BOROUGH OF POOLE & BOURNEMOUTH

PROTOCOLS FOR WORKING TOGETHER TO REDUCE RISK TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO MAY BE AFFECTED BY GANG ACTIVITY

1.   PURPOSE

This strategy has been produced to support multi-agency work to prevent children and young people becoming involved in negative to potentially harmful behaviours associated with "gangs."

2.   DEFINITIONS

2:1   It should be acknowledged that children and young people may gather together in public places to socialise and peer association can be an essential feature of children's transition through adolescence to adulthood.

2:2   It is when these groups become engaged in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour that real concerns are raised and action should be taken to ensure:

- Prevention of this occurring.

- The break up of the group and support individuals who want to break away

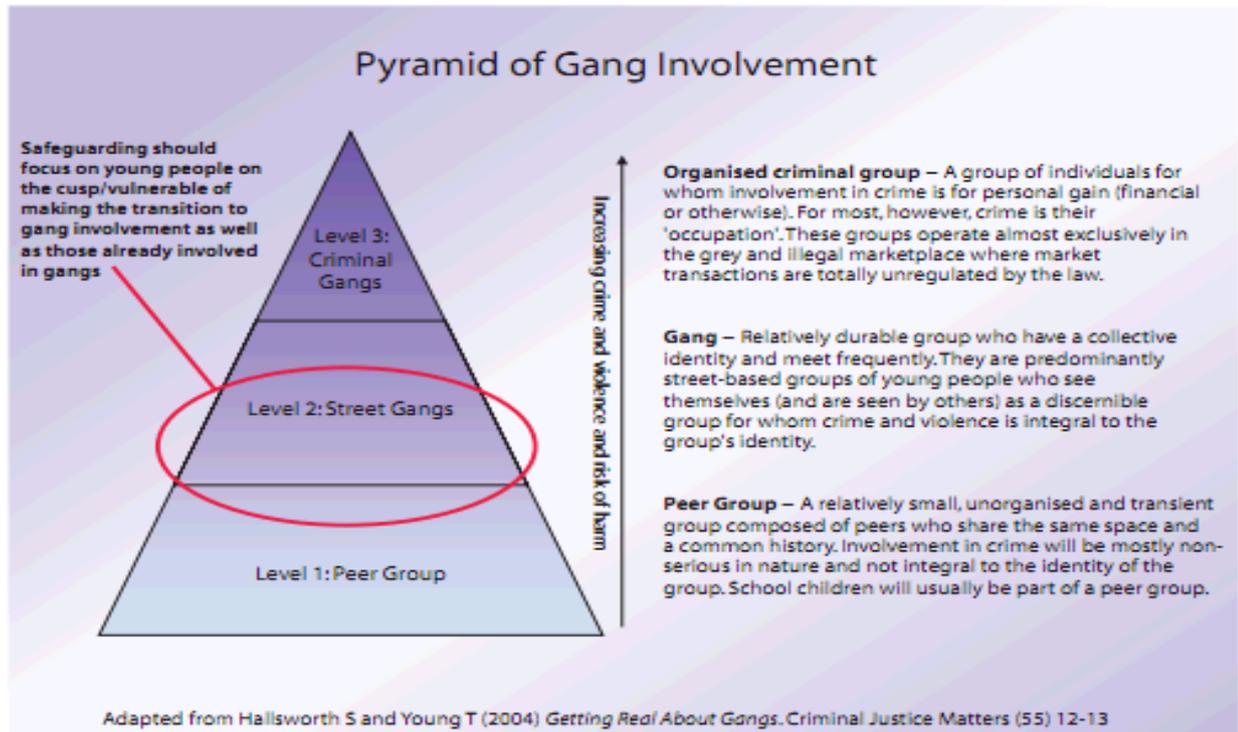- De-escalation and appropriate legal action if behaviours become anti-social or criminal.

2:3   Definition of a Gang
These protocols have adopted the tiered approach to defining gangs as described in "Safeguarding Children & Young People who may be affected by Gang Activity" (Department for Education and Home Office 2010.)

Being part of a friendship group is a normal part of growing up and it can be common for groups of children and young people to gather together in public spaces to socialise. Belonging to such a group can form a positive and normal part of young people's growth and development. These groups should be distinguished from 'street gangs' for whom crime and violence are a core part of their identify, although 'delinquent peer groups' can also lead to increased anti-social behaviour and youth offending. Although some group gatherings can lead to increased anti-social behaviour and youth offending, these activities should not be confused with the serious violence of a gang.

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

A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the group's identity." Halsworth and Young 2004.

Pyramid of Gang Involvement

Safeguarding should focus on young people on the cusp/vulnerable of making the transition to gang involvement as well as those already involved in gangs

Level 3: Criminal Gangs

Level 2: Street Gangs

Level 1: Peer Group

Increasing crime and violence and risk of harm

Organised criminal group – A group of individuals for whom involvement in crime is for personal gain (financial or otherwise). For most, however, crime is their 'occupation'. These groups operate almost exclusively in the grey and illegal marketplace where market transactions are totally unregulated by the law.

Gang – Relatively durable group who have a collective identity and meet frequently. They are predominantly street-based groups of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the group's identity.

Peer Group – A relatively small, unorganised and transient group composed of peers who share the same space and a common history. Involvement in crime will be mostly non-serious in nature and not integral to the identity of the group. School children will usually be part of a peer group.

Adapted from Hallsworth S and Young T (2004) *Getting Real About Gangs.* Criminal Justice Matters (55) 12-13

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 gangs. Terms vary in different areas but names which are often used to different roles within a gang include gang leaders; core members; elders; wanabees; associates; youngsters; youngers; tinys; soldiers; and fantasy members. Rather than specifying what role a young person is playing in a gang, the guidance refers to those already involved in gangs (ie in any role) and those at risk of becoming involved in gangs or being affected by gang-related activity.

These protocols focus on Level 2 – street gangs and group offending. At the top level (Level 3) of this model are organised criminal gangs, composed principally of adult men. At the bottom level (Level 1) are peer groups. Both these types of group (criminal gangs and peer groups) are largely outside the scope of this guidance.

3.   LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY BACKGROUND

3:1   These protocols should be seen in conjunction with the Children's Act (2004), the Government's statutory guidance "Working Together to Safeguard

Children (2010) and Government's guidance "Safeguarding Children & Young People who may be affected by Gang Activity" (2010).

3:2 Working within these frameworks professionals from all agencies have a statutory responsibility to safeguard children affected by gang activity and for serious youth violence.

4. PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE PROTOCOLS

4:1 The following principles have been agreed.

- The safety and welfare of the child or young person is paramount.

- All agencies act in the interests of the rights of the child as stated in the UN convention 1989.

- All decisions or plans for children and young people should be based on good quality assessments and be sensitive to the issues of gender, nationality, culture and sexuality.

- Potentially a child or young person involved with a gang could be both a victim and a perpetrator. This will require professionals to assess and support their welfare and well being needs at the same time assessing and responding in a criminal justice capacity.

- All agencies must work together in partnership with local communities to both empower groups and individuals to challenge unacceptable behaviours in local areas and promote acceptable behaviour.

- To protect and support vulnerable individuals and communities.

Safeguarding children and young people (in this instance from harm through gang activity) is everyone's responsibility.

5. DELIVERY OF THE PROTOCOLS

5:1 Poole and Bournemouth Local Safeguarding Children's Board/Poole and Bournemouth Children's Trusts will:

5:1:1 Ensure that preventative work in relation to gangs and serious youth violence is a key priority ensuring strong partnerships between the children's services agendas and the Community Safety Partnerships.

5:1:2 Ensure there are effective local strategies in place to safeguard children and young people affected by gang activity and intervene when issues arise.

5:1:3 Ensure appropriate multi-agency training is in place to support front line professionals to

- Identify and assess risk

- Share appropriate information

- Understand and undertake early preventative work

- Ongoing planning, monitoring and reviewing of individuals, groups and local areas

5:2   It is vital that all agencies work closely together to implement these protocols. Key relationships will be between the following:

Poole and Bournemouth Local Authority Children's Services

Dorset Police

Poole and Bournemouth Youth Offending Service.

Poole and Bournemouth Anti Social Behaviour Teams

Poole and Bournemouth Schools

Poole and Bournemouth Voluntary and Community Groups.

Health

Social Housing Providers

6.   IDENTIFICATION AND RISK FACTORS

Who is vulnerable to Gang Involvement.

6.1   The Safeguarding Children & Young People who may be affected by Gang Activity (Department for Education and Home Office 2010) provides a useful basis for practitioners considering whether the children and young people they work with may be at risk to engaging in gang activity.

- All practitioners who have contact with children and young people should be able to recognise when a child is vulnerable to, or at risk of harm from, gang involvement or activity.

- Most young people do not become involved in gangs and can resist the forces that may draw them into association with these groups. Often they are able to overcome these forces due to the presence of other protective factors in their lives – such as the influence of their parents and conditions in their environment or in the individuals themselves that moderate the effects of risk factors or increase resistance to them.

- There are particular risk factors and triggers that young people experience in their lives that can lead to them becoming involved in gangs. Many of

these risk factors are similar to involvement in other harmful activities such as youth offending more generally or violent extremism.

- The list below identifies the particular risk factors for a young person becoming involved in gangs. It ranges from those factors which are strong indicators of future involvement in gangs and medium and lower level risk factors that increase the likelihood for future involvement in gang activity. This is based on the assessment triangle set out in *Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* – Department of Health, with specific risk factors grouped under the three headings of child development, parenting capacity and family/environment.

- Practitioners may wish to use this as a tool to aid them in the identification of young people who are involved in gangs, or likely to become involved in gangs, and in the assessment of young people who concerns have been raised. Many agencies already use risk assessment tools in relation to gangs, and practitioners should think about aligning these processes, taking into account the particular risk factors for young people identified below.

- This is not an exhaustive list, and these risk factors should be looked at in isolation – a multiplicity of risk factors is likely to exist for a child who is vulnerable to gang involvement. The list should be used as a guide to aid professional judgement in identification, referral and assessment of young people.

- In the assessment of a young person, agencies will want to be aware of potential 'telltale' signs of involvement in gangs. Many of these factors are normal adolescent behaviour and, indeed, many gang symbols and patterns of speech have been adopted more widely by young people who are not in gangs, but they may be useful in identifying concerns prior to referral and should be taken into account during a robust assessment. Parents or other practitioners involved with the family may be best placed to recognise these signs. These may include:

  - child withdrawn from family;
  - sudden loss of interest in school. Decline in attendance or academic achievement;
  - started to use new or unknown slang words;
  - holds unexplained money or possessions;
  - stays out unusually late without reason;
  - sudden change in appearance – dressing in a particular style or 'uniform' similar to that of other young people they hang around with, including a particular colour;
  - dropped out of positive activities;
  - new nickname;
  - unexplained physical injuries;
  - graffiti style 'tags' on possessions, school books, walls;
  - constantly talking about another young person who seems to have a lot of influence over them;

- broken off with old friends and hangs around with one group of people;
- increased use of social networking sites;
- started adopting certain codes of group behaviour, eg ways of talking and hand signs;
- expressing aggressive or intimidating views towards other groups of young people, some of whom may have been friends in the past;
- scared when entering certain areas; and
- concerned by the presence of unknown youths in their neighbourhoods.

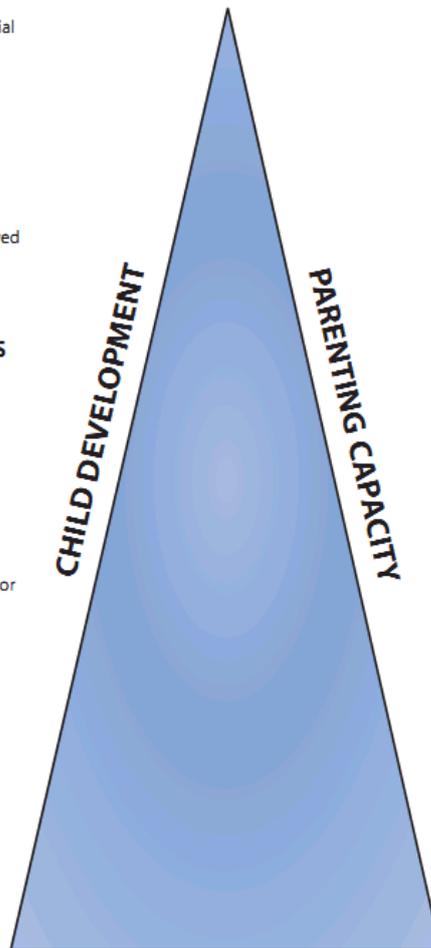## Risk factors for a person becoming involved in gangs

HIGH RISK FACTORS
- Early problems with antisocial and criminal behaviour
- Persistent offending
- Unable to regulate own emotions and behaviour
- Physical violence and aggression
- Permanent exclusion from school
- Friends condoning or involved in antisocial and aggressive behaviour
- Alcohol and drug misuse

MEDIUM RISK FACTORS
- Mental health problems
- Aggression, behavioural problems
- Depression
- Truancy and unauthorised absence from school
- Bullied or bullying others
- Medical history of repeated injuries or accidents
- Child in local authority care or leaving care

LOW RISK FACTORS
- Aggressive bullying by siblings
- Lack of ethnic identity
- Peer rejection
- Not involved in positive activities
- Few social ties
- Exposure to violent media

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

PARENTING CAPACITY

HIGH RISK FACTORS
- Historically involved with or known to social services
- Lax parental supervision
- Lack of parental attachment to child
- Conflict and violence in the home
- Parental abuse
- Parents aggressive towards or unwilling to engage with statutory agencies
- Child is not protected from significant harm or danger, including contact with unsafe adults

MEDIUM RISK FACTORS
- Lack of emotional care
- Allowing child to associate with known troublemakers
- Violent discipline
- Lack of parental discipline
- Inconsistent or minimal boundaries

LOW RISK FACTORS
- Parents don't model positive and responsible behaviour
- Absent parent
- Unstable family environment
- Child left with multiple or unsuitable carers
- Parents unable to communicate effectively with children
- Parent-child separation

FAMILY AND ENVIRONMENT

HIGH RISK FACTORS
- Family members involved with or associated with gangs
- Wider family involved with gangs
- Community norms that tolerate crime
- Local tensions between ethnic/cultural/religious gangs
- Known gang recruitment at school
- Presence of gangs in community
- High level of local crime including drugs market

MEDIUM RISK FACTORS
- Availability and use of drugs
- Criminal conviction of parents or siblings
- Witness or victim of domestic violence

LOW RISK FACTORS
- Lack of positive role models in the community
- Transient families
- Lack of age-appropriate, safe play facilities or diversionary activities for young people in the area
- Financial difficulties affecting child Little interaction with neighbours and community
- High unemployment
- Sustained poverty
- Lack of reliable support from wider family
- Limited access to conventional careers

Version

7. REFERRAL AND ASSESSMENT

7.1 Appendix A provides a flow diagram of current assessment processes and how agencies can work together sharing data and information to ensure preventative strategies are in place and when required appropriate action taken.