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Young People's Involvement in Gangs and Guns in Liverpool

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# Young People's Involvement in Gangs and Guns in Liverpool

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**Applying**  
criminological research  
for policy and practice



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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

There has been growing concern among policy makers and the wider public regarding high profile murders involving firearms, along with a perception that these events are a result of youth gang violence. These incidents have been taking place in major cities across the UK, including Liverpool. This perception of escalating violence among young people, frequently involving weapons, has prompted the government to make confronting what it has termed 'gun, knife and gang crime' a priority.

However, relatively little information exists on 'gang' involvement and 'gun crime', who is committing it, for what reasons and what might be the best ways of reducing it. Other commentators have connected gun crime to criminal gangs and a growing 'gang culture.', nevertheless, important gaps remain in our knowledge about violent crime fuelled by gangs and weapons.

This research study draws upon an extensive literature review of the national and international research examining gangs and gun crime, coupled with a series of in-depth interviews with senior practitioners, senior specialist police officers, front line youth workers, and gang and gun involved young people from across Liverpool.

### Research Questions

The research aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the extent and nature of young people's involvement with gangs and guns in Liverpool?
2. What are the likely causal processes generating and sustaining the problem?
  - a. What factors contribute increased risk of gang and gun involvement?
  - b. What motivates young people to become involved with gangs and guns?
3. Which interventions look promising?
  - a. What factors influence implementation?

### Methodology

A mixed methodology was utilised which made use of the following research techniques:

- Literature review
- Review of relevant documentation
- Interviews and focus groups
- Observation of detached youth work sessions
- Observation of relevant meetings
- Input and analysis of North Liverpool's gun crime nominal profiles

## Findings

### The Extent of Young People's Involvement with Gangs and Guns in Liverpool

The most current definitions of youth gangs in the research literature now emphasise the importance of 'self identification' as a defining feature of the gang. It is of central importance then that few of the young people interviewed in Liverpool viewed themselves as belonging to a 'gang' and the use of the term by practitioners may be serving to add coherence and identity to what are in reality better described as transitional youth groups. This labelling exercise may have created the very circumstances it sought to challenge.

The research identified two distinct types of anti-social/criminal groups to which young people interviewed were involved. Most prominent, described by young people from Norris Green and Croxteth, were loosely interlinked informal peer groups engaged in anti-social behaviour, crime and violence. Young people associated with these networks stated that there was no hierarchy or recognisable structure to their groups. In contrast young people from Anfield, Everton and Kirkdale described more structured, hierarchical criminal groups operating within illegal drug markets.

This distinction is supported in the literature with authors stressing the need to distinguish between 'Close friendship groups'; 'Associates'; Criminal crews'; and finally 'Organised crime networks,' rather than unhelpfully applying the label 'gang' to all forms of association between offenders (Hales et al. 2006) .

The research identified links between involvement in criminal groups and gun crime, particularly in relation to the regulation of drug markets. Strong territorial rivalries were identified as an escalator to more serious forms of crime and violence including the use of firearms.

'Gang' involved young people stated that they had access to firearms and some demonstrated the willingness to use them. However the proportion of gun crime attributable to young people in Liverpool remains unclear.

### What are the likely causal processes generating and sustaining the problem?

The research findings emphasise the cumulative impact of multiple risk factors, with multiple deficits across five developmental domains (family, neighbourhood, school, individual and peers) increasing the probability of involvement with guns and gangs.

'Gangs' and delinquent peer groups provide a number of positive benefits to their members. These include a 'sense of belonging', receiving 'respect' from peers, fun, protection and a source of income. Fear, insecurity, and victimisation play the most significant role in a young person's decision to carry a weapon. Very few young people report carrying a weapon with the proactive intent of using it against others, protection is the key motivation.

The research highlighted that the notions of a 'gang' or 'gun culture' are too simplistic to adequately explain why young people carry and use guns as it fails to explain both the symbolic and instrumental motivations for the user.

### Which interventions look promising?

Nationally and internationally, a wide range of interventions have been attempted to prevent gang involvement by young people. Multi-agency and multi-modal approaches that incorporate components of suppression, social intervention, the provision of social opportunities, community mobilisation and organisation change were identified as the optimal approach to tackling gangs.

Few programmes and initiatives to tackle gang involvement in Liverpool (or indeed nationally or internationally) have been formally evaluated in any methodologically robust independent manner. The evidence that is available suggests that the most promising approaches include education and awareness-raising interventions, including social marketing and Weapons Awareness Workshops; peer-based mentoring, mediation and conflict resolution training.

Findings highlight the necessity of targeting those young people already involved with ‘gangs’ and guns who by definition will be hard-to-reach. Brief interventions in hospital emergency departments with young victims of violent crime are one example of the exploitation of an optimal window of opportunity for intervention and have been shown to produce significant results.

Intensive police enforcement programmes have been successful in reducing gun availability and gun crime. However their success is dependent on retaining a focus on the most criminally prolific young people and the careful management of the negative consequences of intensive enforcement action on policy legitimacy.

A number of interventions were identified that do not show promise in tackling gang and gun involvement. These include: increased severity of punishment, the effect of which is limited by low levels of detection; the use of metal detectors in schools which appear to have limited impact beyond school grounds and ‘Prison tour’ programmes which not have been shown to be ineffective, and may even increase the chances that young people exposed to them will (re)offend.

There is a considerable amount of activity taking place to prevent young people from becoming involved with gangs and guns in Liverpool. This includes alternative opportunity provision, social intervention and diversion for young people, enforcement activities and community mobilization. This multi-modal approach can be enhanced through further efforts to integrate and co-ordinate activity. It appeared that partner organisations working in the area were not fully aware of the services and support offered by other agencies.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

The recommendations that follow have been linked to the relevant key findings emerging from the research.

### Defining the problem

#### ***Recommendation 1: Use of the term ‘gang’***

- Few of the young people interviewed in Liverpool viewed themselves as belonging to a ‘gang’, indeed many were scathing of such an attribution. In the light of the emphasis on self-definition in current definitions of ‘gangs,’ it appears that policy makers, practitioners and researchers have overused the word ‘gang’.
- There was some evidence that the authorities’ labelling of young people as ‘gang members’ and the adoption and use of gang names attributed coherence and identity to what was often only fluid and transitional youth group formations. This may have created the very circumstances it sought to challenge.

***Consideration should be given to dropping the use of the term ‘gang’ in relation to youth violence and delinquency and avoiding the use of gang names to refer to groups of young people.***

#### ***Recommendation 2: Distinguishing different types of criminal group***

- The research literature makes an important distinction between youth gangs and more organised criminal groups. This is reflected in the findings in Liverpool.
- Firearms discharge data provides support for this distinction with evidence of firearms use by both ‘chaotic’ users and more organised users associated with drugs markets

***Interventions should adopt a different approach with those young people who are associated with organised criminal groups compared to those young people who are associated with loosely structured youth networks.***



### **Recommendation 3: Profiling firearms offences**

- It is unclear what proportion of firearms offences in Liverpool are attributable to young people. Nationally the victims of firearms offences are disproportionately young, no information is available on the victims of gun crime in Liverpool.
- There is limited information on the origin and supply of firearms in Liverpool. Anecdotal evidence points to firearms being supplied from three key sources; returning UK soldiers, from the decommissioning of weapons in Northern Ireland, and from Eastern European states.
- Possible explanations for how young people obtain firearms include from family, friends, theft, the black market or 'misappropriation'.

***There is a need for in-depth analysis and profiling of firearms offences and offenders, weapon availability, circulation and supply.***

## **Responses to Gang Involvement and Gun Crime**

### **Recommendation 4: Multi-Modal approaches**

- The majority of interventions designed to tackle gang involvement and gun crime originate from the US and consequently need to be interpreted with caution with regards to their transferability to the UK.
- The optimal approach to tackling gangs is a multi-agency and multi-modal approach which incorporates components of suppression (catch and convict), social intervention (rehabilitate), the provision of social opportunities (prevent and deter), community mobilisation and organisational change.
- There is a considerable amount of activity taking place to prevent young people from becoming involved with gangs and guns in Liverpool. This includes alternative opportunity provision, social intervention and diversion for young people, enforcement activities and community mobilization. An evaluation of the effectiveness of these approaches was beyond the remit of this study.

***The partnership should continue with this multi-modal approach***

***See also Recommendations 15 and 17***

## **Catch and convict**

### **Recommendation 5: Proactive enforcement**

- In line with the national picture, following increases between 1998 and 2007, shootings in Liverpool declined by 23 per cent in 2008. The research findings also point to a reduction in gun availability.
- Practitioners and young people interviewed attribute these reductions to police enforcement tactics.
- Existing research has highlighted that stop and search powers risk creating resentment of the police by young people. This was the case in Liverpool where those young people involved in 'gang' activity reported extremely negative perceptions of the police.
- Using, and being seen to use, fair procedures in encounters with youth offers police an important opportunity to enhance legitimacy.

***a) Proactive policing should continue as central to the 'gang and guns' strategy in Liverpool.***

***b) Enforcement interventions must be targeted selectively focusing on only the most problematic young people. This will ensure their effect is not diluted and minimise the impact of activities on relations between the police and young people.***

**See also Recommendation 6: Procedural justice**

**Recommendation 6: Procedural justice**

- Several young people made allegations of police illegality, brutality and unprofessional conduct. The allegations have been referred to the Police Standards Agency.
- a) **All Police enforcement action should employ the principles of procedural justice in order to build (rather than detract) from police legitimacy in the eyes of the young people. This is irrespective of who is being policed, the level of enforcement action (hard or soft) or young people's presenting attitudes (degree of deference being shown) during an interaction. This will enhance police effectiveness and efficiency in the longer term.**
- b) **Young people need to be provided with the opportunity to express their opinions about policing and know how to make complaint when necessary.**

**Rehabilitate and Resettle**

**Recommendation 7: Positive aspects of group membership**

- Research shows that youths who join gangs are more likely to become involved in delinquency and crime.
- However, it should be remembered that these groups offer many positive benefits to their members including a 'sense of belonging', fun, protection and a source of income.

**There is a need for interventions which can enhance the positive aspects of group membership while minimising negative aspects.**

**Recommendation 8: Peer mentoring**

- While young people did not feel 'pressured' by peers to become involved in gangs and guns, the influence of delinquent peers was paramount.
- Peer-based mentoring has yielded promising results. One of the few robust evaluations of interventions identified showed that young people participating in 'Caught in the Crossfire' were 60 per cent less likely to be re-arrested, placed on probation, breaching probation their conditions.

**Provide opportunities for young people to interact with positive role models and peer mentors, this will enable them to develop positive aspirations and receive support in obtaining them.**

**Recommendation 9: Conflict resolution**

- The closed environments that many of the young people occupied often generated a strong identification, local loyalty and sense of belonging. This promoted territorial disputes between rival groups, acting as an escalator to more serious forms of crime and violence.
- Interviews with practitioners and young people provide evidence of gun use to support apparent 'gang' feuding and recriminations, and to gain respect amongst peers.
- Programmes utilising detached youth workers to engage hard to reach young people in mediation and conflict resolution have been positively evaluated.

**There is a need to provide mediation in conflicts between local groups/gangs and a long term need to provide young people with the inter-personal skills required to avoid future conflict.**

***Recommendation 10: Legitimate channels for masculinity***

- There is strong evidence of a link between firearm-related offending and the trade in illegal drugs both in the UK generally and in Liverpool specifically. Drug dealing underpins the criminal economy, and is 'out-competing' the legitimate labour market alternatives for some young people, especially those in more structurally marginalised positions.
- Violence and the threat of violence by and between young men are shaped significantly by a drive to demonstrate manhood. Limited opportunities to demonstrate manhood legitimately are significant risk factors in young men engaging in violence particularly with other young men.

***The partnership should consider the provision of gendered positive activities that are challenging and relevant to young males and provide a new way to gain 'respect' from their peers and demonstrate their masculinity through legitimate channels. Activities which provide skills can improve the position of young people in the labour market.***

***Recommendation 11: Brief interventions in A&E***

- Practitioners' perceptions varied regarding the partnerships success in targeting the appropriate gang and gun involved youths. Some felt that preventative services are not reaching those young people already involved with guns and/or gang activity. Others felt that at least some of the gang and gun involved youths were being identified and targeted.
- Hospital-based 'brief interventions' incorporating nurse counselling programmes within accident and emergency departments take advantage of a critical window of opportunity to intervene in young people's lives. In the UK these programmes have shown 'consistently promising results' in terms of a 'significant' reduction in alcohol consumption, illustrating the efficacy of brief interventions

***The partnership should consider the implementation of brief interventions targeting victims of violent crime presenting to accident and emergency departments.***

***Recommendation 12: Offender Management***

- Practitioners called for greater integration between disruption tactics and rehabilitation services.
- The majority of gun crime nominals were also PPOs and should therefore be subject to case management. It is not known how many of the gang involved young people were subject to case management.

***The partnership should review the way in which the delivery of offender management and statutory orders are integrating with gun and gang interventions.***

## Prevent and Deter

### **Recommendation 13: Families**

- Family background was consistently highlighted as a key risk factor in gun and gang involvement.
- Liverpool is in receipt of YCAP resources, which includes Family Intervention Programmes.

***The partnership should review the use of family level support delivered through FIPs and identify any obstacles hindering the provision of support to the families of gun and gang involved young people.***

***Under YCAP, face-to-face support for parents should be made available through Parent Support Advisors who should be linked to schools in every Local Authority***

***See also Recommendation 15: City wide perspective on violence***

### **Recommendation 14: Education**

- Young people confirmed that they had access to guns. Respondents spoke of firearms being 'passed down' or borrowed rather than bought, thereby increasing their availability. It was reported that guns are 'stashed' or 'stored' rather than kept in possession.
- Education and awareness-raising interventions showed the most promising results from all approaches that were examined to address young people's involvement with weapons, interventions that have promising results include Social Marketing interventions and Weapons Awareness.

***The partnership should establish a dialogue with young people about the nature, risk and dangers of gang involvement and weapon carrying, delivered through both formal and informal educational approaches.***

***NASUWT are currently preparing an Online Gangs Toolkit designed for use in schools. When completed this may prove a useful resource for schools across Liverpool.***

### **Recommendation 15: City wide perspective of violence**

- Young people who had been exposed to violence are more likely to commit violence themselves.
- The young people interviewed described violence as part of everyday life, describing their experiences as victims, witnesses and perpetrators of violence.
- The combined evidence shows that fear, insecurity, and victimisation play the most significant role in a young person's decision to carry a weapon. Very few young people report carrying a weapon with the proactive intent of using it against others, rather protection is the key motivation. One explanation for this is when neighbourhoods feel threatening, weapon carrying may make young people feel safer.
- Squires (2007) recommends adopting a 'city-wide perspective' to understanding the role that violence plays in communities.

***The partnership should ensure close co-ordination of the separate groups tackling violent crime in Liverpool. This should incorporate partnership groups tackling gangs, knife and gun crime, domestic violence, child protection, hate crime, violence in schools and other forms of violence to share intelligence and co-ordinate practice to ensure the reduction of all forms of violence affecting young people.***

## Community Mobilisation

### **Recommendation 16: Reassuring communities.**

- Several practitioners thought that ‘reassurance policing’ tactics of flooding the area with police after a firearms or serious incident failed to reassure; rather it sent a signal that people’s concerns about insecurity were justified.
- a) A long term strategy of reassurance policing should be developed, one which engages with the community through established community policing teams rather than being incident specific.**
- b) Reassurance policing plans should incorporate a communication strategy to accentuate positive outcomes and make the most of any achievements. Capitalising on ‘quick hits’ is good, but ensure that the community can see how successes will be maintained in the long term.**
- c) Reassurance policing plans should be reflexive and self critical, rather than assuming that high visibility patrols reassure.**

## Organisational change

### **Recommendation 17: Policy mapping**

- There were indications that interventions were insufficiently integrated and interviewees called for improving coordination. It appeared that partner organisations working in the area were not fully aware of the services and support offered by other agencies.
- A policy mapping exercise should identify the full range of interventions currently operating in Liverpool that target young people already engaged in and at risk of becoming involved in gang and or guns. This should include data on responsible agencies and referral procedures.**
- Possible outputs from this exercise include: a) an intranet directory of service provision with contact points and referral mechanisms; b) a series of workshops aimed at practitioners providing each partner agency with the opportunity to highlight the services they offer.**

### **Recommendation 18: Long term strategy**

- Practitioners in Liverpool were in broad agreement that whilst the partnership had been successful in attracting funding for programmes, the often short-term nature of many funding streams was an obstacle to longer term strategies in breaking the cycle of gang involvement.
- There is a need to develop a longer term programme of funding that would be sustained and meet demand side needs, one which removes disincentives to programme development and obstacles to implementation.**

## Evaluation

### **Recommendation 19: Evaluation**

- Few of the programmes and initiatives to tackle gang involvement and weapon use had been formally evaluated in any methodologically robust independent manner.
- There is a need for more rigorous assessments and evaluations of interventions. The impact of interventions will vary depending on the young person’s developmental stage and their varying social conditions, evaluation therefore needs to concentrate on what works for whom, why, and in which circumstances, rather than simply on ‘what works.’**

## Section 1 Research aims and Methodology

### 1.1 Introduction

There has been growing concern among policy makers and the wider public about the continued spate of high profile murders involving firearms, along with a perception that these events are a result of youth gang violence more generally. These incidents have been taking place in major cities across the UK, including Liverpool. This perception of escalating violence among young people, frequently involving weapons, has prompted the government to make confronting what it has termed 'gun, knife and gang crime' a priority.

However, relatively little information exists on 'gang' involvement and 'gun crime', who is committing it, for what reasons and what might be the best ways of reducing it. Other commentators have connected gun crime to criminal gangs and a growing 'gang culture' as an overarching explanatory variable, nevertheless, important gaps remain in our knowledge about violent crime fuelled by gangs and weapons.

This research study draws upon an extensive literature review of the national and international research examining gangs and gun crime, coupled with a series of in-depth interviews with senior practitioners, senior specialist police officers, front line youth workers, and gang and gun involved young people from across Liverpool.

### 1.2 Structure of the Report

The report treats gangs and guns as analytically distinct concepts while at the same time acknowledging and exploring the links between them. Following an introduction to the project, its research aims and methodology in Section 1; Section 2 focuses on gangs and Section 3 on guns. Sections 2 and 3 are both organised into subsections covering: the existing research and practice literature, the evidence relating to the extent and nature of problems in Liverpool, evidence on the risk factors and motivation contributing to young people's involvement in gangs and guns. Section 4 will identify and review strategies designed to address gang and gun problems. This review will include international, UK and Liverpool based interventions. Finally Section 5 will present the research conclusions and develop recommendations for addressing gang and gun involvement in Liverpool

We have also provided a review of the criminological literature on 'knife crime' and interventions aimed at reducing this type of offending. As this form of weapon offence is peripheral to the primary research focus of 'youth gangs' and 'gun crime', this discussion is presented in Appendix 1.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

The purpose of this report is to answer a number of broad ranging questions surrounding youth violence, the significant factors which influence young people to become involved with guns and gangs and the key interventions which show promise in diverting young people away from gang and gun culture. These research aims were reformulated<sup>1</sup> into the following research questions:

1. What is the extent and nature of young people's involvement with gangs and guns in Liverpool?
2. What are the likely causal processes generating and sustaining the problem?
  - a. What factors contribute increased risk of gang and gun involvement?
  - b. What motivates young people to become involved with gangs and guns?
3. Which interventions look promising?
  - c. What factors influence implementation?

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<sup>1</sup>In discussion with the commissioners following earlier drafts of this report

These questions required an examination of the multiple social contexts and influences which concurrently work together to influence youth behaviours regarding gang membership and gun crime. The methodology employed is discussed below.

Based on the findings of this study a series of recommendations has been developed which aim to feed the development of Liverpool Citysafe's strategy to prevent youth violence and delinquency.

## 1.4 Methodology

A mixed methodology was utilised which made use of the following research techniques:

- Literature review
- Review of relevant documentation
- Interviews and focus groups
- Observation of detached youth work sessions
- Observation of relevant meetings
- Input and analysis of North Liverpool's gun crime nominal profiles

Table 1 below provides an overview of the data sources mapped to the research questions that they address.

### Explanation of Data Sources

#### ***Desk based literature review***

A comprehensive literature review was undertaken of gang based research. The review described and explored several key areas of interest including: the definition of gangs; gang structures; risk factors and the use of interventions.

#### ***Review of Documentation***

Relevant documentation from the DISARM partnership and Matrix was reviewed to provide the research team with an understanding of Liverpool's gun and gang strategy

#### ***Interviews with Practitioners:***

##### ***DISARM Members***

In-depth interviews were carried out with 12 DISARM members. (The interview schedule can be found in appendix 1). These interviews involved the Chair and Deputy Chair of DISARM and representatives from:

- Liverpool Citysafe
- Children's Services
- Youth Services
- Merseyside Police
- Liverpool Anti-Social Behaviour Unit (LASBU)
- Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)
- NOMs (Probation)
- Neighbourhood Management
- Connexions
- Community Representative

Table 1 Data Sources Informing the Research

Secondary Data		
Data Source	Number	Research Question Addressed
Literature review	100+ national and international research and practices studies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the extent and nature of young people’s involvement with gangs and guns in Liverpool?</li> <li>• What are the likely causal processes generating and sustaining the problem?</li> <li>• Which interventions look promising?</li> </ul>
Liverpool Firearms Discharge data		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the extent and nature of the gang and gun problem in Liverpool?</li> </ul>
Gun crime Nominal Case Profiles		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the likely causal processes generating and sustaining the problem?</li> </ul>
Primary Data		
Practitioners		
JAG, MARC and DISARM meetings	3 Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the extent and nature of young people’s involvement with gangs and guns in Liverpool?</li> <li>• What are the likely causal processes generating and sustaining the problem?</li> <li>• Which interventions look promising?</li> </ul>
DISARM Partnership	12 Interviews	
Youth Worker Interviews	3 Interviews	
Senior Matrix Officers	3 Interviews	
Young People		
‘Gang involved’ and ‘gang associated’ young people	Total of 30 interviews: Including 6 gun crime nominals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the extent and nature of young people’s involvement with gangs and guns in Liverpool?</li> </ul>
Informal meetings with youths during detached youth work	3 detached youth work outings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the likely causal processes generating and sustaining the problem?</li> <li>• Which interventions look promising?</li> </ul>

These interviews were undertaken to provide information regarding the workings of the DISARM Partnership and information and opinions about DISARM’s strategy. The interviews also served as an opportunity to gather information about each individual agency’s role within the strategy in relation to gun and gang crime. The interviewees were provided with an opportunity to discuss future plans for tackling guns and gangs in Liverpool.

### **Officers from Matrix**

In-depth interviews were carried out with four senior officers (two Chief Inspectors and one Superintendent and one Chief Superintendent) from Merseyside Police’s Matrix Unit. (The interview schedule can be found in Appendix 2). It was felt necessary to interview officers who had some responsibility for the operational side of the Matrix Unit. These interviews gathered information and opinion relating to the policing approach taken by Matrix to tackle the problem of gang related crime. Interviewees were provided with the opportunity to discuss how Matrix’s approach might evolve in the future and also to comment on the efficacy of its current approach.



### ***Youth Service***

Two in-depth interviews were carried out with senior representatives from Liverpool Youth Service. (The interview schedule can be found in appendix 3). These interviews were undertaken as a means of obtaining information with respect to current approaches utilised by Youth Services with regard to working with young people involved in gang criminality/activity. The interviews sought to obtain comments on the efficacy of these approaches and any plans for future work.

### ***Youth Workers***

In-depth interviews were carried out with three youth workers working in the areas of Croxteth and Kirkdale. (The interview schedule can be found in appendix 4). It was felt necessary to interview youth workers who worked on 'the front line' with young people living in gang affected areas. Opinions were sought about the extent of the gang problem, the strategies used to tackle the problem and what was felt to be needed to tackle the problem effectively.

### ***Interviews with Young People Involved or Associated with Gangs***

In-depth interviews were carried out with 30 young people from the areas of Croxteth, Norris Green, Anfield, Kirkdale, Walton and Everton, (The interview schedule can be found in Appendix 6). The notion of 'gang membership' is problematic and makes the grouping of 'categories' difficult, however, the sample included 18 'gang members' (where we had no doubts about gang activity either currently or in the past) and 12 'associates' (on the periphery of gangs and/or whose friends were involved in gang activity). Six of the sampled 'gang members' were current gun crime nominals. The young people interviewed were aged between 16 and 29 years old. Twenty nine were male and one was female. Interviews were undertaken using a narrative style which allowed respondents to present their life story. Probes were used to gather specific information about life in the gang, motivations to become involved, methods of making money, use of weapons including firearms, levels of violence and desistance from the gang.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed and all respondents were asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview commencing (see Appendix 7). The sections below outline the method through which these young people were identified.

### ***Referrals from North Liverpool Youth Offending Service (YOS)***

The research team attended and presented the remit of the research to the YOS team based at the North Liverpool office. As a result, six young people were referred to the research team for interview. Interviews were undertaken at the YOS office or at the Connexions office in Norris Green. Two of the young people referred were gun crime nominals (see section below).

### ***Referrals from North Liverpool Probation Service (NOMs)***

The research team attended and presented the remit of the research to probation teams at North Liverpool Probation Service (NOMs). As a result four gun crime nominals were referred to the research team for interview. Interviews were undertaken in probation offices or at hostels where the interviewees were residing. It must be noted that one of these interviews is not included in our final sample as he left the interview due to illness and did not want to be recorded or talk about any gang/firearm related activity.

### ***Referrals from Hindley Prison***

Following a presentation of the research aims to the Governor, Deputy Governor and colleagues at Hindley Prison, 18 young people were referred to the research team for interview. One of those interviewed was a current gun crime nominal. Of the young men who were presented three were from Bootle (Sefton) and Kirby (Knowsley) rather than Liverpool. It was felt that commonalities in the risk factors for gang and gun involvement would exist between these young men and those from Liverpool. It was also evident that these young men had connections with young people from Liverpool; therefore they were retained in the sample. All interviews were undertaken in interview rooms at the prison.

### ***Referrals from Positive Futures***

Contact was made with the team at Positive Futures in Kirkdale and the research team visited them on a number of occasions. As a result, one young person was referred for interview. This young person was the only female to be interviewed and this took place at a community centre in the Anfield area.

### ***Detached Youth Work***

Three young people in the Norris Green area were spoken to as a result of undertaking detached youth work in the area (see below for an explanation of this method). This was in informal conversation with some of the young men who play football at the Scargreen playing fields in Norris Green. One of these young men had been the victim of a shooting in the recent past.

### ***Further Attempts to Engage with Young People***

Due to the problematic nature of gang research and difficulties of engaging with young people, every effort was made to explore possible methods of identifying and including young people in the research. In addition to the above methods the research team also attended a youth service team meeting (this included youth workers from each youth centre in North Liverpool) and presented the remit of the research. This was followed up with phone calls and e mails requesting assistance with the identification of young people and the organisation of interviews and focus groups. This proved futile as the youth centres did not identify or refer any young people.

### ***Detached Youth Work***

Advice was taken from current experts in the field as to the most productive methods to use. Colleagues from the University of Manchester advised that detached youth work and volunteering at youth centres had been a successful means of engaging with young people in their recent project studying gangs. Due to the time and financial constraints of the current study it was decided that becoming involved in detached youth work would *not* be a feasible approach.

The names of two detached workers in the Norris Green area were provided and a member of the research team accompanied the youth workers on three occasions on their detached work on weekday evenings. Using this method allowed the researcher to see the young people on their own 'turf' and build up a certain amount of trust with them. On the first occasion the researcher just chatted informally with the young people but did explain what the research was about. The detached youth workers have such a high level of trust with the young people that this helped to alleviate any suspicion that they may have had about the research. On the second occasion the researcher spoke with three young men about their experiences of gangs and the use of firearms. A group discussion with some younger boys was also undertaken. On the third occasion the researcher went back to speak with some of the young men not previously spoken to but this was not very successful.

A member of the research team accompanied youth workers from Positive Futures on evening detached work in the Kirkdale, Everton and Anfield areas. This did not lead to any interviews/informal discussions with young people but it was helpful to observe how the youth workers interact with the young people on the streets and the types of assistance/advice they offer them.

### ***Observation of Relevant Meetings***

Observations of Joint Agency Group (JAG), MARGG (Multi Agency Response to Guns and Gangs) and DISARM meetings were undertaken. This provided the research team with an appropriate contextual understanding of partnership working and information relating to Liverpool's gun and gang strategy. It also assisted in identifying appropriate practitioners to interview.

### ***Input and analysis of North Liverpool's Gun Crime Nominals Profiles***

As the research remit called for an investigation of risk factors for gang membership we decided that one of the most productive means of exploring this would be through the creation of profiles for all of North Liverpool's gun crime nominals. Firstly we needed to obtain the list of the current nominals from the Matrix Unit. There was initially some reluctance to do this due to the highly confidential and sensitive nature of the

information. After some discussion this matter was resolved and we were given the current list. At the time of obtaining this there were 26 nominals on the list. Eight of these were young offenders.

YOS and probation were then contacted to discuss the possibility of accessing their systems for example Themis, Delius and Oasys respectively, to extract data on each nominal. This data was to include information about the following:

- Previous convictions
- Age at first arrest
- Number of times in custody
- Family background: single parent family, been in care, social services involvement, family criminality.
- Education: Expelled from school, truanted, educational attainment, diagnosis of behavioural problem.
- Use of drugs and alcohol
- Psychiatric assessment

Contact was made with the head of YOS and a discussion was had regarding the feasibility of accessing the data for eight of the nominals who were young offenders. The discussions were unproductive and we were unable to access the data. YOS were concerned about the human rights issue of external people accessing the young people's files. They felt that the young people should give their consent for this. The only alternative was for YOS staff to access the files and pass them on to the research team but this was not feasible due to the amount of overtime this would cost YOS.

Probation were able to grant permission for the research team to access the nominal's files. By using Oasys and Lotus Notes we were able to extract the above information for the remaining 18 nominals known to or currently working with probation. A member of the research team spent two days at Merseyside Headquarters accessing this information. An anonymised database was created which gives the nominal's ID numbers. Whilst this led to a rich source of information it should be noted that there is missing information for some of the nominals.

Through contacting the Violent Offender Management Unit at Merseyside Police we were given a database that held additional data about the majority of the nominals as many were known to this unit. Combined with the information obtained from probation, our database provides a profile of each nominal with which an analysis of risk factors was undertaken.

### ***Security of Data***

Due to the sensitivity of the research, a number of safeguards were put into place to protect research data. These procedures are detailed in Appendix 1.

## **1.5 Liverpool and the Research Study Areas**

When considering gang involvement and gun and knife crime we need to appreciate the context in which young people live, and the impact on them of where young people live. To this end we have included brief socio-economic profiles of areas in Liverpool which have been the major focus of concern for gang involvement and gun crime. We have not undertaken any socio-demographic analysis in providing these pictures, rather the material is relevant in understanding the concentration of gang involvement and gun and knife crime in certain locations and neighbourhoods.

We provide a brief socio-economic overview of Liverpool with profiles for five wards which were of particular interest during the research (Croxteth, Norris Green, Everton, Anfield, and Kirkdale).

The city of Liverpool has a population of 439,476 making Liverpool the eighth largest city in the UK, and lies at the centre of the wider Liverpool urban area which has a population of 816,216<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>Office for National Statistics, based on Census 2001 data.<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/pop2001/liverpool.asp>

Liverpool's social, economic and cultural conditions are changing apace. The city is emerging as a new tourist destination having achieved the title of European Capital of Culture 2008 and more recently, status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. However, despite these recent successes in raising the national and international profile of the city, Liverpool remains one of the most deprived local authorities in England. It suffers from a combination of widespread and concentrated deprivation with nearly 56% of the city's population living in the most nationally deprived 10% of super output areas<sup>3</sup> (SOA)<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, the city's deprivation score, using 2007 figures, has barely changed since the previous indices for multiple deprivation (IMD) which showed it was bottom of the league in 2004.

In addition, the city also had a relatively high crime rate, low life expectancy and poor social cohesion. The new investment and regeneration spurred by its status as European City of Culture has failed to boost local income or employment, according to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Many of its population are poorly placed to benefit from investment and new jobs because skill levels are below the British median.<sup>5</sup>

The Capital of Culture status has seen a number of large infrastructure projects being undertaken which have improved the physical infrastructure of city. Municipalities have taken steps to pave, cleanse and light streets to enhance the newly developed and highly fashionable areas of town in keeping with a wider urban renaissance. However, despite these considerable advances the economic outlook remains poor for the city. The recent Centre for Cities Report which reviewed the social, economic and environmental strengths and weaknesses of 64 cities in the UK placed Liverpool as one of three cities on "red alert" status.<sup>6</sup>

## Research Study Areas

### **Croxteth**

Croxteth Ward has a population of 14,703<sup>7</sup> and is situated in the north eastern corner of the city bordered by Yew Tree and West Derby to the south, Norris Green to the west and Fazakerly to the north.

Croxteth displays varying levels of deprivation mixed with pockets of affluence. One of Croxteth's SOA's falls within the worst 1% on the Index of Deprivation, a further four within the 2-5% most deprived, three in the 11-25% and five in the 26-50% most deprived. However, by contrast two SOAs are in the 50% least deprived in the country.<sup>8</sup> Average income levels are slightly higher than the city average (£32, 987 compared to £28,991) and worklessness rates are lower than average (18.5% compared to 22.6% for the city).<sup>9</sup>

The ward also had a lower average crime rate compared to the average crime rate across Liverpool City (44.1 compared to 62.5).<sup>10</sup>

Some 29% of households that have dependent children are lone parent households, compared to 39% in Liverpool as a whole, and the number of children with School Action Plus and Statements of Special Educational Need is 195.<sup>11</sup>

### **Norris Green**

Norris Green is in the north of the city and has a population of 15,957<sup>12</sup>. The ward is surrounded by six other wards: Fazakerley, Croxteth, West Derby, Clubmoor, County and Warbreck. The East Lancs Road runs

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<sup>3</sup> Super Output Areas are a statistical geography, being roughly equal in size and containing 1,000-2,000 people.

<sup>4</sup> The Indices of Deprivation: Revised April 2009. Liverpool City Council, Regeneration Policy Programmes & Performance Division, p3.

<sup>5</sup> Consultants 'Local Futures' 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Centre for Cities: Cities Outlook 2009

<sup>7</sup> McElroy, J. (2009) Ward Profile; Croxteth: Issue 6 August 2009

<sup>8</sup> Liverpool Children's Services Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2008 –Croxteth Ward

<sup>9</sup> McElroy, J. (2009) Ward Profile: Croxteth: Issue 6 August 2009

<sup>10</sup> McElroy, J. (2009) Ward Profile: Croxteth: Issue 6 August 2009

<sup>11</sup> Special educational needs (SEN) means that the child has a learning difficulty requiring special educational provision that is additional to or different from that normally made for children of the same age.

<sup>12</sup> McElroy, J. (2009) Ward Profile: Norris Green: Issue 6 August 2009

through the ward which is bounded by Muirhead Avenue to the South. There is a large housing estate, the Norris Green 'Boot' estate which was built in the 1920's, large parts of which have been redeveloped.

Norris Green is one of the more deprived areas with all SOAs being within the 25% most deprived in the country; five SOAs which fall into the 1% most deprived on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, a further five SOAs fall into the 2-5% most deprived, four fall into the 6-10% and two fall into the 11-25% most deprived.<sup>13</sup> The ward also has a lower than average household income for the city (£23,480) and a relatively high level of worklessness (29% compared to the city average of 22.6%).<sup>14</sup> Norris Green had a slightly lower average crime rate than Liverpool City (59.4 compared to 62.5).<sup>15</sup>

Norris Green has a comparatively high proportion of children compared to the other wards in Liverpool, and some 49% of households with dependent children in the ward are lone parent households, compared to 39% in Liverpool as a whole.<sup>16</sup> The number of children with School Action Plus and Statements of Special Educational Need totals 408.<sup>17</sup>

### **Everton**

The ward of Everton is situated to the west of the city with a population of 14,024<sup>18</sup> bordered by Kirkdale and Anfield to the north, Tuebrook, Stoneycroft, Kensington and Fairfield to the east and Central ward to the south. The two key roads running through the ward are Heyworth Street and Breck Road. The area is predominantly urban with few green spaces.

Everton is one of the more deprived wards in Liverpool with all residents living within areas which are among the 10% most deprived in England. Seven SOAs fall within the 1% most deprived on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, four SOAs fall in the 2-5% most deprived and one in the 6-10% most deprived.<sup>19</sup> The average income is one of the lowest in the city (£23,745) and Everton ward has the highest worklessness rate in the city (42.5% compared to the cities of 22.6%).<sup>20</sup> Everton also suffers from a higher crime rate than the city average (87.8 compared to 62.5).<sup>21</sup>

Some 55% of households that have dependent children in Everton ward are lone parent households, compared to 39% in Liverpool as a whole.<sup>22</sup> The number of children with School Action Plus and Statements of Special Educational Need is 281.<sup>23</sup>

### **Anfield**

Anfield ward is in the north eastern corner of the city with a population of 14,770<sup>24</sup> bordered by County ward to the north, Clubmoor ward to the east, Tuebrook and Stoneycroft to the south and Everton and Kirkdale to the west. The area is perhaps best known for the Liverpool FC football stadium which is situated in the ward. A large expanse of the north of the ward is covered by Stanley Park and Anfield Cemetery.

Anfield is one of the more deprived areas in Liverpool and contains six SOAs which fall within the 2-5% worst affected on the national Index of Multiple Deprivation, four SOAs fall within the 6-10% worst affected and one SOA within the 11-25% worst affected. The ward also has lower than average income (£24,955 compared to 28,991 for the city) and higher than average worklessness rate (28.9% compared to 22.6% for

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid (all Rates are per 1,000 population except for Domestic Burglary, which is per 1,000 households)

<sup>16</sup> Liverpool Children's Services Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2008 – Norris Green

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> McElroy, J. (2009) Ward Profile: Everton: Issue 6 August 2009

<sup>19</sup> Liverpool Children's Services Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2008 – Everton

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> McElroy, J. (2009) Ward Profile: Everton: Issue 6 August 2009

<sup>22</sup> HM Revenue and Customs Analysis Team via ONS. Ward totals are estimates derived from LSOA proportioning to residential areas within the wards.

<sup>23</sup> Liverpool Children's Services Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2008 – Everton

<sup>24</sup> McElroy, J. (2009) Ward Profile: Anfield: Issue 6 August 2009

the city in August 2008).<sup>25</sup> In addition Anfield suffers a higher rate of crime than the city average (79.1 compared with the cities of 62.5).<sup>26</sup>

Some 45% of households with dependent children in the ward are lone parent households, slightly above 39% in Liverpool as a whole. The number of children with School Action Plus and Statements of Special Educational Need is 245.<sup>27</sup>

### **Kirkdale**

Kirkdale ward is situated to the north west of the city bordered by County, and has a population of 15,354.<sup>28</sup> The western section of the ward is mainly industrial units dominated by the dockland areas. The Merseyrail Northern Line runs through the centre of the ward with the residential areas located to the east of this and the main corridors of the A565 and Stanley Road also run through the ward.

There are seven SOAs in the Kirkdale ward which are in the 1% most deprived on the Index of Multiple Deprivation. A further three are in the 2-5% most deprived and one which is in the 11-25% most deprived. The ward has a worklessness rate of 35.6% compared to 22.6% in Liverpool as a whole.<sup>29</sup> This is the third highest rate of worklessness in the city, and average income for the ward is lower than the city average (mean household income in the ward is £24,708 compared to the city £28,991).<sup>30</sup> The crime rate for the ward is also considerably higher than the city average (82.5 compared to 62.5).<sup>31</sup>

Some 55% of households with dependent children in the Kirkdale ward are lone parent households, compared to 39% in Liverpool as a whole.<sup>32</sup> The number of children with School Action Plus and Statements of Special Educational Need is 306.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> McElroy, J. (2009) Ward Profile: Anfield: Issue 6 August 2009

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Liverpool Children's Services Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2008 – Anfield.

<sup>28</sup> McElroy, J. (2009) Ward Profile: Kirkdale: Issue 6 August 2009

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid (all Rates are per 1,000 population except for Domestic Burglary, which is per 1,000 households)

<sup>32</sup> Liverpool Children's Services Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2008 – Kirkdale

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

## Section 2 The Extent and Nature of Young People's Involvement with Gangs in Liverpool

### 2.1 Introduction

This section explores the extent and nature of young people's involvement with gangs across the UK and within Liverpool.

The findings in this section are supported by: an in-depth review of the research and practice literature; interviews with gang involved young people as well as interviews with those practitioners who work with them.

It should be noted that the majority of existing research into young people's involvement in gangs emanates from the United States. However, marked social, cultural and legal differences between the UK and USA present difficulties in translating findings to the UK context and more so to the Liverpool context. The differences between the US and UK contexts are significant and include the concentration of much gang research on specific minority and immigrant groups.

### 2.2 Defining Gangs

The past decade has seen increased media interest and consequently political interest in youth gangs. This has mainly been a result of high profile shootings attributed to gang activity. Despite this, British academics remain divided over the existence of delinquent gangs within the UK. Resolving this debate is made more difficult by the challenges of defining gangs and identifying their members and associates, a problem which has also plagued gang research both in the USA. The conflation and interchangeable use of labels such as gangs, delinquent youth groups, and organised crime networks has added further confusion to the debate.

Central to the debate is the question of whether criminality should be considered a defining feature of a gang (Ball and Curry 1995) and how to distinguish between those crimes committed by individual gang members and those crimes resulting from the collective behaviour of gangs (Maxson, 1999). Determining what, if any, age distribution distinguishes youth gangs from adult crime groups (Klein, 1995a, 1995b) presents further problems, along with establishing what degree of group association constitutes membership, e.g. core member, peripheral or wannabe (Esbensen et al., 2001). These problems have led Esbensen et al. to conclude that 'there is little, if any, consensus as to what constitutes a gang and who is a gang member, let alone what gangs do either inside or outside the law' (pg. 106).

In 2004 the Home Office, defined delinquent youth groups as, 'youthful groups which have durability and structure and whose members spend time in public places and engage in delinquent activities together.' By 2008 the Home Office was beginning to place greater emphasis on the use of guns, with the definition: 'A group of three or more people who have a distinct identity (e.g. a name or badge/emblem) and commit general criminal or anti-social behaviour (ASB) as part of that identity. This group uses (or is reasonably suspected of using) firearms, or the threat of firearms, when carrying out these offences,' (TGAP, 2008: 23). More recently the Gangs Working Group have sought to apply a universal definition to be adopted by all those tackling gangs, to end this terminology confusion and allow comparative analysis between different studies. The group defined gangs as, 'A relatively durable, predominately 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 and (5) are in conflict with other, similar gangs' (Dying to Belong, 2009:21).

The unhelpfulness of current definitions has been highlighted by Bullock and Tilley (2008). Their research in south Manchester identified 'serious differences between practitioners as they struggled to agree on which youngsters were gang involved' (pg 3). Practitioners experienced further difficulties in deciding who could be at risk, or on the periphery of joining a gang:

*'seeking to operationalize notions of gangs and gang membership for preventative purposes is hard and it follows that it is harder still to determine who might be at risk of joining a gang but has not yet done so'. (Bullock and Tilley 2008:41)*

This difficulty was highlighted by UK YOS workers, interviewed as part of the Youth Justice Board's report into gangs who expressed grave concerns over what they saw as the current indiscriminate use of the term gang. They argued that many young people take part in group offending but they would not necessarily class themselves as being part of a gang (YJB, 2007).

Thornberry et al. (2003) used a self definition of gang status in their research, indeed they state that 'Adolescents appear to know what gangs are and whether they are a member of a gang' (2003: 22). Marshall et al. (2005) suggest that attempts to define the terms 'gang' and 'gang member' should be abandoned in favour of a focusing on the problem behaviours that are displayed by the 'gang' (e.g. their prolific offending). Attempting to eliminate specific behaviours allows the delivery of a more effective intervention and does not contribute to the labelling process.

The absence of universally accepted definitions has produced contrasting and contradictory findings in the literature (Aldridge et al., 2007). For example research adopting very restrictive definitions has found gang members were more anti-social, more impulsive, had more delinquent friends, were more committed to delinquent peers and committed more crime (Esbensen et al., 2001). It is clear that definitions employed in research have had a significant impact on estimates of the size and nature of the 'gang problem.'

### **2.3 The Extent and Nature of Gang Involvement in the UK**

A number of UK based research projects have identified the presence of gangs. Stelfox (1998) surveyed all UK police forces requesting information about gangs. Of the 48 forces that replied, 16 identified gangs operating in their area. Across these forces profiles of 71 gangs were returned. The majority of these gangs were adult male in composition. There was only one female gang. Two thirds of gangs were predominately white, one quarter was ethnically mixed and the remainder were predominately a single ethnic group. The average age range of the gang members was between 25-29 years old. Gang structures were typically loose, with no identifiable leader, and engaged in a wide range of offences, although 17 per cent were described as offence specialists. Three quarters of gangs were involved in some sort of drug dealing. Most forces reported violence as the main problem associated with gangs. Sixty per cent of gangs allegedly possessed firearms.

Decker (2001) argues that the concept of the gang has been distorted by the dominance of the view that gangs are well organised and tightly structured. Most UK research presents a picture of gangs that are disorganised and typically do not have leaders. This is reflected in Mares' (2001) ethnographic study of two gangs in Manchester. These gangs were both loosely organised and had no formal leaders. He describes the heavy involvement of both gangs in drug trading, including heroin, crack and cocaine. At the time there were about 90 members in each gang and the large majority were Afro-Caribbean in origin. Gangs found elsewhere in Manchester, for example, Salford were all white and many had existed for over 10 years. Most gang members were aged under 25 years old and some were as young as 10 years old. Similarly, Aldridge and Medina (2007), researching gangs in a northern city, found that gangs were 'fluid, loose messy and interlinked networks' (pg. 17) very much like informal friendship groups. The ethnic composition of the gangs in this study reflected the areas in which they were lived, although the authors note that only those from areas with a proportionally higher black minority received media and police attention. In contrast to many studies, Aldridge and Medina found an equal level of female gang involvement, although females were seen as playing a secondary role. This study found evidence of violence, weapon carrying and drug trading, but argued that gangs in no-way specialised in these activities.

Each of the four Manchester gangs that Bullock and Tilley (2002) studied had a core group of main players and a number of additional and associate members. A large majority of gang members were black and male and were heavily involved in criminal behaviour, having on average, twelve prior arrests and two



convictions. They committed a wide range of offences, including serious violent offences and property offences. Weapon carrying was common.

Bennett and Holloway (2004) summarise their research based on arrestees in Britain by suggesting that there are a variety of gangs, but that some common themes may be identified. These include the likelihood that gang members will be male, criminally active (particularly with regard to robbery and drug supply) and have a tendency to carry weapons, including guns. They suggest a series of differences between American and British gangs. U.S. research indicates that gang members are likely to be from an ethnic minority group and the dominant ethnic minority group is black African-American. British research indicates that gang members are likely to be white and the dominant ethnic minority groups are Caribbean and Bangladeshi. However these differences may be explained by Aldridge and Medina's observation that gangs tend to reflect the ethnic composition of the areas from which they are drawn.

Klein's work (2001, 2002) suggests that gangs are typically located in low income housing developments usually on the outskirts of a city, they tend to have only moderate levels of organisation and a versatile pattern of delinquency and offending which Klein refers to as 'cafeteria style' offending, incorporating a range of different criminal activities.

Shropshire and McFarquhar (2002) make an important distinction between 'crime firms' and 'street gangs'. They argue that crime firms are criminal groups who come together specifically to engage in criminal activity. Street gangs on the other hand engage in a wide range of group activities in addition to criminal behaviour. Hales, Lewis and Silverstone (2006) developed a fourfold typology that distinguishes between 'Close friendship groups'; 'Associates'; 'Criminal crews'; and finally 'Organised crime networks,' whose activities include middle-market drug activity, more serious armed robberies, and quasi-legitimate enterprises (2006: 29–31). These typologies highlight that gangs can display many non-gang features and may spend much of their time in a peaceful state, they can be friendly and like socialising with other teenagers, and may spend more time hanging out on street corners doing nothing than they spend committing crime (Ekblom, 2006).

Hobbs (1998, 2001) argues that local crime firms are immersed in the values and culture of the urban working class. As with street gangs, there are significant variations in local crime 'firms' but these loosely structured groups flourish in fragmented social conditions. Some firms may have familial links but the traditional notion of family firms 'ruling' an area has greatly diminished since the 1960s following de-industrialisation and the fragmentation of traditional communities through have disrupted many crime firms (Hobbs 1998).

In summary, UK based research has identified the presence of discernable groups engaged in criminal activity and weapons use. However, descriptions of the nature and organisation of these groups vary considerably. For example, it should be noted that the gangs identified by police forces (Stelfox, 1998) were predominantly adult groups. These disparities can be explained by the application of the term 'gang' to a diverse range of groups. Consequently the typologies developed by Shropshire and McFarquhar (2002) and Hales, Lewis and Silverstone (2006) are invaluable for understanding and delineating distinctly different categories of criminal groups.

## **2.4 The Extent and Nature of Gang Involvement in Liverpool**

The following section explores the extent to which youth gangs and delinquent groups exist within Liverpool; it provides a profile of gang involved young people and their activities. The findings are drawn from interviews with gang involved young people and those practitioners who work with them.

### **The Challenges of Defining the Gang**

The challenges of defining gangs and gang involved young people were reflected by the Liverpool practitioners we interviewed:

*Not only is there not an agreed definition here in Liverpool or in Merseyside there's not an agreed definition in the country. Common sense would tell you that the TGAP definition is a reasonable explanation of what a gang is but in this area you know there's a lot of dysfunctional, disorganisation. Our groups of young males who we are terming 'gangs' and they themselves see themselves as being part of a gang but quite frankly we've got young kids who do nothing more than cause ASB [anti-social behaviour] and they're just being risk taking kids. Now would you say they're being a gang? Well the definition might lead you that way. So I'm not so sure that definition is crucial to looking at what we're doing. Police*

*It depends upon what constitutes a gang really; is a gang a group of highly specialised criminals looking at serious and organised crime i.e. Importation of drugs, extortion activities, robberies, or is a gang a group of kids hanging around on street corners in hoodies? Police*

The difficulties in defining and identifying gangs are borne out by the fact that several practitioners admitted that they did not really know the extent of gang involvement in the city. One police officer was quite candid in this respect:

*If you want my honest opinion I don't actually think we've got to the bottom of that. I have been a purveyor of an argument for quite some time now that we don't understand the gun crime and gang problem. Police*

Other practitioners were more confident of the existence of gangs in Liverpool. Throughout the interviewing process many respondents made mention of two key local gangs operating in two adjacent large estates divided by a main road, the Croxteth Crew (residing in Croxteth) and the Noggies (residing in Norris Green). Although, as one police officer remarked, even within these localities neither gang amassed more than 45-50 members in a local population on the estate of some 20,000 people.

In addition one practitioner claimed to have identified seven distinct gangs through the course of his work. These were: Norris Green (Noggy); Croxteth Crew; Dovecote Crew; Kensington Crew; Toxteth Crew; Anfield Riot Squad; and the Huyton Young Guns. However, practitioners' responses revealed disagreement over whether these gangs exist in a real sense. One interviewee suggested that some of the names that had been applied by the police did not warrant actual gang status:

*[..] there are in inverted commas, gang activity which is drug related. The actual name of the gangs is a police media exercise as a result of Liam Smith's death. Until the (unclear) you wouldn't of heard the names that were bandied around, just didn't exist.*

*The activity existed but the nature of the activity was intrinsically different in a gang sense from many other gang things .. you know. If we're talking about gangs as in USA then you have your colours and things like that – didn't exist. What we had was two relatively low levels of groups of individual's not just youths but older people as well selling drugs. One based in Marsham street, one in Crocky who were in competition with each other for the same business. They were essentially entrepreneurial and were just chasing the same customers. And because they were stealing each other's customers and due to access to guns being relatively easy, then shootings occurred which culminated in Liam Smith's murder, and led onto Rhys Jones murder. Local Resident*

### **What's in a name?**

When young people were asked about the names given to local gangs, the responses were very different. Some participants agreed that their gang or group had a name and that this name was something they had

given to themselves. However the majority felt strongly that these names had been given to local groups by the police and the media and that they themselves did not use these names, and more importantly, did not think of themselves as being part of a gang.

Despite the police and media attention afforded to gangs in the Croxteth and Norris Green areas; the 'Croxy Crew', 'CYG' and the 'Strand Gang'; not one of the young people interviewed from these areas referred to themselves by these names. In fact, they showed a great deal of contempt for the names:

*There is no gangs. All that going on the Strand Gang and that like, there's no Strand Gang, what do you think it is. Where do you think you are? We don't think we're fucking Bloods and Crips and Fucking Dutch and all this and that lad, what are you like pal. There are no gangs, you are all Muppets.*

*The bizzies. I laugh at it all the time I hear it like the notorious Strand Gang. It was just a gang who hanged around in the Strand and they called it the Strand Gang. Everything happened on the Strand. Everyone get mixed into them just cos you lived in Norris Green. Someone would say 'him there' and then the bizzies would say, he's part of the Strand Gang. There might have been two or three groups at the Strand.*

*Yeah, but they're not Crocky Crew and he isn't no Strand Gang, just a fucking load of kids know what I mean.*

As mentioned above, many of the young people spoke about the fact that in their opinion the police themselves had named gangs. It was mainly young people from Croxteth and Norris Green who had held this opinion.

*No-one goes round saying 'Strand-Gang' and 'Crocky Gang' and all that. You know what I mean? It's the police that make them up. Do you think kids are going to walk round like 'yeah, I'm in the Strand Gang' and all that?...look like a little clown?*

*As if kids are going to walk round doing that 'I'm a gang' you're mad, the kids just, police just drive past and see kids standing outside the Strand shops and think 'yeah that's the Strand Gang' because they are in the Strand and there's loads of them.*

*They (the police) should never have made us into gangs so they've got to take some responsibility.*

It is instructive to note, that despite the acknowledgement that the youths themselves do not appear to view themselves as constituting a gang, they have still received a name in use by the Police and perhaps other agencies. This begs the question of how much identified 'gang' activity is due to the (mis)application of naming of what are otherwise young people using public space? As was noted above, currently accepted definitions of gangs require – amongst other things – that the youths view themselves as a discernable group or gang. Indeed as Thornberry et al (2003) notes, adolescents are fully capable of understanding what gangs are and whether they are members.

As the officer below alludes, most youths in gang areas do not belong to gangs but can be mistaken for gang members or associates:

*I think people talk wrongly when they talk about the Croxteth gang and that - because I have seen reports that have come in that their part of the Noggie crew, they're part of the Croxteth crew. And certainly when I was doing work in relation to it and reading reports going in that they're part of the Noggie crew and then a couple of days later there is another report coming in saying that they're part of the Croxteth crew. So there is no doubt a gang culture is up there. Certainly the police are very quick to sort of say that*

*these people are members of it because perhaps they're seen together when say just walking home from school or something and suddenly he is now a part of a gang. And there is nothing to base that on other to say observations that people have seen but they haven't actually gone that stage further where they have been stopped because of some behaviour, it's that they have been seen together. Police*

A police officer argued that the uniformity of dress and fashion among many young people, made them appear similar for stylistic reasons rather than gang membership. However it was clear from the detached youth work, and from the interviews with young people that they were not interested in any distinctive styles of dress, and dressed much as any other young person in the city.

## Labelling

The young people interviewed felt labelling groups as gangs served to glamorise violence and encourage young people to aspire to be part of a gang.

*But like that Mercer kid I'd only ever seen him like once or twice he would have been like 12 or 13 in 2003. I've seen him once or twice if that but that's what I mean. We're all in jail but like all you ever see in the papers is like Croxteth Crew this and that blah, blah, blah. They see this at 13 and they want a piece of this, that's how that Mercer has got into this. I know for a fact that's why he got into it. I mean who was he? I never saw him.*

*Croxy never went round saying we're a gang there were just fights know what I mean? Someone got jumped and then all of a sudden guns started being used and then the papers and the police started saying Norris Green – Nogger Dogs. I've not once said I'm CYG or Croxy Crew, know what I mean? They're the ones that called us gangs, now all these kids in school are just looking and then all they see any time something happens in the paper is there's, like all the lads round by ours now they're all driving round in fast cars and fast motor bikes and they're only 13 and they're thinking I want a go. So it's their fault really with the gangs cos we never called ourself a gang.*

As noted by (Howell 2007) media reporting can exacerbate a gang problem. The media's portrayal of a high profile fatality, for example, may exacerbate the situation, contribute to the creation of a 'moral panic' and consequently exaggerating and misrepresenting the scale of the actual gang problem. It was reported that this may have been the case in the Croxteth and Norris Green areas following the unprecedented media coverage of the death of Rhys Jones. Furthermore, publicising gang activity can perversely make that gang appear strong, and thereby enhance their ability to intimidate, and multiply (Eckblom, 2006), a consequence that was noted by another respondent:

*I'm sort of divided on this. I think when you give them credence and credibility and attach a label to them and say that they're part of a gang and it would be interesting to see what the perception is of those who are said to be a gang or live in those areas . I'm not sure that they're as sophisticated as that, to attach the label gang to them gives them some sort of credibility and kudos and I think really we need to review our stance on that to see if it's the right way to go about it. Matrix*

There was also a candid admission that agencies had added to the problem by inadvertently publicising the gangs and enhancing their reputations:

*It comes back to the issue I said right at the beginning when I said we never understand the problem. So how can we say we've solved it when we don't understand it? We gave the gangs credibility calling them Croxteth Crew and the Strand Gang. We gave them the self publicity and credibility they required to associate. If you said it's a loose affiliation of*

*socially disenfranchised feral youths. People would think the cheeky bastards calling me a feral youth. What we need to focus in on .... we'll never break down gang or association culture, be that geographical anything. What you can start to break down is the behaviours associated with it. How do we break down that need for these people involved in territorial association to use guns? Matrix*

## Gang Structures

Practitioners believed that where gangs exist in Liverpool they tend to be rather disorganised, and unstable with unstructured membership patterns. This contrasts to more organised gang's structures identified in other parts of the country. The picture in Liverpool is one of rather chaotic young people who have access to firearms rather than mature organised criminal gangs:

*In Liverpool it's very different to other parts of the country, in other parts of the country a lot of the gang culture is organised, it's criminal, there are hierarchies, in Liverpool it's not like that. Here its groups of young people, predominately men who may have started some mischief and it's escalated and people have labelled them gangs. It's not organised, they don't have a hierarchy as far as I know. Some of the young people who have been mentioned by name I do know some of them and if I don't I know people who do, so I do think it's very different in Liverpool. Youth Services*

*There is a perception I believe amongst those who want to simplify the issue that we have these siloed groups of individuals who they call gangs and by making them siloed groups of individuals they become very easy targets. There is a natural assumption that they have a hierarchical structure which they can then attack using a variety of tactics. I actually believe in Merseyside generally and Liverpool specifically we haven't got that. We have got groups of disenfranchised youths who associate on the basis of geography and past history between families [...]. Police*

These perceptions of the loose structures of 'gang' activity were reflected in responses from young people, few of whom talked about their group as organised with a hierarchical structure. The vast majority felt strongly that their group was not organised, had no structure and was simply a group of friends doing what they choose to do. Those who spoke of leaders or hierarchy were generally discussing this in the context of drug dealing, where someone would be in charge of supplying the drugs, leaving them to 'graft' and then return the profits to their 'boss'. However, others did speak of 'top men' and 'leaders' when referring to gang rivalries. As with the naming of gangs there was a distinct difference between different areas of Liverpool with regard to the extent that they were structured.

Respondents from, mainly Croxteth and Norris Green, expressed the view that their 'gang' was not organised or structured and that there was no leader or boss directing other members. The vast majority of participants highlighted that their 'gang' was just a group of mates with no-one in charge of gang activity.

*Not as organised as they think really, it's all over the place to be honest with you.*

*It's not like the American gangs or nottin like that they're not organised.*

*It's just your mates innit? Just chill like, there is no leaders it's just like where you're from and that.*

Although their responses suggest that the gangs are loosely organised and have no identifiable leader, a large number referred to 'older ones', who were usually in their late teens, early twenties and they were the people with the expensive cars and nice clothes. The issue of leadership is questionable as although a

named 'leader' may not exist there may be a slightly more structured hierarchy than becomes apparent through the young people's responses.

*There's no leader who tells us what to do like, but there's the older people who have us doing stuff for them innit?*

*No that's what I mean we're, we're like, we're all of us, we're all equal you know what I mean? You don't get told by someone like the leaders to go and do something*

In contrast to Croxteth and Norris Green, young people living in the areas of Anfield, Everton and Kirkdale spoke of a fairly rigid structures and of hierarchies.

[So that the only way gangs would stop you were saying if you take their?]

*[Agreement noise]*

[if their top man ]

*Yeah when we take down their leaders on Scottie Road*

*Yeah, yeah they own everything, they own every little kid and everything, every little kid you see running round and all that they own everything, and the sacks are full of fucking money and drugs and whatever you want got it in, and you can't do nothing about it like.*

Young people in these areas spoke of 'top' families 'owning' the area. Hobbs(2001) refers to family firms owning areas in the 1960s but suggests that these firms have greatly diminished. Our findings indicate that these family firms may still be in existence in parts of Liverpool. This extract between a young person and interviewer is the clearest example of this finding:

[They're the second from top. (Name of family)]

*Oh okay so they're not the top because a lot of people say that they're like the top but they're not quite?*

[No]

*They're just underneath the top?*

[Just underneath yeah]

[So if there's someone else there, then the (name of family), so where does your family come?]

*I wouldn't even have a clue innit, I'd myself, I'd rank myself higher innit but I don't know.*

[You'd rank yourself higher than?]

*Not the (family name) no. They're just crazy man.*

This finding contrasts with much of the research undertaken in the UK which has found that most UK gangs are disorganised with loose structures (Stelfox, 1998; Mares, 2001; Bullock and Tilley, 2002; Bennett and Holloway, 2004). The distinction made by Shropshire and McFarquhar (2002) between 'crime firms' and

'street gangs' may be helpful in understanding the differences in organisation between groups in different areas of Liverpool.

### Gang Territories and Rivalries

Practitioners reported that both the Norris Green and Croxteth gangs were involved in dealing drugs (primarily cannabis according to one source), and that the gangs were primarily spurred by an historic rivalry of two largely disenfranchised but loosely associated groups. The importance of local rivalries was apparent from the interviews with young people. The ethnographic nature of the study and the time spent in the areas by the research team enabled us to build a geographical picture of these territorial issues. It became abundantly clear that in most instances territory and rivalry could be explained by living on one side of a road compared to another or being from adjacent estates. Territorial rivalries were identified in all areas of Liverpool.

Many of the young people from Croxteth and Norris Green were adamant that it was too dangerous for them to venture into the opposing area. Many stated that the only way that they could, would be to travel by car. The extract below illustrates this mentality clearly:

[So you wouldn't go to Croxteth?]

*I wouldn't go there no.*

*No unless I was in a car or something like that, I wouldn't walk through there.*

[Right. And is it because people would know that you lived in Norris Green?]

*Yeah. I can go there but I just, I wouldn't just walk through it, know what I mean? Because I know I'm going to get fucked.*

The young people from Anfield spoke of the same issues,

*The people shooting at us who we've got a beef with. We've got our own little patch and they've got their own little patch.*

[So where's your patch?]

*Oakfield Road and Breck*

[How far away from one other are these two patches?]

*About 5 minutes*

Although it was apparent that territory was in a lot of cases the rationale behind rivalries and violence, other often cited reasons included drug custom, financial gain and issues of masculinity and 'respect.'

However, discussion of this rivalry painted two contrasting pictures, at times even by the same respondents. On the one hand there was mention of anti-social behaviour and low level offending by as the defining feature of gangs, and on the other hand the use of deadly violence using firearms.

### Gangs and Guns

As several police officers noted, much of the 'gang' involvement was unstructured and disorganised but groups had the opportunity to obtain firearms and a willingness to use them:

*I would suggest it is young people in deprived areas who are getting into criminality now where people who have access to firearms and a complete disregard for human safety*

*and are prepared to make a statement. That's not what we're looking at, we're not looking at Mr big in his Audi Q7. We're looking at people on street corners who are able to up the anti and gain weaponry which can prove fatal, that is what we are looking at I think. Matrix*

*I see gun crime in a number of strands, one is youth culture and that youth culture is supported by the rivalry of disenfranchised groups from different geographical locations, drugs and drug turf wars which can be at various levels and then serious and organised criminality. Serious and organised criminality in my view at this moment in time is fairly limited. We don't have serious and organised criminals running around with guns firing them at one another. We don't have the Moss Side Gooch and Doddington Crew issue because at that point of Merseyside criminality they're at the point of legitimising themselves within the society they live in. I'm absolutely positive that if they wanted to call upon guns they can and there's another element of the problem that we don't understand is where those guns are coming from. Matrix*

## 2.5 Factors Influencing Gang Involvement: The Research Evidence

### Risk Factors for Gang Involvement

This section provides an overview of the identified risk factors for gang involvement. Evidence of the motivations cited by young people for their involvement in gang activities is also provided.

Howell and Egley (2005) report that knowledge of risk factors for gang membership has increased enormously during the past decade. Khron and Thornberry (2008:132) describe pertinent risk factors as 'attributes that significantly increase the chances or probability that a person possessing those attributes will subsequently become a gang member.' It is very important to understand that risk factors only have the status of antecedents and not necessarily causal. The possession of one or more risk factors does not mean someone will automatically become a gang member. Nevertheless, properly identifying risk factors allows policy makers to focus intervention strategies on ameliorating them in a targeted manner (Khron and Thornberry, 2008).

Risk Factors for offending have been categorised into five main domains:

1. Family – parental supervision, discipline, broken homes, separation and family criminality.
2. Neighbourhood – socio-economic deprivation, neighbourhood disorganisation and high residential mobility.
3. School – low educational attainment, low commitment to school and unclear and inconsistently enforced rules.
4. Individual – hyperactivity and impulsivity, low intelligence and attainment
5. Peers – association with delinquent peers.

(See Farrington, 1996)

The most comprehensive method of establishing risk factors for gang membership is longitudinal study. Longitudinal studies enable the examination of the time course of events and circumstances. This allows for the separation of those risk factors which 'precede' gang membership and those that follow as a result of gang membership. There have been no longitudinal studies of gang membership conducted in the UK to date. Several US longitudinal studies have identified risk factors for gang membership, most notably the Rochester Youth Development Study (2003) and the Seattle Social Development Study (1999). As noted in Section 2.1 above the context of gangs and gang involvement varies considerable in the US and therefore caution should be adopted before transferring US findings to the UK context.



The Seattle Social Development Study (Hill et al.,1999), examined risk factors measured at ages 10–12 as predictors of gang membership between ages 13 and 18. Risk factors were drawn from five domains listed above (family, neighbourhood, school, individual characteristics and peers). They found that “[21] of the 25 constructs measured at ages 10–12 predicted joining a gang at ages 13 to 18. Predictors of gang membership were found in all of the measured domains” (Hill et al., 1999: 308). The most potent risk factors are ‘neighbourhood youth in trouble’ and ‘availability of marijuana’; ‘family structure’, especially living with one parent and ‘other adults or with no parents’; ‘low achievement in elementary school’ or ‘being identified as learning disabled’; ‘association with deviant peers’; ‘prior involvement in marijuana use or violence’; and ‘externalizing problem behaviours’. Not surprisingly, having multiple risk factors greatly increased the chances of joining a gang.

Thornberry et al (2003) using data from the Rochester Study examined risk factors measured before age 14 to calculate the probability of joining a gang between ages 14 and 17. Gang members had significantly greater deficits as compared to non-members on 25 of the 40 measured risk factors. Risk was observed in all seven developmental domains: ‘area characteristics’, ‘family socio-demographic characteristics’, ‘parent-child relations’, ‘school factors’, ‘peer relationships’, ‘individual characteristics’ and ‘early delinquency’.

Further studies include the Denver Youth Survey (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Huizinga et al 2003; Huizinga et al 1988) which found poor parental supervision, deviant peers, non-delinquent problem behaviours, and certain indicators of school attachment and performance to be related to later gang membership. In contrast, attachment to parents, self-esteem, and attitudes toward the future were not identified as risk factors. Huizinga et al. (1988) also report that the accumulation of risk factors is strongly related to gang membership.

Two studies (Craig et al 2002; Gatti et al 2005) use data from the Montreal Longitudinal and Experimental Study to examine risk factors. Among the variables significantly related to gang membership are: ‘low parental supervision’, ‘deviant peers’, ‘lack of commitment to school’, and ‘non-delinquent problem behaviours’.

Thornberry et al. (1993) identified three general models that could assist in explaining the strong statistical association between gang membership and high rates of crime. The first is the ‘*selection model*’. ‘This argues that adolescents with a strong propensity for delinquency and violence seek out or are recruited into street gangs.’ (Krohn and Thornberry 2008:139). The second model is the ‘*facilitation model*’ which refers to a ‘kind of group’ model. Gang members do not have a higher propensity for delinquency and violence than non-members. However, when they join a gang, the normative structure of the gang along with group processes and dynamics facilitates increased involvement in delinquency.’ (Khron and Thornberry 2008:139). The authors note that these two models can occur at the same time and label this mixed model the enhancement model. ‘Adolescents who are already involved in delinquency are most apt to join a gang (selection) but, after joining, their delinquency is likely to increase significantly (facilitation),’ (Khron and Thornberry 2008:139).

As a result of the longitudinal analyses that have been conducted, Khron and Thornberry (2008) suggest there are several risk factors that stand out as being of primary importance. These include:

- involvement in prior delinquency and related problem behaviours,
- low parental supervision and involvement in deviant peer networks.

Khron and Thornberry suggest that some aspects of poor school attachment and/or performance, and experiencing negative or stressful life events are also important. Essentially they draw attention to the importance of basing our knowledge of risk factors on theory and not just supposition. The authors provide several examples of variables that are often treated as risk factors for gang membership but for which there is little empirical support. These variables include family poverty and family structure, self-esteem, affective bonds with parents, and neighbourhood crime.

The results from longitudinal studies strongly indicate that rather than a few individual risk factors impacting upon gang membership we need to understand that risk factors are cumulative. As Khron and Thornberry

(2008:138) note, ‘Gang members have multiple deficits in multiple developmental domains, each one of which contributes in a small, but statistically significant, way to the chances of being a gang member.’

## 2.6 Factors Influencing Gang Involvement: Evidence from Liverpool Evidence

This section discusses the risk factors of gang involvement in Liverpool. However as acknowledged in Section 2.4 above most young people labelled as ‘gang involved’ by practitioners do not view themselves as part of a gang. As the term was used by practitioners we continue to use it here but only as short hand to include more organised gangs and the delinquent or anti-social groups in which the young people interviewed were involved.

### Risk Factors for Gang Involvement

The majority of the young people interviewed felt unable to state when they became involved with their gang or group. Of the young people that specified an age at which they ‘became involved’ the youngest was eleven or twelve and the oldest - sixteen<sup>34</sup>. Few participants talked about ‘events’ which led to their involvement and again discussed ‘joining a gang’ as something that just happened or evolved. This section aims to uncover the multiple pathways and the initial conditions that can contribute to gang involvement. This section combines interview data which reveals practitioners’ views on pertinent risk factors with relevant information on the backgrounds of gang involved young people. The overall picture gained from respondents supported much of the research literature, namely a picture of socially excluded young males, from troubled families, with low levels of educational attainment.

#### Multiple Risk Factors

Most practitioners cited a range of factors that when combined together were influential in either leading a young person into or being associated with gang membership, rather than any one lone factor playing a causal role. For instance:

*Well, it’s all the usual suspects isn’t it, drugs, alcohol, insecure home life, poor parenting, low educational achievement, social exclusion ..[ ..] You’ll always get the odd kid that comes from a good background but for the most part the theory seems to bear out the practice. Children’s Services*

The different factors mentioned by respondents have been aggregated and organised under five separate categories in Table 3 (below). Family background and parenting factors were mentioned most prominently by respondents, followed by neighbourhood and community factors and academic and school factors. Least cited was individual level factors, with participants reporting more structural and ecological factors than individual factors.

Table 3: Participants Views of Key Risk Factors for Gang and Gun Involvement

Risk Factor	No.
Family Background/Parenting	22
Neighbourhood and Community Factors	16
Academic and School Factors	14
Socio-Economic Deprivation	13
Individual Factors	10

<sup>34</sup> Eleven/twelve (one), twelve/thirteen (one), thirteen (one), thirteen/fourteen (one), fourteen (one), fifteen (one) and sixteen (one).

## **Family**

Family background and parenting figure highly as risk factors to gang involvement, especially poor parenting skills and an inability to exercise sufficient control and supervision over children and young people. As one practitioner noted, parents also needed to be the subject of interventions:

*Its fourth generation now of parents not working and things like that. I'm more convinced now that youth work should start with the parents and that's what Positive Futures is about to start doing. A lot of the girls are from single parent families things like that and they might have witnessed their dad smacking their mum around. Agency worker*

Another respondent bemoaned the broader social changes that had undermined the nuclear family and impaired the upbringing of children:

*Instability of families, the one thing that marriage does is inject a degree of stability. You're far less likely to drop a marriage at the drop of a hat than you are to drop a relationship per se at the drop of a hat, in my view. So in that sense, marriage is probably a good thing. I think that there's clearly (pause) massive evidence to suggest through the Rhys Jones trial and the transcripts and the evidence given in court of absolutely no respect for the family, the family unit, the father, the mother: constant references in verbatim in transcript 'me dad's a dickhead' all that sort of thing 'what do you know, dickhead?' all that sort of stuff. And in the home environment there is no respect, no love, no affection. Then where do those things find a place in the wider world? LASBU*

One senior practitioner had been startled by the lack of parental supervision for many young children when touring some areas of the city one evening:

*[..] we walked around the streets and at 10.30 at night I just couldn't believe what I was seeing, the amount of young kids aged 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 out on the streets by themselves, I just couldn't believe it. The gang members lording it and threatening people to come into their areas. I just couldn't believe what I was seeing. It struck me a little. I used to work in Chelsea and as a young cop there I'd taken children into care, children who were being neglected in my view and it struck me that all of these kids I'd seen were at risk of harm, all of them. Those involved in gangs, those on the periphery of gangs, those young kids wandering the streets. Children's Services*

Responses from young people demonstrated that family relations can also act as a positive protective factor, particularly when changes in family circumstances brought increased responsibility.

*But obviously the only thing that makes me worry about coming to jail is like me mum really like, obviously I don't like, years and like one year and two years isn't much to be away from mum but obviously if I like, if say like I got sentenced for like a gun, like that'd be a sentence then like that would be, me mum.*

*It's not just me I'm thinking about now I've got a baby do you know what I mean? Sorting out but then all the police are going to drag me right back into it.*

*I wanna go straight yeah, if I could I would, I mean and that's what I'm focussing on at the moment, know what I mean? Positive thoughts and that like being able to get away from it all and just stay with me girlfriend and me baby and that, know what I mean, because it's harder for me girlfriend at the moment, she's got, she's, she only depends on herself at the moment, know what I mean, she's got the kid to deal with it must be hard for her.*

## **Neighbourhood**

Neighbourhood and community factors were mentioned by 16 practitioners. These were primarily references to either disorganised communities or insular communities which fostered fierce local attachments. The influence of socio-economic deprivation and social exclusion was mentioned by 13 practitioners:

*Well if you look at where it happens it is in the areas of highest levels of poverty.. and you know, social disadvantage and therefore logic would tell you it is those areas of high social disadvantage that cluster together and make them feel better.* Children's Services

Relative deprivation was mentioned by 13 practitioners, one interviewee provided further elaboration on the mechanisms through which this may operate:

*You've got a generation of parents who were disadvantaged, dispossessed, disenfranchised by the ravages of Thatcherism if you like. So you have second generation and possibly or definitely in many cases third generation unemployed.* Journalist

## **Local culture**

Another five respondents remarked on some feature of the local culture that was present in parts of Liverpool, most generally insularity among some of the young people:

*Liverpool, some of them have not been out of Liverpool, and that is the nature of territorial as well. You don't see themselves going out of their urban area, doing anything outside of that area, having family outside that area, it's just so endemic and they can't see past their everyday lives.* DAT

In turn this insularity is seen by several respondents as feeding into a narrow territoriality in some areas; a territory that needed protecting from incursion by others. Quite why this was so was thought to be unclear, even to those who professed such loyalties:

*It's breaking the mentality here [...], it's something about protecting our territory, it's all of that, it's a combination. I'd be interested to a point to listening to some of the young people involved in gang activity but having to listened to many already, they don't understand half the time what it is there talking about themselves. They don't understand what they're talking about in the sense of why they're in a gang.* Police

Another respondent was blunter:

*Liverpool can't even remember what they are fighting about.* Gang Youth Worker

Young people also emphasised the influence of the local area on their behaviour:

*Well the only thing that could've like stopped you from joining a gang is fate or if you were already born in an area where there is no gangs or something like that.*

*I need to get out of here. If I don't get out of here, then I have got no way forward. And that is the honest truth. If I don't get out of here, then I don't know what I am going to do.*

## **Violence**

One of the most striking and indeed worrying findings from the interviews was the level of violence witnessed and experienced by the young people. The participants explained the violence as an everyday part of life growing up in their area.

The findings suggest that all participants had been involved in violent activity; either committing violent acts, being a victim of violence or witnessing violent acts. The violence involved shootings, knife crime, dog fights, detonating bombs, torture, kidnap and physical fist-fights.

*...you know we were doing some serious shit. You've never seen 16 and 17 year old kids running round with bombs you know what I mean? That's how it was by ours you know what I'm saying?*

*I've been stood on the corner by ours and there's been 20 people and like 15 of them will have a gun on them and the other 5 will have a bomb each know what I mean? You're talking proper artillery there know what I mean? Proper mad, proper crazy things were happening.*

*I mean I've even had me dog robbed off me and that and put on You Tube and it got put in a wheelie bin, a pit bull I had he got put in a wheelie bin and petrol poured in it and lit on fire, it got put on You Tube, know what I mean, it's nasty and that but there's nothing you could do about it.*

*I've kidnapped people and that, and tied them up and then I've stabbed them and that like know what I mean like, and tortured them and that, because that's what I've, that's what I've, that's what I've learnt from growing up when I was a kid.*

*I've seen grenades get put through windows, blown up, people blown up and all that, houses get blown up, people while they're in bed get bombed, I've seen people who are getting shot and all of that.*

Whilst several participants spoke of the 'buzz' or excitement of committing violent acts, others expressed regret, shame and guilt at the violence they had committed, or had watched being committed

*It's like I'd done, like there's some things that I'm not proud of what I've done with, but I was, I was on and all that like tablets all stuff like that, I was smoking Weed and all that at the age of thirteen and then, and like going on like doing all stuff that I never knew I could do, and I wish I, wish I turn back the hands of time to make sure that I never done them things.*

*And the next thing I know I've just looked at the street and seen everyone [claps hands], like the two lads, everyone in my gang there was at least fifty there, and every one of them was jumping all on their heads, you know what I mean? Taking turns at jumping on their heads, and I couldn't understand it, you know what I mean, and taking turns a piece at jumping on their heads, and I couldn't stand it, you know what I mean, I've gone "what the fuck, what's going on here. I've walked back down the other street and like I've, he's walking past me and everything that his face has all been smashed in, know what I mean, and then] I've walked past and had a look behind me and the fella's just collapsed, just collapsed right there in front of me and I've thought 'shit what's going on here?', and looked at his face, all his face, you couldn't even make out if the image of his face because they've stood on] there's blood falling, coming out of everywhere, the fella just collapsed there in the road.*

### **Education**

The damaging effects of low educational attainment during school years and later into adult life were mentioned:

*What the research tells me is that it is poor educational attainment, and that makes sense to me .. if you can't read it is easier to be the class clown and to get some respect bullying others than it is to not answer a question or try hard and not perform. [ ..] We know that*

*the young people that are excluded from school are usually those that are low performing academic ability. Children's Services*

*I think literacy and innumeracy problems are high risk factors, school attendance, if you're not there where are you? Youth Services*

These inner city residents that are failing in the education system find themselves blocked off from obtaining even unskilled labour positions. As one interviewee noted, wider structural changes in the national economy had serious implications for these young people:

*Low levels of educational attainment and the days are gone when you could sell your muscle on the docks and shift heavy weights around and make a wage. You need to be literate, numerate and IT literate, now how are they supposed to feel good about themselves if they can't earn a legitimate living? Matrix*

The overall picture here is that despite a recent period of urban renewal and regeneration, there remain pockets of marginalised and excluded groups who cannot or do not participate within the legitimate economy.

Although the research team did not specifically ask the young people about their length of education, or circumstances surrounding their expulsion, a large majority of the young people talked at length about being expelled from school and the escalation of their involvement in gang activity following expulsion from school. Of those who were interviewed, fifteen had been expelled from school or had left before their GCSEs. In the majority of cases, this was for violent behaviour.

*I got kicked out [of school] in year seven for fighting with the teacher.*

*I was smashing me teachers and that, just smashed the bottle in the teacher's face in year seven and I haven't been school since.*

*I got kicked out [of school] in about year seven innit for fighting in school with different people and, it's all madness now.*

*I wish now but because we wouldn't be in here if I went to school and that.*

One young person spoke of how education can prove a turning point, but stressed the challenges that conventional education had for him:

*Making getting a job easier. It's just so fucking complicated innit? Yeah, that's it. But in here I've done all the GCSEs and that yeah? I haven't been to school since year seven yeah and I was a smart kid, and I've come in here passed me Level two's an me GCSEs now and all that, and all that but it's just getting out innit? I'm not the sort of person that can go to places like college and sit in a room with all dudes I don't like, and then there's listening to a teacher and that, know what I mean? If like someone believed in me like, actually thought, know what I mean, and boxed shit for me, got me a job and that.*

### **Individual Level Factors**

The risk factors least cited by interviewees were individual level risk factors.

#### *Illegal Drugs*

Although 'drugs' were only explicitly referred to by two young people as a factor in becoming involved in gang activity, it became clear from other questions that drug dealing and drug use were a large part of their lives. None of the young people responded that they had a Class A drug habit but practically all of them

spoke about smoking weed. Eight young people explicitly discussed their drug use, of these all smoked weed but took no other drugs. The following accounts between the interviewer and young people describe this use in more detail:

[What do you spend your money on?]

*Trackies and Weed and that.*

[So would you smoke cannabis pretty much every day?]

*Every, every day I'd have some. From the minute I opened my eyes to the minute I closed them, it was constantly.*

*Yeah like, like there's certain drugs that no-one will take because they're not stupid, you know, like heroin or stuff like that. Most of the gang just smoke weed like it's nothing, because I don't see it as a problem I've been smoking weed since I was thirteen.*

*Pretty much all day. Yeah most of me money that I get I just spend it on the weed.*

### **The Role of Peers**

The importance of pressure from peers to become involved in gangs was mentioned by six practitioners, and was felt to be particularly important in leading young people into gang involvement:

*We know that peer pressure is an important factor, and where you have got poor home life, poor parenting (for whatever reason) then your support can come from friends and if those friends are actually engaged in that sort of gang activity then you have got to be quite a strong tough kid not to join the pack, it's easier to join the pack, nobody wants to be different. [...] So I think that peer pressure is a big issue. Children's Services*

*Peer pressure in the area is phenomenal.[...] They call them street families not gangs. Police*

Another practitioner stressed that even after periods of imprisonment peer pressure still exerted a strong influence on some young people to rejoin a gang.

Only three young people spoke of a 'pressure' to become involved in gang activity or to fit in with other people. One young person described a pressure or threat to pay a local gang member for a bike that had been confiscated by the police; with drug dealing for a local gang perceived as his only option to make that money.

*he said to me that, you know, how much it [the bike] was worth go out and get a job, like that do you know what I mean.*

Others talked about the need or desire to 'fit in' with other young people.

*It's all about being led really isn't it? Like just wanting to fit in and that with other people so you really do stuff that they do.*

Several young people spoke about being involved in a gang equating to nothing more than simply being with their mates. This was not a pressure to 'join' a gang, but a choice to spend time with their friends:

*I don't know how I joined they're just me mates innit in the first place so.*

*I was about twelve, eleven, twelve. They was only, like in school, when you were in school they were the only people that I liked, who I fit, know what I mean like that I get along with, I can't sit next to someone who's, in other words, talking shit, know what I mean? Who I don't like or who's talking [inaudible] I'd end up back handing him, there's people who you get along with who think like you think and that. And just, then you just know yourself that you're supposed to be with them.*

During discussions about desistance from gang activity the influence of friends was apparent. Although almost all young people spoke about the difficulties of leaving their 'gang', this was rarely because of the fear of being punished or reprimanded, but rather because leaving the 'gang' would mean leaving their friends. The vast majority of young people highlighted how they could choose at any point to leave the 'gang' and although they may receive some 'stick,' they would be free to leave at any point:

*In gangs and that it's not like people think if you turn your back on it you're not gonna get killed and that you know what I mean? There's none of that well you're in you're in and you're out you're out nonsense. There's never been nottin' like that. So if I don't wanna go back to that now I don't have to you know what I mean? No one's gonna force me, no one's ever forced anyone to do anything round ours ever.*

*They're me mates, they're the ones who really influence me to stop offending, when we like talk about the future and stuff like that I know that we have to stop doing stuff like this or we're just gonna end up in jail all our lives, and that's the only thing what really influences me, me mates and me Mum, like because they're the only people I've got respect for really isn't it?*

Therefore although the influence of peers is more accurately explained as a 'choice' rather than peer pressure, it is clear that in line with risk factor research the acquaintance of delinquent peers acts to increase the risk of delinquent gang involvement.

### **Motivations for Gang Involvement**

Risk factors relate to the causes of gang involvement which are more remote (either in space or time) from the criminal behaviour of interest. This section examines some of the more immediate causes and motivations that practitioners and the young people themselves identified as pertinent to involvement in gangs. All participants were asked their views on what they thought were the main motivations for young people becoming involved or associated with gangs. In practice many respondents tended to discuss motivations and risk factors simultaneously. For the purposes of this analysis, we have treated them as analytically distinct, although risk factors clearly have a bearing the motivations of young people.

Table 2 below summarises the responses given from the interviews and ranks these by frequency with which they were mentioned.

#### ***Sense of Belonging and Group Identity***

The sense of belonging and group identity gained from being in or associated with a gang and the feelings of respect and pride which followed from this was highlighted by both practitioners and young people themselves. This was the motivation most frequently cited by practitioners:

*So you have got children who for all kinds of different reasons are not getting stuck to society, the move into stake holding is not one that they have made and so they are very vulnerable, and gangs create a sense of belonging, a sense of ownership, stuff people should really be getting from their families but they don't. Or it's the sort of belonging that they don't want so they then choose this, you know, wonderfully cohesive but essentially tribal alignment, with initiation rites and rites of passage. I mean it's going back thousands of years really in some ways [..]. Probation*



In this area, first of all there is a sense of belonging for them to be involved with a group of people, they feel protected, and they feel involved. They feel they're own self worth is something rather than nothing. There's nothing else and some kids will see that there's nothing else for them. *Police*

**Table 2 Motivations for Gang Involvement**

Motivation for Gang Involvement <sup>35</sup>	Practitioners	Young People
Respect/Identity/Belonging	11	5
Income/Drugs	6	12 <sup>36</sup>
Protection/Safety	5	4
Defending territory	3	1
Boredom/Excitement	2	3
Consumer society/celebrity	2	0
Human nature/Tribal	0	2

Another respondent noted that this sense of group membership can derive from a number of different sources:

*Well I think it is what I said before with identity. It's not as kind of obvious as listen if you're going to play with us you have to be in this gang, people have associations whether it is in a school or living in an area. In some places it might be the school you go to and just acquaintances and that is the peer group. That has always occurred and is common in youth culture anyway. Gangs is nothing new. DAT*

The additional rewards that gang involvement can bring were mentioned by several other practitioners:

*Someone was telling me a tale about a police officer asking a young person why he had joined a group and he said well, before I was in the group I was nothing, now I'm in the group I'm part of something, I am someone. So the kids are seeing it as getting an identity and respect. A very abused word. Children's Services*

As another interviewee thought, this extends to other lifestyle sectors of leisure and relationships:

*[...] suddenly, hanging out with your mates on a bike outside Spar on a Friday night just isn't that much fun – and you know, your older mates as well have got girlfriends and they're driving round, they're driving around in a nice flash motor that they've bought off*

<sup>35</sup> Totals exceed the total number of respondents because interviewees frequently discussed more than one motivation.

<sup>36</sup> Although drugs were not explicitly mentioned in the ten responses highlighting 'financial gain' a detailed review of the interview transcripts suggest that the financial gain was very often associated with drugs.

*the back of the drugs and you're riding your BMX and you're thinking 'aww, this isn't really. Journalist*

*There's a certain helplessness about living on benefits on a sink estate where there's something proactive, edgy, sexy in some ways of being a gangster, because they see they can push to the front of the queue in clubs, they can get free drinks when people are scared of them, they get certain types of girls who will hang onto their every word. Matrix*

These would amount to powerful sources of credibility and respect for young men, enhancing self-esteem and strengthening group identity. Several other respondents emphasized how group identity and the need to belong were exerted across much of youth subcultures, thereby situating street gangs within just one of many different manifestations of memberships, street organisations and resistance to established value systems.

Although not the most frequently discussed motivation, the feeling of belonging and sense of status gained from association with a gang was also mentioned by the young people interviewed.

As well as the respect/pride associated with money, the participants also talked about the respect and pride associated with being involved in a gang and how this motivated them to join:

*It's just about respect innit? At the end of the day that's all it comes down to, respecting the people, like respecting another person and just knowing that he's bigger and harder than them, that's all it really is to be honest with you.*

*It's all pride as well isn't it? It's all pride*

*Like if some people do it [get involved in gangs] it's just to make themselves big you know what I mean?*

*It's just so they can just get a name for themselves innit? That's why most people do it, to get a name for themselves within like where they live.*

### **Income/Financial Gain**

The most frequent motivation given by young people themselves for involvement in gangs was material gain. Joining a gang for material gain was also mentioned by six of the practitioners. A gang worker contrasted the different motivations for gang membership in Manchester to that of Liverpool:

*Reasons for joining gangs in Manchester; greed, earning instant money, status, major player, best girls etc. In Liverpool it is just the money. Gang Youth Worker*

This motivation was seen by several others as going hand-in-hand with the pressures of living in a consumer society:

*The other reason is that it's financially, it is a step up. We know this one street dealer and he says he can earn £500 per day. It depends how busy they are but you've got people who are 17 who get involved can benefit financially. That is the reason why they join. LASBU*

*[..] Peers are driving around in BMWs and Mercs and saying you're an idiot. And that is the real challenge. So it's less peers walking around saying you have to be part of this gang .. its more do you want this? Are you daft? Local Resident*

This last point would seem to illustrate the importance of styles and stylizations (images) of life— ‘everyday aesthetics’ (Willis 1990) rather than those lost to '(ex) working class males' in the de-industrialized British city. Such influences were deemed area specific though:

*Yes, I wouldn't say in this area necessarily but money is a motivation. They see hoodlums, gangsters whatever with flash cars, lots of cash. We don't get that with the gangs we're talking about here. You get some of that in Liverpool South. Where drugs are really an issue there in terms of making money. You'll see how they look, how they dress, they don't make a lot of money here. I think most people's perception is that it is all linked to drugs and you can make a lot of money out of it. You can, but not here, we're not talking about people being organised here and making money from drugs. Police*

Young people talked about what they could buy with the money they were making – this included clothes, trainers, cars, drugs and providing for their family. It must be noted that this financial gain was in the vast majority of cases made from selling drugs (a more detailed account of which is given in below).

Section 1.5 of this report has described in some detail the deprivation levels of the areas involved in this study. Each of the five areas all have SOAs in the 1% most deprived areas on the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The interviews illustrated a palpable sense of acceptance that young people living in these areas could not gain legitimate employment and therefore an income would have to be made utilising illegitimate means. The sense of worthlessness that these young people felt was also apparent as the quotes below illustrate,

*Yeah I mean what you work for now about £200 a week is the minimum wage or summat. Those kids out there can't live on that. You wouldn't be able to buy a pair of trainees out there for that seriously. Whenever I used to buy a pair of trainees it used to cost about £150 for a pair of trainees, know what I mean? How you supposed to live off that? That's the way they're seeing it now know what I mean?*

*Yeah. At the end of the day, I see people round here, young mum's and that, like the kids and that, they don't work, they are on the dole and shit like that, you can't bring a kid up on that money. You can't, so the kid is going to go out and do stuff. And especially the kids round here cos they see, the older people doing it. They see it from a young age, do you know what I mean? I dunno. I know a kid mate and he has had to do it since he was like seven years of age. Go out and rob and shit like that and to me, I find that disgusting. He is supposed to be in bed, do you know what I mean? In bed at 6 - 7 o'clock, not out at 12 or 1 o'clock.*

Young people also talked about the status that money brought and feeling power over those with less disposable income.

*Yeah like last year I had the most money for me age. So, I just had lots of mates and bought cars and that.*

*I was making more money in a week than the teacher was know what I mean... and they're talking down to me but actually you feel powerful know what I mean.*

Financial gain was frequently associated with drug dealing, eleven young people specifically spoke about involvement in drug dealing. Of these, five spoke of 'dealing for others' and taking a small cut of the profits (whilst someone else took the majority of the profits).

*And then at the end of the day we would go to them with the money we'd made, giving them the money.*

[So, for example could you give him like, you know like a thousand pounds a day?]

*More. Loads more, between two thousand and twenty-five hundred quid a day, say a thousand is a normal day.*

Four of those five spoke of organised 'business' activity where they were 'grafting' for someone else and aimed to work their way 'up the ladder' so that they could earn more money.

*Okay. You've got to start somewhere haven't you? If you start at the bottom you work your way to the top, and someday I'll have people working for me, know what I mean? For the olders, for the older boys yeah? And then some day we're gonna be up there aren't we? ...Off the money that you've made from grafting for them and then you can buy your own shit can't you? You can buy your own. And then you get kids working for you, know what I mean? No they've got us doing it for them. And we're like a little fucking run around really, little jobbies.*

This again raises the question of structure and hierarchy within the gangs. As was discussed earlier, the majority of the young people stated that there was no hierarchy or structure to the gangs but the dialogue around drug dealing would seem to suggest otherwise.

Young people were asked how much money they made from drug dealing and the answers varied from one hundred pounds a day to four thousand pounds. Several young people highlighted the difficulties of finding a legitimate job which could provide them with the same levels of earnings.

*You're making a couple of grand a week so like I don't know how we find a legit, a legit job that'd give you.*

*..it's all bollocks and all that fucking learning shit and that, it's all stupid and that, because when they see the money what them old, what I call the older boys make round here they're fucking hell know what I mean, they're making like, bringing in like fifteen grand a week or something, just off nothing....and plus we're making like an extra two grand each, they've all got brand new fucking Range Rovers and all, you just look at them and think 'you fucking rich bastard'.*

### **Personal Safety**

Practitioners believed that involvement with gangs provided a defensive structure for young people. Five practitioners mentioned reasons of personal safety and the desire for protection that a gang involvement is perceived to offer:

*You ask young people why they stick together it's because they don't feel safe. The police can't protect them, their parents can't protect them, society doesn't do a good job of protecting them, you have to make young people feel safe. Youth Services*

*Certainly young people feel safer moving around the city in small groups rather than walking as individuals. Being part of a group offer you a degree of safety. Children's Services*

*You are perceived as weak if not part of a gang – you're perceived as a threat – you have to join a gang. Those who are not involved just won't go out on a night. Police*

Safety or protection was mentioned as a motivation for gang involvement by four of the young people:

*it feels better, it feels like you don't have to be scared, I'm with me boys. When I'm with me bird or when I'm on me own I'm always looking over me shoulder, seeing whose behind me and stuff. When the boys are with me I can chill and relax you know.*

*When it comes into fighting and all the knife crime or whatever gun crime then you're not on your own are you? You've got people to back you, back you up.*

These observations of young people's personal safety are reinforced by the findings from the last Anti-bullying Audit conducted through the city's schools. The audit found that young people residing in the Alt Valley area and also in Speke felt less safe than other young people, notably that young people who were not involved in gang activities felt less safe in those areas where there was felt to be gang activity.

One practitioner was willing to acknowledge the veracity of this essentially defensive motivation, but questioned the justification or need:

*I think it's a sense of wanting to belong [...] When they get in the gang they have got the bravado from being in a gang, and that will protect them. But then you've got to say well what do you need protecting from?*

Another interviewee highlighted how gang members can increase feelings of safety, while reflecting that the fears of other young people were not in line with the risk represented by crime figures:

*[...] the gang members are very clear where their boundaries are and actually feel quite safe within their gang culture. I think it is more that some of the others are feeling less safe, but the [crime] figures don't bear out that there is any reason for them to feel less safe.* Children's Services

It may well be the case that these young people are indeed over sensitised to crime as this practitioner argues. However, it should be noted that, lifestyles are adapted to reflect personal vulnerabilities, however imperfectly, and fear of an event of low probability but huge impact (being a victim of violent crime) is not to be dismissed as disproportionate.<sup>37</sup>

In view of the analysis and practitioners comments above, gangs can be seen as offering a special service to its members (and associates). Many youths may confront (perceived or real) a dangerous local area and a gang promises a specific solution to that security problem, it helps intimidate for both defensive and offensive purposes. Young people's security concerns become even more understandable when one considers the essential defining feature of a gang, namely one of intimidation (Ekblom, 2006).<sup>38</sup> One conjecture might be that a street gang could form for purely defensive reasons, and once established, and perhaps after becoming aggressive, young people may still be attracted to join purely for defensive purposes

These more defensive motivations that have been cited by respondents may also highlight not only this practical reality of safety in numbers or belonging to a 'tough' group, but in addition, a level of ontological security and trust that is to be found by some on the street which obviates some of the uncertainties and insecurities of being male on the margins of civil society.

### ***Territorial Disputes***

Practitioners described a certain 'territorial mentality' among some young people, based upon loyalty to their local neighbourhoods and hostility to other surrounding neighbourhoods. This was present irrespective of whether youths were involved in gangs or not:

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<sup>37</sup> As we have argued before, see Rogerson, M & Christmann, K. (2007) Burglars or Wardrobe Monsters: Practical and Ethical Problems in the Reduction of Crime Fear, *British Journal of Community Justice*, 5, (1)

<sup>38</sup> As Ekblom argues, a group that did not intimidate would not be a gang (2006: 317)

*Young people who are territorial without there being any gang intent and I have been in Liverpool now for seven years and when I came here and people asked me to describe Liverpool I described it as a City with a village mentality and so when you speak with young people they'll say 'well we don't like them from over there' and you'll say 'why don't you like them from over there?'. 'We don't know, we just never liked them from over there' and so it's more part of that territoriality thing than because it is difficult to identify any significantly, acquisitive crime in relation to the gang. Agency worker*

These territorial mentalities could also be fuelled and exploited by others:

*There was a hierarchy in the area – one individual who had a hold on the boys. Solely responsible for fuelling the fire between the two areas but he has gone now. The area is a lot better now. Police*

Young people underlined the continued importance of locality and belonging and how transgressing those boundaries risked attack:

*Just fight, because of people are from a different area coming round trying to shoot other people and that innit.*

*Just because people just don't like where I'm from and that. Bad, yeah stabbed all over by around twenty lads. This is on me own area [laughs] they come and just look for you.*

*People get killed, some of me mates have been, on a weekend is the worst to go in our area because there's a big gang yeah? And anyone that walks in through the area that no-one knows they'll get killed.*

### **Boredom**

Both practitioners and young people themselves mentioned boredom and lack of positive activities as being responsible for leading young people to become involved in gangs. This was despite acknowledging that there was quite a lot of youth provision for activities in the city. The difficulty was believed to be with those youths who did not want to access existing provision.

Young people also spoke of using violence as a means to relieving boredom

*We would just phone a few lads up, you know, 'lets gets messy', that's all you would ever say on the phone – 'fine with getting messy your lads'? And he'd go 'well go on' and that's how you could get around it. Most of the time we were bored and we'd just 'do you want to get messy' for something to do. Then we'd go down and shoot someone's house. If we couldn't find the people we would shoot their cars.*

*Well not violence in your own area but like other gangs, like gang wars and stuff like that, that did go on, it's only because you've got nothing else better to do really isn't it?*

One young person spoke of the benefits of the provision of positive activities to counter the problem of boredom:

*You need to occupy them more like, more activities and that, the Government needs to start running the activities some more. I think if the Government paid like the Council to keep the staff on in the youth club, five days a week, it would keep a lot of people out of trouble.*

## 2.7 Summary: The Extent and Nature of Young People's Involvement with Gangs

### The Extent and Nature of Gang Involvement

This section has primarily served to highlight what for many respondents was a central issue, that the extent of gang and gun involvement in Liverpool is heavily dependent upon how one defines a gang. The evidence provided demonstrates that 'gang' activity, may not be as structured as some police and practitioners present and that named groups do not exist in the way that has been implied.

The findings indicate the existence of youth groups, who in line with currently accepted definitions of youth gangs are street based and engage in crime, anti-social behaviour and violence together. The research found evidence of rivalry between different groups and that at least some of these groups have access to and are prepared to use firearms. In terms of levels of violence experienced the findings once again fit with previous UK studies which have found that violence is an everyday part life for these young people (Bullock and Tilley, 2002; Aldridge and Medina 2007).

Current definitions point to a degree of durability and structure to groups, but are vague regarding the degree of structure that constitutes a gang. Most UK research presents a picture of gangs that are disorganised and typically have no leaders, and our findings would suggest that Liverpool is no different. Overall, respondents suggested that 'gang' activity tended to be low level, disorganised, and limited to small geographical areas. However, in Anfield, Everton and Kirkdale there is evidence of more structured groups, and local hierarchies that could be better explained as family firms rather than street gangs.

Crucially, in contrast to currently accepted definitions, the research found no evidence that Liverpool groups had a 'distinct identity' and crucially did not define themselves as a discernable 'gang.'

The issue of employing a robust and consistent definition of a street gang is of central importance to the DISARM Partnership. It is clear that any definitions employed will have a significant impact on estimates of the size and nature of the 'gang problem.'

### Risk Factors for Gang Involvement

As there have been no longitudinal studies of gang membership conducted in the UK to date, it makes any comparison with the US literature extremely difficult. Results from longitudinal studies strongly indicate that rather than a few individual risk factors impacting upon gang membership we need to understand that risk factors are cumulative. Exploring young people's motivations to join a gang assists in identifying the immediate causes and motivations pertinent to involvement in gangs.

The motivations for joining gangs cited by respondents confirm some of the wider research literature and situate gang membership in part as a dysfunctional adaptation to socio-cultural pressures, peer group influences and a number of other tangible benefits of group membership such as safety and street respect. Through the understanding and exploration of risk and motivation, practitioners can begin to focus interventions in a more meaningful way.

## 2.8 Key Findings: The Extent and Nature of Young People's Involvement with Gangs

### Gang Involvement

- Much of the pre-existing research in the UK (in contrast to the US) has been circumspect about the existence of gangs.
- Judgements of the extent of gang activity in Liverpool, as anywhere, are heavily dependent upon how one defines a gang.

- The research identified groups of young people engaged in anti-social behaviour, crime and violence. Contrary to definitions of 'gangs' these groups were loosely interlinked informal peer group networks with only moderate cohesiveness. The majority of the young people stated that there was no hierarchy or recognisable structure to their groups.
- Few of the young people interviewed in Liverpool viewed themselves as belonging to a 'gang', indeed many were scathing of such an attribution. In the light of the emphasis on self-definition in current definitions of 'gangs,' it appears that policy makers, practitioners and researchers have overused the word 'gang'.
- There was some evidence that the authorities' labelling of young people as 'gang members' and the adoption and use of gang names attributed coherence and identity to what were often only fluid and transitional youth group formations. This may have created the very circumstances it sought to challenge.
- Notwithstanding this, young people associated with these groups do engage in problematic behaviours, anti-social behaviour and crime. Several police officers noted that these groups had the opportunity to obtain firearms and a willingness to use them.
- It should be remembered that these groups also commit non-criminal behaviour and that they can easily become scapegoats for all crime and disorder problems in their locality.
- The research literature makes an important distinction between youth gangs and more organised criminal groups. This is reflected in the findings in Liverpool. A number of young people from Anfield, Everton and Kirkdale spoke of their involvement with criminal families (or 'firms') operating with a rigid structure and hierarchy, who were prominent in the supply and distribution of illegal drugs. These organised groups are distinct from those described by youths from Norris Green and Croxteth who described loosely organised informal friendship networks engaging in criminal and anti-social behaviour.

### **Risk Factors and Motivations**

- All of the evidence considered confirmed that the main risk factors for gang involvement fall into five key categories; family (parental supervision and family breakdown); neighbourhood (deprivation and disorganization); school (low educational attainment and learning commitment, and poor enforcement of rules); Individual (low intelligence and high impulsivity); and, finally, association with delinquent peers.
- Evidence from longitudinal studies suggests that risk factors are cumulative such that multiple deficits across different developmental domains can increase the probability of gang involvement. However, how these risk factors interact with each other and the impact of this requires further research.
- The need for a 'sense of belonging' was consistently identified as a motivation for association with gangs or delinquent peer groups. Other prominent motivations were peer pressure; to obtain illicit income and protection from risks and dangers.
- The closed environments that many of the young people occupied often generated a strong parochial identification, local loyalty and sense of belonging. This promoted territorial disputes between rival groups, acting as an escalator to more serious forms of crime and violence.
- The young people interviewed described violence as part of everyday life, describing their experiences as victims, witnesses and perpetrators of violence, with several expressing regret and remorse for violent acts they had committed.



## **Section 3 The Extent and Nature of Young People's Involvement with Guns in Liverpool**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This section explores the extent and nature of young people's involvement with guns across the UK and within Liverpool. It will also explore the nature of the linkage between gang membership and gun possession and gun use in later sections.

The findings in this section are supported by: an in-depth review of the research and practice literature; consideration of Liverpool firearms discharge data; analysis of the backgrounds of key gun nominals; interviews with gun and gang involved young people, as well as interviews with those practitioners who work with them.

As noted above, marked social, cultural and legal differences between the UK and USA present difficulties in translating findings from the largely US based research literature to the UK context. There are significant differences between gun crime in the US and UK including the extensive availability of legal weapons and the strongly polarised gun control debate which can influence researchers to provide evidence for their particular ideological position (Golding and McClory, 2008).

### **3.2 The Extent and Nature of Gun Crime in the UK**

Gun crime encompasses a variety of unlawful behaviours ranging from technical breaches of firearms legislation, to anti-social behaviour (air weapons offences) through to fatal shootings. This section reviews the prevalence and nature of gun crime in England and Wales. Section 3.3 examines the nature of gun crime in Liverpool and Sections 3.5 and 3.6 examine why young people carry or use these weapons. The strategies and interventions aimed to prevent the use of these weapons are explored in Section 4.4.

#### **The Availability of Evidence**

The research team's review of the literature found little research in the UK, Europe, or the US which specifically examined young peoples' involvement with guns (as Silvestri's et al, 2009 notes). This relative paucity of data needs to be born in mind throughout our review of gun crime. Where data is available, careful consideration needs to be given to the adequacy of statistics; the contexts of illegal firearm use and the array of weapons that fall under the category of guns.

#### **Core Trends and Statistics in England and Wales**

The statistical data on firearm-related offending presents a complicated picture, one which reflects the highly technical definitions of firearms and firearms 'use' within the legislation. For example, there are as many as 55 offences involving firearms that it is possible to commit even before a gun is pointed or its trigger pulled (Squires, 2008). Gun crime therefore encompasses a variety of unlawful behaviours ranging from technical breaches of firearms legislation, through anti-social behaviour (e.g. air weapons offences) to fatal shootings.

According to official figures gun crime is rare, accounting for less than 1 per cent of all recorded crime in England and Wales (Coleman et al. 2006). Overall gun-related offences have increased since the mid-1960s with a steeper climb in the late 1980s. This long upward trend peaked in 2005/06 with 11,088 offences. Since then firearm offences have decreased by more than a quarter (26%). Victims of firearms offences are disproportionately younger people. Of those offences where the age of the victim was known, 25 per cent of victims were aged 18 to 24, despite this group forming just 9 per cent of the population. Those aged 25 to 39 comprise 34 per cent of victims and 20 per cent of the population (Home Office 2009: 71). Current figures also show a substantial fall in injuries from firearms offences between 2007/08 and 2008/09. The largest reduction is to 'slight injuries' caused by imitation weapons (i.e. plastic pellets) (46%). More serious injuries showed a narrower fall, down 20 per cent from 402 to 320 (Home Office 2009).

As Squires notes (2006) this overall downward trend in diminishing relative lethality may suggest a growing reluctance of those using firearms to risk causing serious injuries or death. However, this more recent development has taken place against a backdrop where contemporary shootings have changed the 'old rules of the game'. As Golding, McClory and Lockhart (2008) argue, rather than firearms being used to facilitate a specific crime, there is a tendency for shootings to be used in a brazen manner as acts of vengeance or in response to perceived 'disrespect' (so called 'diss shootings').

The financial year 2008/09 saw a small rise in the number of offences involving handguns and shotguns. By contrast there was a marked reduction in the use of imitation weapons, with 41 per cent fewer than in 2007/08 and 55 per cent lower than the peak in 2004/05 (Home Office, 2009:71). A Youth Justice Board survey showed that of 31 per cent of respondents that admitted to carrying a knife or gun in the last year, 15 per cent reported carrying a gun containing ball bearings (BB gun) or plastic pellets, significantly less when compared to 2004 and 2005; 23 per cent reported this in 2004 and 21 per cent in 2005 (YJB, 2009:46). Additionally, a significantly lower proportion of young people admitted carrying either a real or loaded firearm, or indeed a replica firearm (3% and 2% respectively) compared to a BB gun over the same period.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Illegal Gun Stock: Its Size and Origins**

We found a lack of literature regarding the origins and supply routes of guns in the UK. The size of the illegal gun stock<sup>40</sup> is unknown with estimates varying between half a million to four million, although Squires' (2008) considers both estimates to be excessive. Indeed, he notes that there is no evidence of a 'flood' of illegal firearms entering the UK. Neither the Police Service nor HM Customs have any evidence of organised and large-scale smuggling of firearms into the UK, either through seizures made by HM Customs, or through the appearance of a large number of such guns in the conduct of crime. The Home Office Memorandum of Evidence to the Home Affairs Committee in 2000 suggested: 'The evidence now available leads the Government to reject the idea that a large number of guns are 'flooding' into the UK from abroad, and rendering our controls ineffectual (in Squires, 2008: 20). The limited research that has been conducted on firearms smuggling in the EU reinforces this conclusion. Whilst smuggling does occur, there is little evidence of it being large scale or particularly widespread (Sagramoso, 2001) although several authors note the need for further research to substantiate this finding (Sagramoso and Davis, Hirst and Mariani, 2001, in Squires, 2008:19-20).

The legislative effort in England and Wales has focused on reducing the supply of firearms, but the police have had difficulty in disrupting illegal markets that supply criminals with hand guns (Golding & McCoy, 2009). Despite the lack of reliable evidence, there is some anecdotal evidence that firearms are being supplied from 3 key sources:

- 1) Returning UK soldiers: It has been suggested that some soldiers bring 'souvenirs' home from Iraq and Afghanistan, sell confiscated weapons or even steal guns from military armouries to sell in the UK. In light of press stories and rising concerns tougher security processes were introduced to screen returning soldiers (Owen and Johnson, 2007 in Squires, 2008:19);
- 2) The Northern Irish 'peace dividend': Other anecdotal evidence points to Northern Ireland, where rather than decommissioning weapons, small arms have been returned to be sold on the streets of Liverpool and Manchester;
- 3) Eastern Europe: The lowering of trade barriers since the incorporation of Eastern European societies into the EU is seen as providing opportunities for gun trafficking, particularly given the highly militarised character of the former Soviet societies (Clements, 2007; Spapens, 2007 in Squires, 2008:19-20).

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<sup>39</sup> Although a substantial proportion of respondents who did not give an answer at this question (21%) (YJB, 2009:46)

<sup>40</sup> A distinction can be made between the criminal gun stock (those weapons currently in active criminal hands) and a 'grey pool' of unauthorised (illegal) weapons (such as wartime souvenirs, working antiques, reactivated weapons or those which have slipped outside the licensing system).

The roots through which legal firearms find their way into illegal markets are unclear. One possibility is that dishonest dealers operating in the primarily legal firearms business are a major source. This was the allegation made in 1994-95 by the then former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Paul Condon. At the time Condon asserted that dishonest dealers were responsible for up to 70 per cent of the illegal firearms recovered by police in London (Squires, 2000: 110–111) although this claim was never substantiated (Squires, 2008: 20).

Other explanations lie in the importance of theft or ‘misappropriation’ (stolen, obtained by fraud or forgery of firearms’ certificates) and the secondary market in supplying youths and criminals. This has been documented by a series of surveys of state prisoners in America. The research revealed that offenders acquired firearms both legally and illegally, but the majority were gained through theft, family and friends or the black market.<sup>41</sup> Squires notes that in the UK, between 1997 and 2007, over 29,000 firearms were recorded as misappropriated. Some 50 per cent of this stock are air weapons, with imitations the next highest category (355 in 2006–2007). Shotguns, rifles and handguns accounted, respectively, for 282, 210 and 103 of the firearms misappropriated in 2006–2007. The highest rates of misappropriation relate to firearms stolen from private homes (Kaiza, 2008, in Squires 20). It is reasonable to conclude then that these weapons can be made available to criminals, including youths.

Following interviews with imprisoned gun nominals, Hales, Lewis and Silverstone (2006) found that the biggest change to the firearms supply in the last five to ten years has been the conversion of imitation firearms, including starting pistols and blank-firing fake guns, to fire real bullets. Converted starting pistols made up 40 per cent of the live-firing guns seized by the Metropolitan Police in the 2009 (O’Neill 2009).

### 3.3 The Extent and Nature of Gun Crime in Liverpool

This section of the report will discuss the patterns and contexts of shootings in Liverpool and the nature of gun supply and circulation. The section is informed by Liverpool firearms discharge data, the perceptions of ‘gang’ and gun involved young people and those practitioners charged with addressing gun crime in Liverpool. It should be noted that whilst all practitioners were asked about the nature and prevalence of gun crime, most of the comments emanate from the police and the Matrix officers who were the most knowledgeable.

Whilst gun crime makes up only a small proportion of overall crime in Liverpool, shootings tend to have a disproportionate effect on public confidence and perceptions of safety within affected neighbourhoods. In this sense shootings can be regarded as ‘signal’ crimes (Innes, 2004) because of the message they convey about the breakdown of community in some inner city areas.

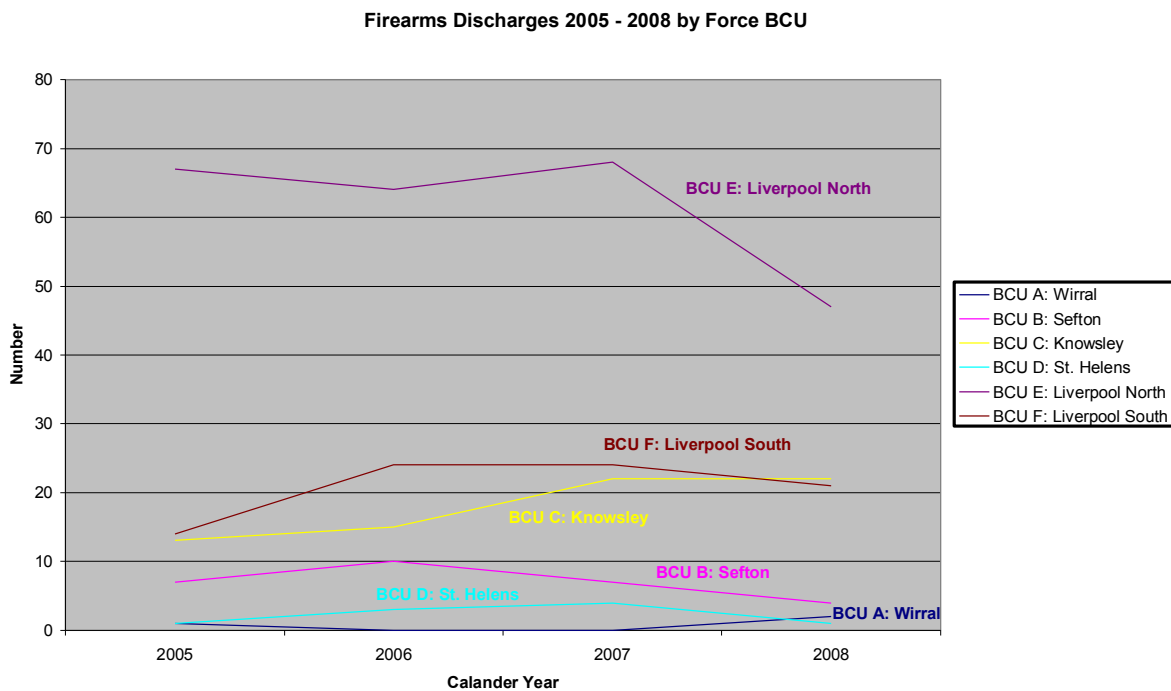
Data on firearms discharges has been supplied by the Matrix Unit and covers data sets from FIS, PNC, Altaris and Corvus. The data refer to the occurrence of actual shooting incidents rather than reported shootings. The police firearms report shows that the number of shootings taking place in the Merseyside Force area has steadily increased by a factor of eight, from a low in 1998 of 15 shootings to the peak in 2007 with 125 shootings. However, this trend was reverted in the following year 2008, which showed a 23 per cent decline in shootings to a total of 96. The Matrix analysts attributed this reduction to the police Operation Noble and the creation of the Gun Crime Co-ordination Unit.

Figure 1 (below) provides an overview of firearms discharges over the last three full calendar years 2005 to 2008. The graph places the discharges in the two Liverpool BCUs in the context of those occurring across Merseyside.

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<sup>41</sup> Wright, J. & Rossi, P. *Armed and Considered Dangerous: A Survey of Felons and their Firearms*; Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Survey of State Prison Inmates* (1993); Sheley, J. and Wright, J. (1993) *Gun Acquisition and Possession in Selected Juvenile Samples*, Research in Brief, US Department of Justice; in Golding & Mc Clory, 2009:13-14

Figure 1 Firearms Discharges in Merseyside by Basic Command Unit



The graph shows that Liverpool North and Liverpool South have the highest levels of shootings within Merseyside (from Jan 2008 to start of financial year 2009). Figure one also shows that of the six Merseyside BCUs, Liverpool North has seen the steepest decline in firearms discharges in 2008.

Geographical hotspot analysis by the Matrix analysts has identified clusters of shootings in beat E421 situated in Liverpool North BCU. There have been five shootings within this beat, two of which targeted the same address, with the second shooting occurring within a few weeks of the first. A second hotspot is in beat E522 and its neighbouring beat E511, with research and Police intelligence indicating that two of these shootings are linked to the same offender. A further hotspot is in beat E621 where four discharges have occurred.

### Chaotic and Organised Shootings

The Merseyside Gun Crime Strategy makes a distinction between two types of firearms offenders, namely ‘Chaotic’ users, and ‘Organised’ users (in addition to ‘domestic users’ and ‘other’ category). ‘Chaotic’ users are associated with gang activity or gun cultures amongst young people, whereas ‘Organised’ users are linked to a more formal criminal infrastructures centred around criminal markets.

The Matrix report links ‘organised’ firearms discharges to the supply and distribution of Class A drugs due to the co-instances of near repeat shootings with the locations of drug seizures in these beats (although curiously the seizures appear mainly for cannabis). For instance, shootings and drugs recovered on arrests were co-located within Liverpool South BCU (F2 neighbourhood) and Liverpool North BCU (E2 and E4 neighbourhoods) with cannabis again being the most prevalent substance.<sup>42</sup> This picture is also borne out by findings from one of the most extensive research studies of gun crime in the UK (Hales et al., 2006) who concluded that ‘illegal drugs markets represent the single most important theme in relation to the use of illegal firearms’ (Page 65) with the level of violence appearing to increase towards the street, or retail, end of the market.

<sup>42</sup> Davidson, M., Andrew, L. (2009). Problem Profiles - Firearms Discharges across Liverpool and Knowsley. Liverpool, Matrix Gun Crime Co-ordination Unit.

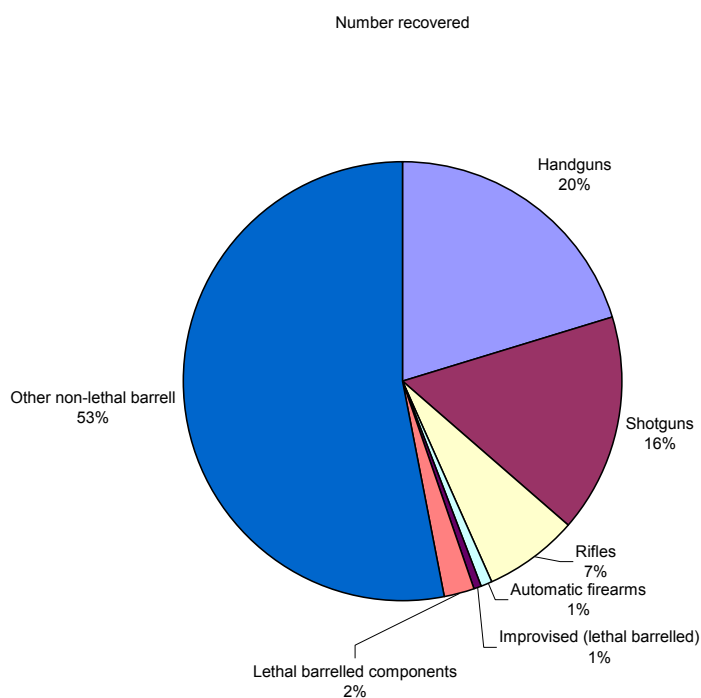
Around 43 per cent of Merseyside shootings (from 4/2008 to 3/2009) were ascribed to chaotic users. Of these cases, only one was a BB gun weapon, with the remainder involving the firing of shotguns (n=13), hand guns or 9mm weapons (n=12) and a further two being automatic weapons (4 were unknown). If correct in their group assignment, these figures indicate that these shootings are associated with youth gang members and young people. There are also instances of near repeat spatial patterns in firearms use ascribed to chaotic users in both the Liverpool South and Liverpool North BCUs. Explanations for this pattern of target selection may include retaliation, coercion, intimidation or escalation of a dispute. Alternatively it may be that gun nominals who are gang members might have also links to more organised criminal groups.

### Gun Circulation

The size of the illegal firearms stock in Merseyside is unknown. A total of 397 firearms were been recovered by Merseyside Police between June 2006 and May 2008 ,with 186 (47%) of these classified as having a lethal barrel. Whilst it is not clear from the Matrix Gun Crime report the exact status of the remaining recovered weapons, it is likely that they are non-lethal or unorthodox firearm types (e.g. BB guns and air weapons). No information is available on the origins of the weapons or supply routes into Merseyside.

Figure 2 below categorises all these weapons used in shootings and recovered. Of the lethal barrelled weapons, hand guns and shotguns figure most prominently, making up some 36% of all recovered weapons.

Figure 2 Types of Weapon Used in Firearm Discharges in Merseyside



It should be noted that only four per cent of shootings in Liverpool resulted in a fatality. A much higher proportion, 37 per cent resulted in an injury, although the severity of these injuries are unknown. This precludes comparison with national figures which show that serious or fatal injury accounted for 3 per cent of all firearm crimes in 2006/07 (including air weapons).

A senior Matrix officer thought that firearms were not as readily available as some commentators and the media implied. This contrasted to Manchester research which found access to firearms ‘common’ among the six gangs that were studied. One explanation for the scarcity of carrying (rather than supply) was thought to be due to the Police’s use of Section 30 and 60 legislation which was seen as suppressing gun carrying and use due to the heightened risk of detection:

*I don't think that any kids or young adults walking round out there with guns in the street, simply because ... the police have got section 30s and section 60s all over the place, so they can just turn up, stop me in the street and say 'Right, what's in your pockets, what's in your waistband' and ... most of them are hidden – most of the guns are hidden.*  
Journalist

Young people appeared to concur with the view that the use of guns across Liverpool had decreased and that this was related to key gang members being jailed as well as the increased risk of being caught in possession of a gun, given the level of police activity within key local areas.

*It was a lot worse before that happened [Liam Smith shooting], in 2003 when everyone was out it was well worse, it was really, really bad. I don't think people realised how bad it was, people think you're lying.*

*Because back then it was no-one cared really know what I mean? So it was just people were going around selling guns and police couldn't really get on to them, back then everyone was getting shot, police were more like ... knowing it was guns so they were going around looking for the guns, and the guns everyone's going around carrying knives now.*

When gun involved young people were asked about the cost of guns, the answers given varied considerably. Answers ranged from £50 to £1500. This could be that the young people were talking about different types of guns, that they are charged different prices given their status within the gang, or that they had not actually bought a gun and were estimating the cost. However many highlighted that they would never actually buy a gun, the gun would be available to anyone within the gang to use and then return:

*We didn't ever buy guns, we got given to us by older groups, we never bought guns we just got them.*

*Yeah. We just had them [guns] like just sitting there, just there if we ever needed it, just there, didn't have to go out the way it was just there for us, or if we needed more than one we'd have to go and get another one. You'd just lend them off people and then they, that person who I lent it off he'd just say "keep hold of it and when I need it I'll phone you, but if you need it just use it" so it was just there and he said "if you need any more just phone me" so I had that till I got locked up and then I gave it back to him.*

*If you would need a gun and as one of the boys then you can get one, you know what I mean? We've got guns anyway, we've had, we've had guns for years. Older boys who've passed down, you know what I mean, who've used them and things and then wanna get rid of them we always grab them, know what I mean? And we've got them there so, if anything happened then we've got tools, everyone's got guns.*

In a similar vein the young people also spoke about how they would very rarely carry a gun in public. The interviews suggest that guns would be stored in places where they could be accessed as when needed thereby avoiding the risk of being caught in possession of a gun. With the exception of one young person who talked about 'burying the guns in a field' they were not explicit regarding the location of their guns. They spoke of 'stashers' and 'local places', but not specific locations.

*Shotties and that. Just have them, don't carry them. Just in case anyone starts shit you know?*

*There's different locations in the area where we have things stashed like guns, knives, bats, weapons, like, in case you need them, in case anyone comes for you.*

*People like are, people are aware, like in my area people are aware that if you get caught with a gun then it's just, you know, it's definitely jail, you're not getting bail, as soon as you caught with a gun you're going straight to jail, you're not getting away with it. So we have them like, they're like stashed and that, know what I mean like.*

Journalists at the Liverpool Echo thought that guns were given either to addicts or other vulnerable people to hide, either in return for drugs or to be left alone. This reduced the owner's likelihood of being caught with the weapon although it would generally be kept within easy reach. The above findings are in line with Hales, Lewis and Sliverston's (2006) discovery that rather than keep guns in their possession, offenders kept them at home, buried or with other people tasked or paid to look after the gun, with girlfriends featuring highly in this role.

### **Areas for Further Investigation**

There is still much that we do not know about gun crime, especially concerning weapons and the profile of offenders, and much official data suffers limitations and inconsistencies which somewhat undermines its utility (Hales, 2006).

Useful analysis would include charting changes in Liverpool gun crime as a proportion of total Liverpool crime, and similarly charting the number of gun crime nominals as a proportion of known offenders operating in the area. In addition, understanding the approximate ratio of the number of gun nominals per firearms would help to better interpret changes in the availability of firearms. For example a decline in available firearms may have less of an impact if there is an increase in the number of offenders sharing each weapon.

Victims of shootings provide another potential source of information in explaining shootings. The Matrix research had identified 44 victims (where an injury occurred as a result of a shooting across the force). However, no details are available on any possible gang membership or affiliations with regards to these victims or their assailants.

## **3.4 The Impact of Media Reporting on Gun Crime**

A small number of practitioners (n=5) were asked to comment on the impact of media reporting of high profile cases involving firearms in Liverpool on affected communities.

One police officer thought that it had the effect of 'amplifying the problem', certainly in the immediate locality or estate. However, another officer reported positive results in getting members of the local community who had witnessed crimes to cooperate.

Several respondents were critical of the media coverage of cases such as the Rhys Jones murder, but made a distinction between the national press coverage and the local press who were seen as more balanced:

*I think that we do quite well with that especially with the local paper the Echo because our successes go in. It's when it hits the national paper, because they don't want to know about that, and the local media are against the national media because what will happen is that they will come in for a couple of days when suddenly there is a murder, then they're back in their van after a couple of days and they're not worried what they have left because they're not going to come back for any period of time. Police*

Other local journalists cast doubt on the accuracy of some national media reporting of gang and gun involvement, both in exaggerating the prevalence of 'active' gang members and the availability of guns in the city. One local reporter described his paper's reaction to a Panorama programme that had paid young people to feign gang type behaviours. Their own investigation had also thrown doubt on whether a gun had been present:

*And we got quite sort of uppity about that as a newspaper 'cos our investigations suggested there was no gun, you know that it was somebody trying to talk (indistinct) and the BBC had come up to make a show and there was certainly evidence that we uncovered of money changing hands in return, you know for sort of 'gang' behaviour – all that sort of stuff – so there's a huge degree of bravado on the streets, probably still – notoriety that's welcomed again by kids seeking the status or attention. Journalist*

Several other practitioners recounted how the national media had paid local youths to pose as gang members, reflected in the comments of a Youth Services worker:

*When the media had a big thing with Croxteth, the media were actually paying young people to put their hoods up and the media gave young people scarves and said wrap that around you and they were giving them £10 to pose, so what does that say one, about our media and two, the morality of our media? That's the message young people will pick up on even though it is subtle. Youth Services*

The result of this media attention in publicising gang and gun activity (whether real or not) is to exaggerate the extent and prevalence of gang activity. Another practitioner thought that this media attention had led to an 'aspirational' culture:

*After Smith's murder things became aspirational for some people to be part of this fantastical thing which is the gang. You look at the social demographics of both areas, the lack of positive male role models, the archetypal .. the gang replaces the family, the gang to be looked up at and to be part of. I would say before Liam Smith there was none of that aspirational stuff. Local resident*

Ekblom (2006) argues that the media, in signalling the existence of gangs to young people and the wider public, including practitioners, link these signals to the nastiest possible image of the gang. This news agenda was highlighted by one seasoned practitioner:

*Without being cynical they [the media] seem to like to focus on the negatives, tragedy sells doesn't it. Police*

This inadvertently assists the intimidation process, often mixing myth with reality, compounding how gang members behave and drawing reactions from those young people around them. Thus the media can inadvertently play a central role in the growth and persistence of juvenile street gangs.

### **Summary: The Extent and Nature of Gun Crime in Liverpool**

This section has drawn together evidence from police data and the perceptions of practitioners and gun involved young people to understand the profile of gun crime in Liverpool.

In line with the national picture, following a long upward trend between 1998 and 2007, shootings in Liverpool declined by 23 per cent in 2008. The decline has been steepest in the Liverpool North BCU; this is attributed to proactive police enforcement tactics deterring gun possession and use. Related to this, the research findings suggest that gun availability in Liverpool has reduced, in contrast to cities such as Manchester. It was reported that guns are 'stashed' or 'stored' rather than kept in possession.

The research literature, firearms discharge data and interview data all provide evidence of the use of firearms by both 'chaotic' users and more 'organised' users with the latter associated with drugs markets. Interviews with practitioners and young people provide evidence of gun use to support gang feuding, recriminations and to gain respect amongst peers.



### 3.5 Factors Influencing Involvement with Illegal firearms: The Research Evidence

Five aspects that have been highlighted in recent debate and gun crime are: the relationship between multiple deprivation high crime and violence, the relationship between 'gun crime' and illegal drugs; the relationship between 'gun crime' and gangs; the existence or otherwise of a 'gun culture'; and masculinity as a risk factor in explaining the carrying and use of guns. These explanations are explored in turn below.

#### Deprivation

The brief socio-economic pen pictures of our field work areas in Liverpool demonstrate that all the areas suffer high levels of multiple deprivation. Whilst the relationship between neighbourhood context and crime is incredibly complex, research consistently shows that high rates of crime and violence mostly affect disadvantaged areas. Violence within deprived areas has been found to be a complex product of the way opportunities and lives are shaped for people living there, and the way that people respond to their situation and to their environment. This is because violence often causes both fear and stress, and repeated exposure to violence (as a victim or a witness) can make people more predisposed to commit violence themselves and to carrying weapons (Silvestri et al. 2009).

The broad thrust of the research evidence, whilst limited, is that where young people live seems to affect whether they get involved in crime, and whether (or how difficult) it is to stop. Findings from research in the USA have shown that young people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are more likely to carry firearms illegally and those who had been exposed to violence were more likely to commit violence themselves (Lieberman 2007). One explanation for this is when neighbourhoods are threatening, weapon carrying may make young people feel safer. However, the presence of weapons may escalate conflicts and increase the likelihood of (serious) injuries. These themes are developed in our review of the research literature below.

#### Gun Crime and Illegal Drug Markets

There is strong evidence of a link between firearm-related offending and the trade in illegal drugs; and the research evidence also provides some possible explanations for the link. One of the most extensive research studies of gun crime in the UK involving detailed interviews with 80 convicted firearm offenders concluded that 'illegal drugs markets represent the single most important theme in relation to the use of illegal firearms' (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006: 65). The authors found that the level of violence appeared to increase towards the street end of the market, with firearms being employed for robbery of drug dealers; territorial disputes; protection; and sanctioning (i.e. recovery of debts, for 'putting a dealer's name about' and for selling 'dud' drugs) (ibid: 65–72). As Squires notes, (2007) the reason for this relationship was seen as the lack of conventional 'risk management strategies' such as legally enforceable contracts, calling the police or purchasing insurance (ibid: 65); these findings present three main challenges for policy makers:

- Drug dealing underpins the criminal economy, and is 'out-competing' the legitimate labour market alternatives for some young people, especially those in more structurally marginalised positions.
- The lack of alternative legal solutions means that firearms offer ultimate levels of both protection and empowerment.
- Police intervention in drug markets can destabilise them, breaking down relationships, and so making markets more violent (Squires, 2007:29).

#### Gun Culture

The notion of a 'gun culture' has been used by commentators in the media and politicians as one among many background factors that drive 'gun crime' (Squires, 2000; Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006). 'Gun culture' is a vague, ill defined concept, but usually refers to musical genres ('gangsta rap'), fashion and popular 'unsuitable' role models which are seen as glamorising gun crime and consequently directing young

people in terms of 'lifestyles choices'. Squires' (2007) discusses two 'general categories' or strands of this culture:

1. *Instrumental criminal gun culture*: here guns are used for offensive criminal purposes (i.e. armed robbery) and situated within a complex criminal gun culture in which the role of firearms is more generalised, including offensive, defensive and symbolic functionality.
2. *Complex criminal gun culture*: this describes a more recent changing criminal culture, one 'increasingly significant', and 'underpinned by three consistent themes: 'the ascendancy of criminal role models, the market in illegal drugs and cultures of gang membership' (ibid), thus reinforcing the interrelationship between drugs, gangs and firearms crime. Notions of 'street credibility' and 'respect' are critical (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006, in Squires, 2007 in Squires, 2007:32).

Hales, Lewis and Silverstone also found that the proceeds from a sample of offenders who had conducted street robberies had not been used to 'sustain the offenders' lives, but rather 'to maintain a particular sort of hedonistic lifestyle that rejects 'rationality and long-range planning... in favour of enjoying the moment'. (Wright, Brookman and Bennett, 2006, in Squires, 2007:33).

However, the authors concluded that instrumental motivations were far more significant than symbolic explanations:

*'On balance, while music... does provide an important cultural reference point for the majority of offenders interviewed, be they Black, White or Asian, its relationship to crime and violence remains unclear and appears peripheral. It seems likely that if anything the most significant factor is the aspirational lifestyle portrayed by some sections of the music industry, rather than the specific lyrics of any particular artist or genre.'* (Wright, Brookman and Bennett, 2006, in Squires, 2007:33).

The thrust of Hales, Lewis and Silverstone's work is that any unified notion of a 'gun culture' is too simplistic to adequately explain the complex phenomenon of possessing and using illegal firearms. As the authors note, it would be 'more useful to describe a plurality of gun cultures' that influence gun crime among young people, (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006: 103) to which their work goes some way to develop.

Nevertheless, the authors argue that particular criminal cultures have indeed changed in recent times, and are now 'characterised by an escalation of violence and the diffusion of firearms down to younger offenders who are reported as being less restrained in their use of such weapons' (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006, in Squires, 2007:33).

## **Masculinity**

Research by Whitehead (2005) has indicated that violence and the threat of violence by and between young men is shaped significantly by a drive to demonstrate manhood. This research is supported by the work of Anderson (1998 and 1999) who is concerned with lethal violence between young black men in poor neighbourhoods in the USA. Both Whitehead (2005) and Anderson (1998 and 1999) found that heightened fears of confrontation with other young men, combined with low social status, much time spent on the streets, and limited opportunities to demonstrate manhood legitimately are significant risk factors in young men engaging in violence and the threat of violence, particularly to other young men. A young man's insecurity in his identity has the potential to cause him to work harder at asserting his masculinity in relation to other young men, thus exacerbating their own insecurity in turn. Anderson (1999) illustrates how such dynamics may lead to acts of violence, which may become fatal where weapons (especially guns) are involved.

## **Guns and Gang Membership**

Research has been carried out to test these models and Bjerregaard and Lizotte (1995) who used data from the US Rochester Longitudinal study to examine the impact of gang membership on patterns of gun ownership. The study focused on males aged 16 to 18 and distinguished between the ownership of guns for

sporting purposes and for protection or illegal purposes. They found that prior to joining a gang, gang members do not have significantly higher rates of 'protection gun ownership' than non-members, nor are they more likely to engage in gun delinquency. Once in a gang, however, the rates of these two behaviours increase, only to fall after they leave the gang. For example, 30.9 per cent of current gang members own a gun for protection as compared to 23.1 per cent of future members and 13.2 per cent of past members. Furthermore, there is a substantial increase in gun ownership during the period of membership.

Several UK studies examine the relationship between gang members and gun use. Work undertaken by the Jill Dando Institute found that gang members were five times as likely as non-gang members to report owning a gun (in Squires, 2007:21, 79). Supporting this finding, a 'Communities that Care' report showed that London students claiming to be gang-involved were nearly seven times more likely to have carried a gun in the past year than students claiming not to be involved with a gang (Marshall, Webb and Tilley, 2005: 17).

These findings were further substantiated by Bennett and Holloway's study (2004, in Squires, 2007). Some two-thirds of gang members were found to have taken a gun to commit an offence and over half claimed they had owned a gun. Furthermore, a third of gang members said they had fired a gun (Bennett and Holloway, 2004, in Squires, 2007:30-31).

Squires (2007, 2008a) argues that one consequence of police enforcement activities in targeting key gang members is to have established a further form of firearm displacement, whereupon 'younger gang conscripts' become 'gun minders' where they are required to transport drugs or conceal weapons for older gang members (Squires, 2007:30). For reasons of security and anonymity they are unknown to the police, and are often below an age where a mandatory sentence would apply; a finding which our data partly substantiates.

In summary, research evidence supports the link between gang and involvement and gun crime and highlights the dependency of drug markets on firearms. The research provides little support for the notion of a 'gun culture' or the influence of popular culture on illegal gun use.

### **3.6 Factors Influencing Involvement with Illegal Firearms: Evidence from Liverpool**

The following section examines the apparent risk factors influencing involvement in illegal firearms in Liverpool. The findings are based on data extracted from Probation databases on the backgrounds of gun crime nominals.

The gun crimes nominals database contained a number of variables which allowed for the exploration of risk factors of involvement with illegal firearms. The database contained variables which shed light on family background, education and individual factors including mental health and drug use. The data did not contain any variables relating to neighbourhood and community factors or to socio-economic status. The analysis below is therefore restricted to the risk factor categories for which data was available.

The database contained details of 26 individuals, all of whom were male. At the time of data collection the nominals ranged from 17 to 32 years of age with a mean age of 22; 8 nominals were 18 or younger. The index offence recorded the most recent offence committed by each nominal. The most frequent index offences were possession of drugs (5 nominals, 20%), and burglary (also 5 individuals, 20%). Four nominals (15%) had index offences for firearms offences (three for possession and one for possession and firing). Other index offences included assault, criminal damage, robbery, and one of murder (a shooting). Nine of (35%) the offenders are Prolific and other Priority Offenders (PPOs).

## **Risk Factors: Evidence from Liverpool**

### ***Family Background***

The gun nominals database provides information on a number of family related risk factors including: growing up in a single parent family, being known to social services, growing up in care, being a victim or a witness to physical abuse in the home and the involvement of family members or peers in criminal activity.

Eighteen (69%) of the nominals exhibited at least one family based risk factor. Half of the offenders (13) exhibited only one of these risk factors, four offenders exhibited a combination of two and a further four exhibited a combination of three or more risk factors. Nine (35%) nominals grew up in a single parent family, three grew up in care (12%) and four were known to social services (15%). Six of the nominals had been a victim of abuse, or had witnessed abuse within the family. Family members of fifteen of the nominals (57%) were known to be involved in criminal activity.

### ***Academic achievement and school behaviour***

The database contained three variables relating to educational attainment and behaviour at school these were low level of educational attainment, unauthorised absences from school and exclusion from school. The majority of nominals (20, 77%) exhibited at least one of these risk factors. These risk factors are known to be closely related and therefore it is not surprising that a total of twelve (46%) exhibited all three of these risk factors. The data suggests that 18 (69%) of the nominals had a low level of educational attainment, leading to a low level of or no qualifications. Fifteen (58%) of the sample were known to truant from school and similarly 15 had been excluded from school.

All of the nominals for which data was available (21) were unemployed.

### ***Drug and alcohol use***

The majority of nominals (21, 81%) were known to have a problem with alcohol or drugs; 16 (62%) were known to have a drug problem, 2 (8%) were known to have an alcohol problem and 3 (12%) had a problem with both drugs and alcohol. A total of six nominals (23%) were recorded as being drug addicts. Four offenders (15%) were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of their index offence. Three were under the influence of alcohol, one under the influence of drugs and the remaining one offender was under the influence of both. The majority of nominals were using cannabis (17, 65%), offenders were also using cocaine (3 nominals), crack cocaine (3), ecstasy (2) and heroine (1).

### ***Mental Health***

Of the 26 offenders, 9 (35%) have been assessed as having mental health problems. These included anxiety, depression, emotional instability, borderline personality disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, paranoia and schizophrenia. Three of the nominals have been identified as self-harming, and four have at one time been suicidal.

### ***Combined Risk Factors***

The sections above have highlighted a high level of distinct risk factors exhibited by the gun crime nominals. The analysis also revealed that the majority of offenders possessed a combination of different risk factor types. There were only two nominals for whom no information on these risk factors has been recorded. Four nominals (15%) exhibited risk factors from just one category of risk and three nominals exhibited risks factors from two. The analysis revealed that nine nominals showed risk factors across three categories. Finally the majority of nominals, eight, exhibited the full range of risk factors for which data was available.

## **Motivations influencing involvement with illegal firearms**

As with gang involvement, factors influencing involvement with illegal firearms include remote causes and more immediate motivations. In common with motivations for gang involvement the research identified the influence of peers and in particular the desire to gain respect from friends as key motivations.

### **Respect and Power**

One senior police officer speculated that shootings by chaotic users might be explained by their desire to establish a tough reputation with their peers:

*What would be really interesting for me is that motivation question even if they are saying 'we don't know why we do it'. To me that's indicative of the peer pressure we don't know why we do it. I wonder sometimes whether there is that amongst people wanted to be accepted amongst their group of people. You get 'if I go and fire that gun then everybody thinks I'm a hero'. You look at most of our nominals and they're all around 18/19/20 age group not graduated to the Tier 2 of crime still wannabes and easy to make a name for yourself by shooting a gun. Matrix*

In a similar vein, several gun involved young people spoke of the sense of power that is derived from carrying a gun:

*When you shoot someone you get a lot of gang members, fear, that's fear and that's the best feeling ever because you feel invincible, you feel no-one can touch you while you've got that on you.*

*The best thing ever is having a gun there's no drug that can ever... If you're running around with a shottie there's people crying here, there's nothing like it in your life, there's no drug like it ever.*

### **Disputes and Conflict**

Shootings were commonly associated with disputes and conflicts, a dispute may simply escalate and a firearm discharged as a 'warning' signal, without intent to shoot or harm. As one reporter noted a typical modus operandi of firearms discharges was two youths on a cycle:

*[...] one on the back will fire a couple of shots up in the air and they'll tear out again. Journalist*

However a senior Matrix officer thought that interpersonal conflicts and feuds were insufficient to explain the resort to deadly force, but recognised that as yet there was insufficient information to explain why firearms discharges were occurring:

*If you go through the 21 discharges this financial year it's too simple to say the motive is feud because every time a gun's fired it's because they've had an argument of some kind, but why have they fired a gun? And that is why we're fire fighting and until we get to a point where down to 50 discharges a year which will give us one or two a month which would give us time to get into the problem and investigate the problem. Matrix*

This officer's observation contrasts with recent work on gangs in Manchester. Whilst one has to be careful in making comparisons between very different urban environments, the research in Manchester found that violence was most likely to be triggered by disputes over friends, family and romantic relationships, rather than turf wars over drug markets. Furthermore, these disputes often took place within gangs rather than between them (Aldridge et al, 2009).

### 3.7 Summary: The Extent and Nature of Young People's Involvement with Gun Crime

This section has drawn together evidence from police data and the perceptions of practitioners and gun involved young people to understand the profile of gun crime in Liverpool.

In line with the national picture, following a long upward trend between 1998 and 2007, shootings in Liverpool declined by 23 per cent in 2008. The decline has been steepest in the Liverpool North BCU; this is attributed to proactive police enforcement tactics deterring gun possession and use. Related to this, the research findings suggest that gun availability in Liverpool has reduced, in contrast to cities such as Manchester. It was reported that guns are 'stashed' or 'stored' rather than kept in possession.

The research literature, firearms discharge data and interview data all provide evidence of the use of firearms by both 'chaotic' users and more 'organised' users with the latter associated with drugs markets. Interviews with practitioners and young people provide evidence of gun use to support gang feuding, recriminations and to gain 'respect' amongst peers.

This section has analysed data recorded by the police and probation service relating to 26 gun crime nominals operating in North Liverpool. The analysis has confirmed that the majority of nominals exhibit several of the risk factors identified in the research literature and interviews with practitioners.

### 3.8 Key Findings: The Extent and Nature of Young People's Involvement with Guns

#### Gun Crime in Liverpool

- In line with the national picture, following a long upward trend between 1998 and 2007, shootings in Liverpool declined by 23 per cent in 2008. The decline has been steepest in the Liverpool North BCU.
- The research findings suggest that gun availability in Liverpool has reduced.
- Practitioners and gun involved young people indicated that proactive police enforcement tactics were successfully deterring gun possession and use in Liverpool.
- There is limited information on the origin and supply of firearms. However, there is anecdotal evidence that firearms are being supplied from three key sources; returning UK soldiers, from the decommissioning of weapons in Northern Ireland, and from Eastern European states.
- Other explanations for how young people obtain firearms include from family, friends, theft, the black market or 'misappropriation'.
- Young people confirmed that they had access to guns, although the types of firearm involved were not specified. Respondents spoke of firearms being 'passed down' or borrowed rather than bought, thereby increasing their availability. Prices of guns were said to range from £50 to £1500.
- It was reported that guns are 'stashed' or 'stored' rather than kept in personal possession, thereby reducing the risk of apprehension. Nationally the victims of firearms offences are disproportionately young people, no information is available on the victims of gun crime in Liverpool.
- The research literature, firearms discharge data and interview data all provide evidence of both firearms use by 'chaotic' users and more organised users associated with drugs markets.
- Interviews with practitioners and young people provide evidence of gun use to support apparent 'gang' feuding and recriminations, and to gain 'respect' amongst peers.

## Risk Factors

- Young people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are more likely to carry firearms illegally and those who had been exposed to violence are more likely to commit violence themselves. One explanation for this is when neighbourhoods feel threatening, weapon carrying may make young people feel safer
- Research shows that youths who join gangs are more likely to become involved in delinquency and crime, particularly serious and violent offences compared to non-gang youth and non-gang delinquent youth.
- There is strong evidence of a link between firearm-related offending and the trade in illegal drugs both in the UK generally and in Liverpool specifically. Drug dealing underpins the criminal economy, and is 'out-competing' the legitimate labour market alternatives for some young people, especially those in more structurally marginalised positions.
- The notion of a 'gun culture' is too simplistic to adequately explain why young people carry and use guns as it fails to explain both the symbolic and instrumental motivations for the user.
- Violence and the threat of violence by and between young men are shaped significantly by a drive to demonstrate manhood. Limited opportunities to demonstrate manhood legitimately are significant risk factors in young men engaging in violence particularly with other young men.
- Family background and parenting figured highly as risk factors to gang and weapon involvement (22 out of 26); Neighbourhood and community factors were mentioned by 16 out of 26; 'Academic and school factors' was cited by 14 out of 26 'Family background and parenting' was mentioned by 13 out of 26, and 'Individual level' factors was thought to be least influential for gang and gun involvement (10 out of 26).
- The combined evidence shows that fear, insecurity, and victimisation play the most significant role in a young person's decision to carry a weapon. Very few young people report carrying a weapon with the proactive intent of using it against others, rather protection appears to be the key motivation.

## Section 4 Intervening in Gangs and Guns: Which interventions look promising?

This section examines strategies and interventions designed to prevent the gang involvement and illegal use of firearms.

Our review of the literature uncovered a number of thorough reviews of research, policy and preventative practice in 'gun crime' in the UK, notably; Squires' (2008); including international research (Silvestri, et al., 2007; 2009) in addition to Golding & McCoy's (2008) review which also included original research amongst practitioners and young people. Our review draws heavily upon these comprehensive studies.

### 4.1 The Response to Gangs: Models of Gang Intervention

There have been relatively few attempts to offer formalised and structured responses to gangs in the UK (Hanley, 2009) with the majority of interventions having been conducted in the US. Approaches range from those that address individual risk and protective factors or cognitive mechanisms to those that address wider social and neighbourhood risk factors drawing upon social disorganisation and social control theories. We review the main approaches to gangs below.

Following an assessment of US youth gang problems in America, funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Spergel (undated) identified the main strategies adopted by communities and organisations in response to gang problems. Spergel developed a typology which is often referred to as the 'Comprehensive Gang Model'. The Model outlines five strands of strategy that are 'commonly used in community responses to gang problems' (Howell, 2009). All of these strands should be incorporated into programs in order to achieve the best outcomes. The five strategies are; i) suppression; ii) social intervention; iii) social opportunities; iv) community mobilisation, and; v) organisational change (Decker and van Winkle, 1996). Cahill et al (2008:11) also propose a multi-faceted and multi-agency approach arguing that, 'Addressing the needs of individual youth necessarily entails making changes in the families, organisations, and communities around them'.

Each of the five components of the Comprehensive Gang Model will be discussed in turn.

#### 1. Suppression (Catch and Convict)

A strategy involving suppression tactics is one that relies on law enforcement and criminal justice interventions, (e.g. arrest, prosecution and imprisonment) (Decker and Curry, 2000). 'Suppression' aligns with the 'catch and convict' strand of the UK Prolific and Other Priority Offenders Strategy.

Thurman et al (1996: 280) suggest that 'suppression has been the favoured law enforcement approach' and outline the main objectives of this approach. They suggest that the three main objectives of suppression are; (a) to arrest and then incapacitate gang members, thus making the streets safer for the larger community; (b) to familiarise police officers with individual gang members and keep them under surveillance; and (c) to deter fringe members from engaging in gang activities (Thurman et al, 1996: 280).

While acknowledging the importance of employing suppression tactics in addressing the immediate consequences of gangs and gang related violence, Egley et al (2006:41) emphasise that enforcement in isolation is not a sufficient strategy. Suppression tactics can only address proximate causes and consequences of gangs, and have little effect on the fundamental underlying circumstances of gangs. Klein (1995) also appears sceptical of purely suppressive approaches (cited in Decker and van Winkle, 1996). From observing the formation of 'specialised police gang squads' (Decker and van Winkle, 1996: 277), Klein concluded that such squads are unlikely to impact upon the success of apprehending gang members.

Decker and van Winkle (ibid) also warn of the 'latent negative consequence of 'creating' a larger gang problem through over identification and conferring increased status to gang members among their peers'. Huff (1990) also raised concerns regarding labelling, suggesting those on the periphery of a gang may become formally affiliated to that gang, once that gang is targeted by the police. As a consequence, they



may engage in gang related activities on a more regular basis (cited in Thurman et al (1996). Bullock and Tilley (2008) suggest that adopting a suppressive approach to tackling gangs and gang violence is seen as the predominant and favoured response to tackling gang-related violence and recommend that a more preventative approach should be adopted.

## **2. Social Intervention – (Rehabilitate and Resettle)**

Social intervention involves traditional social work techniques (Thurman et al, 1996) and is based upon attempting to redirect young people from gangs into legitimate groups, clubs and activities (Spergel and Curry, 1993). ‘Social intervention’ has parallels with the Rehabilitate and Resettle strand of the PPO strategy.

Decker and van Winkle (1993) suggest that social intervention strategies are a form of crisis intervention for young people and their families. These strategies are therefore triggered once a problem has occurred and a response is required. Examples of social intervention organisations include; youth-servicing agencies, grassroot groups, faith organisations, mentoring programmes, activity centres and drug treatment programs (Spergel and Curry 1993; Howell, 2009). As Howell (2009: 158) states, social intervention is about ‘reaching out to the gang-involved youth and their families, linking them with the conventional world and needed services’. This is reiterated by Stinchcomb (2002:29) who says ‘preventative efforts must provide opportunities for involvement in conventional activities and interaction with conventional others’. To ensure that an appropriate intervention is provided it is important that families become involved in the provision of a social intervention strategy (Decker and Curry 2000a).

## **3. Social Opportunities – (Prevent and Deter)**

The ‘social opportunity’ strand of the Spergel model attempts to address the more well-established risk factors (outlined above), such as lack of education and unemployment, which can lead a young person to partake in gang activities. ‘Social opportunities’ overlaps with the ‘Prevent and Deter’ strand of the UK PPO strategy. It involves providing young people with a more long term focus that helps them to legitimately achieve a sense of fulfilment in their lives. Examples of social opportunities include training, education and employment programs (Decker and van Winkle, 1996) job preparation, job placement and tutoring (Spergel and Curry, 1993). The aim of providing a community with social opportunities is to ‘...attempt to reshape values, peer commitments, and institutional participation’ (Decker and van Winkle, 1996: 279).

## **4. Community Mobilization**

Howell (2009) argues that community mobilization is imperative when attempting to curtail the violent behaviour displayed by gangs. Decker and van Winkle (1996) suggest that mobilizing the community involves ensuring that there is an integrated and co-ordinated response of existing services and interventions available for young people. They found that cities attempt to respond to gangs by providing a range of services. However, they argue that ‘...it is rarely the case that such services are integrated or offered in ways that would prove effective in serving the needs of gang members’ (pg. 278).

It is therefore important that not only a local assessment of the ‘actual’ gang problem is undertaken, it is also important to conduct an assessment of the range of services and interventions that currently exist. Once the levels of provision are known, it is then important to ensure that this is co-ordinated (Decker and van Winkle, 1996; Howell, 2009). There may be a spectrum of individuals or organisations within the community that attempt to provide some form of intervention for young gang members within their local community. Pitts (2008:127) describes the community mobilization section of the Comprehensive Gang Model as local citizens and organisations being ‘...involved in a common enterprise...working as a team to understand the gang structures and provide social intervention and social opportunities whenever they can’.

## **5. Organisational Change**

Organisational change requires collaboration across a range of key organisations allowing them to develop a common set of objectives, policies and procedures that allow the most effective use of resources and communication (Spergel and Grossman, 1997). Pitts (2008:126) argues that,

*all workers need to work closely with one another and collaborate....all relevant agencies and organisations should be aware of the conditions that foster violent youth gangs, the far-reaching effects of gangs and the agencies responsibilities under Section 17 (Community Safety) of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998).*

Decker and van Winkle (1996) appreciate that organisational change alone cannot attempt to solve gang problems but stress it is an essential component. This section of the Model is about raising the awareness of local gang problems to local organisations and agencies and making attempts to try and address them, '...or lead to a new set of relations among agencies and groups who respond to such problems' (pg. 278).

As Pitts (2008:126) succinctly points out:

*...whatever we do, we must do it in a partnership between central and local government, public services, the voluntary sector and the children, young people and families who live in gang-affected neighbourhoods.*

### **Programme Longevity**

Before moving on to describe individual interventions an important point should be made regarding programme or project longevity. The Centre of Social Justice (2009:27) argue that the government has failed '...to take a long term approach to the problem with the implementation of temporary short term programmes'. An intervention that runs only during the summer holidays is unlikely to be effective in encouraging and redressing the entrenched views that a young person may have about gang life:

*...a six or twelve week programme is unlikely to transform the life of a young person who dropped out of school with no qualifications, has witnessed people die, has a criminal record... (Centre for Social Justice,, 2009: 204).*

However, to allow this to happen, any intervention needs to be efficiently funded. A lack of regular funding would obviously not allow for a long term intervention to be provided. Long term interventions require long term investment. It is not only the funding that is important; it is the quality of the provision being provided. Funding a long term intervention that does not engage young people, has no clear purpose and is ad-hoc will likely be unproductive whereas a long term intervention that has purpose, structure and is something that has consulted young people may be a more productive means of expenditure. Therefore:

*Youth provision must be more than just putting on activities: it must be meaningful engagement aimed at equipping young people with life and employment skills, raising aspirations and self-esteem... (Centre for Social Justice, 2009 : 202).*

In addition to providing activities for young people to seek out and attend, it is also important that support and interventions are taken to the young people on the streets as a means of tackling 'hard to reach' young people that may not be aware of the interventions or who might not be willing to partake in organised activities.

## **4.2 The response to Gangs – Intervention Programmes in the US**

This section describes and discusses a number of interventions/initiatives that have been implemented in an attempt to tackle gangs and gang-related violence. It is important to note that many of the interventions described originate from the United States, and we present below the major approaches to deal with gangs and gang related behaviour. The descriptions include the conclusions of evaluations conducted where available, however it should be noted that evaluating interventions that are designed to reduce gang involvement and gang-related violence are extremely rare (Esbebsen and Osgood, 1999).

## The Gang Resistance, Education and Training programme (GREAT)

- Social Opportunities/Prevent and Deter

GREAT was introduced by the Phoenix Police Department in 1991. It aims to educate young people about the risks that are involved in joining a gang. The prevention programme is delivered by uniformed police officers within a classroom setting. This provides young people with the opportunity to liaise with an officer and could, as a consequence, positively enhance the relationship between the young people and the police. It is a nine-hour programme that is delivered to entire classrooms of elementary school students, middle school students and high school students. However, the programme is specifically targeted for young people aged between 11 and 13 years old. As the programme is delivered to an entire class, it uses a blanket approach and does not attempt to predict who might be caught up in a gang,

'In contrast to suppression and intervention programs, which are directed at youths who are already gang members, GREAT is intended for all youths...one intervenes broadly, with a simple and relatively unintrusive program, well before any problem is detectable and without any attempt to predict who is most likely to be affected.' (Esbensen and Osgood, 1999:198-199).

The programme aims to increase resilience to gang involvement by helping young people set themselves positive goals and deal with peer pressure and conflict resolution.

The evaluation of GREAT concluded that it had positively impacted upon some of the risk factors that can be related to gang affiliation (e.g. peer group associations etc). Esbensen, (undated) suggests that,

*these changes resulted from GREAT's focus on and encouragement of prosocial activities that lead youths away from delinquent peers and toward involvement with peers who exhibit more socially acceptable behaviour (pg. 3).*

However, the validity of these conclusions have been questioned (e.g. Palumbo and Ferguson, 1995) and others have labelled the programme as an ineffective (Klein and Maxson, 2006) doubting whether a nine-hour programme prevents young people from joining a gang later in life (Howell (2009).

## Operation Ceasefire

- Suppression – Catch and Convict, Rehabilitate and Resettle.

Operation Ceasefire, also known as the Boston Gun Project, is an example of a purely suppressive approach. The project adopted a 'problem orientated approach' that focused on addressing, at least in the shorter term, the immediate or 'proximate' situational factors contributing to gang violence rather than their more deep rooted underlying causes.

The core tactic is to 'apply leverage' through multi-agency targeted crackdowns in those areas where gang violence occurs. This 'cease-fire' strategy involves communicating to gangs the promise that they will be the target of a sustained and co-ordinated crackdown in the event that any of their members' (known or suspected) use or possession firearms or involvement in violence. This requires a communication strategy informing the gangs of the specific behaviours that will not be tolerated. It is complimented by offering those involved in gang life diversionary activities and support and advice. There is also an emphasis upon using inter-gang mediation initiatives whilst at the same time trying to enhance community relations and community informal social control in the affected areas.

An evaluation of Operation Ceasefire concluded that this approach has enjoyed some success in reducing violent incidents (Kennedy, 1997). It concluded that the programme had been responsible for a fall in youth homicides in Boston from an average of 44 per year between 1991 and 1995 to 26 in 1996 and 15 in 1997, a trend that continued through 1998 and 1999 (Pitts, 2008: 128).

## CeaseFire Chicago

- Social intervention (rehabilitate and resettle), community mobilization.

CeaseFire Chicago (not to be confused with Operation Ceasefire in Boston) is an innovative approach to tackle gangs and related violence. CeaseFire consists of five main components i) street-level outreach ii) public education iii) community mobilization iv) faith leader involvement and v) police participation. Unlike other interventions that aim to intervene with a large number of people, it focuses on only a small number of individuals (potential offenders and victims). The individuals that were the focus of the CeaseFire project were ‘...those with a high chance of either being shot or being a shooter’ (Skogan et al, 2008: 1).

The aim of the intervention was to go out on to the streets and attempt to mediate conflicts between gangs to break the cycle of retaliatory violence. This task is principally undertaken by street workers who are recruited to engage with likely gang members, advising them of alternative ways to resolve conflicts that do not involve violence and shootings. Street workers were selected for their local knowledge of how street gangs operated, often being former gang members. This was deemed vital to the success of the project because previous gang experience provided the ‘street savy’ to manoeuvre through an often rough-and-tumble environment, and they often had to pass muster with gang leaders...’ and provided the necessary legitimacy of having ‘lived the life’(Skogan et al, 2008: 6).

Nevertheless, this tactic did raise some practical problems. Principally the need to ensure that those recruited to street outreach had successfully extracted themselves from both street crime and gang involvement. An evaluation of CeaseFire Chicago concluded that the intervention was effective in reducing attempted shootings and killings and retaliatory murders (Skogan et al, 2008).

### **Neutral Zone**

- Suppression (Catch and Convict)Social opportunities (prevent and deter), social intervention (rehabilitate and resettle), community mobilisation, organisational.

‘Neutral Zone’ is a community-based gang prevention and intervention programme that was formed in 1992 in Mountlake Terrance, United States. The aim of the intervention was to reduce the number of young people aged between 13 and 20 that were on the streets at the weekend between the hours of 10.00pm and 2.00am, the time zone identified as that when the occurrence of criminal activity rose. The intervention is named the ‘Neutral Zone’ as it was undertaken in an area known not to be gang territory.

The intervention offers a space (‘The Neutral Zone’) and a range of services to young people ranging from recreational activities, such as basketball, to providing counselling and employment advice. A free dinner was also available. The intervention is described by Thurman et al (1996) as a ‘non-traditional’ as it combines sections of the four elements identified in the Spergel model (suppression; social intervention; social opportunities; community mobilization and organisational):

*For example, in addition to providing youths with school tutoring, which is identified with the opportunities provision strategy, the Neutral Zone also engages in mediation between rival gangs, borrowing from the social intervention model. In addition, the Neutral Zone serves as a source of police intelligence concerning local gang activity, an important benefit recognized by the suppression approach...perhaps the most fundamental attribute of the Neutral Zone is its emphasis on community organisation (Thurman et al, 1996: 293).*

However, owing to the range of young people that might be attending the intervention from the various local gangs in the area, security measures are implemented and police officers searched all participants for weapons.

In an evaluation, participants of the Neutral Zone said that it provides them with the opportunity to become involved in legitimate activities. The young people interviewed as part of the evaluation said that if they did not attend the Neutral Zone at the weekend they would either be ‘on the street’ or ‘getting into trouble’.

### **Caught in the Crossfire**

- Social intervention (rehabilitate and resettle)

'Caught in the Crossfire' is an example of a hospital-based peer intervention in California that is instigated when a young person, aged between 12 and 20 years old, presents at an ER department with a violent injury. The strategy utilises ER information to provide a more accurate and localised understanding of the gang violence problem.

The intervention aims to reduce youth violence and fatalities, preventing the 'revolving door' of violence. The goals of the project are to i) provide trained crisis intervention ii) prevent retaliatory violence iii) reduce re-entry into the hospital iv) link youth with local resources and v) provide positive peer role models (Calhoun et al, undated). This is done through a variety of different methods such as visiting the young person whilst they are in hospital; personal contact through home visits and telephone calls; referring them to relevant agencies to provide them with support and training. The staff who deliver the intervention are referred to as 'Intervention Specialists' are recruited from the local community and have similar life experiences to the victims, having experienced violence in their own lives.

An evaluation of 'Caught in the Crossfire' (2003) found that the intervention reduces the risk of the young person becoming involved with the criminal justice system, hence preventing the 'revolving door' of violence (Shibru et al, 2007).

Although not a specific programme, work in the US has involved the use of ex-gang members to deliver interventions and advice.

### Awareness Raising

When attempting to deter young people from becoming involved in gangs and violence that can accompany it, many argue that it is important that the young people are informed of the potential risks of joining a gang. This can be achieved through many different channels, for example, parents, school, police and community groups, but there is a consensus that speaking to someone that has experienced gang life may be the most effective method.

Decker and van Winkle (1996:265) interviewed gang members and found that they recommended that speaking to a prospective gang member would be useful '...providing prospective gang members with information about what life in the gang is "really" like'. One of the gang members felt that informing young people of the real risks of becoming involved in a gang could be a useful deterrent when he suggested, 'Let them know how it is, what's the consequences. You can be alive one minute then bam [you are dead]' (Decker and van Winkle, 1996: 265). Utilising former gang members that are local to the area may also prove advantageous, as they are familiar with the gangs that exist and the colloquiums that are used.

For former gang members to be productively utilised in an intervention, Pitts (2008:127) suggests that they need 'to be given as much respect as the police officers in the programme'. However, using ex-gang members in any intervention can prove problematic. How does one know that a former gang member has completely removed themselves from life in the gang and gang violence? Decker and van Winkle (1996:262) elaborate on this point:

*'Just as defining a gang and establishing criteria for membership are problematic, determining when and whether membership has ended also is difficult.'*

Someone may present themselves as a former gang member, but may still have tenuous links with existing gang members. It is therefore important to ensure that this is not the case and that former gang members are carefully managed and continuously monitored (Centre for Social Justice, 2009). It is important that former gang members understand the ethos of the work that they will be doing and are trained to deliver the intervention effectively.

### 4.3 The Response to Gangs – Interventions Programmes in the UK

In response to the perceived 'gang culture' emerging in the UK, the then Home Secretary Jackie Smith formed a Ministerial Taskforce in 2007. In September of that year, the Taskforce established the Tackling Gangs Action Programme (TGAP). TGAP was a six month initiative to target and reduce youth violence, particularly gang-related firearm offences, in four UK cities (Home Office, 2008). The four cities, Birmingham, Liverpool, London and Manchester were selected to form the TGAP as they have the highest levels of firearms offences per head of population (Dawson, 2008).

Other government efforts in devising a range of interventions include the "Saving Lives. Reducing Harm, Protecting the Public. An Action Plan for Tackling Violence 2008-2011" to reduce gun crime and gang related violence. However, this approach has been criticised for being disorganised and piecemeal in its method (Dying to Belong Report, 2009: 20) and more damningly, lacking a 'full understanding of the problem' (pg. 35). In part this is a reference to what has plagued a succession of gang research studies in the UK, the lack of any agreed consensus as to what actually constitutes a gang.<sup>43</sup>

A number of locally based initiatives have been piloted or undertaken in the UK which aims to affect young people's involvement with gangs. In some cases initiatives are recent and evaluations have not yet been completed. We describe these interventions below

#### *The Boston Model in the UK: 'Manchester Multi-Agency Gang Strategy' (MMAGS).*

- Suppression (catch and convict), Social intervention (rehabilitate and resettle)

MMAGS was undertaken following a Home Office study in 2002, which examined violence, guns and gangs in Manchester. The programme was originally based on the Boston Gun Project and Operation Ceasefire (which focused on preventing and deterring specific gang-related violent behaviours through a similar 'leverage' strategy of enforcement measures against gang members). However, the evaluation found that the Manchester project had suffered from a 'mission drift' to focus on gang membership as a social problem and diversion of individuals from gangs, and the evaluation highlighted implementation problems, such as differences between practitioners about determining gang membership (definitional issues) and unresolved concerns about stereotyping young people as gang members.

The evaluation also concluded that MMAGS' attempt to address the socioeconomic factors underpinning the reasons why youth to join gangs was an 'impractical strategy'. In addition, according to Bullock and Tilley, the development of preventive intervention had diverted attention from the enforcement aspect of the project. The MMAGS team worked with over 200 'targets' and scored some notable successes in turning gang members' lives around, including diversion onto higher education or employment away from Manchester (Squires et al 2008). It is difficult to see how this approach could deliver intensive interventions to such a large number of young people. The evaluation recommends that crackdowns remain targeted aimed directly at those individuals using firearms, possessing firearms or taking part in serious assaults. Whilst gang-related shootings in the city fell by a third in the three years following MMAGS implementation, Silvestri et al. (2009) highlights that there was no evidence that this change could be directly attributed to the programme.

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<sup>43</sup> Although it should be noted that this problem is also evident in the USA but due to the plethora of research the debate is more advanced.

## X-it Programme

- Social interventions (rehabilitate and resettle)

The X-it programme is a gang exit initiative developed by Lambeth Council in 2004 which aims to:

- Reduce weapon use and serious crime amongst gang involved young people and those at risk of becoming involved with a gang
- Develop young people's self-awareness and sense of identity
- Develop a core group of young leaders who will inform future initiatives (Pitts, 2006).

The programme attempts to empower young people to make positive choices and develop self-esteem through engaging in challenges. It also seeks to identify goals and provide training to young people to increase their employability.<sup>44</sup> This intervention works with young people who 'are offending or at the risk of offending and on the fringes of gang involvement'.

However, targeting young people that are perceived to be on the periphery of joining a gang runs the risk of labelling or ascribing characteristics which is not warranted. The X-it programme uses young people to help deliver the programme, whom themselves are ex-gang members and have undertaken and completed the programme. This can be viewed as beneficial as 'it is more credible in the eyes of gang-involved young people looking for an exit' (Centre for Social Justice, 2009: 204).

X-it is varied and consists of a modular programme that runs over the course of 32 weeks and includes a group work programme, intensive residentials, leadership programmes and a personal development and mentoring support scheme<sup>45</sup>

An evaluation of X-it revealed that 72 per cent of its participants had desisted from gang involvement whilst involved in the programme (Pitts, 2006, cited in The House of Commons, 2007).

## The Street Outreach Service (SOS)

- Social interventions (rehabilitate and resettle)

The Street Outreach Service (SOS) is a relatively new pilot project based in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. The project is part of the local council's strategy to reduce the number of young people that are becoming the fatal victims of violence. The project is an attempt to provide a new method of trying to engage with young people.

SOS commenced in 2008 and its aim is to provide young people, who have been identified as requiring an intervention with a personalised intervention plan and offering the young person and their family access to support services. It adopts a multi-agency approach facilitated through a specialist youth worker and a police officer who is seconded to the project. They both visit the young person at their home to present 'a unified multi-agency front and deliver a message that the safety of the young person is the priority of all agencies involved' (Centre for Social Justice, 2009: 143).

This project is currently in its early stages and therefore no research exists indicating its performance.

## The Phoenix Programme

- Social interventions (rehabilitate and resettle);

The Phoenix Programme, delivered in Lambeth focuses on young people that have been, or are at risk of becoming involved in serious and violent crime, specifically gun related crime and aims to increase confidence and motivation amongst young people.

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.london.gov.uk/gangs/projects/lambeth/project-01.jsp>

<sup>45</sup> Op cit.

The programme is not voluntary and requires a referral from the Youth Offending Service (YOS). The programme runs in conjunction with Supervision Orders and/or Detention and Training Orders and Bail packages. Therefore the Phoenix Programme can only be delivered to those young people that are known to the YOS and have already engaged in criminal activity. The intervention is provided by a range of organisations and agencies such as the voluntary sector and the police.

The intervention comprises the following six elements: numeracy and literacy; education, training and employment; offending behaviour group work; life skills and social skills; substance misuse; and parenting and family support.

### *Kickz*

- Social opportunities (Prevent and Deter)

Kickz is a UK intervention which is not specifically aimed at young people that have, or who are at risk, of displaying gang-related violence. It is a diversionary approach using football to engage with hard to reach young people, specifically those who live in areas of multiple deprivation and high crime. It is managed by the Football Association and uses a local professional football club to deliver the intervention along with local agencies, such as the police and the YOS (Home Office, 2008).

It is an example of a recreational activity that is engaging for many young males; providing young the opportunity to engage in a common interest, in this case football. The programme allows young people to form relationships with one another and with agencies that are involved with the intervention, such as the police. As previously stated, attempting to build a positive relationship between young people and the police is an important feature when trying to reduce levels of gang-related violence in a community. Kickz is an example of how the police can engage with young people in a non-oppressive manner.

### *LEAP Confronting Conflict*

- Social interventions (rehabilitate and resettle);

LEAP Confronting Conflict is an independent registered charity and national voluntary youth organisation based in London. LEAP works with young people and the adults working with them to find creative ways to manage and deal with conflict. It aims to reduce group or gang conflict and has formulated a programme entitled: Gang and Territorialism Programme. This programme aims to 'harness the energy and companionship of the gang into sources of new leadership and learning' (LEAP Confronting Conflict, undated).

It therefore helps to train young people in self-awareness, personal accountability and communication and mediation skills. It also explores areas specifically relating to gangs, such as space and territory, reputation and status and enemies and revenge. LEAP argue that there is a spectrum of gang activity and a range of interventions that work in the various stages of a young person's life and in their offending career. As a consequence, they have developed a 'Gangs Activity Spectrum'. This spectrum identifies that a range of interventions which educate, prevent, intervene and transform a young person is required to have an impact on their actual or potential gang related activity.

## **4.4 The Response to Guns – Intervention Programmes in the UK**

Our review of the literature uncovered a number of thorough reviews of research, policy and preventative practice in gun crime in the UK, notably; Squires' (2008); including international research (Silvestri, et al's, 2007; Silvestri, et al's 2009) in addition to Golding & McCoy's (2008) review which also included original research amongst practitioners and young people. Our review draws heavily upon these comprehensive studies.

We have not included in this review more generic non-weapon youth violence prevention interventions which operate at the primary prevention stages. This would include a potentially very large number of interventions, such as public health approaches which stress the importance of the wider environment and



positive family and community influences. This is not to dismiss the value of these early intervention strategies in preventing youth violence, rather we have focused on secondary and tertiary interventions that have some specificity to weapon carrying.

A number of different strategies have been used to gun crime including tougher legislation; reducing demand; education; amnesties; supply restrictions; and stop and search by the police. We review each in turn below.

### **The Government Response**

In England and Wales, the Home Office 'Tackling Violence Action Plan' and the Youth Crime Action Plan' (both 2008) include measures specifically targeting weapons, including a presumption that anybody aged 16 and over who is found carrying knives should be prosecuted, anyone using a knife 'should expect to receive a custodial sentence', home visits and letters to parents of young people whom intelligence suggests carry weapons, 'bringing children's behaviour to their parent's attention and making them understand their responsibilities', plus a confidential helpline for advice.

The Government is also implementing a 'Tackling Knives Action Programme' (TKAP), launched in June 2008 running until March 2009 to deliver 'tough enforcement combined with education, prevention work (Youth Justice Board 2008a) and information campaigns'. A monitoring programme is currently underway.

Many of the current anti-knife and gun policies in the UK draw on a 'hot spots' theoretical framework as they target areas identified as being at particular risk of violence, for instance TKAP focused on ten areas and The Tackling Gangs Action Programme targeted gang-related firearms offences, focused on four police force areas (London, Merseyside, West Midlands and Greater Manchester). Anti-knife operations (e.g. Operation Blunt, Operation Shield) have also been concentrated on areas where (young) people gather and crime tends to occur, like transport intersections or in city centres at night during weekends.

### **Catch and Convict: Enforcement and Sanctions**

#### **Stop and search**

Squires (2007) reviewed the increased use and extension of police stop and search powers in the UK under s60 of the *Public Order Act 1994* (i.e. in 'anticipation of violence') and concluded that this was a 'problematic' response to addressing knife offences. Not only do these powers have the great potential to create resentment by being used disproportionately used against black and minority ethnic young males, but their effectiveness in apprehending those carrying dangerous weapons would appear to be in doubt. A 2003 Home Office report noted that out of a total of 18,900 people stopped and searched in 2001–2002 under s60, 1,367, only some 7% were found to be carrying an offensive or dangerous instrument. Of these, 14% were arrested for possession. The report concluded:

*'Considering that the search powers in question should be used only where a specific threat of violence is present, these 'hit rates' are surprisingly low, and suggest that police actions alone are unlikely to have a huge impact on the carrying of knives. They need to be backed up by educational campaigns and perhaps periodic 'crackdowns' when there is evidence of weapons being carried in a particular area.'* (Brookmand & Macquire, 2003, in Squires, 2007: 28).

Under the *Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006* these powers have been extended, allowing teachers in schools and further education institutions to search pupils and students in order to look for a knife or other weapon. As yet we have no information on the effectiveness of this measure. Squires notes that Teachers Unions have expressed concerns about the suitability of teachers undertaking this role, along with concerns over how this will impact on the teacher-child relationship and a child's sense of well-being and personal integrity.

### **Increased Prison Sentences**

The introduction of the *Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006* saw the government increase the maximum available sentence for carrying a knife in public without lawful reason from two to four years. The logic here is simple, that an increased sentence will have a corresponding increased deterrence value on would-be-offenders. However, as Squires review notes, it is unclear whether this will reduce knife carrying, particularly among young people. This point would appear to be reinforced by the government's own review of sentencing in 2001. Halliday found that whilst sentences indeed have a deterrent effect, there was 'no evidence to show what levels of punishment produce what levels of general deterrence'. It further noted:

*'The evidence shows the importance of certainty of punishment, so that deterrent effects are unlikely to be achieved if the prospects of avoiding detection and conviction are high. It is the prospect of getting caught that has deterrence value, rather than alterations to the 'going rate' for severity of sentences. The lack of correlation between punishment levels and crime levels is in line with the current literature which analyses these trends in other jurisdictions ... There appears to be no statistical correlation between types of sentence and likelihood of desistance, according to Home Office analysis of the Offenders' Index.'* (Halliday, 2002, in Squires, 2007:29).

In other words the likely consequences of a tougher sentence on a crime which is hard to detect (knife carrying) will have a very uncertain deterrent effect. Furthermore, a number of unintended consequences could follow resulting in longer sentences for children and young people due to the fact that knife carrying is most common among those aged 16 to 17. As Squies (2007) notes, this is also a group least likely to foresee the consequences of their actions.

### **Use of metal detectors in schools**

These measures are used in parts of the US School system and there has been some discussion among policy makers of introducing metal detectors in some urban schools in the UK. The measures include installing security systems and metal detectors, checking of lockers, see-through bags, and hiring dedicated security staff or police officers. A thorough evaluation of these initiatives was conducted by the Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders. The Group found that whilst metal detectors 'reduced the number of weapons [guns, knives or other weapons] brought into schools; they did not seem to decrease weapon carrying or violence outside schools' (Catalano et al 1999 in Silvestri et al, 2009:58).

In the UK the Tackling Violence Action Plan' and the 'Youth Crime Action Plan' (2008) include providing the police with portable knife arches and search wands. This is not specific to schools, but operates in much broader 'hotspot' areas covering an entire region (including Merseyside) (Home Office 2008b).

### **Police Powers and Relationships with Young People**

There is now a substantial and compelling research base supporting the view that people are more likely to comply with rules and decisions when they believe the authority is legitimate. In other words, where people feel that the authority is entitled to be deferred to and obeyed; when decision-making processes are viewed as 'procedurally fair' (Tyler, 1990).

However, a consistent literature demonstrates that young people often have negative perceptions of the police, usually because they make extensive use of public space and can attract the attention and intervention of police (Loader, 1996) and many of these encounters can be adversarial in nature ('stop and searches', name checks, 'move-on' directives, and vehicle stops) resulting in complaints by young people about police harassment (White, 1994; Cunneen and White, 1995; Radford et al., 2005 in Hinds 2007).

Whilst there is a degree of inevitability that young people will always be the subject of police attention, this does not have to lead to poor relationships with those young people. There is now an extensive (and growing) body of research demonstrating that using 'procedurally just' practices during encounters with children and young people has an important role to play in improving young people's judgments of police

legitimacy. Indeed, police can exercise extensive influence over their interactions with young people and how they are perceived, either to the detriment or enhancement of their legitimacy.

There is a large (and increasing) research literature that demonstrates when police use procedural justice in decision-making: (i) people are more willing to accept police decisions, even when the outcome of the decision may go against their best interest [i.e. they get arrested etc.]; (ii) people's judgments of policing as a legitimate authority are more likely to be developed, maintained and enhanced; and (iii) people are more willing to support and cooperate with police (Tyler, 1988, 1990; Tyler and Huo, 2002, in Hind 2007 196).

The fairness of procedures comprises a number of elements, including, the opportunity to express opinions about a problem, situation or event prior to the authority making a decision; consistency and neutrality of decision-making; trust in the benevolence of authorities' motives; and being. Whilst these procedures are to some extent enshrined in the Police's Standards of Professional Behaviour, the implications for police legitimacy of the procedural justice literature are particularly compelling, given the extensive legal powers conferred on police and the importance of public consent in the police's ability to maintain social order and control crime (Tyler, 1990).

Prevent and Deter: Education and Awareness-Raising

### **Prevent and Deter: Education and Awareness-raising**

#### ***The 'Be Safe Project'***

This is an educational approach which delivers 'Weapons Awareness Workshops' to Young people in schools. The aim is to educate young people about the potential harsh realities of what can happen when they carry a knife. This is a five year project which aims deliver workshops to 1.1 million young people and is a key part of the Government's violent crime reduction action plan.<sup>46</sup> Squires (2007:29) notes that the programme has apparently been evaluated by Newham Youth Offending Team and claims 'some impressive results', although this review was unable to substantiate this from the organizations website.

#### ***Bears Youth Challenge, Brent***

The Bears Youth Challenge aims to deliver a bespoke service for to-hard-to reach young people who are at risk of falling into serious criminal activity that may ultimately lead to them carrying firearms. The intervention consists of youth officers meeting with identified at risk young people and delivering a peer-led conflict resolution programme as part of the schools anti-bullying policy. Initial engagement into the service is through a number of music and DJ workshops to attract pupils. Pupils are targeted in primary education for being at risk of school exclusion and who may find the street lifestyle of fast cars and guns glamorous and attractive (Youth and Crime Unit London, in Lemos, 2004) Another more recent initiative has been developed as part of this project called 'ID' which runs culturally specific workshops, looking into key issues such as self-esteem and identity. There were no details of any evaluation or evidence of effectiveness for these interventions

#### ***Prison Tour Programmes***

Prison tour programmes originated in the US, the oldest of which is called 'Scared Straight'. The aim is to deter young offenders or children at risk from (further) involvement with crime by graphically portraying the realities of prison life. Inmates conduct often aggressive presentations of life in prison to increase young people's awareness of the penalties for offending. 'Kids visit prison' programmes have been used in the UK (Welsh and Farrington 2006). Nevertheless, compelling evidence over 25 years, including a systematic review of randomized controlled experiments of Scared Straight and other US prison tour programmes demonstrate that not only are they ineffective in preventing offending; they are actually counter-productive as they *increase* the chances that children exposed to them will (re)offend (Petrosino et al 2006, in Silvestri, et al, 2007:67).

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<sup>46</sup> See <http://www.besafetraining.com/Home>

## Prevent and Deter: Mentoring Interventions

### ***'Big Brothers Big Sisters' (BBBS)***

The BBBS is an influential US mentoring model where mentors meet with 6 to 18- year-old children and young people from single-parent, disadvantaged households, at least three times a month for three to five hours. Silvestri et al (2009) reports that a randomized controlled analysis found that the scheme had 'a positive impact on reducing the likelihood of drug and alcohol use, violence and truancy, especially among young people from black and ethnic minorities' (Tierney et al 1995 in Silvestri et al 2009:57).

### ***'Caught in the Crossfire'***

This is a US peer based mentoring and case management programme that was derived from an earlier hospital-based prevention programme. The aim was to get victims and perpetrators of violence related injuries attending at hospital to avoid retaliatory violence and develop non-violent plans for the future. The project employed young adults who had grown up in the same communities as the target group. Silvestri et al (2009) reports 'promising' results from the programme. Findings from a robust evaluation<sup>47</sup> showed that young people participating in 'Caught in the Crossfire' were 60% less likely to have an adverse outcome (being re-arrested, placed on probation, breaching probation conditions) than those in the comparison group (Becker et al 2004, in Silvestri et al 2009:57).

### ***'Mentoring Plus'***

This is a UK mentoring programme based on the acclaimed Dalston Youth Project. Mentoring Plus takes an opportunity based model approach through aiming to improve the basic education, employment skills and confidence of 'disaffected young people'. One-to-one mentoring is used by adult local volunteers, which includes structured education and careers support. The implementation of 10 of the programmes was evaluated in 2004, which found that they had been 'reasonably successful' in re-engaging socially excluded young people with education and training. Silvestri et al (2009) report that during the evaluation period there was also a reduction in offending, especially in the carrying and use of weapons: but this 'could not be attributed with any confidence to the programme', as it was experienced among both participants and non-participants (Shiner et al, 2004 in Silvestri et al 2009:57). A later meta-analysis examined 18 studies of mentoring programmes and found that mentoring was more likely to reduce re-offending the longer the contact it offered with mentors and be more effective if part of 'multi modal treatment' involving behavioural and other programmes (Jolliffe and Farrington 2007 in Silvestri, et al 2009).

## Rehabilitate and Resettle: Hospital Based Nurse Counselling Programmes

This provision covers brief motivational interventions to young patients aged 16 and over, who attend some UK hospitals with an alcohol-related facial injury, often caused by knives (although other implements such as a smashed bottle or glass, bare fists, being pushed and falling over would also of been included). The aim is for nurses to offer counselling, advice and information to patients to help them understand how they got the injury in the first place and to help prevent them incurring further injuries. The intervention consists of a session with a specialist trauma nurse for what can be only a brief period of between 5 and 65 minutes. The logic behind the targeting strategy is because: 'a large majority of assault injuries are to the face'; 'this group is also prone, as part of an antisocial life-style, to be offenders' and 'come to the attention of other public services – such as the police and criminal justice system – much less frequently' (Smith et al, in Silvestri et al 2009:55). Silvestri et al. (2009) report the results of two randomized controlled trials conducted UK hospitals (one in Scotland, one in Wales)<sup>48</sup> in relation to delivering the programmes. Each of the trials showed

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<sup>47</sup> This was graded a level 4 study on the Maryland Scientific Scale by Silverstri et al 2009:78) This means there was comparison between multiple units with and without the intervention, controlling for other factors, or using comparison units that evidence only minor differences.

<sup>48</sup> Both studies adhered to the most scientifically rigorous methods of testing interventions, using substantial samples, randomly selected intervention and control groups and testing patients' alcohol intake at three points in time: at the time of the counselling, then at three and twelve months afterwards (Silvestri, et al 2009:

'consistently promising results in terms of a 'significant' reduction in alcohol consumption, especially at 12 months follow-up when the most marked differences between intervention and control groups manifested' (Silverstri, et al, 2009:56). As the authors note, the findings illustrate that whilst behavioural change takes time, brief interventions can prove to be cost effective and not necessarily labour intensive.

## 4.5 The Response to Gangs and Guns: Interventions in Liverpool

This next section examines current initiatives and strategies undertaken in Liverpool to address gang involvement and gun crime. It should be stressed here that we do not provide an exhaustive overview of interventions or attempt to map all of the numerous initiatives that have been or are running across Liverpool in respect of the Tackling Gangs Action Plan.

This section of the report concentrates only upon those programs that interviewees mentioned and explores how interviewees perceive the individual interventions and the overall strategy for tackling gang activity and weapon use. The research team examined whether the initiatives being pursued have an evidence base, along with respondent's perceptions of whether they believe that the city is pursuing a suitable strategy. We do not offer any independent evaluation with regards to the effectiveness of these initiatives, but restrict our comments to highlighting performance and evaluation arrangements raised by respondents.

### The DISARM Strategy

The DISARM Strategy was formulated in response to the murder of Rhys Jones in 2007. Operating at the strategic level DISARM is an attempt to improve local government's ability to combat gun crime and associated gang related offending. The aim is to achieve this through a partnership of agencies enacting a range of enforcement, diversion and prevention initiatives. In addition to this enforcement action, there had been an emphasis upon using inter-gang mediation initiatives whilst at the same time trying to enhance community relations and community informal social control in the affected areas.

Many respondents were generally pleased with development of the DISARM partnership and believed it to be making good progress in reducing gun and gang crime. There was also a general feeling that a lot of the work undertaken so far had been broadly successful.

One of a number of successful ingredients to the DISARM partnership was thought to be keeping the partnership at a strategic level of 'decision makers' with the expectation that everyone would make a contribution, not simply in the planning stage but at the level of delivery on the ground. Another strength of the partnership (and Citysafe more generally) was seen to be the willingness to use strategic analysis and intelligence to identify the nature, size and distribution of gun and gang problems so that appropriate action could be taken. Fact finding visits to other parts of the country were also seen as valuable as they provided first hand insights into how other divided communities tackled entrenched community mistrust through mediation and restorative justice measures. This facilitated introducing the partnerships own mediation services in parts of the city.

Several interviewees spoke about the need to examine where the DISARM partnership fitted strategically in respect to the wider council structure under the Local Area Agreements and Strategic Issues Groups in order to avoid duplication:

*[DISARM] is neither the city wide strategy group for all related activity or now looking at a particular district, it tries to provide a strategy especially around young people. And it does link in with City Negotiating with Terrorists, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, 2008 forthcoming. Safe but it's not a formal sub-group at City Safe and there will probably need to be some clarity around where it fits in terms of the work of the neighbourhood partnership working groups, and the strategic City Safe and what is*

*mandated in terms of the City Safe group. I think that the disarm strategy has gone to City Safe for some agreement or approval, but it's not recognised as a formal sub-group. That might need to be looked at - there is a plethora of groups at the moment and there is this potential for some groups for not knowing what others are doing. Children's Services*

As was mentioned the general view by respondents was that the DISARM strategy was working well and was broadly addressing the right concerns

### **Policy and Service Alignment Developments**

Liverpool was a recipient of the Youth Crime Action Plan (YCAP) Intensive Package launched by the Government in July 2008. It was designed to tackle youth crime using three complimentary strategies of: prevention, non-negotiable support and tough enforcement. In addition Liverpool was one of four cities to receive funding to reduce youth violence, particularly gang-related firearm offences. The Tackling Gangs Action Programme (TGAP) was conceived against the backdrop of high-profile fatal incidents involving young people and gangs.

Within Liverpool at the Local Authority level, neighbourhood working parties have been established to identify their own priorities, which feature gun and gang crime in addition to anti-social behaviour by young people and alcohol and drugs. A further policy development is the Integrated Youth Support Strategy which aimed to build closer working between Connexions and the Youth Service and involve all key agencies in targeted support for young people. The aim is to encompass many other services delivered by a range of statutory, third sector and private partners to enable young people to have access to universal and targeted support facilitated by multi agency teams linked to secondary schools and neighbourhoods/districts. It addresses four key challenges identified in the Education and Inspections Act (2006) and outlined by Youth Matters.<sup>49</sup>

### **Interventions and Programmes**

Interviewees were asked to discuss the main initiatives and interventions that were taking place in Liverpool to stop young people becoming involved in gangs and weapon crime or to leave gangs, along with their thoughts about whether the programs were effective in their stated aims. A number of programs and initiatives were mentioned that have been itemised in Table 4. The interventions described below have been mapped to the main strands of the Comprehensive Gang Model, although there are considerable overlaps, particularly between social opportunities and social interventions.

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<sup>49</sup> Liverpool Integrated Youth Support/ Targeted Support Strategy

Table 4: Gun and Gang Program Interventions in Liverpool

Interventions mentioned by respondents	Strategy
Buddy Scheme	Peer mentoring programme
School Mates (originally Street Mates)	Peer mentoring programme
Health Mates	Peer mentoring programme
PAYP Programme	Activities for young people
'Off the Bench'	Opportunities provision (training)
WAVES	Witness protection support initiative
Mediation	Social intervention
Stay Safe	Social intervention
Outdoor Pursuits Programme	Activities for young people
Holiday Sports Scheme	Activities for young people
Norris-Green Pride	Community mobilization
Exit Programme	Activities for young people and reality confrontation
Matrix Team	Enforcement
Knife Amnesty	Enforcement

Despite the police Basic Command Units (BCUs) now having their own disruption plans which were to complement the initial disruption response from the Matrix teams, one Neighbourhood Manager argued for a still greater emphasis upon enforcement activities within the police as a whole:

*You see I don't see enough enforcement. The whole police agenda has moved towards community engagement and the softer stuff and I feel like you should be harder as there's loads of soft stuff going on, everyone else in the room bar the police do soft stuff – like diversionary activities and I think why are the police doing that? Is that a good thing? I feel like why don't we just go and get them and I'm sure it's not as simple as that but that's what I think.* Neighbourhood Manager

Others were more circumspect or openly critical towards some of the longer term consequences that can derive from instigating aggressive interventions which appear to openly target suspected gang members or associates. This was thought especially true when considering the difficulties in identifying gang and gun involved members:

*I think there is a danger sometimes with a zero tolerance approach of doing some collateral damage with young people in particular and the difficulty is that if you look at the social groups of young people and the way they dress in particular if they're all wearing black Alpine Lowe they look like they're part of a gang, now they may not be, they may just be doing it to fit in but they're as likely to get stopped by Matrix disruption and treated with zero tolerance as a gang member.* Matrix

## Social opportunities – Prevent and Deter

### Stay Safe Campaign

Concerns over the lack of parental supervision highlighted in Section 2.6 were addressed by an innovative use of the Police Act, involving police officers proactively taking children that they considered vulnerable 'places of safety' under the. This would occur in either pre-arranged sweeps with disposal teams waiting with Children's Services, or on a more ad hoc basis, for instance when young people were found with alcohol in their possession. A team of officers and social services teams would be briefed together and then sent to hot spot locations for anti-social behaviour, youth crime and gang related crime. Parents would then be required to attend the place of safety and take responsibility for their child, and if appropriate, families would receive help to parent their children responsibly. Whilst these powers had long existed, they had not been used systematically as part of an early intervention strategy and as a prelude to issuing an ABC or ASBO. As one senior interviewee noted:

*This is about protecting them and making parents realise what problems we are dealing with out here. [...] To me if we're giving a child an ABC then we've lost a little bit of control there. I definitely don't want to give a child an ASBO until we've tried everything. It's almost like we've failed, it's what's the next step. Children's Services*

We were informed (at time of writing) that some 612 young people have been subject to these powers. So successful have they been that this strategy was incorporated into the Youth Crime Action Plan.

### **Street Mates**

The peer mentoring scheme, 'Street Mates' (later becoming 'School Mates') had also been run by the Youth Service, which involved the recruitment of 16-19 year olds to support children aged 8-12 years into a range of positive sports, health and youth programmes. At first this was aimed at supporting those children making the transition into secondary school, a period that had been identified as an area of vulnerability. The scheme totals approximately 50+ 'school mates' who are typically allocated to a couple younger children each. Mentors receive vouchers in payment for their efforts. One respondent described the course as being focused on building positive relationships:

*The school mates programme is really about kids respecting each other, it's about older children looking after younger children and recognising their own responsibility for being a bit older and the younger kids looking up to somebody. It's about again, creating a culture of positive relationships. Children's Services*

The success of this scheme saw it being extended to target siblings of those involved in gang activities, although not exclusively so. In conjunction with this some gang involved young people were also offered high adrenalin activities through the Outdoor Pursuits Programme. This was an attempt to replicate and substitute elements of the danger and emotional highs experienced in carrying a gun. The programme also had counsellors available to encourage these young people to discuss any problems, and to provide therapeutic interventions and support in addressing any distorted socio-cognitive deficits and dysfunctional behaviour. The School Mates scheme was later broadened to include some health concerns through the new 'Health Mates' initiative.

### **Positive Activities**

Further provision of positive activities during school holiday periods was delivered through the Schools Sport Partnership and Youth Centres and a collaboration of agencies. This Holiday Sports Scheme provided young people with both mainstream sports and more imaginative activities such as archery and street running. The secondary schools also collaborated in setting up a programme of engaging parents and carers in order to involve them with the aims of the project. At the time of interview interventions were also being developed around alternative education provision for excluded pupils and dry clubbing nights open to all young people.

The research team were informed by one interviewee that consultation with the young people themselves by Youth Services was influential in deciding the type and content of diversionary activities that were provided. The consultation was deliberately broader than just those young people involved in gang activity



or on the periphery of this, although none of the respondents mentioned that this more inclusive approach was problematic. However, there was disagreement from other respondents on the true extent of this consultation exercise, with another respondent indicating there was little consultation in practice. Whilst this remained a point of contention, activities that proved popular with young people were Salsa dancing and DJ'ing.

### **The Exit Project**

One project targeted specifically at 'gang wannabes' was the Exit Project. This is an educational programme designed to address both functional illiteracy - due to the fact that a lot of the candidates experience difficulties in reading and writing - as well as confronting youths with the consequences of their delinquent behaviours. The idea was that the combination of local housing officers, police officers, and local parents would nominate boys they believed were suitable to take part in the scheme within the Croxteth and Norris Green wards, although it was unclear how far this project had progressed.

## **Community Mobilisation**

### **Waves**

In support of enforcement actions the Waves Programme was established to encourage people to give evidence and to offer support through the process. The programme aims to garner a reporting culture and build confidence amongst the wider community to gang and youth disorder problems. Waves operates in addition to an existing witness protection programme that allows witnesses to give evidence anonymously, with the witness's true identity known only to the court, the prosecution and the police. This anonymity, coupled with measures such as screens in court to shield the witness from all but the judge and the jury and perhaps even voice modulation can provide adequate protection without such a long lasting impact upon the life of the witness, their family and friends.

### **Norris Green Pride**

A broader community orientated 'Be proud of Norris-Green' initiative was run for local people who had 'gone the extra mile' in the community. This was an award ceremony that aimed to build community capacity and cohesion and encourage positive perceptions of the area.

## **4.6 The Response to Gangs and Guns in Liverpool: Practitioners Perceptions**

Interviewees were asked whether they felt that Liverpool was implementing the most suitable mix of programmes and overall strategy to tackle youths involved in gangs and guns (including other weapons). All of the respondents were generally very positive about the work being undertaken and thought that the wider strategy and its direction of travel were broadly addressing gang involvement and weapon use:

*I think the police are very focused... I think the partnership is very focused. I think the direction from this group ... we're not all over the place, we're singing from the same hymn sheet .... and I think the priorities are well identified, were intelligence led, were dynamic, flexible and hopefully respond to emerging problems as well as longer term historic issues in each area. I think people are engaged [...] We have got youth, the third sector, the national representative, Children's Services and most importantly we have got the community. I don't know what is replicated in other big cities but I think this is becoming a pretty good model with some clear objectives, direction goals, the right level of buy in from the right players, there is funding available for the right issues. Police*

Emphasis was put upon the way that interventions had been based upon local solutions derived from local people with first-hand knowledge of the problems rather than importing programmes from other cities. Devising local solutions that allowed young people a say in what activities were provided in respect of diversionary and opportunity provision was deemed crucial to success, as was carefully targeting that provision. This saw the provision of more imaginative activities than mainstream sporting events. Other

strategies such as deploying adequate numbers of detached youth workers in combination with a mass publicity exercise improved take-up rates. Some additional provision was provided by opening up community facilities at weekends and Friday and Saturday evenings that were otherwise closed so that young people could access venues at these times.

One senior interviewee spoke of his frustration at what was seen as central government's preference for conventional approaches to crime reduction and an overall reluctance to innovate:

*And the other thing I found is when anything that was suggested that was outside of the normal approaches, people would say 'oh no' that won't work, because they weren't comfortable with it and the frustration was 'okay-if that won't work, what will?' and so we were always caught up in this situation of we know what won't work, but we don't know what will. And that for me is problematic. Police*

This same reluctance to innovate was also deemed to be present within national policy in areas of resettlement and reintegration of young people, particularly how safeguarding was presently being interpreted using the 'blunt tool' of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. As is well known the requirement for ex-offenders to stipulate their criminal histories to a prospective employer makes gaining a legitimate income that much more difficult. It was felt that this current impasse under the rubric of safeguarding needed to be rethought in a more imaginative way, one which facilitated ex-offenders back into employment and the route to a legitimate income.

### Addressing Remote Causes

The balance between enforcement and prevention was discussed by several respondents, a senior police officer highlighted the limitations of enforcement and disruption tactics:

*[..] the way to look at this is, enforcement will never solve this problem it will control it, to allow prevention and rehabilitation, but it won't solve the problem. Matrix*

The Neighbourhood Working Parties which were tasked with identifying their own priorities were seen as a constructive way to address some of the wider social issues, as one interviewee remarked:

*The local authority level we have got the neighbourhood working parties who identify their own priorities and a lot of them will feature ASB and young people, and alcohol and drugs ... and guns and gang crime. It is a massive, massive agenda but ... it's not just gun and gang in isolation, it's a bit boarder than that. It may be well how is our housing policy looked at? How are we placing people ... things like that for example. What are the aspirations and giving people the opportunities to change and that is a much broader issue. I think neighbourhoodisation agenda going under the name of work parties enable that. DAT*

Several other practitioners also acknowledged that there needed to be a greater emphasis upon preventative measures in Liverpool, and this was true across all partnership agencies. A number of impediments were seen to be acting against introducing this, with one senior respondent reporting that political considerations in central government meant privileging punitive and custodial sentencing policies above pursuing a more explicitly preventative agenda:

*The question was asked, what elements will address preventative measures. So there is a movement towards a greater acknowledgement of sort of prevention, but by no means far enough. Because, when we were there, we were looking at initiatives in schools and we had to tiptoe around schools because there is a serious contradiction in the government's position in relation to the independence of schools and collaboration. They couldn't attribute the work, the design of children's services to affect the circumstances;*

*they have placed absolutely no thought at all to collaborate in schools. So with the changes in legislation and the duty to collaborate, then we might get a situation where a more holistic approach in terms of prevention can be pursued by a whole range of agencies. Police*

The same interviewee noted that gang strategies often failed to sufficiently address how to transform young people lives once they were in gangs, this was because they were not taking sufficient account of what he considered was the key driver for gang involvement, namely the need to belong and identify to something:

*Very often, policymakers and respondents tend to focus on the money element where the activity is related to acquisitive crime, in particular drugs and things like that, but when you actually sit down and speak with young people that was never their starting point. Their starting point was a sense of belonging, their starting point was a sense of esteem and so in fact, very simplistically, often some adults will say, 'well how can we compete with the amount of money and...' And I am saying, yes, but that was not their starting point, they never went in because of the money. When you actually listen carefully to them, it's all the other things they get from it, so if we are going to be creative, we have to think how we replace the status. Police*

Related to this point several Matrix officers spoke about wanting more integration of disruption tactics with those services that are needed to address offender's personal and social problems, and any welfare deficits they might have:

*For me disruption isn't just about officers going and arresting people it's the whole bag of tricks and it's not just disruption but it's about putting people in touch with health support whatever, that's still disruption as you're putting them in touch with people. The fact that you're going to have a more long term solution is a benefit and I think disruption has got to be problem solving, it's got to be a long term. [...] When we get smarter at it and we get those systems set up then {name of officer} and his team will be able to say, well we're stopping so and so on the street time and time again and instead of locking him up be able to say 'look these are the people you need to speak with. We could have a referral form which {name of officer} and his team can say that they keep stopping this individual.*

Matrix

What is less clear is why these additional services would appear not to be being provided, either at the custodial suites through referral activities or later during sentence and reintegration into the community.

### **Provision of Youth Services**

One area where there was some concerns raised and disagreement was in the provision and coverage of Youth Services. Many respondents recognised that there were gaps in the current provision, primarily due to budgetary constraints which were seen to be restricting extending services on evenings and weekends. As one respondent noted:

*We've got police officers doing diversionary activities which is fine but quite frankly isn't our role, they're doing it out of necessity. You'll find that our Youth Service Provision is lacking and that's not a dig at those involved in it but quite frankly how those resources are applied; it is the weakest link at this moment in time. It's difficult, a lot of youth service people start to feel entrenched a little bit and they would see a comment like that as having a go but it's pointless for me having youth provision Mon to Fri 9 to 5, when quite frankly that's not the issue. Police*

Other interviewees told us that extra monies had been invested to ensure that there were more activities at weekends and other high risk time periods. This discrepancy may be explained by respondents making reference to different parts of the city or being unaware of additional provision.

Several other respondents mentioned how restorative justice measures were being used to good effect for minor offences in areas such as Everton, Anfield, Fazarkerly, along with the broader success of the Justice Centre.

### Conflict Resolution

Several other interviewees spoke with enthusiasm about the potential for introducing Northern Ireland style conflict resolution strategies into local areas with gang problems. However, one interviewee thought this approach was only likely to be successful when both parties in conflict understood the nature of that conflict, something that youth in local gangs in Liverpool were believed not to either know or comprehend.

### Partnership Working

Interviewees were asked about how they thought the partnership practices were working so far and whether they were happy with their own organisation's level of influence within the partnership. Overall partners were broadly positive about their working relationships with other organisations, and reported an environment which allowed 'honest and open debate' and constructive criticism. All those interviewed referred to a core group of 'key players' who fully participated in the DISARM group and believed these to be the right organisations represented by senior management commitment.

Partnerships with schools were seen to be improving by two interviewees, but both acknowledged that this was an area where there needed further improvement. Having multi-agency teams embedded within schools, developed as part of the Integrated Youth Support Arrangements, was seen as a successful initiative, although schools were still seen as insufficiently aware of the range of services that they could draw on. One interviewee cited an example of the Pupil Referral Unit to illustrate this general point:

*There was one young girl who it turned out had been there for 2 years, 2 years at a pupil referral unit. And when I was talking to the staff there and they were saying they could not get the help they needed from the council or the service .. and I was saying well what about this and does that fit and I could feel some of the frustration that the schools must of felt, where we would say well we have all these services and every time you try and access them the door would be shut because it doesn't quite fit the criteria or the threshold. I think the teams around the school are starting to get people understanding each other's roles and how to work together more effectively in that early interventions area. Children's Services*

However, several interviewees noted that some agencies had tended to 'drift away' from regular meetings or had been 'slow off the mark' and additional effort was required to keep all partners actively engaged to avoid hindering progress. It was recognised that Children's Services needed to make other partners more aware of their work and 'sell themselves' and their contribution to the partnership. However, it is unclear how the current restructuring whereby Children's Services will now fall under 'empowering residents' will act to ameliorate this criticism.

Two other respondents mentioned that there had been 'real tensions' in agencies having to meet their own organisational targets, or one organisation taking the lead to move a project swiftly forward without taking full account of other ongoing work on the ground:

*I think for the most part the tensions are overcome, the Youth Crime Action Plan has just had to be written into it to explain our approach to the certain strands that are required under the youth crime action plan. [...] I think on some occasions there has been some tensions when somebody is moved forward to do something in order to get something*

*going quite quickly when somebody else is not taken sufficient account of something already going on the ground, but that is probably better than people either not doing something or not only being aware that something is going on. So the communication is better than it used to be. Children's Services*

In terms of the future direction of programmes and wider gang and gun strategy, several interviewees stressed the need for more emphasis on prevention and diversionary activities and cross-partnership working. As one noted:

*I think we're doing the right thing for this moment I think it needs to grow, Liverpool First need to own this strategy but they need to know what it contains and we need to look at working with colleagues and housing and environment to extend it, so it needs to be taken to other strategic partnerships and say what are you going to do in housing to enable the strategy to take place? What are you going to do in environment? And that's not happened as yet. Youth Services*

### **Targeting at Risk Young People**

Interviewees were asked whether the existing provision effectively targeted gang and gun involved young people, and how this was achieved given the difficulties in reliably identifying gang structures discussed at length earlier. Confidence that the right youths were being targeted varied across respondents, although all thought that at least some of the gang and gun involved youths were being selected. A lot of confidence was placed on the current services having knowledge of gang involved youths, as one practitioner noted:

*Throughout the whole programme what we were really told by DISARM was that you don't have to worry about those children who are involved in gangs because we know who they are, but what we don't know are those who are likely to become involved. Children's Services*

The process of identifying other young people who were not known to services was a more difficult task. This was undertaken in a discrete manner by going into schools and examining attendance records and selecting those with poor attendance, supplemented by families known to the school who had problems with their children, in addition to any siblings of known gang members.

Two multi-agency steering groups (one in Croxteth and another in Toxteth) were established to organise the programme, and detached youth workers brought on board to feed local intelligence about youth gang activity and as an additional means to ensure that the right young people were being selected. We were told that throughout there was a working assumption by practitioners that this combination of targeting known youths and the more broad brush approach based on risk factors such as poor school attendance and geographic location constituted appropriate selection criteria. As several respondents acknowledged:

*I used to say, if that is a child in a certain age group and has an address in Croxteth or Toxteth then the likelihood is that they are as vulnerable as any. In a way they were all vulnerable but we worked closely with schools particularly in the Croxteth area. [...] Postcode was important as a kind of catch all, we worked with detached youth workers who had local intelligence about what was going on [...] Children's Services*

*Yes ..I'm only one strand of a strategy really, ah .. what I like to think is that we're targeting the right people at the right time from my perspective. LASBU*

Several of our respondents mentioned how effective they thought the work around the extended schools programme was and how this provision had been targeted at those youths who were involved in gangs and known to services. This was particularly the case for siblings of gun and gang nominals who were known to

the police. Stringent efforts had been made to ensure these siblings were able to access a range of enhanced diversionary activities, including some residential courses along with providing programmes for the parents. Others stressed the need for early interventions:

*There is a lot going on and there is a lot of resources going in because everyone agrees we have got to get them at maximum six or seven years old. If you're waiting until nine or ten at the schools ... my staff went to a meeting in the south of Liverpool and they were all starting at five and six year olds. That's the right approach. LASBU*

Engaging and attracting young people to diversionary activities brought some mixed results depending upon the location. However, despite some turnouts being small, confidence was expressed that they were attracting the target group, as one interviewee noted:

*The sports programme we would give money to those who said they needed it to offer the activities. It was a success numbers weren't great but it was targeting those who we really wanted. There were some kids who we didn't expect to turn up as they were at the sharp end. The evening and weekend diversionary activities was a bit more about changing the culture of the youth service and saying to youth centres you need to look at, we can fund this as a pilot. Results were varied and some centres really got a fantastic turn out and offered really good quality programmes, others weren't so good and we were chasing them around all over the place [...] Youth Worker*

There was acknowledgement that the gang and gun problem required both universal programmes and specifically targeted programmes. Stress was also put upon developing a more tiered approach, including developing Family Intervention Programmes which worked with the whole family or preventative programmes provided by YOS, and examining the potential for linkage with the Street Mates scheme:

*It's that whole kind of tiered approach to interventions that we need to get to the right people at the right time and it's really hard to sort out but if we can sort that out then some of these individuals may not have chosen to go down that line as we will have given them an alternative and made it convincing and that's the plan. Agency Worker*

Whilst many interviewees expressed confidence that the combination of police intelligence and Youth Service knowledge of local families successfully identified gang and gun involved youths, several others gave examples of how some problems with youth gangs were due to mistaken perceptions. The example of groups of young people socialising in the city centre was one:

*So much is about perceptions and it's been a big issue for elected members and for the public .. around Goths in the city centre and their use of the gardens at the back of St Georges Hall in the centre, and people wanting them moving on. And their (unclear) kids from the region that dress in a certain way, chatting each other up and socialising and aren't actually doing anything wrong but now we have Zanzibar going on some Saturdays to try and herd all these kids into Zanzibar so that they are not visible to the tourists to the city who might feel they can't walk through the garden to go to the museum - and they're not doing anything. It's about being perceived and being a real city centre problem. Children's Services*

Another respondent reflected on the need for better targeting and engagement with gang members as a means of more effectively deterring young people from gang involvement. In a similar vein another interviewee questioned whether the partnership was sufficiently focused on gun and gang crime and was not convinced that the numerous youth diversionary activities taking place were always the most suitable interventions to undertake:

*That's another interesting thing for me with DISARM and this group is that it's all focused on young people and I don't know that many of them are firing guns. It's actually quite difficult to get that group to focus on gun and violent crime because they focus on youth*

*activity. That's for the youth group. I'm not convinced that some of the diversionary stuff is going to tackle gun crime per se. Sometimes it feels a bit tenuous to me. One of the big criticisms up till now is sometimes when we put on diversionary activities to work with the most vulnerable young people is that sometimes that's not happening.* Neighbourhood Manager

Another practitioner had similar concerns that Youth Services were not targeting the right young people and were rather employing a 'scatter gun approach'. Often this was thought to end up co-opting children from supportive and aspirational families that were the least in need of diversion whilst neglecting those that required the most help and were the hardest to engage. This was given additional credence by a frank admission by another interviewee that in the early stages of the partnership some diversionary activities were more driven by using up budgets than designing successful and targeted diversionary activities:

*Sometimes with diversionary activities you can find yourself driven by the money other than what actually needs to happen and this endless process of spending the money in the financial year and the monitoring process and it can be death by funding and you lose track of what you were ever trying to do in the first place. And we were in danger of that to some extent at the beginning and we did all identify that. We made a conscious decision to say it wouldn't all be about the money and those people who had experience of commissioning money would do that outside of the meeting.* Children's Services

Others argued that what was required was a much more robust, if not outright coercive approach to engaging young people, although exactly how this would be achieved in practice was not forthcoming:

*For me it should be ..we know the families and we know the ones who are in danger. Most of the time we do a lot. They're the ones where the school has sign posted or the youth services have sign posted, we should be actively targeting them and a much harder and active level than we are doing. And almost not taking no for an answer, we should refuse to take no for an answer.* Local Resident

### **Improving Relationships with Young People**

One Matrix officer conceded that the police as an organisation needed to be better at breaking down barriers between themselves and young people:

*I don't think we're very good as an organisation at breaking those barriers down with young people or other minority groups I think we're learning and we're learning very quickly and we're trying to make those adjustments.* Matrix

Nevertheless, the same officer also noted that the perceptions amongst his fellow officers conducting the disruption tactics were to see all targets as crime perpetrators, where a more nuanced view was required:

*The biggest challenge I'll have is changing the mindset of the officers because - they're here quite rightly and I'm 100% behind them - is to lock the bad people up but they need to understand that not everybody is bad. There are different shades of bad and it's about differentiating between those people [..] Matrix*

The above remarks by interviewees, notably police officers when describing the current drive to curb gun crime and street gangs draws further attention to the status and trajectory of what could loosely be described as the 'gang associate', and or gang members who are not engaged in criminal or anti-social behaviour. The obvious concern is that in targeting, or more bluntly, harassing individuals who are associated with gangs can alienate both the gang members and their associates who might otherwise and under different circumstances help the police. This damage to youth-police relations is more likely if we are

right in assuming that gangs in Liverpool are not primarily tight knit groups bent upon drug dealing and other forms of crime but loose, fluid and disorganised, with shifting memberships and allegiances.

This danger of alienating young people was openly acknowledged by one senior Police officer:

*We are stopping and searching and lawfully making our gun crime targets have a horrible life in the communities where they live. I say that with no problem at all until they change their ways. But there's collateral damage with that because there's a lot of young people in this area who dress the same and look the same and we do stop and search an awful lot of young people. Now I've obviously spoken with all of my officers to make sure they're polite and courteous but I'm not out there on the streets every day, so the collateral damage is that the youth do become a little disengaged with the Police. Police*

Several other interviewees from non-police agencies also noted that young people could often find themselves being picked on as 'easy low hanging fruit' in order to meet police targets, thereby further exacerbating police-youth relations.

Other senior figures mentioned that there was no robust strategy for dealing with 'gang wannabes', who were deemed more difficult to tackle than established criminal gang members. As one senior interviewee noted:

*What the problem is, is how do we deal with the 'wannabees'? and the establishments around us don't have sufficiently robust strategies to deal with the 'wannabees'. And very often, the 'wannabees' end up being far more vicious than those whom they replace because they have to establish their reputation over a very short period of time because if you take out the headman? Then the vacuum has to be filled and that message has to go out that this has been filled and it is quite vicious in sending that message out. Police*

### Reassurance Policing

There were some criticisms of the Reassurance Policing measures following a shooting incident or firearms discharge. The tactic of having police officers flooding an area with a high visibility presence to both dissuade further violence and attempt to reassure residents was seen as at best only a short term measure:

*When we have a shooting, basically the first thing that the police do is flood an area for the next two weeks. Its reassurance to the public but it is very short term reassurance because if there is a shooting somewhere else then they will go somewhere else. And basically they will just go from place to place .. and what we should be looking at is really the problem and trying to solve it. LASBU*

### Prioritising Gun Crime

Respondent from the police highlighted some concerns over how the individual BCUs strategic priorities with gun crime were being marginalised by concerns over volume crime. It was thought that the existence of a dedicated unit like Matrix encouraged the BCU's to pass on this strategic responsibility in practice to the Matrix team:

*Undoubtedly it is one thing we need to look at is we are driving the issue at the moment, I'm not convinced necessarily that the BCUs are buying into it. The difficulty within our organisation once you give a specific group, team, squad ownership of a problem it becomes their problem and policing is far more sophisticated and far more complex than gun crime. Matrix*

There was concern that without the BCUs playing a more active role those incidents which were considered to have the potential to act as precursors to gun crime (be they incidents of acquisitive crime, violent crime



highlighted through the GARD process) were not being sufficiently forecasted or addressed, threatening the impact of the Matrix team:

*We get an update the following week and I'm beginning to believe and it's coming back to haunt people now that events that were raised six months ago have continued to bubble under the surface and we're not impacting like we should do. Matrix*

Other problems in sustaining the current focus on gun crime were felt to be exacerbated by pressure from senior management to meet other crime targets. Furthermore, as one senior police officer noted, there was an unhelpful tendency for strategic responsibility for gun crime to be placed solely on the Matrix team:

*Our current ACPO team whilst in word will say that gun crime is a strategic priority they then go and bloody batter you because your street crime's gone up. So I do understand but we have got in Liverpool North things like your GARD and JAG meeting they are Liverpool North as a BCU they send us a Chief Inspector to those meetings who has responsibility for one hub of four within the BCU. There's an issue about representation in the meeting, there's an issue then about crime fighters which is where the command team are held to account, they're never held to account about gun crime as that's seen as a Matrix problem. So that focus needs to change. Matrix*

These difficulties aside, the overall picture which emerges from this analysis is one of broadly positive partnership working.

## Resources

Interviewees were asked if they thought that sufficient finances were available in tackling gang and gun problems in their area. The general consensus was that whilst the partnership had been successful in attracting funding for programmes due to its innovative approaches, the short-term nature of many funding streams was an obstacle to longer term strategies in breaking the cycle of gang involvement. Other difficulties surrounded the short time period of spend for the programme or what were viewed as overly restrictive guidelines, as one interviewee recalled:

*What does not help is the short term nature of the funding and the very silly windows of spend. I was getting money in October and had to have a spending plan by the end of the month and deliver it by March. It's just impossible and then it came in a Sure Start grant which had so many strings attached to it anyway. Some of the problems have been the nature of the funding and how difficult it's made to actually deliver. I don't know what's been effective in other communities where they have had the same problems. Youth Service*

The short term nature of funding was also seen as sometimes deterring high quality candidates from staying in the paid third sector or in youth work.

Several interviewees mentioned that there was insufficient youth services provision at high risk times, (typically weekends and late evenings) or enough detached outreach work. In part this was viewed as both a matter of sufficient resources and also about changing the culture within the service. However, we were informed that the Youth Service was increasing the number of detached youth service teams to engage youths on the streets on weekends and evenings.

Most respondents acknowledged that more money was desirable, but would be dependent on demonstrating a business case for funding:

*The answer is always we could do with more money. The Home Office put more money into the gun and gang crime and I think that has got to be reviewed, and I think if you*

*make a case they should give you the money. There is nothing worse than throwing money at the problem, I think you should make a case based on what do you want to do? And so, from that perspective, I think when we have asked for money, we have to make a good business case, especially in the present climate. LASBU*

None of the respondents mentioned that lack of resources had unduly hampered delivering programmes and initiatives.

## Evaluation of Programs

Interviewees were asked whether the interventions and programs chosen to address gang involvement and weapon use were based upon research evidence, and whether the programs had been evaluated.

We were told that many of the current approaches to monitoring and evaluation took the form of output measures, quarterly statistical returns, feedback and recommendations rather than formal evaluations. Often these parameters were set at the commissioning phase, which would often determine how a program or service provision was measured. So because commissioning would take place through a grant application process prearranged measured outcomes were typically a condition of tendering. As two interviewees noted:

*When the Local Authority commissions anything it is usually through a grant application process with specific criteria, and some measured outcomes. Some outcomes are often not impact measures, so might be like you have to engage with 50 young people rather than you have to reduce the number of ASB levels so much. So it's usually more about outcomes than impact. Children's Services*

*All the programmes are monitored quarterly. So the ones that were particularly aimed at guns and gangs were monitored like the others. They're monitored in terms of young people accessing them, the outcomes, the equality issues so you will be able to track that and the evaluation will be a peer evaluation model. Youth Services*

Many of the initiatives had output measures which provided the key evidence for a programme, but these generally did not extend to understanding the mechanisms which may have different effects on different subjects in different situations in a theory testing role. They were largely restricted to measures such as throughput, completion of a programme, referral activities etc. However, for some of the diversionary activities this could include a lengthy description of what activities had taken place and practitioners perceptions of how effective they had been in achieving their stated aims, including any capacity issues. In fact some respondents emphasised practitioner experience as a means of assessing effectiveness of a given approach was preferable to conventional research:

*I think for us .. research I know that it's a bit of a dilemma really, you can research things to the nth degree but I also I like to learn from experience of what works. And respecting people for their expertise as practitioners. [...] I would rather learn something, do something and learn from that, and continue to take rather than do the research and take 12 months to come back with an answer. DAT*

Other strategies such as mentoring were accepted as proven methods by several interviewees. We were also informed that the School Mates project had received external evaluations, but had no further details on this. However, new programmes that were being developed had built in a multi-agency approach around extended services to ensure that sustainability of good practice came out of the programme

It appeared that few of the programmes and initiatives had been formally evaluated regards their effectiveness in a robust independent manner, rather the emphasis was upon output measures and feedback from practitioners and the young people themselves in gauging how projects were working.

## 4.7 The Response to Guns and Gangs in Liverpool: Perceptions of Young People

The young people were asked their views on intervention and what could have prevented them from becoming involved in gang activity. Several spoke positively about agencies which had helped them to desist from gang activity, or were involved in helping them at present. These included: Connexions, Youth Offending Service (YOS) and Positive Futures. Others talked about punishments which they felt had helped them to desist from gang related activity. These included: Being on license and long jail sentences.

### Stop and Search Activity

Young people also talked about excessive stop and search activity by the police and how this is largely unjustified. They highlighted how they understood that the police had to 'do their job' but that this activity was exacerbating the level of hatred felt towards the police – particularly amongst the younger people living within those areas.

*Just when they'd see you walking down the street they'd stop you for nothing and start asking you all kind of questions, start searching you and that. Pisses you off, pisses you off.*

*You could get stopped with them four or five times a day and that. They normally, the excuse is they're looking for drugs which, they never find nothing.*

*They don't, they just say this is a random section stop and search. I'm used to it, I just stand there and say go on, whatever, do your job. It makes the young ones hate them, and then they go around terrorising people. It's the bizzies really it's their fault, I'd say it was anyway. I turned on them ages ago. At one time I could have wall papered me bedroom in stop and search forms. I had that many it was like harassment.*

Several young people also talked about experiences of being treated unfairly by the police. These claims are not supported by evidence; however, it is clear from the interviews that there is a deep hatred among some respondents to the police, and the Matrix team in particular.

*The bizzies do horrible stuff to the kids and that. They just smash your head.*

*They just pull you and smash your head in, been violent towards me I've had me head smashed in. I have had smashed bones and all that...you don't realise, no, people don't realise what the bizzies do to the kids.*

### Agencies

*Yeah they've [Connexions] been phoning me saying there's this and there's that and there's two weeks work here and there. I'm doing the building now installing the security stuff.*

*No the YOT Worker I think's very good, the people that work there are very good you know what I mean, and I know them very well because I've been there since a young age.*

*Yeah but they [Positive Futures] come around to us and like all started talking to us and got us away from a lot of places...come around to us and asked us to go in and put applications in for jobs or college. Yeah Positive Futures it is, it's good like.*

## Interventions

*[As part of license] I weren't allowed in Croxteth, I weren't allowed in Norris Green, I weren't allowed with none of your mates. But I dealt with it...like now I don't really go out. I just stay in with me girlfriend do you know what I mean? Whatever happens I have to stay in.*

*If I hadn't got that nine year jail sentence I'd be doing life now I know that. I know for a fact I would be. If they would have given me 3 or 4 years in jail I know for a fact I would have done two years and I would have been straight out and I would have been back in Croxy. You realise don't you. I've got nine of me good mates doing life sentences they'll probably never get of jail again know what I mean? It could have been me and speaking to them and getting letters off them you know what I mean? It's not worth it to be honest with ya.*

Many young people had more negative views about interventions (or lack of interventions) throughout their lives, with several suggesting that nothing would have, or could prevent them from being involved in gang activity.

*Nothing Works!*

*So many people have tried. I've had counsellors, I've had Barnados, the whole family help and that there's so much. None of it's helped.*

*Nothing works, like that ETS and that, that doesn't work you know what I mean? The only person that's gonna stop it is you yourself know what I mean? Nothings gonna help you stop, at the end of the day it's your decision.*

## 4.8 Summary: The Response to Gangs and Guns

### National and international interventions

Nationally and internationally, a wide range of interventions have been attempted to prevent gang and gun involvement by young people. These include individual level protective factor approaches, cognitive mechanisms and counselling; and those that emphasize more macro-level approaches drawing upon social disorganization and social control theories. Many of the interventions derive from the US and consequently need to be interpreted with caution with regards to their transferability to the UK.

The optimal approach to tackling gangs is a multi-agency and multi-modal approach which incorporates components of suppression tactics by police; social intervention to divert at risk young people into legitimate activities; the provision of alternative social opportunities to achieve a sense of fulfilment; community mobilisation to ensure an integrated and co-ordinated response from services and local third sector agencies; and collaborative partnership working amongst agencies.

Robust evaluations of gang and gun interventions are rare; the limited existing evidence points to a number of promising approaches. Education and awareness-raising interventions showed the most promising results of all the approaches that were examined. The only clear exception to this was the prison visit programmes that proved to increase the chances that children exposed to them would (re)offend.

Mentoring interventions also appear to have shown some positive results. Nevertheless, despite their widespread popularity there is very little common understanding of what 'mentoring' actually involves and what activities are included under what is an umbrella term, encompassing a range of strategies. Silvestri et al (2009) notes that a thorough review conducted in 1997 concluded that *'even with the encouraging*

*findings from the most recent controlled test of community mentoring, there is too little information for adequate policymaking'* (Sherman et al 1997 in Silvestri, et al 2009:58).

Programmes which harness the positive features of the gang (sense of belonging, respect, safety) while tackling the negative aspects through mediation and training for young people in conflict resolution have also shown signs of success.

Enforcement strategies (e.g. stop and search) can be effective but need to be focused on the most problematic young people to prevent the dilution of their effect and to minimise the feelings of resentment towards the police by young people. Squires (2007) argues that trends in youth violence, particularly 'knife crime', are not determined by criminal justice responses but rather relate to:

*'underlying social and economic developments which cannot be ignored in any strategy that seeks to prevent increasing numbers of people being both the victims and perpetrators of knife related violence'. Neither do these policy responses acknowledge that concentrated patterns of violent crime in poor communities has anything much to do with inequality, racism or the rest of society (2007:33).*

Squires advocates a 'city-wide perspective' in understanding the role that violence plays as a resource in poor communities which are marginalised from the mainstream economy.

The issue of effective targeting is not restricted to enforcement strategies; social interventions face the challenge of targeting the most at risk young people and doing so without the consequences of labelling. Hospital-based nurse counselling programmes take advantage of a critical window of opportunity to intervene in young people's lives. In the UK this programme has shown 'consistently promising results in terms of a 'significant' reduction in alcohol consumption, illustrating the efficacy of brief interventions.

### **Interventions in Liverpool**

We have summarised the interventions and initiatives that were discussed by the Liverpool interviewees. As indicated above, this is not an exhaustive list but rather provides a guide to activities that have taken place. We cannot comment upon is the adequacy of these interventions in addressing the problems in local communities.

The overall impression from respondents was that of a considerable amount of activity taking place. This covered interventions such as alternative opportunity provision and social intervention and diversion for young people, along with a range of enforcement activities and some attempts at community mobilization. Undoubtedly what is described by our interviewees constitutes a comprehensive strategy to address gang and gun involvement amongst some young people. However, there was a sense, although one never clearly articulated by respondents, that the approach was not sufficiently integrated or co-ordinated.

On the one hand some respondents felt that the partnership had been very successful in reaching out to those young people at greatest risk of gang involvement. However, other respondents felt that interventions had been targeted too broadly and that recipients were not those in greatest need of intervention. Other respondents commented that there was a need for greater support for those young people already involved in guns and gang activity.

## **4.9 Key Findings: Responses to Guns and Gangs**

### **The Existing Research Evidence**

- Nationally and internationally, a wide range of interventions have been attempted to prevent gang involvement by young people, including individual and protective factor approaches, cognitive mechanisms and counselling; and those that emphasize more macro-level approaches drawing upon social disorganization and social control theories. Many of the interventions derive from the US and consequently need to be interpreted with caution with regards to their transferability to the UK.

- The optimal approach to tackling gangs is a multi-agency and multi-modal approach which incorporates components of suppression, social intervention, the provision of social opportunities, community mobilisation and organisation change.

***Suppression: Catch and Convict***

- Existing research has doubted the effectiveness of stop and search programmes in apprehending individuals carrying dangerous weapons mainly because the powers have the potential to create resentment of the police by young people.
- There was little evidence in the existing literature to show that increased levels of punishment increase deterrence. Furthermore, a number of unintended consequences could follow from increasing sentence length resulting in longer sentences for young people.
- The use of metal detectors in schools appear to reduce the number of weapons brought into schools, but were not found to decrease weapon carrying or violence outside schools.

***Social interventions: Rehabilitate and Resettle***

- Peer-based mentoring and case management programmes yielded promising results. One of the few robust evaluations of interventions identified showed that young people participating in ‘Caught in the Crossfire’ were 60 per cent less likely to be re-arrested, placed on probation, breaching probation their conditions.
- Hospital-based nurse counselling programmes take advantage of a critical opportunity to intervene in young people’s lives. In the UK this programme has shown ‘consistently promising results in terms of a ‘significant’ reduction in alcohol consumption, illustrating the efficacy of brief interventions.
- Other promising programmes are those that provide young people with training in self-awareness, personal accountability and communication and conflict resolution. Some programmes have utilised detached youth workers to ensure the engagement of hard to reach young people.

***Social opportunities: Prevent and Deter***

- Education and awareness-raising interventions showed the most promising results from all approaches that were examined to address young people’s involvement with weapons, interventions that have promising results include Social Marketing interventions and Weapons Awareness Workshops. However few of these interventions have been subject to robust evaluation.
- Prison tour programmes have proved ineffective, indeed they appear to increase the chances that young people exposed to them will (re)offend.

***Interventions in Liverpool***

- There is a considerable amount of activity taking place to prevent young people from becoming involved with gangs and guns in Liverpool. This covered interventions such as alternative opportunity provision and social intervention and diversion for young people, along with a range of enforcement activities and some attempts at community mobilization.
- However there were indications that approaches were insufficiently integrated and interviewees called for improving coordination. An evaluation of the effectiveness of these approaches was beyond the remit of this study.
- Practitioners in Liverpool were in broad agreement that whilst the partnership had been successful in attracting funding for programmes, the often short-term nature of many funding streams was an obstacle to longer term strategies in breaking the cycle of gang involvement.
- None of the programmes and initiatives to tackle gang involvement and weapon use had been formally evaluated in any methodologically robust independent manner.

### ***Suppression: Catch and Convict***

- Evidence from interviews with practitioners and young people in Liverpool suggests Police enforcement tactics have led to a reduction in the number of shootings and the availability of weapons.
- However, those young people involved in 'gang' activity reported extremely negative perceptions of the police, particularly Matrix officers. Allegations were made that officers instigated violence against the young people or knowingly put their safety at risk.

### ***Social interventions: Rehabilitate and Resettle***

- Perceptions varied on how successful programs were in targeting the appropriate gang and gun involved youths. Some felt that preventative services are not reaching those young people already involved with guns and/or gang activity. Others felt that at least some of the gang and gun involved youths were being identified and targeted.
- Practitioners called for greater integration between disruption tactics and rehabilitation services. Comments often suggested that partner organisations working in the area were not fully aware of the services and support offered by other agencies.
- Several young people were positive about the benefits of their involvement with agencies that such as Connexions, Positive Futures and the Youth Offending Service. Others were more pessimistic, doubting the effectiveness of agencies in promoting desistance from 'gang' activities.

### ***Social opportunities: Prevent and Deter***

- A number of respondents called for greater emphasis on approaches tackling the remote causes of gun and gang involvement.
- Mixed views were expressed regarding the partnership's effectiveness in targeting those youths who were thought likely to become involved in gangs and weapons in the future. In this respect several praised the work of the Extended Schools Programme and that of detached youth workers. Others expressed scepticism and felt that interventions had been targeted too broadly and that recipients were not those in greatest need of intervention.

### ***Community Mobilisation***

- Several practitioners thought that 'reassurance policing' tactics of flooding the area with police after a firearms or serious incident failed to reassure; rather it sent a signal that people's concerns about insecurity were justified.

### ***Organisational Change***

- Partnerships with schools were acknowledged as an area where further improvement was needed (i.e. a better understanding of available services on behalf of schools and greater provision of information to allow for early intervention). However, the introduction of multi-agency teams embedded within schools, developed as part of the integrated youth support arrangements, was seen as a successful initiative.

## Section 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions

A large body of analysis has been presented in this report that takes stock of the research literature on gangs and gun crime, police firearms data, practitioner perceptions and insights concerning all aspects of gang and weapon involvement, and the accounts of some of those actually involved in gun crime as offenders along with active and peripheral 'gang' members.

Our review of the research literature covered approximately one hundred articles on gangs and gun crime and provides a comprehensive examination of the multiple social contexts and motivations which concurrently work together to influence youth behaviours regarding gang membership and gun crime. We have also detailed the key approaches and interventions that can be used to prevent and divert young people away from gang involvement and gun and knife crime.

The primary research involved gathering a wide range of practitioner and senior practitioner's thoughts, garnered across a range of services, in order to better understand gang and weapon involvement in Liverpool. This included interviewing practitioners with front-line experience of working with gang or gun involved young people as well as practitioners who occupied a more strategic responsibility for service planning and delivery. This exercise also included gathering practitioners' perceptions of how these problems were being tackled in Liverpool.

In addition, the recruitment and interviewing of young people involved the use of highly experienced researchers and was executed with great care and considerable skill. In total 30 young people involved in or associated with gangs were interviewed comprising 18 gang members (including 6 nominals) and 12 associates. A database was constructed, in part from this interview data and the analysis of case file information, to identify the risk factors that can lead young people to become involved with gangs and guns. This exercise also built on the results of the earlier literature review of risk factors.

Whilst we have documented practitioners' perceptions of the interventions that have been undertaken with gang and gun involved young people, and a broader range of young people perceived at risk of these influences, this research was never intended to be an in-depth evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of the DISARM strategy, or its related interventions on gang and weapons-related crime in Liverpool.

Answering the research questions posed at the beginning of this report illustrates the fact that gang involvement and gun crime as with youth violence more generally, are extremely complex problems. Therefore, responses to the problem need to be similarly complex and require a thorough understanding of the nature of the problem in the local area prior. It also requires clarity in what is meant by a 'gang'. Otherwise the rush to label 'the gang problem' and to devise a range of interventions on this basis risks creating the very circumstances it seeks to challenge, and there is some evidence that this occurred in Liverpool.

#### **The Extent of Young People's Involvement with Gangs and Guns in Liverpool**

The research identified groups of young people engaged in anti-social behaviour, crime and violence. Contrary to definitions of 'gangs' these groups were loosely interlinked informal peer group networks with only moderate cohesiveness. Young people associated with these networks stated that there was no hierarchy or recognisable structure to their groups. Importantly, few of the young people interviewed in Liverpool viewed themselves as belonging to a 'gang' and the use of the term by practitioners may be serving to add coherence and identity to previously transitional youth groups. This may have created the very circumstances it sought to challenge.

The identified youth groups did engage in anti-social behaviour, crime and violence and some stated that they had access to firearms and the willingness to use them. Strong territorial rivalries were identified



between groups which acted as an escalator to more serious forms of crime and violence including the use of firearms.

The research identified that some young people particularly those from Anfield, Everton and Kirkdale were involved in more structured criminal groups operating within illegal drug markets. These organised groups are distinct from those loose friendship groups described by youths from Norris Green and Croxteth.

Gun crime in Liverpool represents a small proportion of all crime. It is unclear what proportion of Liverpool gun crime is attributable to young people although national figures highlight that victims of gun crime are disproportionately young. Young people interviewed confirmed that they had access to guns but stated that gun availability had reduced in Liverpool as a result of police operations. Young people spoke of firearms being 'passed down' or borrowed rather than bought.

Links between gang involvement and gun crime were identified with gang involved young people more likely to become involved with crime and gun crime to non-gang involved young people.

### **What are the likely causal processes generating and sustaining the problem?**

The research findings emphasise the cumulative impact of multiple risk factors, with multiple deficits across five developmental domains (family, neighbourhood, school, individual and peers) increasing the probability of involvement with guns and gangs.

Young people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are more likely to carry firearms illegally and those who had been exposed to violence are more likely to commit violence themselves. Heightened fears of confrontation with other young men, combined with low social status, much time spent on the streets, and limited opportunities to demonstrate manhood legitimately are significant risk factors in young men engaging in violence, particularly to other young men. The combined evidence shows that fear, insecurity, and victimisation play the most significant role in a young person's decision to carry a weapon. Very few young people report carrying a weapon with the proactive intent of using it against others, protection is the key motivation.

The need to 'belong' was consistently identified as a motivation for association with gangs or delinquent peer groups. Other prominent motivations were peer pressure; to obtain illicit income and protection from risks and dangers.

There is strong evidence of a link between firearm-related offending and the trade in illegal drugs both in the UK generally and in Liverpool specifically. Several gang involved young people spoke of involvement in drug dealing. Drug dealing provides young people with an opportunity for income generation and status which is not available to them through the legitimate labour market.

Lastly the research highlighted that the notions of a 'gang' or 'gun culture' are too simplistic to adequately explain why young people carry and use guns as it fails to explain both the symbolic and instrumental motivations for the user. Supporting this finding, detached youth work in the research areas revealed that young people were not particularly interested in exhibiting specific dress codes or 'badges of identity.'

### **Which interventions look promising?**

Nationally and internationally, a wide range of interventions have been attempted to prevent gang involvement by young people. Many of the interventions identified originated in the US and consequently need to be interpreted with caution before transferred to the UK. Multi-agency and multi-modal approaches that incorporate components of suppression, social intervention, the provision of social opportunities, community mobilisation and organisation change were identified as the optimal approach to tackling gangs.

Education and awareness-raising interventions showed the most promising results from all approaches that were examined to address young people's involvement with weapons, interventions that have promising results include social marketing interventions and Weapons Awareness Workshops. However few of these

interventions have been subject to robust evaluation. Programmes targeting victims of violence in hospital emergency departments take advantage of a crucial key window to intervene. In the UK the efficacy of these brief interventions as applied to alcohol consumption has shown 'consistently promising results.' Peer-based mentoring and case management programmes feature among the most promising approaches with participants less likely to be re-arrested, placed on probation or breach their conditions.

The effectiveness of enforcement programmes including stop and search can be mired if efforts are not targeted at the most problematic young people if the approach creates resentment of the police by young people. Increased levels of punishment do not appear to increase deterrence, similarly prison tour programmes prove less effective, and have may even increase the chances that children exposed to them will (re)offend.

### Interventions in Liverpool

In Liverpool a considerable amount of activity is focused on reducing young people's involvement in gangs and guns. However there were indications that approaches were insufficiently integrated and required improving coordination.

Evidence from interviews with practitioners and young people in suggests that Police enforcement tactics have led to a reduction in the number of shootings and the availability of weapons. However, this has been at the cost of relationships between young people and the police. A number of the young people we interviewed made serious allegations concerning police malpractice. **It should be stressed that all of these allegations are entirely unsubstantiated, and we cannot comment authoritatively upon the accuracy or otherwise of them.** The use of stop and search as a tactic to deter weapon carrying and use is an important police power. The problem lies in the often unintended consequences that can follow, particularly if stop and searches are used in a confrontational or adversarial manner.

The challenge of targeting the most at risk young people while avoiding the consequences of labelling was raised by several practitioners. Several respondents felt that interventions had been targeted too broadly and that recipients were not those in greatest need of intervention. Other respondents commented that there was a need for greater support for those young people already involved in guns and gang activity.

Few of programmes tackling gang involvement and weapon (in the US, the UK or in Liverpool) have been formally evaluated in any methodologically robust independent manner.

## 5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations that follow have been linked to the relevant key findings emerging from the research. They cover three broad areas: the need to ensure clarity in defining the problem and devising strategies; approaches to preventing young people's involvement with gangs and guns and the robust evaluation of impacts. Recommendations relating to interventions are structured by the five main strands of the Comprehensive Gang Model: Suppression/Catch and Convict; Social Intervention (Rehabilitate and Resettle); Social Opportunities (Prevent and Deter); Community Mobilisation and Organisational change.

### Defining the problem

#### ***Recommendation 1: Use of the term 'gang'***

- Research conducted in the UK (in contrast to the US) has been circumspect about the existence of gangs. Judgements of the extent of gang activity in Liverpool, as anywhere, are heavily dependent upon how one defines a gang.
- The research identified groups of young people engaged in anti-social behaviour, crime and violence. Contrary to definitions of 'gangs' these groups were loosely interlinked informal peer group networks with only moderate cohesiveness. The majority of the young people stated that there was no hierarchy or recognisable structure to their groups.
- Few of the young people interviewed in Liverpool viewed themselves as belonging to a 'gang', indeed many were scathing of such an attribution. In the light of the emphasis on self-definition in current definitions of 'gangs,' it appears that policy makers, practitioners and researchers have overused the word 'gang'.
- There was some evidence that the authorities' labelling of young people as 'gang members' and the adoption and use of gang names attributed coherence and identity to what was often only fluid and transitional youth group formations. This may have created the very circumstances it sought to challenge.

***Consideration should be given to dropping the use of the term 'gang' in relation to youth violence and delinquency and avoiding the use of gang names to refer to groups of young people.***

#### ***Recommendation 2: Distinguishing different types of criminal group***

- The research literature makes an important distinction between youth gangs and more organised criminal groups. This is reflected in the findings in Liverpool. A number of young people from Anfield, Everton and Kirkdale spoke of their involvement with criminal families (or 'firms') operating with a rigid structure and hierarchy, who were prominent in the supply and distribution of illegal drugs. These organised groups are distinct from those described by youths from Norris Green and Croxteth who described loosely organised informal friendship networks engaging in criminal and anti-social behaviour.
- Firearms discharge data provides support for this distinction with evidence of firearms use by both 'chaotic' users and more organised users associated with drugs markets

***Interventions should adopt a different approach with those young people who are associated with organised criminal groups compared to those young people who are associated with loosely structured youth networks.***

### ***Recommendation 3: Profiling firearms offences***

- It is unclear what proportion of firearms offences in Liverpool are attributable to young people. Nationally the victims of firearms offences are disproportionately young, no information is available on the victims of gun crime in Liverpool.
- There is limited information on the origin and supply of firearms in Liverpool. Anecdotal evidence points to firearms being supplied from three key sources; returning UK soldiers, from the decommissioning of weapons in Northern Ireland, and from Eastern European states.
- Possible explanations for how young people obtain firearms include from family, friends, theft, the black market or 'misappropriation'.

***There is a need for in-depth analysis and profiling of firearms offences and offenders, weapon availability, circulation and supply.***

## **Responses to Gang Involvement and Gun Crime**

### ***Recommendation 4: Multi-Modal approaches***

- The majority of interventions designed to tackle gang involvement and gun crime originate from the US and consequently need to be interpreted with caution with regards to their transferability to the UK.
- The optimal approach to tackling gangs is a multi-agency and multi-modal approach which incorporates components of suppression (catch and convict), social intervention (rehabilitate), the provision of social opportunities (prevent and deter), community mobilisation and organisational change.
- There is a considerable amount of activity taking place to prevent young people from becoming involved with gangs and guns in Liverpool. This includes alternative opportunity provision, social intervention and diversion for young people, enforcement activities and community mobilization. An evaluation of the effectiveness of these approaches was beyond the remit of this study.

***The partnership should continue with this multi-modal approach***

***See also Recommendations 15 and 17***

## Catch and convict

### **Recommendation 5: Proactive enforcement**

- In line with the national picture, following a long upward trend between 1998 and 2007, shootings in Liverpool declined by 23 per cent in 2008. The decline has been steepest in the Liverpool North BCU. The research findings suggest that gun availability in Liverpool has also reduced.
- Practitioners and young people interviewed attribute these reductions to police enforcement tactics.
- Existing research has highlighted that stop and search powers risk creating resentment of the police by young people. This was the case in Liverpool where those young people involved in 'gang' activity reported extremely negative perceptions of the police.
- Using, and being seen to use, fair procedures in encounters with youth offers police an important opportunity to enhance legitimacy.

***a) Proactive policing should continue as central to the 'gang and gun's strategy in Liverpool.***

***b) Enforcement interventions must be targeted selectively focusing on only the most problematic young people. This will ensure their effect is not diluted and minimise the impact of activities on relations between the police and young people.***

***See also Recommendation 6: Procedural Justice Enforcement operations should incorporate the principles of procedural justice.***

### **Recommendation 6: Procedural justice**

- Several young people made allegations of police illegality, brutality and unprofessional conduct. The allegations have been referred to the Police Standards Agency.
- c) All Police enforcement action should employ the principles of procedural justice in order to build (rather than detract) from police legitimacy in the eyes of the young people. This is irrespective of who is being policed, the level of enforcement action (hard or soft) or young people's presenting attitudes (degree of deference being shown) during an interaction. This will enhance police effectiveness and efficiency in the longer term.***
- d) Young people need to be provided with the opportunity to express their opinions about policing and know how to make complaint when necessary.***

## Rehabilitate and Resettle

### **Recommendation 7: Positive aspects of group membership**

- Research shows that youths who join gangs are more likely to become involved in delinquency and crime.
- It should be remembered that these groups offer many positive benefits to their members including a 'sense of belonging', fun, protection and a source of income.

***There is a need for interventions which can enhance the positive aspects of group membership while minimising negative aspects.***

***Recommendation 8: Peer mentoring***

- While young people did not feel 'pressured' by peers to become involved in gangs and guns, the influence of delinquent peers was paramount.
- Peer-based mentoring has yielded promising results. One of the few robust evaluations of interventions identified showed that young people participating in 'Caught in the Crossfire' were 60 per cent less likely to be re-arrested, placed on probation, breaching probation their conditions.

***Provide opportunities for young people to interact with positive role models and peer mentors, this will enable them to develop positive aspirations and receive support in obtaining them.***

***Recommendation 9: Conflict resolution***

- The closed environments that many of the young people occupied often generated a strong identification, local loyalty and sense of belonging. This promoted territorial disputes between rival groups, acting as an escalator to more serious forms of crime and violence.
- Interviews with practitioners and young people provide evidence of gun use to support apparent 'gang' feuding and recriminations, and to gain respect amongst peers.
- Programmes utilising detached youth workers to engage hard to reach young people in mediation and conflict resolution have been positively evaluated.

***There is an need to provide mediation in conflicts between local groups/gangs and a long term need to provide young people with the inter-personal skills required to avoid future conflict.***

***Recommendation 10: Legitimate channels for masculinity***

- There is strong evidence of a link between firearm-related offending and the trade in illegal drugs both in the UK generally and in Liverpool specifically. Drug dealing underpins the criminal economy, and is 'out-competing' the legitimate labour market alternatives for some young people, especially those in more structurally marginalised positions.
- Violence and the threat of violence by and between young men are shaped significantly by a drive to demonstrate manhood. Limited opportunities to demonstrate manhood legitimately are significant risk factors in young men engaging in violence particularly with other young men.

***The partnership should consider the provision of gendered positive activities that are challenging and relevant to young males and provide a new way to gain 'respect' from their peers and demonstrate their masculinity through legitimate channels. Activities which provide skills can improve the position of young people in the labour market.***

**Recommendation 11: Brief interventions in A&E**

- Practitioners' perceptions varied regarding the partnerships success in targeting the appropriate gang and gun involved youths. Some felt that preventative services are not reaching those young people already involved with guns and/or gang activity. Others felt that at least some of the gang and gun involved youths were being identified and targeted.
- Hospital-based 'brief interventions' incorporating nurse counselling programmes within accident and emergency departments take advantage of a critical window of opportunity to intervene in young people's lives. In the UK these programmes have shown 'consistently promising results' in terms of a 'significant' reduction in alcohol consumption, illustrating the efficacy of brief interventions

***The partnership should consider the implementation of brief interventions targeting victims of violent crime presenting to accident and emergency departments.***

**Recommendation 12: Offender Management**

- Practitioners called for greater integration between disruption tactics and rehabilitation services.
- The majority of gun crime nominals were also PPOs and should therefore be subject to case management. It is not known how many of the gang involved young people were subject to case management.

***The partnership should review the way in which the delivery of offender management and statutory orders are integrating with gun and gang interventions.***

**Prevent and Deter**

**Recommendation 13: Families**

- Family background was consistently highlighted as a key risk factor in gun and gang involvement.
- Liverpool is in receipt of YCAP resources, which includes Family Intervention Programmes.

***The partnership should review the use of family level support delivered through FIPs and identify any obstacles hindering the provision of support to the families of gun and gang involved young people.***

***Under YCAP, face-to-face support for parents should be made available through Parent Support Advisors who should be linked to schools in every Local Authority***

***See also Recommendation 15: FIPs should be integrated into a city wide perspective on violence***

#### **Recommendation 14: Education**

- Young people confirmed that they had access to guns. Respondents spoke of firearms being ‘passed down’ or borrowed rather than bought, thereby increasing their availability. It was reported that guns are ‘stashed’ or ‘stored’ rather than kept in possession.
- Education and awareness-raising interventions showed the most promising results from all approaches that were examined to address young people’s involvement with weapons, interventions that have promising results include Social Marketing interventions and Weapons Awareness.

***The partnership should establish a dialogue with young people about the nature, risk and dangers of gang involvement and weapon carrying, delivered through both formal and informal educational approaches.***

***NASUWT are currently preparing an Online Gangs Toolkit designed for use in schools. When completed this may prove a useful resource for schools across Liverpool.***

#### **Recommendation 15: City wide perspective of violence**

- Young people who had been exposed to violence are more likely to commit violence themselves.
- The young people interviewed described violence as part of everyday life, describing their experiences as victims, witnesses and perpetrators of violence.
- The combined evidence shows that fear, insecurity, and victimisation play the most significant role in a young person’s decision to carry a weapon. Very few young people report carrying a weapon with the proactive intent of using it against others, rather protection is the key motivation. One explanation for this is when neighbourhoods feel threatening, weapon carrying may make young people feel safer.
- Squires (2007) recommends adopting a ‘city-wide perspective’ to understanding the role that violence plays in communities.

***The partnership should ensure close co-ordination of the separate groups tackling violent crime in Liverpool. This should incorporate partnership groups tackling gangs, knife and gun crime, domestic violence, child protection, hate crime, violence in schools and other forms of violence to share intelligence and co-ordinate practice to ensure the reduction of all forms of violence affecting young people.***

### **Community Mobilisation**

#### **Recommendation 16: Reassuring communities.**

- Several practitioners thought that ‘reassurance policing’ tactics of flooding the area with police after a firearms or serious incident failed to reassure; rather it sent a signal that people’s concerns about insecurity were justified.

***a) A long term strategy of reassurance policing should be developed, one which engages with the community through established community policing teams rather than being incident specific..***

***b) Reassurance policing plans should incorporate a communication strategy to accentuate positive outcomes and make the most of any achievements. Capitalising on ‘quick hits’ is good, but ensure that the community can see how successes will be maintained in the long term.***

***c) Reassurance policing plans should be reflexive and self critical, rather than assuming that high visibility patrols reassure.***



## Organisational change

### **Recommendation 17: Policy mapping**

- There were indications that interventions were insufficiently integrated and interviewees called for improving coordination. It appeared that partner organisations working in the area were not fully aware of the services and support offered by other agencies.

***A policy mapping exercise should identify the full range of interventions currently operating in Liverpool that target young people already engaged in and at risk of becoming involved in gang and or guns. This should include data on responsible agencies and referral procedures.***

***Possible outputs from this exercise include: a) an intranet directory of service provision with contact points and referral mechanisms; b) a series of workshops aimed at practitioners providing each partner agency with the opportunity to highlight the services they offer.***

### **Recommendation 18: Long term strategy**

- Practitioners in Liverpool were in broad agreement that whilst the partnership had been successful in attracting funding for programmes, the often short-term nature of many funding streams was an obstacle to longer term strategies in breaking the cycle of gang involvement.

***There is a need to develop a longer term programme of funding that would be sustained and meet demand side needs, one which removes disincentives to programme development and obstacles to implementation.***

## Evaluation

### **Recommendation 19: Evaluation**

- Few of the programmes and initiatives to tackle gang involvement and weapon use had been formally evaluated in any methodologically robust independent manner.

***There is a need for more rigorous assessments and evaluations of interventions. The impact of interventions will vary depending on the young person's developmental stage and their varying social conditions, evaluation therefore needs to concentrate on what works for whom, why, and in which circumstances, rather than simply on 'what works.'***

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## Appendix 1: Security of Data

Due to the sensitivity of this research we had to put a number of security safeguards in place. This involved:

*The use of passwords to protect access to files, computers and recording equipment.*

The use of encryption software to provide secure places to hold data on desk top and lap top computers and on portable storage media such as memory sticks. We purchased and used 'Steganos' software. This allowed us to identify a portion of a hard drive that we wanted to secure; everything stored within it was referred to as an 'encrypted disk'. When opened, work on files in the encrypted disk area carries on usual. When closed, the encrypted portion of the disk itself is not visible. Access to the encrypted disk is controlled via a password and Steganos assists users in creating highly secure passwords.

*Ensuring that all members of the research team use the same security procedures.*

We made backups of work carried out on encrypted computer disks to portable encrypted media (eg. memory stick) and stored this separately to the computer where original work was carried out. During analysis of data, all data was held on an encrypted portion of the computers being used by the research team. For those working on laptops and carrying these back and forth between home and university offices, the laptop and memory sticks were be carried separately, in case of loss or theft.

Paper fieldwork notes were destroyed as soon as possible after digital encryption.

We minimised paper printouts of data. Where it was necessary (for eg. taking field notes) all paper documents were be kept in locked filing cabinets when not in use and shredded immediately after use



## Appendix 2: Knife Crime in Liverpool

The research team's review of the literature found little research in the UK, Europe, or the US which specifically examined young peoples' involvement with knife-related crimes. The review did identify a number of thorough reviews of research, policy and preventative practice in 'knife crime' in the UK, notably; Squires' (2008), Silvestri, et al., 2007; 2009 and Golding and McCoy's (2008).

We begin by reviewing the prevalence of gun and knife crime in England and Wales, prior to examining why young people carry or use these weapons, and the strategies and interventions aimed to prevent the use of these weapons.

Any attempt to measure 'knife crime' is complicated by the broad range of offences and various sources of data covering different aspects of the offence. Police recorded crime figures have only recently reported the use of knives in certain offences and a by definition these data only shed light on offences that have reported to and recorded by the police.

These figures show there was a 2% drop in offences of possession of a weapon (from 35,590 in 2005–2006 to 34,707 in 2006–2007) although it is not possible to know from these figures how these trends correlate with knife carrying (Home Office 2009). There was a fall in the number of homicide offences involving a knife or other sharp instrument (down from 270 to 252) between 2007/08 and 2008/09, but a rise in the number of attempted murders involving a knife (up from 245 to 271 offences). Robbery offences involving knives decreased slightly in the same period. Turning to the BCS data, Squires found little evidence of any significant change in the proportions of knife use in wounding and robbery from 1997 to 2007.

The NHS provides an additional source of information for the more serious incidents of knife crime. The provisional 'Hospital Episode Statistics' show an 8% fall in Admission Episodes for assault by a sharp object in England in the 12 months from March 2008 to February 2009 (4,847) compared to the previous year (Home Office, 2009). However, these figures omit Accident and Emergency admissions for those not subsequently admitted to hospital, and therefore likely undercount wounds suffered as the result of assault with a knife.

Squires (2007) reviewed data from the British Crime Survey, police recorded crime figures and for young people, the Offending, Crime and Justice Survey (OCJS) and Youth Surveys commissioned by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and concluded that knife carrying was the most common form of knife related offence. A survey in Scotland in 2000 canvassed 3,121 children (aged 11-16) and found that 12% claimed to have carried a sharp instrument as a weapon at some stage in their lives. According to similar annual MORI surveys in England and Wales for the YJB, there have been notable increases for offences of 'hurting somebody without the requirement for medical attention' and 'carrying a knife', up 12 percentage points since 2002, with some 32% of children admitting to carrying a knife in the past 12 months (in Squires, 2007:11). However this apparent dramatic rise may reflect the questionnaire wording change in 2003 rather than any real increase, and so needs to be interpreted with caution.

A MORI poll of young people attending Pupil referral Units (PRU's) found that 6 in 10 (61%) young people said that they have carried a knife or a gun in the 12 months prior to the survey. Just over two in 10 said that they did not (22%).<sup>50</sup> Young people were more likely to have carried a knife (54%) than a gun (46%), although some young people have carried both. Seventy percent who say they have carried a knife have also carried a gun in the last 12 months, whereas 83% of those who have carried a gun have also carried a knife (YJB, 2009b:51).

The OCJS survey provides one of the best means of assessing the scale of knife carrying in England and Wales as it focuses exclusively on young people (aged between 10-25, living in private households). In 2006 the OCJS found that 3% of young people had carried a knife with them in the last 12 months, with over half

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<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that 16% of young people who took part in the MORI (2009) survey did not provide an answer as to whether they had carried a knife or gun with them in the last year.

(54%) having only carried a knife once or twice during this period. Pen knives were the most commonly carried (46%) whilst carrying of flick knives (20%) and kitchen knives (12%) was less common. Not surprisingly, males were more than twice as likely as females to have carried a knife (5% versus 2%) and according to respondents the peak age was 14 to 17 (6% of this age group). A very small minority of the three per cent of young people who had carried a knife reported using the knife to threaten or injure someone (4% and 1% respectively) (Roe & Ashe, 2009:7). This finding diverges sharply with the earlier mentioned Youth Survey of School children finding of 32% carrying knives, however, the different age groups and methodologies used means that they are not directly comparable.

### **Why Carry a Knife? Risk Factors and Motivations for Knife Carrying**

There are a number of different youth surveys which specially address why young people carry knives and other weapons. The OCJS is the most comprehensive, and found that 85% of respondents who carried a knife did so for reasons of 'protection', a further 8% stated they carried a knife 'in case they got into a fight' (OCJS, 2006). The YJB (2009) survey similarly finds that insecurity and protection are key factors in knife carrying among young people. After carrying a knife for hobbies, activities or sport (32%) carrying a knife for their own protection was common (30%). However, very few young people stated that they carried a knife with the proactive intent to use it against others; 5% attribute knife carrying to scare others, 3% to threaten others and 3% to injure someone (YJB, 2009:46-47). The same survey found little variation in terms of age, gender and ethnicity for the reasons given for carrying a knife in the last year. Interestingly, over a third (35%) of those young people who had been previously victimised cited carrying a knife for protection, compared to 20% of non-victims.

The MORI survey also found that exposure to drugs seemed to have an effect on whether or not a weapon is carried. Those young people who claimed to have obtained drugs were much more likely to report that they also carried a weapon (69%), compared to only 23% of those who did not have the ability to obtain drugs.

The MORI survey is also conducted among young people attending PRUs, and found that those young people who had committed a criminal offence in the last 12 months were significantly more likely to have also carried a knife or gun than those who had not (72% compared to 38%). As with more general offending patterns, there appeared to be a link between young people carrying a gun or knife and being part of a group where crime is seen as acceptable (76% compared to 54%). As with other young people, PRU attendees were significantly more likely to say that they have carried a knife or gun in the same time period than those who had not been a victim of an offence (71% compared to 46%). Over half of those who carried a knife stated reasons of protection (51%), with a further 26% said that they would use it in case they got into a fight. One-quarter either said to scare (13%) or threaten (12%) others. Fewer PRU attendees than young people generally who carried knives said that they would use the knife for a hobby (20%).

A number of other studies have found that being exposed to violence (either as a victim or a witness) can increase the likelihood of some young people committing violent acts themselves (Patchin et al 2006, Sieger et al 2004, McGee 2003, in Silvestri et al, 2009:29). One reason may be where people fear attacks by others in the neighbourhood, and resort to carrying knives or even firearms in order to get revenge or for protection. Silvestri et al's (2009) review of the research literature also points to young people's concerns about risks and dangers in their immediate neighbourhood or community, particularly journeys to and from school as a key reason for carrying a weapon. Broadhurst et al's (2008) survey on behalf of the teacher's union NASUWT produced accounts from some young people about the protective and self-defensive practices they followed on the way to school. "It's not a bad thing to bring a weapon into school. You might get attacked on the way to school, on the way back. It's protection." (Broadhurst et al 2008, in Silvestri, 2009:38). There is some support for these findings in London where the Metropolitan Police head of Operation Blunt stated that the period 3pm to 7pm, just after the end of school, is the peak period for knife crime incidents.

These findings are also supported by a report commissioned by the Bridge House Trust, *Fear and Fashion*, which concluded that fear of crime was the most significant reason 'in a young person's decision to carry a knife or weapon', a reason supported by practitioners who participated in the research (Lemos, 2004:8). As

one practitioner noted; *“Fear outweighs aggression as a motivator. We work with teams of offenders and at the bottom of it is fear ... [it’s for] defence” (Lemos, 2004:vii)*

The authors also found that experience of victimisation (direct or indirect) and the desire for status were also chief motivations for carrying a knife (Lemos, 2004: 8-11). There is anecdotal evidence that the status associated with the possession of a knife has a ripple effect and creates a fashion that other children might want to follow (Lemos, 2004).

### **The Response to Knife Crime: Interventions in the UK**

There are few projects or activities that specifically focus on preventing or tackling the use of knives amongst children and young people in the UK. Those identified by this review include Government enforcement and sanctions, projects designed to raise awareness amongst young people of the dangers of carrying weapons, informal education projects, and work with offenders. As well as these specific projects some others integrate work with young people on carrying offensive weapons with more general youth offending programmes. These include mentoring, conflict resolution, work with gangs and support for parents.

We have not included in this review more generic non-weapon youth violence prevention interventions which operate at the primary prevention stages. This would include a potentially very large number of interventions, such as public health approaches which stress the importance of the wider environment and positive family and community influences. This is not to dismiss the value of these early intervention strategies in preventing youth violence, rather we have focused on secondary and tertiary interventions that have some specificity to weapon carrying.

#### **The Government Response**

In England and Wales, the Home Office ‘Tackling Violence Action Plan’ and the Youth Crime Action Plan’ (both 2008) include measures specifically targeting weapons, including a presumption that anybody aged 16 and over who is found carrying knives should be prosecuted, anyone using a knife ‘should expect to receive a custodial sentence’, home visits and letters to parents of young people whom intelligence suggests carry weapons, ‘bringing children’s behaviour to their parent’s attention and making them understand their responsibilities’, plus a confidential helpline for advice.

The Government is also implementing a ‘Tackling Knives Action Programme’ (TKAP), launched in June 2008 which ran until March 2009 to deliver ‘tough enforcement combined with education, prevention work (Youth Justice Board 2008a) and information campaigns’. A monitoring programme is currently underway.

Many of the current anti-knife and gun policies in the UK target on a ‘hot spot’ areas identified as being at particular risk of violence, for instance TKAP focused on ten areas and The Tackling Gangs Action Programme targeted gang-related firearms offences, focused on four police force areas (London, Merseyside, West Midlands and Greater Manchester). Anti-knife operations (e.g. Operation Blunt, Operation Shield) have also been concentrated on areas where (young) people gather and crime tends to occur, like transport intersections or in city centres at night during weekends.

#### **Knife amnesty**

Knife amnesties are routinely run at local authority levels in Britain, and presumably work on the presumption that having fewer knives in the possession of young people provides greater security for everyone. However, little research has followed these and other knife amnesties to assess their impact on knife carrying and knife offences and furthermore, little is known about who is likely to hand in a knife during the amnesty or why. (Squires, 2007).

According to the Home Office, the national knife amnesty in 2006 saw a total of 89,864 knives being handed in during the national Amnesty, but assuming every household in Britain has at least one knife, this still leaves a minimum of 22 million households in England and Wales, each possessing a kitchen knife. As Squires (2007) notes, on this calculation the amnesty has been successful in removing only 0.0041 per cent of knives

that might be used in crimes, although this does not consider the ready supply awaiting purchase in any high street shop.

Evidence from other knife amnesties in London<sup>51</sup>, and Strathclyde (Beetleman, 1997 in Squires, 2007) found that knife amnesties only had a short-term impact on knife crime in terms of reducing the number of knife related offences. However, amnesties fail to address the underlying causes of such violence. Furthermore, it would seem likely that those who carry knives for reasons of protection or to commit crime would be the least likely to dispose of them at police stations.

### ***Use of metal detectors in schools***

These measures are used in parts of the US School system and there has been some discussion among policy makers of introducing metal detectors in some urban schools in the UK. The measures include installing security systems and metal detectors, checking of lockers, see-through bags, and hiring dedicated security staff or police officers. A thorough evaluation of these initiatives was conducted by the Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders. The Group found that whilst metal detectors 'reduced the number of weapons [guns, knives or other weapons] brought into schools, they did not seem to decrease weapon carrying or violence outside schools' (Catalano et al 1999 in Silvestri et al, 2009:58).

In the UK the Tackling Violence Action Plan' and the 'Youth Crime Action Plan' (2008) include providing the police with portable knife arches and search wands. This is not specific to schools, but operates in much broader 'hotspot' areas covering an entire region (including Merseyside) (Home Office 2008b).

### ***Social marketing/campaigns***

The Home Office conducted a £3 million anti-knife campaign portraying the dangers of knife crime through the use of strong images (using billboards and web-based resources like Bebo and YouTube). The programme also included provision for workshops on the dangers of weapons.

A survey in 2008 tried to establish the effectiveness of the campaign. Some 500 young people (aged 11 to 19) were surveyed, 70 per cent of whom had seen the adverts. Of those, 62 per cent of young people said the ads had made them more fearful of crime; 32 per cent thought the adverts would stop young people carrying knives but 48 per cent said this was unlikely. Opinions on the ads' effectiveness were found to vary according to age. Nearly half of 11 to 13-year-olds thought the shocking images portrayed would work, while only a quarter of 14 to 17-year-olds agreed. The figure fell further for 18 and 19-year-olds, with only a fifth of them thinking the ads were likely to stop young people carrying knives (Smith 2008 in Silvestri, et al 2009). More promising results were found from a later online survey for the Home Office in August 2008. Of the 1000 young people (10-16 year old) who had viewed or heard the adverts, 73% said they had made them 'less likely to carry a knife' (Home Office correspondence 2009, in Silvestri, 2009). These survey results need to be treated with caution though, as surveys are not a methodologically reliable source of evidence with regards to weapons and young people.

### ***The 'Be Safe Project'***

This is an educational approach which delivers 'Weapons Awareness Workshops' to Young people in schools. The aim is to educate young people about the potential harsh realities of what can happen when they carry a knife. This is a five year project which aims deliver workshops to 1.1 million young people and is a key part of the Government's violent crime reduction action plan.<sup>52</sup> Squires (2007:29) notes that the programme has apparently been evaluated by Newham Youth Offending Team and claims 'some impressive results', although this review was unable to substantiate this from the organizations website.

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<sup>51</sup> Metropolitan Police Service (2006), *Knife Amnesty Impact on Knife-Enabled Offences*, London: Metropolitan Police Service, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/share\\_d/bsp/hi/pdfs/06\\_12\\_06\\_knif\\_e\\_amnesty.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/share_d/bsp/hi/pdfs/06_12_06_knif_e_amnesty.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> See <http://www.besafetraining.com/Home>

## Appendix 3: Practitioner Interview Schedule

### Section A: DISARM Group

1. Could you tell me a little bit about the history of the DISARM Partnership? (prompt: why was it set up? When was it set up? Why were the agencies selected?)
2. What is the DISARM strategy?
3. What informs the strategy?
4. Where does Children's Services sit in the partnership? (prompt: what is their role/influence?)
5. What progress has been made so far? (prompt: what achievements? What direction will it go in?)
6. Is the partnership approach working so far? (prompt: do DISARM partners work together on the ground? Do some agencies take more of a lead than others? Do some agencies have more influence than others?)

### Section B : Role of LASBU

1. What do you feel is the extent of the gun/gang problem in Liverpool?
2. Is there a difference in problems between Liverpool south and Liverpool north?
3. What is Children's Services role/strategy in dealing with/working with young people involved in gangs/firearms?
4. Are you happy with the role that Children's services has?
5. Other than the DISARM partnership do you work with any other agencies with respect to young people and gang culture?

### Section C: Motivations and risk for gang culture

1. In your opinion what do you feel are the motivations for young people's involvement in gang culture? (prompt: what are these?)
2. Do you feel that there are specific risk factors for young people in Liverpool? (prompt: what are these?)
3. Research indicates that there are a number of risk factors associated with gang membership these include:
  - Community Factors: availability of drugs, fear of crime and low levels of attachment to area.
  - Family Factors: poor parental supervision, family members involvement in criminal activity and/or gangs
  - School Factors: low educational attainment
  - Peer factors: having delinquent beliefs and associating with delinquent peers.
  - Individual factors: consuming drugs and alcohol and experiences of violent victimisation.

Do you feel that the work of DISARM/Children's Services addresses these risks?

4. There have been high profile cases involving firearms in Liverpool have these had an effect on these communities (prompt: negative press inflating the problem, community mistrust of agencies).

## Section D: Initiatives and Interventions

1. Can you tell me about some of the interventions/diversionary projects that are already in place in Liverpool? (prompt: what is Children's Services role in this?)
2. Which agencies take the lead with most of the projects? (prompt: detached youth workers, charity, voluntary, community based projects, non-statutory bodies?)
3. Are the interventions based on what research tells us about the risk factors already discussed and/or on any evidence of successful projects elsewhere? (prompt: if so which?)
4. In your opinion do you feel that Liverpool has/is implementing the most suitable strategy for the issue? (are there enough finances? Partnership working? Initiatives based on evidence of what can work?)

If you would like to add anything else please do so.

## Appendix 4: Young Person's Interview Schedule

1. There is a lot of stuff in TV, films, newspapers and things that people say about what gangs are like. How does this compare to what things really are in your own experience?

(If they don't recognise "myths" give them examples: highly organised, leaders, initiation rites, codes of conduct, etc)

(Careful to "myths" about gangs and bullshit –proving about their own experience)

(Probe for structural characteristics: organisation, subdivision in cliques, leadership, different categories of members, size, demographic –ethnic, sex, age- composition of gangs, initiation rites, codes of conduct, names of gangs, territoriality, colours/graffiti/special clothing, changes over the last ten years in the Liverpool gang landscape, conflict between different gangs, do all members know each other) different types of gangs, how are these things in their own gang, what is a gang to them)

(If they use native categories: "soldiers", "generals" –check about their meaning and probe them; don't take'em at face value)

2. Tell me about the first time, probably when you were much younger than now, than you personally knew of someone being involved in a group like (name of the gang he/she is associated with)?

(Probe for getting involved in the gang, how old were they when they started hanging out, initiation rites, reason to join the gang, gradual introduction from hanging out to more frequent interaction, special requirements to be a gang member, degree to which people stay in the same gang, risk factors for membership, and significance of the gang identity)

3. Tell me about some of the things that you get from being involved in (name of the gang) that you don't get from anywhere else?

(Probe for friendship, loyalty, suspicion, betrayal, protection, shared profits, co-offending possibilities and criminal opportunities, meeting girls, relationships with women, role of women, respect and street credibility, ethnic relations and tensions, tell me a funny story that happen when you were with your friends from (name of the gang))

4. Do people you know treat you differently when they know you are in (name of the gang)?

(Probe for family, school, employers, other community residents, people from other areas, other youth, girls/boys, police, discrimination, labelling)

5. I'm also interested in learning about everyday life in the gang. If I were in a group like you are, how would my typical day be like?

(If they give us an exciting day, ask how often that sort of day takes place, and what most days are really like)

6. Earlier we talk about all the things that people say about gangs. Something that is often mentioned is that gangs are violent groups that use guns and fight against each other. How does this compare to what things really are in your own experience?

(Probe for what the conflicts between gangs and within gangs are about, gun availability, significance of guns, victimisation experiences, is victimisation related to joining the gang)

7. What are the main ways that you and people in (name of the gang) make money? I'm just asking because the media often says that it's mostly about drug-selling or things like mugging?

(Probe for legitimate sources of income, public benefits, acquisitive crime, drug selling, linkage to unemployment, how central drug selling is to the gang, degree of organisation, drug use, is drug use discouraged, how much income they get from it, is it sufficient?)

8. Just to wrap up, best case scenario, worst case scenario, where do you see yourself in five years time?

(Probe: still hanging out, prison, going legit)

FOR FORMER GANG MEMBERS

9. Tell me about your experience of leaving the gang?

(Probe for triggering events –victimisation experiences, getting caught-, factors that helped –job, partners, family, formal interventions, prison-, factors that made it difficult, people's reaction to efforts to leave the gang, problems confronted when leaving the gang, durability of the gang stigma, opinion on existing community responses, suggestions for helping the process for existing gang members,)



## Appendix 5: Young Person's Consent Form and Confidentiality Agreement



*University of*  
**HUDDERSFIELD**

Consent Form

**Title of the project:** Guns and Gangs in Liverpool

I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to leave at any time without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected.

I understand that information from the interview will be treated in confidence and that no individual will be identified in anything that is published.

I understand that I won't be identified or named in anything that is written.

I understand that if I wish to go 'on the record' and allow my name to remain in the data, then I will provide written consent for this.

I agree to take part in the study.

---

Name

Date

Signature

