

REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF THE KNIFE CRIME TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Report Author: Councillor Lauren Townsend

Purpose of Report:

To update SaferMK on the completion of the Knife Crime Task and Finish Group and to provide information on the projects that have received funding.

FOR INFORMATION

1. Background

- 1.1 In January 2020, MK Council committed £100,000 to the prevention of youth violence and knife crime in Milton Keynes. A Task and Finish Group (TAF) of the Community Safety Partnership was set up to make recommendations about how this money should be allocated.
- 1.2 The Knife Crime TAF was chaired by Cllr Lauren Townsend and includes colleagues from Thames Valley Police, Milton Keynes Council, CNWL, Milton Keynes Hospital, representatives from primary and secondary education in MK, as well as Cllr Keith McLean and Cllr Kerrie Bradburn.
- 1.3 The TAF group has now officially ended, however a smaller meeting will be held to discuss allocation of the remaining funds - approximately £8,000.

2. Projects approved for Funding by the TAF Group

2.1. Hazard Alley Scenario

Hazard Alley is part of a charity called The Safety Centre. Based in Kiln Farm, they are regularly visited by groups of school children, youth groups, scouts and guides etc. They show visitors how they can stay safe, how to understand risks and identify danger, and how to avoid accidents through powerful experiential learning.

Hazard Alley received £40,000 of the knife crime prevention funding. They are using this to replace an outdated scenario in the centre with a new scenario focused around youth violence and knife crime. Work has started on what will be the new street scene of a recognisable local centre; with 'corner shop', takeaway, bench, bin and hedges. Here children and young people will be educated on how to stay safe when out and about, how to avoid getting involved in ASB or involved in

negative behaviour, how to respect the places they live, and how to report concerns or worries to a trusted adult. Age appropriate education packages will be developed to equip children with the tools they need to avoid being targeted for criminal exploitation, becoming involved in violent behaviours and carrying knives.

Members of the TAF have agreed to follow up the launch of the new scene at Hazard Alley with a comms push through their different networks to encourage more local schools and groups who do not currently visit the centre regularly, to do so, to ensure as many children as possible across MK have access to this learning experience.

2.2. *SOFEA CLARiTY*

SOFEA works with young people to build their employability and give them a sense of purpose and community, delivering training and education to those who have a history of offending across the Thames Valley and Northamptonshire areas. At the same time, they provide nutritious food for people in need via their partnership with FareShare, the UK's largest charity tackling the combined issues of food waste and hunger, redistributing food that would otherwise be sent to landfill to frontline charities.

Based in Bletchley, SOFEA received £20,700 of the knife crime prevention funding to allow them to continue their mentoring project with partners CLARiTY, following a successful pilot in Oxfordshire. SOFEA have joined with CLARiTY to provide a mentoring programme to at-risk young people thought to be most in need of additional intervention, support and guidance.

The charity works closely with the Youth Offending Team to identify young people who would benefit the most from this style of intervention, encouraging them to get involved in their community and be a part of something positive, with trained professionals on-hand to speak to them, build trust, and ultimately steer them away from all criminal activity, including knife crime.

The programme has been running successfully in Milton Keynes so far, even with the difficulties presented by Covid-19 and lockdown. This additional funding from the TAF will act as final seed-money for the project, allowing them to continue their work until they become fully self-sustainable via their FareShare work, as they have managed to do in Oxfordshire.

2.3. *Beacon Angling Club*

Beacon Angling Club is a private fishing lake in Milton Keynes. They have been funded £11,835.33 to convert a currently disused lake into a specialist area for young people to learn to fish and to learn about fisheries management. They will work with local partners to engage young people at risk of criminal exploitation, to offer diversionary activities and teach them valuable skills. As well as the fishing and fishery management, they will provide opportunities for the young people involved to contribute to the maintenance of the area, giving them a sense of responsibility, helping to improve their self-esteem, enabling them to spend time outside in the fresh air, and helping them learn how to work effectively as part of a team.

Specialist coaches will work with the young people to teach them all the skills they need to become confident in the sport and Beacon have expressed their hope to expand on this work in the future, incorporating nature walks and nature photography, offering more young people the opportunity to get out and about in nature and learn to respect and admire our green spaces and wildlife.

2.4. *MK Gallery and Paramount Parkour*

MK Gallery have been funded £20,000 to partner with Paramount Parkour and deliver a two-year street arts programme for young people. Over a two-year period, Paramount Parkour will deliver workshops to young people who are referred in by our partners, teaching them how to use outside spaces in a healthy and safe way, to channel their energy into a fun and currently popular sport, and including demonstrations to inspire them to stick with it and grow their talent. This will be complimented by workshops delivered by MK Gallery on activities such as film making, t-shirt design and spray painting, encouraging age appropriate and fun activities to keep young people engaged and prevent them from being drawn into crime.

Young people will be celebrated for their achievements at celebration events, which will include invitations to parents and carers, giving them the opportunity to showcase their newly acquired skills and talents. MK Gallery will also provide a drop-in facility for young people to meet friends they've made through the programme and to access support from professionals should they require it.

The programme aims to reach 200 young people in year one and 350 in year two, targeting those deemed to be most at risk of offending or becoming involved in violent behaviour, by working with local partners to engage those who would benefit most from the programme.

3. Summary

- 3.1 The TAF group was initially delayed due to Covid-19 and prior to lockdown was focused more on evidence-based school programmes. The pandemic encouraged us to re-think our strategy and look closer to home to find local grassroots projects that could be supported to get off the ground around Milton Keynes.
- 3.2 Members of the TAF agreed that a long-term holistic approach to knife crime and youth violence is what is needed to make a real difference, and that the issue of young people carrying knives and becoming involved in dangerous behaviours cannot be treated just as a criminal problem, but as a public health and societal one too. By working with our partners, and other charities and organisations across MK, to offer a number of different initiatives simultaneously, we believe we can make a real change to how young people in MK currently perceive themselves, and the world.
- 3.3 The core aims of each funded initiative are to divert young people's time and energy away from negative influences and into productive and enjoyable activities; to organically create new support bubbles of positively influencing peers and trusted adults; to build their confidence, sense of responsibility and what it means to be part of a community; and to close the 'aspiration gap', giving them a renewed sense of hope and purpose.
- 3.4 I feel the TAF group have taken a big step towards achieving this and that we will see these funded projects grow and develop into sustainable interventions that will help many children and young people across Milton Keynes for years to come. All funded projects offer free or affordable preventative education and diversionary activities that, together with the multiple activities being carried out by the partnership and by other organisations - such as the MK Dons SET - will help us eradicate knife crime from our community. We agree that no one group within MK will succeed in trying to tackle these issues alone, and that it must be a combined effort, with effective communication and sharing of best practice between all partners. Even with collaborative working and engagement, we recognise that the issue before us is still a challenging one. It has become clear from the discussions in our meetings that reducing knife crime and violence will not happen overnight, and that if an 'instant remedy' existed, we would have used it already.
- 3.5 A final, small meeting to discuss the last £8,000 will be held on 11 March. We have previously discussed as a group the possibility of spending some of the money on tools that will allow us to effectively measure the outcomes of the projects we've funded, so we can learn

what initiatives worked the best at diverting young people away from negative behaviours and lifestyles, and justify replication of this work where necessary and appropriate, perhaps in different parts of MK, moving forward. The difficulty here is that we don't expect any of the initiatives to produce 'instant' results, we believe the work needs to continue for a period of several years before we start to see a real difference in the young people we've invested in and levels of crime we are working to reduce. Suggestions were also made in regards to a few other projects that have found their main source of funding elsewhere, but could perhaps use a little extra to boost their work. We will provide a final update to the next SaferMK meeting.

Councillor Lauren Townsend