SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO MAY BE AFFECTED BY GANG ACTIVITY
Section 1: Introduction

1. We know that there are a number of areas in which young people are put at risk by gang activity both through participation in and as victims of gang violence. Safeguarding procedures can provide a key tool for all agencies working with young people to ensure that they are working together to prevent young people from being drawn into gangs, to support those who have been drawn into the margins of gangs; and to protect those who are at immediate risk of harm because of gangs.

2. The risk posed by gangs varies across the country and establishing a local evidence base, and putting in place local protocols for information-sharing and effective multi-agency working will be key to preventing young people from suffering harm in the gang context. This guidance addresses these issues as well as providing case studies of areas which have already started to establish these processes.

3. This guidance is addressed to those who work in voluntary and statutory services across the children’s workforce; social care, crime prevention, the police, probation, health, education and all others whose work brings them into contact with children and young people.

4. This guidance is supplementary to, and should be used in conjunction with, the Government’s statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006). The processes outlined in Working Together should be followed at all times.

5. This supplementary guidance is intended to help agencies and professionals ensure that the safeguarding process responds effectively to the needs of children and young people who are at risk of gang-related violence and harm. To that end, the guidance outlines factors for agencies and professionals to consider and processes to follow in terms of identification, referral, and assessment and support for young people who may be affected by gang activity.

6. The guidance analyses the reasons that young people become involved in gangs. The particular risks associated with gang membership for the young people and the risks of being affected by gang activity in other ways (e.g. victims of gang-related violence; having siblings who are gang members). The risk posed by gangs varies across the country. Establishing an evidence base, putting in place local protocols for information-sharing and effective multi-agency working will be key to preventing young people suffering harm in the gang context. The guidance addresses these issues as well as providing case studies of areas which have already started to establish these processes.
Key Principles

7. This practice guidance fits within the framework of *Every Child Matters* and the existing legal framework, which requires relevant agencies to take responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child to enable them to:

- Be healthy;
- Stay safe;
- Enjoy and achieve;
- Make a positive contribution; and
- Achieve economic well-being.

8. Addressing the problem of gang involvement is a multi-agency issue. Partnership working and information-sharing will be key to safeguarding young people at risk of gang-related harm and helping them achieve the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes.

9. The following principles, which build on those in *Working Together*, should be adopted by all agencies identifying and responding to young people at risk of or being affected by gang activity:

- the safety and welfare of the child is paramount;
- children who harm others are both victims and perpetrators;
- all decisions or plans for children should be based on good quality assessments and actions taken proportionate and in the best interests of the child or young person;
- everyone working with or in contact with children and young people has a responsibility to recognise and know how to act on evidence, concerns or signs that a child’s health, development or safety is being or is at risk of being impaired; and
- all agencies and professionals should work in partnership with others, including members of the local community, to make well-informed assessments and put in place the best support to safeguard young people.

10. The role of safeguarding and child protection in relation to gangs should be both preventative and responsive – responding to the needs of those young people who are involved in gangs and at risk of harm as well as addressing the risk factors of other young people being drawn into gangs in the future.

11. Overall, children that are particularly vulnerable to suffering harm in the
gang context are:

- children not involved in gangs but at risk of becoming drawn in, for example, siblings or children of known gang members;
- non-gang-involved but at risk of becoming victims of gangs
- non-gang-involved but living in a gang area which can have a negative impact on their ability to be safe, healthy, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing; or
- gang-involved and at risk of harm through their gang-related activities (e.g. drug supply, weapon use, risk of attack from own or rival gang members)

12. Young people who become involved in gangs and commit violent crime as a result of this involvement have significant needs themselves. They should be held responsible for their actions and harmful behaviour but professionals also have a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of these young people and to prevent further harm both themselves and to other potential victims.

*Victims and offenders are often the same people. When adults treat a young person as just a victim or just an offender, they are not taking into account the complex, cyclical nature of the victim-offender link and the factors that influence young people’s lives.*

13. As some young people involved in gangs are likely to have a dual victim and perpetrator status it is vital that professionals assess the needs of young people and provide them with support alongside assessing and responding in a criminal justice capacity if appropriate. Close partnership working and shared intelligence between local authority children’s social care services and law enforcement and public protection agencies will be vital to achieve the right balance of support and criminal justice whilst safeguarding the child’s welfare.

Section 2: Background and Context

Policy Context

14. Whilst the focus of this practice guidance is on how the child protection system can be used to help young people at risk of gang-related harm, it must be recognised that preventative measures and the risks associated with gang activity need to be addressed within a broad safeguarding context with a focus on multi-agency safeguarding arrangements that can be used to help those young people at risk of gang related harm. A great deal of work is being undertaken by professionals and across Government to tackle the problem of gangs, both from a wider preventative perspective and a public protection angle.

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1 Hoodie or Goodie? The link between violent victimisation and offending in young people (2007), Victim Support
15. Cross-Government efforts to tackle gangs are focused on these main areas:

a. tackling the supply of guns and ammunition for criminal use;
b. reducing the level of glamour associated with gang membership and the use of weapons, including knives;
c. supporting families in making gang membership less attractive and supporting parents to develop resilience in children and young people;
d. provide alternative activities to make gang membership less attractive;
e. Increasing the confidence of communities affected by gang-related crime that the problem is being properly addressed;
f. Increasing the willingness of potential witnesses to come forward to give evidence or information to the authorities;
g. ensuring effective engagement and cross-agency risk management of gang members and those at risk of becoming involved in gangs;
h. Increasing the sustainability of funding of initiatives and projects which tackle gangs;
i. encouraging effective partnership working and information-sharing, including when children transition from local authority-provided services into services for young adults; and
j. Improving the evidence base relating to causal factors and what works in tackling gang and gun crime.

16. The Tackling Gangs Action Programme was launched by Government in 2007 to focus on gang problems in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool – the four areas of the country which have been identified by the police as suffering disproportionately from problems with street gangs. The Home Office have produced a guide for local authorities which sets out the lessons learnt from the Tackling Gangs Action Programme for local authorities, Crime and Disorder

17. The Youth Crime Action Plan\(^2\), published in July 2008, set out plans for the development of a comprehensive package of measures to prevent youth crime, provide further protection for communities and take robust action when young people offend. This emphasises the importance of prevention through early intervention and non-negotiable support. Two particular proposals in the plan that will help agencies safeguarding young people involved in gangs are:

a. Improving local authority systems so that we identify, engage and assess the needs of families better and join up services to meet the needs of all family members; and

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\(^2\) http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/youth-crime-action-plan/
b. Expanding intensive family interventions for the most vulnerable and chaotic families with children at risk of offending, with non-negotiable elements that may carry sanctions for failure to engage.

18. Two provisions in the Youth Crime Action Plan are particularly relevant here. The Plan set out our intention to roll out Operation Staysafe, where police use existing child protection legislation to remove children and young people from the street late at night to a place of safety. Parents and, where necessary, additional services can then be contacted. The Youth Taskforce will work with local partners in priority, high youth crime areas to develop this initiative over the coming year and will provide local areas with good practice emerging from trials.

19. In addition, the Youth Crime Action Plan also set out our commitment to deter young people involved in criminal and anti-social behaviour by engaging them with street-based teams of youth workers and ex-gang members, working in partnership with the police. These teams will help engage disaffected young people where and when it is most needed. Offering young people a viable alternative to criminal and anti-social behaviour will help break the damaging cycle of negative influence that gangs or delinquent peer groups may have.

20. Multi-agency working and any local protocols on child protection and gangs should be part of the wider preventative agenda. Support services that exist specifically to prevent young people from entering into gangs, such as peer mentoring and voluntary and community organisation activities can be useful as part of this wider preventative work as well as a source of support put in place following assessment. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) and other agencies may already be operating targeted preventative programmes which could also be used for this purpose.

21. Any decision to remove a child into a place of safety must be based upon an assessment of risk of harm shared primarily between the Police and local authority children’s social care services. The Police should use child protection legislation only in circumstances agreed with the local authority and in accordance with agreed local protocols, which are sensitive to the particular challenges of protecting children and young people in such circumstances. In developing local protocols Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) and Children’s Trusts must consider the safeguarding issues inherent in young people being drawn into gangs and be prepared to apply them in relation to individual cases, including the younger siblings of gang members.

22. Respondents to the DCSF Staying Safe consultation raised concerns about gang, gun and knife crime. Some respondents felt that LSCBs had a role to play in this area, but other LSCB representatives were concerned that they did not have the expertise or resources to deal with this issue. This guidance sets out a framework for addressing gangs through safeguarding procedures and also includes links to further expert advice and resources which can be found in annex C.

Definition of a gang

23. 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.  

24. 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 gang. Terms vary in different areas but names which are often used for different roles within a gang include gang leaders; core members; elders; wanabees; associates; 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 (i.e. in any role) and those at risk of becoming involved in gangs or being affected by gang-related activity.

25. This guidance focuses on level 2 – street gangs. At the top level of the model are organised crime groups, composed principally of adult men. Both these types of group (peer groups and organised criminal gangs) are largely outside the scope of this guidance, which focuses on street gangs and group offending.

26. Throughout this document a child is defined according to the Children Acts 1989 and 2004 as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.

27. 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 places to socialise. These groups should be distinguished from ‘gangs’ for whom crime and violence are a core part of their identity, although ‘delinquent peer groups’ can also lead to increased antisocial behaviour and youth offending. Although some group gatherings can lead to increased antisocial behaviour and youth offending, these activities should not be confused with the serious and organised violence of a gangs.

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Evidence of Gangs

28. The nature and characteristics of gangs vary from area to area. The use of intelligence and analyses by all local agencies, effectively shared, is vital in building a local profile of gangs. This is needed to understand the issues and to ensure appropriate responses are made. Analysis of gang members across London, Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester has given us some evidence of the typical characteristics of people involved in gangs:

   a. Predominantly young, with an average of 20 years. 97% were aged under 30. Ages ranged from 13 – 42;

   b. Predominantly black, with 75% being African-Caribbean;

   c. Predominantly male – 97%;

   d. Have extensive criminal histories. The sample group of 774 known gang members were responsible for over 7000 known offences. Only 8% had no known criminal history; and

   e. Begin offending early, often in their early teens. The average age of a first conviction was 15 years. By age 18 82% had been convicted.

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for an offence.

29. Anecdotally, it seems that some children, including girls, who claim gang affiliation, are as young as 7 and 8 years old. It is more common for ‘youngers’ or ‘tinsys’ to be in their early teens, and their role is often to carry weapons, drugs or stolen property for ‘elders’ or other gang members. They may also engage in street crime, sexual assault and other anti-social behaviour in their own right.  

30. The nature of gangs varies between areas. Gangs are often territorially based – with a particular postcode or group of streets which may define the name or identity. Some gangs are based on a particular estate and their ethnic make-up reflects the ethnic make-up of that estate. In some cases membership appears to be based on religion or people who associate with each other due to a common religion.

31. The Tackling Gangs Action Programme found that there has been a noticeable and significant lowering of the age profile of recognised gang members. These young gang members are often motivated by issues of respect, territory and gang identity. They may engage in a lower level of criminality to begin with, and in a more disorganised way, including street robbery, burglary, assault and anti-social behaviour.

Section 3: Gang-Related Activity – What is the Risk?

32. The particular risks that young people face because of gang involvement differ from area to area. Not every gang is involved in the same activities – there is limited evidence of the use of initiation rituals or transactional sex for example but anecdotally these activities do occur, although prevalence varies across the country.

33. Local evidence-gathering and profiling of local gang problems will be needed to establish what the risks are in a particular area. The Tackling Gangs Action Programme (TGAP) practice document offers an easy to follow guide on ways to profile your local gang problem. However, when carrying out the profiling of local gangs and assessing risks to individual young people professionals should be aware of particular risks to young people involved in gangs from violence and weapons; drugs; and sexual exploitation.

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7 http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/violentstreet/violentstreet011.htm
8 Safeguarding Children from Sexual Exploitation - draft guidance aims to provide practitioners across all relevant agencies and the voluntary and community sector with information about different forms of sexual exploitation to help them identify and safeguard children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation, or who are being sexually exploited. www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/conDetails.cfm?consultationId=1566
Violence and Weapons

34. Young people who are involved in gangs are more likely to suffer harm themselves, through retaliatory violence, displaced retaliation, territorial violence with other gangs or other harm suffered whilst committing a crime.

35. Gang membership increases both the rate and seriousness of adolescent offending, particularly serious crimes associated with guns, knives and the supply of drugs.

36. Young people involved in gangs are more likely to possess and use weapons, both knives and guns, than non-gang members. Evidence shows that those carrying weapons are themselves more likely to become victims of weapon attacks. The risk of serious injury or death whilst defending oneself or fighting is increased when carrying weapons, and the risk of using a weapon, and of being seriously injured, grows in group situations. Across the country, knives and other weapons are far more prevalent than firearms, particularly in the case of children and young people although in some local areas guns are of increasing concern.

Knives – What is and isn’t legal

- It is illegal for any shop to sell a knife of any kind (including cutlery and kitchen knives) to anyone under the age of 18

- It is generally an offence to carry a knife in public without good reason or lawful authority (for example, a good reason is a chef on the way to work carrying their own knives)

- Knives where the blade folds into the handle, like a Swiss Army Knife, are not illegal as long as the blade is shorter than three inches (7.62 cms)

- If a knife is used in a threatening way (even a legal knife, such as a Swiss Army knife), it is regarded as an ‘offensive weapon’ by the law. This is also the case with things like screwdrivers - once used in a threatening manner, they are treated as offensive weapons. It is an offence to carry an offensive weapon in a public place, if you don't have a reasonable excuse

The police’s ‘Stop and Search’ powers

- Police officers have the right to search any person they suspect of an offence - including carrying an offensive weapon.
feel pressure to commit further offences to maintain respect. If they refuse they risk losing respect or even being violently attacked by their own gang.

38. In the wider context, gangs and gang members use violence to assert their power and authority in their local area, on the street or estate. Gangs may have to assert their power and gain respect in relation to other gangs in the area. This is why so much gang-related crime and violence is perpetrated against other members of gangs or relatives of other gangs’ members and rarely against police or other state sector individuals.

39. The concepts of collective responsibility and collective “honour” mean that violent conflict can quickly escalate from inter-personal disputes to collective violence, with some or even all of the individual gang members identified as potential targets.

Drugs

40. According to a recent Youth Justice Board survey of children known to London Youth Offending Teams, many of the young people who were involved in gang activity used illegal drugs and alcohol. Their use of drugs brought them into contact with adults who are involved in organised crime as suppliers of drugs. The drugs market is often regulated by career criminals through extreme violence or the threat of violence.

41. Many gang members also deal drugs as a way to make money, either to fund their own use of drugs or for financial gain in its own right. The use of drugs by gang members again varies from area to area, with some gang members selling drugs but not using these themselves. This again brings gang members into contact with organised crime and can increase the threat of violence and violent situations that members are exposed to.

Sexual Exploitation

42. Safeguarding principles should be a priority for girls who are sexually exploited and abused. This can be a particular risk for girls associating with or targeted by gang members. This risk has been highlighted in particular areas and not others, but should be considered as a risk when assessing individuals and when should be considered when developing a local profile of gangs.

43. The majority of gang members are male, although there are a number of female gang members or female gangs. Girls are more likely to be subservient in predominantly male gangs, often being used to carry or stash weapons and drugs.

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9 Safeguarding Children from Sexual Exploitation - draft guidance aims to provide practitioners across all relevant agencies and the voluntary and community sector with information about different forms of sexual exploitation to help them identify and safeguard children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation, or who are being sexually exploited. www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/conDetails.cfm?consultationId=1566
44. In some localities female members of gangs are often on the receiving end of violence and extortion and their relationships with other gang members tend to be abusive and submissive. Within a gang girls may be sexually exploited or may sexually service older male gang members in return for a supply of drugs or for fear of worse retaliation if they refuse. Some senior gang members pass their girlfriends around to lower ranking members or to the whole gang at the same time.

45. Initiation rituals are sometimes based on sexual violence, with female members of their own gang or, more often, on the female members of a rival gang or girlfriends of rival gang members. In this way ‘youngers’ can earn their rights to be a core gang member and ‘prove’ themselves as worthy of progressing up the gang hierarchy.

46. Rape by gang members, as a form of retaliation or as an act of violence in itself, are said to occur quite frequently in some areas and reports to the police are rare due to fear of intimidation or reprisal.

One of my year 10 students was recently gang-raped by some gang members. I talked to her and her mother. They are obviously frightened and the mother insists that it was consensual. The girl won’t come to counselling because she is afraid of being seen to talk to anyone in authority about it.\(^\text{10}\)

47. An American study of gang activity\(^\text{11}\) concluded that group sexual assault mainly occurs in an environment where group behaviour and acceptance is important to the young men involved. The report suggests that individuals who might not otherwise have perpetrated sexual assault may do so in situations where the presence of others committing the same act diminishes the feeling of individual responsibility that a person would feel for his behaviour.

48. Female relatives of gang members can be at particular risk of either being drawn into a submissive sexual role in a gang or of being the victim of sexual violence by another gang. Siblings are particularly at risk but other members of the wider family may also be exploited in this way.

Victims

49. Research has shown that victims of crime can become offenders because of their experience.\(^\text{12}\) Often those young people who become offenders in gangs following victimisation have similar risk factors as those who become involved in gangs more generally. Causes of the leap from victimisation to offending can include a retaliation attack on the offender or gang, joining a rival gang to seek revenge, or making friends or joining the offending gang or other gang to seek protection.

50. Violence committed by victims is not always associated with the attackers

\(^{10}\) Pitts, John (2007), p. 40


\(^{12}\) Hoodie or Goodie? The link between violent victimisation and offending in young people Victim Support
but can take the form of violence displaced onto another victim. This can be the case if the original perpetrator is perceived as too powerful or strong for the victim to successfully attack, which may be particularly true of gangs. Displaced retaliation can also make the young person feel that they have achieved revenge and justice in some way, even though the violence was not committed against the original perpetrator.

51. Respect and recognition can also be a factor in the progression from victim to offender, with young people striving to regain respect in their social group or area following an attack. Carrying a weapon following an attack can help the young person rebuild that respect, as well as offering the victim a feeling of personal protection.

52. Professionals should bear these points in mind when assessing either victims or perpetrators of crime and should be aware of the potential for young people to become involved in gangs and gang-related violence as a result of being a victim of violent crime.

Section 4: Identification and Risk Factors

Who is vulnerable to gang involvement?

53. All professionals 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.

54. 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.

55. 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.

56. The list below identifies the particular risk factors for a young person becoming involved in gangs. It is tiered 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 with specific risk factors grouped under the three headings of child development, parenting capacity and family/environment.

57. Professionals 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

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involved in gangs and in the assessment of young people for whom concerns have been raised. Many agencies already use risk assessment tools in relation to gangs, and professionals should think about aligning these processes, taking into the account the particular risk factors for young people identified below.

58. These risk factors should not 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.

59. When developing a local protocol or applying this guidance in the local context agencies may wish to amend the list in light of local data and local knowledge of the risk factors in their area. Manchester Safeguarding Children’s Board has developed their own assessment tool which can be found at http://www.manchesterscb.org.uk/prof-specific.asp.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Development</th>
<th>Parenting Capacity</th>
<th>Family/Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High level risk factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early problems with antisocial and criminal behaviour</td>
<td>Historically involved with or known to social services</td>
<td>Family members involved with or associate with gangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent offending</td>
<td>Lax parental supervision</td>
<td>Wider family involved with gangs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unable to regulate own emotions and behaviour</td>
<td>Lack of parental attachment to child</td>
<td>Community norms that tolerate crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical violence and aggression</td>
<td>Conflict and violence in the home</td>
<td>Local tensions between ethnic/cultural/religious groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent exclusion from school</td>
<td>Parental abuse</td>
<td>Known gang recruitment at school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends condoning or involved in antisocial and aggressive behaviour</td>
<td>Parents aggressive towards or unwilling to engage with statutory agencies</td>
<td>Presence of gangs in community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol and drug misuse</td>
<td>Child is not protected from significant harm or danger, including contact with unsafe adults</td>
<td>High levels of local crime including drugs market</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Medium Risk Factors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental health problems</td>
<td>Lack of emotional care</td>
<td>Availability and use of drugs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aggression, behavioural problems</td>
<td>Allowing child to associate with known troublemakers</td>
<td>Criminal conviction of parents or siblings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Violent discipline</td>
<td>Witness or victim of domestic violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Truancy and unexplained absence from school</td>
<td>Lack of parental discipline</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bullied or bullying others</td>
<td>Inconsistent or minimal boundaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical history of repeated injuries or accidents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child in local authority care or leaving care</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Low level risk factors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aggressive bullying by siblings</td>
<td>Lack of positive role models in the community</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of ethnic identity</td>
<td>Parents don’t model positive and responsible behaviour</td>
<td>Transient families</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer rejection</td>
<td>Absent parent</td>
<td>Lack of age-appropriate, safe play facilities in the area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not involved in positive</td>
<td>Unstable family</td>
<td>Financial difficulties</td>
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<tr>
<td>activities</td>
<td>environment</td>
<td>affecting child</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Few social ties</td>
<td>Child left with multiple or unsuitable carers</td>
<td>Little interaction with neighbours and community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exposure to violent media</td>
<td>Parents unable to communicate effectively with children</td>
<td>High unemployment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent-child separation</td>
<td>Sustained poverty</td>
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60. As mentioned above, siblings of gang members can be at particular risk of being drawn into gang activity, whether as an active member (including as deliverers of drugs or concealers of weapons) or being attacked by other gangs. There is a particular risk for sisters of gang members of being sexually exploited or abused. In some cases other members of the family can also be drawn into gang feuds.

61. It is important that Local Safeguarding Children Boards understand the needs of, and have an open dialogue with children and young people in order to identify risk factors and seek innovative ways of effectively tackling and preventing gang activity.
62. In the assessment of a young person agencies will want to be aware of particular ‘telltale’ signs of involvement in gangs. Many of these factors are normal adolescent behaviour but may be useful in identifying concerns prior to referral or to be taken into account during a robust assessment. Parents or other professionals 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;

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**Case Study - Liverpool Safeguarding Children Board**

Supporting Youth participation:

Liverpool has in place a Joint Commissioning Strategy for gun and gang crime. There are several streams of work being carried out by Liverpool SCB member agencies which address children and young people’s involvement in gangs across the city.

Liverpool SCB’s communication strategy includes the need for active dialogue with the local community, including talking about gun and gang activity. The Board has therefore appointed a youth participation officer to work directly with young people to engage them in the local safeguarding agenda.

The aim of the participation officer role is to gather and report on young people’s concerns and ideas and talk to them about how to stay safe in the city. This is done through an on-the-ground approach for example through schools. By employing a participation officer with an understanding of social services, the LSCB hopes to ensure a proactive and interactive way of understanding young people’s thoughts on safeguarding, including the risk of harm from gang activity.

Further information on this case study and others can be found at: [http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/_files/61135F4F15B7B2D31F0EA26198C8E500.pdf](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/_files/61135F4F15B7B2D31F0EA26198C8E500.pdf)
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;
started adopting certain codes of group behaviour e.g. 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.

Section 5: Referral and Assessment

63. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) may be crucial in the early identification of children and young people who need additional support due to risk of involvement in gang activity. The CAF is a shared assessment tool for use across all children’s services and all local areas in England. It aims to help early identification of need and promote coordinated service provision. This can be particularly useful in the case of gangs where multiple agencies may be involved or aware of risks to a child.

64. Any agency or individual practitioner who has concerns that a child may be at risk of harm as a consequence of gang activity (either through their participation in activity or as a victim) should follow the guidance set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006) and What to do if you’re worried a child is being abused (2006). If there are immediate concerns for a child’s welfare they should contact the local authority’s children’s social care services or local police for the area in which the child is currently located.

65. The flowchart on page [17] of this guidance sets out the process that professionals should follow following concerns being raised that a child is:

a. not involved in gangs but vulnerable to, or at risk of, becoming involved in a gang
b. non-gang-involved and at risk of harm from gang members
c. gang-involved and at risk of harm through their own gang-related activities

The flowcharts in Working Together, pages 143 – 144 should be followed by professionals at all times.
Referral

66. The social worker should clarify with the referrer what their concerns are. They need to find out why the referral was made, and, what led the referrer to believe the child may be at risk of harm as a result of involvement in gang activity. The referrer should be asked to put their concerns in writing to ensure an accurate and clear audit trail is maintained.

67. It may be that informal intelligence leads to police or social care concerns about a child, and it might be necessary in that situation to verify the accuracy of the intelligence. The welfare and safety of the child should be the foremost concern in these situations.

Assessment

68. The initial assessment should be led by a qualified and experienced social worker. It should be carefully planned with clarity about who is doing what, as well as when and what information is to be shared with parents and carers. It may be appropriate for this social worker to be embedded in, or work closely with, a team which has access to ‘real-time’ gang intelligence in order to undertake a reliable assessment.

69. Parents may be a useful source of information to assess the risk of harm. They are most likely to have observed behaviours and signs of a gangs influence in their child. If it is appropriate to engage them, it is important to be clear that this about the safety and welfare of the child. Parents may not be aware of their child’s involvement and can be shocked into action by being made aware of the dangers of gang involvement and become active participants in the prevention of their child being or becoming involved in gangs.

70. Careful involvement of parents and carers may be required as they may not know how to react to the situation or may be condoning their child’s involvement in gangs.

71. The term ‘gang’ and associated language can be quite alarmist. There is a need to try and take away the media hype and glamorisation of gangs and to understand what it is that a child is attracted to, or pushed towards, in this kind of life. You will need to agree a local definition that best describes your gang problem.

72. Evidence and information-sharing is key to ensuring that a robust assessment is undertaken and that the most appropriate support is put in place for the individual child. Agencies need to be aware of the extent to which a young person is involved in gangs or likely to be involved in or affected by gang activity. The police, Youth Offending Teams, social care professionals and other agencies need to work together to ensure that all agencies are aware of how gangs or other relevant factors may impact on the young person’s welfare.

73. Professionals should be aware that children who are being looked after by the local authority can be particularly vulnerable of becoming involved in gangs. An assessment should be undertaken to identify any risk of a child becoming involved in gangs, or suffering harm as a result of gang involvement against the
risk assessment tool. There may be a need to review their care plan in light of this information and to provide additional support to the child specifically targeted at their potential or current involvement with gangs.

**Immediate Safety**

74. If there is a risk to the life of the child or a likelihood of serious significant harm agencies should secure the immediate safety of the child. Agencies with statutory child protection powers (local authorities, the police and the NSPCC) should act quickly to safeguard the child from immediate harm.

75. Where there is a risk to the life of a child or the likelihood of significant harm emergency action might be necessary to secure the immediate safety of the child. The need for emergency action may become apparent only over time as more is learned about the circumstances of a child’s involvement in gang activity. When deciding whether emergency action is required consideration should be given to whether action is also required to safeguard and promote the welfare of other children in the same household.

76. It may be necessary to ensure either that the child remains in a safe place or is removed to a safe place, either on a voluntary basis or by obtaining an Emergency Protection Order (EPO). The police have powers to remove a child to suitable accommodation in cases of emergency. If it is necessary to remove a child, a local authority should, wherever possible, and unless a child’s safety is otherwise at immediate risk, apply for an EPO. Police powers should only be used in exceptional circumstance where there is insufficient time to seek and EPO or for reasons relating to the immediate safety of the child.

77. A strategy discussion including all relevant local agencies should take place as soon as possible after any emergency action is taken to plan next steps. Legal advice should normally be obtained before initiating any legal action, in particular when an EPO is to be sought. It is important to recognise that emergency action addresses only the immediate circumstances of the child. Any emergency action should be followed up quickly by the agencies involved working with the child and family to assess the needs and circumstances of the child in the longer term.

78. An Osman Warning (a warning regarding threat to life,) is so named after the Osman v United Kingdom case (1998) which placed a positive obligation on the authorities to take preventative measures to protect an individual whose life is at risk from the criminal acts of another individual. In the context of gangs this may occur as a result of gang rivalry or because of an incident occurring within a young person’s own gang (for example threatening to leave or refusing to commit an act of violence).

79. There is evidence that so called Osman Warnings have sometimes been delivered by the police to young people without any further interventions being triggered. LSCBs may wish to amend their processes so that any Osman Warning results in an automatic referral to local authority children’s social care.

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14 Section 46 of The Children Act 1989 provides for the removal and accommodation of children by police in case of emergency.
services and the initiation of a strategy discussion, or may trigger the need to consider taking immediate safeguarding action depending on the nature of the threat to the child’s life.

Identification and Referral Flowchart

Professional identifies incident or cluster of factors which raise concerns that child is vulnerable to being:

a) Involved in gangs and at risk of harm
b) Affected by gang activity and at risk of harm

Professional consults agency’s nominated safeguarding children advisor and manager as they think appropriate

Still has concerns

No longer has concerns

Referral to LA children’s social care, following up in writing within 48 hours

No LA children's social care support required, but other action may be necessary, e.g. CAF, onward referral

Initial assessment required – completed within 7 working days from referral

Information shared between referrer, social services and local youth justice team and safer neighbourhood policing team

Concerns about child’s immediate safety

Child in need

Processes outlined in flowcharts in Working Together pp. 143-144
Section 6: Support and Interventions

80. The outcomes of the initial assessment should always be shared between children’s social care, the referrer, the police and the youth offending team. Information-sharing should happen at all stages of referral, assessment and ongoing case management.

81. Every effort should be made to hear the young person’s voice throughout identification, assessment and intervention. Children who are involved in gangs may be reluctant and wary of talking about it. If the child is willing to talk about gang involvement professionals should always take what the child say seriously. Any information they gather from the child should be taken into account in the assessment and subsequent support put in place.

82. Most victims of gang crime will know the perpetrators but may fear the consequences of speaking out and may be reluctant to talk to professionals regarding their experiences. Use of an intermediary such as a parent or mentor may be useful to help the young person talk about their experience.

Risks of Harm to Professionals

83. Professionals should be aware of any potential threats to the social workers’ safety during interaction with a child before or during section 47 enquiries and should make a decision on the suitability of a home visit. It may be more appropriate to interview the child and/or parents and carers in a neutral setting.

84. The risk of harm may also exist for other professionals, who may be visiting a household without knowledge of the gang context, or to follow up concerns about a child’s involvement in gangs. Information-sharing about high-risk families and individuals (such as those who carry lethal weapons) should be considered across all agencies that might have interaction with that individual, such as health professionals, social workers and the police.

85. Local authorities may also want to consider putting in place protocols for managing risk of harm to professionals in this context. All professionals should have access to competent and consistent risk management advice. It may be appropriate for security measures to be taken such as ensuring professionals can access panic alarms and mobile phones as well as conflict resolution training for frontline staff.

Support

86. As with all young people support and interventions should be proportionate, rational and based foremost on the child’s needs identified during an assessment. There will be a scale of interventions that might be considered appropriate according to the child’s needs, from use of preventative support related to gangs and reduction of the risk factors to the application to a family court for a care order under section 31 of the Children Act 1989.

87. The diagram below sets out the areas of intervention for the different tiers of need based on the risk factors identified in section 4, from the universal
services and activities for those with low level risk factors, moving up to targeted youth support and then targeted individual interventions and enforcement.

88. Whole-family approaches to identify and tackle the risk of young people being involved or affected by gang activity can be very powerful in reducing the risk of harm to a child and the wider family. Existing provision of family-based interventions within an LA may be appropriate, such as family group conferencing and family intervention projects. Support should also be put in place to tackle specific risk factors in the family environment such as domestic violence or family members’ involvement with gangs.

89. Individual safety plans may be appropriate to ensure a young person’s safety in the short term, for example ensuring that the young person travels to and from school safely, particularly if walking through a rival gang’s territory.

90. As well as family-based interventions, use should be made of support services targeted at individual young people such as youth projects, peer mentoring, positive activities and access to a respected, trusted adult for advice. Targeted interventions could include challenging specific myths surrounding gang lifestyles in relation to possessing firearms, drug dealing and money. Such provision may already exist across the local authority. Voluntary and community organisations can be useful sources of this kind of support and may be better received by young people. Youth Inclusion Projects (YIPs) and Youth Inclusion...
and Support Panels (YISPs) may already have in place programmes that social care professionals could refer young people to that will reduce the likelihood of young people committing offences.

91. There are likely to be a number of young people that do not meet the thresholds for statutory children’s services intervention, nor are under the remit of the Youth Offending Team. It may be concluded that the child is not a child in need, or in particular at risk of harm as a result of gang activity but that some involvement, or potential involvement in gangs is still of concern. It may be appropriate to refer the young person to other support for gang prevention at that time. LSCBs should ensure that such children are tracked and that suitable support is provided for them.
Section 7: The Role of the LSCB

Protocols

92. LSCBs should develop local procedures and multi-agency protocols for children at risk of harm through gang activity in their area. Clear protocols can help to create a seamless, collective response to meet the needs of children and young people. The protocols can be part of, and should be consistent with, wider LSCB policies and procedures for safeguarding children and other relevant protocols in the LA, for example on youth offending. The identification of a child at risk of harm related to gang involvement should trigger the agreed local procedures.

93. It is important to establish a sound local evidence base, including informal intelligence and anecdotes, to use as a starting point for developing local protocols and procedures on gang activity. As noted earlier in the guidance, characteristics and activities of gangs differ widely across the country and local intelligence will be needed to develop a robust evidence base.

94. Police, in particular safer neighbourhood and community policing teams, may be particularly useful in pulling together local knowledge and local perspectives to inform procedures. Voluntary and community organisations as well as local neighbourhood management teams, registered social landlords and other ‘frontline’ workers will have ‘soft’ intelligence and knowledge of what is happening on the ground. Schools and other educational establishments can also be useful contributors to evidence gathering.

95. Young people should be involved, where possible, in building intelligence on gangs, including identifying appropriate solutions and support. Youth inclusion projects and projects run by voluntary and community organisations may be particular methods used to engage young people from a variety of backgrounds to talk about their experiences of gangs, whether involved in one or not. Gang members who have been convicted and reformed gang members may be particularly accessible and willing to talk about their lives and local gangs.

96. LSCBs should make use of this evidence base to determine whether safeguarding young people at risk of harm in a gang context is a local priority. Where evidence gathered indicates that gangs are not a problem in a local area, then it may be useful in identifying other young people at risk of harm through youth offending or violent extremism as well as in identifying young people with other specific risk factors such as domestic violence.

97. Protocols and local procedures should be developed in a local context but sharing practice and knowledge with other local authorities with similar problems may also be useful in establishing procedures.

98. Particular areas that protocols may need to cover are recognition, referral; multi-agency decision-making and information-sharing; and ongoing case management.

99. The LSCB may well consider how to ensure effective implementation of any local protocols and procedures related to gangs that are developed. Regular
reviews of the protocols and outcomes may be useful, as well as evaluation of how many young people are being referred due to concerns related to gangs, on what basis they are being referred and the action taken. Local or regional evaluation should assess whether young people involved, or at risk of being involved with gangs, who were previously not receiving support, are being supported.

100. Securing support from senior management in the local authority for early intervention and safeguarding in relation to gang activity will help facilitate multi-agency working and help build agreement that the issue of gangs and young people is one for prevention and early intervention as well as enforcement.

Multi-Agency Working and Information-Sharing

101. There is likely to be a group of young people known to a number of agencies as being at risk of becoming involved in gangs and who without intervention will probably go on to take part in gangs and be at risk of harm as a result of this. Effective information-sharing can help prevent these young people from entering into the gang culture and can be a route to these young people being referred to social care professionals. ‘Real time’ information-sharing is important to avoid missing critical intelligence which could reduce harm and manage risk of young people becoming involved in gangs.

102. Protocols should be used as a means of developing and maintaining a consistent and informed multi-agency approach. A particular focus on effective information-sharing between professionals and agencies will be necessary to ensure that referral and support of young people involved in gangs is successful identification.

103. The LSCB can play a role in developing a consensus and understanding on the role of safeguarding child protection in relation to gangs and young people, informed by this practice guidance. Local evidence and risk factors should be commonly understood by professionals and the processes for referral and information-sharing clear and followed by all. The government’s guidance on information-sharing should be used to support this.

104. LSCBs may want to consider putting in place a joint agency group to focus on gang activity or becoming involved in an existing group within the local authority. The role of this group would be decided at a local level. It could be convened to support information-sharing, preventative work across the local authority or have an overview of threshold levels across different agencies and the use of specific risk assessment processes. The development of risk management panels or similar multi-agency fora can also be useful in the ongoing case management of those at risk.

105. As highlighted throughout this guidance, key to tackling gang activity is a sharply focused multi-agency approach driven by intelligence based evidence and involving the police, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, children service’s and any other relevant stakeholders. This multi-agency approach to information sharing and tackling gang activity in local areas also allows for joint

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15 [www.ecm.gov.uk/informationsharing](http://www.ecm.gov.uk/informationsharing)
partnership working in tackling the difficult decisions and choices that local authorities and agencies have to face when considering how best to prevent children from becoming involved in gang activity. It should include systematic identification of individual children at risk including the younger siblings of known gang members, rigorous tracking of those children and a planned programme of interventions and diversions, including work with parents to protect the children, and help prevent them being drawn back into gang activity.

**Case Study - Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board (NCSCB)**

Nottingham recognises that the local gang culture is changing with a changing pattern of children and young people’s involvement. Increasingly younger children are recruited into gangs and a diverse range of communities are affected.

The development of a clear strategy and protocol by NCSCB and its partners is planned within the current 3 year Business Plan and will help to create a seamless and collective response to tackling gang activity – one in which agencies are responding appropriately and consistently, no matter with which agency the children, young person or family member gets in touch. Use of the Common Assessment Framework and NCSCB Child Protection Procedures will be implicit within the process, which will aim to promote mutual understanding between the partnerships’ in dealing with the related problems of gang and gun culture:

The NCSCB also addresses issues of inter-agency working by improving the interface relationships between CDP, NCSCB and the YOT through agreeing/setting out shared practice and assessment guidelines and training requirements, in recognition of the fact that the majority of the work will be delivered by people doing street work with children and young people at risk. An area where the multi-partnership approach has been successful in bringing together different agendas is the link between NCSCB and Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) where the head of Safeguarding for Nottingham City is a member of the MAPPA panel. The police, as a member of NCSCB, have seconded a police inspector to the MAPPA coordinator and have developed multi-agency training.

Further information on this case study and others can be found at: [http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/_files/61135F4F15B7B2D31F0EA26198C8E500.pdf](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/_files/61135F4F15B7B2D31F0EA26198C8E500.pdf)

106. Children’s Trust Boards should play their part in ensuring good relations and buy-in from key partners. This will facilitate the formation of multi-agency groups that can make good use of existing expertise on gangs and bring together that expertise with other professionals’ knowledge and experience of child protection and safeguarding. Particular professionals that it may be useful to involve in such a group are:
- LA children’s social care staff/social worker teams
- Family and parenting support teams
- Safer neighbourhood policing and community policing teams
- Antisocial behaviour action teams
- Youth offending teams and youth inclusion and support panels (YISPs)
- Local authority education services, Headteachers and other education leaders
- Social inclusion teams
- School attendance improvement services
- Health professionals
- Voluntary and community organisations
- Police intelligence or local police firearms desks

107. It will be particularly important to establish good relations and buy-in from the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and to balance the need for law enforcement with the need for safeguarding and prevention.

108. If the remit of multi-agency professional meetings covers individual case management then agencies currently involved with the child or family who have appropriate contributions to make should be involved in the discussion about that particular young person.

109. Multi-agency partnerships can maximise the chances for successful prevention across an area, and successful intervention with individual young people, through effective information-sharing and the potential pooling of resources to help capacities of agencies to respond appropriately.

The diagram below sets out the process that LSCBs are recommended to follow, including when working in partnership with other LSCBs across area boundaries:
Prevention

110. Preventative work in relation to gangs should be a key part of LSCB strategies. The LSCB should link up with other preventative work in the area, establishing strong partnerships with social exclusion teams, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), the police and other agencies.

111. LSCBs should have an overview of the work of agencies in the area, such as the police, local authority children’s services and the voluntary and community sector, to minimise the risk of other children becoming involved in gang activity. Knowledge of local and national prevention schemes should be shared with social care professionals and other practitioners so that appropriate support services are put in place for young people.

112. The LSCB or multi-agency group on gangs could play a role in tracking all children referred to social care due to gang-related concerns. In particular the LSCB could map where and why young people have been referred. Lessons learnt from this overview should be shared with other professionals and agencies to inform wider preventative work and build up a profile of gangs and young people in the area.

113. Particular attention in preventative work should be paid to engaging with young people at high risk or becoming involved in gangs through targeted activity and consultation. Schools and voluntary and community organisations can be well placed to do this, through workshops, posters and communications, sport and other positive activities. Information from these sessions can be useful in understanding the issues in a local area, including why young people are
becoming involved in gangs, and should feed back into the local protocols and evidence base.

**Case study – Greater Manchester Police Operation Cougar**

Operation Cougar is aimed at combating and reducing gang related tensions within specific areas in Manchester. Within these areas it has become evident that children as young as 14 are now recognised gang members, and that 12 year olds are seen associating with gang members.

The risk posed to these children is predominantly caused by their general behaviour including, who they associate with (known gang members), the areas they frequent (locations known as ‘gang hangouts’), and their general conduct. Whilst this general behaviour is not criminal and does not make them gang members, the perception of other persons, particularly opposing gangs means that they are likely to branded as gang members.

In order to highlight the risk their general conduct is putting them in, a ‘letter of concern’, has been devised to serve on both the young person at risk and their parent(s) or guardian. Each letter is personalised to reflect precisely what it is about that child’s conduct or behaviour that is putting them at increased risk.

The letters are served in person by members of the Police. The response of parents and guardians to this approach has been extremely positive and supportive of the police action. The issuing of the letter of concern automatically triggers a referral to MMAGS (Manchester Multi Agency Gang Strategy) who visit the family, normally within 24 hours of the issuing of the letter.

Further detailed information on Operation Cougar can found at [annex A](#).

**Training**

114. LSCBs are responsible for ensuring that single agency or inter-agency training of those who work with children, or in services affecting the safety and welfare of children, is provided in order to meet local needs. Training may need to be delivered to practitioners to raise awareness of local protocols, increase their confidence of making referrals related to gangs and to enable them to be comfortable with local preventative programmes related to gangs as support services for young people. Training on safeguarding young people from gang violence should be made available to all relevant agencies.

115. There may existing activity in the area aimed at raising awareness of the risk factors associated with gangs, for example in local schools or police. The
LSCB will want to make the necessary links with this work and ensure that safeguarding young people in relation to gangs is a core part of other local work on gangs.

**Child Death Panels and Serious Case Reviews**

116. In accordance with *Working Together* (Chapters 7 and 8), LSCBs undertaking Serious Case Reviews and Child Death Review processes in relation to individual incidents, and where gang activity is a factor, should consider the safeguarding needs of any siblings in the victim’s family, or those of other associated children and young people, and, where appropriate, take action to safeguard their welfare.

117. LSCBs may want to revisit previous Serious Case Reviews on children who have been involved in gangs to harness learning and enhance the local evidence base before developing local protocols. They should continue to update their evidence base with any findings from relevant Serious Case Reviews or Child Death Reviews.

**Section 8: Other Agencies’ Roles and Responsibilities**

118. The statutory duties of a range of bodies and professionals are explained in the government’s guidance *Making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under section 11 of the Children Act 2004* (2007).\(^{16}\)

119. Whenever a professional or volunteer comes into contact with a child for whom they have concerns regarding their safety or welfare as a result of involvement with gangs, they should consult and follow the guidance set out in Chapter Five of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2006).

**Police**

120. The police have a particular role and responsibility in identifying and referring young people to local authority children’s social care services. Police, especially safer neighbourhood policing and community safety teams, should be aware of and know how to use risk assessment processes and should be part of the development and agreement of local protocols.

121. The police play a key role in sharing information with other professionals, in particular with children’s social care staff. They should ensure that intelligence on young people’s involvement with gangs and any risk that they might face is shared with social workers. Police Stop and Search information, for example, offers useful insight into young people’s lifestyles and behaviour. Teams within the police should share information as appropriate e.g. child abuse investigation teams and safer neighbourhood policing teams.

122. They should be particularly aware of any siblings or other children living in households which are connected to gangs in some way, and should share intelligence on this with social workers where they have concerns about the safety and welfare of these children.

123. Intelligence on high risk, dangerous households and individuals should be shared with other professionals who may be in contact with the household in another capacity, such as health professionals and social workers, so that the risk to professionals’ safety can be properly managed. The identification of high risk, dangerous households and dangerous individuals needs to be based on an assessment of risk shared between the police and the local authority.

124. Police officers who attend child protection conferences should ensure they are fully informed about the case and experienced in assessments and the subsequent decision-making processes.

125. Under section 46 of the Children Act 1989, if the police have reasonable cause to believe that unless they take action the child is likely to suffer significant harm, they may use their powers to either remove a child to a safe place or prevent the child’s removal from a safe place. As noted above, if the police give an Osman warning to a young person they should inform children’s social care and consider if there is an immediate threat to the young person’s safety.

Youth Offending Teams

126. Staff working in Youth Offending Teams are likely to come into contact with many children who are involved in gangs or at risk of involvement in gangs. If a YOT has concerns for the safety and welfare of a child that they come into contact with, safeguarding procedures should be followed immediately and the local authority children’s social care and police should be contacted. If possible the YOTs should not simply work with the young person but also with the child’s family.

127. YOTs should share information about involvement with gangs with children’s social care services and other relevant partner agencies such as schools and Connexions so that this can be taken into account of this in making assessment and in putting in place appropriate support for the child.

Schools and Educational Establishments

128. DCSF has published guidance for schools on gangs and group offending. It provides information on the prevalence and characteristics of gangs, advice on prevention within school, advice on incident management, and guidance on working with external partners and agencies. The guidance includes advice for schools on using safeguarding procedures for young people at risk of harm from gangs. It can be found at, http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=12639.

129. Schools affected by gang issues will need to work in partnership with professionals such as the police, youth offending teams and local authority children’s social care services. Safer School Partnerships can be an effective forum for this multi-agency working.
130. Where schools or other educational establishments such as colleges have concerns about the welfare or safety of a child in relation to gangs they should inform the senior member of staff with designated responsibility for child protection and ensure that the police or local authority’s children’s social care services are contacted. Schools can be well-placed to pick up signs of gang activity and identifying those at risk of harm as a result of gangs including siblings of gang members and girls at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse by gang members.

131. Schools will also need to work closely with multi-agency partners to protect children at risk. The role of the school should include the close monitoring of a child’s attendance, and offering extended activities as part of an agreed programme of work that is agreed directly with parents, and communicated regularly with any key worker and the multi-agency team.

**Searches in schools and colleges**

School staff in England have the power to search, without consent, any pupil they suspect of carrying a knife or other weapon in school, or on an educational visit. Schools can also screen pupils at random, without suspicion, using a screening arch or an electronic ‘wand’. Schools are not required by the law to inform a parent before performing a search, or to get parental consent. It is a criminal offence to bring a knife or other offensive weapon into school.

132. Schools should review their safeguarding arrangements and the training provided for staff and ensure that processes and procedures are in place which reflect gang-related risks. This is particularly important when the child is off site, for example if they are participating in provision which takes place within a further education college.

**Health**

133. Health professionals may become concerned about a child’s involvement in gangs, for example from visiting a family home, receiving a disclosure of a crime from a family member, witnessing criminal activity or unwittingly seeing firearms or weapons during a visit. They should contact the police or local authority children’s social care services where they have concerns for a child’s safety or welfare as well as being alert to any risk of harm to the professional themselves.

134. Professionals should be particularly alert to stab wounds and injuries caused by sharp instruments or knives. NHS Trusts may want to consider having protocols in place for these occurrences, such as increased security in A and E and information-sharing protocols between health professionals and the police and children’s social care services.

135. Health professionals may also come into contact with girls whom they
suspect may have been sexually exploited or abused, perhaps through Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinics, sexual health services and GP practices. These professionals should be alert to a child’s likely reluctance and fear of discussing this and should contact the local authority children’s social care services.

136. Further information on the role of health services in safeguarding children can be found in Chapter 2 of Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006).

Voluntary and community organisations

137. Voluntary and community organisations can have good knowledge of local community issues, young people and families involved in gang activity and the risk factors of children being affected by gang violence. Because of their knowledge and experience in working with some of the most vulnerable children and young people in communities these organisations can be best placed to reach children who are at risk of gang-related harm.

138. These organisations can be particularly helpful in building a local evidence base on gangs and appropriate reactions in a local context. They can help overcome the media hype and myths surrounding gangs and provide ‘soft’ intelligence to help build up a profile of gang activity in the area. They should be encouraged to share information with the police and local authority’s children’s social care to safeguard individual children from harm.

139. Volunteers and professionals in these organisations often provide vital support for prevention or rehabilitation from gangs as well as support to victims of gang-related crime and children who have suffered from sexual exploitation or abuse related to gangs. These can be trusted organisations in communities that may have a high level of distrust of state sector bodies.

140. Community groups and voluntary organisations should make their staff and volunteers aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and how they should respond to child protection concerns in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006). They need to work effectively with LSCBs and be confident with the risk factors related to gang involvement or being affected by gang violence.
Annex A

Case study – Greater Manchester Police Operation Cougar

Operation Cougar is a case study on the development of strong information sharing and multi-agency work to tackle gang activity within a local area, and raise the awareness to children of the dangers of being involved in gang activity.

The objectives of Operation Cougar are:

- Protect and preserve life of the public, police, emergency responders, potential victims and subjects.
- Proactively identify young persons, who by virtue of their behaviour or location or time of day (for example, out on the street in the early hours) may be at increased risk of falling victim to gun crime.
- Prevent escalation in firearms discharges and tensions
- To ensure effective joint working between all police and partner agencies and specifically, MMAGS, CDRP, Local Authority, LCJB/G, Children's Services, Social Services and where appropriate the wider community; and any other organisation or agency deemed necessary and appropriate.
- Develop a better understanding of current tensions through improved intelligence analysis and assessment via weekly threat / risk assessment.
- Arrest and prosecute subjects using any legislation.
- Reassure and engage with the wider community and elected members.
- Develop a robust media strategy with key messages, highlighting successes during the last two financial years.

Implementation

The following paragraphs explain how Operation Cougar set about achieving the objectives set.

Protection of life

The protection and preservation of life as with any police operation is of paramount concern. Increased numbers of police officers both in uniform and in plain clothes were deployed in the areas of concern. Detailed risk assessments for officers deployed were conducted which included direction that officers in plain clothes can only stop suspects with uniformed support present.

Young People at risk

It has become evident that gang members in the area are becoming younger. Boys as young as 14 are now recognised gang members, and boys of 12 years are seen associating with gang members.

From intelligence gained by officers from the Xcalibre Task Force, (whose sole responsibility is to deal with gangs in the South Manchester area), 20 children were initially identified as being most at risk. The risk posed to these children was predominantly caused by their general behaviour including, who they were associating with (known gang members), the areas they frequented (locations
known as ‘gang hangouts’), and their general conduct. Whilst this general behaviour was not criminal and did not make them gang members, the perception of other persons, particularly opposing gangs, would be likely to brand them as gang members.

**Letter of Concern**

In order to highlight the risk their general conduct was putting the children in, a ‘letter of concern’) was devised to serve on both the young person at risk and their parent(s) or guardian. The purpose of the letter was to highlight the risk to that child that the police perceive them to be under. Each letter is personalised to reflect precisely what it is about that child’s conduct or behaviour that is putting them at increased risk.

It is important to note that this conduct may not in any way be criminal, but simply because of either, who they were associating with, or where they were frequenting, and the time of day, they were placing themselves (often unwittingly) at risk.

The letters were served in person by members of the Task Force. The response of the parents and guardians to this approach was extremely positive and supportive of the police action. The issuing of the letter of concern automatically triggered a referral to MMAGS (Manchester Multi Agency Gang Strategy) who visited the family, normally within 24 hours of the issuing of the letter.

As well as the initial 20 young people identified as at risk, a further 36 vulnerable were identified (and served with letters of concern), as the operation progressed.

**Partner Agency Intervention**

A MMAGS representative attended the family address of each child issued with a letter of concern. They talked to the family about the general dangers of gangs, what help is available to avoid the child becoming ensconced in gang activity, and conducted an assessment of the child’s vulnerability.

As a result of the MMAGS assessment, if the threat was deemed significant enough, the young person was referred to the Manchester and Trafford Violent Gangs Board. The board is made up of representatives of all partner agencies involved in child welfare issues in the area. This referral resulted in a meeting where the risk to the child would be assessed by each representative, and a comprehensive action plan put into place to reduce the risk to that child. The action plan was constantly reviewed and amended where appropriate via regular follow up meetings.

**Use of Emergency Protection Orders**

Where children continued to put themselves at risk by continuing to associate with gang members or in areas where there is increased gang activity there is a need for further action to protect the child. Ultimately this is in the form of emergency protection orders (EPOs).
Where a child is identified as falling within this category, an initial assessment of the threat level posed to that child is undertaken. If it is deemed the child to be in significant danger an EPO will be used to protect the child.

The use of an EPO will trigger immediate Section 47 enquiries and a care assessment by all partner agencies.

**Co-operation**

Co-operation both between police divisions and departments, and between partner agencies is fundamental to the success of the operation.

Task Force staff engaged on the operation are required to compile a comprehensive summary of all intelligence and events that occurred that evening which is circulated to senior management before the officers retire from duty. This presents an accurate and up to date intelligence picture of the current threat levels. This in turn enables the Operation Cougar management team to effectively assess the current threat level and to decide on staffing levels, and tactics for the proceeding days. After being sanitised, the summary is circulated to all partner agencies. This gives these agencies an accurate, up to date picture of people actively involved in gang activity, many of whom are already subject of referrals to these agencies, this allows early intervention and early identification of risks.

Regular consultation is kept with partner agencies. For this process to be successful it is imperative that all agencies involved ‘buy in’ to the process fully.

**Is Cougar A Success?**

During the 76 days of the first operation there were no gang related firearms discharges. There had never been a calendar month without at least one gang related firearms discharge.

Between the 14th February and the 30th September 2008, Operation Cougar has been deployed on 126 occasions. In this seven and a half month period there were 15 confirmed firearms discharges in the areas affected by the gang problem, of which three were gang related. In the corresponding period in 2007, there were 47 confirmed firearms discharges, of which 29 were gang related. This represents a 68% decrease in firearms discharges overall, and a 90% decrease in gang related firearms discharges.

Initial evaluation suggests this significant decrease is due largely to:

Effective targeting of known gang members has led to a reluctance for gang members to carry firearms and frequent areas where they will be targeted. Discouragement of gangs to gather in public areas has taken away potential targets. Continuous targeting of gang members and those associating with them, and the removal of children seen frequenting with gang members, has led to a reluctance for those on the periphery of gang activity to become involved.
There have been 200 arrests for various offences, and nine section 1 or 5 firearms recovered.

36 vulnerable young people have been identified and referred to partner agencies and four emergency protection orders have been invoked.

1437 stop searches have taken place, and to date not one formal complaint has been made against police.

**Conclusion**

Much of the success of Operation Cougar can be credited to effective partnership working.

The operation itself has been tailor made to tackle the specific gun and gang problem in the South Manchester area, and whilst many of the tactics maybe successful in other areas, other tactics may not.

Fundamental to Cougar’s success is the manner in which it evolves and develops to meet the changing threat posed by the gangs. Many of the tactics now employed on Cougar have been developed by officers engaged in working Cougar on a day to day basis. This hands on knowledge is the cornerstone to the operation and has allowed Cougar to keep one step ahead of the gangs over what is now a significant period of time.
Annex B: Legal Framework

Children Act 1989

141. A child is defined as ‘in need’ by section 17(10) of the Children Act if:

- s/he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him/her of services; or
- his/her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him/her of such services; or
- s/he is disabled.

142. Section 20 placed a duty on the local authority to provide accommodation for any child in need within their area who appears to them to require accommodation as a result of:

- There being no person who has parental responsibility for him; or
- His/her being lost or having been abandoned; or
- The person who has been caring for him/her being prevented (whether or not permanently and for whatever reason) from providing him with suitable accommodation or care.

143. Section 20(3) of the Children Act 1989 provides that every local authority shall provide accommodation for any child in need within their area who has reached the age of 16 and whose welfare the authority consider is likely to be seriously prejudiced if they do not provide him with accommodation.

The Concept of Significant Harm

144. The Children Act 1989 introduced the concept of significant harm as the threshold for compulsory intervention in family life, requiring the courts to consider the child’s welfare as their paramount consideration in any application made under the Children Act 1989. A court may only make a care order (committing the child to the care of the local authority) or supervision order (putting the child under the supervision of a local authority) in respect of a child if it is satisfied that:

- The child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm; and
- That the harm or likelihood of harm if an order is not made is not what it would be reasonable for a parent to give, or that the child is beyond parental control (section 31).

145. Where a local authority has reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm,
the authority shall make, or cause to be made, such enquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child’s welfare (Section 47 (1)(b)).

146. ‘Harm’ is defined as:

- Ill treatment, or the impairment of health or development (which includes for example impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another);
- Ill treatment includes sexual abuse, and forms of ill treatment which are not physical, for example emotional abuse;
- Health means physical and mental health; and
- Development means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development.

147. This may include seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another (section 31 of the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2004).

148. Other legislation which may be useful in the context of gangs:

- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Criminal Justice and Police Act 2004
- Criminal Justice Act 1988
Annex C: References and Useful Links


HM Government (2006), What to do if you’re worried a child is being abused www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/search/IG00182


[HM Government (2008), Youth Crime Action Plan ]


Home Office (2008), Guidance for Young People on Gangs www.teenissues.co.uk/saygoodbyetoschoolgangs.html.

Mccormick, Naomi, B. (1995), ‘Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood and
Privilege on Campus’, *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, Vol. 24

