



HM Government

Ending gang violence and exploitation

January 2016

Introduction

This document sets out a refreshed approach to tackling gang related violence and exploitation, and our priorities for the future. It is aimed at our local partners, especially in the 52 local areas we have worked with on the Home Office funded Ending Gang and Youth Violence (EGYV) programme.

The aim of the EGYV programme has been to reduce violence, and to achieve this through supporting a change in the way that public services respond to gang and youth violence. That continues to be the case, however, the work of the EGYV frontline team and our key partners has identified the need to respond and focus on gang related exploitation of the vulnerable and the future approach and priorities of local areas, supported by the Home Office, must reflect this.

The new challenge: Gang related exploitation of vulnerable young people and adults

The Ending Gangs and Youth Violence programme has meant we have a much better understanding of the issues in relation to gang and youth violence, and how to tackle them. We also have a clearer picture of the challenges, and how best to target action. We know, for example, that many gangs are changing. Local partners tell us that street gangs are becoming less visible in public, and more fluid in the way they organise. In particular, it is important that local partners are able to respond to the exploitation of vulnerable people by gangs, especially as the problem is often hidden, and not always understood in some local areas where it is taking place. That is why we have refreshed our approach, and why we are concerned with both reducing gang related violence and preventing the exploitation of vulnerable people by gangs.

Priorities for 2015/16 and onwards

We have identified six priorities to support the refreshed approach. In order to address these priorities, it remains very important that agencies continue to work closely together and have a good understanding of current and emerging local problems and how they can be addressed most effectively.

1. Tackle county lines – the exploitation of vulnerable people by a hard core of gang members to sell drugs

Gang members are moving into drugs markets outside the urban areas where they usually live and operate, because they are unknown to the local police, there is less competition locally from rival gangs, and non-metropolitan police forces tend to have less experience of addressing this type of activity. The exploitation of vulnerable people is central to county lines. For example, young people are groomed and/or coerced into moving or selling drugs, and the homes of vulnerable adults can be taken over as a base from which drugs are sold.

The first National Crime Agency (NCA) assessment of county lines, safeguarding and gangs, published in August 2015, provided evidence of the nature and scale of the problem. For example, more than half (57%) of the areas affected by county lines in the sample were coastal towns or towns close to the coast. The NCA assessment identifies county lines as a national issue that almost always involves exploitation of vulnerable people: both children and adults who require safeguarding; and those targeted include Looked After Children and other children known to children's social care or youth offending teams.

The NCA and National Policing Lead on Gangs are leading the national response to tackle county lines through Operation Engaged working together with the support of the other relevant policing leads in the National Police Chiefs' Council. However, it is essential that police forces and their partners develop an understanding of what this means locally and that they understand how to identify and respond to gang related exploitation of vulnerable people.

2. Protect vulnerable locations – places where vulnerable young people can be targeted, including pupil referral units and residential children's care homes

Looked After Children and those children known to children's social care or youth offending teams are at risk of being exploited and used by gangs. Children not known to services are, however, also used by gangs in an effort to evade detection.

There is evidence that residential children's care homes and pupil referral units are being targeted. We also know of cases where gang members have been waiting outside schools to meet children. The gang members take the child away to participate in criminal activities and return them in time to avoid them being reported missing or raising suspicion.

The Department for Education (DfE) has been taking steps to raise the quality of care in children's homes and reinforce their role in safeguarding vulnerable children. New regulations and guidance, introduced in April 2014, make it clear that homes can and should prevent a child leaving the home where there is an immediate risk to their safety – which would include where a gang was seeking to lure a child away for involvement in gang activities.

DfE has also undertaken a stock-take of frontline practice in relation to missing children, which will inform and help to shape ongoing work to strengthen and improve practice with the Association of Directors of Children's Services.

3. Reduce violence and knife crime – including improving the way national and local partners use tools and powers

We will continue to prioritise the reduction of gang related violence including tackling knife crime. The Ending Gangs and Youth Violence programme has supported local areas in bringing key partners together and developing an effective local response to gang violence. Local areas are encouraged to continue to follow this approach, and through undertaking regular local assessments, ensure their actions remain focused on emerging local issues.

The Government implemented the extended and amended gang injunction power in June 2015, including an updated statutory definition of gangs, and this allows the police and local authorities to take pre-emptive action against possible gang violence and drug dealing. In July 2015, we also brought into force the new sentencing provision that anyone caught in possession of a knife for a second time will now face a mandatory minimum sentence in prison or secure youth custody if convicted by the courts.

Information sharing on gang-affected offenders is also an important element and helps to manage both the risk that such offenders present and to provide the support needed to help them leave gangs. The Home Office and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) are working together to develop a consistent national approach to information sharing on gang-affected offenders. This will reduce duplication of effort amongst agencies and provide consistent and reliable access to data, resulting in improved management of dangerous offenders, better targeting of interventions, and improved planning for release and resettlement of those sent to custody.

MoJ has brought together researchers and analysts from across the criminal justice system to examine the evidence base. Their findings will ensure responses will be more coherent and effective in tackling gang activity.

4. Safeguard gang-associated women and girls – including strengthening local practices

Safeguarding gang-associated girls and young women continues to be an important priority. Following the success of work on this area over the last three years, local areas have a better understanding of a previously hidden cohort of vulnerable women. Through support from the frontline team and network, national events and the work of Young People's Advocates, local partners are now better able to identify and support vulnerable gang-associated girls.

It is important that local agencies have access to relevant information and tools that they can use to help vulnerable girls and young women, whether as victims of abuse or to help them to leave gangs. We will therefore share innovative approaches with local partners, and bring together the range of information and tools into one place to help support the development of work in this area. It is vital that vulnerable girls and young women are identified and receive appropriate help and interventions, and we will work closely with our partners to ensure momentum is maintained and good practice is shared.

5. Promote early intervention – using evidence from the Early Intervention Foundation to identify and support vulnerable children and young people (including identifying mental health problems)

We know that intervening early can stop young people from becoming involved in gang and youth violence in the first place. Local areas have told us that they have a better understanding of how to intervene early and they have been able to commission more effective preventative programmes and support as a result. We need to build upon this, and the Home Office has funded the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) to identify the risk and

protective factors that can lead to young people becoming involved in youth violence and gangs. Local areas will be able to use this information to help identify and protect possible children at risk early on, so they are less likely to become involved in gangs. We are also funding the EIF to produce and disseminate practical guidance which supports local areas in developing effective early intervention approaches.

The Home Office is also working with the Department of Health (DH) to highlight the importance of linking with health services. We would like local hospitals and police and Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to work closely together to share data that helps identify where violent incidents are taking place. This joint working supports planning and early intervention by ensuring effective local measures can be put in place by the police and its local partners to help prevent and reduce such violent incidents taking place. To assist this, DH has published an information sharing standard for Accident and Emergency departments in hospitals which sets out the minimum level of data they are required to collect and share with the police and CSPs. Violence Reduction Nurses have been appointed at up to 12 major trauma centres to promote data sharing, to build links with CSPs and to support other nearby hospitals.

6. Promote meaningful alternatives to gangs such as education, training and employment

It is essential that those involved in gangs or at risk of becoming involved are able to find a meaningful alternative, such as education, training and employment. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will continue to work with the Home Office to support those at risk of gang involvement and exploitation into employment, education and training. DWP already supports care leavers into employment and is actively involved in the Government's refreshed care leavers' strategy that includes measures to protect them from gangs and exploitation.

DWP is also introducing a new Youth Obligation which will ensure young people aged 18–21 who are claiming Universal Credit are given the support, skills and experience they need to move into work and fulfil their potential. DWP also use Social Impact Bonds, for example, the Youth Engagement Fund, to support disadvantaged young people with a variety of issues, including those involved in gangs, to help them engage in education, training and work. The Youth Engagement Fund started operating in April 2015 and will run for three years.

DWP is introducing demand led Jobcentre support for schools focused on young people identified as being most at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), or who may otherwise be disadvantaged in the labour market. It will be aimed at effecting a smooth transition from school to work, training or further study. Pathfinders will begin in Birmingham in the early 2016 with full rollout (across England) by March 2017.

The DfE continues to focus on action to improve school attendance, as regular attendance plays a vital role in keeping young people away from gang involvement and other crime and antisocial behaviour. DfE has, from September 2015, reduced the threshold for 'persistent absence' from 15% to 10%, emphasising the message that attending school should be a priority for every pupil.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) have introduced traineeships which will be valuable in supporting young people who are involved, or at risk of becoming involved, in gangs. They provide training, education, mentoring and work experience for 16-24 year olds who are motivated by work and are within six months of being ready to enter the labour market.

There are also Cabinet Office led programmes that provide alternatives to gangs for young people:

- A new mentor programme “Power Up London” and “Power Up Liverpool” will support more young people who want to put gang life behind them;
- Two social action programmes, the Uniformed Youth Social Action Fund and National Youth Social Action Fund, target young people in deprived areas and those from lower socio-economic groups respectively; and
- The National Citizen Service for 16 and 17 year olds brings together young people from different backgrounds in every local authority across England, and has been shown by consecutive independent evaluations to deliver more confident, compassionate and engaged young people.

Sport and culture plays a positive role in issues such as helping employability, skill development, tackling inequality, promoting social cohesion and building self-confidence. Over the course of its 2012-2017 strategy, Sport England will invest over £81 million in projects and partners that are getting more people in deprived areas to play sport. Arts Council England funding also supports organisations who work with disenfranchised people and communities across the country who use arts and culture as a tool to engage with those who may feel excluded from society.

How the Home Office will support local areas

The Home Office will continue to support local areas this year and encourage them to adopt the refreshed approach and priorities, as set out in this document, which address both reducing gang violence and tackling gang related exploitation of vulnerable people. 52 local areas are now being assisted through the Ending Gang and Youth Violence programme, and have been reviewed and provided with recommendations by the Home Office sponsored peer network (now nearly 100 strong) and the Ending Gang and Youth Violence frontline team.

Practical support through peer reviews has been extended to nine new areas and we will also assist with local area assessments in up to 20 other areas. The membership of the peer review network has been refreshed to ensure it includes expertise on dealing with, for example, early intervention, county lines, vulnerability and exploitation.

We are also gaining the views of young people with “lived experience” of gangs on how gangs are changing and what interventions work best. These discussions will be run and facilitated by voluntary sector partners that work with gang-affected young people, such as the Safer London Foundation.

The Inter-Ministerial Group on gangs and youth violence, chaired by the Home Secretary, will continue to bring together all the key departments and ensure an effective, over-arching strategic response to gangs and youth violence. This is vital in assisting the police and other key partners, whether nationally or locally, to tackle the challenges of gang related exploitation and violence.

Resource links

The Ending Gang and Youth Violence programme Annual Reports from 2011 to 2015 can also be found at: www.gov.uk/search?q=ending+gang+and+youth+violence

National Crime Agency Assessment on county lines, gangs and safeguarding.
www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/620-nca-intelligence-assessment-county-lines-gangs-and-safeguarding/file

Public Health England/ Home Office document 'Mental Health Needs of Gang Affiliated Young People' and Health Podcasts
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-needs-of-gang-affiliated-young-people>

Early Intervention Foundation publication: youth violence/gangs risk factors and what works documents. <http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/preventing-gang-and-youth-violence>.
The EIF have also produced guidance on commissioning mentoring programming:
<http://www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Guide-to-Commissioning-Mentoring-Programmes-FINAL-VERSION-1.pdf>

Information sharing to tackle violence: Audit of progress. The Department of Health have produced an audit into how A&E departments and community safety partnerships (CSPs) share non-confidential information to tackle violent crime.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-information-to-tackle-violent-crime-audit-of-progress>

Annex A: Ending Gang and Youth Violence areas

Joined in April 2012

Barking and Dagenham
Birmingham
Brent
Camden
Croydon
Derby
Ealing
Enfield
Greenwich
Hackney
Haringey
Islington
Knowsley
Lambeth
Lewisham
Liverpool
Manchester
Newham
Nottingham
Oldham
Salford
Sandwell
Sheffield
Southwark
Tower Hamlets
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Westminster
Wolverhampton

Barnet
Bromley
Havering
Hillingdon
Ipswich
Kensington and Chelsea
Luton
Stoke on Trent
Tendring
Thanet

Joined in 2015

Basildon
Grimsby
Harrow
Hastings
High Wycombe
Medway
Sefton
Southampton
Swindon

Joined in December 2012

Bradford
Hammersmith and Fulham
Leeds
Merton

Joined in 2014