

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
HM Chief Inspector of Probation
HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary

The management of gang issues among children and young people in prison custody and the community:

a joint thematic review

June 2010

‘Pain is temporary, pride is forever.’

One young person's view of gangs

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SW1P 2BQ

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Introduction

The issue of gangs, particularly among children and young people under 18, is an emotive and difficult one. There is a considerable risk of over-reaction and therefore of glamorising, and potentially entrenching, criminal activity carried out by groups of young people – a pattern of offending that is neither new nor surprising. Young people are likely to be both victims and perpetrators of crime, and to be identified and self-identify as part of a group. However, the opposite extreme – ignoring or failing to recognise the existence of genuinely gang-related activity among young people – is even more dangerous.

There have been a number of initiatives to tackle this issue, aimed in particular at young people – including the Tackling Gangs Action Programme and its successor, the Tackling Knives Action Programme. This independent thematic review was carried out under a service level agreement between the Prisons Inspectorate and the Youth Justice Board (YJB), to contribute to the YJB's management of performance and continuous improvement arrangements. It was undertaken jointly by the inspectorates of prison, probation and police. It examined how in practice the three inspected agencies – police, youth offending teams and young offender institutions – were dealing with and understanding gangs and gang-related crime. It found that, in spite of the range of initiatives, there was a lack of coordination and of clear and effective guidance on local implementation. At local level there was no agreed working definition of a gang, either within or between the three services. Where clear definitions and strategies existed locally, this greatly helped in developing and implementing responses.

Responses from all three inspected services were patchy and at times counter-productive. The police service, in general, had a relatively well-developed understanding of gang activity and its contours. However, policies tended to focus on enforcement – 'catch and convict'. This work was not in general located within an overall safeguarding agenda, recognising that young people who are a risk to others are also at considerable risk themselves. Youth offending teams (YOTs) varied considerably in their approach, with some examples of good practice, but they too tended to focus on criminal justice and enforcement arrangements, rather than prevention and rehabilitation.

Prisons often had the least well-developed approach. One young offender institution refused to identify gang affiliation in the belief that it did not exist. Others, which were well aware of the problem, dealt with it solely as a security issue within the prison, developing mechanisms to 'keep apart' known gangs. This is clearly an important and difficult task within a closed environment. However, this approach risked reinforcing and even extending gang identity, and replicating the 'postcode boundaries' characteristic of gangs in the community.

Within and across the agencies inspected, there were some good initiatives and some good practice, and we list examples in the report. But information sharing across agencies was generally inadequate, and in general practitioners and managers believed that they lacked support, training and the necessary range of interventions to deal with young people in gangs.

Interviews with young people themselves showed that, for young men, gang membership was a source of protection but also a source of fear. Friendship, territoriality and above all 'respect' defined and justified gang activity. Young women's situation was more fluid and less clear-cut: they could be used (particularly sexually), protected or mistrusted, depending on the situation.

It is important not to exaggerate the extent of genuinely gang-related activity among young people, or to assist its growth by glamorising it. However, where such activity does exist, it is pernicious – affecting the safety and well-being of those involved, as well as the safety of their families and the community.

Research for this report showed that there was no clear integrated joint national strategy to support criminal justice and community agencies in tackling the causes as well as the effects of gang activity. Agencies had therefore missed significant opportunities to work with young people involved or likely to get involved in gangs. This report suggests that such an approach is overdue. It is welcome that there have been some more recent initiatives by the Youth Justice Board – for example the Knife Crime Prevention Programme and guidelines on working with young women affected by gangs – but there remains a need for much greater coordinated action at national, inter-agency and inter-departmental level.

Anne Owers
Chief Inspector of Prisons

Andrew Bridges
Chief Inspector of Probation

Denis O'Connor
Chief Inspector of Constabulary

June 2010

1. Key findings

- 1.1 This thematic review was a joint exercise conducted by HM Inspectorates of Prisons, Probation and Constabulary to examine the management of children and young people (aged under 18) with gang affiliations and gang-related offending, both in custody and in the community. We did not set our own parameters by prescriptively defining ‘gangs’ or ‘gang-related offending’, so that the police service, the Prison Service and youth offending teams (YOTs) were free to describe how they understood management of specific issues in the context of their individual areas. This included the effectiveness of arrangements for the safe release of the young people and their management in the community through YOTs, and the effectiveness of sharing gang-related intelligence between the police service, young offender institutions (YOIs) and YOTs. The three inspectorates, therefore, conducted separate fieldwork in their respective areas of responsibility and shared findings to produce an overview of three connected aspects of youth justice.
- 1.2 Despite a growing pool of research in the UK, there remains a range of definitions and explanations of what constitutes a ‘gang’ and ‘gang culture’.
- 1.3 Only two studies had been conducted on gang activity in prison settings in England and Wales and both focused on adult prisoners.
- 1.4 There was no agreed working definition or common understanding of what constituted a gang and responses to gang issues and gang culture varied in both the community and the custodial context.
- 1.5 Where common understandings or agreements did exist, as was the case for some YOTs and their partners, it was clear that this had helped managers and staff to develop their responses to gang issues in their localities.
- 1.6 While there had been a range of national and local initiatives, these had not been well coordinated from the centre or implemented appropriately at local level. National and local leadership and governance arrangements had not been sufficiently clear.
- 1.7 Many local authority areas experienced the guidance and initiatives launched from the centre as coming in a piecemeal fashion to YOTs and police. There was a dearth of centrally-led strategic guidance for prisons.
- 1.8 Expected government guidance for the probation and prison services on tackling gangs had been delayed considerably.
- 1.9 There were some interesting examples of police-led multi-agency approaches in the community to tackling gang-related problems. However, overall there was an emphasis on detection and enforcement rather than prevention.
- 1.10 Neither the Youth Justice Board (YJB) nor the National Offender Management Service’s Women and Young People’s Group (W&YPG)¹ retained aggregated data on young people with gang affiliations or gang-related offending and their movements through the secure estate.
- 1.11 Although there had been efforts to introduce a data collection tool into some YOTs, there was no central collation of management information to allow monitoring.

¹ The National Offender Management Service’s Women and Young People’s Group oversees NOMS policy work on children and young people, including the operation of the service level agreement with the Youth Justice Board.

- 1.12 While police and YOTs recognised the involvement of children as young as 10 in gang-related activity, in YOIs there was a general lack of such recognition, minimisation of the involvement of under-18s in gang culture, and a belief that young men tended to exaggerate their involvement in gangs.
- 1.13 Gang associations in custody were dynamic and differed depending on the location of the prison and the nature of the prison population. The fluidity of gang membership was also evident in the community, with a steady stream of new recruits.
- 1.14 The dynamic nature of gang allegiances was recognised by senior managers in all the participating agencies, but how these manifested themselves in each context differed. This was particularly marked in custody, where allegiances were formed on the basis of current perceived threat and the ongoing need for young people to be and feel safe. There was a common belief in YOIs that gang issues dissipated in custody and that the custodial sentence offered respite to some young people.
- 1.15 There was evidence of good community initiatives, particularly in YOTs but also those led by the police, though there was no specific focus on under-18s in the latter.
- 1.16 Information and intelligence resources had not been fully capitalised, mapped, coordinated and shared. Intelligence flows to and from, and between, young offender institutions and other agencies, including YOTs and the police, were sporadic, and there was a generally low volume and quality of intelligence from seconded officers in YOTs. This was disappointing, especially considering that there are seconded police officers in both YOTs and YOIs. This was an underused resource.
- 1.17 Safeguarding arrangements for children and young people associated with gangs were underdeveloped in some local authority areas and in the prison estate. There was a lack of a shared or clearly defined understanding of gang-related safeguarding concerns and few specific procedures to address them.
- 1.18 Prisons differed in their approach to the management of gang-related concerns – some operated separation and others enforced integration. There were difficulties with both approaches.
- 1.19 Only two YOIs had a specific gangs strategy. The focus was on managing behaviour in custody, mainly through existing strategies, such as violence reduction. There was no recognition of and help for those who had been traumatised by their gang experiences.
- 1.20 Resettlement was generally considered by prisons to be the remit of YOTs. Training plans rarely dealt with gang issues and there was little evidence that gang-specific interventions were planned or provided.
- 1.21 There had been little direct funding from the YJB to individual YOTs for gangs work.
- 1.22 The YJB had provided general consultancy and support to individual YOTs that were dealing with gang issues. In contrast, there was no evidence of support for managers in YOIs and few prison managers interviewed were aware that there was a dedicated post in the YJB with a development brief and remit covering gangs.
- 1.23 National and local strategies had not been well communicated to frontline staff. Not enough work had been done to ensure that practitioners were aware of the strategic context in which they were working.

- 1.24 The responses of the community and custody environments had developed at different stages and were not well aligned. The most developed responses centred on tackling the symptoms of the problems rather than the causes – ‘catch and convict’, enforcement and ‘keeping apart’ (in YOIs) were examples.
- 1.25 Practitioners in the police service, prisons and YOTs commonly expressed the view that they had not had access to sufficient relevant practice guidance, training and joint working opportunities.
- 1.26 Young men generally described their ‘gang’ associations in terms of friendships or family ties. For some young people, there was a sense of inevitability in gang membership, linked to living in particular localities. Some saw this as necessary for their protection. There was an acceptance of the risk of having a short lifespan, especially among those who had been on the receiving end of gang violence.
- 1.27 The involvement of young women in gangs was reportedly different from young men. Young women often played a submissive role in male gangs and this had its own inherent risks.
- 1.28 There were missed opportunities to work constructively with gang affiliated young women in small, well-resourced custodial units.

2. Background to the report

- 2.1 This thematic review was a joint exercise conducted by HM Inspectorates of Prisons, Probation and Constabulary to examine the management of children and young people (aged under 18) with gang affiliations and gang-related offending, both in custody and in the community. We did not set our own parameters by prescriptively defining ‘gangs’ or ‘gang-related offending’, so that the police service, the Prison Service and youth offending teams (YOTs) were free to describe how they understood management of specific issues in the context of their individual areas. This included the effectiveness of arrangements for the safe release of the young people and their management in the community through YOTs, and the effectiveness of sharing gang-related intelligence between the police service, young offender institutions (YOIs) and YOTs. The three inspectorates, therefore, conducted separate fieldwork in their respective areas of responsibility and shared findings to produce an overview of three connected aspects of youth justice.

What are gangs?

- 2.2 According to recent media reports, youth gangs are a huge problem. However, accounts of gang activity do not adequately describe the complex way that today’s young people form and break bonds with their peers and, sometimes, break the law.
- 2.3 Common descriptions of gangs range from the standard dictionary definition – ‘a group of people who associate together or act as an organised body, especially for criminal or illegal purposes’² – to more sophisticated and complex descriptions from social researchers – ‘children and young people who see themselves, and are seen by others, as affiliates of a discrete named group with a discernible structure and a recognised territory. They are almost always in conflict with rival gangs ... yet these struggles appear to strengthen the gang’s identity’.³ We came across correlations with this definition in our interviews with young people in prison. It also seems that, just as conflict and struggles with rival gangs have the potential to strengthen gang identity, gangs can reinforce ethnic identity within different ethnic groups, for example in Eastern European gangs and Somali gangs.
- 2.4 A report by the Centre for Social Justice⁴ gave a definition very similar to the dictionary, but with two significant additions: the gang is predominantly street-based; and its members engage in ‘a range of criminal activity and violence’.
- 2.5 Although there is now a growing pool of research on gang culture in the UK, the major difficulty of defining what constitutes a ‘gang’ still remains. Most authors, however, agree that it is the purpose and/or criminal intent of the group, rather than just its association, that enables the term ‘gang’ to be applied. In the literature, UK gangs have been defined as ‘street gangs’⁵ or ‘youth gangs’,⁶ which are based on a strong group identity, have moderate levels of organisation, a variety of structures, versatile offending patterns and exhibit an amplification of criminal behaviour over time.

² *Collins Concise Dictionary* (1997), Glasgow UK: Harper Collins Publishers.

³ Pitts, J (2008), *Reluctant Gangsters: the changing face of youth crime* (p.6). Devon: Willan.

⁴ The Centre for Social Justice (2009), *Dying to Belong: an in-depth review of street gangs in Britain*. London: The Centre for Social Justice.

⁵ Klein, M (2001), Resolving the Eurogang Paradox in M Klein, HJ Kerner, C Maxson and E. Weitekamp (eds), *The Eurogang Paradox: street gangs and youth groups in the USA and Europe*. The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishing.

⁶ Sanders, WB (1994), *Gangbangs and Drive-bys: grounded culture and juvenile gang violence*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

- 2.6 Distinctions have been made between gangs and peer groups:
- peer group – a small, unorganised, transient group. Crime is not integral to its self-definition
 - gang – a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people, seen by themselves and others as a discernible group; crime and violence is integral to the group's identity
 - organised criminal group – professional involvement in crime for personal gain.⁷
- 2.7 It is also acknowledged that there are more serious 'criminal gangs' or 'crime firms' that come together with the intent of committing a particular criminal act and then disperse.
- 2.8 There are some common views on why young people join gangs, including the strong correlation between areas of deprivation and areas of high crime and antisocial behaviour, involvement in the illegal drugs trade and associated drug and alcohol misuse, as well as psychosocial reasons, such as wanting to belong, desiring respect and a sense of power in one's immediate environment.
- 2.9 The Youth Justice Board's report on groups, gangs and weapons⁸ highlighted that gang culture was reflected in the styles (such as popular youth culture, music, clothing) adopted by groups of young people, although they were not involved in any criminal activity or offending. The report also cautioned against the use of the term 'gang' in relation to young people as this may lend 'glamour to the minor forms of delinquency committed by groups, and actively encourage them to become involved in more serious offending.'⁹ We came across evidence in YOIs, as well as YOTs, that this had influenced local policy development.
- 2.10 Literature suggests that groups are not static and are known to evolve depending on the social and cultural climate. Though crime is not initially integral to the existence of the peer group, normal modes of teenage behaviour and peer pressure can quickly spiral into antisocial behaviour. In the worst cases, exacerbated by social pressures, this can turn into full-scale street violence and gang-style 'turf war'.
- 2.11 It was evident in our fieldwork that such complexities continued in custodial environments. When faced with a new and unknown set of peers, young people (like any other group of people perceiving a threat) formed new alliances and, sometimes inadvertently, created new enemies in an attempt to feel safe and accepted in unfamiliar territory. Conversely, the strictly controlled and disciplined environment of prison life can offer an escape from constant conflict and threat outside. Some young people we interviewed agreed that this was the case, but for others, it was evident that the 'street mentality' was not something easily shaken off.

The scale and nature of the problem

- 2.12 In a survey of 100 male youths (aged 11–18) in Southwark and Lambeth in January 2008,¹⁰ 33 of them said they were current or former gang members and/or had committed serious violence against other youths. Forty-eight said they had suffered serious violence from other youths, of whom 12 (25%) said the violence was triggered because of gang rivalry and only

⁷ Hallsworth, S and Young, T (2004), 'Getting real about gangs'. *Criminal Justice Matters*, 55, 12-13.

⁸ Youth Justice Board (2007), *Groups, gangs and weapons*. London: YJB.

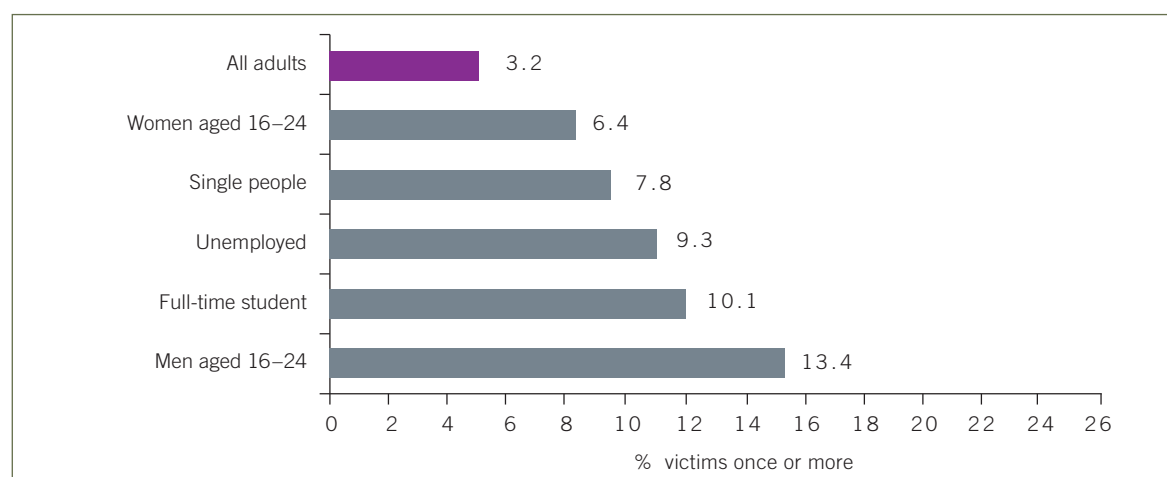
⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ <http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/dispatches/why+kids+kill/1400747> Dispatches (2008). *Why kids kill*

nine (9%) of the 100 surveyed said they reported it to the police. In research by the Policy Exchange think-tank,¹¹ 50% of a sample of young people (from YOT caseloads) felt that the police could not protect them from violent crime in their area.

- 2.13 The difference between serious youth violence and offending in groups, and specifically gang-related offending, can be difficult to determine. It is not surprising that more young people commit offences with friends or that their victims are often other young people, but this does not necessarily constitute gang activity. The 2008 Mori Youth Survey¹² found that only one-fifth (21%) of 914 young people surveyed in pupil referral units across the UK who had committed an offence said they usually offended on their own. The majority, 69%, said they offended with other people; young people were most likely to commit offences with friends (65%) than anyone else. Sixty-five per cent of young people in pupil referral units who had been a victim of an offence said that the perpetrator was another young person. This proportion had risen significantly since 2004. In total, 61% said that at least one offence had been committed against them by a group of young people, with the majority of offences taking place in the local area. Six in 10 young people surveyed said that they had carried a knife or gun in the previous year. They were more likely to have carried a knife than a gun (54% versus 46%). Despite the high percentages, this figure has not changed significantly since 2004/5. The survey also indicated that 31% of 11–16-year-olds in mainstream education and 61% of excluded young people had carried a weapon at some point in the preceding year.
- 2.14 The Metropolitan Police Service, in its *Pan-London Gang Profile* report,¹³ noted an increase in the number of gangs since 2003: 25% of gangs were believed to be involved in low-level assaults, 43% in serious assaults, 19% in kidnaps and over 25% were thought to have some connection to murders. This report was not specific to young people.
- 2.15 At the end of March 2008, more children were in prison for violence against the person than for any other offence.¹⁴ While it is unclear how much of this was attributable to gangs, it is clear that young people are the victims of crime as much as they are the perpetrators. In 2007/8, young men aged 16 to 24 had the highest risk (13%) of being a victim of violent crime.¹⁵

Figure 1: Risk of being a victim of violent crime 2007/8¹⁶



¹¹ Golding, B and McClory, J (2008), *Going Ballistic: dealing with guns, gangs and knives*. London: Policy Exchange.

¹² Youth Justice Board (2008), *MORI Youth Survey 2008: young people in pupil referral units*. London: YJB.

¹³ Metropolitan Police Service (2006), *Pan-London Gang Profile*. London: MPS.

¹⁴ Ministry of Justice (March 2008), *Population in Custody monthly tables*, p.7. England and Wales.

¹⁵ Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (2008), *Crime in England and Wales 2007/8: a summary of the main findings*. London: Home Office www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/08/hosb0708summ.pdf

¹⁶ *ibid.*

2.16 In December 2007, BBC News concluded it had been the worst year on record for fatal street violence among young people.¹⁷ Twenty-eight people under 20 were murdered in 'gang-related' incidents in the capital alone.¹⁸ The figure grew to 29 in 2008, most of whom were victims of stabbing.¹⁹

Government response to gangs

2.17 The number of high profile fatal incidents involving young people and gangs prompted the government to take action. In September 2007, the Home Secretary set up a task force to focus on serious gang violence in Birmingham, Liverpool, London and Manchester – which together accounted for over half of all gun crime. The four cities were allocated £1.5 million through the tackling gangs action programme (TGAP), which brought together a multidisciplinary team with representatives from across government, the police, local authorities and regional government offices to coordinate existing work over a period of six months.²⁰ A cross-departmental ministerial task force was also created to deal with gangs and gun crime through targeted packages designed by the police and local authorities. They included both enforcement and preventive work and were delivered in partnership with a range of local agencies.

2.18 At the same time, in October 2007, the government published its response to the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee report on young black people and the criminal justice system.²¹ This document accepted the recommendations relating to gang membership and proved to be an early predictor of strategies to follow. It included reference to gang exit programmes, safe houses and tackling gun and knife crime, and recognised that local partnerships, together with police and community groups, needed to work collaboratively to identify gang problems and possible solutions.

2.19 By June 2008, the government launched the tackling knives action programme (TKAP),²² illustrating a shift in focus away from gangs towards a more encompassing remit. This £3 million intensive cross-government action programme was committed to 'take swift action to reduce incidents of death and serious violence among teenagers'.²³ It involved 10 police force areas across the UK: Metropolitan Police, Essex, Lancashire, West Yorkshire, Merseyside, West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Thames Valley, South Wales and Nottinghamshire.

2.20 Data from the TGAP published in May 2008²⁴ provided an analysis of demographic data, which showed the average age of 774 identified gang members to be 20. The majority of the sample (75%) were black Caribbean and male (98%), and 714 (92%) were already registered on the Police National Computer. Results after the six-month campaign had ended indicated that firearms injuries had reduced by 51% (from 93 offences in October 2007 to 46 in February 2008) during the period of TGAP's operation. This was a greater reduction than in the same period in the previous two years. Firearm offences also showed a decrease.

¹⁷ http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2007/12/11/kurt_teen_murders_feature.shtml by Kurt Barling, 11 December 2007.

¹⁸ Pitts, J (2008), *op cit*.

¹⁹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7777963.stm> by Christine Jeavans, *Mapping UKs Teen Murder Toll*. 15 December 2008. ¹⁷

²⁰ Central Office of Information (July 2008), *Youth Crime Action Plan*. London: HM Government.

²¹ The Government's Response to the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee Report: *Young Black People and the Criminal Justice System* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/ybp-cjs.htm>, 18 October 2007.

²² http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/tackling_knives.htm by The Home Office, June 2008.

²³ *ibid*.

²⁴ Dawson, P (2008), *Monitoring Data from the Tackling Gangs Action Programme*. London: Home Office.

2.21 However, government policy on gun and knife crime came under scrutiny from academics because it seemed to contradict research evidence and some went so far as to say that it sometimes actively strengthened the gangs they targeted.²⁵ A two-year research study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC),²⁶ based on six gangs in an anonymous English city, found evidence that challenged the core assumptions of government policy on gang and knife crime. The research team carried out interviews in the community and spoke to more than 100 gang members, associates and informers. Their main findings suggested that:

- youth gangs were not usually tightly organised units that specialised in drug dealing
- police often targeted individuals who, although part of a gang, were not themselves engaged in criminal behaviour. This continued to build animosity between young people and the police and strengthened the status of the gang
- violence was not predominantly provoked by turf war; it was more likely to be triggered by family/friend/relationship disputes, and often within the gang rather than between gangs
- a gang's ethnic make-up tended to reflect the local area and did not stereotypically consist of mostly black youngsters.

2.22 More recent media criticisms point to the failure of the £3 million tackling knives action programme in reducing knife crime in large English cities, as it failed to cut the number of fatal stabbings. According to Home Office figures published in July 2009, 'there was no change in the number of provisionally recorded sharp-instrument related homicides among victims aged 19 and under in TKAP areas'.²⁷ Most critics of the government's approach said there was too much legislation and too little action to tackle the causes of social breakdown, but some have also criticised the government's 'racialisation' of the matter.²⁸

2.23 Despite the criticisms, in July 2009 ministers planned to launch a £5 million second phase of the TKAP, extending the campaign to 16 police force areas and to tackling all forms of serious violence, including gang culture, among 13–24-year-olds. According to the Home Office website,²⁹ the tackling knives action programme will include a specialist team to help tackle gang-related violence, with £100,000 funding to work with local areas. A published guide aimed to support local partnerships in devising a gangs' strategy, and develop understanding of the tools available to deliver this.³⁰ These included possible interventions for local areas to adapt to their own circumstances and specific guidance for schools, YOTs, parents and carers, and the Crown Prosecution Service.

2.24 The Home Office crime reduction website said that guidance for the probation and prison services on tackling gangs should have been available from autumn 2008.³¹ However, our enquiries found that the guidance was still under development by the violent crime unit. There was also a joint research project by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS)

²⁵ Nacro (October 2008), 'Tactics against gangs fatally flawed' in *Safer Society*, Nacro.

²⁶ Aldridge, J, Medina-Ariza, J and Ralphs, R (2007), *Youth Gangs in an English City: social exclusion, drugs and violence*: Full Research Report ESRC End of Award Report, RES-000-23-0615. Swindon: ESRC. (<http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/esrcinfocentre/viewawardpage.aspx?awardnumber=RES-000-23-0615>).

²⁷ Ward, L and Diamond, A (2009), *Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) Phase 1: overview of key trends from a monitoring programme*. London: Home Office. – p 1 Key Findings.

²⁸ Alexander, C (2008), *(Re) thinking Gangs*. London: The Runnymede Trust.

²⁹ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news/plans-tackle-youth-violence> by The Home Office, 22 July 2009.

³⁰ <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/violentstreet/violentstreet012.htm> by The Home Office, *Tackling Gangs: A Practical Guide*. May 2008.

³¹ *ibid.*

interventions and substance misuse group, the Metropolitan Police and the Home Office tackling gangs action programme on the psychological processes that contributed to violence carried out by prisoners identified as street gang members. The project's report was in its final stages in October 2009.

- 2.25 It was difficult to establish the sections in the Ministry of Justice or the Home Office that were working on gang-related issues (other than in the Metropolitan Police). While the project lead officers were aware of the separate gang-focused projects under way, there seemed to be little coordination between them and many missed opportunities for joint working.

Local community responses

- 2.26 Local responses have been particularly motivated by the wave of young deaths in their areas. For instance, in London, the gangs, guns and weapons reduction board (GGWRB)³² operates with a practitioners group to coordinate and deliver cross-agency responses at a London-wide level. The Metropolitan Police serious crime directorate also leads an initiative based on US experience, known as Operation Pathways. This initiative seeks to formalise communications with those involved in serious gang violence. It uses enforcement while supporting groups of offenders to maximise their exit from gang-based lifestyles.
- 2.27 Birmingham's partnership response to tackling gang violence began following the murders of Charlene Ellis and Letisha Shakespeare on New Year's Day 2003. The statutory agencies came together with the local voluntary and community sector to form Birmingham reducing gang violence (BRGV), which became a core priority group in the Birmingham community safety partnership.
- 2.28 In 2004, the Greater Manchester Police launched operation Xcalibre to provide a strategic and tactical response to support the objective – 'aiming for gun-free streets'. Manchester and Trafford local authorities also established a joint violent gangs board to provide a strategic response to emerging cross-authority gang issues. The Manchester multi-agency gang strategy works through multi-agency cooperation on the problems of street gangs and the associated use of firearms. The principal aim of this team is to eradicate gang violence in Manchester within three years (starting from 2007).
- 2.29 Merseyside Police created the matrix firearms team – a specialist unit to tackle gun and gang crime – by combining covert investigative resources with uniformed disruption officers. The crime and disorder reduction partnership in Liverpool operates a longer-term strategy group of key partners, critically children's services, community safety antisocial behaviour managers and community representatives, to consider changing ways of working to pre-empt and tackle emerging gang-related activity across the city.
- 2.30 None of these initiatives had a specific or separate emphasis on children and young people, and local young offender institutions were not represented in any of these local community partnerships.

Responses to gangs in custody

- 2.31 There have been only two studies of gang activity in prison settings in England and Wales and both focused on adult prisoners. The Prison Service has recognised that gang culture needs to be properly identified and dealt with in its prisons. Prison Service order (PSO) 2750 states

³² <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/violentstreet/violentstreet012.htm>

that: 'The establishment must be alert to sources of conflict that are imported from outside the prison, particularly gang-related issues'.³³ Although PSO 2750 is applicable in the juvenile estate, there is no specific reference in PSO 4950, which specifically covers the care and management of children and young people under 18, to the particular issues which apply to that age group.

Other agency responses

2.32 The Centre for Social Justice³⁴ commissioned a two-year review of youth gangs in Britain and grouped its recommendations into 'immediate response', involving police disruption of gangs to prevent violence, 'medium-term action', involving the voluntary sector to build relationships between police and young people and 'long-term investment in the next generation', involving tackling the socioeconomic drivers of gang culture and intervening early. The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) also commissioned research into school-based gang interventions.³⁵ The information gathered is to be used to develop a practical (web-based) toolkit for schools to help them prevent and tackle gangs and gang culture. The Youth Justice Board's report *Groups, Gangs and Weapons* highlighted a distinction between those young people who offend in groups and those who are in gangs and offend, and suggested more specific targeting of these different youth crime groups. Its research found that serious gang violence was more likely to involve young adults than 10–17-year-olds.

Summary

2.33 The literature suggests various definitions of a 'gang', but that from Hallsworth and Young,³⁷ which refers to organised criminal groups acting for personal gain, seems to be the one most agreed upon and cited. It is important not to overstate the problem – young people who commit serious offences in groups and against other young people are not necessarily part of a gang. Nevertheless, gangs, as properly defined, do exist.

2.34 While the police service, government agencies and academics continue to measure the scale of the problem, new national and local initiatives and strategies aim to reduce serious youth crime and violence. Though this is a very general aim, gang culture and gang activity are now recognised as a significant contributing factor to youth crime and, as such, have become targeted for some of these initiatives.

2.35 There has been criticism of the focus on legislation and enforcement at the expense of tackling the underlying causes, specifically deprivation and social breakdown. Opportunities for coordinated joint working have been missed. Some local responses have developed multidisciplinary approaches with community organisations. However, work with young people with gang affiliations or gang-related offending while they are in custody is inconsistent and very limited.

³³ <http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/resourcecentre/psispsos/listpsos/index.asp?startrow=1> by The Prison Service, 6 June 2007.

³⁴ The Centre for Social Justice (2009), *op cit*.

³⁵ Broadhurst, K, Duffin, M, Taylor, E and Burrell, A (2009), *Gangs and Schools*. NASUWT, UK; Fitch, K (March 2009) in *Teenagers at Risk: the safeguarding needs of young people in gangs and violent peer groups*. London: NSPCC.

³⁶ Youth Justice Board (2007). *Groups, Gangs and Weapons*. London: YJB.

³⁷ Hallsworth and Young (2004), *op cit*.

3. How are gangs defined?

- 3.1 This chapter explores how the different definitions of gangs, or the interpretation or understanding of what is commonly described as a gang or gang culture, can determine the way that the police, young offender institutions (YOIs) and youth offending teams (YOTs) approach their tasks.

The Youth Justice Board and the women and young people's group definitions

- 3.2 We were told that the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and the Prison Service's women and young people's group (W&YPG) worked with the dictionary definition of gangs, namely 'a band of persons acting or going about together, especially for criminal purposes' but neither had published a clear working definition. The extent to which acceptance of the dictionary definition determined practice or strategy development, either centrally or locally, was unclear. We were told that the YJB did not work with a specific definition in initial placement decisions for those entering custody, but relied on police intelligence and information from YOTs to identify young people with gang affiliations.
- 3.3 The following description of a gang offered by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) intervention and substance misuse group demonstrates how a definition potentially determines strategy and the development of interventions.

The term 'gang' is widely used to refer to a range of criminal collectives ranging from delinquent peer groups, prison cliques to serious organised crime networks. Any intervention seeking to address the issue of gang violence needs to be clear on who the intervention is aimed at and what behaviours are being targeted, rather than trying to address 'gangs' as a homogeneous group.

How the police define and understand gangs

- 3.4 There was not one accepted definition of a 'gang' in the police service and it was clear from various personnel in the same police areas that definitions varied locally. For example, police officers gave us definitions varying from just a group of young people gathering on street corners to organised crime networks. However, the most common understanding of a 'gang' held by police intelligence units was a group of people who identified as a group, usually through a name, who were geographically based and had some involvement in criminal activity.³⁸
- 3.5 Gang culture is complex and dynamic and it was, therefore, unsurprising to discover that the police service sometimes struggled to maintain timely intelligence on all aspects of gang membership, culture and activities. Police intelligence indicated that it was not uncommon for fledgling gangs to fail or to merge with other gangs or for their members to change allegiance.
- 3.6 There were no examples in any of the fieldwork areas of gangs solely restricted to those under 18, although it was said that some gangs did have members as young as 12 or under. Some of these gangs had been in existence for many years, sometimes with an organised crime

³⁸ Hallsworth, S and Young, T (2004). Getting real about gangs. *Criminal Justice Matters*, 55, 12-13.

facet, but mainly involved in lower level crime activities or simply reinforcing perceived geographic control, with little, if any, financial gain in their activities. It was suggested that the upper age profile of such gangs rarely exceeded 25 to 30, with most being in their late teens/early 20s. It seems that individual membership changes over time and that there is a steady stream of new recruits.

- 3.7 Although accurate numbers of young people involved in gangs were difficult to ascertain in the areas visited, we were told that they were low compared with the overall population of young people. As a result, many police officers interviewed in the community felt that gang issues for young people had been 'blown out of proportion' by the media and this had adversely affected the public image of young people in general. However, there was also acceptance that even low numbers could have a high impact on the community, occasionally manifesting itself in extreme violence with fatal consequences, and all areas visited had examples of both.
- 3.8 Manchester operated an impressive approach to tackling gang issues known as Xcalibre (see paragraph 2.28). This approach balanced preventative and enforcement activities, but defined gangs as only those who had ready access to firearms to use with criminal intent. The number of children and young people involved in Xcalibre was low (see paragraph 4.12).
- 3.9 In contrast to the prescriptive definition used in Xcalibre, police in another area visited did not perceive there to be any gangs operating locally, preferring to use the terminology 'delinquent youth groups', although this appeared to be accepted practice rather than a published force policy. In this case, the terminology may have been appropriate as there was little intelligence that young people coming to the attention of police carried weapons, had ready access to them or had any organised culture of criminal activity.
- 3.10 In all areas visited, police intelligence suggested that some gangs (or at least the name of some gangs) had existed for many years, sometimes with a large membership. There were also other gangs with a small membership, sometimes lasting for only a short time before they broke up or merged with another gang.
- 3.11 In the main, police intelligence officers believed that there were no organised hierarchical structures in these gangs, or at least extremely tenuous hierarchies, which made it difficult to identify individuals who influenced the activities of gang members, especially the vulnerable younger members.
- 3.12 A further difficulty highlighted by the police service was determining whether a young person who self-identified as being a member of a gang – perhaps through wearing 'colours' or verbally stating their allegiance – was actually an active gang member. The social pressures to join gangs are complex and some police said that some young people claimed allegiance to a gang to address a perceived fear of not belonging to a local gang or even being coerced into membership. Whether or not they actually took part in criminal activities was uncertain.

Young offender institution definitions

- 3.13 The tackling gangs action programme (see 2.17) suggested a need to agree a definition of gangs. We asked managers in YOIs to consider whether it was necessary to have an agreed definition of a gang in order to manage individual young people with gang affiliations in prisons or gang-related problems that arose.

3.14

We have taken a conscious decision not to use the term gangs in the establishment because we think that it has unhealthy connotations and can falsely empower young people. We prefer to use the term 'groups'.

We should define a gang, that is, we must have an agreed workable definition that distinguishes between a serious organised crime cell and a bunch of kids who hang out together.

3.15 The majority of managers said that neither their establishment nor their department worked with a definition of gangs. Those who reported that they had not developed an establishment-wide definition justified this mainly in two ways. First, they said that gang issues could be dealt with through existing strategies, such as safeguarding and violence reduction strategies. Second, managers said that they had decided not to use the term 'gang' to avoid unwarranted attention to or over-glamorisation of gangs. One manager said:

My own concept is a group of individuals with a number of shared values and beliefs combined with shared antisocial values and beliefs. I would be cautious about using the term gangs unless young people raise it themselves. This is because I think it can sometimes give negative connotations and reinforce unhealthy aspects of behaviour.

3.16 The general view was that staff in their establishment shared an understanding of gang issues, even in the absence of a definition. However, with no agreed definition, the different interpretations of what constituted a gang were evident in responses to a range of questions.

3.17 We asked managers if they believed that gangs had formed in their establishment. Several said that this had happened, but others said that there was little solid – although some anecdotal – evidence that they had. Many prefaced their answer with a view that the question was open to interpretation and some commented that young people often formed 'alliances' and 'strategic friendships', often related to home areas, but that this was not the same as forming a gang and did not always lead to violence or a threat to security.

3.18 The managers who said that gangs had formed in their establishment gave examples, which included young people giving themselves a name and carrying out organised violence on the wings. This reflected the way in which the definition of a 'gang' shaped what was interpreted as a 'gang problem'. One manager said:

My perception is different from unit staff – kids from the same area are just kids from the same area.

3.19 Managers commonly believed that there was a fluidity of gang membership in custody. They described how young people sometimes changed their allegiances depending on the population and perceived risks to them and their gang at the time. For example, when the establishment was populated largely by young people from a major city, they were able to remain in small localised groups similar to those in the community, but when the establishment was a mix of different geographical areas, young people formed alliances based on their city of origin. One manager in an establishment that had recently changed its catchment area said:

They shift alliances to suit their own needs. We have noticed different rivalries since our catchment area changed. It used to be solely Liverpool versus Manchester, but the addition of Preston gangs has changed the dynamics.

- 3.20 Some managers went beyond the position that there was no need for a definition of gangs and asserted that gang issues for young people under 18 were not of great concern in YOIs. One manager said:

Gangs are not a huge problem. Young people here are really minimal affiliates of older cousins or brothers who say they are gang members.

- 3.21 In YOIs that held a combined population of children and young people under 18 and young adults between 18 and 21, managers were keen to stress that the main problems they dealt with related to the young adult population. However, there was no separate analysis of the relevant security data for the two populations and so this assertion was not based on reliable security information. There was a common belief that boys 'talk themselves up' and their claims about the extent of their involvement in gangs were considerably exaggerated. One manager said:

We don't have gang issues, but we do have gang members. The initial vulnerability assessment asks for that information, but I don't see the need to make an issue of it. Often they just use gang affiliations as an excuse not to move or to engineer a move.

- 3.22 Only two of the 16 YOIs in the under-18 estate had developed a formal gang management strategy that included a definition of a gang. One had a 'gang management strategy' (produced in June 2009), which included a definition based on the effect gang activities would have on the small under-18 unit.

A group of three or more individuals who through their activities pose an actual or perceived threat to the GOOD (good order or discipline) of the establishment.

Although this strategy was establishment wide, the establishment held a majority population of adults. There were no references to the specific issues that related to the under-18 population.

- 3.23 The strategy of the second establishment, the 'antisocial group and gang management strategy' (April 2009), described a classification model for gang members ranging from passive to active, though there was no distinct definition of a gang.

A passive gang member is an individual who has had his gang allegiance confirmed but is complying with the requirements laid out in this policy and not involving himself in the associated destabilising activities ... An active gang member is an individual currently engaged in activities associated with gang membership both within and external to the establishment.

- 3.24 This strategy described the dynamic nature of gang activity: 'individual young people can elevate themselves from passive to active or vice versa dependent on their compliance and conduct'. Although the strategy acknowledged young people's 'need to belong to something', as well as other reasons for violent behaviour and disorder resulting from a large number of adolescent boys growing up together in a confined space, it also asserted that it was unconstructive to define gangs.

The label 'gang' ultimately creates an image of glamour and power that as an establishment we would not wish to reinforce.

- 3.25 The most common approach seemed to be based on the view expressed by managers that gang issues dissipated in custody and allegiances altered. This stemmed from the belief that there was little or no difference between offending by young people with gang affiliations and young people involved in other serious offences and that issues that arose in custody could be dealt with within existing structures. This approach took no account of specific and often serious problems relating to resettlement, desistance and lifestyles related to gang association, both for individual young people and for the management of the regime. Custody was likely to offer temporary respite, rather than dissipation, for such problems, which almost inevitably would be resurrected on release. One manager's view supported ours:

Although we are able to manage the situation inside, there are no strategic or long-term solutions to manage the problem outside.

YOT definitions

- 3.26 One issue raised in all the YOTs, and more widely at the local level, was that finding a definition of a gang that made sense in their locality was problematic. One definition in use locally saw gangs as:

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.³⁹

- 3.27 Under this model, staff also had access to examples of how a young person might define themselves as being in a gang:

A gang member is someone who has self-identified themselves as being a member of a gang, for example, through verbal statements, tattoos, correspondence, graffiti etc, and this is corroborated by police, partner agencies or community intelligence.⁴⁰

- 3.28 Several YOTs argued that it was more helpful to have a general set of principles, rather than a single national definition. The YOTs visited during the fieldwork had considered a range of definitions. All, however, had found them to be wanting to some degree and felt they needed to be adapted to suit their local circumstances.

³⁹ Hallsworth, S and Young, T (2004). Getting Real About Gangs. *Criminal Justice Matters*, 55, 12-13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* MPS definition.

- 3.29 In some YOTs, the emphasis had moved from trying to define gangs to producing a conceptual framework that enabled multi-agency responses with a focus on serious youth violence. The partnership agencies had concluded that the search for an accurate definition of a gang was less helpful than being clear about the focus of the problems that needed to be tackled, such as serious youth violence and its impact on the wider community.
- 3.30 In one YOT this led to a partnership approach that focused on groups and individuals who had access to firearms and a willingness to use them. This area had had a long-term focus on gang issues. The local definition, agreed between the partner agencies, focused on risk of serious violence. The approach used for gang disruption reflected the continuum of youth involvement in crime and antisocial behaviour.
- 3.31 Factors that affected the presentation of gang issues in local areas included:
- territorial issues
 - established families with an organised crime focus
 - aspects of race and ethnicity
 - various local loyalty factors, such as schools attended or football teams supported.
- 3.32 It was common to hear that the nature of gang activity could change very quickly, for instance, following the release of an individual from custody or an incident that had taken place in custody or in the community. On this basis, the dynamic nature of gang issues locally was clear and added weight to the need for a conceptual framework that could accommodate the dynamic, and often chaotic, nature of serious youth violence and gang issues.
- 3.33 During the fieldwork, we found that where there was a locally agreed conceptual framework, either of what gangs were or the problems to be addressed, it helped with understanding and responding to the issues on a multi-agency basis. This applied at the strategic level as well as for service delivery.

Summary

- 3.34 There was no single accepted definition of what constituted a 'gang' or indeed what should be the focus of local problem-solving efforts. It was, therefore, unsurprising to find that multi-agency understanding of gang issues and gang culture was insufficiently clear, in both the community and the custodial context and it was difficult to determine the extent to which young people were involved in gangs. Some YOTs had decided to avoid a prescriptive definition of gangs and instead develop a set of principles and a clear framework to tackle gang-related problems, and this had helped focus the local response. Some managers in YOIs expressed a view that it was important not to glamorise violent behaviour by the use of gang terminology or to distinguish those with gang affiliations from others. Some police officers thought that gang issues for young people had been 'blown out of all proportion', but also acknowledged the high impact on the community, including fatal consequences. The dynamic nature of gang allegiances was recognised by senior managers in all the participating agencies, but how these manifested in each context differed. This was particularly marked in custody, where different allegiances were formed on the basis of current perceived threat.

4. How are gangs managed?

- 4.1 This chapter reports the findings from the fieldwork in custodial settings and the community. It describes the strategic management and operational arrangements in the police, prison and youth offending services. This derives from interviewing senior managers and practitioners, examining strategies, policies and protocols, and analysing individual case records. This chapter also reflects findings from interviews with nominated strategic lead staff in the Youth Justice Board, the Prison Service's women and young people's group and local authority children's services community strategic partnerships.

What the YJB and the Prison Service are doing

- 4.2 Neither the Youth Justice Board (YJB) nor the Prison Service's women and young people's group had developed a strategy or guidance on any aspect of the management of young people affiliated to gangs. For the YJB, this was a considered position. It had shifted from an original intent to devise a strategy to address 'serious youth group offending, gangs and weapons' to developing a work plan to include strands of 'serious youth violence', such as gangs and guns, knife crime, young women and violence, and preventing violent extremism. This work was carried out in the context of a wider Home Office serious youth violence strategy.
- 4.3 The YJB had identified the need for a YJB coordinating role in practice developments for gang-related work and to consider the national performance management arrangements for this work in youth offending teams (YOTs). A dedicated gangs coordinator had been appointed and developments in this area included efforts to improve data collection and information sharing.
- 4.4 A tool had been designed for YOTs to use to collect and manage information on young people with gang affiliations. It had been piloted by four YOTs in London and there were indications that it would be adopted by up to 30 YOTs. The majority of YOTs had not opted to receive the facility and, even where it was available in YOTs, there was little evidence that frontline practitioners used it. Information returns were not required as part of the YJB performance management systems, so it was unclear how the system would be used to generate management information.
- 4.5 Multi-agency serious youth violence forums had been established in London, the North West, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the West Midlands. Future forums were planned for the North East and the East Midlands. Participants included lead practitioners from YOTs, representatives from the young people's secure estate, the police and specialist voluntary sector organisations. The forums were intended to improve practitioner awareness of gang related issues, improve inter-agency communication and showcase innovative interventions. YOTs and the YJB gangs coordinator saw the forums as a helpful framework for developing inter-agency understanding of a range of priority issues and for generating ideas on service delivery responses. However, forums had limited ability to contribute to the development of strategy and commissioning activity. The YJB gangs coordinator saw clearer links to the relevant regional and local governance structures as the next stage in their development.
- 4.6 There had been little direct funding from the YJB to individual YOTs for gangs work. The national planning for YOTs had not established gang issues as a core business for them. Local initiatives had been funded from local partnership arrangements or national programmes, such as tackling gangs action programme (TGAP) and tackling knives action

programme (TKAP). The YJB had provided general consultancy and support to individual YOTs dealing with gang issues. For example, in Sheffield, programme development advice was offered.

- 4.7 We were told by the YJB that awareness-raising workshops had taken place in a number of young offender institutions (YOIs), as well as meetings with some governors and safeguarding leads. However, none of the managers interviewed said that they had received any support from the centre, and few were aware that there was a dedicated post in the YJB with a development brief and a remit covering gang issues.
- 4.8 Although there was no dedicated post in the Prison Service women and young people's group (W&YPG) and no written protocol, there was support for YOIs with the management of individual young people whose behaviour was problematic, possibly due to gang affiliations, from a nominated member of staff. He was a conduit for passing information from the establishment to the YJB and advocating on behalf of the establishment when a request for a move to another establishment was the preferred option. We were told that it was not possible for the W&YPG to maintain a central gang database as data collection in YOIs was inconsistent. However, some data were gathered as part of a process to monitor operational stability through regular data snapshots. No information was stored and none was shared with establishments, the YJB or other departments or agencies concerned with the management of gang-related concerns.
- 4.9 Although neither the YJB nor the W&YPG retained aggregated data on young people with gang affiliations, the YJB was able to calculate, at our request, that between February and May 2009 inclusive there had been 343 transfers in the children and young people's prison estate. Records indicated that gang-related issues were the primary reason for 21 (6.15%) of these transfers. The YJB did not routinely monitor how many transfers took place because of gang-related problems and, as a result, was unable to comment on the extent to which young people were moved between establishments to manage gang-related tensions.
- 4.10 We were told of one specific Prison Service initiative with some relevance to children and young people involved in gangs. In a response to the increase in gang-related youth violence in London, the Metropolitan Police and partners developed the pathways initiative, aimed at reducing violence among London's gangs. This initiative was closely linked with two other London-based projects – the diamond district initiative and the London Criminal Justice Board youth justice pilots.⁴¹
- 4.11 One strand of the pathways initiative that related directly to young people was the resettlement project, located in the Heron unit at Feltham YOI, which was due to open in September 2009. This unit provided places for 30 young people from the six diamond districts of Lewisham, Lambeth, Croydon, Southwark, Newham and Hackney. Work on the unit was intended to focus on providing high quality education, training and employment opportunities and assistance in helping young people to find suitable accommodation on release. Additional support included a mentoring scheme during the custodial phase, personal officer support and an external mentor to continue to work with the young person on his release. Allocation to places depended on an assessment of motivation to make life changes. Although young people affiliated to gangs were not specifically targeted for this project, it was thought likely that a number of participants would have gang affiliations.

⁴¹ The Diamond Initiative is a two year multi-agency project bringing together a wide range of services including officers from police, probation and local authorities aiming to help resettle offenders following their release from prison. Newham, Lewisham, Lambeth, Hackney, Croydon and Southwark are piloting this initiative. The core target group are adult offenders who have been sentenced to less than 12 months. There is a funding commitment from central government of £1 million for 2008/09 – £700,000 Ministry of Justice; £300,000 Home Office.

What the police are doing in the community

Strategy

- 4.12 The strategic approach by the police to addressing gang violence among young people varied considerably. All fieldwork sites had some link to the local crime and disorder reduction partnership, either directly or through some form of violent crime sub-group. There were some interesting examples of multi-agency approaches, such as the Birmingham multi-agency gang unit (MAGU), an offender management model exclusively for offenders believed to be involved in or at risk of being involved in gang-related activities, and Manchester's Xcalibre unit (see paragraphs 2.28 and 3.8). Both these units benefited from input from adult prisons and YOIs, something not apparent in the other areas we visited. However, there was no specific focus on young people in either the MAGU or Xcalibre projects, and there were few young people under 18 on these programmes.
- 4.13 Two areas used multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) as a way of managing offenders identified as being involved in gang-related offences. The MAPPA group met separately just to consider individuals involved in gang-related offences. Again, there was no specific focus on children and young people (see also 'What YOTs are doing' below).
- 4.14 Safeguarding arrangements were generally not well developed. Some police officers believed this was due to a lack of a shared or clearly defined understanding of gang-related safeguarding concerns, rather than a lack of procedures to address them. One officer said:

We need to raise awareness that safeguarding includes risk of harm on the street, as well as risk of harm in the home.

Interventions

- 4.15 Although they have an enforcement role, the focus of neighbourhood policing teams is primarily on prevention. Those that covered neighbourhoods where gang membership was prevalent had a good understanding of the social issues surrounding young people and gang membership and we came across some examples of good interventions.
- 4.16 For example, safer school partnerships, an approach that placed police officers in the school community, were used to identify young people at risk of joining local gangs. In such cases, police worked with partners to arrange appropriate interventions, which included home visits to inform parents and referrals to youth inclusion support panels or mentoring schemes, such as the City Disciples in Birmingham. In Birmingham, police had organised 'street influence sessions', a programme aimed at teachers and other school employees to raise awareness of local gangs issues. The four sessions included notifying staff of existing and emerging gang names and the 'colours' that were sometimes worn to display a gang allegiance. The intention was that such knowledge would allow school professionals to identify early signs of gang allegiance in young people and use the appropriate referral avenues.

Intelligence

- 4.17 Despite inconsistencies about definitions, all the police areas we visited had a good knowledge of gang membership in their locality. An ongoing intelligence requirement meant that detailed problem and target profiles were developed. These were primarily used for enforcement activities, often carried out by dedicated teams.

4.18 There was at least one police officer seconded to every YOT in the fieldwork sample. Their duties varied, but the volume and quality of intelligence from seconded officers was generally low. This was disappointing considering that many of these police officers had regular personal contact with young people who offend in the community and, in some circumstances, also in YOIs.

What YOTs are doing in the community

Strategy

- 4.19 The scale and consequences of gang issues varied in each YOT area visited. These ranged from persistent concerns about serious risk of harm and safeguarding issues – with child deaths in some areas – to gang involvement in lower level public disorder and acquisitive crime. The manifestation of gangs in local communities was said to be dynamic and the focus could change quickly. Where there were concerns about serious violent offences, the number of young people involved was small, but the impact of their actions could have a profound and detrimental effect on the wider community, in particular other children and young people.
- 4.20 There were differences in approaches to using information and intelligence to understand the scale and the scope of gang issues locally. Areas that had a clear conceptual model were more likely to be clear about the nature and scale of the gang issues in their locality. They were also better able to decide upon and target their resources.
- 4.21 The varying scope of local strategies was also evident. These ranged from broad-ranging endeavours on prevention, catch and convict and rehabilitation to seeing gangs as primarily a criminal justice issue. None of the strategies included management information systems or performance management facilities. Few strategies involved a media component to help local communities get a balanced picture of the issues.
- 4.22 There was a lack of clarity about central expectations on how gang issues should be addressed on a multi-agency basis. In the areas visited, guidance from the centre and research were applied differently to understand and respond to local issues.⁴² More work was needed to monitor the extent to which central guidance had been implemented locally and had been helpful.
- 4.23 Local responses varied in their focus and scope. Criminal justice responses were the most developed aspects, particularly on enforcement and detection arrangements. Broader approaches to prevention and rehabilitation were less well developed. In one YOT area, gangs had been established for over 25 years and had been able to draw in new ‘recruits’ every year. This indicated a need for broad-based preventative approaches to tackle the basis for gang development, as well as dealing with the problems they created.
- 4.24 Many areas saw the need to identify gang issues at primary school age. Feedback from frontline staff indicated that children and young people were being drawn in at an earlier age and that their behaviour was becoming more reckless and chaotic. Practitioners felt that by the age of 12 and 13, some young people were steeped in gang culture and ideology. Schools were seen as having the ability to make a significant contribution to preventing this development. However, some schools were reluctant to engage in gang issues as they feared being ‘labelled’ as problem organisations.

⁴² The most commonly cited documents that provided practical guidance in local areas were: *Gangs and Group Offending Guidance for Schools* (DCSF 2008), *Tackling Gangs: a practical guide for local authorities, CDRPs and other partners* (Home Office 2008), *Safeguarding Children and Young People Who Might Be Affected By Gangs* (DCSF 2009), *Groups, Gangs and Weapons* (YJB, 2007).

- 4.25 While many YOTs commented on aspects of national guidance that had been useful, the range of nationally commissioned projects had seemed to create an array of processes that were not helpful in the mainstream development of local strategies. For example, several YOTs and their partners commented on their perceptions of the unhelpful overlap between the tackling gangs action plan, tackling knives action plan and preventing violent extremism programmes. Many initiatives that had been established depended on short-term funding. For those YOTs, police services and local authorities that saw work on gangs as a core business, there were problems in accessing the required resources for long-term work targeted at gangs.
- 4.26 One local authority in London had invested £400,000 a year in its specialist mobile gangs intervention team (MIT) and a further £2 million in other gang and youth crime reduction specialist interventions. The local police service had also invested considerable resources in tackling gangs. For example, a designated inspector for youth managed a specialist team of two sergeants and 12 officers. The violence against person crime desk in the borough intelligence unit concentrated on gang-related activity, and the safer neighbourhood teams were tasked to deal each day with gang activity on estates. The work was managed through weekly YOT management meetings and fortnightly MIT meetings. The YOT operational lead was the YOT prevention manager, who oversaw the deployment of staff in response to case demands and borough crime hotspots.
- 4.27 In another YOT area, local intelligence suggested that the number of gangs and individuals involved had changed, as had the ability and willingness of gang members to use firearms. The data suggested that approximately 500 young people posed some degree of risk, with a larger number having a more marginal involvement. Tackling gang activity had placed considerable demands on the local authority and its crime management partnerships. In 2006, the police in that area established a task force to deal with intelligence and enforcement for younger gang members locally, who were resorting to disproportionately high levels of extreme violence. This included a joint task group from the police and local authority services.
- 4.28 At the time of the fieldwork, almost all the YOTs visited were developing or reviewing existing gang-related strategies. These tended to be complex, given the emphasis on partnership working and the scope of the work. The emerging strategies shared the aims of reducing gang-related crimes and risk of harm to the community associated with gangs, and efforts to reduce the supply of young people drawn into gang activity. The strategies were also increasingly building in explicit links to safeguarding strategies.
- 4.29 A London YOT provided an example of a strategic framework in place at the time of the inspection.

While we do not have a specific gangs' strategy document, there is a clearly articulated strategic approach to gang issues.

- 4.30 The approach had clear governance arrangements and reflected the continuum of youth involvement in crime and antisocial behaviour, from preventative work through to addressing serious offences. The plan was being delivered in four stages.
- Stage I – primary prevention through universal services: this focused on schools and was delivered by the Youth Offending Service (YOS) gangs’ team. Lesson plans had been developed in consultation with teachers to address emerging concerns about recruitment to gangs in primary schools. A range of other agencies contributed to the messages for young people in terms of rejecting the ‘gangster lifestyle’ and keeping themselves safe. Police officers were present in all secondary schools through the safer schools partnership.
 - Stage II – targeted early intervention for those at risk and involved in low level offending: this work aimed at diverting children and young people identified as being at risk of involvement in crime. There was a focus on the siblings of young people involved in gangs, identified as most at risk of also becoming involved. Two youth inclusion support panels coordinated multi-agency interventions. There was a strong partnership between the YOS and the local antisocial behaviour unit for information sharing and joint interventions using anti-social behaviour legislation, acceptable behaviour contracts and a range of interventions to promote change. The YOS integrated its work with the development of the targeted youth support model.
 - Stage III – prevent and deter: for those engaged in serious and/or gang-related offending. Children and young people scoring 21 plus on the Asset⁴³ and/or achieving high-risk on a risk of serious harm assessment were referred to the YOS risk management panel. This was a multi-agency forum, which met monthly and was chaired by the head of YOS. It coordinated and monitored the quality of interventions to manage and reduce risk and safeguarding concerns. This facility provided an important interface with children’s social care in safeguarding young people and their families from gang violence, as well as ensuring that specific child protection concerns were dealt with on a multi-agency basis. A local YOS/social care protocol specified reciprocal roles and duties with respect to vulnerable young people.
 - Stage IV – enforcement/catch and convict: enforcement work was overseen by a dedicated police operation. This was a multi-agency intelligence-led forum that brought together key agencies to review the intelligence on known gang nominals,⁴⁴ their offences and emerging affiliates. Part of its work was to review partnership-wide intelligence and use it to prioritise enforcement action. The Metropolitan Police Service had viewed this operation as a best practice model.
- 4.31 The ‘gangs action plan’, based on the Hallsworth and Young model, was used by one London YOT, the Metropolitan Police Service and in the draft London’s Children Safeguarding Board: *Children affected by gangs or serious youth violence (2008)*. This allowed resources to be targeted on risk issues.⁴⁵ The redesign of governance structures for the crime and disorder reduction partnership had clarified the partnership accountability arrangements for this work. There were strong partnerships with a shared vision for addressing gang issues, based on the notion that gangs were not just a criminal justice issue. There was a broad range of relevant partners at the local and London-wide levels.

⁴³ Youth Justice Board assessment documentation completed by youth offending teams.

⁴⁴ Individuals targeted for legitimate security reasons.

⁴⁵ National guidance was used to shape local plans, priorities and developments. The policies that guided the work were: Crime Reduction Strategy 2009–11, Youth Crime Prevention Strategy 2008–11, YOT Annual Service Plan 2009/10, Gangs Work Plan 2009/10, and the Gangs Awareness Training Plan.

- 4.32 Safe for All was a multi-agency operation to tackle youth violence, which began in one London area in October 2008. This was developed in response to a spate of high-profile knife-related incidents, which placed the issue high on the public agenda. The operation was a balance of enforcement, prevention and community engagement. A multi-agency task force was set up and jointly chaired by the chief executive of the council and the police borough commander. The group met every two weeks and managed the delivery of a 30-point action plan. Some of the key actions included increased use of youth early support panels, the introduction of extra police officers in hotspots and the use of council enforcement teams to support the police. Organised activities were to be introduced on Friday and Saturday nights in hotspots. Training on the identification and support of those most vulnerable to gang influence and victimisation was to be introduced in schools. Family interventions packages were to be developed alongside increased use of parenting contracts and orders.
- 4.33 As a result of the operation, local data suggested that youth violence offences dropped by 19.5% during its first eight weeks (compared with the previous eight weeks) and knife crime offences fell by 39.5%. This equated to 63 fewer victims of knife crime compared with the same period in the previous year.

Joint working with YOIs

- 4.34 There was evidence of some good joint working between YOI and YOT staff. The following case example illustrates effective communication between a YOT and a YOI.

Adele was a case worker for 12 young people in one custodial institution, over half of whom had a gang affiliation. This presented difficulties in keeping them and others safe from gang-related reprisals. Adele established contact with the head of resettlement in the YOI and met him to relay information on the gang profiles of the young people and advise on their contact with others. Adele also met the safeguarding principal officer to put him in contact with the local specialist gangs team manager and share information on some of the more high profile offenders in the establishment. Information gleaned from these sources helped in the move of a local gang ringleader, who was serving a long prison sentence, to another establishment. It was noted that this move could have led to another of the young people moving into a 'prestigious' gang position. However, intensive contact with this young person and his caseworker helped him to avoid taking on a central gang role. The young person was given the opportunity to voice his plan to avoid further gang activity on release and he was granted early release. Intelligence reports indicated that he had remained offence free since his release.

However, even when practitioners' efforts had been supported by management, there were still inconsistencies in this work. Overall, we saw little evidence of sharing of gang-related information between YOTs and YOIs, though one YOT in London had developed its partnership work with the secure estate. Three group work programmes had been delivered in HMYOI Cookham Wood and preparatory work had been completed in Feltham and Huntercombe YOIs. The gangs team was due to provide a regular intervention programme, in partnership with the five borough alliance, in the Heron unit in Feltham to assist in the resettlement of youth gang members.

- 4.35 Inter-gang rivalries and conflict between those in custody affected young people once they were released into the community. We saw case examples where problems and conflicts that emerged between young people in custody were being settled on the streets. To help address this, information on gang affiliations, risk and vulnerability was shared with the secure estate through vulnerability assessments, post-custody reports and training planning meetings. For cases involving custody, the initial assessments had been forwarded to the relevant institution within 24 hours in 77% of the cases we examined.

Safeguarding and public protection

- 4.36 There was also variation in the extent to which local safeguarding arrangements had been integrated with gangs work in the areas we visited. In one area, gang issues were not significant safeguarding concerns and there was little overlap between the public protection and safeguarding arrangements. In another YOT, safeguarding was at the heart of the processes to address concerns about young people and gangs. Every time a young person was identified as being at risk of becoming involved in a serious violent offence, their siblings and family were assessed for safeguarding concerns. This was based on the local experience that siblings of gang members were more likely also to become involved in gang activity and were most at risk of being a victim of a serious violent offence. The local safeguarding children board (LSCB)⁴⁶ also offered a one-day gangs and safeguarding children course, delivered jointly by members of the gangs' team and the board's training pool. The purpose of this course was to raise awareness and develop an understanding of the background and extent of gang culture in the area to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.
- 4.37 In one London YOT, there had been considerable debate on the interaction between gang issues and safeguarding. Here safeguarding was managed through the normal referral and assessment routes on a case-by-case basis. Where agencies identified significant safeguarding concerns, referrals were made to the children's social care service. Senior representatives from the key agencies dealing with gangs issues were represented on the LSCB. This kept the board informed of ongoing assessment of the local gangs problems and the partnership responses to those issues. The LSCB undertook reviews of child deaths and reviewed analyses of trends, and fed these into the gangs review processes.

The Safer Birmingham Partnership produced a guidance document to support the pre-common assessment framework, for use by professionals who worked with children and young people who needed access to services as a consequence of their direct or indirect involvement in urban street gangs. The guidance offered advice on what to look for and other sources of information. A flow chart of options and a referral form helped staff to access relevant services for children and young people who met the criteria for a range of interventions. Police officers, teachers and other professionals reported that they found the guidance on assessing the issues and the processes to access services to be useful in their work.

- 4.38 In general, we found that gang issues had a limited profile in the work of local criminal justice boards and that links to sentencers were not well developed.
- 4.39 Many YOT practitioners interviewed were unclear about MAPPA arrangements and their links to YOT work in general and gangs work in particular. In discussions with the chairs of the local MAPPA boards, the extent to which MAPPA had been developed to accommodate gang issues for children and young people varied.

We came across one effective example. A monthly pan-Birmingham MAPPA and shared priority forum shared information under the national offender management strategy, and a project support officer kept the community informed of critical incidents. The youth multi-agency risk assessment panel used the systems that originated from the adult public protection system. These were implemented regionally via the West Midlands area MAPPA support team.

⁴⁶ Under section 13 of the Children Act 2004, local authorities in England that are children's services authorities, as defined in section 65 of the Act, are required to establish LSCBs. Their board partners (which include the chief officer of police, local probation board, primary care trust and the other persons and bodies listed in section 13(3)) are required to co-operate in the establishment and operation of the LSCB.

Interventions

- 4.40 There were accommodation resource implications for gangs work, in particular, rehousing and supporting young people and families when necessary. Timely access to suitable accommodation was a problem for all the YOTs visited, particularly when young people and/or their families had to be moved at short notice. It was questioned whether any individual local authority would have the resources to provide the specialist accommodation required in some gang cases. Relocation of whole families was sometimes necessary and the following case example illustrates a successful outcome resulting from collaborative working between YOTs and the police in this case of extreme need.

Charles was a 14-year-old who had been convicted of a serious gang-related stabbing of another young person. This had been his first contact with the criminal justice system. Soon after commencing supervision, information sharing between the YOT and the police enabled a fuller understanding of Charles's involvement with, and role in, his chosen gang. He was seen as being a key figure in this gang. Information received, and a shooting of one of his peers, suggested that Charles was also at risk of being a victim of serious reprisal by rival gang members. Working with his family, the YOT arranged for Charles to be relocated to another city 200 miles away. The YOT in the receiving area responded quickly to the transfer. YOT staff helped Charles to access a range of constructive interventions in the new area. His behaviour changed markedly in the new locality and there was a significant reduction in the risk of harm posed by him and in the risks he faced. Two police services were part of these arrangements and there was evidence of good communication between the police and the two YOTs. The absence of Charles from his area of origin coincided with police action to disrupt the remaining gang structure. Recent intelligence suggested that the gang had ceased to operate.

- 4.41 Many practitioners saw the need to go beyond the criminological aspects to have a better understanding of the psychological and sociological processes that drew some young people into serious gang issues: in particular, the strength of the hold that gangs had on some young people and the degree to which they had internalised the gang culture as a way of life. Practitioners sought this knowledge to help them identify those at risk of becoming involved with gangs, provide relevant interventions and help young people stay free from gang-related crime and lifestyles.

Using local authority and the Department for Children, Schools and Families funding, Croydon Youth Offending Service undertook a pupil survey to consult on gang issues. This survey was offered to schools in the borough and nine secondary schools took part. The schools were all in areas of the borough where there were concerns about gang activity. The healthy schools officer gave a presentation on the issues to the relevant classes and pupils were then invited to complete the survey. In total, 1,453 children and young people responded. Some of the key responses were that only 29% felt there were gang issues in their schools, but 83% felt there was a gangs problem in Croydon. Half said they felt safe on public transport and a similar proportion said they felt safe at evenings and weekends. However, 56% said they thought there was pressure to carry weapons for personal protection. The information from the survey was used to plan the focus of work of the gangs' team, and the survey was a benchmark for comparison with further enquiries into community perspectives on gang issues.

- 4.42 Practitioners generally agreed on the reasons that young people were motivated to become involved in gangs. They consistently cited 'respect', status, power and (occasionally) money. There was also recognition that gang members got a sense of 'family', or belonging, from their gang. Many young people involved in gangs were seen as having responded to their perceived choice: either be involved in a gang or end up as a victim of that gang. This indicated the experiences of children and young people living in particular environments and the extent to which gangs and the wider gang culture in the area affected their life chances. Practitioners and young people agreed that once young people had become involved in a gang it was difficult for them to leave. The gang had a powerful draw for, and hold over, some young people.
- 4.43 There was a pattern to the entry of young people with gang-related offending into the criminal justice system. Many had limited histories of offending and had unpredictably escalated to serious violent/robbery offences. The offending was mostly directed at other young people in the area (robberies) or other gang members (violent offences). In our sample, 88% of the cases had been involved in gang activity before the index offence for which they had been sentenced at the time of the inspection. Yet only three of these cases showed that there had been effective multi-agency gang work before the most recent offence.
- 4.44 There were similarities in the way young people involved in gangs engaged with the work of the YOTs. In our casework sample, 81% of the young people had complied with their requirements. However, case managers noted that many young people did not fully engage with the work, for example, through open discussion of gang matters and the issues linked to their offending. This raised the question of why so many young people had a similar approach to their engagement with YOTs. Given this, it was difficult to see how YOTs could achieve much in effecting change in young people's gang involvement. There was variation in the extent to which gang-specific interventions were available to YOTs. Some had no dedicated interventions and others had developed local packages, delivered by specialist staff. Many YOTs used general knife/violent crime initiatives or mainstream approaches as interventions in this work. Some YOTs had developed specialist posts or teams to take the lead in gangs work, which had helped to focus on this work.
- 4.45 One YOS offered a 'Rites of Passage' programme to support 16–19-year-old men of African and African-Caribbean heritage. This was available to young people who were at risk of involvement in gangs. The programme was targeted at young people who were not in work, education or training. They were supported by their parents/carers, who were also guided on how they could work with the programme for the benefit of the young people. The programme gave the young people opportunities to develop themselves and overcome barriers to their educational and employment progress. The 13-week programme was delivered through a range of activities involving art, creative writing, drama, dance, martial arts and challenging physical activities. Mentors supported the young people and their parents and carers were also offered support. When they finished the programme, each young person completed a self-assessment and received a certificate at a graduation ceremony attended by their parents and carers.

Leadership and management

- 4.46 Fewer than half the managers we interviewed thought that local leaderships had sufficiently supported gang-related work. Only one-third of practitioners said that policy and practice guidance had adequately supported them in their work, and just over half said that line management support for gangs work had been adequate. Strikingly, only one in 10 of practitioners interviewed said they had access to appropriate training opportunities for this work.

- 4.47 Regardless of the extent to which a gang strategy had been developed locally, many staff were confused about the definitions and corporate approaches used in their areas. This led to variations in approaches in individual cases. Many staff saw local gang strategies as addressing only the 'tip of the iceberg'. In general, staff were not clear about their role in the overall approach.
- 4.48 Many YOTs faced heavy workloads with complex risk of harm and safeguarding concerns. Some practitioners noted that dealing with serious offences and gang issues had become part of their everyday work and that they could have become desensitised to the seriousness of the offences.
- 4.49 The majority of practitioners interviewed said they would welcome practice guidance for gangs work and to better understand the factors that lead to serious gang involvement by young people. A common theme was consolidation of practice guidance for the work. Many staff felt they had not had the time to train together with their partnership colleagues. In several YOTs, there had been a regular turnover of staff and it was felt that induction for new staff did not prepare them adequately for gangs work. Many practitioners felt that they had 'learned as they went along'. Certainly, there were inconsistencies in the ways practitioners assessed gang issues in individual cases, although the majority of cases we examined included some assessment.
- 4.50 A general theme was the differences in staff approaches to recording and planning the management of gang issues. Even when they could discuss their concerns in specific cases, their plans often did not explicitly address these gang-related concerns and did not specify the partnership work to be undertaken, such as joint work with YOIs. While the overall finding was that Asset score profiles reflected the risks and needs in the cases examined, in some teams, Asset scores were low. This was particularly the case when the young person did not have an extensive offending history. The issues that were routinely underscored were family relationships, neighbourhood and lifestyle. For some staff, the focus of the Asset score was more about compiling a problem inventory for the young person than identifying the range of issues associated with offending.
- Almost all the cases we looked at had an initial assessment of the likelihood of reoffending, and the standard of the initial assessment was sufficient in 86% of cases.
 - Parents had been involved in these assessments in 90% of cases.
 - Almost all young people, and 84% of parents, had been meaningfully involved in the planning process.
 - There were planned interventions to address gang issues in 58% of community cases and only one-fifth of custody cases.
- 4.51 Although 90% of cases had an intervention plan, case planning was not driving the work and leading to the focused coordination of the activities of the range of workers and partners involved in specific cases. When several staff were involved, we saw problems in the oversight of risk of harm and vulnerability. The focus of many plans was descriptive and not outcome oriented.

- 4.52 In the majority of YOTs, there had been a change over time in partnership working. Managers and staff identified changes in team cultures, with much progress on breaking down the barriers in multi-agency work. In general, case managers used data from a range of sources to inform their assessments and partner agencies also contributed. Gang-related multi-agency resources had been used in just over two-thirds of community cases and half of custody cases. There was a focus on family work in the interventions delivered, with evidence in over three-quarters of community and custody cases that families and carers had been actively engaged with the work.
- 4.53 In almost all the YOTs visited, there was an awareness of the potential for conflict between young people from rival gangs meeting in their offices. There had been considerable efforts by YOT staff to manage this problem and minimise the likelihood of violent outbursts in their premises. One difficulty that emerged in some YOTs was access to suitable community venues for work with young people, especially where there were territorial constraints on their mobility. Many YOT staff arranged appointments with young people in community venues, such as libraries. However, because of distractions and lack of privacy, these were often unsuitable for engaging in focused work with the young people.
- 4.54 There were inconsistencies between and within YOTs in the way enforceable procedures were used to address gangs issues, for example, the use of licence conditions, antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) and electronic tagging. The links between YOT gang workers and ASBO teams varied and was insufficiently coordinated in some areas.
- 4.55 Practice on the Asset assessment of the risk of serious harm (RoSH) was mixed. Almost all cases had a RoSH screening and over three-quarters of these were accurate. The quality of subsequent assessments was insufficient in over a third of cases, although a high proportion of cases received a home visit to inform risk of harm and safeguarding issues. Only 50% of the assessments demonstrated sufficient oversight by managers. MAPPA was not used to its optimum, with just over half of the relevant custody cases referred into the arrangements. Two-thirds of relevant cases had a risk management plan, of which only half were comprehensive. A high proportion of cases had been reviewed within three months of the start of the sentence, but this was not replicated where a review was needed following a significant change in circumstances.
- 4.56 There was evidence of positive impact on levels of offending in many cases. Nearly three-fifths showed a reduction in either or both frequency and seriousness of offending during the supervision period.
- 4.57 Progress was seen mostly in relation to employment, training and education, substance misuse and thinking and behaviour. However, sufficient priority had been given to victim issues in only 43% of cases.
- 4.58 Practice issues relating to safeguarding work were of variable quality. Some individual YOTs had made more progress in this work than others, but the overall picture was of variability with some worrying deficiencies. While a high proportion of cases had an assessment of safeguarding, we considered that these were of sufficient quality in only 64% of cases. Just over half the relevant cases had vulnerability management plans, and only 56% of these had been completed to a good enough standard. For community cases, all necessary immediate action to safeguard the young person was seen in half the cases, with action to protect other young people in only a third of cases. Effective management oversight was evidenced in just over half the cases.
- 4.59 We saw several cases where gang members had sought help to exit from their gang involvement and this had been provided. In other cases, parents had asked for help. In some

extreme cases this involved the relocation of the whole family. We found several examples of considerable progress on risk of harm and safeguarding issues in very challenging circumstances.

What the police are doing in YOIs

Strategy

4.60 There was little evidence of a strategic approach to the effective sharing of information between the Prison Service, police and YOTs. While each YOI had an information-sharing protocol that underpinned a memorandum of understanding with partner agencies, police liaison officers (PLOs) said there was a lack of coordination in the exchange of information. Some said they had experienced no problems with the flow of information, while others said prison staff were confused about what PLOs were allowed to access. This situation was often exacerbated by Prison Service security audits that questioned PLO access to the PIN (personal identification number) telephone monitoring system in establishments, even when access was backed up by intelligence sourced from security information reports (SIRs). Engagement between the PLO and other agencies, such as YOTs, social services, health professionals and substance use teams, was patchy, although some PLOs said the latter sometimes provided general information.

Sharing intelligence

4.61 Intelligence flows to and from young offender institutions were sporadic. Most police intelligence units had arrangements through on-site PLOs to access intelligence from within establishments, but this was seldom done unless there was a specific operational reason, for example, the Metropolitan Police Service's operation Trident.⁴⁷

4.62 Most PLOs covered more than one prison across a region, with no dedicated coverage of establishments holding children and young people under 18. This meant that some YOIs only saw their PLO for one day a week. This was perceived to hamper effective working relationships for the exchange of intelligence.

4.63 There appeared to be little parity in resourcing the PLO role. For example, one police force had two local prisons and two PLOs, each of whom was integral to the work of the establishment. In contrast, another police force had two PLOs to share work in three local prisons. Some PLOs had to deal with up to 10 different police forces because of the extent of the catchment areas for YOIs. One PLO dealt with intelligence on young people from the West Midlands, East Midlands, Northern England, Wales and London. Only one PLO said they had seen force strategic assessments on gang input/output generated by the police national intelligence model, although there was some evidence of greater awareness of the model within the Prison Service.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ An anti-gun crime operation that was set up in 1998 to help end a spate of shootings and murders among young, black Londoners.

⁴⁸ The National Intelligence Model (NIM) is an intelligence-led policing model adopted by ACPO and ACPOS. NIM identifies patterns of crime and encourages the matching of resources against an accurate picture of crime and incident problems. NIM promotes a cooperative approach to policing and partnership with other agencies and bodies. There had been progress on rolling out the national intelligence model across prisons, and its presence was evident in one establishment that had fully adopted it.

- 4.64 Police liaison officers received intelligence from several different intelligence infrastructures. The West Midlands had a regionalised model, still in its development phase, which covered the police forces of West Midlands, West Mercia, Staffordshire and Warwickshire, and had a regional prison intelligence unit based at Solihull. It employed three PLOs from the West Midlands, two and a half full-time PLOs from Staffordshire and five from West Mercia. It had been in development for 18–24 months and had got off the ground in the last nine months. The PLOs from the YOIs in this region received requests for intelligence direct from the regional force intelligence bureaux and the regional prison intelligence unit. They also received intelligence requests from police officers related to conflict between known gang members. Requests could also be received through Police Advisory Service forms (PAS 1s). Information gleaned from these intelligence requests was submitted via a security information report to the prison's security department. The West Midlands model incorporated a multi-agency gang unit (MAGU), and the intelligence analyst in the fieldwork site said they met the MAGU once a month to discuss ongoing issues and trends.
- 4.65 Other PLOs said that they received the majority of requests for intelligence directly from force intelligence bureaux. Occasionally, security departments in the YOI asked the PLO for information as a result of incidents within the establishment, including verification of an individual's gang status in specific police forces or boroughs. Such enquiries were time-consuming and required off-site work, as many PLOs did not have access to home force computers from the YOI. Many PLOs reported little or no contact with the Prison Service Central Authorities Bureau.⁴⁹
- 4.66 All PLOs reported good personal contacts with the high profile operations in the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), such as operations Trident and Trafalgar.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The Central Authorities Bureau is part of the National Intelligence Unit in the Prison Service, which is the central contact for establishments that have intelligence under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA).

⁵⁰ Operations Trident and Trafalgar are MPS initiatives to tackle gun crime among London's black communities, with a particular focus on drug-related shootings. The aims of the projects are to increase community engagement, especially with young people, and maximise prevention opportunities through the development of specific anti-gun crime initiatives in high gun crime locations.

What YOIs are doing

Identification and risk management

- 4.67 The majority of establishments said they attempted to find out in an initial interview with a young person if they had a gang affiliation or had been involved in gang activity in the past. However, if a young person chose not to declare an association, establishments had to rely on information in their Asset documentation placement alert forms and any other records from a previous establishment. One establishment mentioned identification through the training planning process; only one mentioned involving parents; and a further establishment referred to identification from information provided by the gangs lead in the women and young people's group.
- 4.68 Almost all establishments, apart from some smaller units, kept a list of the gangs that young people in their establishment were involved in. Only two establishments could state how many young people they had identified as being involved in gangs in the previous 12 months. One claimed 106 identifications and another 100. One establishment said that it could not calculate the number, although it had reported that it kept a gangs database. In the absence of an agreed working definition, reported numbers were unreliable and comparisons between establishments were not possible.
- 4.69 One manager said that it was not standard practice to ask young people specifically if they were involved in a gang as part of resettlement assessments. He was confident that this would come out as part of routine contact with personal officers or caseworkers.
- 4.70 Our interviews with personal officers and caseworkers suggested that this might not be the case, as only around two-thirds of caseworkers had met the young person whose case they were responsible for and had an informed opinion on the level of their involvement in gang-related activity. Some had only met the young person at review meetings, where there was little evidence that gang issues were given any focus.
- 4.71 Only one establishment said that it would not attempt to identify young people with gang affiliations, with the justification that:

We don't want to create a monster that doesn't exist.

- 4.72 In our examination of training plans, we found that very few if any of the fieldwork sites made any reference to this aspect of the young person's lifestyle, or its relationship with their offending, as part of an assessment of needs. The risks to or by the young person had not been addressed through training planning targets.

CASE STUDY

A 17-year-old man of mixed heritage, in custody on remand for five months, admitted to being a member of a Manchester gang during his induction to the establishment.

The young person's view

The young man's responses during interview showed a strong sense of gang loyalty: 'I'm not the type to walk away from my friends. MMAGS [Manchester Multi-Agency Gang Strategy group] have tried to talk to me about gangs – they're useful, but nothing they say will change anything...'

The key worker's view

While the young person's offence was robbery, the remand caseworker did not know whether this was gang related and said: 'The only reason he's here is because he breached his bail.' The YOT was not willing to offer him the intensive support and supervision programme due to his risk to the community; he had many previous offences, not knowingly linked to any gang activity, but obviously thought by the YOT to be so. The young person's remand plan was said to include involvement with MMAGS, but there was also comment that he did not seem motivated to engage with them. When asked about the involvement of family, the caseworker commented that the young person's father might also have had gang associations, as he sometimes disrupted the remand planning meetings.

Wing file records

A completed reception gang questionnaire stated the name of the young person's affiliated gang and the initial vulnerability assessment made reference to gang issues. Wing observation books noted at one stage that the young person was placed on covert observation and monitoring for bullying. While these entries did not specify that the bullying incidents were gang related, staff said that the young person had a reputation for being involved in gangs and that he had influence over the other young people on his wing. The security department held details of the young person's gang affiliations and his associates, and his activities were restricted through the establishment's 'keep apart' list. The young person had been the subject of 12 security information reports during the previous six months; two specifically mentioned problems with young people with affiliations to rival gangs. The young person had been assessed as MAPPA level three.

Training plan

None of the remand planning documentation referred to offering help or services in relation to the young person's gang involvement. Neither was there any evidence that gang-related issues had been given any attention in any of the meetings, despite many comments in the young person's records to suggest gang involvement was a significant factor in relation to his behaviour and resettlement prospects.

4.73 The majority of establishments used information about gang involvement to inform individual cell locations and allocation of activity places – basically to keep apart young people who might be problematic. One establishment operated a system of keeping young people apart following identification of gang affiliation. There was a 'keep apart' list, although it was not used exclusively for gangs. One manager said that they had so many young people on the list that it was not possible to identify who were gang members and what the particular gang issues or concerns were.

4.74 While the benefit of keeping young people apart was recognised, the ultimate gain was questioned:

Yes, there is a very long list of young people that should be kept apart, which is effective in reducing violence but is not a long-term solution, and does not help young people to resolve their issues.

4.75 Other criticisms of this method were that it interfered too much with the regime or that it was ineffectual when the regime required young people to mix, for example, during activities.

- 4.76 Some managers took a different view and expressed dilemmas not only about what was possible within the custodial setting, but also about what was useful. One manager summed this up as follows:

We do a good job of keeping young people safe. In other words, we keep the lid on things while they are here. But we are not getting to the root of the problem – having said that, I would question whether that is our job.

- 4.77 One establishment reported that it had adopted an approach of full integration to remove any glamour associated with gang membership. We were told that all related policies and practice were based on this stance. In practice, rather than integration, the establishment's policies did not specify separation. In our interviews with young people and some operational staff, it was clear that young people from rival gangs were separated without formal acknowledgement of this practice.

- 4.78 Most managers commented that keeping young people apart was a good way to reduce violence, but it was also widely acknowledged that it was difficult to distinguish gang-related from other types of violence. Some said that as long as they kept young people safe, they were managing the situation well, regardless of whether it related to gangs. However, there were also some reservations about the overall effectiveness of separating young people.

I would like to think we are in control of gang-related issues, but I am not really sure. We are in control of the establishment. But we are seeing the tip of the iceberg. We aren't identifying lieutenants and generals, that is, the hierarchy.

Strategy

- 4.79 None of the managers we interviewed said they had come across national guidance or advice. Some said they had informal information and advice from W&YPG, but only one mentioned any support from the YJB, and that was about moving individuals from rival gangs to other establishments. Most managers expressed frustration at the lack of central direction. One said:

We often look to help from the YJB. But their response 90% of the time is 'just manage the problem' which is shocking – they're supposed to put the child's interests first.

- 4.80 Managers felt that headquarters also had a coordination role across YOIs. One said:

We need to have better links with other establishments in order to get a better handle on the extent of the gangs issue for this age group nationally. The YJB have a big role to play in this also. There should be a central database similar to the disruptive list. They should tell us what gangs operate in which areas of the country. They should maintain an overview and keep us informed.

4.81 One manager summed up general frustration as follows:

The disparity between the amount of discussion taking place on the subject and the amount of work actually being carried out needs closing.

4.82 The majority of managers said that there was no overarching strategy on the management of gangs in their establishment. Some managers admitted that they did not know if there was a strategy or not. Only two establishments had produced a strategy specific to the management of gang-related issues. In one establishment, the strategy had only recently been completed, but three managers failed to mention it during their interview. The other strategy had been produced by an establishment that also held adult prisoners and there were no specific references to the different considerations for children and young people.

4.83 One manager expressed his frustration at the lack of a common understanding of the issues facing young people with gang affiliations and the absence of a coordinated response, both nationally and within different departments in YOIs.

It's not an incurable disease. For many it's an unfortunate imposition. Many of these boys are just brothers [of other gang members] who find themselves in a world they don't want to be in. But there are few lifelines outside and even less in here.

4.84 Two establishments reported that they were carrying out some work to find out what was happening elsewhere on working with young people involved in gangs. In one establishment, the psychologist had undertaken a literature review and was making links with relevant agencies in the community to see what programmes were available. In another, the chaplaincy team had visited several gang projects in the USA and reported on their experiences.

4.85 Some managers said that gang issues were not a problem in their establishment and so did not merit consideration for specific strategic management or procedures. Others said that all young people were dealt with according to their individual assessed needs and described care planning as a tool for this. However, we found little evidence to support individual care planning in the case records that we examined for the 70 young people in our sample described as those with the most significant gang problems.

4.86 In the absence of a specific strategy for all but two establishments, we asked managers if there were any other policies, strategies or protocols that dealt with any aspects of gang-related issues. Some managers believed that their violence reduction strategy covered all aspects of violent behaviour, including that related to gang membership, and felt that this was sufficient. We found only one violence reduction strategy that included a very brief paragraph on 'gang work'. It described an approach that would challenge young people's attitudes and beliefs by 'working in partnership with external agencies in delivering effective, innovative and needs-led interventions'. The strategy included details of one external partner that was said to be delivering an intervention. One establishment felt that its antisocial behaviour policy was relevant to the management of gangs, but the policy made no specific reference to its applicability to the management of young people with gang affiliations. Very little was included in the resettlement strategies sent to us or the safeguarding strategies that we examined.

4.87 There was much confusion in establishments about the resources available to manage gang-related issues and where responsibilities lay. We were told of specific posts related to gangs in only two establishments. One establishment had a gangs coordinator/collator based in the

security department. Another had a strategic threats coordinator. Another establishment was about to recruit a new post of 'dedicated gang intelligence senior officer'. The main responsibilities of these posts were to collate information from SIRs that was gang related and to maintain a database, used mainly to keep identified individuals apart.

- 4.88 In the absence of a strategy that included robust assessment of risk and need, practice tended to be based on risk avoidance or risk elimination rather than risk management. There was very little dynamic assessment of the risk to themselves or to others posed by individual young people who had a gang affiliation and there was little assessment of the risk that gang issues posed to the establishment overall. Very few establishments had specific procedures on the management of gangs, other than official and unofficial 'keep apart' procedures which resembled the postcode 'fences' that sustain gangs in the community and therefore risked reinforcing or creating gang identity in custody.
- 4.89 During the fieldwork, we found that gang members were not necessarily the most problematic young people to deal with while they were in custody. Many restrictions on their activities were based on their potential to be disruptive rather than actual behaviour displayed in custody. One manager commented that a lack of strategy and the resultant fractured approach by various departments in his establishment were unhelpful:

It is a security issue at the moment and we need to expand it to make it multidisciplinary.

- 4.90 Heads of functions interviewed were asked to describe their department's role in the management of young people with gang affiliations. Responses generally focused on maintaining a safe and secure environment and included a description of the difficulties associated with that task and the need to pass on security-related information. One residential manager said:

Residential involvement is to promote a non-gang culture and to constantly challenge gang-related behaviour and monitor young people well – which means getting to know them. We can do that better now that we have much smaller residential groups.

- 4.91 Responses from heads of resettlement or offender management units varied from 'nothing really' and:

We can only do so much while they are here. The most important work has to take place when they are released.

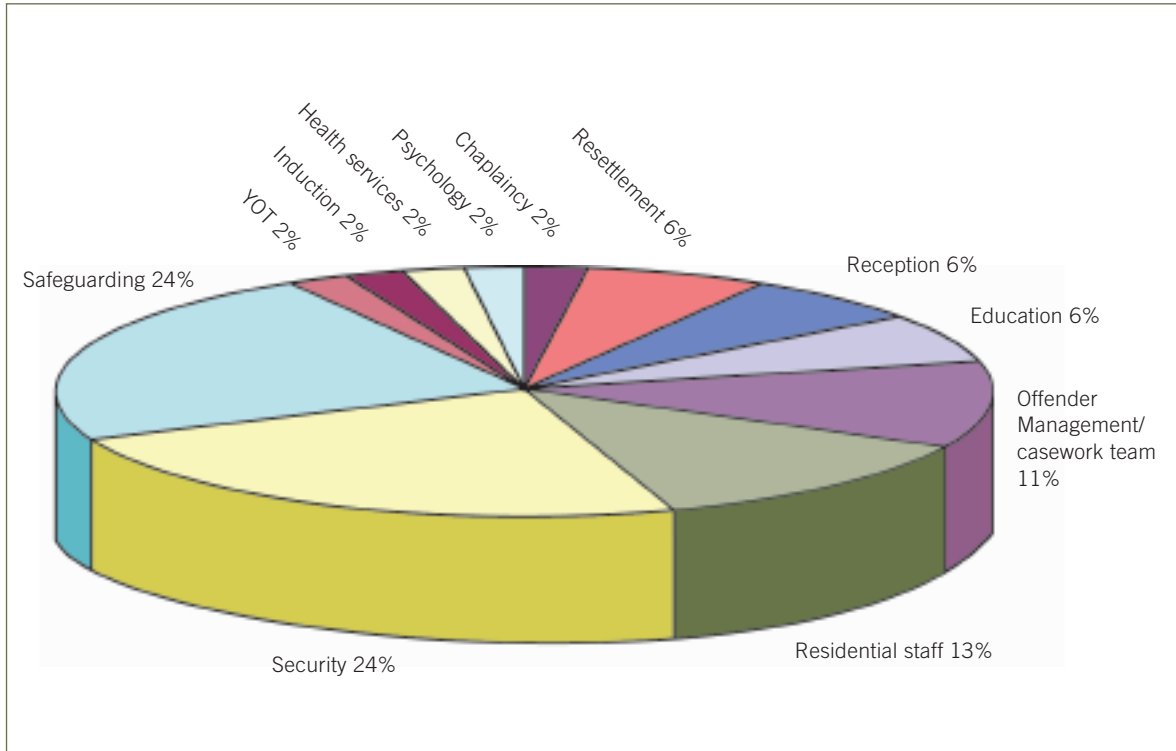
to:

Our specific role relates to securing employment or education and accommodation on release. We have managed to relocate some young people in the past, but this has usually been about high profile offences and victim issues, not directly gang related. The main influence which we would like to change for young people involved in gangs is family influences, particularly older brothers, but that is very difficult.

- 4.92 While almost a third of the 70 young people we interviewed said that they were Christians and a third said they were Muslim, there was rarely any mention of the chaplaincy as a department that could offer support or provide additional targeted services for young people with gang-related problems to deal with.

4.93 When asked who the key departments were in managing gang issues in an establishment, the results from those who responded were as follows:

Figure 2: Departments thought to be responsible for managing gang issues



4.94 A comment by one manager described the general approach across the YOI estate well:

It's very much a reactive rather than a proactive process, just trying to manage each individual issue as it presents itself.

Safeguarding

4.95 There was generally little difference in the responses by safeguarding managers in different establishments about their role in the management of young people with gang affiliations and few safeguarding managers identified specific responsibilities in this regard. However, one manager said:

We also have a critical role in engaging with community agencies to ensure that there are no implications for community safety, and this includes the safety of siblings and other associates. We always consider whether it is appropriate to make a child protection referral. We work really well with [the local authority] here as they have a big gang problem in that area so are aware of the issues.

Interestingly, this comment came from a manager in one of the two establishments that had a gangs strategy.

4.96 Two-thirds of managers interviewed felt that there was a culture of fear and intimidation caused by gang tensions. However, some asserted that the fear experienced by vulnerable

young people in custody was not necessarily directly related to gang tensions or activity. Many felt that the reputation of a gang member automatically made others feel intimidated, regardless of a real threat. A culture of fear was also reflected in the interviews with young people. Thirty of the 41 young people (73%) who responded to this question said there was fear and intimidation in the prison because of gang members. When young people were asked what the negative aspects of gang involvement were, the most frequent responses were getting hurt or killed and dealing with the constant feelings of fear, anxiety and lack of safety.

CASE STUDY

A 17-year-old man in custody on a 10-month sentence for attempted burglary.

The young person's view

The young man had been in his current establishment for only a month, but said he had already experienced gang issues.

'I got stabbed by a member of a rival gang when I was out in January 2009. When I came to [the establishment] people were bragging about it. The person who did it is here. I don't go to education much as I was concerned about all the threats I was getting here. They have negotiated a move to [another establishment] but I don't know whether I want to go as I will lose the few visits I get, so I may try staying – not sure they [the rival gang members] will do anything to me. I don't feel safe on my current wing. I am not going to education and I'm not on a wing that provides wing-based education. I would be in my cell all the time if I didn't have association.

'My YOT worker knows there are big gang issues here. I don't understand why they sent me here ... They didn't do everything in my best interests. The YJB should have a special system. They should work with the YOT workers who know what gangs people are in and where they are.'

This young person agreed that gang-related issues affected the lives of young people negatively, but disagreed that staff were knowledgeable about their extent. However, he strongly agreed that the prison was managing gang-related issues well: 'They do it to the best of their ability'.

The caseworker's view

The caseworker described some effective information sharing between the YJB and the establishment. However, plans for the young person's resettlement had not begun to be developed, even though he would only be spending five of his 10-month sentence in custody. His records stated: 'He is not yet in need of resettlement help'. A community social worker was involved with the young person, but there had been no contact. Caseworker records generally demonstrated a reasonable level of awareness of the young person's difficulties, but few solutions. 'The problem is getting away from it, as the rival gang still associate him with it. He is at high risk as both gangs are here at [the establishment]. All we can do is reduce the contact which also reduces his opportunities.'

[continued over]

CASE STUDY cont.

Wing file records and training plan

Wing history sheets had many detailed entries about the risks other young people posed to this young man. An officer noted that the young man told him of his problem with rival gang members during a conversation and commented: 'They have already tried to attack him at court. I have put in an SIR'. The cell-sharing risk assessment noted that there were issues with boys from areas in south London and suggested an anger management course as an action. There were no other suggestions for help or intervention, apart from 'keeping off certain wings'. The young person's training plan did not address his concerns and did not mention his non-attendance at education. The many SIRs submitted about this young person mostly detailed the areas of the prison where others had threatened him, and which other boys should be 'kept apart' from him.

- 4.97 None of the managers interviewed said that specific action had been taken to address gang-related anxiety and fear, even though they agreed that some young people refused to engage in the regime or were prevented from doing so by formal, as well as informal, procedures that kept certain individuals or groups apart. Opinions on the effectiveness of keeping young people apart were polarised. Some managers said that separation was the only way to ensure the safety of young people. Many agreed that young people who believed they were at risk refused to attend certain activities. This was sometimes interpreted as an indication that the young person concerned had gang affiliations that he had not declared.
- 4.98 Views about the extent to which there was bullying related to gang involvement were almost equally split. There was general acknowledgement that it was difficult to distinguish between different types of bullying.

There is bullying and I am sure that some of it must be related to gangs. Certainly there is bullying in numbers – that is, groups of young people against other groups. So is that gang related? We can't always tell and in truth I doubt we make much effort to find out.

- 4.99 One manager felt that some young people involved in gangs manipulated others to bully or intimidate others on their behalf to avoid taking responsibility themselves. Similarly, managers said that it was difficult to distinguish gang-related fights from other fights between young people. One manager said:

The problem with fights between young people is it is hard to decide what the trigger was – so much of it is just spontaneous – that's just what boys do.

CASE STUDY

During his interview, one young person told us he had been attacked by three members of a rival gang while in a holding room waiting for a legal visit. On his wing file, notes of the incident simply said 'involved in a fight', and did not link this to any gang activity, even though other documents in this same file detailed which gang he was affiliated to and which gangs he should be kept apart from.

Case study

In one young person's post-court report, the vulnerability section detailed gang affiliation and concern over rival gangs. The recommendation was to 'monitor on 24-hour watch due to reparation from rival gang'. Wing history sheets mostly detailed this young person's disruptive behaviour. There were rarely reasons given (and no evidence that reasons were sought) for this behaviour, although his vulnerability assessment stated there 'may be rival gang members that want a revenge attack' in the establishment. His induction assessment listed him as a member of a named and well-known London gang and this was on the YJB placement alert form. On another placement alert form, there was more specific detail: 'Do not send to [a named establishment] due to rival gang issues' with two named gangs. His cell-sharing risk assessment mentioned 'gang issues', but did not detail the gang names that were readily available and could have been used in allocating a cell mate.

The initial remand plan document was one of very few we saw that actually included a gang-related target – 'do not fight with rival gang members'. This document also had instructions from the YOT stating that he must be 'kept apart from his co-defendants' (again with no reason given). At the time of our visit, this young person was on the same wing as his two co-defendants. His wing history sheet contained nothing about gang affiliations or issues and none of the above information had been transferred.

- 4.100 There were also reports of intimidation between gangs and a belief that some young people were drawn into disputes that they would not choose to get involved in were it not for their gang affiliation.

Gang members are also intimidated by other gang members. If there are issues between individual gang members in the prison, young people are expected to support their gang member when most of them would prefer to keep their heads down while in custody.

- 4.101 We asked managers if there was evidence that some young people who were not in a gang previously had become part of one since they came to prison. Most felt that there was little evidence of this. A common view was that young people naturally seek safety in numbers and might align themselves with a particular group that they perceive to be the most powerful.

Some do it because they think everyone is involved in a gang here so they need to sign up for their own protection.

- 4.102 It was noteworthy that the majority of views suggesting that gangs had formed in custody came from one establishment.
- 4.103 A few managers offered examples of different gangs that had been formed in custody at the instigation of a small number of young people. One establishment had found evidence in a written hierarchy, which described a redefinition of leadership of a particular gang based on the members who were in custody at the time.
- 4.104 In general, establishments reported that young people were rarely moved to another establishment specifically because of gang-related issues. It was not possible to obtain accurate data, as such records were not retained by either the YJB or the Prison Service. Anecdotal accounts from managers suggested that there were examples of young people, both gang members and those intimidated by them, who asked to move wings or to another establishment to avoid trouble with other gang members. This was arranged if deemed the best course of action.
- 4.105 Some managers thought that location in a YOI away from their home area was in the best interests of young people with the most influential gang affiliations and gave examples of young people transferred to their establishment for serious discipline reasons who had settled very well. They attributed this to their loss of status as they took on a different position in the establishment among local gang members.

Young people who arrived with a high profile in a gang away from this area lose their credibility here and often settle down while they are here. Status comes and goes.

- 4.106 Managers were also sceptical of the motivation of some young people.

Often they just use gang affiliations as an excuse not to move or to engineer a move.

- 4.107 Regardless of their gang affiliations, the young people who formed the focus of this thematic review were legally children. Many would reach the significant harm threshold that justifies compulsory intervention in family life in the best interests of the child and imposes a duty on local authorities to make enquiries to decide whether they should take action to promote or safeguard the welfare of the child.⁵¹ Yet safeguarding issues relating to gang involvement were generally not addressed in policies or procedures covering the risks to the young person and the risk they posed to others.
- 4.108 One manager highlighted the concerns well:

We think that gang members are one of the groups that should be given a premium service by the establishment and YOTs. It is a child protection issue for young people who are involved in gangs who are likely to get hurt or even killed.

⁵¹ Section 47, Children Act 1989.

Information sharing

- 4.109 When asked about information sharing, just over half the managers interviewed said that staff were adequately briefed on gang issues across the establishment and on individuals with gang affiliations. Most managers said that internal gang issues were discussed at monthly security committee meetings. Some mentioned discussion at the safeguarding or safer custody meetings. Others said that staff were better informed about individuals than about overarching establishment-wide concerns about the management of gang issues. Some managers mentioned daily emails and security newsletters or briefings as effective methods of information sharing, but very few referred to consulting the establishment's gangs database or 'keep apart' list. Staff meetings and verbal briefings were said to be the main method of sharing information, but one manager highlighted difficulties associated with this approach:

We rely heavily on our senior officers to disseminate information and they are very poor at this.

- 4.110 Managers who were less content with existing methods of information sharing said that staff needed more information about local gangs in their area, as well as more detailed information about individuals in the prison, to get a better understanding of the need to share information and ways to improve existing systems.
- 4.111 Our examination of the Asset documentation of the young people we interviewed indicated that there was frequently useful information about their gang affiliations, but it was not appropriately disseminated across the establishment. Many placement alerts had been sent by the YJB placements team to give establishments advance information about gang issues for individual young people, but this information was not easily accessible on wing files and had not filtered through to staff who needed it. The lack of understanding of the issues was mentioned by other managers who thought that the intelligence they received from staff in the establishment was not as good as it should have been. One manager said:

I'm concerned that staff aren't sophisticated enough in passing all relevant information on. They spot the big obvious stuff but not enough of the lower level stuff.

- 4.112 Just over half the managers interviewed said that staff passed on gang-related intelligence effectively, mainly through the SIR system. Others said that staff made good use of observations books on the wings. However, during our fieldwork we found that the use and content of wing observation books varied widely. In one case, the wing observation book had a useful list of the 'street names' young people used for themselves and the gangs they were affiliated to. However, in most cases observation books were used mainly to log operational functions, such as the results of cell checks, sign-off from night staff and lists of which young people needed to be kept apart – with no explanation of the reasons for separation. In other instances, the wing observation book recorded only incidents of fights and poor behaviour, often without any follow-up actions noted and little evidence of further investigation into the reasons behind the incident or behaviour to address it properly. One member of staff reported:

We've had some bizarre incidents – lads being openly assaulted, not fighting back and not willing to acknowledge that they've been assaulted – which makes us believe initiation rites are going on.

- 4.113 In one establishment, several managers said that the safeguarding meetings were used to share information about individuals. However, this was an uncommon response. Many establishments did not consider that safeguarding arrangements were an obvious forum for sharing information about individuals with gang affiliations or establishment-wide gang-related safeguarding concerns.
- 4.114 There was almost no intelligence relating to gang-related criminal activity within establishments. Such gang-related intelligence that there was primarily related to the potential disruption based on rival gang members' intolerance of each other. There was little information to quantify the number of disturbances, fights or assaults that were gang related and there was no aggregation of data on gang-related activity. Some managers complained that, although data on gangs were collected, nothing was then done with it.

We have raw information coming through, but nobody is interested in engaging with it in any meaningful way.

- 4.115 A third of caseworkers interviewed said that information about individuals did not always flow through to the casework team and that certain security information bypassed them and went to other departments. Most also said that if they received a case that contained gang information, they would submit an SIR to the security department, but some expressed a need for a response to SIRs so they could be alerted to their outcome.
- 4.116 We examined the security files of the young people we interviewed who had been selected because they were known to have gang affiliations, but there was almost no intelligence about gang involvement in any of them. In one establishment, there had been no gang-related SIRs on seven of the 10 young people chosen for us to interview.

CASE STUDY

One young person with a very detailed wing file clearly had some behavioural problems, but very little to suggest it was gang related, other than the fact that he himself claimed to be in a gang. It could have been that gang involvement was one of his many problems, but the file indicated that, while he was monitored well, there was little evidence of action to tackle his behaviour, gang related or otherwise. He had moved cell 12 times in the previous seven months due to 'issues with other lads', according to his caseworker. His caseworker was sceptical about the young person's gang involvement because he sometimes changed his mind about which gang he was affiliated to. This was an example where an establishment definition of a 'gang member' would have been useful.

- 4.117 Several staff felt that the flow of information and communication could improve, especially the information flowing from the security department:

Communication could be improved both ways [that is, also from security]; arrangements could be improved by including a member of security in the staff meetings and ensuring that safeguarding is automatically considered as part of the information-sharing loop – currently it is not.

The security department share their intelligence on a perceived 'need to know' basis.

- 4.118 Twelve of the 16 YOIs said they had a gangs database or gang list (separate from a 'keep apart' list), while four said they did not. Three of the girls' units said they did not have a database, mainly because there were few or no gang issues and, if there were, the population was small enough to manage without one. From our fieldwork, it was evident that the gangs' databases were used largely to inform staff about the names of street gangs in custody at the time, the number of young people from those gangs, and sometimes their street names. They were also used to develop 'keep apart' lists, but there were criticisms of the emphasis on keeping young people apart, as this had the potential to distract from good information-sharing systems. One manager said:

In terms of information about who is in gangs, I'm only informed which individuals need to be kept apart. People aren't acting on information and aren't sharing it either. There is a lack of understanding about the extent of the threat, even among management.

- 4.119 In one establishment, we were told by a manager that there were regular meetings involving the police and representatives from the local YOT to share gang information and intelligence, and there were also regular meetings with the borough commander. However, these arrangements were not mentioned by the head of security or the police liaison officer, who were both critical of the amount of gang-related intelligence coming into the establishment from the police and the lack of information flow between relevant agencies.
- 4.120 Nine establishments said that they would share information about gang-related issues with YOTs and with other external partners through the police liaison officer, although several qualified this with criticisms of both agencies. Information sharing with police was described as one way, with little intelligence coming from them to the prison, and work overall with YOIs on gang-related issues was described as underdeveloped. Only one establishment mentioned that it would share information with the YJB and W&YPG. One cited the YJB guns, gangs and weapons forum as an opportunity to share information, and one cited MAPPA meetings.
- 4.121 Few establishments offered evidence of working with external stakeholders and those that did said the police and YOTs were the main partner agencies. Only one spoke of arrangements with local safeguarding children boards as an essential component of managing safety concerns in this area. One manager mentioned the responsibilities of housing services and one spoke of the need to involve families, but there were no formal systems to involve either. Only one establishment had a gang-related agreement or protocol with external partners, and this was with a YOT for the delivery of group workshops. One manager described partnership arrangements as virtually non-existent.
- 4.122 There were few examples of relevant training or briefings for staff relating to gangs and this was highlighted as a gap by several managers. Some spoke of the need to educate staff to understand the importance of information sharing in this area. Examples included training in mediation and conflict resolution and informal training or briefings from other establishments with a level of expertise, such as local police and community groups. One establishment had received training from MMAGS,⁵² but this had been delivered only to the senior management team and had not been cascaded to frontline staff. One of the

⁵² The Manchester Multi-Agency Gang Strategy (MMAGS) was introduced in 2001. It is a Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) team working solely to tackle the problems of street gangs involved in firearms use.

girls' units had recently had staff training from the YJB, but the unit manager felt that it was not tailored to staff dealing with young women and did not take into account their specific needs. In another establishment, the young people's substance misuse service had taken the initiative to visit the Bristol Gangs Project (part of the Community Resolve Project) to organise some training for the establishment, but this had not materialised.

Programmes/interventions

- 4.123 The majority of establishments said they had no relevant programmes that would target specific issues for young people with gang affiliations. Three establishments said that outside agencies came in to work specifically with young people involved in gangs, for example, MMAGS. However, one was a research project rather than a targeted intervention or joint work with the establishment. Of the two remaining establishments that said they ran specific programmes, one was delivered by the local YOT and one was trialling an awareness programme. Both these establishments said that they prioritised gang members for referrals. A few establishments reported using mediation in resolving disputes between individual members of rival gangs. In one, problems had been anticipated in attempting mediation, because mediation and the underlying philosophy of 'making peace with an enemy' was incompatible with gang culture. However, some young people with gang affiliations had been offered mediation and all those invited to take part had agreed. All mediation sessions had apparently been satisfactorily concluded and we were told of one example in which two young people from rival gangs had subsequently become good friends.
- 4.124 Other establishments said that all offending behaviour programmes and interventions, such as anger management, were relevant to gang members. However, only one establishment said that young people with gang affiliations had been prioritised for interventions or services when they were available, although few had participated. The lack of targeted interventions was common for most young people we interviewed. In one establishment, none of the 10 selected had attended a programme. Neither was it evident from the case records or discussions with personal officers or caseworkers that the needs of young people identified with gang-related issues had been properly assessed. Only one had a risk management plan or vulnerability assessment that described specific issues relating to involvement with gangs. However, even in this case, there were shortfalls in planning and action.

CASE STUDY

One young person's vulnerability risk management plan indicated that guns and gangs should be addressed with him one to one, that the risk assessment would be completed in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police, and that the establishment should continue to liaise and share information with the police/borough intelligence unit and the relevant YOT. Other documents, including the pre-sentence report and Asset, had details of his serious gang involvement and the involvement of his older brother, who was also in custody. There were no specific training plan targets related to gang issues, but the plan said that his gang affiliation/retaliation could 'affect his ability to achieve the objectives that are in his training plan'. It also noted that the young person had had limited access to training courses due to his gang issues. The plan did not specify how the difficulties identified would be addressed.

- 4.125 We asked managers what help and support was available for young people who asked for help to resist coercion or break away from gang involvement. Many responses indicated that managers thought that existing systems could be used, but one manager summed up the limitations:

The problem is staff do not have a clear enough understanding of the issues or the context to deal with the specifics properly.

- 4.126 Some managers said that responsibility would fall on the safeguarding department to arrange the specific support required through individual case management, although none could provide examples of this. Most managers replied that they had known no young people who had asked for this help, although it was generally acknowledged that young people were unlikely to confide in staff about gang-related matters.

Some young people ask to move wings or to another prison because they are getting hassle from other gang members. Sometimes if we say no, they force our hand – maybe by smashing up their cell to get a move to the segregation unit. They say they have to behave like this because they can't be seen or known to have asked for help.

- 4.127 There was no formal support targeted specifically at young people with gang affiliations in any establishments. One manager said:

We don't do 'hands on'; it's mainly backdoor support.

- 4.128 Informal support relied largely on personal officers and caseworkers, and some managers mentioned that the chaplaincy sometimes offered support. One manager qualified this by adding:

But I have to say that personal officers and residential staff are probably more focused on issues of security than individual care.

- 4.129 When asked about the plans in place for young people with gang issues, responses from caseworkers and personal officers fell into three main categories. Some focused on the short-term plan for keeping young people safe in custody, which essentially meant keeping young people in rival gangs apart. Others described outside solutions for the young person, such as transferring to another establishment or working with the community YOT. They commented on the need for more help with resettlement rather than focusing on plans that could be made while in custody. The final group suggested that it was difficult to plan for young people who were in custody for very short periods. They said this was especially problematic for those on remand, who often could not be allocated to programmes and interventions, and those on short sentences, who simply ended up on the waiting list until release or did not have sufficient time to complete a programme.

This [the gang issue] is not seen as his priority issue – and it's compounded by him only being here a short time on recall.

- 4.130 We interviewed staff and managers from young people's substance misuse services (YPSMS). There was a consensus that young people with gang affiliations in custody

tended to deal in class A drugs rather than use them, although there were no data to support this belief.

Gang membership is not defined by drug use; rather drug use is just one part of many parts that make up the sub-culture of this group.

- 4.131 No patterns of drug use specific to young people involved in gangs had been identified, although cannabis was said to be the drug of choice, more as a function of gang and street culture than a predictor or determinate of gang membership. Young people rarely viewed the use of cannabis as a problem. One YPSMS manager said:

The 'real' gang members will almost never present to or engage with YPSMS for help or even information as it is not 'cool' to admit to a drug problem if you are a serious gang member.

And another said:

The problem is not so much here, but for the Prison Service when these guys grow up.

Staff views on young women

- 4.132 In some YOT areas, gangs affected girls directly, either through their involvement in gang activities or offending or as victims of gang activity. In general, staff felt that girls and young women were involved in gangs, but that they were engaged in a different way to the young men. For example, it was noted that, in some areas, girls and young women could have links to rival gangs, often based on relationships with gang members. This meant they could be a conduit of communication: for example, passing on information or the phone numbers of young men in different gangs. Having this information was felt to be a risk factor for the girls and young women as they could fall foul of others by passing on the wrong messages. There was also anecdotal evidence of girls being subject to sexual exploitation, such as sexual acts with one or several gang members, which were recorded on mobile phones and circulated. We were given examples of some ongoing trials that covered allegations of rape by groups of alleged gang members.
- 4.133 For YOT staff, the role of young women in gangs was a critical issue. Gangs remained male-dominated with young women often regarded as 'trophies', which led to them being the victims of violence and sexual exploitation. Jealousy over relationship issues had been cited as the cause of some serious violent offences between young men. There was a general view that there had been insufficient analysis of the role of girls and young women in gangs: what motivated them, how they affected the dynamics of the groups, and what risks they faced.
- 4.134 Many YOT staff said that young men were guarded in what they would reveal about the involvement of girls and young women in gangs. The picture they described seemed to be that girls and young women were associated with gangs, but were not members in the same way and on the same basis as men.

- 4.135 The managers interviewed in Prison Service girls' units felt that gang affiliation did not cause a problem in the units, but they acknowledged that young women and girls were sometimes involved in gangs in the community. They said that young women who affiliated themselves to a gang were usually identified if a note was made on their files, if they self-identified during the reception assessment, and, in one case, through their outgoing mail.
- 4.136 Managers in these units said that they were aware that some young women had links with gangs through their boyfriends, but said that it had no impact or bearing on the running of the unit.
- 4.137 Managers attributed none of the bullying or fighting that occasionally occurred on the units to gang-related factors. Neither did they have any specific interventions that sought to address the problems for young women related to gang involvement. However, one manager said that they did seek to educate the girls, especially in terms of becoming aware of how their bodies could be exploited by boys in gang situations.
- 4.138 The management of these young women in custody was considered straightforward due to the small and relatively autonomous units they were in. Managers said that, as they had dedicated staff and met daily on the unit for briefings, they could easily pick up on tensions between girls and pass on any gang-related information effectively. Our fieldwork visits found very little reference to gang issues in the files of the young women. In the risk of serious harm section on one Asset document for a young woman involved in gang related offending, there was a comment that indicated that her offence was committed 'to impress male peers'.

Summary

- 4.139 There was no central joint strategic direction on how gang-related issues should be dealt with. There was evidence of some good YOT and police-community initiatives, often led by staff in specialist roles. The police did not have a specific focus on under-18s. YOTs had the most progressive strategic approach to gang-related issues among children and young people. However, the extent to which local safeguarding arrangements within YOTs had been integrated with gang-related work was variable. YOT staff endeavoured to understand the complex role of young women and their relationship with gangs, particularly their motivation. The scope of local responses varied, but they all felt that frontline staff had not been adequately informed and trained to deliver local strategies. Management information and performance management systems in relation to gang activities were underdeveloped.
- 4.140 Prisons lagged behind in development in this area, with their overriding focus on behaviour management, and there was little difference in the approach taken between managing young men and young women. Though this could assist in maintaining a safe custodial environment, it did little to deal with gang affiliations – indeed it could strengthen them. In addition, it affected a young person's access to the prison regime or to receive visits when located far from family and friends. Prisons generally considered resettlement to be the remit of YOTs and few specific interventions were delivered in custody. The flow of intelligence was poor, not only between agencies, but between institutions and even departments within institutions in the custodial context. This was disappointing, especially considering the presence of seconded police officers in both YOTs and YOIs, which was an underused resource. Safeguarding procedures for these children and young people were underdeveloped.

- 4.141 Managers in Prison Service units holding small numbers of young women acknowledged the role of young women in gangs in the community, but said that it did not present problems in custody. The approach taken in the units was similar to that taken in YOIs holding boys, with no specific attention to gang affiliations and a focus on potential threats to the stability of the unit.

5. The experience of young people

- 5.1 This chapter primarily reports on the interviews conducted with young men and women in custody and accords with the feedback received from the small number of interviews with young people in the community.

Young men

- 5.2 The young men we interviewed described gangs very differently from staff and several could compare the difference between their view of gangs and the way adults in general, and the police in particular, viewed them. The need for friendship was at the root of several descriptions and some mentioned peer pressure bordering on coercion. Some spoke of the unfairness of the stigma associated with the term 'gangs' and how it was often used inappropriately, for example, for a group of friends from the same area or simply when a large group of boys were out together. This had resonance with some of the views expressed by staff.

If you are going to a party with five friends, police pull you up assuming you're a gang.

- 5.3 Some young people described the inevitability of getting involved in gangs. Several mentioned that family members, often older brothers, were in gangs, and they had influenced them to become involved at an early age.

I was one of the 'youngers' for a while, but if you get involved in a lot of stuff quickly you don't stay a younger for very long. I moved up the ranks quickly.

- 5.4 Some described how their involvement had evolved out of long-term friendships in their area. A few said that their entire friendship group was involved in the gang, making alternative friendship groups difficult to develop. Others spoke of the inevitability of belonging to a gang in certain areas and described it as a form of protection.
- 5.5 Only one young person interviewed said that their gang existed because of race or ethnicity and most said that race was not a determining factor for the gang – either inside or outside prison. Some commented that their gangs involved mostly black boys, though they themselves were white or Asian, but they attributed this to their locality rather than to an ethnic divide.
- 5.6 Friendships unique to a distinct locality, and subsequent territorial conflicts, seemed to be a major factor in gang formations. There were descriptions of a sense of trust that came from growing up in the same neighbourhood, which developed into a need to protect an area or friends from potential threats. For some, this developed further into organised criminal activities involving drugs and other acquisitive offences to sustain a certain lifestyle, and violence to gain and sustain a reputation.
- 5.7 Some young people spoke of their admiration for the 'olders' in their gang and clearly had a glamorised view of the lifestyle that could come with belonging to a gang. The opportunity to make money was often cited as an obvious reason for operating in a gang.
- 5.8 While some felt they could distance themselves from former friends and influences while in custody, some simply saw prison as a temporary change in circumstances and felt as much a part of their peer group as before. They saw no need to change their lifestyles, and the

experience of custody had little effect on their attitude towards their peers. In some cases, it was described as beneficial still to have ties with those outside.

I am still in contact with outside gang members, but I won't tell you how it works. If you want something done it can be done.

- 5.9 We asked young people how they were able to identify a gang member while in prison. They gave examples of visible markings, such as tattoos or scars, or clothing, such as coloured shoe laces. Less obvious signs cited included the way young people walked and talked and particularly the questions they asked. Some young people were sufficiently notorious that they were instantly recognised. Almost all the young people agreed that gang culture existed in the prison, although there were differences in the way that it operated compared with in the community – for example, fights without weapons and tensions rather than sustained violence.
- 5.10 Two-thirds of young people said that there were fights between rival gangs in their establishment, and in one establishment gang affiliations were said to be at the root of most fights there. The need to demonstrate ongoing loyalty to the gang while in custody was a strong belief, as was the need to save face and protect reputations. This was offered as a common explanation for fights, although staff rarely seemed to acknowledge this as the reason for fights between young people.

It's solidarity, we're brothers. If you're repping your crew you won't back down because you can't be seen to have no courage. You will be discredited. Pain is temporary, pride is for ever.

- 5.11 Some young people spoke of having no choice and said that most problems they had experienced while in custody were related to fights with young people from rival gangs. Some admitted that they did not want to fight and that they sometimes did not want to come out of their cells to do so. Some said that they had to fight because they had a reputation and if they chose not to they would be seen as weak and probably become a victim. Others described an obligation to fight:

They feel obliged to have a couple of fights, but then it calms down and they don't fight any more – you can't keep fighting. But although the fighting might stop there is always tension.

- 5.12 Pressure to fight established gang rivals did not just come from within the prison. There were expectations from gang members in the community that gang fights would continue in custody. One young man summed up the nature of this pressure:

We are always enemies of the gangs we had fights with on the outside and we have to fight them when we are in here, because there is pressure from your gang members outside to do so. If they hear that you didn't get involved in fighting rival gangs when you are inside prison, then you could get shot when you leave. You are trapped. You sign a promise to stay in the gang. We have a motto – 'death before dishonour'.

- 5.13 Some young people said that not only were gang rivalries and feuds from the community continued in custody, but some were taken back out to the streets again.

A lot of the fights that start in prison carry on into the street when you get out. It doesn't have to be the same people. If you hear of one of your gang getting into a fight in prison with another gang, those outside retaliate.

- 5.14 Similarly, staff and young people spoke of the unsettling effect on the prison community when serious gang-related incidents took place in the community. This was demonstrated during one of our fieldwork visits within days of the murder of a gang member in the community. Some young people showed anger and grief, including those who admitted they had not known the victim well but who voiced their desire to mete out some revenge. Some young people even spoke of gang-related problems that had quietened down in the community being revived in prison or even escalated.

Sometimes when there is trouble inside a prison it starts up fights again on the outside. There might have been some sort of peace on the outside, [but trouble] starts up again in prison.

Not sure how to describe it; I'm making ties for when I leave prison.

- 5.15 Some young people spoke of their time in prison as an opportunity to avoid the tensions associated with being involved in a gang. Some said this merely meant maintaining a distance, but others spoke more positively of a period of respite.

Prison is better than outside as you get to talk to people you wouldn't on the outside. People hang round with people they have something in common with. It's a good thing to hang round with people that you wouldn't associate with on the outside. In this jail it's a different mentality as we're far away from where we're from. It's an opportunity.

- 5.16 We asked young people whether they thought they would return to a lifestyle involving gangs when they left custody. Just over half said that they would not, a few said that they did not know, but over a third said that they would return to their gang. Many young people felt that being involved in a gang was not a significant consideration for them, and they were unequivocal in accepting responsibility for their involvement in gang-related offending and did not blame the influence of others. They did not consider any harmful effects and felt that they could break away without difficulty if they chose to.

- 5.17 In contrast, some young people were very clear that a change in lifestyle was not an option for them – some went as far as to say that they would be in danger even considering it. There was some evidence of a rationalisation of their situation. Some young people said that it was better to enjoy the limited benefits of being in a gang than to experience the difficulties they might encounter trying to break away. One young person said:

I have considered [breaking ties with the gang], but I think it's impossible. If I left the gang I would be dead. Being in a gang changes your life. Certain things I have done cannot be corrected by just saying that I am sorry.

- 5.18 Some young people said that while in custody they had reflected on their mistakes and had resolved to break away from their association with a gang, but were pessimistic about their chances of success unless they could move away from their gang associates – both during their custody and on release. Although most young people we interviewed said that they did not think they could be helped, none had been asked if they needed help. Several said that they would consider help and support if it were offered. Some mentioned the concern of their mothers and not wanting to distress them as a reason for wanting to change. These expressions of determination to break away from a gang’s lifestyle further exposed the missed opportunities to intervene to help them take steps towards lifestyle changes while in custody.

I would like to break away from the gang, but it's very hard to do it, because people outside will not let you – they will come after you. There must be a way of doing it and someone must be able to help you, but I'm not sure who to go to.

CASE STUDY

A 16-year-old man sentenced to six months for robbery.

Background

The Asset form indicated no gang issues, but the post-court report was very detailed about his gang-related offending and suggested his current offence was committed because he felt there would be repercussions if he said no to it. He said in a pre-sentence report that he did not want to go down this route – he preferred his college buddies, but was easily led. In various documents, this young man had shown his desire to change, but described himself as a failure. There was also a record of his referral to the child and adolescent mental health service.

Personal comments on gang involvement

‘I wouldn't say I was involved in ‘gangs’ – I would say I'm affiliated to a certain group of people. Even if I didn't feel safe, I'd still have to come out [of my cell]. I can't be bothered with the gossip, I do have a reputation here, news spreads quickly. Who wants to be fighting every day? I don't, but at the same time, I don't want to go to [the wing for vulnerable young people].’

Personal comments on the establishment's management of gang issues

‘They ask you about gangs when you first come in, but then they do nothing with it – what do they expect will happen? We're from different areas all living together, we get in fights, but we have to see each other again afterwards anyway. Education happens in one place so we see each other; it makes you want to retaliate, having to see your mum on a visit with a black eye, it makes you angry.’

This young person disagreed that gangs were a serious problem in the prison, commenting that: ‘There's not enough people for gangs to be a serious problem in this prison’. However, he strongly agreed that gang-related issues affected the lives of young people in his establishment negatively (but only in reference to others, he didn't believe it was a big issue for him). He also agreed that staff were knowledgeable about the extent of gang-related issues, but strongly disagreed that the prison managed these issues well.

[continued over]

The young person's caseworker

At the time of the interview, the caseworker had not yet met this young person but had read his file. The young person had been in the establishment for five months.

His training planning documents contained objectives, including anger management and victim awareness, but little to improve his own self-esteem and no help to break away from the gang, although this was indicated as one of his needs in other documents.

Security information reports (SIRs)

Forty-eight SIRs had been submitted about this young person in the previous six months – 21 seemed to be gang related. Examples included: arranging a fight with another gang, threatening to have his boys 'bang' another lad out, boasting about his gang.

We came to the conclusion that this young person's reputation had probably preceded him (staff told us anecdotally about a notorious older brother in another prison), so while staff were very aware of his gang ties and monitored him closely, little had been done to meet some of the needs detailed above.

- 5.19 One young person said that he had been involved in a focus group to talk about his experiences, but that it did not offer any practical help. Several young people felt that staff did not understand their situation sufficiently to be able to give them the help they needed.

How can they [people offering services] help? They don't know what they're talking about; all they advise is 'just say no' but it's not like that. The only thing that would help is to move away to a totally new area, with my own place and some money, but who's going to do that?

- 5.20 We asked young people if there was anyone in the establishment they could turn to about their personal concerns, in particular those related to gang issues. Responses were almost evenly split between those who said they could talk to staff and those who said they could not. Some described the positive relationships they had with certain staff, even though many felt that staff were powerless to help them.

I could choose to talk to my personal officer but I don't choose to. They don't understand and they can't help; they've not lived my life.

- 5.21 Others spoke of their mistrust of staff and, in particular, fear that they would report confidential conversations to others. Some said that staff were unhelpful, uncaring and sometimes neglectful of them. They gave examples of having confided their anxieties to staff and predictable incidents where no preventative action had been taken.

Got to deal with it on my own. Staff don't take it serious as I don't look scared, but that's just not me. I spoke to a gov[ernor] about my problems with a boy on the wing and said there would be an issue – but nothing was done.

- 5.22 Fewer than half the young people we interviewed said that staff were well informed about gang issues and many of those said that they gained their knowledge from talking to young people who were blatant about it. When we asked young people what staff did to manage gang-related problems and help young people with their problems, the main response focused on keeping certain young people apart, including friends as well as enemies. Young people pointed to weaknesses in keep apart systems, which allowed contact in certain settings, such as education and the gym.
- 5.23 Other than mediation, and the involvement of Manchester Multi-Agency Gang Strategy (MMAGS) in a couple of establishments, young people had no knowledge of specific interventions for young people with gang affiliations or involved in gang-related offending. Comments about mediation sessions were mixed. Some young people found them useful, while others said they were a waste of time and could never work when young people were getting killed in the community.

We do it but we just lie. No one means 'sorry'.

- 5.24 A more positive comment was:

I've done that because I kept fighting with the same person, and the session helped to 'squash it' between us. I'm friendly with the person now.

- 5.25 Suggestions from young people about what could be done to help them included several that focused on staff talking to young people more and using ex-gang members to talk about the dangers.

We need to hear from people who have been through it [gang life] and changed. You have to live through it to know about it. It is easier to consider [when being spoken to by someone who has experienced it].

- 5.26 A few spoke about the need to prepare young people better for release and to provide them with opportunities for training so that they could get a job rather than earn money through gang-related crime. Some young people thought that very little could be done to help them while they were in custody – even if they were prepared to accept help.

I don't think most young people would want help: when they get out, they want to go back – some don't have a choice. I'm dedicated to my gang; it's all I know, my uncle and cousins. If they came out of it, I would. I got out twice, but keep going back.

- 5.27 Some young people described changes to their affiliations in custody, but added that the same principles applied, such as 'you all look after each other'. They said they actively chose to form ties with others they would usually distance themselves from, if there was a greater threat from a common enemy. This emphasised the importance of regionality to some young people and what some referred to as 'postcode wars'.

If I'm in a Birmingham prison, the London lads will have my back. Even if you're rivals on the out, you will make friends. When you get out you will then try and deal with your problems. When you get to know each other it's not that bad. I have friends in prison from rival gangs.

- 5.28 However, some were keen to stress that there were some rival gangs that could never associate with each other.

Some gangs form ties with others, as long as they are not rival gangs outside. South London gangs could join up with east London gangs, because they have nothing to do with each other on the outside. But Brixton gangs could never join up with a Peckham gang, because they are enemies outside.

- 5.29 Some said that they would not describe their alliances in prison as a gang and one young person said that he thought of it more as a circle. Others said that little had changed for them by coming into custody and they remained loyal to their gang, describing the benefits of this, including being less likely to be victimised and maintaining respect. One young person said:

I'm in the same gang I was involved in outside. There's no rank but people know about my connections and it gets me respect.

- 5.30 The majority of young people felt that 'proper' gangs did not form in prison. One young person said:

Loyalty to a prison gang only goes so far.

- 5.31 Some said friendship groups formed, but were adamant that they could not be described as a gang. The few who said gangs did form in prison gave examples of young people who made plans to meet after their release or used their powers to 'run the wing'. There were no examples of organised gang activity taking place.

- 5.32 The majority of young people said that young people who were not involved in gangs before they came to prison were not pressurised to join a gang in custody, nor did they seek to. Just under a third of young people thought this did happen, but gave examples that supported the view that everyone needed to feel protected from bullying. One young person said:

It can't happen. You have to be out in the community to be able to join a gang.

- 5.33 We asked if there was gang-related bullying that was distinct from other types of bullying. Just under a third of young people thought there was gang-related bullying and more felt that young people were intimidated by gang members. Many made a clear distinction between bullying in general and bullying by gang members targeted at those who were not involved in gangs, as well as rival gang members. Some described behaviour that was characteristic of gangs: that is, young people who terrorised others. One young person said:

Some boys are used to getting what they want from other boys, when they are outside, so it's not surprising that they carry on inside.

- 5.34 Many young people felt that staff treated them differently because of their gang affiliations. Some said that staff watched them all the time, but others said they were treated unfairly and stereotyped as someone who would always do bad things. Some said that staff used gang members for their influence on the wing and sometimes asked them to speak to other young people.

- 5.35 Most young people felt safe in their current establishment. However, this was generally attributable to their own confidence in surviving the prison setting or having associates in the prison who they thought would protect them, rather than steps that the establishment had taken to ensure their safety. Some young people said they felt safer inside in comparison to the risks to their safety outside in the community. One young person said:

A fight is the worst that can happen here. On the road you have many things to worry about ... I didn't feel safe before I came to prison, and I won't feel safe when I leave.

- 5.36 We asked young people what were the most negative aspects of being in a gang. The most common response was the risk of getting hurt or killed. One young person spoke of the inevitability of his fate:

It started on the road and it will end on the road.

Young women

- 5.37 Our interviews with young women in custody revealed that they focused less than the young men on their loyalty to and dependence on the gang, and more on their relationships with those in the gang and the impact of the gang on their other relationships, including siblings, parents and boyfriends. One described the situation for her as a mother and why it was important that she was not thought of as being in a gang.

I have a child. I can't afford to have my door kicked in by police or by gangs.

- 5.38 Being an older sister also brought responsibilities:

My younger brother was in the gang before me. I thought by me being involved I could watch his back.

- 5.39 Most of the young women spoke about being involved or associated with gangs through their boyfriends, rather than being members themselves. Several mentioned that the gang influenced them to behave in a certain way and some believed that they would not have been in prison were it not for the influence of the gang, although the majority claimed not to have been influenced by their peers at all.

- 5.40 Young women's reasons for becoming involved in gangs were similar to those given by the young men – feeling a need to represent the area where they lived and becoming involved through friendship groups and the association of older siblings or boyfriends. Some young women said that they had become involved with gangs at a very early age – one said when she was nine. Some shared the view of the young men that it was very difficult to break away once in a gang. One young woman said:

It started off as a bit of fun but it got out of hand.

- 5.41 There was little difference in the views of the young women about the most positive things about being in a gang – protection, a sense of belonging and money. When asked about the

negative things about being in a gang, the most frequent response related to acquiring a reputation or being stereotyped. As with the young men, the young women were also concerned with getting hurt or killed. Unlike the young men, the young women raised substance use as a negative aspect of gang involvement. Most young women thought that there were distinct differences for them in gangs compared with young men. They described being protected by the young men but at the same time being exploited by them. Some young women maintained there was no difference.

5.42 Unlike the young men, the young women we interviewed did not often describe a sense of loyalty towards their gang and rarely shared a sense of pressure to 'save face' or protect their reputations. The young women mostly described an affiliation to their area and focused on their friendships and relationships within the gang.

5.43 There were even fewer similarities when we asked about experiences in custody. None of the young women said that gang issues had affected the regime in any way. Some spoke positively of a session they had taken part in on the unit, where there was a small external research project under way in relation to gangs. However, most said that the unit could do more to help them. Some spoke about skills training and being better equipped to find a job on release. Others spoke about needing opportunities to speak to people they could relate to.

5.44 The majority of young women interviewed said they felt safe in custody. The two young women who said they did not feel safe were in the same unit. Some young women spoke about the 'streetwise London girls' who were known to be proud of their gang affiliations. Regardless of this, most young women we interviewed felt less threatened by gang issues and were more willing to mix with young women from rival gangs because they had to try to live together. Unlike young men in custody, they were, of course, held in small units with a more proactive and multidisciplinary staff presence.

5.45 Most young women thought that staff were well informed about gang issues, but added that this was not the same as understanding their experience. Consequently, many were reluctant to speak to staff and some spoke of mistrust. One young woman said:

I told my YOT worker about something and she passed it on. That could have been my life over if he got sent down or heard about it. You get killed for those kind of things.

5.46 Young women described the same challenges as young men in trying to break away from their gang affiliations on release from custody. When asked if they would continue to be in gangs when they left prison, one young woman said:

I could say no while I'm in here. But outside it's a different situation.

5.47 Some of the young men we interviewed in custody spoke in derogatory terms about young women involved with gangs, though their views were inconsistent. On the one hand, they said that 'getting loads of girls' was one advantage of being in a gang. They described how young men used young women to 'set up' opposing gang members by enticing them to places where their enemies would be waiting for them. At the same time, the young men accused the young women of not being trustworthy and questioned their 'true loyalty' to the gang. Along these lines, one manager described the young women as 'hostility builders'. A young man said:

Girls aren't trustworthy, they set you up. They'll be with one of us and behind our back they'll be with one of the gang rivals and set you up.

- 5.48 Other roles that the boys said girls were useful for included carrying weapons and fighting other girls who had offended them. Young women and young men both spoke of the role of young women in providing sexual favours, but did not view this as sexual exploitation. Some young men said that young women were never gang members, they were just 'girls who hang around with male gangs'.

A lot of girls get involved. Girls sleep with different boys in the gangs which turns the boys against each other – they cause a lot of the problems.

- 5.49 Among both groups, however, there was shared acknowledgement that girls did not, and often were not expected to, get involved in the more extreme sides of violence and crime, which is probably why most felt the level of involvement was so different for girls.

There are girls in my group, I treat them like sisters, protective over them – guys can defend themselves. I don't let the girls do what my guys do.

Summary

- 5.50 The difficulty of defining 'gangs' was corroborated by the young people's interviews. Young men generally described their 'gang' associations in terms of friendships or family ties. There was also, however, some suggestion of inevitability in gang membership if you lived in a certain locality, for your own protection, but race or ethnicity was not a determining factor in gang formation. During their time in custody, some young men maintained their gang connections. They supported the reputation of their gang through fights, either on their own account or to support their associates. In contrast, some used their time in custody as a period of respite, though the difficulty of breaking away from their associations altogether was acknowledged. There was an overriding sense of the inevitability of their situation and, to some extent, an acceptance of a short lifespan, especially among those who had been on the receiving end of gang-related violence.
- 5.51 Young women often played a submissive role in male gangs and this had its own inherent risks. There were missed opportunities to work constructively with gang-affiliated young women in small, well-resourced custodial units. Young women spoke less of loyalty to the gang and more about friendships within the gang and relationships with young men. They did not believe that gang issues affected their experience in custody. Like young men, they described the overwhelming challenges of trying to break away from their gang outside custody. Young men described considerable manipulation of young women, including sexual exploitation and using them as 'bait' with opposing gangs. They did not entirely trust young women, but nor did they expect them to get involved in extreme violence.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 Within a national approach to tackling serious youth offending, there should be a specific strategy for tackling gang culture among under-18s. This should be developed by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) working with local authorities and in conjunction with the Department for Education, the Ministry of Justice, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the Home Office, on behalf of prisons, probation and the police. The gang strategy should include:
- an agreed working definition or common understanding of gang culture to facilitate the development of a common framework within which joint work across agencies can take place
 - a recognition of the difference, as well as the relationship, between serious and violent youth offending and the specific nature of gang-related offending
 - the requirement for a local needs assessment
 - staff information and training on how to manage gang members in both the community and custody
 - operational guidance acknowledging the dynamic nature of gang associations
 - the development of local policies and procedures with a specific focus on gang issues in that locality
 - common methods of recording gang affiliation and activity across all relevant agencies
 - inter-agency cooperation and a requirement for the sharing of timely intelligence about gang affiliations and gang-related activity between and within the police, youth offending teams (YOTs) and young offender institutions (YOIs) and the methods of achieving this
 - operational guidance that recognises distinct gang-related reintegration and resettlement needs and ensures a consistent approach between YOIs and YOTs and the need for continuity during post-18 transition arrangements
 - monitoring of the local implementation of central guidance
 - the management of risk of harm to others and safeguarding issues relating to gang activity through existing partnership arrangements, namely multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) and local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs).
- 6.2 The national strategy for tackling gang culture among under-18s should be informed by further research into:
- the difference between serious violent offending by young people in groups and gang-related offending
 - the difference between young men and young women and their gang involvement
 - effective methods of prevention and diversion from gang activity, including resettlement needs for those released from custody.
- 6.3 NOMS and the YJB, working with chief constables, should ensure that there is collaboration between the police, YOIs, YOTs and relevant local community groups and partnerships, including the LSCB and crime and disorder reduction partnerships, Children's Trusts, health authorities and local housing departments, to identify gang problems and possible solutions.

- 6.4 NOMS and the YJB, in collaboration with chief constables, should ensure that a gangs coordinator is appointed in each local setting (YOTs, YOIs and police) who will:
- provide a lead on gangs issues
 - be the repository for gang-related intelligence
 - be responsible for disseminating information to the relevant agencies, departments and individual staff for them to take action
 - coordinate the response to gang issues that manifest in that setting.
- 6.5 NOMS and the YJB should jointly oversee the development of a programme of interventions specific to tackling gang culture and addressing gang-related offending among children and young people, including gang exit strategies. Programmes should be developed in conjunction with community organisations for delivery in both the community and custody.
- 6.6 NOMS and the YJB should jointly develop interventions specific to the needs of young women involved in gangs that acknowledge their vulnerability and seek to address problems associated with low self-esteem and experience of abusive and exploitative relationships.
- 6.7 The YJB should commission research to identify and promote good practice on gang-related issues across both YOTs and YOIs, and relevant contact details should be disseminated to senior managers in those agencies.
- 6.8 The YJB should commission work to enable practitioners to understand better the criminological, sociological and psychological issues that affect young people's involvement in gang culture and gang-related offending.
- 6.9 The YJB should commission and disseminate to all relevant partners work to enable practitioners to understand better the profile of girls and young women in gangs and/or serious youth violence issues, and on the risks and needs they face.
- 6.10 The YJB should monitor gang affiliations and gang-related activity across YOTs and YOIs to inform the transfer of young people across the secure estate and their eventual resettlement in the community, with their safety and well-being as priorities. Resettlement strategies should be developed that include specific strategic objectives to address gang-related resettlement issues, including joint working between YOIs and YOTs, the police, probation and the adult prison estate.
- 6.11 NOMS and the YJB should ensure that training plans and intervention plans include specific targets to tackle gang involvement, and there should be continuity in their application following transfer between establishments and from custody to the community to improve joint planning between YOTs and YOIs for individual young people.
- 6.12 NOMS and the YJB should ensure that risk management plans and vulnerability action plans should sufficiently address safety concerns related to the young person's involvement in gangs.

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Appendix II: Fieldwork sites

HMI Prisons and HMI Constabulary fieldwork	w/c	13 weeks
Werrington and Foston Hall: Toscana Unit (pilot)	06/01/09	4 days
Feltham	23/02/09	2 days
Stoke Heath	18/03/09	2 days
Ashfield	23/03/09	2 days
Brinsford	01/04/09	2 days
Warren Hill and Carlford Unit	07/04/09	2 days
New Hall: Rivendell Unit	06/05/09	2 days
Huntercombe	06/05/09	2 days
Hindley	12/05/09	2 days
Downview: Josephine Butler Unit	18/05/09	2 days
HMI Probation fieldwork	w/c	13 weeks
Nottingham (pilot)	09/03/09	5 days
Croydon	27/04/09	5 days
Birmingham	11/05/09	5 days
Wessex	01/06/09	5 days
Hackney	08/06/09	5 days
Southwark	15/06/09	5 days
Manchester	29/06/09	5 days
Liverpool	06/07/09	1 day

A questionnaire was sent to the chosen sites before the fieldwork week. This invited a response in relation to strategic and leadership, partnership working, resources, operational and staff issues. The youth offending team partnership was invited to give a presentation on the first day detailing how it had dealt with the gangs issue, both strategically (including through the local authority) and operationally.

Following completion of the fieldwork in YOIs, all 16 establishments in the young people's estate were sent a questionnaire covering key aspects of gang management. All 16 establishments returned this information, representing 100% response rate.

Appendix III: Summary of managers' and young people's views

Managers' views

Forty-five Prison Service departmental managers were interviewed. We asked them to rate (on a scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) the following statements in accordance with how much they agreed or disagreed with them, in order to summarise general opinions.

1. The issue of gangs is a serious problem in this prison

Average response from boys' establishments = 2.5 (ideal = 1)

Most managers from the boys' estate disagreed that gangs were a serious problem (19 interviewees gave a rating of 2, and six said they strongly disagreed that gangs were a serious problem in their establishment). Only seven managers agreed that gangs were a serious problem, and of these, two were from the same establishment. When categorised into departments, deputy governors, young people's substance misuse service (YPSMS) teams and safeguarding managers gave an average rating of 2, disagreeing that gangs were a serious problem, while security managers and residential managers gave an average rating of 3, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with this statement.

2. I feel that most staff are well informed about young people involved in gangs

Average response from boys' establishments = 3.2 (ideal = 5)

On average, there was neither agreement nor disagreement about whether most staff were well informed. Even across departments, the average rating was always 3. No one interviewed strongly disagreed with this statement, but only five strongly agreed with it.

3. This prison is managing gang-related issues effectively

Average response from boys' establishments = 3.5 (ideal = 5)

Again there was neither agreement nor disagreement about this statement. Three managers from different establishments strongly disagreed with this statement, while four strongly agreed, two of whom were from the same establishment (the only establishment we visited with a gang management strategy). Safeguarding managers and residential managers gave a higher average rating of 4, compared with other departments that gave an average rating of 3. The safeguarding and residential departments have a more active day-to-day role with the young people in their care, are therefore more responsible for informal methods of control and management of gang-related issues, and feel able to respond quicker to tensions on the wings.

Young people's views

Seventy-nine young people were interviewed, including 67 young men and 12 young women. We asked them to rate (on a scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) the following statements in accordance with how much they agreed or disagreed with them, in order to summarise general opinions.

1. Gangs are a serious problem in this prison: (ideal = 1)

Boys' average response = 2.6

Girls' average response = 1.5 (no one gave a 4 or 5 response)

2. Gang-related issues affect the lives of young people here negatively: (ideal = 1)

Boys' average response = 3.1

Girls' average response = 2.1

3. Staff are knowledgeable about the extent of gang-related issues here: (ideal = 5)

Boys' average response = 2.8

Girls' average response = 2.8

4. This prison is managing gang-related issues well: (ideal = 5)

Boys' average response = 2.6

Girls' average response = 3 (most said that there were no gang issues to manage)

Comparing managers' opinions to young people's opinions

Out of all those who responded, those who agreed or strongly agreed with the statements below:	Young people (65)	Managers (39)
<i>The issue of gangs is a serious problem in this prison</i>	17%	18%
<i>I feel that most staff are well informed about young people involved in gangs</i>	26%	37%
<i>This prison is managing gang-related issues effectively:</i>	26% <i>(statistically significant difference)</i>	59%

(Only responses from boys' establishments were included here.)

Appendix IV: Profile of case samples⁵³

Custody sample

In total, 70 young men and 12 young women made up the custodial sample. Of the 70 young men, only 67 were interviewed, but the documentary analysis and related caseworker interviews were still carried out for the remaining three cases.

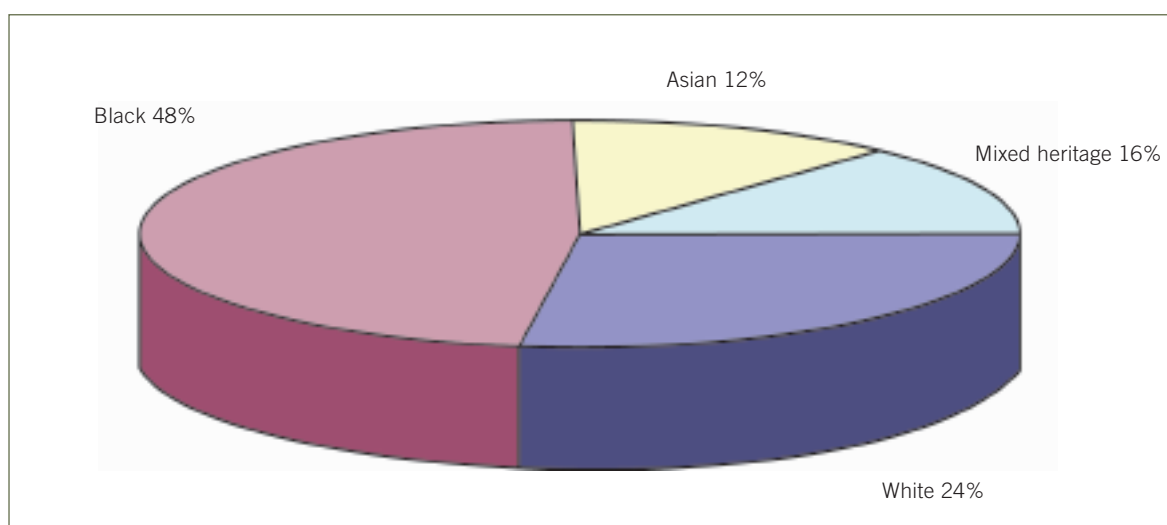
Age

The average age of the sample was 17. All young women in the sample were aged 17. Eight young men were 15.

Ethnicity

Nearly half of the sample were black (48%; n=39), the majority of whom were black-Caribbean (n=23). Twenty-four per cent (n=20) were white, 16% (n=13) were of mixed heritage, and the smallest proportion of the sample were of Asian origin (12%; n=10).

Figure 3: Ethnic breakdown of custody sample



Status

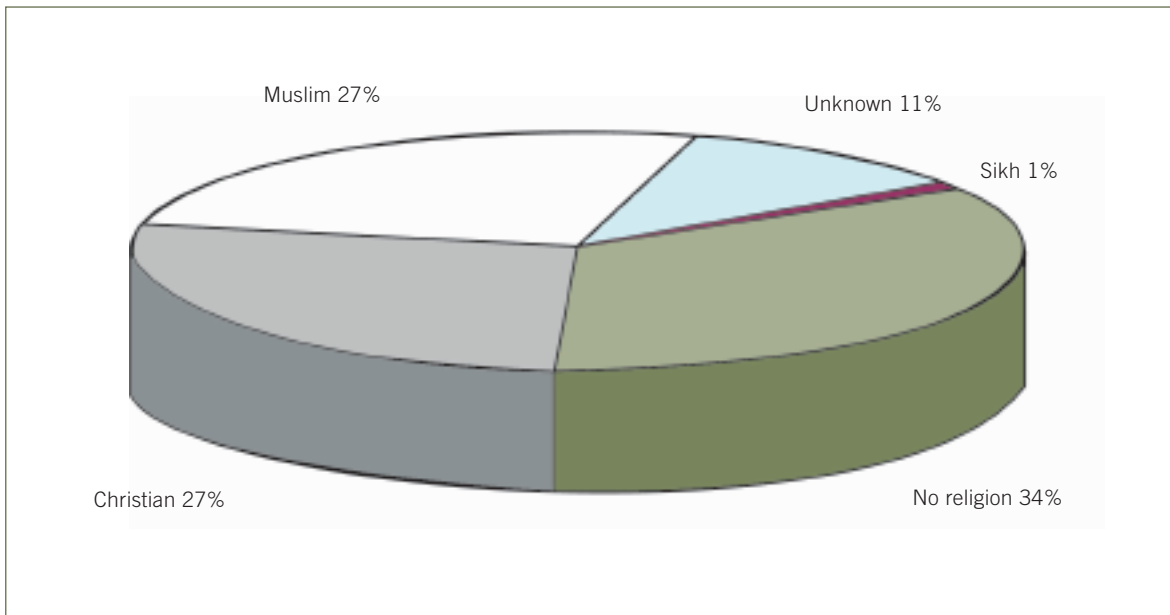
Sixty-four per cent (n=53) of the sample had been sentenced to a period in custody, 11% (n=9) were convicted but unsentenced, and the remainder (n=20) were held on remand.

Religion

The largest proportion of the sample was recorded as having no religion (34%; n=28). An equal proportion of young people (27%; 22) stated their religion as Christian or Muslim. Only one young person identified themselves as Sikh. The remainder (11%; n=9) had no religion recorded.

⁵³ Throughout this thematic, the size of the samples should be borne in mind in terms of the applicability of the findings to the wider population of young people, both in custody and the community.

Figure 4: Religious breakdown of custody sample



Length of sentence

The sentenced sample had the following sentences:

- Life (n=5, including 1 girl)
- 4 – 8 years (n=9 including 2 girls)
- 1 – 4 years (n=21 including 4 girls)
- 12 months or less (n=15 including 2 girls)
- Unknown (n=3)

Offence

The offences for which the young people had been sentenced were:

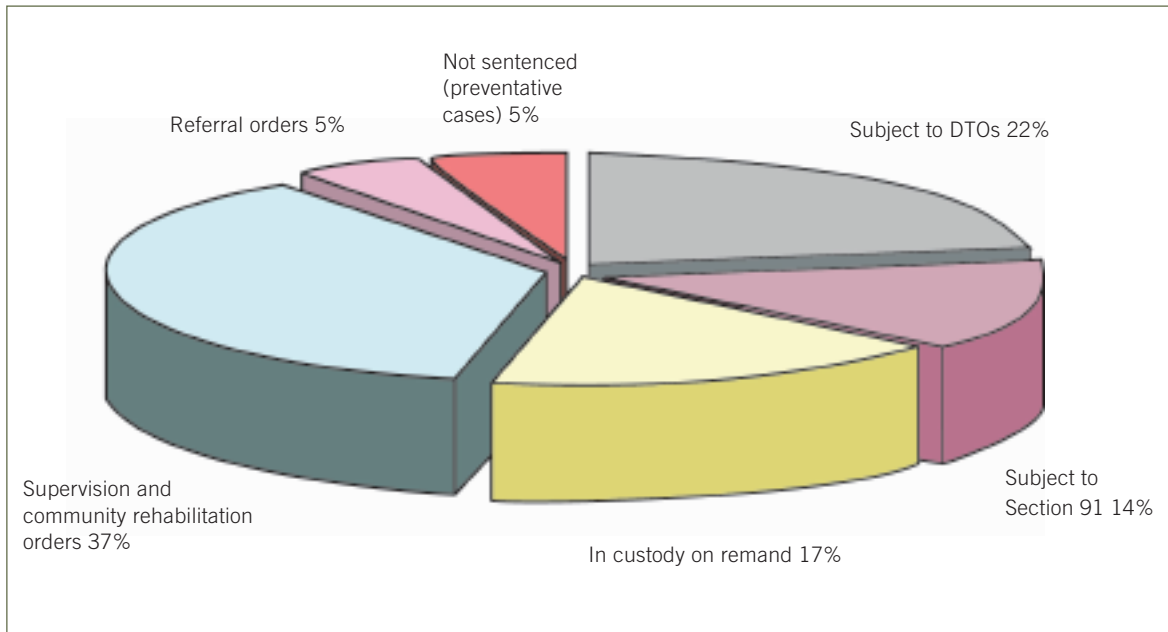
- Robbery (n=23 including 4 girls)
- GBH/ABH/wounding (n=14 including 4 girls)
- Murder (n=10 including 1 girl)
- Weapons (n=7 including 1 girl)
- Burglary (n=5)
- Breach of licence (n=4)
- Rape (n=3)
- Involving drugs (n=3 including 2 intent to supply)
- Kidnap (n=2)
- Arson (n=1 girl)
- Taking and driving away (n=1)
- Unknown (n=1)

(some young people had more than one offence listed)

Community sample

In total, 58 young people were chosen as the community sample from 120 cases that met the case criteria. Ninety-three per cent (n=54) of the community sample were male and most were on supervision and community rehabilitation orders. The status of these 58 cases was as follows.

Figure 5: Status breakdown of community sample



Within the above groups, 38% (n=21) of the young people had been sentenced to a period in custody. Thirteen of these (62%) were subject to detention and training orders (DTOs) and eight (38%) were subject to Section 91 sentences. Twelve of the custody cases (57%) were still in custody at the time of the fieldwork. A further 18% (n=10) of the sample were in custody on remand. Three of the cases (5%) were preventative cases.

Of the 24 young people (41%) subject to a community sentence, 21 (88%) had been given supervision and community rehabilitation orders (with or without additional conditions) and three (12%) had been given referral orders.

Offence

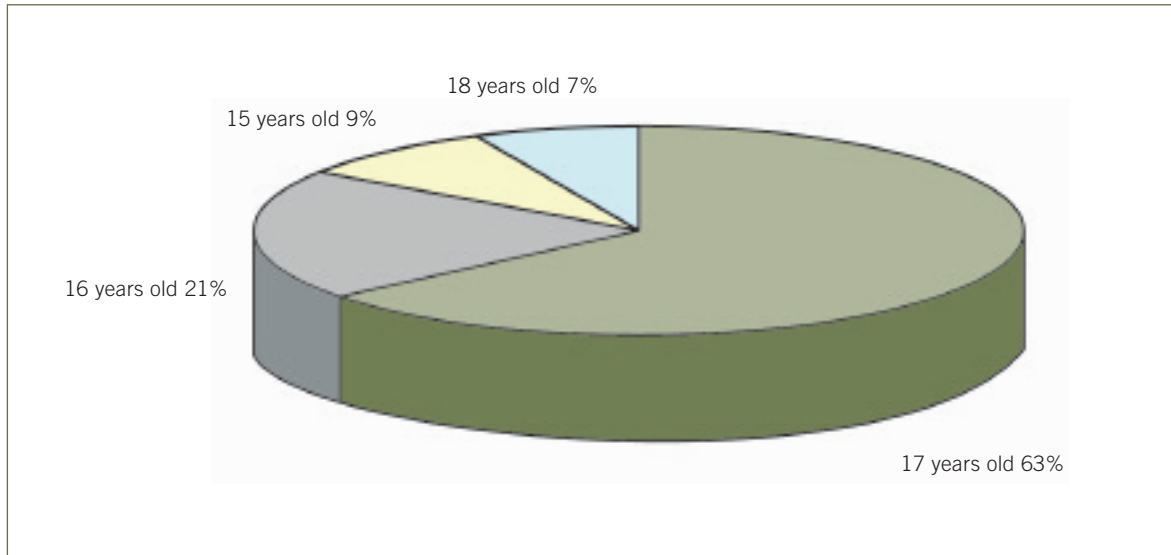
The three preventative cases had not involved an offence and one case had been a short remand in custody that had culminated in an acquittal. The offences for the remaining 54 young people were:

- robbery (n=21)
- violence against the person (n=18)
- motoring offences (n= 4)
- drugs offences (n=3)
- other offences (n=3)
- burglary (n=2)
- sexual offences (n=1)
- theft and handling stolen goods (n=1)
- public order offences (n=1)

Age

Thirty-seven (63%) of the sample were 17 years old, 12 (21%) were 16, five (9%) were 15 and the remaining four (7%) were 18.

Figure 6: Age breakdown of community sample



Ethnicity

Seventy-eight per cent of the sample (n=45) were from a black or minority ethnic background, 12% (n=7) were white and 10% (n=6) were from other ethnic groups.

Religion

The largest proportion was recorded as having no religion (79%; n=46). The next largest group was Christian (14%; n=8), followed by Muslim. (5%; n=3) One young person (2%) identified themselves as 'other'.

Appendix V: Methodology

Fieldwork in custody

At the time that fieldwork began in January 2009, there were 16 young offender institutions (YOIs) that held children and young people under 18, including four units that held girls. Nine establishments were selected for the fieldwork, including two girls' units (see Appendix II for a list of fieldwork sites).

The fieldwork focused on interviews with young people and operational managers, and examination of documentation, including all relevant policies, strategies and operational guidance related to the management of young people with gang affiliations and/or gang-related offending, as well as wing and individual records for each of the 10 young people interviewed.

Seventy-nine young people were interviewed during the fieldwork, including 67 young men and 12 young women. Establishments were asked to make their own judgements, and select the 10 young people (though this was as few as six in the young women's units) they felt were the most seriously involved in gangs, either in the community or during their time in custody.

Forty-five Prison Service departmental managers were interviewed, including heads of units in establishments holding girls, deputy governors, resettlement managers, safeguarding managers, diversity managers, young people's substance misuse service (YPSMS) managers and on-site youth offending team (YOT) managers. HMI Prisons was accompanied by HMI Constabulary on the fieldwork visits. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the head of security, or a senior member of the security department, and the police liaison officer about access to security information and the flow of intelligence between the prison and police about young people with gang affiliations and/or gang-related offending.

The caseworkers and/or the personal officers of the 10 young people in our sample were interviewed where available to assess the quality of individual case management, and their relationship with the young person they were responsible for managing.

Senior managers from the Youth Justice Board and the women and young people's group were interviewed to gain an understanding of their respective strategic roles and policy development in this area.

Fieldwork in the community

Six youth offending teams across the country were selected for the fieldwork. Fieldwork was carried out by HMI Probation inspectors, accompanied by an HMI Constabulary inspector (see Appendix II for a list of fieldwork sites).

During the visits, inspectors conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews with a variety of key strategic personnel, including:

- chair of multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) strategic partnership
- chair of the crime and disorder partnership
- borough commander (or their representative)
- chair of the local criminal justice board

- chair of the local safeguarding children board
- YOT managers
- police and YOT staff responsible for services focused on gangs involving young people.

There were also interviews with case managers for 10 young people (from an identified sample of 20) and with a small number of young people and parents, where possible. The sample consisted of a combination of cases where the YOT had identified a gang affiliation, and/or the young people had been convicted or charged with a serious violence or drugs offence. The majority of the young people in the sample were in the community (either on a community order or having been released from custody), and the remainder were in custody. Case documentation, both in electronic and paper form, was assessed. This included access to partnership working documentation, such as MAPPA meeting notes.

