



# **Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Boards**

## **Safeguarding Children and Young People who may be affected by gang activities**

### **Practice Guidance**

**Revised July 2011**

# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Children and young people are put at risk by gang activity directly as a result of their participation in related crime and violence, becoming victims of related crime and violence, and indirectly as a result of association with participants in their peer groups, their neighbourhoods, or their families.
- 1.2 Effective responses are often seen in terms of crime and disorder activity but effective safeguarding procedures are essential to preventing children and young people being drawn into gangs, to support those who have been drawn into the periphery of gangs, to promote the exit of those who have become more strongly involved, and to protect those who are at immediate risk of harm either as members or victims of gang related behaviour.
- 1.3 This guidance is based on national multi-agency guidance *Safeguarding Children and Young People who may be affected by gang activity* published in 2010 but reflects local understanding and perspectives of the nature of gang activity affecting children and young people in Nottingham. It should be read in conjunction with the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board Child Protection Procedures and other specific practice guidance. These are available on the Board's website at [www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=591](http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=591)
- 1.4 It is addressed to those who work in voluntary and statutory services across the children's workforce in Nottingham, together with all other agencies represented on Nottingham Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB).

## **2. Key Principles**

- 2.1 This guidance reflects the existing legal framework which requires relevant agencies to take responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child and young person (defined as those under the age of 18 in accordance with the Children Acts 1989 and 2004).
- 2.2 The following principles should be adopted by all agencies identifying and responding to young people at risk of or being affected by gang activity:
- the safety and welfare of the child or young person is paramount
  - children and young people who harm others are both victims and perpetrators
  - all decisions or plans for children and young people should be based on good quality assessments
  - actions should be proportionate to the risk or potential harm and be in the best interests of the child or young person
  - everyone working with or in contact with children and young people has a responsibility to recognise and know how to act on evidence, concerns or indications that their health, development or safety is being impaired or is at risk of being impaired
  - all agencies and practitioners should work in partnership and with local communities to make well-informed assessments as a basis for putting in place the best support to safeguard young people
- 2.3 Children and young people who may be particularly vulnerable to suffering from the impact of gang activity and whose needs have to be addressed through this guidance are those who:
- are not involved in a gang but live in an area where there is gang activity and whose safety, well-being and achievement may be negatively affected
  - are not involved in gang activity but are or may become victims of it
  - those who are the children or siblings of gang members or share the same household and may become victims of gang related tensions and reprisals
  - are not involved in gang activity but may be at risk of being drawn into or affected by it as a result of being, for example, siblings or children of known participants in gang related activities
  - young women who are associating with gang members, often from rival gangs who are vulnerable to domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and involvement in criminality such as hiding drugs and/or weapons.

- are involved in gang activities and at risk of harm from them through, for example, drug supply, weapon use and risk of attack from own or rival gang members

2.4 Young people who are involved in gang activities and commit serious crime themselves have significant needs as a result. They have to be held responsible for their actions and harmful behaviour but all agencies have a responsibility to safeguard them and promote their welfare, and to prevent further harm to them and to other potential victims. At different times, victims and offenders may be the same people, or to go from one status to another over time.

### 3. Definition

3.1 A tiered approach to defining gangs was set out by Hallsworth and Young (2004 - *Getting Real About Gangs*). This outlined three basic categories:

- **Level 3: Organised Crime Group (OCGs)**

- Crime is a business considered as a vocation/occupation, typically own and control means of production
- Membership may be based on family or ethnic lines but individuals may co-operate together in a particular criminal enterprise
- Those involved in drug distribution are likely to be armed and carry guns. Violence or a capacity for it can be mobilised as a way of accumulating a viable male identity.

- **Level 2: Gang**

- Typically a mutation of a peer group, falling mainly into one of two types: the territorial fighting unit and the entrepreneurial street gang. Rarely well organised and often volatile and short lived.
- Members may be affiliated with older criminals or OCGs who use them to 'run' drugs. Likely to be armed and the weapon used is most likely to be a knife.
- Violence may occur as a consequence of group rivalries or 'jostling' for places when members higher up the chain or in the OCG world are removed i.e. imprisonment

- **Level 1: Peer or friendship group**

- Affiliation of people who share common history or biography. Will most likely congregate in public spaces but crime and violence is not intrinsic to identity or practice.
- Involvement in crime is usually low level and would most commonly include underage drinking, fighting, drug use, upsetting the local community as a result of low level anti-social behaviour and perhaps behaving in a way that could be perceived as a threat.

3.2 This guidance focuses on children and young people who are in, on the periphery of, or vulnerable through family or other connections to making the transition towards Level 2 groups (street gangs and group offending), specifically those who are known to be strongly associated with OCG members.

3.3 There is often a distinct but fluid hierarchy in gangs, with individuals moving up and down the structure over time. Seniority often comes from long service in the gang. Rather than specifying what role a young person is playing in a gang, the guidance refers to those already involved in gangs (i.e. in any role) and those at risk of becoming involved in gangs or being affected by gang-related activity. The guidance also recognises that enforcement action taken by the Police in relation to more prominent OCG members may have a direct impact on the hierarchy of the lower gang levels and it is important to ensure that services work in partnership to protect those set out in this document as vulnerable when such action is planned or has taken place. (Refer to Nottingham Guns, Gangs and Knives Strategy)

- 3.4 A particular distinction needs to be made between this level and peer or friendship groups at Level 1. It is common for groups of children and young people to gather together in public places to socialise and this can be a positive and normal part of young people's growth and development. A well-lit and overlooked public place may indeed appear to them to be a safe place for them to gather, even if it concerns or alarms older members of their community. Level 1 groups may sometimes become involved in incidental minor offending or anti-social behaviour but it is not integral to the group's existence and engagement through detached youth work or intervention through low-level anti-social behaviour measures will often deal effectively with such problems.

## **4. Evidence of gangs in Nottingham**

- 4.1 Nottingham acquired a particular reputation in the early part of the last decade for “guns and gangs” as a result of heavily reported shootings and weapons incidents. Much of this was the work of a relatively small number of organised crime groupings that have been extensively disrupted by concerted action by the Police and their partners over the past ten years.
- 4.4 The Crime and Drugs Partnership carried out an analysis of the scale and nature of the gang problem in Nottingham in February 2010, as part of the Problem Profile for the Serious Youth Violence Action Plan. This identified five Level One peer groups, eight Level Two street-based groups, and two others between the two levels. There was little intelligence to suggest that Nottingham street-based groups were operating as organised criminal units, and the key driver for members appears to be a sense of belonging rather than the specific intent to commit crime. However, more recent work looking in detail at the three key organised crime groups involved in gang related behaviour have identified a significant number of young people involved in gang related behaviour with well established and more organised drug dealing groups.
- 4.5 Violence was the most common offence, but offending by members of groups appears to be undertaken as individuals or with one or two friends rather than as a larger group. Other key features were:
- Young people identified as gang members within the three key gangs are predominantly black or dual heritage
  - There were less than 5 female members identified, however broader intelligence shows that there a significant number of young women associated with individual male gang members and often have links between two or all three of the gangs profiles.
  - The average age across those groups profiled was 22 years, with ages ranging from 13 to 61 years, and the most common age as 18 years
  - Only 15 to 20% of the young people (under 18) involved were known to the Youth Offending Team
  - There are key geographical differences in relation to the profile of young people, e.g. in relation to one gang 15% of the young people involved has been assigned the ‘gifted and talented’ identifier within in school recording systems.

## **5. Safeguarding risks from involvement in gang activity**

5.1 Evidence from other cities and / or experience in Nottingham shows that children and young people are affected by gang activities in a variety of ways, whether they are active participants or not.

### **5.2 Violence and Weapons**

- Young people who are involved in gangs are likely to suffer harm through retaliatory violence, displaced retaliation, territorial violence or other harm suffered whilst committing a crime
- Gang membership increases both the rate and seriousness of adolescent offending, as young people involved in gangs are more likely to possess and use weapons, and to be involved in offences such as drug-dealing
- Young people carrying weapons are more likely to become victims of weapon attacks themselves, and the risk of using a weapon, and of being seriously injured, increases in group situations
- The concepts of collective responsibility and “honour” mean that inter-personal disputes between individuals can quickly escalate to violent conflict, with individual members and those associated with them outside the gang becoming potential targets
- Violence may be directed against, or required of, a gang’s own members as a part of belonging to it, as relationships within gangs may not remain static over time

### **5.3 Drugs**

- Young people involved in gangs may be involved in dealing drugs, either to fund their own use of drugs or for financial gain
- There is an increased risk of drug-taking within some gang cultures, although others may discourage drug use within the gang
- Young people involved in gangs and dealing drugs are more likely to come into conflict with organised crime groups and increase the risk of violence

### **5.4 Young women involved with gangs**

- The majority of gang members are male, and girls and young women are generally less willing than males to identify themselves as gang members
- They may however be drawn into association with gangs through relationships with young men, and may be used to conceal weapons or drugs

- Young women may also become attracted to gangs because of the protection they are offered, although this may lead to expectations of sexual favours and resulting sexual exploitation and abuse
- Young women may become vulnerable in conflicts between gangs as a relatively easy target for retaliation

### 5.5 Sexual Exploitation

- This can be a particular risk for girls associating with or targeted by gang members, but may also affect male gang members.
- Rape by gang members, as a form of retaliation or as an act of violence in itself, has been noted in some cities and is rarely reported to the police
- Female relatives of gang members in particular, but also other members of the wider family, may be at risk of being under pressure to have sex with gang members or of being the victim of sexual violence by another gang

### 5.6 Victims

- There is clear evidence that victims of crime are at increased risk of becoming offenders themselves following their experience, and the risk of this is increased in situations arising from gang activity, which may include a retaliatory attack on the perpetrator, joining a rival gang to seek revenge, or joining the offending gang to seek protection
- Retaliation for violence inflicted by someone who the victim feels is too powerful or well protected for direct retaliation against them may be displaced on to another victim.
- Respect in their social group or area following a violent attack and personal self-esteem may be restored by the victim's willingness to perpetrate violence themselves
- Young people who have been victims (or who fear becoming so because of the perceived threat in their area) may be more likely to carry weapons for self-defence, and therefore more likely to cause or suffer serious injury
- Children of gang members at the organised crime group end of the spectrum may be vulnerable as a result of reprisal activity and acts of violence towards a household as a whole.

## **6. Identification and Risk Factors**

### **Identification**

6.1 In identifying children and young people who have become involved in gang activities, there are a number of behavioural factors that might be indicative of involvement. Parents or other practitioners with a longer-term knowledge of the young person will be particularly well-placed to identify changes in behaviour, and to assist in judging their significance to each young person. Many of these behavioural factors may be part of normal adolescent behaviour and many elements of gang culture have been widely adopted by young people who are not in gangs. The behavioural factors may include:

- child withdrawing from family
- sudden loss of interest in school, and decline in attendance or achievement
- using new or unknown slang words
- unexplained possession of money or property
- staying out unusually late without reason
- sudden changes in appearance, and in particular wearing similar clothing to others they spend time with often including a particular colour or pattern
- dropping out of positive activities that they have previously been keen on
- acquiring a new street or nick-name
- unexplained physical injuries
- graffiti style 'tags' on possessions, school books, walls
- constantly talking about another young person who seems to have a lot of influence over them
- breaking off with old friends and spending time with a particular new group of young people
- increasing use of social networking sites
- adopting codes of group behaviour, such as patterns of speech or hand signs
- expressing aggressive or intimidating views towards other groups of young people, some of whom may have been friends in the past
- showing fear when entering certain areas or concern about the presence of unknown youths in their neighbourhoods

## Risk factors for a person becoming involved in gangs

6.2 There are particular risk factors and triggers that young people experience in their lives that can lead to them becoming involved in gangs. Few of these are, however, exclusive to the risk of involvement in gang activities, and many are common to other negative outcomes. The list below is not exhaustive, and risk factors should not be looked at in isolation as a multiplicity of risk factors is likely to exist for a child who is vulnerable to gang involvement.

HIGH RISK FACTORS	MEDIUM RISK FACTORS	LOW RISK FACTORS
<b>CHILD DEVELOPMENT</b>		
Early antisocial and or criminal behaviour	Mental health problems	Bullying by siblings
Persistent offending	Aggression, behavioural problems	Lack of ethnic identity
Inability to regulate own emotions and behaviour	Depression	Peer rejection
Physical violence and aggression	Truancy and unauthorised absence from school	Lack of involvement in positive activities
Permanent exclusion from school	Bullied or bullying others	Few social ties
Friends condoning or involved in antisocial or violent behaviour	Medical history of repeated injuries or accidents	Exposure to violent media
Alcohol and drug misuse	In local authority care or leaving care	
<b>PARENTING CAPACITY</b>		
Historically involved with or known to social care	Lack of emotional care	Failure to model positive and responsible behaviour
Lax supervision of children	Allowing child to associate with known troublemakers	Absence or separation
Lack of attachment to child	Violent discipline	Unstable family environment
Conflict and violence in the home	Lack of discipline	Child left with multiple or unsuitable carers
Parental abuse	Inconsistent or minimal boundaries	Inability to communicate effectively with children
Aggressive towards or unwilling to engage with statutory agencies		
Failure to protect child from harm including contact with unsafe adults		
<b>FAMILY AND ENVIRONMENT</b>		
Family members involved with or associated with gangs	Availability and use of drugs	Lack of positive role models in the community
Wider family involved with gangs	Criminal conviction of parents or siblings	Transient families
Community norms that tolerate crime	Witness or victim of domestic violence	Lack of age-appropriate, safe play or positive activities facilities in the area
Local tensions between ethnic / cultural / religious gangs		Financial difficulties affecting child and / or sustained poverty
Known gang recruitment at school		Little interaction with neighbours and community
Presence of gangs in community		High unemployment and /or limited access to conventional careers
High level of local crime including drugs market		Lack of reliable support from wider family

6.3 Practitioners should use this tool as an aid to identifying and assessing young people who might be at risk of becoming involved in gang activity, and as an indicator of issues that may need to be addressed when dealing with a young person who is already involved. Evidence suggests that effective interventions tend to be based on

addressing these underlying problems rather than challenging the affiliations with or loyalty to the gang. These indicators should be used alongside existing assessment tools such as the Common Assessment Framework, ASSET (the YOT risk of re-offending assessment tool) and ONSET (the Youth Justice Board's assessment tool for youth crime prevention).

6.4 While the indicators of changed behaviour and the risk factors should always be considered in assessing vulnerability, practitioners should always be aware of a number of key points

- Neither the existence of these indicators and risk factors nor their absence should be taken as conclusive evidence of whether a child or young person is involved in or affected by gang activity if there is other evidence that suggests otherwise – for example, police or community intelligence, or a history of family affiliations
- The safeguarding risks identified in section 5 above apply to many children and young people who are not directly involved in gangs and who therefore may not have any or many of the risk factors in their history or environment
- Effective information exchange and triangulation of intelligence is essential in identification, as any one practitioner is unlikely to be fully aware of all aspects of a young person's life. This is particularly important for those who see young people in a controlled or structured environment such as a school or YOT.

## 7. Referral and Assessment

### Referral

- 7.1 Where a practitioner in any setting is concerned that a child or young person might be vulnerable to or involved in gang activity, this should be shared with their line manager or the designated officer in their agency with responsibility for safeguarding.
- 7.2 Suspicion that a young person is involved in gang activities is not of itself reason for an immediate child protection referral but there needs to be careful consideration of the most appropriate response in the context of the potential risks. The NCSCB Child Protection Procedures and supplementary practice guidance should be referred to and followed in relation to specific types of risk such as neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse and, emotional abuse, missing children, sexual exploitation, domestic violence (including interfamilial violence). Access to appropriate service can be made through the Family Support Pathway.
- 7.3 In other circumstances
- **Where there is evidence or concern about immediate risk of serious harm**

Steps should be taken to secure the immediate safety of the child or young person where possible, a Child Protection referral should be made to Children's Social Care, and the Police should be notified.
  - **Where there is evidence or concern about a child or young person being involved in or affected by gang activities but no indication of immediate risk of harm**

The local Family Community Team should be contacted for discussion of possible risks, decision on whether an immediate Child Protection referral should be made, and advice on other action – for example, assessment by an appropriate practitioner in a Locality Team (MALT), Family Intervention Project or the YOT.
  - **Where there are indicators or concern that a child or young person might be involved in or affected by gang activities but partial or no evidence that they are at risk of harm**

The local Family Community Team should be contacted for discussion of possible risks and agreement on other action, and in particular arrangements for initiating a CAF.
- 7.4 The CAF should be the first step for any child or young person who is experiencing or exhibiting problems and may require additional or extensive support, and it is central to the process of identifying the level of needs of a child or young person being affected by gang activities who is not at risk of immediate harm.

## Assessment

7.5 Assessment of cases where there has been a Child Protection referral will be managed in accordance with Safeguarding Children Procedures. In other cases, the assessment may be led by Family Community Teams or by other practitioners with existing knowledge of the family, but will require the full support of colleagues and partners across Children Services and other agencies. Regardless of accountability for the assessment process, key issues are:

- In any assessment of vulnerability or risk arising from involvement in gang activities, there should be clarity about information-sharing processes with the aim of ensuring that there is access to current gang intelligence to ensure that it is reliable
- Parents may be a valuable source of information as they are likely to have observed behaviours and signs of a gang's influence on their child. Parents may not, however, be aware of their child's involvement and may be shocked into immediate action that may compromise police investigations. It is also possible that they know of and condone their child's involvement. It is therefore essential that there is effective co-ordination with the Police and full sharing of intelligence in any assessment process
- Community intelligence may provide information about a child or young person's association with gang members before it is recognised by parents or reflected in Police intelligence, and there needs to be clarity at partnership level that practitioners can be provided with this intelligence in the course of their assessments.
- Although agencies may become aware that an individual with whom it is engaged is involved in or affected by gang activities, it is more likely that this awareness will develop across several agencies as a result of effective information-sharing and communication, and that a full understanding of the risks faced by the individual child or young person (and others who may be involved or affected) can only develop from multi-agency partnership working.

## **8. Support and Interventions**

### **Support**

- 8.1 Support and interventions will be proportionate, rational and based on the assessment of the needs, risks and vulnerability of the child or young person. Practitioners in Nottingham have access to a wide range of tools, programmes and interventions for children and young people involved in or affected by gang activities, provided by statutory or voluntary agencies. A number of these have been developed locally to fit directly with local needs and cultures. Advice on access to and use of these interventions and resources can be provided by local Family Community Teams, the YOT, or the Crime and Drugs Partnership and a list of some of the resources available is in section 9.
- 8.2 Consideration should also be given to the use of anti-social behaviour tools and powers that may support and enable effective interventions, including acceptable behaviour and parenting contracts, dispersal orders, anti-social behaviour and parenting orders, and tenancy requirements and conditions. Further advice can be provided by Anti-Social Behaviour teams across the City.
- 8.3 In any assessments or interventions, practitioners need to be conscious that working with high-risk children, young people and families may result in threats to the safety of the worker. Agencies need to ensure that all work is carried out in the context of its lone working policies, and that effective information-sharing and multi-agency planning and co-ordination is at the core of safe working practices.
- 8.4 A local example is given overleaf of a developing multi-agency action plan in an area of Nottingham to respond to gang-related problems.

### **Case Study: Multi-Agency Gang Intervention Plan**

Local tasking arrangements identified long-standing gang related issues on a specific estate managed by a housing association. Previous attempts to dismantle and disrupt the gang related activity, mainly through enforcement action by the Police and housing association, had resulted in short-term improvement but no sustainable long-term change. Gang related activity included the use of violence and weapons, anti-social behaviour and drug dealing, and as the multi-agency plan has developed, evidence has begun to emerge of domestic violence and sexual exploitation.

From Police and community intelligence, 80 individuals (mostly young adults and older) have been identified as linked to gang activity and they have been ranked according to their level of involvement as peripheral, medium, high and very high. To determine the type and level of intervention required, each household has been profiled in relation to:

- Offending and anti-social behaviour
- Tenancy related issues
- Open or closed CAFs
- The assigned school for all school age children
- All under 5s residing in the household
- Children's Social Care, Probation, YOT, Youth and Children's Centre involvement

An individual multi-agency action plan is being developed for each household. Those comprising a single individual ranked as high or very high will be likely to be subject mainly to enforcement interventions – for example from Police and ASB Team, Probation or YOT. Households containing an individual ranked medium, high or very high, with other occupants, will receive an intensive intervention tailored to the needs of the whole household. Each partner agency is developing a menu of tiered interventions appropriate to the level of involvement in gang activities and the risks posed to members of the household.

The approach will provide assertive interventions to tackle the intergenerational aspect of gang related behaviour. Where enforcement action has been taken – for example following execution of a search warrant for drugs or weapons – there is often a window of opportunity in which families are more receptive to supportive interventions. For example:

- Children in the household are protected
- Work with younger siblings to promote protective factors and build resilience to reduce the risk of them repeating the pattern
- Address domestic violence issues within the household

As the plan has developed, a further issue has emerged relating to girls and young women who see themselves as affiliated to the gang. Many of them feel protected by gang members but accept that the price of this protection is often sexual abuse. This pattern has emerged largely through the schools that some of the girls and young women attend and interventions are being developed to address the issues.

## **9. Resources and programmes available for children and young people involved in or affected by gang activities in Nottingham**

This is currently under development through the Nottingham City Partnership Guns, Gangs and Knives Strategy and are being drawn from best practice from the Tackling Knife Crime Action Plan initiatives evaluated at the beginning of this year and projects that have attracted funding through the Communities Against Guns, Gangs and Knives fund.