

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Report to: Leader of the Council

Date: June 2020

Subject: **H&F Dedicated Gangs, Violence & Exploitation Unit**

Report of: Deputy Leader of H&F – Cllr Sue Fennimore

Responsible Director: Sharon Lea - Strategic Director for the Environment

Reasons for Urgency

The impact of Covid-19 brings both challenges and opportunities that need to be urgently addressed. The lockdown brought significant decreases in the levels of crime but there are concerns, as the lockdown is eased, that levels of violent crime and anti-social behaviour, often a precursor to more violent incidents, will return to their pre-Covid levels. The council, as highlighted in the Annual Report 2020/21, is determined to improve safety on our street and to crack down on gang activity and youth violence.

Summary

Our number one priority is to keep people safe and our residents need to know that we are doing everything in our power to prevent their children and young people being victimised and exploited by those involved in organised crime.

The recommendations set out in this report propose the creation of the borough's first ever dedicated unit to tackle gangs, violence and exploitation. Through a ground-breaking agreement between the council and the Metropolitan Police it is proposed that H&F will fund Police officers to work together with specialist council staff to bring the full weight of criminal legislation to bear on gangs and gang leaders operating in the borough.

Some young people in the borough (and nationally) have been conscripted into gangs and gang culture by organised crime leaders. It is our duty to safeguard young people from this and prevent others from being drawn into this form of criminal activity. We also need to ensure that those who are the perpetrators of this form of exploitation are brought to justice. In addition to the very real harms caused by gang activity, fear of crime and gangs is pervasive and something which must be tackled.

Aided by our expansive CCTV network, more investigative officers will be on the ground to enforce legal action against perpetrators.

We will be tough on gangs, but as a compassionate council, we will also be tough on the causes of gangs, which means addressing the underlying issues.

Recommendations

1. To approve the creation of the Council’s first Gangs, Violence & Exploitation Unit.
2. To approve entering into a contractual funding agreement with the Metropolitan Police under Section 92 of the Police Act 1996.
3. To approve the one-off allocation of £737,000 in Section 106 funding towards the new Unit for 2020/21 (from Section 106 funding already agreed for the purposes of community safety).

Wards Affected: All

H&F Priorities

The proposals set out in this report will contribute to our priorities in the following ways:

Our Priorities	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Priorities
Building shared prosperity	<i>Safer streets will ensure people feel free to enjoy their high streets during the day and in the evening</i>
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	<i>The creation of the dedicated gangs, violence & exploitation unit will ensure complex cases are more effectively dealt with and will reduce pressure on social care services</i>
Taking pride in H&F	<i>A borough where residents feel safe and young people do not fear being targeted by gangs</i>

Financial Impact

It is proposed to create a dedicated Hammersmith & Fulham Gangs, Violence & Exploitation Unit, consisting of 11 LBHF employed officers and 6 Metropolitan Police Officers (17 FTEs). The total annual cost of the unit is £983,000 (£737,000 part year for 2020/21, assuming 1 July 2020 implementation).

For 2020/21, it is proposed that the £737,000 additional cost of the new Gangs, Violence & Exploitation Unit is met from s.106 funding already agreed for the purposes of community safety. Confirmation of the s.106 funding is provided in the Planning Implications section later in this report. From 2021/22 a permanent full year base budget of £983,000 (plus annual indexation) will need to be agreed as part of the Council's normal Medium Term Financial Strategy process, unless alternative external funding is able to be identified.

Legal Implications

Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, in summary, provides that subject to specific statutory limitations relating to defined service areas, a local authority has power to do anything ...which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions. Further section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires the Council to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, (a) crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment); and (b) the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area; and (c) re-offending in its area. Cabinet is thus able to agree the recommendation to create the Council's first Gangs, Violence & Exploitation Unit.

"Section 106" refers to section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This allows the Council to collect financial contributions from Developers to be spent on the specific purposes set out in each section 106 Planning Obligation - which can sometimes be geographically limited in extent. In this sense section 106 contributions are "ringfenced" to the purposes and geographical areas set out in each section 106 agreement. Further, section 106 contributions are development sensitive and are dependent on the developments being implemented to trigger the payment contributions.

Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 grants Councils a General Power of Competence whereby a Local Authority has power to do anything that individuals generally may do, including the use of funds received from planning obligations to address the impact of developments carried out in the borough.

The costs of funding the Gangs, Violence & Exploitation Unit as identified in this report are to be partially met from the Community Safety and Services contributions secured under the Section 106 agreements identified in paragraph 16 below. Legal services have checked the three s.106 agreements as identified and are satisfied that the section 106 contributions can be used for the proposed purposes as identified in this report.

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Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Proposals and Analysis of Options

1. Due to changes in the crime and anti-social behaviour landscape it is necessary to explore alternative service delivery models for solutions which can consistently and effectively address longstanding issues but also be flexible enough to respond to emerging concerns.

H&F Gangs, Violence & Exploitation Unit

2. Regionally and nationally, gangs, violence and exploitation have become one of the primary crime and disorder concerns over the last 5-10 years. Until last year, Hammersmith & Fulham had experienced a relatively low level of serious youth violence but along with the majority of London boroughs, H&F has recently experienced an increase in serious youth violence. As a result it is clear we now need to act decisively to tackle gang related offending.
3. In addition to gang related activity violent offences in general have increased in H&F in recent years. Since 2014/15 knife related crime has increased dramatically with Police figures showing that overall knife crime has increased 118% and knife crime with injury has increased 51%. In addition to these worrying figures, in the last year alone we have witnessed the tragic deaths of three young men.
4. In tackling Gangs, Violence & Exploitation our priority must be to keep our vulnerable young people as safe as possible. We believe the best chance we have of doing this is to increase levels of direct support to young people affected through the creation of a dedicated H&F Gangs, Violence & Exploitation Unit. It is proposed that this multi-agency unit is formed of Metropolitan Police officers and directly employed Council officers working together with statutory services to provide enhanced safeguarding arrangements to those assessed as most at risk. In addition to the protective function

of the Unit it will target legislative action and prosecutions at the most harmful offenders to prevent them exploiting and harming our young people and their families. It is recognised, however, that very few young people pro-actively choose criminality and instead are either coerced into offending or feel they have severely limited employment options. We will therefore work with our commercial partners in H&F to provide genuinely attractive employment opportunities for young people as part of a range of measures to tackle the causes of gang crime.

5. It is proposed that H&F, together with the MPS and key partners, creates a Gangs, Violence & Exploitation Unit to:
 - Safeguard and protect all children and young people from gangs, violence and exploitation
 - target serial perpetrators with the full range of legislative sanctions
 - lead a programme of prevention and diversion work to stop our young people being drawn into gang related offending
6. The Unit will operate on a joint tasking basis, managed collaboratively by one MPS manager and one H&F manager and all operational practices will be set out in Standard Operating Protocols to ensure the Unit operates on jointly agreed principles. To ensure the new Unit is effectively joined up with other community safety and safeguarding teams, the council will have the ability to co-locate GVE Unit resources within other teams on a matrix management basis, as required.
7. It is anticipated that the GVE Unit could be operational within six to eight weeks of approval being given.

OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

8. The proposals have been made following research on best practice in dealing with issues of gangs, organised crime and youth violence. The funding of additional resources to investigate, engage with, support and if necessary, enforce against perpetrators is thought to be the best way for H&F to improve levels of safety for our young people and the wider community. The new Unit will require revised working practices to be developed in a number of statutory services to take account of the new resources and ensure there is no duplication.

Reasons for Decision

9. The recommendations are made in order to ensure the operational Community Safety teams can deliver on the Council's vision to keep people safe and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

Equality Implications

10. Involvement in gangs, street violence and knife crime in inner city areas – both victims and perpetrators – is often related to drug crime and deprivation. In Hammersmith & Fulham, those communities most vulnerable to involvement in those criminal activities are the most deprived communities in the borough, which are often

BAME communities, such as the Somali communities located in the north of the borough. This should not pre-determine the focus of this new Unit.

11. To ensure that there are no negative implications for groups with protected characteristics, under the Equality Act 2010, the Gangs, Violence and Exploitation Unit must ensure that it does not discriminate on the basis of race, nationality or any other protected characteristic, in its targeting of potential or suspected offenders and/or victims.
12. Implications completed by: Peter Smith, Head of Policy & Strategy, tel. 07818 402486.

Risk Management Implications

13. Recommendations are consistent with Council Priorities and are being done in accordance with our H&F business plan specifically being pioneering and relentlessly searching for better answers to manage risk in the community by listening, working with residents and finding creative ways to take us forward.
14. Implications verified by: Michael Sloniowski, Risk Manager, tel 020 8753 2587

Planning Implications

15. The recommendations in this report request £737,000 of one-off s106 funding for 2020/21.
16. The current available balance from planning agreements that include specific obligations towards community safety purposes is £56,293 and these will be allocated to the project as a proportional contribution for the central Hammersmith area.

AKA	Planning Ref	Available Funds	Notes
784	2013/00856/FUL 282-292 Goldhawk Road, W12 9PF S106 signed 10.09.2013	£16,552.96	For projects within the Central Hammersmith Area
776	2012/03546/FUL & 2014/02370/VAR Kings Mall Car Park and West 45 Glenthorne Road S106 signed: 01.07.2013 & 07.05.2015	£39,739.69	For projects within the Central Hammersmith Area

17. A further £595,000 towards community safety purposes has been negotiated but is not expected to be received in the forthcoming years.
18. As there are insufficient specific funds currently available for these purposes, the remaining balance of £680,707 required for the s106 contribution towards the operation of the Gangs, Violence & Exploitation Unit for 2020/21 will therefore need to be funded from some of the planning agreements secured from developments

within the growth areas of the borough. A number of these include obligations for community safety in the long list of purposes for which the funds can be used in those areas. For 2020/21, it is proposed that the £737,000 additional cost is met from s106 funding from these growth area funds. These have already been agreed and allocated in principle for the purposes of community safety.

19. Implications verified by Joanne Woodward, Chief Planning Officer.

Consultation

20. The proposals have been developed jointly with the Central West BCU Borough Commander and in consultation with members of Hammersmith & Fulham's Community Safety Partnership.
21. This report complements the work of independent, resident led Crime Commission.