

Developing diversionary and exit strategies for people involved in gangs in Brent

Why are we looking at this area? Have there been recent legislation/policy changes? Are there any performance or budgetary issues?,

In response to the debate about gangs the perception that gang activity had increased in Brent a report entitled *Establishing the reality of gangs in Brent*¹ was commissioned by Brent Community Safety Partnership to establish the actual situation in relation to the following concerns:

- That gangs have increased in prevalence in Brent
- That Gangs are territorially based, are violent and are attracting young people, and
- That gangs pose a serious threat to public order

The key findings highlighted a number of issues. Firstly that the definition of the term gang varies significantly, what some people might term a gang others might see as a group of friends. The use of the term gang particularly by the media can stigmatise young people, create fear amongst some residents and fear among young people in general. Secondly there is little evidence of US style gangs in Brent, though some street based groups of young people, mostly boys, do exist in the south of the borough. Lastly, for young people involved in these groups there is insufficient provision to divert them away from involvement.

A report produced jointly by the chief inspectors of Prison, Probation and Constabulary², which was published in June 2010, highlighted gangs as an emotive issue saying that over-reaction carries the risk of glamorising them to groups of young people. It also concluded that while the majority of gang related polices tend to focus on criminal justice and enforcement, more emphasis should be placed on safeguarding, prevention and the rehabilitation of young people involved or likely to become involved in gang related activity.

In October 2007 the government published its response to the Home Affairs Select Committee report on young black people and the criminal justice system³. This response included references to gang exit programmes and recognised that local partnerships together with the police and community groups needed to work together to identify solutions.

What are the main issues this task group should address

While the report on *Establishing the reality of gangs in Brent* did not identify a particular gang problem in Brent it did highlight the existence so some street based groups particularly in the south of the borough. One the conclusions of this reports and other national research reports highlighted above is the need

¹ Produced by the Centre for Social and Evaluation Research, London Metropolitan University

² The management of gang issues among children and young people in prison custody and the community, June 2010. A joint report by HM Chief Inspectors of Prison, Probation and Constabulary

³ www.justice.gov.uk/publications/yb-cjs.htm

to develop diversion and exit strategies for young people who are at most risk of becoming involved in gang activity.

Practitioners in Brent felt that there was insufficient provision to divert young people away from antisocial groups or gangs. The Crime Prevention Strategy Group has agreed to support the establishment of an overview & scrutiny task group to investigate how effective diversion and exiting provision could be developed.

What should the review cover? Give brief outline of what members could focus on, which partners to engage with, how residents/public can be involved.

The review could:

Identify the common characteristics of the areas borough where street based groups exist and between those involved in gang related activity.

Identify the types of intervention and prevention initiatives that could work in Brent by:

- Talking to local agencies and practitioners
- Talking to those involved
- Looking at best practice elsewhere such as PATHWAY
- Considering how partners could undertake joint working
- Review the current provision indentifying duplication, poor practice and use of resources

What could the review achieve?, influence policy change?, improvement to service delivery?, budget savings?, develop partnerships?.

The task group's report and recommendations will be aimed at the Crime Prevention Strategy Group.

The task group could contribute to the evidence on gang related activity in Brent and map out the prevalence of gang related activity in Brent.

The task group could make recommendations aimed at developing diversion and exit strategies for young people involved in or likely to become involved in gang related activity.

The task group could make recommendations how partners could deliver diversion and exiting strategies.