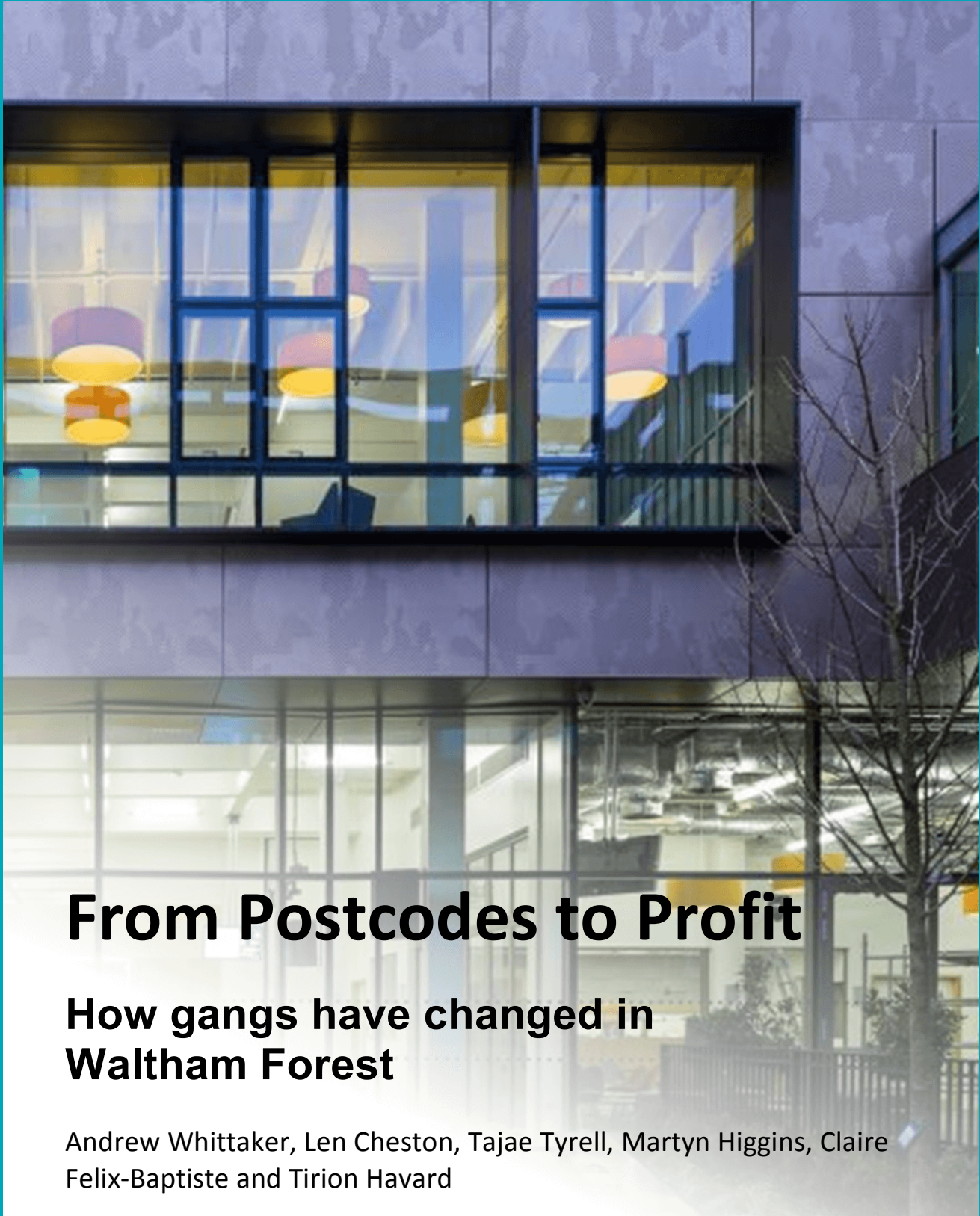




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# **From Postcodes to Profit**

## **How gangs have changed in Waltham Forest**

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# From Postcodes to Profits

## Executive Summary

Gang cultures in Waltham Forest are changing. When the classic *Reluctant Gangs* study was completed ten years ago, the focus was upon postcode territories that needed to be defended from outsiders. Gang members described an emotional relationship with their local area, leading one young respondent to say that he would 'defend anyone who lived in his postcode' (Pitts, 2008, p.114). These territories bore little if any relationship to drugs markets and the violence involved appeared to serve little practical purpose beyond providing an arena to demonstrate courage and physical prowess. Gang membership was exhibited through gang 'colours', where clothing and other insignia were used to demonstrate a visible presence within that territory.

### **From postcodes to profits**

The current study has found that this has significantly changed. The first major development is the emergence of a more organised and ruthless operating model focused on the drugs market and driven by a desire for profits. This new operating model rejects visible signs of gang membership as 'bad for business' because they attract unwanted attention from law enforcement agencies. Our dialogue with professionals, young people involved with gangs and former gang members has been dominated by the rise of one gang, the Mali Boys. They have led the current changes as the most business driven, violent and ruthless of the gangs but also the most secretive, working hard to remain anonymous to the police and local agencies.

Although the Mali Boys may appear to be a local phenomenon, there is growing evidence that they are part of a wider pan-London development as gangs become more organised. As gangs develop, they move from a 'recreation' stage where crime is rarely acquisitive to a 'crime' stage, where criminal activities are a means to support the gang (Densley, 2014). In the next stage, successful gangs move into an 'enterprise' stage where criminal activities become an end in itself and the original members form an 'inner circle', recruiting new members as subordinates to carry out street level activities. Some gangs move into a fourth 'extra legal governance' stage where they control the market to the point of gaining a monopoly (Densley, 2014).

Understood within a gang evolution model, the dominance of the Mali Boys results from their moving into the advanced stages of the 'enterprise' stage. Whilst local gangs have moved from a postcode focus, the Mali Boys have been the most successful at responding to the demands of a more professional operating model, securing markets locally as the dominant partner in business alliances with other gangs.

This more business-oriented ethos has changed the meaning of territory. Instead of an emotional sense of belonging to a postcode that needs to be defended, territory is valued as a marketplace to be protected. The local estate still has meaning for younger gang members as they are usually recruited from that locality but older gang members are less likely to live on the estate and identifying with the estate is often more symbolic than real.

The focus of the new operating model is expanding territory to secure new drugs markets. In response to the saturation of the London drugs markets, gangs are moving outside to develop operations in other towns where there is little competition and they are unknown to local law enforcement agencies. The 'County Lines' business model where the gangs transport and sell drugs outside London has developed considerably in the last few years (NCA, 2015, 2016, 2017b). A recent National Crime Agency (NCA, 2017b) report found that 88% of areas nationally report established county lines activity in their area and a third (33%) reported the existence of Somalian gangs, the most common ethnicity recorded. Whilst it did not name specific Somalian gangs, the Mali Boys are known to be highly active in county lines operations.

### **Girls and gangs**

The second major development is the increasing involvement of women and girls in the activities and identity of gangs. In a study of county lines activity, 90% of areas reported gangs using young women (NCA, 2016). The low visibility of girls make them attractive to gangs in transporting drugs, particularly as they are fewer female police officers to conduct searches. This involvement comes at a cost as young women and girls are increasingly exposed to violence and sexual exploitation as they fulfil a range of key roles at considerable risk to themselves. Over a third of police forces (35%) reported some evidence of sexual exploitation in relation to county lines activities (NCA, 2017b). Girls and young women have a more fluid relationship with gangs, often having links with more than one gang.

### **The role of social media and technology**

The third development is the growing role of social media and technology, which has divided local gangs. Whilst some gangs use social media as a means of promoting their 'brand', others eschew it as attracting unwanted attention from law enforcement agencies. The worrying trend of senior gang members using smartphone technology such as GPS location services to track and control younger members is also discussed.

### **Emerging threats**

Possible emerging threats are examined, including the use of darknet cryptomarkets to access new drug markets and potential links between street gangs and terrorist networks. New interventions are explored, including using financial investigations to reveal money laundering strategies and the use of Modern Slavery legislation to address the exploitation of young people in county lines operations.

# 1. Introduction and study design

The study has been commissioned by the London Borough of Waltham Forest to understand current gang activity in the borough. The study completed by Professor John Pitts ten years ago (Pitts, 2007) established a clear baseline for understanding the complex nature of gangs and their activities. Since then the Waltham Forest has seen some significant changes. The London Olympics and strength of the London economy has seen the development of a night-time economy in parts of the borough, combined with rises in house prices and rents. Social housing stock has been sold and returned as 'buy to let' properties. The number of employed people in the borough has increased and improvements have also occurred in school performance.

Through these changes street gangs have remained, as the social factors that assist their survival remain in the borough. Gang members continue to grow up in the deprived corners of the borough and for some young people the temptation of making money through drugs appears more attractive than legitimate opportunities. More detail on education and employment is set out in Appendix 4 and more detail on housing is set out in Appendix 5.

The fluid nature of gangs and gang activity and the influence of wider social changes mean that the current study provides the opportunity to gain a fresh picture to establish current and future risks. As a ten-year follow up study, it provides an opportunity to compare gang activity across two time periods.

## Aims of the study

The research will describe and analyse:

1. The national and regional policy landscape.
2. The current gangs and their interrelationships with each other, and with other gangs located in neighbouring boroughs.
3. The size, reach, geographical scope and threats posed by the gangs.
4. The structural make-up and attributes of those gangs.
5. The objectives of the gangs and any operating models.
6. Any emerging threats that the gangs pose.

## Research methodology and design

The research design consisted of multiple data collection tools used at two main stages. The first stage consisted of qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus groups with young people affected by gang activity (10 participants) including former gang members (4 participants) as well



as professionals from the statutory and voluntary sector (21 participants). We have used the term 'former' or 'ex-gang member' to describe young people who have had varying degrees of 'embeddedness' in gangs (Pyrooz, Sweeten and Piquero, 2013) and who either self-identify as gang members and/or who have been identified by gang intervention agencies as being involved with local gangs. This is a group that has traditionally been very difficult for researchers to reach and the current drive for gangs to be more secretive has made this more challenging.

These interviews with young people involved in gangs were supplemented by interviews and focus groups with professionals and agencies that work with young people involved in gangs in order to triangulate the data from young people. The sample included professionals from gang intervention programmes, the Youth Offending Service, Probation, the Metropolitan Police Service, Education, drug agencies and as well as regional agencies such as Trident and key individuals from neighbouring boroughs.

This was augmented by an analysis of key quantitative and qualitative data held by local services, including the YOT, Police, Education and drug agencies. Whilst quantitative information can provide important insights into the scale, severity and duration of particular social problems, qualitative information is important in order to understand the meaning and motivation of the social actors involved (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The short time frame of fieldwork (July - Oct 2017) was necessary for the results to feed into the service planning cycle. At the end of this stage, all data collected was then analysed and preliminary findings were formulated.

The second stage consisted of presenting these preliminary findings to focus groups of key professionals and agencies in order to test and deepen the analysis. A total of 37 participants were involved in two focus groups with participants from a wide range of agencies who were part of the local partnership.

The analysis was also tested through consultation with the following experts in the field:

Dr James Densley, Metropolitan State University, Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA (Gang development and structure).

Dr Simon Harding, University of West London, UK (Gang membership and structure).

Dr Wojtek Przepiorka from the Utrecht University in the Netherlands (Darknet drug cryptomarkets).

There are a few provisos that the reader should bear in mind. Firstly, the research presents a snapshot at a specific point in time. Gang activity is inherently changeable and particular aspects, such as gang alliances, are inherently unstable. Secondly, the study has not looked at the impact of the reduction of government funding to the public sector and its partners through their response to financial crisis of 2008. There has been less money available for both mainstream

and specialist services in Waltham Forest and this will have had an impact on communities, gang members and their families.



## 2. The national and regional policy landscape

The aim of this chapter is to review the policy context of gangs and identify key messages. The three areas reviewed were government strategy, the policy context on gang intervention and the London policy context. More detailed analysis of national and London-wide policy changes is set out in Appendix 2 and more detail on gangs and mental health are provided in Appendix 3.

### Government strategy

In the last ten years, government strategy on gangs has remained consistent across the political divide. The focus is on partnership working, local solutions, early interventions, rehabilitation, and gang exit work with gang members. However, within this overall approach this period has also seen the rise of new concerns related to gangs. These include:

- Gangs developing 'county lines' drug dealing operations outside of London, typically in rural and seaside towns.
- Safeguarding children and child sexual exploitation (CSE).
- Public health engagement with gangs through mental health work and the role of Accident and Emergency Departments.
- Potential links to counter-terrorism work and the Prevent agenda.

These concerns have resulted in new legislation such as gang injunctions and tighter laws on knives and guns. A significant development in London is the growing role of the Police and Crime Commissioner/Deputy Mayor for Policing and the work of the Mayor's Office on Policing and Crime (MOPAC).

Government definitions of gangs have remained consistent using the three-tier model, which presents a pyramid with three categories from 'peer group', 'gang' and 'organised criminal group' (Hallsworth and Young, 2004). The main challenge to this assessment has been the Jay Inquiry into child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham that focused on gangs of older Asian men who exploited young women and girls. These gangs did not fit with the picture of gangs depicted in previous policy work and are different from traditional street gangs.

### Policy context on gang intervention

Subsequent government reports have continued the government strategy of partnership and localism (Home Office, 2008). Reviews of gang initiatives have provided some evidence on the effectiveness of interventions. The 2012 review of the progress of the *Ending Gang and Youth Violence strategy* (Home Office, 2012) focused on new legislation about the use of knives and guns, the forcible removal of gang members from the UK by UKBA and a dedicated £1.2 million

fund over three years to develop a network of support workers for girls vulnerable to or suffering from gang-related sexual violence.

The 2013 review of the same strategy (Home Office, 2013a) looked at the impact of the £10 million allocated by the Home Office. Positive results included improvements to the local strategic direction and leadership around tackling gangs and youth violence. There was also increased involvement with other local agencies, such as health, Job Centre Plus and the voluntary and community sector. New and improved approaches to specific issues were adopted such as understanding the local problem with gang and youth violence, and supporting girls and women associated with gangs. The review also provided statistical data on the impact of the programme with a specific focus on violent crime and homicide and many of its conclusions mirror those from the 2013 Annual Report (Home Office, 2013b).

The review of the operation of injunctions to prevent gang-related violence (Home Office, 2014) focused on the lack of use of these injunctions and explored the reasons behind this, e.g., lack of knowledge about the legislation at a local police level and the length of time taken to put together an injunction. In the period Jan 2011- Jan 2014, 88 gang injunctions had been taken out, including 46 in one local authority area outside London.

The most recent government report *Ending gang violence and exploitation* (Home Office, 2016a) continues to focus on similar themes as in previous policy documents. The report builds on previous publications with an additional focus on county line issues. It highlights the new challenge of gang-related exploitation of vulnerable young people and adults. The priority goals identified were:

- Tackle county lines and the exploitation of vulnerable people to sell drugs.
- Protect vulnerable locations – places where vulnerable young people can be targeted, including pupil referral units and residential children's care homes.
- Reduce violence and knife crime – including improving the way national and local partners use specific tools and powers.
- Safeguard gang-associated women and girls – including strengthening local practices
- Promote early intervention – using evidence from the Early Intervention Foundation to identify and support vulnerable children and young people (including identifying mental health problems).
- Promote meaningful alternatives to gangs such as education, training and employment.

No additional funding was provided and in an austerity-focused government this has been an on-going issue in this field. Local authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners are expected to make effective use of existing resources.

## London policy context

The momentum for a London-wide approach to tackling gang related crime only started once the Police and Crime Commissioner legal structure was fully in place in 2012. Before that point, anti-gang work appeared to be a low priority at the pan-London level. The first written statement on policing and gang work informed the new Mayor's team (The Police and Crime Plan 2017-2021). Building on the work of the previous mayor, the report criticised limited government funding of local authority initiatives and particularly cuts to youth services. What distinguishes this report is that it makes the point that not all knife crime is gang crime. It also considered the link between gang membership and potential radicalisation.

One of the major changes in gang activity has been the sale of drugs by urban gangs in other towns and cities. 'County lines' is the term used by police to refer to urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas, rural areas, market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines or 'deal lines' (NCA, 2015, 2016, 2017b). Gangs typically use children and young people as runners to move drugs and money to and from the urban area and this often involves them being exploited through deception, intimidation, violence, debt bondage, grooming and/or trafficking by the gang. In addition, gangs are known to target and exploit vulnerable adults by taking over their homes to use as a local base for drug dealing, a practice known as 'cuckooing' (NCA, 2015, 2016, 2017b).

In September 2016, the Waltham Forest Gang Prevention Programme report to the Communities Scrutiny Committee explored how young people from Waltham Forest have engaged in county lines activities that have expanded into Essex and parts of the Thames Valley. London gangs are now known to use young people to run drugs both within London and to other parts of the UK. Police have identified young people from Waltham Forest involved in drug markets in Essex and parts of the Thames Valley areas and they have even been found as far away as Scotland.

### 3. From postcodes to profits

*'Back then it wasn't about money...Back then it was just about ratings (Participant 27, ex-gang member).*

*'It's not really about postcodes any more. It's about money' (Participant 10, statutory sector professional).*

There have been key changes in the ways that gangs operate since Pitts' (2008) original report ten years ago. Gangs have moved away from a focus on postcodes towards a more professional business approach focused upon the drugs market and this has three core elements. Firstly, a move away from postcodes and visible displays of membership towards avoiding activities that attract police attention. Secondly, territory has developed a new meaning. Instead of an emotional sense of belonging to a postcode that needs to be defended, territory is valued as a marketplace to be maintained. Thirdly, a focus upon financial gain through control of drugs markets, particularly through alliances with other gangs and aggressive expansion outside of London to new markets with the development of county line operations.

#### **It is no longer about postcodes**

*'We just don't hear about postcodes.. they've evolved now in that, you know, the money's with the drugs ( Participant 9, pan-London statutory sector professional).*

*It's moved on from postcode related activity: it's now more to do with drug dealing. I think that's changed, probably, over the last, maybe, five years (Participant 8, statutory sector professional).*

When the classic *Reluctant Gangs* study was completed ten years ago, the focus was upon postcode territories that needed to be defended from outsiders. Gang members described an emotional relationship with their local area, encapsulated by one participant who stated:

*I'd defend anyone in E10 (Key Informant 27, Pitts, 2007, p.34).*

These territories often bore little if any relationship to drugs markets and gang territories. The violence involved appeared to serve little practical purpose beyond providing an arena to demonstrate courage and physical prowess (Pitts, 2008, p.114). Gang membership was exhibited through gang 'colours', where clothing and other insignia were used to demonstrate a visible presence within that territory.

Throughout the fieldwork, local and pan-London participants consistently reported that this had

changed:

*Gangs nowadays have gone away from that territory based colour, clothing with violence .. they are all going towards financial criminal activity (Participant 12, statutory sector professional).*

*We have become more and more aware of a decreasing focus on territory and honour (Participant 1, statutory sector professional).*

The most commonly expressed explanation for this change was that using gang colours drew unwanted attention from law enforcement agencies. One statutory professional explained:

*I don't see it at all anymore so it was particular bandanas, particular colours linked to specific gangs and that was how you would identify whether you were a member of a particular gang, whether you were a rival gang member, so it's very unclear that the person, whether they are linked to a gang at all because this clothing or colour association isn't sort of present anymore and it's a lot more covert, the gangs are active and operating at a more covert level (Participant 12, statutory sector professional).*

A pan-London statutory professional saw it as a wider trend across London and made a similar point:

*Why stand out? Why wear colours and identify yourself? Because you know police are just going to stop you, well that's, your grounds are halfway there when you're walking down the estate certain time, being arrested before you got gang colours on, you're open to being stopped and searched you? So, yes, they've moved with the, they've certainly moved with the times (Participant 9, pan-London statutory sector).*

However, one young person saw the original focus on postcodes and gang colours as heavily influenced by the media:

*Someone in the media came out and called us gangs and then everyone just seemed to run with it and it became a cool thing. Let's do this thing and let's get colours, let's get bandannas and we'll give ourselves a name but realistically it is just individuals who are friends (Young person, focus group).*

This presents any interesting account of how media interest in gangs may have originally contributed towards gangs responding by adopting American style gang insignia. Both explanations are not mutually exclusive; media interest may have provoked an impetus to develop a gang identity, but gang members may then have realised that these insignia have unwanted consequences.

## The importance of keeping a low profile

Another aspect of the new operating model is the adoption of behaviour that seeks to avoid attracting unwanted attention from law enforcement agencies. For individual gang members, this was expressed by behaviour such as not claiming welfare benefits because this would involve disclosing significant amounts of personal information and being subject to considerable scrutiny:

*With the people of working age, very typically, they don't sign on – they do not sign on – they are unable to evidence a legal income. They've all got these 'magical friends' who give them money (Participant 4, statutory sector professional).*

This was also true in relation to avoiding being named on housing tenancies, with many gang members reporting to probation as being homeless. One potential reason is to avoid drawing attention to their partners and any children living in the property, particularly if there are any incidents of domestic violence or involvement of children's social care. Another potential reason was to secure housing as gang members experience difficulties in securing a tenancy, since they cannot provide evidence of a legal income:

*The biggest difficulty with a lot of the gang members is establishing a home address because a lot of them will say that they're homeless when, clearly, they're not homeless. And we're never sure if that's under the belief that they'll get housing... Or it it's linked to domestic abuse, to be honest. So there's generally a bit of both because they don't want to disclose partners, even though we know who they're with (Participant 4, statutory sector professional).*

Another aspect was avoiding ostentatious displays of wealth, such as expensive cars and clothes. This is mainly promoted by a specific gang, the Mali Boys, who will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Whilst this was often attributed to being a distinguishing feature of this gang compared to other gangs, this new way of operating is consistent with a recent Home Office study (Disley and Liddle, 2016), which found:

*Gangs were thought to be operating more covertly, in part in response to the use of gang injunctions and other enforcement tactics... But practitioners and associates also suggested that reduced visibility could be a sign of gangs evolving into more organised groups (a trend reported in other research into gangs in the UK) who avoid public signs of gang affiliation on the grounds that it is "bad for business" (Disley and Liddle, 2016, p.36).*

There are specific issues in relation to the use of social media, which will be discussed in detail in chapter nine. To summarise here, whilst the Mali Boys avoid social media, other gangs utilise it as a means to promote the gang and their drug sales.

### **A more professional business model focused on the drugs market**

*You notice how gangs have changed, how their modus operandi has changed, it just shows that they will evolve, the strong gangs will evolve and change (Participant 48, statutory sector professional, focus group 2).*

A consistent theme across the accounts of ex-gang members, young people and professionals was that there had been a move towards a more professional operating model that was focused upon the drugs market:

*That seems to have exploded in the last few years, I think: the drug dealing. I think it's still more now because of the whole thing: the explosion round drugs. It's more around getting the money (Participant 6, statutory sector professional)*

In the original report, Pitts (2007, 2008) described the early stages of this development as a response to the increasingly difficult challenges faced by gangs engaged in one-off large robberies or 'blags' involving banks post offices and security vans. The increasing use of technology to enhance security had frustrated such robberies and drugs was started to provide an easier and more reliable alternative. One professional also linked it to increasing affluence in the local economy that contributed to the growth of the drugs market:

*Ten or fifteen years ago robbery was the main crime because the money wasn't there for a drug market, it was robbery to fund the recreation habit but it's now moved on, drugs is now the main thing (Participant 37, statutory sector professional, focus group 2).*

In chapter six on gang structure, the evolution of gangs through a 'recreational stage' to a 'crime', 'enterprise' and 'extra legal governance' stage will be described (Densley, 2012, 2014). At the time of the original report, Pitts described how gangs had started to move towards the drugs market as a lucrative source of income. It will be argued that gangs such as the Mali Boys have moved from a 'crime' stage onto the 'enterprise' stage. The difference is that criminal activity such as the drugs market is an important means to support the gang's activities in the crime stage, whereas it becomes an end in itself in the enterprise stage. This was captured by one statutory sector professional:

*The drug dealing is almost their raison d'être – it is an industry – that they would look to expand as any successful industry (Participant 11, statutory sector professional).*



What this required at the enterprise stage is a more formalised structure in order to organise activities efficiently, which was noted by both young people and professionals:

*What I've seen is they are more organised now (Participant 22, young person).*

*The thing which we're more aware of is a more formalised structure to things (Participant one, statutory sector professional).*

The reasons why drugs markets had become central to gang activity was explained by a former gang member:

*It's predominantly drugs because, as a gang member, that's your most stable income. It's easier for you to get a bag of weed or a kilo or half or whatever and sell it. It's easier than going out and having to rob people every day. There's a lot less risk involved (Participant 29, ex-gang member).*

This view was elaborated on by a statutory sector professional:

*Mobile phones back then were worth a lot more than they are now, there are mechanisms now to block phones, so they're just useless handsets, there isn't really much benefit from robbing someone unless you're going to rob them for cash but people aren't walking around with cash in their hands... We've seen a massive reduction I think in robberies because it's not a viable source of income, drug criminality is a confirmed source of income (Participant 12, statutory sector professional).*

There is a much lower emphasis on robbery as a modus operandi, particularly as a means of initiation. This is reflected in the reduction in street crime in Waltham Forest recently.

An important aspect of a more professional operating model is that it is more ruthless in its economic drive for profits. This is supported by recent research in another London borough, which used focus groups with young people in gang-affected areas. Young people argued that money was the key motivator for gangs and violence was an instrumental means of protecting business interests rather than an expressive means of reinforcing gang identity. The researchers concluded:

*We heard statements like this a lot, for example: 'Money, money, money that's what it's all about now. It ain't about all this violence and shanking anymore, that was like 2008. You gotta prove your trap now, be business men' (Male, 15, Group 1)' (Storrod and Densley, 2017, p.685-6).*

## The changing mean of territory and violence: From expressive to instrumental

With a reduced focus upon postcodes, territory is developing a different meaning. While territory is also important for business purposes, it is more for instrumental rather than expressive reasons. Rather than purely an emotional sense of belonging, there is an increasing sense of territory as a workplace. For example, county lines operations provide access to new markets without the constant physical presence required to defend a particular postcode or estate.

It is likely that this has been influenced by developments in housing, such as increasing housing pressures and the redevelopment of the Beaumont Estate, which makes it increasingly difficult for some gangs to maintain a structure based on small estates. In next chapter, the discussion about specific gangs will describe how some senior gang members do not live in the estate where their gang is based so they 'commute' to work. This was expressed by one professional in the following way:

*Some of the more senior ones that are a bit older – some of the more coordinated players – may well have their own addresses. Some of them live off borough as well. So they come in to work* (Participant 11, statutory sector professional).

Just as territory has a more instrumental meaning, the same is true of violence. Rather than a means of expressing identity, violence was described as a means of achieving business objectives:

*You need to make some money and that is the best way to make money and if you've got links already into that kind of activity then I can see why people do it and it's going away from the violence. There is still violence because of the drug activity but not so much violence just for the sake of violence because it then highlights the other activity you were doing* (Participant 12, statutory sector professional).

*The gangs at the moment are much more about making money and they will use violence to get what they want* (Participant 6, statutory sector professional).

This is consistent with other research studies on London gangs. Storrod and Densley (2017) undertook focus groups with young people in gang-affected areas. They quoted one young person:

*'Real violence only happens when it needs to and there has got to be a good reason for it now'. He added, 'It's not like the old days, it's all about the money now'* (Male, 15, Group 4) (Storrod and Densley, 2017, p.685-6).

Storrod and Densley (2017) concluded that the participants identified money as the key motivator for group membership and that violence was primarily used to protect 'business interests' in the drug trade.

### **Market expansion through county line operations**

Gangs operating county lines use a telephone number or set of telephone numbers that link back to a central line for ordering drugs, operated from outside the area, which becomes the group's 'brand' (NCA, 2017a). Part of the more business focused operating model is the expansion of markets using county lines operations, which is common across London rather than being a local phenomenon. One statutory sector professional described the logic behind the targeting of new markets:

*They identify areas where there is a demand and if you think a lot of these people in Ipswich, there are these dead end towns with former days of glory and unemployment is going up, the industrial decline. People who would have done those jobs in the past are now targeted by drug dealers, that creates a demand (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

One young person expressed it as follows:

*When you look at gangs, the root of it, a lot of criminal offences come from money and the money comes from the drugs so like in any market, when it becomes overpopulated they need to find a new market so they find another area that maybe they can make money from (Participant 24, young person, focus group 1).*

### **More opportunities for business alliances**

The pursuit of business interests has led to greater opportunities to engage in alliances that can serve the interests of both parties. This is particularly true of the Mali Boys, who are currently the most influential gang in Waltham Forest and leading the new operating model. One statutory sector professional described their approach:

*They're very much into much more of a business alliance... it is the professionalism of that particular gang, they are more focussed on making money than on inter-turf warfare (Participant 4, statutory sector professional).*

Another statutory sector professional gave the example of how the Mali Boys had recently formed an alliance with a smaller gang (DM Crew):

*But the Mali Boys being feared and being the bigger gang by this point... have basically absorbed the DM Crew, they are almost like an umbrella gang where they move into areas where there's smaller gangs and basically I'm assuming put it to them, you are either with us or against us, so the smaller gangs join them. It's almost like a franchise, like McDonalds or Benetton where the Mali Boys have got a very effective pyramid structure, business plan, but instead of burgers and woolly jumpers its Class A drugs and cannabis (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

However, one former gang member explained how business alliances between gangs could be unstable:

*One minute you're friends; the next minute you're not. And it could just be one person within that group. You lot could all be fine. There could be ten guys from this gang, ten guys from that gang: everyone's fine with each other apart from this person and this person doesn't get on. They have a fight: their friends have to back their friends (Participant 29, former gang member).*

Indeed, he went on to describe how, when things were tight, gang members can turn on each other:

*Even within that tight circle, when things are getting hard, there's not enough money coming through, maybe there's been a drought with the drugs – no weed coming in – they will, literally, look at who's in their circle and think, 'Who can we rob?' 'Who can we kick out?' 'Who can we get rid of?' In their **own** circle (Participant 29, former gang member).*

### **A highly exploitative operating model**

*It's all about the drug dealing now. It's about getting young people out in the streets, selling your drugs for you, not really caring too much about any outcome they may have... (Participant 6, statutory sector professional)*

The new operating model has particularly ruthless and exploitative aspects that pose significant risks to a wide of people but there are several groups of people who are at particular risk. Firstly, young people who are at risk of being drawn into working in drug markets locally and outside of the area in county lines activities. An example is provided below:

**Case study 1:**

A 14-year-old boy was recruited into a local gang to become involved in county lines activities. He received a phone call from a gang member at 3am on a school night telling him that he would be going to a seaside town and a taxi will be arriving soon with a sports bag containing the crack he would be transporting. He is told that he will be paid £500 when he returns back having sold all of the drugs. Once he arrived in the town he was dropped off a trap house. Within half an hour of him arriving there, three men kick the door to his room down, stab him in the buttocks three times and steal £3,000 worth of crack.

Professionals working with the boy strongly suspect that the three men were associates of the gang who had been tipped off about his arrival and it was a form of 'debt bondage' (NCA, 2017b). The boy is left indebted to the gang, who then control him. As one professional stated, *'That's the level of ruthlessness of these gangs, they will recruit these kids and basically just use them as a piece of meat for whatever purpose they've got'* (Participant 11, statutory sector professional).

The particular 'grooming' techniques used by gang recruiters are discussed in chapter seven on gang membership. The particular vulnerability of younger people was highlighted by one participant:

*Youngers are normally easier to influence, when they are at school* (Participant 21, ex-gang member, focus group 1).

A second vulnerable group are individuals whose properties are taken over using 'cuckooing' tactics. This is well established in county lines activities, where the properties are used to sell drugs from. However, this tactic is used locally to provide addresses to store and package drugs and to hide in during police activities. A former Mali Boys member insisted that the ways that they took over people's homes was not exploitative:

*You see one thing that we're known for, the Mali's, we ain't dickheads, we won't be a prick that knows this woman is disabled and what not and we're going to use her house to do our things and what not, yeah. It can happen, I'm not saying they won't do it but it is a thing where we have respect that comes from our culture, respect, that's one thing we've got, we've got respect, do you know what I mean? So stuff like that, disabled people, old people, people like that is the type of thing where we have respect for them so it's not like we can run in their house and do whatever we need to do and then shut the door behind their backs. We do it where the person where we are using their house is getting something out of it as well, so it's not just oh we're friends, we'll use your house, that person is getting*

*money or drugs or something* (Participant 28, former Mali Boys member).

This could be seen as a form of denial in which taking over someone's house is morally reframed as a transaction between consenting adults in which both parties gain. When he was questioned further, he explained the motivation for using somebody's home in this way:

*If they are outside it is more of a way that they can get caught, let's be honest. They are just getting paid to think smart here. What people are getting paid for is to think for us so what it is, we have to find our little rat holes where can just crawl in quickly so them rat holes – even those houses, they don't really sell things out of it, all they really do with these type of houses is they just go there and bag up their weed* (Participant 28, former Mali Boys member).

Thirdly, local businesses may be intimidated by gangs, including being forced to remove or disable their CCTVs. One participant identified a case in which a local branch of a fast food chain was taken over to sell drugs from.

*Sometimes, they do want to set up shop somewhere so they use intimidation. If they've a favourite shop: they intimidate the shopkeeper into taking down the CCTV for example. They threaten violence and use violence sometimes. There's a [local branch of a fast food chain] that they took over for a while, intimidating the owners there. Again, I think they choose them quite carefully. So they probably choose their victims carefully* (Participant 11, statutory sector professional).

There is clear evidence that gangs in Waltham Forest have developed county lines operations outside the capital. Indeed, there is worrying evidence that cuckooing is used locally to support drug dealing activities in ways that are slightly different to activities outside London. When used locally, the existence of established drug dealing areas means there is less need to use properties to sell drugs. Instead, the properties are often used to store and package drugs and as somewhere for street dealers to hide during law enforcement operations. This means that they attract less attention and are more difficult to discover, which presents additional risks to the vulnerable people involved.

### **Use of surveillance intelligence by gangs**

One of the features of the new operating model is the use of technology and other means of surveillance to gain information on individual police officers.

*But the Mali Boys seem to have a business model and are a much more professional outfit. And that manifests itself in many different ways, such as the intelligence collection they do*

*on officers. So they try and intimidate officers by collecting number plates etc and going on social media (Participant 11, statutory sector professional).*

The Mali Boys also used technology as an integral part of their surveillance activities on police officers. For example, there were reports that gang members using social media such as FaceBook to gather information about the personal lives of police officers. They also used mobile phone technology to place spotters at strategic places to warn others of any police presence. This was combined with more traditional methods, such as waiting outside of the police station to record the number plates of officers' personal cars.

*It's for power, to try and intimidate... there were a number of the Mali Boys recently who were hanging around the back gate of one of the police stations where the police come in and out and they were making notes of the registration marks of the police officers' personal vehicles and taking photographs of those vehicles. What they were saying was we know where you live, we can trace you from this and that type of thing. It is a statement from the Mali Boys that they're not scared of the police and it's almost sabre rattling (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

The participant pointed out that gang members would not be able to gain home addresses for car registrations so the information was of limited value, adding that:

*I just don't think it would be in their best interests to start taking on the police that way. They know the legal system, they're using these kids so for the older gang members to say right, we're going to take out the police and do this, that and the other, is only going to make it more tough for them so the status quo is better for them as it is so at the moment it is why disrupt it? We're not the enemy, the enemy is the rival gangs. They're making money, they're being successful (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

In conclusion, the key features of the new operating model have been outlined. In the next chapter, the specific gangs who are active in Waltham Forest will be profiled and the emergence of one gang, the Mali Boys, will be discussed in depth.



## 4. The gangs of Waltham Forest

Gang membership is widespread over the whole London area and affects all communities. Within the London area there are approximately 250 recognised gangs made up of around 4,500 people. Gang type ranges from street-based gangs involved in direct violence and robbery to criminal networks involved in supply of class 'A' drugs and firearms offences. The small number of people involved are estimated to be responsible for 50% of shootings, 22% of serious violence, 17% of robbery and 14% of rape offences within the area they operate in.

Within Waltham Forest in 2017, approximately 230 individuals have been identified as being gang members or associates (Graham, 2017). 56 people are currently imprisoned or on remand for a variety of offences ranging from minor fraud through to serious violent offences. Gang members appear to be mainly made up of young people aged from 14 to 24 years of age although younger children have been identified as being on the periphery of gangs, attracted by the apparent money, power and status that gang membership appears to give to their older peers.

This chapter is based on intelligence gathered by the local authority and Metropolitan Police in the period between early 2014 and early 2017 combined with individual interviews and focus groups with professionals and ex-gang members as part of this study. It is important to point out that the issues of estimating the size of gangs has become more complex and less reliable with the move away from visible gangs protecting specific geographical areas. One participant stated:

*Individuals then were more likely to associate with a gang and would come forward to say that they were a member of a particular gang whereas now you don't find that they are saying that they're associated to a gang, they're less likely to say that, denying that they're linked to a gang so then the intel to suggest that they are gang associated is harder to come by (Participant 12, statutory sector professional).*

Consequently, an important proviso is that the information here is the best that is available at the current time and the ever-challenging nature of gang activity means it is subject to change.

One gang, the Mali Boys, featured strongly in the data obtained from both young people and professionals. Indeed, when participants were asked about the different gangs, the Mali Boys were discussed more than all of the remaining gangs combined. Consequently, they will be discussed in a separate section at the end of the chapter.

## The gangs of Waltham Forest from 2007 to 2017

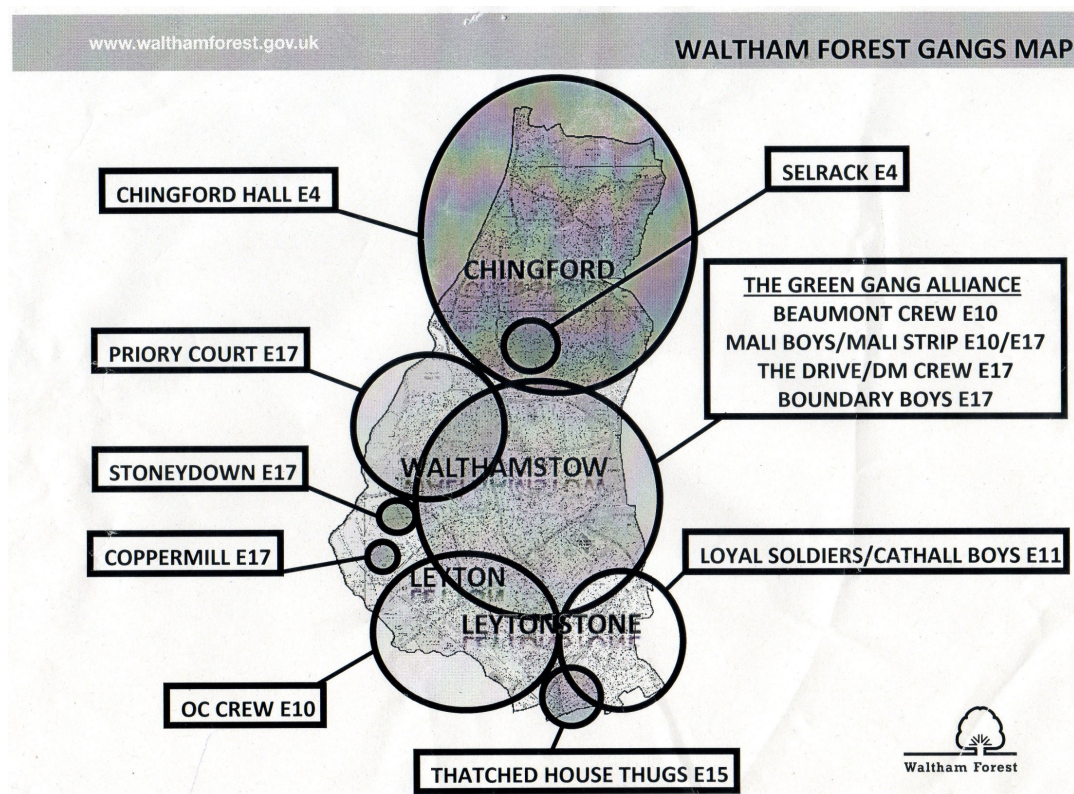
The table below lists the gangs identified in the Pitts (2007) study and the currently identified gangs in Waltham Forest.

Table 1: Gangs identified in the original Pitts (2007) study compared to current gangs

Original gangs (Pitts, 2007)	Current gangs (2017)
Beaumont	Beaumont Crew E10
Boundary/Monserrat	Boundary Boys E17
Priory Court	Priory Court E17
Drive	The Drive/DM Crew E17
Piff City	Mali Boys/Mali Strip E10/E17
Red African Devils	Loyal Soldiers/Cathall Boys E11
Canhall	Chingford Hall E4
Barrier/Brookscroft	Selrack E4
Highams Park	Stoneydown E17
New World Order	Coppermill E17
Asian Auto Theft	OC Crew E10
Hackney Overground Commuters	Thatched House Thugs E15
Russian/Lithuanian/Polish Gangs	

There are currently 12 gangs who are active in Waltham Forest, compared to the 13 gangs identified in the Pitts (2007) study. Of the original gangs, only the first four named (Beaumont Crew, Priory Court, Drive and Boundary) are still active.

At the time of data collection (October 2017), the Mali Boys are in alliance with the Boundary Boys, the Drive/DM Crew, Stoneydown and Coppermill.

**Figure 1: Gang map of Waltham Forest**

Source: Graham, R (2017) Waltham Forest YOS/FPT Gang Overview 2017.

## Profile of individual gangs

### Beaumont Crew E10

The Beaumont Crew is the longest established gang in the borough having a membership of around 100 people aged between 14 and 35. The original Pitts (2007) study highlighted the Beaumont Gang as being one of the dominant gangs in the borough from the late 1990's, whilst forming alliances with other gangs outside of the borough in order to establish a more organised criminal enterprise (Pitts, 2007). They continue to be frequently in dispute with rival neighbouring gangs. At the time of the original study, relationships took a turn for the worse when a rival gang from the Oliver Close Gang, robbed a member of the Beaumont Crew due to a dispute over drugs (Pitts, 2007). The Beaumont Crew was the largest in borough at the time due to the size of the estate, but found themselves out-numbered as smaller gangs such as the Boundary Boys and the Cathall Gang joined forces to take over the drugs business in the area (Pitts, 2007).

The Beaumont Crew has a hierarchy although it can be difficult to identify specific leaders. They are working across county lines although evidence on their level of involvement remains patchy. The younger gang members between the ages of 12-17 are increasingly becoming active in street level crime both as victims and perpetrators including serious violence (stabblings), weapons carrying, CSE and drug dealing.

The gang's longevity, control of the street drug trade in its patch and reputation is keeping it alive and it is still recruiting young people even if its connection to the estate has weakened. The regeneration of the estate has had an impact on gang members who live on the estate. Some young people in the focus group queried how many gang members still live on the estate.

*What's funny, half the people who say they're from the area do not live in the area, it's actually funny that. All the people who say they're from Beaumont, no one lives on Beaumont. There were only two people living there last year and they've gone now.*  
(Participant 23, young person, focus group 1)

A statutory sector professional who was familiar with the estate commented:

*A lot of that has changed because all the blocks have been pulled down. It's all been, now, done up. And then, also, the other new thing they've done since I've left working there is they've built a lot of new blocks, which they've then put ... They've sold, rather than being social housing. So now, rather than it just being purely social housing in that estate, it's a mixture of owner-occupiers as well and it's really changed the demographic. In fact, one of the guys was talking to me the other day – we were talking about gangs and stuff on Beaumont –and he said, 'If you go down there, no one's there now. He said, 'Everyone's moved off and the people that are there are not gang members* (Participant 6, statutory sector professional).

### **Mali Boys/Mali Strip E10/E17**

The Mali boys grew from a split with the Beaumont Boys in 2015. Gang size of the leadership group is estimated at least about 40. They appear well organised and their power and influence has grown since the split. They lead the new economically-driven operating model and are less interested in post code rivalries unless it is to protect their drug market. The Mali Boys are heavily involved in drug supply and have a 'street' reputation as a violent and feared group across the borough.

The Mali Boys gang elders are males from the Somali community of Waltham Forest, but we have recently seen that at a street level 'youngers' are boys and girls from non-Somali backgrounds. One professional stated that the Mali Boys:

*[The Mali Boys] are very diverse and have a very multicultural recruitment policy and you started seeing younger boys, less so girls, mainly boys being affiliated and associated with the Mali Boys who had a non-Somali background (Participant 6, statutory sector professional).*

Young people have been recruited and used as drugs runners, sometimes leaving the London area for cross county lines drug dealing organised and paid for by the Mali Boys elders. The younger gang members between the ages of 12-17 are increasingly becoming active in street level crime both as victims and perpetrators including serious violence, weapons carrying, CSE and drug dealing.

The leadership is male and seeks anonymity with little ostentation. It remains unclear what happens to the 'profits' of drug supply. The leaders are rarely seen with girls or young women, although girls have been found during 'trap house' raids.

### **The Drive/DM Crew E17**

The Drive/DM Crew (as known as 'Dangerous Minds') now works for the Mali boys, although they have still maintained a separate identity. There are currently around 20 members of the DM Crew on the Waltham Forest gang matrix, 5 of whom are in prison. The gang still has a presence on both Hoe Street and Wood Street wards.

The DM Crew have a notable internet presence on social networking sites like YouTube (via PACMANTV) and Myspace, which are used to engage in taunting of rival gangs.

Gang members from the DM Crew regularly engage in anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the area and communal areas of the blocks of flats in the DM Crew territory are used as frequent hangouts. However gang members appear to live throughout the borough and some reside in neighbouring boroughs.

### **Boundary Boys E17**

When Pitts (2007) conducted his study, the Boundary Boys were also identified as being in existence for a long period of time, but had recently formed alliances with individuals from a Monserrat heritage. Their location at the time of that study, Manor Hall Gardens, used to be the base of the Beaumont Gang, but this changed when rival gang members joined forces, as previously mentioned (Pitts, 2007).

Intelligence on the Boundary Boys has largely disappeared suggesting the gang is no longer functioning independently and has been subsumed by the Mali Boys. During interviews, this gang was mentioned in accounts of gang history but was rarely mentioned as a relevant current 'player' by the ex-gang members and professionals interviewed.

### **Loyal Soldiers/Cathall Boys E11**

There are currently around 50 members of the Cathall/LS gang identified on the Waltham Forest gang matrix, with others affiliated or active on the periphery of the gang and eight members are currently imprisoned.

Between October 2014 and February 2015 they were rated by the police as one of the top 10 gangs in London. They do not appear to be as active or as dangerous as they were in that period.

The majority of active LS members in the Leytonstone area are aged between 18 and 22 years, and were the teenagers from the generation of LS youths who started out engaging in anti social behaviour (ASB) and street robberies but who have now progressed to more serious offences. These established members of the Loyal Soldiers / Cathall gang are surrounded by a penumbra of associates and "youngsters", many of whom are involved in low-level drug supply, ASB and assaults, commonly involving knives, both as victim and suspect.

The Loyal Soldiers / Cathall gang has predominantly been involved in gang on gang incidents with the Thatched House Thugs and the Beaumont Crew.

There have also been recent internal disputes over leadership challenges that have resulted in internal conflict within this gang. The gang has no history of collaboration with other gangs but is involved in county lines drug running. There were few direct quotes about the Cathall Boys in the interviews.

### **Priory Court E17**

Priory Court, as known as the Priory Court Grey Gang (PCGG) has around 40 members of the gang, of whom eight are currently in custody. The age range is from young teenagers to early 20s; gang members from Priory Court regularly cause ASB on the estate and in the nearby roads.

Priory Court is one of the most geographically-based gangs on the borough, with the majority of their members living on or around the Priory Court Estate.

Like many gangs, there is a hierarchy within the gang consisting of the Elders and the Youngers. One leader had identified links with the Tottenham Man Dem gang and some of the identified County Lines work was covered by both gangs. It is also worth noting that unlike some gangs, membership of Priory Court does not automatically confer protection from other members. Other have suggested an alliance with a Hornsey-based gang

*But Priory for example, they are affiliated with the Grey Gang which is in Hornsey which has got war going on with Wood Green and Tottenham, no, they haven't got a problem with Tottenham, they get on, but it's so nuanced (Participant 7, voluntary sector professional).*

Priory Court has a notable internet presence on social networking sites like YouTube and MySpace, which are used to conduct taunting of rival gangs.

Historically, Priory Court were allies of the Beaumont Crew through previous familial links, however this allegiance no longer exists and these two gangs are now rivals (owing to the fatal stabbing of a Beaumont crew member). They also had a previous allegiance with the Cathall Boys. The gang are in conflict with more gangs in Waltham Forest than any other. Current conflicts are with the Chingford Hall Gang and the Beaumont Crew/Boundary Boys/DM Crew.

### **Chingford Hall E4**

The gang currently comprises of around 45 known members. Originally, the gang was made up of members in their late teens and early twenties; however there are now many younger members between the ages of 14 and 20 years of age.

The younger members are seen as “coming up” the ranks. There is evidence that street fighting and robbery are used as initiation rites into the gang. The gang make-up appears highly hierarchical, with a clear leader who surrounds himself with several lieutenants who undertake “enforcement” of members where the leader considers it necessary, using violence to do so. He is also thought to exercise further control by making gang members hold weapons or drugs as a test of their loyalty. The isolation of the estate makes the control of the territory easier for the gang. The structure of this gang is unusually hierarchical with a clearly identified leader, which will be discussed further in chapter six.

Members of the Chingford Hall Gang have a strong internet presence, mainly promoting their songs via You Tube. Videos uploaded to You Tube show gang members making threats to shoot other young males in E11 gangs, Priory Court Grey Gang and the Dem Africans Gang from Edmonton North London. These tit-for-tat posturing and threats of violence prevail between the Chingford Hall gang members, associates and their rivals in Priory Court (Grey) gang or the Beaumont (Green) gang and the ‘Dem Africans’ Gang.



**Selrack E4**

The Selrack are a smaller group with approximately 10-15 members and associates. They are often seen as rivals to the much larger and dominant local Chingford Hall Gang. Members and associates of this gang have been involved in firearms offences, drug supply and have been both suspected of and victims of knife crime, thought to be related to drug supply disputes with the Chingford Hall Gang.

The leadership of the gang has been identified as a pair of brothers of Albanian extraction who have the links for the supply of drugs to the gang. It is viewed as a closed and introverted gang who have been known to target vulnerable residents. This gang is not particularly active and was rarely mentioned in interviews.

**Stoneydown E17**

The Stoney Down gang are a small group with fewer than 10 members and associates aged between 14-17 years old. This gang appears to have been absorbed into larger gangs in this area probably the Mali Boys but possible links with Priory Court.

**Coppermill E17**

The Coppermill gang are another small group with fewer than 10 members and associates aged between 14-17 years old. Members and associates of this gang are believed to have been involved in drug supply appears to have been absorbed into larger gangs in this area namely the Mali Boys but possible links with Priory Court. In the interviews, this gang was only mentioned as part of the alliance with the Mali Boys.

**OC Crew E10**

The OC Crew has reduced in prominence in recent years, partly due to the incarceration of a number of its more influential members. It has around 10 identified members on the Waltham Forest gang matrix. There has been recent intelligence to suggest that there is an emerging set of youngsters' who are trying to make their names with attacks on Beaumont, DM and Loyal Soldiers gang members. There were few mentions of this gang in interviews except when past events and rivalries were recalled.

## Thatched House Thugs E15

The Thatched House Thugs are a relatively small group with fewer than 10 members and associates and they are often seen as rivals to the Loyal Soldiers/Cathall Boys. They operate in the south of Waltham Forest Borough, in the E15 area bordering Newham Borough, and consequently also have rivalries with the Maryland Gang from Newham. This gang was rarely mentioned apart from in connection with historic rivalries. One participant stated, that '*they can't go to Newham, they've got a war with the East 7 Gang, Wood Grange Park Boys or whatever*' (Participant 7, voluntary sector professional).

## The rise of the Mali Boys

The Mali Boys are currently the most influential gang in Waltham Forest, appeared to have filled a power vacuum created 2-3 years ago following police operations in relation to two other gangs. The Mali Boys were formerly in alliance with Beaumont Crew, but split in 2016 and now operate separately.

Current intelligence on the Mali Boys is that they have subsumed several smaller gangs (DM Crew, Boundary, Coppermill and Stoneydown gangs) under their umbrella due to their reputation for extreme violence and access to high quality drugs supply. As one participant stated:

*I think they've got a good supply of drugs and so from a business point of view I think certain people have teamed up with them because they get good stuff at a good price* (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).

One statutory professional described how the Mali Boys present a new operating model:

*With seeing the Mali Boys coming now it's a different kettle of fish altogether. Whereas some of the other gangs were involved in the drugs trade, that wasn't necessarily their raison d'être. It was the gang came first... But the Mali Boys seem to have a business model and are a much more professional outfit* (Participant 11, statutory sector professional).

The participant went on to identify several ways in which the Mali Boys were different. Firstly, they collected intelligence on police officers through social media such as Facebook as well as collecting officer's personal number plates as a form of intimidation. Secondly, they have spotters who can alert others of police presence in the local area. Thirdly, they work in flexible ways in response to police operations:

*They are agile enough not to shut down operations when police have a high visibility operation on the High Street. They'll just go into people's houses: cuckooing. So, actually, it's a more sophisticated approach than, I think, hitherto, we've experienced with the other gangs* (Participant 11, statutory sector professional).

## **Narratives about the Mail Boys**

*'The Malis are a whole new entity. Those people come from these countries where they're pirates, and people are gang raped and beat up and it's all in front of them, they're ex-soldiers, they're seeing people's heads get blown off... Even if they're not born there, their mums and dads have been raised by people who this has happened to and they're just products of these things, and so they feel they can come to here and do it here, this pirate thing, this whole 'We're taking over the ship'* (Participant 21, young person).

This particularly rich quote from a young person captures a key idea expressed by other participants. This is the idea that members of the Mali Boys have been exposed to extreme forms of violence in Somalia, either directly or indirectly through family members. This is used to explain why gang members have a particular propensity to more extreme violence.

During this study, it has been very difficult to establish the accuracy of this belief. A study of the Somali community in East London in 2010 found that two thirds of the Somali population is under 20 years old and only 4% are over 50 years (Options UK, 2010). Whilst this may question whether gang members have first hand experience of war, this is very difficult to verify and does not include the effect of secondary traumatization through close family members. The research team is also concerned to avoid the stigmatization of a community that is vulnerable to both racism and Islamophobia.

Another factor is that all gangs have a 'mythology' which may have a basis in fact but which can also be used to enhance the gang's reputation. Having a reputation for extreme violence can be a valuable commodity in situations where control is valued. This idea was expressed by a statutory sector professional:

*I hear that they [the Mali Boys] are quite good at holding control because a lot of them have come from quite war torn countries so their experiences of violence and what they have seen is quite normalised, they have seen some stuff that people here haven't necessarily been exposed to so they are able to exact control over people based on the fact that they can be a bit more vicious about things* (Participant 32, statutory sector professional).

The participant went on to describe hearing members of the Mail gang using this in a threatening way:

*I have heard them speaking in crazy places and saying I've seen far worse things in Somalia, this is nothing. So they do talk about it, so people understand whatever you think is going to be bad, I'm seen much worse therefore I can do much worse (Participant 32, statutory sector professional).*

While the Mali Boys present as a strikingly different gang, in chapter six we will examine evidence that the new operating model that they exemplify is one that is becoming more increasingly prevalent across London. This will be discussed in terms of a gang evolution model that highlights how gangs change as they become more organised.

## 5. Gangs and the drugs market

Drug markets in the UK remain a segmented market. The high level drugs market has traditionally been divided into international importers and UK-based wholesalers. However, this distinction is becoming blurred as more UK-based wholesalers are travelling to the continent (NCA, 2017a). The NCA highlight the growth of Albanian gangs in the supply of drugs into the UK (HM Government, 2017).

In the last ten years there have been changes in the patterns of illegal drug use in the UK. The Home Office (2016b) *Drug Misuse: Findings from the 2015/16 Crime Survey for England and Wales* records a declining use of illegal drugs by people aged 16-59 over the last 10 years, with a distinct decrease for those aged 16-24, although recent trends indicate this is trend has started to 'flatten out'.

**Cannabis** - Cannabis remains the most commonly used illegal drug in the UK, with 6.5% of people aged 16-59 years having used it in the last year (HM Government, 2017). The most common form is herbal skunk cannabis. Although the number of cannabis farms detected in the UK has grown in recent years, most cannabis is imported (HM Government, 2017). The large source countries for cannabis resin are Afghanistan and Morocco. Herbal cannabis is also smuggled into the UK from South African countries, the Caribbean and the Netherlands.

**Heroin** - Ninety-five per cent of heroin imported into the UK has originated from Afghan opium via the traditional routes are via Turkey and Pakistan (HM Government, 2017). Turkish and Pakistani group continue to dominate heroin trafficking in the UK (NCA, 2017a).

The National Drugs Strategy (HM Government, 2017) noted that the number of people aged under 25 entering treatment for the first time who use opiates, mainly heroin, has fallen substantially over the course of the last 10 years. In the Crime Survey for England and Wales, heroin use has declined to such an extent that is now no longer recorded as a separate drug in the findings (Home Office, 2016).

**Cocaine and crack cocaine** - Cocaine comes mainly from Peru, Columbia and Bolivia. It is transported to the UK either direct or through Europe, the Caribbean and West Africa (HM Government, 2013).

## The Waltham Forest picture

The original *Reluctant Gangster* study reports an increasing drugs business around the sale of opiates and a growing stabilisation of the supply market following territorial battles between gangs (Pitts, 2007). Interestingly, the study records the embryonic development of a business-orientated approach to the sale of drugs.

Street gangs have continued to concentrate on the traditional drugs markets selling crack cocaine, heroin and cannabis. There is little evidence that street gangs have become involved in the sale of powder cocaine, ecstasy and new psychoactive substances to the expanding night-time economy in the borough. There is little evidence of street gangs being involved with the sale of 'spice' either to prisoners or to the homeless community. The County Lines development has reflected these 'traditional' drugs markets and suggests street gangs have looked for opportunities to expand their usual markets as opposed to trading in 'new' drugs in the borough.

The main 'open' drugs markets are the St James St area (known as the 'Mali Strip'), Wood St (controlled by the DM Crew in alliance with the Mali Boys) and well as less high profile markets around the Bakers Arms/Beaumont estate and on the Cathall Road estate. A former Mali Gang member who was interviewed viewed the High Street area from Sainsbury's to the junction with Hoe Street including the Bus Station as neutral territory.

Professionals report St James Street drug activities by the Mali Boys tend to be small scale £5 bags leading to a high volume, low value model. This may be influenced by county lines activity, which tends to involve smaller deal amounts than other drug supply methods (NCA, 2017b). At first sight, this would appear to be a bad business model as it increases risk to street level dealers and generates low profits. However, it increases their market share by opening up the market to people such as students and homeless people who may not be able to afford larger amounts and puts pressure on competitors who cannot afford to operate on this model:

*They will sell any amount to make whatever they can. They obviously produce such a level that they can afford to do that. Whether they produce it themselves or buy it from other people, they have that facility and my personal opinion it is to get a whole handle on the complete market... they are going to have the variety of product to take over from everyone else (Participant 32, statutory sector professional, focus group 2).*

A concerning trend is that a number of professionals noted that the age of those selling Class A drugs has dropped:

*But I think the actual drug selling has slightly changed: younger people are dealing Class A drugs, whereas, from what I knew from my experience before in my last job, I would say that it was more Class B and C drugs.... Class A drugs were dealt by the elders. Now, it is any*

*age that they are dealing Class A. And gangs have more of a financial gain for them*  
(Participant 8, statutory sector professional).

At the time of the original study in Waltham Forest, heroin was mainly supplied by South Asian groups operating out of shops and restaurants with street gangs controlling the sale and supply of drugs in their estates (Pitts, 2007). It would appear that street gangs have taken over the market of heroin, although it appears to be a market in long-term decline.

Local drug agencies report fewer new registrations of clients with heroin problems. Information from local drug services confirmed that they are receiving fewer new referrals of people who use heroin. One professional noted:

*For the past couple of years, it has been. I think, from our day to ... There has been less and less presentations of new heroin users coming into the service. At the moment, we really have a lot of the older generation who, historically, have been using opiates* (Participant 2, voluntary sector professional).

The higher level suppliers in Waltham Forest are currently unknown but investigations are on-going with international agencies to establish supply routes and it is thought likely that these are likely to be Turkish or Balkan. Some of the established gangs have links into Haringey and Enfield Street gangs and these seem to have established links to Turkish drug suppliers.

### **Earnings from drug sales**

Given a more secretive operating model, it has become increasingly difficult to estimate weekly earnings through selling drugs. Local police sources had estimated that the drug operations run locally by the Mali Boys generates approximately £50,000 per week of sales.

Some street level dealers involved in county lines operations reported to professionals that they were making approximately £500 per day. The most recent National Crime Agency report on county lines (2017b) states that it is very difficult to establish reliable figures, but it estimates that a typical line can make in the region of £3,000 per day with some more prominent lines possibly making in excess of £5,000 per day. Most street dealers do not use the drugs that they are selling with the exception of cannabis and this can make a difference if individuals are using their drug selling to finance their cannabis use. One former gang member stated:

*Well me personally, we never made any money, I'd be busy just smoking it myself! So like weed can make money if you don't smoke because half of the time I was smoking my own profit so there was nothing to make* (participant 28, former gang member).



This growth in young street dealers being both sellers and users of cannabis had been noted by professionals but it is less common with other drugs.

The national Drugs Strategy (HM Government, 2017) has a focus on the links between street gangs and county lines activities. Waltham Forest street gangs are part of this development as most have tried to establish county lines into towns in England, particularly Eastern England due to transport links.

### **Challenges for the borough**

Currently there is no over-arching recent assessment of the drugs market and its implication for future drug and alcohol strategies and work with street gangs. We give some indication of the areas that need to be considered by the partnership in this section:

- What are the implications of demographic changes for local drugs markets? Will the population increase in the borough open new markets for street gangs?
- If the local drug market in Waltham Forest is shrinking for street gangs, will gangs be competing more for this market?
- It appears from national and local data that heroin use is in long-term decline. What are the implications for local drug markets?
- Is the move across county lines influenced by gang members' associates and families being rehoused out of London?

## 6. Gang structure

The term 'gang' has provoked considerable controversy within the academic community. Pitts (2007) identified a debate between two broad approaches that continue to this day. The first approach is the 'youth governance' approach, which disputes the existence of gangs and argues that the term is used as a justification for the scapegoating and criminalisation of predominantly black youth. Prominent academics (Hallsworth and Young, 2008; Gunter, 2017) have argued that street crime cannot be reduced to gangs and that the term can bring out the worst in criminal justice policy (Densley, 2013). This view was expressed in the current study by one former statutory sector professional:

*I personally do not believe there are gangs in Waltham Forest. Does that mean I don't believe there are groups of young people who are involved in criminal activity, who are involved in violence? Of course there are (Participant 31, former statutory sector professional).*

The participant went on to state that it is only a small percentage of young people who are involved in crime. Consequently, there is a danger that talking of 'gangs' can be used to criminalise young black males who are visible on the streets:

*Working class young people, black young people have always inhabited social space. They are not middle class, they haven't got nice big houses, right, with glass and marble floors, they are not private Eton Harrow school, right? So their social world is on the streets or if you want to play football, play cricket, you go out with your mates. Unfortunately we want to ethnically cleanse our streets, we want to be gentrified, we want nice middle class people to live in these swanky flats. We don't want to see roughneck kids hanging about laughing and joking (Participant 31, former statutory sector professional).*

The other extreme is the 'risk factor' paradigm, which argues that we face a serious problem that is often explained in terms of individual deficiencies and rooted in dysfunctional families. This has been criticised for seeking to turn 'public problems' into 'private ills', thereby stigmatising individual families and ignoring the realities of poverty and racism.

The current study takes the view that street crime cannot be reduced to gangs and that the great majority of young people are not involved in criminal activity. However, there is a small minority who are involved in increasingly organised criminal activities. Many of these are particularly young and vulnerable people who are drawn into activities that they do not fully understand until it is too late and it is necessary to understand these activities in order for agencies to offer support and protection. It continues in the third tradition exemplified in the original Pitts study, in which the drivers to gang activities are understood not in terms of individual deficiencies but

in terms of a political economy that has its own logic. It is through understanding this logic that the operating models are revealed, which provides insights into how young people can be protected.

The study utilises the definition utilised in *Dying to Belong* (CSJ, 2009) with five key features:

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 a range of criminal activity and violence, (3) identify with or lay claim over territory, (4) have some form of identifying structural feature (5) are in conflict with other, similar, gangs (Centre for Social Justice, 2009).

This chapter will look at how gangs evolve, the different levels of hierarchy in the gang and what role they play, how trust is formed amongst gang members and the difficulties individuals face when trying to exit from a gang.

## **Gang evolution**

Ten years ago, there were considerable academic debates about the definitions of gangs and a focus upon identifying different types of gangs. Whilst these debates continue to some extent, this report will draw upon more recent research to argue that it is more helpful to understand current developments in terms of gang evolution rather than gang types.

Densley (2012, 2013, 2014) conducted a study of gangs in London that comprised of twelve gangs in six local authorities (Croydon, Hackney, Haringey, Lambeth, Lewisham, and Southwark). He conducted interviews with 52 self-nominated 'gang members' and 17 self-nominated 'gang associates'. The study focused upon how the gangs were organised and he developed a four-stage model to describe the development processes that gangs go through from being a loose recreational group of friends through to a highly organised stage of extra legal governance. According to Densley (2014) gangs initially start off as groups of peers who come together based on similar recreational activities, which then expands into becoming increasingly organised (Densley, 2014). Of course, many street gangs, like many new businesses, fail and disappear. Others stagnate and never reach more developed levels. However, others grow and develop in size and complexity and need to negotiate a series of challenges at each stage that require a different structure.

Please see table 2 below, which describes the four stages:

**Table 2: The evolution of gangs (Densley, 2012, 2014).**

Stage	Features
<b>Recreation</b>	Most gangs start as recreational groups based upon friendship and family ties and a shared history. Criminal activity is usually opportunistic and rarely acquisitive, e.g., fighting, vandalism.
<b>Crime</b>	Crime and violence become intrinsic to group identity and a means of supporting gang activities. Members gain 'respect' through these activities, but this attracts attention from police and rival gangs. As they develop, gangs need to become more cohesive and organised to survive and to secure income.
<b>Enterprise</b>	In response to powerful incentives, gangs become more organised and rely more upon a goal orientation than personal relationships. Crime is no longer a means, it has become the end in itself. Original founding members become <i>de facto</i> leaders, usually with one member who is 'primus inter pares', the first amongst equals, acquired through a combination of a reputation for violence and business acumen.
<b>Extra-legal governance</b>	Some gangs evolve to be the sole suppliers in a given domain (Densley, 2012, 2014) and invest in the 'resources' of violence, territory, secrecy, and intelligence to embed themselves in an area.

In the first stage, individuals start as a recreational group that is brought together through friendships and family relationships. One professional that was interviewed for the study described the 'recreation stage' through the eyes of a gang member as:

*They go to the studio, they hang out and they may play games like Play station and X-box. Some of them go to school so they meet in education they meet anywhere, like the chicken shop* (Participant 10, statutory sector professional).

Participants from the focus group described the recreational stage of a gang as:

*Similar people tend to do similar things so if you are around somebody that is doing something for long enough, birds of a feather you will naturally start to do it. You make friends, you chill with your friends and if your friends do bad things then sometimes you get caught up and sometimes you don't* (Participant 23, young person, focus group 1).

Whilst the initial recreational stage appears to be focused on socialising and participating in everyday activities, it also became clear that not everyone had the same agenda.

A former Mali Gang member that was interviewed for the study explained that some people were very focused on money whilst others were more focused upon recreation.

*There are two different types of people. There are people who are just really money hungry and then there's people that are just coming to the Strip just to chill, small quantities of spliffs and chill, do you know what I mean. There are certain people who are just on money, those type of people, the police know them, individuals know those people and those people make a lot of money (Participant 28, ex-gang member).*

Most recreational groups at the first stage remain so and do not become formalised as gangs. Those that do move into the second 'crime' stage. Whilst crime is rarely acquisitive at the first stage, it becomes a means of supporting the gang's activities and identity at the second stage.

At this stage, criminal activity become central and members are integrated into the gang by committing offences in order to gain respect amongst the peers and rival gangs. However, this stage also attracts attention from the police and the gang must become more organised to remain successful and safer from both police and other gangs. In order to gain respect during the 'crime stage' an ex-gang member gave an example of a situation that had previously occurred within the borough:

*So, I could be a younger that will carry knives and I don't care about stabbing people so I will do the dirty work for people. So, in that sense, one of the olders can go up and say, 'Oh yes, I've got an issue with this person, deal with him'. I do it repeatedly, until I get this reputation of, 'Right, that guy is crazy, he will stab you in seconds, he doesn't care and then you gain this more of a status.....people just have more respect for you' (Participant 29, ex-gang member).*

The 'enterprise' stage is the third part of the model where gangs move away from everyday recreational activities based upon personal friendships, and focus more on business acumen. At this stage gang recruitment is not based upon friendship and family networks but on recruiting subordinates who are essential to business expansion. As noted previously, the Mali Boys are currently the most influential gang in the borough and exemplify many of the core features of the 'enterprise' stage, which enhances their reputation as a potential business partner. As one participant stated:

*They have a got a good supply of drugs and so from a business point of view I think certain people have teamed up with them because they get good stuff at a good price I guess (Participant 7, voluntary sector professional).*

Gangs at this stage are particularly active at seeking new markets, which is currently the focus of county lines operation outside of London. With the 'enterprise' stage also comes a high level of violence in order to secure the gangs business model as previously mentioned. The level of violence can consist of anything from serious assault to murder:

*When your son or daughter becomes somebody who is just evil, as in violent and doing heinous crimes, like kidnapping people and holding them hostage...like I know a story where the Mali's had got a boy in the boot and drove him all the way to Wales...money, drugs, you know, owe people money, you've got to pay the debt, if you ain't got the money, get yourself killed or something (Participant 20, young person).*

In order to be successful at this stage, the gang will need to have to have an informational advantage in order to stay one step ahead of any rival gangs and the police. During the study the use of social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram are described as being some of the new modern tools that gang members use to communicate with each other:

*Social media's enabled people to communicate. I mean originally, it was more around people using BBM to message people but it's much more sophisticated now so I'm just wary of that, every young person's got a smart phone (Participant 9, pan-London statutory sector professional).*

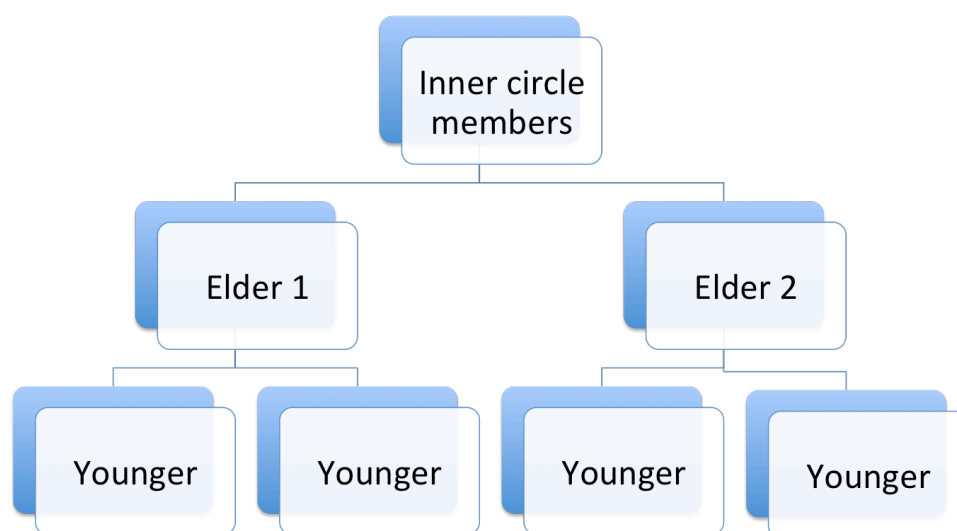
The final stage of the model is that of 'extra-legal governance', where the gangs move to becoming the sole supplier of goods and services (Densley, 2012). At this stage, gangs resemble organised crime groups. Few gangs reach this stage, at least partly because it is very difficult to gain a monopoly in drugs markets except in a very limited area. It is possible to become a monopoly survey in niche markets such as firearms, but this appears to remain the preserve of organised crime groups. Another development is that gangs begin to form legitimate businesses. For example, the London gang PDC (Poverty Driven Children) has an underground record label, a clothing line, a barbershop, a youth engagement project and investments in the local night time economy (Densley, 2014, p.537). Consultation with Dr Densley has confirmed that the Mali Boys are at the advanced stages of the enterprise stage and have not moved into the extra legal governance stage. This is discussed in more detail in chapter ten on emerging threats.

## **Gang hierarchy**

Previous studies have shown that in order for a gang to maximise its profits especially when the crime involved the distribution and selling of illegal drugs, it was imperative that a level of hierarchy was put in place (Pitts, 2012). This is particularly true in the 'enterprise' stage, which is the stage that the most active gangs in Waltham Forest are currently at.

In his study of 12 gangs in 6 local authorities (Densley, 2012, 2013, 2014) found that gangs in the 'enterprise' stage typically had the following structure, comprising of approximately three levels of power and authority: the higher level or 'inner circle, 'elders' and 'youngers'.

Figure 2: Gang hierarchy



The higher level or 'inner circle' members are able to make autonomous decisions and sanction individuals in the lower levels. These are often the founding members of the gang and connected together through friendship and family relationships. In an environment where trust is scarce, these existing relationships are important in everyday activities. This is typical a tight-knit group of approximately seven members who share roughly equal authority. However, there is usual one member who is 'primus inter pares', the first amongst equals. Although this individual does not have a formal title, they have acquired their implicit dominance through a combination of a reputation for violence and business acumen (Densley, 2012, p.53). However, responsibility is shared amongst the inner circle as a means of ensuring operations can be sustained if one or more members are removed.

Secondly, the middle or 'elder' level, who translate the decisions of the inner circle into actions and are the visible face of the gang. Alternative terms for elders are 'olders' or 'generals'. They are usually a mix of first and second-generation gang members, aged 17–24 years on average. Inner circle members add credibility to the gang but tend to distance themselves once it is established in order to conceal the level of gang organisation from outsiders. Therefore, elders are responsible for running the gang's business on a day-to-day basis. Whilst the majority operate as retail level drugs 'entrepreneurs', some have a particular reputation for violence and are called upon as 'enforcers'.

Thirdly, the lower or 'younger' level who are directed by the elders and rewarded or punished by them. On average, these are aged 12-16 years old. 'Youngers' gain entry via the gang elders, who

act as gatekeepers. In chapter seven, the processes that elders use to 'groom' youngers as part of this recruitment will be discussed. Youngers are usually attached to a specific elder, who often provide a street name or 'tag' that links to the particular elder. Elders direct the criminal activity of the youngers on a day-to-day basis. In more established and articulated gangs, there is a younger 'tinies' group (Densley, 2012, p.53-4). Immediately outside the core gangs are a number of associates and affiliates, many of whom wish to become core members.

One gang in Waltham Forest did not fit this model exactly as it had a single leader who was clearly identified, rather than the 'first amongst equal' model of more diffused senior leadership. The Chingford Hall gang had a particularly hierarchical structure with a single leader who was described as being '*at the top of the pyramid*' and having an '*almost mythical status within the estate*' (Participant 16, statutory sector professional). The second layer of the pyramid consists of gang members who play a crucial role in the operation of the gang. These individuals are described as being family member or close relatives, which appears to be similar to the inner circle. The next level is the elders, known as 'enforcers' or 'generals', who are aged between 18-20 years old and their role is '*...sort out the carrier lines, the transportation, network with users in the area, so supply and demand*' (Participant 16, statutory sector professional). The bottom level consists of the youngers, who undertake the street level dealing.

### **Establishing a reputation**

It became apparent during the study that those at the top of the pyramid were not only making the most profits but also had less chance of being identified by the police which could result in imprisonment or being seriously injured or even killed by other gang members.

Harding (2014) provides an important analysis using social field theory to explain how gang members gain a reputation. Using the analogy of a 'street casino', he explains how gang members navigate the constant flux of gang life in order to accumulate street capital that determines their position in the gang structure (Harding, 2014). The most senior members (the incumbents) set the rules and have a 'house advantage' in maintaining the status quo. Members try to move from being a 'younger' to become an 'older' through strategic use of street capital to build a reputation. The 'subordinates' or 'new arrivals' tend to be those at the bottom of the pyramid who need to prove themselves in order to make it up the pyramid (Harding, 2014).

A member could move up the hierarchy by earning 'ratings' not just amongst their peers but also from those at the top of other gangs. A young man who used to be affiliated with the Mali Boys described how he established his reputation:

*To get a reputation you have to go through a lot of stages. Me personally when I was back on the Strip there was this period where I was just going from house to house. People could*



*see it in my eyes that I was not playing around, I wasn't trying to go home and drink some tea or stay with family* (Participant 28, ex-gang member).

### **Is the rise of the Mali Boys a local a local phenomenon or part of a wider pan-London development?**

One of the key questions for the research was whether the emergence of the Mali Boys is a local phenomenon or whether it is part of wider pan-London trends. Although local participants have described the Mali Boys as being unique in many respects, participants working in pan-London roles have identified similar changes in gang operation models, which suggest that it is more than a local phenomenon. One participant noted:

*Gangs have become much more organised... it's not so much around postcodes... a lot of it centres around the drugs, the county lines, the violence and vulnerability* (Participant 9, pan-London statutory sector professional).

This is compatible with a recent Home Office survey across the 33 areas in the government's Ending Gang and Youth Violence (EGYV) programme, which found that London gangs were more likely to engage in organised criminal activities (Disley and Liddle, 2016). In London, over a third of areas (35%) reported that gangs in their area were more likely to get involved in organised criminal activities compared to two years previously. Only 11% of respondents from outside London identified a similar change. Respondents in London were also more likely to report an increase in organised and large-scale drug supply, describing local gangs as more 'professional', operating in more 'intelligent' ways and having financial or commercial motivations (Disley and Liddle, 2016, p.46).

In conclusion, the emergence of the Mali Boys is best understood as a particular stage in gang evolution rather than an isolated local phenomenon. The Mali Boys exemplify the core features of the later stages of the 'enterprise' phase of gang development. Both pan-London information and a national research study would support the hypothesis that emergence of a new operating model is having an influence across London but not yet affected other cities. The potential threats posed by the Mali Boys developing into the final 'extra legal governance' stage will be examined in chapter ten on emerging threats.

## 7. Gang membership

This chapter focuses on understanding gang membership and highlights features of gang membership among young people. The first part examines the complex motivations that young people have for joining gangs. The second part examines the tactics that gang members use when recruiting new members. The final section examines the barriers to young people leaving gangs.

### Why do young people join gangs?

Motivation for young people to join a gang is complex. While social drivers such as poverty and racism have a powerful influence, other factors are more individual. Previous research literature shows that gang membership can be born out of poverty, strong or weak familial connections (Harris et al, 2011), school communities, (Gordon et al, 2004), places of worship, custodial relationships, and geographical boundaries (Densley, 2012) and those seeking cultural or racial points of reference.

A number of participants were attracted to gangs because they associated success with the accumulation of wealth. Gang membership was seen as a quick way to raise income, which was central to many of the participants interviewed. It was seen to be part of a business and participants represented themselves as entrepreneurial. In one of the focus group interviews it was clear that membership appeared to be central to the young people's survival. One young person stated:

*Nobody woke up one morning and said I want to be in a gang... you all just grew up in the same area and both areas happened to be deprived areas with the same problems but the main problem you have is you live on an impoverished estate, people have not much money there, that's one of the biggest problems, they've got no money. How can we make money? We can't get no jobs so you turn to drugs (Participant 24, young person, focus group 1).*

This expresses a sense of hopelessness about the future and a sense of desperation that can leave young people vulnerable to being exploited by gangs. It also captures the sense that growing up in a particular environment can increase the likelihood of being involved in drug dealing and gang membership. One former gang member explained it in the following way:

*If you are for example 13 and your brother's a drug dealer and he has always got his friends in your house and you see certain things happening as you're growing up, you start seeing money, you see drugs, you know what drugs look like and how to do certain things with them, you grow into naturally doing it as your path (Participant 21, ex-gang member, focus group 1).*

The participant added that this could be aggravated by other factors such as financial pressures to contribute to the family:

*You might have that one youth who started out as a good youth, he just never, ever wanted to be involved but the struggle at home has got too much and his mum is stressing too much about the bills and it's crunch time now. Especially when boys get to 16, they're not a man but not a little boy anymore, they're becoming a man so they feel they need to starting doing something to help their mum pay the bills and all they see around them are people selling drugs (Participant 21, ex-gang member, focus group 1).*

A similar point was made by another former gang member:

*The reason why they're doing the things that they're doing is based on the misfortunate position that they've been brought into it. Maybe their parents were crack heads; maybe there was domestic violence at home; there's not enough money coming in. So they're obviously thinking, 'Well, crap! What can I do to improve my family's situation?' And 90% of the time, the easiest thing for a young person to do is sell drugs (Participant 29, ex-gang member).*

Poverty was identified by a number of participants as an important factor:

*I think it's probably down to money, people are struggling, young people are struggling and they don't see a way out, they don't see education as a key to help them move forward (Participant 10, statutory sector professional).*

*Another aspect, and one I see more, is as an escape from poverty, money is a big factor especially with the younger kids (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

Financial pressures within the family can lead to extra demands such as parents working long hours, which gangs can exploit. One statutory sector professional gave the following example of recruitment:

*Mum moved back to the Waltham Forest area, got a job doing long shifts in an elderly care home, low paid income but at least it's a job but with shift work she was often absent. Gangs have picked up on this, the boy was excluded from mainstream education, didn't fit in because of his troubled background and ended up in a pupil referral unit. Within that environment he was recruited to the DM Crew (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

If family members are experiencing considerable poverty and the young people are financially

contributing, it can provide an extra barrier to challenging or reporting the behaviour. For example, one statutory sector professional described one of the difficulties in establishing when children are missing on county lines activities:

*The parents don't always report them missing because, financially, the parents are gaining as well because they target, generally, poor economic backgrounds. So the parents are sometimes collusive (Participant 4, statutory sector professional).*

Some young people seek gang membership as a result of racist bullying and victimisation at school or in their neighbourhoods. A number of participants indicated that they pursued gang membership because being in a gang provided them with protection against victimisation including other neighbouring gangs. One young person described it in the following way:

*People want protection, and if I hang around with the Somalians, yes, I might get protection because, you know, if I'm going to do that for them they're going to do that for me... They've got a reputation now for being scary people, and if that's the scary gang then we need to join that scary gang because we need protection, because the police cannot protect us (Participant 20, young person).*

Gang membership can offer personal and territorial protection from attack from neighbouring gangs:

*It's that old cliché of 'safety in numbers'. A lot of these guys are running around with people that they were in primary school with: 'They're my boys if anything comes up.' The wider society will see them as gangs but I see it's just safety in numbers: they're huddling together, trying to protect themselves in the society that's quite volatile. And, at the same time, causing havoc for everyone else (Participant 2, voluntary sector professional).*

Others seek what they perceive as the excitement of a glamorous life style, what one participant described as the promise that 'life is Grand Theft Auto', adding:

*For some of them it's boredom, they'd rather be infamous and have reputation. It's exciting and they perceive it as being glamorous, they have the immaturity to think this is an exciting lifestyle (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

## Recruitment

All gangs must recruit new members to survive, particularly with expanding markets outside London. The tactics that gang members used to recruit new street level dealers appear to have become increasingly sophisticated and exploitative. The grooming process can go on over a

period of time when gang members have identified as young person as vulnerable. Age is a vulnerability factor that gang members have become expert at exploiting:

*Youngers are more easily to influence, when they are at secondary school (Participant 21, ex-gang member, focus group 1).*

The grooming process starts early, often around the age of 10 years. An early stage of this process is desensitisation, where the young person is asked to commit petty crime as a means of normalising criminal behaviour. One statutory sector professional gave the following example:

*I had a conversation with a kid who told me that the gang members were trying to groom him from the age of 10 or 11, by saying go to the shop and get me a Lucozade but don't pay for it, nick it. But he would go and buy the Lucozade, come back and say here, I stole it (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

As part of recruitment, older gang members establish credibility in their initial contacts with potential recruits through 'war stories' about previous experiences that they have been through. A former Mali Boys member talked about how these stories act as 'mind games' that impress young people and draw them in;

*We know these guys have been through these stages, they tell us their stories of what they've been through, do you know what I mean? Me personally, their stories to me are like, how can I say, like mind games... For certain people, let's say more younger people that aren't wise enough, they will take those mind games. Me, I've gone through mind games on the Strip, they are trying to use me for some money... (Participant 28, ex-Mali gang member).*

He added that this is particularly effective with what he described as 'weak' people:

*That's what I mean by weak people, people that don't see their future, those are the type of people you can influence. These are the people you can say to, look bro, let's go to the chicken shop, do you want something to eat? Yeah? The minute they say yeah, they have jumped into the trap already because that's when they are thinking, oh that's cool, he's buying me something to eat. You take them to the chicken shop, you're buying them something to eat, the kid is thinking yes, yes, this guy actually thinks I'm cool, etc, etc, before he even knows you and you are now on the bus going towards something else (Participant 28, ex-Mali gang member).*

Some young people joining gangs had strong, supportive family relationships but senior gang members dealt with this by deliberately isolating them from their families:

*They get them to completely ruin their relationships with their family... they're sometimes quite solid families that these young people are picked up from but they fracture, they fracture the family relationship so they completely identify with being a street level gang member rather than a son, a daughter, a schoolchild, a potential footballer, potential musician. It's just I'm a street kid, I deal drugs, I get my money, I do what I need to do and that's me. That's the mindset that they get them in (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

What was striking was that gangs appeared to have little difficulty in recruiting street level dealers. One statutory sector professional explained that there had been a large operation where young street dealers were arrested but they were quickly replaced:

*We had a big push recently, we arrested quite a lot of people, mainly for possession. And they've been kids – young – twelve to fifteen. And, what we've seen is, even though we've made quite a substantial number of arrests, we've seen more and more people, almost like a cab rank: they're just coming in and replacing those that we've taken out (Participant 11, statutory sector professional).*

## Leaving the gang

Terminating gang membership comes with many risks. These risks include threats to the individual, or their family and loss of income:

*They struggle to leave because they have been ... Well, in a lot of cases they can't leave – because the risks are too great – unless it's done in a way that's assisted by other agencies or by school or police to assist a move, actually, out of an area. It's very difficult to just leave a gang (Participant 8, statutory sector professional).*

Leaving the gang can require radical changes such as moving homes or changing schools. This allows the young person to re-establish themselves in a new location and creates opportunities to make new peer networks away from their criminal fraternity. The main challenge of renegotiating new relationships with networks of relatives and friends is complicated because gang members and their associates typically live in relatively small areas, such as Priory Court or the Beaumont estate. Although senior gang members are less likely to live on the estate, junior and middle level members are usually recruited locally so are more geographically embedded. One former gang member described the lack of any natural process for leaving a gang in the following way:

*There is no actual exit procedure, there's not enough support that people would actually feel they could do it. Unless you move away from it, there is no good supported exit process*

*or procedure. You can get too caught up. Once you start getting deeper, .....I always say you never realise how deep you are until you're too deep because it is only when you start doing things to people that you start thinking I do not want to do this anymore and you're too deep then (Participant 21, ex-gang member, focus group 1).*

There are also limited 'exit' opportunities and alternative 'legal' ways to earn a living:

*Number two risk is probably it's easy money that they're getting. They would have to actually get a normal job and be part of a normal.... Probably not the best paid job initially. And they know: they know that that's the reality and it's .... I don't know, I suppose they might look at it and think that it's an easy way of making money. But I think, predominantly, they think they can't leave. And, when your presented with a child that you know wants to leave but can't – or thinks they can't – it's quite heart breaking (Participant 8 statutory sector professional).*

Densley (2014) provide further evidence that at least some aspects of criminal behaviour of gang membership increases during membership and then declines significantly after the gang member has terminated their membership. However, it is important to emphasize that gang members do successfully leave. A final example is a young person who described how it was the impact on his mother that made him change:

*Every time I got nicked it was the type of thing where I didn't really analyse it till the day I got to court and my mum's sat right next to me. One day, my last court case, my mum came up to me and she said, 'I can't do this no more, I actually can't do this no more.' Then I had to start thinking more about the life that's ahead of me, do you know what I mean? So I start thinking and I was thinking, right, is it really worth coming here and making my mum cry when these people don't give a shit about me? When there's a person at home waiting for me that actually gives a shit about me. So you have to understand, who is more important to you, people close to you or people that want to use you for two minutes and then be gone from your life? (Participant 28, ex-gang member).*

## 8. Girls and gangs

The involvement of women and girls in gangs is gaining media attention, but the truth of their involvement remains relatively unknown. How much of current preoccupation with girls in gangs is socially constructed as a result of media panic (Campbell, 1995) and how much their involvement is increasingly central to gang development, identity and gang enterprise is not entirely known.

### Prevalence of girls in gangs

Nationally, the gender makeup of women and girls in gangs is unclear (Centre for Social Justice, 2014). The Crime Survey for England and Wales (previously the British Crime Survey) offers information regarding the age breakdown of people in gangs, but has no available data regarding the gendered nature (or otherwise) of gangs across the UK (ONS, 2014). However, this lack of information is not just on a structural level, as a voluntary sector professional explained:

*There's a silence around it [recruitment of girls] as there is in most communities actually around gangs.... I suspect they are being drawn in but we just don't know about it* (Participant 17, voluntary sector professional).

*If you drive round the hotspots in Haringey in terms of gangs you will just see groups of boys, you won't see girls, so to try and map the girls and know their role is very difficult because we don't have that much contact with them* (Participant 14, non-local statutory sector professional).

In the literature, there is a growing sense that women and girls in gangs is still in the minority but that their involvement is increasing (Disley & Liddle, 2016; National Crime Prevention Council, 2011). This is also the case in Waltham Forest:

*There's lots of females getting involved now: that's a growing trend, definitely.....* (Participant 8, statutory sector professional).

*There are a lot of females involved in gangs. Obviously, they're not on the same level as what a lot of the guys are. For every ten guys that are seriously on it and are hard-core gang members, you'll probably get one female that's on that same level* (Participant 29, ex-gang member).

Explanations for this apparent rise of women and girls in gangs are not always consistent but there is an understanding that women and girls' vulnerability to gang involvement is linked to



poverty and lack of opportunity (Beckett et al 2013). Risk factors associated specifically with the recruitment of women and girls (rather than males) include abusive backgrounds, a sense of power, the search for a sense of belonging or family structures such as involvement with romantic partners (Centre for Social Justice 2014; National Crime Prevention Council. 2011). The Centre for Mental Health published *A need to belong: What leads girls to join gangs* in 2013. The report found that over a quarter of their sample of gang-associated girls were identified by workers as having a suspected diagnosable mental health problem and over a third showed signs of behavioural problems before the age of twelve. In Waltham Forest, practitioners talked about naivety and less egotistical reasons, such as a sense of family responsibility, as reasons for why girls become involved in gangs:

*They're young... they don't know what they're doing; they've no schooling in this, what's going to happen* (Participant 6, statutory sector professional).

*Some of the young people I've spoken to have said things like they want to be able to assist their parent in providing and so if they're aware that their mum is struggling financially that they would want to help out and be able to alleviate the pressure for them...* (Participant 18, voluntary sector professional).

### **Roles of women and girls in gangs**

Women and girls often participate in gang related criminal behaviour, such as carrying or hiding illegal goods, including guns or drugs (Disley & Liddle 2016; Firmin 2011; Home Office 2017; Medina et al. 2012). This exploitation was evident in Waltham Forest:

*There are some women who, say, will collude with their sons, etc to hide weapons* (Participant 4, statutory sector professional).

*We've got girls being used to bring drugs along county lines* (Participant 11, statutory sector professional).

*There's a lot of exploitation. A lot of guys obviously use the females to carry weapons and drugs: they think they're not going to get stopped as likely as what they are* (Participant 29, ex-gang member).

The centrality of female involvement in gangs is a contested issue. Beckett *et al* (2013) believe that women and girls are associated with gangs, rather than actively involved. Others promote the understanding that this is a 'myth' and that women and girls now play a legitimate, active role and are central to gang activity (National Crime Prevention Council, 2011). This confusion was also visible in Waltham Forest:

*There are males and females as well but the females, to be honest, are cut off more*  
(Participant 28, ex-gang member).

*Do you know what it is, females are not necessarily in the gang but I would say they are affiliated...* (Participant 24, young person, focus group 1).

*This is what the girls are doing now, they're going to get things, they're flogging it, they go to places, do you know what I'm trying to say? Girls nowadays, I know a few instances where girls have been punched in the face, beaten up because you are effectively a part of them* (Participant 22, young person, focus group 1).

Interestingly, when applied to female gang members the literature refers to such behaviour as 'support activities', but when the same behaviour is applied to males, they are viewed as central to gang activity (MOPAC and NHS England, 2016).

When specifically asked why girls are now joining gangs, a former gang member was clear:

*Why they are joining a gang is because a girl thinks she's a tomboy really. She can never be seeing someone in a gang and being involved in that sense, more times it's because she's a tomboy* (Participant 27, an ex-gang member).

In his original study *Reluctant Gangsters*, Pitts (2007) described two categories of girl gang members: the girlfriends who are attracted to the glamour and celebrity of gang membership and those who considered themselves as 'soldiers' who become involved in violent crime. The former category is currently referred to as 'links' i.e. young women and girls involved in casual sexual relationships with gang members (Beckett, H. *et al*, 2013; Centre for Social Justice, 2014; House of Commons, 2015). This was also evident in Waltham Forest:

*Before you know it, you are, you're linked, you're pulled in and you're unable to get out again* (Participant 8, statutory sector professional).

*We've had a number of well-documented instances over the last few years where girls have been used and there's a number of terms we use, so they instigate them, so we call them instigators or honey traps, so they, they will lure boys and become boyfriends, gang members, opposing gang members, lure them to somewhere and then they get attacked or stabbed* (Participant 9, pan-London statutory professional).

Professionals described how women and girls are less likely to remain 'loyal' to one specific gang, preferring to associate with more than one gang at the same time. These transient relationships

that women and girls build with gangs did cause concern for those who work specifically with females due to the risks involved:

*With young women we see that they often have links to multiple different groups and gangs and that doesn't mean it's not dangerous for young women; it absolutely is but I think those connections can be quite fluid..... some of those [young women] have made multiple allegations of rape and sexual violence as well (Participant 19, voluntary sector professionals).*

*So they will have this boyfriend and then maybe a few months later they're with someone else (Participant 14, non-local statutory sector professional).*

The blurred and nebulous understanding of girls' importance in gangs may be to the gang's advantage. Women and girls are not recorded in the statistics and the silence around their recruitment means that they are less likely to attract police attention or intervention (House of Commons 2015). Indeed, concern has been expressed that current national stop and search practices are incentivising women and girls to engage in criminal behaviour, for example the majority of police officers are men and are therefore unable to search women and girls (Centre for Social Justice, 2014). This idea that gender can render the female gang member invisible, was also a feature in Waltham Forest, but as the quote below explains ethnicity, class, and the appearances of women and girls are also being used or even exploited by gangs in their criminal activity:

*I'm aware of cases in the borough where young women have been asked to maybe hold things for people or maybe running for people.....this young woman tends to drive these gang members about... but [a young man on the local estate] he said 'She's a white woman who's from a good family, so nobody will look at her and think she's involved in anything'....She's quite well presented for somebody who's not working, i.e. hair, nails, you know, like how she presents herself, always taking cabs everywhere, you kind of question it (Participant 5, statutory sector professional).*

Disley and Liddle (2016) study on urban street gangs reported that many gangs in inner cities widened their recruitment of young people to include those from different ethnic minorities and cultures. This they believed was in order to represent the community that they were selling to and that the recruitment of younger, vulnerable children (including women and girls) enables products such as drugs to be filtered down the hierarchy and onto the streets. This hierarchy is discussed in detail in chapter six. The reverse may be happening in Waltham Forest as a consequence of county lines. We have already seen in chapter four, how the Mali boys are recruiting from a wide range of young people at the street dealer level, however, travelling outside of the London area may require gangs to also adapt their recruitment so that their members reflect the demographics of more rural populations. Recruiting young, white, well

presented women and girls would enable the gang to maintain a low profile and avoid attracting unwanted attention from the authorities such as the police. This coupled with the invisibility of women and girls may well make their recruitment more desirable or even essential to gang activity. This is illustrated by the following case study:

#### **Case study 2: County lines activity in Suffolk**

Police recently raided a property in the Suffolk area due to information about firearms and found firearms, drugs and drugs paraphernalia. There were four 14-year-old girls from Waltham Forest in the property. Police officers had the legal power to do an intimate search and found £3,000 worth of crack concealed inside their persons.

This highlights that girls are attractive to gangs as a means of transporting drugs and demonstrates the risks they face. A statutory sector participant described how these girls were transporting the drugs for more senior gang members, who would have a powerful control over them:

*The control will be done by the upper tiers but nothing will come back to them because the three girls won't have any contact with [Gang leader], they won't have any contact with the next tier, it's the generals that would be doing that and they are so fearful of them, they're the enforcers, they're the violent ones. So they don't open their mouths, you almost have a wall of silence around there (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

The four girls would then be indebted to the gang as they would be held responsible for having lost the drugs as a result of the police raid:

*The older gang members.. don't care to a certain extent when they have a heavy hit like that. What I mean by that is that it gives them grounds to then say to these four girls, well we own your backside now. They come from poverty, they are not going to be able to pluck three grand out of the sky and pay it off so they say you have to work off that debt, selling more drugs, hiding firearms, performing sexual acts when required, various other forms of control. If they refuse to do it their lives are threatened or their family's lives are threatened (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

The extent of the exploitation is highlighted by the fact that the young women are expected to carry both the prosecution and financial risks involved, not the senior gang members.

## Recruitment

The targeting of schools to recruit women and girls into local gangs is well documented in the literature (Disley & Liddle 2016; House of Commons 2015; MOPAC and NHS England, 2016). This was also the case in Waltham Forest:

*Often they are grooming, this is my concern around why we do so much work in schools, is that often we have young men hanging around the school gates at lunchtimes and they're talking to the girls and they're befriending them and it's that whole education piece about you might think he's a lovely guy and drive a nice car but, you know, there's always something more to him (Participant 9, statutory sector professional).*

The professionals that we did speak to commented on the inconsistency in the understanding, priority and support that schools offered to women and girls in the borough. These opinions reinforced those expressed in the literature regarding the importance of schools being open about abuse in order to provide a holistic, multi-disciplinary oversight and understanding of the exploitation of women and girls (Beckett. et al. 2013; Berelowitz et al. 2013; Centre for Social Justice 2014; Firmin 2011; House of Commons 2015). The role of the school to help identify and prevent this exploitation as well as offer suitable support to those who have been victims was also seen as essential in this study:

*Some schools want to factor in the sessions into a lunchtime because it's seen as optional, it's not seen as a necessity to support a young woman who has just experienced a whole load of trauma. But in other schools they will completely be fine with you taking them off a class because they can see the benefits of supporting someone that has experienced such things (Participant 19 voluntary sector professional).*

The voluntary sector professional went on to explain some of the ways in which individual cases are managed that were not ideal:

*...the solution might just have been to exclude usually the young man but then not do any other work than anyone else in the school who might have witnessed it or heard about it or teased the young woman for it..... There's not any kind of specific guidelines on what schools should do in those situations so it's up to them to decide what they think should happen and that's not always the right thing (Participant 19 voluntary sector professional).*

Vulnerable young people are not only being recruited from schools but also other institutions such as residential children's homes. Research reveals (MOPAC and NHS England 2016) a link between gang involvement and young people missing from homes, including care homes. This was echoed in this study:

*There's a lot that goes into it and I think there's a lot of planning that goes into it; there's a lot of targeting of particular people that goes into it. We're looking at an increase in looked after children definitely that are getting targeted: so that's children in foster homes or children who are adopted or in children's homes. There's definitely an increase in those children being targeted (Participant 8, statutory sector professional).*

*Children's care homes are particularly susceptible because they're more likely to go missing. We've got a couple of care homes in the borough that we have a lot of missing episodes from... The girls are regular high risk of missing people, CSE risks, risk to other people, risk from criminal exploitation. They perpetrate their own crimes either within the care home or outside it. So they are generators of demand and risk, themselves (Participant 1, statutory professional).*

*Young women going missing, across the board, whether they're in care or not but what we find with young women in care is that their reported number of missing episodes is far greater than young women who are at home..... what we see with young women who are Waltham Forest children placed elsewhere and other local authority children who are placed here, their numbers of missing episodes a month are very, very high (Participant 18 voluntary sector professional).*

There is also evidence from neighbouring areas that women and girls are being targeted and recruited through the use of social media and music. The role of social media in gang life will be discussed in detail in chapter nine and its relationship specifically with women and girls will be considered later in this chapter. Consider the quote below and how music and 'fame' are used to entice women and girls into gang culture:

*I think the difficulty we have is that some of the gang members are involved in music and are quite big in the music scene so there's that attraction there, oh so and so wants you to come to this party or whatever they call it, you've got someone there who has a good name so then girls get attracted to that.....When you've got someone who is quite popular in the music industry, for them it's what helps to lure the girls into it (Participant 14, non-local statutory sector professional).*

Once involved in this lifestyle, senior gang members can hold women and girls to ransom for failing to repay a debt, even if the debt was obtained as a result of a police arrest when they were trafficking for the gang across county lines. It is easy to see how women and girls become embroiled in gang culture, with nowhere to turn and seemingly no way out:

*One young woman that [name of a professional] was working with owed a debt and was threatened by a gang member that she'd have to do a line-up with ten men if she didn't pay off the debt (Participant 17, voluntary sector professional).*

Members of other gangs also target women and girls as a means of retaliation or settling a score:

*They couldn't find him, he was in prison, so they targeted his ex-partner, ..... made threats to her and smashed her window in..... I've currently got a similar young woman at the moment ..... he [partner] was stabbed in front of their child in the back of the car but she's also been targeted because they can't find him or locate him, they know where she lives, they know what car she's driving because he's driven it in the past, so she's very much kind of been threatened... (Participant 5, statutory sector professional).*

## Social media

The significance of social media in gang lifestyle is well documented (Beckett, H. *et al*, 2013; Berelowitz *et al*. 2013; Centre for Social Justice 2014; Disley & Liddle 2016; HM Government 2011; MOPAC and NHS England 2016). This centrality was also noted in this research project:

*I think like social media it's just massive, I'd say it's one of the main factors... That ties the whole thing together (Participant 19 voluntary sector professional).*

Social media is used in many ways and for many reasons, including the recruitment of women and girls in relation to both child sexual exploitation generally (Berelowitz *et al*, 2013) and more specifically in relation to gangs (Disley & Liddle 2016). Women and girls are at risk as they are targeted as part of a recruitment drive (Berelowitz *et al*. 2013). This was also the case in Waltham Forest:

*I think that it's also a way in for people, so people I've spoken to have said that they've never met people before someone's commented on their Instagram picture and that's how they've began the initial link with them (Participant 17 voluntary sector professional).*

*They use Snapchat to advertise these parties but it's basically getting young women to come to a party where they essentially expect to get hit from these young women and usually use alcohol and some drugs and things like that, but it almost seems like this cool thing to be at, it's almost like a party where young women are just getting sexually exploited (Participant 18 voluntary sector professional).*

Social media is used as a forum for gangs and gang members to threaten and intimidate others and ensure compliance with the gangs demands, but it is also a tool with which to promote themselves and visually display their success (Centre for Social Justice 2014; Disley & Liddle 2016):

*They [male gang members] will have relationships with the girls in particular and they will film it so if the girls don't do what they say at a later date they will often threaten to disclose by social media footage of these girls performing sex acts. The girls think they are their friends, they don't identify as victims, they think that they are in control and it is something that they are able to somehow manage and that there is no threat to them. It's very hard, they don't identify as being victims (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

*When they're in the initial stages to promote that they are living a certain lifestyle, so taking pictures which show they have money or have new possessions which is advertising it for everyone on Instagram for example or Snapchat (Participant 17 voluntary sector professional).*

Mobile phones allows for the instant communication and extensive distribution of information including through social media (Dimond *et al.* 2011). The sharing of sexual images, often without the knowledge or consent of the person in the recordings or photographs, are used by gang members (Beckett, H. *et al.* 2013; Centre for Social Justice 2014). This exposure to further sexual exploitation, abuse and control is a concern for professionals in Waltham Forest where male gang members are using it to undermine or discredit women and girls and simultaneously increasing their public profile:

*Girls being baited out, social media, I mean girls describe them as being exposed for being slags or skets but they're being exposed for rape and sexual violence (Participant 18 voluntary sector professional).*

*If it is a circulation of a video of a girl performing a sexual act or something like that, that can then draw more attention to that girl because it's been circulated to more males which effectively increases her risk even more..... And their [mobile] numbers being put on social media and then what happens is those young women receive copious phone calls, text messages and things from people they have no idea who they are, trying to get them to meet up with and trying to get them to do sexual things to them or someone else and things like that, so young women are kind of exposed on social media in that way and we hear a lot about (Participant 19, voluntary sector professional).*

## **Child sexual exploitation (CSE)**

The centrality of violence and child sexual exploitation in gang culture and its relevance to women and girls is considered throughout this report. This includes the exploitation of women and girls to carry drugs across county lines, hide weapons and the use of debt bondage as a means of control. Women and girls are also used as tools within gang culture where their



experiences of violence and sexual exploitation by young men are used to control their behaviour or as forms of revenge against other (often missing) gang members. The literature also indicates that physical and sexual violence including child sexual exploitation (CSE) is becoming more prevalent in gang culture (Beckett *et al*, 2013; Centre for Social Justice 2014; Disley & Liddle 2016; MOPAC and NHS England 2016). Many professionals in Waltham Forest expressed concern regarding the extent of such exploitation as well as the risks faced by these vulnerable women and girls:

*I know that each month there's between 25 and 35 open CSE cases at any one time... the majority have had at least one episode of being missing and some of those have had 70 missing episodes over six months (Participant 17, statutory sector professional).*

One statutory sector professional identified that one of the barriers can be establishing a shared understanding:

*One of the things we're finding .... is the use of language, phrases like sexual exploitation are used but when you drill down people have got very different accounts for it (Participant 1, a statutory professional).*

However, Disley and Liddle (2016) warn that caution is heeded as these reports may be a reflection on professionals' increased awareness of CSE after the conviction of organized gangs in the north of England and increased media attention (Burns, 2012; Simon, 2017) rather than an increase in CSE *per se*. Beckett *et al* (2013) also recognizes the under reporting of sexual violence or exploitation but attributes this to several issues including the lack of confidence in professional services' ability to protect survivors and the normalization of such experiences. One statutory sector professional stated:

*I would say the violence is a big risk. The young people that are getting drawn into it are desensitized to the level of violence that's happening (Participant 8, statutory sector professional).*

This under-reporting remains of concern, especially within a gang related context; data on youth violence often focuses on stabbings and shootings and fails to include data on sexual violence (House of Commons 2015). Whilst both genders are vulnerable to violent and sexual exploitation (Disley & Liddle 2016), girls are seen as most at risk with boys forming a significant minority (House of Commons 2015; MOPAC and NHS England 2016). Professionals at Waltham Forest were also conscious of this:

*I guess what I mean by sexual exploitation is the potential coercing of young men, because we tend to think of the stuff as binary, girls exploited, boys exploit, but the way that boys are exploited into that sexual ritual, line ups and sharing of sexual partners, we're aware of*

*that going on* (Participant 1, statutory sector professional).

*There's been, definitely, an increase in sexual exploitation: that is a huge risk, especially for girls but also for boys with regards to initiations and things like that: sexual exploitation can be used* (Participant 8, statutory sector professional).

This perception that women and girls are more at risk of sexual violence or CSE coupled with the lack of recording means that professionals and organizations may be missing the opportunity to identify and support vulnerable children at significant risk of CSE. Rather than having their needs attended to, many of these children are faced with more punitive child protection procedures (MOPAC and NHS England 2016) which can lead to further victimization of these women and girls.

There is also evidence in the literature that women and girls, often themselves victims of child sexual exploitation, are used to recruit other young people to be sexually exploited (Berelowitz et al, 2013). Such women and girls were referred to as 'hooks' in this research:

*... a hook so a recruiter for other young women, which I understand but I find problematic in itself because it then strips that young woman of any perceived vulnerability and I think professionals stopped viewing her as a vulnerable.... those young women where they might be grooming other young women, it's quite hard for professionals to accept that someone can be both a potential harmer and being harmed themselves* (Participant 18, voluntary sector professional).

*We've got girls at risk of CSE on the periphery of the gangs and girls recruiting other girls as well. So, both at risk of CSE and a risk of CSE to other girls etc.* (Participant 11, statutory sector professional).

The current lack of knowledge about girls and gangs contributes towards uncertainty about how much of their vulnerability results in their involvement with gangs or how much is because of their involvement (House of Commons 2015). Many of these young people are children and so entitled to their own rights and to protection from statutory services (Inspectorate of Probation 2014). Whilst professionals in this study showed a clear understanding of many aspects of gang culture and demonstrated a commitment to protecting young people, they also expressed frustration at the lack of consistency across all agencies in the borough. This confusion is evident in the literature too, where professionals are often unclear about the situations and challenges faced by vulnerable young women and girls and unable to ask the right questions to meet their needs (Disley & Liddle 2016; Firmin 2011; House of Commons 2015; Inspectorate of Probation 2014).

## Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the role of women and girls in gang identity, development and gang activity. There seems to be a code of silence where gang members, including women and girls, are reluctant to share their knowledge and experience of gang life, probably due to the potential negative repercussions. This silence, coupled with the lack of statistics and their invisibility to many statutory agencies means that women and girls remain relatively hidden within gang life.

However, this research has shown that the experiences of a wide range of professionals that work with vulnerable young women and/or gangs in Waltham Forest echoes that observed nationally. Women and girls do appear to be increasingly represented in gangs, i.e., there are more female gang members than previously observed, and they seem to be more involved in gang activity. Women and girls roles seem dependent on their own exploitation and often, regrettably, the exploitation of others. Women and girls are specifically targeted by gangs for recruitment, play a significant part in holding or transporting weapons and/or drugs, they also have an important role in the retaliation of other gangs/gang members. This chapter suggests that due to their gender and their 'invisibility' to statutory services, such as the police, women and girls may now be an essential element of current gang life and gangs may struggle to exist without their involvement. More research would be needed in this area that specifically considers the emerging role of girls in gangs and their centrality to gang culture.

The recruitment of women and girls seems to be changing. They continue to be recruited from schools and targeted if known to local authorities, but gangs appear to be using social media specifically in the targeting of women and girls.

Social media is viewed by many practitioners as a fundamental part of gang life, the glue that holds the elements together. It is involved in many aspects of gang activity including recruitment, threats and ultimately controlling young women and girls. This is also true of child sexual exploitation which has been a theme throughout this chapter. Again it appears to be a core tool in the way gangs recruit, threaten and coerce young women and girls to engage in criminal activity and respond to gang demands. The silence surrounding CSE, women and girls and gang life is making it difficult for professionals to protect vulnerable children from further abuse.

## 9. Gangs, technology and social media

*The most important thing is most young people live for social media, that's their world isn't it? Anything that is going to happen in a young person's life happens on social media*  
(Participant 31, former statutory sector professional).

Social media and technology are central to the lives of young people in ways that have developed so rapidly that it is difficult for professionals, agencies and families to keep pace. The internet and digital technology provide a space that is less regulated than most other areas of young people's lives and can provide positive opportunities for self expression and creativity. However, they also provide opportunities for supporting criminal activities, which gangs are becoming adept at exploiting. This chapter will examine the relationship that gangs have with social media and other forms of technology. There are also significant issues around social media that are specific to young women, which were discussed in the previous chapter.

The extent to which this has changed is indicated by the fact that social media was not mentioned at all in the previous *Reluctant Gang* study (Pitts, 2007). The use by gangs of social media platforms such as YouTube to share videos has become widespread in the UK. Popular platforms include FaceBook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter. This often take the form of music videos, in which gang members seek to boast about their activities and antagonise other gangs but has included videos of crimes against rival gangs taking place to antagonise the rival gang, a phenomenon known as 'net banging' (Patton *et al*, 2013).

Territory has always played an important role in the history of gang life and the development of the internet has provided a virtual space in which gang members can interact and foster collective identity without the need for face-to-face interactions (Storrod and Densley, 2017; Décary-Héту and Morselli 2011). One view of the potential role that social media can play for gangs is that it provides a platform upon which gangs can play out conflict as an alternative to the physical conflicts that previously happened in the streets. However, this seriously underestimates how conflict enacted online can spill out into real world violence, which is aggravated by two factors. Firstly, whereas physical conflicts in the street were sporadic, social media is continuous. Social media such as Twitter and YouTube require constant activity and are freely available 24 hours a day. Social actors who want to maintain a presence on social media must communicate on a regular basis to maintain interest, often with material that involves conflict and controversy, which is equally true for gang members as it is for celebrities and politicians.

The second factor is that physical clashes in the street have a limited number of bystanders as an audience. By contrast, social media provides a global audience who can access material whenever they want. Therefore, perceived taunts and insults remain 'live' and can be replayed

indefinitely, which can increase the risk of retaliatory attacks. One former gang member highlights how older gang member can ‘gas’ (incite or wind up) their ‘youngers’ to attack rival gang members, which is influenced by the considerable number of followers who provide an audience:

*Someone from one area makes a song about moving the guys from this area. All of his youngers get gas and say, ‘Yes, yes. Do you know what? Let’s go and do this.’ It’s all retaliation, all because of this guy gassed up all of his youngers. And especially if he’s a well-known rapper as well. If you’re someone like Nines or whatever, they make a music video about wanting to stab or kill people from Beaumont, I’m pretty sure, within that week, something’s going to happen because you’re getting all of this influence – all of these thousands and millions of followers that are watching you and looking at your music (Participant 29, ex-gang member).*

It is for this reason that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) monitors this on a daily basis and proactively contacts gangs to seek to avoid violence. At the time of writing the report (October 2017), the HM Inspectorate of Probation published a national report that featured work undertaken by Waltham Forest YOT about young people’s use of social media and offending as a good practice case study. The report made explicit links with social media and violence:

*In areas where gangs were present there was a significant social-media dimension... In one case, a young person had appeared in a gang video filmed outside of his home. A rival gang identified the location of the home and a group arrived one evening to intimidate and cause damage to the home. This incident had been highly distressing for both the young person under YOT supervision and other family members (HM Inspectorate of Probation 2017, p.18).*

This demonstrates how individuals can become involved in posting material online that can leave them vulnerable to intimidation and violence.

### **Promoting a ‘brand’ versus maintaining a low profile**

Gangs in Waltham Forest have demonstrated a sharp division in their attitudes towards social media. Whilst many embrace it as a means of promoting the gang’s identity and ‘brand’, a minority eschew it as ‘bad for business’. More specifically, the Mali Boys do not use social media because their operating model prioritises maintaining a low profile to avoid police attention and to reduce the risk of evidence that can be used against them. This difference between the position of the Mali Boys and the other gangs was encapsulated by one professional, who emphasized their more professional and economically-driven approach:

*You've got the Mali Boys who.. are literally going to step back and say, there you go, you take all of this out on the street and we'll collect the money where the other street gangs are having arguments about five years ago or whatever (Participant 47, voluntary sector professional, focus group 2).*

This stance of the Mali Boys was confirmed by a former Mali gang member, who stated:

*No, no, social media definitely don't play no part because everyone keeps away from social media... Somalians keep away from social media, yeah. Everyone keeps away from social media to be honest because they are paranoid of the state. The police can go through your phone, this person can go through your phone, de-de-de-de-de, do you know what I mean? (Participant 28, ex-gang member).*

This specific example relates to smart phones that can be searched following arrest but there were other examples of young people being caught out through social media. One statutory professional described visiting a family where there were concerns that the son was involved in gangs:

*We go round there and see them and their mum, I say... we're concerned about your 13-year-old son and the mum says, my son's not in a gang, you're just picking on him, which often happens. I say well this is my laptop, have a look at this YouTube video and tell me if you recognise anyone in this and there's her son, at the front, spliff in his mouth, holding a knife, hood up, I'll F you up (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

There is a history of law enforcement agencies using information gained from social media to track gang membership and activities. For example, one statutory sector professional described how law enforcement agencies learnt to use Facebook as a means of gaining information about suspected gang members and their social networks:

*At one stage you could get loads of information from that because it had a list of all their friends, their profiles were open. And then they just, it just all got shut down and then basically you've lost all that information so it's, there's a period where they're utilising it, law enforcement catches up to that, catches on, there's a period when they're like actually it works, law enforcement is brilliant and then they change their use of it and they don't post stupid things on social media now (Participant 12, statutory sector professional)*

Indeed, this led to Facebook being referred to as 'Fedbook' (Densley, 2013, p.99). In response, gangs have learnt to use other forms of social media such as Instagram and Snapchat, as well as closed groups such as WhatsApp as a means of communication because they are aware that these are not monitored by law enforcement agencies. As one professional stated:

*I think that the gangs are probably using other forms of communications that are hard for police or law enforcement to intercept or to use, so things like Snapchat and things like that, so offences that are sexual in nature will be, so child sexual exploitation or bullying and things like that will be occurring over those kind of phone platforms that you're not going to see because it's not posts, it's not like on Twitter or Facebook.. So it's only when you might receive a phone in custody, seize it that you then might identify other offences.. With Snapchat, the images and stuff disappear and you can't get them unless they're saved or pictures taken at the time so the evidential base is difficult (Participant 12, statutory sector professional).*

The temporary nature of images in social media such as Snapchat mean that it can be used in the sales of drugs without leaving incriminating evidence:

*They use Snapchat to film and sell what they're selling. So it might be that they've got some drugs that they want to sell and they might publish that on Snapchat: 'So this is what I've got at the moment', so that people can see what they can buy (Participant 8, statutory sector professional).*

The rapidly evolving nature of technology and social media has meant that professionals have struggled to keep up with developments:

*It's trying to keep up with them, we'll never be ahead of them, they'll always be catching up with it and I think we were slow with the social media kind of thing (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

*The older generation or people who are just law enforcement aren't up to date with the youngsters of today about what's happening and going on... There must be communication in some way, how they're doing that is a bit of mystery because if it's, if you're not being exposed or given that information you're never going to know kind of thing (Participant 12, statutory sector professional).*

However, other local gangs do promote themselves through social media, including gangs currently in alliance with the Mali Boys. For example, the DM Crew are in alliance with the Mali Boys but they maintain a separate identity and members were recently featured in a music video on Tim Westwood TV video, which has over 600,000 subscribers. The lyrics, which started 'If you owe me, pay it up quickly', focused on drug activity and conflicts between gangs. Other gangs, such as Chingford Hall and Priory Court also have a notable internet presence on social networking sites.

This split in gangs' attitudes towards social media is consistent with the findings of a recent Home Office survey across the 33 areas that make up the government's Ending Gang and Youth

Violence (EGYV) programme (Disley and Liddle, 2016). The study found that most areas reported a declining street visibility but the use of social media was widespread and thought to be increasing. Practitioners thought that the main use was to promote the gang and its reputation. However, a minority of gangs were said to be cautious about using social media as it could attract attention from law enforcement agencies (Disley and Liddle, 2016, p.36).

### **Using social media to promote county lines operations**

Gang activities on social media serve to enhance their 'brand name', which is useful in increasing drug sales, recruiting new street level dealers and defending their markets against other gangs (Moule, Pyrooz, and Decker 2014; Storrod and Densley, 2017). Storrod and Densley (2017) have identified a recent trend of London gangs using 'Trap rap' (a form of hip-hop music that focuses on drug dealing from 'trap houses') posted to YouTube as a means of reaching out beyond their localised social networks to a larger digital audience. In their study, videos from a number of different London gangs were studied and shown to focus groups of young people in areas affected by gangs. This included videos of gang members going 'on holiday' to rural and seaside towns where there are developing county lines operations, which served two purposes. Firstly, they serve to promote a fearsome reputation that will warn off other local gangs. This point was made locally by a statutory sector professional who stated:

*A lot of these YouTube videos show these kids in London gangs being very, very aggressive, very, very threatening so if you are some kid from Ipswich watching YouTube, which is what they do, and you see the Chingford Hall, one of their videos saying we've got guns, we've got knives, we do this and then you hear on the street that they're the ones coming out selling the drugs, you are going to shit yourself and stay away... So definitely it is money motivated, the demand's there, they supply it and the lack of strong opposition in those areas to do it (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

The second purpose is that such videos advertise to potential customers that they are operating in their local area and promote 'brand recognition' of the drugs that they offer.

### **Social media and gang hierarchy**

There appeared to be differences between younger and older gang members in their roles and approaches to social media. In the Storrod and Densley (2017) study, two thirds of the music videos were professionally produced, which incurred significant costs. Young people in the focus groups explained how gang 'olders' invested money from drugs sales into the videos in order to both make legitimate money through their music and to promote drugs sales but it was the gang 'youngers' who featured in the music videos:



*That ‘youngers need seed money from gang elders to get their videos produced’ (Female, 15, Group 10) spoke to the hierarchical organisation of gangs. One trap rap performer observed: ‘You have to pay them (producers), but the elders do that, comes out of gang business, they sort it all out, time and place. We don’t get paid, but you got to be in them when they ask as after it might get you places. They (the elders) must think I’m good for business, init’. (Male, 15, Group 5) (Storrod and Densley, 2017, p.685).*

A similar hierarchy was noted locally, where videos posted on YouTube tend to feature gang youngers, who have most to gain in establishing their reputation. The videos tend not to feature the most senior members of the gang, who have already established their reputations and prefer to maintain a low public profile to avoid police attention. One participant stated:

*Notably you don’t get the upper gang members in the pyramid featuring, it’s all the lower tier (Participant 16, statutory sector professional).*

Two participants explained this difference between younger and older gang members may be understood in terms of their motivation:

*The elders were making money, you recognised that but.. for the youngers it’s all about respect (Participant 47, focus group 2).*

*It’s about money for elders and that money is kept coming in by control and status but the youngers, they just want the status. And if they thought more about the money then maybe they wouldn’t behave in the way they do because stabbing someone over stepping on your trainer or looking at you in a funny way is going to send you to prison and you’re not making any money, so I think they’ve yet to grasp that concept (Participant 7, voluntary sector professional).*

Gang elders have established their reputations and are receiving significant greater financial rewards so their motivation to use social media is likely to be more instrumental in the sense that it furthers the material interests of the gang and its members. Gang youngers have yet to establish their reputations and are receiving meagre financial rewards so social media provides a means of enhancing personal reputation and pursuing expressive goals such identity, friendship and revenge that are separate from material concerns. They are also more likely to invest in ‘old school’ notions of gang identity, which promises both excitement and protection.

### **Social media and technology as a means of control**

Social media and technology provides many positive opportunities but can also be used in a means of control and exploitation. A worrying trend is technology used by older gang members

to control younger members. Smart phones enable gang members to monitor where someone is, what they are doing, and who they are with at all times via locations tags, GPS tracking, pictures and video calling (Storrod and Densley, 2017, p.688). In the Storrod and Densley study, young people explained how this happened:

*'They always got to know where you at', explained one respondent (Male, 14, Group 3). Gang boys might be instructed to 'meet up with someone to give them something' or 'get to a train station to get a train somewhere' (Female, 15, Group 6). Gang girls might be told or 'get to some boy's house and be ready to beat (have sex)' (Female, 14, Group 1). The response had to be instantaneous or there would be sanctions in the form of physical or sexual violence – sanctions that young people generally rationalised: 'If your battery died or you just aren't quick then we could be losing money innit so you just gotta make it work' (Male, 15, Group 5) (Storrod and Densley, 2017, p.688).*

Another alternative approach identified by local professionals was that young members were given old style Nokia phones when they were recruited into county lines operations because they do not leave a digital footprint so could not provide incriminating evidence. Similarly, young people involved in county lines activities were likely to receive instructions through telephone calls because text messages were more incriminating.

### **Social media as a form of 'radicalisation'?**

*The music is a form of radicalisation* (Participant 42, voluntary sector professional, focus group 2).

This striking comment by an experienced professional captures a view that music videos can create a mind-set in young people that desensitizes them to violence and normalises criminal behaviour. A similar view was expressed by a former gang member, who described how the music can serve to 'programme' young people:

*And the worse thing about it: they've got their headphones into you, twenty-four hours a day. As soon as they wake up, slap on their stereo. They start programming. Especially when you're waking up every morning; you put your stereo on and you're listening to the gang music. When you leave your house, you've got your headphones in and all you're listening to is, 'Stab man this ...' 'Rob man that ...' 'Selling this', 'Selling that' ... And you're getting gassed, just being hooked* (Participant 29, ex-gang member).

The participant went on to describe how this influence young people to feel that this is their life and they have few other opportunities:

*And then, all of a sudden, you've got this negative mindset where you genuinely feel like – to yourself – 'All I can do is sell drugs. I can't get a job.' And you think to yourself ... But, when you look at that person, you think, 'You haven't applied for a job yet.' 'You've never, ever applied for a job but you feel like you can't get one. Why is that? Because of the shit that you're listening and programming yourself with is telling you (Participant 29, ex-gang member).*

A former gang member described how they had noticed a qualitative change in music videos recently which had moved away from 'violence as retaliation' to 'violence as fun':

*One thing that I think is different is there's so much more violence in these kids... the music that I would have listened to, even if it was violent, it was coming from a different place. Even if it was rap it was coming from a place of realism, it was coming from a place of pain so if you go to gigs, yeah they are talking about doing violent things and they could encourage people to do those things but it's coming from a place of pain, you are hungry, you've got to eat whereas now it's fun ... this is really mad stuff they're talking, they're getting so excited. When I was listening to it, it was very different, so yeah I'm going to kill you because you killed my brother and that hurt me and now it's just for fun (Participant 21, ex-gang member, focus group 1).*

This was reinforced by a professional, who stated:

*Even five, ten years ago the rappers, the artists they were listening to, there may be some who were talking about even violent acts but it was a revenge act and they would talk about how what they were doing was because of how they were feeling but the music they are listening to now is blatant, young people talking about going round stabbing people for no reason and stealing drugs. They said the emotion's gone, the feeling's gone and this is what young people are listening to now so it is going to have an impact. (Participant 43, statutory sector professional, focus group 2).*

## **Drug markets and the darknet**

Information from Trident suggests that it is likely that some London gangs are using the darknet in terms of selling drugs but they have received few intelligence reports on this. This is an emerging threat that will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, social media and technology play a central role in gang life that would have been

difficult to imagine ten years ago. It has polarised gangs in Waltham Forest and nationally, with some eschewing it as attracting unwanted attention whilst others embracing it as a powerful means of promoting the gang 'brand' and drugs sales. One of the most worrying aspects is the potential for technology to be used by older gang members to track and control younger members or girlfriends through GPS and video calling technology.

## 10. Emerging trends

The chapter explore emerging trends in gang activity in Waltham Forest and the potential risks that they pose. As well as addressing actual trends, it will also address potential trends that were identified at the beginning of the study but have subsequently provided to be unfounded, as both are important to gaining a picture of the current situation in Waltham Forest.

The potential emerging trends that will be examined are:

- Addressing the challenge of the Mali Boys
- Inter-gang conflict for county line markets
- Gangs, acid attacks and moped enabled crime
- Gangs and the Prevent agenda
- Gangs and darknet drug markets

### **Addressing the challenge of the Mali Boys**

The dominance of the Mali Boys presents a number of challenges. Their ethos of maintaining a low profile presents challenges to partnership agencies as it has become more difficult to track their activities. Their grip on the local drugs market appears strong and increasing. The fluid, ever changing nature of gang activity makes it difficult to predict future gang development but there are a number of possibilities. The first possibility is that this dominance will be challenged at some point in the future by other gangs who seeks to regain their market share. However, the more established gangs appear to have lost momentum and have a long and bitter history of disputes amongst themselves that would make effective alliances difficult to sustain.

Another possibility is a revolt amongst the gangs who are subsumed under the Mali Boys. However, these are smaller gangs who appear to have reached an accommodation that works for both parties, so it is unclear why this would be in their interests. For example, the Mali Boys have allowed the DM Crew to maintain their own identity within a wider alliance, so the smaller gang maintains a separate identity whilst enjoying the business advantages of being in a powerful alliance. However, gang alliances are inherently unstable and conflicts amongst younger and less mature gang members could present a threat.

A third possibility is that the Mali Boys could become more entrenched and develop into the 'extra-legal governance' stage (Densley, 2014). Consultation with Dr Densley from Metropolitan University in Minnesota has confirmed that it is unlikely that the Mali Boys are at this stage yet. Given the wide availability of drugs in London, it would be difficult for the Mali Boys to achieve monopoly control except in very limited geographical areas. Monopoly control is more feasible in

specialist markets, such as firearms, but there is no evidence that they are seeking to develop into these areas and they would face significant resistance from established organised crime groups. It is more likely that they will continue to seek to widen their geographical reach to secure profitable markets outside London without having to engage in conflicts with other gangs. Whilst this may work in the short term, the expansion of other London gangs into rural areas is likely to lead to gang conflicts enacted in other areas as they compete to dominate new markets.

### **Inter-gang conflict for county line markets**

County lines operations are already well developed and the emerging threats arise as gangs move onto the next stage, when Waltham Forest gangs seek to secure markets in rural towns that already have county lines activities run by other gangs from London or other large cities. The result is likely to be escalating conflict as gangs compete for new territory. At the time of writing this report, an NCA report (NCA, 2017b) was published that confirmed that 58% of forces reported county lines related turf wars occurring in the past year, including violent and destructive conflicts between rival groups competing for market dominance.

The same National Crime Agency report (2017b) identified that one in three areas nationally identified the presence of Somali gangs running county lines operations in their local area, adding that this is probably an underestimate as some areas did not provide information on the nationality of gang members. The report did not name specific gangs, but local information suggests that the Mali Boys are highly active in county line activities and may be more active than previously realised. It was noted that the East of England has a particularly strong representation of Somali gangs. This is supported by other studies that have noted the presence of Somali gangs in county lines activity in Ipswich (Andell and Pitts, 2017) and Southend (Coomber, 2015). It is likely that inter-gang conflict will initially take place outside of London in the local areas that are being competed for. However, there is a significant risk that rivalry between gangs will affect the local area in medium to long term.

### **Gangs, acid attacks and moped enabled crime**

The use of acid by gangs in London is a newly identified trend that has occurred whilst this report has been written. It has been highlighted by the Metropolitan Police and is getting considerable media coverage. This related to gangs using corrosive substances such as acid or ammonia to attack rival gang members. Corrosive substances are seen as a safer weapon to carry around with them on the street than a knife and this led to an increase in this kind of violence in the last 6-12 months.

Whilst some local incidents of young men carrying acid and one incident of a police officer having had a noxious (but not corrosive) substance thrown in his face was reported during this study, it

was not viewed at this point as a significant change in street gang behaviour. One statutory sector participant challenged the idea that it was an entirely new phenomenon:

*I have known the sort of ammonia and acid for a long time, so back in 2008 they were used, back then it was still in a Lucozade bottle because you can't see the content. ...And that person that I was looking at had used such a low level amount of ammonia that they couldn't even charge them with any offence because it didn't meet a threshold, so it was 2% and it needed to be 5% to meet a threshold to charge for a noxious substance (Participant 11, statutory sector professional).*

The participant added that, at that time, carrying a corrosive substance was often more as a defensive form of protection to enable the holder to run away as opposed as a means to cause deliberate and premeditated harm to another.

At the time of writing the report, there has also been some media attention related to moped enabled crime, where individuals have engaged in street robberies on mopeds that they have used as a means of escape. The agile nature of the mopeds has meant that it is more difficult for police cars to give chase and some young people believed that police cars would not give chase if the individuals on the mopeds take off their helmets. The police report a small increase in moped thefts across the borough but not at the same level as in neighbouring boroughs.

### **Gangs and darknet drug markets**

The sales of illegal drugs on the darknet are a fast growing trend, particularly in the UK. The darknet or dark web refers to websites that cannot be accessed through ordinary web browsers or search engines and require specialist browsers such as the Tor browser, which enable anonymous communication. The Global Drugs Survey 2017 (Winstock, 2017) revealed that 25% of UK respondents bought drugs from the darknet cryptomarkets, compared to 18% a year earlier. This compares with 13% in the USA and only 6% in Germany. Since 2014, the number of drug users that purchased substances from the darknet has more than doubled (Winstock *et al*, 2017).

In a study of the darknet, Bartlett (2015) concluded that drug cryptomarkets operate in similar way to other online businesses and suppliers are successful on the basis of high quality products and customer service. The first darknet marketplace for illegal drugs was the Silk Road in 2011, which offered a similar model to eBay and Amazon.

Customers logged onto the Silk Road site using the Tor browser, which enables users to remain anonymous by hiding the user's location and usage. The encryption technology involved makes it virtually impossible for law enforcement to intervene (Przepiorka *et al*, 2017). Once on the site,

users could choose from hundreds of suppliers, who are rated by customer review according to product quality, delivery times and reliability. Once they have made their choice, customers pay using anonymous Bitcoin currency and receive their order through the post in an anonymous package. Although the Silk Road original site was eventually closed down by the FBI in 2013, it later reopened as Silk Road 2.0 before closing again in 2014. There are currently a wide range of alternative market places that fulfil the same role. A successful prosecution of a British vendor in 2016 revealed that over 5,000 sales had been completed in the previous two years, including sending packages of drugs hidden on blotter paper into prisons (HM Government, 2017).

Relating this to street gangs, intelligence information from Trident suggests that some London gangs are likely to be using darknet markets to sell drugs but little formal intelligence has been received, partly because this activity is less visible than other forms of drug dealing and it is very difficult to establish the physical location of suppliers. The National Crime Agency has identified the development of darknet markets as a key emerging threat in the next five years (NCA, 2017a).

Darknet cryptomarkets are growing rapidly and offer considerable opportunities to access wider drug markets with significantly lower risks than traditional street dealing. Given that accessing new drugs markets is a primary driver for more organised gangs in the enterprise stage of development, this is likely to be a growth area. Indeed, the considerable technical difficulties in policing darknet markets may mean that some London gangs are already active but have been undetected.

However, there are also barriers to street gangs accessing darknet markets that should not be underestimated. Firstly, it is contingent upon gangs having access to individuals with sufficient levels of technical proficiency (Sela-Shayovitz 2012). Given the levels of ingenuity demonstrated by some of the more organised street gangs, this is unlikely to be an insurmountable barrier. Moule, Pyrooz, and Decker (2014) argue that higher levels of gang organisation increase the likelihood that gangs use the internet as a means to achieve their goals.

Secondly and more importantly, developing cryptomarkets activity would require street gangs to access a wider range of products and adopt a more customer-focused business model. The darknet markets tend to focus upon cannabis, powder cocaine, heroin, MDMA and more 'party drugs' and new psychoactive substances. Thus, they cover many of the main drugs supplied by street gangs apart from crack cocaine, which is less commonly supplied in darknet markets.

A leading researcher on drug cryptomarkets, Dr Wojtek Przepiorka from the Utrecht University in the Netherlands, was consulted for this study. He identified several barriers that local street gangs would experience:

*If gangs go online, they will have to compete with other sellers from around the world and*



*provide good quality product. In this case they will inevitably lose power and control over their customers.... It is however not straightforward to establish an account in one of the dark net markets and it is even more difficult (i.e. time and effort consuming) to build a good reputation as a seller (Dr Wojtek Przepiorka, Utrecht University).*

He concluded that cryptomarkets present a significant alternative to street level dealing and it is likely that the market control that street gangs have will diminish as cryptomarkets grow. The only exception is crack cocaine, which is much rarer on darknet markets so may become a niche market for street gangs. The partnership need to be aware that local gangs may become involved in darknet activities as part of the new aggressive business model.

### **Gangs and the Prevent agenda**

Recent research from the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence at Kings College has suggested that there has been a gradual merging of the social networks and environments of terrorist networks and street gangs to form a growing crime-terror nexus (Basra *et al*, 2016). This is at an individual rather than group or network level as terrorist networks and street gangs recruit from the same pool of people with shared vulnerabilities. For example, the British jihadist group Rayat al-Tawheed produced a recruitment campaign entitled 'Sometimes people with the worst pasts create the best futures' (Basra *et al*, 2016). Such campaigns can attract former gang members as it offers a redemption narrative while satisfying the personal needs and desires that led them to become involved in crime - the need for power, violence and a strong identity that is anti-establishment. A similar point was made by a local statutory sector professional:

*The same people who are susceptible to radicalisation are the kind of people who are susceptible to criminal exploitation as well: suggestible, behavioural, emotional, psychological issues, maybe less support from families, maybe have been in prison before... these are all similar vulnerabilities, it's almost bad luck which avenue you get picked up by (Participant 3, statutory sector professional).*

However, local intelligence on individuals who are suspected of involvement with gangs and involvement with terrorist networks indicates that there is virtually no crossover between the two groups. The same professional offered an explanation for this lack of crossover:

*When you look at the actual groups that do the radicalising you think well they probably wouldn't want to touch somebody who is involved in criminal gangs with a bargepole, that's the last person you'd want because they might get arrested and they're more likely to be talking to people, they're more likely to be on a radar. If you're an extreme right group or you're an Islamic fundamentalist group you want somebody who has no footprint, you*

*don't want someone who is getting involved in drug dealing or petty crime* (Participant 3, statutory sector professional).

This is supported by previous research, which has found that gangs are not viewed as attractive partners for terrorist groups because they attract too much attention from the police and tend not to be good at clandestine operations (Decker and Pyrooz, 2014). For example, a terrorist group in Libya tried to form links with the *El Rukn* gang in Chicago to plan acts of terror but the attempts by a gang leader to make contact with the Libyan group from a federal prison meant that the plot was quickly uncovered (Decker and Pyrooz, 2014).

The risk that funds from local drug activity are being used to fund terrorist activities cannot be ruled out but there was no evidence at the current time to support this. However, it would be very difficult to establish this locally as any links would go through a series of mediating parties and networks so local informants would be unlikely to have information. Terrorist attacks in Europe have not required significant financial support from the Islamic State's leadership or central command as part of a deliberate policy of seeking to keep financial barriers to entry low, making it possible for all their supporters to engage in terrorist activities (Basra, 2016).

Another potential threat identified is from returning ISIS recruits. Jason Burke, a respected author on ISIS, offers this assessment in the Observer 22 October 2017:

*Many recruits to ISIS from the UK, Belgium or France were young men of immigrant backgrounds with records for petty, and sometimes serious crimes, and a superficial knowledge of the faith they professed to follow. ISIS offered everything a street gang does- adventure, status, even financial and sexual opportunity- but with the bonus of redemption from past sins and resolution of complex identity crisis. A weakened ISIS, stripped of its territories, is no longer the 'biggest, baddest gang around'.... so the attraction is no longer there* (Burke, 2017).

In conclusion, there was no evidence to indicate there are any linkages between local street gangs and radical Jihadi groups. It is important to stress that this is based on knowledge within the borough at the time of writing the report (October 2017) and the situation could change quickly.

## 11. Conclusions

This chapter will summarise the main conclusions of the study and explore the implications for current and future interventions. The study found three major developments; the emergence of a more professional and economically-driven operating model focused on the drugs market, the increasing involvement of girls and young women in gangs and the growing importance of social media.

### **From postcodes to profits**

The emergence of the Mali Boys as the most influential gang in Waltham Forest has coincided with the development of a more business-oriented operating model with several components. Firstly, the meaning of territory has changed. Instead of an emotional sense of belonging to a postcode that needs to be defended, territory is valued as a marketplace to be protected. Secondly, the rejection of visible signs of gang membership, which are 'bad for business' because they attract unwanted attention from law enforcement agencies. Thirdly, the focus has moved to expanding territory to secure new drugs markets. In response to the saturation of the London drugs markets, gangs are moving outside to develop 'county lines' in other towns where there is little competition and they are unknown to local law enforcement agencies. The new operating model presents additional challenges to law enforcement agencies and partnership agencies more generally as gangs direct considerable effort towards concealing gang membership and their activities.

Local professionals and young people have identified the Mali Boys as 'different' and have explained the new operating model in terms of specific features of the gang. However, pan-London professionals and other recent research studies have identified similar features, which would suggest that it is part of a wider evolution of gang activity. In conclusion, the emergence of the Mali Boys is best understood as a particular stage in gang evolution rather than an isolated phenomenon. The Mali Boys exemplify the core features of the later stages of the 'enterprise' phase of gang development. Both pan-London information and a national research study would support the hypothesis that emergence of a new operating model is having an influence across London but not yet affected other cities.

There is worrying evidence that cuckooing is used locally to support drug dealing activities in ways that are slightly different to county lines activities outside London. When used locally, the existence of established drug dealing areas means there is less need to use properties to sell drugs. Instead, the properties are often used to store and package drugs and as somewhere for street dealers to hide during law enforcement activities. This means that they attract less

attention and are more difficult to discover, which presents additional risks to the vulnerable people involved.

### **Girls and gangs**

The second major development is the increasing involvement of women and girls in the activities and identity of gangs. They form an essential part of the activities of most gangs (NCA, 2016, 2017). The low visibility of girls in gangs means that getting the full picture of their involvement is difficult but through talking to practitioners, it seems that their involvement in gangs is increasing and their recruitment is possibly essential to gang enterprise. This comes at a cost as young women and girls are increasingly exposed to violent and sexual exploitation.

### **The role of social media and technology**

Since the original report, social media and technology has come to play a central role in the lives of young people. It serves to polarise gangs in Waltham Forest, who have contrasting attitudes. Whilst some gangs regard it as attracting too much attention, others see it as central to the gang's identity and 'brand'. This promotion is particularly important in relation to county lines operations as gangs use it to advertise that they are moving into a new town and to intimidate any local gangs. The 24/7 nature of social media means that continuous communication is required to maintain a presence and controversial and provocative content is most successful in gaining attention. This creates an unhelpful driver for gangs to engage in hostile visual conflicts viewed by large online audiences, which can generate real world violence in retaliation. Other research which has reported that many gangs have a lower street visibility but a growing presence on social media (Disley and Little, 2016) would suggest that these developments are more widespread.

### **Emerging threats**

Possible emerging threats have been examined, including the use of darknet cryptomarkets to access new drug markets and potential links between street gangs and terrorist networks. One growing area is the use of darknet to develop cryptomarkets that bring suppliers and customers together using anonymous Bitcoin technology for payment. Pan-London law enforcement agencies regard it as highly likely that some gangs are using the darknet but there are very few intelligence reports about it. Given that the darknet is a 'territory' that does not require suppliers to use violence in order to protect their market, this significantly reduces the risk of attracting police attention and is more likely to go undiscovered.

## Implications for current interventions

The current report has identified key ways in which gang activity in Waltham Forest has changed over the last ten years that are likely to have implications for the current partnership. However, it is important to not exaggerate the implications for current interventions. The core activities that are undertaken remain highly relevant to the current challenges. What is important is to consider whether there are additional approaches or changes in the current approaches that would address new realities.

Given that the primary driver is currently economic, professionals within the partnership have identified possible new approaches that could address this. These include measures that encourage individuals away from gang activities (for example, initiatives to channel the entrepreneurial skills towards legitimate businesses) and deter through economic measures (for example, financial investigations that identify illegal funds and money laundering mechanisms). As a research team, we would support these as promising interventions in addition to current interventions.

## County lines and exploited young people; A form of modern day slavery

At the time of writing the report, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) published a report about the policing response to modern slavery and human trafficking (HMIC, 2017). The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Kevin Hyland, used the opportunity to highlight that using children to transport and sell class A drugs in county lines operations is a form of modern-day slavery.

This was supported in the House of Commons by the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on runaway and missing children and adults, Ann Coffey MP, who highlighted how criminal gangs used children and young people as 'commodities'. She added that she felt that the criminal exploitation of children to sell drugs in county lines operations is the 'next big grooming scandal' and argued that there were comparisons with early child sexual exploitation cases in places such as Rotherham and Rochdale (Hansard, Volume 630, 26 October 2017, Column 487). The latest NCA report on county lines (NCA, 2017b) found that seven police forces across the country reported possible instances of imprisonment/modern slavery, where vulnerable people were detained against their will and/or denied access to areas within their home.

This would suggest that there is clear potential to consider whether prosecuting gangs engaged in county lines operations under the Modern Slavery legislation could provide a viable addition to current interventions.

A final note is that, although the study has been a reassessment of the risks posed by gangs rather than an evaluation of current services, it would be a lost opportunity to not share feedback received from agencies outside Waltham Forest. In the course of interviewing professionals who have pan-London roles and in neighbouring boroughs, participants have spontaneously described Waltham Forest as a borough with a deservedly strong reputation for its work with gangs and its understanding of the issues involved. On our own part, the research team were impressed by the positive partnership relationships that have been observed throughout the study, which bodes well for the challenges ahead.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Project team

### **Dr Andrew Whittaker, Principal Investigator**

Andrew Whittaker is Associate Professor in Social Work and Head of the Risk, Resilience and Expert Decision making (RRED) research group at London South Bank University. He is an experienced researcher in the field of risks faced by young people within urban settings. His research interests centre around how young people and professionals view risk and how their decisions about risk are influenced by the environment they are in. He is currently principal investigator on a study of young people's perceptions of risk in their local communities, which has identified that gangs and child sexual exploitation (CSE) are the two most frequently identified sources of risk. He was previously a Research Fellow at the Centre of Social Work Research at the Tavistock Clinic/UCL and co-authored studies of child abuse linked to witchcraft and spirit possession, a prison service, and an adolescent outreach service. He is the author of several textbooks in social work and related fields. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts and a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. He was previously a senior social worker and manager in child protection and mental health services for children and adolescents.

### **Len Cheston, Senior Researcher**

Len Cheston is a qualified probation officer and the former senior contract manager for the National Offender Management Service in London and South East England. He managed the Probation Trust and Community Rehabilitation Company contracts in this region. He was the lead contract manager for the Serco Community Payback contract in London. He is a qualified leadership coach and mentor. Len has worked for Restorative Solutions on new partnerships, bid writing and Hampshire OPCC Restorative Justice Contract. Len is Chair of 'A Fairer Chance', a Waltham Forest based Community Interest Company helping ex-prisoners find employment.

### **Tajae Tyrell, Senior Researcher**

Tajae Tyrell is a criminologist with extensive experience working with young people who are at risk of serious harm and violence. She has previously conducted research into mental health and reoffending which consisted of a case study on the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health using a mixed methodological study on Restorative Justice and the effectiveness of current services in rehabilitating offenders. She is currently undertaking a PhD on the rise of violence in UK prisons. She is also an Independent Fostering Panel member for ISP Foster Carers.

**Dr Martyn Higgins, Co-Investigator**

Martyn Higgins is Associate Professor in Social Work at London South Bank University and a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. His research interests include: working with families and hard to reach communities, direct work with children, and inter-professional working. With Andrew Whittaker, he managed a large project (£150,000) to produce a national training manual for the Children's Workforce Development Council within a 6-week timescale. He previously undertook a major longitudinal study of social work education and practice, which involved the participation of service users and other professionals. He was a children's social worker for many years mainly in East London, including the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

**Claire Felix-Baptiste**

Claire Felix-Baptiste is the BA Course Director and a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at London South Bank University. Her research area is academic success for newly qualified black and ethnic minority social workers and she is in her final year of her professional doctorate. Claire has twenty years experience of working with BME mental health service users and providers. Claire has been teaching social work for ten years, her other interests lie with the development and progress of African and Caribbean people and their descendants in the United Kingdom. Claire is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Authority.

**Tirion Havard, Co-Investigator**

Tirion Havard is a qualified social worker who was employed by the National Probation Service, London both as a probation officer and as a trainer. During this time she had a diverse caseload and worked with a wide range of offenders including violence within intimate relationships as well as stranger violence. This included gun and knife crime where she undertook the assessment and risk management of high-risk offenders. She is currently undertaking a research study into how mobile phones and other forms of technology are used in the monitoring and coercive control of others.

## Appendix 2: The national and regional policy landscape

### **Home Office (2008) Tackling Gangs: A Practical Guide for Local Authorities, CDRPs and other local partners**

Practical Guide on what local borough partnerships should do to tackle gang crime

- Local Partnerships
- Understanding your gang problem
- Preventing gang membership
- Targeting gang members
- Reassuring your community

Lists lots of examples of work that could be carried out including gangs being territorial, gang mediation, use of various law enforcement methods for tackling gangs, dangerous dogs and girls in gangs.

### **Home Office (2008) Saving lives, reducing harm, protecting the public: An action plan for tackling violence 2008-11:**

- Focus on violence crime
- Partnership working
- Links to PSA targets
- Build on Tackling Gangs work
- Firearm detection

Focus on violent crime and services to victims. Builds on earlier strategy and frequently cross refers to the Tackling Gangs plan. No gang specific central government funding offered. Uses PSA targets as a way of driving local crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs) to take action.

### **Home Office (2009) Saving lives, reducing harm, protecting the public: An action plan for tackling violence 2008-11 One year on**

- Focus on local partnerships
- Continued emphasis on PSA targets
- £4.5 million available for tackling knife crime and gangs subject to a national competition.
- Wants to see Tackling Knives Action Plan combined with drug work.
- Link gang membership prevention work to local Safeguarding Arrangements with strong emphasis on working with parents, carers and schools.

Continues to build on Tackling Gangs plan, money made available although complex to track which fund would be paying for what service at times same amount of money repeated against

slightly different worded initiatives. Starts to ask questions on links for children at risk of gang membership to local Safeguarding arrangements.

The links of gangs to the Government's counter-terrorism strategy through to the Prevent and Channel work is newly emerging at a national policy level as European work is increasingly identifying men who have been radicalised in prison going onto perform violent crimes.

**HM Government (2010) Safeguarding children and young people who may be affected by gang activity, London: The Stationery Office. Department of Schools, Families and Children and Home Office**

The guidance contains familiar themes on partnership working and information-sharing. The focus is on preventing vulnerable young people from becoming gang members with a specific focus on girls. It asks local Safeguarding Boards to take a leadership role in this work. It has a specific section on Child Sexual Exploitation and Violent Extremism.

**Home Office (2011) Ending Gang and Youth Violence A Cross-Government Report including further evidence and good practice case studies**

By the time this report was published the Coalition Government had introduced gang injunctions 'As part of this approach, from 31 January 2011 police and local authorities will be able to apply to a county court for an injunction to prevent an individual from engaging in, or encouraging or assisting, gang-related violence, or to protect an individual from such violence' (December 2010 Press Release). £250,000 was allocated to the Ben Kinsella Fund for anti-knife crime initiatives.

The key themes from the strategy are

- Local Partnerships
- Strong Leadership
- Understanding the Problem
- Assessment and Referral
- Targeted and Effective Interventions including knives and guns
- Mobilising the Community

**Home Office (2012) Ending Gang and Youth Violence Report: One Year On.**

The report looks at the progress of the 2011 strategy. It has a focus on new legislation about the use of knives and guns, the forcible removal of gang members from the UK by UKBA and a 'dedicated £1.2 million over three years to fund a network of 13 support workers for girls vulnerable to or suffering from gang-related sexual violence'.

The report focuses on partnership working and information-sharing, links for girls at risk of gang membership to Safeguarding arrangements, what works and sharing good practice.

**Ending Gang and Youth Violence: Annual Report 2013**

The report highlights the success of the programme in contributing to a drop in violent crime. It highlights the importance of partnership working at a local level and good information-sharing.



The need for offering gang members routes out of membership is stressed and that successful partnerships have these arrangements in place. The lessons learnt section of the report highlighted the issue of future funding as the Home Office money will finish in 2013/2014 and the tension between local and national commissioning timescales. In London the issue of working across borough boundaries was highlighted. The report had a section on girls and gangs that identified Home Office achievements.

### **Home Office (2013) Ending Gang and Youth Violence: Review 2012-13**

This review looked at the impact of the £10 million allocated by the Home Office. In one of its conclusions it stated: 'Positive changes that were felt to have occurred due to the programme included: improvements to the local strategic direction / leadership around tackling gangs and youth violence (for example the clarity and communication of plans for the future); increased involvement of other local agencies (e.g. health, Job Centre Plus) and the voluntary and community sector; and, new improved approaches to specific issues (such as understanding the local problem with gang and youth violence, and supporting girls and women associated with gangs' (p3). The review provides statistical data on the impact of the programme with a specific focus on violent crime and homicide. Many of its conclusions mirror those from the 2013 Annual Report.

### **Home Office (2014) Review of the operation of injunctions to prevent gang-related violence**

The review focuses on the lack of use of these injunctions and explores the reasons behind this for example lack of knowledge about the legislation at a local police level, large amount of time taken to put together an injunction and problems setting prohibition areas. In the period January 2011- January 2014, 88 gang injunctions had been taken out with 46 in one (non-London) local authority area.

### **Ending Gang and Youth Violence: Community Engagement 2014**

This report looks at the issues over community engagement and the use of peer reviewers. It is part of a range of reviews flowing from the 2011 initiative.

### **Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme: Annual Report 2014/15**

The report covers the closure of the £10 million Ending Gang and Youth Violence initiative launched in 2011. It provides a long list of successful projects from across the country although none from Waltham Forest make it into the report. It covers how the money acted as a catalyst for change, supported strong local leadership, provided practical support for local areas, was value for money and improved identification of gang related and serious violent crime. It had a section on improving public health responses to gangs which focused on mental health services for young people and responses in Accident and Emergency Departments to gun and knife crime.

### **Ending gang violence and exploitation 2016**

The work built on existing policy statements from the past with an additional focus on county line issues. It highlights the new challenge of 'Gang related exploitation of vulnerable young people and adults.

The priority areas are set out by the Government, which are:

- Tackle county lines – the exploitation of vulnerable people by a hard core of gang members to sell drugs
- Protect vulnerable locations – places where vulnerable young people can be targeted, including pupil referral units and residential children's care homes
- Reduce violence and knife crime – including improving the way national and local partners use tools and powers.
- Safeguard gang-associated women and girls – including strengthening local practices
- Promote early intervention – using evidence from the Early Intervention Foundation to identify and support vulnerable children and young people (including identifying mental health problems)
- Promote meaningful alternatives to gangs such as education, training and employment

### **Statutory Guidance Injunctions to Prevent Gang-Related Violence and Gang-Related Drug Dealing 2016**

Further legal advice on how to use Gang Injunctions. It includes a section on the use of the injunction with girl gang members. No data on the use of the injunction or models of good practice are offered.

### **Home Office (2016) Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme: Independent Review**

The report is a detailed examination of the 2012-2015 Home Office funded initiative. It is an independent review undertaken by Dr Simon Harding from Middlesex University. Waltham Forest was not included in the sample base. The report highlighted successful work in strong local leadership, mapping the problem, multi-agency collaboration, assessment and referral, targeted and effective Interventions. The author commented that attempts at community engagement had been less successful and in engagement with Criminal Justice system, probation and YOTs were fully participating but prisons appeared a more marginal partner. There was no indication of the Government's response to this review.

## **The London policy context**

The momentum for a London-wide approach to tackling gang related crime only started once the Police and Crime Commissioner legal structure is fully in place in 2012. Until then anti-gang work appeared a low priority at the London-level. The *London Crime Reduction Board: Partnership*

*Anti-Gangs Strategy 2012* is the first London-wide strategy, which reflected the thinking on gang work at that time with a strong focus on partnership working.

### **Time for Action in November 2008**

This was a consultation document issued in response to a spike in young men being killed through guns and knives in London. It focused on young people looking at young offenders in custody, those in care, partnership working, truancy, usage of sport and evaluation. It made minimal mention of work with gangs but is the first example of the then new Mayoral administration seeking to impact on young Londoners lives.

### **London Crime Reduction Board: Partnership Anti-Gangs Strategy 2012.**

The first comprehensive anti-gangs strategy for London. It focused on the trying to bring consistency across London in anti-gang work. The key aims were effective enforcement; identifying and prioritisation of most harmful gang members; monitoring enforcement and alternative enforcement opportunities. It set out a wide range of expectations for some partner agencies such as London Probation Trust and the London Safeguarding Children Board. It emphasises the need for partnership working at a local and London-level.

### **London Police and Crime Plan 2013-2016**

This detailed plan reflected the high priority the Mayor gave to work with gangs. In this strategy it is one of the key areas and there was an expectation that Police resources will be allocated to this priority. The focus was labelled tackling gangs and serious youth violence, using the Trident Gang Command to drive enforcement activity. The plan reinforced the earlier LCRB plan repeating the action set out in the plan.

### **Strategic Ambitions for London: Gangs and Serious Youth Violence 2014**

The Plan builds on the work of the LCRB's strategy from 2012. It is based on a consultation with interested parties and reflects much of the national debate in the Home Office. It provides useful data on gangs in London, a focus on violence against women and girls and discusses work in HMP Isis. It examines the links with mental health issues and comments on the lack of sustainable funding for exit plans. It builds its strategy around prevention, intervention and enforcement providing details on what it expects. Partnership working is encouraged.

### **Police and Crime Plan 2017-2021**

It builds on existing work from the previous regime, it does criticise Government policy regarding local authority funding with a specific focus on youth service cuts. It has the usual focus on the need for partnership working, makes violence against women and girls a high priority, and has a stronger analysis and focus on serious organised gangs, making a distinction between them and more localised street gangs. It is one of the first plans that start to highlights that not all violent knife crime is gang related. It starts to explore the link between gang membership and potential radicalisation.

**MOPAC Knife Strategy June 2017**

The strategy builds on the Police and Crime Plan. Its main focus is on knife crime and but mentions work on gangs as part of this wider strategy. It outlines that only 5% of knife crime is gang related but this tends to more violent and usually involves victim and offenders from BME communities. The strategy does not seek to change existing ways of working with gang members with a focus on the Trident and their Gang Matrix work, gang exit programmes and working across County Lines. The work on County Lines was the first mention in a MOPAC paper of the need to undertake this work.

**National Drugs Strategy 2017**

‘County lines’ is the term used by police to refer to urban gangs supplying Class A drugs to suburban areas, rural areas, market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines (“deal lines”). Gangs typically use children and young people as runners to move drugs and money to and from the urban area and this often involves them being exploited through deception, intimidation, violence, debt bondage, grooming and/or trafficking by the gang. In addition, gangs are known to target and exploit vulnerable adults by taking over their homes to use as a local bases for drug dealing.

## Appendix 3: Gangs and mental health

### Understanding the Mental Health Needs of Young People involved in Gangs. A Tri-borough Public Health Report produced on behalf of the Westminster Joint Health and Wellbeing Board 2013

This extensive analysis of research into gangs and health issues in the UK reported:

- *Young people involved in gangs have much higher rates of a broad range of mental health problems. These higher rates (compared to both the general and young offender populations) include:*
- *Conduct disorder (in children and adolescents) and antisocial personality disorder in young adults, possibly due to common risk factors for gang membership and conduct disorder*
- *Anxiety disorders, possibly due to fear of violent victimisation*
- *Psychosis, possibly due to high cannabis use*
- *Suicide attempts, possibly due to impulsive violent acts directed inwardly*
- *In addition, young people involved in gangs have higher rates of drug and alcohol misuse.*

In a sample of 100 young gang members, it could be expected that:

- 86 will have conduct problems (<18 years) or antisocial personality disorder (18+ years)
- 67 will have alcohol dependence
- 59 will have anxiety disorders (including post traumatic stress disorder)
- 57 will have drug dependence (mainly cannabis)
- 34 will have attempted suicide
- 25 will have psychosis
- 20 will have depression.

In 2015 Public Health England published a report entitled 'The mental health needs of gang affiliated young people'. The Executive Summary outlined:

*Research is beginning to expose the high burden of mental illness faced by young people involved with gangs. Gang members are at increased risk of a range of mental health conditions including conduct disorder, antisocial personality disorder, anxiety, psychosis and drug and alcohol dependence*

- *The links between gang-affiliation and poor mental health can operate in both directions. Poor mental wellbeing can draw young people to gangs while gang involvement can negatively impact on an individual's mental health*
- *Violence is an inherent part of gang culture and gang members are at increased risk of involvement in violence as both perpetrators and victims. Long-term exposure to violence is associated with psychological problems including depression, conduct disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder*

- *Poor mental health and gang-affiliation share many common risk factors, often relating to young people's early life experiences and the environments in which they grow up. The more risk factors young people are exposed to the greater their vulnerability to negative outcomes*
- *Girls involved with gangs can be particularly vulnerable to mental health problems resulting from sexual and intimate partner violence*
- *Preventing the development of risk factors and promoting mental wellbeing in young people requires a life course approach that supports parents and families and encourages healthy development from the very earliest stages of life*
- *Programmes such as home visiting, parenting programmes, preschool programmes and school-based social and emotional development programmes can protect children from the risk factors for gang involvement and poor mental health, including parental stress, exposure to violence and behavioural problems*
- *Evidence-based, relevant, accessible and non-stigmatising community interventions should be available in gang-affected areas to promote health and emotional wellbeing, support recovery from mental illness and help young people move away from harmful gang-related activities*
- *Gang-affiliated young people may experience particular barriers to engaging with mental health and other services. Novel approaches are required, including the provision of holistic support in young peoples' own environments and the use of key workers or mentors who are able to build trusting relationships with young people involved with gangs*

Effectively addressing the relationships between gang-affiliation and poor mental health requires a strong, collaborative approach that co-ordinates services across a wide range of organisations. Health services, local authorities, schools, criminal justice agencies and communities all have an important role to play in promoting healthy social and emotional development in children and young people and ensuring vulnerable young people affected by gangs and poor mental health receive the support they require.

## Appendix 4: Education

### Ofsted

Many schools seek to have a good Ofsted report and it could be seen that any mention of gangs in an Ofsted report could be detrimental to that schools reputation with parents. Gangs and work with gang members is rarely mentioned on school websites or in Ofsted reports. Only two schools in Waltham Forest mentions gang prevention and support work. They are Frederick Bremer and George Mitchell. The schools and colleges were praised by Ofsted for their safeguarding and ensuring the school/college provided a safe environment for learning.

Analysis of gang members and their educational backgrounds is providing in the Haringey Draft Gangs Strategy 2015:

*There is a 22% prevalence of Special Educational Need / Educational Psychologist history observed in the gang involved cohort. This is comparable to the 2013 SEN snapshot against the approximate school age resident population of around 47,000 in Haringey, where around 4% of children were identified with a SEN / psychologist history. Although this is only an estimate based on 2013 figures it does demonstrate that the gang-involved cohort are disproportionately identified as having a SEN and requiring intervention from educational psychologists.*

*A snapshot of the statements of SEN of the gangs cohort has been examined and the following common themes identified: a high proportion of individuals excluded from school, low self esteem and confidence, delayed language skills, easily distracted, impulsive and finds it difficult to reflect on own behaviour.*

## Appendix 5: Gangs and housing

### Changes in Waltham Forest in last 10 years

Waltham Forest has changed in a visible way in the last 10 years, a process accelerated post the 2012 London Olympics. A process of gentrification has made an impact on the shops, restaurants and bars of Walthamstow and parts of Leyton and Leytonstone. New places have opened catering to a changing population. House prices and rent have increased at a higher rate than other parts of London, throughout the borough spare land is being built upon leading to the borough's population to increase.

### Gang and housing tenure

It would appear few have any form of stable housing tenure. The National Probation Service indicates that getting an address from a gang member is very difficult. They move between family, friends plus an increasing use of 'cuckooing'. Many still identify with an estate and would want try to give an address on that estate but increasingly they sleep at addresses outside the original gang territory due to friends and family being relocated to other parts of the borough.

The current pressures on housing suggest that it will become increasingly difficult for gangs to maintain a structure based on small estates and they are more likely to become looser alliances spread across a part of the borough.

Neighbouring boroughs suggest that their neighbourhood gang members may be living in Waltham Forest but will still gravitate back to their original estate but indicates a further weakening of geographical ties.

### Lack of housing impacts on gang exit work

Agencies working on gang exit highlight housing as the biggest problems faced in working with gang members. The lack of access to affordable housing make it difficult to move ex-gang members within the borough and also outside the borough boundaries. Cross borough arrangements seem to have broken down again impacting on opportunities to move gang members.

If housing is found it is likely to be in the private sector with an accordingly high rent effectively making it necessary to claim housing benefit to supplement any wages or grant and may lead to loss of housing if landlords do not house those claiming any form of benefit.



The local authority needs to take advantage of the London Mayor's expectations on low cost and social housing to increase the amount of available housing for those on low incomes and should use this increased opportunity to support gang members exit work.