Knife Crime scrutiny review

Foreword: Councillor Jasmine Ali

The Education and Children’s Scrutiny Committee asked children and young people in Southwark what they would like us to scrutinise. They told us they were deeply troubled by the high instances of knife crime in London.

Knife Crime is a very sad and grave issue and something that I know is an urgent concern to our communities in Southwark and across London.

It is a phenomenon that is growing, that drags young people into a cycle of tragedy that is heart-breaking for everyone directly involved.

Last year in Southwark alone we witnessed an 11% increase in Violence Against the Person offences. For the period June to May 2018 Southwark saw a 0.35% decrease in knife crime offences compared to the same period the previous year. Overall the Metropolitan Police reported an increase of 16.7% during this period. Yet even with this decrease, Southwark remains one of the boroughs with the highest incidence in knife crime in the capital.

Both the Council and Southwark’s diverse communities are rallying together to address the problem of knife crime and the wider issue of youth violence. In the course of this review an event at All Saints Church, Peckham, was held to combat knife crime, which has influenced the report. We are grateful to Community TV Trust, community organisations and Cavendish School pupils who created the short films showcased at the event, referred to in the review.

The Education and Children’s Scrutiny sub-committee held a one-day scrutiny event to look into this terrible problem. We packed out one of the pods in the Peckham Library with standing room only. A diverse section of the community attended the sessions which heard evidence from the deputy director dealing with Knife Crime at the GLA, the Southwark Cabinet member for Community Safety, people from the Youth Council, young people with experience of gangs and officers from the council dealing with related issues of youth violence, safeguarding and sexual exploitation.

I would like to thank Julie Timbrell our Scrutiny manager, all of the speakers and every one of the participants from the local community who actively joined in on this deep dive into knife crime. For everyone that took part, the ‘scrutiny in a day’ was not just about holding local politicians and officers to account but about developing policy initiatives ourselves, working together to strengthen our community’s response.

- We urgently want to identify real causes
- We urgently want to look for those reactions that we know can help reduce the threat and the incidence of knife crime.
- And we urgently want to find ways to mend the hurt to our communities.
The hurt we all feel brought our communities together and the results are documented in the attached paper which, if implemented, will help us forge safer, stronger communities in the future.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 This is the final report of the scrutiny review into Knife Crime. The Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee decided to conduct a review in July 2017. The aim of the review is to make recommendations to the Cabinet, the Southwark Children’s Safeguarding Board and the police.

1.2 The review set out to address these issues in particular.

- How to best safeguard young people in care from knife crime & knife carrying (with a focus on young people in need because of social / emotional deprivation & mental health needs).
- The links between knife crime, girls, gangs and Child Sexual Exploitation
- How best to work with schools, including primary schools, and the community to reduce and respond to knife crime
- Engaging young people and youth services in preventing knife crime and knife carrying (particularly the Youth Council, voluntary & statutory youth service)
- Wider strategies and good practice in combating violence, in particular Scotland and the WHO Public Health approach to tackling knife crime and violence

1.3 The sub-committee chose this subject in response to the recent rise in incidents of knife crime and the terrible impact knife crime injuries and deaths have had on young people and their families, in particular. Knife Crime a big concern within the local community. There is also widespread anxiety amongst young people, families and schools about the extent of knife crime and knife carrying, associated with a strong desire to reverse the present trend and work to end knife crime.

1.4 Previous sub-committee reviews into Mental Health, Care Leavers and achievement in school committee have all touched on youth violence. There is evidence that young people are more at risk of knife crime if social, mental health and educational issues are not addressed.

1.5 After a drop in knife crime incidents, in the early years of this decade, the UK and London has seen a reversal of this trend.

1.6 In the year ending March 2017, there were 34,700 offences involving a knife or sharp instrument in England and Wales. This is the highest number in the seven-year series (from year ending March 2011) the earliest point for which comparable data is available.
1.7 In the 12 months to March 2017 there were over 12,000 knife crimes recorded in London. The latest Metropolitan Police statistics to March 2018 show this is still rising by 21%.

![Recorded Crime Count - London](image1.png)

1.8 There were 314 incidents of ‘knife crime with injury’ in Southwark during 2017-18, compared to 255 in 2016-17: a rise of 23% per cent.

![Recorded Crime Count - Southwark](image2.png)

1.9 The last year has seen significant steps by both the Mayor of London, local police and the council to tackle knife crime. There is both a Mayor of London knife crime strategy, and a Southwark Knife Crime and Knife Carrying action plan. The latter is a joint priority for the Southwark Safeguarding Adults’ Board (SSAB) and Southwark Children’s Board (SSCB). In Southwark two scrutiny
committees and the Youth Council have all identified tackling knife crime as a priority.

1.10 At the same time the Metropolitan Police’s anti knife crime initiative Operation Sceptre has publicly recognized its own weakness in engaging with communities most affected by youth violence.

1.11 The Mayor of London has provided a good overview in his report, and identified trends such as men and the BAME community being significantly more at risk, and that although women are less likely to be victims and significantly less likely to be perpetrators there are some worrying trends around domestic abuse and CSE.

EVIDENCE CONSIDERED

Committee meeting

2.1 On 5 September 2017 the review first received a paper from Southwark officers and lead member, Cllr Barrie Hargrove, setting out current work being carried out by local statutory agencies to tackle knife crime in Southwark and the recently published Knife Crime and Knife Carrying action plan, and a discussion was held with the committee.

Outreach

2.2 A community event addressing Knife Crime was attended. This was organized by Rev Jonathan Mortimer, of All Saints Church in Peckham and Chris Haydon, Chair of Peckham Settlement and director of Community TV Trust. The evening of story telling featured an update on Operation Sceptre, with Dr Victor Olisa QPM, along with contributions from retired detectives, serving community and safety officers; ex-offenders, ex-gang leaders; an aspiring boxer from Camberwell, two filmmakers, an artist/entrepreneur, young people at school in Bermondsey, an England boxer recently in the news; a local theatre company using forum theatre techniques; a representative of IAG and a Stop & Search consultant and local residents.

‘Scrutiny in A Day’ event was held on 21 March 2018 on ending Knife Crime

2.3.1 The event was opened by Sophie Linden, London’s Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, London, who presented on the London Knife Crime Strategy. Councillor Barrie Hargrove, Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety and Leisure and Southwark Borough Commander Simon Messinger spoke about Southwark’s Knife Crime and Knife Carrying action plan. Southwark Youth Council representatives, Hannah Olomola and Tobi Ayeni spoke briefly about knife crime, voted a top concern by Southwark young people. Quince Garcia contributed to the panel discussion on breaking the offending and reoffending cycle. An informed and lively audience debated the issues with the panel participants. (See appendix 1)

2.3.2 Two workshops were held: on: a) Community workshop on prevention and support and b) intersections between girls, gangs, and CSE and knife crime
2.3.3 The community workshop brought people together to share different perspectives on causes, impact, responses and alternatives, listening to what is working well and what needs to be done differently. Considering:

• The root causes and how we might tackle them
• The ripple effects on the whole community
• How we can better respond as a community when traumatic incidents happen
• What fresh approaches we can take to help prevent future tragedies

(See appendix 2)

2.3.4 The workshop on the intersections between girls, gangs, CSE and knife crime first heard from leads from the Police, Council and voluntary sector on Anti Violence work, CSE and recent work in the community (see appendix 3)

Background research

2.4 Background research was done on Scotland Violence Reduction Unit & World Health Organization’s work on taking a Public Health approach to violence and statistical information available from government sources.

3.0 Main issues

Youth violence, crime and gangs

The London Knife Crime Strategy notes that most knife crime is robbery or street violence, and their research said that the most common reason young people give for holding a knife is perceived protection from this threat. Other reasons given to carry a knife are to increase status or to commit a crime.

This report states that recent data suggests that the majority of knife crime is not gang-related; with gang flagged crime accounting for 5% of all knife crime with injury during 2016 – down from almost 9% in the preceding year. However, gang-related knife crimes are usually of a more violent nature than other knife related offending.

National data trends indicted that robbery is actually decreasing, however uses of a knife for the purpose of committing a rape or a sexual offence and threats to kill and attempted homicide have risen significantly. This review did not look at national increases to sexual offences and the link with knife crime to see if this was a significant issue for Southwark and it did not feature in discussions held.

Anecdotal evidence from the police, ex-gang members, and young people and youth leaders at the events all pointed to the drugs trade and other criminal enterprises as a significant driver for violent crime, and that young people were turning to this, in part, because of a combination of poverty, a lack of opportunities or self belief. A youth leader commented that we now have groups of young people in London who have decided they will not be successful and that they are adopting other approaches to raising revenue that unfortunately involve serious violence.

The other driver mentioned was role of social media in escalating disputes, particularly posting of YouTube videos. Ex-offenders and local residents at the All Saint Church
event cited concerns over Drill music; hyper local music videos where groups of young people rap, with the images and lyrics referencing local neighborhoods, drug dealing and threats of violence, on occasions to identifiable opposing individuals and revile groups/ gangs. Police do sometimes remove these videos. Young people present at the All Saint Church event criticized this as curtailing one of the few creative outlets available and that the music business offers a legitimate route out of poverty. However, ex- offenders/ gang members supported there removal by the police when they depicted actual threats. Recent events in Southwark have seen lethal and non lethal violence that involves people associated with some Drill videos and particular gangs/ groups of young people that are known to be in dispute.

Community TV Trust's worked with Cavendish School and its pupils to creating short video in which pupils spoke openly. Young people said it was common knowledge that certain groups of young people were in conflict and who they were.

Other people cited the positive role of music in youth culture. Drill’s aesthetic is to depict the reality of young people lives; with young people defending the genre as reflecting the real challenges they face. While much Drill music appears nihilist there are alternative types of Drill music, most notably ‘Gospel Drill’ with a very different ethos – both types are big in Southwark. Music, art and writing were also cited as ways for people to express and come to terms with psychological and social issues, and improve mental health.

Community TV Trust's worked with Cavendish School and its pupils to creating short video to show at the All Saints Event, in which pupils spoke openly and powerfully about the issues. Young people said it was common knowledge that certain groups of young people were in conflict and who they were.

Mental Health

A pediatric doctor at the scrutiny event at Peckham Library highlighted that many of the young people involved in knife crime have frequently experienced many Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). ACEs include domestic abuse, emotional and physical abuse and neglect, bullying, parental separation, family substance misuse.

Scotland’s Public Health response to violence identified that prevention of ACEs could lead to a 52% reduction in perpetration of crime and 51% reduction of victimization.

Apart from prevention of ACEs there are other protective factors for young people; children who have at least one stable and positive relationship with a close adult appears to be protective them from the worst effects of ACEs.

Access to timely support from Early Help and more intensive support from CAMHS is important and there were concerns about the level of support for young people who did not meet high thresholds, due to steady reduction in funding.

All the professionals emphasized the importance of partnership work and sharing information in order to help young people most at risk: the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) undertake this work.
Offenders and those at the edge of offending will often need help with Mental Health; both therapeutic, community and faith support was cited as effective in making significant changes to mental health, attitude and lifestyle.

Child Sexual Exploitation

The majority of young people at risk from CSE are girls; and young men are usually the perpetrators. On average Southwark perpetrators are about 18 years old and victims about 14. The young women involved often have low self esteem and crave attention. Mental health is frequently an issue; girls are often in Snowfield and also drug use is frequently a problem, particularly strong strains of cannabis.

Professional said that exploitation is the common theme with gangs and girls can be used to carry knives and pay drug debts through sexual favours / coercion. There are networks that tend to perpetrate CSE, which are very similar to gangs and interlink. Police officers present at the workshop said that the more they engage with CSE the more they understand how much it intersects with other types of criminal exploitation.

MASE is a multi agency hub that works with around 50 young people at high risk - mainly girls, however there are a few boys.

The workshop heard reports of boys being targeted for sexual humiliation as a result of gang activity and rivalry; police said this is more used as a tactic to silence and degrade. This is traumatic and can lead later down the line to acting out. Frequently perpetrators have also been victims.

There are wider cohorts of girls at risk of CSE who may not be known by services or do not reach the threshold required for intensive protection. Southwark have a ‘make safe’ programme aimed at the wider community, such as taxi drivers, to enable the community to be aware of risks and take protective action. Services also undertake contextual safeguarding where they look at signs of abuse in certain localities. More work needs to be done with schools to tackle CSE.

The police go into schools and reported that there are unhealthy attitudes to sexual relationships amongst teenagers and as early as Year 9, and at this age exploitation has become normalized among some young people e.g. buying gifts for favours. The service has some excellent resources to tackle CSE, including a pack on CSE developed with Bubble Theatre.

Online grooming was discussed in the workshop. Social care officers said this needs careful handling as nowadays we are all very attached to our mobile phones. The danger with banning is that inappropriate relationships can go underground; rather the emphasis ought to be more about forming trusted relationships with young people so they can disclose risks and be supported in developing healthy relationships.

There was general consensus that more needs to be done at an earlier age to tackle CSE and the intersection with knife crime, in an age appropriate way. Youth workers, church leaders and teachers present all welcomed this, and would welcome more professionals support to work with children, young people and parents.
Youth activities and community engagement

The last decade has seen a significant fall in funds available to local services, including youth work. The council’s lead members and senior officers spoke about difficult decisions they have made to reducing spending and that they have focused funds on youth offenders, and other young people at high risk, while keeping as much face to face generic youth work going as possible.

The All Saints Church event spent significant time showcasing community youth projects; featuring short videos about a community boxing club and Brixton street gym, both of which emphasize the importance of community and providing a place where young people not only keep fit but also develop, make real friends and be supported. These voluntary projects are often explicitly offering an alternative to street life and what were described as the false attractions of gang life, by a young interviewee. Community TV Trust’s worked with Cavendish School and many of the public gave their perspective. Church leaders and youth workers also talked about their work with young people.

There is clearly a community appetite for providing youth and community work to meet the needs of young people at risk; by mentoring, facilitating positive social relationships, and providing opportunities for young people to make the most of their talents as well as diverting young people from offending and other risky behavior. Church youth leaders at events wanted professional input to assist their pastoral work with parents on knife crime and related issues, such as CSE.

The community workshop in Peckham Library explored the impact knife crime had on the participants, whether young people, parents, community volunteers or professionals. It was clear that many people had been deeply affected. Participants welcomed the opportunity to talk and wanted more planned opportunities for people to come together to find solutions. Young people highlighted their ability to reach and influence other young people and their desire to act as conduit. Professionals wanted the involvement of young people in planning to ensure strategies reflected the realities of young people’s lives.

It was noted that when there are incidences of crime knife there needs to be a response to both the victims and the community, when there will often be trauma and sometimes heightened tensions. The council has recently invested in Peer Navigators to work with young people who are impacted by knife crime; officers need to make links with the community so they are deployed effectively when needed.

Young people often know where the flash points are and who is involved, however more thought needs to be given to enable sharing of information safely. There are platforms out there to report issues e.g. Crimestoppers, youth equivalent: ‘Fearless’, and a community enterprise platform in development: HUNCH. However while these solutions and are there they either do not work as well as they could, or are not well known or there are other issues that need to be resolved. This is something that the Southwark Knife Crime and Knife Carrying partnership needs to get to grips with, in collaboration with young people and the wider community.
Prevention: early intervention and schools

Southwark Knife Crime and Knife Carrying partnership was instigated because of a Serious Case Review into Child U+. This highlighted the need for better partnership work amongst professionals involved in helping the young man who died from knife wound.

Schools play a central role in the life of young people and have come to scrutiny in the past sharing their frustrations with being able to effectively refer to CAMHS and to always access appropriate social and employment support for their young people at risk. A headteacher at All Saints Church event detailed the extensive work they do to search for employment and training placements for young people at risk of becoming NEET and disaffected. The council does have an extensive investment in apprenticeships for young people; more still needs to be done to link this programmes with schools and young people in need.

At the other end of the age spectrum young people and professional both spoke about the need to reach children early to provide positive relationship models, to address CSE and knife crime, and ensure that there is wider social and mental health support available for children who need this.

4.0 Recommendations

3.1 The Council continues to support and invests in the continuation of these conversations and events which a) bring people with shared experience together and b) bring people of different age groups and experiences together. There was also a strong feeling that these meetings are promoted throughout the whole community recognising and supporting the power of the community to help to heal and also to come out and take action.

The events ought to be coordinated and ensure that community is empowered and able to mobilise to act.

3.2 There needs to be a coordinated approach to offering a variety of meaningful roles to young people as experts in helping to solve problems and find solutions: as volunteers and paid consultants, mentors, advisers, youth panel members and that these should be coordinated.

Linked to this is a need for the Council and other agencies to continue to ask young people for their ideas, experience and expertise and that they have a variety of ways of continuing to check in with young people about the shaping and development of those ideas. This includes seeing the original idea from its beginning to its implementation - how it is named, how it is publicised. For example, one younger participant suggested that immediately following an attack i.e. when the young person is still at the hospital that they have access to another young person that:

- they may know
- has been trained to listen
- that has understanding of the situation and the issues
may have been through the same experience

It is recommended that the Safeguarding Board facilitate a forum for young people active in this area to come together and that this links the Safeguarding Board’s role in delivering the Knife Crime and Action Plan (KCAP). The forum ought to include the diversity of young people concerned: Change Makers, Southwark Youth Council, Speaker Box, Peer Navigators, young people active in voluntary and church groups etc.

3.3. There is a need for the Council and other agencies to support the community to continue to focus on innovative ways to help young people feel safe.

For example:
- a number they can call/‘speak’ to someone through text or the offer of safe places
- a programme to look at "snitching" or "ratting" so that people can make supported and safe choices about when they can genuinely report something they see that they are worried about that is happening in their community and sharing information without fear of being a "snitch" or a "rat" or a "grass"

A consultation exercise ought to be held with young people that looks at existing arrangements and community provision (e.g. Fearless, Safe haven, HUNCH, Out of Hours social care and youth provision) to see if they are fit for purpose, with a view to ensuring they are revised to meet the needs of young people and that there is then a communication strategy to ensure young people are clear how to report concerns and get help.

3.4. There is a need for a better service for those who are trying to leave a criminal lifestyle, including those who have come out of prison, to get both immediate emotional support and practical support and advice, such as writing CVs, access to benefits.

All the relevant agencies involved: the prison service, VCS and Council (e.g. Anti Violence Unit, YOS, and Mental Health services) ought to ensure that the pathways to leave crime are clear and that there is a high level of awareness available amongst all people who are likely to come into contact with offenders seeking to exit. The prison service ought to lead this work.

3.5. There is a need for the Council and other agencies to prioritise early interventions and recognise how a gradual involvement in a negative cycle can develop. This includes interventions in schools and in the community as early as year 4 that focus on building children’s sense of identity; confidence building; feeling effective; building self esteem and empowering them to make right decisions; recognising and fostering children’s individual talents.

The current Early Help offer to schools ought to be as coherent and coordinated as possible with education leaders in organisations and networks including the council, SASH, primary schools network, academy chains, and church diocese all playing their part to ensure that this happens.
It is universally recognised that young people who have experienced trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences are much more at risk of being involved either as victims or perpetrators of knife crime. Information protocols must be in place so that children at risk are identified early and get the additional support they need.

3.6. **There is a need for staffed services and support to be offered beyond 9-5 on weekdays.** This should be available in the evening, at night and during the weekend, as most of the situations in which young people are most vulnerable and when crime happens, are outside regular working hours.

The council has produced a list of the current youth services its delivers and commissions (see appendix A). There are other services that young people and responsible adult can contact if young person is in immediate danger (e.g. 111). Other services in development are provision of Trusted Adult for young people in need of extra adult input.

A list of all services available to young people, depending on need, ought to be put online so these are coordinated, accessible and visible.

3.7 **Develop a plan for enabling skilled facilitation of workshops on knife crime and related issues (violence reduction, criminal exploitation, and CSE, sex and relationship education) and promoting healthy relationships to take place with children, young people, parents, family members and the wider community.**

Teachers and youth and church leaders at the event said they want to work with their children, young people, parents, grandparents etc. about knife crime and related issues, such as CSE. They would welcome expert help and support to do this well.

Surrey Square Primary School are presently hosting discussions led by the police with children and then with parents/ carers. This work ought to be reviewed and lessons learnt.

The workshop discussions ought to be honest, informed, age appropriate and focused on outcomes; such as enabling parents/ cares and family members to create to right kind of relationships with young people, provide guidance on tricky issues such as social media, and help them address concerns and seek support if needed.

Peer support is recognised as effective and ought to be part of this: young people assisting young people and parent/ carers assisting each other.

Consider commissioning or developing in-house bespoke training for teachers, youth & community leaders and volunteers to deliver this.

3.8) **Promote healthy relationships by adopting ‘being kind to each other ‘as a Council Fairer Future promise.** The underlying challenge is that knife crime and violence are symptoms of unhealthy relationships. Borough wide work is needed to promote healthy relationships: being kind to each other, tackling bullying in school and the workplace, resolving conflict constructively, communicating effectively and promoting values such as kindness and empathy.
3.9 Take a Public Health approach to knife and violent crime learning from Scotland and considering how this could be adopted in Southwark

3.10 The planned refresh of the council’s Domestic Abuse strategy ought to keep in mind how early experience of violence and domestic abuse can play out later in unhealthy relationships and peer violence.

3.11 Funding for Safer London to come back (higher risk). This was cut and there was plea for this to be reinstated.

3.12 Focus services that enable young people to make the most of their talents in a difficult economic climate on those most at risk; these needs to be broader than just conventional career routes.

Some disadvantaged young people do not see legitimate routes out of poverty, and consistently ask for a range of support and options to develop their potential. They want imaginative work experience opportunities (music, business, design, social care, politics etc.), mentoring, and quality apprentices. These will often need to include soft support, and be about broadening young people’s horizons and providing networks.

The Councils Skill Strategy and Apprenticeship scheme ought to proactively link with children in need and organisations such as schools, YOS etc. who can refer young people at risk.

3.13 Protecting children from adverse experiences, addressing Mental Health needs, providing Victim Support and recognising the role of trauma, all have an important role in tackling knife crime.

Prevention is better than cure, but young people with a number of ACEs will be at more at risk of violence and may well need to access CAMHS.

There are other protective factors for young people; children who have at least one stable and positive relationship with a close adult appears to protect them from the worst effects of ACEs. Agencies need to be aware of this importance and facilitate this through Family Early Help and the Trusted Adult programme.

Offenders will often need help with Mental Health; both therapeutic, community and faith support was cited as effective in making significant changes to lifestyles.

3.14 There are many parts of the council and agencies leading on knife crime; one lead person would help coordinate the work and provide additional accountability.

4 Report Contributors

4.1 Education and Children’s Services scrutiny sub committee

Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)
Councillor Rosie Shimell (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Karl Eastham  
Councillor Samantha Jury-Dada  
Councillor James Okosun  
Councillor Catherine Rose  
Councillor Kath Whittam  
Martin Brecknell  
Lynette Murphy-O’Dwyer

4.2 Officer and partner support:

Chris Haydon, Community TV Trust & Peckham Settlement  
Cavendish School (video input and headteacher input to the All Saints Church event)  
Sophie Linden, London’s Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime.  
Councillor Barrie Hargrove, Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety and Leisure  
Hannah Olomola, Southwark Youth Council representative  
Tobi Ayeni, Southwark Youth Council representative  
Simon Messinger, Southwark Borough Commander  
Quince Garcia, writer, producer & director.  
Luton Sinfield, Community Safety officer  
Julia Honess, Freelancer in the creative, heritage and community sectors  
Daisy May James, Supervising Social Worker and training lead  
Sharon Ogden, Safer Communities Team Manager  
Caroline Thwaites Assistant Director Community Safety & Partnerships  
Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities, Housing and Modernisation  
Jenny Brennan, Assistant Director Family Early Help & Youth Justice  
Lizzie Jones MD, Police CSE lead  
April Bald, Assistant Director Children’s safeguarding  
Pauline Campbell, Senior Anti Social Behaviour officer  
Julie Timbrell, scrutiny project manager (report author)

Appendix

1. Panel discussion write up  
2. Workshop 1 How will we end knife crime ?  
3. Workshop 2 Intersections between girls, gangs, and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and knife crime.

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iii House of Commons briefing Number SN4304, 16 March 2018. Knife crime in England
and Wales.

iv  
https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p065zhf8/radio-1-stories-gangs-drill-and-prayer

v  
http://safeguarding.southwark.gov.uk/learning-from-case-reviews/