

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

Reference Number: PAF/02/21

<b>Report title:</b> Task and Finish Group Report – Drug Gangs, Knife Crime and County Lines	
<b>Report to:</b> People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
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<b>Date:</b> 14 January 2021	<b>For:</b> To consider the update and identifying any follow-up actions
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<b>County Divisions affected:</b> Not applicable	

### 1. Introduction

This is an update on the conclusions and recommendations in a Task and Finish Group report which were endorsed by the Committee in September 2020.

### 2. Action required

The Committee is asked to:

- (i) Consider the attached update (Appendix 2) in response to the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group which looked at the multi-agency response to the issue of drug gangs, knife crime and County Lines in Essex.
- (ii) To consider how it may wish to further monitor future progress in multi-agency working and the implementation of the recommendations, and the timing for any such updates;

### 3. Background

- 3.1 The final report of a Task and Finish Group looking at the multi-agency response to the issue of drug gangs, knife crime and County Lines in Essex was endorsed by the Committee in September 2020.
- 3.2 The Task and Finish Group held discussions 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. A link to the final report of the Group is here – [Task and Finish group report - September 2020](#)
- 3.3 The conclusions of the Task and Finish Group are at the end of the above referred report starting on page 26. These conclusions comment on

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partnership working, leadership, funding, the role of education and raising awareness, and communication and transparency. As a result, the Task and Finish Group 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;
- (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.

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### **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;

(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

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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.

- 3.4 The above conclusions and recommendations were discussed with Cabinet Members at the Committee's September 2020 meeting and it was agreed that a further update on the implementation of recommendations (to the extent that that has been possible) be scheduled for 3-4 months' time.
- 3.5 Further consideration has since been given by Cabinet Members to the 'ownership' of each recommendation and amended ownership has been agreed with Councillor Guglielmi (as Lead Member of the Task and Finish Group). As a result of this discussion, recommendations 1 and 2 are owned by Councillor Gooding and recommendations 4-8 are owned by Councillor Madden.
- 3.6 Since the September 2020 meeting, the final report of the Task and Finish Group has been distributed to Essex Members of Parliament, local councils in Essex and adjoining county councils under cover of an email from the Lead Member of the Task and Finish Group. Councillor Guglielmi may wish to highlight any responses he has received to these mailings.

### **4. Update and Next Steps**

An update from Cabinet Members is attached as Appendix 2 and the following are expected to attend to introduce the update:

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 – extract of the minutes of the virtual meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 September 2020.

Appendix 2 – update from Cabinet Members

### **Extract of the minutes of a virtual meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 September 2020**

#### **4. Task and Finish Group Report - Drug Gangs, Knife Crime and County Lines**

The Committee considered report PAF/17/20 comprising 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.

The following joined the meeting to respond to the conclusions and recommendations in the report:

County Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member – Education and Skills;

County Councillor Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member – Children and Families;

County Councillor Dick Madden, Cabinet Member, Performance, Business Planning and Partnerships;

Michael O'Brien, Head of Specialist Education Services, Essex County Council.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Guglielmi, as Lead Member of the Task and Finish Group, introduced the item. The conclusions of the review commented on partnership working, leadership, funding, the role of education and raising awareness, and communication and transparency. As a result, the Task and Finish Group had made eight recommendations

In turn, Cabinet Members were given the opportunity to give an initial response to each recommendation. During that discussion the following was acknowledged, highlighted, suggested and/or agreed:

- (i) The County Lines business model was dynamic and fast changing and agency resources to challenge it were limited;
- (ii) There was significant emphasis on joint partnership working within the local Violence and Vulnerability Framework requiring individual agencies to be transparent and report back on those activities on which they led and/or for which they were responsible. It was important that duplication of work between partners be minimised;
- (iii) The governance structure and leadership of different work strands should be regularly reviewed to ensure the most diverse and effective leadership;
- (iv) The Task and Finish Group had struggled to adequately obtain all the information it needed in a timely manner so as to robustly challenge the accountability on how partnership funding was being used. There was

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also some uncertainty on the structure of funding from the two unitary councils in Essex. However, it was stressed that the overriding principle was to buy into the project with less emphasis on actual boundaries and being prescriptive.

- (v) An overall Violence and Vulnerability Unit communications strategy had been agreed in July which had acknowledged that sometimes messaging might need to vary where geographical differences in challenges being faced had been identified across the county. It was suggested that further review of the strategy should be in 3-6 months to gauge the impact of the current strategy.
- (vi) It was important that there were interventions to discourage school exclusions and ensure there was adequate support for schools to facilitate young people quickly returning to school after a period of exclusion. The decision to exclude a pupil sat with the Head Teacher and the County Council believed that there should be more pre-conditions required to be met before that happened;
- (vii) There was less influence over academies than maintained schools;
- (viii) More work may be needed to further heighten awareness of youth services on offer.
- (ix) Members were encouraged that there was a review of youth service outreach work and it could start at an earlier age in future compared to the present;

At this point, the Chairman invited representatives from the Young Essex Assembly to participate in the discussion. The following specifically contributed to the discussion:

Satine Dawes, Member of Essex Young Assembly.  
Ms Hatch, Teacher, Gilberd School.

and advised that through the Essex Young Assembly they had also been looking at issues around drug gangs and County Lines and confirmed that it was perceived to be a significant issue in schools. It was suggested that schools were not getting all the support they needed and that the pandemic had also made access to those services more difficult. It was stressed that raising awareness of both the early warning signs of involvement in drug gangs, together with the availability of support services, needed to further improve.

### Conclusion:

The Chairman thanked the Task and Finish Group members for their time and commitment in undertaking the review.  
It was agreed that:

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- (i) The Task and Finish Group report, conclusions and recommendations, be endorsed;
- (ii) The report should be distributed to Essex MPS, Essex Borough, City and District Councils (including the two unitaries);
- (iii) Councillor Guglielmi would seek further clarifications on source and use of partnership funding at a meeting to be held with the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner;
- (iv) Responsibility and owner for each recommendation was as follows (subject to any further clarification from Cabinet Members);

Recommendation 1 – Councillors Gooding and McKinlay.

Recommendation 2 – Councillor Gooding.

Recommendation 3 – to be referred to the Health Overview and Policy Committee.

Recommendations 4, 5, 6 and 7 – Councillor Madden.

Recommendation 8 – Councillor McKinlay

- (v) The Committee be updated on progress in approximately 3-4 months;
- (vi) Email contact details of the YEA participant in the discussion would be provided to Cllr Guglielmi so that they could be kept informed of progress.
- (vii) A copy of the finalised Healthwatch Essex report looking at child exploitation would be circulated in due course.