

# SHOOTINGS, GANGS AND VIOLENT INCIDENTS IN MANCHESTER: DEVELOPING A CRIME REDUCTION STRATEGY

## Briefing Note

Crime Reduction Research Series Paper 13

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*The views expressed in this briefing note are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).*

### Introduction

The Targeted Policing Initiative (TPI) forms part of the Government's Crime Reduction Programme. The TPI comprised a range of evaluated action projects. This briefing note summarises a report that describes the preliminary research on one of them, based in Manchester. The project to which this report relates is unusual in that it involved a problem-oriented approach requiring a relatively long, six-month research phase prior to putting measures in place. It is also unusual in attempting to address a major crime problem, serious gang-related violence rather than volume crime. In both of these respects, it draws inspiration from an apparently very successful initiative in Boston, Massachusetts, Operation Ceasefire, which was associated with a rapid decline in numbers of fatalities caused by use of guns or knives (Kennedy et al, 1996; Braga et al, 1999).

The Boston project, like the one being developed in Manchester, also used a problem-oriented approach. The idea in both cases was to gather as systematically as possible reliable information about the nature of the problem and to formulate practical proposals to deal with it in the light of that information. The Boston strategy was to produce a rapid and sustainable reduction in injuries and deaths caused by firearms. Given its purpose, the analysis in Boston was not framed around those underlying social conditions that might foster gangs. Rather, it aimed to identify more immediate ('proximate') and modifiable conditions for violent events to occur. This approach has been followed in Manchester.

### Methods of research

Using mainly police sources, two data sets were constructed and analysed. These related to shooting incidents and to individuals involved in shootings and/or gangs. In addition a small sample of young men believed by the police to be involved in gangs and gang violence were interviewed about shootings and stabbings and about the circumstances leading up to their involvement in gangs. A semi-structured practitioner focus group was run to canvass informed opinion. Finally, social services files relating to a small subset of gang-members were consulted. None of the data sources used is without problems. Data on shooting incidents and individuals relate only to those known to and recorded by the authorities. Those interviewed do not comprise a random sample, but were again those known to the authorities who could be readily contacted. Files consulted relate to those suspected by project workers to have had difficulties, again not a random sample.

### Main findings

#### *Shootings*

1. Violence in general, gun violence in particular and fatal shootings most specifically are concentrated in some specific small areas of South Manchester.
2. Victims of gun violence in Manchester are mainly young, black or mixed race males, who have criminal records.
3. Suspected perpetrators of serious gun violence in Manchester tend to have similar attributes to victims.

4. Those who have been victims of shootings are at increased risk of repeat incidents.
5. The total annual cost of firearms related violence in South Manchester is estimated as £5 million.
6. Young black (and mixed race) male victims of shootings in South Manchester were generally known to have been involved in gangs.
7. About 60 per cent of shootings are thought to be gang related.

### **Gangs**

8. There are differences in the make-up, origins, activities, and organisation of the four main South Manchester gangs, though members of all are involved in a wide range of criminal behaviour.
9. Gang-membership comprised a mix of same-age local friendship groups, blood relatives and recruits.
10. Gang-related criminal behaviour includes drug-related offences, but only as one element of a patchwork of violent and non-violent crime.
11. Rates of arrest for gang-members tend to fall as they age.
12. Gangs in South Manchester are loosely area-based.
13. Alliances are sometimes formed between some South Manchester gangs, but conflict is endemic and easily triggered.
14. Firearms carrying by gang-members is at least partly protective and police intelligence records suggest that it may also be part symbolic and part instrumental for the commission of violent crime.
15. There are strong norms of non-co-operation in police enquiries into gang-related shootings, in particular in giving evidence, which undermine successful prosecution of offenders.

### **Ways forward: The proposed crime reduction strategy**

The primary concern is to save lives and to reduce serious injury. So what are the most promising interventions to try? On the basis of the preliminary analysis, a strategy, involving police and partners is sketched out. Three elements can be adapted from the Boston project. These are:

1. Applying co-ordinated leverage to gangs through highly publicised multi-agency targeted crackdowns, aimed at gangs using firearms, possessing firearms or taking part in serious assaults
2. Enhancing strong community relations, to obtain neighbourhood support for the targeted crackdowns and to stimulate community efficacy in informal social control and reduction in incivilities
3. Engagement with gang-members to elicit information, to transmit consistent messages about targeted crackdowns, and to provide diversionary services.

Three additional elements are proposed to address the differing conditions for an initiative in Manchester. These are:

4. Development of inter-gang mediation services, to head off and diffuse tensions that risk leading to serious incidents of violence, including shootings
5. Protection for victims and repeat victims
6. Sensitisation of agencies to the implications of their actions for gangs and the risks to their members, especially in the light of the provisions of Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998).

### **References**

- Braga, A., Kennedy, D. and Piehl, A. (1999) *Problem-Oriented Policing and Youth Violence: An Evaluation of the Boston Gun Project*, Unpublished Report to the National Institute of Justice, Washington DC.
- Kennedy, D., Piehl, A. and Braga, A. (1996) 'Youth violence in Boston: Gun markets, serious youth violence, and a use-reduction strategy', *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol 59, No. 1, pp. 147-196.

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