



**YOUTH
SAFETY
TASKFORCE
REPORT**



camden.gov.uk/youthsafetytaskforce

INTRODUCTION

FROM CHAIRS



In November 2017 we were asked by Councillor Georgia Gould, the Leader of Camden Council, to lead the Youth Safety Taskforce investigation into the causes and nature of youth violence in our borough, and we are now pleased to present the findings and recommendations within this report.

It is our firm belief that no young person should feel unsafe in their community. However, what has become clear to us whilst leading this work is that for some young people, fear of crime and violence has become part of their daily life and we want this to change.

When the Taskforce was set up, we knew that Camden, like other parts of London, was seeing a worrying rise in knife crime. It is a credit to the leadership of Camden Council that it took the pro-active step to find out why this was happening in our local community and what could be done to tackle it. During the early course of the work, the problem continued to escalate with the profoundly shocking murders of two young men on a single night in February. These tragic events reinforced the urgency of the investigation and we were overwhelmed by the huge outpouring of community spirit from local residents and voluntary groups who reached out to offer help in any way they could.

Extensive engagement with the local community formed a key part of the evidence gathering and we have had the opportunity to go out into neighbourhoods to hear the views of residents directly, especially our young people who we strongly believe are part of the solution, not the problem.

We have recommended a whole Camden community approach to tackling youth violence and much of the excellent community work we witnessed gives us hope that positive change can be achieved when we all work together. Our report shows that it is often the most vulnerable young people who are affected by youth violence and we all have a role to play in keeping them safe.

Camden has a well-known drugs market but we believe that it should not be 'normal' or tolerated to see children selling drugs anywhere in our community. The exploitation of young people to engage in dangerous and illegal activities for the profit of others is simply unacceptable and we hope this report goes some way to changing how we view this issue.

Education is a key contributing factor to reduce the risk of youth violence amongst young people and therefore schools have a central role to play. More needs to be done to keep young people in school with extra support given to those at-risk of exclusion or with poor attendance. Similarly, for those young people aged over 18, employment opportunities and the ability to earn money is crucial. We do not believe a young person stops being vulnerable when they turn 18 and so more support is needed for this age group.

We were struck by the deep distrust some communities have of the police and other public services. The police have an important and often difficult job to undertake in addressing this issue, which is why we have welcomed their representation on the Taskforce and their contribution to this work. However, it is clear that there is more work required to improve relations between the police and young people if we are to see greater cooperation going forward. Similarly, some parents are reluctant to ask for help from local services which could provide much needed support in family homes.

It has been a privilege to chair the Taskforce, which comprises dedicated representatives from health, the voluntary sector, the council, the police and schools. The recommendations outlined in this report will require all of these groups to come together with the rest of our community to drive the changes that will help keep our young people safe.

**Co-chair: Keir Starmer QC, MP -
Member of Parliament for Holborn and St Pancras**

**Co-chair: Councillor Abdul Hai -
Cabinet Member for Young People and Cohesion, Camden Council**

TASKFORCE MEMBERS

- Co-chair: Keir Starmer QC, MP - Member of Parliament for Holborn and St Pancras
- Co-chair: Councillor Abdul Hai - Cabinet Member for Young People and Cohesion, Camden Council
- Kate Bond - Youth Outreach Project Manager, New Horizon Youth Centre
- Dr. Jeff Halperin - Head of Psychology and Psychotherapy Services, Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust
- Dr. Richard Grove - Clinical Psychologist, Project 10/10
- Nicholas John - Headteacher, Acland Burghley School
- Detective Superintendent Caroline Haines - Metropolitan Police
- Foyezur Miah - CEO of Queen's Crescent Community Association
- Martin Pratt - Executive Director, Supporting People, Camden Council
- Jenny Rowlands - Executive Director, Supporting Communities, Camden Council
- Eve Stickler - Director of Early Intervention and Prevention, Camden Council
- Jessica Gibbons - Director of Community Service, Camden Council
- Eugene Griffin - Head of Integrated Youth Support Service, Camden Council
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PROJECT SUPPORT

The work of the Taskforce was supported by:

- Shane Fitzgerald - Senior Policy and Projects Officer, Camden Council
- Lizzie Skalski - Youth Violence Intelligence Analyst, Camden Council
- Noemi Drew - EU Liaison and Constituency Support Manager, Office of Keir Starmer QC, MP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Camden Youth Safety Taskforce was set up in December 2017 in response to the significant increase in youth violence incidents in the borough over the previous year. Councillor Georgia Gould, Leader of Camden Council, asked Keir Starmer QC, MP and Councillor Abdul Hai, Camden's Cabinet Member for Young People and Cohesion, to chair a Taskforce to look at the underlying causes of youth violence in the borough and see what more could be done to keep our young people safe.

Over the course of the Taskforce's lifetime, the upward trend of youth violence continued and tragically culminated in the loss of two lives in one night in February 2018. Camden residents have expressed their deep shock and distress about what is happening in their local area, and the Somali community in particular has felt the devastating impact of this increase in youth violence, with three of the four most recent murders being young Somali men.

The Taskforce sought to gather information through extensive engagement with young people, parents and residents, professionals and the voluntary sector, as well as a detailed literature review to learn from what has worked elsewhere. This has enabled it to evaluate which interventions would be most effective in tackling youth violence and make recommendations to promote youth safety in Camden. The voice of young people is firmly at the centre of the work and keeping them safe is the top priority.

The Taskforce gathered evidence by asking three broad questions:

- Why do some young people carry knives?
- What are the main causes of youth violence?
- What can be done to address the problem of youth violence in Camden?

These questions formed the basis for key lines of enquiry and were posed to citizens and professionals during the extensive programme of engagement. They also formed the basis for a comprehensive review of leading research and best practice. This research has been used, alongside the voices of citizens and community organisations, to develop the recommendations in this report.

The Taskforce found growing concern among many young people about their personal safety in light of the increased incidents of knife crime over the past year. This fear is a key factor in why some young people carry knives.

Camden has a well-established and widely-known drugs market which the evidence makes clear is an aggravating factor in youth violence in the borough. The Taskforce heard how boys especially are groomed into gangs and the drugs trade from a young age. The vast majority of young people affected by youth violence have suffered trauma in their early childhood and it is often the most vulnerable young people who are most at risk. The Taskforce found that a large proportion of young offenders are also victims. It is often these children and young people who are being exploited for profit by adults involved in selling drugs. Helping young people affected by youth violence is not simply about giving them a second chance, it is very often about giving them their first real chance.

The Taskforce learned that there are various 'risk factors', which can increase the likelihood of a young person becoming involved in a gang and youth violence. Poor school attendance is one such factor and the issues of exclusions came up many times during the Taskforce's research and engagement. A lack of 'things to do' and a lack of employment opportunities for young people were other reasons given to the Taskforce when local residents were asked about the causes of youth violence.

A 'public health approach' is the term given to treating youth violence as a broad public health issue rather than simply a law and order issue. This means taking a whole-community approach to tackling the problem, with a clear focus on prevention and involving a wide range of partners in the effort from schools and the police, to health professionals and youth workers. Camden has a proud tradition of community action and the Taskforce calls for the adoption of a Camden 'public health approach' to youth safety.



Adopting this position, the Taskforce examined what more could be done to help reduce youth violence and keep young people safe. Young people called for more positive activities for them to participate in their local area and there was widespread agreement on the desire to keep students in school and reduce exclusions. Parents told the Taskforce of the need for parenting support programmes and the national policy literature found that family and schools-based interventions are among the best-evidenced to have impact. Leading research in this area also concludes that programmes which give young people life skills such as conflict resolution are more effective than the traditional 'scare tactic' techniques. Youth safety interventions should equip young people with the skills to make positive choices in difficult situations.

The desire and need to make money is a strong factor in what makes gangs and the drugs business seem an attractive prospect for some young people. Camden is fortunate to have many world-leading businesses located in the borough and the Taskforce recommends using these businesses to develop greater employment and training opportunities for young people at risk.

The Taskforce was struck by the level of distrust that exists between some local communities and the police. Many young people have a negative view of the police and under-reporting of youth violence incidents is something which makes the effort to keep young people safe more difficult.

Stop and search practice was highlighted to the Taskforce as being particularly controversial for young people, with young black men feeling they are disproportionately and unfairly targeted. Alongside this, the Taskforce found that parents in some communities are reluctant to ask for help from local services due to fear of social services 'stepping in' and being stigmatised as a bad parent. The Taskforce is clear that this reported distrust is detrimental to efforts to tackle youth violence and efforts must be made to improve relations.

The research identified a gap in support or provision for 18 to 25-year-olds. Many of those affected by youth violence are aged over 18 but the support available to them is significantly reduced once they reach this milestone. This view is backed-up with local evidence and is strongly supported by the professionals the Taskforce engaged with. Rehousing and relocation for those most at risk is also especially important for this age group and requires an improved pan-London approach on the issue.

Analysing all the information gathered through the extensive engagement with young people, parents and residents, professionals and the voluntary sector, as well as a detailed literature review to learn from what has worked elsewhere, the Taskforce has developed 17 recommendations to the council, schools, businesses, community partners, and to all citizens in the borough. Through its research, the Taskforce formed a view that the exploitation of children in gangs and the drugs business, and the wider vulnerability of young people who are affected by youth violence, requires a clear, focussed strategy. The remit of the Taskforce was to see what more could be done to keep young people safe and it has adopted and adapted a successful framework used in Camden to tackle child sexual exploitation (CSE). Therefore, the recommendations have been categorised under five themes: Prevent, Identify, Support, Disrupt and Enforce.

In line with a 'public health approach', these recommendations are not just for the council. It will need all the relevant partners and communities in Camden to come together to implement the changes set out under the five themes. The partnership work to turn the recommendations into actions will be developed



and delivered as a follow-up to this report, and Camden Council plans to commission an independent evaluation to track progress and measure success one and two years on from the publication of this report.

The 17 recommendations are listed below. Further detail on the key issues as well as the evidence on best practice which has informed the recommendations, can be found in later sections of the report.

PREVENT

Prevent youth violence by providing young people, parents and professionals with information which raises their awareness of the issues and helps them keep themselves safe, make positive choices about their behaviour and build their resilience.

1. The huge goodwill and community spirit which has been shown to the Taskforce should be mobilised by supporting community-led efforts to prevent youth violence and finding ways to make it easier for local residents to volunteer and get involved.
2. A Camden-wide 'public health approach' to tackle youth violence should be established, which involves young people, parents, residents, schools, businesses, community and voluntary groups, the council, the police and all other local partners who can contribute to keeping our young people safe.
3. Robust programmes should be developed to equip young people with the skills and resilience needed to make positive choices and deal with difficult situations, with a focus on those young people moving from primary to secondary school.
4. Young people's access to and ownership of activities in their community which can have a positive impact on their lives should be increased, and information about the borough's full youth service provision should be brought into one centralised and easy-to-access place.

IDENTIFY

Identify and refer those young people who need support because they are vulnerable to being affected by youth violence.

5. Professional identification of those at risk of being affected by youth violence should be increased to inform effective prevention and support strategies, and ensure appropriate referrals are made by schools, youth workers and other practitioners who work with young people.
6. Young people, families, and the wider community should be better able to identify and act on early warning indicators of those at risk of youth violence, with one centralised place for people to contact for advice and help.

SUPPORT

Target those at risk of or affected by youth violence and provide them with the support they need, including enabling parents and professionals to support the young people with whom they are involved.

7. Schools, youth workers and other professionals who work with young people should develop trauma-informed practices.
8. Additional support for students excluded, at risk of exclusion or with poor attendance should be provided and schools should have information on the most effective interventions alongside a knowledge-sharing mechanism for best practice.
9. Businesses in Camden should be encouraged to develop employment and training opportunities for those young people at risk of or affected by youth violence to open up suitable and attractive routes to employment.
10. Additional support should be developed for young people aged 18 to 25 who are at risk of or affected by youth violence.
11. Early Help services should be promoted to families where there are indications of additional need, particularly focussing on those who may be least likely to ask for help. Alongside this, community-led parenting programmes which develop parenting skills and promote greater resilience in families should be supported.

DISRUPT

Disrupt the patterns of youth violence to make Camden a safe environment by interrupting the activities of perpetrators and inhibiting the grooming and targeting process.

12. Camden should take a leading role in changing the local conversation about the drugs trade and campaign nationally to highlight the exploitation of children in gangs.
13. Ways in which greater trust and cooperation can be fostered between young people and local communities, and the police and other public services should be explored.
14. An improved rehousing and resettlement offer should be available for young people at risk and families, including a pan-London approach on the issue.
15. The design and planning of local environments which help reduce crime and make residents feel safer should be promoted.

ENFORCE

Use appropriate enforcement against perpetrators using information and intelligence gathered by partner agencies.

16. Enforcement action should be targeted on those 'at the top' of the drugs market who exploit children and young people for profit.
17. The borough police, young people and the wider local community should work together to explore ways to ensure stop and search measures are seen to be used fairly, proportionally and in a respectful manner.



CAMDEN CONTEXT

Located in the heart of London, Camden is home to 243,000 residents, over 300,000 workers, around 30,000 businesses, 58 state-funded schools, 11 universities, and boasts some of London's most culturally significant landmarks. Camden is also home to a vibrant and diverse community - 173 different languages are spoken and 33% of the resident population are black, Asian and from minority ethnic backgrounds.



Citizens in Camden show a sense of pride in the place where they live, and the council's Camden 2025 strategy articulates the vision for the borough of communities coming together to develop shared solutions to tackling inequalities and creating a place that works for everyone.

Integral to the community vision for Camden is the wellbeing, voice and contribution of the 71,753 young people aged under 25 years who live in the borough. On the whole, young people in Camden do well - 97% of schools in Camden are 'good' or 'outstanding', and overall Camden pupils at Key Stage 2 achieve better results than the national average. Benefiting from the rich offer of further education institutions, work-based learning, and the labour market in Camden, there are more young people aged 17 and 18 in education, employment and training (EET) than the London average. Camden has the largest student (higher education) population in London, and because of its reputation as a radical, artistic and vibrant hub of central London, many young people flock to Camden to live, study, work and visit.

There are some young people in Camden who do less well, and similarly to the picture across central London, there are significant inequalities in the borough which can impact on the life chances of young residents. The average household income in the wealthiest ward is more than twice that of the average income in the least affluent ward and 39.92% of children and young people live in Child Poverty¹. Across the UK, children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to perform less well than other pupils, and this stubborn trend is evident at all key stages. Similarly to the national trend, Camden has also seen an increase in young people with mental health issues, and the current prevalence rate indicates that 13% of children and young people have some type of mental health disorder. Those young people in Camden who do less well may be seen by social work services, youth early help, and a much smaller percentage by the youth offending service.

Of the total population of young people in Camden, less than 1% will be seen by the youth offending service per year.² The number of first-time entrants (FTE) into the youth justice system has been steadily falling since 2013, as has the number of offences leading to cautions or convictions. However, the nature of these offences has become more violent, and more frequently involving weapons. The proportion of 'violence against the person' offences (such as assault, assault with injury, possession of weapons) has been rising since 2012 reflecting similar increases nationally.

36 %

of youth offences in
Camden were for
'violence against the
person offences' in
2017/18

17 %

decrease in number of children receiving their first caution or conviction in Camden 2017/18 compared with the previous year

For some years, Camden was positioned below comparable boroughs in terms of recorded numbers for youth violence and knife crime. Between 2010 and December 2016, fatalities resulting from violent crime remained low, with two young people under 25 years old becoming victims of murder in Camden. However, the figures for knife crime with injury doubled in 2017 compared with the previous year. From December 2016 until today, there have been four murders of young people under 25. In the last year, there were 100 victims of knife crime with injury in the borough. It is recognised that, for a number of reasons, incidents of violence are not always reported to the police and therefore the actual figure is almost certainly higher. Camden's youth offending service (YOS) is working with a smaller cohort of young people, but with more complex needs and an upward trend of more violent offences.

National research and leading professionals have linked youth violence to gangs and the illegal drugs market. Camden Council, in partnership with the Metropolitan Police, identifies that there are six active gangs in Camden and they are associated with drug dealing and other criminal activity. Camden also has an established and widely-known drugs market, operating outside of the legitimate economy and offering what can be perceived by some young people as opportunities to make money from selling drugs. Young people are often groomed into these activities from an early age and a strong level of exploitation exists in how the drugs market operates.

Camden 2025 demonstrates the way citizens, businesses and community partners have come together to create a shared vision and intent for partnership working and this includes the ambition for young people to thrive in Camden, whilst acknowledging that for some young people this seems distant to them. Citizens in Camden have shown they want to work together to give children the best start in life, to enable young people to flourish in school and access routes to employment, for all young people to be able to contribute to their community, and for Camden to be a safe place without violence or harassment.



¹Centre for Research in Social Policy. Based on HMRC data and including updates on recent regional Labour Market Survey data to include in-and-out-of-work households.

²Based on 100 people in YOS in 2017-18, and 2011 census data for 10-17 year olds. Figure is approximately 0.67%.

KEY FINDINGS

The Camden Youth Safety Taskforce was set up to help understand, prevent and ultimately reduce violence amongst young people, including knife crime, in the borough. The taskforce undertook an intense research programme to better comprehend the underlying characteristics and reasons contributing to youth violence. This included data analysis, community research with parents and young people, a literature review of the latest thinking policy on youth violence, and focus groups with sector professionals.

The sections below summarise the key findings of the Taskforce, structured against the three main questions which have formed the key lines of enquiry.

Why do some young people carry knives?

When the Taskforce asked young people why they think some of their peers are carrying knives in Camden, the overwhelming answer was fear and protection. This was the top answer voiced in every single focus group conducted with young people.

33% of respondents to the online survey (open to all Camden residents) said they feel unsafe in Camden, and most young people who spoke to the Taskforce directly said they feel less safe in Camden than they did a year ago.

While it is estimated 0.15%³ of young people in Camden carry knives relative to the borough's age 10-17 population, the young people we met in our focus groups overwhelmingly believed the scale of knife carrying was much higher. Alarming, every single participant in a school focus group believed that the problem of young people carrying knives will get worse. Young people, parents and youth workers all felt that the recent spikes in incidents and resulting media coverage are making it more likely that young people in some communities will start carrying a knife.



The Taskforce engaged with:

- Four secondary school visits to speak with approximately 100 students.
- Four youth centre visits to speak with approximately 70 young people across different parts of the borough.
- An online survey which was completed by 169 people.
- Small and individual focus groups including with 12 young people open to Camden's Youth Offending Service.
- Two parents' focus groups and three community conversations involving parents and other local residents including around 100 attendees at a public meeting at St Luke's Church, Kentish Town.
- An open drop-in session for anyone in the borough who wanted to meet the Taskforce.
- A number of professional focus groups which included: youth workers, family support workers, community safety officers, headteachers and a meeting with the Borough Commander of the Metropolitan Police.
- One-to-one meetings with policy experts and local voluntary groups.

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I wouldn't walk down certain streets at night time as it's too dangerous

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Young person in a youth club

Some of the teenagers the Taskforce spoke to in youth centres suggested that the principle of 'postcode wars', where groups of young people defend certain areas which are affiliated with them, still applies in Camden. Parents are worried for their children, especially those from BME communities. Some of the Somali parents, who were consulted shortly after the tragic murders of two young people, told the Taskforce that they believe their children are in a 'constant state of fear' in Camden and they always feel the need to check who is around them when they are outside. The parents believe this is having an effect on their mental health and wellbeing. Parents in the communities most affected by youth violence are also very afraid. The Taskforce heard from one parent who said they would rather their son carry a knife as they too believed it made him safer when walking around the borough.

The London Mayor's Knife Crime Strategy agrees that the majority of research on why people carry knives is for self-protection⁴. The London Assembly Police and Crime Committee states that a main driver of knife crime among young people is the belief that they need to be prepared to defend themselves, and that this is itself driven by the widespread view on the number and severity of weapons on the streets.⁵ From the young people who spoke to the Taskforce, the apparent need for young people to defend themselves appears to outweigh the fear of penalties that may result if they are caught by police. While the Taskforce is not saying enforcement and deterrent policies have no role, it is clear that with such significant numbers young people afraid for their lives, this is the overwhelming driver.

What are the main causes of youth violence?

The issue of youth violence in Camden is complex and varied in its nature. There is no one single cause of youth violence and neither is there one single solution. However, research has found a number of common factors which can predict an increased risk of young people becoming involved in a gang and / or youth violence. What seems clear from the research is that it is often the most vulnerable young people who are at the greatest risk.

Lack of 'things to do'

The taskforce heard representation about the breadth of services offered to young people in Camden, both council-delivered services and provision by the voluntary and community sector. However, when young people were asked in the online survey what are the main causes of violent crime, 'lack of youth services' was the third most popular answer (69% of respondents), following 'gangs' and 'drugs'. Youth centres were seen as a way to keep young people off the streets and away from trouble.



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Young people are getting involved in youth violence because they don't have anything else to do

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Young boy at a youth centre

Of those young people who spoke to the Taskforce through the online survey or visits to schools and youth centres, there was a universal ask for 'more things to do' such as youth centres and after-school activities. Young people also made it clear that they value having fun things to do in the borough, particularly things which match their interests.

On the type of activities available and who they are targeted at, young women known to the Youth Offending Service were particularly critical of the current offer in their local youth centres. They stated that they rarely attended, are not interested in the activities provided, which they described as "boring" and mainly consisting of "boys playing pool and PlayStation". These young women stated that they mostly socialised within their local area / estate or in their homes with other friends, and while they feel that youth centres have little to offer them, a number stated they would welcome the support of a mentor. During one school visit, all the girls in the group agreed that they wanted activities which are solely focussed on girls. They were critical of youth centres, which seemed geared towards boys' interests only.

³29 young people received a caution or conviction for carrying a knife or offensive weapon in 2017-18. This is 0.15% of the population aged 10-17.

⁴MOPAC knife crime strategy (2017) p13

The Taskforce also discovered that many young people were unaware of what activities are on offer in the borough or even the location of their nearest youth centre. The parents' focus groups overwhelmingly said there needed to be 'more activities for young people to do'. Through the community conversations, it became clear that parents have noticed and are feeling the effects of funding cuts to services. The parents felt that the universal services available have been reduced and the cost of many other activities for young people, such as gym or local play facilities, are too high.

On a broader level, the numbers of young people attending youth centres in Camden has decreased since 2012/13. However, on other indicators, such as regular participation and developing life skills, there has not been a similar decrease. Youth workers have attributed the decrease in attendance to both the reduction in investment in universal youth provision and the changing nature of how young people socialise, with more time now spent at home, in friends' houses or on estates. The lack of outreach work has also been attributed to funding reductions, and hinders youth centres being able to engage and publicise their programmes to young people. Many youth workers felt more funding is needed for youth services and believed they would be able to reach more young people at risk of involvement in youth violence as a result. However, the percentage of young people currently known to the Youth Offending Service who attend any youth provision is low at 23%, and youth workers felt that this was because these young people were now entrenched in offending behaviour and youth provision had little to offer them as an alternative. In addition, this cohort of young people and their peers were seen as difficult to engage, with many having been excluded from centres due to poor behaviour, threats to staff or drug-related issues.

Funding cuts have been an unavoidable part of local government life since 2010. A report by Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)⁶ published at the end of 2017 estimated an almost £400 million reduction in council funding has led to more than 600 youth centres being closed since 2010 across the UK. Figures from the Department for Education show that local authorities in England are spending £206 million less on youth services than three years ago⁷. In line with all comparable councils across the country, Camden has had to make savings. However, Camden Council reduced its budget on youth services much less than most other councils and the funding for voluntary sector youth providers has remained the same during this period which is a testament to the huge value the council leadership places on the local voluntary and community sector.

Outcomes relating to youth service provision are notoriously difficult to measure, as noted in a House of Commons Education Committee report in 2011⁸. There is not enough research to make the claim that the reduction in youth service funding has led to a rise in youth violence. However, what has been made undoubtedly clear to the Taskforce is that young people, their parents and the professionals who work with them all want to see greater investment in the activities offered to children in the borough.

⁵London Assembly Police and Crime Committee (2016). Serious Youth Violence Report [online]

⁶SCVO report, A future at risk Cuts in youth services, December 2017

⁷DfE, Planned expenditure on schools, education and children's services by local authorities in England, 2017-18

⁸Education Select Committee, Services for young people report, 2011

School exclusions

School exclusions was a recurring topic during the conversations with the Taskforce, specifically with the Somali community in Camden. Of the young people the Taskforce spoke to who had been excluded, they felt more could have been done to keep them in school. Somali parents asserted that they believe there are too many exclusions of young people from their community and their sons are disproportionately affected. A study commissioned by the Somali Youth Development Resource Centre reports that between 2013 and 2016, nine young Somali pupils were permanently excluded, with 95 fixed-term exclusions. However, many young people living in Camden attend schools in a different borough, which means information is less available and makes it difficult to reach firm conclusions. Many parents also said that they do not know what support is available to children who have been, or at risk of being, excluded.

In the main, the professionals called for fewer school exclusions, with the general principle stated in one focus group as the desire to 'keep them in mainstream education for as long as possible' and out of the reach of gangs. Research from the Early Intervention Foundation strongly suggests that regular attendance in education plays a vital role in keeping young people away from gang involvement. Low commitment and disengagement in school are also early risk factors for involvement in youth violence and gangs. A study of Camden's young people who received their first caution or conviction for weapon possession showed that 43% had previously been excluded from school. The recent Ministry of Justice report Examining the Educational Background of Young Knife Possession Offenders showed that 83% of knife possession offenders were persistently absent from school in at least one of the five academic years from 2008/09 to 2012/13 and a higher than average percentage had been persistently absent and/or excluded from school. The Home Office Serious Violence Strategy presents evidence showing that children excluded from school are overrepresented in young offender populations and also as victims of serious violence.

The Taskforce did not find evidence in Camden of direct causality between school exclusions and youth violence so it cannot say as an absolute that an increase in school exclusions leads to an increase in youth violence. However, being excluded and not engaging with school are very strong indicators for those who are at risk of involvement and the message from young people and parents is that more support needs to be provided for young people at risk of exclusion or who have been excluded.

Gangs, grooming and the drugs trade

Camden has an established and widely-known illegal drugs market and this was echoed in all conversations the Taskforce had with parents, teachers and professionals. The most common answers in the online survey to 'what are the causes of violent crime in Camden' were gangs (76%) and drugs (72%). A large number of survey respondents expressed the need for the drugs market to be disrupted and parents in particular are worried about gangs and drugs selling in their local area.

The term 'gang' was used significantly more in conversations with parents and youth workers than it was by young people. The response from young people about whether there were gangs in Camden was mixed. Not one young person mentioned any gang by name. Young people spoke more about the issue as 'knife crime', with some mentioning the notion of 'postcode wars' and defending territories. Many more linked it with the desire to make money and the drugs business.



A number of professionals told the Taskforce that organised gangs are becoming a bigger problem for the borough but also that some young people might be mislabelled as being gang members – they might consider themselves just a group of friends in some cases. This chimes with London-wide reports that agree that while gangs are a serious problem in London, some young people are reported to feel that the police and other authorities incorrectly label groups of youths a ‘gang’ when it may not be the case. Some young people told us they are simply a group of boys from the same area.

The Home Office’s recent Serious Violence Strategy⁹ says that the presence of drugs markets can drive sudden shifts in serious violence in local areas. It presents evidence which shows that violence is used as a way of maximising profit in the drugs market. A recent report commissioned by Waltham Forest Council gives a detailed and thorough account of how gangs in London groom children into the drugs business¹⁰. It found that the process of grooming is becoming increasingly sophisticated and starts early, as young as 10 years of age. This is a picture with which Camden’s professionals are sadly very familiar. The research seen suggests that it is often the most vulnerable young people who are groomed for gang membership and the drugs business. A gang can be perceived as providing a young person with a sense of belonging and stability in contrast to a troubled family life at home. There is no doubt among the professionals who spoke with the Taskforce that young children in Camden are being exploited by older criminals, specifically in the drugs trade.

The evidence reviewed by the Taskforce is clear that a large proportion of young offenders are also victims and they heard examples of how young people change from being victim to offender on a daily or even hourly basis in some cases. Data from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) published in the Home Office’s Strategy¹¹ show that of the 306 suspects named in 134 MPS homicide investigations in 2017, 72% had previously been a victim of crime, and 26% a victim of knife crime.

While a significant proportion of youth violence in Camden is linked with the drugs market, serious youth violence in London is often seen as just a ‘gang issue’ - but this is not true. Not all young victims of youth violence are linked to gangs. However, while evidence suggests that the majority of knife crime is not gang-related, gang-related knife crime tends to be more violent and young black and ethnic minority males are disproportionately affected.

⁹HM Government (2018). Serious Violence Strategy

¹⁰Whittaker, A., Cheston, L., Tyrell, T., Higgins, M., Felix-Baptiste, C., Havard, T. (2018). From Postcodes to Profit: How gangs have changed in Waltham Forest

Lack of opportunities for training and employment, and the need to make money

The Taskforce heard directly from young people that they wished to earn money but saw their employment opportunities as limited. This was discussed at length in a number of focus group meetings with young people and also with professionals. The focus groups asserted that lack of opportunities and the desire to make money were the main drivers of gang association and that not being in education, employment or training may be a causing factor of youth violence. One research project by MOPAC found that 30% of the victims of youth violence were not in employment, education or training.¹²

The information relating to Camden’s cohort of offenders, and from the national literature, is that young people are getting involved in gangs and the illegal drugs business as a way to make money. The evidence from focus groups with young people tells a story of how the illegal drugs business is often seen as the best, or in some cases the only, way to make money. The Home Office¹³ has also concluded that selling drugs is seen as a way to achieve material goods and make money, which is viewed as unobtainable through legal work. Waltham Forest’s recent report¹⁴ on gangs also shows that the nature of gang operations in London has shifted to an enterprise model with a focus on making profit above all else.

The information seen on gang cultures in Camden also shows a change in characteristics. Historically, the focus has been on postcode territories that need to be defended from outsiders. The information seen by the Taskforce is that more recently there have been signs of protection of a territorial drugs market, which is driven by a desire for profit regardless of the harm it might cause. This operating model moves away from young people displaying visible signs of gang membership as this can attract unwanted attention from the police and other partnership agencies. The growing role of social media and technology has also played a significant part in provoking other groups and gangs and increasing tensions and issues between rivals.

The Taskforce has heard the view of young people, professionals and the available literature and ascertained that being in education, training or employment are protective factors which could decrease the vulnerability of young people or their involvement in youth violence.

Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

The Taskforce heard how a number of research studies identify significant levels of trauma in the history of high-risk young people. In one study, inspectors from HM Inspectorate of Probation¹⁵ saw evidence of trauma in over 80% of cases where information was available. The examples of trauma experienced covered separation and estrangement from parents, the death of a parent or main carer, sexual abuse, severe physical

¹¹HM Government (2018). Serious Violence Strategy

¹²<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/governance-and-decision-making/mopac-decisions-0/continuation-clinically-embedded-youth-support-major-trauma-unit>

¹³HM Government (2018). Serious Violence Strategy

¹⁴Whittaker, A., Cheston, L., Tyrell, T., Higgins, M., Felix-Baptiste, C., Havard, T. (2018). From Postcodes to Profit: How gangs have changed in Waltham Forest

¹⁵HM Inspectorate of Probation (2017). The Work of Youth Offending Teams to Protect the Public.

chastisement, serial domestic abuse and parental substance misuse. For some young people, their experiences of trauma were both multiple and severe and the Home Office's recent Serious Violence Strategy also highlights these experience as predictors of youth violence. A study by Haringey Council⁴⁶ of 20 of its most prolific young offenders found 30% had witnessed domestic violence by age seven and 90% had either experienced loss of a parent through death or separation.

A study⁴⁷ of the 43 young people in Camden who received a caution or conviction between October 2015 and September 2016 and who reoffended in the subsequent 12 months had similar findings. 84% of the group were male and their ages ranged from 12 to 17 years old. Of this group, 77% had experienced signs of deprivation, 33% had been looked after children (in care) at some point in their lives and 30% had either previously been or were subject to a Child Protection Plan at the time.

A significant proportion of the cohort had experienced sustained family dysfunction. Over half of the cohort had experienced parental or care-giver neglect. The risk factors of substance misuse and poor adolescent mental health were seen in 61% and 44% of the cohort respectively.

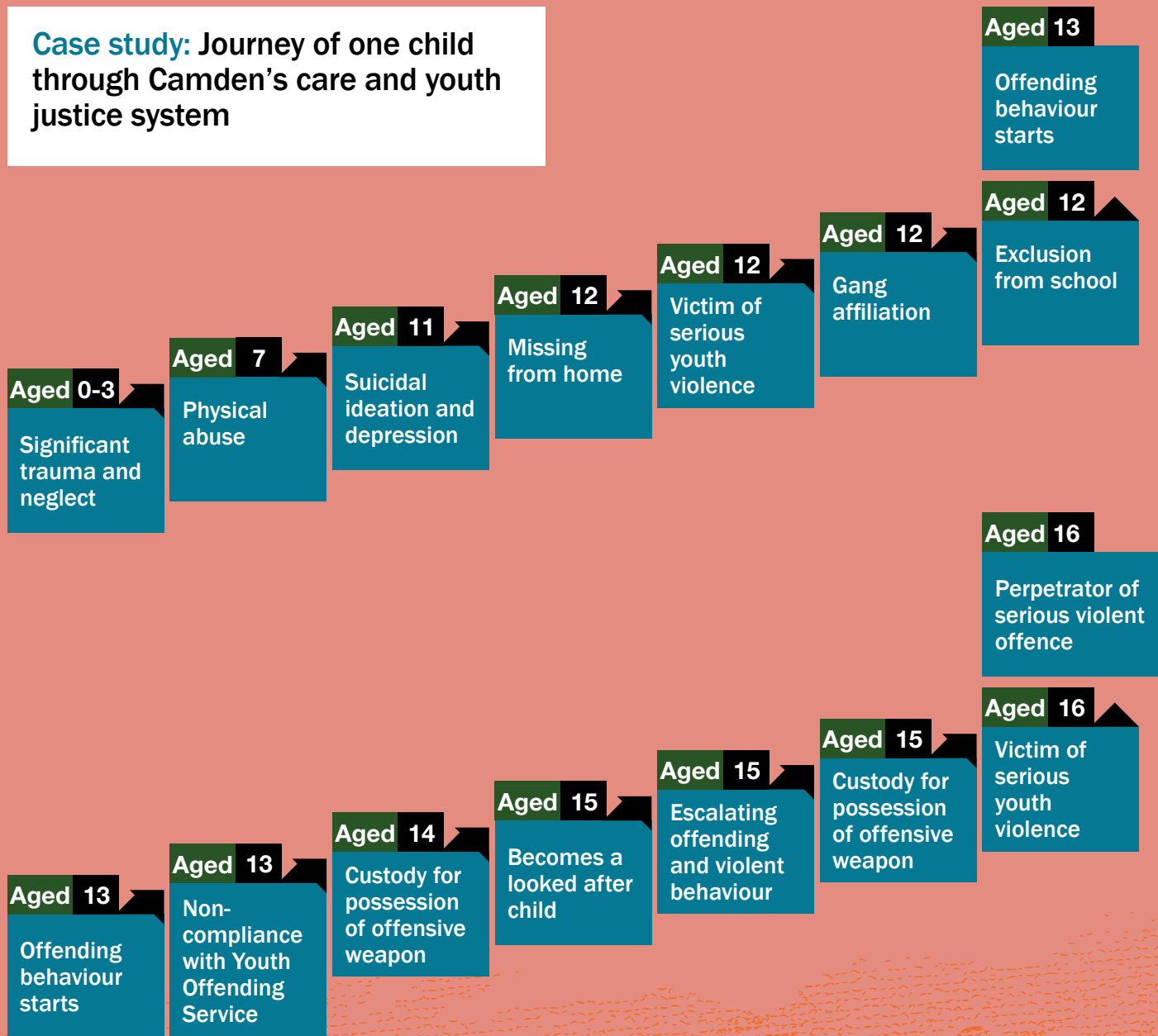
Trauma was cited as a key cause of vulnerability by the focus groups of professionals and experience of early childhood trauma is regularly reported by workers as being evident in the young people they work with, with some suggesting it has led to desensitisation to violence for those involved. They said that the trauma experienced in childhood has led to an emotional detachment from the violent actions taking place in the borough. In the online survey open to the public, and dissimilarly to the response from the professionals focus groups, residents rated childhood trauma within the bottom three causes of violent crime (just 34% of respondents chose this answer). This indicates a public understanding of the issue that differs from that of the professionals and from the policy literature.

The Taskforce heard evidence from public health professionals⁴⁸ regarding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These define the negative impact of abuse, neglect, domestic violence, household substance abuse, parental separation and parental imprisonment, among others, as having long-term and profound impact on young lives. Research has shown that the higher number of ACEs a person has suffered, the more likely they are to have negative outcomes later in life. In a Welsh ACE's study⁴⁹, people who had experienced four or more ACEs were 14 times more likely to be the victim of violence and 15 times more likely to be the perpetrator of violence in the last 12 months, compared with those with no ACEs. Furthermore, 14% of people with zero ACEs experience low mental wellbeing compared with 41% of people with four or more ACEs. These outcomes are similarly seen in education. In other studies, the performance of students who experienced higher number of ACEs showed a higher likelihood of behaviour problems, low academic performance and attendance issues. These are all risk factors for involvement in youth violence.

The Taskforce considers the prevalence of trauma and ACEs in young people who are affected by youth violence as a main risk factor which should be addressed early on with appropriate support from those who work closely with young people. This approach also calls for changing the way professionals and the community view the causes of a young person becoming involved in youth violence, shifting the question from 'why are you behaving like this?' to 'what has happened that is leading you to this?' This is a key principle for the Taskforce's strategy and approach to tackling the problem of youth violence in Camden.



Case study: Journey of one child through Camden's care and youth justice system



¹⁶Haringey Council - Safety, Resilience and Emotional Wellbeing of Young People
¹⁷Camden Council Youth Offending Service, Risk of re-offending cohort strategic analysis, April 2017
¹⁸Keynote speakers at Camden Vulnerable Adolescents Conference, March 2018.
¹⁹Justice Analytical Services (2017). Understanding Childhood Adversity, Resilience and Crime

Social media, identity and negative role models

Every single young person the Taskforce spoke to believed that social media is making the problem of youth violence worse. Evidence presented to the Taskforce and national literature on the topic tell how rival gangs are using social media to taunt each other and promote gang rivalries. A report on social media and youth violence by Catch22 shows how social media promotes gang culture and the most viewed videos are often those which result in retaliatory violence²⁰.

Research and anecdotal evidence the Taskforce has seen shows how social media can inflame tensions in communities as its 24-hour nature means there is no cooling-off period. The Taskforce recognises the power and influence of social media, and the impact this can have on the views and behaviours of young people.

“

Because all the kids want to be gangsters. A lot of youths get quickly attached to trends to fit in and be popular

”

Young person working with Camden's Youth Offending Team

Overall, the young people the Taskforce spoke to gave a mixed response to whether social media is a cause of youth violence. Many young people say it as a symptom of the problem rather than an underlying cause, especially 'drill music'. Drill music is a style of music which began in America and is now associated with youth violence in the UK as a way for rival gangs to taunt each other or incite violent attacks, often by uploading music videos on social media. The Mayor's Knife Crime Strategy found there to have been a number of cases of serious violence associated with these confrontational music videos and this has been seen in Camden.

The Catch22 report asks for a distinction to be made between the vast majority of music videos that reflect the raw hardships and reality of some young people's lives and a much smaller number of videos which incite violence and make explicit threats. The former group may be outlets for legitimate creative expression that could be channelled into positive activities in partnership with local partners in Camden.

While the Met Police has successfully engaged with YouTube to take down some of the most provocative videos, banning drill music wasn't seen as a credible solution by the majority of young people, even if it was possible. Music was often held up as a positive activity for young people to do. Camden is home to many world-leading social media companies and music venues, which presents a potentially unique position to effect positive change in this area.

Linked with social media, a number of professionals raised the problem of negative role models for young men and the issue of 'toxic masculinity'. The lack of positive role models was raised repeatedly in focus groups with youth workers when asked about some of the causes of youth violence and gang activity. Young people affected by youth violence often come from a troubled background and research tells how gangs can address a basic need to belong to a group and find a self-identity²¹. The Children's Society found that the young people groomed into gangs can feel a sense of status and power they have not experienced before and, as a result, they do not see themselves as being exploited²². While this language was understandably not used by young people themselves, some told the Taskforce about young boys wanting to feel like a 'big man' by carrying a knife.



WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF YOUTH VIOLENCE IN CAMDEN?

Public health approach

Much was heard during the work of the taskforce of the 'public health approach'²³; the model used in Scotland (the city of Glasgow, in particular) which is being discussed often in public debate and is quoted as the best practice model for tackling youth violence. The public health approach treats youth violence and knife crime as not just a 'law and order' issue, but as a problem needing a whole-community approach involving community groups, local authorities, youth centres, the police, health professionals and other interested parties coming together to share information and stop young people from becoming involved. Its focus is very much on prevention and the Taskforce endorses this approach in Camden. The Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick has backed calls for a public health approach in London, saying that this

has been “well-evidenced in Scotland”. Recent statements by government ministers on knife crime have also used some of the language associated with a public health approach.

The focus group participants unanimously agreed that a public health approach is needed in Camden and across London but the Taskforce also heard that Camden has some characteristics which are fundamentally different from Scotland, including underlying causes, ethnic make-up, the illegal drugs business and socio-economic factors among others. Relations between the police and young black and minority ethnic residents are also particularly negative in London. The Taskforce has therefore used the approach as offering a framework of underlying principles for tackling the problem of youth violence, but has based the recommendations in this report on addressing the Camden-specific causes and solutions which were identified by communities and professionals in the borough.

Youth services

Many people in Camden told the Taskforce of their belief that providing more positive activities for young people would help reduce youth violence. The Taskforce also learnt that many young people do not know what youth services are available in their local area, and that some young people do not use local provision because the activities available do not match their interests.

Young people made it clear that they value having fun things to do in the borough and particularly things which excite them. During the school visits undertaken by the Taskforce, the young people asked for youth centres and activities to be available close to their school. They did not want to travel to different parts of the borough, which is partly due to how scared they feel at this current time. Music came up a number of times with the boys the Taskforce spoke to as did free access to gyms. Camden benefits from its central London location with many leading cultural assets located in the borough. Youth provision in Camden should not just be seen as the council-run centres - it should embrace the full range of activities available to young people through our local partners in the business, voluntary and community sectors.

The parents’ focus groups overwhelmingly said there needed to be ‘more activities for young people to do’. Many youth workers felt more funding is needed for youth services and believed they would be able to reach more young people at risk of involvement in youth violence as a result. Youth workers also expressed the view that more resources should be targeted at the younger age group of 10 to 14-year-olds (‘transitions’ or Junior Youth Clubs) as it is this group who are most at risk of criminal exploitation but who are also most likely to engage in positive and constructive activities.

Support to stay in school and a ‘whole-school approach’

The Taskforce heard that poor attendance, disengagement from school and exclusions were all risk factors and potential causes of young people becoming involved in youth violence. When asked ‘what can be done to help’ the problem of youth violence, there was consensus across young people, parents and professionals that support to those who are struggling to engage with school could prevent behaviours developing which could lead to youth violence. The national evidence strongly suggests that regular attendance in education plays a vital role in keeping young people safe and away from gang involvement. Low achievement and low commitment in school are shown to be early risk factors for involvement in youth violence and gangs. Schools not only hold the information needed to



aid early intervention and prevention but they also have a positive role to play through the curriculum with schools-based programmes shown to be very effective.

“ Our primary school had a male sports coach who a lot of the boys respected but this role was cut so the school could save money. It wasn’t long after this before the violence against my son started. I feel like I was the only one who made the connection ”

Parent response to online survey

²⁰HM Catch 22, Social Media as a Catalyst and Trigger for Youth Violence, January 2017

²¹(Mercy et al., 2002) in Public Health, Youth Violence and Perpetrator Well-Being, University of St Andrews, 2015

²²The Children’s Society, Criminal Exploitation and County Lines: A toolkit for working with children and young people, 2017

²³No Knives Better Lives website: http://www.actiononviolence.org.uk/sites/default/files/10%20YEAR%20PLAN_0.PDF

Camden's headteachers made strong representation to the Taskforce that they believe that keeping young people in school would reduce the risk of involvement with gangs locally. The headteachers' view is that exclusions are never desirable but an unfortunate necessity in some cases where the bad behaviour is of a more serious nature. The headteachers also wanted it recognised that funding to schools has been consistently cut over the past number of years leaving them with little choice but to cut support staff roles, including family liaison officers. This role involved working in partnership with pupils who needed support, their families, teachers and other agencies to help deliver better outcomes for that young person. However, all Camden secondary schools who spoke to the Taskforce have had to discontinue this post, explaining that the choice they faced was cutting support roles or cutting classroom teachers. Camden's schools believe these roles are critical to tackling the issue of youth violence, as this member of staff can be a trusted and consistent relationship for vulnerable young people and their families.

Mental health issues were raised many times by young people. They said more support is needed to help young people deal with mental health issues through school counsellors and having someone to talk to. A young person known to Camden's Youth Offending Services spoke about how his friend's mental health had 'got the better of him' when he committed a violent offence. These responses show that many young people feel that support should be put in place at an early time, and before someone becomes affected by youth violence.

Responding to the evidence presented to the Taskforce on trauma, and ACEs being a common factor driving youth violence, further evidence was presented to the Taskforce on trauma-informed practice and training of professionals in schools and in youth provision to ensure they are better equipped to support children displaying behavioural challenges who may be dealing with underlying trauma. In schools, this training is encouraged under a 'whole-school approach', which means all levels of staff working in the school, from the headteacher to the teaching assistants, identify and respond to signs of trauma. The Taskforce was made aware of a pilot programme with a number of schools in Islington and the positive feedback on the changes brought about so far, albeit too recently to see long-term and long-lasting impact yet. The work is being watched with great interest.

Family support

The Taskforce heard from residents and professionals that many parents in the borough need additional support and help. One reason given a number of times in focus groups was that parents are often working long hours due to austerity and the high cost of living in London, which means they are out of the house for the best part of most days. Through our engagement with the Somali community, some people spoke of an 'intergenerational gap' between parents and young people. Cases were presented in which the parents spoke little or no English, which makes it particularly hard for them to engage with local services and means they have to rely on their children as translators, which can cause a shift in the power dynamic.

“

Schools [could run] something like the Parent Gym working with a particular estate / area. This will help increase children's chances of success by encouraging good parenting skills

”

Resident, from a community conversation

The Early Intervention Foundation found that family-based approaches are among the most effective interventions to tackle the problem of youth violence. These approaches can be targeted at young families (even from infancy) to improve parenting skills and strengthen parent/child bonds. The Taskforce heard evidence that trauma is a factor in the lives of many young offenders, and the research shows that whole-family approaches to interventions have positive outcomes and can impact on reducing delinquency and anti-social behaviour in children later in life. Young people's behaviour is very often influenced by their family life and family therapy is a well-evidenced and effective way to prevent youth violence in at-risk children.



However, the Taskforce heard from residents and professionals that some families are not seeking support when they feel they might need it, and many parents stated that they are unaware of what is available or how to access it. For some families, this was compounded by a deep mistrust of social services. This was especially acute in local Somali communities. These parents told how they would prefer to seek help from their own community or peer-led parenting groups rather than council services.

Increased identification and early referrals

Help for young people before they get into trouble was the second most popular answer (77% of respondents agreed) in the online survey to the question 'what could help tackle the problem of youth violence in Camden?' Some of the young people who have worked with Camden's Youth Offending Service believe that the necessary support is only accessed after it's too late.



“
A mothers' network from all different areas and cultural background might be a good next step
”
A resident from a community conversation

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) was commissioned by the Home Office in 2017 to research effective approaches to tackling gang involvement and youth violence²⁴. It recently published a report of its findings and the Taskforce has drawn on this evidence to inform thinking along with the testimonies from young people, parents and professionals. Across the age groups, the EIF found that individual factors (such as low self-esteem) as opposed to their contexts (such as coming from a low-income family) are the most powerful signs of risk. The EIF published a list of indicators from across the ages (seven to 15) and contexts (individual, family, school, etc) in young people's lives, which could indicate a trajectory towards youth violence and/or gang involvement. Some of the indicators are examples of behaviours (e.g. aggression and substance misuse), whilst others are wider factors around them, such as availability of marijuana in the area. The EIF argue that knowledge of these indicators across key parts in a young person's life could enable young people and the networks around them to identify their developing behaviours and receive support early on.

“
I think it's really bad that young people have to get arrested and go through the youth justice system just to be able to access support that should really be accessible before. I believe that if the support was widely available without them being arrested, then there would be fewer arrests.
”
Young person, evidence to the Taskforce

²⁴EIF, Preventing Gang And Youth Violence: Spotting Signals Of Risk And Supporting Children And Young People

The Home Office's Serious Violence Strategy²⁵ states that young people are particularly vulnerable to involvement in violence during the transition from primary to secondary school and this was echoed many times from the professionals in Camden who work with young people, such as youth workers, voluntary groups and teachers. The transition to secondary school brings many challenges for young people and those less resilient are at a particularly vulnerable time in their lives. It is a crucial point for preventative interventions. The Greater London Authority (GLA) funds the Stepping Stones programme²⁶, which aims to help vulnerable young people to make a better transition into secondary school. An evaluation of its pilot programme in 2016/17 found that this support can have a "substantial positive impact on the attainment, behaviour and attendance of vulnerable young people in their first year at secondary school". The Taskforce believes that identification of vulnerable periods in a young person's life, such as this transition period, and effective interventions in place to offer support, are key examples of early intervention and support at the right time.

The evidence is overwhelming that early intervention and prevention is essential to tackling youth violence in the long-term. The literature, professionals in youth services and the respondents to the online survey (78%) all agreed that efforts need to be focussed on supporting young people before they get involved. One youth worker said: "If gangs are able to identify and target the most vulnerable young people in our communities, then local authorities should be able to do so as well." Headteachers told the taskforce that their teaching staff were able to identify those most at risk in both primary and secondary school. Early referrals are key to stopping the problem before it happens and there is local evidence that referrals are coming to the attention of children's support services and our front door multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) too late, therefore requiring urgent sanctions and remedial measures, rather than offering preventative strategies at an earlier point of identification of risk.

Employment and training

Young people wanted more apprenticeship opportunities, which many believed offered a credible path to making money. However, many young people felt that gaining an apprenticeship would be unobtainable for them. Parents, professionals and residents all agreed on the need to engage with the plethora of businesses in Camden to encourage them to provide training or employment opportunities to young people at risk of being affected by youth violence.

“Businesses wouldn't hire someone from my estate”

Young person living in the north of Camden

However, some local partners with experience in this area wanted to make the point that many of the most at-risk young people required job readiness support initially, with short-term placements being the most suitable starting point. Full-term employment or long-term apprenticeships may not suit many of the most vulnerable young people initially, as they need to build-up confidence and skills.

Life skills

'Toxic stress' is the term used in leading academic research to describe the responses that can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity²⁷. Toxic stress can lead to significant negative outcomes later in life and the Taskforce has found that many of the young people affected by youth violence have suffered trauma in their childhood. While professionals cannot undo the negative experiences children have suffered, there are ways to give young people the skills required to cope better and build resilience later in life. Resilience can turn 'toxic stress' into 'tolerable stress'²⁸.

Young people understandably did not use the terms 'trauma' or 'toxic stress' in conversations with the Taskforce but they did mention the need for support to make better decisions and cope with difficult situations.

“We need help at a young age in terms of learning right from wrong”

Young person working with Camden's Youth Offending Service

The evidence gathered by the Early Intervention Foundation found that programmes which give young people skills and the ability to control their behaviour (problem-solving, anger management, etc) are among the most effective in preventing youth violence²⁹. A number of high-profile reports conclude that 'scare tactic' programmes are ineffective²⁹ and that the focus should firmly be on giving young people the skills required to make positive choices.

Professionals told the Taskforce that it is not possible for adults or authorities to safeguard young people at all times and research has found that policies which focus solely on the removal of risk miss the opportunity to develop skills and promote resilience in young people³⁰. The former approach is what Research in Practice describes as 'safe but miserable' and focuses on trying to remove young people from their friends, local networks and local environment in order to protect them³¹.

The Taskforce agrees that the focus needs to be on giving young people the skills to cope with difficult situations. This fits in with the research from the EIF that shows that individual risk factors are stronger than environmental ones.

²⁵HM Government (2018). Serious Violence Strategy

²⁶MOPAC – Mayor's Knife Crime Strategy

²⁷Harvard University, Centre on the Developing Child, Toxic Stress

²⁸Harvard University, Centre on the Developing Child, The Science of Resilience

²⁹EIF, Preventing Gang And Youth Violence: Spotting Signals Of Risk And Supporting Children And Young People



Camden's teachers and youth workers told the Taskforce that there is a need to build life skills in young people and that this would bring wider benefits, such as improving classroom behaviour, securing employment or training and making positive choices, all of which have been identified as positive steps to addressing the problem of youth violence.

Role models and trusted relationships

Groups of students in local schools raised 'providing youth counsellors and people to turn to when in need' as something which could help tackle the problem of young people becoming involved in youth violence. The students placed a lot of emphasis on the need to have a trusted adult they can speak to, whether this be a teacher, a youth worker or their parents. The Taskforce found these relationships to be crucial for prevention, identification and support, as most young people said that they would not talk to the police.

Parents who spoke to the Taskforce echoed the view that it is important for young people to have role models and trusted relationships with adults. In focus groups with sector professionals, many of them put huge value on the importance of having a consistent point of contact for a young person and their family whom they trusted. Many added that training or interventions targeting at-risk young people should include this trusted relationship where possible.

The lack of trusted relationships is consistently cited in reviews of failures around Child Sexual Exploitation³². Research by the EIF found that vulnerable children are less likely to trust adults but that such relationships can lead to better outcomes. In February 2018, the Government launched a Trusted Relationships Fund to help foster better relations between frontline professionals and young people at risk of exploitation, reflecting the importance of supporting these bonds. These relationships could be with teachers, professionals or community workers. Community-based organisations are often trusted and well-connected in local areas³³.

²⁹EIF, Preventing Gang And Youth Violence: Spotting Signals Of Risk And Supporting Children And Young People; Home Office, Serious Violence Strategy

³⁰Harvard University, Centre on the Developing Child, The Science of Resilience

³¹Research in Practice, Working with adolescent risk & resilience: a relational approach, presenting at Camden Safeguarding Adolescence conference

³²EIF (February 2018). Building Trusted Relationships For Vulnerable Children And Young People With Public Services.

³³The London Community Foundation (March 2018), The Violence Virus.

“

I met Brenda 15 months ago when she came to help me. Other people have tried to help me but when it doesn't work they walk away or pass me on to someone else. Brenda is still here - she's never walked away. She doesn't judge me on my family's reputation. She doesn't judge me when I slip up and make mistakes. She doesn't judge me at all. She believes in me.

”

Young person in Camden talking about his Youth Early Help Case Manager

Better relationships between communities and the police

During focus groups, it was made clear to the Taskforce that many young people in the borough distrust the police. This is especially, though not exclusively, the case among those from BME communities. Anecdotally, it appears from the engagement work that those young people who had the most dealings with the police had the most negative opinions about them (with the exception of Safer Schools Officers) and they would be unlikely to co-operate with the police or call them for help. It is also important to note that this feeling does not just exist in BME communities or amongst young boys who have been stopped and searched; a general distrust of the police was widespread amongst the young people the taskforce engaged with.

The vast majority of young people who spoke to the Taskforce feel that 'stop and search' tactics unfairly target young black men. Some black young men told the Taskforce that they are stopped and searched regularly and the police do not treat them with respect. They did not want to see more police on the streets. However, for other young people the picture was more mixed. Some young people recognised the need for stop and search but they wished to see it applied "more fairly".

Young people who are stopped and searched in Camden are predominantly male. BAME young people (representing 45% of Camden's total youth population) are disproportionately stopped and searched in Camden. The proportion of searches of BAME young people is consistently higher than Camden's youth BAME population overall. The Home Office's Serious Violence Strategy acknowledges that there has been some commentary suggesting that the reduction in stop and search in recent years is driving the increase in youth violence. However, it says that the "data does not support such a conclusion".

Body-worn video (BWV) was rolled-out in Camden and Islington in March 2017. These cameras have been issued to around 1,200 police officers and PCSOs – police community support officers. They are worn attached to the officer's uniform and do not permanently record. Members of the public are told as soon as practical that they are being recorded and when the camera is recording. If the public wish to view footage taken of them they can request, in writing, to obtain it under freedom of information and data protection laws.

In general, young children of primary school age had a significantly better view of the police than teenagers. Some young people in schools asked for more police patrols in their local area as they were afraid after recent events. The vast majority of young people we spoke to in schools had a favourable opinion of their Safer School Officer. This suggests that efforts to build personal relationships between named police officers and local residents can be successful.

Parents and the majority of older residents called for more visible police patrols. Not enough police on the streets was cited as the fifth most important (62%) cause of violent crime in Camden, with many people calling for more police in the community. Parents strongly called for more visible policing and more community police officers. This came across particularly strongly in the Kentish Town 'community conversation', which was held shortly after the tragic murders in February. Parents and other residents felt there were fewer police on the streets and they wanted more patrols in areas where it is known tensions exist. However, parents from BME communities especially spoke about the need to establish better relationships with the police if things are to improve in the borough. The Taskforce recognises that significant efforts will need to be made to improve relationships between

local communities, young people and the police. This will be particularly important for greater information sharing and identification of young people at risk of youth violence and is therefore central to keeping young people safe.

Changing the language and communications

The evidence reviewed by the Taskforce is clear that a large proportion of young offenders are also victims and examples were given by youth workers of how young people change from victim to offender on a daily or even hourly basis in some cases. The EIF's research on risk factors and the overwhelming view of professionals who spoke to the Taskforce suggests that it is often the most vulnerable young people who are groomed for gang membership and the drugs business. The Taskforce also learnt that, in many cases, young people affected by youth violence have experienced trauma and ACEs which can lead to vulnerabilities and patterns of behaviour which are associated with youth violence. The vast majority of young people affected by youth violence are also the most vulnerable.

The Taskforce heard anecdotes from local partners and professionals of children selling drugs in the Camden Lock area and that 'middle class' recreational drug users are often those purchasing these drugs. There was a strong feeling that more communications are needed to emphasise that it is children who are selling these drugs and therefore the illegal, damaging and dangerous trade is profiting from the exploitation of children. Nationally, the conversation is starting to recognise this exploitative element, with the recognition of child trafficking and modern slavery in 'county lines' being the most obvious example. Grooming and child sexual exploitation (CSE) has risen up the national agenda in recent years but professionals generally felt that the public do not yet recognise child criminal exploitation (CCE) and the grooming of children in the illegal drugs business with the same distaste.

The representations to the Taskforce were strongly of the view that Camden Council and its partners should campaign and promote language which makes clear that children are being exploited.

18 to 25s

A consistent message from the focus groups was that there is a gap in provision for young people aged 18 to 25. This age group represents a significant cohort of Camden's youth violence profile but the services and provision available to these young people is considerably less. The local intelligence relating to incidents of violent knife crime suggests the average age of the victims is 21, falling to 18 for the suspected perpetrators.

“ You don't stop being vulnerable when you turn 18 ”

Youth worker in a focus group



The professionals who work with young offenders said a multi-agency service is needed for 18 to 25s and, without this, tackling the problem will be much more difficult.

Young people have specialised needs as they enter adulthood and the focus groups sent a strong message that more investment is required in this area. Resettlement options and employment opportunities are especially important for this age group. Providing support for young adults would not only allow greater access for those who need it, but would also allow existing relationships between children and professionals to continue as those children transition to adulthood. This approach has been adopted by Islington's Integrated Gangs Team, who provide multi-agency support for children and young people aged 10 to 24.

Safety, protection and housing relocation

'Snitches get stitches' was how one young person responded when asked if he would ever speak to the police. This sentiment was widely shared among young people who spoke to the Taskforce. Many residents in Camden, especially those who live on estates, told how they would not feel safe if they cooperated with the police.

The Taskforce heard examples of how some victims of youth violence and their families were forced to remain in their home when they felt extremely unsafe and at risk of further violence. The social workers who spoke to the Taskforce stated that improving and quickening housing moves would be one of their top recommendations. They said that dealing with housing teams within the council can be very slow, even in situations considered urgent and high-risk, and managed moves with Housing Associations are not often possible. If the young person at risk is over 18, then the challenge is greatly increased. Moving families to another local authority is even trickier, with one social worker describing this as an 'absolute nightmare'. They suggested the Taskforce or the council lobby for a London-wide Housing Consortium on the issue so that all local authorities can agree a fair and workable agreement for managed moves.

The Taskforce also heard from professionals that parents with more than one child are often caught between having to balance the welfare of their at-risk child with the welfare of other siblings who would have to be removed from their school, friends and support networks. They said families need resettlement support alongside any relocation.

Designed environments

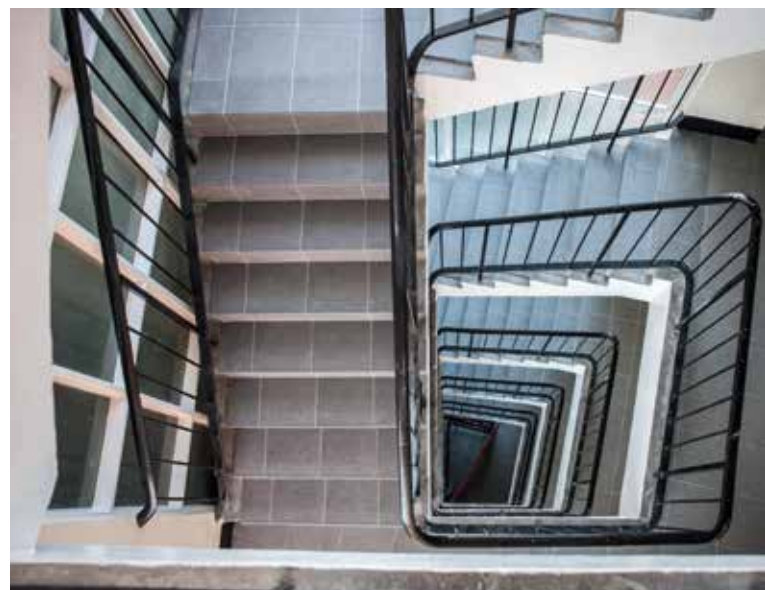
In response to the rise in youth violence and feeling less safe as a result, a number of residents called for improvements to be made to their local area such as an increase in CCTV. While this answer was ranked low in the online survey of what could help, some parents in estates that have witnessed violence felt it could play a role. Professionals also spoke about how many estates 'look in on each other' meaning that some families can feel trapped or isolated after an incident of youth violence or other criminal activity.

The police representations to the Taskforce called for better planning to 'design out' crime for areas of high criminal activity. The theory of designed environments are guiding principles which seek to reduce crime by ensuring areas are visible, open and well-used, doors and windows are secure and well-maintained, and homes are laid out in a way which encourages more 'natural' surveillance.

Secured by Design (SBD) is the title for a group of national police projects focussing on the design and security for new and refurbished homes. Its research found that developments which met its standards are up to 75% less likely to be burgled alongside a 25% reduction in criminal damage³⁴. The Mayor of London's overall strategic plan, the London Plan, also strongly supports the principles of 'designing out' crime³⁵.

Targeting enforcement action at those 'at the top'

The Taskforce repeatedly heard evidence about how children, mainly boys, are groomed into the illegal drugs business from a young age. The local residents and youth workers the Taskforce spoke to expressed a strong desire for enforcement action to be taken against those 'at the top' of the drugs businesses – those adults who are making money from the exploitation of children. There was a strong view from parents, youth workers and other professionals that the exploitation of young people needs to feature more prominently in any discussion on enforcement, especially in Camden, which has an established and well-known drugs market.



³⁴SecuredbyDesign.com, About

³⁵The London Plan, Policy 7.3, Designing out crime

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Taskforce has heard the voice of young people, parents, community organisations and professionals who work with young people and has reviewed the best available literature on the causes of youth violence and successful strategies which have worked elsewhere. Synthesising its findings, the Taskforce has developed 17 recommendations to tackle the problem of youth violence in Camden.



The council, citizens in Camden, schools, businesses and partners in the community have shown a strong desire to work together in partnership to tackle shared problems in the community, and the spirit of this shared endeavour is reflected in Camden 2025. The Taskforce has taken the same approach in bringing the community together to tackle the problem of youth violence, and the recommendations are therefore a call to action for all citizens and connected professionals to work together to keep young people in Camden safe.

In investigating the issues contributing to the problem of local youth violence, the Taskforce formed a view that the exploitation of children in the drugs business and gangs, and the wider vulnerability of young people to become involved in youth violence, requires a clear strategy. Camden has already done extensive work to thwart child sexual exploitation (CSE) and has a firm strategy in place to tackle this issue. The Taskforce has likened the work to tackle youth violence with the focussed strategy on tackling CSE and so has used a similar strategic framework as a familiar and tested model for developing the recommendations and associated action plan. This framework bases the recommendation on five key themes:

PREVENT | IDENTIFY | SUPPORT | DISRUPT | ENFORCE

The recommendations are based on what the Taskforce has learnt about the causes of youth violence and knife crime and the knowledge it has gained on what can help tackle the problem in Camden.

PREVENT

The Taskforce has heard that prevention is key to tackling the problem of youth violence and that a large focus should be on programmes and interventions which provide young people with the conditions and skills which could prevent them from becoming involved in gangs, crime or youth violence. The recommendations below are about preventing violent youth crime by providing young people, parents and professionals with information which raises their awareness of the issues and helps them keep themselves safe, make choices about their behaviour and build their resilience.

Within Camden's communities, there is a strong sense of civic pride and a powerful shared understanding of being stronger working together. Recent residents' survey findings (December 2017) show 77% of residents in Camden would be willing to work with others to improve their local area. The new publication of Camden 2025 sets out a 'shared endeavour' vision and call to action, involving citizens in decisions and working together across different sections of the community to improve outcomes for everyone. It looks to strengthen communities and utilise their assets to create resilient neighbourhoods, providing early help to prevent issues from escalating. This approach also seeks to empower people and organisations to work together to tackle social challenges.

Camden as a whole community has suffered the devastating impact of youth violence during the lifetime of the Taskforce but it has also seen an overwhelming response from local people who want to give their time and effort to help keep our young people safe.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

1. The huge goodwill and community spirit which has been shown to the Taskforce should be mobilised by supporting community-led efforts to prevent youth violence and finding ways to make it easier for local residents to volunteer and get involved.

Tackling youth violence requires a borough-wide approach involving all sections of the community. Youth violence is not solely a policing and crime issue and the most effective approach is through a whole-community response which takes into account all the factors which contribute to the problem and works with all partners in the borough to bring about positive change. The Taskforce acknowledges that in many ways Camden already adopts this approach, but as has been done elsewhere, Camden should formalise its response in one overarching strategy similar to the 'public health approach' adopted in Scotland.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

2. A Camden-wide 'public health approach' to tackle youth violence should be established, which involves young people, parents, residents, schools, businesses, community and voluntary groups, the council, the police and all other local partners who can contribute to keeping our young people safe.

The Taskforce heard that programmes which give young people life skills and the ability to control their behaviour (problem-solving, anger management, etc) are among the most effective in preventing youth violence. The Taskforce also heard from

young people that they would value skills which help them to make good decisions, and also from professionals that building life skills in young people will bring wider benefits, such as improving classroom behaviour, securing employment or training and making positive choices.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

3. Robust programmes should be developed to equip young people with the skills and resilience needed to make positive choices and deal with difficult situations, with a focus on those young people moving from primary to secondary school.

The Taskforce heard that young people need more 'things to do' and ways to channel their energy and skills into positive activities. The Taskforce also heard that youth services and structured activities which match young people's interests are an important way of preventing young people from getting involved in the activities and behaviours which could lead to youth violence. Young people should know where these services are in their local area and how to access them.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

4. Young people's access to and ownership of activities in their community which can have a positive impact on their lives should be increased, and information about the borough's full youth service provision should be brought into one centralised and easy-to-access place.



IDENTIFY

The recommendations in this section are about identifying and referring those young people who need support and are vulnerable to being affected by youth violence. The Taskforce heard evidence that identifying patterns of behaviour which lead to youth violence is possible, and could lead to targeting support at those young people most at risk.

The Taskforce also recognises that in order for professionals to actively identify and act on risk indicators, there needs to be greater awareness of the risk factors and more intelligent use of information from multiple sources which can show those signs developing in young people. This is about information sharing and effective analysis to help bring to light the experiences of young people who are at risk. Schools, youth centres, council officers and all other professionals who work with young people and their families should be aware of what signs to look for those at risk and they should know when and where to make appropriate referrals.

Camden was one of the first local authorities to create and develop the role of Missing and Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator and Analyst. This role has enabled police and the local authority to build up a profile of the pattern of incidents so that services can work together to both identify and prevent abuse. A similar role in youth safety would increase identification of children and young people who are at risk of youth violence, gang involvement and child criminal exploitation. This would involve providing expert analytical advice and recommendations detailing the risks faced by children and young people, reviewing and identifying service delivery, establishing strong relationships with key partners such as the police, probation and youth offending service, and facilitating intelligence sharing with relevant agencies within Camden and cross-borough.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

5. Professional identification of those at risk of being affected by youth violence should be increased to inform effective prevention and support strategies, and ensure appropriate referrals are made by schools, youth workers and other practitioners who work with young people.

The Taskforce heard how some parents and young people are aware of potential young people who are at risk in their communities but there is a lack of information about what signs to look for and when they do want to seek advice on their concerns, it is not clear where they should do.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

6. Young people, families, and the wider community should be better able to identify and act on early warning indicators of those at risk of youth violence, with one centralised place for people to contact for advice and help.





SUPPORT

The Taskforce has seen that many of the young people affected by youth violence have suffered trauma in their childhood, and it is often the most vulnerable young people who are exploited by gangs. Traumas are often multiple and complex and can lead to poor life chances later in life. It is important that all agencies working with young people can recognise the signs of trauma and respond appropriately. The recommendations in this section are based on targeting those affected by youth violence and providing them with the support they need. It also makes recommendations to enable parents and professionals to support the young people they're involved with.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

7. Schools, youth workers and other professionals who work with young people should develop trauma-informed practices.

The evidence presented to the Taskforce is clear that engaging in education reduces the risk of young people becoming involved in youth violence, and that young people and parents felt that more needed to be done to support young people who are at risk of exclusion. Support is needed within schools to prevent exclusions and keep young people in education.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

8. Additional support for students excluded, at risk of exclusion or with poor attendance should be provided and schools should have information on the most effective interventions alongside a knowledge-sharing mechanism for best practice.

The Taskforce heard directly from young people about how they wished to earn money but saw their opportunities as limited, and also how some young people who become involved in gangs or the illegal drugs trade do so as a way to make money. Young people also told the Taskforce that they wanted more apprenticeship opportunities as a credible path to making money. However, many felt that gaining an apprenticeship would be unobtainable for them.

The Taskforce heard evidence that some businesses are offering training and employment opportunities to homeless people and the Taskforce members agreed that a similar scheme based on the same principle would be an excellent way to provide career opportunities to the most at-risk young people.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

9. Businesses in Camden should be encouraged to develop employment and training opportunities for those young people at risk of or affected by youth violence to open up suitable and attractive routes to employment.

The Taskforce learnt that many young people affected by youth violence are over the age of 18, and professionals painted a clear picture of the support provided to young people being significantly reduced when they turn 18.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

10. Additional support should be developed for young people aged 18 to 25 who are at risk of or affected by youth violence.

As detailed in earlier sections of the report, family support intervention and programmes to strengthen the bond between parent and child are some of the most effective in preventing youth violence. The Taskforce heard how some parents are reluctant to seek help due to stigma and mistrust of council services. Some parents associate all council services with statutory social services which they believe, if contacted, will make a statutory intervention in the family home. However, many of these same parents also told the Taskforce that they would like additional family support, such as developing parenting skills.

The council and partners have worked together to shift the balance away from intensive statutory intervention for children and young people in crisis, and towards help as early as possible for families who may need it. This approach is overseen by the partnership Early Help Strategy. Early Help services do not just protect children and young people from harm, but actively promote their welfare and resilience to prevent harm from occurring. It is not only those children and families who meet the statutory criteria for interventions who are supported, but also those families who would benefit from Early Help to prevent problems from escalating.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

11. Early Help services should be promoted to families where there are indications of additional need, particularly focussing on those who may be least likely to ask for help. Alongside this, community-led parenting programmes which develop parenting skills and promote greater resilience in families should be supported.



DISRUPT

The recommendations in this section are based on disrupting the patterns of youth violence to make Camden a safe environment by interrupting the activities of perpetrators and inhibiting the grooming and targeting process. Under a public health approach, all citizens in Camden have a role to play in this effort. Camden's effort to disrupt youth violence cannot be achieved by the council alone.

The Taskforce has heard the evidence to show that many children and young people who are at risk of or affected by youth violence are some of the most vulnerable in Camden. The Taskforce also learnt that vulnerable young people are more susceptible to exploitation and grooming into gangs and the illegal drugs business. However, the exploitation of children into the drugs business is not yet recognised by the general public to the same extent as child sexual exploitation. Changing perceptions will enable greater involvement from all members in the community.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

12. Camden should take a leading role in changing the local conversation about the drugs trade and campaign nationally to highlight the exploitation of children in gangs.

Earlier in the report, the Taskforce noted that many young people, and in particular young people from BME communities, do not like or trust the police. It is essential for the voice and concerns of young people to be heard. The Taskforce also learnt that some parents, particularly mothers in Somali communities, do not seek support from public services due to mistrust. The Taskforce is clear that more work needs to be done to improve these relationships.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

13. Ways in which greater trust and cooperation can be fostered between young people and local communities, and the police and other public services should be explored.

The Taskforce heard directly from families in households where there is an at-risk young person that they do not feel safe in their homes. Victims of knife attacks often will not name their attackers due to fear of reprisals. While not always desirable, the Taskforce recognises that rehousing and resettlement options are needed to help keep some young people safe. Rehousing families into another borough is particularly problematic and the Taskforce heard how a pan-London agreement is needed which helps families in all types of housing tenures.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

14. An improved rehousing and resettlement offer should be available for young people at risk and families, including a pan-London approach on the issue.

Within community planning, there is a need for developments to consider how crime can be reduced and encourage spaces to be used for positive activities. Residents have spoken about how they don't feel safe in their local area and these concerns should be considered when planning local developments.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

15. The design and planning of local environments which help reduce crime and make residents feel safer should be promoted.

ENFORCE

The Taskforce recognises that enforcement action is required to help keep our young people safe. The Taskforce has heard evidence both locally and nationally about the ways in which children and young people are groomed into gangs by adults involved in the drugs businesses. The Taskforce believes those people who are grooming children into criminal activity should be targeted.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

16. Enforcement action should be targeted on those 'at the top' of the drugs market who exploit children and young people for profit.

Parents especially made it clear to the Taskforce that they would like to have a more visible police presence on the streets and they want to see knives taken off the streets. However, stop and search tactics were raised many times by young people the Taskforce spoke to as one of the main reasons for deep distrust that exists between some communities and the police. It is a particularly controversial issue. Body-worn cameras provide greater opportunities to promote transparency in the practice and there are also opportunities for young people to have better representation on boards which hold the police and other authorities to account.

The recommendation of the Taskforce is:

17. The borough police, young people and the wider local community should work together to explore ways to ensure stop and search measures are seen to be used fairly, proportionally and in a respectful manner.



THANKS AND

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Youth Safety Taskforce spoke to hundreds of young people, parents and local residents and we would like to thank all those who engaged with our work and contributed to producing this report. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the support given by the following groups:

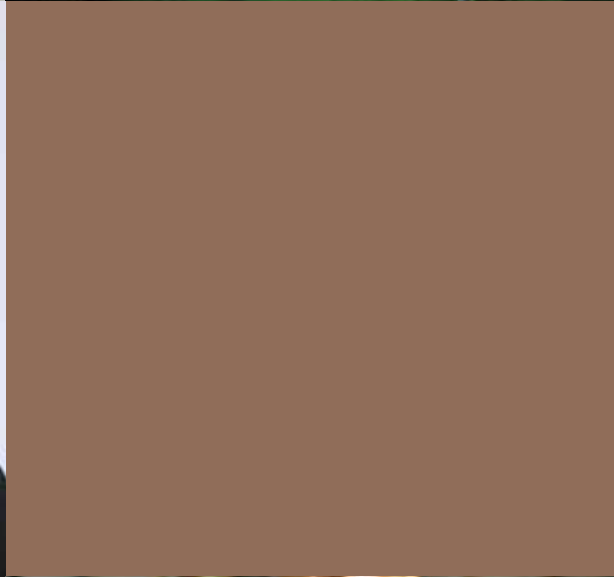
- Camden's Somali community
- Camden's voluntary youth organisations
- Camden headteachers
- Parliament Hill School students
- Acland Burghley School students
- Regent High School students
- Haverstock School students
- NW5 Project
- Project 10/10
- Clime-it Brothers
- New Horizon Youth Centre
- St Mary's Church and St Mary's Centre Youth Team
- The Winch
- The Dome
- British Somali Community
- Kentish Town Community Centre
- LEAP
- Save Our Boys, Save Our Girls
- Camden Against Violence
- Citizens UK
- Somers Town Youth Centre
- Kilburn Youth Centre
- Fresh Youth Academy
- Somali Youth Development Resource Centre (SYDRC)
- Queen's Crescent Community Association
- Central North BCU, Metropolitan Police Service
- Young Camden Foundation
- St Luke's Church
- Camden staff and officers



FIND OUT MORE AND
CONTACT US

For more information and to read the appendices of the report please go to camden.gov.uk/youthsafetytaskforce

If you would like to contact the Taskforce or get involved in making Camden safer for our young people please email youthsafety@camden.gov.uk



camden.gov.uk/youthsafetytaskforce

