

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AFFECTED BY GANG ACTIVITY May 2011

(The document provides Guidance in Part 1 and the BSCB's associated Procedures in Part 2)

Acknowledgements

Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board draws substantially from the Manchester and the Pan London Safeguarding Children Board Procedures (and the research contained within their guidance).

Part 1. Guidance and Background Information

1. Local Profile 2010

1.1 Recent research by Thames Valley Police revealed there are a number of gangs in existence across Buckinghamshire, with the majority of gangs based in the Wycombe area. These gangs have been identified over a 12 month period, where a group of individuals have formed an alliance and given themselves a self defined name. Some of these gangs have been around for several years, while others appear to be less well established.

1.2 The majority of these gangs appear to be peer group, predominantly male, who came together as a result of having common interests, being a similar age group or living in the same area. Unlike many city based gangs, gangs in Buckinghamshire have not created an identity associated with local post codes, but there are some geographical or travel link identifications. They are mostly, but not exclusively, involved in low level anti-social behaviour, rather than the more serious criminal behaviour. It is recognised however, that the nature of gangs is known to change over time.

2. The Guidance

2.1 This document provides guidance for frontline staff and their managers in all organisations, and individuals in Buckinghamshire's local communities and community groups on identifying and safeguarding children who are vulnerable to or at risk from involvement in or targeting from:

- Emergent criminality, serious youth violence perpetrated by their peers in gangs, or increasing anti-social behaviour; and
- Serious youth violence perpetrated by children acting on their own.

2.2 This procedure supplements the Home Office Guidance 'Safeguarding Children and Young People who may be affected by gang culture 2010 and should be read in conjunction with the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board Procedures www.bucks-lscb.org.uk

3. Definition of a gang

3.1 Defining what constitutes a 'gang' can be difficult, partly because its characteristics are known to change over time and locality. Being part of a friendship group is a normal part of growing up and it can be common for groups of children and young people to gather together in public places to socialise. These groups should be distinguished from 'gangs' for whom crime and violence are a core part of their identity, although 'delinquent peer groups' can also lead to increased antisocial behaviour and youth offending.

3.2 Although some group gathering can lead to increased antisocial behaviour and youth offending, these activities should not be confused with the serious and organised violence of a gang.

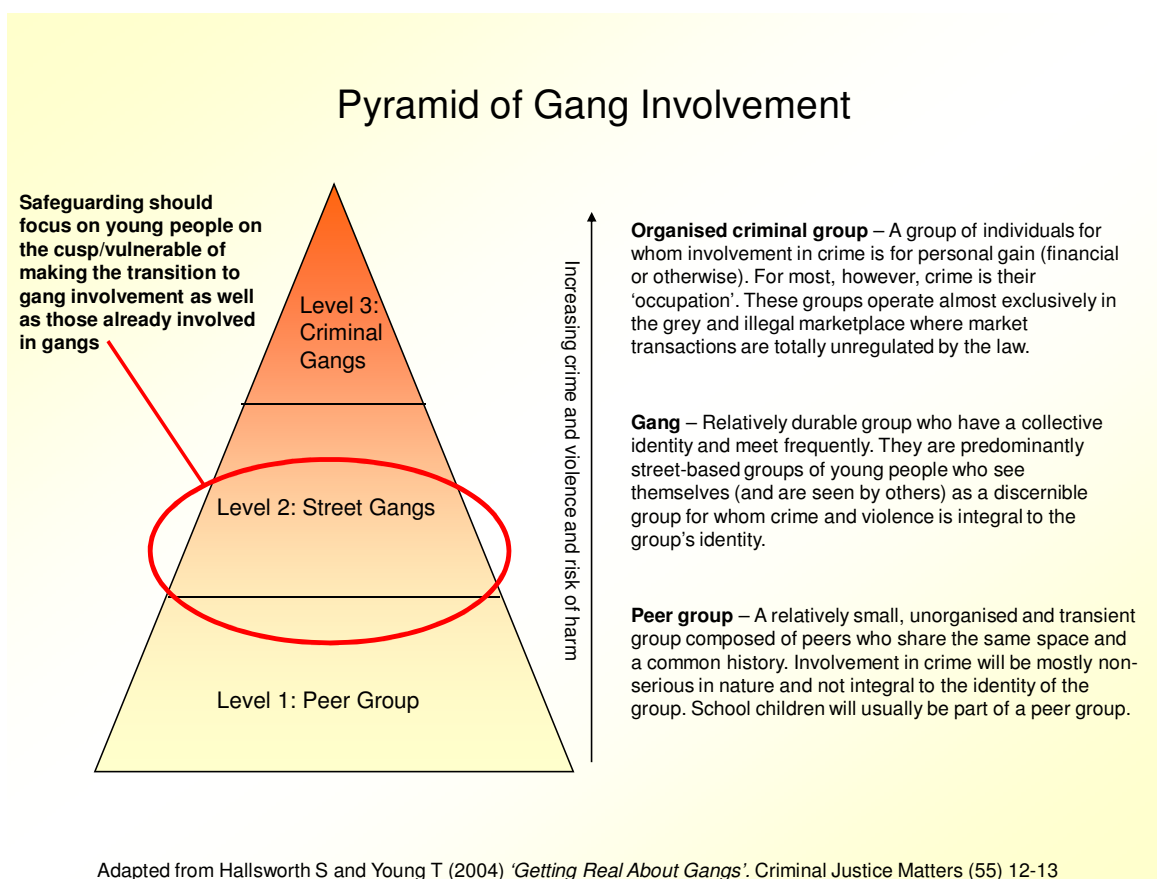
3.3 Hallsworth¹ and Young and Robert Gordon² set out the following definitions:

- **Peer group:** a small, unorganised, transient group of children who 'hang out together' in public places such as shopping centres. Crime is not integral to their self definition;

- **Wannabee group:** includes children who band together in a loosely structured group primarily to engage in spontaneous social activity and exciting, impulsive criminal activity, including collective violence against other groups of children. Wannabees will often claim 'gang' territory and adopt 'gang-style' identifying markers of some kind;
- **Gang:** a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of children who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the group's identity.
 - Children may be involved in more than one 'gang', with some cross-border movement, and may not stay in a 'gang' for significant periods of time;
 - Children rarely use the term 'gang', instead they used terms such as 'family', 'breddrin', 'crews', 'cuz' (cousins), 'my boys' or simply 'the people I grew up with'; and
- **Organised criminal group:** members are professionally involved in crime for personal gain, operating almost exclusively in the 'grey' or illegal marketplace.

3.4 Gordon also suggests that definitions may need to be highly specific to particular areas or neighbourhoods if they are to be useful. Furthermore, professionals should not seek to apply this or any other definition of a gang too rigorously; if a child or others think s/he is involved with or affected by 'a gang', then a professional should act accordingly in assessing the risk to the child as both a potential perpetrator and a victim.

3.5 The diagram below sets out a tiered approach to defining gangs. This guidance is focused on those young people on the periphery of becoming involved with street gangs and those young people already involved.



4. Principles supporting this procedure

4.1 The following principles should be adopted by all agencies in relation to identifying and responding to children (and unborn children) at risk of or being affected by gang activity and/or serious youth violence:

- Children who are harmed and children who harm should both be treated as victims, and professionals should bear in mind that a child may be a perpetrator and also a victim of violence;
- The safety and welfare of the child is paramount;
- All agencies act in the interests of the rights of the child as stated in the UN Convention (1989);

- All decisions or plans for the child/ren should be based on good quality assessments and be sensitive to the issues of gender, nationality, culture and sexuality; and
- All agencies should work in partnership with members of local communities, to empower individuals and groups to develop support networks.

5. Serious youth violence

5.1 The majority of children do not become violent and those that do, tend not to become violent in a short space of time. For the latter, their behaviour represents many years of [increasingly] anti-social and aggressive acts, with aggressive habits learned early in life often the foundation for later behaviour. Where a child succeeds at low-level anti-social acts, such as verbal abuse and bullying, violating rules and being disruptive, s/he may feel emboldened to perpetrate increased violence. However, any public discussion around serious youth violence should contain messages that reassure the public and build confidence, i.e. that **the vast majority of young people contribute positively towards society**. It is a fact that serious youth violence is committed by a small minority (less than 2%) of young people.

6. Environmental factors

6.1 Several factors are important contributors in potentially increasing an individual child's propensity to act violently:

- Exposure to media images of violence;
- Access to weapons;
- Involvement with alcohol and other drugs; and
- Involvement in a gang.

6.2 Exposure to media images of violence increases a child's fear of becoming a victim, with a resultant increase in mistrust of others ^{4 and 5}. It desensitises the child to violence, resulting increased callousness toward violence directed at others and a decreased likelihood to take action on behalf of the victim when violence occurs. It also increases a child's willingness to become involved with violence

6.3 In families where children's viewing is not regulated, they can readily access graphic violence, often with sexual content, through cable TV, the internet and on DVD.

7. Gang Involvement

7.1 Recognition and respect

7.1.1 A recent study of street crime confirms that much of it is primarily concerned with respect and recognition rather than monetary gain. Gang members will sometimes video their offences and post them on websites. While this renders them more vulnerable to prosecution (these sites can be a good source of intelligence), it serves to consolidate their reputation for toughness and hence the 'respect' to which they aspire.

7.1.2 Respect matters to children in relation to gangs because to be 'disrespected' makes a child a target for anyone who wants to make a name for themselves. An act of 'disrespect' that goes unpunished can be perceived as inviting a challenge from rivals within their own gang as well as members of other groups. In certain neighbourhoods, being 'mugged' is often a prelude to a career of street crime prompted by fear as children endeavour to rebuild respect in their social group in the wake of an attack.

7.1.3 Violence is also a way for gang members to gain recognition and respect by asserting their power and authority in the street, with a large proportion of street crime perpetrated against members of other gangs or the relatives of gang members.

7.1.4 Gang members also tend to be socially and emotionally isolated individuals with a very low level of mutual trust. Their relationships are put under even greater strain when gang members assault or rob friends, relations or one another – a not infrequent occurrence. However, it is worth noting that some high profile gang members have excellent social and communications skills, and can be intelligent and articulate.

7.2 Group behaviour

7.2.1 In some circumstances, those who participate in group instigated violence are not known to be aggressive or anti-social. Rather, they can be children whose permissive parenting did not equip them to resist the group.

7.2.2 Where violence develops, it can escalate very quickly in a contagious manner, often through shared concerns and values.

7.2.3 Whilst only a small percentage of children join gangs, and the absolute amount of violent behaviour by gang members is small, some studies suggest that homicide and aggravated assault are three times more likely to be committed by gang members than by non-gang anti-social children.

8. Formation of gangs

8.1 Community and family circumstances

8.1.1 Circumstances which can foster the emergence of gangs include:

- Areas with a high level of social and economic exclusion and mobility (which weakens the ties of kinship and friendship and the established mechanisms of informal control and social support)
- Areas made up of predominantly social housing, and especially where it is high rise / high density social housing.
- Areas with poor performing schools – in terms of leadership, positive ethos, managing behaviour and partnership working;
- Lack of access to pro-social activities (e.g. youth service) and to vocational training and opportunities;
- Communities who have experienced war situations prior to arrival in the UK;
- Areas with a high level of gang activity / peer pressure and intimidation, particularly if the family is denying this or is in fear of the gangs; and
- Family members involved in gang activity and criminality.

8.1.2 Many parents are aware of the perception that the gang problem is ultimately a product of poor parenting and that the solution lies in assuming responsibility for their children. However, they feel unable either to control or to protect their children.

8.1.2 Gang-involved families are vulnerable to attack, reprisal and burglary. Parents may have the dilemma of deciding whether their child's best interest is served by resisting the gang or joining it. Sometimes colluding with gang membership is viewed as the safest option for their child and family.

8.1.3 Families who are exposed to violent crime can suffer long term negative impact on their health and well-being. Homicide can cause shock, denial, anger and fear, which may be heightened if the victim or family know the offender and/or live in the same neighbourhood. Victims, families and communities can also be stigmatised by homicides through being (or feeling) blamed for the situation.

8.2 Reluctant or naive gang members

8.2.1 Children may become reluctant gang members as a means of self-protection. Non-affiliation may mean that it is dangerous to use certain services or facilities like an FE college or the local park, either located in gang territory or where access is only possible if one traverses gang territory.

8.2.2 Children can become involved in anti-social behaviour and gangs (and high-risk behaviours of all types) through impulsivity, lack of experience and failing to foresee consequences.

8.2.3 However, gang members who want to leave a gang not only lose its protection, becoming vulnerable to other gangs with whom they have previously come into

conflict, but may also be at risk from their former associates because of the disrespect or disloyalty implied by their departure.

9. Serious youth violence

9.1 Weapons

9.1.1 Fear and a need for self-protection is a key motivation for children to carry weapons – carrying a weapon affords a child a feeling of power. Neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation and social exclusion generally have the highest rates of gun and knife crime.

9.1.2 Many children do not seek active involvement in gun crime and if they do use a gun are horrified by what they have done.

9.1.3 Knives and other weapons are far more prevalent than firearms, especially in the case of children. The Offending, Crime and Justice Survey (Home Office, 2005) highlights that:

- Four percent of children had carried a knife in the last 12 months;
- Less than one percent reported having carried a gun in the same period; and
- Eighty-five percent of those that had carried a knife said the main reason was for protection, and a further nine percent said it was in case they got into a fight. Unfortunately, carrying weapons increases the risk of serious injury or death while defending oneself or fighting, and the risk multiplies in group situations.

9.1.4 The Home Office reports that in 2005-06 the most common method for all killings was with a sharp instrument; twenty-eight percent of all victims were killed by a sharp instrument; and seven percent of victims had been shot (50 victims) in 2005/06.

9.2 Knives – What is and is not legal?

- It is illegal for any shop to sell a knife of any kind (including cutlery and kitchen knives) to anyone under the age of 18
- It is generally an offence to carry a knife in public without good reason or lawful authority (for example, a good reason is a chef on the way to work carrying their own knives)
- Knives where the blade folds into the handle, like a Swiss Army Knife, are not illegal as long as the blade is shorter than three inches (7.62 cms)
- If a knife is used in a threatening way (even a legal knife, such as a Swiss Army knife), it is regarded as an 'offensive weapon' by the law. This is also the case with things like screwdrivers - once used in a threatening manner, they are treated as offensive weapons. It is an offence to carry an offensive weapon in a public place, if you don't have a reasonable excuse

10. 'Stop and Search' powers

- Police officers have the right to search any person they suspect of an offence - including carrying an offensive weapon.
- Professionals working with children who may have reason to be fearful in their neighbourhood or school / FE college etc should be alert to the possibility that a child may carry a weapon. See guidance on Keeping professionals safe and Management responsibility, and Screening and searching pupils for weapons in schools.

11. Alcohol and drugs

11.1 The use of alcohol and illegal drugs can play a major role in violence involving young people.

Children's and young people's use of drugs can bring them into contact with adults who are involved in organised crime, supplying drugs. The drugs business tends to attract career criminals who regulate the market through often extreme violence or the threat of violence.

11.2 Children often carry drugs (or weapons and stolen property) for the older gang members, so that they can be stopped and searched with impunity. Children will also serve jail terms for older gang members.

12. Sexual violence and grooming

12.1 The majority of gang members are male, although there are a number of female gang members or female gangs. Girls are more likely to be subservient in the predominantly male gangs, often being used to carry or stash weapons and drugs.

12.2 In some localities female members of gangs are often on the receiving end of violence and extortion and their relationships with other gang members tend to be abusive.

12.3 Initiation rituals are sometimes based on sexual violence, with female members of their own gang, or more often, on the female members of a rival gang.

12.4 Very few incidents of sexual violence by gang members are reported, with girls extremely reluctant to identify their attackers and often intimidated and threatened not to talk.

12.5 An American study of gang behaviour concluded that group sexual assault (and other types of assault) mainly occurs in an environment where group behaviour and acceptance is important to the young men involved. An individual who might otherwise not have perpetrated a sexual assault, may do so in situations where the presence of others acting in a similar fashion, diminishes the individual's feeling of responsibility for the harmful consequences of his own behaviour.

12.6 Gang members often groom girls at school and encourage / coerce them to recruit other girls through school / social networks. There is also anecdotal evidence that younger girls (some as young as 10 or 12) are increasingly being targeted, and these girls are often much less able to resist the gang culture or manipulation by males in the group. The girls often do not identify their attackers as gang members and tend to think of them as boyfriends. They may also be connected through family or other networks.

12.7 Girls are often groomed using drugs and alcohol, which act as disinhibitors and also create dependency.

12.8 Female relatives of gang members could also be at particular risk of either being under pressure to have sex with gang members or of being the victim of sexual violence by another gang. Siblings are particularly at risk but other members of the wider family may also be exploited in this way

13. Gangs' use of the internet and mobile 'phones

13.1 The internet has increasingly become a key recruitment tool to help gangs expand, both in terms of territory and the number of members in each gang. Young members typically use mobile phones to conduct drug transactions and prearrange meetings.

13.2 Gang leaders actively reach out through popular online services to create a new generation of gang members. They describe gang life as glamorous and seductive. Recruiters tell of a life of power, leisure, and wealth, and instant gratification, as well as a 'family' and sense of belonging that many young people may desperately want.

13.3 Feedback from young gang members in London is consistent with this: "Peer pressure and wanting to look 'bad' are two of the reasons, but during our investigation, one thing seemed to stand out. Young people are searching for some kind of family unit" - Headliners 2010.

13.4 For the most part, gangs use the same sites everyone else does – MySpace, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. The videos and photos posted may just be about their lives, but frequently include documentation of crimes they want to brag about. The sites are also used to convey threats and intimidate. The threats exchanged on line create a new cause for offline violence as gang members settle disagreements that started online.

14. Signs and symptoms of gang involvement

14.1 Children as young as 7 years old can be gang-involved. Professionals who have contact with children should be competent to identify the signs and symptoms which, particularly when clustered together, can raise concerns that a child may be either reluctantly or willingly involved with a gang.

14.2 Indicators:

- Child withdrawn from family;
- Sudden loss of interest in school. Decline in attendance or academic achievement (although it should be noted that some gang members will maintain a good attendance record to avoid coming to notice);
- Being emotionally “switched off”, but also containing frustration / rage;
- Started to use new or unknown slang words;
- Holds unexplained money or possessions;
- Stays out unusually late without reason or breaking parental rules consistently;
- Sudden change in appearance – dressing in a particular style or ‘uniform’ similar to that of other young people they hang around with, including a particular colour;
- Dropped out of positive activities;
- New nickname;
- Unexplained physical injuries, and/or refusal to seek / receive medical treatment for injuries;
- Graffiti style ‘tags’ on possessions, school books, walls;
- Constantly talking about another young person who seems to have a lot of influence over them;
- Broken off with old friends and hangs around with one group of people;
- Associating with known or suspected gang members, closeness to siblings or adults in the family who are gang members;
- Started adopting certain codes of group behaviour e.g. Ways of talking and hand signs;
- Expressing aggressive or intimidating views towards other groups of young people, some of whom may have been friends in the past;
- Scared when entering certain areas; and
- Concerned by the presence of unknown youths in their neighbourhoods.

14.3 Looked after children are particularly vulnerable due to their low self-esteem, low resilience, attachment issues and the fact that they are often isolated from family and friends. There are risks specific to different types of placements such as secure units, children’s homes, foster homes, or living in semi-independent accommodation.

14.4 It seems that the more heavily gang-involved a child is, the less likely s/he is to talk about it. However, if a child does talk about gang involvement, professionals should always take what the child tells them seriously.

15. A child at risk of becoming a serious violent offender

15.1 Professionals who have contact with children should be competent to identify the combinations of signs and symptoms which can place children at risk of becoming serious and violent offenders.

Additional indicators:

- Hyperactivity – the relationship between hyperactivity and later violence has been found consistently across studies, regardless of the measurement methods used;
- Concentration problems – which can predict later violent behaviour as well as academic difficulties, which themselves are risk factors for violence;
- Aggression - the earlier anti-social and violent behaviour presents, the more likely a child is to display chronic and serious violence in later childhood and adolescence;

- Acceptance of violence, carrying weapons and substance misuse and sexual exploitation – which weaken a child’s internal controls against these behaviours;
- Dishonesty, anti-social beliefs and attitudes, and hostility toward police – all of which have all been found to predict violence, particularly among boys.

16. Sexual exploitation

16.1 Children at risk of sexual exploitation linked to gang activity and/or serious youth violence may also present with:

- Running away;
- Overt sexualised dress / attire;
- Internal injuries, multiple sexually transmitted infections (STIs), miscarriages and/or termination;
- Chronic drug dependency (particularly crack / heroin); and/or
- Expressions of despair such as self-harm – cutting, overdosing, eating disorders, sexualised risk-taking.

16.2 See the BSCB procedure for safeguarding children abused through sexual exploitation www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/procedures

17. Looked after children

17.1 Looked after children say that bullies, gangs and the risk of serious youth violence are the worst thing about where they live.

- A fifth of children had concerns about gangs and bullies; and
- Over half of the children had been bullied – with 20% of them as frequent victims.

17.2 Professionals in all agencies who have contact with looked after children should be alert to their increased vulnerability to being gang-involved, targeted by gangs or adversely affected by gang activity. These children could potentially be at risk of harm from serious youth violence.

17.3 Youth offending services should ensure the National Protocol for Case Responsibility is followed in regards to any transfer of young offenders between boroughs where gang affiliation is known. This information should include welfare and risk information.

18. Information sharing

18.1 Staff in all agencies need to be confident and competent in sharing information appropriately to safeguard children at risk of harm through gang activity and/or serious youth violence.

18.2 All agencies are empowered to share information without permission for the purpose of crime prevention under section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, although obtaining consent is good practice

See also Information Sharing guidance:

<http://bucks.phewinternet.co.uk/sites/all/files/assets/documents/Local-or-National-Guidance/local/Information%20sharing%20Code%20of%20PracticeApril%2009.pdf>

19. All education establishments can be affected

19.1 Some primary schools in the country report conflict between self-styled gang members. From time to time, gang-affiliated youngsters from secondary schools are summoned to a primary school by their younger brothers and sisters as reinforcements in the aftermath of an ‘inter-gang’ playground dispute.

19.2 In some areas of the country, FE colleges are vulnerable as sites where gang activity and/or serious youth violence can gain momentum because, unlike schools, gangs are more likely to view further education colleges ‘as belonging’ to particular gangs. This ownership can give rise to incidents of serious youth violence on the premises and create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

19.3 In recent UK studies, almost two thirds of 23 active gang members interviewed had been permanently excluded from school, with the exclusions often resulting from gang involved and gang-affected children attempting to bring weapons onto school premises. The studies confirmed that children involved in anti-social behaviour and gangs tend to see academic striving as 'uncool' and, as a result, educational failure can come to be accepted as the norm amongst them.

20. Health

20.1 Health professionals, in particular GPs and A&E staff, may become concerned about a child's involvement in serious youth violence due to injuries or wounds, particularly those caused by sharp instruments or knives.

20.2 Health professionals may also come into contact with girls who they suspect may have been sexually exploited or abused, perhaps through Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinics, sexual health services and GPs. The professionals should be alert to a child's likely reluctance and fear of discussing this.

21. Housing and Social Landlords

21.1 Through their housing management function, social landlords are well placed to identify risk and to make a strong contribution to delivering positive outcomes across the range of preventative, enforcement and/or resettlement strategies.

21.2 The incidence of gang activity and/or serious youth violence are high-level concerns for social landlords and their residents in neighbourhoods in which they manage properties.

21.3 There is also a key role for the hostel / supported housing sector who may be accommodating the young people themselves. This includes 16 / 17 year old 'children in need' who are accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act, and whose circumstances may make them particularly vulnerable to exploitation by gangs. These types of services are uniquely placed to pick up on risk factors and also to work with young people attempting to break away from gang activity.

22. Community groups / voluntary agencies and faith groups

22.1 Community groups / voluntary agencies can be well placed to know the profile and location of local gang activity and potential or actual serious youth violence through their community links and the work they do to support children and their families. In addition, community workers and professionals from voluntary agencies can be best placed to reach children who are at risk of harm from their peers.

22.2 Gang-related 'territorialism' and serious youth violence can make community, voluntary or youth work difficult in any local area. In these circumstances, safe outreach work rather than building-based activities can be an effective way forward.

References

- 1 Hallsworth, S and Young, T. Getting Real About Gangs, *Criminal Justice Matters* 2004 (55) 12-13
- 2 Gordon, R. Criminal Business Organisations, Street Gangs and "Wanna Be" Groups: A Vancouver perspective. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. 2000. vol. 42. No 3
- 3 Thompson, C et al. Representing Gangs in the News: media constructions of criminal gangs. 2000. *Sociological Spectrum* 20. 409-432
- 4 Goode, E and Ben-Yehuda, N. *Moral Panic: The construction of deviance*. 2009 *Sociology Index*, Sociology Books.

Bibliography

London Safeguarding Board: Safeguarding children affected by gang activity and/or serious youth violence. 2010

HM Government: Safeguarding children and young people who may be affected by gang activity. 2010

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008), *Gangs and Group Offending Guidance for Schools*, www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=12639

Victim Support (2007) *Hoodie or Goodie? The Link Between Violent Victimisation and Youth Offending: A Research Report*,

www.victimsupport.org.uk (see publications, research reports section)

Part 2. BSCB Procedures - Responding to Concerns of Gang Activity

1. Identifying a child at risk from gang activity and/or serious youth violence

1.1 A child could be:

- non-involved, but at risk from becoming involved and harmed from gang activity or serious youth violence;
- non –gang involved and at risk of harm from gang members
- involved with gang related activities and/or serious youth violence and at risk both of harming others and being harmed him/herself.

1.2 Potentially a child involved with a gang or with serious violence could be both a victim and a perpetrator. This requires professionals to assess and support his/her welfare and well-being needs at the same time as assessing and responding in a criminal justice capacity.

1.3 See the quick referral flowchart in [Appendix 1](#)

2. Assessing levels of need

2.1 Staff should assess the presenting behaviours / what a child is telling them in the context of whatever information they know or can gather from the child about the risk factors which contribute to the child's vulnerability to gang involvement and serious youth violence.

2.2 See also the risk assessment framework for children affected by gangs and serious youth violence, in [Appendix 2](#).

2.3 The tools for making an assessment are:

- The Common Assessment Framework (CAF); and
- A specialist / statutory assessment (including children's social care initial and core assessments, ASSET50, or CAMHS).

3. Deciding to undertake a CAF

3.1 A common assessment should be undertaken by the service or agency which first has concerns that a child is vulnerable to, or at risk of harm from, gang involvement or activity. There may be a need to assess (and convene meetings) about more than one child. For guidance on CAF please see:

http://www.buckinghamshirepartnership.gov.uk/partnership/CYPT/Local_Delivery/practice_guidelines.page?collection=bcc

3.2 A member of staff who has concerns about a child should discuss these with his/her immediate/line manager, nominated safeguarding children adviser and local professional with specialist knowledge in relation to gangs and serious youth violence.

4. Multi-agency decision making and signposting

4.1 If a common assessment indicates that more than two agencies should be involved in meeting the child's needs, it may be appropriate to hold a multi-agency professionals meeting. Agreement about which agencies will be invited should be reached with the child and family, and the local professional with specialist knowledge in relation to gangs and serious youth violence should be consulted.

5. The multi-agency meeting has a number of responsibilities and functions to fulfil:

- Share information about the child and their family. Under Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, all agencies are empowered to share information without permission for the purpose of crime prevention (although obtaining consent is good practice);
- Identify key contacts and lead professional;
- Plan the most appropriate services to intervene and support the child and their family;
- Modify plans in the light of information shared;
- Ensure accountability;

- Increase mutual understanding and the use risk assessment techniques;
- Identify other children who might be at risk;
- Increase understanding of different agencies' ability to and constraints of taking action; and
- Increase understanding of the success of different interventions.

5.1 The outcome of meeting may be that:

- There is no need to proceed further at this point;
- There is a need to invoke child protection procedures;
- There is a need for further assessment;
- There is a possibility of criminal action against an adult;
- There is a possibility for restorative justice (restorative conference), mediation meetings and/or family group conferences.
- There is a need for a gang exit strategy - leadership, anger management conflict resolution training and, where necessary, relocation.
- Counselling is required to divert the child from involvement;
- There is justification for criminal action against the child;
- There is insufficient information at this stage, but concerns remain and further work is required to clarify them; or
- A referral to a voluntary project / organisation should be made

5.1.1 Multi-agency case plans should have clear outcomes, assigned responsibilities and be led by a lead professional chose from those practitioners present at the multi-agency meeting. The lead professional will take the lead in co-ordinating provision and be a single point of contact for a child and their family for the range of services represented by the multi-agency meeting.

6. Recognition of significant harm.

6.1 In relation to gangs and serious youth violence, children could be or could put themselves at risk of significant harm from:

- their peers; or
- gang-involved or affected adults in their household (including because their parent cannot protect them).

7. Referral to LA children's social care

7.1 If a professional is concerned that a child is at risk of significant harm – as a victim or a perpetrator of serious youth violence, gang-related or not – the professional should:

- wherever possible, consult with their agency's nominated safeguarding children adviser, their manager and, if available, the local multi-agency gang intelligence forum and/or professional with specialist knowledge in relation to gangs
- make a referral to LA children's social care
- where there is immediate danger of significant harm, refer to the police

7.2 When an agency receives notification that LA children's social care will not be taking action, the professional who made the referral to LA children's social care should undertake a common assessment for the child (see Common Assessment Framework).

7.3 Once concerns are raised about harm from gang activity and serious youth violence, there should also be consideration of possible risk to members of the child's family and other children in the community. Professionals should be alert to the fact that other children could be identified as being at risk of harm from gang involvement / activity and will then need to be responded to as a child in need or a child in need of protection.

7.4 The LA children's social care response will be in line with the usual processes, outlined in the BSCB Procedures.

8. Parental engagement

8.1 Wherever possible, professionals in all agencies should involve parents as early as possible in cases where there are concerns that a child may be affected by gang activity and serious youth violence; and the child and his/her parents should be invited to any multi-agency meeting to discuss the concerns.

8.2 The exception to this is where professionals have concerns that to involve parents would risk further harm to a child or undermine a criminal investigation. If the parents are not invited, the reason should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting together with a written undertaking that a named person informs them of the outcome of the meeting.

8.3 Where there are difficulties in engagement with parents, staff should consider alternative ways of achieving co-operation, including the use of community organisations and/or community leaders to facilitate the work with parents/family.

9. Parenting Contracts and Orders

9.1 In many cases, parents engage willingly with the support on offer. But parenting contracts can offer more structure to the relationship between service and the family, which may suit some families better, and parenting orders can be used if parents do not engage voluntarily. Parenting contracts and orders are preventative interventions that can be used to provide support and challenge to parents of children and young people showing problematic behaviour such as:

- Serious misbehaviour at school which could lead to exclusion;
- Exclusion;
- Truancy;
- Criminal conduct;
- Anti-social behaviour (for further information see Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003).

10. Looked After Children

10.1 When children are known to be involved with or affected by gangs, professionals need to take into account gang territory and gang membership when planning placements for looked after children, to avoid placing a child in a situation which exposes him/her to serious youth violence.

10.2 At reviews, the Independent Reviewing Officer should recommend that a team manager convenes a multi-agency professionals or network meeting if there are concerns that a child may be vulnerable to gang involvement and/or serious youth violence. The overall intention is that there needs to be clear lines of accountability for any looked after child who is vulnerable to or affected by gang activities and/or serious youth violence.

10.3 All children's homes should have access to a local professional with specialist knowledge in relation to gangs and serious youth violence or a gangs and serious youth violence team.

11. Local intelligence

11.1 Police officers who interact daily with young people are often best placed to recognise the signs displayed by young people that may either already be gang members or at most risk of being recruited into a gang. A responsibility rests with all to ensure that intelligence around those affected by gangs is accurately recorded and then shared with partner agencies, in order that appropriate strategies can be implemented.

12. Osman warnings

12.1 A warning regarding threat to life, or an Osman Warning, is so named after the Osman v United Kingdom case (1998) which placed a positive obligation on the authorities to take preventive measures to protect an individual whose life is at risk from the criminal acts of another individual. In the context of gangs, this may occur as a result of gang rivalry or because of an incident occurring within a young person's own gang (for example threatening to leave or refusing to commit an act of violence).

12.2 If the police give an Osman Warning to a young person they should inform children's social care and consider whether:

- There is a need for immediate action regarding risk of significant harm
- The child should be referred for a common assessment

13. Risk of Harm to Professionals

13.1 Professionals should be aware of any potential threats to the social workers' safety during interaction with a child before or during section 47 enquiries and should make a decision on the suitability of a home visit. It may be more appropriate to interview the child and/or parents and carers in a neutral setting.

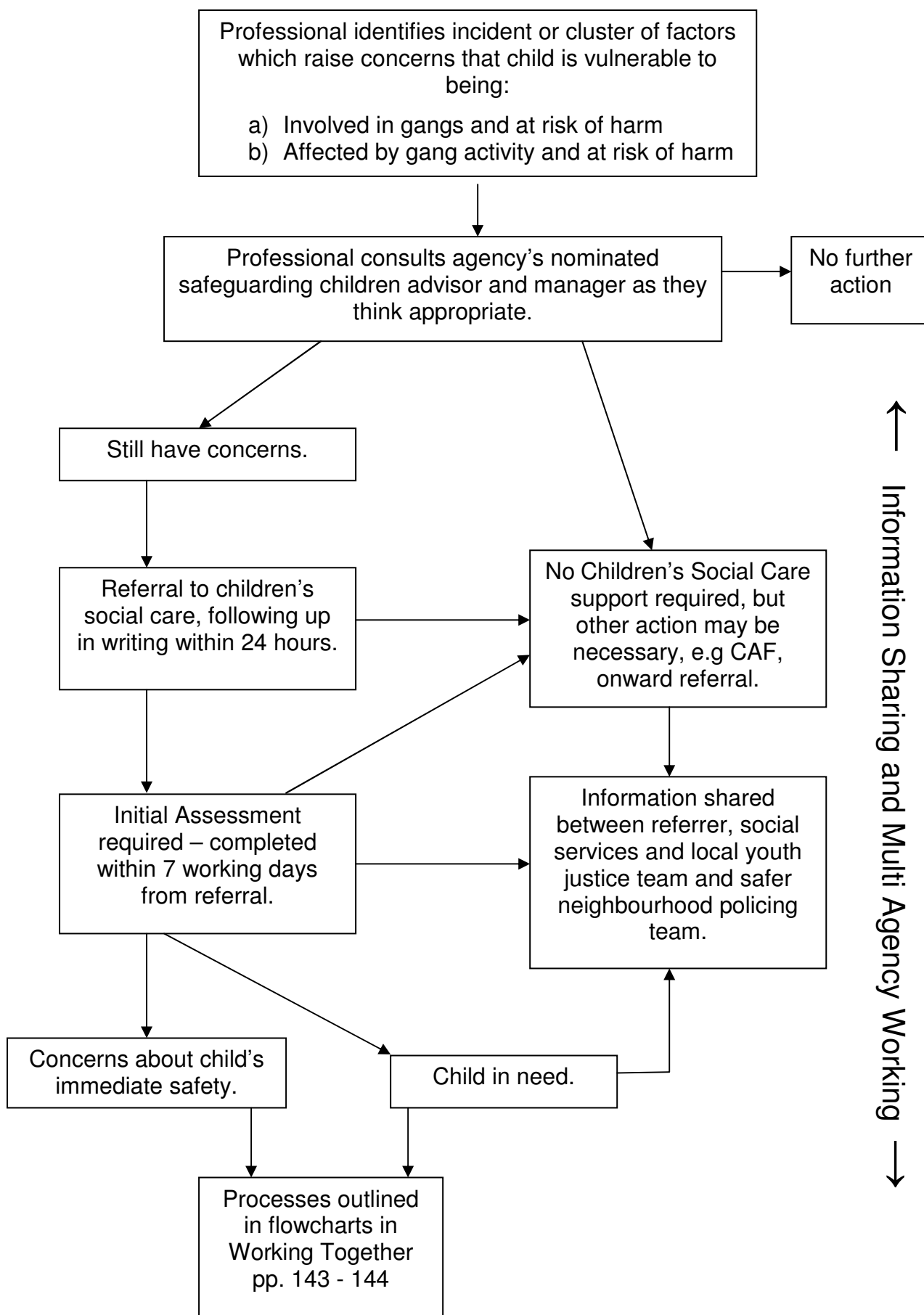
The risk of harm may also exist for other staff, who may be visiting a household without knowledge of the gang context, or to follow up concerns about a child's involvement in gangs. Information-sharing about high-risk families and individuals (such as those who carry lethal weapons) should be considered across all agencies that might have interaction with that individual, such as health professionals, social workers and the police

13.2 Agencies may also need to consider putting in place protocols for managing risk of harm to professionals/staff in this context. All professionals should have access to competent and consistent risk management advice. It may be appropriate for security measures to be taken such as ensuring professionals can access panic alarms and mobile phones as well as conflict resolution training for frontline staff.

14. Support

14.1 As with all young people support and interventions should be proportionate, rational and based foremost on the child's needs identified during an assessment. There will be a scale of interventions that might be considered appropriate according to the child's needs, from use of preventative support related to gangs and reduction of the risk factors to the application to a family court for a care order under section 31 of the Children Act 1989.

Appendix 1 - Identification and Referral Flowchart for actual or potential gang association



Appendix 2 - Risk assessment framework

Child Development	Parenting Capacity	Family / Environment
High Level Risk Factors		
Early problems with antisocial and criminal behaviour	Historically involved with or known to social services.	Family members involved with or associated with gangs
Persistent offending	Lax parental supervision	Wider family involved with gangs
Unable to regulate own emotions and behaviour	Lack of parental attachment to child	Community norms that tolerate crime
Physical violence and aggression	Conflict and violence in the home	Local tensions between ethnic / cultural / religious groups
Permanent exclusion from school	Parental abuse	Known gang recruitment at school
Friends condoning or involved in antisocial or aggressive behaviour	Parents aggressive towards or unwilling to engage with statutory agencies	Presence of gangs in community
Alcohol and drug misuse	Child is not protected from significant harm or danger, including contact with unsafe adults	High levels of local crime including drugs market
Medium Risk Factors		
Mental Health problems	Lack of emotional care	Availability and use of drugs
Aggression, behavioural problems	Allowing child to associate with known troublemakers	Criminal conviction of parents or siblings
Depression	Violent discipline	Witness or victim of domestic violence
Truancy and unexplained absence from school	Lack of parental discipline	
Bullied or bullying others	Inconsistent or minimal boundaries	
Medical history of repeated injuries or accidents		
Child in local authority care or leaving care		
Low Level Risk Factors		
Aggressive bullying by siblings		Lack of positive role models in the community
Lack of ethnic identity	Parents don't model positive and responsible behaviour	Transient families
Peer pressure	Absent parent	Lack of age-appropriate, safe play facilities in area
Not involved in positive activities	Unstable family environment	Financial difficulties affecting child
Few social ties	Parents unable to communicate effectively with children	High unemployment
	Parent – child separation	Sustained poverty
		Lack of reliable support from wider family
		Limited access to conventional careers