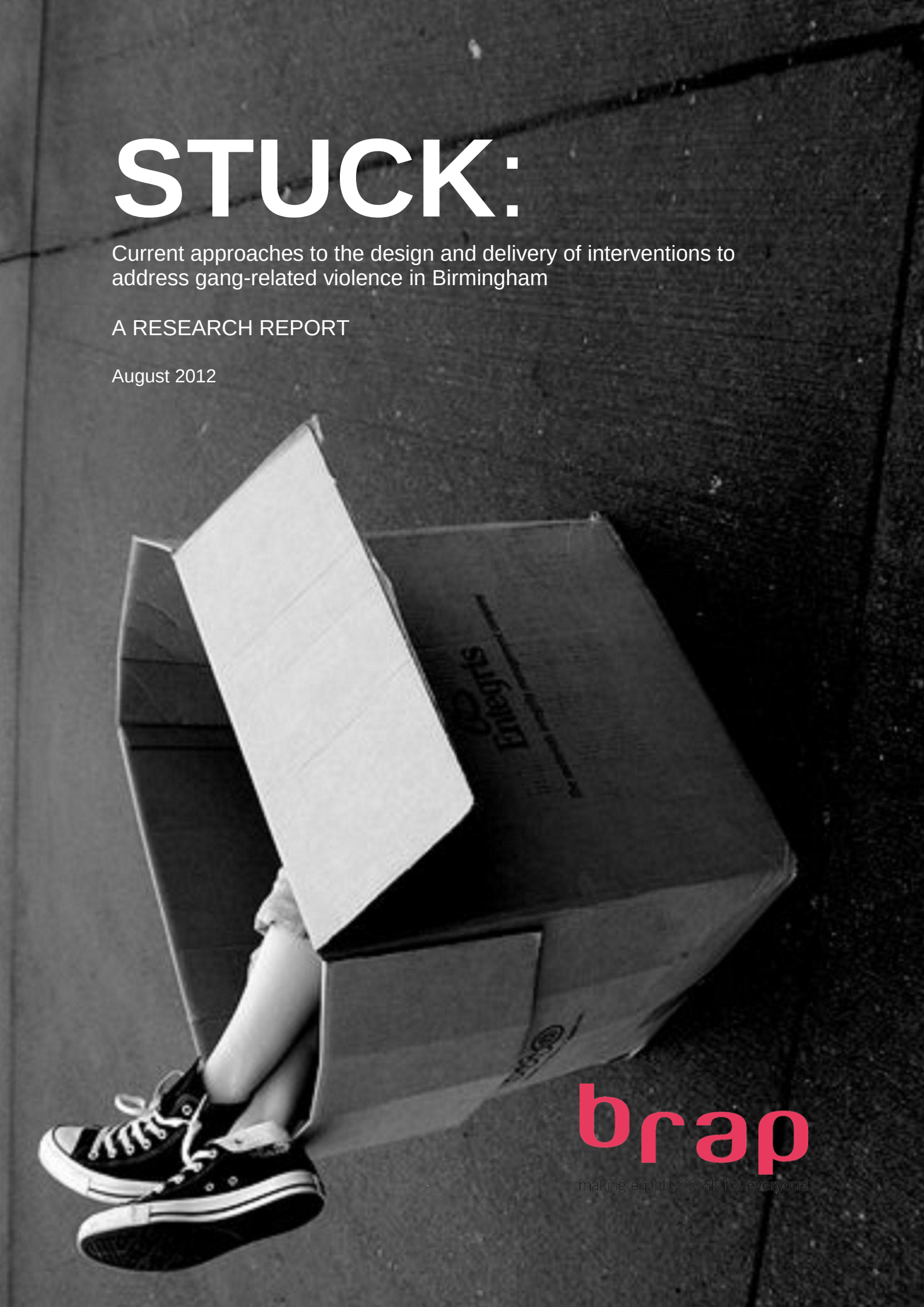
STUCK:

Current approaches to the design and delivery of interventions to address gang-related violence in Birmingham

A RESEARCH REPORT

August 2012



brap

making equality work for everyone

"I welcome any new research which assists to improve our understanding of gang related issues. There is a considerable amount of really good work taking place by all agencies across Birmingham to address these issues, but there is always more that we can do. I welcome the involvement of BRAP and look forward to working with partners to build an even stronger response to addressing gangs and serious youth violence."

Assistant Chief Constable Sharon Rowe
West Midlands Police

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Executive summary

Background

brap has been actively involved in work to improve the impact of gang-related crime interventions for some years now. The Barrow Cadbury Trust is keen to learn more about the experiences of the kind of young people and practitioners brap engages with as part of its work. Funding provided by the Trust has enabled brap to conduct a short consultation and research exercise to understand how young people at risk of gun or knife related crime in Birmingham feel about interventions to support them.

The report has three main aims:

- to help those involved in this field gain a better understanding of the experiences, views and needs of a small group of young people at risk of or involved in guns and gang related crime in Birmingham
- to provide an overview of statutory, private and voluntary sector responses to guns and gang related crime in Birmingham (and links to West Midlands-wide provision)
- to recommend options for future support and research in this field

Approach to the research

This was a relatively short and contained piece of research drawing on brap's own experience in delivering a small project to help young people at risk of or involved in gang-related violence (the 'Back on Track' project). This research aims to add value to other larger and more comprehensive reviews and research in the field.

A desk-based review of relevant documents was combined with primary research that engaged a range of relevant respondents in interviews and focus groups. These included: 31 people (aged between 10 and 35) classified as 'gang affiliated'; 7 voluntary and community sector organisations (VCOs) working in the field; 3 law enforcement agencies working on the anti-gangs effort; 7 independent experts and 2 academics with many years' experience in this and related fields.

A roundtable event was held in August 2012 to discuss implications of the research and to test recommendations with practitioners and policy makers in the field (the report of the conference is available at www.brap.org.uk/research).

What we found

- That there is inadequate evidence to understand the impact of interventions.

- That partly as a result of this, judgments about good practice are rarely based on long-term analysis of the impact of interventions but instead tend to focus on operational evaluation and the ability of initiatives to disrupt 'overt' street-level gang activity.

- That there is a need for policy and practice to respond more explicitly to the expressed needs of young people.

- That current anti-gang strategies are largely grounded in specific theories of crime and that sometimes these theories are 'out of step' with the issues as experienced by young people and practitioners. The underlying theories and ideas that inform our understanding of good practice in this area need greater critical examination.

- That anti-gang practice tends to focus heavily on enforcement and dispersal techniques and that a wider view of good practice is required that goes beyond that of direct law enforcement. On the other hand, other 'non-enforcement' interventions (such as mentoring, developing resilience, diversionary activities) are not always subjected to the same level of evaluation and scrutiny and this prevents any methodical comparison of the relative impact of different techniques and approaches.

- That despite recent attempts to improve multi-agency working, there are still challenges associated with that model. Different agencies in the West Midlands define 'gangs' differently, with implications for the interventions they design and prioritise. Frameworks and structures for information sharing and knowledge exchange are under-developed.

- That people join gangs for a wide range of reasons. In particular, issues of inequality and discrimination faced by those involved in or at risk of gang-related crime need to be considered more closely. A debate about the degree to which gang members themselves are also 'victims' is needed.

- That user-involvement in shaping gang-related services is in its infancy and requires significant investment if it is to be meaningful.

- That more nuanced analyses are required that distinguish between gun and knife crime.

Conclusions and recommendations

Much of the report focuses on the day to day 'processes' and 'systems' that inform responses to the gang problem – partly because young people and agencies working in the field told us that it is these day to day issues that can help and impede effective delivery in this area. For this reason, some of the recommendations in the report focus on aspects of the 'system' that could be modified to better help those at risk of or involved in gang-related crime. Other recommendations refer more to current 'thinking' on this issue. The report

argues, in particular, that there is a perception, certainly amongst young people, that agencies are less willing to confront the underlying causes of gang-related criminality in society. The report identifies 5 specific areas where future interventions could be reconsidered.

Understanding Impact

Many of the more recent gang-related interventions in Birmingham have not been formally evaluated and this of course has implications for judging what works well. This affects the ability of commissioners to make sound judgments about which services and/or interventions are effective and should be purchased. It also affects the ability of voluntary and community sector providers to influence mainstream statutory practice.

The on-going challenge of evaluation and impact assessment is further complicated by a tendency to commission voluntary and community sector organisations to deliver *short-term* preventative and diversionary activities. This makes it even harder to assess the contribution that preventative or diversionary programmes might make to shaping individual's life chances – such as re-engagement with education and starting a career – which are apparent only over a significantly longer timescale. Barriers to multi-agency working and information-sharing further compound this challenge of 'tracking' what happens to young people once they exit a short-term intervention.

Implications:

commissioners of services (e.g. police and local authorities) to consider how voluntary/community organisations operating in this field can be supported to evaluate and share the value and impact of interventions. How does this fit with current types of voluntary/community sector 'infrastructure' support in the city? What methods are most effective? What are expectations around type and quality of evidence required from commissioned providers? Can the type of evaluative evidence collected be made more consistent across providers?

Effective commissioning and service design

More is known about impact and good practice related to enforcement and dispersal but there is less coverage regarding effective approaches to prevention, reducing reoffending, diversion, resettlement and rehabilitation. Similarly, interventions for gang-related violent crime are still under development and much practice remains heavily influenced by enforcement, dispersal and 'punitive' approaches. Young people that we spoke to described the negative impact this balance of interventions can have on their lives – for example, the negative effect of criminal citations on their job prospects when other forms of social support may have had a more beneficial outcome.

That said we did identify a number of strong examples of practice in the field of prevention, diversion, resettlement and rehabilitation. Yet what happens after that preventative/ diversionary activity takes place is frequently a missing link. Is it reasonable to expect that a

young person involved in gang-related activity will get a job after a training course on CV-writing and interviewing techniques?

In our view some of the gaps in current provision reflect a lack of vision, aspiration and ambition in policy and service design. For schools and other agencies to say that young people affected by gang-related crime are 'uneducable' is a cop-out and unacceptable. Such easy options do not offer the kind of 'wrap-around'/'pathway' of support – encompassing education, counselling, and support for parents –that can help young people get 'back on track'. If we are not clear about how commissioning a particular service will help to achieve some of these broader and harder-to-achieve outcomes for young people then this needs to be remedied.

Implications:

- there are opportunities for **research institutions** to further examine the effect of ASBOs and other low-level citations on the future prospects of young people and understand the degree to which alternative forms of social support could have resulted in more effective outcomes
- **police** and **voluntary/community sector providers** in this field could be encouraged to work more closely together to identify clear, evidence-based examples of good practice – particularly in areas such as prevention, diversion, desistance, rehabilitation and resettlement. Are there ways in which this knowledge about good practice and impact could be better reflected in service specifications and commissioning decisions?
- what would help Birmingham's **Multi-Agency Gang Unit (MAGU)** and related agencies to design wrap-around/multi-agency services? The transitions as young people move from one service to another and transitions between key episodes in young people's lives seem particularly important to focus upon. Does Birmingham have a clear 'support pathway' that can help young people to manage these transitions?
- what role could **charitable trusts** play in supporting development of more integrated 'pathways' of support in the future – perhaps by bringing together grant holders working on this agenda?

The thinking behind policy and practice

The lack of a commonly held standpoint on what 'causes' people to join gangs and what helps people to leave (or not join) gangs makes it difficult to judge what constitutes best practice. It is also important to reviewing the 'thinking' that informs this agenda as some interventions are being shaped and influenced by ill-founded or even damaging assumptions or stereotypes (e.g. approaches that do not take into account the socio-economic reality of those involved, approaches where those affected by gang activity are presumed – by default - to have appropriate skills to support others affected by gangs).

These are complex and sensitive issues and this agenda has been highly politicised for a number of years. It has generally focused on responding to particular groups in society, rather than to some of the root causes for social inequality, disaffection and gang-related

crime. It is important that public debate is informed by more than political trends and public opinion and that where there are examples of effective practice based on sound evidence these are given a chance in Birmingham.

Implications:

- how can Birmingham promote a more honest and open public debate about the antecedents of gang-related crime? The **police** and others have already taken steps to encourage young people to engage in discussions about this agenda – with a particular focus on the type of services currently offered to young people. Yet **public bodies** in the city have a collective responsibility to promote wider debate on this issue – what is it about Birmingham that drives young people to join gangs and what role can public services play in preventing it?
- how should **Birmingham City Council district decision-making structures** and **Community Budgeting structures** consider and respond to evaluative information about guns and gangs issues in their area? This is particularly challenging given its politically sensitive nature (e.g. debate about whether gang members should receive social housing over and above other residents)

The problem of definition: re-thinking how we 'label' young people

There is a lack of a common definition of gangs. Agencies and indeed members of the public may define someone as a gang member when they may 'only' be involved in anti-social behaviour, or petty crime. Some of this is informed by broader political and public opinion about young people and their role in society. It seems that as we seek to understand young people and their behaviour, we also need to explore our own attitudes, and in particular our willingness to attach negative labels to youth behaviour and the implications this has for the interventions we develop.

Implications:

- are young people wrongly labeled because they lack 'voice' in the system and find it hard to influence local policy on this agenda?
- the West Midlands Police definition of gangs has historically referred to a higher risk of criminality (including threatened or actual use of firearms or violence). However, there is a wider public engaging in anti-social behaviour are engaging in 'gang' behaviour. Could more be done to develop revised and more nuanced descriptions of youth behaviour? How can we avoid the trap and consequences of 'labelling' whole groups of young people by virtue of age, geography or ethnicity? **MAGU** and associated agencies would be well placed to lead the way in promoting this debate

A lack of equality and human rights analysis

The reasons for people engaging in gang-related violent crime are multi-faceted and numerous. Yet the interventions that young people described were often influenced strongly by assumptions and stereotypes about their age, culture, gender and ethnicity. For example, 'gangs' are seen as largely made up of young 'black' (African Caribbean) people, despite the fact that evidence indicates that gangs largely reflect local demographics. Or, for example, young people are often signed up to 'mentoring' support, without sufficient needs assessment to understand whether it is the lack of a 'role model' that is really the issue for them. Those interventions that avoided stereotypes like this and were nuanced and more sensitive to people's individual needs were often informed by strong screening, profiling and needed assessment work early on in the process.

Yet, of course, many of these stereotypes are reflected in wider society too. Focus is placed on the culture and habits of young people themselves ('those young people always hang around on the street', 'those African Caribbean young people come from single-parent families and lack male role models'). Yet this has the effect, albeit often unintentionally, of placing the 'blame' and responsibility on communities themselves. The focus is not on fixing the longer-term structural issues that may be contributing factors (such as discrimination and inequality in the labour market which makes people from some ethnic groups much more likely to be unemployed than White British people), or on changing the actions of public service providers that may influence young people to join gangs (e.g. respondents referred to frustration with 'police brutality', unfair stop and search policy and discrimination in school exclusions).

Implications:

- what can **commissioners** do to ensure that the equality implications of gang-related interventions are fully thought through? How can we ensure that **voluntary/community sector** provision in this field is inclusive and does not disadvantage young people that don't fit into a particular box?
- how do **commissioners** currently find out about what service users think about the quality and equality of services they receive? Are current feedback mechanisms fit for purpose and are they implemented well? How does feedback like this influence the future design of services in the city?
- in addition to interventions that focus on gang members and their families, there is room for more focus on some of the longer term, structural, societal causes of gang-related behavior. what role can **research institutions** and **charitable trusts** play in generating evidence about the link between income inequality, unfair recruitment practices, poor education practice, and gang-related criminality in an area, for example?

More nuanced and sensitive screening and profiling

Different agencies take a variety of approaches to the screening and profiling of individuals. This can result in significantly different profiles for the same individual and is highly problematic from a safeguarding point of view. It can mean that young people are wrongly classified as 'at risk' and can be subjected to gang related interventions which they may not

need and may react badly to. It can also make joint-working and cross-agency referral harder. A more consistent approach to profiling would help to avoid this. Similarly, a more sophisticated profiling tool could help to better understand how risks can be identified and mitigated more holistically (e.g. if interventions can be used to respond to the mother's behavior, then young people may be more likely to attend school). Similarly a more nuanced approach to needs assessment could be used to deploy mentors for young people based on individual needs of the beneficiary. At the moment there is often a crude match between the young person and the mentor.

Implications:

- can profiling approaches be made more resilience intuitive? Also, can profiling approaches be made more consistent and standardized within and across agencies? These are questions that will hopefully interest a number of agencies, not least the **police, MAGU, Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence (BRGV), youth offending teams** and **voluntary/community organisations** operating in the field. There may be a role for **charitable trusts** to play in supporting some of this pioneering partnership work in the future
- related to the above point, 'mentoring' is seen as a central pillar of support services in this field. How can more sophisticated approaches to profiling and needs-assessment be used to model more 'phased' approaches to mentoring service design? Are there opportunities for **commissioners** to encourage a more phased approach to mentoring? Would a more phased approach help to introduce the right type of expertise to the beneficiary at the right time and in the right sequence, dependent on the assessment of need?

Multi-agency working and information sharing

Frameworks for knowledge and information sharing remain under-developed within and between the voluntary and public sectors. The implications of this are significant. It undermines the impact of a multi-agency approach. It can influence the effectiveness of referral processes and evaluation of area-based interventions in particular. It can also limit opportunities for shared learning, benchmarking and peer review of practice. Gangs do not respect particular jurisdictional boundaries of agencies across the region, yet limited sharing of information across borders can limit the effectiveness of action on this agenda. In the voluntary sector in Birmingham, the lack of a network or similar shared resource for practitioners also limits the sustainability of organisations and their work.

Implications:

- those working in the field won't be surprised to hear that there are problems with data-sharing. Yet, this can affect the impact of interventions. A meeting to understand why agencies do not share information would be extremely valuable. This could include agencies such as the **West Midlands Police, city councils** across the region, **voluntary/community organisations** operating in the field, **youth offending teams, MAGU** and **BRGV.** This discussion would come at a time when police forces across the

region are being encouraged to work together more closely on this agenda as part of a West Midlands-wide corporate approach to tackling gang related violence

- how can **voluntary/community organisations** be supported to network and develop realistic and joined-up pathways out of gang-related violence in the context of limited resources? More support is required for VCOs to share learning and skills on this agenda. This would be a worthwhile investment for **charitable trusts** and **MAGU** in Birmingham

The programmes they bring to help us are not the things we want, but nobody talks to us. I think it's meant to control us, like.

17-year old young person 'at-risk'

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

brap has been actively involved in work to improve the impact of gang-related crime interventions for some years now. This began in 2004 when brap ran an event with over 200 young BME people to discuss the links between hip-hop and gun crime and to discuss appropriate interventions to support young people. In 2005 brap ran a project called ‘Gangs and Girls’ which helped young women reflect on their experience of gun crime. Since then, as an ‘infrastructure’ organisation, brap has also supported a number of smaller community groups working in the field. This has involved helping organisations that deliver guns and gangs related interventions to reflect on and improve the value and impact of their work. Understanding the impact of work in this area is of particular interest to brap. In the last year we have also been involved in piloting direct delivery of diversionary activities to help young people at risk of gun and knife related crime.

The Barrow Cadbury Trust is keen to learn more about the experiences of the kind of young people and practitioners brap engages with as part of its work. Funding provided by the Trust has enabled brap to conduct a short consultation and research exercise to understand how young people at risk of gun or knife related crime in Birmingham feel about interventions to support them.

Consequently, this report has three main aims:

- to help those involved in this field gain a better understanding of the experiences, views and needs of a small group of young people at risk of or involved in guns and gang related crime in Birmingham

- to provide an overview of statutory, private and voluntary sector responses to guns and gang related crime in Birmingham (and links to West Midlands-wide provision)

- to recommend options for future support and research in this field

1.2 Key Issues Explored

Drawing on our own experience in this field, brap was also particularly interested in exploring certain aspects of this agenda in more detail. In addition to providing a ‘snap-shot’ of current approaches to responding to gang-related crime in Birmingham, the report goes on to make the following broad arguments:

- That there is inadequate evidence to understand the impact of interventions.

- That partly as a result of this, judgments about good practice are rarely based on long-term analysis of the impact of interventions but instead tend to focus on operational evaluation and the ability of initiatives to disrupt 'overt' street-level gang activity.

- That there is a need for policy and practice to respond more explicitly to the expressed needs of young people.

- That current anti-gang strategies are largely grounded in specific theories of crime and that sometimes these theories are 'out of step' with the issues as experienced by young people and practitioners. The underlying theories and ideas that inform our understanding of good practice in this area need greater critical examination.

- That anti-gang practice tends to focus heavily on enforcement and dispersal techniques and that a wider view of good practice is required that goes beyond that of direct law enforcement. On the other hand, other 'non-enforcement' interventions (such as mentoring, developing resilience, diversionary activities) are not always subjected to the same level of evaluation and scrutiny and this prevents any methodical comparison of the relative impact of different techniques and approaches.

- That despite recent attempts to improve multi-agency working, there are still challenges associated with that model. Different agencies in the West Midlands define 'gangs' differently, with implications for the interventions they design and prioritise. Frameworks and structures for information sharing and knowledge exchange are under-developed.

- That people join gangs for a wide range of reasons. In particular, issues of inequality and discrimination faced by those involved in or at risk of gang-related crime need to be considered more closely. A debate about the degree to which gang members themselves are also 'victims' is needed.

- That user-involvement in shaping gang-related services is in its infancy and requires significant investment if it is to be meaningful.

- That more nuanced analyses are required that distinguish between gun and knife crime.

1.3 Structure of the report

Section 1: Introduction

Section 2: Why this research was needed/ background on the scale of this issue in Birmingham

Section 3: How we approached the research/ methodology

In line with the three key areas Barrow Cadbury Trust were keen for us to explore, the remainder of the report is split into the following main areas:

Section 4: An overview of current approaches to this agenda (national and local)

Section 5: Views of young people involved in/ at risk of gang-related crime, practitioners and policy makers on the issues described above

Section 6: Final thoughts and recommendations for future work/ research

1.5 About Barrow Cadbury

The Barrow Cadbury Trust is an independent charitable foundation, committed to supporting vulnerable and marginalised people in society. The Trust promotes social justice through grant making, research, influencing public opinion and policy and supporting local communities. The Criminal Justice programme aims to support people who are within, or at risk of entering, the criminal justice system, and to improve their life chances – with a particular focus on young adults. The Trust also runs a Poverty and Inclusion programme and a Migration and Europe programme.

1.6 About brap

brap is a Birmingham-based national equality and human rights charity, and a think-fair tank, inspiring and leading change to make public, private and voluntary sector organisations fit for the needs of a more diverse society. brap offers tailored, progressive and common sense approaches to equality challenges, community engagement, capacity building and policy engagement at all levels.

You’ve got to have money to live. With my CRB, no one wanted to touch me. I’m stuck. After trying over last three years, I’ve given up. What to do?’

Male, 21

2. Why this research?

This was a relatively short and contained piece of research drawing on brap's own experience in delivering a small project to help young people at risk of or involved in gang-related violence (the 'Back on Track' project). By drawing on the views of young people and other stakeholders (e.g. voluntary and community sector providers and local practitioners in Birmingham) this research aims to add value to other larger and more comprehensive reviews and research in the field.[1]

There were four main reasons why we were especially keen to undertake this research:

- the size of the problem
- imbalance between law-enforcement and social support/preventative methods
- use of public resources
- lack of evidence on impact and value of interventions

Size of the problem

In 2011 there were an estimated 42 urban street gangs in Birmingham, estimated to involve about 400 individuals situated mostly in the North West of the City.[2] This compares to over 250 gangs in Greater London and over 170 in Greater Manchester.[3] Despite the relatively low number of gangs in Birmingham the Home Office recognises the disproportionately high impact of those gangs on crime and communities in the city. The number of urban street gangs in Birmingham has increased during the past decade. The number of incidents of gang-related violence involving the use of arms between 2008 and 2011 was 900 but there has been a relative reduction in the number of firearm incidents between 2009/2010.[4]

It should also be noted that Birmingham faces significant disadvantage. Birmingham has a high rate of unemployment with significant inequality between different ethnic groups in the labour market: for example, 7.4% of White British people are Job Seeker Allowance claimants compared to 34.9% of mixed White and African Caribbean people.[5] Birmingham is also the youngest city in Europe with a high proportion of the population under 24-years of age. Birmingham is ranked the third most deprived Core City (behind Liverpool and Manchester), with 10 of its wards numbering among the 10% most deprived in super output areas in England.[6]

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1 See bibliography for detailed list of useful reference material.
2 Birmingham City Council (2010) *Partnership working to tackle gang violence in Birmingham - 2010*
3 Home Office (2011), E*nding Gangs and Youth Violence – A Cross-Government Report* including Further Evidence and Good Practice Case Studies, Annex B - '*Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence*'
4 *ibid*
5 NOMIS/ ONS, *JSA Claimant Data Q3 2011*
6 Birmingham City Council (2011) *Index of Deprivation 2010 – An Analysis of Birmingham Local Statistics*, Birmingham: Birmingham Economy

In England as a whole, violent youth crime has fallen between 2007 and 2010. Yet still tens of thousands of young people are affected. Significant public costs are still incurred in responding to violent youth criminality.[7]

Imbalance between law-enforcement and social support/preventative methods

In recent years there has been increasing recognition that there is a need for a better balance of law-enforcement led interventions and preventative activity. One study has said, '…the practical message is unmistakable: preventive interventions with young children exposed to high levels of risk may be disproportionately useful in reducing later involvement in serious crime, and particularly violent offending.'[8]

Yet on the ground, preventative, diversionary and rehabilitation-driven interventions remain relatively low-level when compared to activities that focus on law-enforcement. Similarly, a significant proportion of the preventative and 'exiting' activity that has taken place in recent years is police-led and informed by a law enforcement approach. We wanted to explore the implications of this in a particular city (Birmingham), focusing in particular on how young people at risk of or involved in gang-related criminality feel about the value and impact of current interventions in this field.

Use of public resources

Early intervention, preventative work and reducing the long-term pressures on public services are key issues in coalition policy.

If young people at risk do not take-up early preventative activity and social support that can help them to avoid or exit gang related criminality, then the costs to the public purse can be high. According to Justin Russell, Head of Violent Youth Crime Prevention Unit at the Home Office, one London family triggered over 250 interventions in the course of a single year at a cost to the public purse of over £200,000. Employing Russell's model hypothetically, the potential public cost of Birmingham's known 400 individual gang members could exceed £80m annually. Successful preventative activity has the potential to reduce these costs significantly and understanding what works well in this field is therefore critical.

Similarly, effective rehabilitation and resettlement activity also has the potential to reduce costs to the public purse. We already know that the majority of gang members who are jailed will be under 30-years old and reoffending rates in this age group are significantly higher than the average.[9] Each time somebody reoffends, the cost of investigation, prison and

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[7] Murders in England involving victims aged 13 to 24 peaked at just over 180 in 2007/08 and have fallen in the period to 2009/10 to just over 160. NHS hospital admissions for the same period similarly peaked at around 18,000 in 2007/08 and fell to just over 16,000 in 2009/10. Home Office (2011) *Ending Gang and Youth Violence: A Cross-government report including further evidence and good practice case studies*, London: HM Government.

[8] Sutton, C., Utting, D., and Farrington, D. (2004) *Support From the Start: working with young children and their families to reduce the risks of crime and anti-social behaviour. Research Report No 524,* London: Department for Education and Skills

[9] Ministry of Justice (2011) *Early Estimates of Proven Re-Offending Rates (Quarterly Statistics* www.justice.gov.uk/publications/statistics-and-data/reoffending/proven-reoffending-quarterly.htm

probation is significant.[10] Reducing reoffending then is a key issue with this cohort and rehabilitation and resettlement services play a key role in this. Yet there are political ramifications to such approaches. Birmingham Reducing Gang Related Violence (BRGV), for example, has been criticised for resettlement programmes that are seen as 'rewarding' criminals.[11] Local Authority allocation of social housing for former gang members is one such area of debate.

There are benefits, then, in understanding how public money can be spent most efficiently in terms of prevention, diversion and rehabilitation, and in understanding how the numerous public services involved in this area of work can work together more effectively. This research aimed to explore both of these issues from the perspective of young people and service providers in the public and voluntary sectors. It was felt that by considering and comparing the views of these stakeholders new insights regarding the strengths and weaknesses of existing provision might be identified.

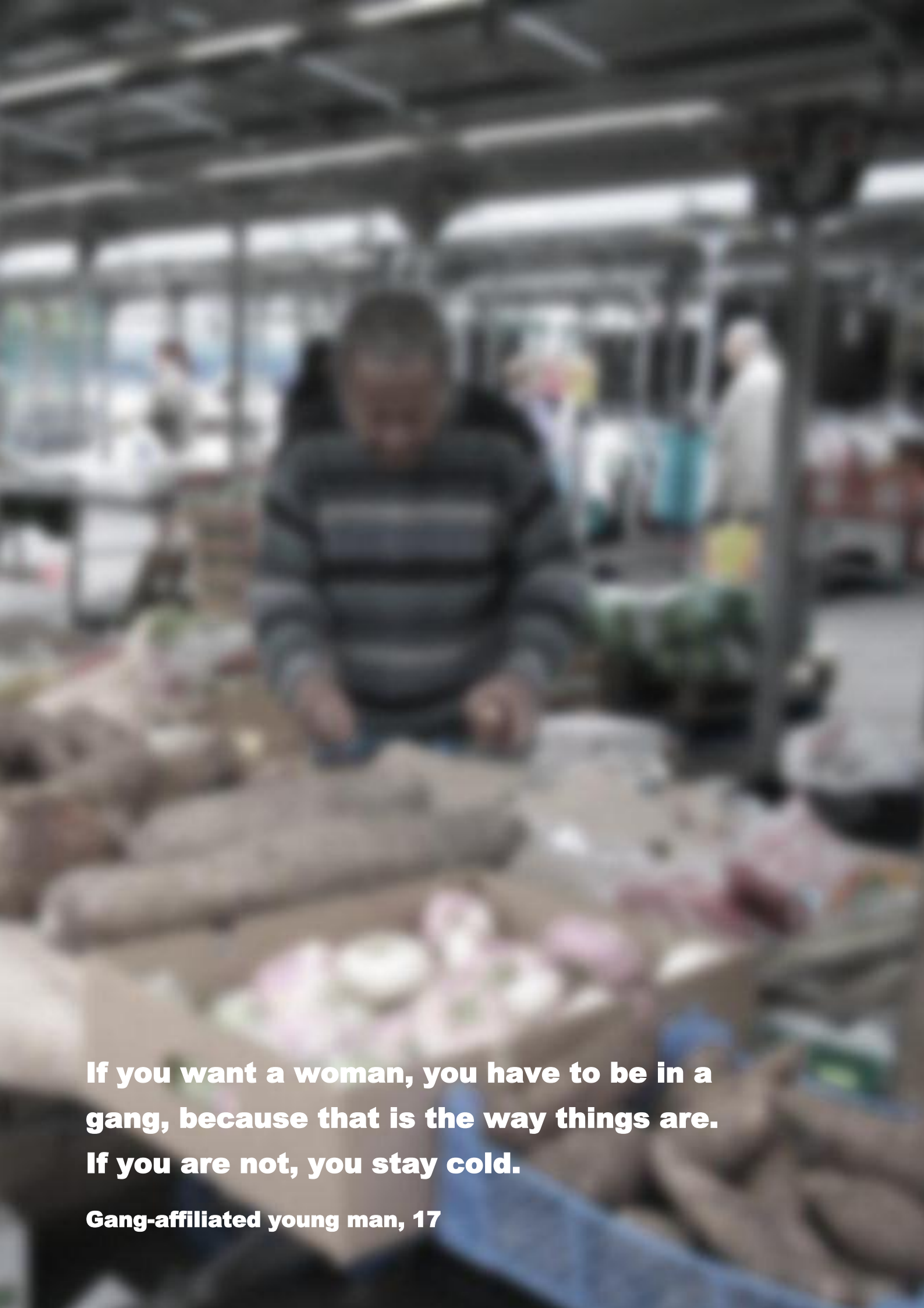
Lack of evidence on impact and value of interventions

In developing the brief for this research we undertook a quick review of available evaluation material on previous interventions and policies to address gang related violence. We found relatively little. One recent review notes that 'remarkably few interventions on youth knife and gun crime, nationally and internationally, have been subjected to rigorous research and/or independent assessment'.[12] We wanted to investigate this further – to ask young people and providers about their understanding of evaluation and impact and to understand the challenges and opportunities for future evaluative activity in this field.

[10]New Economics Foundation (2010), *Punishing Costs, How Locking Up Children is Making Britain Less Safe*, London: NEF. Up to £100,000 to provide a prison bed for 1 year, an additional £40,000 in indirect costs post-release from prison. To keep a young offender in a young offender institution, the direct costs top £42,000. Non-custodial sentences are not cheap, either: a 1 year community rehabilitation order costs £3,000; a 1 year community punishment order costs £2,000; a combined rehabilitation and community punishment order would cost £4,000, while a 1 year drug treatment order would cost £8,000 and a 6-month intensive supervision and surveillance programme would cost £6,000.

[11] BRGV (2010) *Partnership Working to Tackle Violent Crime*, Birmingham: BRGV

[12] Silvestri A, Oldfield, M, Squires P, Grimshaw R, (2009) *Young People, Knives and Guns A comprehensive review, analysis and critique of gun and knife crime strategies,* London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. See also,.Hodgkinson J, Marshall S, Berry G, Newman M, Reynolds P, Burton E, Dickson K, Anderson J (2009) *Reducing Gang-related Crime: A Systematic Review of 'Comprehensive' Interventions*, London: University of London



If you want a woman, you have to be in a gang, because that is the way things are. If you are not, you stay cold.

Gang-affiliated young man, 17

3. Approach to research and relevant definitions

A desk-based review of relevant documents (e.g. policy statements, existing research and literature) was combined with primary research that engaged a range of relevant respondents in interviews and focus groups. The central themes underpinning the inquiry (described above) were deliberately narrow and this allowed for comparative analysis of the views of different respondents on key issues. Empirical evidence from the primary research was used to consider and test established thinking, policy and practice.

The following respondents were engaged in interviews (including one focus group of 11 young people):

- 31 persons (aged between 10 and 35) classified as 'gang affiliated', over 50% of whom are on current police and court orders as a result of offences such as gang-related violence, or assault committed under circumstances indicating gang association.
- 7 voluntary and community sector organisations that are directly working with young people at risk of gun and knife related crime.
- 3 police-related institutions in law enforcement dedicated to the anti-gangs effort.
- 7 independent experts who have engaged for many years in directly related work; and
- 2 academics working in related fields.

A list of key documents considered is included in the Bibliography.

In addition, a roundtable event was held in August 2012 to discuss implications of the research and to test recommendations with practitioners and policy makers in the field (a report of the conference is available at www.brap.org.uk/research).

Definition of 'gang'

The definition of a 'gang' is the subject of considerable debate. Law enforcement agencies, voluntary and community sector organisations, faith communities, academics, criminologists, policy makers and others all attach different shades of meaning to their definition. We explore these nuances in greater detail later in the report. For the moment, we adopt in this report the following broad elements that emerge from the competing definitions of the term.

Gangs and gang activity…

- can be group-based
- may have permanent recurring features (such as presence in a location)
- may have identifiable leadership and some form of internal organisation or may regularly change in shape, form and membership
- may involve claim over territory
- may involve a business activity (e.g. drug dealing)
- may involve the pursuit of violence as a legitimate form of group activity
- may involve other forms of anti-social or criminal behaviour
- may involve young people and more mature adults
- involves both men and women (although public perception of gangs tends to focus on the role men)

I needed company, to get away from the fighting at home. Couldn't stay at school – me mates weren't at school. Thought it was cool to hang out. We had fun.

Youth offender, 17

4. Current approaches to this agenda (national and local)

4.1 National policy and programmes

The origins of current national policy on gang-related criminality can be traced directly to the Tackling Gangs and Knives Action Programme (TGAP), launched by the Home Office in 2008. The Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP), also developed around this time, was led directly by the Police. The latter programme, which was renewed and revised in three phases, covered 16 police forces and focused mainly on:

- Stepping up enforcement operations.
- Targeting the most dangerous young people in an area.
- Carrying out home visits and sending letters to parents if their children are known to carry weapons.
- Clamping down on retailers who continue to sell knives to young people.
- Setting up or expanding youth forums to enable young people to have a say in local issues.
- Responding to the fear and peer pressure that drive young people to carry weapons.
- Interventions and information sharing between police, local authorities, health authorities (e.g. A&E departments) and the voluntary and community sector to better identify people likely to commit serious violence.

TGAP was replaced in 2011 by the Communities against Guns Gangs and Knives programme (CAGGK). CAGGK recognised that a cross-agency and community-based focus was required. An accompanying cross-Governmental report emphasised the following priorities:

- **Providing support** to local areas to tackle the problem.
- **Preventing** young people from becoming involved in violence in the first place – with a new emphasis on early intervention and prevention.
- **Offering pathways out** of violence and the gang culture for young people, who want to break with the past.
- **Punishment and enforcement** to suppress the violence of those refusing to exit violent lifestyles.
- **Partnership-working** to join up the way local areas respond to gang and other youth violence.[13]

Under the CAGGK programme, 200 voluntary and community organisations have received funding to deliver a menu of diversionary, preventative and rehabilitative work. Originally

[13] Home Office (2011) *Ending Gangs and Youth Violence: A Cross-government report including further evidence and good practice case studies,* London: HM Government.

directly managed and overseen by the Home Office, CAGGK is now led by the three priority police force areas of London, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands.

At the national level the government's anti-gangs strategy is led by the Ending Gangs and Youth Violence (EGYV) Team, located within the Home Office. The EGYV team operates as the central hub, and is drawn from a wide array of agencies including health, safeguarding, youth justice, education, criminal justice, policing and local government.

The EGYV team works through four specialised units: a team of 100+ advisors, a research and analysis group, a team providing single points of contact, and an expert advisory group. The simple diagram below shows the policy, institutional and programmatic framework of the anti-gangs strategy in the UK since 2008.[14]

4.2 Policy and Programmes – West Midlands and Birmingham

West Midlands

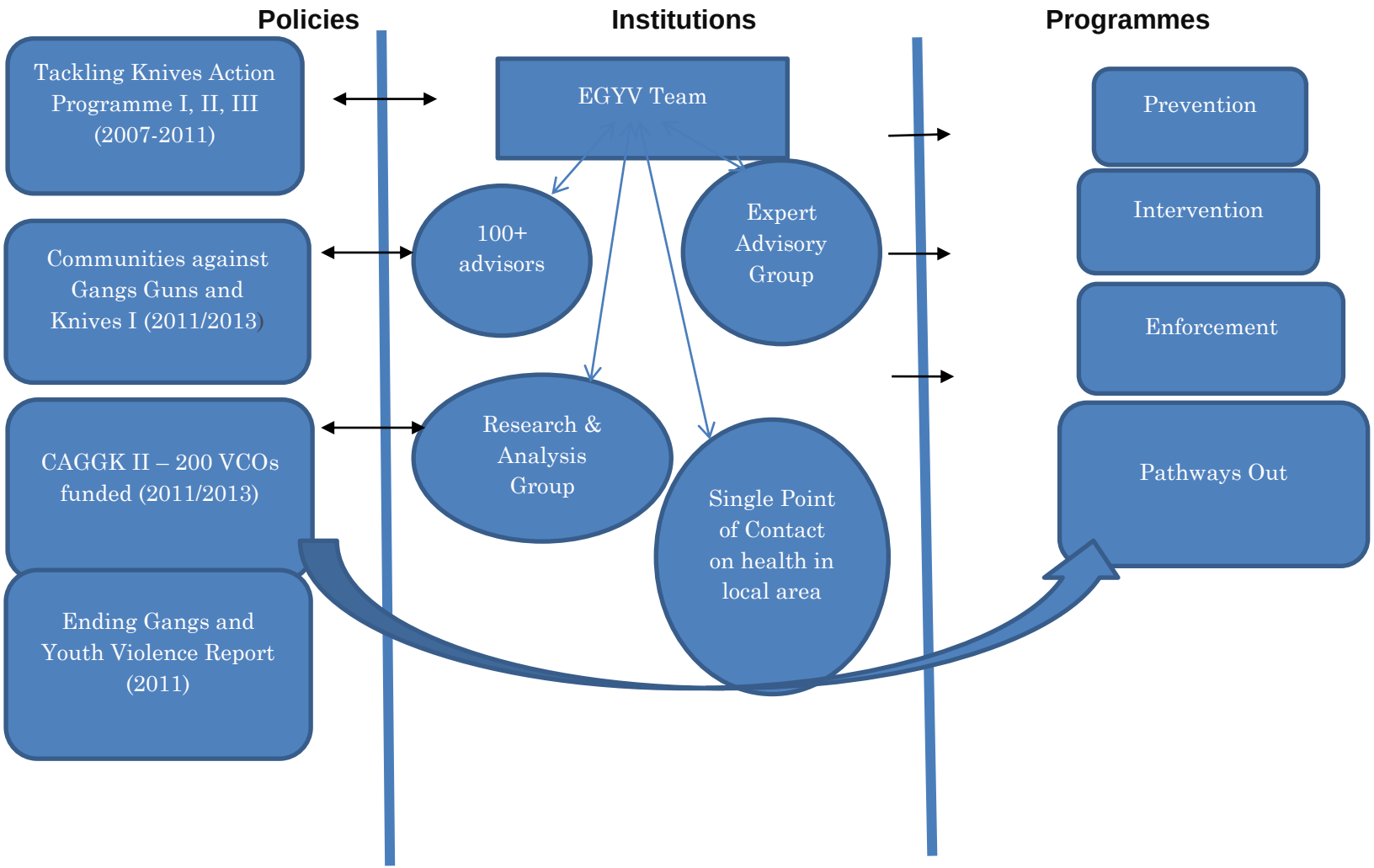
As well as implementing specific central government strategy on gangs the West Midlands Police Force area has developed local approaches to responding to gang violence for decades (mainly via broader approaches to reducing serious offending). In Birmingham the anti-gangs effort became more prominent following the notorious drive-by shooting of Letisha Shakespeare and Charlene Ellis in January 2003. According to one of the voluntary and community organisations engage earliest in guns and gangs work in the city:

> 'The shooting of Letisha Shakespeare and Charlene Ellis shocked the communities in Birmingham, and marked the onset of territorialism in Aston and Handsworth. Rival gangs felt that had the two girls not gone across the street for the New Year bash, they would not have been victimised. Territorialism became a self-protection measure.'

The police response was a strong 'Catch and Convict' programme that prioritised disruption and dispersal as core operational strategies. In 2003, the Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence (BRGV) strategic group – a partnership of relevant agencies across the city – was formed. BRGV's aims as outlined in the Community Safety Strategy 2005-2008 were to:

- Engage, coordinate and task particular organisations with the delivery of interventions to reduce gang networks and gun related crime.
- Devise and implement a control strategy for Birmingham as a whole.
- Work with local delivery groups to devise and implement local plans to tackle hot spot locations.
- Enhance offender targeting in liaison with PPO forums.
- Work to increase the resistance of young people to gangs and the use of firearms.
- Improve public reassurance as regards gun crime across the city and improve the local and national image of Birmingham as a safe city.

[14] Further information about the role of the Expert Advisory Group, Advisors, Research and Analysis Group and Single Points of Contact can be accessed in Home Office (2011) *Ending Gangs and Youth Violence: A Cross-Government Report*


Policies
Institutions
Programmes
Tackling Knives Action Programme I, II, III (2007-2011)
Communities against Gangs Guns and Knives I (2011/2013)
CAGGK II – 200 VCOs funded (2011/2013)
Ending Gangs and Youth Violence Report (2011)
EGYV Team
100+ advisors
Expert Advisory Group
Research & Analysis Group
Single Point of Contact on health in local area
Prevention
Intervention
Enforcement
Pathways Out

In recent years, the following have been the central mechanisms adopted to reduce gang violence in Birmingham:

- Policing at neighbourhood level upwards to prevent gang-related anti-social behaviour (ASB), serious violence and firearms offences.

- The Integrated Offender Management (IOM) process to manage serious or prolific offenders.

- A Common Assessment Framework used to develop integrated processes for agencies working with children or families that are in need of additional support through specialist partner agencies such as Social Care, Education and Health.

- Multi-Agency Public Protection arrangements to help reduce re-offending by sexual and violent offenders and protect the public and previous victims of serious crime.

- The use of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) and criminal anti-social behaviour orders (CRASBOs) to disrupt offending.

- Cash seizures and restraint orders to recover money or other benefits that offenders may have gained from their criminality.

- Intelligence-led operations to target criminals involved in gangs.

- Different types of preventative activity depending on the risk and threat posed by gangs. For example, school-based awareness-raising on anti-social behaviour and bullying and courses for young people to help them change their lives. BRGV has set up an Urban Street Referral Panel to ensure multi-agency referrals are undertaken effectively.

- Gang injunctions to prevent gang related violence, with a force-wide gang-injunctions group set up to consider how best these may be used.[15]

To support the current CAGGK programme West Midlands Police has been focusing on improving force-wide analysis of gang-related criminality and has developed a 'problem profile' which is used to understand levels of risk across the region. Monthly Force Tasking meetings enable partner agencies to engage with WMP to discuss progress and priorities for tackling gang-related crime. WMP has assessed strengths and weaknesses for each partnership area and has also created a commissioning panel to identify key interventions to be delivered through CAGGK.

While different local approaches have developed across the West Midlands in line with the particular character of gangs and interventions needed in local areas, WMP recognises that a region-wide approach is also required in order to build on local practice and help those areas with the least experience of responding to gang related violence. A review of WMP's

[15] West Midlands Police (2011) *Policing Criminal Gangs in the West Midlands: Report of the Chief Constable 6th October 2011*

approach to tackling gang violence began in May 2011 led by ACC Cann and WMP has decided to develop a WMP-wide strategy. A force-wide strategic partnership is being set up to engage all local authority areas along with a Reference group to help the force develop its strategy and improve trust and confidence in local communities.

Birmingham

As the diagram over page shows, Birmingham Reducing Gang Related Violence (BRGV) develops strategy. BRGV, the Safer Birmingham Partnership and the Birmingham Multi-Agency Gang Unit (MAGU) are collectively responsible for operational and tactical decisions. A range of interventions and injunctions/orders have been designed to disperse gang-related activity. A range of accompanying support services are offered by partners across the city focusing on prevention, diversion, resettlement and rehabilitation.

The City's recently completed Youth Justice Strategic Plan (2012-13) calls for greater focus on preventative activity. For example, one of the Youth Offending Service's strategic priorities is "to continue to improve education, training and employment opportunities of young offenders especially those identified as being in vulnerable groups…" The Plan acknowledges the issue of 'disproportionality' (higher rates of young people from Black or Black British backgrounds engaged in the criminal justice system).

In recent years alternatives to criminal citation (that is, to arrest and formal criminal processing) have been used more often. For example, the mediation service offered by the Centre for Conflict Transformation supports negotiation between factions and mediates to prevent retaliation and escalation of conflict. Also a 'Call-in' service has been developed. Instead of arresting a gang member, the target individual together with his family is 'called-in' and made to sign 'acceptable behavior agreements', 'good neighbor agreements' and similar commitments. These were introduced for the first time in October 2010, and their legacy so far in the city has been positive.

These innovative approaches to dealing with the gang problem underscore the increasing acceptance among law enforcement agencies around the country – and indeed within the Home Office – that the 'Catch and Convict' and 'Disrupt and Disperse' models have not been altogether effective: even as seasoned gang members are taken off the streets the ranks are filled by new members. To stem the entry of more people into gang life, the evidence indicates the need for a shift in focus to prevention, rehabilitation and support. Through collaboration with the Safer Birmingham Partnership, the BRGV strategy is now implementing a revised 'tactical strategy' that also focuses on broader issues of prevention and rehabilitation.

And yet as the diagram indicates, there is still a strong focus on enforcement and dispersal. The relationship between the work of WMP on enforcement and other agencies is not always clear and (as illustrated later in this report) there is merit in exploring this further.

Current Approach in Birmingham

Strategy	National: EGYV Local: BRGV					
Operational	MAGU					
	Centre for Conflict Transformation	Local Health Trusts	West Midlands Police	Probation Service and YOS	Birmingham City Council (Birmingham Safety Partnership)	Voluntary and Community Sector organisations
Dispersal and Enforcement			Injunctions Call-ins ASBOs Arrest Prosecute	ABCs GNAs PCLCs ASBOs	LSEGs Call-ins	Engagement (tackling boredom, creating opportunity, raising aspirations
Related Support Services		-Monitoring -Knife / gun injuries -Family support (Overall well-being) -Information sharing -Early interventions -Intelligence	-Mediation -'Catch & convict' -Community engagement -Intelligence	-Support during imprisonment -Retraining prior to release -Collaboration with other agencies -Intelligence	-Enterprise -Regeneration -Housing -Social services -Diversionary activities -Early interventions -Family / children's services	-Mentoring -Coaching -Enterprise training -Job training -Diversionary activities -Family interventions -Individual support services -Exit support and resettlement

Key: LSEGs: Local safer estates groups; ABCs: Acceptable Behavior Contracts; GNAS: Good Neighbour Agreements; ASBOs: Anti-Social Behaviour Orders; P-CLCs: Post-Custodial License Conditions; Call-Ins: Call in Approaches

4.3 Response by voluntary and community organisations

In the United Kingdom, numerous voluntary and community organisations are engaged in delivering gang-related programmes, evidenced by the Home Office's dedication of £4 million in direct funding to these organisations in recent years.

Voluntary organisations implement a range of programmes aimed at building resilience, creating realistic pathways out of a life in crime, and providing diversionary activities that occupy young people while equipping them with pro-social skills. Third sector-led activities in Birmingham and the wider region emphasise:

- Mentoring – mainly focused on advice, support and friendship to aid in reducing anti-social behavior, support continued engagement in a range of education and training programmes, promote improved family relationships, and a host of other personal and psychological needs of individuals. (For example, 100 Black Men of Birmingham, brap, Bringing Hope, Catch 22, Nacro, New Hope Mentoring Project and Young Disciples.)

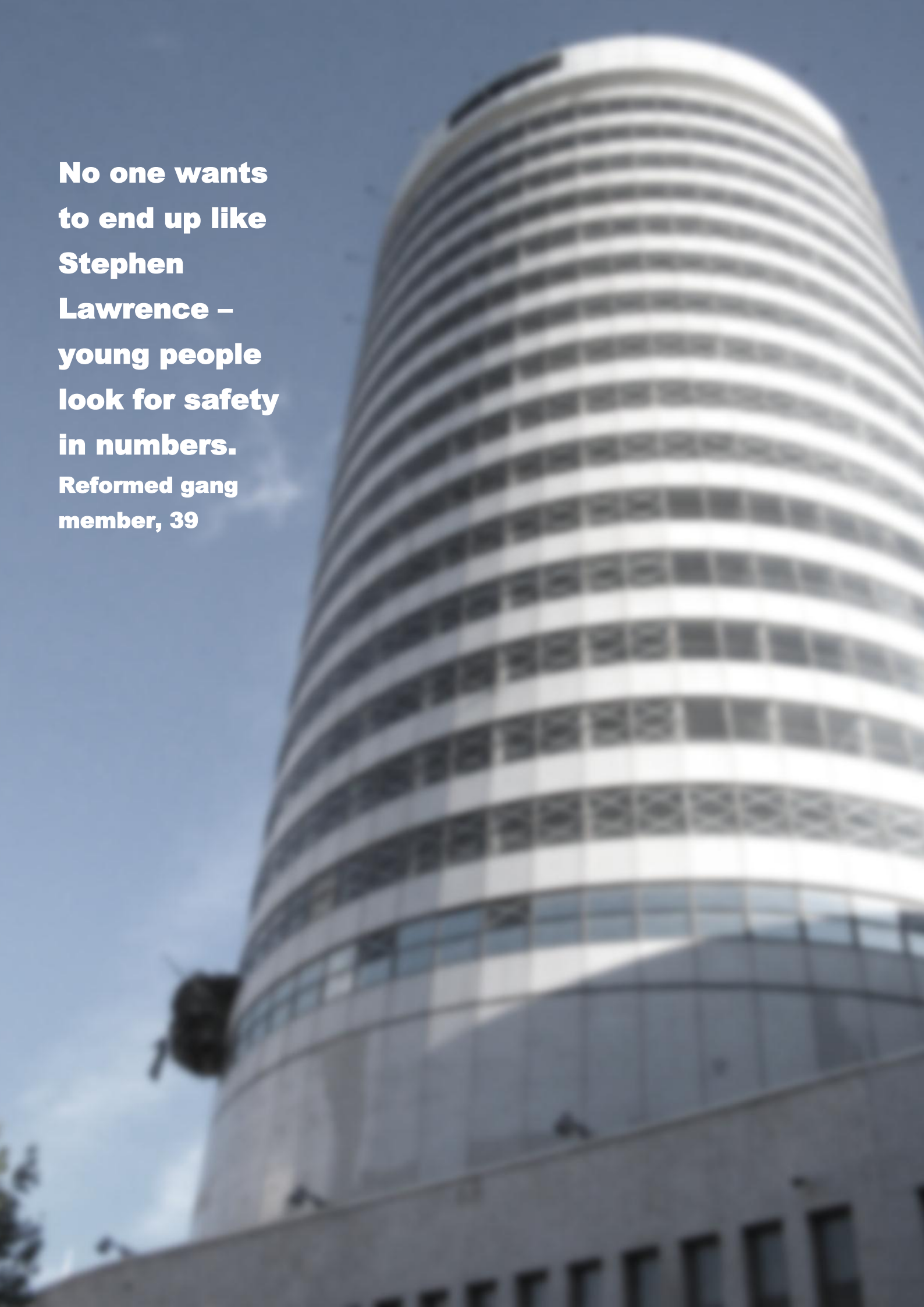
- Coaching – on personal goal making and individual development needs, including the social development of individuals in such areas as self-control, anger management and cultural diversity. (For example Aquarius, Citizen Coaching, Foundation 4 Life and Recre8.)

- Enterprise Training – as an alternative to long-term unemployment. (For example, 100 Black Men of Birmingham, brap, Greenspring Training and Prince's Trust.)

- Job Training – to provide critical job-holding skills, attitudinal training, deportation and self-organisation. (For example, brap, Hidden Talents Partnership, Prince's Trust and Prospects.)

- Diversionary activities – to occupy free time, redirect youthful energy to meaningful activity that support skills acquisition and the reinforcement of self-worth. (For example, City United Ltd, the YMCA Coventry and Warwickshire Krunch.)

- Family interventions – to support families in a range of difficult domestic circumstances. Targeted at all age groups from toddlers to adulthood, and including signposting to help families access other services. (For example, Birmingham District Family Mediation, Bringing Hope and Young Disciples.)



No one wants to end up like Stephen Lawrence – young people look for safety in numbers.

Reformed gang member, 39

5. Key issues

The findings in this section are drawn from our review of relevant literature and from interviews and discussions with young people involved in or at risk of gang related crime, policy-makers and practitioners in the voluntary and public sectors.

The section is divided into key 'themes', some of which will be familiar to those working in this field, other themes less so.

5.1 Reasons for joining gangs

In terms of the profile of gang members, evidence in the UK, European and American literature suggests that:

- Most 'visible' gang members are typically aged between 10 and 25 years of age.[16]
- Most self-proclaimed gang members were truants in school or were altogether excluded from education for varying reasons.[17]
- Gang activity is mostly male dominated.[18]
- Girls and women are uniquely affected by gang activity, mostly as victims, and occasionally as active participants.[19]
- Gangs engage in a diverse range of activities, many of which are criminal in nature.[20]
- Street-level trade in illicit drugs is closely linked to gang activity.[21]
- Structured street gangs employ violence to maintain 'respect'[22] and to protect territory.[23]
- Most gang members started out in gangs as unemployed youth.

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[16] Sharp, S., Aldridge, J., Medina, J. (2004) Delinquent Youth Groups and Offending Behaviour: findings from the 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey. Klein, M. (2001) *The Eurogangs Paradox: Street Gangs and Youth Groups in Europe and the US*, New York: Springer

[17] Bullock, K., Tilley, N. Shootings, Gangs and Violent Incidents in Manchester: Developing a Crime Reduction Strategy, London: Home Office. Pitts, J (2007) *Young and Safe in Lambeth,* Lambeth Executive Commission on Children, Young People and Violent Crime

[18] Dawson, P (2008) *Monitoring Data from the Tackling Gangs Action Programme*, Home Office

[19] ROTA (2010) *Voices in Violence Final Report – This is It, This is My Life – on the impact of serious youth violence and criminal gangs on women and girls across the country* (2010), ROTA/ Barrow Cadbury

[20] Dawson, P (2008), op. cit.

[21] Pitts, J (2007) *Reluctant Gangsters: Youth Gangs in Waltham Forest,* University of Bedfordshire

[22] For example, newspaper reports: 'Mark Dinnegan, 14, murdered over 'dirty look' in *The Telegraph* 30th May 2008

[23] Bennett, T., Holloway, K. (2004) 'Gang Membership, Drugs and Crime in the UK' in *British Journal of Criminology*, 44(3), pp.305-323

- There is a close correlation between gang involvement and socially and economically deprived neighbourhoods, as well as neighbourhoods with substantial constraints in social housing.[24]

  There are strong relationships between violence and social inequality and deprivation. The rates of emergency hospital admissions for assault are around four times higher among people 10–29 years old in England who live in the most deprived areas than among those who live in the least deprived areas (unpublished Hospital Episode Statistics, routine analysis from the Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University, 2010).[25]

  The drugs trade is a significant driver of gang-related activity. A 2007 study of gangs in Waltham Forest, North East London, for example, found that a street-level gang operative earns an annual income of about £26,000 from drugs, with the gang 'elders' who control and approve street-level operations able to earn upwards of £120,000 a year. Entry into gang-related activity is also attracting ever younger individuals.[26]

  The Ending Gangs and Youth Violence (EGYV) report by the Home Office restates a widely-held view that the vast majority of young people want nothing to do with gangs. Furthermore, that the distribution of the tiny minority that engage in gang criminality is not random – in effect, that certain well-defined factors apply commonly to all of them, and recur time after time.[27]

  As part of a recent (2011) consultation exercise undertaken by WMP, forty young people were asked: 'Why and how do young people get involved with gangs?' Responses included:

- peer pressure
- boredom/lack of things to do
- lack of opportunity
- drugs/ money, protection and respect
- for personal reputation (nobody messes with them)
- to attract male and female attention
- acceptance and emotional/physical support, because they live in a gang's street/postcode area
- sometimes single parents – some people may feel that gangs are like family because they don't get that sense of family at home

  This supports what brap found. The young people we consulted indicated the following to be the main reasons, based on their own personal experience, why young people get caught up in gang-related criminality:

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[24] Davies, K. (2008) *Housing Poverty: from social breakdown to social mobility*, London: Centre for Social Justice
[25] Quoted in Sethi, D., Hughes, K., Bellis, M., Mitis, F., Racioppi, F (2010) *European Report on Preventing Violence and Knife Crime among Young People*, World Health Organization
[26] Pitts (2007) op. cit.
[27] Home Office (2011) *Ending Gangs and Youth Violence: A Cross-Government Report*

Economic and social deprivation – including deprived neighbourhoods, poor housing and lack of quality local services, which combine to drive anger, under-attainment in education, and eventual chronic unemployment:

'How could I not? Who's not in it in this estate? You can't survive here otherwise.' (Young man, 15)

'Young people lack recreational activity. With lots of energy, and coming out of socially deprived backgrounds, they find alternatives to legitimate energy release.' (Reformed gang member, 39)

'I was sentenced to four years in prison when I was 18 – I got no support when I got out. I couldn't go home, couldn't find work – what was I supposed to do?' (Gang-related adult, 25)

Challenged family spaces – punctuated by domestic violence and the image of males as dominant nominal and females subservient, financial want, low parental education, poor parenting, single parentage/absent fathers.

'I needed company, to get away from the fighting at home. Couldn't stay at school – me mates weren't at school. Thought it was cool to hang out. We had fun.' (Youth offender, 17)

'Maybe if I'd had a father, things might have been different. John was cool – got me stuff, and I got to do stuff for him. These guys love me. We are loyal here – no snitching. We play fair.' (Youth offender, 16)

'They were there for me when others weren't. That deserves respect.' (Youth offender, 16)

Inequality of opportunity, sometimes perceived to be the result of racial discrimination embedded in institutional practices.

'No one wants to end up like Stephen Lawrence – young people look for safety in numbers.' (Reformed gang member, 39)

'There's something about my name – I feel I do not get shortlisted for interviews because of my name.' (Young man, 19)

Criminalisation of minor offending (the CRB barrier) which drives worklessness and unemployment, poverty and disaffection.

'Money, man. Got to have money to live. With my CRB, no one wanted to touch me. I'm stuck. After trying over last three years, I've given up. What to do?'
(Young man, 21)

'Bad CRB, long-term unemployment – I had to do something to provide for my son. They say I am engaging in organised crime. Give me a job, I'll quit today. Treat me fair, I'll quit today.' (Gang-related adult, 36)

Anger – driven by perceived and experienced social exclusion / limited life chances, and perceptions of lack of respect at the family level.

'I learnt to fight at home – you had to fight to keep your corner. Dad was violent. And my sister and I fought a lot. When you grow up abused, you learn to fight in your own way.' (Gang-involved young man, 24)

'Growing up with disadvantage makes you angry.' (Reformed gang member, 39)

Glamorisation of the 'gangster': flashy cars, money, perceived power and respect ('success' measures: how much money one has, what and where one eats, with whom one lives, and the power of retribution for slights).

'Success is what you drive, man. How can you get respect if you can't go the B? If you can't buy your woman xyz? Money is respect. You gotta have it.'
(Young offender, 19)

Police 'brutality' (use of excessive force under the 'catch and convict' mandate of Birmingham's anti-gangs response strategy; perceptions of collective punishment of ethnicities, victimisation of communities and institutional racism).

'The police were brutal. They insulted Z, and we are all targets now. Why must they be so heavy? Do gangsters have human rights? We feel we don't. You don't need to do nothin' – just be associated with a gang and your days are numbered.' (Young man, 19)

Peer pressure (sometimes driven by desire for intimacy).

> 'If you want a woman, you have to be in a gang, because that is the way things are. If you are not, you stay cold.' (Gang-affiliated young man, age 17)

As can be seen from the quotes above, the reasons people become involved in gangs are multi-faceted. One issue that emerges, but one not often covered in the literature on this subject, is the role of race inequality and discrimination. Often these are broader societal problems (e.g. disproportionate levels of school exclusion for people from particular ethnic and/or socio-economic backgrounds), but occasionally institutions' responses to gang-related crime will further compound the discrimination and disadvantage already experienced by people involved in crime. This is seen most clearly in the criminalisation of minor offending and the negative impact this has of further reducing people's employment prospects.

This demonstrates not only the need for multi-agency responses to address inequality in education, social care, job recruitment and housing. It also highlights the need to consider the human rights and equality implications of current approaches to intervening on the anti-gangs agenda.

5.2 Challenges of Multi-Agency Work

There is a clear need for joined-up, multi-agency approaches to gang-related crime and Birmingham's Multi-Agency Gang Unit (MAGU) model acknowledges this need. Yet there are challenges with this and with similar models across the country. The following case study illustrates some of those challenges.

Case study – Boy K

Boy K, a beneficiary of the *Back on Track* project, is 11-years old and is the eldest of six siblings. His mother is 29, and all six children are born of different fathers. Boy K's father is a known gangster, currently serving time in prison for a gang-related offence. Boy K routinely carries a knife when leaving home and openly associates with known urban gang members. He has disengaged from education: at school, he refuses to learn, does not fight, and has been repeatedly excluded for refusing to engage. He grew up witnessing extreme violence against his mother by his imprisoned father, and has himself started being violent to his mother: on two occasions he has stabbed her, and on two other occasions punched her in the face and pulled her hair.

When he came to the *Back on Track* project, we triggered a MAGU response based on our profiling of his needs. When MAGU took over, many statutory agencies were brought to the table. It soon transpired however that each institution had different methods of working, and the early gains we had achieved with Boy K soon deteriorated as he reacted negatively to

the varying styles of the lead workers from different agencies. Furthermore, attention soon shifted to Boy K's mother and his other siblings, all of whom were subsequently placed on protection orders. The agenda had effectively shifted from Boy K to his family.

A *Back on Track* project worker described the situation in this way:

> 'One institution adopts a judgmental, accusatory, policing attitude strongly wired to fault-finding and compliance; while our project worker adopts a befriending and motivational approach. To the beneficiary, the differing approaches are annoying – and this is reflected in the seesaw behavioural patterns of the beneficiary: one day a role model for good conduct; the next a truant and disengaged pupil; the other an angry, destructive young man.'

Discussions with other voluntary and community organisations suggest that this is a relatively common scenario. One told us:

> 'The MAGU model is good if it worked – in our experience, the focus is on public protection rather than the rehabilitative needs of the primary individual – "me".'

A number of respondents noted that support for poorer communities, such as parenting and gaining employment, is often under-developed, not joined up, or simply missing. When interacting with 'troubled' families, professionals can lack the skills needed to address issues of gang related crime.

Another key challenge to multi-agency working is that the frameworks and structures for information-sharing and knowledge exchange remain under-developed and agencies rarely talk the same language.

Our work on the Back on Track project revealed that some voluntary and community organisations providing support to at risk groups in Birmingham are frequently acting in isolation. There are no formal networks for information sharing, no structured systems for exchanging good practice, and many lack the resources to carry out a meaningful evaluation of their methods and outcomes.

Our interviews with law enforcement agencies, voluntary sector organisations and individual practitioners confirmed that frameworks for knowledge and information sharing remain under-developed. A CAGGK representative of the West Midlands Police observed:

> 'There are three operational problems with this agenda: first, there is no commonly agreed definition of what gangs mean – currently, we understand it from a law enforcement perspective: if shootings and stabbings reduce, we are meeting our basic public protection objectives, but we both know more young people are getting into gangs; two, we have not yet evaluated our interventions to determine the extent to which they are actually making a difference; three, there is still a huge problem with information sharing protocols among and

> between agencies – we must resolve this to move this agenda along.' (Police force member)

Commenting on the role of the sector's involvement in Birmingham's anti-gang strategies, voluntary and community organisations told us:

> 'The police understand gangs differently from us – their approach is to disrupt and contain while ours is therapeutic: we seek and try to meet the needs of the whole individual.'
>
> 'We must be careful with the use of terminology – the people we call 'gangsters' are not gangsters in fact: they may be delinquent, yes; they may be anti-social in behavior, yes; and they may occasionally get caught up in petty crime, even burglary, but that does not make them gangsters.'
>
> 'The police over-emphasise enforcement – there should be greater partnership with community organisations to drive reformation and diversionary activity.'
>
> 'The BRGV does not facilitate information sharing: it is an intelligence gathering process to inform tactical operations – the model needs reform.'
>
> 'There is need to move away from the current general classification of young ill-behaved people as 'mad, bad and dangerous to know' and requiring greater control and incarceration.' (Voluntary and community sector organisations)

A police representative observed:

> 'If the behavior in question is tied to street group formations, for instance if it forced a young child needing to get to school to walk a much longer route because of fear of harm if they crossed a 'rival' territory, then regardless of whether an overt crime is committed, this is a situation that disrupts community life and must not be tolerated.'

And added:

> 'But there is certainly need to review the model, especially to create room for more productive engagement with the voluntary sector. There is an additional problem, however. Information sharing across police force areas is a persisting challenge, and there is merit in commissioning work that would help come up with models that can aid in addressing this.'

Another key challenge with multi-agency working relates to differences in the way agencies define 'gangs'. While this debate is covered extensively in other literature,[28] a universally accepted definition remains elusive.

[28] Pitts 2007, Centre for Social Justice (2009) *Dying to Belong* and Alexander, C. (2008) *'Re-thinking Gangs'*, London: Runnymede Trust

In addition, the primary focus of research on 'gangs' has been the USA and this US evidence base has been particularly influential in informing not just UK definitions but also theory and practice. For example, many commentators now define gangs in relation to four key characteristics – structure, territoriality, criminality, and durability.[29] This is a perspective inherited directly from US research.

In its 2009 report *Dying to Belong,* the Centre for Social Justice defines gangs as:

> 'A relatively durable, predominantly 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.'

This definition adopts the four characteristics of structure, territoriality, criminality, and durability.

The West Midlands Police Authority describes an 'urban street gang' as:

'A group of young people, who hang out together, mainly on the street and are recognised as a group which:

- Is involved in criminal activity and violence.
- Covers a known territory.
- Has some form of identifying feature.
- Gets into fights with other similar gangs.'[30]

We found there to be widely differing interpretations of the term 'gang' amongst agencies in the West Midlands and consequently wide differences in how agencies define the 'problem' of gangs. This of course has direct implications for the interventions they design, prioritise and implement.

However, we also found that both statutory and voluntary sector organisations tend to define the gang from a criminal law perspective, with the majority also tending to focus on the role of young people in gangs. Yet a number of organisations we spoke to emphasised that this association between the term 'gang' and criminal activity is not always helpful – especially when it is almost exclusively used in descriptions of young people. One voluntary sector worker said:

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[29] Howell, J. (1997) *Youth Gangs, Fact Sheet*, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention – defines a youth gang as *"a self-formed association of peers having the following characteristics: a gang name, a recognisable symbol, identifiable leadership, a geographic territory, a regular meeting pattern, and collective actions to carry out illegal activities."* Miller, W. B. (1982) *Crime by Youth Gangs and Groups in the United States,* Washington DC: US Department of Justice. Klein, M. (2001) *The Eurogangs Paradox: Street Gangs and Youth Groups in Europe and the US*, New York: Springer. S. Hallsworth and T. Young (2004) 'Getting Real About Gangs', in *Criminal Justice Matters*, No. 55. 2004, pp. 12-13

[30] West Midlands Police Authority: Policing criminal gangs in the West Midlands (nd). http://www.west-midlands-pa.gov.uk/documents/main/7/Policing_Criminal_Gangs-A_report_on_policing_strategy_in_West_Midlands%20.pdf

> ‘There are gangs and youth groups – some are crime-motivated; others are just social peer networks that create diversion for disengaged youth. They do not present the same problem, yet whenever we see young people dressed in a particular way and hanging out in particular streets at particular times, we are quick to call them gangs.’ (Voluntary and community sector organisation)

In summary, different definitions of ‘gangs’ and barriers to effective information-sharing can prevent sharing of learning on this agenda. They can also be an obstacle to effective referral across institutional boundaries – and was seen in section 5.1, referral is particularly important as a wide range of services may be required to respond to the multiple needs of each individual or family affected by gang-related crime.

5.3 More sensitive screening and profiling

Problems with current approaches to screening and needs assessment can also prevent effective referral and can limit the impact that interventions have on clients and their families.

Of those we interviewed each institution employed different assumptions and applied varying parameters to the ‘individual risk matrix’. Applying each of the screening methods to a single individual, separately, yields vastly different profiles of the same individual. This is a significant problem for safeguarding. We spoke to young people who had been wrongly classified as requiring ‘gang’ related interventions, were then subjected to those interventions and became increasingly frustrated.

One interviewee said:

> ‘With the questions they asked me no wonder they get the wrong end of the stick. I need a job, not a counselor, I need money I’ve got responsibilities.’ (Gang-involved young man, 24 years old)

In addition, many of the screening and profiling methods employed by agencies in the voluntary and public sectors tend to apply static and historical risk parameters (e.g. previous offences). One voluntary and community organisation told us:

> ‘There are elements of institutional racism in the screening methods, a propensity to label any anti-social behavior by some ethnicities as gang activity, and a lack of cultural competence in the handling of targeted individuals.’ (Voluntary and community organisation)

Also, it is important to note that none of the screening methods we encountered focused on ‘resilience’ factors: those factors that, unlike risk, strengthen an individual’s capacity to abstain from or resist the commission of a criminal offence.

Pioneering work in the area of violent extremism employs a psychometric analysis tool that helps to identify or ‘map’ an individual’s risk and resilience profile highly accurately. In

addition, the tool permits the profiling of an individual's psycho-social outlook, enabling the targeting and sequencing of interventions in a type of 'multi-phase' mentoring. Brap has been working with partners in Manchester who developed the violent extremism tool to see whether something similar could be applied to gang-related violence. The assessment tool has the potential to radically alter the way in which frontline services conduct initial screenings with people at risk. This would have significant benefit as improper profiling can drive enormous public cost through inappropriate referral. Improper profiling also carries the significant risk of incorrectly 'labelling' an individual as a gang-member, a 'misprofiling' which may affect them for the rest of their life.

5.4 Gang members as victims

In some cases, a more nuanced understanding of what gang members are going through is required in order to develop more targeted interventions. This should include consideration of the degree to which gang members are themselves 'victims'. The law enforcement focus of the EGYV strategy, with its focus on public protection, catch/convict and disrupt/disperse does not sit easily with this idea. Yet many voluntary sector providers see themselves as responding to the individual holistically and seek to meet the individual's entire needs. One interviewee said:

> 'Community organisations meet the holistic needs of the individual, unlike Police who focus on arresting offenders. We try to understand why people commit crime, and try to meet those needs. It is not that we think crime is not a cause for concern; we just think that focusing on the really sustainable stuff is more helpful. You arrest the young person who perhaps offended due to peer pressure, send him to prison, where he comes into contact with more hardened offenders, and he comes out an angry man. What can he do with a bad CRB record? You have just taken the future away from that person.' (Voluntary and community organisation)

It is important to note that of the 31 gang-involved interviewees we spoke to *all* reported themselves as coming from dysfunctional families. They all said they had witnessed extreme domestic violence towards a female member of their family; many said they came from a single-parent home; most said they were unemployed and had struggled with education. One said:

> 'Schools don't care. If they perceive you as difficult, and you get into trouble, they do not support you so that when you drop out, it does not affect their OFSTED ratings.' (Gang-involved young person, 17-years old)

Boy K, for instance, in the case study cited earlier, was excluded for refusing to engage with his school. And yet the school admitted he had not fought or destroyed property. This suggests that the problem may lie as much with the manner in which this school engages with difficult children as it does with Boy K.

About 50% of the gang-involved interviewees said they had being diagnosed with Asperger's or ADHD, and some felt they were labeled because of medical conditions they were struggling with. One said:

> 'They think I have a compulsive desire to cause harm, to be truant, to be anti-social. I wish they knew how frustrating struggling with my issues is. I used to think I was, until I was told I had these conditions.'

Are individual gang members victims or is society the 'victim'. Are the two mutually exclusive? There is at the least a need to further debate this concept of victimhood.

5.5. Identifying Good Practice

Clearly, there are a wide range of issues to consider when developing interventions to respond to gang-related criminality and a 'one-size fits all' approach is not appropriate. We wanted to explore further how good practice is identified and what practitioners and service users think about the services on offer in the city. This is a broad subject, so responses are divided into three key sub-sections:

- Understanding the impact of previous approaches.
- How good practice is defined and what influences this.
- The need for wider and more evidence-based understanding of good practice.

Understanding the impact of previous approaches

There is fairly widespread consensus on the gaps in evaluative information.[31] For example, despite the wealth of anti-knife crime initiatives operating in the UK, there is very little independent research about their impact on knife use.[32] The Home Office released figures in 2011 based on an evaluation of the TKAP as a whole. These suggested that there were reductions in serious violence involving teenagers and young adults across the country between 2007 and 2010, but with little discernible difference between those areas targeted by the programme and those that were not.[33] In addition, as Silvestri *et al* noted in 2009:

> 'A large number of locally based initiatives are being piloted or undertaken in the UK which aim to affect young people's carrying or using of weapons. In some cases, initiatives are recent and evaluations are therefore premature; in others, the lack of (independent) assessment of their efficacy is due to a shortage of funding.'[34]

While evaluative information is available for some of the larger programmes this generally comes with a 'health warning' that the learning from such evaluations is developmental. The assessment of the TKAP Phase II programme, for instance, highlights a number of methodological challenges in comparing TKAP and non-TKAP areas.[35] There is also still relatively little information available focused on small and local level interventions.

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[31] Silvestri et. al. op. cit.
[32] *ibid*
[33] Ward L, Nicholas S and Willoughby M (2011) *Research Report 53, An Assessment of the Tackling Knives and Serious Youth Violence Programme (TKAP) - Phase II*, London: Home Office
[34] Silvestri et. al. op. cit.
[35] Ward et. al., op. cit.

Birmingham Reducing Gang Related Violence, for example, has identified a reduction in real terms in gang related murders in the city, with deaths falling from 27 in 2002/03 to three between 2006/2010. This coincides with the period when BRGV became active and is seen as one of the clearest indications of its effectiveness. This is confirmed by NI29 (gun crime) figures which show a reduction in gun related incidents in the twelve months to October 2008.[36] However, BRGV itself notes that there are challenges in understanding the impact of its work:

> '…concurrent activities between BRGV, the partnership agencies and other partnerships and initiatives make it hard to tease out the impact of BRGV itself. In addition to this, much information has to be professionally examined case by case to identify if it is gang related.'

Indeed much of the available evidence about the relative impact or contribution of specific programmes (whether diversionary, preventative, rehabilitative or suppressive in purpose) is limited in its ability to ascribe 'cause and effect'. This applies to public as well as voluntary and community sector-led interventions.[37] It is our understanding from available evidence and research that there is a need to focus more closely on the impact of specific local interventions and to better understand the assumptions that are being made about what good practice 'looks like'.

A number of interviewees suggested that voluntary and community sector organisations are particularly well placed to respond to the needs of people at risk of gang-related criminality. For example, when asked whether statutory agencies and voluntary sector organisations understand gangs in the same way, one voluntary sector interviewee said:

> 'In my experience, we do not see this problem the same way – statutory agencies are rule-driven, which makes them inflexible. VCOs are not hung-up about procedures: we are quick to accommodate and respond to changing individual needs. We are not judgemental – we affirm the individual while disapproving negative behaviour. (Voluntary and community sector organisation)

Yet we found that voluntary and community sector organisations are not always able to provide the type of evaluative evidence required to persuade and influence broader policy or to secure mainstream change in the practice of statutory agencies. Much of the evaluative information gathered by voluntary and community sector organisations working on this agenda comprises:

- 'Grey' literature (not publicly available).
- 'Monitoring' information for funding purposes focused on particular outcomes and outputs as required by funders.
- Anecdotal information that is not written down and held by those working in the field.

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[36] Birmingham City Council (2010) *Partnership Working to Tackle Gang Violence in Birmingham*

[37] Geoff Berry Associates (2006): *Evaluation of West Midlands Mediation and Transformation Service*, Birmingham: Geoff Berry Associates. See p.12: "…the project operates in a dynamic environment and that a number of factors, including the wider work of the BRGV and its' component agencies, may influence individual behaviour. As a result, it is dangerous to ascribe cause and effect, particularly in relation to some of the quantitative data such as the level of gun related crime."

One community organisation told us:

> 'We are not aware of any evaluative work among community organisations engaging in this agenda – we certainly know that some programmes appear to be effective, but we cannot point to a specific model. We have developed our own approaches, and like to think they are effective – certainly, we see change, and that must mean something.' (Voluntary and community sector organisation)

This lack of publicly available comparative evidence makes it harder to identify the kind of services that should be commissioned from voluntary and community organisations in this field. A West Midlands Police interviewee observed:

> 'We would like to see more research on how to more effectively define the problem. We may need to engage more evaluatively [sic] with the American models that are known to have worked. But we need translation work on all models that work, to inform design of interventions, including how to functionally translate intelligence into useful options in the anti-gangs effort – and we need more work on gangs and women, starting from the Children Commissioner's Report.'

This lack of evidence regarding impact has implications for agencies' ability to identify what makes good practice 'good' and yet many continue to do precisely this despite these gaps in evidence.

How good practice is defined and what influences this

It is important to say that where good practice is identified, this judgement seems most frequently based on operational evaluations and the ability initiatives have to disrupt overt street-level gang activity – rarely on long-term analysis of the impact of interventions. Nor do these judgements necessarily reflect the impact of interventions on other aspects of practice – for example, the impact on addressing specific causes of criminality such as emotional problems.

Two programmes singled out by the EGYV 2011 report as particularly good models from Birmingham include:

- The BRGV strategy (already discussed) – complete with its menu of robust enforcement actions (ABCs, ASBOs, LSEGs, GNAs, civil injunctions, etc).

- The Centre for Conflict Transformation programme which mediates in the context of gang-related violence. Members of the community are recruited, trained and accredited as mediators and mentors. Also, gang leaders with influence and power are recruited to mediate conflicts – before incidents, after incidents to prevent retaliation, and in supporting those who wish to exit.

At a national level the EGYV report (2011) identifies a range of examples of good practice from across the country. A review of these programmes identifies best practice as:

- A partnership approach – a multi-agency framework.
- Information sharing and resources.
- A central role of research and analysis.
- Strong disruption to weapons acquisition and carrying.
- 'Nominals' list – a list of known high-risk individuals.
- Injury surveillance (A&E data monitoring and sharing).
- Outreach, community policing.
- Call-ins – targeting rival nominals, clearly communicating further violence will not be tolerated, offering support to desist.[38] [39]

Only one programme adopts a public health approach to addressing the gangs problem – Strathclyde Police's Violence Reduction Unit. This model was developed by the WHO and has four ecological factors in its matrix: societal factors (e.g. availability of weapons), community factors (e.g. domestic circumstances, school experience); relationship factors (e.g. peers) and individual factors (biological, psychological, sociological).[40]

From the USA, the Boston Gun Project and Operation Ceasefire has been a leading model and has influenced the mainstream design of many tactical options by UK Police Forces.[41] This involved a direct law enforcement attack on illicit firearms traffickers supplying youths with guns and an attempt to generate a strong deterrent to gang violence.

Current anti-gang strategies are largely grounded in theories of crime,[42] with a consequent impact on how interventions are designed, prioritised and operationalised. The central problem is that while there are numerous competing theories of crime there is little consensus regarding the extent to which these theories can be directly applied to gangs. With so many differently placed people currently studying and commentating on the gangs phenomenon – sociologists, criminologists, policy-makers, academics, voluntary and community organisations – it is perhaps not surprising that views differ dramatically regarding 'good practice' and 'impact'.

While the present strategy for ending gang and youth violence in the UK emphasises four central pillars –

- Prevention
- Punishment and enforcement
- Pathways out (resettlement) and
- Providing support (family strengthening; early intervention)

– many of the voluntary and community sector practitioners we spoke to consider that approaches to 'operationalising' and implementing these policies and ideas have remained largely 'enforcement'- and 'dispersal'-led, at least until the advent of CAGGK.

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[38] Home Office (2011) *Ending Gang and Youth Violence: A Cross-Government Report*
[39] Home Office (2011) *TKAP Good Practice Guidance*
[40] World Health Organisation (2002) *World Report on Violence and Health*
[41] US Department of Justice (2001) *Reducing Gun Violence: The Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire*, Washington: National Institute of Justice
[42] For a review of prominent theories of crime, see Cullen, F., Agnew, R. (2002) *Criminological Theory: Past to Present (Essential Readings)* Los Angeles: Roxbury

One interviewee said:

> 'The title of the EGYV report is unrealistic: gangs and gang violence cannot be 'finished off' because the underlying drivers persist: low educational attainment, social and domestic disadvantage, perceptions of racism and racially-driven isolation, unemployment and run-down neighbourhoods. Unless these underlying drivers are addressed, it is difficult to see how gangs can be ended.' (Voluntary and community organisation)

The idea that gangs and gang violence are strongly driven by a lack of alternative opportunities at a local level was a common theme amongst practitioners that we interviewed.

A number of interviewees also suggested the need to explore new theories in more detail. For example a criminologist argued:

> 'We know an awful lot about why people commit crime, yet we know amazingly little about the really important stuff – why people stop committing crime….There is a lot of merit in placing more emphasis on **desistance** than previous interventions design did.*'* (Criminologist)

Desistance is a crime theory that explores the reasons persons who have previously offended choose not to offend. It is an advanced version and offshoot of such crime theories as the maturation theory (propounding that crime has a close association with an individual offender's age – as they grow older, they 'outgrow' the proclivity to crime).[43]

The need for wider and more evidence-based understanding of good practice

Young people interviewed referred to limits in the range of interventions available to them. A particular area where people felt more support was required was in mental health. One interviewee said:

> 'The mental health service can trivialise mental health issues where black people are concerned. It is not only that they don't support I don't think they know how to get it right.' (Former gang-member, 24-years old)

A number of respondents referred to problems they had faced as they were growing up. One young man (19 years old) in particular referred to the benefit of support for parents:

> 'No-one wants to tell parents how to do their job, but if they can't deal with their kid's behavior then why not? I don't think they [service providers] want to go there. They need help, parents need help.'

Perhaps the most common theme amongst young people and practitioners alike was the need to focus more directly on improving employment and education prospects:

[43] For an easy literature review, see: Prior et al (2011) *Maturity, Young Adults and Criminal Justice: a Literature Review,* Birmingham: Birmingham University – commissioned by Barrow Cadbury Trust.

> 'The young people I've worked with, and they are many, all need one thing: employment. Bad CRBs hold them back. This needs to be tackled. Interventions that are grounded in employment creation succeed because they expand opportunity. They may have other personal issues, but employment always hits the right buttons.' (Voluntary and community sector organisation)

> 'Police are too quick to slap you with a criminal tag. Why not work with young people in ways that avoids soiling their CRBs? Now I can't quit: what would I do with a CRB carrying four convictions? Who would employ me? I went to college – see where I am now. Young people will keep getting into gangs unless poverty and disadvantage are addressed.' (Gang member, 32-years old)

There was also a call from practitioners for more examples of good practice in fields like this outside the realms of police-led enforcement and dispersal. A few specific examples were provided:

- Bringing Hope (Birmingham) employs a three-pronged service model: 'peer-led culturally competent mentoring; morality and rites of passage; and reframing the context.' The first focuses on building resilience around the decision to turn away from street culture; the second focuses on reaffirming self-worth, regardless of past acts of violent crime; the third focuses on inclusion – a notion of restorative justice.

- Young Disciples (Birmingham) employs what it calls 'the therapeutic' model of practice – which resonates with the public health model implemented by Strathclyde Police department.[44]

- Chance UK employ the Goodman Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQs) as an efficient screening tool that helps identify particular types of mentoring interventions required by different clients. The impact of the SDQs was evaluated by Goldsmith University in 2008.[45]

Other respondents referred to general principles and approaches that they regarded as good practice. These fall into five main categories:

- **Mentoring**: People talked about the value and credibility of using mentors that had experience of or were at risk of gang-related criminality and had managed to leave or avoid joining gangs.

- **Rites of passage**: One practitioner in particular talked about the importance of helping young people to go through key 'rites of passage' that they may have missed in their lives before. Practitioners referred to the importance of introducing particular 'trigger events' that can lead to young people becoming 'men'. This would help them to avoid joining or staying in gangs.

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[44] Home Office (2011), E*nding Gangs and Youth Violence – A Cross-Government Report, Annex B*

[45] Smith, P., Howard, S. (2008) *An Analysis of the Impact of Chance UK's Mentoring Programme*, London: Goldsmiths University of London

- **Faith based** approaches to diverting young people from gang-related activity were commonly cited as best practice.

- **Resilience**: Some practitioners referred to the benefit of work to develop resilience in the face of pressure to become a gang member or undertake related criminal activity. This involves equipping people with the thinking approaches that can help them to weigh up the alternatives to joining or staying in gangs. The focus is on psychology and on helping people to respond to the adversity that they face in their lives.

- **Diversionary activities**: A number of practitioners referred to the value of diversionary activities, often involving sport and music.

It is worth noting, however, that some interviewees also highlighted drawbacks to a number of these examples of good practice. For example, some felt that people are sometimes reluctant to question or critique faith-based interventions and yet they should be subject to the same level of evaluation and scrutiny as other projects. The commissioning and promotion of faith-based interventions is often targeted at particular ethnic groups. There is a risk that this may conform to the assumption that it is a lack of faith or 'values' that may lead individuals from these groups into crime, rather than wider issues of inequality and deprivation. For some of our participants, faith based initiatives were initially off-putting and although projects were at pains to state that they did not proselytise, there may be an issue of 'choice' here in relation to what type of initiatives are seen to apply to and work for particular groups.

Resilience approaches are based on the idea of developing 'thinking skills'. The basic premise is that if people think more positively about an adverse situation, they will be able to develop better strategies for dealing with that situation. While there appears to be some benefit to this approach[46] it is based on a psychological 'fix' to issues which may be inherently sociological (such as living in poverty and areas surrounded by crime and unemployment). While these issues don't by themselves lead to crime and negative thinking, they can present a challenge to the idea of thinking more positively. Resilience approaches also to some extent gloss over issues of class. For some social groups, adversity is easily overcome and there is daily evidence of this. For others, despite their best efforts, things do not work out in their favour. It is also worth noting that studies on resilience training in schools have found that while children at the lower end of the social spectrum initially increase their achievement, the impact of that training tapers off after time. This would suggest that resilience training has limited impact as a 'one-off' – in order for benefits to be sustained, regular interventions may be required.

5.6 Involving young people in designing and scrutinising services

A trend discernible in other areas of public service – including services for vulnerable people living in poverty – is that of the involvement of service-users in the design and modification of services. Such approaches in gang-related services are in their infancy and many of the

[46] American Psychological Association, Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents (2008) *Resilience in African American children and adolescents: A vision for optimal development,* Washington DC: APA

young people we spoke to who were potential or actual users of gang-crime related services had not actively considered any role they might have in shaping the future of those services.[47] Amongst the comments made were the following:

> 'Why do they sit in posh rooms and decide what we need? I know what I want – but I never get asked. It's like take this or leave it – and if you're on police radar, you gotta take what's a must for you, and do your thing.' (Young person 'at risk', 19-years old)

> 'The programmes they bring to help us are not the things we want, but nobody talks to us. I think it's meant to control us, like.' (Young person 'at risk', 17-years old)

> 'There should be more information given to us. If I know where to get things done, I would go there myself.' (Gang member, 19-years old)

There are some specific challenges in reaching and talking to young people in this field. We found that a relatively high-level of investment is required if young people who are 'at risk' of gang-related crime are to engage in any meaningful way. A number of people that we spoke to had complex needs (e.g. mental health problems) and were frustrated because they had been treated badly by public services in the city in the past.

There was some suspicion that brap researchers might be linked to law-enforcement agencies in some way and on one occasion we had to use intermediaries who were more familiar to the young people. A number of young people also emphasised the importance of being treated with 'respect' when engaged by statutory agencies to share their views.

5.7 Knives and guns: is the problem identical?

In the same way that young people and practitioners called for more sensitive and individual needs-led services, voluntary and community organisations that we interviewed also tended to stress the need to view knife and gun youth crime separately. Gun crime, they felt, was more easily associated with gang activity, but knife crime should not necessarily be regarded as gang-related or gang-driven.

This view is in contrast to law enforcement agencies which tend to speak to both knife and gun youth crime as a bundle. This is perhaps not surprising given that government policy since 2008 (the TKAP programmes) has lumped the two together.

One interviewee said:

> 'Knife carrying and knife use are not the same thing. Young people frequently carry weapons for dramatically different reasons. They may do so to conform to a social code, without ever intending to use it. If ever they end up using it, it is more often an accidental or opportunistic type of offence, as opposed to a 'gang hit'. They may also carry a knife as a sense of security, because they live in

[47] West Midlands Police recently engaged some 40 young people to find out their views on WMP's approach to policy on criminal gangs – WMP (2011) *Policing Criminal Gangs: Report on 2011 youth consultation*

> tough neighbourhoods. A knife in this case is a deterrent to attacks, hence a self-defense mechanism.' (Voluntary and community organisation)

Another said:

> 'Things are changing. School kids want protection, who else is going to do it? Guns – different ball game. They are for gangsters – it's wild out there.' (Gang-involved young man, 24-years old)

Combining knife and gun crime under the same policy banner, bearing a similar or closely related menu of policy responses, is not necessarily justified. One of our interviewees suggested that this might in fact contribute to misprofiling and 'labeling' of people that is inappropriate.

Secondly, definitions of 'gangs' that focus on criminality, structure, territoriality and street-based physicality (as previously described) are not attributes easily associated with the known manifestation of knife-carrying. These observations do not, of course, seek to trivialise the life-damaging consequences of knife crime, well documented in the Kinsella Report.[48] However, the people that we spoke to suggested that there would be merit in more nuanced policy responses and associated interventions in the future.

5.8 The challenge of sustainability in community led responses

Since 2010 approximately £32m has been devoted to tackling gang and youth violence.[49] Some of this has been earmarked for work by voluntary and community sector organisations.

Yet there are fundamental questions regarding the level of resourcing available to these providers and consequently the sustainability of their services – especially in the current climate of budget austerity. This also has a direct effect on the *impact* of such interventions.

For instance, on the Back on Track Project, each client is allocated a maximum number of hours of support. Some cases turn out to be relatively easy; the client's needs can be accommodated in the allotted time and other necessary services are accessed smoothly and on schedule. Yet in other cases clients clearly require more support than is resourced. In one example, the project supported a 10-year old boy with a history of multiple stabbings, school exclusions and association with known gang members. Not only did this require extra support beyond the maximum allocated hours, it also required support to be provided for the boy's mother: her needs and circumstances were fundamental to the boy's turnaround. The delivery team was able to meet these multiple needs, but the work was undertaken on a pro-bono basis: it was done because it needed to be done – had to be done. Many voluntary organisations find themselves in similar circumstances, but this is not a sustainable method of engagement and cannot be replicated hundreds of times.

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[48] Kinsella, B (2011) *Tackling Knife Crime Together – a Review of Local Anti-Knife Crime Projects,* Home Office

[49] CAGGK (2011-13) £4 million, Home Office direct funding of £18 million (£4 million directly to VCOs, £250k to Ben Kinsella Fund, £3.75 million to London, Greater Manchester and West Midlands, £10 million for prevention and diversionary activity), EGYV (£10 million to 30 areas most affected by serious gang and youth violence).

One interviewee told us:

> 'The CAGGK programme is good on one level: it has made it possible for a wider range of civil society organisations to squarely take on gangs within their communities. On another level, it is quite tokenistic: how much real change can £10,000, spread between 20 beneficiaries, introduce/catalyse?' (Voluntary and community organisation)

This issue of sustainability becomes particularly important when considering the beneficiaries involved. Young people – the primary beneficiaries for many of the projects active in this field – are at particularly high risk of reoffending. Reducing levels of reoffending often requires sustained work with the same cohort over a relatively long period of time. Yet very little attention is given to issues of sustainability – effort is deployed in relation to the duration of the funding or contract with little or no provision made for ongoing support.

Through our research we identified a number of voluntary and community organisations that had strong, proven models of engagement but lacked the resources and capacity to provide intensive, sustainable support in the longer-term. This was also true for some public sector providers – including providers that frequently make referrals to those very same voluntary organisations as a means of sourcing additional services and support.

This can result at times in beneficiaries of these programmes feeling they are not receiving what they need. A young person interviewed expressed exasperation at what he termed 'empty social programmes':

> 'Gangs sell. They keep social enterprises in business through attracting funds. Nobody really cares about us. That is why all these ineffective support programmes will never work – I attend XYZ as a beneficiary to spend time on the computer, and hit the street after, go home at 12.'

Clearly, the limited impact of programmes like this can relate to more than a lack of available resources. A key issue we have noted is misprofiling. We noted a tendency for agencies (both public and voluntary sector) to stereotype badly behaved young people, especially black and minority ethnic people, as in need of gang-related interventions, but this is not always what they require. Methods used to assess individuals are often applied on the basis of 'risk' – either to wider society, or to the individual themselves. Yet we suspect that these are not always nuanced enough and misprofiling appears to be a common phenomenon in this field of work.

Growing up with disadvantage makes you angry.

Reformed gang member, 39

6. Final thoughts and recommendations

A significant focus of this report is on the 'processes' and 'systems' that shape and inform responses to the gang problem. If this seems overly technocratic, we apologise. It is necessary because it is these very systems and processes that sometimes impede meaningful and impactful work in this field. For this reason this final section focuses at least in part on aspects of the 'system' that could be modified in order to improve services for those at risk of or involved in gang-related crime.

But we also consider current 'thinking' on this issue. We argue that in a climate of highly politicised opinion, lack of consensus regarding remedies, and deep, intractable problems it is perhaps not surprising that there is a lack of vision, aspiration and ambition in service design, delivery and outcomes. However, this seems to suggest — and amongst young people certainly fuels the perception — that there is a willingness to 'write-off' young people and a reluctance to confront the underlying causes of gang-related criminality in society. The report concludes by suggesting a number of specific areas where future interventions should be reconsidered.

Understanding Impact

Many of the more recent gang-related interventions in Birmingham have not been formally evaluated and this of course has implications for judging what works well. A number of assumptions have been made about what 'good practice' looks like without a thorough understanding of the value and impact of those interventions or indeed the shape and nature of interventions that work really well, especially in the longer term. This affects the ability of commissioners to make sound judgments about which services and/or interventions are effective and should be purchased. It also affects the ability of voluntary and community sector providers to influence mainstream statutory practice.

The ongoing challenge of evaluation and impact assessment is further complicated by a tendency to commission voluntary and community sector organisations to deliver *short-term* preventative and diversionary activities. This makes it even harder to assess the contribution that preventative or diversionary programmes might make to shaping individual's life chances – such as re-engagement with education and starting a career – which are apparent only over a significantly longer timescale. Barriers to multi-agency working and information-sharing further compound this challenge of 'tracking' what happens to young people once they exit a short-term intervention.

Implications:

commissioners of services (e.g. police and local authorities) to consider how voluntary/community organisations operating in this field can be supported to evaluate and share the value and impact of interventions. How does this fit with current types of voluntary/community sector 'infrastructure' support in the city? What methods are most effective? What are expectations around type and quality of evidence required from commissioned providers? Can the type of evaluative evidence collected be made more consistent across providers?

Effective commissioning and service design

More is known about impact and good practice related to enforcement and dispersal but there is less coverage in the available literature regarding effective approaches to prevention, reducing reoffending, diversion, resettlement and rehabilitation. For example, Birmingham's most vocal work on the gang violence agenda has been in the area of enforcement. This is recognised and Birmingham is now revisiting this to consider prevention, rehabilitation and support more closely.

Although national strategy[50] is logical and clear in its identification and communication of these issues, interventions for gang-related violent crime are still under development and much practice remains heavily influenced by enforcement, dispersal and 'punitive' approaches. Young people that we spoke described the negative impact this balance of interventions can have on their lives – for example, the negative effect of criminal citations on their job prospects when other forms of social support may have had a more beneficial outcome.

While we identified a number of strong examples of practice in this field, we were left with an overwhelming feeling (shared by many of the voluntary and community organisations we talked to) that in many cases even these would not be adequate responses if not supported by a wider multi-agency response from others in the city. Without that additional support for beneficiaries, some interventions run the risk of acting as little more than time-limited 'holding bays' that help keep young people 'off the streets.' What happens after that preventative/diversionary activity takes place is frequently a missing link. Is it reasonable to expect that a young person involved in gang-related activity will get a job after a training course on CV-writing and interviewing techniques?

In our view some of the gaps in current provision reflect a lack of vision, aspiration and ambition in policy and service design. Shouldn't our overall aspiration be to educate and support young people affected by gang-related crime? Too often aspiration falls short of this and it assumed that young people instead require an 'alternative' to mainstream education. But for schools and other agencies to say that these young people are 'uneducable' is a cop-out and unacceptable. Such easy options do not offer the kind of 'wrap-around' support –

[50] Home Office (2011), E*nding Gangs and Youth Violence – A Cross-Government Report*

encompassing education, counselling, and support for parents –that can help young people get 'back on track'.

As a society we can't afford to say that some individuals or groups are uneducable because the cost to those young people and to society is too high. If we are not clear about how commissioning a particular service will help to achieve some of these broader and harder-to-achieve outcomes for young people then this needs to be remedied.

Implications:

- there are opportunities for **research institutions** to further examine the effect of ASBOs and other low-level citations on the future prospects of young people and understand the degree to which alternative forms of social support could have resulted in more effective outcomes
- **police** and **voluntary/community sector providers** in this field could be encouraged to work more closely together to identify clear, evidence-based examples of good practice – particularly in areas such as prevention, diversion, desistance, rehabilitation and resettlement. Are there ways in which this knowledge about good practice and impact could be better reflected in service specifications and commissioning decisions?
- what would help Birmingham's **Multi-Agency Gang Unit (MAGU)** and related agencies to design wrap-around/multi-agency services? The transitions as young people move from one service to another and transitions between key episodes in young people's lives seem particularly important to focus upon. Does Birmingham have a clear 'support pathway' that can help young people to manage these transitions?
- what role could **charitable trusts** play in supporting development of more integrated 'pathways' of support in the future – perhaps by bringing together grant holders working on this agenda?

The thinking behind policy and practice

It is important to highlight the assumptions and theories that inform our treatment of 'gangs' for two reasons. Firstly, openly airing these issues is a step towards building consensus on the topic. Competing academic theories, political trends and public opinion all play a role in influencing the type of interventions that are developed and funded in this field. The lack of a commonly held standpoint on what 'causes' people to join gangs and what helps people to leave (or not join) gangs makes it difficult to judge what constitutes best practice. It is important to reiterate here that there are many reasons why people join gangs and neither the available interventions nor wider public perceptions of the issue fully reflect the variety of issues that can propel people into gang life. Secondly, reviewing the 'thinking' that informs this agenda will also help identify where interventions are being shaped and influenced by ill-founded or even damaging assumptions or stereotypes (e.g. approaches that do not take

into account the socio-economic reality of those involved, or approaches that require people to pursue a particular faith for the intervention to work).

This research has identified examples of where the problem of 'gangs' is 'racialised' and where the response is then 'racialised' to match. There are clear expectations about who is best placed to deliver interventions and this includes a strong belief that people who have been affected by gang activity have the skills and are the 'best' people to work with those at risk. There are also clear expectations about who those interventions need to be delivered to.

This agenda has been highly politicised for a number of years. It has generally focused on responding to particular groups in society, rather than to some of the root causes for social inequality, disaffection and gang-related crime. It is important that public debate is informed by more than political trends and public opinion and that where there are examples of effective practice based on sound evidence these are given a chance in Birmingham.

Implications:

- how can Birmingham promote a more honest and open public debate about the antecedents of gang-related crime? The **police** and others have already taken steps to encourage young people to engage in discussions about this agenda – with a particular focus on the type of services currently offered to young people. Yet **public bodies** in the city have a collective responsibility to promote wider debate on this issue – what is it about Birmingham that drives young people to join gangs and what role can public services play in preventing it?
- how should **Birmingham City Council district decision-making structures** and **Community Budgeting structures** consider and respond to evaluative information about guns and gangs issues in their area? This is particularly challenging given its politically sensitive nature (e.g. debate about whether gang members should receive social housing over and above other residents)

The problem of definition: re-thinking how we 'label' young people

There is a lack of a common definition of gangs. Agencies and indeed members of the public may define someone as a gang member when they may 'only' be involved in anti-social behaviour, or petty crime. Some of this is informed by broader political and public opinion about young people and their role in society. It seems that as we seek to understand young people and their behaviour, we also need to explore our own attitudes, and in particular our willingness to attach negative labels to youth behaviour and the implications this has for the interventions we develop.

Implications:

- are young people wrongly labeled because they lack 'voice' in the system and find it hard to influence local policy on this agenda?
- the West Midlands Police definition of gangs has historically referred to a higher risk of criminality (including threatened or actual use of firearms or violence). However, there is a wider public engaging in anti-social behaviour are engaging in 'gang' behaviour. Could more be done to develop revised and more nuanced descriptions of youth behaviour? How can we avoid the trap and consequences of 'labelling' whole groups of young people by virtue of age, geography or ethnicity? **MAGU** and associated agencies would be well placed to lead the way in promoting this debate

A lack of equality and human rights analysis

The reasons for people engaging in gang-related violent crime are multi-faceted and numerous. Yet the interventions that young people described were often influenced strongly by assumptions and stereotypes about their age, culture, gender and ethnicity.

For example, 'gangs' are seen as largely made up of young 'black' (African Caribbean) people, despite the fact that evidence indicates that gangs largely reflect local demographics. Also, preventative strategies such as mentoring are often recommended by statutory providers as a matter of course after young people receive a citation (e.g. an ASBO). Yet, this is often done with no examination of whether 'mentoring' is an appropriate measure. In instances where the purpose of mentoring is to provide a role model, for instance, there is frequently no examination of whether the lack of a role model is a particular issue for the individual concerned. Respondents talked about how coming from a single-parent family doesn't automatically mean they are going to join a gang. Those interventions that avoided stereotypes like this and were nuanced and more sensitive to people's individual needs were often informed by strong screening, profiling and needed assessment work early on in the process.

However, it is important to note that many of these stereotypes are reflected in wider society too. Focus is placed on the culture and habits of young people themselves ('those young people always hang around on the street', 'those African Caribbean young people come from single-parent families and lack male role models'). Yet this has the effect, albeit often unintentionally, of placing the 'blame' and responsibility on communities themselves. The focus is not on fixing the longer-term structural issues that may be contributing factors (such as discrimination and inequality in the labour market which makes people from some ethnic groups much more likely to be unemployed than White British people), or on changing the actions of public service providers that may influence young people to join gangs (e.g. respondents referred to frustration with 'police brutality', unfair stop and search policy and discrimination in school exclusions).

Implications:

- what can **commissioners** do to ensure that the equality implications of gang-related interventions are fully thought through? How can we ensure that **voluntary/community sector** provision in this field is inclusive and does not disadvantage young people that don't fit into a particular box?
- how do **commissioners** currently find out about what service users think about the quality and equality of services they receive? Are current feedback mechanisms fit for purpose and are they implemented well? How does feedback like this influence the future design of services in the city?
- in addition to interventions that focus on gang members and their families, there is room for more focus on some of the longer term, structural, societal causes of gang-related behavior. what role can **research institutions** and **charitable trusts** play in generating evidence about the link between income inequality, unfair recruitment practices, poor education practice, and gang-related criminality in an area, for example?

More nuanced and sensitive screening and profiling

Different agencies take a variety of approaches to the screening and profiling of individuals. This can result in significantly different profiles for the same individual and is highly problematic from a safeguarding point of view. It can mean that young people are wrongly classified as 'at risk' and can be subjected to gang related interventions which they may not need and may react badly to. It can also make joint-working and cross-agency referral harder. There are drawbacks to a 'risk-based' approach to profiling individuals too as this doesn't always consider other issues such as 'resilience' factors (e.g. people's behavior, past experience and future ambitions) that may improve somebody's ability to avoid getting involved in gang-related violent crime. There are benefits in developing more sophisticated profiling tools that can reduce the risk of improper profiling. They can also help to build a programme of interventions that is more individualistic.

Both ourselves and RISE are involved in work in this field, but there would be merit in exploring this further at a national level with other practitioners. A more sophisticated profiling tool could help to better understand how risks can be identified and mitigated more holistically (e.g. if interventions can used to respond to the mother's behavior, then young people may be more likely to attend school). Similarly a more nuanced approach to needs assessment could be used to deploy mentors for young people based on individual needs of the beneficiary. At the moment there is often a crude match between the young person and the mentor.

If a young person wants to become a writer are they being matched with a good English tutor? Through our research we rarely came into contact with mentor programmes where mentors were being used to develop a strong educational advantage for the young person. We recognise not everything is about reading and writing, but they are important.

Implications:

- can profiling approaches be made more resilience intuitive? Also, can profiling approaches be made more consistent and standardized within and across agencies? These are questions that will hopefully interest a number of agencies, not least the **police, MAGU, Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence (BRGV), youth offending teams** and **voluntary/community organisations** operating in the field. There may be a role for **charitable trusts** to play in supporting some of this pioneering partnership work in the future
- related to the above point, 'mentoring' is seen as a central pillar of support services in this field. How can more sophisticated approaches to profiling and needs-assessment be used to model more 'phased' approaches to mentoring service design? Are there opportunities for **commissioners** to encourage a more phased approach to mentoring? Would a more phased approach help to introduce the right type of expertise to the beneficiary at the right time and in the right sequence, dependent on the assessment of need?

Multi-agency working and information sharing

Frameworks for knowledge and information sharing remain under-developed within and between the voluntary and public sectors. The implications of this are significant. It undermines the impact of a multi-agency approach. It can influence the effectiveness of referral processes and evaluation of area-based interventions in particular. It can also limit opportunities for shared learning, benchmarking and peer review of practice. Gangs do not respect particular jurisdictional boundaries of agencies across the region, yet limited sharing of information across borders can limit the effectiveness of action on this agenda. In the voluntary sector in Birmingham, the lack of a network or similar shared resource for practitioners also limits the sustainability of organisations and their work.

Implications:

- those working in the field won't be surprised to hear that there are problems with data-sharing. Yet, this can affect the impact of interventions. A meeting to understand why agencies do not share information would be extremely valuable. This could include agencies such as the **West Midlands Police, city councils** across the region, **voluntary/community organisations** operating in the field, **youth offending teams, MAGU** and **BRGV.** This discussion would come at a time when police forces across the region are being encouraged to work together more closely on this agenda as part of a West Midlands-wide corporate approach to tackling gang related violence
- how can **voluntary/community organisations** be supported to network and develop realistic and joined-up pathways out of gang-related violence in the context of limited resources? More support is required for VCOs to share learning and skills on this agenda. This would be a worthwhile investment for **charitable trusts** and **MAGU** in Birmingham

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