

SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL 2 – KNIFE CRIME AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

MINUTES

Tuesday 18th September 2018

PRESENT: Councillors: Aysha Raza (Chair), Praveen Anand, Jon Ball, Tariq Mahmood, Rajinder Mann, Chris Summers and Simon Woodroofe.

LBE Officers Present:

Harjeet Bains - Scrutiny Review Officer
Charles Barnard - Assistant Director Integrated Early Years, Preventative and Youth Services
Ian Jenkins - Head of Integrated Youth Service
Janine Jenkinson - Democratic Services Officer
Jess Murray - Head of Community Safety, Tenancies and Regulatory Operations

External Representatives

Diana Dishley - Justice of the Peace, Your Life You Choose
Heather Sharland - Justice of the Peace, West London Bench
Ibrahim Osman - Director Somali Advice and Development Centre
Pam Ullstein - Justice of the Peace, Your Life You Choose
Fadumo Yussuf - Somali Advice and Development Centre

1. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 1)

Councillors Seema Kumar (Vice-Chair), Carlo Lusuardi and Yvonne Johnson - Deputy Leader, (Portfolio Holder Schools and Children's Services), Elly Heaton-Virgo (co-optee) and Stephanie Kesey (Redthread) had tendered their apologies prior to the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 2)

There were none.

3. Matters to be Considered in Private (Agenda Item 2)

There were none.

4. Minutes

(Agenda Item 4)

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2018 be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5. Knife Crime – Partner Updates
(Agenda Item 5)

Magistrates Sentencing Guidelines

Heather Sharland explained that she had been acting as a magistrate on the West London Bench for 14 years, and had spent 12 of those years sitting on the Youth Bench. She told the Panel that the Sentencing Council had published new guidance for the sentencing of offenders convicted of the possession of a bladed article or offensive weapon, in public, and of using it to threaten someone. She explained that the new guidance would help to ensure consistency in sentencing and that sentence levels reflected Parliament's concern about the social problem of offenders carrying knives. The Panel was informed that there was a mandatory minimum sentence of six months custody for offenders who used any type of weapon to threaten someone. The new guidance applied to both adults and those under 18 years old. For those under 18 years old, the guidance would work alongside the Sentencing Children and Young People guidance and would encourage courts to look, in detail at the age, maturity, background and circumstances of each offender, in order to reach the most appropriate sentence, to prevent re-offending. She explained that it was rare for children or young people to receive a custodial sentence for a first offence. In deciding what sentence to impose, the following circumstances were taken into consideration: whether the incident was premeditated, the vulnerability of the victim, if the incident had occurred in a public place, and if alcohol or drugs had been involved. The personal circumstances of the perpetrator were also taken into account i.e. upbringing, maturity, learning difficulties and whether they had submitted a guilty plea.

The Panel was informed that typically, for a first offence by a young person, the Integrated Youth Service presented a report to court that outlined measures that could be taken to prevent re-offending. For a second offence, the guidance suggested a minimum four month custodial sentence.

Questions

Councillor Summers explained that he worked as a journalist and had often attended court trials to report on knife crime cases. He said that perpetrators often presented a defence case to 'get away with it' and he was concerned to hear that youths were rarely given custodial sentences. He added that there was little difference in age between a 17 and an 18 year old and he found the disparity in sentencing between the two ages 'bizarre'. In addition, he asked how often the courts dealt with repeat offenders and what the minimum sentence for possession of a weapon was.

Heather Sharland explained that for youth perpetrators the emphasis was on interventions to prevent further offending; the emphasis for adult offenders was different and focused on protecting the public, punishment and rehabilitation. She said 17 year olds were given a strong reminder that their eighteenth birthday was approaching and of the consequences of re-offending. She reported that the minimum sentence for an adult threatening to use a weapon was two and a half years; for youths custodial sentences ranged from four months to four years.

Councillor Anand expressed concern that knife crime offences were not being addressed appropriately. He said that whilst he understood that sending young people to prison could lead them to becoming 'hardened criminals', he felt the courts should take a harder stance due to the seriousness of knife offences and the devastating impact on people's lives. He said first time offences should be dealt with in the same manner as subsequent offences and 'the first time should be the last time'.

Heather Sharland explained that vulnerable young people were often exploited by peers and asked to carry weapons and / or to perpetrate crime. The Head of Integrated Youth Service explained that anti-slavery legislation (The Modern Slavery Act 2015) could be applied in cases where perpetrators had been trafficked or involved in criminal gangs. He explained that under this legislation people could be treated as victims rather than offenders.

Councillor Woodroffe explained that he worked in a prison and asked if offenders' backgrounds were considered when sentencing.

Heather Sharland said that a number of factors were taken into consideration, including family background and circumstances. She explained that the Council's Integrated Youth Service prepared a pre-sentencing report which detailed the full background and circumstances of the perpetrator.

Councillor Mahmood asked about the reasons behind the increasing number of offences committed, and what could be done to address the situation.

The Head of Integrated Youth Service explained that there was a level of apprehension amongst young people and they often reasoned that carrying a knife would protect them from becoming a victim. He said the Youth Services team aimed to provide early interventions. He explained that following the arrest of a young person, the team undertook a full assessment of them, including a mental health and capacity to understand screening; these were then used to determine the most appropriate course of action.

Heather Sharland said she felt that being out of education was a significant factor which leads young people to become involved in crime. She said that young people not attending school often became involved with drugs and criminal gangs.

Councillor Ball expressed concern about reports in the media that some schools used permanent exclusions as a means of taking pupils who were performing poorly off the roll, in order to manipulate results and league tables. In addition, he said it was often reported in the media that short term prison sentences for adults were ineffective because short sentences could not provide long term rehabilitation.

Councillor Mann said there had been an increase in knife crime offences in his ward, Norwood Green, and he felt that the closure of the local police station was a contributing factor. In addition, he said knife crime was a serious offence and he felt the court sentencing was 'not hard enough'.

Heather Sharland said the Magistrate's Court relied on the police to charge people with offences in a timely manner. She explained there had been occasions when there had been a significant delay between a person being charged and the case

being presented to court; and this impacted on the quality of evidence a witness was able to provide. She said the police process needed to be expedited. The Panel noted that a police representative was scheduled to attend the next meeting and members would have an opportunity to ask about the process.

Somali Advice and Development Centre

Ibrahim Osman and Fadumo Yussuf from the Somali Advice and Development Centre (SADC) provided a presentation to the Panel.

The Panel was advised that SADC was a registered charity that served the Somali community in Ealing. SADC worked in cooperation with local statutory agencies, including schools, police, social services, children and youth services, voluntary organisations and the local community to help young people at risk of crime and antisocial behaviour. Intervention programmes were also provided to support and divert young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system or who were already involved in criminal activity.

The Panel was informed that Somali children made up nearly 10% of the school age population in Ealing and were a relatively new community in the UK. Somalis had arrived from war torn countries, mainly as refugees, and they had experienced extensive deprivation and barriers, including language and access to statutory services. SADC acted as a bridge between the community and the statutory sector to help families understand and work with statutory agencies. Members were advised that Somali young people were significantly overrepresented in youth crime linked to multiple deprivation factors and in school exclusions. SADC advocated for young people and helped them and their parents to understand and trust the statutory services that could assist them and improve their life chances. Services provided included family counselling, individual mentoring led by positive older Somali role models, hosting an annual Youth Speak Out Somali Conference and outreach community work with local mosques and women's groups.

SADC provided the following:

- Diversionary programs for young people at risk of crime
- Advice and guidance surgeries for disadvantaged families
- Early intervention programmes for vulnerable children
- Mentoring sessions at Feltham Young Offenders Institute
- Community advocacy
- Mentoring students with challenging behaviours
- Early intervention service to support children and families
- Youth Club

The majority of service users were families from large households who were new to British life and lacked understanding of how the local authority and statutory agencies worked and what assistance they were entitled to. The barriers they had were not only language, but also an understanding of institutions and British culture. Most service users had come from civil war ridden countries where there was no law and order, and they had been victims of traumatic experience; therefore the transition to a new way of life was challenging.

The Panel was informed that service users were often from a large single parent household where the father figure was not present, for a variety of reasons, including the impact of war. The families were frequently experiencing severe economic hardship and this could result in some children being vulnerable to engagement in youth crime, gangs, sexual exploitation, violence and mental health issues. SADC provided mentoring to young people who were at risk of becoming involved with crime. The key aim was to divert young people away from a gang lifestyle and to create positive alternative opportunities through an early-intervention programme. One-to-one mentoring was used to help young Somali people to address their situation and to look for positive pathways to move them away from criminal involvement.

SADC provided outreach workers who had an understanding of the cultural and social context of the Somali community. This enabled them to relate to the young Somali people caught between the mainstream UK culture and the traditional culture of their parents. The Panel was advised that outreach workers were extremely effective in mediating between children and parents caught in a generational and cultural gap. Outreach workers focused on involvement in education, training and employment as an alternate route away from crime. SADC worked closely with the youth justice service, the police, social services, schools and mosques. Work also integrated local cultural networks in order to build the capacity of the community to address issues.

The Panel was informed that SADC undertook work to address the issue of sexual exploitation. Ibrahim Osman said that sex was a taboo subject for the Somali community and SADC worked with parents to empower them to understand the cultural context young Somalis were growing up in. In addition, he explained that a major factor which contributed to young people becoming involved in criminal activity was a failure in education. He said there was a clear link between permanent exclusion from school and involvement in criminal gang culture. He explained that parents often did not understand the education and justice systems and SADC provided support to parents to navigate through these important processes and provided advice about services available to support them. The Panel heard that some young people took advantage of their parents' lack of understanding and SADC worked to empower parents.

Ibrahim Osman explained that SADC delivered an Annual Ealing Somali Youth Conference. In 2018, more than 100 young people aged between 13-19 years old had attended the Conference. He explained that the Somali community in Ealing did not have a platform where socioeconomic issues were discussed. He said for young people in Ealing, the Conference, having now run for five consecutive years, had become almost like a tradition. The Conference provided an opportunity for young people to voice concerns and questions and to engage with young adults from Ealing who had once been in their position. The objectives of the Conference were to raise awareness in four key areas: educational underachievement, gang culture, sexual exploitation and radicalisation.

SADC engaged with the local mosques, in order to reach the wider community and address the vulnerabilities of the youths to knife crime and gang violence. SADC had been invited to speak at major community events held at Darrussalam Mosque in Southall, which several hundred people had attended. SADC representatives had spoken about safeguarding children; youth gang culture, county lines, knife crime

and youth violence. It was felt that engagement with the community in the traditional community hub was empowering for all participants.

Ibrahim Osman explained that SADC also reached the community via teleconference programmes which provided parents, particularly Somali women, with an opportunity to openly discuss issues and help each other to find solutions. He explained that it was the only platform Somali women had, that was not male dominated. He said SADC had delivered five lectures via the teleconference about the concerns in relation to child sexual exploitation, knife crime, school exclusions, family breakdown and identity crisis of Somali youth, and on each occasion more than five hundred Ealing residents had watched the lectures.

SADC delivered counter-radicalisation workshops for young people and parents. The charity had worked to combat radicalisation, primarily through workshops and the Ealing Somali Youth Event. The workshops were used to build the resilience of young people against the radicalisation and extremist narrative. SADC worked closely with the Ealing Prevent team to contribute to the dialogue and delivery of the Prevent programme.

Questions

Councillor Mahmood noted that the Somali community made up 10% of the population in Ealing and asked if SADC had the capacity to engage with that number of people. In addition, he asked what relationship SADC had with the Council and what the Council could do to assist the organisation.

Ibrahim Osman explained that there was a huge population of Somali residents, approximately 35,000 people and SADC was a small organisation employing 4-5 staff with support from volunteers. He said SADC was inundated by requests from parents for advice and guidance. He explained that SADC had a very good relationship with the police and the Council, including the Youth Justice Service, Social Services and local schools.

Councillor Summers explained that for his work as a journalist he had been following a court trial involving the murder of a Somali young person, and as part of this he had spoken to older Somali men to get their perspective on the case. He said the Somali men had explained that Somali girls were doing well in school and flourishing academically, whilst Somali boys were not performing well in school. In addition, he highlighted the difficulties Somali parents faced due to a lack of language and cultural understanding, and how this could lead to the loss of parental authority.

Ibrahim Osman said that many young people felt that by carrying a knife they were protecting themselves, and they failed to fully take into consideration the consequences of their actions. He explained that it was important for parents to be fully aware of the issues. He said that if a parent did not speak English, it was easy for a child to take advantage of the situation and to an extent there was a 'parental role reversal'.

Councillor Ball highlighted the importance of working with parents in order to address issues.

Councillor Anand said it was important for parents to be aware that many children took knives from the family home.

Councillor Mann said it was positive SADC engaged with local mosques; however he felt it would also be beneficial for SADC to engage with other community groups and suggested that representatives attended ward forum meetings.

Your Life You Choose

Pam Ullstein explained that Your Life You Choose (YLYC) delivered a one-day multi-agency presentation to Year 7 students in Ealing high schools. In a rotation of workshops with the agencies, students looked at how society dealt with people who committed crimes. The workshops explored preconceptions and stereotyping in relation to criminal activity. The aim was to raise awareness of the long lasting and far reaching effect of crime on students' future. The students discussed the life choices they had and the consequences of making the wrong choices. The programme encouraged young people to make informed decisions and to understand that they had a choice about the path they took in life.

The YLYC project was led by magistrates in the West London Justice area and operated across boroughs in West London, North West London and South East London. The Panel was informed that YLYC presented workshops to all state secondary schools in the Ealing area, except for one school, and four independent schools. YLYC made no charge to schools or academies, and each school could choose which agencies presented during the day. The YLYC day was tailored to cater for specific issues each school faced and these are explored in the relevant workshops. Topics covered included: gang and drug issues, knife crime and joint enterprise. The programme addressed aspects of the Key Stage 3 Citizenship Curriculum.

Diana Dishley explained the structure of the day involved:

- DVD (all students)
- Professional workshops (15-20 students)
 - Magistrates
 - Police officers – safer schools / trident
 - Prison officers
 - Directions Project – ex-offenders
 - Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) – inclusion officers / paramedic / cyberbullying and sexting

The day concluded with a plenary DVD that presented real life stories (all students).

Diana Dishley explained that the DVD shown in the morning told the story of a boy who becomes involved in a gang. The DVD illustrated how the boy was groomed by the gang leader, by way of receiving gifts, then the boy is asked to store and deliver things, and the situation gradually escalates. The DVD concludes with the boy's home being burgled by a rival gang and his grandmother being beaten up. The DVD storyline was available to view on the YLYC website - <http://www.ylyc.org.uk/>. As part of the Panel review, members were invited to attend a future YLYC day session

in school. Members were directed to contact the Scrutiny Review Officer if they wished to attend.

The DVD shown at the end of the day included a message from the mother of a boy who had been murdered. Diana Dishley explained that the message was very powerful and reminded students to think before they acted and directed them to make good decisions. At the end of the day all children were given a card that listed helpline telephone numbers for relevant agencies. YLYC printed 5000 cards annually for distribution. Pupil and teacher feedback was gathered at the end of the day by using a bespoke evaluation form to evaluate their experience of the day.

Pam Ullstein said the project days were well received by students, and schools had repeatedly invited YLYC back each year. In relation to the outcomes and impact of the day, she explained that measuring the impact was difficult because it was not possible to know if the day had prevented an incident occurring. However, during the course of the day students often made disclosures, and this enabled early intervention by the Youth Justice Team, parents, teachers and relevant agencies. The Panel's attention was drawn to the Evaluation Report, set out in Appendix A of the report.

Questions

Councillor Mann reported that he had recently watched a television programme regarding the issue of sexual exploitation and the grooming of girls in Birmingham. He said an individual had pledged to fund two police officers for two years to tackle the issue. A further £100,000 had been raised by the public to fund policing and prevention measures.

Diana Dishley explained that the YLYC programme took a broad approach and all relevant issues were discussed throughout the day. She said the programme was offered to all schools once a year, and whilst there was a demand for the programme to be followed up in Year 9, the YLYC organisation did not currently have the capacity to offer additional sessions.

The Chair suggested that sessions could be offered to students in the last year of primary school, as the transition from primary to secondary school was often difficult for many children.

Pam Ullstein explained that due to the number of primary schools in the borough, the organisation did not have enough volunteers to attend each school. YLYC currently hosted 18 high school visits a year.

Councillor Ball asked what the Council could do to persuade the one school resistant to hosting a YLYC day, and what the Council could do to assist the YLYC organisation.

Pam Ullstein explained that it would be extremely useful if the Council could print the helpline information cards in-house or fund the printing of the cards.

Councillors Anand and Ball suggested that ward forum funding could be used to fund the printing of the helpline cards. The Panel recommended that SADC and YLYC

applied to all ward forums for funding. It was highlighted that the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) funding may also be available to support projects.

Councillor Woodroffe noted the information provided in the Evaluation Report. In particular, he highlighted Recommendation 1 'Reconsider gender as a binary construct'.

Pam Ullstein advised that the evaluation forms used needed to be re-designed to strengthen the data collected. Diana Dishley said she had observed a significant difference in the concerns raised by students that were 'streetwise' and those who were not. It was suggested that it would be useful for YLYC to liaise with representatives of the SADC to discuss how best to engage with the Somali community.

Resolved: That the Panel noted the presentations provided and recommended:

- I. That SADC representatives attended ward forum meetings with a view to integrating the Somali community in the local community.
- II. YLYC and SADC applied to ward forums for funding grants to further support the local community.

6. Panel Operations (Agenda Item 6)

Resolved: The Panel:

- I. Agreed the co-option of Ms Elly Heaton-Virgo (Chief Executive, Young Ealing Foundation) to the Panel.
- II. Noted the feedback from the recent site visit, provided in Appendix 1 of the report.
- III. Approved the agenda items and actions, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report, for the next meeting scheduled to be held on 14 November 2018.

7. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 7)

The next meeting was scheduled to be held on 14 November 2018.

Councillor Aysha Raza, Chair.

The meeting ended at 9.30 p.m.