




# Gangs at the Grassroots

Community solutions to street violence

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New Local Government Network (NLGN) is an independent think tank that seeks to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities. NLGN is publishing this report as part of its programme of research and innovative policy projects, which we hope will be of use to policy makers and practitioners. The views expressed are however those of the authors and not necessarily those of NLGN.

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# 1 *Introduction*

**This report focuses on violent and criminal gangs rather than broadly defined anti-social behaviour or youth crime. It looks primarily at how to maximise the impact of local interventions that target people involved in or on the fringes of gangs.**

The report highlights how top-down responses and ‘crack-downs’ on youth crime can do little to address the underlying drivers of gangs and their criminality. We go on to show how increasing recognition of this fact is driving improved local initiatives.

Local, multi-agency frameworks are key to addressing gang violence. We know that effective solutions must simultaneously deliver a range of interventions across education, health, policing, youth-work, community engagement, economic development, regeneration, skills and training and family support, all tailored to the specific communities and context in which different gangs operate. This puts local authorities firmly on the front-line in tackling this issue, bringing partners together under a common vision and co-ordinating services across an area.

We ask that the Home Office continue to work with local authorities over the long-term to develop local models to tackle youth violence and gang activity. This includes freeing up the police and other central agencies to work more closely with councils and the third sector within local frameworks, less hindered by central targets and processes.

We also ask for:

- Affected councils to produce and publish clear gangs strategies
- Strengthened gang specific partnerships between councils, the third sector and the police;
- A separate commissioning, monitoring and review body made up of the local authority, third sector and young people;
- The coordination of gang programmes and training through a separate

gang specific body, headed by the local Voluntary Action Council or associated body;

- Measures that ensure a regular flow of youth support workers with the experience, capacity and community ties to work with young people in the affected areas;
- A strengthened role for specific 'youth mentors' to sit alongside or within statutory services;
- Greater local freedom and accountability for the police, particularly in Neighbourhood Policing Teams;
- Greater local influence over sentencing options;
- The concentration of funding and efforts in gang-affected wards;
- More co-ordination between risk assessment systems throughout youth services.

## 2 *National Issue*

**Gangs are not a modern phenomenon. Newspapers headlines from the late nineteenth century reveal surprisingly familiar concerns over rising youth crime, gang violence and even the corrosive impact of substandard ‘culture’ on young minds. Since the 1950s we have seen the ‘teddy boys’, ‘mods’ and ‘rockers’, ‘punks’, ‘skin-heads’ and ‘hoodies’, all portrayed as violent ‘gangs’ with varying degrees of legitimacy. Recent media coverage has once again raised the public’s fears of violence and the moral degradation of youth. There is a growing sense among the public that we need to combat this disturbing trend. Concerned citizens demand that the state tackles youth violence and puts an end to the needless deaths of young people in our communities.**

Recent incidents of youth violence have been closely linked with ‘gangs’. Though we still struggle to draw clear lines around what makes a gang, modern definitions define a gang as a group that has:

- A name which all ‘members’ recognise and accept;
- An identity related to territory;
- Participants who define themselves as gang members;
- A hierarchical structure;
- A high level of involvement in crime;
- The use of extreme violence (including murder) to achieve their objectives.<sup>1</sup>

Are UK gangs really getting worse or do we face another ‘moral panic’? In the UK, around 10 percent of young people aged 10 to 19 define themselves as belonging to a ‘gang’. Few of these gangs may fit the stereotype or pose a real threat to community safety<sup>2</sup> but most estimates put membership firmly on the increase. An estimated 3 percent of 10-to-19 year olds (200,000) are in

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<sup>1</sup> J.Pitts, *X-It Evaluation* (2006)

<sup>2</sup> Home Office, *Delinquent Youth Groups and offending behaviour* (2004)

gangs whose involvement in illegal activity is part of their group identity<sup>3</sup>, but perhaps only 20,000 of these are directly linked to serious criminal activity – equal to the estimated number of adult gang members.<sup>4</sup>

Statistics vary and could be used to prove almost any view on gangs, but we cannot ignore that some communities face significant challenges. In large urban areas such as London, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham in particular, gang activity is increasingly responsible for violent crime, drugs and rising fear of crime. One report showed that gang members were responsible for 31 percent of offences, despite only representing 15 percent of offenders. These statistics have been brought home to the wider populace by high profile cases such as the death of Rhys Jones in 2007.

*“There does seem to be evidence of a rise in the number of gangs and there seems to be an increase in the number of young people involved”*

**Metropolitan Police Commander Paul Minton (February 2007)**

In London alone, upwards of 169 separate gangs have been identified, with more than a quarter involved in murders.<sup>5</sup> Despite crime falling across the capital, 26 young people were murdered in 2007, and figures are further marred by a four percent rise in gun crime and a 21 percent rise in drug offences. One-fifth of youth crime in London is attributed to gangs. Knife crime has been the issue of 2008 so far, largely associated with gang violence and territorial disputes. A 2007 Youth Justice Board (YJB) report revealed that a majority of young people excluded from mainstream education carried a knife within the last year.

More widely, the number of killings in which both victim and assailant were under 18 has jumped from 12 in 2005 to 37 last year. Between 22,000 and 57,900 young people were victims of knife crime in 2004.<sup>6</sup> Almost a fifth of all crimes committed by under-18s are violent offences, and the number of violent crimes has risen consecutively for four years. A recent survey suggested one-in-five young adults knew a relative or friend who had been threatened with a knife or gun in the past year.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Home Office, *Delinquent Youth Groups and offending behaviour* (2004)

<sup>4</sup> Bennett and Holloway, *Gang membership, drugs and crime in the UK* (2004)

<sup>5</sup> BBC, *Police identify 169 London gangs* (21 Feb 2007)

<sup>6</sup> Centre for Crime and Justice Studies

<sup>7</sup> Policy Exchange, *Going Ballistic* (2008)

Youth crime costs public services over £1 billion per year.<sup>8</sup> If early intervention had been provided for one in ten of young people sentenced to custody each year, public services could have saved over £100 million.<sup>9</sup> If just one death is prevented as a result of interventions, it will likely have covered that project's costs for a number of years. There is a clear moral, community and financial case for tackling this issue head-on.

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<sup>8</sup> Audit Commission, *Misspent Youth* (1996)

<sup>9</sup> Audit Commission, *Youth Justice* (2004)



### 3 *The top down 'crack-down'*

Compared to the US, coordinated strategies for tackling gangs in the UK are in their relative infancy. Many interventions have been central Government led, focusing on enforcement and justice system interventions where the Government's influence is greatest. Spending on youth justice rose from £381 million in 2000 to £648 million last year, though with relatively limited results.<sup>10</sup> There has also been a 'Home Secretary's Round Table on guns, knives and gangs', and various Home Office announcements around tackling serious violence (scan arches, amnesties, increased stop-and-search and weapons crackdowns).

Such top-down approaches ignore the importance of a local understanding of context and priorities. A range of interventions, from ASBOs to dispersal orders, to non-negotiable child behaviour contracts, increased sentences and knife arches have all faced criticisms for being top-down, 'clunky', impracticable. The youth justice system is criticised, in the same way as its adult counterpart, for failing to address the 'needs' of vulnerable youth and focusing only on their offending.<sup>11</sup> New reports continue to reaffirm the view that more wide-ranging, multi-disciplinary and locally tailored approaches to criminal justice are required.<sup>12</sup>

Centrally-driven strategies have also been criticised for short-termism and providing local agencies with too little money and information to tackle the root causes of violence or gang activity.<sup>13</sup> Just £20 million has been made available to support local multi-agency interventions and information sharing to manage and identify people at risk of committing serious violence. Since 2004 the Government's gangs programme has provided just £1.75 million to local community groups to support local gun crime, knife crime and gangs projects, within a context of 45% increases in youth justice spending. More must be done to align these strands locally and to turn individual, siloed actions into more coordinated and impactful local gangs strategies.

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**10** Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, *10 years of Labour's Youth Justice Reforms* (2008)

**11** Joint Inspectorate, *Safeguarding Children* (2002)

**12** Scotland's Futures Forum, *Drug And Alcohol Misuse in Scotland* (2008)

**13** NAO, *Reducing the risk of violent crime* (2008)

Criminal justice is an emotive issue and criticisms are inevitable, even with regards to the most successful interventions. We do not pass judgement on individual actions in this report, but would re-emphasise that their success is dependent on local context and the ability to join them up with a range of other targeted, cross-cutting activities.

It would be wrong to suggest the Government does not recognise this. It's Social Exclusion Unit specifically argued that "*policies tried to deal with.. problems individually..[without] tackling the complicated links between them, or preventing them arising in the first place.*"<sup>14</sup> Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) have both been attempts to link up policy areas and front-line services into a more coherent and locally responsive package. The success of these reforms varies from area to area, but they created fora around and within which discussions on areas such as gang violence can proliferate.

In 2007, the Tackling Gangs Action Programme (TGAP) was launched, comprised of central and local Government and frontline services, and expected to deliver a tailored package of enforcement action and community reassurance for key areas. But even this strategy continues to focus on reducing serious and firearm violence rather than tackling local issues in the round - "there is *some lack of focus on where the money available might best be targeted.*" (Officer involved)

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<sup>14</sup> Burnett & Appleton, *Joined-up Services to Tackle Youth Crime* (2004)

## 4 *The beginnings of local intervention*

**Things are beginning to change. We are learning lessons from the US where gang violence is more common, widespread, deeply embedded and virulent. In some American cities, community, law enforcement and support services are acting as one to tackle local gang issues. Federal and State-based interventions are working together in a more co-ordinated fashion<sup>15</sup>, and there has been an increased emphasis on a bottom-up, community-based approach.**

*“Because gangs thrive in disorganized communities, any local intervention must rally the community to organize and work together.”*

**Bureau of Justice Assistance, Addressing Community Gang Problems (1999)**

Though theories on gangs are generalised, the risk to a particular person will vary from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, individual to individual, and over time. Existing structures and frameworks are not always flexible enough to recognise this, particularly as the young people involved are often the ‘hard to reach,’ ‘those that slipped through the net,’ and the ‘service resistant.’ Policy-makers know that an effective gangs strategy must look right across the policy spectrum to address gang activity. Some positive steps already taken by the Government include:

**Team Around the Child (TAC)** allows a range of professionals, (e.g. social workers, police and school nurses) to work together to develop care plans for children with additional needs.

**The ContactPoint system** (previously ‘information sharing index’) will be a quick way for practitioners to find out who else is working with a young person, making it easier to deliver more coordinated support.

**The Youth Taskforce** action plan aims to deliver early, multi-agency interventions and support, and to provide at risk young people with ‘mentors’. It suggests increased help for local authorities to deliver targeted youth support reforms, promoting interaction between young people and society, and an award scheme to recognise young people who successfully turn round their lives.

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**15** Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Juvenile Justice Reform Initiatives* (1996)

The Youth Offending Team (YOT) is a one-stop shop for young offenders, composed of social workers, probation officers, police officers, education and health workers, housing workers and drug misuse professionals.

Intensive Supervision and Support Programmes (ISSP) run by YOTs, provide bail supervision and support for young people on bail and provides weekly education, supervision sessions and related activities.

Youth Inclusion and Support Panels (YISPs), involving police, schools, health and social services, aim to prevent anti-social behaviour and offending by 8 to 13-year-olds who are considered to be at high risk of offending.

Positive Activities for Young People – young, at-risk people aged 8-19 are able to participate in positive activities during the school holidays and access out of school activities throughout the year.

These are all positive steps, but centrally defined services deal in eligibility criteria, frameworks, definitions and processes. This can leave gaps in service provision. Young people are particularly at risk when they fall into these gaps, and during transitions between service providers. For example, in the transition between primary and secondary education, between prison and reintegration with the community, between youth programmes and sustained education, training or employment, between youth and adult services, and between universal and specialist service provision.<sup>16</sup> It has already been suggested, for example, that the TAC model be (formally or informally) extended beyond age 19 for those most at risk.

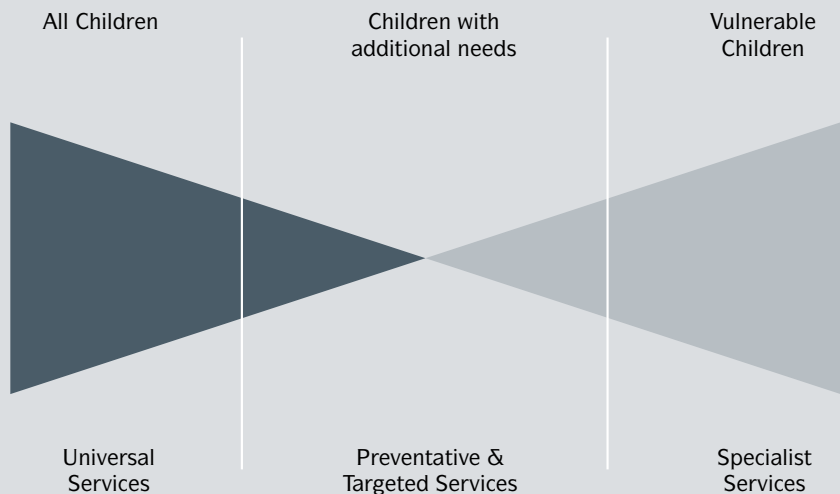
Locally tailored and responsive services are better able to plug these gaps and join up processes. For example, in Southwark the YOT links their own gangs assessment to the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).<sup>17</sup> Even at the local level the focus of funding can be on the extreme ends of the spectrum.<sup>18</sup> **More must be done to reach those that fall between the 'gap' in existing services**, those who require the most help, but are least willing to accept it.

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<sup>16</sup> Lambeth Team Around the Child: Business Case (2007)

<sup>17</sup> CAF was introduced as part of Every Child Matters to assess the additional service needs of at risk children

<sup>18</sup> Lambeth Team Around the Child: Business Case (2007)

**Figure 1** Gap between universal and specialist services<sup>17</sup>

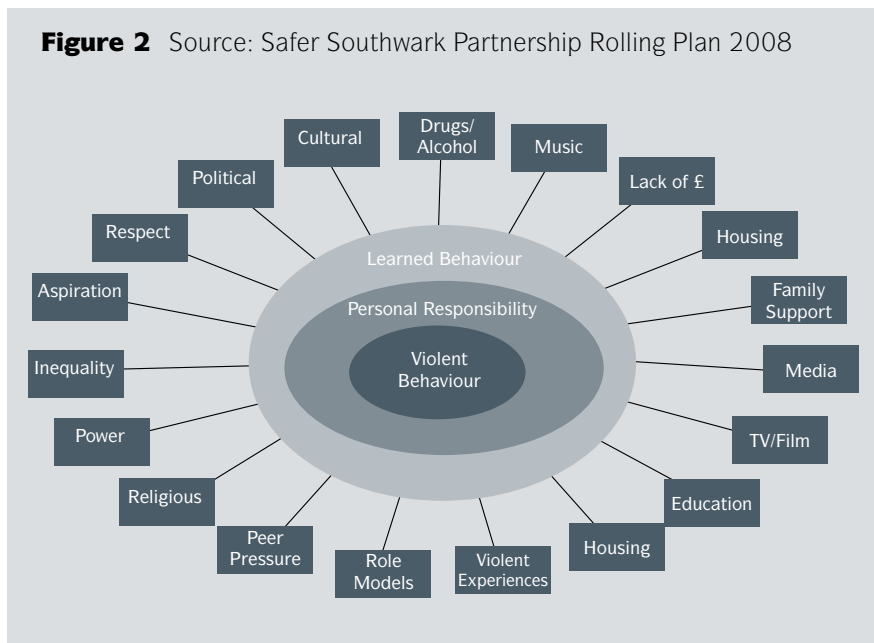
Source: *Children Well: a new vision for children's services*, London, LGA Publications 2002

We must also understand and reduce the flow of gang members. US and UK research such as that conducted by Southwark Community Safety team, has sought to understand the range of factors that influence an individual's involvement in criminal gang activity. These risk factors can include:

- Individual characteristics (mental health);
- Family conditions (domestic violence);
- School performance (literacy);
- Peer group influences; and
- Community context.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> LGA, *Serving Children Well* (2002)

<sup>20</sup> Lambeth Gangs Commission (2008)

**Figure 2** Source: Safer Southwark Partnership Rolling Plan 2008

This community context, or 'Neighbourhood risk factors' were emphasised by Lambeth Council's recent Gangs Commission, which described no-go areas where residents were *'either with us or against us'*, where *"the choice over whether or not to enter a gang is no choice at all"*. Only local agencies can understand this context and design their responses around it.

*"Part of the challenge to effectively responding to youth gangs is countering common assumptions about gangs that may not accurately reflect local problems."*

**Wyrick and Howell (2004)**

A successful cross-cutting strategy model must bring together schools, youth services, the police, and health workers. Local authorities should be at the centre of this process, with influence over a range of services including schools, youth services and family support. Local authorities' wider duties on neighbourhood engagement, economic development, worklessness, housing and community safety, all play an important role in creating the environments in which gangs are stifled or flourish. So too will local authority funding, support, and coordination of third sector partners.

So too are the impacts and responses largely local. Fear of crime may be universal, but the large majority of perpetrators do not stray far from their homes to offend, creating pockets of intense criminality and gang culture. By their very nature, gangs are territorially based. Gang crime stretches local police resources, straining community relations and undermining positive work on community safety, cohesion and education.

## 5 *Developing a stronger local lead*

**Breaking the cycle of youth, gangs, guns and crime requires a holistic view of young peoples' circumstances in a very local context. Local authorities and their partners have been driving forward local plans to tackle gang violence from the bottom up, through community work, coordinated service provision and locally tailored criminal justice interventions.**

### **Figure 3** Local Gang Projects

#### **Southwark**

A Gangs Disruption Team funded by NRF and based in the YOT. This small-scale scheme funds gangs workers to demystify the appeal of gangs, raise risk awareness and develop exit strategies. Client access is through the justice system or community groups. It focuses on providing information and support to allow young people to make informed choices.

A sub-project was developed within Her Majesty's Prison Service (Feltham) to work with those identified as belonging to gangs, or seen to be at risk of gang bullying or recruitment. The programme was well received by stakeholders, and saw some (qualified) improvements in youth outlooks.

#### **Brent**

Back in 2003, Brent's LDA-funded "Hard to Reach" programme worked with young men in the Harlesden and Stonebridge areas. It was run by Youth Officers who themselves were once involved in gangs and street culture. The scheme also worked with primary schools providing a conflict resolution programme and 23 pupils to volunteer as 'peace officers' for their year.

#### **Islington**

A Commission on Young People And Safety led to a gang prevention strategy to target 60 young people from two wards identified as being at risk of falling into gangs. It is now being rolled out across the borough with £200,000 from Islington Council to help 400 young people over the next three years.



**Lambeth**

The X-It programme, managed through Children's and Young People's Service and funded by £44,000 from Police, Government Office and local Community Safety Team. Involved Police, Community Safety Teams, Tenant Associations and Youth Workers/Peer Educators. It won the Guardian newspaper's Public Services Awards 2007.

Participants included the invited and self-nominated including several prolific offenders, a usually hard to reach group. The programme aimed to reduce weapon carrying among an 'at-risk' group, develop self awareness and sense of identity, and nurture a core group of young leaders to inform future initiatives. Independent research suggested some success with 18 of the 25 people in the programme not re-offending.

Key success factors include:

- The voluntary nature of the programme;
- Positive word-of-mouth 'marketing';
- Peer educators recruitment and motivation of the target groups;
- Building upon already established relationships of trust;
- Participation of a local police officer with 18 years experience in the area;
- Third sector interventions supporting emotional needs and lifestyle choices.

**Manchester**

The Manchester Multi-Agency Gang Strategy (MMAGS) was initiated in 2002, funded by NRF, Building Safer Communities, BCU grants and some individual agency funding (£400k annually). The strategy involves Police, probation, YOT, LEA, Housing, Social Services and CYPS.

The programme aims to reduce gang and gun-related crimes in Manchester through a combination of preventative and enforcement based activities. Modelled on the Boston Gun Project in the US, and based on extensive local research it seconded staff from statutory agencies. MMAGS accepts referrals from partners and other agencies, operates outreach work through detached youth workers and youth liaison officers in schools and through direct contact by young people. Early diagnosis results in a multi-agency Intervention Action Plan (IAP). Over 200 youngsters were involved, with only 10 percent of the "target list" re-offending.

**West Midlands**

West Midlands Mediation and Transformation Services, established in 2004, was initially funded through the Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence (BRGV) group of the Community Safety Partnership but now exists as a limited company. It operates with trained mediators, together with Police and community groups.

The aim is to reduce gang related shootings and provide exit strategies, provide 'proactive intervention' (negotiation between factions) and 'post-event intervention' (preventing retaliation and escalation).

There was an average 9.1 percent decrease in local firearms offences between 2004/5 and 2005/6 against a national background of increasing incidences. The support and co-operation of the Police was essential for success, but lack of long-term funding is the biggest hurdle to sustained performance.

As these examples show, local authority gang responses range from improvements to local statutory service provision, to the joining up of existing services, to innovative individual new gang intervention programmes. The popularity of NEET and youth justice indicators in the new round of LAAs will ensure councils build on this good work.

In some areas, individual programmes emerge from and contribute to fully formed local gangs strategies. These strategies are wide-ranging and multi-agency, bringing statutory and non-statutory services together under a common umbrella, working together to tackle the gangs challenge. The ten conditions for a successful gangs strategy were outlined by a 2004 Home Office Rapid Evidence Assessment:

1. Adopt a problem solving approach and analyse the local problem rather than simply importing an intervention;
2. Have a strong management structure with clear leadership;
3. Target behaviour (gang violence) rather than affiliation (gang membership);
4. Offer both a carrot (providing opportunities) and a stick (enforcement, prohibition);

5. Focus on reducing incidence and lethality;
6. Support partnership working by adopting a collaborative approach;
7. Exchange information formally and informally;
8. Engage community groups and voluntary groups via existing networks;
9. Market effectively, to the target audience and wider community; and
10. Interventions should monitor and evaluate their effectiveness, including cost effectiveness to add to the evidence base.

#### **Figure 4** Lambeth Gangs Strategy

A quarter of London's gangs are based in Lambeth, forty gangs including as many as 2,500 members. Lambeth suffers nearly a sixth of all London murders, rising from 14 cases in 2006 to 23 during 2007. 7.4 percent of victims of crime in the borough are under 18.

Statutory responses have included strategic use of the Building Schools for the Future programme to address under-provision of local secondary schools and a Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF) panel of young people to help allocate and manage £300,000 of capital and revenue investment.

Beyond these statutory interventions, Lambeth Council, together with the police, Youth Offending Service and other third and private sector partners, is developing a comprehensive gangs strategy – Young and Safe in Lambeth. The six key strands of the Lambeth Gangs Strategy are:

1. Targeted Diversionary Activities;
2. Pathways to Employment;
3. Supporting Family Life;
4. Improved Enforcement – Stemming the flow of gang violence;
5. Improved Enforcement – Keeping ahead of the problem (information and intelligence)
6. Delivery – making it happen (neighbourhood capacity building).

Both local interventions and local strategies emerge in response to specific local circumstances, be it perceived electoral need, a push from the local community input, a pro-active community safety unit, or from the inspiration of other groups such as teachers, neighbourhood policing or young people themselves. Each intervention is rooted in the political, social and cultural context of the area and is shaped by local experiences of what works and what doesn't.

For example, Lambeth has a large, active and popular community sector, many of which involved in youth outreach and support services that directly target at-risk youth. A lack of clear leadership and coordination between these groups, coupled with historic strains between the community, the council and police, meant that existing gangs work was not always perceived to be effective. In this context, the council felt it was vital they take a lead in bringing all these agencies together, without necessarily wielding the 'power' in the final strategy. Elsewhere, Southwark have asked the community to set the priorities but community groups have then set an expectation that the council, with the police, will lead the resulting actions.

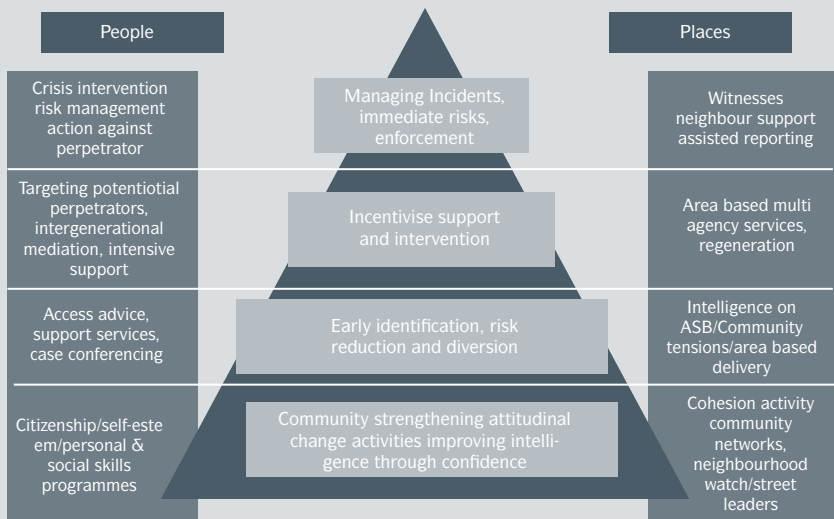
The need for local leadership and a coordinated strategy in areas of gang concerns is clear. The Home Office should make clear that responsibility for gang interventions lies with local authorities, and match this with increased local control over resource and priority setting. **Local authorities with large urban populations should develop a local gangs strategy** in cooperation with the police, third sector, schools, and other partners deemed locally relevant. This strategy should sit within the Community Safety Partnership/CDRP. Councils with these plans should be able to claim **ownership of local neighbourhood policing teams** in areas suffering gang violence, with direct control over priorities and resource allocation.

**Figure 5** Southward Gangs Strategy

In Southwark, the Youth Crime Steering Group identified 'gang' behaviour as a key local concern. The Community Safety team within the council has taken a lead, together with the police, in creating a coordinated gang strategy based on a Home Office violent crime model.

Strategic decisions on the choice and funding of interventions are made by a strategic team consisting of the BCU commander, CYPS, voluntary sector and Youth Offending Team. These decisions are supported by eight years of data from trials and tests, and consistent, mainstreamed funding. Further input is provided by a community gangs forum and high level discussions with the Home Office (including Trident and asset recovery teams).

The choice of intervention is based on a locally tailored individual risk assessment tool and the individual's place in the hierarchy of a gang structure. Interventions work at four levels - *Early identification, Intervention, Intensive prevention* and *Enforcement*.



Source: Safer Southwark Partnership Rolling Plan 2008

## 6 *Key success factors for a gangs strategy*

**It is not enough to tackle enforcement alone. Nor will improved youth services be sufficient without also addressing issues of the local economy, housing, mental health, education and family support. Tackling each strand holistically will be vital, and solutions will have to be made locally relevant, making best use of the experiences, relationships and information available in a given area.**

Despite this variation, there are key issues that we believe would allow local authorities to devise and implement such holistic solutions

1. Coordination, commissioning and review;
2. Building credibility and capacity;
3. Targeting local interventions;
4. Integrating the community safety role.

### **Coordination, commissioning and review**

A **strategy and commissioning board** should be accountable for the ongoing success of the gangs strategy. This board could contain the council leader or cabinet member, the CYPS director, a Young Peoples Panel (graduates of the Community Advocate programme, the youth Mayor and previous project participants), a police representative, YOT members and a Programme Provider Panel (a rotating selection of youth workers selected by the local Voluntary Action Council or similar body). This board will:

- Collect and collate performance and funding information from across third sector and statutory providers;
- Analyse and report on this data, in conjunction with the Neighbourhood Intelligence Unit (now in development to provide real-time data on key performance and quality-of-life indicators at the neighbourhood level);
- Make funding and commissioning decisions based on this information;

- Channel resource from key statutory partners and external funding streams toward those programmes showing the most potential in targeted areas;
- Agree a list of ‘approved’ gang intervention suppliers, whose success has been proven in the area;
- Develop and update the gangs strategy over time to adapt to changes in the local context;
- Work with LVAC to ensure that local service providers are offering value for money and have sufficient support to develop capacity across the Borough.

Databases should be developed, in close consultation with the third sector, to **provide a comprehensive list of available courses and programmes across** an area. This list should also make clear those programmes that are considered by the commissioning team to be most effective.

Away from the strategic level, there is a need to ensure interventions are properly funded, trained and supported to deliver. Despite partnerships between youth justice and the voluntary sector being of vital importance<sup>21</sup>, relationships between councils and third sector agencies vary from area to area and are not always conducive to a joined up, sustainable gangs strategy.

*“With regard to the Phoenix Project... one of the problems in the past had been the sustainability around continued support for the voluntary sector.”*

**Lambeth CPCG meeting minutes (3 Oct 2006)**

NLGN’s report, *Making Change Happen*, highlighted the organisational and environmental barriers to effective local authority and local third sector partnership. These include the need for economies of scale, short-term funding arrangements and a lack of trust and understanding around each sector’s goals and capacity. These barriers are compounded by other gangs-specific issues, including occasions where statutory agencies undermine trust of community sector programmes and concerns over information sharing and the police.

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**21** Minkes, Hammersley and Raynor, *Partnership in Working with Young Offenders with Substance Misuse Problems* (2005)

In order to get the most from those delivering programmes on the ground, the **actions, funding and forward-planning of all local bodies delivering gang interventions should be aligned**. To achieve this in a joined-up, credible fashion, we **suggest a semi-independent coordinating and development body** - A Gangs Trust - to lead on gang related programmes and interventions. This body will have responsibility for :

- Increasing the capacity of third sector agencies in the field;
- Helping programmes to draw down funding from external grants and from the local authority;
- Ensuring that gang related interventions are co-ordinated and delivered in line with the local strategy;
- Designing and delivering training schemes tailored to local youth work and gang related programmes;
- Promoting a flow of appropriate youth workers through the model; and
- Co-ordinating the development and allocation of youth workers across programmes in the area.

The make-up of this body will vary from area to area but should be **led by the local Voluntary Action Trust or a similar body** with good third sector contacts and a remit that includes building third sector capacity. The local authority should support this body by making clear that **successful programmes will receive three year funding** agreements, and seconding trainers from statutory services. The gangs strategy and commissioning body should **make clear which interventions will be prioritised for funding** so that training can be tailored toward these. The coordinating body should ensure that appropriate individuals from schools, existing programmes, the YJS, the local authority, and Connexions are all captured by the system and given the opportunity to work in this field.

### **Building credibility and capacity**

A gangs trust or coordinating body, such as that outlined above, can reduce some of the acknowledged difficulties in making statutory service interventions 'palatable' to individuals, gangs and communities. More could be done.



Young people at risk of gang involvement are on the borders of the socio-cultural, educational and economic mainstream. They often identify themselves as stigmatised and marginalised simply by virtue of the neighbourhoods in which they live. In this environment, **issues of trust and credibility become of heightened importance** in their lives. A key risk factor for gang involvement is the absence of a trusted senior figure a young person can turn to for pastoral support and protection (e.g. Korem, 1995). The Youth Justice Board's *Groups, Gangs and Weapons* (2007) revealed that gang-involved young men thought that "*having a significant, respected adult they could turn to*" was a key factor which might have prevented their involvement in gang criminality.

Successful gang programmes often incorporate mentors drawn from the community, faith groups, voluntary organisations, or the statutory sector. The roles and responsibilities assumed by these mentors shift 'organically' as young people increasingly turn to them for support.<sup>22</sup> This 'mentor' approach has been repeated in the Government's recently piloted "intensive intervention projects".

**Recruiting from the immediate community increases 'credibility'** and the 'social proof' required for youth workers to bridge the gap between a young person and mainstream socio-economic culture or service provision. This can necessitate effective third sector working where the third sector is best-placed to engage with youth, and where it carries less perceived 'baggage' than statutory agencies.

*"X-it programme... success was built on a bedrock of solid youth work, and community policing, untaken over many years. Thus meant that the workers had credibility and, because of the trust engendered by this credibility, this was extended to other workers introduced into the programme."*

### **An Evaluation of the X-it gang desistance programme (p.36)**

Agencies should be **targeting those who can have the greatest potential impact** (e.g. males aged 25-35, ex-gang members, those living in the most gang-affected areas). Council and other statutory services should agree to seek out and signpost appropriate users toward this body in order to increase the flow of people training in this field.

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<sup>22</sup> Anderlecht initiative, *Young and Safe in Lambeth*, (2008)

Having attracted the right people to these new roles, we must ensure they are integrated within and supported by the existing statutory framework. For example, **youth workers should be encouraged to act as ‘lead professionals’** for at-risk children within the TAC framework. Where this is not appropriate, **‘Youth Liaison Managers’ might be assigned** to work with the lead professional and the young person, sharing information about their changing circumstances and encouraging their continuing engagement.

Outside this framework, ‘mentors’ and gang programme workers should initially be supported by a **locally led, intensive ‘gangs-worker’ training course**. This would introduce them to the general and local issues of working with young at-risk people, to the factors affecting gang involvement, and to working with the statutory sector. Following a period of intensive but generalised training, these individuals should be able to choose from a further range of local authority-backed, specialised training and youth programme opportunities in the Borough, directly linked to the range of interventions in place locally. **A proportion should be given the opportunity and support to move into strategic positions on local authority and neighbourhood decision-making boards.**

### **Figure 6** Building advocate capacity

Lambeth’s approach to the ‘Supporting People’ programme delivers as much as 98 percent of services through contracts with third sector providers and has received considerable external recognition as a benchmark for third sector commissioning.<sup>23</sup>

Lambeth Voluntary Action Council (LVAC), supported with NRF funding, has recently managed a community advocates programme that helped 48 local people to build up the skills, confidence and capacity to take on key roles in bodies such as safer neighbourhood teams and the local strategic partnerships.

### **Targeting local interventions**

It is important to set a gangs strategy with a strong, transparent local framework, but the strategy must also maximise the impact of its interventions by targeting them at the right people, in the right places, and at the right time.

**23** IDeA Supporting People, <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=6099819>

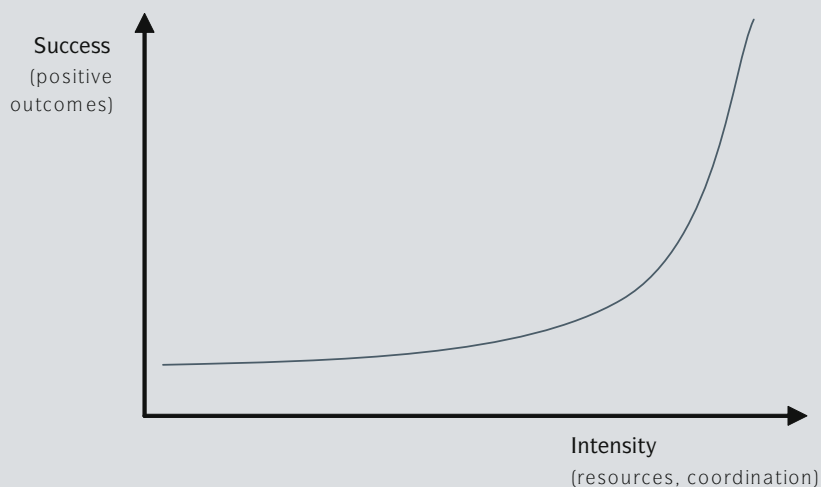
Simply living in an area can substantially increase a young person's risk of gang involvement. With gang problems so strongly associated with geographical areas it is vital that responses are area specific. They must be also be sustainable as:

*“Every failure to capitalise on a window of opportunity feeds back to other young people... driv[ing] young people deeper into the gang culture.”*

**Developing Multi Agency Strategies to Address the Street Gang Culture and Reduce Gun Violence Amongst Young People (p.6)**

Success will feed success. The efficient **targeting of resources at a neighbourhood level** will have a much greater combined impact than the same resources spread thinly over a wider area. This requires longer-term partnerships that **reward successful programmes with guaranteed funding** and ensure capacity-building and investment is made worthwhile – particularly among third sector programmes.

**Figure 7** Strategy Intensity Local threshold for success



Other activities may better managed across councils, through MAAs or at a sub-regional level. For example, resource intensive but less regularly needed interventions such as a mediation service might be funded and managed

across a wider area as with London's 5 Borough alliance. Similarly, locally led police intelligence work and some youth offending work may need to cross local authority boundaries. CDRPs will be well-placed to understand which activities fall into this category.

Targeting the right places is only half the story. A holistic local gangs strategy also requires local government to target young at risk people at the right time. Young people in gangs are among the most challenging group for agencies to work with. The window of opportunity for engagement can be small and "*statutory agencies are simply not geared up to respond this fast.*"<sup>24</sup> The supply and flow of information will therefore be vital to the success of a local gang strategy.

The joining-up of statutory services with third sector interventions will help agencies to highlight and support at risk young people through difficult points in their lives. This approach should be built on. ContactPoint, the ASSET assessment profile of young offenders, and other local assessment tools could be important enablers in this process. These **systems should be adapted and coordinated** so that they might help identify both at risk young people and potential 'Youth Advocates' or lead professionals to work with individuals at risk.

Such a system could also **record third sector interventions and support timely two-way communications** between agencies involved in a young persons life. Data-sharing protocols and safeguards must be formalised to enable this, but most councils are already pursuing formalised data-sharing policies. The universal coverage of ContactPoint should align with the database of services and referral processes outlined earlier. ContactPoint could also include a more **informal information sharing portal** for all those working with an at-risk child or in a particular neighbourhood. This would require strict rules on the information available and anonymity of those involved.

As well as identifying at risk young people, local authorities should coordinate local community programmes that tackle risk drivers before they emerge. This means doing what they already do – driving local economies and supporting families – but including within that a specific focus on the issue of gangs.

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<sup>24</sup> Shropshire & McFarquhar, *Developing Multi Agency Strategies to Address the Street Gang Culture and Reduce Gun Violence Amongst Young People* (2002)

For example, in the wards where gang activity is most prevalent, between 47 percent and 60 percent of children live in families eligible for means tested benefits. The possibility of diverting gang activity and existing social capital into legitimate economic activity is worthy of further investigation – *“just imagine the organisational, logistical and entrepreneurial skills that go into some of these gang operations, and then imagine what they could do if channelled into something constructive”* (Council Cabinet Member). The recently proposed young offender academies might achieve something along these lines. These academies would give those aged 10 to 18 access to health, education and family support services before, during and after periods in custody.

For the time being, **councils should take the lead promoting national employment schemes** such as ‘Employer of Choice’ and Aimhigher, and involving employers in a drive to get young people into stable, long-term work. Similarly, regular, targeted and well-publicised **employment drives should be based in those neighbourhoods worst affected by gangs violence**, maximising the potential of regeneration and corporate social responsibility initiatives of local employers.

**Council led apprenticeship programmes** such as those run in Kent can also provide opportunities for at-risk young people to begin their careers in a stable, committed working environment. Furthermore, RDA led **Grants for family-based business start-ups** could encourage households with long-term dependency needs to develop their own local business interests.

Councils should also continue and expand the work begun by the Government’s Parenting Fund, providing **parenting support services for some of the country’s most vulnerable**. Amid claims of nanny stateism, the Family Intensive Support schemes and Family Intervention Projects trialled by local authorities around the country, have made an impact on at-risk families.<sup>25</sup>

These intensive **local programmes could be funded based on the US’s Million Dollar Block model**. This model takes a block where the cost of incarcerating its residents is over \$1 million, reduces the number of prison sentences for ‘lesser’ crimes, and uses some of that money to improve the places those people came from in the first place. This system would work

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<sup>25</sup> See Nottingham City Council and Newham Borough Council for examples

best where local authorities had a greater influence over local prison and probation budgets. At the very least it would require greater partnership between these agencies and increased local flexibility over sentencing.

### **Integrating the community safety role**

More must be done to integrate the work of the police with a local gangs strategy, and wider community safety strategy. As our paper, *Your Police or Mine?*, argued, **local authorities should have more direct responsibility for setting local police priorities** and be made more accountable for local police performance. This would allow for more **flexible targeting of local police resource** toward issues that matter to local communities – issues such as gangs. This shift in accountability could also support more rapid and locally tailored responses from the police on ideas such zero-tolerance and stop and search, but only where community approval and local improvements could be proven by the local CDRP.

In the shorter-term, we argued earlier for a more **localised Neighbourhood Policing agenda owned fully by councils**. ‘Ownership’ of neighbourhood policing is not always clear, with local authorities and the Home Office not always in agreement over their role, control and leadership. Neither have issues around accountability, targets and priorities been completely addressed. Bridging this gap is vital because the dissociation of young people from public service provision is at its most acute with respect to the police and criminal justice agencies. For example, Lambeth’s X-it programme argued that having a recognised and respected officer on board was key to the programmes success.<sup>26</sup>

*“The fact that referral is via criminal justice agencies means that some of the young people most seriously involved in gangs and gun crime fail to engage.”*  
**Young and Safe in Lambeth, p.65**

This kind of community or neighbourhood policing is already embodied in the good work of Safer Neighbourhood Teams. It is crucial that the sensitivities of working with gang-involved young people in areas of high gang activity, are recognised within these teams. Some Safer Neighbourhood Teams are in the process of setting up youth panels to support the Safer Neighbourhood

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<sup>26</sup> J.Pitts, *X-it evaluation* (2008)

Panels, improving youth engagement and consultation, supporting more effective decision-making and priority setting in the area. In areas of high gang activity, **youth liaison officers should be able to play a dedicated ‘gangs’ role**, working with local X-it style programmes and making themselves available for targeted youth work with third sector programmes.

### **Figure 8** ‘CoP (Community of Police Cards)

In Kingston, young people and anti-social behaviour were the number one concern for local residents, yet Safer Neighbourhood Team enforcement activity actually alienated some young people and the consistent supply of gang members was not tackled.

Police worked with council departments, sports clubs and schools to design the ‘CoP Card’ to improve engagement and familiarisation with the local police, encourage youth participation in activities and break the cycle of gang membership. Primary school pupils were given a card and set task of collecting stickers from activities based on web clues. Winners got a free day out at Chessington World of Adventures and gift vouchers.

The number of youths identified as members of distinct gangs fell from 67 to 15 and no ‘CoP Card’ holder received a youth letter, joined a gang or entered criminal justice system.

Neighbourhood Policing specifically ensures that resources do not follow need - all wards have the same size Safer Neighbourhood Teams. In Lambeth for example, Coldharbour and Streatham Hill wards both have seven Safer Neighbourhood team members although Coldharbour has higher levels of crime in almost every category for which data is available.<sup>27</sup> Safer Neighbourhood teams are intended to provide a minimum standard of local neighbourhood policing, however, neighbourhood policing resources should be made more responsive to *local* variation in need. A **locally administered ‘hot-spot’ approach**, where councils can move resource between neighbourhood teams, fits well with the suggestion that sustained, targeted interventions are necessary. The previous London Mayor signalled

<sup>27</sup> ‘Violence Against the Person’ is 166 percent higher in Coldharbour than Streatham Hill, and ‘Drugs Offences’ are almost 1200 percent higher (Source: Metropolitan Police).

some receptiveness to this logic, developing a 'Neighbourhood Pathways' initiative which could be extended to 'hot spots' of high gang activity.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, in wards of high gang crime concentration, **local authorities and the Police could look to co-fund increased community police presence.**

The sharing of sensitive intelligence between the community, local authority, third sector and Police can be culturally difficult but is increasingly important. Coordinating systems such as ContactPoint and ASSET will only take us so far. The effective and timely passage of information between partners is vital to the coordination of preventative and criminal justice interventions, but front-line services must not be seen as a conduit for police 'informing'. Responses to community hotlines have been mixed. *"All they're trying to do is catch us all in a trap where they know everything about us. It's not going to help us out; it's to help them out."*<sup>29</sup>

Some councils might also **consider an arms-length mediation body**, modelled on the West Midlands MTS and including a community board to provide 'eyes and ears', bringing together information from Safer Neighbourhood Teams and communities themselves. In London this sort of team is being considered on a sub-regional, 'five borough alliance' level. This body can intervene where intelligence suggested that violence was likely (e.g. revenge attacks). It could draw on local social networks to maximise influence, without responsibility for carrying out Police related functions.

Localised justice initiatives can also be effective in meeting the gangs challenge. We have already outlined the Million Dollar Block theory, and **argued for greater local influence over sentence design.** This has been trialled through ideas such as Liverpool's Community Justice Centre, bringing about greater local input into sentencing decisions and more visible reparation to the local community. The Government's recent report, *Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime*, agreed, suggesting greater use of 'Community Payback' initiatives. Equally, this model could support more structured activity aimed at gangs including compulsory attendance on sporting, training or enterprise programmes.

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**28** Greater London Authority Press Release, 13 Mar 2008

**29** Ex-gang member and youth worker on X-it programme



*“One of the most satisfying and successful things we have done, is sentencing persistent young offenders to apprenticeships.”*

**Rob Whiteman, Chief Executive, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, NLGN Seminar, April 2008**

## 7 Conclusion

**Gangs are not a new phenomenon but in some communities they are attracting increasing numbers of young people, getting more heavily involved in drugs and violent crime, and creating an intense fear of crime among local people. The Government has spent billions trying to bring down youth crime with a mix of interventions ranging from crack-downs, to knife-arches, to the creation of Youth Offending Teams, Community Justice Initiatives and Family Intervention Projects. The success of these initiatives, and the public response to them, has been variable, in part due to the lack of coordination and top-down nature of their creation. What is needed now is a locally led system that ties all these initiatives together in a way that is appropriate for the specific local conditions in which these gangs prosper.**

Local authorities are already beginning down this path and various gang strategies have emerged from community, council and police led processes. What is needed now is a coherent framework within which these strategies can grow. The MPA's recent report, *MPS Youth Scrutiny*, and Louise Casey's review, *Engaging communities in fighting crime*, attempt to bring together thinking and ideas on tackling this issue. They suggest:

- Local authorities must involve young people in devising gang-related services and train them to do so effectively;
- Safer Neighbourhood Panels and neighbourhood policing play a stronger role in building relationships and signposting individuals toward programmes;
- Work in this area is time-intensive and requires sustained effort.

We add to this the need for:

- Local authorities to develop, with partners, a coordinated gangs strategy that brings together siloed strands of public policy and fragmented interventions;
- Effective, transparent and coordinated commissioning of gang related services, potentially through a stand-alone body;

- Interventions targeted and sustained at a geographical, family and individual level;
- Improved relationships between the police, criminal justice system and local authorities, including increased powers for councils to coordinate Neighbourhood Policing and local Community Justice initiatives;
- Mechanisms to attract and train appropriate youth and community representative to play key roles in each of these stages.

If local partners can get this right, there is potential to make a prolonged impact on the communities they serve, reducing crime, increasing economic opportunity, increasing aspirations among young people and changing 'no-go areas' back into attractive and cohesive neighbourhoods. Some of this will require new powers, much will just need a new outlook and vision from those involved. The momentum is already building, we must just make sure it does not go to waste.

**This research paper focuses on violent and criminal gangs rather than broadly defined anti-social behaviour or youth crime. It looks primarily at how to maximise the impact of local interventions and that target people involved in or on the fringes of gangs.**

*Gangs at the Grassroots* highlights how top-down responses and ‘crack-downs’ on youth crime can do little to address the underlying drivers of gangs and their criminality. We go on to show how increasing recognition of this fact is driving improved local initiatives.

Local, multi-agency frameworks are key to addressing gang violence. We know that effective solutions must simultaneously deliver a range of interventions across education, health, policing, youth-work, community engagement, economic development, regeneration, skills and training and family support, all tailored to the specific communities and context in which different gangs operate.

This puts local authorities firmly on the front-line in tackling this issue, bringing partners together under a common vision and co-ordinating services across an area.