

SCRUTINY REVIEW – KNIFE CRIME, MOBILE PHONE THEFT ETC. – VISIT BY MARGATE TASK FORCE– FRIDAY 15 JANUARY 2016

Present: Councillors: Troy Gallagher
Una O'Halloran
Jenny Kay
Caroline Russell
Clare Jeapes

Peter Moore – Scrutiny officer -Islington
Catherine Briody – CSU Islington
Tony Nagle – Youth Offending service
Alva Bailey – CSU Islington
Mark Selby – Islington Police
Dave Jones – Integrated Gangs Team Islington
Jenny Duggan – Integrated Gangs Team Islington

Andrew Pendlebery and Mark Pearson of the Margate Task Force made a presentation to the Committee.

Following the presentation the following main points were made –

- The main challenges for the Task Force were gangs and sexual exploitation
- The Task Force has been operating for 4 years and is based at Thanet District Council and involves a variety of agencies including Police, Fire, mental health, housing, troubled families etc. and focused on delivering criminal justice, social justice and safeguarding
- There is a commitment from each of the agencies involved to operate in an integrated manner and work tended to concentrate on the two most deprived wards
- Most crimes are drug related and the integration of services had demonstrated the usefulness of sharing information and shown that over a third of crime emanated from just two wards which had enabled resources to be concentrated in these particular areas
- There were high levels of vulnerable people in these wards and looked after children were going missing on a regular basis and there are high levels of child sexual exploitation
- There are over 46 nationalities represented in these wards
- The Task Force carry out street surveys to try to identify problems and vulnerable people and social issues to be able to better respond to the risks to these vulnerable people and to try to provide solutions
- There were 12 gangs currently operating in Margate and gangs were coming up from London – these gangs were of varying ethnicity
- Members were informed of the various tactics the gangs used to draw people into drug use and trafficking and sexual exploitation

- The gangs targeted vulnerable people and used and gang members are rotated to avoid detection
- Young people as young as 9/10 years old are being used to courier drugs and even children from middle class families are targeted
- Young people joined gangs for a variety of reasons such as a sense of importance, social status, feeling part of a family, money etc.
- The Task Force took part in Family Support Panel meetings where families and young people voiced their feelings and concerns and agree a way of moving forward
- The age profile of the gangs was getting younger and the number of missing children had increased
- Gangs organised street parties and lured young people with freedrugs and alcohol but then made them become runners to pay off their debts
- The Task Force also worked with schools and the PRU and health services to share information which built up a more comprehensive picture and a postcode joint agency approach and analysis
- Work is also taking place on prevention and in dealing with young people who wish to exit gang involvement and schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme are being used to enable young people to have positive messages on CV's
- The Task Force is co-located in a Council building bringing together a number of services to ensure they were in close contact
- There were difficulties in showing the cost benefits of the team when it was first set up and there is a need for the relevant agencies to give a lead and work collaboratively to deliver the benefits of joint working
- One problem highlighted was that youth workers worked at night and at weekends generally. However the other Task Force members tended to work 9-5 and there needed to be consideration given to this
- The forming of effective relationships with young people can lead to a lot of useful information being provided to the Task Force and the Task Force had to sign confidentiality agreements and were vetted
- There is still good youth provision in Margate and the provision tended to adapt to changing demands of young people
- In response to a question as to whether young people involved in criminality may encourage others attending youth facilities to become involved it was stated that there were youth workers at the centres who looked out for this to ensure it did not happen and keep young people safe
- Community work is taking place and when the Task Force engages in door knocking exercises they are informed of the work taking place and improvements being made and it was felt that the Task Force is having an impact
- The large amounts of money that young people can get from being involved in the drug trade is a deterrent to them from leaving gang involvement but the door was always left open to them to have assistance
- The Task Force worked with schools to identify if there had been behaviour change as this could be an indicator of gang affiliation.

There were now instances of 12/13 year olds carrying knives and CAMHS involvement is critical in many of these cases

- In relation to schools there is a problem due to funding reductions in that safer schools officers had been removed from schools and this made the situation more difficult
- Margate is also suffering from the benefit changes and loss of social housing which is forcing many vulnerable and complex families to be moved out of London to areas where accommodation is cheaper and there is a need to work with London Boroughs to share information and carry out more cross border work
- A lot of referrals were received as a result of the street visits and from schools and it was easier to intervene at an early stage rather than when criminality and gang membership had become entrenched
- There had been a significant number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who had gone missing in Margate in the past year
- In response to a question as to whether there were any additional things that could be done in terms of the integrated model that would benefit Islington it was stated that joined up working is essential however it should be noted that not all local authorities worked in the same manner which made this difficult
- The view was expressed that early intervention is vital and Members were of the view that street surveys and sharing of information is vital to build up an overall picture
- The Chair stated that if Members had any further questions of the Margate Task Force these could be directed through the Scrutiny Clerk to take up
- Members stated that they may wish to visit Margate to look at the conducting of a street survey

The Chair thanked Mark Pearson and Andrew Pendlebery for their presentation