# Preventing Gang Involvement and Youth Violence Strategy 2016-2019

Committed to preventing gang related harm and youth violence, together.

www.saferwton.org.uk



Operating as Wolverhampton's Local Police & Crime Board

## Foreword

The Safer Wolverhampton Partnership (SWP) recognise the impact that gang related harm and youth related violence have on our communities. This has been a key focus for the city; our revised Preventing Gang Involvement and Youth Violence Strategy 2016 - 2019 will ensure that this focus continues. The partnership has been keen to ensure that there is strong local leadership and collaborative working between statutory partners and communities to reduce associated harm and vulnerability.

Our previous strategy has delivered successes such as reduction in gun crime by 15.6% and a reduction in knife crime by 13.6%, which has led to reduced harm in our communities. However despite these achievements the nature of gang activity has changed and the prevalence of youth violence remains a concern. An enhanced focus must therefore be on identifying and targeting young people at an earlier point to manage behaviour before escalation to criminality and to divert them from gang involvement.

This strategy has been developed through consulting with a broad range of partners and communities; the responses acknowledged the successes to date and fully supported the move towards an enhanced focus on prevention.

The experiences of young people will continue to shape our local delivery. 'I had to learn to walk tall on my own' is a phrase voiced by a young person negatively affected by youth violence; it acts both as a reminder of the impact violence can have on individuals and on family life and also of the need to ensure this strategy has strengthened links to mainstream safeguarding and to the diverse support services already operating across the city. New developments such as the multiagency safeguarding hub (MASH) will aid this approach.

The partnership recognises that challenges and vulnerabilities are evolving; reducing the impact of violence on young people and families, the grooming of younger people, understanding and tackling the impact on women and girls, better use of social media, increasing our focus on mental health and promotion of existing pathways to support gang exit are all areas of early development.

We will continue to drive our response in partnership through a well-established Gangs Steering Group; utilising the skills and knowledge of partner agencies and communities. The partnership response will work across sectors and align with other approaches such as Families in Focus, Violence Against Women and Girls, Safeguarding Business Plan and the Youth Justice Plan.

Whilst the primary focus is on prevention, SWP will continue to take robust action against the few who persist in their offending behaviour using the full range of tools and powers at our disposal. Wolverhampton's acclaimed approach to the management of gang offenders using proven pathways to exit the cycle of offending will remain a continuing and critical element of local delivery. SWP will work hard to make this strategy real and relevant for our communities. It will be considered a success if it prevents young people and families from being harmed through gang involvement and youth related violence. The mobilisation of our communities to play an enhanced role along with systematic and critical evaluation of our delivery will be an underpinning feature.



Councillor Sandra Samuels City of Wolverhampton Council



**Linda Sanders** Chair, Safer Wolverhampton Partnership



Keith Fraser Superintendent Operations and Crime (Wolverhampton) West Midlands Police



**Councillor Val Gibson** City of Wolverhampton Council

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# Introduction

As a result of Wolverhampton's successes to date, SWP are confident that it is now in a position to progress to the development of earlier, sustainable interventions to drive down youth violence.

Although our approach to date has seen successes, challenges remain which reaffirm the need for strong partnership working. The Home Office's annual report 2014-15 from the Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme reflects Wolverhampton as a priority area for the country, additionally the recently updated problem profile recognises the progress made, but also highlights existing risks to the city and the need for reducing gang-related harm and youth violence to remain a priority for SWP.

As a partnership there is a clear rationale for us to focus on young people; although key aspects of crime are reducing across the city, young people are still disproportionately impacted upon in relation to violence.

Our current approach is based on the definition of gangs set out in the Centre for Social Justices' report, 'Dying to Belong'. A street gang is:

"A relatively durable, predominantly street based group of young people who:

- 1. See themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group;
- 2. Engage in criminal activity and violence;
- Lay claim over territory (this is not geographical territory but can include an illegal economy territory);

- 4. Have some form of identifying structural feature; and
- 5. Are in conflict with other similar gangs".

A particular concern is that by using the 'gangs' label rather than youth violence, particularly when commissioning services, young people that require support, but do not overtly meet the gangs threshold may not receive the appropriate intervention. In light of these concerns the partnership is in early discussions to ensure the adopted gang's definition does not prevent SWP from tackling identified vulnerabilities.

Consequently the shift in focus is from reducing gang-related harm to an enhanced focus on preventing gang involvement and youth violence. The partnership is able to make this bold step due to a far broader and in-depth understanding of the issues and how to tackle them. We have much better knowledge of the challenges, and how better to target action and prevent harm through early intervention. The considerable progress we have made needs to be sustained; this will be achieved through support for local communities who are empowered to take a more active role within the partnership response.

The strategy was informed by consultation responses received over a 12 week period. Feedback was received through various channels, using electronic means as well as meeting with key stakeholders and groups, enabling us to reach a wider audience.

# **Previous Strategy Successes**

Wolverhampton's Reducing Gang Related Harm Strategy 2012-15 has helped to greatly improve the lives of those communities blighted by gang activity in the city. Key indicators such as knife crime and gun crime have reduced; there are less visible signs of gang tension in our communities and the partnership approach to tackling issues has been strengthened. The strategy has also paved the way for greater community and third sector involvement. SWP is committed to its approach; strong partnership working together with robust intervention tiered at appropriate levels has delivered commendable outcomes. The further development of sustainable interventions will continue to drive down youth violence and reduce gang related harm.

Key successes have been achieved over the period of the previous strategy including effective offender management of active gang members involved in criminality through the nationally renowned Gangs One Day One Conversation (ODOC), which enables coordinated multi-agency case management of offenders. For those involved in low-level offending, which have gang associations, disruption tactics have been adopted to reduce risk and deter offending.

SWP commissioned services have provided responsive and effective interventions for medium/high risk gang members, gang injunctions have been used to restrict behaviour and critical incident interventions have been deployed at times of heightened tensions. The partnership landscape was significantly strengthened over the period of the previous strategy. The Gangs Steering Group which provides strategic direction and drive to achieve outcomes has grown in membership and includes a range of specialist third sector providers and statutory services; notably, the group has recently secured representation from the secure estates sector.

As the strategic driving force, the partnership has embarked on integrating gangs and youth violence within a number of key initiatives and areas of work, for example, safeguarding now recognise that young people engaging in gang related activity meet the threshold for early help.

SWP reviewed its commissioning arrangements to be more effective and targeted through the introduction of a case management model where specialist providers were commissioned to support individuals in most need and at risk of gangrelated harm. Support was commissioned on a case by case basis, and tiered payments awarded based on outcomes achieved.

# National Context

Reviewing the bigger picture and how it impacts on Wolverhampton is an important part of determining our local response to preventing gangs and youth violence in the city.

Wolverhampton was one of twenty nine priority areas identified by the Home Office as part of the national Ending Gang and Youth Violence (EGYV) programme that commenced in 2012; the programme has since been extended, with the total number of areas now receiving support increased to fifty two, allowing learning from initial EGYV areas to be applied.

There is now national recognition that tackling gangs and youth violence is not singularly about ensuring the right sanctions are in place to punish criminal behaviour. Since the inception of EGYV, on-going reviews and learning from practice across England and Wales has highlighted the need to address underlying root causes to sustain reductions in youth violence and curb gang activity. Underlying issues such as undiagnosed mental health issues amongst gang members, substance misuse and chaotic family environment significantly impact on the behaviour of a young person.

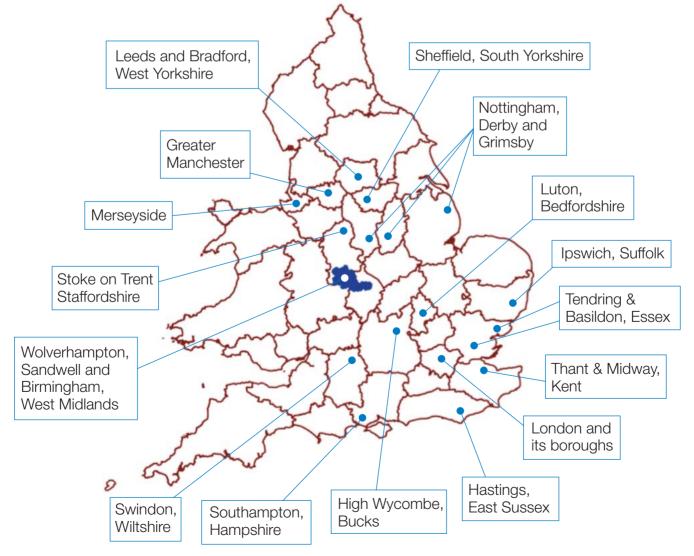
Managing the impact of gang and youth violence is just as important as managing those who commit such offences. Impact is felt within the community, individuals and within the family. Nationally, there is direction for areas to safeguard vulnerable people who can become victims of gangs and youth violence, and in some cases be at risk of being coerced into similar behaviour, causing a cycle of offending.

A refreshed cross-government approach to EGYV and exploitation launched in January 2016 has identified the need to respond and focus on gang-related exploitation of the vulnerable, with the following priorities communicated to the EGYV areas for local consideration:

- 1. Tackle county lines address the exploitation of vulnerable people by a hard core of gang members to sell drugs
- 2. Protect vulnerable locations places where vulnerable young people can be targeted, including pupil referral units and residential children's care homes
- 3. Reduce violence and knife crime including improving the way national and local partners use tools and powers
- Safeguard gang-associated women and girls - including strengthening local practices
- 5. Promote early intervention using evidence from the Early Intervention Foundation to identify and support vulnerable children and young people (including identifying mental health problems)
- 6. Promote meaningful alternatives to gangs such as education, training and employment

Many of the priorities identified at national level are also local priorities for Wolverhampton and reflected in this refreshed strategy; the knowledge, skills and expertise across the range of partners working together locally will enable us to focus our effort and address these challenges.

#### Ending Gang Youth Violence areas:



# Gang and Youth Violence Profile in Wolverhampton - Summary

The landscape regarding Urban Street Gangs (USGs) in Wolverhampton has changed in recent years. Through targeted delivery and intelligence-led enforcement action, a number of key individuals within the identified USGs have been removed from their organisations. Criminality and disputes, although still occurring, are not as overt and communities have reported less tension and issues within their neighbourhoods.

A Gangs Profile was recently produced which identifies how as the elder members of USGs have been removed, or had their activities reduced, a younger cohort of members has begun to fill the void and come to note - see appendix 1. While still operating around drug and weapon criminality, a number of violent disorders with rival gangs and street robberies have shown that this younger group has a more chaotic outlook and a propensity for violence. Territorial factors still feature, however there is more geographic fluidity and less association with postcodes evident with the younger cohort.

New USGs have emerged and are on occasion affiliated to the established USGs in Wolverhampton. The use of social media appears to play a key role in their associations and activities. Three quarters of victims of youth violence are male, the majority of youth violence is committed against young people by young people and 12.9% of violent offences were recorded as involving a weapon.

Whilst success in Wolverhampton regarding USGs has meant no gang-related loss of life in recent years, threat continues to exist around the emerging young people who are either already affiliated to a USG, or are at risk of joining. As a result, early intervention and engagement with young people is a key component in the reduction of those risks. The incidences of both gun and knife related crime have reduced, as have drug offences.

Since 2012 it has been reported that:

- Violence with Injury offending has increased
- The number of youth victims of violence has increased
- The number of youth offenders for violence has decreased
- Three quarters of victims of youth violence are male
- The majority of youth violence is committed against young people by young people

Within the West Midlands area, Sandwell and Birmingham are included in the Home Office EGYV programme alongside Wolverhampton. Consequently there have been opportunities for collaborative working across these areas of the West Midlands in recent years. There is a commitment for this to continue as part of the new strategy where there are opportunities to do so and where there are efficiencies to be gained.

The City of Wolverhampton - Violent Gun Crime					
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Total	99	62	36	35	29
% Committed Against Under 25's	28.3	30.6	30.6	34.3	34.5
% Committed by Under 25's	19.2	12.9	25.0	14.3	24.1
Contract of the second s					

The City of Wolverhamp	ton - Violent Knife Crime
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	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Total	358	225	127	152	140
% Committed Against Under 25's	50.8	49.3	51.2	42.8	43.6
% Committed by Under 25's	16.8	20.4	16.5	19.1	15.0

The City of Wolverhampton - Public Place Violence with Injury					
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Total	1375	1032	783	989	1099
% Committed Against Under 25's	47.0	45.5	40.1	40.6	40.4
% Committed by Under 25's	22.5	23.8	21.6	16.6	18.9

# Challenges and our Partnership Response

The partnership understands the importance of recognising specific challenges, whether that is at operational or strategic level, which will need to be addressed to achieve successful delivery.

A whole family approach needs to be embedded in our delivery as issues around gangs and youth violence do not start or end with an individual; there is also an impact on families, siblings, children and the wider community which needs to be at the core of how we align our approach.

Those at risk of gang harm have acute needs which are not always addressed through universal services. Whilst there is a requirement to ensure universal services are accessible to our diverse communities to meet support needs, the provision of specialist intervention services will also be required on occasion.

Communication with partners and the third sector has significantly improved over the last

twelve months; a Community Reference Group has been established which engages with key community members, which has influence and experience of working within affected communities, and has the skills and importantly, the trust to engage individuals at risk. This dialogue must be continued and the trust strengthened between statutory and third sector agencies to facilitate more open information sharing between partners and the community.

The changing demographics in the city raises challenges and highlights potential gaps in our knowledge and understanding around this agenda, both in terms of community needs and vulnerabilities.

Whilst this is not an exhaustive list of challenges and the journey ahead is clearly complex, the commitment of partners to work collaboratively will make inroads in addressing these.

Focus on those families most affected and provide whole family solutions





Building the capacity and capability of partners to deliver effective interventions



Improve collaborative working across third sector partners to maximise use of reducing resources

Support and embed practice of the cross agency forum to manage confidential issues around key gang individuals

> Continue to improve channels of communication and relationships between voluntary and statutory sector partners

Extend awareness of the case management model amongst partners to increase effective use and align with MASH and Early Help

# Vision and Objectives

Wolverhampton Gangs Steering Group agreed a shared vision is paramount in taking forward this agenda as a partnership.

Endorsed by SWP our vision is: Committed to preventing gang related harm and youth violence, together

### **Our Objectives**

Prevent young people becoming involved in violence with a new emphasis on early identification, intervention and prevention

Improved information flow and use of intelligence between agencies and communities

> Strengthen partnership working to prevent harm to families and communities

Develop support pathways out of violence and gangs

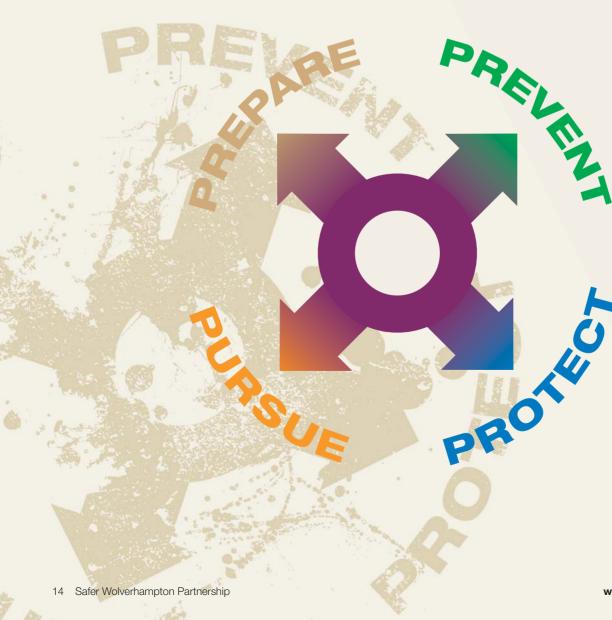
Drive forward robust enforcement and offender management to control those individuals involved in gangs and/or youth violence, who refuse the opportunity to exit the gang life style

# **Our Approach**

The model which has been adopted is a wellestablished tried and tested approach in achieving key objectives, particularly across the crime and community safety world.

Wrapped around this approach will be robust governance and delivery structures made up of a range of statutory and third sector partners, and importantly members of the community who play a key role in addressing this agenda.

Delivery of objectives will be via adopted model of:



# **Delivery Outcomes**

## **Prevent**

The prevention strand will identify individuals at risk of becoming gang members or those vulnerable as a result of gang involvement. It will seek to identify those at risk of being harmed by gangs or youth related violence. The approach will work with these individuals and their families to prevent further harm by identifying longer term solutions to reducing this behaviour. Success can be gained by partners working together to tackle some of the underlying causes. Individuals are often known to a range of services, therefore there are significant opportunities for intervention and prevention. The strand will aim to prevent vulnerability and harm to communities and victims who are affected by gang involvement.

Early areas of focus will be centred on raising awareness and knowledge of risk across agencies, target support to families at risk, integrate the approach more directly into safeguarding practice, strengthen links to the city's employment and training partners and grow capacity and capability of third sector partners to support delivery.

## **Outcomes**

- Earlier identification of individuals at risk/vulnerable to gang association
- Improved targeting of youth diversion
- Reduced risk of offending
- Reduced harm to families
- Improved prevention interventions
- A shared definition of gangs adopted across the city

# **Delivery Outcomes**

## Protect

The aim of this theme is to protect the community against gang related activity, reduce the fear of crime and protect those who are most vulnerable. Communities working together to address concerns, issues and providing support will have a significant role in tackling gang related crime and violence. Local residents need to believe that concerns can be raised confidentially and that issues will be addressed.

Early delivery will include revised arrangements for critical incident response, strengthened systems for information exchange, widened promotion of referral pathways and development of a targeted communications plan.

### Outcomes

- Reduced reoffending
- Improved understanding of the risk to prevent offending/harm
- Strengthened community response to critical incidents
- Enhanced intelligence gathering through use of social media
- Improved community reassurance



# **Delivery Outcomes**

## **Pursue**

Pursue will work to identify risk and progress enforcement action against those involved in the most serious violence; it will manage those that are involved in medium-high risk offending, and deter those involved in lower level criminality or anti-social behaviour (ASB) with use of civil powers to aid desistance.

Early delivery will include revised arrangements for critical incident response, strengthened systems for information exchange, widened promotion of referral pathways and extended use of ASB legislation.

## **Outcomes**

- More effective management of threat and risk
- Fewer knife crime incidents
- Fewer gun crime incidents
- Less youth-related violence
- Wider use of legislative powers

# Prepare

The prepare strand will strengthen resilience of victims and communities to mitigate the harm caused by gangs and youth violence.

Early focus will include delivery of mediation training for specialist third sector organisations, development of a critical incident protocol and the application of best practice to local approaches.

## Outcomes

- Increased community trust and confidence
- Improved joint response to critical incidents
- Greater understanding of gang issues
- A stronger evidence base for what works

# Safeguarding

The landscape of gangs in Wolverhampton is changing. The number of active gangs across the city remains small in number; in some cases street gangs are becoming less visible to the public, and more fluid in the way they organise themselves. There is the emergence of younger, more chaotic and violent groups.

Partnership work has shown that young people, who are drawn into gangs, whether as victims, perpetrators or both, are subject to a wide range of risk factors that need a bespoke partnership response - see appendix 2. This response to risk will ensure that young people are appropriately safeguarded. Evidence shows that gangs look and operate differently in each area of Wolverhampton, there is no single universal approach that will work in all cases - see appendix 3 for tiered approaches.

Another risk relates to the safeguarding of vulnerable gang-associated girls and young women; work is needed to change the attitudes amongst young men which can fuel violence and lead to women and girls being exploited. We must ensure that the city's approach to reducing violence against women and girls plays its part in our plan.

There is an improved understanding of the underlying causes of gang violence which demonstrates the need for safeguarding, and requires an increased involvement from health and education agencies. Health services recognise this and view their role in reducing violence with increasing importance. Public Health's commitment to the West Midlands Violence Prevention Alliance demonstrates this. Risk factors do not usually exist in isolation, local multi-agency work on prevention and early intervention must address complex need and coordinate the local offer. Practitioners from all agencies who come into contact with young people from early years onwards need to be alive to these risk factors for risk and threat to be effectively reduced; agencies need to be signed up to the plan and ensure alignment with other city-wide strategies.

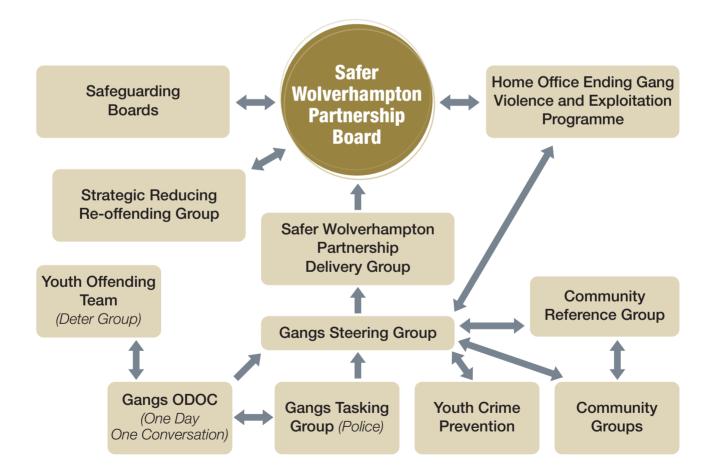
Gang related harm is a complex issue and the impact on affected families and communities is not consistently part of a co-ordinated and focused response. Further work is needed to dovetail specialist gangs and youth violence responses with universal services and programmes such as Early Help and Troubled Families. The city's Children, Young People and Families Plan 2015-2025 supports the need for this co-ordinated and focused approached in relation to young people and families and its aims align with this strategy.

Finally tackling the links between serious and organised crime and street gangs is crucial in preventing gang violence and crime and in stopping street gang members from being drawn into more serious organised criminal activity. The local and regional approach to address organised crime supports the aims of this strategy.

## Governance

SWP governance structures are robust, providing a clear thread from strategic to operational arenas. Community links and information sharing forms an integral part in governance and delivery structures; the structure chart below outlines relationships with key groups contributing to the prevention of gang harm and youth violence.

See appendix 4 for a list of key partners.



## Governance

Links to key strategies and programmes

Preventing Gang Involvement and Youth Violence Strategy 2016 -2019

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner Police and Crime Plan

**Wolverhampton Police Local Policing Plan** 

**Youth Justice Plan** 

Wolverhampton Children, Young People and Families Plan

**Violence Against Women and Girls** 

**Safeguarding Business Plan** 

**Families in Focus** 

**Strengthening Families** 

**Police and Schools Panels** 

**Targeted Youth Support Panels** 

## Equalities

The strategy aims to identify those in need of support at an earlier point, progress enforcement action against offenders, and direct services at those who are known to be active gang members or those at risk of gang membership.

The gangs and youth violence profile undertaken highlights the strategy will impact predominantly on males spanning a wide age range, and females, due to their vulnerability from associations with gang members. Whilst historically, established gang membership has seen disproportionate representation from black/mixed race groups, gang membership is now reflecting an increasingly mixed ethnic representation, especially amongst younger USGs. A full equality analysis has been completed to inform our approach and will be kept under review to monitor take up of services and revise delivery as required. When considering the development of the strategy, consultations were held with a wide cross section of the community, those included in the consultation process were; members of the general public, community leaders, voluntary and community sector groups including prominent youth groups as well as statutory services. A number of structured questions were asked to ensure that the process captured a comprehensive response from those consulted.

# Appendix 1 - Target Age Group

Children & young people have been described as persons under the age of 18 years. It is recognised that the 18 to 24 year age range is a key stage of young people's development. The brain is still developing, this period is key for gaining independence, socialising, experimenting with drink, drugs and sexual relationships and a time in a person's life when they are most likely to come into contact with the Police through offending or as a victim/ witness.

For these reasons, for the purposes of this strategy, Children & Young People should be defined as everyone up to and including the age of 24 years. This can be divided into three distinct groups:

- Under 10 years of age Children below the age of criminal responsibility
- 10 to 17 years of age Children & Young People above the age of criminal responsibility
- 18 to 24 years old Young adult

# Appendix 2 - Risk factors for a person becoming involved in gangs

# **Child Development**

#### **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

(Source: Home Office)

FAMILY & ENVIRONME



# Risk factors for a person becoming involved in gangs

OPMEN

## **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 & 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

(Source: Home Office)

# Appendix 3 - Intervention linked in response to risk and vulnerability

4 tiers of need and intervention based on Hardiker, Exton & Barker 1991

Acute immediate intervention required

Risk vulnerability identified and apparent

Early identifcation of risk and vulnerability, but risk of gang related activity or youth related violence remains low to medium

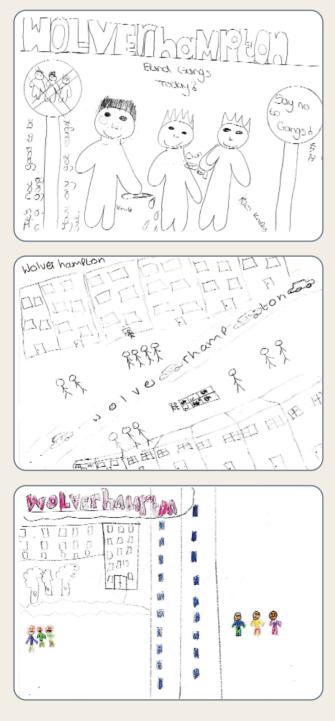
Universally delivered servcies not requiring additional or targetted support

# Appendix 4 - Preventing Gang and Youth Violence Partners

- Base 25
- Believe to Achieve
- Catch 22
- Community Rehabilitation Company
- Community Safety Team City of Wolverhampton Council
- Connexions
- C3
- EYES
- Hope Centre Project
- HM Prison Service
- Lime Productions
- National Probation Service
- Office for Policing & Crime
- Public Health City of Wolverhampton Council
- Recovery Near You
- Safeguarding City of Wolverhampton Council
- Square Pegs Round Holes
- Victim Support
- West Midlands Fire Service
- West Midlands Police
- Wolverhampton Citizens for Change
- Wolverhampton Homes
- Youth Offending Team City of Wolverhampton Council
- Youth of Wolverhampton

## **Artwork Competition** Runners up

Pictures submitted by children attending The Hope Centre, Heath Town, Wolverhampton.





was addressed...

## **Artwork Competition**

Winner - by Connor Smith, aged 13



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