



Police and Crime Plan Priority: Reducing Crime and Harm

Title: Commission on Gangs and Violence: 2 Years On

Presented by:

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Bishop Derek Webley, Chair, Commission on Gangs and Violence
Dr Rev Carver Anderson, Author: *Uniting to Improve Safety*

Purpose of paper

1. The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Strategic Police and Crime Board (SPCB) with an update on the work undertaken by the Commission on Gangs and Violence – 2 years on since the launch of the Commission’s report – [Uniting to Improve Safety](#). The launch took place on December 7 2017. The link to the video is [here](#)

Background

2. The Commission on Gangs and Violence was formed by the Police and Crime Commissioner in March 2016 and sought to coordinate a series of interventions by the community and public sector agencies and offer detailed responses to the actual spike in gun related violence, the rise in youth violence, and the community perceptions that run alongside.

3. The Commission was made up of representation from community members who were chosen due to their community representation, expert experience in the sector and work within the community. Crucially, they were not self-appointed community representatives, they were specialist providers with community credibility and a track record of working effectively with the issues of concern to the Commission and community.

Representation:

Bishop Derek Webley: Chair of the Commission

Rev Dr Carver Anderson: Academic and Researcher

Joan Campbell: Specialist Family Intervention Practitioner (d 11 November 2019)

Rev Robin Thompson: Gangs, offenders and rehabilitation specialist

Lloyd Robinson: Criminal Justice Specialist (until February 2017)

Mohammed Ashfaq: KIKIT Pathways to Recovery

Bobby Dennis: Community Engagement Specialist

Yusef Ahmed: Youth Commissioner (Birmingham West and Central)

Lincoln Moses: Holford Drive Community Sports Hub

Craig Pinkney: EU Gangs Project (UK Lead), Lecturer - School of Education & Community
Tanayah Sam: Young People, Sports and Education, joined during the consultation phase
and Nathan Dennis from First Class Legacy who also joined during the consultation phase -
Consultation and Engagement specialist.

All their experiences and skills were vital to the research, because they facilitated contact with and access to the voices of young people, men and women living in communities across the city, impacted directly and indirectly by serious violence and gang-associated issues.

4. Statutory representation included senior officers from West Midlands Police, Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Combined Authority, Public Health Birmingham, the Violence Prevention Alliance, in addition to the PCC and then APCC Ashley Bertie.

5. There were a number of competing situations of which we were aware:

- There are new guns available, have become available, or have been drawn back into use
- A new generation of young people are being tempted by or drawn into gang related activities/ participation
- Gangs are a persistent threat
- The voices of young people are critical in developing effective interventions
- Not all recent fire arms offences and violent acts are gang related
- Community members are concerned about the lack of a sustainable partnership strategy to address the key issues associated with gang related activities and violence
- There has been a significant change in demographics in the area
- A lack of sustainable funding has undermined former activity to impact on gang related harm, which has supported community groups and projects and led to a reduction in local voluntary and community activity
- Members of the community had
 - told us that 'Something is different, things have changed'
 - expressed concern about perceptions of confidence in the police
 - Expressed a need to have a genuine and sustainable strategy and action plans that's community owned and driven 'from the bottom up', where the PCC and other partners are held accountable for what is commissioned.

6. Gang and youth violence has a devastating impact on the young people who get caught up in it, as well as their families and communities. It is not an issue that any one agency or government department can tackle alone. It requires the police, teachers, social workers, housing officers, youth workers, employment advisers and many others working together, and sharing information in order to safeguard vulnerable young people and target the most violent. This was the overriding aim of the Commission, and listen to and respond to the views of the community.

The Response

7. To be able to tackle the complex challenges, we needed to be able to define the associated issues, and the PCC commissioned a research project that would gather evidence to allow us to understand and subsequently address the issues raised, in partnership with other agencies. The key to this piece of work was that it was community-led from the outset, both through the process and also in the development and implementation of the recommendations. This approach put local people at the heart of making changes to the area in which they live; and community involvement was an on-going process throughout the lifetime of the project.

8. The commissioned research included a literature review to gather evidence to establish the current position of reports and recommendations to date to establish understanding of past work and recommendations made to date, meetings, focus groups, roundtables, consultation events with faith organisations, IAGs, community and residents groups, community activists, consultation events with mothers and families. The youth strand of the project was commissioned separately and included targeted youth intervention work, detached youth outreach work and an online survey done through schools. It also included interviews with key senior leaders within Birmingham in order to get an understanding of the work that their agencies and organisations could do to feed into the response, as well as review and offer support for work that is currently taking place in the area.

The Report

9. The report highlighted a number of key themes across the research data, community participants, victims and perpetrators, who all highlighted the following key needs:

- Individuals and organisations that can be trusted to support them when they are in crisis
- Employment opportunities, especially if one has a criminal record.
- Statutory agencies, especially the police to acknowledge the pain and mistrust by certain groups/communities that have been advertently or intentionally misrepresented or mistreated, and to commence a conversation regarding a process of 'healing'.
- Safe spaces and venues in communities that offer advice and guidance regarding personal development.
- Support for parents with youngsters at risk of gang association and criminality.
- For black young men to be given opportunities to progress beyond the labels of gang affiliation as portrayed by the media.
- To get ex-offenders more involved in mentoring and supporting youngsters at risk of involvement in criminality.
- For more early support for schools and parents with children identified as having behavioural challenges.
- Showing genuine love, care and concern for the families of victims and perpetrators and where possible support them in restorative justice processes.

10. The report also shows links between the drugs industry, the illegal use of firearms, knives and serious violence. It looks at key points and responses to these issues between 2003 and 2017 and shows the importance of community groups and organisations, families and faith groups in limiting violence and promoting peace in Birmingham. It shows how local, regional, national policies, perspectives and procedures shape what happens on the ground and in people's lives. The research suggests that there is no single explanation for reductions in gun and knife crime. Many things can contribute to more peaceful streets and lives. The key is to create an environment where people can work together effectively.

11. 24 recommendations for making things better in Birmingham are laid out in the report, however, they should be considered with the learning and reflections falling under three headings: the breakup of key governance frameworks; the 'criminal justice' or law enforcement model which limits impact; and the mainstream media which often makes things worse by the sometimes, sensational and 'moral panic' responses, which at times lack any detailed or critical analysis or enquiry into the very complex world associated with gangs and violence.

12. The PCC's says the following in the foreword:

'We are determined that we do not go back to where we were a decade ago. Violence is unacceptable and we all need to work together to ensure that we don't go backwards on this crucial issue. Excellent work has been done by the police, but in particular by the community.

Gangs and violence are complex issues and the response should be, too.

A tough approach from the police is just one aspect of how we tackle gangs and violence. We need a consistent approach by the whole public sector, across different agencies to empower communities to help them tackle these issues collectively. Whilst gun crime has fallen over the last decade, if it takes place on your street it is, of course, the biggest concern in your life. We recognise that concern and, for that reason, we are coming together to launch this commission into the root causes of gangs and violent crime in the city.

A robust police response is necessary, but we cannot arrest our way out of this problem. Arrests and prosecutions will only be temporary solutions that deal with the symptoms, not the core issues. We all need to work together to bring about a solution that includes skills, jobs and prosperity for the affected areas. The Commission on Gangs and Violence will be community-led, with the support of statutory agencies, not the other way around'.

From Enforcement to Public Health

13. The research reveals that there are more possibilities for real change where criminal justice, law enforcement approaches are considered within a public health framework. From the growing body of evidence relating to public health, it is becoming increasingly clear that its cross-disciplinary nature can bring partners together from different sectors and agencies. These should include credible community groups and organisations, which can help communities to develop, fund, implement and evaluate a comprehensive strategy that supports individuals and families towards desistance.

14. There are numerous examples in the data highlighting how serious violence and gang associated activities are related to other social issues. These include: living in poor and under resourced homes and neighbourhoods; school exclusions; educational 'underachievement', exposure to violence; family and personal debt; the glorification of 'materialistic lifestyles' on social media; negative experiences with statutory personnel/service providers; boredom and a lack of recreational spaces and activities; minimal parental supervision and 'father deficit'; 'disruptive' family relationships; mental health difficulties; unemployment; trauma; being 'looked after' by a local authority, racism and bullying (victim or perpetrator). Whilst each aspect in isolation should not be seen as a tipping point towards gang affiliation or violence, however, when they become interconnected, negative outcomes are likely. This increases the risk of people getting involved in criminal activities.

15. Uniting to Improve Safety adopted a public health approach in their response to violence in 2016, and the report has been the precursor to the PCC's bids for Early Youth Intervention Fund 2018/20 and also the Violence Reduction Unit 2019/20 – the report is evidence of the significant consultation that has taken place to give us an understanding of the community response to violence in the West Midlands and the community view to the response needed. The report has also received [local](#) and [national](#) recognition.

24 Recommendations

16. Uniting to Improve Safety delivered 24 recommendation; to limit the multiplication and interconnection of the issues covered, they are grouped under the following key themes that are represented in the findings of the full report:

- Criminal justice and public health considerations
- Gang labels - contested and reinforced
- Community-involved and community-led partnerships
- Individuals and families ('street' and natural) – support structures and interventions
- Education, training and preventative considerations
- The voices of young people ('uninvolved', 'gang-associated', 'victims' and 'perpetrators')
- Specialist providers and culturally competent grassroots organisations
- Faith groups - an untapped component
- Prison influences
- Statutory and Business sector responses

17. The recommendations and rationales as set out in the report are as follows:

Governance, implementation and review

Recommendation 1: The Gangs and Violence Commission is to provide ongoing leadership, direction and co-ordination to work that will reduce the impact of gangs and violence, working to fill the current leadership vacuum.

Recommendation 2: The Gangs and Violence Commission will work with a range of partners to collate and analyse data about gangs and violence.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement/Approaches

Recommendation 3: The Gangs and Violence Commission will agree a broad, preventative public health based action plan for addressing gangs and violence, recognising that enforcement does not offer enduring solutions. The commission partnership should agree on a public health approach to gangs and violence and use this to commission services. The public health approach does not negate the inclusion of criminal justice or law enforcement actions, but considers it within a framework for considering how gangs and violence problems are defined; also the challenges, aspirations, causal factors and support needs for those associated. This should enable more inclusive and effective partnership working and better outcomes.

Recommendation 4: The action plan will include targeted, place-based activity. The commission partners, with the West Midlands Police should decide which neighbourhoods need more strategic interventions and partnerships to address their specific concerns. The partners should also offer 'doable' strategic action plans with 'measurable' outcomes.

These plans should also include the joint training needs that would allow for more effective work with families and communities associated with gangs and violence.

Recommendation 5: The commission should consult with local community-led organisations to support their full involvement in the development of 'local community well-being partnerships' (community, voluntary, faith, statutory and business) in neighbourhoods identified as areas needing interventions relating to gangs and violence.

Recommendation 6: The commission partners should enable community organisations and groups involved in gangs and violence associated interventions to strategise, share and train together. The best practices produced locally can be shared with statutory providers to influence city policy and practice.

Recommendation 7: Our understanding of gangs and violence locally must be underpinned by a sustained academic research programme. The commission partners should ask academic partners, in particular Birmingham City University, to host an annual Birmingham partnership symposium regarding best practice around gangs and violence reduction. The aim is to make a learning, training and empowerment space for 'stakeholders' (victims and perpetrators included) to offer insights and experiences regarding sustainable and effective approaches and interventions.

Community Mapping/Networking

Recommendation 8: The development of a community-led partnership; to use social media and information technology mechanisms to strategically reach key communities and stakeholder audiences regarding gangs and violence awareness /initiatives.

Recommendation 9: The commission partners should ensure a remapping of all community groups/organisations, faith groups and key individuals providing or supporting gangs and violence services and interventions. These groups and individuals should be invited onto an Independent Advisory Group (IAG) to work with the commission to deliver workshops around: gangs and violence reduction; and ways to increase community participation and explore more effective ways to support communities directly affected by gangs and violence.

Offending: Young People/Adults

Recommendation 10: The commission partnership should learn from Birmingham Youth Offending Service and consider a roll out of its family-empowerment approach as a template for working with families, with needs linked to the criminal justice system, youth violence and criminality.

Recommendation 11: A flexible and culturally responsive community based preventative and reactive mediation and conflict intervention capability is required. The commission should promote a shift away from the 'law enforcement' response towards community-led mediation and conflict interventions and approaches. Community organisations (faith and non-faith) should be supported to appoint and train community mediators and facilitators to mediate in situations associated with gangs, conflicts and violence reduction in neighbourhoods.

Recommendation 12: The commission partners should work to include an 'authentic youth and family voice' in their discussions and planning. This voice can represent the views of victims and perpetrators in service provision and provide relevant information about 'life on the ground'.

Recommendation 13: The commission partners should prioritise supporting community-led organisations that support children, young people and young adults identified as ‘at risk’ of gang or violence related behaviours and activities. Such early interventions have a greater chance of success and should be available to anyone in need.

Education/Support for Young People

Recommendation 14: The Commission will review approaches to school exclusions, aiming to develop services and support for excluded pupils and their families. The commission partners should examine patterns of school exclusions and how schools manage them in the priority areas. Processes that lead to exclusion overlap with processes that encourage people to become involved with organised crime and violence. The aim is to understand what leads to exclusion, how exclusions are managed and what support is offered to the child and family once they have been excluded. This includes issues around race, gender, faith, culture and the need for schools or colleges to signpost families affected to local groups (faith, business, parents and community) for support.

Recommendation 15: The new Police Cadet scheme must engage young people in areas most affected by gangs and violence. The commission should promote the implementation of the Cadets Scheme in specific areas of Birmingham. This will involve a more targeted approach to the recruitment of volunteers from diverse backgrounds to be cadets and a community-city partnership to engage groups and institutions to champion and support the scheme.

Recommendation 16: The Commission will develop, support and review schemes that support young adults at risk and ex-offenders to find work and start businesses. The commission should set up a strategic working partnership to support young adults and ex-offenders facing challenges around getting a job and starting a business. This group could work with the Birmingham and Solihull Youth Promise Plus project to help ‘hard to access’ young people to engage directly with key city business leaders and employers.

Recommendation 17: Mentoring schemes should be targeted at young people at most risk. The commission partners should support the appointment of the Partnership Engagement Manager to develop school-based mentoring schemes to support young people ‘at risk’ of exclusion/offending and in need of greater support. The engagement and consultation with local community groups will be necessary for this role.

Family and Community Support

Recommendation 18: The Commission will support development of specialist family and trauma therapy services for those affected by gang associated violence. The commission partnership should ensure that specialist counselling services, including family therapy and trauma therapy services are available to both victims and perpetrators of gang associated violence. This will involve commission partners compiling a comprehensive list of organisations and agencies that offer these specialist services.

Recommendation 19: Birmingham City Council should engage partners in a review of services for young people. The commission should encourage the City Council to review its position on youth facilities in priority areas and wards to consider the establishment of partnerships or to re-establish spaces and facilities where meaningful activities (learning, fun, sports, discussions, counselling, coaching, mentoring) can take place.

Recommendation 20: Prisoners associated with gangs and violence should have a comprehensive ‘intervention and support package’ in place for when they leave prison. The

commission should promote community-involved and community-led approaches to offenders and ex-offenders by setting up a working group. This group can encourage agencies that work with these individuals (the West Midlands National Probation Service, Community Rehabilitation Company, Youth Offending Services, and HMP Prisons link to City of Birmingham) to fulfil their statutory responsibilities to support prisoners towards and on release. Prisoners with gang and serious violence issues need an 'intervention support package' to ease their re-entry to productive community life. This package should follow the government's seven pathways to encourage rehabilitation and reduce reoffending. These include: accommodation; education; employment and training; health (physical and mental); drugs and alcohol; finance, debt and benefit; children and families; and attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

Faith

Recommendation 21: The Commission's action plan should include exploration and review of faith-based approaches to gangs and violence. The commission should develop a co-ordinated approach to engage all inter-faith and multi-faith forums/groups in Birmingham. The aims are to discuss the role of faith, values and morals in issues around organised crime, gangs and violence and to promote working together, especially in 'priority neighbourhoods', to increase the peace.

Funding

Recommendation 22: There should be investment in capability to seek greater external funding from charitable and non-statutory funders. The commission should support the appointment of a Fundraising/Community Development Manager to encourage capacity building in community groups and to build a network of voluntary and community groups. Such a network can investigate joint funding and investment strategies to secure substantial funding, e.g. Big Lottery Reaching Communities joint bid, from non-statutory funders supporting gangs and violence reduction initiatives.

Business, Employment, Jobs and Training

Recommendation 23: The commission should establish a community-led 'interdisciplinary business hub' for supporting individuals and families associated with gangs and violence. This hub will show people routes into employment, training, self-employment and business start-up possibilities.

Recommendation 24: The Commission should work with businesses to provide spaces for activity, training, mentoring and advice for individuals and families associated with or impacted by gangs and violence. The commission should involve the business sector in its work through the promotion of corporate social responsibility. Such social responsibility can lead to partnerships between all sectors to acquire appropriate buildings and premises for establishing 'safe spaces' for learning, personal development, advice, guidance, business start-up and other relevant support for individuals and families associated or impacted by gangs and violence.

18. The report highlights the willingness of the different sectors in the commission partnership to work together in addressing the challenges linked to gangs and serious violence. It also notes the clear, local, regional and national acknowledgements that arrests and law enforcement approaches are not enough to effectively confront and reduce serious violence in local neighbourhoods or communities (Home Office, 2011; Jamieson, 2016).

19. It is from these recommendations that this report confirms that only an active and sustained multi-agency, city-community response to the recommendations will make any significant inroads into what, for some, has been categorised a 'crime epidemic' relating to gangs and serious violence.

20. Attached at Annex 1 is an update on the progress of each of the recommendations, and the Commission is working closely with the Violence Reduction Unit to support the delivery of the recommendations.

Financial Implications

21. The Police and Crime Commissioner committed £2 million from Police Main Grant to the Commission on Gangs and Violence when the report was launched, to support delivery of the recommendations. The PCC was also successful in applying for additional funding of £4,694,000 to respond to serious violence. These came via the Early Youth Intervention Fund 2018/20 (£1,324,000) and Violence Reduction Unit funding (£3,370,000) and was allocated through the Government's [Serious Violence Strategy](#) which was launched in April 2019. The main aim of the Strategy is to address serious violence and in particular the recent increases in knife crime, gun crime and homicide. The funding has been used to support serious violence activity across Birmingham and the West Midlands as a whole.

Legal Implications

22. Schedule 9 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 provides Commissioners with the powers to award crime and disorder grants to any organisations and projects they consider will help them achieve their crime prevention and wider priorities.

Recommendations

23. The board is asked to note the progress made by the WMCSF during the last 18 months, and since the last report to Board in November 2018. This report highlights the additional capabilities realised by the WMCSF, value for money and economies of scale realised due to force wide commissioning.

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