

Drug gangs, knife crime and county lines

A report by a Task and Finish Group
established by the People and Families
Policy and Scrutiny Committee

September 2020

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Foreword

This report responds to a request from Full Council that there is oversight of the development of multi-agency working to confront the issue of drug gangs, knife crime and County Lines in Essex.

Task and Finish Group Members have recognised that their main task was to ensure that the County Council was getting value for money for its financial contribution to the multi-agency working and that this funding was making a difference in the lives of those young people caught in the awful trap of County Lines. However, it became apparent right at the offset that this social scourge on our communities also has had a significant effect on our public services.

We most certainly hope that the findings within this report will be picked up and given serious consideration by the relevant bodies outside Essex County Council, otherwise it would be a truly short-sighted response to the work that has been carried out. We will be distributing a copy of it to all Essex MPs, and to those relevant Counties who are plagued by the same issues.

Our Recommendations are directed to local agencies and government and includes suggesting that future contributions by Essex County Council to the local multi-agency working be made conditional and encouraging London Boroughs to forge stronger partnership working with all the Essex Districts, Boroughs, and City Council to combat County Lines.

The report highlights the short shelf life, and the irregular way of funding granted by government - this needs to be urgently reviewed so that a coherent strategy to combat County Lines can be supported and sustained. While it is difficult to compare directly with Glasgow, it is noted that they seem to have had access to more sustainable longer-term funding.

As our work was undertaken before the Covid-19 Pandemic, it does not comment or speculate on its impact on County Lines activity as it is too early to do so.

Finally, I wish to thank my fellow Task and Finish Group members for their commitment and due diligent approach and professionalism during this review.

I commend this report to you.

COUNCILLOR CARLO GUGLIELMI

Lead Member

Task and Finish Group - Drug Gangs, Knife Crime and County Lines

September 2020

Executive Summary

This review was prompted by a request by Essex County Council's Full Council for the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee to have oversight of the multi-agency response in Essex to the challenge of drug gangs, knife crime and County Lines and contribute to the multi-agency strategy and its development. The background, establishment of this review and its Terms of Reference are detailed in Annex 1 to this report.

The Task and Finish Group has sought to focus on the effectiveness of multi-agency funding and joint working. It's primary source of evidence has been through face to face discussions with a variety of stakeholders as listed in Annex 3. This evidence has been supplemented by some presentational and written material which is listed in Annex 4.

The conclusions of the Task and Finish Group are at the end of the report starting on page 26. These conclusions comment on partnership working, leadership, funding, the role of education and raising awareness, and communication and transparency.

As a result, the Task and Finish Group has made eight recommendations:

- seeking to minimise school exclusions;
- further promoting a directory of youth services;
- that the Health Overview Policy and Scrutiny Committee consider the impact of the public health approach to drug gangs, knife crime and County Lines as part of its regular scrutiny of public health activity;
- increasing local input to permitted development rights;
- improving accountability and governance around multi-agency funding;
- seeking greater diversity of leadership in the local multi-agency governance structures;
- seeking a greater role of district councils in promoting community awareness; and
- suggesting a different focus for future public communication strategies.

These are all listed together overleaf for ease of reference but also appear individually within the main part of this report.

Recommendations

The Group has made eight recommendations and requests that these should be carefully considered for implementation.

Increasing prevention and intervention

Recommendation 1 (page 14) – that further consideration be given to:

- (i) identifying the gaps in educational provision for young people on the periphery of exclusion;
- (ii) finding further alternative options to support schools dealing with behavioural problems instead of exclusion and, where a young person has been excluded, that there is resource allocated to facilitate a safe return to formal education;
- (iii) encouraging schools to minimise the number of young people being excluded and to sign-up to the Inclusion Policy if they have not already done so;
- (iv) requiring schools to clearly demonstrate which steps they took before escalating the intervention to an exclusion;
- (v) support a process whereby schools continue to be held accountable for the educational attainment and welfare of permanently excluded pupils;
- (vi) resources being made available to schools to facilitate the safe return to school following an exclusion.
- (vii) having clearer oversight of the off-rolling process at schools and encouraging clearer and comprehensive guidance being available to parents and carers contemplating off-rolling.
- (viii) reviewing the current provision of the Pupil Referral Unit and look to expand this closer to a full-time syllabus.

Recommendation 2 (page 17):

That a more visible comprehensive directory of locally available youth services and support groups should be available including those initiatives commissioned and funded by the Office of the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner (through the Violence and Vulnerability Unit).

Recommendation 3 (page 18):

That the Health Overview Policy and Scrutiny Committee consider reviewing the impact of the public health approach to drug gangs, knife crime and county lines as part of its regular scrutiny of public health activity in Essex.

Recommendation 4 (page 18):

- (i) The Group supports the work being done with London Boroughs to investigate developing a broader informative notification process and sharing interim support costs;
- (ii) That the County Council should continue to work with Essex District Councils to develop a process for the County Council to have a greater input and influence on consideration of applications for permitted development rights and that relevant officers ensuring ongoing links with the work of the Violence and Vulnerability Unit. [Note: This will ensure that cases like the Terminus House in Harlow should never happen again].
- (iii) That national lobbying be considered for government to review the permitted development rights process.

Adding Value to existing and planned activities

Recommendation 5 (page 20):

That further local funding granted to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex by local partners (such as the County Council) should be provided on a conditional basis making clear that:

- (i) it should be spent on community initiatives focussed in the County of Essex;
- (ii) there should be the expectation that much of it should link to the priorities around county lines identified by the Community and Safety Partnerships; and
- (iii) a clear assessment framework be established to review the effectiveness and outcomes achieved from the allocated funding.

Cross border and partnership working

Recommendation 6 (page 23):

That there should be a regular review of the leadership of key strategic groups as part of maintaining overall diversity of leadership within the governance structure.

Recommendation 7 (page 24):

Essex District Councils have local connections and influence and should be given a greater role in promoting community awareness of county lines and building resilience in the community.

Improving visibility and awareness of partnership activity

Recommendation 8 (page 26):

The Violence and Vulnerability Unit should drive and lead a local communications strategy that should focus on how drug taking is socially unacceptable and highlight the personal abuse and harm that is seen and exercised through the supply line.

Findings and evidence

Context

County Lines is a term used for organised drug dealing networks usually controlled from urban areas which distribute illegal drugs across a county using runners, who are often young and vulnerable, which is co-ordinated by utilising dedicated untraceable mobile phones. County Lines is based around supplying drugs that drive dependence and addiction.

The criminal gangs operating in England are complex and ruthless organisations, which use sophisticated techniques to groom children and chilling levels of violence to keep them compliant

Source: Children's Commissioner – Keeping Kids Safe – February 2019

It is estimated that there are 2200-2300 working County Lines in England and Wales (source National Crime Agency Co-ordinator for County Lines) with around 135 lines coming into Essex at the time of this review (source: Essex Police - 2019). Whilst it is thought that County Lines operations are essentially exports from large cities (London in the case of Essex), there is also some evidence that there are some County Lines operations coming into Essex across borders other than from London (e.g. Suffolk). Essex's location makes it a prime target for County Lines, being close to London and having good transport links.

In addition, it is estimated that there are just over 40 mapped gangs in Essex with the majority of them home-grown. These tend to have a common and successful local business plan and purpose and often get supplies from elsewhere other than through County Lines operations. There is some suggestion that different tactics and approach may be needed to confront these particular gangs.

However, agencies are specifically seeing a robust 'franchise model' in operation where County Lines come into an area and take over already successful local drug supply operations.

Essex is no different to other areas in seeing significant criminal exploitation of young people. There is also an indication that there is increasing in-county exploitation (exporting to elsewhere in Essex). Essex County Council representatives reported there was evidence that ever younger children were being exploited.

27,000 children in England identify as a gang member but there are children who are groomed and exploited by gangs who would not identify as gang members:

- 313,000 know a gang member

- 60,000 are gang members or siblings of gang members
- 34,000 know a gang member and have been a victim of violence

Source: British Crime Data held by the Office of National Statistics

Comparisons with other areas still suggest that Essex is a relatively safe area in which to live. Overall fewer young people are actually using drugs so there is a need to keep a perspective. Most violent crime against individuals is being conducted within a mile and a half of their home and predominantly the violence is not being imported into their area – only the drugs. Despite this there are still a substantial number of serious offences being recorded with arrests for trafficking drugs having increased by 30% in recent years although this may also be partly due to increased police activity and vigilance. At the same time, a visible local police presence should have some deterrent effect on most forms of street crime.

Essex has the highest number of violent incidents linked to county lines across the East of England. Serious violence in Essex is increasing at a lower rate in Essex than the rest of the country but it is still rising, and its high profile can have a detrimental impact on local communities. Serious violence offences are concentrated, with clusters around urban areas, and town centres. The following areas have all shown significantly higher volumes of serious violence – Basildon, Chelmsford, Clacton, Colchester, Grays and Tilbury, Harlow and Southend.

In the year to September 2019: In Essex 2271 individuals had been affected by serious violence including 920 suspects and 1390 victims.

Source: Essex Police

Whilst some of the drug related serious violence can be shocking and traumatic, a considered perspective is still needed on such an emotive issue to get proper context and avoid creating a moral panic. The availability of illegal drugs supplied through local operations is not a new phenomenon but it is now being more efficiently run through a dynamic evolving business model which enforces its operations in a robust and violent manner with few moral boundaries.

The rate of serious violence offences is significantly higher for 16-21 year-olds than any other age grouping

Source: HM Government – Serious Violence Strategy – April 2018

This Task and Finish Group review has spoken to a number of key contributors to ascertain how the local system is responding to challenges and the extent and effectiveness of multi-agency working. It has not focussed on the causes of knife crime as there is already significant research available on that.

The Violence and Vulnerability Framework in Essex

The Government's response to the increase in serious violence in the last few years has been to establish a Serious Violence Strategy in April 2018. The strategy identified the risk of county lines gangs as a key driver of the increase and places a new focus on early intervention alongside robust law enforcement. Various funding initiatives have arisen from that.

The Violence and Vulnerability Unit (VVU) has been established as a multi-disciplinary partnership team led by the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex and includes Essex Police, the Youth Offending Service and other agencies and is set up to deliver on the objectives set out in the Violence and Vulnerability Framework. The VVU undertakes joint operations and interventions and encourages further sharing of data and intelligence across all those agencies where appropriate.

The VVU is also expected to highlight where cross-border and partnership working would be beneficial. It is recognised that this is a complex governance structure with all partner agencies looking at the issue and they need to avoid duplication of work as there are so many different strands of work.

During 2019/20 the work programme of the VVU was utilising a partnerships fund of approximately £2.2 million, made up of £350,000 from the Home Office Early Intervention Youth Fund, £1.16m from Home Office funding to establish local Violence Reduction Units, £500,000 contributed by Essex County Council and a contribution of £200,000 from the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. With partners providing funding, the whole local system needs to have confidence in the governance and financial management of the work being undertaken and so the Group has also considered this aspect during its review and comments elsewhere in this report. This funding has continued into 2020/21 but future funding beyond that is uncertain. It is unclear whether Thurrock or Southend have made any financial contribution to this fund.

Separately, Essex Police have been awarded 'surge' funding from the Home Office to help directly with targeting county lines activities being run by drug gangs operating in Essex. Police surge funding is primarily operational and street focussed and often involves short term enforcement activity. In December 2019 a further £1.1m of government funding was announced.

The VVU has five broad strategic objectives and we have structured the rest of the report under those headings for ease of reference (although not necessarily in the same order as stated by the VVU) and to make linkages clearer and more transparent.

Increasing prevention and intervention

The voice of young offenders

The Group were very interested in a research and evaluation project conducted by the Essex Youth Offending Service during the summer of 2019. The project looked at the lived experiences of young people and families and carers exposed to County Lines, gangs and criminal exploitation in Essex. Front-line practitioners were used as researchers so there was a better understanding of the views being stated by young offenders' on how well the wider system worked for them. At the same time the project also gained different perspectives of the same relationships (i.e. family, social worker, young person) and a common message was that the signs of vulnerability and exploitation were there to be seen and that the Essex system should have seen them earlier.

People who can be groomed into it are looking for a bit of family, a bit of love and just want to belong to someone or something. That's how it tends to start

Police Officer - Youth Offending Service – 2019 Summer Project

Some of the most common triggers exposing young people to be criminally exploited to be identified in the project were a sense of isolation or exclusion from school, family and friends. This can be exacerbated by bullying and underachieving academically which can be attributable to unmet learning needs. Schools are in prime position to identify early signs of vulnerability and exploitation. Yet one of the common issues raised during the project about what young people wanted to see done differently was that greater effort should be made to keep young people engaged in school which might mean a more non-academic focus for some but to identify what interests them and who they engage with.

Between 2006/7 and 2012/13 the number of permanent exclusions in England reduced by nearly half, but it has risen by 40% over the past three years.

Source: House of Commons Education Committee (2018) Forgotten Children: Alternate Provision and the Scandal of Ever-Increasing Exclusions, Fifth Report of Session 2017-19

The Timpson review of school exclusion has also stressed the protective role of schools and the opportunity for young people to build trusted relationships in them. With the exception of home, the school environment is probably the only environment where a young person can benefit from safeguarding, health and wellbeing and learning.

Therefore, early intervention can be a key step in reducing the recruitment of vulnerable children. Such intervention must start in schools which can offer a protective environment through building support mechanisms, relatable role models and awareness amongst teaching and non-teaching staff. The investment increasing awareness and support should complement direct enforcement operations against gangs which is critical to establishing an overall system that helps prevent young people from being exploited.

Early Help

Members heard that many schools have struggled to adapt and respond to the challenge of the County Lines gang model (as opposed to the traditional gang model) and that further work is ongoing to fully understand where vulnerability is originating in and around the school environment. So much of a robust response will depend on the leadership and transparency of each school which does seem to vary considerably across the county. There needs to be greater clarity on the message to schools on how to confront the challenges – for example most schools have a zero-tolerance policy towards the carrying of knives and possession of drugs but that leads to more permanent exclusions which may then make those excluded more vulnerable to exploitation. However, at the moment, schools are limited in their available responses to disruptive and violent pupils.

Risk Avert

There is evidence that the Risk Avert behavioural programme encouraging personal resilience is changing personal behaviours. Until recently this has been focussed at secondary schools with around two thirds of them taking it up although schools often raise the issue of their capacity to deliver the programme. The ECC School Improvement Team do not specifically visit schools on the issue of take-up and this could be reviewed. A primary schools version launched in 2019. At the moment, there was only anecdotal evidence that the programme had cut the numbers of exclusions and referrals to multi-agency safeguarding hubs. It was also reported at the time of the Group's evidence session in late 2019 that the Youth Service had not yet fully engaged with the programme.

Peer support

Some members of the Group have seen local schools piloting forms of peer support, mainly in terms of mental health and wellbeing, led by older pupils. However, in the

instances cited the initiative did not extend to whistleblowing opportunities in respect of drug use and drug dealing.

The dynamic county lines business model in schools is only being challenged through Educational programmes when perhaps more is needed.

Exclusions

Being excluded from school can materially change a child's 'direction of life' and members heard a number of witnesses stressing that the basis for exclusions needed more attention to ascertain if thresholds for exclusion were too low and discretionary.

They [gangs] tend to target marginalised children with multiple interlinked vulnerabilities both at individual level – such as mental health or special educational needs – and at family level – such as abuse and neglect.

Source: Children's Commissioner 2019 – Keeping Kids Safe.

Exclusions are an important component of effective behaviour management in a school but they should be a last resort in a long-line of disciplinary measures. The Group has heard that outcomes for these children can be poor. The Timpson Review, in particular, concluded that exclusions affected academic outcomes and that those excluded achieved poorer academic outcomes on average compared to their peers in mainstream education. In addition, it is widely acknowledged that those excluded can become more vulnerable to exploitation.

Between 2006/7 and 2012/13 the number of permanent exclusions in England reduced by nearly half, but it has risen by 40% over the past three years.

Source: House of Commons Education Committee (2018) Forgotten Children: Alternate Provision and the Scandal of Ever-Increasing Exclusions, Fifth Report of Session 2017-19

Everything should be done to prevent a young person from being excluded from school and exclusions should only be a last resort. Schools should be required to clearly demonstrate which steps they took before escalating the intervention to excluding the pupil. With this in mind, the Group were pleased to note the programme underway to encourage schools to sign up to an Inclusion Statement.

...while it is incorrect to suggest that exclusion of any kind causes crime, or that preventing the use of exclusion would, by itself, prevent crime, it should be recognised that school exclusion is one indicator of a higher risk of exposure to, and involvement in, crime.”

Source: Gov.UK (2019) – Timpson Review of School Exclusion, online.

Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) do not provide a full-time timetable. Therefore, pupils can have more spare time on their hands and possibly be more vulnerable to exploitation. Placing all excluded pupils together in one place also could create a further risk of exploitation. With that in mind, the Group were particularly pleased to hear that the PRU model for primary school pupils is being reviewed to try to reduce the mixing of vulnerable primary school pupils with secondary age pupils. However, further thought needs to be given to how the PRU model can avoid being a ‘breeding ground’ for further exploitation.

There has been a significant capital programme investment in the Pupil Referral Unit estate and future communications around this should be carefully drafted to avoid giving an impression that extra capacity is being created solely to encourage an expansion in the number of exclusions.

The Group has been interested in the links between PRUs and the community and voluntary sector. Vulnerable Pupil Referral panels already look at individual circumstances and the YOS has data suggesting a significant improvement in those cases where there have been bespoke personal packages put in place.

Recommendation 1 – That further consideration be given to:

- (i) Identifying the gaps in educational provision for young people on the periphery of exclusion;
- (ii) Finding further alternative options to support schools dealing with behavioural problems instead of exclusion and, where a young person has been excluded, that there is resource allocated to facilitate a safe return to formal education;
- (iii) Encouraging schools to minimise the number of young people being excluded and to sign-up to the Inclusion Policy if they have not already done so;
- (iv) Requiring schools to clearly demonstrate which steps they took before escalating the intervention to an exclusion;
- (v) Support a process whereby schools continue to be held accountable for the educational attainment and welfare of permanently excluded pupils;

- (vi) Resources being made available to schools to facilitate the safe return to school following an exclusion.
- (vii) Having clearer oversight of the off-rolling process at schools and encouraging clearer and comprehensive guidance being available to parents and carers contemplating off-rolling.
- (viii) Reviewing the current provision of the Pupil Referral Unit and look to expand this closer to a full-time syllabus.

There was suggestion from voluntary and community group witnesses that some disruptive young people could have their teaching hours reduced by the school but still remain on the school roll so that the school could still receive funding for them. The Group have viewed this as anecdotal evidence and cannot verify if this is a widespread practice or not but any reduction in teaching hours should be discouraged.

Pastoral support

Voluntary and community group witnesses have highlighted to the Group their concerns that schools may be reducing their levels of pastoral support (albeit evidence was anecdotal and area specific and so may not be able to be extrapolated across the county). However, this is a possible consequence if schools feel they are under budgetary pressures in being asked to provide other additional oversight and support services. Whilst the voluntary sector can provide opportunities for socialisation and developing peer group support networks this perhaps is not as linked-in with formal education facilities as it could be.

Home schooled children

There is a further challenge for home-schooled children (who may or may not have been excluded as a precursor to being home-schooled) as often they are not in any regular contact with school peer groups and will not necessarily have access to educational and emotional support programmes available if they were enrolled at a mainstream school. This is compounded by the County Council having no oversight of the delivery of the curriculum and teaching standards in the home. The Group are aware of and endorse the conclusions of the cross-party group led by Councillor Gooding, Cabinet Member – Education and Skills, looking at these challenges and the planned lobbying approach.

Whilst not receiving specific evidence on the matter, there is also some suggestion that drug and gang issues are not just reserved just to the state education sector and that private school pupils can also be vulnerable to exploitation and may not access or benefit from mainstream educational and support programmes. In these

circumstances, the existence and ongoing support of services such as the Safe In Essex early intervention service delivered by the Children's Society is essential as an option before any formal referral to Family Solutions.

Training

There seems to be an acknowledgement that there may need to be more thought about how ECC works with schools to both help further improve their education offer and, where necessary, to challenge them. This enablement and challenge should be multi-agency with police, and other agencies forming a collegiate approach to assisting schools. The ECC Education department can serve as a conduit between these agencies, stakeholders and partners and should be further encouraged to build upon existing relationships.

Parenting support

Parenting support services are vitally important as part of enabling a strong early intervention and prevention approach. These can be universal available across early years services, social workers and youth offending service amongst others as well as some specific early help that is delivered through the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service. The Group supports the regulatory framework enforced through OFSTED on the schools safeguarding policies.

Youth services

There has been significant media coverage of reduced funding in local government and, in particular, reductions in the number of youth clubs. Members have heard from ECC that despite those reductions it was felt that the overall effectiveness of youth delivery had improved in Essex with more delivered away from school settings and in the community instead. Members felt that that assertion probably needs to be further challenged as access to community run groups could be more limited, be subject to more discretionary eligibility criteria, and have concerns about long-term funding and sustainability. In any case, it is clear that the issues currently being confronted cannot be solely, or probably neither significantly, attributable to that change in youth services. Young people are being targeted by a ruthless business model which will continue to target young people (and entice them with promises of greatly exaggerated earnings) irrespective until demand and supply of illegal drugs can be significantly reduced.

The Group also notes the reduction in front-line police numbers in recent years and that this would have had some effect on the capacity of police to engage in their local communities and build positive relationships with young people in schools and on the

streets. This has been particularly evident in wider resource planning and restructuring leading to a reduction in the number of community support officers and school outreach officers. It was reported that the Commander in Chelmsford had started to put some officers back into a liaison role with local schools. Recent Government announcements now indicate further funding to the Police and it is hoped that a significant portion of it can go to increase community and neighbourhood policing.

Recommendation 2:

That a more visible comprehensive directory of locally available youth services and support groups should be available including those initiatives commissioned and funded by the Office of the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner (through the Violence and Vulnerability Unit).

Public Health

There is an important role for Public Health to promote prevention and early intervention as relying on retribution and punishment through the justice system will not be sufficient to eliminate the drug gang culture and operations. A Public Health approach has to be multi-agency to fully understand the issue through evidence and respond to it through carefully designed interventions. The objectives are to reduce re-offending and improve health and social functioning but achieving this is getting more complicated due to the complexity of the system and presenting issues.

In Essex an integrated health and justice service has been developed to better serve the needs of the individual and develop more meaningful community interventions. The Group were encouraged to hear that there were future plans to more effectively identify complex presenting issues and develop a wider range of referral routes and provision for offenders and those vulnerable to committing crime. The Full Circle service now provides some brokered support to offenders fulfilling a probation order and only 7% who enter Full Circle then re-offend in the next 12 months. The Horizons project works intensively with a small number of the most difficult individuals to integrate them into the community and provide ongoing support. Those with gangs related offences will have targeted provision. It is noted that both the Full Circle and Horizons Projects are services for adults.

Members have noted the public health approach in Scotland which it is thought contributed to reducing violent crime. However, at a local Essex level there needs to be more evidence of the impact of such an approach on day to day practice.

Recommendation 3:

That the Health Overview Policy and Scrutiny Committee consider reviewing the impact of the public health approach to drug gangs, knife crime and county lines as part of its regular scrutiny of public health activity in Essex.

Local Planning Framework

Members heard concerns raised by a number of witnesses about the apparent increasing use of permitted development rights to change previous commercial and industrial property to residential use and the concentration of these new developments in specific areas of the county. Planning permission was no longer required for such change of use and this could be used by local authorities to relocate people - often from the London Borough areas. The YOS has seen such an increase in the number of people transferring from London Borough areas and members have challenged whether there need to more robust discussions with these 'exporting' councils. It is acknowledged that there is some ongoing work with the London Boroughs to discuss a broader more informative notification being made to the importing authority (beyond just the s208 notification that making a placement) and a possible agreement with them to pay some interim support costs. The Police confirmed that there was some evidence of a rise in unsocial behaviour but did highlight also that some of the noticeable levels of migration into Harlow, for example, actually was from Thurrock. With BAME and other vulnerable groups often disproportionately represented at these re-purposed sites, the Group feels that the County Council should be empowered to have greater control over permitted development rights and resulting residential accommodation that is created.

Recommendation 4:

- (i) The Group supports the work being done with London Boroughs to investigate developing a broader informative notification process and sharing interim support costs;
- (ii) That the County Council should continue to work with Essex District Councils to develop a process for it to have a greater influence on consideration of applications for permitted development rights and that relevant officers ensure ongoing links with the work of the Violence and Vulnerability Unit.
- (iii) That national lobbying be considered for government to review the permitted development rights process.

Adding Value to existing and planned activities

The nature of funding

Members heard from multiple witnesses that the short-term nature of the Home Office grant funding to the local Violence and Vulnerability Strategy and Framework did not allow 'capability-building' within communities nor provide sustainability. It means that many funding structures are still focussed on short-term interventions so it is difficult for local organisations to plan a programme or project that could make a permanent change and improvement. In some cases, there also could be gaps in delivery due to funding insecurity. Voluntary and community representatives emphasised the importance and need of stable, sustainable and long-term funding to provide certainty for planning purposes. Yet they felt that funding was often provided as part of a 'knee jerk' reaction. All of this can undermine the broader public health approach that everyone believes is essential.

The use of funding

As a key part of their review, members sought clarification on the decision-making process and accountability for how partnership funding was being allocated and spent. In particular, the Vulnerability and Violence Unit Board, which had representation from various partner agencies and chaired by the PFC Commissioner, needed to be clear and accountable for decisions being made and evaluating impact.

The Group wanted to see evidence of, and test, the success of interventions being funded through partnership monies but were not reassured at this time that there was a proper process in place for this that was being co-ordinated and monitored by the PFCC. This needs to be developed over time otherwise there is a risk that focus switches back to enforcement, the impact of which is easier to measure.

The first tranche of VVF funding was used to commission external consultants to report on (and evaluate) interventions that had already showed some evidence of working. The PFCC admitted that on reflection the report had not gone as far and they would have wanted it to as they already knew they wanted to continue to invest in some existing projects and test new ways of working. The report had cost £30,000 and members were concerned that, at the time of challenging the PFCC about how money was being spent, that this report was one of the more prominent activities being highlighted by the PFCC.

The Group are disappointed that the late provision of the work programme prevented the Group from being able to spend more time discussing at the work programme in more detail.

It is fair to say that funding from partners (such as Essex County Council) was initially provided without any conditions and without the hindsight of knowing about the award of national funding as well. It seems that this has perhaps led to the perception that less accountability to local partners was needed on the use of funds.

There has been some reluctance in providing the Group with information on this in an easily digestible and transparent manner. Perhaps the legal and regulatory framework for formal accountability and scrutiny of PFCC (through the Police, Fire and Crime Panel) has not helped the Group pursue its work with the PFCC and diluted its potential influence. The Group has been frustrated by this and the significant delay in being provided with any form of financial breakdown, or an analysis of outcomes, after requesting it and feels that the scrutiny function should form part of the governance process for this information.

Recommendation 5:

That further local funding granted to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex by local partners (such as Essex County Council) should be provided on a conditional basis making clear that:

- (i) It should be spent on community initiatives focussed in the County of Essex;
- (ii) There should be the expectation that much of it should link to the priorities around county lines identified by the Community and Safety Partnerships; and
- (iii) A clear assessment framework be established to review the effectiveness and outcomes achieved from the allocated funding.

Gaps in current and planned activities

Police and neighbourhood policing

Using government 'surge' funding Essex Police had spent £1.7m for focussed street-led activity at the time of the review. As a result, there had been a 255% increase in the use of stop and search activity in the year to August 2019. This broadly correlated with the increase in arrests. Whilst the funding had enabled more investigations there was also some work looking at education settings and, in particular, PRUs but this needs to be pursued sensitively with schools (see section on Exclusions and PRUs).

The Group heard from a number of witnesses in the community that they were not seeing the most effective engagement with neighbourhood policing but with anecdotal evidence that Neighbourhood Watch meetings often focus on enforcement rather than one to one engagement. The Group believes there is a challenge here for the Police (through the VVU) to further resource community policing and ensure greater consistency as part of the overall system response.

National considerations

The Group heard from the National Crime Agency Co-ordinator and other witnesses that they would like to encourage more focus on prosecutions for modern slavery (as more prohibitive) rather than possession of Class A drugs. There have also been some pilot projects where custody officers had also had lines of questioning to use to try and identify coercion and vulnerability.

Perhaps performance indicators for the Police are too quantitative and could impact on the ability and opportunity to assess those apprehended as if they are victims. It was suggested during discussions that there could be a greater focus on safeguarding and vulnerability when young people were brought into custody. Such a focus could reduce further exploitation and re-offending. The Group were pleased to hear that a County lines code had been created for inputting on the national police database which flashes up for repeat offences and possible vulnerability but all partner agencies need to be able to access such indicators. There could also be an opportunity for neighbourhood policing teams to take a greater role.

Whilst there may have been more funding for police there had been a reduction in funding for the criminal justice system in recent years leading to an increase in waiting times. A change in bail laws also means that a young person can be arrested and then not immediately charged and, instead, released pending further investigation. However, in doing this, by the time the young person did eventually appear at court they may have committed multiple further offences in the meantime. ECC was working with the Youth Offending Teams in Southend and Thurrock to intervene earlier and have support in place for that period before the case comes before court.

The Group have discussed the wide range of Essex Youth Offending Service (YOS) provided interventions including pre and post Court support. The YOS has two key priorities – increase the use of Restorative Interventions and improve access to good quality education and training for young people in contact with the service. The YOS has the benefit of enhanced provision for young people at risk of custody or who are assessed as posing a high risk of harm. The Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP) can be a condition of bail or be an alternative intervention to custody and seeks to engage young people through daily activities designed to enable them to move away from serious offending . It is based on a bespoke plan for each individual which could include attending relevant courses, undertaking community work or some one-to-one sessions. The YOS adopts an evidence informed approach to its work and as current evidence suggests that re-offending rates for those who have participated in restorative justice interventions is much lower this is ‘woven’ through all interventions including ISS.

Due to the intensity of the programme (7 days a week), ISS is only available to a small number of people at any one time and it is difficult to quantify the money that ISS is saving the overall local system. The Group are very aware not to rush to conclusions on the upside of any ‘released under investigation’/released on bail

options as there can still be safeguarding issues and the individual released without mobile phone, or money could still be particularly vulnerable and at risk.

Data collection

Despite a strong commitment to multi-agency collaboration in the VVU to tackle the issue, discussions during the review suggest there seems to be room for further significant improvement in stronger data recording, analysis and processes for the sharing of information. The Essex Centre for Data Analytics is tasked with developing a strategic picture of gang activity and a dynamic tool to share intelligence across partner agencies that would inform decisions. A set of dashboards has been developed to look at vulnerable locations and placements of cohorts of individuals at risk to be produced as near 'real-time' as possible. The Group supports this piece of work as critical to effective multi-agency working arrangements and co-operation.

Efficient intelligence sharing is critical to promote agile responses to confront a drug business model that is dynamic and quick to change. The Essex Data platform has been commissioned by partners to share intelligence so as to get an accurate multi-agency view of county lines activity. This is expected to provide a further opportunity for disruption and enforcement and assist prevention and early interventions. It combines data from adult and children social care services, drug and alcohol, Treatment services, education, Essex Police Athena system, Youth Offending Service records and includes Experian Mosaic market research and lifestyle data which provides a detailed view of communities in respect of housing, employment, health and social trends. At the time of the review, the work had identified approximately 16,000 households within Essex that met one or more defined vulnerability risk criteria (approximately 4% of total households in the county). Of those 16,000 households, the presence of serious and drug related violence, or at risk of being identified at risk from county lines recruitment, equated to 0.4% or approximately 2,500 households.

There also remains issues around consent and differing interpretation of current legislation on data protection which impacts on the effectiveness of the local system to respond as effectively as it could to concerns. For example, the Group has heard about difficulty in disclosing information without parental consent. Ultimately, clearer direction on interpreting the legislation will need to come from the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and other national agencies working closely together to give one clear message.

There still remains limitations of sharing information cross-border (i.e. Metropolitan Police sharing with Essex Police) and this type of cross border co-operation may need further encouragement nationally.

Cross border and partnership working

The Group have stressed throughout that encouraging strong partner relationships was fundamental to its review.

Governance structure

The Group has heard that Violence and Vulnerability activity in Essex works within a governance framework. Strategic groups (Round Table and Executive Group) determine the contents of the work programme and are responsible for overseeing delivery as well as setting the strategic direction for partnership activity. There was some assurance that Essex County Council had adequate political and officer representation on the strategic groups. Reporting to the strategic groups on the progress of activities within the work programme is the Violence and Vulnerability Operations Board chaired by a police representative and including various ECC officers as members.

During the course of the Group's review, the Chairmanship of Safer Essex was changed from being a local government representative (the Chief Executive of Tendring District Council) to a police representative. This seemed to further re-enforce the Group's view that there seems to be a concentration of PFCC leadership within the current local governance arrangements. The chairmanship of a Strategic Domestic Abuse Group changed to Essex Police and various other strategic groups within the VVU governance structure were also chaired by the Police and/or the Commissioner. Whilst the Police and PFCC are vital local partners, the local system may benefit from more diverse leadership with different partners heading up different strands of work and different components of the governance structure. Such greater diversity may help in further promoting particular focus in different work streams – e.g. a higher profile and greater focus for prevention and early intervention work rather than more reactive responses. In addition, it may be the opportunity to further align leadership with statutory responsibilities.

Recommendation 6: That there should be a regular review of the leadership of key strategic groups as part of maintaining overall diversity of leadership within the governance structure.

The Group have been advised that the work programme for Violence and Vulnerability Unit has been developed to respond to the priorities identified for the county and to work to co-ordinate and develop a more joined-up approach. However, whilst the establishment of the VVF has been important in setting a welcome precedent of partnership working in the local system, the Group has not been

entirely convinced that partner agencies are working together well enough to avoid some duplication of work and further effort is probably needed to minimise this duplication. In particular, partners need to continue to move towards respecting the expertise within the system and recognising who is best placed to lead on issues and specific approaches.

The County Lines model is dynamic, multi-pronged and evolves. System partners struggle to be as flexible and respond and adapt as quickly as that. However, the system partners can still respond in a significant and effective way using their own strengths with, for example, a consistent and robust educational programme to heighten awareness and early detection and to further build personal resilience. Communities will play a large part in this and system partners perhaps need to do more in promoting their community work and to recognise who in the wider local system is best able to deliver such community work.

Recommendation 7:

Essex District Councils have local connections and influence and should be given a greater role in promoting community awareness of county lines and building resilience in the community.

Community safety arrangements in each district

Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) are operating in each district area and their activities vary from area to area although the group were advised that there was overall cohesion through the shared Violence and Vulnerability Framework. The Partnerships were set up to be a conduit between statutory and voluntary organisations, to minimise duplication of work and provide a collective local approach to community safety (and not just drug gangs and county lines risk). The CSPs report back to the PFCC and Safer Essex. The latter, in particular, should be ensuring the sharing of good practice and consistency across the Community Safety Partnerships.

The Group were keen to see that the role and objectives of each hub were clearly communicated and that there is a performance/evaluation framework put in place to ensure consistency of approach and activity. The Group have questioned the outputs expected from the Hubs. The hubs set their own priorities each year although they should deliver against the Police and Crime Plan priorities. The Group has questioned to what extent do the hubs identify vulnerability and whether there were enough strategic links between the hubs and other strategic forums to help that and citing bodies such as the Children's Partnerships Boards and the wellbeing hubs (such as the one at Great Bentley focussing on mental health) as examples.

There has been some acknowledgement that the profile and visibility of the Partnership and hubs may not be as high with other less strategic partners as it should be but the ongoing development of the hubs is an opportunity to further 'draw-out' partners who do not directly participate in the Partnerships.

School Inspection Regime

Whilst there can be an appetite to promote collaborative work there can be legislative and structural barriers that inhibit this. School engagement is a critical part of a prevention and early intervention approach, yet the County Council's influence and oversight powers arguably have been reduced as a result of the academisation process. Part of the OFSTED inspection framework is now around gangs' awareness and it is likely that any mandated change to approach towards academies will only come through formal OFSTED recommendations. There also remains a need for enhanced powers to have greater oversight over home schooling (see elsewhere for further comment). Similarly, a greater alignment of resources both at a local and national level would maximise effectiveness so that those partners and government departments best placed to lead and direct on specific issues do so without duplication from others.

A consistent strategic approach is needed. Part of the cross-agency approach should be to further strengthen young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health and fully linking Education up with the service delivered by the North East London Foundation Trust and family hubs (under the Essex Child and Wellbeing Service) is critically important. The Group welcome the ECC whole school workforce programme that has been developed to respond to children with challenging behaviour with empathy and encouraging staff to seek to understand underlying causes.

Improving visibility and awareness of partnership activity

The Youth Offending Service has developed training modules to highlight awareness of vulnerability and building resilience. There is an opportunity for this to be delivered as part of social work training, teaching, policing and wider community settings as a revenue generator for re-investment back into local YOS projects. The impact and outcome of successful training could be that stakeholders are empowered to make more informed and more appropriate referrals and further strengthen preventative interventions.

Drug gangs, County Lines and Knife crimes are a national and county wide problem and a county wide solution will be needed to confront the specific issues in Essex.

The media can often stoke a significant negative storyline creating moral panics that we are all 'under attack'. There is a significant threat but there is also a need to focus attention on what can be done – such as reducing the demand for these drugs. The Group believes that alongside a national campaign should be a local one driven and led by the VVU that gives a message that drug taking is socially unacceptable and unfashionable and to highlight the consequences further down the supply line.

Recommendation 8:

The Violence and Vulnerability Unit should drive and lead a local communications strategy that should focus on how drug taking is socially unacceptable and highlight the personal abuse and harm that is seen and exercised through the supply line.

Conclusions

This Task and Finish Group review has spoken to a number of key contributors to ascertain how the local system is responding to challenges and the extent and effectiveness of multi-agency working in confronting drug gangs, knife crime and County Lines in Essex. The review has included trying to ascertain how partnership monies have been allocated and used within the Violence and Vulnerability Framework activities.

Partnership working

It is probably not surprising that, as with any complex partnership working, there is always room for improvement, and this is particularly the case here where the system has the additional challenge of confronting a County Lines operation that is a focussed, dynamic, evolving and ruthless business model. It is fair to say that system partners struggle to be sufficiently flexible to adapt and respond to that. However, the Group have noted that the development of the local Violence and Vulnerability Framework has necessitated joint working between agencies where perhaps they have not done so much in the past and this is a significant positive development.

Leadership

There is a significant challenge for the local system to become more proactive in its planning and response. The Group has recommended a greater diversity in leadership of different component parts within the local governance structure and this should facilitate being able to give greater prominence to different approaches and contributions to the overall system response, including education, public health and the role of voluntary and community groups.

However, impact of prevention and early intervention initiatives are not seen straightaway and outcomes cannot be evidenced immediately. It is still too early to evaluate the success of a public health approach in Essex. May be a stronger message needs to be made through all the governance structures that the cost of doing prevention and early intervention programmes should be cheaper than custody and the cost of increased risk of re-offending. With pressure to demonstrate outcomes, careful balance needs to be maintained whereby the emphasis does not shift too far to increased police presence, stop and search and knife crime prevention orders which could be detrimental to young people's trust in the police and yet for which a degree of impact can be more easily evidenced.

Funding

Overall, the Group have been frustrated by the level of engagement and provision of information from the PFCC and have tried to explain this through the prism of the current legal and regulatory framework for the PFCC. The County Council has contributed financially to the activities of the local Violence and Vulnerability Framework and yet the Group has struggled to gain the assurance that there is enough accountability and transparency in the governance structure relating to the allocation and use of partnership funding. Early in the review, it became clear to the Group that any future funding should be conditional on a number of ongoing obligations being met and this has been a key recommendation of the Group. It was specifically highlighted to the Leader of the County Council at an early stage in the review and well ahead of the drafting of this report.

The Group has also seen that the short-term funding basis for the VVF (both national and local partners) does not help the development of a coherent long-term strategy to confront County Lines. This short-termism needs to be urgently reviewed to ensure sustainability and certainty in planning.

Role of education and raising awareness

It has become very clear that educational settings will make a substantial contribution to the local system response in confronting the county lines operations and promoting a more prevention and early intervention-based approach. There is significant evidence that excluding pupils from attendance at schools just further exposes them to the risk of exploitation. The Group view the promotion and enablement of inclusivity in educational settings as a critically important contribution to building community resilience and have recommended actions to facilitate this.

Education settings can play an important part in raising awareness and developing skills and approaches which help contribute to building overall community resilience. It is important however, that this also captures raising parental and carer awareness to the early signs. It was eye-opening to hear some of the personal testimonies in the YOS's Summer Project of young people involved in County Lines highlighting that often the early warning signs were just not seen by parents, schools or other

responsible individuals. This highlights that more work needs to be done to raise such awareness.

However, raising awareness goes beyond just the formal education settings and we would expect further collaboration between agencies to heighten awareness with training programmes targeted at a wider audience which could begin with staff at these agencies. The Group has noted that the YOS has been developing a training programme which could be a valuable contribution to such a programme. In due course, we would expect to see some impact analysis on levels of awareness built into the VVF performance assessment.

However, communities can also play a large part in heightening awareness and system partners perhaps need to recognise who in the wider local system is best able to deliver this and, in particular, the Group has recommended that district councils should be given a greater role in promoting community awareness of County Lines and building resilience in the community.

Communication and transparency

Media coverage tends to focus on the violence at the end of the supply line. There also seems to be a challenge in overcoming a societal view that some drug taking may be acceptable. In a way, this may have been supported by mixed or absent messaging about how drug taking is socially unacceptable and that significant personal abuse and harm is exercised by gangs throughout the supply line. The VVF has a strategic objective to improve the visibility and awareness of partnership activity and the Group has concluded that a clearer communications strategy should be developed to address this.

Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown occurred after the conclusion of this review and so there is no specific mention of it in the main report. Whilst there may be some anecdotal evidence, it is far too early to speculate with any authority on its impact on County Lines and gangs' activity. However, an indirect effect may be that national focus is becoming redirected to concern about mental health and personal physical health as a result of prolonged lockdown and social restrictions. It is important that the focus on County Lines and gangs' activity is not diluted as a result and that the issue remains near the top of both national and local policy agendas. Statutory agencies already struggle to react quickly enough to the dynamic evolution of the County Lines model without further diluting their focus.

Glossary

BAME	Widely used abbreviation for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (used to refer to members of non-white communities in the UK).
Children's Commissioner	The Children's Commissioner has powers to highlight the views of children and young people and influence policymakers to make changes. The Commissioner is independent of Government and Parliament. A link to website for the Children's Commissioner is here - Children's Commissioner
The Children's Society	A charity providing a range of free and confidential services to children, young people, adults and families. It works in partnership with statutory and other agencies to deliver joined-up services and interventions. A link to the website of the Children's Society is here - Childrens-society-east
County Lines	County Lines is a term used for organised drug dealing networks usually controlled from urban areas which distribute drugs across a county (and county borders) using runners, who are often young and vulnerable, and which is co-ordinated by utilising untraceable mobile phones.
Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service	Virgin Care and Barnardo's provide a range of child and family health services in Essex which includes Health Visitors, Parenting Support, School Nursing, and Family Health. A link to the website of this service is here - Essex Family Wellbeing
Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services	An independent voice of the voluntary youth sector in Essex which aims to support, network and resource the voluntary youth sector whilst building links with statutory services that wish to engage with the sector. A link to the website of this service is here - www.ecvys.org.uk
Essex District Councils	In addition to all the District Councils in Essex, this term also includes the Borough Councils in Essex and Chelmsford City Council
Essex Youth Offending Service (YOS)	The Essex Youth Offending Service supervises young people subject to interventions ordered by Magistrates and Crown Courts and cautions issued by Essex Police. Essex YOS also oversees the youth justice system in Essex county. Essex YOS works to prevent offending and reoffending and to ensure that custody is safe, secure, and addresses the causes of their offending behaviour. A link to the website of this service is here - essex-youth-offending-service
Essex Youth Service/The Youth Service	Runs youth services for young people in Essex. A link to the website of this service is here - Essex youth service
Family Innovation Fund	This is a fund developed by Essex County Council and its partners to help voluntary and community groups to establish early help services such as coaching, peer

	support, counselling and mediation, and managing aggressive behaviour. A link to more information is here - Essex Family Innovation Fund
Family Solutions	Family Solutions is aimed at helping families with a range of issues on a voluntary basis. They work with families for up to 12 months by helping them identify their own solutions to their problems. A link to this service is here - Essex Family Solutions
Full Circle	A single integrated service to co-ordinate support for people across prison, courts, probation and police custody settings and encompassing services for older people, people with learning disabilities, substance misuse and mental health problems. A link to more information on this service is here - Full Circle
The Home Office	The Home Office is the lead national government department for immigration and passports, drugs policy, crime, fire, counter-terrorism and police. A link to the Home Office website is here - The Home Office
Home Office Early Intervention Youth Fund	The Government launched its serious violence strategy in April 2018. Within the strategy was a fund available to Police and Crime Commissioners to bid (as lead bidders) with local community safety partnerships for funding to support targeted early interventions and prevention activity for young people.
Local Education Authority (LEA)	Has oversight of all schools in their area including the distribution and monitoring of funding for some schools, in partnership with the Schools Forum. They also co-ordinate the admissions process. In Essex the LEA is Essex County Council.
National Crime Agency	An operationally independent non-ministerial government department leading the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime. A link to the website of the National Crime Agency is here - National-crime-agency
National County Lines Coordination Centre	Launched in September 2018. A new multi-agency team to develop a national intelligence picture of the complexity and scale of county lines and promote engagement across government.
People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee (PAF)	An Essex County Council Scrutiny Committee, comprising elected Councillors, that reviews and scrutinises the planning and provision of local services. PAF looks at education, social care and children and families' services.
OFSTED	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. It is a non-ministerial Government department. It inspects and regulates services that care for and educate children and young people. More information on OFSTED is available using this link - OFSTED
Police Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC)	This is an elected post. The Commissioner sets the priorities for Essex Police and Essex County Fire & Rescue Service, sets the budgets and tax precepts, and holds the Constable and Chief Fire Officer to account for their

	services' performance. A link to the website of the PFCC is here - PFCC
Police Fire and Crime Panel	The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner will be scrutinised by the Police, Fire and Crime Panel. Their role is to support the effective exercise of the functions of the PFCC. A link for further information is here - PFC Panel
Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)	Pupil Referral Unit - An alternative education provision for children who are not able to attend school. This could be because they have a short- or long-term illness, have been excluded, or are a new starter waiting for a mainstream school place.
Public Health	The team within County Councils and unitary councils' which commission preventative health services such as health checks, weight management programmes, and other healthy lifestyle programmes.
Safe in Essex	The Children's Society and Kids Inspire provision of either one to one or group support for young people aged 8-19 with risky behaviours, who are previously unknown to statutory services and who have not previously received any specialist interventions. A link to further information is here - Safe-in-Essex
Safer Essex	Is the local statutory Community Safety Partnership (CSP) in each district council area. The purpose of the Partnership is to provide a strategic and co-operative approach to addressing local crime and disorder between agencies and the communities within the area.
Timpson Review	This made 30 recommendations to ensure exclusions are used appropriately and that Government commits to new school accountability. A link to the review is here - The Timpson Review
Violence Reduction Units/Violence and Vulnerability Unit	Government funding was awarded in 2018 to set up specialist local teams to tackle violent crime in their area. The Violence Reduction Units bring together different organisations, including the police, local government, health, community leaders and other key partners to tackle violent crime by understanding its root causes and come up with a co-ordinated response.
Violence and Vulnerability Framework (VVF)	A framework to encourage a coordinated approach amongst organisations who are working to reduce the threat of violence across Essex. Its aims include improving the visibility, awareness and effectiveness of partnership activity and identifying opportunities to add value to existing and planned activities.

Annex 1 - Background, Terms of Reference and Membership

Motion to Full Council

The issues of drug gangs, knife crime and county lines were discussed at Full Council on 12 December 2018 and the following motion passed:

This Council recognises the impact of drug gangs, knife crime and county lines as a local, regional and national issue.

This Council commends the work of multi-agency statutory and voluntary partners in Essex, Southend and Thurrock in relation to these issues, particularly given the judgement of “Outstanding” by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation, following a recent inspection.

This Council is pleased to see this work is being recognised by the Home Office in awarding the sum of £640k to the Police, Crime and Fire Commissioner’s Office to further expand this multi-agency work.

This Council therefore:

- Calls upon all political parties to work together to drive down the impact of drug gangs, knife crime and county lines on the residents of Essex.
- Requests that the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee has oversight of and contributes to the multi-agency strategy and its development.

Full Committee discussion

The People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee had initial discussions with representatives of Essex Police and the Police Fire Crime Commissioners Office at its February and April 2019 meetings respectively and a link to the meeting papers for both those meetings is here:

[PAF 14 February 2019 meeting papers](#)

[PAF 11 April 2019 papers](#)

Thereafter, the Committee subsequently resolved to establish a Task and Finish Group to conduct a detailed review. The initial current scoping agreed by the Committee was as follows:

Terms of Reference

To consider the adequacy of current agency work to reduce the destructive impacts of gang culture in Essex. To have oversight of, and contribute to, the multi-agency strategy and its development.

Key Lines of Enquiry

- (i) To gain assurance that challenges being faced have been clearly defined and recognised by all agencies;
- (ii) To gain assurance that the role and responsibilities of all agencies is clear;
- (iii) To gain assurance that, to the extent necessary, there is an organised and robust system wide (and partnership) working in challenging and reducing the destructive impacts of gang culture;
- (iv) To understand ECCs specific role and its contribution as a key contributor to and driver of actions being taken.

Membership

Volunteers were sought from beyond the membership of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee to serve on the Task and Finish Group and final membership was agreed as below:

Councillor Carlo Guglielmi (Lead Member)
Councillor Jenny Chandler
Councillor Mark Durham
Councillor Anthony Hedley
Councillor Peter May
Councillor John Moran
Councillor Pat Reid

Annex 2 - Library of background reports and publications

Prior to and during the course of the scrutiny, a virtual library of supporting documents and reports, news articles, was established and maintained.

1. Article - MPs call for police in schools to cut youth violence – BBC.co.uk – July 2019;
2. Counting-Lives-disrupting-child-criminal-exploitation-Parliamentary Briefing- The Childrens Society - July 2019;
3. Counting-Lives-report-summary – The Childrens Society - July 2019;
4. Grooming-gangs-and-victim-support- debate-briefing-14th-May 2019 -The Childrens Society;
5. Home Affairs Select Committee - Serious Youth Violence - 31 July 2019;
6. Home Affairs Select Committee - Serious Youth Violence - summary of report – 31 July 2019;
7. Causes of knife crime and serious violence – London Assembly briefing;
8. Article - National County Lines Coordination Centre to crack down on drug gangs – bbc.co.uk - 21 September 2018
9. Press article - stop exclusions and close pupil referral units – Evening Standard – 20 June 2019;
10. Serious-Youth-Violence-briefing- The Childrens Society- March-2019;
11. Youth Select Committee- Knife Crime Inquiry – The Childrens Society Submission - June 2019;
12. Youth Services Funding- 24th July 2019 – The Childrens Society-and- Barnardos;

Annex 3 - Contributors

Evidence gathering took place between August and November 2019. Members would like to extend their gratitude to those who contributed to the review. These were:

Name	Title and organisation
Pastor James Bell	Tile Kiln Evangelical Church (Chelmsford)
Rachel Brett	CEO, Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services (ECVYS)
Ian Davidson	Chief Executive of Tendring District Council, ex-Chairman of Safer Essex and representative of the Essex Community Safety Partnerships.
Duncan Evans	National Crime Agency Co-ordinator for County Lines (representing the NPCC National Police Chiefs Council)
Leanne Fuller	Service Manager, Safe-In Essex, Children's Society [and also manages the Children at risk of Exploitation Team]
Jane Gardner	Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex
Tanya Gillett (twice)	Head of Youth Offending, Youth Offending Service
Councillor Ray Gooding	Cabinet Member – Education and Skills, Essex County Council, Essex County Council
Tracey Harman	West LPA Commander, Chief Superintendent 2220, West Local Policing Area, Essex Police
Ben Hughes,	Head of Wellbeing and Public Health, Essex County Council
Clare Kershaw	Director – Education, Essex County Council
Councillor Dick Madden	Cabinet Member – Performance, Business Planning and Partnerships, Essex County Council
Councillor Louise McKinlay	Cabinet Member – Children and Families, Essex County Council
Michael O'Brien	Head of Specialist Education Services, Essex County Council
James Pearson	Team Manager Youth Offending Service/Team Manager ISSP, Essex County Council
Jane Ryan (twice)	Acting Team Manager, ISS Team and Gangs Prevention Service, Youth Offending Service

Altogether the Group held 12 evidence sessions (some with more than one witness in attendance) over five main evidence days. Most evidence was oral although some written material was also considered. Advance questions were provided in many instances to help structure the discussions.

Tanya Gillett, Head of Youth Offending, has been a key subject matter support to the Group and the Group would like to express their gratitude to her for her advice and guidance. In two instances (sessions with Jane Ryan) Tanya withdrew from her advisory role and attended as a witness.

Annex 4 - Written evidence

Power Point presentation from James Pearson, Team Manager Youth Offending Service/Team Manager ISSP, Essex County Council;

Power Point presentation from Ben Hughes, Head of Wellbeing and Public Health, Essex County Council;

Power Point presentation from Duncan Evans, National Crime Agency Co-ordinator for County lines;

Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex's Work Programme;

Written answers from Councillors Gooding and McKinlay to pre-set advance questions.

Lived Experiences of County Lines, gangs and criminal exploitation in Essex – Essex Youth Offending research and evaluation project 2019 – Essex Youth Offending Team

The following events were attended by some members of the Task and Finish Group to support the review

Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services Conference 2019 – Youth Violence and Knife Crime in Essex – 12 October 2019 – Anglia Ruskin University, Chelmsford

The National Combating gangs, Violence and Weapon Crime Conference – 3 December 2019 – London Government Events.

Annex 5 - Limitations of the review

The Group is content that it has received a range of views and collected evidence from a number of key witnesses to help it have oversight of multi-agency arrangements both already in place and also being planned to confront issues around drug gangs, knife crime and county lines and the overall co-ordination of services. This has enabled it to come to some reasonable evidence-backed conclusions. However, the Group also acknowledge that, due to time and resource constraints, they have only just 'dipped below the surface' on some of the associated issues identified.

There were further investigations that could have been made and other witnesses with whom the Group could have consulted. For example, the Group could have visited local schools to see at first hand the perception and level of awareness of vulnerability to drugs, gang culture and bullying and coercion. However, the Group acknowledges that such an exercise would still have had limitations as it would have relied on a small sample size of all schools in Essex, and in a relatively concentrated geographical area, when trying to draw broader conclusions.

The Group have not spoken directly with parents, children or young people. Instead, through discussions with representatives from the Youth Offending Service and representatives from the voluntary sector, the Group believes it has received a reasonable representative evidence base of their views and experience.

The Group did not look in any detail at the direct causal links that may exist between certain health and environmental issues and vulnerability to drug and gang activity although there is significant evidence to indicate such links.

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