



ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR
CHILDREN

Chair: Baroness Massey of Darwen

Vice-Chairmen: Jessica Lee MP, Baroness Walmsley, Baroness Blood, Bill Esterson MP, Tim Loughton MP

Secretary: Baroness Howarth of Breckland **Treasurer:** Earl of Listowel

Clerk: Heather Ransom

There was a meeting of the
All Party Parliamentary Group for Children on:
Monday 7th April 2014
4:30-6:15pm, Committee Room 4A, House of Lords
(booked in the name of Baroness Massey)

Children and the Police inquiry:

Oral evidence session 6: 'Police engagement with youth gangs'

This was the sixth meeting of the APPGC's inquiry into 'Children and the Police'. This meeting explored the experience of children and young people who are gang members when engaging with the police, and considered which groups of children and young people are at greater risk of joining gangs and why. It examined good practice used by police forces, including examples which drew on multi-agency working with children's services, and considered how engagement can be improved.

Members in attendance: Baroness Massey, Earl of Listowel, Baroness Howarth, Baroness Blood, Baroness Walmsley, Baroness Humphreys, Lord Judd, Heidi Alexander MP

Speakers: Hannah Bourazza, Ethan Bernard and Steven Ekpenyong (XLP), Dr Olive Moloney and Dr Clare Holt (MAC-UK), Dr Andy Briers (Trident Gang Crime Command, Metropolitan Police), Detective Sergeant Andy Day (Metropolitan Police), Jeremiah Emmanuel (1 Big Community), Deputy Chief Constable David Thompson and Sergeant Mark Bellingham (West Midlands Police), Police Office Kevin Reevey and Leon Cartwright (Merseyside Police), Tom Sackville (Dawes Unit at Catch22), Professor John Pitts (University of Bedfordshire)

Voluntary and community sector in attendance: Marion Sandwell (YJB), Phillippa Goffe (Ministry of Justice), John Metcalfe (BASW), Mary O'Shaughnessy (SCYJ), Junior Nelson (Merton Civic Centre), Nick Wilkinson (Association of YOT Managers/Kent County Council), Aika Stephenson (Just for Kids Law), Graham Ritchie (Office of the Children's Commissioner), Alexander Lee (Barnardo's), Ben Estap (new economics foundation), Francis Boylan (BASW Criminal Justice Special Interest Group), Max Tobias (Family Action's Waltham Forest Anti Gangs Project), Mary Crowley and Ann Crowley (International Federation for Parenting Education), Helen Atwood (Kids Company), Caroline Adams (Sussex Police), Enver Solomon, Richard Newson, Heather Ransom and Rosie Eatwell-White (NCB)

Apologies: Baroness Hughes, Bishop of Leicester, Lucy Powell MP, Damian Hinds MP, Commander Mak Chishty (Metropolitan Police), Wendy Scott (TACTYC), Sue Dale Tunnicliffe (Institute of Education), Fiona Smith (Royal College of Nursing), Andrew Pilbury (Tytherington High School), Elaine Arnold

Baroness Massey welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Hannah Bourazza: explained her role running a mentoring programme for the youth charity XLP.

The work of XLP

- A youth charity which works with disengaged young people who are already at risk of getting involved in gangs by taking a holistic approach.
- Young people are matched up with a mentor who supports them and helps them see what they need to change in their behaviour. Young people are supported back into education and parents are also given support. XLP can also provide advocacy and support following arrest or in court.
- XLP also work with partners such as schools, youth offending teams and social workers to provide wrap-around support.
- The aim is to instil positive self-belief in the young people.

Young people's engagement with police

- This is often a very negative experience for young people, who do not trust the police.
- XLP help to build bridges with the police by helping young people understand that the police are there to support them.

Ethan Bernard: explained that he runs a mobile recording project for XLP which works in different estates across London and engages with some of the hardest to reach young people.

Young people's views of the police

- Young people feel that the Met does not 'look like London'. When young people from BME backgrounds engage with white adults they tend to be teachers or the police and both of these experiences can be negative.
- Young people have very negative perceptions of the police. They feel that the police cannot be trusted and that they do not care for them.

Young people at risk

- Those at risk of getting involved in gangs are those who struggle in school and who get excluded.
- They feel judged and as a result tend to let out their frustrations in a negative way.

Improving relationships between young people and the police

- XLP use various methods to improve relationships.
- In Catford, they run a community project in a car park. One police officer always took the time to come over and get involved, and sometime brought other officers with her. Over time, relationships slowly built up between the officers and the young people.
- A relationship managed to form between officers and some of the most hardened gang members in Lewisham. Unfortunately, one of the officers then got moved on and the relationship ended.

Steven Ekpenyong: spoke about working with XLP and how it had changed his perceptions of the police.

- Young people in his area had wanted to start rioting in response to a police shooting.
- They rang him to ask him to get involved, which in the past he would have done, but because of a change in his attitude towards the police he chose not to.
- He got in touch with a police officer he knew and was able to arrange a meeting between the officer and the young people. The situation was diffused and the riot did not take place.
- He concluded that it was because of knowing and trusting that officer that this was possible, and that trust plays a crucial part in bridging the gap between young people and the police.

Dr Olive Moloney: explained that she worked as a Clinical Psychologist for MAC-UK, a youth charity which works to make mental health support available to those involved in gangs.

Gangs and mental health

- An understanding of mental health and its relationship to serious youth violence is at the heart of finding a solution to gang violence.
- One in three young offenders have an unmet mental health need at the time of the offence.
- Young people in gangs are excluded from services and are and are very unlikely to access traditional forms of support, so MAC-UK brings services to them.

The work of MAC-UK

- MAC-UK bases its work on long-term relationships, working with young people for three years and developing youth-led projects where young people co-produce and lead activities.
- Work focuses on all those in the peer group, and not just those exhibiting mental health need.
- Focus is given to developing confidence and improving life skills for work, education and training.
- They may talk to the young people about issues such as traumatic memories or substance abuse – issues which may impact upon their ability to find work and be successful in their goals.
- They support young people to lead their own activities, including project planning and budgeting.
- MAC-UK is also involved in training professionals.

Messages from young people

- 6-8 minutes is too short a time to discuss this issue
- They have gone past feeling threatened or intimidated by police but do feel humiliated by them.
- Many young people offered a balanced view, accepting there are good and bad officers, as in any job. However, the experiences with bad officers have tarnished their view of the police generally.

Clare Holt: gave an example of a young person who MAC-UK had worked with.

- The young person reported that he had never previously had a positive interaction with the police.
- He wanted to share information with the police for his own safety but it took weeks for MAC-UK staff to support him to feel able to approach the police. When he did, the meeting was positive.
- However, since then, a number of incidents have occurred which have broken down the trust which was built during that meeting. For example, several different officers have called the young person, some of whom he had not met, leaving him with a feeling of a lack of control over what is happening to his information. He felt like he was being used as an informant.
- Importantly, this experience will not just affect that young person's view of the police but will have a ripple effect if he shares this negative experience with others.

Olive Moloney: added that experiences like this have reinforced negative stereotypes. Some police officers have been very involved at a ground and senior level and have been good at communicating information in order to inform risk assessments and keep staff and young people safe. There have also been many examples of when officers have reached out to young people, have met with young people and have supported young people with acute mental health needs.

Andy Day: explained that he had previously worked for the Islington Youth Engagement Team, a team of police officers which had been set up in response to a spike in youth violence in the area.

Work of the Islington Youth Engagement Team

- The team included a youth worker from XLP and two council youth workers, and took referrals from a range of partners across Islington, including parents, schools, churches etc.
- The team focused on engagement. They would conduct home visits where they would sit down as a team with a young person and offer specialist support.
- One a month, partners from across the borough, including children's services, the police, the council and youth services, would meet to ensure they were providing a consistent response.
- This work is being developed into a pan-London programme through Trident (the Metropolitan Police Gang Crime Command).

Andy Briars: stated that as a police officer he had been seconded into a very difficult school, where he worked for a year, and then had the opportunity to do comparative work in the USA. He drew on this experience for his work with the Islington Youth Engagement Team and now at Trident. Officers from Trident go into primary and secondary schools and give talks on gangs, which have been quite effective.

Young people at risk of joining gangs

- There is a real concern that younger people and girls are now being drawn into gangs.
- There is evidence of gangs known to Trident moving into the counties and beyond, with gang activity being picked up as far as Norwich and Glasgow. This is a concern.
- Many young people at risk fall under the radar and only come to the attention of police if they are stabbed or shot.

- In particular, there is a concern about girls who come into A&E regularly. They may be drunk, suffering a drugs overdose or displaying bruising suggesting domestic violence, but too often this is not being picked up quickly enough.

He concluded by stating that there are a great deal of police officers working on intervention. Over 250 Met officers work full-time in schools and there are efforts to expand this, which is very positive.

Jeremiah Emmanuel: explained that last year, after a friend died as a result of youth violence, he founded 1 Big Community (1BC). 1BC is a coalition which seeks solutions to youth violence by bringing together young people from across London.

Problems with tackling youth violence

- In a survey conducted by 1BC, the most shocking result was that 94% of young people believed youth violence was *not* associated with gangs.
- There is a 'wall of silence' between young people and adults such as police officers, teachers and doctors. Young people do not approach these adults if they have a problem. 1BC is trying to break down this 'wall of silence'. They are holding an event at City Hall to discuss the issues.
- Too much time is spent talking about the problems with policing but not enough time is spent discussing solutions. The police have been blamed far too much and it is time to move on.
- The key thing is building trust. 1BC have brought together young people and the police so that both sides can discuss the issues and a positive conversation can happen. During these interactions the police have been very professional and respectful.

Baroness Massey: took questions and comments from peers and the wider audience, including:

- Is there scope for a national mentoring programme for young people led by the police?

Andy Briers: stated that many officers are encouraged to mentor young people and this is done on an ad hoc basis, although officers are not always the best people to be mentors. Work is being done on a possible training package which would involve a mentoring programme. He added that the 32 London boroughs have police cadet programmes, which are a great way of engaging young people.

- Who mentors the young people involved in XLP?

Hannah Bourazza: explained that anyone in the community can volunteer to be a mentor. By coming from the same community they understand the area and the issues and can relate to the young person.

- What can be done to stop young people using that level of violence?

Hannah Bourazza: stated that it can be very positive for young people to have ex-gang members as mentors as they can see that their mentors have been down the same road and have managed to make a change in their lives. This can be a very positive inspiration for them.

Steven Ekpenyong: added that when he started as a mentor he felt scared and unsure of what he could offer a young person, but that the young person actually has taught him a great deal and he gets a lot back from the mentoring process.

- What leads a young person to use that degree of violence on another person?

Ethan Bernard: explained that as an ex-gang member himself, growing up around knives and in a family known for criminality, picking up a knife and using it was "nothing". It is only after the damage has been done and they have caused a severe injury or death that young people realise how serious it is.

Olive Moloney: added that young people associated with gangs want the same things from their lives as anyone else (relationships, a good job, their own house etc.). Often coming from a background of social and health inequalities, they feel that the system has forgotten about them. They have described feeling like ghosts, living in a parallel world where the norms and values are different. Coming together in a gang can offer them protection and a feeling of belonging. They may have grown up in a culture of violence or experienced

trauma from a young age, which can normalise these experiences. The effects of experiencing trauma can enable you to do things you might not imagine yourself ever doing.

- Is the problem of gangs getting better or worse in London?

Philippa Goffe: stated that the data show that the numbers people convicted for knife possession is falling, and is falling faster in children than adults. There has also been a fall in the number of homicides.

Andy Briers: added that the improvements are due to partnership working and good information sharing. Whilst crimes levels are falling, the *fear* of crime amongst young people still remains high.

Nick Wilkinson: raised the point that the issue of gangs and youth violence was not confined to London or to inner cities, but that other areas such as Kent had seen an increase in these problems.

Baroness Massey: brought an end to questions and invited the next witness to speak.

David Thompson: explained that he was the national policing lead for gangs. He described the gangs issue as a 'wicked problem' which is hard to solve because of the incomplete picture of what the problem is about. The requirements around the problem change and the issues are very complex.

Defining the problem

- The term 'gangs' is quite loose and the associated problems we want to solve change. The problems have moved from guns and drugs to knives and riots, and now to sexual violence.
- The term can be used generally to mean 'them' and not 'us'.
- The police like to categorise things in boxes but gangs cannot be defined that easily.
- The problem boiled down is that too many young people are leading violent, street based lives and the police need to stop them becoming victims or perpetrators of violence.
- Violence is behind the problem but there is a need to see this as a safeguarding and public health issue. The current strategy regarding violence and young people is insufficient and not joined up.

The work of the police

- A variety of services is provided but services are not sufficiently integrated.
- The police work in five ways:
 - Reducing the number of young people who are victims of crime
 - Stopping young people becoming perpetrators of crime
 - The police have a legitimacy duty to work with young people who are the largest group of victims of crime and amongst the largest groups of perpetrators of crime.
 - The police fill the gaps and are the agency of last resort, which is an increasing problem as cuts to youth services increase.
 - The police are involved in the direct case management of youth offenders
- The police also have a role in identifying those at risk early on.

Police relationships with young people

- Young people are amongst the biggest consumers of police time.
- The police are likely to have conflict with young people as they represent authority at a time in a young person's life when they are least willing to want their behaviour to be regulated.
- The police need to consider the powers they have and how best to use these in a way that promotes confidence and legitimacy amongst young people.

Mark Bellingham: explained that he was given the remit of looking into gang prevention. When attending a meeting of schools which addressed counter-terrorism and combating extremism, he realised that a lot of the underlying issues and the children involved were the same.

The links between gangs and education

- >1% of the secondary pupil population are in alternative educational provision in the Birmingham area, yet 88% of children nationally at YOIs have been excluded from school.
- The victims of the last three knife crime murders in the West Midlands were all from alternative educational provision.

- These groups of children are both victims and offenders simultaneously.

Improving working

- A big problem is the lack of resources available to help create links between providers.
- The key is to build sustainable relationships based on trust with young people, so that they feel confident to ask for help if they get in trouble.

John Pitts: spoke from his expertise as researcher into gangs and youth crime.

Groups at risk of joining gangs

- The children of the poor are the most at risk of criminalisation. It has been this way for decades.
- The poorest suffer high infant mortality, high levels of means tested benefits, high family poverty, and over the last twenty years this is worsened.
- Governments do not seem to tackle this root problem, but only to address its consequences.

Police interaction with youth gangs

- Young people's interaction with the police varies enormously.
- During Operation Excalibur in Manchester there was a shift in the police's response towards seeing young gang members and their families as victims. As a result, people began to see the police as being fair and no longer saw them as racist.
- The continuity of contact is crucial. If intervention is only going to last six months then it is not worth it, and can even make things worse. Solid long-term engagement is needed.
- Neighbourhood police often complain that their hard work building relationships with communities can be undermined by poor communication from other police squads and heavy handed tactics.
- People who are victims of violence are very unlikely to report it to the police or social workers.

Future working

- There is a need to move away from a model of abstraction, whereby individual gang members are abstracted from the gang environment. Instead what is needed is a model of embeddedness, where the police work is embedded in the community.
- This would require a radical rethink of traditional models of service delivery. This kind of working is already happening in small pockets but needs to be expanded in order to have a wider impact.

Tom Sackville: explained that the Dawes Unit at Catch 22 combines policy and research work with direct service provision in Wolverhampton. The Dawes Unit focuses on community mobilisation, early intervention and prevention and providing programmes for those wishing to exit gangs.

Young people's interaction with the police

- Young people are not a homogenous group and so their experience varies widely.
- For many young people, the 'die is cast' when even before their first interaction with the police. Stereotypes are passed down from parents and older siblings and young people form a view of what to expect from the police. It takes work to break these stereotypes down.
- Many young people do not feel they have any control over their life and the police are perceived as one of the main groups taking away control.
- In the eyes of many young people, the police do not see them as victims or as having welfare needs, but as potential offenders. Young people's perceptions and experiences of stop and search further ingrain this idea.
- Young people feel treated as criminals and so that is what they feel they are.
- If the police want young people to share intelligence then it needs to be handled correctly.

Future working

- There is a shift in attitudes amongst the police who realise that they cannot 'arrest their way out of the problem'. Importantly though, young people need to believe that their attitudes have changed.
- Relationships are key and work needs to be driven by strong, persistent relationships.
- Damage can be done if police move on having built up relationships with young people and communities.
- Young people must be involved in the training of police officers. There are examples of projects which used to be run in which officers spent a week with gangs projects as part of their training.

Baroness Massey: took questions and comments from peers and the wider audience, including:

- What work is being done with parents in order to break the cycle of the normalisation of violence?

Max Tobias: explained that his project, Family Action's Waltham Forest Anti Gangs Project, takes a whole family approach to intervention. One of the problems organisations in this area face is the uncertainty of future funding and the short time scales for work, meaning that their future is only secure for a few months at a time. Working with this pressure makes it hard to build long-term relationships.

Hannah Bourazza: stated that in her work it is important to meet and engage with families and refer them if needed. There needs to be a support structure for struggling parents. XLP sometimes work with parents and young people to try and promote open dialogue between them if this is a problem.

- Are there any parents who are not interested in engaging?

Ethan Bernard: said that yes there are, but that it is up to XLP to give young people choices and to hope that they make the right choices.

Clare Holt: added that the barriers to young people interacting with services are also there for parents.

Tom Sackville: explained that a whole family approach is necessary as it is important for a young people to have a strong family to go back to. However, it is not just a question of the family saying violence is unacceptable, but the whole community sending that message.

Jeremiah Emmanuel: pointed out that whilst parenting can affect a young person's situation, it is not the only factor influencing gang involvement. Two people with similar upbringings can make very different choices when it comes to becoming part of a gang.

- Can the culture of violence be changed through work in schools?

Lord Judd: commented on the need to maximise the work and effectiveness of XLP, MAC-UK and other similar organisations. He pointed out that there appears to be a complete divorce between the priorities in education at the moment and the opportunity for community and value work in schools.

Andy Briers: explained that in the UK, if the police engage with a school then parents view the school as unsafe and it puts them off sending their children there. This is a concern.

David Thompson: added that in Birmingham the police run headteachers' forums in order to discuss young people who are coming into contact with the police.

- How do we change police culture when it comes to attitudes towards young people?

Andy Briers: stated that the police are changing as a service but training needs to be developed. Youth workers need to be working alongside the police and helping to train them up.

David Thompson: explained that when it comes to the police, the past gets mixed up with the present. For example, the recent inquiries into Hillsborough and the Stephen Lawrence investigation both deal with some aspects of policing which took place decades ago. There is a shift in what policing is about and a move towards prevention. Importantly, all 43 police forces are different and each will have areas for improvement.

Baroness Massey thanked all speakers and everyone who had attended.