

A response from London Youth and its member organisations

London Youth is a network of almost 300 diverse community-based youth organisations serving young people of all backgrounds right across the capital.

Our member organisations have a wide range of experience and expertise at supporting young people, some of whom may be at risk of or involved with the criminal justice system. Our members generally have strong links within their communities with the police, the NHS, local authorities, housing associations, schools and other agencies, and so we've actively sought to solicit their views in shaping our response.

At a corporate level, London Youth works closely in partnership with the MOPAC-LVSC voluntary sector reference group. And for the past four years, we have hosted our own Tackling Youth Violence network, which is made up of leaders from around 30 youth organisations from different parts of London who come together to share practice, identify emerging needs and contribute to policy development, engaging regularly with MOPAC, the Home Office, the Youth Justice Board and others.

The consultation process

We very much welcome the openness and engagement that the Deputy Mayor and MOPAC have shown throughout the consultation process, and we've tried to mirror that in the way we have sought views to shape our response.

Since the publication of the draft strategy, we've sought in as many ways as possible to gather constructive views and facilitated opportunities for youth workers and young people to discuss, clarify and respond to the draft plan. Some of the ways we have done this were:

- At the outset of the consultation a representative from MOPAC joined our Tackling Youth Violence Network meeting, and outlined the key themes of the strategy; and we also attended the Mayor's Knife Crime Summit
- We subsequently hosted a series of round table meetings and focus groups with youth organizations to discuss the draft plan, focusing on the key questions asked. 15 youth leaders took part in these discussions.
- At the same time we circulated the MOPAC online questionnaire, and developed our own tailored survey specifically focusing on the Children and Young People priorities in the draft plan
- And we received specific detailed responses from 7 youth organisations from within our membership, from a range of communities and working with different groups of young people across London: Oasis Play; [Carney's Community Centre](#); [Hyde Housing Association](#) ; [Epic CIC](#); [Dost Centre](#); [Young Lewisham Project](#); [South Central Youth Ltd](#)

We've also worked closely with Leap Confronting Conflict, Safer London Foundation and Redthread in co-ordinating our responses, and have welcomed the opportunity to meet with and hear from Deputy Mayor Sophie Linden on a number of occasions throughout the process. Our response is drawn together based on all of these inputs, and we hope it contributes constructively to making London a safer city for all of us.

Our response

While we found the questions posed in the plan, and within its thematic sections, helpful, some of the examples and issues we uncovered through the consultation process touch on broader issues. We've tried as far as possible to include our evidence under the relevant questions that the consultation asked but our focus has mostly been on the how the plans relate to children and young people. We've made a main set of responses to the core questions framed in the draft plan in section 1 below; and then some further comments on the specific commitments around children and young people in Section 2.

Section 1: our overall response

Questions 1 and 2: To what extent do you agree that the plan will make London a safer city for all? And do you think the priorities stated by the Mayor are the right ones?

We believe that many of the proposals that the plan sets out will – if implemented well – contribute to making London a safer city. We also welcome the high priority given to children and young people within the plan. Children and young people in London are proportionately much more likely to be victims of crime than in other parts of the country, and levels of serious crime affecting young people – including deaths and serious injuries from knife crime – remain intolerably high. The strong focus on girls and young women and prioritizing tackling sexual violence is helpful, and amongst youth workers there was agreement that the urgent priorities set out in the safeguarding young people section of the plan (knife crime, gang related crime, sexual abuse and serious youth violence, child grooming) were among the right ones.

Similarly the commitment on neighbourhood policing is very welcome as is the clear priority on multi-agency working, to build a better criminal justice system in which the public – including young people – have more confidence. We talk more about this later in our response.

At a more granular level, and as an example, the draft plan's commitment to tackle grooming was deemed particularly important by our members. Our members spoke in depth about young children (some as young as 11 years old) being used by older gang members/ drug dealers to transport drugs/weapons to different parts of London and beyond. While complex safeguarding issues – from radicalisation to gang membership to child sexual exploitation - can be very different in terms of whom they affect, youth workers recognize that many of the techniques that abusers use, and the vulnerabilities young people face, can be similar. So a commitment to prioritise understanding and addressing these issues would have benefits to a broader range of young people.

Question 2 (continued): Thinking about the priorities - please provide any comments you have about the plan itself including anything you would add or change.

Crucial to the success of the plan will be a number of factors:

- ***The extent to which implementation of the plan is joined up across City Hall, with other strategies around social integration, broader support for children and schools, transport, health and housing.*** This came out strongly in discussions both amongst our members, and with the Deputy Mayor and other stakeholders. Our sense from discussions within City Hall is that there is an encouraging and welcome focus on

collaboration – which recognizes that while MOPAC needs to own and shape the strategy, and be accountable for delivery, there are other significant policy areas which affect young people and communities, and if engaged and joined up will have a positive impact on safety and reducing crime.

- ***The reality of multi-agency working:*** One challenge is how broad to make the multi-agency approach. We welcome the plan's commitment to work collaboratively with different agencies to improve the identification of London's most vulnerable young people and commission services to support young victims of crime. There is a need to ensure that partnerships include the youth and community sector. Youth organisations can play a vitally important role in identifying and supporting vulnerable young people, particularly young people who are not accessing statutory services and therefore unknown to statutory agencies. Similarly, housing associations are also important partners. Housing Association such as Hyde Housing, have a wealth of data and intelligence on their occupants which could help MPS identify vulnerable young people.

Another challenge for multi-agency working is information sharing amongst different agencies. Failures in information sharing have been at the root of well documented child protection cases. And on a day to day level, information gaps can lead to young people becoming lost in the system and unable to access support. As a potential solution to this, local areas are mapping existing services and expertise across the voluntary sector with the hope that this will improve and speed up referrals to specialised support. Our members have fed back very different ways in which information sharing is managed across London. In some boroughs such as Islington this seems to work well: the local authority has developed multilateral information sharing agreements with VSOs. There is a case for replicating this approach. Many youth organisations will continue to work with young people throughout and beyond their interactions with police or youth justice system, and so the ability to know about any developments or incidents (eg becoming a victim or being arrested etc) would enable them to support young people much better

Thirdly, there is the challenge that involving multiple agencies can significantly slow down provision of services. Responses from our members talked of the long time scale between tracking a young person in need (ie as a victim or at risk) and commissioning services for them. If multi-agency working is to be effective, then clear systems and processes for addressing these challenges must be put in place.

- ***The availability of funding for implementation:*** the Deputy Mayor has been clear in the interactions we have had with her during the consultation that there will be a significant challenge to funding all of the aspirations in the plan. Simply, the demands on the police and justice system are expected to continue to grow, and resources are very limited. It is also clear that some of the long term and behavioural or cultural changes required if the plan is to succeed will take significant investment. That is all the more reason for there to be a collaborative approach across City Hall, but also with local authorities, and providers of education, transport, the regeneration industry and other policy areas. This could lead to the identification of more and different resources which could be used in part to help prevent crime and support victims. This is particularly significant for children and young people. MOPAC's pledge to continue to financially support each of the London Boroughs' Children and Adult Safeguarding Boards is therefore very welcome, as these boards are seen by those working with young people

as a great resource for training and sharing information. Beyond this, whilst we appreciate the draft plan's recognition of the role of youth work at crisis points for young people, youth workers and others we spoke to believe that there also needs to be an investment into universal youth provision because of its potential preventative work. While there will always be a need for some targeting, the risk of developing programs exclusively for gang nominals or those involved in criminal activity only segregates them further from mainstream society and brings them deeper into the world of criminality.

In addition, the Early Intervention Foundation estimated that the cost to London of 'late interventions' – economic inactivity among young people, school exclusions, crime, substance misuse etc – was a staggering £2.4bn in 2014/15. So a London-wide commitment to find new ways of investing in services for young people, which are open access and focus on positive opportunities would in our view not only be an effective way of preventing more young people from becoming victims or perpetrators, but could lead to significant savings for Londoners further down the line, as well as stronger, healthier and happier communities.

Question 3. Are the delivery plans and commitments clear and easy to understand? Please provide any comments you have about the delivery plans and commitments. Is there anything you would like to contribute regarding the approach MOPAC intend to take?

For the children and young people's section, the commitments are clear, and welcome – however, they do look quite variable in scope and scale (eg from a broad aspiration to tackle knife crime through to a very specific commitment to open two Child's Houses). Later in our response we address these commitments in more detail and highlight the things that we welcome, as well as noting where we would like to see more focus.

Question 4. Do you agree with the approach laid out in terms of how success of the plan will be measured? Please provide any comment you have about performance measurement of the police or criminal justice service.

The success measures in relation to children and young people are clear, at a London-wide level and everyone would welcome success in relation to reducing crime, and the likelihood of young people becoming victims. However, many elements of the plan concern things which – while they will impact on these success measures – really do need some performance indicators of their own. For instance, many youth workers and others comment regularly about the lack of trust in some communities between young people and police. Things like the gangs matrix have contributed to this in some areas, and many youth workers have also referred to the fact that while at one time they enjoyed regular contact with their local neighbourhood police, in many areas this service has been reduced, and deemed not a priority, creating a lack of a visible and 'human' face which young people, youth workers and parents can relate to. So while measures of public confidence in the police at a London-wide level are very welcome, more thought needs to be given to how this might translate to local areas. Broadly we welcome activities that will improve detection rates and police effectiveness – as children and young people are disproportionately victims of crime - however these activities must be shown to be effective and not negatively impact on relations between young people and the police. Later in our response we pick up some specifics in each of these areas.

Question 5. What do you think the Police and Crime Plan will achieve?

We are very supportive of the ambition of the plan and will work in partnership with MOPAC and others to help it succeed. And if our responses are taken into consideration and we have the opportunity to work in partnership to address some of the challenges we have identified, we hope it can make a difference to the lives of young people, and all Londoners. However, as identified above – and below in our responses on the children and young people’s section – there are a number of critical things which we believe also need to happen if we are truly to achieve the ambition of making a safer city for all Londoners.

Question 6. What would you like to see more emphasis on?

In our specific responses on the children and young people’s section below, we will suggest a number of areas for additional emphasis. However there are a few key points which came out so strongly from our conversations that it is worth bringing these out up front.

A stronger, clearer acknowledgement of the role for community organisations and youth work in prevention:, including a recognition of the need for stronger partnerships between schools and others within local communities. We welcome the draft plan’s recognition of the role of youth workers in the ‘teachable moment’ (for instance, in custody) and the powerful experience of Redthread, Rugby Portobello Trust (both member organisations of London Youth) and others who have successfully supported vulnerable young people and help them change their attitude towards crime. For young people being arrested for the first time, the experience of being held in custody can be a teachable moment for them, as they are isolated from negative influences and confronted with the threat of prison and a criminal record. However for this positive changed to be sustained long-term, it is essential that young people have continued support and opportunities to take part in positive activities.

There are many examples of where youth work has been helpful in breaking down barriers: London Youth members St Matthew’s Project in Lambeth, and Ignite in Harrow are just two who provide opportunities for young people to engage with each other through football and other sports, including bringing teams from (notionally) rival estates or postcodes together. Art Against Knives uses arts and cultural activities to give young people the space to be creative and channel their energies more positively. Carney’s Community Centre in Battersea uses boxing, which continues to be an important way of engaging some young people. Project Dost works specifically with young refugees, engaging them in positive activities, and supporting their learning and integration into communities. And most youth organisations now combine this kind of preventative work with other social action, youth leadership and personal development activities, including accredited qualifications. A final example is London Youth’s Build-it project which gave young people on Tulse Hill estate a chance to get work experience, training, mentoring and job opportunities with the construction firms and contractors who were regenerating the estates. There was a clear benefit to the young people who got training, support and jobs – but also to the wider community. Not only did local people have a stake in the regeneration; but older people on the estate stopped perceiving young people as a problem, instead seeing them as making a positive contribution. Local Police told us at the time that during the project they saw a significant reduction in reports of anti-social behaviour. It is of course impossible to ascribe a direct link, but our belief was that the youth work based programme helped.

Related to this, the aspirations set out in the Mayor's City for All Londoners, which highlight the positive role that spaces in communities can play in bringing people together, indicate a clear role for youth and community organisations in strengthening communities and building stronger social integration. Both of these things are likely to have a positive impact in reducing crime, so we'd very much welcome a commitment to joining these agendas more closely – and a clear signal that youth work and services for young people outside of school are an important part of London's social infrastructure.

Amongst the collaborative working suggested in the plan, there is no mention of supporting schools to work more closely with the wider community to tackle youth violence and crime. There are some good examples from within London Youth's network of where schools and youth organisations work together – often these focus on Sport (eg Football Beyond Borders, which delivers after school provision in south London; London Basketball Association which works across Westminster and West London); but the engagement of young people in positive activities has a positive preventative effect, as well as building social skills and helping motivation around learning. Research carried out by education consultants LKCMO in 2015 for London Youth found that teachers felt that youth workers could significantly help support young people facing challenges around transitions (eg moving home, family breakdown, changing schools etc). Young people at these times may be more likely to become vulnerable to other challenges – including as victims of crime – so our belief is that encouragement of partnerships which combine in-school support with something similar outside the classroom would be very beneficial.

Finally, youth work provision often also involves some kind of outreach, and so can act as a gateway through which young people affected by or involved in youth violence become engaged in more positive activities. Some of our members viewed the work that they do as crucial to the success of more targeted initiatives such as London Gangs EXIT programme, as this is reliant on referrals of young people who are willing to escape gang culture. Current investment from MOPAC (and beyond) doesn't reflect an acknowledgement of the role that outreach and engagement by non-specialist youth organisations plays in tackling serious youth violence.

Giving a higher priority to parents in the plan – particularly in the children and young people's section: Youth workers have commented that there needs to be more focus on parents and carers if the plans for young people are to succeed. As well as bespoke work through schools and with parenting organisations, youth and community projects and centres have expertise in sustaining long term relationships with the families of the young people they work with. As noted above, this can be particularly through at times of transition; and can create a bridge for parents, many of whom do not seek help until too late, for fear of getting their child arrested or taken away by social services. There are a number of successful example projects, including London Youth member *The Crib's* Hackney initiative, [Parent Voice](#), which not only focus on engagement, but on upskilling parents to be able to help young people make better choices, and seek help when they need it.

Tackling the narrative around gangs, and focusing on social media: Additionally, although the draft strategy proposes some 'social solutions' to combat youth violence, we believe more needs to be done to combat the perception amongst some young people that crime (notably gang and drug culture) is glamorous. Social media has had a significant effect on the way that incidents – whether gang related or now – are escalated and 'go viral' amongst young people.

Youth workers within London's communities tell us they continually see the escalation of gang violence through the use of YouTube videos; and some cited examples of things like victim and witness statements being 'broadcast' on social media, exposing young people to physical harm and threats of violence. This has impacted on the number of young people speaking out and testifying in court. One of our members reported an incident of one young person who was forced to leave the country, due to threats on his life after his statement was put up on Instagram. A strong counter narrative is needed, but to make it effective it really needs to be shaped and articulated by young people themselves, giving them the opportunity and license to use social media in positive ways. Some youth workers also believe that the focus of some of the media and some policy makers on 'gang' stories does not always help – as it risks creating a perception that gangs and gang activity is much more widespread than it may actually be. This not only creates a climate of fear in some communities, but also may perversely encourage some young people to become involved as they will assume that it is something that everyone does.

Question 7. Is there anything else you think the Mayor should take into account when creating his plan?

Although there are many players at all levels involved in crime prevention and criminal justice, for many young people there is inevitably a huge focus on the role, the culture and the operational decisions of the police. Youth workers are firmly in support of the plan's commitment to neighborhood policing and building a police force which reflects the diversity of the city. Locally based police officers were widely cited as a positive presence, and many youth workers regretted the fact that 'more urgent policing priorities' had in recent years removed the opportunity for contact and dialogue between police officers and the local community. A renewed commitment to locally based police working in partnership with community organisations would be seen as a very positive step forward.

However, we recognize that long term change within the police is a challenge – and that the MPS is itself under a huge range of pressures balancing multiple priorities. Within this context, welcome the intention to strengthen the universal policing offer. Ideas such as deploying more specialist officers in crime hotspots and schools drew some cautious support from youth workers but have risks: while people recognize the value of neighbourhood policing, too much 'targeting' might lead to perceptions of 'over-policing' of low income communities, further criminalising the young people who live in these areas and increasing resentment towards the police. Criminals operating in these communities were also thought likely to simply move their operation to less policed areas, displacing rather than solving the problem.

Similarly our feeling is that plans to deploy specialist police officers in schools needs more consideration – this might also give the impression that certain communities or young people were being (unfairly) targeted. One proposal to build on this might be the funding for youth workers to work in schools to help diffuse conflict between pupils (which might otherwise escalate into violence after school), and to give vulnerable young people a neutral adult to confide in if they were feeling threatened.

In terms of policing culture, MOPAC's continued commitment to provide police officers with diversity training, we would like to see that training extended to youth involvement, so that officers are well trained with dealing with young people. Personal relationships are very important and our members have reported incidences of negative interactions between young

people and police officers often due to miscommunication from both parties. This is largely attributed to police officers having no knowledge of the cultural nuances of the young people they are interacting with. Youth workers can play a big role in helping officers better understand the young people they are communicating with.

And we are pleased with the plan's acknowledgement of the inequalities which exist in the criminal justice system, including what many believe is institutionalised bias which disproportionately affects young black men. However the community based workers we spoke to during the consultation were clear that this was a major challenge, and there was some cynicism about the length of time and resource that cultural change across the criminal justice would require – and a realism about how much influence MOPAC could really exercise.

Section 2: Specific responses to the Plan's commitments on Children and Young People

While many of the points in over overall response (Section 1, above) are concerned with children and young people, there were a number of things that the youth workers and others we consulted with raised in relation to the young people's commitments.

Produce and implement a Knife Crime Strategy in the New Year, bringing police, partners and communities together to take tough action against this urgent problem facing young Londoners

While the strong focus on knife crime is welcome, youth workers felt that there was a real need that in order to be effective it would need real input from young people themselves – and this would not just be as messengers or advocates, but in making real decisions about the strategy itself and its focus. Leap Confronting Conflict, Safer London, London Youth and many other organisations can – and want to – play a role in convening young people and facilitating this input. More broadly, the voice of young people is largely absent from the draft plan. Whilst there was some very welcome youth involvement during the Knife Crime Summit in November 2016, there is a need for further opportunities for young people to convey their experience of services and shape the development and commissioning of programs to combat youth violence and crime.

There are many great examples which could be supported, replicated or developed. Safer London are working in partnership with shopping centres, supporting young people to do research with their peers and with security staff, looking at how their experience of public space could be better and safer. New initiatives focused on young people should wherever possible have an element of co-production with the young people if they want the best chance of succeeding.

Lead a new independent group of police leaders, child protection experts and academics to drive the oversight and change necessary to ensure that the lessons of the HMIC report are learned and that children in our city are not let down when they are most vulnerable. And with NHS England, commission two Child Houses to provide investigative, medical and emotional support in one place to young victims of sexual violence.

Youth workers were very positive about the introduction of two child houses, to offer protection to young victims of sexual assault and removing the need for young victims to go through the repeated trauma of giving their statement several times to different agencies. The lack of safe, secure accommodation for young victims had been identified by members as a failure in previous child protection strategies.

However, more broadly – and this was raised at a number of meetings and discussions we took part in during the consultation – there is a significant gap in the draft plan in respect of the need to address the link between crime, victimhood (direct and indirect) and mental health. Beyond providing beds for young people with mental health problems and a commitment to a trauma based approach, there is a need for a more comprehensive strategy. We recognize this is itself beyond MOPAC's remit – but it is clear there is a need for involvement in shaping such a strategy. Youth workers told us of examples of young people witnessing or experiencing serious youth violence yet not being provided with appropriate mental health support in the aftermath. Post traumatic stress is often not spoken about in the realms of youth violence however it is a real and occurring phenomena amongst young people who have experienced or been victims of youth violence. Evidence from our members suggests that not doing enough is being done to refer young people to the appropriate mental health professionals, and that in many cases those service simply aren't available to young people.

As potential opportunities or solutions, London Youth recently hosted an event with Public Health England, looking at support needs for youth workers to manage and support the wellbeing of young people. Working in collaboration with the health sector would seem to be a good way of managing resources efficiently and potentially finding new investment.

Similarly in 2016 we hosted a conference for around 40 youth workers on emerging complex safeguarding needs, including CSE, radicalization and gang violence. Not only was this an excellent opportunity for youth workers to hear experts and shape their own practice; it also helped London Youth develop and secure funding for a strategic programme – Stronger Voices – working with 6 of our member clubs to support young people to use social action to build their own resilience to take on negative influences – and equip youth workers with knowledge of when and how to refer.

Finally, there is a clear demand for safeguarding training for youth workers. London Youth is training 30-50 youth workers every couple of months in safeguarding, risk assessments and other issues related to keeping young people safe. One of the major consequences of local authority cuts to youth services is the disappearance of local safeguarding training in some boroughs.

Review the MPS approach to gang crime, including the Gangs Matrix, and support the MPS to tackle gang crime, gun crime and knife crime more effectively in London.

This commitment is welcome, and needed. The **Gang Matrix** is seen as major challenge in both fueling tensions within communities, mistrust between young people and the police, and youth workers gave a number of examples of young people whom they felt had been severely and unfairly criminalized as a result. We would welcome very much a review which – at the very least - changed some of the ways in which the matrix system will be operationalized in London. There is specific concern amongst the community sector about the lack of transparency within

the Gangs Matrix. Whilst the system is designed to track young people who are at risk of serious violence (both perpetrators and victims) some have argued for should be a time limit for being on the Matrix, if there have been no further offences or intelligence. We would also propose that young people under the age of 21 be removed from the Matrix once they are of no threat to being victims or perpetrators of serious violence. Members have reported incidences of young people being put on the Matrix purely by association with childhood friends they no longer see in adult life.

There was some worry that MOPAC was putting resource towards crisis community initiatives but without giving a long enough time, or sufficient investment to enable a real assessment of their impact on youth violence. The *Safe Haven* Initiative was cited as one example that was well intentioned however appeared to have been limited in impact. This initiative's apparent reliance on people such as shopkeepers with no authority or power was seen as a failing in the design of the programme. The murder of a 16year old girl who was shot through the window of a pizza shop in Hoxton was used as an example of the scheme's limitation to protect vulnerable young people in actual danger. This is not to say that there is not an appetite amongst youth workers for trying new ideas to protect young people – but there must be proper investment, and engagement with young people and community workers in designing these initiatives if they are to have the best chance of success. The voluntary sector is – despite its funding challenges – often able to be more agile and responsive to need than other sectors, and there is scope for using learning from community led solutions to scale up into broader or longer term programmes.

Stop and search: Youth workers were strongly of the belief that in too many incidences stop and search powers are still being used to unfairly target and criminalise young people – and particular communities. We therefore welcome the plan's commitment to support the Stop and Search Community Monitoring Network Community groups, who review MPS use of stop and search in their areas to ensure it is being used fairly and proportionately. Feedback from our members suggests that Stop and Search is most likely to be accepted and understood by young people if they have confidence that it is being conducted legally, professionally and based on intelligence. To build this confidence amongst young people we call upon MPS to ensure an active youth voice within the Stop and Search Community Monitoring Network Community groups. Whilst youth workers understand the use of stop and search as a deterrent, it must be intelligence led otherwise it damages the relationship between communities and the police. And the intelligence needs to be linked to individuals rather than whole communities. Youth workers report that some young people who are not engaged in criminal activity feel that they are constantly targeted by police because of their postcode.

Work with the MPS and local authorities to reduce the arrest and charge rates of looked-after children.

This is welcome. As an additional point to consider, whilst we recognize that the Mayor is unable to influence the decision of schools to exclude pupils, our members were in agreement that the current exclusion system was contributing to the high levels of gang and serious youth violence, and this has a disproportionate impact on young people in care. Again this is a further area where work between MOPAC and other departments – both the DfE in central government and the Education and Youth Team within City Hall – is very important.

With London partners, seek to review custodial and community provision for children and young people to break the cycle of offending.

Once again, this commitment is welcome – and we would ask for opportunities to involve young people and community organisations in designing what this looks like. Our strong belief is that effective, positive services for young people, offering them opportunities, will contribute to reducing offending, and the risk of young people becoming victims of crime. The arguments in this respect that we laid out in Section 1 of this response are therefore relevant once more. In addition, we warmly welcome the plan's emphasis on restorative justice, and the mayor's new £1.3m restorative justice programme led by victims of crime, and for victims of crime. We hope that parts of this Pan-London Restorative Justice programme can be delivered locally by grassroots community groups.

Final word

Thanks again for giving us the opportunity to feed into this draft plan. We hope that you find our response helpful and constructive – it is intended to be. Please do contact us if you want any further information or have any questions.

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