

GENERAL SYNOD

No Easy Answer: Responding to Serious Youth Violence

Summary

Serious Youth Violence (SYV) covers much more than popular perceptions of knife or gun crime affecting young people. Rather it is the violent and visible outcome of a complex of social issues, often distorted by media reporting which negatively stereotype particular groups of young people. Research and statistics show a more diverse picture of SYV, in which school exclusions and loss of youth services stand out as key phenomena.

It is vital to understand how vulnerable young people are targeted and recruited into gangs and how they are used and abused in the 'county lines' drug movement. As the Church of England has a presence in every community, it is clear that the C of E has an important role to play in understanding SYV, intervention in the recruitment cycle where gangs are active, and in the provision of pastoral care to victims, victims' families, also perpetrators and communities affected by SYV. Many churches already model good practice in addressing this difficult and distressing issue in which young people sometimes lose their lives.

This paper aims to:

- Set out a theological rationale for engagement with SYV.
- Look at the background to SYV and examine some of the known social issues driving the problems.
- Show how to build a wider understanding within the Church of SYV.
- Help to inform national and diocesan policy development
- Explore the role of dioceses, clergy and church communities in responding to SYV

Introduction

1. Serious Youth Violence is defined by the police service as 'any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime, where the victim [*not* necessarily the perpetrator] is aged 1-19'.¹ However SYV can also involve intimidation, threat or coercion intended to escalate violence between young people.²
2. Too many young people have lost their lives or been seriously injured in incidents of SYV and these tragedies have prompted investigation and strategic response from the authorities. We argue that the Church of England also needs to be equipped to respond to the phenomenon of SYV, to do all that is possible to prevent its occurrence in communities and to offer a pastoral and reconciling response in affected communities.

Why should Christians care about Serious Youth Violence?

3. Scripture shows us that God calls children and young people (e.g. 1 Samuel 3) and that their lives are precious to God (e.g. Isaiah 40:1-3; Jeremiah 1.5-8; 1 Kings 3:16-28). Children and young people are to be made visible as those loved and blessed

¹ <http://policeauthority.org/metropolitan/statistics/crime-stats/definitions/index.html>

² https://www.kcsc.org.uk/sites/kcsc.org.uk/files/documents/vofs/cypf/agenda_minutes/16-11-15/VOF%20presentation%20Jack%20Dunton.pdf

GENERAL SYNOD

by God and to be protected from harm, as Jesus was protected as a child (Matthew 2: 13-14).

4. Yet the world of the Bible is often intensely violent, and children and young people do lose their lives, *all the time*. The voice of lament for them is heard echoing in the prophets (Jeremiah 3:15), and violence against the vulnerable creates a cycle of revenge and escalating enmity (e.g. Judges 19). Against this are voices of warning about conflict and violence.

Proverbs 31: 29-31 says:

Do not plan harm against your neighbour
who lives trustingly beside you.
Do not quarrel with anyone without cause,
when no harm has been done to you.
Do not envy the violent
and do not choose any of their ways

And the Psalmist warns that:

The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked,
and his soul hates the lover of violence. (Psalm 11:5)

5. In Jesus, we see God's desire for peace, healing and reconciliation made manifest (e.g. Mark 5:36-43; John 8:7-11; Matthew 26: 51-52 and parallel in Luke) and in Jesus we see God taking all human violence, torture and power over others to the Cross. We proclaim salvation to others by Jesus' cross and resurrection and that means caring profoundly about doing something about the violence and suffering perpetrated on the most vulnerable within our own communities. Our faith demands not just that we care about SYV but that in Jesus Christ's name we work with others to protect the lives of our young people among us and make it possible for them to live in safety.³

Distorted Perceptions: Serious Youth Violence in media reporting

6. 'London bloodbath: HORROR as 15-year-old child stabbed to death in Hackney' screamed *The Express* in May 2019.⁴ Headlines like this announcing that another young person has been violently injured or killed have become all too familiar. Serious youth violence seems like it has become increasingly common. The media reporting of SYV has brought the issue right into the public space and has contributed to shaping perceptions of the background and lifestyle of victims and perpetrators.
7. However, one of the first issues in understanding SYV is whether news reporting confuses or distorts how we understand what is happening and therefore how we should respond to it. For example, in their research project looking at whether there

³ Further theological reflections on children as victims of violence can be found in Anne Richards (2013) *Children in the Bible*, (London SPCK).

⁴ <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1121707/London-news-hackney-stabbing-UK-knife-crime-latest-metropolitan-police>

GENERAL SYNOD

is 'Unbalanced negative media portrayal of youth',⁵ one of the areas that Hertsmere young researchers reviewed was knife crime reporting. Their findings reveal that:

- It would appear that the incidents with the least facts or detail of context are the ones which were covered the most.
 - The incidents involving teenagers vs. teenager in ANY context raise the most media coverage.
 - The incidents involving teenagers vs. teenagers NEARLY ALWAYS have reference to other totally unrelated incidents within the report.
 - In cases where there was no evidence of a particular story being covered in its own right; the incident was still cited within other articles on knife fatalities covered by the same paper
 - Doing this research highlighted the difficulty in finding clear, easy-to-understand statistics which correspond with each other e.g. different time frames, different age ranges, different variables assessed. This in itself leaves 'facts' open to speculation.
8. The root causes of SYV are complex, however this 'speculation' has helped to create a stereotype of a young person vulnerable to, or involved in, SYV. Actually SYV is
- *Not* simply an urban issue
 - *Not* simply 'black on black crime'
 - *Not* simply reserved to young people involved in gang activity
 - Young women can be both victims *and* perpetrators of SYV
9. In his paper '*School leadership and the challenge of serious youth violence*' Professor Gus John (CMEAC member) writes – 'When a growing section of the youth population continues to feel they have nothing to lose and even less to gain, when their own freedom ceases to have meaning, it puts us all at risk, because the results for themselves of their desperate acts are of no consequence when compared to the instant gratification they derive from having the power to kill or maim somebody'. (See Appendix 3)
10. This suggests that we need to get beyond stereotypes and media portrayals of SYV and look more deeply into what drivers are creating the conditions for violence.

How many incidents are we talking about?

11. The Government's recent serious violence strategy (Home Office, April 2018)⁶ reports that whilst crime in general (including violent crime) continues to fall, homicide, knife and gun crime have risen across virtually all police force areas in England and Wales since 2014. Although around half the increase may be attributed to improved reporting and police recording of crimes, the rising trend is supported by other data such as hospital admissions. Between 2013/14 and

⁵ <https://www.hertsmere.gov.uk/Documents/08-Parks--Leisure/Children--Young-People/Final-Report---Unbalanced-negative-media-portrayal-of-youth.pdf>

⁶

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf

GENERAL SYNOD

2016/17 admissions due to assault by a sharp object showed an increase of 18%,⁷ giving credence to the concerns about rising knife crime.

12. The London Assembly Report (Sept 2016)⁸ found that:

- The number of victims of serious youth violence has risen in the capital by over 20 percent since 2012-13.
- In 2015-16, there were 6,290 victims - a 4% rise on the previous year.
- The use of a knife is flagged in almost half of serious youth violence data.
- An increasing number of young women are victims of serious violence.
- Gang activity is present in only a small proportion of serious youth violence.
- Knives continue to play a significant part in serious youth violence.
- Following an incident of serious violence some young people will carry a knife if they feel unsafe.

13. The Youth Voice Survey 2018⁹ in which young people were asked about their exposure to gangs and knife crime found that:

- A quarter of young people say that they know someone who has carried a knife (26%, 1790 of 6856) or who is in a gang (23%, 1583 of 6798).
- Certain groups of young people appear to show greater vicarious exposure to these issues, including young victims of crime and those who have attended a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).
 - For example, 54% of young victims of crime (396 of 738) know someone that has carried a knife compared with 21% of non-victims (1082 of 5210). Similarly, 53% of young victims know someone in a gang (382 of 724), compared to 17% of non-victims (904 of 5184).
 - When looking at PRU attendees, 47% (92 of 196) say they know someone who has carried a knife with them, compared with 25% of non-PRU attendees (1188 of 4673). Once again, it is a similar picture for exposure to gangs, with 46% of PRU attendees saying they know someone in a gang (87 of 191) compared with 22% of non-PRU attendees (1022 of 4585).
- The proportion of young people responding to the survey who claim to have carried a knife (218 of 7033) or to have been in a gang themselves (217 of 7056) is 3% in each case. 38% (76 of 198) of those saying they have personally been in a gang also say that they have carried a knife. The proportion here saying that they have carried a knife is lower than that shown by other research, but in each case there are substantial methodological differences.

⁷ NHS Digital (2017) Hospital Admitted Patient Care Activity, 2016-17: External causes.

⁸ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/serious_youth_violence_report_-_london_assembly.pdf

⁹ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/youth_voice_survey_report_2018_final.pdf

GENERAL SYNOD

Understanding County Lines¹⁰

14. Criminal exploitation when gangs and organised crime networks exploit children to sell drugs is also known as 'county lines' because often these children are made to travel across counties, and they use dedicated mobile phone 'lines' to supply drugs. Gangs are deliberately targeting vulnerable children – those who are homeless, living in care homes or trapped in poverty. These children are unsafe, unloved, or unable to cope, and the gangs take advantage of this.
15. These gangs groom, threaten or trick children into trafficking their drugs for them. They might threaten a young person physically, or they might threaten the young person's family members. The gangs might also offer something in return for the young person's cooperation – it could be money, food, alcohol, clothes and jewelry, or improved status – but the giving of these gifts will usually be manipulated so that the child feels they are in debt to their exploiter.
16. However they become trapped in county lines, the young people involved feel as if they have no choice but to continue doing what the gangs want.

The Role of 'Delinquent Norms'

17. Sociological and criminological theories of deviant behaviour from social norms demonstrate the complex of issues which put children and young people on the street and which may then put them at risk of violence. Underclass theory, strain theory and theories about illegitimate opportunity structures highlight the roles of risk-taking, status frustration, domestic problems, school problems and weak support mechanisms in establishing 'delinquent norms' for young people. By these means, young people may find homes in gangs and accept violent behaviour perpetrated by them and against them as part of ordinary life.¹¹

The Role of School Exclusions

18. In Professor John's article '*Youth Work and Apprehending Youth Violence*¹², he states: ' A disturbing development which has been normalised, largely without protest, is that of criminalising young people while at school.....Time was when schools saw it as part of their duty to assist young people in identifying and unlearning inappropriate behaviours and in developing emotional intelligence, especially an understanding of the impact their conduct has on others. Ways were devised as part of a social education curriculum, often with the engagement of youth workers, to help young people manage their anger and learn to resolve conflict without resorting to violence. That form of intervention with young people was an integral part of the school's fulfilment of its purpose to facilitate students' personal, social, emotional as well as academic development.'
19. Qualitative research conducted by Professor John among teenagers in a number of youth offending institutions (as yet unpublished) indicates that well over fifty percent of them had been permanently excluded from school, some while they were as young as 12.

¹⁰ <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-is-county-lines>

¹¹ See for example, Ian Taylor, Paul Walton, and Jock Young (2013) *The New Criminology: for a social theory of deviance* (London: Routledge)

¹² <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/apprehending-youth-violence/>

GENERAL SYNOD

20. In October 2017, IPPR published a report¹³ on the link between school exclusion and social exclusion. Its findings included: 'Excluded children are the most vulnerable: twice as likely to be in the care of the state, four times more likely to have grown up in poverty, seven times more likely to have a special educational need and ten times more likely to suffer recognised mental health problems. Yet our education system is profoundly ill-equipped to break a cycle of disadvantage for these young people.
21. Education should be the means to break the link between demographics and destiny. Yet official figures suggest that every day, 35 of the most disadvantaged children – equivalent to a full classroom of pupils – are permanently excluded from school, with disastrous personal and societal consequences. In fact, our research reveals that official figures significantly underestimate the actual number of children in this position.'
22. The reality is that SYV is escalating, denying too many children and young people a future. Tackling SYV requires the efforts of a range of people, groups and sectors such as, young people, parents/carers/families, education, social and youth services, community and faith leaders, voluntary/statutory and charitable services.

The role of loss of services for young people

23. There has also been a focus on the loss of youth services and places for young people to go. Lack of youth services and support systems for young people are cited as creating spaces for gang culture to become established. In the Safer Lives Survey, the top response from 2,200 young people asked what one thing would make their lives safer was for "the provision of more youth centres, sport clubs and other youth activities in their local areas".¹⁴

Distorted narratives

24. Professor John in his written evidence to the youth violence commission, said: '...it is a matter of grave concern that the 'gang' narrative has so distorted people's understanding of the challenges and threats that young people in our communities face, that the immediate assumption the police, media and indeed communities themselves make is that such incidents are gang related...'¹⁵.
25. *The London Youth Voice Survey 2018*¹⁶ asked young people for their views on what can stop people from carrying knives, the most common theme (occurring in about 30% of comments) to emerge regarded police action. However, deeper analysis revealed significant factors related to those that disagreed with this view: being older, being from a black ethnic group, having a bad opinion of the police, and knowing someone that is in a gang. This in turn echoes previous findings from MOPAC's Knife Crime Strategy Consultation in June 2017.
26. Another common theme regarded education about the realities and consequences of carrying knives. The nature of the education that young people spoke of was multi-agency, involving schools, teachers, the police, parents, charities, previous offenders and victims. This commonly overlapped with comments about wider communication

¹³ <https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-10/making-the-difference-report-october-2017.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://centrepoint.org.uk/about-us/blog/quality-youth-work-is-key-to-preventing-crisis-for-young-people/>

¹⁵ <http://yvcommission.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GUS-JOHN-YVC-Written-Evidence.pdf>

¹⁶ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/youth_voice_survey_report_2018_final.pdf

GENERAL SYNOD

and understanding on behalf of all the different agencies referred to. The young people expressed a desire and stressed the importance for such agencies to engage with their own situations, circumstances and points of view. This highlights positive opportunities for multi-agency work to help educate young people on the risks and impacts of knife violence.

Role of the Church at national, diocesan and local level

27. Recommendations:

- Church of England schools should monitor, measure and report on exclusions. In addition, strategy should be developed with the aim of keeping exclusions to an absolute minimum.
- Training and education in best practice for the whole school community
- Dioceses should resource education, training and support for clergy and church communities, for example, in participating as members of community initiatives, providing pastoral care and support, working in partnership on prevention and response, understanding and using the ‘teachable moments’
- Recognising, supporting and equipping the key roles of chaplains in all sectors and all those involved in church-based youth work.
- Churches generally have space that should be used/offered for convening community meetings and events. Churches should be ‘safe spaces’ for young people, providing space for programmes and activities
- Churches should work with secular organisations such as Word 4 Weapons to install knife amnesty bins.

Some examples of Church response and good practice are given in Appendix 1.

28. At the Prime Minister’s youth violence summit in April of this year, UK Youth (a leading national charity) CEO said ‘A public health approach, similar to the one implemented in Scotland, is clearly needed to address serious violence against young people across the UK. There are examples of this approach already happening in certain areas. Our priority should be to identify and understand the approaches that work and begin to replicate them in other parts of the country. To achieve this we need to bring all the agencies young people interact with together, with youth work at the heart, to create and deliver solutions in partnership’

Dr Elizabeth Henry, National Adviser on Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns
Dr Anne Richards, National Adviser: Mission Theology, New Religious Movements and
Alternative Spiritualities
May 2019

Published by the General Synod of the Church of England
© The Archbishops’ Council 2019

GENERAL SYNOD

APPENDIX 1

Examples of Church response and good practice

29. The Church of England is already responding to Serious Youth Violence in positive ways. Some examples include:
30. Southwark Diocese examples

Timeline of Southwark Diocese SYV work

- September 2018: Pan-London Churches Response to Serious Youth Violence Summit
- Feb 2019: Reigate passed a Motion at Deanery level on Serious Youth Violence.
- March 2019: Reigate Serious Youth Violence Motion passed at Diocesan Synod.
- April 2019: Standing Together Rally in Trafalgar Sq.
- May 2019: Standing Together Senior Leaders Summit.
- July 2019: resourcing event with Synergy Network.
- September 2019: Launch event of Synergy Network Serious Youth Violence Work.

Southwark has committed to strengthening a pan-London network of ecumenical and Anglican leads in this area as well as working more closely with the Greater London Authority (GLA).

Structural

- Passing of the motion at Diocesan Synod, to go to General Synod.
- A Diocesan planning group will be brought together led by +Jonathan and Canon Rosemarie Mallett with the hope that this will build capacity in the diocese for us to respond to this issue.

Grass-root initiatives

- The Day of Prayer for Mothers, organised by Kingston MEACC held on 30th March 2019 focused on prayer for families affected by serious youth violence.
- Public Spirit- an initiative of Croydon North Deanery and Croydon Citizens. Young people came together to think about what issues affect them and how they can initiate change. The issue they chose was the relationship between police and young people. On the 2nd April 2019 this year they held a gathering at St Paul's Thornton Heath where they invited a number of prominent people including Superintendent Tamsin Jones, Steve Reed, MP, Mayor Bernadette Khan, local imams and Archdeacon Chris and Bishop Jonathan to ask for their support in encouraging better relationship through using social media and using a stop and search programme called stop-relate-and-search.

Training

- Developing a training package with Power the Fight for clergy and laity to see the signs of vulnerability to county lines and gang involvement.

GENERAL SYNOD

Schools

- Working with Southwark Diocese Board of Education (SDBE) around disseminating their exclusion research with the GLA and wider (written by Mr Craig Morrison, Secondary Advisor, SDBE).

Partnership

- Working with *Synergy Network* and the Ascension Trust ecumenically. The Synergy Network, part of The Ascension Trust. The Synergy Network is an ecumenical body with the aim to network, strategies and support churches and communities on the ground engaging with the issue of Serious Youth Violence.
- Bishop Jonathan is meeting/ speaking regularly with Bishop Rob Wickham, Edmonton, Bishop Peter Hill, Barking and Bishop Simon Burton-Jones, Tonbridge to continue a pan-London dialogue at a senior level. This has come out of the Pan-London Churches Response to Serious Youth Violence Summit last year.
- Canon Rosemarie Mallett, is on the Greater London Authorities Violence Reduction Unit's Community Involvement planning group.

31. London Diocese examples

- All Saints Isleworth led a vigil following the fatal stabbing of 17-year-old Abdirashid Mohamoud on March 2019. More than one hundred people gathered from across the community to show solidarity with Abdirashid's family, who were in attendance, and for the neighbours who witnessed and attended the aftermath of the attack.
- St Mark's Teddington partnered with local police on a community gardening project, after concerns about drug dealing and anti-social behaviour on the local estate.¹⁷
- St Mary's Church and North London Citizens brought together members of the community in North London for a Citizens' Assembly in response to the recent rise in knife crime and gang violence across London¹⁸. The Assembly saw local groups and institutions share their experiences on the front line following the recent rise in knife, gang and racist violence across London, and develop a plan to help end this crisis. The Assembly was attended by over 150 members of the local community, as well as Cllr Georgia Gould, the Leader of Camden Council, Tulip Siddiq MP and Keir Starmer MP, co-chair of Camden Council's Youth Safety Taskforce.
 - The Assembly also saw the launch of the Safety Commission. This body will look more closely into the causes of knife and gang violence, and seek to collaborate with politicians, police and other services in taking the next steps – together. This will include a visit to Glasgow, led by Cllr Georgia Gould, to learn from the Glasgow model, and a push for the government to recognise youth knife crime as a public health issue.

¹⁷ <https://www.london.anglican.org/articles/st-marks-teddington-partners-with-police-on-community-gardening/>

¹⁸ <https://www.london.anglican.org/articles/36473/>

GENERAL SYNOD

- St John at Hackney has worked with *Word 4 Weapons* to install a knife amnesty bin.¹⁹
 - Rector Al Gordon commented “As a church our priority is to play our part in bringing hope to the heart of Hackney, we are privileged to be able to serve this community in lots of ways and the knife bin is part of that. In the past this bin has been one of the busiest in London, which reflects the times we live in. Our hope is that in a small way we can help to make the wonderful streets of Hackney a safer place for everybody.”
 - Michael Smith, of Word 4 Weapons, the charity that runs the amnesty bin project, said one of the reasons it had been such a success was the church’s work in promoting it.
 - “When we started doing this I was a serving police officer. I went to the churches because officers said that they would probably have a greater success. Who wants to take a weapon to a police station, you know?”

32 Other examples

- St Margaret’s Church in Rainham, Kent successfully bid for funding from the Government’s Community Fund to deliver knife crime awareness raising programmes across Medway in schools, specialist services (youth offending team and pupil referral unit) and the wider community (including parents). Nathan Ward, Vicar of St Margaret’s Church said: *“This project will bring communities together across Medway and will work with both those of faith and none. The partnership organisations are a mixture of community groups and statutory agencies with a clear focus on having the community in the centre. This project is about the local community developing local solutions to issues we face.”*
- St Giles’ Trust is a UK charity that was founded in 1962 as the Camberwell Samaritans and was based in the crypt of St Giles’ Church Camberwell. The trust runs several projects supporting disadvantaged young people around the UK.²⁰ These include:
 - *SOS and SOS+* Programmes. These programmes offer both targeted and general support to help young people exposed to or at risk of violence and exploitation. This ranges from intensive, individually targeted programmes to providing interactive sessions in schools, PRUs and colleges.
 - *Work in Hospitals*: The trust has 2 case workers in the Major Trauma Centre of Royal London Hospital to offer support to young people who are admitted as a result of serious youth violence and sexual violence. When young people are referred to by staff, the trust assess their needs then support them whilst they are still in hospital, on discharge and offer follow up services in the community to help them stay safe and reduce the likelihood of future admissions. Usually, this involves helping the young person find a safe place to stay as returning to their home area can often have risks of reprisals. Once

¹⁹ <https://www.hackneygazette.co.uk/news/crime-court/busiest-knife-amnesty-bin-in-london-returns-to-lower-clapton-s-st-john-at-hackney-church-1-5370496>

²⁰ <https://www.stgilestrust.org.uk/what-we-do>

GENERAL SYNOD

the young person's situation is stabilised, they help them engage with services offering support around education, skills and training.

- St Giles' Church Camberwell still supports the work of the trust.
- Word 4 Weapons are a faith based anti-gun & knife crime charity.²¹ Since its founding in 2007 tens of thousands of weapons have been surrendered through their knife amnesty bins. Many of their 18 knife bins in London are situated on Church property.

²¹ <https://www.word4weapons.co.uk/about/>

GENERAL SYNOD

Appendix 2

Case study: C17**Ex-gang member story (told to Anne Richards):**

'I had a bad day at school and walked out halfway through the afternoon. I went to the park and was really angry. I was texting my friends when this boy appeared and we started talking. He showed me a music video on his phone which had the park in it. It was cool. The boy said school was doing no good and it was all about being in control of your life. I agreed. It made sense. And I hated school.

A week later, I saw the boy and some others outside the school. They were friendly and invited me to a flat. We just talked but one of them gave me some money and a beer, just because. They said I was cool. I smoked some weed. I met some more people. I started hanging out with them. One day, I came out of school having a fight with another boy, just arguing. The gang appeared and grabbed him and frightened him because I was their friend. One of them waved a knife in his face. It felt good to have them stand up for me. I decided I didn't need school any more. People picked on me. I had friends outside.

The next day, they asked me to hold some drugs 'as a thank you'. I did it. I felt good about it. Powerful. Part of it. That was how it started.'

C17 gang - Thurrock, SW Essex ²²

The C17 gang is made up of about 40 members, many of which are thought to be teenagers aged around 14-15. Police believe the youngest member may be 13. The gang is linked to gang 410 from Brixton and other gangs in Havering. Dealing primarily in drugs, the gang has been linked to a number of stabbings, acid attacks and sexual assaults with violent activity peaking from May 2017. The group actively recruits young vulnerable teenagers, especially those who are estranged from families or who are seeking protection.

C17 is associated with 'drill' music videos which are designed to inflame tensions with other groups and to proclaim their power, authority and criminality. Drill music is followed by other rival gangs and C17 makes videos in front of police cars with a provocative narrative. For example, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3CVTb3W_Dc The videos show gang managed territory, and proclaim their presence and authority through clothing, jewellery, gestures, use of language and body language. In this video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ts1uQfxyf_g the gang is seen performing at Grays station in front of the parish church.

The gang is also extremely organized. Some members organize the drugs distribution, others manage the phones and yet others the money, using some members as mules. This makes it difficult for police to gather evidence of drug deals. Injury and death is included as a glamorous risk. 15-year-old Jordan Douherty/Young Valenti, the brother of the ringleader,

²² <https://www.essexlive.news/news/essex-news/everything-you-need-know-thurrock-2130524> ; <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/gangs-and-gang-crime/gangs-in-thurrock>

GENERAL SYNOD

was stabbed to death by five attackers in Romford. Police, raiding a party celebrating his life, found a cache of shotguns.

C17 activity has caused a great deal of public intimidation with workers afraid to leave and walk home at night through areas frequented by gang members. The police have responded with injunctions banning movement of nine members of the gang (five under 18) in specific areas of Thurrock such as parks, the town centres and railway stations. They have also banned individuals from making drill videos, wearing hoodies and associating with young girls.

Induction into the gang begins by a phased process of grooming. Isolated young people are targeted and approached in public spaces such as parks, shops, the areas around flats or schools offering friendship and acceptance, sometimes with free drugs or money (see the story above). Gang members have been known to infiltrate youth clubs (including church youth groups and scouts) and other gatherings of young people looking for vulnerable possibilities. Once a relationship is established, the young people are offered more money or other rewards for 'favours' such as becoming drug mules, selling cannabis or stashing or holding weapons. Doing this offers trust, 'respect' and praise and more importantly, a feeling of protection, 'having your back'. Girls are approached as well as boys and are often used as distracters or spotters while drug deals are taking place.

After the initial phase, gang membership becomes more monetized. Young recruits handle more money and have the chance to make their own money. They may be moved around, selling drugs in strange flats or other properties. Some of these places may be inhabited by vulnerable adults, especially drug users who have themselves been groomed or coerced and used as patsies in any police raid. This process is called 'cuckooing'. Knives are often weapons of choice because it is not an offence to have knives, no matter how large or how many, in a private residence. Consequently, knives may be easily bought and stashed at multiple locations for easy access, for intimidation or use before being re-stashed.

Recruits may also be asked to carry or hold other weapons and be pressurized to commit violent 'initiations' or violent acts of revenge, especially using knives, or sexual 'punishments' on others. They may be asked to risk more and expose themselves to danger as a test of loyalty or to earn or maintain respect. This behaviour locks new members into a cycle of fear and need for protection as against taking on more risk and danger. It is now extremely difficult and dangerous to leave, so recruits usually try to secure their places with acts which earn them loyalty points and consolidate their positions. Earning money through drug deals convinces them that they have some sort of autonomy and will eventually be able to buy their way out. To do so requires them to do more risky and demonstrative acts, usually violent.

Some East London gangs are based on people groups (in Ilford, two rival gangs were made up of Somalian and Albanian members respectively, competing for control of particular

GENERAL SYNOD

streets and spaces where drug deals might be easily completed, such as the station). Police have been given extra stop and search powers, but this focuses purely on weapons and does not break the cycle of grooming and recruitment.

GENERAL SYNOD

Appendix 3

'School leadership and the challenge of serious youth violence' A Paper by Professor Gus John (CMEAC member)

On Tuesday 23 April 2013, at about 3.00pm, serious youth violence in London claimed two lives, that of Derek Boateng who turned 16 that very day and of his 15-year-old assailant (who cannot be named for legal reasons). Derek was stabbed to within an inch of his life on the 393 bus and had to be airlifted to a specialist trauma unit in hospital where he died the following day, surrounded by his family. He was an only son and had two elder sisters.

The air ambulance landed on the Astro turf pitch of Highbury Grove School on Highbury New Park, not far from the 393 bus stop.

Born in Homerton Hospital, Hackney in 1997, Derek lived all his short life with his family. His schooling career was clearly troubled. Having attended Brook Community Primary School in Hackney, he joined the Jack Petchy Academy, also in Hackney. He moved to Highbury Grove School two years ago but was excluded after just one year. He later started attending Camden JobTrain, a vocational training facility catering for excluded students and run by Westminster Kingsway College. He had been at JobTrain for 15 months until 23 April when, having shared a birthday cake with students and staff at that centre, he left to start his fateful journey home.

His father, Davis Boateng, is reported as saying: "He was practical, rather than academic, but he was bright. He did distract the class sometimes, but it was a phase. He was starting to fulfil his promise, he wanted to be an engineer, and at his last parents' evening the teachers praised him. He was starting to think about making a life'.

The principal of JobTrain commented:

"He had had difficulties in the past, but he was trying very hard to put the past behind him and turn his life around. He was attending regularly and devoting himself to getting education and training to set himself up for the future.... He had shown talent in art and design as well as motor engineering. Staff had been impressed with his dedication to his courses and were hoping to enter him into higher education".

On 24 April 2013, the headteacher of Highbury Grove School wrote the following letter to parents/carers:

Dear Parents/Carers

Re: Serious Incident – Tuesday 23rd April – on Highbury New Park

You will probably be aware by now that there was a serious incident after school yesterday in the nearby vicinity of our school. At this point, I do not have a great deal

GENERAL SYNOD

of information to share with you. Police attended following reports of a stabbing on the Route 393 bus. London Ambulance Service attended the scene along with the Air Ambulance, which needed to land on our astroturf pitch. The victim - who is not a Highbury Grove student – is in a critical condition in hospital.

I have addressed each individual year group this morning through assemblies; sharing with them the limited facts as we know them, and reassuring everyone that our school continues to be a safe and secure one.

It was a very sad way to finish a wonderful day in school, which had been filled with joy, celebration, and children sharing their talents and achievements. We had over 40 media organisations from magazines, newspapers and television networks covering Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber and his wife's continued involvement in our school. This press conference was part of publicising the **Lloyd Webber Foundation** sponsorship link we now have as a result of our innovative approach to music, and the wonderful opportunities Highbury Grove offers for all students.

Please be assured that I will keep you informed.

Yours sincerely

Rhiannon Hughes

Headteacher

On the very day of the stabbing, the media was reporting that the victim was a student who had been excluded from Highbury Grove School. The headteacher states baldly and indeed accurately that 'the victim - who is not a Highbury Grove student – is in a critical condition in hospital'.

Even if the headteacher had not known the identity of the boy one day later – and it is difficult to imagine how that could have been - or that he had been excluded from Highbury Grove just one year earlier, one would have expected a degree of compassion in that letter. A child was 'in a critical condition in hospital'. His parents and siblings, his entire extended family and his friends would be distraught and full of anxiety as to whether his life could be saved. Highbury Grove students who travel by bus to school, or walk to school, would be anxious, too, especially given the level of fear of youth violence that exists among young people in London and elsewhere.

Never mind all those considerations, what is clear from the wording of this letter is the headteacher's concern to distance the school from the incident itself: *'the Air Ambulance needed to land on our Astroturf pitch'; 'the victim...is not a Highbury Grove student...'*, *'...reassuring everyone that our school continues to be a safe and secure one'*.

Presumably 'safe and secure' as in: please do not be anxious as to whether our school, which has been judged 'outstanding' by Ofsted, has students who run around with knives on their person or in their satchels, or of the sort who would get into altercations outside school with those who do; above all, be assured that the only link between the school and this unfortunate incident is the fact that the Air Ambulance 'needed' to land on our pitch.

GENERAL SYNOD

Nothing said about the level of youth violence in the community and the fear that that induces in young people, whether students of Highbury Grove School or not. Nothing said about what the school as part of the community from which its students come is doing to engage with students' anxieties about that. Nothing said about how parents might support their children if the latter are expressing fear of travelling from or to school on buses. Instead, the letter projects the school's high profile and high achievements, due in no small part to the dedicated involvement of Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber and his wife.

The school sent another letter to parents one week later on 29 April:

Dear Parents/Carers

Re: Serious Incident – Tuesday 23rd April – on Highbury New Park

Following the Headteacher's letter of 24th April, we are now writing to update you about further developments.

You may have heard that, sadly, since the incident on 23rd April, the victim has now died. Our thoughts go out to his family and friends.

We have also learned that the suspect being held by the police has now been charged. It is far from clear what the motive was behind the incident and more information will emerge, no doubt, as the matter progresses through the criminal justice system. We do understand though that the two young men knew each other.

In the current circumstances, the heightened police presence around the school will continue for the time being. Students, parents and staff have all indicated that this is reassuring and we have thanked the police on everyone's behalf for their support.

Inside the school, the situation remains calm and students tell us that they continue to feel safe. We have arranged assemblies and are now offering support to any students (and staff) who feel they may have been affected by the incident.

This is a tragic reminder that some young people continue to carry knives. In the circumstances, we want to be sure that we are doing all we can within the school to promote the safety of all our students. So, we will continue to enhance our current safety measures.

We will keep in touch with you as things develop, but at this stage our key message is that we wanted to re-assure you about the action we have taken in the school and with other colleagues across the Borough, to ensure that our young people stay safe.

Yours faithfully

Rhiannon Hughes
Headteacher

Steve Arnold
Chair of Governors

Even one week after the incident, by which time it was widely reported that Derek Boateng had been permanently excluded from Highbury Grove, the school makes no mention of the

GENERAL SYNOD

fact that he did attend the school and was excluded after one year. *'...since the incident on 23rd April, the victim has now died. Our thoughts go out to his family and friends'*

'The victim' remains nameless and disconnected from our school. By inference, he was never part of us; neither he nor his parents were ever part of our school community. His killing outside our school has no context, save for the fact that *'This is a tragic reminder that some young people continue to carry knives'*.

Challenged by the media about this apparent lack of compassion and empathy, the headteacher is reported to have said to the Islington Tribune:

"On behalf of the school community, I wish to express our condolences to Derek Boateng's family. It is wrong to suggest the school is distancing itself from the incident – but we are very conscious that there is a police investigation under way, and a young person in custody charged with this serious offence... It is therefore wholly appropriate that we exercise caution in what we say in relation to this incident."

Due caution indeed, but how does acknowledging that Derek Boateng was until just over a year ago a student at your school potentially impair or impede a police investigation? There is evident correlation between school exclusion and the fate of those permanently excluded from school, as years of academic research has established, but it would be absurd to suggest that there is a causal relationship between the fact that Highbury Grove School excluded Derek Boateng and the stabbing outside the school that led to Derek's death.

The letter sought to reassure parents/carers that:

we want to be sure that we are doing all we can within the school to promote the safety of all our students. So, we will continue to enhance our current safety measures.

This raises a number of important questions which one seldom sees schools addressing: Parents are compelled by law to send their children to schools as places of learning in communities, unless they opt to educate them at home. They have a right to expect that the school will be a place of safety for their children and for those who teach them. But, how does the school as a place where children learn to develop emotional and social skills, self-management skills and conflict resolution skills 'promote the safety of all (its) students' by means other than by enhancing its existing safety measures?

Given the number of gun- and knife-enabled murders involving children as young as 10 that there have been in this country since 1988, and the apparent ease with which young people could produce a knife and plunge it into the chest of others at arm's reach, what is the function of school in engendering in children an understanding of human rights and respect for life and liberty, theirs and others?

GENERAL SYNOD

What is the function of school in guiding and supporting children to unlearn inappropriate behaviours and to embed commonly shared values by giving them practical expression in every aspect of daily living?

What is the function of school in working in partnership with parents/families and assisting children to develop human values that could shape and inform their attitude to themselves and their self-worth, thus enabling them to bring those same values to their interactions with others and to their management of themselves in situations of conflict?

How can schools work with communities and not just the police towards a situation among young people where their safety and those of others is assured by their exercise of self-control, sound self-management skills and the application of living values, rather than by the coercion of school rules and sanctions, the presence and engagement of the police, or the use of knives and guns for 'self-protection'?

What is the point of schools' rhetoric about being 'part of the community', yet, when children bring to school from those very communities the challenges they face, the anxieties they have and the inappropriate ways they adopt for dealing with those challenges, the school accuses them of seeking to import 'gang' culture into the school and excludes them?

Do schools not have a wider community education function in respect of all of those matters, having due regard to the community's aspirations, complexity, strengths and challenges and not just the task of putting children through endless tests and public examinations?

That tragic murder outside Highbury Grove School and the school's reaction to it is in my view a helpful case study of the extent to which schooling in this country has lost its way and how that is compounded by education secretaries who insist on proceeding 'arse about face' to deepen the crisis.

In the preface to *'The Case for a Learner's Charter for Schools'*, I wrote:

For too many children, schooling is a massive irrelevance and both the regime of schooling and the curriculum fail to engage with the matters that preoccupy them in their living outside school.

The challenge, then, is how to make schooling relevant, how to address in schools the burning issues that young people take into schools from their homes, their peer groups and their communities and make sure that teachers have both the competence and the time and resources to deal with them.

Over 60% of all young people in Young Offender Institutions in this country gave up their schooling as a result of permanent exclusion from school. Among those are teenage murderers serving long sentences that would take them way into their late thirties and forties before release. The State's hope is presumably that by the time they are released they would no longer pose a threat to the public on account of their lack of self-management and

GENERAL SYNOD

anger management skills, their indifference to human pain and suffering, their anger at their circumstances and with the world around them, and their use of violence as a crutch.

The nation's schools will continue to sift and select, nurture and exclude, place a quality stamp on some and dump others in the recycle bin, banishing them to pupil referral units or other forms of 'alternative provision'. In the end, though, they cannot escape the crucial role they play in promoting social exclusion and building a two-speed Britain, one in which the Derek Boateng's within our communities will continue to be the casualties and their assailants a growing band of losers.

When a growing section of the youth population continues to feel they have nothing to lose and even less to gain, when their own freedom ceases to have meaning, it puts us all at risk, because the results for themselves of their desperate acts are of no consequence when compared to the instant gratification they derive from having the power to kill or maim somebody.

That is why we all have a duty to ensure that the nation as a whole does not continue to regard these relentless murders as 'black on black' crime. That is why we the people must stop and revisit the question: what is schooling for in this increasingly segregated society, irrespective of where government seems hellbent on taking it.

Professor Gus John

London

10 May 2013