

London Borough of Merton

**Report and recommendations
arising from the scrutiny review of gang culture
among young people in Merton**

June 2008

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Foreword by the review chair

Criminal activity is nothing new. The use of guns and knives to commit crime is also not new. What is new and is cause for extreme concern is the frequency with which weapons especially knives are used nowadays to commit crime and most worrying of all, there is a rise in the use of knives amongst young people to commit crimes against young people.

I was extremely pleased when I was asked to chair this review because more than anything else I wanted to get a closer insight into what it is that causes our youngsters to get to the stage where they now feel that there is nothing wrong with carrying a knife to school or carrying a knife generally. Those I have spoken to say they do so in order to “protect” themselves. In my opinion they do so without seriously considering that they might themselves become the perpetrator of the crime. I was also enthusiastic about the possibility that together with my colleagues we could come up with some recommendations – solutions belong to a perfect world - both as preventative measure and follow-up.

A review such as this has posed many limitations, for example, as councillors we do not do the work on the ground as it were, and we have had to work within certain guidelines, as this is a very broad topic.

A great deal of good work has already been done and is presently being carried out on the issue of gang culture in Merton. We did not want to conduct a review simply for the sake of doing so. We did not want to shrug our shoulders or throw our hands up in the air in a sense of hopelessness when we heard about another teenage murder on our streets. We wanted to look into what we could do differently to help to combat gang culture in Merton.

It goes without saying that the majority of our young people have a lot of talent and skills and a great deal to offer society, but things can go badly wrong when as a society we cease to listen to them, when we cease to teach or uphold and appreciate moral values and standards of behaviour and try to do too little too late. Everyone, and that includes youngsters, need to be loved, encouraged and rewarded when they do good and to be deterred from doing wrong.

Councillor Patricia Lewis

Chair of the review task group and member of the Life Chances Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Summary of recommendations and observations

Recommendations:

R1 The council must recognise that children are being exposed to gang culture at a younger age and should develop prevention strategies that include a focus on this age category. This could be by encouraging schools to undertake workshops/lectures on a continuous basis predominantly for children between 8 to 13 years to actively discourage them from glamourising criminal gang culture.

R2 The council should provide a continued service of leisure provision (i.e. between the play service & the Youth Service) in order to include children aged 8-13.

R3 The council should ensure that it educates the parents of children aged 8-13 and younger about the signs of gang and criminal activity as part of its parenting strategy.

R4 The council and partners should ensure that feedback from school officers is communicated around all partners.

R5 The council should provide a comprehensive list of information to parents to enable quick and easier access to partners with whom the council are working, such as Anti-graffiti teams, Safer Neighbourhood Teams and Youth Offending Team, in order to help combat gang culture.

R6 Councillors should be asked to become involved in initiatives to counter gang culture whenever their support is useful.

R7 The council must recognise that finance plays a vital role if these outcomes are to be achieved.

Observations:

O1 The council's emphasis on literacy & communication in Merton's schools is an important tool in arresting alienation in young people and may be a factor in deterring them from joining gangs.

O2 The council should continue to recognise good practice in relation to activities for younger people and facilitate its development across the borough where practical.

O3 The council and partners should continue to explore ways to bridge the gap between the police and younger people.

O4 The council has a pivotal role in involving all the organisations/groups/individuals who contribute to combating gang culture. It should continue to perform and expand that role.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. Each year the Scrutiny function at the Council identifies key issues to be scrutinised through a review process. A review can be carried out for a number of different reasons and will normally make recommendations & observations to improve outcomes for the local community. Elected Members, working together in task groups, undertake these reviews.
- 1.2. The Life Chances Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to carry out the review of gang culture among young people in Merton at its meeting in June 2007. A task group was set up of five councillors and two young people representatives who are co-opted members on the Life Chances Panel. The task group developed a plan/scope for the review that was agreed at Life Chances Scrutiny Panel meeting on 17 July 2007.

- 1.3. The purpose of the review was:

“To look at the issue of criminal gang activity and determine ways to discourage young people from joining criminal gangs in Merton.

And, that the key areas of enquiry for the review were agreed as:

- To determine levels of involvement of young people in gang culture in Merton – in both numbers and depth of involvement;
- To look at how it is affecting young people in Merton;
- To look at how it is affecting families and siblings of young gang members;
- Investigate how agencies are working in partnership across the borough in order to improve the position in Merton;
- Investigate how we are working across borough boundaries and with other local authorities;
- Investigate the council’s role in improving the position in Merton; and
- To look at best practice both locally and nationally.

- 1.4. The task group carried out its review as follows:

July 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing the STABB video • Interview with Paolo Nistri (Safer Merton Partnership)
September 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with Jason Young (Youth Worker) • Meeting with young people at Farm Road youth office
October 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with Malcolm Cameron (Metropolitan Police) • Review of Merton Gangs Intervention Plan and Tilly Award Bid
November 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing the ‘Consequences’ video • Interview with Pat Dejesus (Grafitti Team)
January 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site visit to Waltham Forest • Meeting with Andy Redfern (YMCA), John Shelly (YOT), Bernadette Sawney (Groundwork), and Rob Mobile (MVSC).
February 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress meeting
March 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with Keith Shipman and Kevin Vickers
April 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final meeting to agree recommendations and observations

2. Local context

- 2.1. Merton is a diverse outer London borough in the south west of London, with a population of 44,000 0-19 year olds. This figure is projected to rise to over 51,000 in the next 10 years. Deprivation rates in Merton are relatively low overall. However the needs of local children and young people are characterised by a marked contrast between the more affluent areas in the west of the borough, such as Wimbledon, and the more deprived areas in the east, particularly Mitcham. Average household income in east Merton is 23% lower than the borough average. Nearly a quarter of children and young people live in areas that are within the 30% most deprived in the country and 21% of Merton's children live in overcrowded housing. There are 5,000 lone parents in Merton.
- 2.2. Areas of particular affluence in the west of Merton mean that in overall terms Merton is statistically a comparatively wealthy borough. This has historically hidden some of the clear deprivation shown in 2.1 above and made certain grant funding, unavailable to the borough.

3. Gang culture and the problem in Merton

- 3.1. There is a national concern that gang culture is increasing across Britain and especially in London. In 2007 the BBC¹ cited an unpublished metropolitan police report that identified 169 different gangs across London. According to the report Merton contained 12 gangs².
- 3.2. There is little consensus about what constitutes a gang. There is disagreement over the extent such groups can be viewed solely in terms of their criminal activities or whether their primary function is to serve social and emotional needs³. Additionally, it is felt that the traditional American definition of a gang based on notions of hierarchy and depicting rituals and symbols as essential to membership may lead to a stereotype that is misplaced in a British context.
- 3.3. The London Borough of Croydon has nevertheless informally adopted the following definition of a gang, which was originally developed by the Manchester Multi-Agency Gangs Strategy (MMAGS):

*'A group of three or more people who have a distinct identity (e.g. a name or badge/emblem), which commits general crime or anti-social behaviour as part of that identity, and uses (or is reasonably suspected of using) firearms or the threat of firearms in the commission of offences'*⁴.
- 3.4. In Merton the problem of gang culture originally manifested through the Merton Borough Investigation Unit which revealed an increase in street crime of 48.2% in the last quarter of 2005 v 2004. A large majority of these incidents occurred in a specific geographical area, within a one-mile radius of Mitcham town centre. In particular, robbery showed a large increase of 111%. Further analysis showed that in 131 of the 171 cases 77% of the perpetrators or suspected perpetrators were young people and, that in 84% of the incidents young people were the victims. Critically, in 94% of the cases more than one perpetrator was involved with 65% of incidents involving a

¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/6383933.stm>

² No evidence was brought forward to the panel to substantiate this.

³ Youth Justice Board (2007) Groups, Gangs and weapons

⁴ While it is accepted that knives are commonly present in Merton gang culture, no strong evidence was presented to the review to suggest the widespread or organised use of firearms

group of more than two. These figures alerted researchers to the possible emergence of gang activity⁵.

- 3.5. The group were told by witnesses that in London some gangs are centred on dealing drugs but that this does not seem to be the case in Merton at present. Merton gangs are primarily focused around territory and safety and the main reason young people join gangs is for identity, safety and power.
- 3.6. There have been recent developments which suggest an increase in the number of girls who are getting involved in gang culture and who have established gang identities of their own.
- 3.7. There are still many more boys than girls in gangs, but the number of girls carrying weapons appears to be on the increase.

4. Work being undertaken in Merton

- 4.1 The Council already undertakes a wide range of work to tackle the problem of gang culture across Merton and, following the gang-related fatal stabbing of a young person in 2006, intervention work by the council in relation to gangs has been stepped up. It is a top priority in the borough; work to date has been highly productive and clear plans for the future have been produced.
- 4.2 This section outlines the work that the council and its partners are currently undertaking and will highlight recommendations throughout.
- 4.3 The JAR undertaken in 2007 wrote positively of the council's activity towards gang activity:

'There is a clear and appropriate focus on gang activity, with good links between the relevant public agencies, both locally and across London. The range of approaches to this problem, and to preventative and intervention work more generally, is good. It recognises that flexible packages, targeted at individuals and local areas have the best chance of success. There is clear evidence that both young people and parents and carers value the support provided, and levels of antisocial behaviour and low-level crime have been reduced. The deployment of police officers in secondary schools is a real strength. It contributes both to the improvement of behaviour within schools and local areas and to reducing the fear of crime and bullying for young people. The prompt response by the local authority to graffiti and vandalism in the wider community also helps in addressing such fear (Page 20)⁶.

- 4.4 The Merton Teenage Gangs Initiative in March 2006 through the local multi-agency Joint Tasking Group (JTG) with the aim of developing partnership working to problem-solve the increase in gang-related crime and disorder. The JTG is significant as many of the underlying causes of gang culture can only be addressed through a partnership approach that involve partners from the statutory, private and voluntary sectors.
- 4.5 The Merton Gangs Intervention Plan was developed by the JTG to focus their work in order to make a significant impact:

⁵ Adapted from Tilley Awards application

<http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/tilley/tilleyawards2007.htm>

⁶ http://www.merton.gov.uk/jar_report_merton.pdf

- Strand 1: Diversionary activities to provide a series of structured and flexible initiatives for engaging young people in, associated with, and on the cusp of gangs.
- Strand 2: Enforcement activities to carry out initiatives designed to catch and deter offenders thus reducing gang-related crime.
- Strand 3: Ongoing intelligence gathering activities to provide regularly updated and intelligence as to developing dynamics of gangs in Merton and establish pan-borough information and best practice sharing.
- Strand 4: Media/communications to publicise initiatives and activities for general public information and maintain open channels of communication between stake holding agencies.

4.6 Merton's approach to gangs has included a multitude of approaches. The councillors were introduced to many of these through discussions with officers.

4.7 The task group were introduced to the S.T.A.B.B. (Students and Teachers Against Bullets and Blades) initiative, which is a series of workshops that explore issues and attitudes about gang-related behaviour, and also viewed the Consequences film. Officers described the positive general reaction from young people after viewing the film and highlighted the questions they asked in response. These included:

- Stop and search issues and Section 60 need more explanation of why stops are needed
- They wanted to know more about the recent violent death of a young person in borough
- How young people who are victims of crime can/should report it.

Film was taken to all secondary schools in the borough apart from two and the council is planning to roll it out again early next year. Once the film has been released for 'open' viewing, it will be taken to youth clubs and similar places.

4.8 The Merton youth service developed a documentary as part of the S.T.A.B.B. programme to form part of a toolkit for that will be used by them in schools and other work with young people to address gang issues. The documentary acts as a deterrent and features both current and former gang members talking about the impact of their criminal record on being able to get jobs and other issues.

The documentary highlighted to the groups of the issues that need to be addressed such as supporting parents, providing young people with something to do, providing a means to tap into and support the talents of young people.

4.9 The Police have taken a strong approach to dealing with gangs and have embedded themselves within the partnership arrangements.

4.10 There has been a focus on reducing knives on street with an emphasis on enforcement. Initiatives have included a Knife Amnesty with surrender bins and a mobile detector arch that acts as a high visibility deterrent

4.11 Members of the task group informed the police representatives of their recent meeting with young people where they had been told that there was poor relationship between young people and the police, often believing that police only come to them when there is a problem and do not engage with them before there is a problem⁷.

⁷ Informal reports based on interviews with schools and community officers suggest that this is not always the case. See 4.12 & 4.13.

- 4.12 In response the police representative said that he recognised that issue and there was some truth in this. However, police are making a lot of efforts to address this, for example, young people have been asked to put forward a priority in each ward in the borough, the number of schools officers have increased and there is now one in each school in borough, police cadets operating out to St Marks, and Kickz⁸ operating from Harris Academy with more planned.
- 4.13 The role of the SSO's (Safer Schools Officers) is primarily to ensure that the places of learning in Merton are places of safety and have become an integral part of the school teaching team, offering advice, opinions and views in relation to all school issues. They are part of their Safer Neighbourhood team and ensure that the schools issues are represented at local community meetings.
- 4.14 The programme has been successful. Youth projects are a huge success, truancy rates have fallen, children and staff feel safer within their learning environments and safety messages can be delivered easily to every child on the Borough all of which aid in breaking down the barriers between police and younger people. The SSO's also act as an intelligence database as they are able to feedback information and opinions from pupils to the wider policing/social community.
- 4.15 The SSO's still face a number of challenges; the main challenge is to overcome the conflict between being part of the school as well as the Metropolitan Police Service. Crucially, they need to enforce the law and engage with the young people and at times these are challenging and possibly conflicting agendas.
- 4.16 Graffiti is closely linked with gang culture. Gangs often use 'tags' to mark territorial boundaries. The graffiti team work closely with police, schools, housing, parks and southwest trains and remove graffiti free of charge. Legal graffiti walls discussed but members agreed with the current stance not to have legal graffiti walls⁹.
- 4.17 The groups explored the role of community groups in relation to gang culture. In particular the groups spoke to the coordinator of Merton Street Pastors whose work complements that of the Council and Police. Street Pastors¹⁰ are a Church based group operating in Mitcham. As their co-ordinator stated; *'We're not out to preach, but it's the church's response to working alongside the community to make Merton a safer place'*.
- The group felt that this was a good example of a community organisation in response the problem of gang culture.
- 4.18 A drama project called The 'Bare Truths'¹¹ has been established in partnership between a theatre company (Pro-ThinC) and Merton Youth Justice Service. It explores issues around gangs and gang violence, and the young people involved are able to express themselves in a safe environment, whilst being mentored and encouraged to reflect on their experiences and take responsibility for their actions.
- 4.19 SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) is a comprehensive approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and well-

⁸ <http://www.footballfoundation.org.uk/our-schemes/kickz/>

⁹ From interview with Pat Dejesus/John Bull

¹⁰ <http://www.streetpastors.org.uk/pages/merton.html>

¹¹ http://www.theambassadors.com/wimbledonstudio/basket_sp_p4391.html

being of all who learn and work in schools. It proposes that the skills will be most effectively developed by pupils and staff through:

- A whole-school approach to create the climate and conditions that implicitly promote the skills and allow these to be practised and consolidated.
- Direct and focused learning opportunities (during tutor time, across the curriculum, in focus groups and outside formal lessons).
- Learning and teaching approaches that support pupils to learn social and emotional skills and consolidate those already learnt.
- Continuing professional development for the whole staff of a school.

Excellence and enjoyment: Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (Primary SEAL) and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning for Secondary schools (Secondary SEAL) can be viewed or downloaded from the SEAL website¹².

- 4.20 The Missdorothy.com¹³ learning programme is an innovative approach to learning about personal behaviour and safety for seven to eleven-year-olds and has been introduced to schools. It is designed to tackle behavioural issues including bullying, crime and disorder, social inclusion, racism and good citizenship. The programme is unique - delivering learning through the medium of a web site cartoon character - Miss Dorothy Com or Dot Com to her friends and family.
- 4.21 The Council is pursuing a programme of multi systemic therapy (MST). MST is a national three-year pilot between the Department of Health, Department for Children, Schools and Families and Merton, Kingston, South West London and St Georges Mental Health Trust. It will work with high-risk young people and their parents intensively in their home and community to prevent family breakdown and offending. MST is a model from USA and will be overseen from there, however there is strong international evidence that it works to prevent high level offending.
- 4.22 The members recognised that strong partnership working is crucial to tackling the problem of gang culture. On the whole the task group were impressed with the evident openness and co-operation that exists between all the partners involved. The councillors wanted to ensure that this cooperation continued and expressed an interest in their role to facilitate this. However there remain problems regarding information sharing. There is little capacity to do the work in Merton, especially in comparison to other boroughs, and there is a need for more data analyst time.
- 4.23 The Council seems to recognise the need to secure external funding in order to achieve our aim to successfully tackle gang culture. The Councillors were encouraged by officer comments about having a strong focus on securing this funding and felt that it was an appropriate and important use of officer time.
- 4.24 The group visited Waltham Forest (WF) who have been recognised as employing best practice in their work regarding gang culture. This visit served two roles; first, it provided a comparator against which the Councillors could compare work that is taking place in Merton; second, it provided evidence for possible recommendations. WF are trying to develop an effective multi-agency response to tackling gang culture and have produced a short-term action plan to (1) reduce violent crime in Waltham Forest involving children and young people and, (2) to disrupt gang membership and reduce access to weapons in the Borough. Their action plan is split into three sections. Prevention at the universal level; targeted work with those at risk and; specialist work to disrupt those already offending and within the justice system.

¹² <http://www.bandapilot.org.uk/>

¹³ www.missdorothy.com

- 4.25 The Councillors thought that WF had made some good progress in tackling gangs. They also felt that the work Merton has already undertaken was equal to that in WF.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The task group acknowledged at the start of the review that gang culture is a complex issue affecting all of London and beyond. It was never their intention to fully explore that complexity. They were aware that Merton Council, the Police, schools, the Third Sector and many young people themselves were already actively engaged in combating gang culture in Merton and the Councillors wanted to examine at closer hand what they were doing, and whether there were any gaps in their provision.
- 5.2 One of the main difficulties facing the group was the difficulty in distinguishing gang culture/activity from wider youth crime. As a result some of the research and recommendations have more of a youth crime focus. Nonetheless, young people involved in crime are at risk of becoming involved with gang culture, therefore it is hoped the group's recommendations will provide a valuable asset for the Council in their work against gang culture.

There is already exceptional work taking place

- 5.3 The group was most impressed with the services it came across during the review and was at pains to make it clear that its recommendations should in no way interfere with good work currently being performed. The group noted with great pleasure that the Council has been short-listed¹⁴ for a national award surrounding its work on gang culture.

Children are being exposed to gang culture at a younger age

- 5.4 From a variety of interview sources the task group identified that children are starting to become exposed to gang culture at a younger age and that age-appropriate prevention initiatives should start from the age of 8.
- 5.5 It was also noted that there are links between alienation from school (and in particular, communication and literacy difficulties) and gang membership. However, it was also understood that many people with such difficulties do not become gang members. A recent Life Chances panel recommended a strong emphasis on literacy & communication in Merton's schools from Early Years onwards, and members of the task group sought to underline this.

Gaps in leisure provision and insufficient parental involvement

- 5.6 It was noted that play service caters for children up until eight-years old and then the youth service begins at 13. The Councillors identified this as a gap in provision for Children aged 8-13 which should be addressed. The group believe it is important that the Council should aim to provide a continuous service providing both deterrence and alternative occupation to young people throughout their childhood and adolescence.
- 5.7 The task group was made aware that gang membership often originates from siblings or relatives following each other into gangs. Parental understanding, knowledge and involvement are essential in combating this. It is recommended that the parenting strategy should address this.

¹⁴ <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/tilley/tilleyawards2007.htm>

Recommendations

R1 The Council must recognise that children are being exposed to gang culture at a younger age and should develop prevention strategies that include a focus on this age category. This could be by encouraging schools to undertake workshops/lectures on a continuous basis predominantly for children between 8 to 13 years to actively discourage them from glamorising criminal gang culture.

R2 The Council should provide a continuous service of leisure provision (i.e. between play & the Youth Service) in order to include children aged 8-13.

R3 The Council should ensure that it educates the parents of children aged 8-13 and younger about the signs of gang and criminal activity as part of its parenting strategy.

Observation

O1 The Council's emphasis on literacy & communication in Merton's schools is an important tool in arresting alienation in young people and may be a factor in deterring them from joining gangs.

Improved facilities and opportunities for younger people

- 5.8 Both young people who met the task group and those who raised the issue through the S.T.A.B.B. documentary complained that there is a lack of facilities for younger people in the borough. The main types of facilities mentioned were youth clubs and organised sports.
- 5.9 Facilities for younger people have been a longstanding issue but the group questioned whether this was an actual or perceived problem. There are however places in the borough where there is a known lack of adequate provision. The Councillors felt that although the provision of facilities will not by themselves prevent young people from becoming involved in gangs, they could, however, help to serve as a deterrent.
- 5.10 The Council may not have to be the provider of such facilities/activities and the group identified good practice taking place across the borough by many different organisations and individuals. The Council has a role to support and facilitate these initiatives by sharing good practice across the borough. The Youth Service review (2005-2006) identified this role and made a recommendation at that time; that recommendation is valid for all age groups.

Observation

O2 The council should continue to recognise good practice in relation to activities for younger people and facilitate its development across the borough where practical.

Role of Faith

- 5.11 The Councillors identified a link between faith and gang activity as the subject arose on a number of occasions independently of each other.

- 5.12 YMCA initiatives, Street Pastors and the Jehamiah project are examples of community-based activity prompted by Christian faith rather than a direct answer to gang culture; nevertheless the task group noted their positive effect.
- 5.13 The role of faith has been highlighted through the press; a recent article in the Guardian¹⁵ discussed the role of the church in tackling gun and knife crime. The Guardian stated that 3,240 church members and leaders from across UK took part in a survey and 89% of these felt gun and knife crime was an issue for the church to address.
- 5.14 The Councillors found it hard to draw conclusions on this subject. They recognised that faith plays an important general role in our community, and that there are positive initiatives from all faiths to combat gang culture.

Relationship with the police and young people

- 5.15 From meeting with the group of young people and hearing from some other witnesses the Councillors felt that the police could improve their communication with young people so they understand why action is being taken against them. A familiar example is when young people are targeted by the police for stop and search when they don't think that they have done anything wrong. They feel harassed because the reasons or the policy have not been explained to them.
- 5.16 At the initial stages of the gangs initiative, the joint Tasking Group (JTG) was tasked with addressing this issue specifically in relation to school pupils. To address this and crime levels within academic institutions they jointly funded the on-site full-time safer schools officer which has been a great success.
- 5.17 However, the councillors feel more needs to be done, especially outside the school gates. They also feel it is important to ensure that the experiences of the school officers are shared amongst the wider police force.

Recommendation

R4 The Council and partners should ensure that feedback from school officers is communicated around all partners.

Observation

O3 The Council and partners should continue to explore ways to bridge the gap between the police and younger people.

Partnership working

- 5.18 The group heard from a wide range of partners and agreed that partnership working across the borough is well developed with high levels of trust existing between partner organisations.
- 5.19 The group spoke with some wider voluntary and community organisations and felt that their work made a positive contribution to the wider gang initiative. However, the councillors want to ensure that the Council fully recognises the scale and scope of all the partners supporting this agenda and involve them accordingly.

¹⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/oct/22/ukcrime.ukguns>

Recommendation

R5 The council should provide a comprehensive list of information to parents to enable quick and easier access to partners with whom the council are working, such as Anti-graffiti teams, Safer Neighbourhood Teams and Youth Offending Team, in order to help combat gang culture.

Observation

O4 The Council has a pivotal role in involving all the organisations / groups / individuals who contribute to combating gang culture. As such it should continue to perform and expand that role.

Sense of 'belonging'

- 5.20 The councillors felt that young people often suffer from a lack of belonging quite often to their family or education and this disengagement increases the risk of seeking belonging through gang culture. Some schemes such as Kickz have been successful in providing this sense of belonging to young people at risk.
- 5.21 The group felt that it is important for the Council and partners to recognise this and focus on schemes to provide this sense of belonging.

Role of councillors as advocates for initiatives

- 5.22 The Councillors felt that there was more they could do to support the work being done by the Council. For example they could act as advocates for school initiatives. As such the group recommended that councillors should be informed and, where possible, given the opportunity to involve themselves.

Recommendation

R6 Councillors should be asked to become involved in initiatives to counter gang culture whenever their support is needed.

R7 The council must recognise that finance plays a vital role if these outcomes are to be achieved.