked what prevention work was delivered for clients supported by the IGU who were aged 18 to 25.

1.24   The Manager, Integrated Gangs Unit advised that the same methodology was applied to all cases, in terms of prevention, diversion and, were it was necessary, enforcement.

1.25   Two Probation Officers based in the Unit worked with over 18s. The DWP Officer also provided support.

1.26   In response to a question, the Integrated Gangs Unit Manager advised that there were no females in the IGU cohort.

1.27   However, the IGU through Safer London worked with young females who were at risk of sexual violence.

1.28   Adding to this the Service Manager, Youth Justice Service said that there was an issue around some young males who were involved in crime having quite toxic views towards masculinity. This was sometimes manifested in sexual violence. Some young females also saw this as normal.

1.29   A Member noted a recent tragic case in which a young man had been murdered, and had been found to have had some gang links. This was despite being a student and – on the surface – living a very safe and successful life. He asked if this case – with a young person leading a 'double life' – was common.

1.30   The St Giles Worker said that it was not unknown. He said that as people got older – into their early twenties – sanctions for offences tended to be more severe than during younger years. He said that this could make young adults more likely to carry out their activities discreetly.

1.31   The Service Manager, Youth Justice Service advised that it was important to note that – while services traditionally approached those aged 18 differently and provided a lower offer to these groups – that adolescence did not end until 25 or 26.

1.32   This was reflected in work to extend the provision of some services previously catering for people up to age 18, up to the age of 25. This included Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the Substance Misuse Education and Outreach Service.

1.33   He said that in terms of a perpetrator's involvement in serious violence, it was quite common for this to drop off from around the age of 25.

1.34   This tended to be due to one or more of three reasons; greater maturity and the taking on of responsibilities, the gaining of employment and satisfaction within this, and the establishment of less toxic, more positive relationships.

1.35   Another factor leading to a reduction in involvement could be a transition to crime seen as lower risk; for example a young adult moving from knife enabled robbery to carrying out credit card fraud. Within violent crime, there were sometimes greater penalties for older young adults than younger adults, for the same offence.

1.36   The Integrated Gangs Unit Manager advised that some of the street gangs the IGU worked with had quite sophisticated business plans. Trident in their work encountered dental and medical students who were involved with this activity. The street gangs in Hackney were a very diverse range.

1.37   A Member asked whether local youth clubs could help the situation. He had been against changes which had led to a 4 youth hub model.

1.38   A St Giles Trust worker advised that they could, but that this very much depended on the quality and extent of staffing.

1.39   The Service Manager, Youth Justice Service said that youth clubs were part of the answer, but that it was also important to note that the few young people who were involved in serious violence were sometimes 'unclubbable'.

1.40   A Member noted the references to a Public Health approach to tackling serious violence. She asked whether the IGU being based elsewhere from the Directorate incorporating Social Care, Youth Services and Public Health could risk creating barriers to achieving this approach.

1.41   The Manager, Integrated Gangs Unit said that the approach being followed by the IGU was one of the closest to what was meant when people referred to taking a Public Health approach to tackling violence. It was a strength that the IGU was based in the Council with its range of diversionary and preventative services, and not with the Police as was the case with a number of other IGU models.

1.42   Linkages with Children's Social Care had improved.

1.43   Asked how this was the case the Manager, Integrated Gangs Unit said this had been aided by good links with the new manager in Hackney's First Access Screening Team (FAST). The IGU was getting high numbers of referrals from here and also the Extra-Familial Risk Panel.

1.44   The Service Manager, Youth Justice Service advised that the Extra-Familial Risk Panel was part of the Contextual Safeguarding approach in place which recognised and addressed risk outside of the family context.