
STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR RESPONDING TO **GANG-ASSOCIATED WOMEN AND GIRLS**

THE MAYOR'S OFFICE FOR POLICING AND CRIME

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November 2013

Published by:

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This report is available at www.london.gov.uk/policing

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INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose of this strategic framework document

The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) has developed this strategic framework to support London boroughs and agencies in devising their strategic and operational responses to young women and girls involved in or associated to criminal gangs. It has been developed in response to calls from London partner agencies for greater clarity on how to confront this serious problem which until recently had received very little attention.

To date, approaches to tackling gang violence have been centred on the experiences and needs of men and boys. The Mayor has made a commitment to improve the way agencies identify and respond to gang-associated women and girls. This framework suggests ways in which local areas can start to tackle these issues.

This is not intended to be a prescriptive and definitive guide on how to respond to gang associated women and girls. Approaches to girls and gangs are still in the early stages of development and we need more evidence about what works in practice. This document is a first step in attempting to develop a strategic response to these complex issues. It will provide pointers, checklists and minimum standards for local areas embarking upon this area of work so that London responds more effectively and consistently to gang-associated young women and girls.

2. Definitions

The definition of gangs that has been adopted is the current Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) definition of gangs which is derived from the Centre for Social Justice 'Dying to Belong' report and Home Office Ending Gang and Youth Violence definition:

A gang is "a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who:

1. see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group;
2. engage in criminal activity and violence; and may
3. lay claim over territory (this is not necessary geographical territory but can include an illegal economy territory);
4. have some form of identifying structural feature;
5. be in conflict with other, similar gangs."

A Gang Member is anyone who meets one or both of the following criteria:

- Identifies themselves as being a member of a gang and this is corroborated by information from more than one independent source*
- Is identified as being a member of a gang and this is corroborated by information from more than one independent source*

* Sources to consider are not only authorities and partnerships but such areas as community intelligence & social media.

* For girls and young women these partner agencies may be different to those usually engaged with; including agencies working in the fields of sexual violence, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, sexual health and mental health, youth offending services, education and other services which also work with boys and young men.

Gang Associate

A Gang Associate is any individual that has one or more of the following features:

- Offends with or for gang members, either willingly or through coercion or exploitation but does not identify themselves as a gang member and there is no other corroborative information that they are a gang member.
- Is shown to associate with gang members by Police, Partner agencies, community intelligence or has displayed through conduct or behaviour, a specific desire or intent to become a member of a gang.

Gang-associated women and girls

There is not yet an agreed definition of gang-associated women and girls. The Home Office worked with partners to develop the below definition based on the evidence of the girls and young women identified through Female Voice in Violence and other work on girls and gangs which is a useful starting place for the process of mapping. Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and the ACPO trialled this definition in a pilot which aimed at identifying those most at risk from gangs:

“a woman or girl who is a family member of or in an intimate relationship with a gang nominal”

We recognise that this definition does not capture all women and girls who may be affected by gangs, however, it is a useful starting point.

3. Who is this strategic framework for?

This framework is aimed at local community safety partnerships (CSPs), violence against women and girls (VAWG) Partnerships, gangs partnerships, local Safeguarding Children Boards, Health and Wellbeing Boards, policymakers and commissioners across pan-London agencies and in boroughs. It is intended to be a useful resource for local agencies operating both at the strategic and operational levels who have a role to play in tackling gangs and serious violence, VAWG and safeguarding including the police, criminal justice agencies, health, children and young peoples' services and voluntary and community sector agencies.

4. Policy context

Until recently, policies and strategies to tackle serious youth violence and gangs focused on men and boys both as offenders and victims and failed to address the issues and needs of gang-associated women and girls. Similarly, VAWG strategies and policies have failed to address the additional risks faced by women and girls in a gang context. This has resulted in inadequate systems, procedures, interventions and provision of support for gang associated women and girls.

The Mayor's VAWG strategy, *The Way Forward*, published in March 2010, highlighted these gaps and made a commitment to improve the way London agencies identify and respond to gang-associated young women and girls.

The *Female Voice in Violence Programme*¹ and the Office of the Children's Commissioner's² *Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups* has provided a focus on the experiences and needs of gang-associated women and girls.

As a result of this heightened awareness and evidence base, the risks and issues facing gang-associated young women and girls have been acknowledged in Government policy including the Cross Government action plan to tackle VAWG³, the *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* strategy⁴ and the *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan*⁵. The Home Office has also invested in 13 new Young People's Advocates to support girls under 18 suffering rape and sexual abuse, including from gangs. A *Women, Girls and Gangs* working group has been established as part of the Ending Gang and Youth Violence programme which aims to develop policy and influence local delivery to prevent and reduce the impact of gang violence on girls and women. The Home Office also established an Ending Gang and Youth Violence Peer Review Team to support local areas in developing and strengthening their response to gangs which has included a review of what areas are currently doing to respond to gang-associated women and girls and recommendations for future work.

In January 2013 the London Crime Reduction Board (LCRB) Partnership Anti-Gangs strategy was published which also contains commitments around gang-associated girls:

- Share learning, good practice, and identify priority issues relating to girls and young women who may be victims of violence and exploitation by gang members.
- Develop a programme to support young women to exit gangs and identify funding to run a pilot in London

Although, there has been significant progress over recent years at a policy level, there remain significant gaps in the implementation of policy at a local level which will be highlighted throughout this document. What is clear is that most local areas now acknowledge the issues faced by gang-associated young women and girls and want to do something about this and have called for greater clarity on how to respond to these issues.

The LCRB Anti-Gangs strategy includes a commitment to work with the London VAWG Panel and the London Safeguarding Children Board to implement this strategic guidance. The *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* Peer Review Team will also use this document to support local areas across the UK in strengthening their response to gang-associated women and girls.

5. Developing gangs strategies that take into account the specific issues and risks faced by gang-associated women and girls

¹ <http://www.rota.org.uk/content/female-voice-violence-project-home>

² <http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/info/csegg1>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-action-plan-2013>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-gang-and-youth-violence-cross-government-report>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation-action-plan>

In order to provide an effective response to gang-associated women and girls, local areas should avoid considering women and girls as an add-on to their work on gangs. It is important that local CSPs, Health and Wellbeing Boards, Safeguarding Children Boards and London-wide agencies consider women and girls across their entire strategic approach to gangs.⁶

Why consider women and girls when tackling gangs and serious youth violence?

Public authorities have a legal duty to eliminate discrimination and promote equality under The Equality Act 2010. The Act indicates that the “need to advance equality of opportunity” includes:

- Removing or minimising disadvantage suffered by particular groups
- Taking steps to meet different needs of particular groups
- Encouraging participation by particular groups in areas of public life or other activity where they are under-represented; and
- Foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Duty applies to all public bodies that are listed in Schedule 19 of the Act and to other bodies that carry out public functions (e.g. voluntary and community sector organisations). The list includes ministers and central government departments, local councils, police authorities, NHS trusts, other health bodies, governing bodies of maintained schools and institutions of further and higher education.

The Equality Act should not be interpreted to mean that both sexes should be treated the same. Single sex services are permitted where it can be shown to be the most effective way of providing those services or where the service is needed by one sex only. It is legal and appropriate for public authorities to fund (and provide) female-only services in these circumstances.

The UK is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)⁷ which seeks to ensure the realisation of equality between men and women. As a signatory of CEDAW, the UK Government and all public authorities and agencies should ensure that their strategies, policies and services respond effectively to the different needs of women and men.

Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) the UK has an obligation to ensure that all children under the age of 18 in the UK have a right to:

- Protection from violence
- Health and health services
- Protection from sexual abuse and exploitation
- Protection from abduction, and

⁶ One of the key recommendations of the Female Voice in Violence reports (ROTA 2010 & 2011) was for all serious youth violence policy and practice to be gender-proofed. Gender-proofing is the means by which it is ensured that policies and practices within organisations have equally beneficial effects on men and women.

⁷ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/committee.htm>

- Protection from all other forms of exploitation

Local authorities and all agencies working to tackle gangs and serious youth violence have a duty to ensure that they address the specific needs of young women and girls. These may be very different to those of men and boys. They also have a duty to ensure that strategies, policies and service provision responding to male gang members do not have a negative or discriminatory impact on young women and girls. If the impact on women and girls is not considered at a strategic level, this will result in agencies not identifying women and girls at risk which means that they are not offered appropriate protection and support. This could have grave consequences for individual women and girls and also leaves public authorities open to challenge. To avoid this, the needs of women and girls need to be considered and addressed in strategic planning, commissioning and operational delivery.

Local CSPs, Health & Wellbeing Boards and agencies need to consider for instance issues like data collection, information-sharing and risk assessment. For instance when mapping the violence and crimes perpetrated by criminal gangs it is crucial that offences that impact mostly on women and girls are also considered such as domestic and sexual violence so that CSPs and Health & Wellbeing Boards can measure the impact of interventions on these crime types. Partnerships should also include agencies that are most likely to hold intelligence on female gang associates and that information sharing protocols are developed to enable professionals to routinely share relevant information safely. Risk assessments would also be enhanced so that they include risks that are specific to young women and girls.

A multi-sector strategic response to girls and gangs should lead to the following outcomes:

- Improved mapping and understanding of the profile of gang-associated women and girls
- Improved identification of young women and girls at risk
- Accurate risk assessments of young women and girls
- More effective interventions, and
- Improved referral pathways to meet the needs of young women and girls

This document will provide guidance and checklists on gender-proofing responses to gangs under five key areas:

- A) Leadership and partnership
- B) Understanding the problem
- C) Identification, assessment and safeguarding
- D) Commissioning interventions to work with gang-associated young women and girls
- E) Working with men and boys to challenge attitudes and behaviour towards women and girls

A. LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP

Political leadership, buy-in and commitment from senior executives across multi-sector stakeholder agencies in a borough are key to progressing work around gang-associated women and girls. Without strong leadership, it is unlikely that issues affecting gang associated women and girls will be treated as seriously as those affecting men and boys.

The Home Office *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* peer reviewers found that most local areas now acknowledge the issues facing gang-associated young women and girls, however, in most cases, even in areas where there was evidence of promising practice at a practitioner level, there was a lack of emphasis on young women and girls by senior strategic leads. This is likely to be due to the fact that men and boys are the ones that are causing the most harm and more likely to become perpetrators or victims of serious violence such as murder, gun or knife crimes. Forms of violence experienced by women and girls are not given the same level of attention even though gang members are known to be committing serious crimes such as domestic violence, sexual violence and sexual exploitation. For instance, in most local areas, gang-associated women and girls are not yet included in gang/serious youth violence strategies; or where they are mentioned, addressing these issues is not a clear strategic priority for the CSP. Specific targets and measures to track work on girls and gangs need to be developed.

A significant barrier to progress on the girls and gangs agenda locally is that most areas are yet to move from a domestic violence strategy to a broader integrated VAWG strategy which would include gang-associated girls. MOPAC has published guidance for boroughs on how to move from a domestic violence strategy to a broader VAWG strategy: <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/policing-crime/mission-priorities/violence-against-women-girls/local-vawg-guidance>

It is crucial that Political Leaders and senior executives including Chief Executives, Borough Commanders and Directors of Public Health:

- Acknowledge that gang associated women and girls are present in their borough even if they have not been identified
- Set a clear strategic priority to address this issue, and
- Prioritise and allocate resources accordingly

This is not an issue that is limited to certain areas in London. As the *Female Voice in Violence* report highlighted, it is common for gang members to have relationships with young women and girls who live in non-gang-affected areas which means that gang-associated women and girls could be present in any local area.⁸ Local authorities should therefore assume that there are gang-associated women and girls within their borough even if they do not have a significant gang problem or if the available data and police intelligence does not immediately highlight this.

This has been a year of significant change and transition for MOPAC. In May 2012, shortly after the establishment of MOPAC, Boris Johnson was re-elected as Mayor of London. In June 2012, the Mayor appointed a new Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, Stephen Greenhalgh.

In the summer, the Mayoral Decision announcing MOPAC's **Mission & Priorities** was agreed, setting out a clear vision summarised in three core objectives:

⁸ ROTA (February 2010) *Female Voice in Violence* Project. A study into the impact of serious youth and gang violence on women and girls, p. 67

- A metropolis considered the safest global city on the planet.
- A Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) that becomes the UK's most effective, most efficient, most respected, even most loved police force.
- A capital city where all public services work together and with communities to prevent crime, seek justice for victims and reduce re-offending.

Having spent the year defining priorities and establishing itself with community safety partners, MOPAC is now focused on helping the police and criminal justice system deliver a safer London.

Steps forward

Local Community Safety Partnerships should:

- Ensure that they integrate and address the needs of gang-associated women and girls in local ending gang and youth violence strategies and through service commissioning.
- Develop an integrated VAWG strategy which addresses the specific needs of gang-associated women and girls.
- Work together to develop a shared vision, strategic priorities, outcomes and targets for gang-associated women and girls across the partnership and allocate resources accordingly.
- Explore opportunities for multi-sector commissioning to fund initiatives that meet the needs of gang-associated women and girls on a sustainable basis.
- Consider putting in place strategic-level training on gang-associated women and girls for senior staff and members of the CSP to support the partnership in developing an effective approach across all agencies.
- Consider establishing a multiagency working group reporting into the CSP to drive forward and coordinate activity around gang-associated women and girls.

Local safeguarding children boards should:

- Work with gangs and VAWG partnerships locally to ensure that any policies and strategies relating to children and young people also cover gang-associated women and girls

Directors of Public Health should:

- Ensure that the needs of gang-associated women and girls are captured through the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and inform the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (See box below).

Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) & Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies (JHWSs)

The Health and Social Care Act introduces duties and powers for local Health and Wellbeing Boards in relation to JSNAs and JHWSs. JSNAs assess the needs of a local population in order to inform and guide the commissioning of health, well-being and social care services within local authority areas.

The JSNA will underpin the new JHWSs which are a new statutory requirement which in turn will inform commissioning plans. The objective of a JSNA is to analyse the health needs of local populations in order to improve the physical and mental health and well-being of individuals and communities and to reduce inequalities for all ages.

JSNAs should be informed by local need, looking at specific groups such as those likely to have poor health outcomes and should also have regard to wider issues such as crime, community safety and violence. The statutory guidance on JSNAs and JHWSs states that Health and Wellbeing Boards need to consider the needs of vulnerable groups who experience health inequalities and those with complex and multiple needs such as offenders and victims.¹

Research has highlighted the fact that gang-associated young women and girls have often experienced domestic and sexual violence and sexual exploitation¹ so they are clearly a vulnerable group with multiple and complex health and wellbeing needs. VAWG is linked to mental health problems such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, suicide and attempted suicide, self-harm, drug and alcohol addiction as well as physical harm. A report by the Centre for Mental Health, *The Need to Belong*, highlights the health, educational and social risks and needs experienced by young women involved in gangs and examines what works to support these young women.¹

Local areas should ensure that the health and wellbeing needs of gang-associated young women and girls are captured through the JSNA and integrated into the JHWS to inform commissioning and ensure that appropriate, specialist provision is put in place to address their multiple and complex needs.

Partnership working between the gangs, VAWG, children and young people sectors is crucial if local areas want to improve the identification and assessment of gang-associated women and girls and the interventions that are put in place to respond to them. The *Female Voice in violence* highlighted the need to foster closer partnership working across the serious youth violence and VAWG sectors in order to identify those at risk and provide truly specialist interventions for women and girls affected by serious youth and gang-related violence.⁹ The interim report of the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups also stated that all

⁹ ROTA (March 2011) Female Voice in Violence Final Report. This is it. This is my life, pp.41-47

agencies, police units and other organisations need to do much more to work in partnership with each other and to share information, to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation.¹⁰

The Ending Gang and Youth Violence Peer Review Team found that currently, local partnerships are not always engaging all relevant partners and this is true both at a strategic level and at an operational level. For instance, in most areas, not all the right partners are sitting around the table at Gang Case Panels where professionals review and assess the risks posed by gang nominals. This limits their ability to assess the threats and the risks faced by women and girls. Sexual health services are not always sharing information about sexual violence and exploitation with appropriate agencies such as the police or local safeguarding teams and there is still limited engagement between the gangs and serious youth violence sector and the VAWG sector. This results in:

- Missed opportunities to identify those most at risk.
- A limited understanding of the nature and the scale of the problem.
- Gaps in partnership arrangements and structures in place to address gangs and youth violence.
- Ineffective responses to gang-associated women and girls.
- Missed opportunities for joined up working to maximize available resources and avoid duplication.

Gang-associated women and girls may be in contact with a whole range of services across different sectors. It is crucial that strategic partnerships develop information sharing protocols and consistent methods for identifying and assessing the risks to gang-associated young women and girls. The services that are likely to come into contact with gang-associated young women and girls include VAWG services (Rape Crisis Centres, refuges, Sexual Assault Referral Centres, Integrated Sexual Violence Advocate/Independent Domestic Violence Advocate services), specialist services working with young women, sexual health, mental health, multi-systemic therapy teams, A&E, GPs, child sexual exploitation services, dentists, housing, hostels, foyers, residential care homes, children's services, local safeguarding teams, youth justice triage and liaison and diversion services, youth offending services, the secure estate, probation, police, organisations working with at risk parents (i.e. parents in custody or with mental health or substance misuse problems), voluntary sector providers for vulnerable young people, missing people units, school staff including education welfare officers, school "talking therapy" providers, Safer Schools Officers, youth workers and youth clubs, peer outreach workers, pupil referral units and further education institutions. Specialist gang projects working with young men and boys are also likely to pick up female vulnerability so it is crucial that processes are in place for the appropriate sharing of such information.

A range of partnership arrangements are in place locally for tackling gangs for instance, Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) or local gangs panels where the police work in partnership with a range of local agencies to assess and manage the risks posed by gang nominals. It is crucial that these partnerships also include agencies that are likely to come into contact with gang-associated women and girls. Likewise, partnerships tackling VAWG issues need to ensure they have representation from those working on gangs/serious youth violence issues. Partnerships working on gangs should ensure they develop information sharing protocols with VAWG partnerships so that

¹⁰ OCC (November 2012) Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups Inquiry Interim report, p.13

relevant information can be shared. (The Home Office is currently working on this with the Department of Health through the Improving Information Sharing and Mapping Project).

Steps forward

Community Safety Partnerships should:

- Review governance arrangements for local gangs boards/partnerships to ensure there is appropriate membership from relevant sectors:
 - Is there at least one VAWG representative on the CSP, Health & Wellbeing Board, local safeguarding board and any other strategic partnerships working on gangs?
 - Is there at least one representative from the gangs sector sitting on VAWG strategic partnership?
- Ensure strategic coordination across the different policy areas through strengthening linkages and communication channels between the different partnerships.
- Review the membership of operational risk assessment partnerships such as gangs panels and ensure that there are information sharing protocols and systems in place to share relevant information between relevant risk assessment panels e.g. between gangs panels and Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACS), Multi-agency Public Protections Arrangements (MAPPA), Multi-agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) and Integrated Offender Management (IOM).
- Develop local information-sharing protocols to enable the safe sharing of information between sexual health, other health services (Mental health, GPs and substance misuse) the VCS and statutory agencies. Work with agencies across different sectors to develop “defined and agreed outcomes” and reinforce to multi-sector partners why addressing the needs of gang-associated girls is important to their outcomes frameworks.
- Consider ways of improving the partnership working between the gangs, VAWG, health, education, housing and safeguarding sectors and improving awareness of the issues facing gang-associated women and girls by coordinating networking events, workshops and training for practitioners.

B. UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

There is no doubt that the *Female Voice in Violence* reports and the *Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups inquiry* have led to greater awareness of issues such as sexual exploitation by gang members. The Ending Gang and Youth Violence peer reviewers found evidence of local areas considering sexual exploitation in policy documents and addressing it through specialist interventions. However, there is a danger that in some areas, the focus around gang-associated young women and girls is limited to sexual exploitation. While sexual exploitation is a significant issue for gang-associated women and girls it is equally important that local areas think about the broader range of issues affecting gang-associated women and girls.

In addition to sexual exploitation, the *Female Voice in Violence* research identified the following issues:

- Young women and girls occupying roles within gangs.
- Young women and girls directly involved in offending (often under coercion) including hiding weapons and drugs for partners, brothers or associates fraud, “honey traps”, set ups, violence, robbery, shoplifting etc.
- Young women involved in or associated with gangs experiencing domestic and sexual violence from gang members.
- Sexual violence being used as a weapon between rival gangs¹¹.

The University of Bedfordshire research into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence found that sexual violence and exploitation between young people in gang-affected neighbourhoods largely reflects what we know about sexual violence and exploitation in general i.e. the perpetrators are predominantly male, while victims are predominantly female; it usually takes place between people who are known to each other; and; it is used as a means of boys and young men exerting power and control over girls and young women.¹² The study did however identify certain features that are unique to or exacerbated by the gang environment such as:

- pressure to engage in sexual activity;
- engagement in sexual activity due to fear of force, violence (physical and/or sexual) and intimidation;
- the recording and distribution of images of sexual activity via mobile technology;
- sex as initiation into the gang;
- sex in return for (perceived) status or protection;
- sex as a means of achieving material gain;
- young women “setting up” people in other gangs; and

¹¹ ROTA (March 2011) *Female Voice in Violence Final Report*. This is it. This is my life, pp.36-37 and pp.41-47 and ROTA (February 2010) *Female Voice in Violence Project*. A study into the impact of serious youth and gang violence on women and girls, pp. 48-59

¹² Beckett, H with Brodie, I; Factor, F; Melrose, M; Pearce, J; Pitts, J; Shuker, L and Warrington, C. (November 2012). *Research into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence*. University of Bedfordshire.

- cases of rape (single and multiple perpetrator) and other sexual assaults – as punishment, a weapon in conflict and/or for sexual gratification¹³.

The research also found that not all young women are viewed by men and boys as having equal rights to assent or decline sexual activity. In particular, young women who are seen as engaging in casual sex were vulnerable because they were viewed by some as having lost their right to withhold consent.¹⁴ The Centre for Mental Health report¹⁵ on what leads girls to join gangs identified a wide range of risk factors that may lead girls to join gangs including:

- Severe childhood behavioural problems and mental ill health
- Poor maternal mental health, exposure to violence in the home and experience of trauma
- Low academic aspiration and disengagement with school
- Association with antisocial or gang-involved peers and peer rejection or victimization
- Feeling unsafe or marginalised in their neighbourhood
- High income inequalities and social influences that devalue female roles
- Poor quality family attachments and social bonds
- History of sexual abuse

The study found that young women involved in gangs had a threefold greater risk of health and social difficulties compared with average youth justice entrants and over double the number of vulnerabilities of other females that were screened. Major risk factors were:

- Parental imprisonment, substance misuse or poor mental health
- Experiences of victimisation (such as sexual abuse, maltreatment, bullying, witnessing or experiencing domestic violence)
- Experiences of neglect
- Histories of running away
- Poor educational performance and exclusion from school
- Involvement in sexually risky or harmful behaviour
- Diagnosis of a mental health problem, a history of self-harming or risk of suicide, sleeping or eating disorders

¹³ Beckett, H with Brodie, I; Factor, F; Melrose, M; Pearce, J; Pitts, J; Shuker, L and Warrington, C. (November 2012). Research into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence. University of Bedfordshire.

¹⁴ Beckett, H with Brodie, I; Factor, F; Melrose, M; Pearce, J; Pitts, J; Shuker, L and Warrington, C. (November 2012). Research into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence. University of Bedfordshire.

¹⁵ Centre for Mental Health (May 2013) A need to belong, p.2

- Signs of behavioural problems before the age of twelve

The *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* strategy asks local areas to draw on as wide a range of data as possible including health, local authority (including housing), educational, voluntary sector, criminal justice and community data alongside police intelligence to map who is involved in serious violence and gangs; where the violence is happening; when it is happening and why it is happening. They were also asked to consider and map the specific risks to young women and girls.

Locally there is a considerable amount of work going on to better understand the local gang problem such as information and data sharing protocols between A&E departments, the police and other agencies, mapping of when and where violence is occurring to provide insights into the links and tensions between gangs and the make-up of gangs in terms of family connections and acquaintances. However, this work does not generally extend to cover gang-associated women and girls.

The Ending Gang and Youth Violence Peer Review Team found that:

- Most local partnerships do not understand the true extent and nature of the risks faced by gang-associated women and girls.
- Few local areas have undertaken or even started any work to map women and girls associated to known gang nominals.
- Data sharing protocols did not include agencies that are most likely to hold information on women and girls such as sexual health services, VAWG services, voluntary and community sector agencies including grassroots organisations.

In order to improve their understanding of the extent, profile and needs of gang-associated girls, local areas need to draw upon a wide range of data from different agencies including:

- Reported rapes, sexual and domestic violence (Police data)
- Girls or young women in possession of firearms, drugs etc. (police, youth offending teams or YOTs, probation)
- Girls or young women involved in offending including a pattern of early violent/aggressive behaviour (YOT, probation)
- Terminations, pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (sexual health)
- Mental health, attempted suicide, self-harm, young women in care (children and adolescent mental health services or CAMHS, social services)
- Exclusions from school for sexual misconduct (schools/local authorities)
- Repeated absences from school (schools/local authorities)
- Girls or young women that are repeatedly missing or running away, persistent unauthorised overnight absences (Missing Persons Units/social services)

One way of developing our understanding of the risks that gang-associated girls face and the role that agencies could play to prevent and address those risks to minimise harm is through serious case reviews (SCRs).

The Government's *Working together to safeguard children* guidance (2010) states that a SCR should be considered when:

- “a child sustains a potentially life-threatening injury or serious and permanent impairment of physical and/or mental health and development through abuse or neglect; or
- a child has been seriously harmed as a result of being subjected to sexual abuse; or
- a parent has been murdered and a domestic homicide review is being initiated under the Domestic Violence Act 2004; or
- a child has been seriously harmed following a violent assault perpetrated by another child or an adult.

Many gang-associated women and girls would meet the above criteria so better use could be made of SCRs. They are important for learning lessons about the case and the way in which professionals work together to inform and improve future practice to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. It would be beneficial for the London Safeguarding Children Board to work with local safeguarding boards to undertake a review of cases where girls have been implicated in victimisation or offending in a gang context to identify any lessons that can be learnt and shared amongst different partners to improve practice in this area.

Steps forward

- The London Safeguarding Children Board should consider working with Local Safeguarding Children Boards to identify any local cases where gang-associated girls have experienced or been involved in serious violence or exploitation and undertake a review to identify any lessons learnt to inform future practice. The findings should be shared across the partnership to ensure that professionals improve practice in this area.
- Local CSPs should undertake an information collection exercise to draw together all of the available intelligence across different agencies and identify any evidence gaps.
- Local CSPs could also consider undertaking or commissioning a piece of research to address any evidence gaps or focus groups with young women and girls to better understand the extent, profile and needs of gang-associated girls locally.

C. IDENTIFICATION, ASSESSMENT AND SAFEGUARDING

The Ending Gang and Youth Violence Peer Review Team identified gaps and inconsistencies in the identification of risk and potential harm to gang-associated young women and girls. (In some areas, the same is true in relation to men and boys too.) As highlighted in the previous section, information sharing and partnership working on the gangs agenda should include agencies that are most likely to hold information about young women and girls. This would enhance opportunities for local areas to identify those who are most at risk and to undertake appropriate risk assessments to inform follow up actions and referrals.

Boroughs should not assume that because there are not high levels of reporting from gang-associated women and girls that there are no gang-associated women and girls experiencing sexual and other forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. There are low levels of reporting of sexual violence amongst the general population, particularly young people so it is not surprising that levels of reporting are even lower amongst gang-associated young women and girls.

The University of Bedfordshire study into gang-associated sexual exploitation and violence found that gang-associated sexual violence was rarely reported because of the normalisation of such experiences; fear of retribution or retaliation; low levels of reporting of sexual violence amongst young people in general; and a lack of confidence in the ability of police and other statutory services to offer adequate protection following a disclosure.¹⁶

We should therefore not wait for gang-associated women and girls to come forward and report crimes before taking action to address these issues. A more proactive response is necessary.

Given that young women and girls at risk of violence and exploitation or who have experienced gang-associated sexual exploitation are unlikely to disclose to professionals, it is crucial that professionals across all relevant front line agencies are aware of the signs of gang-association and VAWG so that they are able to identify those at risk. Local partnerships should ensure that relevant staff across key agencies has received training and awareness raising sessions to improve the identification of young women and girls at risk. One of the findings of the review into child sexual exploitation issues in Rochdale was that some frontline professionals were aware of child sexual exploitation but the response appeared to be that these were “choices” being made by the young women.¹⁷ Training and awareness-raising could go a long way in challenging such attitudes held by frontline professionals and supporting them in identifying and responding appropriately to child sexual exploitation.

Professionals in social care should work with partners to plan for the transition from childhood to adulthood. While a young woman of 18 may legally not be a child and child protection procedures may no longer apply, gang-association will still make her vulnerable and measures should be put in place to ensure that she continues to receive appropriate support and protection. In order to ensure that young women do not fall through the net transition planning should be undertaken before a young woman turns 18.

The MPS gangs matrix was developed to identify individuals associated with gang-related offending and violence using criteria such as offending history, previous arrests and other police intelligence to assess the level of risk they pose. Gang-associated women and girls are rarely likely to be identified through this process as even those that are actively involved in gangs are not the most dangerous

¹⁶ Beckett, H with Brodie, I; Factor, F; Melrose, M; Pearce, J; Pitts, J; Shuker, L and Warrington, C. (November 2012). Research into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence. University of Bedfordshire.

¹⁷ Independent review in relation to child sexual exploitation issues in Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council (2006-2013) Prepared by Anna Klonowski, Independent Consultant, AKA Ltd
21 May 2013

offenders so local areas should not rely on the gangs risk matrix to identify gang-associated young women and girls.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner inquiry recommended that all police forces work with partner agencies, including third sector specialist organisations, to log information on the girls and young women linked to gang members, and then risk-assess these young people for sexual exploitation using their sexual exploitation indicator list.

As sexual exploitation is only one of the risks that gang-associated women and girls face, risk assessments should also cover other forms of VAWG too. There is currently no single risk assessment covering all forms of VAWG experienced by young women and girls. The DASH risk assessment covers domestic violence, forced marriage and "honour"-based violence but is unlikely to capture all of the specific issues faced by younger women and girls. VAWG and gang association should be embedded in the Common Assessment Framework, however, at present the form does not include specific questions about these issues.¹⁸ Although, the link may not be immediately apparent, it is important that gang-associated girls are risk-assessed for forced marriage and "honour"-based violence. ROTA through the Female Voice in Violence programme identified cases where professionals with good intentions informed parents of their daughters' links with male gang-members but for some BAME women and girls, informing their parents that they are associating with men/boys, regardless of whether they are gang members or not, could put them at risk of forced marriage or "honour"-based violence. It is therefore important that professionals consider the potential implications of disclosing such information to parents and approach this issue in culturally sensitive manner. Care should be taken to avoid putting the young woman and girl at risk of other forms of VAWG. Professionals should listen to any concerns expressed by the young women/girl and involve her in any decision-making around her personal safety. Specialist BAME women's organisations may be able to offer further advice in such cases.

Once risks have been assessed, practitioners need to think about appropriate referrals in line with safeguarding guidance. The London Safeguarding Children Board has produced guidance entitled "Safeguarding Children Affected by Gang Activity and/or Serious Youth Violence" which provides guidance to professionals on identifying and safeguarding children who are vulnerable to or at risk of gang and youth violence. While the guidance does mention the issue of gang-associated women and girls it provides little advice on what specifically a professional should do if they have identified a girl at risk. This gap needs to be addressed because a lack of clarity on how to effectively safeguard gang-associated girls may act as a barrier to professionals fulfilling their duties under Child Protection Procedures to protect young people at risk. The London Safeguarding Children Board is currently revising the London Child Protection Procedures. This provides a good opportunity to ensure that the procedures cover issues affecting gang-associated women and girls in line with the revised Home Office "Safeguarding children and young people who may be affected by gang activity" which has now been looked at in detail to ensure that the specific needs and risks facing gang-associated young women and girls are addressed.

The Ending Gang and Youth Violence Peer Reviewers identified cases of professionals not sharing information due to a fear that this could heighten the risk if child protection procedures were applied. Professionals should always refer onto social care and/or the police where there are immediate risks to the young person. However, it is also important to consider the potential implications of interventions

¹⁸ The Home Office has committed to explore the suitability of existing risk assessment tools for 16 and 17 year olds in its 2013 VAWG action plan.

that are not carefully planned and professionals should be aware that certain actions that are intended to protect the young woman/girl could inadvertently escalate the risk. For instance, reporting rape or sexual violence by a gang member who is arrested as a result of a disclosure could lead to further violence or retribution from other members of the same gang. In order to ensure that the risk to young women is not heightened it is crucial that agencies work in partnership to develop solutions that do not place the young woman/girl in a vulnerable position. Police and social services should always listen to the young woman's concerns about her safety and take these seriously. By working in partnership with specialist VAWG sector organisations and listening to the girls' concerns creative solutions can be developed that safeguard gang-associated young women and girls.

Professionals need to understand their own information confidentiality policies and sharing protocols and explain these to the young woman/girl from the start and at regular intervals thereafter (as suitable). The young woman/girl is expert on planning around her own safety and should feel in control of how her information is being utilised. While agencies need to follow up on and act upon information that the young woman has disclosed, it is crucial her safety and welfare are prioritised. Multiagency working is crucial in such situations so that agencies can put in place a safety plan to mitigate against any escalation of risk that could arise through disclosure.

Most boroughs in London have developed or are developing MASHs which co-locate police and other public protection agencies including safeguarding and health to cut bureaucracy and facilitate information sharing to enable professionals to gain a full understanding of the potential harm and risk to individuals and agree follow up actions. Even in boroughs with well-developed MASHs, information pertaining to gang-associated women and girls may not be systematically picked up either because practitioners don't have an understanding or awareness of the risk indicators or access to relevant information i.e. data from sexual health services, teenage pregnancy, terminations etc. It is important that MASH include data from agencies that are likely to hold information on gang-associated women and girls so that they have all relevant information to undertake assessments effectively. MASH staff should also receive training on gang-associated girls to enable them to identify and assess risk appropriately.

As of 31 March 2013, the definition of domestic violence and abuse was widened to include 16-18 year olds. Children's services and domestic violence services need to develop protocols for joined-up working and identify appropriate referral pathways. Given the overlaps between teenage relationship violence, child sexual exploitation and gang related sexual and domestic violence it is crucial that local areas consider the specific needs of gang-associated young women and girls as they implement the change in definition. The Home Office has published guidance for local areas to support them in addressing the change in definition locally which is available on the Home Office website.¹⁹

¹⁹ Home Office (March 2013) Information for Local Areas on the change to the Definition of Domestic Violence and Abuse. Produced in partnership with AVA.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/142701/guide-on-definition-of-dv.pdf

MPS work on mapping and risk assessment

Proactively identifying gang-associated women and girls and assessing their vulnerability remains extremely complex. Such cases present overlaps between child sexual exploitation, domestic violence, rape and gang violence, with their corresponding risk assessments, making it confusing for professionals to identify and assess vulnerability and risk to protect young women and girls.

MsUnderstood¹ is analysing MPS and CPS case files to identify:

- The nature and dynamics of peer-on-peer abuse (both within and external to street gangs)
- Any influencing factors within young people's relationships, families, peer groups, schools, and neighbourhoods which can escalate or de-escalate abusive situations.
- How cases have been managed in the past, learning lessons about what has worked and where improvements are required from prevention, through to identification and handling of cases through criminal justice, and other systems.

These case reviews will be presented to the MPS, London Safeguarding Children Board, CPS and MOPAC, and redacted lessons learnt will be provided to boroughs in 2014.

The findings of this work will be used to provide local agencies with direct strategic and operational support to address all forms of peer-on-peer abuse from January 2014 onwards.

Steps forward

- Local CSPs should adopt the ACPO/GMP definition of gang-associated women and girls to assist with the identification and assessment of women and girls at risk.
- Undertake a review of historic cases that meet this definition to review any lessons learnt. This could be enhanced with agency/role specific training to build the capacity of professionals to respond.
- Local authorities should work with police and other partners to map all gang-associated women and girls (as per agreed definition) that are linked to their known gang nominals and safely log all available information on them.

- Police should work with key partners, particularly specialist VAWG sector partners, to risk assess gang-associated women and girls for sexual violence and exploitation, domestic violence and other forms of VAWG including forced marriage and HBV.
- Police, the London Safeguarding Children Board, local safeguarding boards and specialist VAWG organisations should work together to develop local safeguarding procedures and referral pathways for gang-associated women and girls based on the revised national safeguarding guidance on children that are affected by gangs.
- Local safeguarding children's board should coordinate/develop training for key frontline professionals on gang-associated women and girls to raise awareness of the risk indicators, how to respond and local referral pathways.
- Safeguarding, health and community safety partners should work together to put in place specialist training for MASH staff on indicators of gang-associated VAWG and sexual exploitation and are aware of which datasets to check to identify any further information about possible risks and dangers faced by gang-associated girls.

D. COMMISSIONING INTERVENTIONS TO WORK WITH GANG- ASSOCIATED WOMEN AND GIRLS

The Ending Gang and Youth Violence Peer Reviewers identified emerging examples of promising practice across local areas. There has been a significant shift at a local level over the last couple of years. The issue of girls and gangs is now firmly on the agenda of most local areas and there is evidence of some promising practice in responding to gang-associated women and girls and a number of boroughs have started to fund specialist initiatives for gang-associated women and girls. Many still have nothing specific in place at all or they may have a healthy relationships programme which covers gangs which is perceived by local partners as an intervention for gang-associated young women and girls. While all young people need education on healthy relationships, this is not the same as a specialist intervention to support gang-associated young women and girls who have multiple needs and issues that need addressing.

In most local areas, there is a recognition of the need for a range of interventions to respond to the different needs of men and boys involved in gangs from mental health to employment and training and mentoring, but with young women and girls, there is a tendency for boroughs to adopt a one-size fits all approach typically having just one girls and gangs project in place (if anything at all). Like men and boys, girls need to be able to access provision across many different intervention points to address their safety, health, wellbeing and support needs.

Over the last few years, a number of new specialist projects have emerged across London to respond to gang-associated women and girls – some are focused on prevention while others are focused on diversion. It is too early to say which models of provision are best practice and “what works” with gang-associated young women and girls because most of these initiatives are yet to be evaluated. One of the recommendations of the Centre for Mental Health report into gang-associated girls is for academic institutions to prioritise research and development into effective responses to the needs of young women involved in gangs.²⁰ In the appendices are included a few examples of service provision that are considered to be promising practice.

Local areas should consider a range of different interventions targeted around different needs when commissioning services for gang-associated young women and girls.

Exit provision is a key gap that has been highlighted through scoping and research in London. Gang exit provision for boys is slightly more established but fails to consider the specific risks, relationships and needs of girls who are fleeing criminal gangs. Male association is more likely to be linked to their own criminal activity focusing on movement out of area, employment opportunities and gang mediation. Women and girls are more likely to be associated or involved in gangs through romantic or intimate relationships with gang members. While lessons can be learnt from gang exit strategies for men and boys they may not be directly transferable to young women and girls.

Without an exit strategy the risk to young women from intervention can be heightened. Young women exiting gangs have often been placed in non-specialist accommodation which does not meet their needs. As highlighted in the accelerated report of the Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s (OCC) Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gang & Groups, there is an inconsistent use of, and over-reliance on, secure children’s homes as a means of seeking to protect children from sexual exploitation. There is also evidence of children aged 16 and over being housed in foyer, bed and breakfast and hostel accommodation which may place them at significant risk. The OCC accelerated report also highlighted the fact that most of the accommodation available for children in care (foster carers, residential children’s homes, foyers, hostels or secure units) lack suitably trained staff who have specialist skills working with highly troubled children and young people or those who have

²⁰ Centre for Mental Health (May 2013) A need to belong, p.4

experienced sexual exploitation and other forms of VAWG. Most of the provision is mixed gender, non-specialist and not linked to other services for children and young people.

The majority of refuge provision in London is aimed at adult women (aged 18 or over) and only a handful admit young women that are 16 or over in specific circumstances. Traditional forms of refuge provision are not equipped to deal with the level of risk associated with criminal gangs or the specific needs of younger women. Young women need specialist support including high security crisis accommodation; staff with knowledge and expertise on serious youth violence; gang related issues and violence against women issues; an understanding of the complex needs of these vulnerable young women including culturally specific needs; an ability to work with young women who may have been involved in offending but have also experienced domestic and sexual violence. Whilst it may not be realistic to provide this in every borough, local authorities could consider cross-borough or sub-regional partnership arrangements to co-commission suitable specialist refuge provision.

Core principles and minimum standards for commissioners to consider when commissioning programmes and interventions to work with gang-associated women and girls

To date, the majority of gang-prevention programmes and interventions have been designed around the needs of men and boys and while there has been a recent emergence of initiatives for young women and girls, the majority have not been effectively evaluated as highlighted in the Centre for Mental Health study into gang-associated girls.²¹ Below is list of core principles and minimum standards based on the limited available literature on programmes and interventions for girls.

- **Women-only services** –young women and girls need access to women-only support.²² Young women and girls are unlikely to disclose issues such as sexual and domestic violence or sexual exploitation in the presence of men and boys.
- **Agency expertise** -ensure that the agency has expertise around VAWG, gangs, safeguarding and working with young people. Agencies should be able to demonstrate expertise across the following areas:
 - An understanding of how to work around issues of sexual violence, sexual exploitation and domestic violence.
 - An understanding of the additional risks and complexities that gang-association presents and practical knowledge of how to risk assess and safety plan around these issues.
 - High quality skills in building strong and positive relationships, supporting the development of young women’s self-esteem, and adopting empowerment-based ways of working

²¹ Centre for Mental Health (May 2013) A need to belong, p.25

²² A Corry, D, Dhami, K, Hudson, I, Moore, K & Powhare, T (2007) Why women only? The value and benefit of by women, for women services. Women’s Resource Centre

- An understanding of the impact of prolonged maltreatment, victimization and of trauma. Agencies will need protocols and good quality links with engaging therapeutic and trauma-based services promoting progress and recovery.
- An understanding of the impact of multiple risks on young women and of the wraparound and multi-faceted gender-specific approaches promoting exit from gang associated lifestyles.
- Good knowledge of issues which may increase vulnerability and/or links to other forms of VAWG such as forced marriage and “honour”-based violence.
- Good understanding of coercion and other factors that underpin young women/girl’s offending and an understanding of the female-specific risks driving gang involvement.
- Expertise in working with young women and girls from BAME backgrounds.
- Expertise around safeguarding processes, procedures and policies.

There are very few agencies that have expertise across all of these areas so organisations should be encouraged to work in partnership to develop and deliver effective programmes that meet the needs of young women and girls.

- **Best practice/quality assurance** – although there are not yet any best practice models or quality assurance frameworks for this area of work, agencies who have received accreditation or are working towards national service standards across other projects/services are more likely to have the relevant professional standards and ethos to deliver work with gang-associated young women and girls. A thorough vetting process should also be undertaken to ensure that agencies/individuals commissioned to undertake work with gang-associated women and girls do not have a history of perpetrating sexual or domestic violence.
- **Positive role models & relationships**- programmes for young women and girls should teach and role model healthy and respectful romantic and sexual relationships.
- **Flexible women-centred support** – services should be flexible and tailored around the needs of young women and girls. They should empower young women and girls to have a greater voice in service provision to influence the way their needs are met. Service user feedback should be routinely collected to inform future delivery.
- **Age appropriate** – Programmes and services for young women and girls should be age-appropriate. Adult VAWG services are not likely to be appropriate for younger women. Interventions and programmes should seek to maximise engagement with younger women through outreach and creative engagement tactics. Young women and girls should be involved in or consulted on the development and delivery of interventions to ensure they are age appropriate and meet their needs.
- **Targeted and holistic interventions**- a one size fits all approach is inadequate. Interventions should be targeted. Gang-associated young women and girls require holistic support to address the multiplicity of girls’ experiences, risks and needs (including immediate safety concerns and practical difficulties, recent and previous experiences of sexual violence

and abuse and other forms of VAWG; trauma and other mental health issues, physical and sexual health issues, substance misuse, education, training and employment needs and issues around self-esteem and confidence).

Types of services that should be offered

- Prevention work/healthy relationships that covers gang-association and VAWG delivered in schools, PRUs and in out of school youth-based settings.
- Early intervention and diversionary work such as mentoring and peer support to support young women on the peripheries of gangs.
- Crisis support such as advocacy, exit provision that is safe and provided by women that addresses the holistic needs of young women and girls (as above).
- Longer-term support such as specialist counselling to support young women and girls to overcome the trauma of gang-associated VAWG. Counselling services should be specialised as inappropriate responses can exacerbate the effects of sexual violence as they can damage the victim's positive sense of self or lead to higher levels of psychological symptoms and poorer recovery.²³
- Interventions to promote self-esteem and confidence.
- Education, training and employment opportunities tailored for young women and girls. A women-centred approach to education, training and employment should be about ensuring young women and girls have access to a broad and diverse range of opportunities and that appropriate systems and support are put in place to address their specific needs.

²³ Sexual Violence Research Initiative (2007) Rape: How women, the community and the health sector respond. World Health Organisation.

A study of more than 300 survivors found that women who received negative social reactions on disclosing adult sexual assault, had more severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. In contrast, survivors who had someone believe their account of what happened to them and were allowed to talk freely about the assault, considered these reactions to be healing and had fewer physical and emotional health problems (Lievore, D. (2005) No longer silent: a study of women's help-seeking decisions and service responses to sexual assault.)

E. WORKING WITH MEN AND BOYS TO CHALLENGE THEIR ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS WOMEN AND GIRLS

It is not possible to effectively respond to the issues faced by gang-associated women and girls without work to address negative attitudes and behaviour amongst men and boys.

As highlighted in the Female Voice in Violence research, men and boys accessing universal services rarely have their attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls challenged. Even services targeting men and boys engaged in gangs and serious youth violence do not challenge negative attitudes or comments around violence against women and girls.²⁴

A joint inspection by the probation, police, prison, education, health, care and social services inspectorates recently highlighted that the early indicators of sexually abusive behaviour by young men and boys often against their peers or younger children are too often disbelieved, denied or minimized and treated as a “one off” by both professionals and families.²⁵

Professionals and agencies working with male gang members across both the statutory and voluntary sectors should be trained on VAWG to ensure that they have the expertise and skills to challenge negative behaviour and attitudes towards women and girls. A failure to address negative notions of masculinity and harmful attitudes is a missed opportunity to influence young men’s attitudes towards women and girls and in some cases can perpetuate negative attitudes. If this is not addressed it means that interventions to tackle one policy priority i.e. gangs and serious youth violence may undermine another policy priority, VAWG.

Core principles and minimum standards for undertaking work with gang-associated men and boys

- Before awarding contracts to the voluntary and community sector, commissioners should undertake a thorough vetting process to ensure that professionals within an agency do not have a history of perpetrating VAWG and that professionals promote positive attitudes towards women and girls. CRB checks are unlikely to identify all individuals that would be inappropriate role models so thought needs to be given as to how this information could be obtained.
- Agencies should have knowledge and awareness of VAWG and demonstrate an ability to work with young men and boys around these issues, to act as positive role models, foster equal and respectful attitudes towards women and girls.
- Agencies should have a VAWG policy which outlines how staff are expected to respond to any disclosures of VAWG from men and boys including who the information should be shared with if there is a young women/girl at risk, how to challenge/tackle the behaviour disclosed and who to refer onto.
- The content of projects and programmes for men and boys should not contain activities or materials which foster negative attitudes towards women and girls or which objectify and sexualize women and girls.

²⁴ ROTA (March 2011) Female Voice in Violence Final Report. This is it. This is my life, p.82

²⁵ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (February 2013) Examining Multi-agency Responses to children and young people who sexually offend. A Joint Inspection of the effectiveness of multi-agency work with children and young people in England and Wales who have committed sexual offences and were supervised in the community.

- Professionals working with male gang members should receive training on VAWG delivered by a specialist VAWG agency and links should be established with local VAWG projects to ensure on-going partnership work, training and support can be provided around VAWG issues.
- Agencies delivering work with men and boys should ensure that they have VAWG representation on their governance structures.
- Agencies working on gangs should also build good links with organisations delivering high quality interventions for young men involved in sexually harmful behaviour and those working with domestic violence perpetrators and staff should receive training on both of these areas to ensure that they have the skills to identify and work around these issues.

CHECKLIST TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO GIRLS AND GANGS

<p>Leadership</p>
<p>Local Community Safety Partnerships should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that they integrate and address the needs of gang-associated women and girls in local ending gang and youth violence strategies and through service commissioning. • Develop an integrated VAWG strategy which addresses the specific needs of gang-associated women and girls. • Work together to develop a shared vision, strategic priorities, outcomes and targets for gang-associated women and girls across the partnership and allocate resources accordingly. • Explore opportunities for multi-sector commissioning to fund initiatives that meet the needs of gang-associated women and girls on a sustainable basis. • Consider putting in place strategic-level training on gang-associated women and girls for senior staff and members of the CSP to support the partnership in developing an effective approach across all agencies. • Consider establishing a multiagency working group reporting into the Community Safety Partnership to drive forward and coordinate activity around gang-associated women and girls.
<p>Local safeguarding children boards should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with gangs and VAWG partnerships locally to ensure that any policies and strategies relating to children and young people also cover gang-associated women and girls.
<p>Directors of Public Health should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the needs of gang-associated women and girls are captured through the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and inform the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (See box on p.13).
<p>Partnership</p>
<p>Community Safety Partnerships should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review governance arrangements for local gangs boards/partnerships to ensure there is appropriate membership from relevant sectors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Is there at least one VAWG representative on the CSP, Health & Wellbeing Board, local safeguarding board and any other strategic partnerships working on gangs?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Is there at least one representative from the gangs sector sitting on VAWG strategic partnership?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure strategic coordination across the different policy areas through strengthening linkages and communication channels between the different partnerships?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the membership of operational risk assessment partnerships such as gangs panels and ensure that there are information sharing protocols and systems in place to share relevant information between relevant risk assessment panels e.g. between gangs panels and Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACS) (, Multi-agency Public Protections Arrangements (MAPPA) , Multi-agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) and Integrated Offender Management (IOM) .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop local information-sharing protocols to enable the safe sharing of information between sexual health, other health services (mental health, GPs and substance misuse) the VCS and statutory agencies. Work with agencies across different sectors to develop “defined and agreed outcomes” and reinforce to multi-sector partners why addressing the needs of gang-associated girls is important to their outcomes frameworks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider ways of improving the partnership working between the gangs, VAWG, health, education, housing and safeguarding sectors and improving awareness of the issues facing gang-associated women and girls by coordinating networking events, workshops and training for practitioners.
<p>Understanding and mapping the problem</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The London Safeguarding Children Board should consider working with local safeguarding children boards to identify any local cases where gang-associated girls have experienced or been involved in serious violence or exploitation and undertake a review to identify any lessons learnt to inform future practice. The findings should be shared across the partnership to ensure that professionals improve practice in this area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local CSPs should undertake an information collection exercise to draw together all of the available intelligence across different agencies and identify any evidence gaps.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local CSPs could also consider undertaking or commissioning a piece of research to address any evidence gaps or focus groups with young women and

girls to better understand the extent, profile and needs of gang-associated girls locally.

Identification, assessment and safeguarding

- Local CSPs should adopt the ACPO/GMP definition of gang-associated women and girls to assist with the identification and assessment of women and girls at risk.
- Undertake a review of historic cases that meet this definition to review any lessons learnt. This could be enhanced with agency/role specific training to build the capacity of professionals to respond.
- Local authorities should work with police and other partners to map all gang-associated women and girls (as per agreed definition) that are linked to their known gang nominal and safely log all available information on them.
- Police should work with key partners, particularly specialist VAWG sector partners, to risk assess gang-associated women and girls for sexual violence and exploitation, domestic violence and other forms of VAWG including forced marriage and HBV.
- Police, the London Safeguarding Children Board, local safeguarding boards and specialist VAWG organisations should work together to develop local safeguarding procedures and referral pathways for gang-associated women and girls based on the revised national safeguarding guidance on children that are affected by gangs.
- Local safeguarding children's board should coordinate/develop training for key frontline professionals on gang-associated women and girls to raise awareness of the risk indicators, how to respond and local referral pathways.
- Safeguarding, health and community safety partners should work together to put in place specialist training for MASH staff on indicators of gang-associated VAWG and sexual exploitation and are aware of which datasets to check to identify any further information about possible risks and dangers faced by gang-associated girls.

APPENDICES – PROMISING PRACTICE

Examples of promising practice

This section includes a number of examples of girls and gangs projects that have been developed and are funded in a number of London boroughs which are examples of promising practice.

1. Ms Understood Partnership

The MsUnderstood Partnership has been founded by Carlene Firmin, the author of the Female Voice in Violence reports. It brings together the University of Bedfordshire, Imkaan, and the Girls Against Gangs Project to address young people's experiences of gender inequality by influencing the development of policy, practice and research. Building on analysis of MPS and CPS case files, and the broader research into VAWG, gang-associated and serious youth violence, and child sexual exploitation, the partnership has been funded from 2013-2016 to improve local and national responses to peer-on-peer abuse through:

- Free strategic and operational support to three local areas for three years to improve the prevention, identification and handling of peer-on-peer abuse cases
- A national assessment of provision for boys and young men
- Paid internships and volunteer opportunities to engage young women in service, policy and research development

For further information please contact carlene@msunderstood.org.uk or visit www.msunderstood.org.uk

2. Young Women's Advocacy Project, Women & Girls Network

The role of the Advocate is to support young women (11-18 years) who have been victims or are at risk of sexual violence and/or sexual exploitation with a focus on association with gangs offering immediate crisis intervention, safety planning and risk management, support through the court system, emotional and advocacy support.

The Advocate works from an empowerment and strengths based approach and uses the Change Model in all aspects of work she undertakes that include:

- 1-2-1 casework/support
- Advice to young women, friends, family and professionals via drop-in sessions, phone and email.
- Prevention and early intervention workshops/support groups to young women.
- School/community based prevention programme that focuses on increasing young people's awareness of the prevalence and impact of sexual assault.
- Professional Exchange Seminars to frontline staff in the West London Boroughs around Girls and Gangs.
- Strategic and Partnership work with key agencies in the borough to identify and respond to this client group.

WGN offers a wraparound service for young women accessing support and a fast-track system for women to be internally referred to WGN's Counselling service.

Values and Principles of YWA Service

- A Young Women's Need Led service.
- Gender Responsive.
- Young Women Centered.
- Philosophy of empowerment.
- Safety is paramount.
- Consent.
- Confidentiality.
- Multi-Agency Working.
- Anti-discriminatory Practice
- Specialist Young Women's Holistic Empowerment Model: Is a strengths and resilience based approach with multifocal individualised interventions aimed at personal empowerment. The model incorporates five key stages related to promoting: safety, stabilisation, relational engagement and positive enhancement. The model provides resources and tools such as grounding exercises, self-care techniques and explores healthy relationships to support recovery and build positive futures.

Casework

Clients present with a range of experiences of sexual violence including: multiple assailant rape, sexual exploitation, sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Presenting issues include severe trauma, complex needs, dual diagnosis, PTSD, depression, self-harming behaviours, suicidal ideation, sleeping and eating disorders, low self-esteem and confidence. For further information please visit the Women and Girls Network website <http://www.wgn.org.uk/>

3. Safe Choices, Nia

'Safe Choices' provides 1:1 intensive support and group work to young women who may be experiencing, or at risk of: sexual violence; sexual exploitation; gang involvement or gang association; and / or violent offending.

Safe Choices is a gender-specific approach that works with young women who are frequently exposed to multiple risk factors that can lead to poor life chances, and leave them vulnerable to abuse, violence and exploitation, as well as involvement in criminal activity. They are often alienated from other services and may not trust adults easily. The Safe Choices programme focuses on developing resilience and building positive support networks, whilst addressing issues of sexual violence and where necessary challenging patterns of offending behaviour to support young women to achieve positive outcomes. The project creates a space for young women to support each other, consider their options and make informed choices in relation to their lives, aspirations and relationships.

Safe Choices places a lot of value on building trust and developing a positive relationship between the individual young woman and the Safe Choices project worker. 1:1 sessions centre around the needs of the young woman, and offer a space where she can talk about what's going on in her life, think about her interests, and access positive activities such as drama, photography and sports. Project workers also provide advocacy for the young woman in relation to other agencies and run sessions on 'Networks and Destinations' in order to ensure appropriate, on-going support beyond the life of the project.

Safe Choices runs group work in schools and pupil referral units, and in youth, community and custodial settings. Topics covered include: sexual violence and exploitation; girls, gangs and risk; anger; identity and consequences. The group work is very interactive and the sessions promote an ethos of co-operation, shared learning and building trust, listening to each other respectfully and valuing each other's experiences and views.

'Safe Choices' also works with professionals to promote the value of a gender-specific approach. The project offers a range of training options, including one-day multi-agency awareness-raising, a 3-day training course in delivering Safe Choices, and bespoke training courses.

Feedback from Safe Choices projects:

'After the first session, I was excited for the next session to come. Your first thought is, is this about gangs, and you don't want to be classed as a gang member so you're sceptical, but it's not... I found out a lot through this course, but what I found out the most was my own value as a woman, my rights and what others are going through. I would encourage anyone to do this course... brilliant mentors... The best thing about this course is I learnt a lot about things I thought I knew about. If you take the chance to give Safe Choices a go I am sure you will enjoy it as much as I have!'

Jade, Group Work participant, HMP Holloway

'I am very pleased with the programme that was delivered to the girls. The activities and discussion allowed the girls to express their own thoughts and opinions, and the girls all felt that this was one of the main factors which made the group enjoyable and successful. I found the sessions to be very interactive and flexible to the needs of the group. Each session had a purpose and each topic was delivered very well so that all the young women were engaged in the activity. Following the group work all the girls have shown that there has been a positive impact and they have a better understanding of particular issues affecting them. Consequences and anger are the two main topics which had a general impact on all of the girls and how they conduct themselves within school. All the young women found the sessions enjoyable and I would definitely like to consider delivering the programme again to a different group of girls, possibly in the next academic year with the new year 10's.'

Angela, Teacher, Islington secondary school

(names have been changed)

For further information please contact visit the Nia website <http://www.niaendingviolence.org.uk/>

4. Empower Programme

Empower is a support programme addressing young women's experiences of sexual violence and exploitation, primarily through gangs. A prevention and intervention programme, it places vulnerable young women aged 11-18 at the core of its support framework and empowers them to make positive life choices.

Central to their delivery model is to have their Empower workers embedded within Local Authority co-located multi-agency teams to support the identification and appropriate support for young women at serious risk of, or experiencing sexual violence. The specialist team also works closely with local authority

colleagues to support strategic and operational planning and to develop clear and robust referral and progression pathways for young women.

The Empower team has representation on a variety of operational and strategic groups across community safety and Children and Families services within the boroughs as well as representation on pan-London strategic and policy level groups.

Our model works within a 'strengths and resilience' based framework that is young person centred. We focus on identifying and building on the strengths and capacities of the young person and use this as an initial method of engagement. Staffs have completed OCN accredited training delivered by AVA and Women & Girls network and use the holistic support model that was shared through this training. This is a five stage trauma based approach.

The Empower programme is operational in nine London boroughs and has supported over 1,200 young people and 700 professionals.

The delivery model consists of six strands:

- Strand 1: One-to-One intensive support for young women
- Strand 2: Young People's Advocates
- Strand 3: Young women's group work programme
- Strand 4: Young men's group work programme
- Strand 5: Workshops for parents and carers
- Strand 6: Local borough CSEGG specialist advice, support and guidance. Professionals training

Programme feedback includes:

Feedback from young women on what they learnt:

"That I can trust people and don't have to keep things bottled up"

"About girls and rape"

"Knowing my rights"

"Self-respect and about peer pressure and how to say no"

"It helps you get over fears – to speak in groups"

"You get to talk about your feelings more freely"

"It helped me and it would help others solve their problems"

Feedback from young men:

"My thinking and behaviour has changed. Been able to walk away from fights and keep my cool"

"It teaches you to be careful and treat girls right"

"It helped me improve my relationships more"

Feedback from partner agencies:

"My experience of Safer London is that their partnership work is sound and robust. They are able to work flexibly and collaboratively with partners and to build strong relationships that assist in navigating existing services and structures" (YOS operational Manager – Gangs)

"The number of exclusions has reduced and punctuality is better" (School Inclusion Manager)

"This is a session that the group respect, think highly of and genuinely believe covers some of the issues that directly affect them as young women" (School Learning Mentor)

Contact Lisa Bellis, Senior Programme Manager, Empower

Visit www.saferlondonfoundation.org, Empower Programme page:
<http://www.saferlondonfoundation.org/projectfull.php?p=14>

5. Growing against Gangs and Violence (GAGV) – a preventative education programme for schools

GAGV is an academically structured and evaluated early intervention and prevention partnership with the MPS which delivers gangs resistance and positive life skills education to young people with three goals: (a) to reduce gang membership and association, (b) to reduce serious youth violence, and (c) to improve confidence of young people in police. The GAGV programme is currently targeted at London's EGYV Boroughs. As of July 2013, GAGV had been delivered in 14 London boroughs to more than 35,000 young people, in over 300 schools. This equates to over 135,000 pupil hours of positive, academically prepared and evaluated preventative engagement.

Sessions are universally delivered across school year groups to educate and inform the widest population of young people. Delivery of GAGV does not imply a school has a “gang problem”, but rather the school is committed to tackling gang culture. GAGV is a coordinated and integrated approach supported by local authorities, ensuring no financial cost to schools where GAGV is funded to deliver.

The GAGV programme is delivered across primary and secondary schools, PRUs and other educational setting with age appropriate curricula from Year 6 to Year 10, inclusive. It is highly regarded by hundreds of schools and educators across London.

What sessions do GAGV offer that directly relate to Girls and Gangs:

1) Girls, Gangs & Consequences (Year 10)

Academically developed in partnership with Victim Support and the MPS this 100 minute session separates boys and girls to address gender-specific issues and assist young people in making safer choices without fear of discussing sex and sexuality in front of peers of the opposite sex. The session challenges victim blaming, popular “rape myths”, and the glamorisation of gang members. Realistic consent scenarios illustrate risky situations in which boys and girls may find themselves and demonstrate what is required for true consent. Participants also review unequal power relationships, risk and reward in decision making, personal responsibilities, preventing victimisation, the investigative and disciplinary processes for sexual violence cases and the consequences for rape and for seeking reprisal against the victim. Students explore the antecedents of abusive domestic relationships, explore positive relationships and identify what they would look for in a romantic partner.

Specific referral pathways and signposting to local authority/support services are provided to schools to enable on-going support to students where appropriate. Session delivery is by specially trained GAGV facilitator, supported by Victim Support or Rape Crisis Youth Worker(s).

Is the Girls, Gangs and Consequences session evaluated?

It is subject to high level Academic Review by Professor Miranda Horvath of Middlesex University and this session was also referred to as best practice in the Home Secretary's *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* report to Parliament (2011).

The GAGV programme is validated to Oracle Level 2 status. Starting in October 2013, GAGV has commissioned a full academic outcome evaluation that includes both intermediate outcomes such as attitudes and knowledge concerning gangs, delinquency, and police, as well as behavioural outcomes including delinquency and gang membership.

2) Anti-Social Media' Session – “What happens online can hurt you offline” (Year 8/9)

This half-day session, academically developed in partnership with Goldsmiths College, University of London, examines peer-on-peer bullying and the communicative role of smart phones and social media in coordinating gang activity and sexual violence. The aim is to improve Internet safety and raise awareness of how young people utilise technology to advertise, conspire, organise, boast and taunt, but in doing so make themselves and others vulnerable to police scrutiny and rival predation. On route, they explore how violent media acts as a “facilitator” for people already prone to violence— we demonstrate how popular culture does not cause gang membership but rather provides a style for how gang membership is performed and a lens through which young people interpret their lives.

This session further explores how mobile phones are integral to young people’s lives and why their on-line and off-line worlds are increasingly linked, which presents real dangers and challenges. In turn, they examine cyber-bullying, victim blaming, “sexting”, sexual exploitation, and the distribution of child pornography. Students will identify the role of bullies, bystanders, and allies in violence and develop the refusal skills and confidence necessary to challenge and report inappropriate behaviour. Referral pathways and signposting to support services are provided to students and school staff. Delivery is by a trained GAGV facilitator.

Contact Strategic lead Nick Mason, OBE on nick.mason@gagv.co.uk or MPS Inspector Allen Davis on allen.davis@met.police.uk.

Other formats and languages

For a large print, Braille, disc, sign language video or audio-tape version of this document, please contact us at the address below:

MOPAC

Greater London Authority Telephone **020 7983 6532**
 City Hall
 The Queen's Walk **www.london.gov.uk/policing**
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 London SE1 2AA

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Chinese

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 請致電以下號碼或與下列地址聯絡

Hindi

यदि आप इस दस्तावेज की प्रति अपनी
 भाषा में चाहते हैं, तो कृपया निम्नलिखित
 नंबर पर फोन करें अथवा नीचे दिये गये
 पते पर संपर्क करें

Vietnamese

Nếu bạn muốn có bản bản tài liệu
 này bằng ngôn ngữ của mình, hãy
 liên hệ theo số điện thoại hoặc địa
 chỉ dưới đây.

Bengali

আপনি যদি আপনার ভাষায় এই দলিলের প্রতিলিপি
 (কপি) চান, তা হলে নীচের ফোন নম্বরে
 বা ঠিকানায় অনুগ্রহ করে যোগাযোগ করুন।

Greek

Αν θέλετε να αποκτήσετε αντίγραφο του παρόντος
 εγγράφου στη δική σας γλώσσα, παρακαλείστε να
 επικοινωνήσετε τηλεφωνικά στον αριθμό αυτό ή ταχυ-
 δρομικά στην παρακάτω διεύθυνση.

Urdu

اگر آپ اس دستاویز کی نقل اپنی زبان میں
 چاہتے ہیں، تو براہ کرم نیچے دئے گئے نمبر
 پر فون کریں یا دیئے گئے پتے پر رابطہ کریں

Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinizde
 hazırlanmış bir nüshasını
 edinmek için, lütfen aşağıdaki
 telefon numarasını arayınız
 veya adrese başvurunuz.

Arabic

إذا أردت نسخة من هذه الوثيقة بلغتك، يرجى
 الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو مراسلة العنوان
 أدناه

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦੀ ਕਾਪੀ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ
 ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਹੇਠ
 ਲਿਖੇ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਰਾਬਤਾ ਕਰੋ:

Gujarati

જો તમને આ દસ્તાવેજની નકલ તમારી ભાષામાં
 જોઈતી હોય તો, કૃપા કરી આપેલ નંબર ઉપર
 ફોન કરો અથવા નીચેના સરનામે સંપર્ક સાધો.