Waltham Forest’s Gang Prevention Programme

Report of the Communities Committee

March 2017
Members of Community Safety Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Masood Ahmad, Chair

Cllr Jacob Edwards, Vice-Chair

Cllr Millie Balkan

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Philip Dundon, Co-opted Member
Executive Summary

1.1 Responsibility for gang prevention falls to a number of organisations in Waltham Forest, but there are clear roles for the Council who has actively taken a lead on gang prevention work since 2007. Engagement with the issue of gangs by the Council is not just in terms of work on community safety, neighbourhoods services and enforcement, but also by regeneration, social care and employment.

1.2 The Community Safety Scrutiny Committee looked at the issues around the Council’s gang prevention programme at three meetings, taking evidence from the Families Team and the Metropolitan Police Service about the work undertaken in this area.

1.3 The Council launched its Gang Prevention Programme in January 2011, and it is currently being refreshed again, having previously been done so in 2014 and 2015. Our review also coincided with a spike of violence during summer 2016 and the launch of a major joint operation between the Council and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) aimed at tackling gangs.

The gang prevention programme

1.4 When the Council launched its Gang Prevention Programme in January 2011, the aim was to reduce gang violence and gang-
related crime in the borough, improve young people’s life chances, to help the community to feel safer and therefore make Waltham Forest a better place to live. It was different from previous gang violence prevention programmes: although it combined enforcement with support, Waltham Forest’s programme focused on family based solutions and involved local communities centrally in decision making about the direction of the programme.

1.5 The Gang Prevention Programme has led the way for other local authorities to rethink how they approach gang prevention. The Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) has now also commissioned a city-wide gang prevention programme that looks very similar to the approach Waltham Forest has taken since 2011. The Committee can wholeheartedly commend the Council for the fact that this pioneering approach is being taken forward by other partners. The Council will want to ensure that MOPACs new programme complements the Council’s programme. Furthermore, the Council will want to ensure that the level of resource allocated to Waltham Forest and the surrounding areas reflects the fact that half of gang violence occurs in East London.
Principles

1.6 The Committee were told that the programme works best when someone wants to change their lifestyle and exit gang-related activity. The programme offers many opportunities to encourage and support people to make this change, through the adoption of a multi-agency family focus and a whole family approach towards working with individuals, as well as through the early intervention work with children that have been identified as potential gang members.

1.7 The Council needs to continually ensure that programmes like the Gang Prevention Programme also provide reassurance to the community, given the concern that people have about gang related activity and the impact it could have on their own lives through drug dealing, violence or anti-social behaviour.

Current Commitments

1.8 The Committee was pleased to hear that the Council has committed to fund the Gang Prevention Programme for the next two years given the continued need to tackle gangs and operate a pro-active gang prevention programme, both given the scale of the problems identified and the impact on lives that gangs can have.

1.9 The Committee was also told by the Borough Commander that tackling gang violence was a top priority for the local MPS. This
work includes safeguarding vulnerable people from being targeted by gangs.

**Gangs Prevention Programme Performance**

1.10 The Gangs Prevention Programme has worked with 171 individuals in the first 6 months of the 2016/17 year. These individuals are supported by the Council and a number of partners who the Council commissions to deliver a wide range of activities. There has been a reduction in the level of reoffending by those individuals that have received intervention via the Programme: the Committee was told that there was an 8%-9% reduction in re-offending by people in the Programme on a short-term basis.

1.11 Gangs operate across more than one London borough and gangs are spreading into Hertfordshire and Essex as well as Kent and Surrey. The government’s refresh of its gang strategy identified the crossing of county lines as an area that urgently needed tackling. The governance arrangements for tackling issues on a cross or pan London basis are established through the governance arrangements for MOPAC and the MPS. However, given the increased activity across local and county borders, we recommend that it would be helpful for the council to assess its relationship with other local authorities.
Drugs

1.12 The MPS recently launched Operation Teague in the St James Street area, which was their response to the issues prevalent in the area, specifically illicit drug supply and the anti-social behaviour and other criminal offences associated with this. It was a first for the Council as we offered to provide statistical and intelligence gathering support to the Police.

1.13 The interim update the Committee were provided with suggests that Operation Teague is a success, with 16 arrests of high level individuals, and a cash seizure of £15,000 from one individual alone. The Committee were told that gang members have been forced out of addresses and forced to change their strategy.

Neighbourhood Policing

1.14 The Council and MPS are rightly concerned to take action and ensure that the community have confidence in local policing, and feel safe in their local community. This confidence will be maintained through having a physical presence on the streets. The Council has already committed to “establishing an anti-social behaviour team to help keep our streets feeling safe”. We believe that resident confidence in the safety of our streets would be further improved by the maintenance of the neighbourhood policing model.
Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The council should engage with MOPAC to ensure their programme is complementary and that adequate funding is secured for east London.

Recommendation 2: Any refresh of the gang prevention strategy should be based on principles of building awareness of the opportunities that the scheme provides, being community focussed and zero tolerance where appropriate.

Recommendation 3: The local MPS need to ensure their ward priorities are written with greater clarity, so that the public knows when they refer to gangs.

Recommendation 4: The council should review its relationship with local authorities outside London, and in particular with the neighbouring district of Epping Forest, to ensure that we have the necessary strategic relationships in place to tackle gang-related crime when it crosses county-lines.

Recommendation 5: The Council should ensure that the Youth Independent Advisory Group gets a chance to talk about their work and be given opportunities to advocate for the gang prevention programme.

Recommendation 6: Following Operation Teague, the Council should use this intelligence gathering capability to seek to work with the MPS on similar operations in other parts of the borough.

Recommendation 7: The Portfolio Lead Member for Community Safety and Cohesion to write to the Mayor of London and the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime to ensure there is continued commitment from the MPS to neighbourhood policing.
2. Introduction

1.1 In June 2016, the Communities Scrutiny Committee agreed to carry out a themed review into the Council’s Gang Prevention Programme. This programme has been running since 2011, and its continued importance to the Council and residents is reflected in the Council’s current priority to:

*deliver an anti-gangs programme in partnership with the police to provide our young people and their families with a positive future*¹

1.2 The Committee were interested to look at the Council’s programme because of the impact gangs have on individuals and the impact on the wider community as a result of their anti-social behaviour, violence and drug-dealing. This was also a timely review for the Committee to undertake as the Programme is currently being refreshed. It also coincided with a spike of violence during summer 2016 and the launch of a major joint operation between the Council and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) aimed at tackling gangs.

1.3 The Committee looked at the Gangs Prevention Programme at three of its meetings:

- on September 7 the Committee heard from the community safety team about gangs and drugs. The Borough Commander also attended this meeting and provided the Committee with an update about the work of the MPS on gangs.²

- on November 9 the Committee heard from the community safety team about gangs and weapons.³

- on January 11 the Committee heard from the community safety team about gangs’ exploitation of vulnerable individuals. The meeting was also attended by the MPS who provided an update about Operation Teague.⁴


1.4 The Committee is also fortunate that the Youth Independent Advisory Group (YIAG) regularly attend our meetings and provide an alternative perspective on issues we look at. We were extremely grateful to be able to speak to a member of the YIAG about their own experiences as a gang member and the impact of the Gang Prevention Programme.

3. The national and regional policy context

2.1 The government has set out its approach to tackling gangs through its Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation strategy, which was launched in 2011 in the wake of the London riots. The strategy aims to “reduce violence, and to achieve this through supporting a change in the way that public services respond to gang and youth violence.” It was refreshed in 2016, which makes clear that since the original strategy was launched:

“many gangs are changing. Local partners tell us that street gangs are becoming less visible in public, and more fluid in the way they organise. In particular, it is important that local partners are able to respond to the exploitation of vulnerable people by gangs, especially as the problem is often hidden, and not always understood in some local areas where it is taking place.”

2.2 In London, the Committee were told that whilst the number of gang members at the highest risk of violence has decreased between 2012 and 2015, that a greater proportion were convicted of a serious offence (violence, drugs or sexual offence). This included a substantial increase in the number of drug offences: three quarters of London gang members were convicted of a drugs offence, up from 59% in 2012.

4. The Gang Prevention Programme

History of the Programme

1.15 Responsibility for gang prevention falls to a number of organisations in Waltham Forest. There are clear roles for the Council who has actively taken a lead on gang prevention work since 2007. Engagement with the issue of gangs by the Council is not just in terms of work on community safety, neighbourhoods services and enforcement, but also by regeneration teams through attempts to design out anti-social behaviour (ASB); social care services in order that proper care can be given to vulnerable adults and children who get caught up in gangs; and employment services through the work that is undertaken to encourage current and former gang members into education, training or employment as an alternative.

1.16 In 2007, following a gang-related murder in the borough, the Council commissioned a gangs expert to undertake research into the nature and scale of urban street gangs in Waltham Forest. The resulting report helped shine a spotlight on the problem of gang violence both generally and in Waltham Forest. Work was therefore already underway to tackle gang violence in Waltham Forest when a spate of gang-related violence took place in the borough in the summer of 2010 indicating a pressing need for local partners to do even more.

1.17 The Council launched its Gang Prevention Programme in January 2011. The aim was to reduce gang violence and gang-related crime in the borough, improve young people’s life chances, to help the community to feel safer and therefore make Waltham Forest a better place to live. It was different from previous gang violence prevention programmes. Although it combined enforcement with support, Waltham Forest’s programme focused on family based solutions and involved local communities centrally in decision making about the direction of the programme.

1.18 It was initially designed to last for 3 years, and was reviewed and refreshed in 2014 and 2015. The basic principles of the programme remained the same but with a slight shift of focus, taking account of better evidence of the links between gangs and the drug markets and drug distribution in the borough.

1.19 The successful delivery of the Gang Prevention Programme depends on strong partnership working with the police. Whilst there is a clear role for the local police force, with whom the Council has a good working relationship, it should be noted that responsibility for drugs-related operations resides with the central Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).

1.20 The Gang Prevention Programme has led the way for other local authorities to rethink how they approach gang prevention. The committee heard that the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) has now also commissioned a city-wide gang
prevention programme that looks very similar to the approach Waltham Forest has taken since 2011. The Committee can wholeheartedly commend the Council for the fact that this pioneering approach is being taken forward by other partners.

1.21 However, the Council will want to ensure that MOPACs new programme complements the Council’s programme. Furthermore, the Council will want to ensure that the level of resource allocated to Waltham Forest and the surrounding areas reflects the fact that half of gang violence occurs in East London. This is shown in the image below, which tracks the number of gang related offences in the rolling year to December 2016 by borough. As well as showing that Waltham Forest has a higher than average number of offences, it also shows that there is a clear cluster of gang related activity across Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham.

![Gang Crime Indicators - Borough Map](image)

*From the gang crime and serious youth violence dashboard*

1.22 The Committee felt that the Portfolio Lead Member for Community Safety and Cohesion should write to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor for Safety and Cohesion seeking assurances that this happens, as well as seek out opportunities with other East London councils to make joint representations. The Council should also be proud that

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6 [https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/one-rule-for-all](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/one-rule-for-all)

its innovative model has been replicated at a London-wide level, and seek opportunities to talk about and promote this approach.

Recommendation 1 –The council should engage with MOPAC to ensure their programme is complementary and that adequate funding is secured for east London.

Principles

1.23 The Committee were told that the programme works best when someone wants to change their lifestyle and exit gang-related activity. The programme offers many opportunities to encourage and support people to make this change, through the adoption of a multi-agency family focus and a whole family approach towards working with individuals, as well as through the early intervention work with children that have been identified as potential gang members.

1.24 The Committee accepts that not all gang members will be prepared to make this lifestyle choice. This does not just involve making them aware of potential imprisonment, but other consequences from being in a gang, such as not getting a job, or entry to university or college. The Council is clear that whilst the Programme offers people a route out of gang-related activity, that if this is turned down that the Council and MPS will target them for enforcement.

1.25 This is also an area where the Council and MPS do not always have discretion. Since 2015 there has been a change to the sentencing for people found guilty of repeatedly carrying knives. The new ‘two-strikes’ sentence means that adults and young people convicted more than once of being in possession of a blade face a minimum 6 month prison sentence and a maximum of 4 years. Announcing the changes, the government said that in 2014 1,300 people received a non-custodial sentence or caution for a repeat offence of knife possession. Under the new rules, they would all have faced a prison sentence. Changes like this work best if perpetrators know about the penalty that they could face, and communicating the consequences that young people face needs to be a key principle of the Programme.

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8 [http://safe.met.police.uk/gangs_and_violence/consequences_and_the_law.html](http://safe.met.police.uk/gangs_and_violence/consequences_and_the_law.html)

The Council needs to continually ensure that programmes like the Gang Prevention Programme also provide reassurance to the community, given the concern that people have about gang related activity and the impact it could have on their own lives through drug dealing, violence or anti-social behaviour.

We believe that these principles should be clearly stated as part of the Programme, as they have helped to create the conditions for the scheme to date but should be clearly stated so that people are clear about what the programme seeks to achieve and how.

**Recommendation 2:** Any refresh of the gang prevention strategy should be based on principles of building awareness of the opportunities that the scheme provides, being community focussed and zero tolerance where appropriate.
5: Current Commitments

4.1 The Committee was pleased to hear that the Council has committed to fund the Gang Prevention Programme for the next two years given the continued need to tackle gangs and operate a pro-active gang prevention programme, both given the scale of the problems identified and the impact on lives that gangs can have.

4.2 The Committee was told by the Borough Commander that tackling gang violence was a top priority for the local MPS. This work includes safeguarding vulnerable people from being targeted by gangs. Each ward has its own neighbourhood policing priorities, and the Committee noted that a number of them were tackling “anti-social behaviour by groups of youths” or “anti-social behaviour – drugs”. The Committee were told that in practice this meant tackling casual drug dealing and taking in the streets which upsets residents, links back to gangs and “ultimately results in violence with injury”.

4.3 Whilst we welcome this focus on gangs and the responsiveness of the local MPS to residents’ concerns through the tailored set of priorities, we believe that residents would benefit from greater clarity of what the MPS means when it states what ward priorities are. Anti-social behaviour covers a wide range of activity, but it is not necessarily intuitive that this covers gang-related activity.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>MPS Neighbourhood Team Priorities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lea Bridge</td>
<td>• Anti Social Behaviour by youths causing noise and nuisance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Drug dealing and using</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Anti Social Behaviour related to alcohol</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hoe Street</td>
<td>• Anti Social Behaviour - Drugs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Burglary</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Theft and violence against the person</td>
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10 [http://content.met.police.uk/Page/TeamFinder?scope_id=1257246764369](http://content.met.police.uk/Page/TeamFinder?scope_id=1257246764369)
Recommendation 3: The local MPS need to ensure their ward priorities are written with greater clarity, so that the public knows when they refer to gangs.

5.1 Tackling domestic violence is the responsibility of a number of public sector bodies. In 2010, the Home Office produced its Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategic Narrative and Action Plan,11 which covers domestic against both female and male victims and encompasses the four priorities of Prevention, Provision, Partnership, and Perpetrators. In 2013, the Mayor of London, who has responsibility for the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), published a London-wide plan which includes: working with partners to intervene with perpetrators of violence in order to stop the violence, hold them to account, change their behaviour, and deter others.12

5.2 When giving evidence to the Committee, the Borough Commander, DS Richard Tucker, made it clear that domestic violence is an absolute priority for the local police and the wider MPS, not least because of the high risks associated with incidents of domestic violence.

5.3 A significant proportion of the Council’s support for domestic violence services comes via MOPACs Crime Prevention Fund, and we were informed that this is due to expire by April 2017. The Committee recommends that the Portfolio Lead Member for Community Safety and Cohesion writes to the Mayor of London about the future funding opportunities via the Crime Prevention Fund post April 2017, and the importance of continuing funding to tackle domestic violence, and support for victims.

5.4 Local healthcare partners also have a role to play. Waltham Forest Care Commissioning Group has responsibilities for ensuring that commissioned services appropriately safeguard children and adults who at risk or victims of domestic violence.

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12 http://www.ldan.org.uk/PDFs/March2014Sarahper cent20Easeyper cent20MOPACper cent20VAWGper cent20strategyper cent20presentation.pdf
violence, placing Independent Domestic Violence Advocates within setting such as Whipps Cross Hospital and other community health services. They also commission services that support victims of domestic violence, such as those covering mental health for adults and children.
6. Gangs Prevention Programme Performance

5.1 The Gangs Prevention Programme has worked with 171 individuals in the first 6 months of the 2016/17 year. These individuals are supported by the Council and a number of partners who the Council commissions to deliver a wide range of activities:

- adult outreach services
- prison In-Reach Intervention
- intervention for Children and Young People
- victim Intervention
- child Sexual Exploitation Interventions
- education, training and employment
- supporting vulnerable individuals.

5.2 The overall aim of this work is to reduce the level of reoffending especially those that have been released from custody. Research shows that 73% of young people reoffend within the first year of leaving custody. There has been a reduction in the level of reoffending by those individuals that have received intervention via the Programme: the Committee was told that there was an 8%-9% reduction in re-offending by people in the Programme on a short-term basis.

5.3 The secondary aims are to increase education training and employment for both gang affected individuals and their families. This both increases life opportunities and also reduces the likelihood of people obtaining illegitimate income. There are also increased safety measures for victims of gang activity and increased enforcement measures for entrenched gang members through civil and criminal sanctions.

County Lines

5.4 Like so many issues, problems associated with the borough’s gangs do not end at our own boundaries. Gangs operate across more than one London borough and the Committee was told by the Borough Commander and the Community Safety team that
gangs are spreading into Hertfordshire and Essex as well as Kent and Surrey. The government’s refresh of its gang strategy identified the crossing of county lines as an area that urgently needed tackling, especially as ‘exploitation of vulnerable people is central to county lines’.\textsuperscript{13}

5.5 The governance arrangements for tackling issues on a cross or pan London basis are established through the governance arrangements for MOPAC and the MPS. However, given the increased activity across local and county borders, we recommend that it would be helpful for the council to assess its relationship with other local authorities. This will not only assist with the disruption of gangs but also with the safeguarding of vulnerable people.

**Recommendation 4 –** The council should review its relationship with local authorities outside London, and in particular with the neighbouring district of Epping Forest, to ensure that we have the necessary strategic relationships in place to tackle gang-related crime when it crosses county-lines.

**Youth Offending Service/ Youth independent Advisory Group**

5.6 The Youth Offending Service is a multi-agency team of police officers, family and opportunity development workers, social workers, health and education specialists, who work with young people and their families, that have come into contact with the police or courts through criminal or gang activity.\textsuperscript{14}

5.7 The Committee were told that Waltham Forest’s Youth Offending Service has the second-lowest reoffending rate in London. These statistics are supported by what we heard from a member of the Youth Independent Advisory group (YIAG) who is a former gang member. They recognised that on their own they would never have broken out of the cycle of gang activity they had been drawn into, but that the YOS had stuck by them. The work that the YOS with individuals can be intensive, but the member of the YIAG recognised the benefits of the boundaries that were put in place. The Committee

\textsuperscript{13} County lines has been described by the National Crime Agency as “a situation where an individual, or more frequently a group, establishes and operates a telephone number in an area outside of their normal locality in order to sell drugs directly to users at street level. This generally involves a group from an urban area expanding their operations by crossing one or more police force boundaries to more rural areas, setting up a secure base and using runners to conduct day to day dealing.” [http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/620-NCA-Intelligence-Assessment-County-Lines-Gangs-and-Safeguarding/file](http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/620-NCA-Intelligence-Assessment-County-Lines-Gangs-and-Safeguarding/file)

\textsuperscript{14} [https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/content/youth-offending-team-early-help](https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/content/youth-offending-team-early-help)
would like to commend the Youth Offending Service for the quality of their work and their impact.

5.8 The YIAG are a group of young people, some of whom are ex-offenders, victims of crime or come from areas where youth violence is a part of their lives. They run regular sessions at schools, Pupil Referral Unit’s and the Youth Offending Service and also engage with the police on how they deal with young people and improve community safety.\(^{15}\)

5.9 We were impressed by the confidence and willingness of the YIAG member who spoke to us, and were struck by the power of their testimony. The YIAG are a resource that could be used more widely by the Council to speak to school children and the wider community about the value of the Council’s gang prevention work.

**Recommendation 5 – the Council should ensure that the Youth Independent Advisory Group gets a chance to talk about their work and be given opportunities to advocate for the gang prevention programme.**

## 7. DRUGS

6.1 Public Health England estimates of local drug use indicate that in the previous year:

- 5,033 residents used Class A drugs, 1,463 of whom are heroin and crack users;
- 14,765 residents used any illicit drug;
- 11,409 residents used cannabis.

6.2 The Committee was encouraged by the scope of the work that is being undertaken on drugs across the Council. As well as enforcement this currently includes work to “design out” opportunities for drug dealing and anti-social behaviour at new housing developments, as well as Public Health's prevention work and commissioning of treatment for people with substance misuse issues.

\(^{15}\) [https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/content/involving-young-people](https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/content/involving-young-people)
6.3 We have previously noted that local MPS forces do not have the authority to direct drug operations. Members across the whole Council were pleased when the MPS launched Operation Teague in the St James Street area, which was their response to the issues prevalent in the area, specifically illicit drug supply and the anti-social behaviour and other criminal offences associated with this.

6.4 Operation Teague was conducted in a way to disrupt three distinct strands of local gang organisations:

- the third tier dealt with street dealing, and was tackled by a strong police presence in order to ‘take back’ the streets.

- the second tier involved individuals who manage drug lines and who are responsible for bringing the drugs into the area.

- the first tier was concerned with the senior figures in the organisation which comprises 5 or 6 individuals. These individuals are responsible for directing the gang related violence in the borough and are likely responsible for the murder last summer and have been linked to child exploitation.

6.5 Operation Teague was a first for the Council as we offered to provide statistical and intelligence gathering support to the Police. The Committee was told that Waltham Forest has one of the worst records for intelligence gathering across London. Operation Teague sought to remedy this through the cooperation of the Council which was rightly eager to do what it could to support the police operation.

6.6 The interim update we were provided with suggests that Operation Teague is a success, with 16 arrests of high level individuals, and a cash seizure of £15,000 from one individual alone. The Committee were told that gang members have been forced out of addresses and forced to change their strategy.

6.7 We hope that the Council and both the Waltham Forest and the central MPS will reflect on what has helped the Operation achieve its objectives and how important it was to have an enthusiastic local authority willing to use its resources to support a police operation.

Recommendation 6 - Following Operation Teague, the Council should use this intelligence gathering capability to seek to work with the MPS on similar operations in other parts of the borough.
8. Weapons

7.1 The Committee were told that Waltham Forest had a considerably lower number of knife crime offenses in 2015/2016 than neighbouring boroughs. With regard to gun crime, the borough also has generally lower rate of offences than neighbouring boroughs, (though not as low as knife offences). The majority of victims and suspects of both gun and knife crime were aged between 20-29 years old with the age group of 10-19 years old not far behind.

7.2 Members of the Council and the wider community were aware that there were a number of gun discharges during the summer of 2016. Over the first part of 2016/17 there has been an increase in the number of residents who are concerned about crime, from 32% to 36%, higher than the London average.¹⁶ Whilst the factors affecting such sentiments are many and varied, the Committee felt that in part it could be because of increased use of weapons, and a corresponding increase in the number of stories being reported in local media or shared on-line.

Neighbourhood policing

7.3 The Council and MPS are rightly concerned to take action and ensure that the community have confidence in local policing, and feel safe in their local community. In the same way that the Council is working to improve the confidence of residents on drug-dealing, by working to design out opportunities for ASB.

7.4 This confidence will also be maintained through having a physical presence on the streets. The Council has already committed to “establishing an anti-social behaviour team to help keep our streets feeling safe”. We believe that resident confidence in the safety of our streets would be further improved by the maintenance of the neighbourhood policing model.

Recommendation 7 –The Portfolio Lead Member for Community Safety and Cohesion to write to the Mayor of London and the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime to ensure there is continued commitment from the MPS to neighbourhood policing.

9. Exploitation of vulnerable people

8.1 The government’s gang strategy refresh makes clear that gangs are increasingly exploiting vulnerable people to facilitate the selling of drugs through the crossing of county lines, and one of its priorities is also to “protect vulnerable locations – places where vulnerable young people can be targeted, including pupil referral units and residential children’s care homes.”

8.2 Tackling the exploitation of vulnerable people is hard-wired into the Gang Prevention Programme: the emphasis on early intervention and early identification seeks to ensure that children and young people do not find themselves coerced into gang related activity.

8.3 The London-wide Empower programme also aims to reduce Sexual Violence and Exploitation of young people in the context of gangs. Intensive support is provided to young people affected by sexual exploitation, combined with high quality training and advice for the adults involved in their care.

8.4 It is not just children and young people that are exploited by gangs. Vulnerable adults are often targeted by gangs, who will seek to befriend that and take over their home as a base to store drugs or weapons, drug deal and perpetrate child sexual exploitation.

8.5 This practice is known as “cuckooing”, and the Committee are pleased that action is being taken to tackle this by the Council and its partners, given the national priority that has been attached to tackling this. We were also pleased that Operation Teague searched between 6 and 9 “cuckooed” premises. We hope that this send out a strong message to gang members that this practice will not be allowed to continue.
10. CONCLUSION

9.1 Tackling the gang problem in Waltham Forest remains a priority for the Council, and we welcome the constant emphasis on new ways of working that the Council has engaged in to counter the changing nature of the gang problem in the borough.

9.2 We were also pleased that the Council’s pioneering approach is being copied and everyone who has worked on the Gang Prevention Programme should feel proud of this as well as what they have achieved through the programme. We found many areas of excellence practice.

9.3 Our seven recommendations seek to build on this practice, putting forward a series of changes that could ensure that the Council continues to be at the forefront, in London and nationally, of efforts to combat gangs as well as making life better and safer for all of our residents.