

Task and Finish Group Report – Drug Gangs, Knife Crime and County Lines

Reference Number: PAF/17/20

Report title: Task and Finish Group Report – Drug Gangs, Knife Crime and County Lines	
Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Date: 17 September 2020	For: To consider receipt and endorsement of the report and identifying follow-up actions
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County Divisions affected: Not applicable	

1. Introduction

This is the final report of the Task and Finish Group established in response to the Full Council request for this Committee to look at the multi-agency response to the issue of drug gangs, knife crime and County lines in Essex.

2. Action required

The Committee is asked to:

- (i) Receive and endorse the attached final report of the Task and Finish Group looking at the multi-agency response to the issue of drug gangs, knife crime and County Lines in Essex (Appendix).
- (ii) To consider how it wishes to monitor future progress in multi-agency working and timing for any updates;
- (iii) To consider how it wishes to monitor implementation of recommendations, including identifying ownership of each recommendation and timing for any updates;

3. Background

The issue of drug gangs, knife crime and County Lines was 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

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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.'*

The Committee resolved to establish a Task and Finish Group to look at the issue in more detail which met for the first time in July 2019. Working closely with Tanya Gillett, Head of Youth Offending, the Group then held 12 evidence sessions over five main evidence days between August – December 2019. Discussions were held with a variety of witnesses ranging from a National Crime Agency Co-ordinator for County Lines, Essex Police, the Deputy Police Fire and Crime Commissioner, and representatives from community and voluntary groups through to County Council Cabinet Members and Officers (these are listed in Annex 3 to the report).

The Group has been beset by various delays in finalising its review and final report culminating in the pandemic lockdown and a decision was then taken to not attempt to publish the report until social restrictions began to be relaxed.

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 reproduced below for ease of reference:

Increasing prevention and intervention

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;

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(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:

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:

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:

(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 VVU. [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:

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;

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(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:

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:

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:

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.

4. Update and Next Steps

The final report is attached as an Appendix. Next steps are as outlined under Section 2 - Action Required.

The following have been specifically invited to attend to give their initial response to the conclusions and recommendations in the report:

County Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member – Education and Skills;
County Councillor Dick Madden, Cabinet Member – Performance, Business Planning and Partnerships;
County Councillor Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member for Children and Families.

5 List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – final report of the Task and Finish Group looking at the multi-agency response to the issue of drug gangs, knife crime and County Lines in Essex