



HOW HACKNEY POLICE ARE TAKING ON THE LOST BOYS AND GIRLS RIPPING THE HEART OUT OF DALSTON

EVERY DAY Sergeant Charlie Pilbeam switches on his office desktop in Stoke Newington police station to see what eight or nine youths have been up to over the last day or so.

The number of teenagers varies because sometimes some are out of action. A 12-year-old, for example, who was threatening to knife someone was himself later stabbed, taking him off the street — temporarily.

The teens are the budding criminals — among them phone thieves, weapons-carriers and drug-runners — whose behaviour is damaging businesses in central Dalston as the raucous behaviour increasingly puts off people seeking a snack or just a coffee.

The youngsters have lit fireworks inside the busy Kingsland High Street **McDonald's**; fought in Dalston Square outside the **CLR James library**, where they have also been causing mayhem inside before being ejected by **Hackney council's** hired security men or the police; and gone on robbing sprees in the stalls and stores of the Kingsland Shopping Centre and in cafés and other eateries.

Pilbeam, whose job description is head of problem-solving in north Hackney, says:

“These particular teenagers are the main troublemakers around here.”



People in Kingsland High Street go quietly about their business but there has been trouble at this Maccers

About 20 gangs ran in Hackney, each with up to 100 “lost boys”, as they are known, and a minority of girls.

“One day,” says Pilbeam, “a girl was even persuaded to take off her clothes in Gillett Square.”

In the shopping centre the sergeant and I chat to Khalide Khan, working on a stall in the centre hall. He tells us: “Every day it’s the same thing: stealing. You should talk to the stall next door – he’s had a really bad time.”

We move on to McDonald’s. One of two huge security men guarding the entrance from 3.30pm every weekday — school exit time — says the day had been quiet because two cops outside had given a couple of teenagers a 24-hour dispersal order and they had stayed away. Last week, however, a 40-year-old man had been involved in a scrap at the fast-food restaurant.

Another café operator shows us a smartphone recording of an incident. An African-origin private-hirecar driver complaining to a teenager about anti-social behaviour is quickly mobbed by others who rush one by one to surround him. The man panics and runs north towards Café Oto. Sunan says: “They (the owners) are fed up there, too.”

Dalston Square residents have paid for a weekend security guard for a few months. What are the police doing?

Chief Inspector (neighbourhoods) **Ben Clark** tells Loving Dalston: “We are running operations specifically targeting these groups and individuals – many of whom do not reside in the area – both in terms of anti-social behaviour and for more high-risk crimes such as knife crime and gang-related issues.

“We are also working with partners – such as Hackney council, local schools and others to engage with and divert those on the periphery.

“Hackney council also provides significant support in terms of CCTV, Intelligence analysis and the deployment of enforcement officers. This is all done through a joint monthly meeting to ensure we are working together...”

“As police, we are also not shy of using powers to disperse groups and individuals and Dalston regularly sees us dispersing individuals under Section 35 of the **Anti-social Behaviour Act**.

“I am launching a revised method as to how we police anti-social behaviour across the borough.”

He had diverted a team of officers from other duties to build in “long-term problem-solving” – “already, good work is going on with businesses such as McDonald’s, who are already taking a proactive approach to reducing risk and harm, as evidenced by their recent stance to stop a party taking place there.” (This was the **rooftop rave** that McDonald’s was **not aware of** until Loving Dalston uncovered the plan.

Hackney police also regularly sweep through the housing estates, use stop-and-search on the streets looking for hidden weapons and encourage voluntary surrender of knives in special bins. Last year there were 91 stabbings involving under-25s in the borough, 16 per cent up on the previous 12 months.

Local MP and shadow Home Secretary **Diane Abbott** has been working hard to find a solution, discussing the problem with Hackney Mayor **Philip Glanville**, the police and other local leaders.



*McDonald's in Kingsland High Street, pictured, has hired security guards to 'protect customers and staff'.
Picture: Emma Bartholomew*