



**Report on a National Policy Round Table:
Gang, Gun and Knife Crime: Seeking Solutions
held on 29 February 2008**

Jointly organised by APYCO, The National Youth Agency and
Speaking Out (NCVCCO/NCVYS)

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Introduction

The Association of Principal Youth and Community Officers, the National Youth Agency and the Speaking Out Project (NCVCCO/NCVYS)¹ jointly organised a round table event to discuss how to combat knife, gun and gang crime and how this should be taken forward with policy makers.

The event elicited significant debate on the key issues and there was a general consensus that the issue of violent weapon crime by groups of young people is not a new phenomenon, and is in part being fuelled by the media. Whilst the scale of violence and injury is worrying, weapon violence is not an isolated issue. Group crime involving weapons transcends ethnicity and occurs across all races, with neighbourhood poverty and deprivation at the root.

The round table proposed that multi-agency work involving both statutory and voluntary organisations is key to responding effectively to this issue, requiring an appropriate mix of enforcement and prevention. Approaches must involve young people and their communities in shaping an understanding of problems and agendas for positive action. More transparent and needs-led commissioning is required along with sustainable long-term funding and cross-government strategic planning that tackles social and economic disadvantage alongside the need for more relevant employment opportunities for young people.

¹ Speaking Out is a partnership between the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations (NCVCCO) and the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS), which seeks to build a voice for the children and young people's voluntary and community sector across Government.

About the event

The Association of Principal Youth and Community Officers, The National Youth Agency and the Speaking Out Project (NCVCCO/NCVYS) jointly organised a round table event to discuss how to combat knife, gun and gang crime and its effects on children and young people and how this should be taken forward with national policy makers. The event brought together 30 experts from the field, including policy makers and practitioners from the children and youth sectors, senior youth service officers, national and local community and voluntary groups, academics and senior civil servants from across government. A list of the attendees can be found in appendix D. The event provided delegates with the opportunity to share experiences, highlight best practice and inform government about the contribution of the youth work sector and the children and young people's voluntary and community sector to this agenda.

This report is based on the discussions at the national round table event and the appendices include a summary of the key presentations and debates. In particular, the report draws on delegates' expertise in identifying the current issues and solutions for young people at risk of or already involved with gangs, guns and knife crime.

The seminar was chaired by Bishop Roger Sainsbury, chair of The National Youth Agency. It featured presentations that set the context for day. The keynote speakers were:

Professor John Pitts, Director of the Institute of Applied Social Research and the Vauxhall Centre for the Study of Crime, University of Bedfordshire

Frank Leon, PAYP Manager, London Borough of Islington

Viv Ahmun, Chief Executive Officer, Involve

Margaret Barker, Senior Adviser on Gangs and Guns, Home Office

The programme for the event can be found in appendix A and the contents of the speakers' contributions are summarised in appendix C.

The presentations were linked to two in-depth round table discussions that focused on the following themes:

- Effective multi-agency working;
- The role of local authority youth work services and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in supporting the delivery of interventions in this area;
- The effectiveness of the Government agenda;
- How best to involve children and young people.

The debate was energised and passionate, and reflected a wide range of shared concerns and solutions. Feedback from delegates following the event was very positive.

Some of the key issues raised at the event included:

- The issue of violent weapon crime committed by groups of young people is not a new phenomenon, and is in part being fuelled in part by the media's reporting of the issue.
- Whilst the scale of violence and injury is of concern, weapon violence is not an isolated issue. The same factors of poverty, neglect, unemployment and deprivation also feed anti-social behaviour and other criminal activities.
- Engaging honestly with young people, families and communities affected by knife, gun and gang crime and listening carefully to what problems and solutions are identified may help to shape government responses and agendas on this issue.
- A bottom-up approach is necessary; parachuting in responses from elsewhere palpably does not work. Local models and solutions need to be tailored to take account of individual circumstances.
- Multi-agency work between statutory and voluntary organisations is key to responding effectively to any problems and an appropriate mix of enforcement and prevention initiatives are required.
- Preventative responses and initiatives should be given proportionately greater resources than they currently receive.
- The issue of group crime involving weapons transcends ethnicity and occurs across all races, with neighbourhood poverty and unemployment being the underlying causes.

Recommendations and conclusions

Participants at the roundtable event focussed on developing *solutions* to the high profile issues as many of the causes and consequent problems are well documented. The discussion emphasised the need to take concerted action at both national and local levels and put forward a number of recommendations.

Overarching recommendations:

- The public discourse on this issue is at best confusing and at worst actively detrimental. Government at all levels and the voluntary and community sector have a responsibility to both promote a positive image of young people and counteract misperceptions. The term “gang” has become synonymous with serious organised crime committed by young people, and it should no longer be used loosely and inaccurately.
- All parties contributing to tackling gun, gang and knife crime should be sharing good practice and effective solutions particularly from within the UK. Mechanisms for good communication across sectors and between organisations must be established.
- Solutions to divert young people away from gun, gang and knife crime must take a ‘think family’ approach which considers the needs of parents, families and carers as well as the needs of children and young people. This could include intergenerational work, particularly where young people may be lacking role models.
- Children, young people, their families and communities must be fully involved in developing solutions in a meaningful way that goes beyond limited consultation. Agencies working at both national and local level also need to ensure they consult and engage with a diverse range of local community representatives.
- Good youth work needs to be valued and the training of youth workers and other support workers is a priority. This requires dedicated resources.

At a national level:

- Government strategies and policies must reflect the multi-dimensional nature of gang, gun and knife crime issues. Future work in this area should encompass the Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health, Department for Innovation, University and Skills as well as the Department for Children, Schools and Families, Home Office and Ministry of Justice. This will ensure that there is an appropriate balance between preventative and enforcement activities and that links to deprivation and unemployment are included in the government’s response.
- The performance framework is unduly focused on increasing conviction rates rather than minimising the number of young people in custody. Consideration should be given to how best to support creative working to address gun, gang

and knife crime. These creative initiatives should be encouraged and not undermined through national performance indicators and inspection regimes.

- The central government policy framework must be sustained and consistent, rather than constantly altered or refreshed in response to new instances of gang, gun and knife crime.
- The government has made a commitment to three-year funding but this is counter productive in terms of enabling successful interventions to come to fruition. The length of funding should reflect the longer term nature of the interventions and support needed for children, young people and families involved or at risk of involvement in gang, gun and knife crime.

At a local level:

- Local public bodies must work in genuine partnership with voluntary and community organisations to identify local needs and develop appropriate services. In some localities there is a need to develop greater trust and mutual respect between statutory organisations and the voluntary and community sector.
- If the voluntary and community sector is to play a full part, local partners must put dedicated capacity building support in place to ensure that those organisations that are an integral part of the solution are able to deliver.
- Schools and colleges have a key role to play, in partnership with other services to children and young people, in addressing problems at the local level. Local authorities and inspection bodies should consider what levers are needed to make this happen.
- Local authorities should work with local partners to undertake an audit of existing services that support children, young people and families and ensure that the needs of local communities are being fully met.
- Local authorities should work with local partners to monitor emerging gang trends and ensure appropriate interventions and services are put in place. There must be a transparent link between analysis of the local picture and commissioning processes.
- While there is a clear role for enforcement and criminal justice responses to gun, gang and knife crime, prevention must feature more prominently in the menu of local services to reduce offending and re-offending and need to be better resourced.
- Employment is a key path out of social exclusion and other contributing factors to gang, gun and knife crime. Local public bodies must lead by example in employing disadvantaged and excluded young people and providing appropriate employment opportunities to get young people into work.

- Active citizenship by young people needs to be more actively encouraged through education, so that they play an key part in shaping solutions to violent crime in their communities

Conclusion

These actions will be critical to reducing the incidence of gun and knife crime and the likelihood of young people being drawn into gangs. We look forward to continuing discussions with government and the voluntary sector to ensure that these approaches are embedded into ways of working.

ACYPO, NCVCCO, NCVYS, NYA
April 2008

Appendix A - Round table programme

- 10.00am Arrivals, registration and refreshments
- 10.30am Chair's introduction to the day
Bishop Roger Sainsbury
- 10.40am Research perspectives
Professor John Pitts, Director of the Institute of Applied Social Research and the Vauxhall Centre for the Study of Crime, University of Bedfordshire
- 10.55am Local Authority Youth Service – a holistic approach
Frank Leon, PAYP Manager, Islington
- 11.10am VCS working in partnership with the Police and LA
Viv Ahmun, CEO, Involve
- 11.25am Round table discussion - What needs to happen to support better multi agency working? Do you have good examples from your local areas? How can local youth services and the VCS support the delivery of interventions in this area?
- 12.25pm Plenary feedback
- 12.45pm Lunch
- 1.25pm The Government's agenda
Margaret Barker, Senior Adviser on Gangs and Guns, Home Office
- Followed by Q & A
- 2.00pm Round table discussion - Has the Government got it right? What has to happen to get it right? How should we involve children and young people in getting right?
- 2.30pm Plenary feedback
- 2.50pm Chair's round up & next steps
- 3.00pm Event Close

Appendix B - Key points from the round table discussions

Effective multi-agency working

A collaborative approach is vital to successful solutions. Multi-agency working should not involve too many partners and should focus on a “roots-up” and not a “top down” approach.

Multi agency working should work proactively at a neighbourhood level rather than being artificially created to respond to an issue. Partnerships should be service user led and there should be an understanding of what is required before deploying interventions.

Support and intervention should not be homogenous; services should be delivered in a diverse way to suit the local area and should reflect the differences between young people.

There is a need to use and share resources amongst agencies.

Decision makers need to be transparent regarding funding and commissioning decisions and Commissioning of services can be problematic; smaller organisations are likely to disappear due to lack of funding or commissioning of work.

Large organisations often want to work in partnership, but are often viewed with suspicion by smaller voluntary organisations, especially because of competition of resources and funding.

Silo working is seen as a barrier to partnership working in some areas and sometimes the solutions to overcome silo working do not always produce the desired effect i.e. integrated youth support services and youth offending teams (YOTS) are seen by some to create new silos.

Interventions should be outcome focused. Evaluation and careful monitoring of projects is important as is sharing good practice between organisations and projects.

There are difficulties in getting employers to take part in employment initiatives with young people, especially those who have been involved in crime and gangs.

More positive language is needed when dealing with the issue. There should be less focus on terms that have negative connotations i.e. gangs, young people at risk. For example projects such as the “At Risk” project renamed “Supporting Communities”.

The contribution of local youth services and the VCS

Voluntary, community groups and statutory services working together are a key part of the solution. Some representatives from the VCS sector do not feel valued by those in authority and are often left out of decision making. Often there is little or no community involvement in the design or delivery of programmes or initiatives. Therefore there is a need to allow transparent access for community based organisations.

There is a need to build trust between voluntary, community and statutory organisations. There is an issue about different levels of expectations from voluntary and community groups. Some groups are denied access due to a lack of trust and credibility in the eyes of central and local government.

Respect is needed for different organisations and different disciplines. Youth work should be seen as a valued profession; however, there is a need for investment in effective workforce training and support across the workforce.

Some community groups are over-consulted by statutory agencies. By contrast, some organisations find it difficult to get their voices heard. There is a tendency for self-appointed leaders from communities (geographically faith or ethnically-based) who often are not representative of the communities they claim to represent, to be given too much attention and credence by local or central government. It is important that a variety of community spokespeople representing diverse communities are consulted. It is too easy for authorities to select only those community representatives and young people with whom they feel comfortable.

The effectiveness of the government agenda

The mechanism of government is complicated and at an operational level can be too diluted. A reduction in the number of contradictory policies, targets and objectives across Government is required.

The different arms of Government often do not link up as they should. The preventative and enforcement strategies are seen as in conflict with one another rather than complementary and driven by shared goals and targets.

The Home Office is leading on the issue of gangs and street violence and consequently more focus, including funding, has been placed on enforcement measures as opposed to prevention.

Longer term funding and initiatives are required. Currently there are too many pilot projects and an over emphasis on short term funding.

The current target culture can be perverse and there is too much pressure from central government to achieve youth justice targets. There is a need for agencies to have space for creative work and initiatives.

The language and imagery used by some government spokespeople is often very negative and demonising of young people. It is important to use much more positive language and images of young people, in order to portray them as assets to their communities. Many other countries, e.g. Finland, have governments that do this habitually, with the result that the view portrayed of young people becomes self-fulfilling.

The Government often selects communities and organisations that promote the same messages they are championing and may promote a biased view.

Research on knife, gun and gang crime is not overly developed in the UK, which has led to an over reliance on US research to inform our policy and practice.

There is a critical need to build the capacity of parents and communities to respond to issues that face them. Services for families and young people need to be enhanced, with a focus of empowering local people and building social capital.

The government has given schools too much autonomy and they may decide to not work in partnership in areas where their involvement may be deemed crucial.

Involving children and young people

Participation with young people is often tokenistic. Young people's voices need to be heard, especially the voices of the hardest to reach young people as collectively they often know the solutions. Young people should receive remuneration for their time and should receive feedback on consultations in which they are involved.

Provision for young people should be provided at times when they need it and take account of individual circumstances especially for young people on release custody.

Young people need to be given ownership and need to stop being demonised. There is a need to reverse the stereotypes and perceptions held about young people.

Gang culture involving young refugees and asylum seekers needs to be addressed. There is concern that groups of young people that are demonised, marginalised and criminalised as a result of the government focus on illegal immigration will have little opportunity to move away from the lure of illegal activities.

Appendix C - List of delegates

Viv Ahmun	Chief Executive Officer	Involve
Margaret Barker	Senior Advisor on Gangs & Guns	Home Office TGAP
Mubeen Bhutta	Policy and Information Manager	NCVCCO
Erykah Blackburn	Vice Chair	School of Law, The University of Manchester
Mark Blake	Head of Policy	NCVYS
Spike Cadman	Senior Policy Development Officer	Nacro Youth Crime Section
Sygre Campbell	Manager	Shaftesbury Young People
Rikki Garcia	Head of Youth Service	London Borough of Bromley
Donald Gayle	Project Manager/Social Worker	Respect Mentoring Counselling Project
Peta Halls	Development Officer	NYA
Liz Hassock	Principal Youth Officer	London Borough of Hounslow Youth Service
Nadine Ibbestson	Policy and Research Assistant	NCH
Frank Leon	PAYT Manager	Islington Council
Sharon Lewis	Head of Service	Centrepoint
Pete Loewenstein	Senior Development Officer	NYA
Norbert Marjolin	Project Manager	NSPCC
David McWilliams	Head of Youth Services	Nottingham City Council
David Melia	Youth Engagement Advisor	Rathbone
Chester Morrison	Principal Education Officer	Liverpool City Council
Godfrey Owen	Chief Executive	Brathay Hall Trust
Lynn Perry	Assistant Director	The Children's Society
Prof John Pitts	Director	University of Bedfordshire
Dr Robert Raphs	Criminologist	School of Law, The University of Manchester
Susie Roberts	Chief Executive	APYCO
Roger Sainsbury	Round Table Chair	NYA
Enver Solomon	Deputy Director	Centre for Crime and Justice Studies
Sophie Wainwright	Policy Officer	NCVCCO
Julia Wolton	Brixton - Xit Programme	London Borough of Lambeth
Chris Wright	Director of Services	Rainer
Tony Wright	Chairperson	Voice of BME Trafford