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# **Five Boroughs' Alliance: Guidance for the Communications Strategy**

**Jessica Jacobson and Amy Burrell  
UCL Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science**

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# **PREFACE**

## **Five Boroughs' Alliance: Guidance for the Communications Strategy**

The Five Boroughs' Alliance is a multi-agency programme set up in 2006 to develop long-term, effective solutions to serious violence, including gang-related issues.

The programme brings together the expertise of the Metropolitan Police Service and councils within Croyden, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham, and Southwark, the Home Office, the Probation Service, local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and the Government Office for London to deliver schemes that they cannot deliver alone.

Effective communication between the various agencies, police and communities is crucial and forms one of the key five strands of the programme. The overall aim is to reduce the harm caused by gangs on the five boroughs by sharing best practice among partners and delivering simple, effective messages to engage with the community.

The UCL Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science was commissioned to review existing research literature on gangs in order to inform the programmes' communication strategy.

This document presents the results of this work, focusing on messages, the best people to deliver these messages, key audiences and methods.

FIVE BOROUGHES' ALLIANCE, 2007

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## Background

The Metropolitan Police Service and partners are working together as part of the Five Boroughs' Alliance to reduce the harms caused by gangs across the boroughs of Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham, Greenwich and Southwark. The project is using the Hallsworth and Young (2006) definition of a gang, which is one element of a three-fold typology of 'urban collectives'. The typology is presented in Box 1.1.

### Box 1.1: Hallsworth and Young's typology of urban collectives

**Peer Group:** A small, organised, transient group occupying the same space with a common history. Crime is not integral to their self definition.

**Gang:** A relatively durable, predominantly street based group of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernable group for whom crime and violence is integral to the groups identity.

**Organised Criminal Group:** Members are professionally involved in crime for personal gain operating almost exclusively in the 'grey' or illegal marketplace.

The UCL Jill Dando Institute has been commissioned to review the existing research literature on gangs, in order to help the project develop its communications strategy. The literature review sought to identify the key elements of the communications strategy – namely:

- The **messages** to be disseminated about gangs and gang-related offending
- The people and organisations who should deliver the messages - i.e. the **deliverers**
- The **audiences** to whom the messages should be conveyed
- The **methods** by which the messages should be delivered.

This document presents the results of this work, in the form of guidance on the messages, deliverers, audiences and methods.

## Components of the guidance

The literature review revealed that there is potentially an enormous range of issues that could be encompassed by the communications strategy. However, three sets of messages have been identified as the core of the strategy. These are set out in box 1.2.

### Box 1.2: Three sets of messages

1. Messages about how to **exit** gangs
2. Messages about **enforcement activity** targeting gang-related criminality
3. Messages about the **harms** caused by gangs – to self, to family and friends, and to the community.

Section 2 of this guidance is concerned with the identification of the audiences at whom the above messages should be targeted, and those who should be delivering the messages. Sections 3, 4 and 5 look in detail at each of the three sets of messages, respectively. Section 6 concludes the guidance with a brief reiteration of the key elements.

## Overarching principles

The development of this guidance has been informed by five overarching principles, which emerged as recurrent themes in the research literature. These principles are outlined below.

1. Research on gangs – conducted in both the United States and the United Kingdom – consistently reveals that gang membership tends both to *enhance* offending and to *facilitate* offending. In other words, some individuals who previously engage in minor offending tend to engage in more serious offending after joining gangs; and some individuals start offending after joining gangs. (See, for example, Thornberry et al, 1993; Bennett and Holloway, 2004; Marshall et al, 2005; Smith and Bradshaw, 2005; Tita and Ridgeway, 2007.) Hence the group dynamics associated with gangs are a factor in offending.
2. While recognising the relevance of group dynamics to offending, it is important that police activity tackle the *criminality* associated with gang membership and not gang or peer group

membership per se (Butler et al, 2004; Hallsworth & Young, 2004; YJB, 2007). The risk of criminalising youth involvement in collectivities of various kinds is that those young people who may only be on the fringes of criminal activity will be alienated and thereby propelled further into genuine criminality. Moreover, tailoring interventions to address behaviour rather than affiliation provides greater scope for community support for police action, especially in areas in which gang membership is integral to community life (Tita et al, 2003).

3. The focus of police action should start with the *most serious* criminality associated with gangs; once reductions have been achieved the strategy can re-evaluate the offending problem and adjust the focus accordingly. It may be tempting to try to tackle all criminal aspects of gang activities, but this would result in the dilution of the strategy. A focus on the most serious harms first makes it easier for partners to find common ground and develop a shared sense of purpose, and also facilitates community engagement in the interventions. A focus on the most serious criminality was an aspect of Operation Ceasefire; an innovative programme which achieved some success in tackling youth homicide and firearms crime in Boston (Braga et al, 2001; Kennedy et al, 2001). In contrast, an anti-gun project in Manchester, which sought to apply to the Ceasefire model, encountered implementation and partnership difficulties partly as a result of the broadening of its remit (Bullock and Tilley, 2003).
4. In focussing on the most serious criminality, it is also important to recognise that much of this is likely to occur spontaneously and as a result of disputes over personal issues and matters of 'respect' rather than in the context of organised, acquisitive or drug-related crime (Kennedy, 2007; YJB, 2007).
5. Gang-related criminality is rooted in a broad cultural context, and reinforced by certain themes in music and fashion which glorify guns, knives and violence (Young, 1999; White, 2004; Pitts, 2007). The police cannot change the culture and sub-cultures within which gangs operate; and nor should they attempt to do so. However, the police should be aware that they run the risk of *reinforcing* the negative cultural forces, by (inadvertently) sensationalising and glamourising gang violence through the public information messages they disseminate<sup>1</sup>. Care should thus be taken to convey messages to the public in a balanced and objective manner.

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<sup>1</sup> See Hallsworth & Young (2004) and White (2004) for a discussion of the affects of sensationalising gangs

## 2 IDENTIFICATION OF AUDIENCES AND DELIVERERS

This guidance takes it for granted that thorough analysis of the nature and level of gang-related offending will be a precursor to, and an ongoing part of, the implementation of the communications strategy and indeed other forms of intervention. An element of problem analysis that has specific relevance to the communications strategy is the identification of the target audiences of the messages and the most appropriate and effective deliverers of the messages.

This guidance defines the audiences and deliverers in broad terms only, as set out in boxes 2.1 and 2.2. At a local level, it is the responsibility of those implementing the strategy to use the range of information sources available to them to identify the specific individuals, organisations and groups who will comprise the audiences and deliverers.

### **Box 2.1: Audiences for communications strategy**

- **Gang offenders:** that is, individuals known to the police and other agencies who are believed to be currently involved in gang-related criminality.
- **Potential gang offenders:** that is, young people believed to be at risk of involvement in gang-related criminality. The communications strategy is unlikely to target identifiable individuals within this group, but will target young people more generally within local areas in which there are high levels of gang involvement and youth offending.
- **Parents and carers** of known gang offenders; these should include foster-parents and any older relatives (e.g. siblings, grandparents) with caring responsibilities.
- **Community influencers:** that is, known individuals within the local community who exercise, or potentially exercise, a degree of influence over young people and are willing to work in partnership with the statutory agencies. These are likely to include influential members of community associations and voluntary groups, religious leaders and individuals who are formally or informally undertaking 'mentoring' roles.
- **Practitioners:** for the purpose of this guidance, this term is used broadly to include officers within the range of statutory agencies (excluding the police) that are likely to be in close contact with gang offenders, potential gang offenders and their families. These are likely to include Youth Offending Team workers, Drug Action Team workers, social workers, youth workers, housing officers, and teachers.

### **Box 2.2: Deliverers of communications strategy**

- **Police** – including front-line officers
- **Parents and carers** of known gang offenders (as in Box 2.1)
- **Community influencers** (as in Box 2.1)
- **Practitioners** (as in Box 2.1)

It is immediately apparent from Boxes 2.1 and 2.2 that there is a large overlap between the audiences and the deliverers: with parents/carers, community influencers and practitioners appearing in both lists. This is because it is critically important that the communications strategy is not developed as a set of messages that the police, alone, convey to local communities or sectors of those communities. Rather, implementation of the strategy should entail the formulation, design and delivery of the messages by the police in partnership with other local agencies and members of local communities who share the same goals.

With respect to certain messages – particularly those about exits and those about harms - the ‘community partners’ of the police (practitioners, community influencers, and those parents/carers who are prepared to engage) are often in a better position (through natural hierarchies and/or because they are trusted by young people) to engage with gang offenders and potential gang offenders in an effective and meaningful manner (Bullock & Tilley, 2002; Shropshire & McFarquhar, 2002; Din & Cullingford, 2006). These individuals might also be able to aid in the development of local exit and harm messages. With respect to enforcement messages the police are likely to be best equipped to undertake the formulation and delivery; but even here, community partners can play a vital role in reinforcing the messages (Crime Concern, 2005; Kennedy, 2007).

Hence, in the sections of this guidance that follow, the police are presented as the agency that should take the lead in developing and delivering the key messages, with their community partners initially acting as audiences, and subsequently becoming involved in delivery. However, it is worth sounding a note of caution about the deployment of ‘partnership’ in this context. Where the guidance specifies that, for example, ‘community influencers’ or ‘practitioners’ should

be involved in a particular element of the work, this does not mean that *all* potential partners within these broad groups should be engaged. For each element of the work, it will be important to identify those specific partners most relevant to it. More partners does not necessarily equate to a better strategy: in fact, the indiscriminate inclusion of agencies and individuals can be detrimental to a strategy if the partners struggle to find common ground and lose any sense of ownership of the work (Shropshire & McFarquhar, 2002; Bullock and Tilley, 2003).

### 3 MESSAGES ABOUT EXITS

The provision of messages about exits – that is, advice on methods by which gang members can safely and legitimately leave gangs – is potentially a critical component of the communications strategy. The Metropolitan Police Service has highlighted an increase in the numbers of gang members expressing a desire to leave the gang environment (MPS, 2007). However, gang members' reluctance to engage with the criminal justice system has made it difficult for the police to offer exit strategies to such individuals. The research literature highlights the challenges associated with offering gang members legitimate exit options (especially in areas where affiliation to gangs is common), however, emphasis is consistently placed on the provision of youth resources and legitimate life opportunities (Bullock & Tilley, 2002; Grainger, 2002 cited in Crime Concern, 2005; Lemos, 2004; Communities that Care, 2005).

Messages about exits should be highly practical and, wherever possible, targeted at those who are in need of, and want, help. There are two main kinds of message. First, there are specific messages about the help available to gang members (and their families) who wish to leave areas associated with gang involvement, because of threats of violence and intimidation. Secondly, there are more general messages about what legitimate life opportunities are available to young people as an alternative to gang membership, and how these opportunities can be accessed.

As set out in Table 3.1, the police have a role to play in initiating the formulation of these messages. The specific *contents* of the messages, however, should be developed by police partners in the community: that is, practitioners and community influencers. The police and their community partners should all, subsequently, play a part in delivering the messages to gang members and their parents/carers – whether through formal or informal mechanisms.

Some of the more specific issues associated with the theme of 'exit messages' are briefly highlighted in Boxes 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3. Box 3.1 presents the concept of the 'reluctant gangster'; Box 3.2 considers the scope for the promotion of 'legitimate life opportunities' within a police-led anti-gang strategy; and Box 3.3. looks the potential role of the mentor for gang members.

**Table 3.1: Messages about exits**

Deliverer	Audience	Messages: contents and means of delivery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioners</li> <li>• Community influencers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contents:</b>            Identification of the <i>kinds</i> of practical issues to be covered in messages about exits – relating to</p> <p>a) the availability of help for individuals wishing to leave areas associated with gang membership (e.g. help with re-housing), in recognition that members may perceive threats to their or their family's safety on attempting to leave a gang;</p> <p>b) access to legitimate life opportunities in the realms of education, work and leisure, which may provide alternative rewards to those offered by gang membership.</p> <p><b>Method:</b>            Initiate discussion and formulation of the contents of 'exit messages' through partnership and community stakeholder forums.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Practitioners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gang offenders</li> <li>• Parents/carers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contents:</b>            Detailed 'exit messages' (as formulated by the community partners of the police) about what practical assistance is available and how that assistance can be accessed.</p> <p><b>Method:</b>            Conveyed through:</p> <p>a) the establishment of formal information services, such as telephone helplines, texting services and leaflet distribution;</p> <p>b) Face-to-face, routine or ad hoc contacts resulting from enforcement or other interventions.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community influencers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gang offenders</li> <li>• Parents/carers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contents:</b>            Detailed 'exit messages' (as above).</p> <p><b>Method:</b> Via ad hoc personal contacts and through more organised mentoring systems.</p>

### **Box 3.1: 'Reluctant gangsters'**

The effectiveness of exit messages developed by the police and their community partners will depend, in part, on the extent to which local gang members have a desire to leave their gangs and their associated criminality. Exit messages will have little or no relevance to those gang members who are fully entrenched in the gang lifestyle and no wish to change this situation. However, other gang members may be open to such messages because they are less committed to the gang.

On the basis of recent empirical research conducted in Waltham Forest, Pitts (2007) developed the concept of the 'reluctant gangster'. Writing of gang members in the borough, he argues that "the gang involvement of around one-third of these young people is not wholly voluntary" (page 54). He identifies five main modes of 'involuntary affiliation':

- Affiliation because of the risks to oneself and one's family from non-affiliation
- Affiliation for protection from other gangs/crews
- Affiliation to gain access to educational/recreational resources in gang territory
- Affiliation because of lack of access to legitimate opportunity
- Continued affiliation because of the dangers inherent in leaving the gang

### **Box 3.2: Improving access to legitimate life opportunities**

Social exclusion, deprivation and lack of educational attainment are often strongly associated with gang involvement and related criminality (see Crime Concern (2005), Firmin et al (2007), and YJB (2007), among others). Gang membership can offer individuals a range of rewards, from opportunities to make money through drug dealing and collective acquisitive crime, to the promise of (certain forms of) social inclusion and respect (Grainger, 2002 cited in Crime Concern, 2005; Shropshire & McFarquhar, 2002). Hence it is plausible that the provision of information about how individuals can access legitimate life opportunities can encourage individuals to leave gangs.

However, it is unrealistic to expect that a single anti-gangs strategy – and particularly a police-led strategy – can effectively redress some of the complex socio-economic problems that underlie social exclusion and deprivation. Moreover, there are risks inherent in broadening the remit of a strategy to encompass wide-ranging social and welfare goals. In particular, the risks of losing focus and providing scope for different partners to pull in different directions (see, for example, Bullock and Tilley's account of the difficulties of this kind encountered by the Manchester Anti-Guns Strategy, 2003).

Hence, to the extent that the communications strategy of the Five Boroughs' Alliance includes a 'life opportunities' element, this should be clearly delineated and modest in its scope. The provision of relevant and highly practical information to a targeted group of individuals is likely to be more promising than a wider-ranging strategy of general youth diversion.

### **Box 3.3: The role of the mentor**

There has recently been extensive media debate about the need for effective 'role models' and individuals who can act as 'mentors' for young people involved in gangs and crime, and especially young black men and boys (see, for example, Laville, 2007; Muir, 2007). The theory behind the deployment of role models and mentors is that – particularly where the role models/mentors can demonstrate that they themselves have experienced and overcome adversity – young people can be persuaded of the viability and attractiveness of legitimate routes to success and respect.

Messages need to be clear, unambiguous and emotionally engaging to the target population (Butler et al, 2004) and so the selection of mentors is vitally important. Ex-offenders may be particularly effective mentors. As part of a review of gun crime in Brent, Hales and Silverstone interviewed 15 convicted offenders. Several of the respondents voiced the opinion that “ex-offenders should be used to help influence attitudes”, suggesting “perhaps the beginnings of a consistent view ... that might see ex-offenders playing an education role in steering young people away from crime” (2005: 106).

The advantage to mentoring schemes is that it means messages can be delivered over time and not as a one-off. Contrary to popular belief there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that one-off fear arousal interventions (scare tactics) delivered by uniformed authority figures are not an effective method of dealing with gang-related offending (Butler et al, 2004; YJB, 2007). In fact, Petrosino et al (2004) specifically counsel against this.

## 4 MESSAGES ABOUT ENFORCEMENT

Enforcement messages are twofold. First, there are messages about *specific* enforcement activities in the local area that are currently targeting, or will shortly target, gang-related criminality. These messages are primarily aimed at current gang offenders. Secondly, there are more *generic* messages about the enforcement powers of the police and criminal justice system more widely – primarily aimed at deterring potential gang offenders from engaging in criminality.

The stages of delivery of the enforcement messages, and the relevant deliverers and audiences, are presented in Table 4.1. All but the last row of the table are concerned with *specific* enforcement messages. The strategy outlined here, with respect to these specific messages, broadly follows that deployed by Boston’s Operation Ceasefire (on which more detail is provided in Box 4.1). The key elements are that:

- The messages about specific, local enforcement activities should be directly and explicitly conveyed to individuals who are known to be current gang offenders.
- The key messages are that if these individuals commit a serious criminal offence, they will be arrested and prosecuted.
- While the police are the primary deliverers of the messages, they should wherever possible harness the support and direct involvement of their partners in the community – including practitioners, community influencers and those parents/carers of gang members who are willing to engage.
- In order to have any impact, the messages must be credible – meaning the promised action by the police must be taken, and must be *seen* to be taken. Ongoing communication and reporting of action taken is therefore a vital part of the strategy.

Generic enforcement messages aimed at potential gang offenders can be conveyed through information campaigns of a wide variety of kinds. Assessing the outcomes of public information campaigns of any kind is extremely challenging (Coffman, 2002), which makes it difficult to point to specific methods that have proven effectiveness. However, a short series of recommendations for offender-focussed publicity campaigns is presented in Box 4.2.

**Table 4.1: Messages about enforcement**

<b>Deliverer</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Message: Contents and means of delivery</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioners</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contents:</b> Details of the specific enforcement activities that are to be undertaken in relation to gang offenders. Details also of the input required from partners engaged in enforcement (e.g. YOT workers). Explanation of the rationale for the enforcement action, to ensure full support from partners, and agreement of shared goals.</p> <p><b>Method:</b> Discussion in partnership groups and forums convened specifically for this purpose.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents/carers</li> <li>• Community influencers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contents:</b> Details of and justifications for the specific enforcement activities, in order to gain community support for the work and their involvement in delivery of the messages.</p> <p><b>Method:</b> Specially convened community forums.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Parents/carers</li> <li>• Community influencers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gang offenders</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contents:</b> Description of the specific consequences – in terms of enforcement activity – that will follow from continued serious criminality.</p> <p><b>Method:</b> Small-scale forums, at which police, parents/carers and community influencers can deliver the messages in different combinations.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential gang offenders</li> <li>• Practitioners</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contents:</b> Generic descriptions of enforcement powers of the police, the sentencing powers of the courts, and the achievements of the police in tackling gang-related criminality.</p> <p><b>Method:</b> Poster campaigns, local Press and radio, leaflet drops, police visits to schools, etc.</p>

#### **Box 4.1: Operation Ceasefire**

Operation Ceasefire was set up to tackle violence between young people through direct, sustained engagement with violent street groups. There was an explicit focus on tackling the most serious violence associated with the groups – i.e. shootings.

While Operation Ceasefire was much more than a communications strategy, it is the communications element of that initiative that is of interest here. Essentially, this work adopted

a pulling-levers approach [which] attempted to prevent gang violence by making gang members believe that consequences would follow on violence and gun use, and choose to change their behaviour. A key element of the strategy was the delivery of a direct and explicit 'retail deterrence' message to a relatively small target audience regarding what kind of behaviour would provoke a special response and what that response would be (Braga et al, 2001).

This intervention also entailed engaging with the local communities affected by the gang offending and giving them the opportunity to express their views to representatives from the street groups.

The strategy allowed members to refuse to commit violent acts without fear of in-group retribution, and provided an 'honourable exit' for some members as they could argue that their violent actions will negatively affect the whole group. Impact evaluation of the operation indicated that it resulted in a decline in levels of youth homicides and shootings (Braga et al 2001; Kennedy et al 2001). The approach has been trialled in other areas, and a modified version of the initiative was implemented as the Manchester Anti-Gangs Strategy (see Bullock and Tilley 2002; 2003).

#### **Box 4.2: Publicity campaigns on enforcement**

Based on a review of a wide range of crime prevention publicity campaigns, Barthe (2006) presents a number of recommendations for developing offender-focused campaigns. These are summarised as:

- Advertise increased risks and reduced rewards
- Avoid moral appeals and focus on the likelihood of capture
- Publicise the message where offenders can see it at appropriate times
- Campaigns work best in small geographic areas (the messages are more likely to be relevant locally)
- Focus on specific crime types
- Timeliness and relevance is the key to success

## 5 MESSAGES ABOUT HARMS

Messages about harms are a more amorphous set of messages than those concerning exits and enforcement, because the very concept of 'harm' is more difficult to define. Despite the burgeoning research literature on gangs in the UK, there is little that enables the police and their partners to delineate specific, harmful consequences that necessarily equate with gang membership in the British context. However, there is evidence that levels of gang involvement in Britain are increasing (Bennett & Holloway, 2004), as are levels and seriousness of gang-related criminality (Braga et al, 2001; Shropshire & McFarquhar, 2002; Schneider et al, 2004), especially in terms weapons use (Lemos, 2004).

The substance of the messages about harms should be the consequences of violence: that is, the potential and reality of injury or death caused to gang members themselves, their friends and associates, and their family members. There are also the wider, ripple effects of violence and threats of violence: which can create fearful, fragmented communities and feed into a vicious cycle of weapon possession and use for the purposes of 'self-defence'. To the extent that messages about harm can draw on real events and experiences in local communities, they are likely to have more power.

As applies also to the messages about enforcement, there are two broad levels to the delivery of messages about harm. First, work should be undertaken with current gang offenders to challenge and subvert the kinds of 'gang narratives' that sustain the life of the gang by justifying violence and dismissing the significance of harm. Secondly, there is scope for public information campaigns aimed at deterring potential gang members by highlighting the harms associated with gangs, violence and weapons.

Table 5.1 sets out the audiences and deliverers to be engaged in this work. As with the enforcement messages, the police role is initially to harness the active support of their community partners, and then to work with these partners in confronting the gang members face-to-face (for more details, see Box 5.1). This kind of intervention can be carried out alongside – or as an integral part of – the enforcement-focused communications strategy described in the previous chapter.

With respect to wider publicity campaigns on harms, targeting potential offenders, the results are likely to be as uncertain as the results of publicity campaigns on enforcement. However, recommendations drawn a relevant research review are presented in Box 5.2.

**Table 5.1: Messages about harm**

Deliverer	Audience	Message: Contents and means of delivery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioners</li> <li>• Community influencers</li> <li>• Parents/carers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contents:</b> To include information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the local harms associated with gang criminality (an accurate picture of local events and their repercussions)</li> <li>b) the ways in which gang narratives contribute to these harms</li> <li>c) the means by which gang narratives can be challenged, by the police working with their community partners</li> </ul> <p><b>Method:</b> Discussion in partnership groups and community forums.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Practitioners</li> <li>• Community influencers</li> <li>• Parents/carers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gang offenders</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contents:</b> Description of local harms, in the context of discussion of the gang narratives – as far as possible as articulated by the offenders themselves – with the aim of encouraging the questioning of those narratives.</p> <p><b>Method:</b> Small-scale forums, with discussions facilitated variously by the police, community influencers and parents/carers. Special care should be taken to ensure genuine engagement with the offenders; for example, in some cases this may be most effective if the police are absent.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential gang offenders</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contents:</b> Descriptions of harms caused by gang-related violence and criminality. Wherever possible, these should reflect local events that have had a significant impact on the community. The material should be presented in a manner that does <i>not</i> sensationalise, glamourise or exaggerate local gang-related problems.</p> <p><b>Method:</b> Poster campaigns, local Press and radio, leaflet drops, police visits to schools, etc.</p>

### **Box 5.1: Challenging gang narratives**

As highlighted by Kennedy (2007), gang narratives are the schema which gang members adopt to fit in with their peers and to justify their violent and other offending behaviour. Common narratives include: 'It's not my fault, nobody ever gives me a chance'; 'I don't care if I go to prison/prison is a badge of honour'; 'Violence is the only way to (re)gain respect'; 'There is no alternative to violence'; and 'I don't care if I die, we all have to die sometime'. These narratives form part of the 'street code' which is instrumental in driving the gang's criminal behaviour and sustaining its group dynamics.

Gang offenders commonly state that they buy into gang narratives when they are with their peers but often refute these claims when challenged alone. Kennedy (2007) describes this phenomenon as 'pluralistic ignorance' and suggests that challenging the group to defend their narratives is the key to dispelling the notion that they all, as individuals, subscribe to them (see Kennedy et al, 2001).

Ex-gang offenders may be well-placed to help current gang members to challenge their narratives. They can relate their own experiences to the young people, in order to educate them about the realities and consequences of gang-related offending (Hales & Silverstone, 2005) (See also Box 3.3 on mentoring).

### **Box 5.2: Publicity campaigns on harms**

In Box 4.2, above, Barthe's recommendations for offender-focused publicity campaigns were summarised. These are broadly applicable to campaigns on harm as well as campaigns on enforcement (and indeed, the two kinds of campaign may well be integrated). Some further points to consider are suggested by a review of behaviour-changing campaigns conducted by the Rail Safety and Standards Board (2003) to inform their development of a campaign, targeted at young people, warning of the dangers of railway trespass and vandalism. The review concluded that the following are important elements of campaigns about harm/danger:

- Creating a very *real* situation
- Exploiting emotional hooks
- Maximising shock
- Simplicity and clarity
- Presenting environment as unpredictable/dangerous
- Preventing opportunities for side-stepping communication
- Avoiding judgement
- Presenting as from an organisation that cares

## 6 KEY ISSUES

There are five overarching principles that should inform the development and implementation of the communications strategy:

1. Gang membership enhances and facilitates offending: in other words, the group dynamics associated with gangs are a factor in criminality.
2. Nevertheless, the police should target the offending behaviour rather than the gang affiliation.
3. The focus of police activity should be on the most serious forms of gang-related criminality – primarily, violence.
4. It should be recognised that much of this violence occurs spontaneously as a facet of personal disputes, rather than in the context of acquisitive or drug-related crime.
5. Gang-related criminality is rooted in a broad cultural context. The police should seek to avoid reinforcing negative cultural forces by (inadvertently) sensationalising and glamourising gang violence.

This guidance defines the target audiences and deliverers of the communications strategy as follows:

### **Audiences:**

- Gang offenders
- Potential gang offenders
- Parents/carers
- Community influencers
- Practitioners

### **Deliverers:**

- Police
- Parents/carers
- Community influencers
- Practitioners

Parents/carers, community influencers and practitioners are defined as deliverers of, as well as audiences for, the messages contained in the communications strategy. This is because they are expected, where possible and appropriate, to engage with the police in the formulation of

the specific contents of the messages, and in conveying the messages to gang offenders and potential offenders.

Prior to implementation of the strategy, the specific individuals, groups and agencies which comprise the audiences and deliverers must be identified.

Three sets of messages should form the core the communications strategy:

### **1. Messages about exits**

These take the form of advice on methods by which gang members can safely and legitimately leave gangs. The messages should be highly practical and targeted at those who are in need of, and want, help. They should include specific information about the help available to gang members who wish to leave areas associated with gang involvement; and more general information about legitimate life opportunities and means of accessing these.

### **2. Messages about enforcement**

Messages about enforcement operate at two levels:

- Information about specific, local enforcement activities should be directly and explicitly conveyed to individuals who are known to be current gang offenders. The key message is that if these individuals commit a serious criminal offence, they will be arrested and prosecuted. There is a cautionary note, however, and that is that the police must be confident that the chosen enforcement options can be effectively delivered before disseminating the messages publicly.
- Generic messages about the enforcement powers of the police and associated agencies should be conveyed through public information campaigns aimed at deterring potential gang offenders from criminality.

### **3. Messages about harms**

Messages about harms should focus on the consequences of violence for individuals, families and wider communities. As with messages about enforcement, these messages operate at two levels:

- The 'narratives' that sustain gangs, by justifying violence and dismissing the significance of harm, should be challenged through face-to-face engagement with gang offenders.
- Public information campaigns should highlight the harms associated with gang criminality, in the effort to deter potential offenders.

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