

Commission on
Gangs and Violence:
**UNITING TO
IMPROVE SAFETY**

Summary Report November 2017

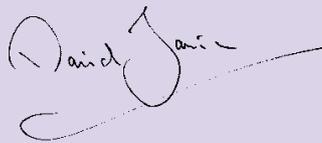
Rev Dr Carver Anderson



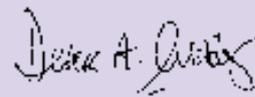
west midlands
police and crime
commissioner

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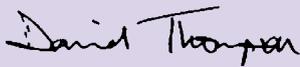
Signatories



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West Midlands
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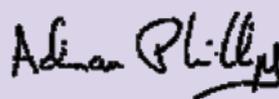
Bishop Derek Webley MBE DL
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Director of Public Health



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Birmingham City Council

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Foreword from the Police and Crime Commissioner

We are determined that we do not go back to where we were a decade ago. Violence is unacceptable and we all need to work together to ensure that we don't go backwards on this crucial issue.

Excellent work has been done by the police, but in particular by the community. That work has decreased the level of gun crime and made our streets safer. This commission will review that work and make recommendations on what needs to occur in the future to ensure that this spike in gun crime does not reoccur.

We have listened to the community and their concerns on gangs and violence; that is why we are launching this root and branch review. Gangs and violence are complex issues and the response should be, too.

A tough approach from the police is just one aspect of how we tackle gangs and violence. We need a consistent approach by the whole public sector, across different agencies to empower communities to help them tackle these issues collectively.

Whilst gun crime has fallen over the last decade, if it takes place on your street it is, of course, the biggest concern in your life. We recognise that concern and, for that reason, we are coming together to launch this commission into the root causes of gangs and violent crime in the city.

A robust police response is necessary, but we cannot arrest our way out of this problem. Arrests and prosecutions will only be temporary solutions that deal with the symptoms, not the core issues. We all need to work together to bring about a solution that includes skills, jobs and prosperity for the affected areas. The Commission on Gangs and Violence will be community led, with the support of statutory agencies, not the other way around.

Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the diverse contributions of the individuals and groups who took the time to participate in this report. Their thoughts, experiences and insights offer both empirical and anecdotal data that have allowed a greater understanding of the increase in gang-associated activities, the use of weapons and incidence of serious violence in some Birmingham neighbourhoods over the past eighteen months. It is from this understanding that key recommendations have emerged.

Thanks to Professor Steve Garner, Dr Martin Glynn and Mohammed Rahman from Birmingham City University for their academic support and critical reflections throughout the research.

Thanks to the team of Specialist Providers: Mohammed Ashfaq (KIKIT Pathway to Recovery), Joan Campbell (Community Vision West Midlands), Bobby Dennis (Community Outreach and Facilitations), Nathan Dennis (First Class Legacy), Lloyd Robinson (Criminal Justice Specialist, involved up until February 2017), Lincoln Moses (Holford Drive Community Sports Hub), Craig Pinkney (Real Action UK), Tanayah Sam (TSA Projects) and Rev Robin Thompson (Bringing Hope Charity). Their experiences and skills were vital to the research, because they facilitated contact with and access to the voices of young people, men and women living in communities across the city, impacted directly and indirectly by serious violence and gang-associated issues.

Introduction

This is a summary of a research report into gangs and violence in Birmingham, commissioned by the Police and Crime Commissioner. It began in March 2016 with the launch of the Commission on Gang and Violence. The commission's job was to respond to the serious increase in the numbers of people hurt and killed by firearms and knives and other forms of violence. It also had to respond to the families, friends and communities mourning the loss of loved ones and wider concerns about organised crime and serious violence in city neighbourhoods.

The research report offers a **community-led, 'city-community' partnership** response to gang and non-gang related violence in Birmingham. In essence, it explores the challenges associated with engaging and working with individuals and families associated with criminality regarding desistance, which is the termination of criminal activities and negative behaviours (McNell and Weaver, 2010; Glynn, 2014). It uses statistics, official documents, interviews, meetings and observations to explore the challenges, interests and issues around organised and spontaneous violence in the city, which generally occurs in public spaces and environments. For those individuals and communities impacted, it highlights the depths of hurts, pains, regrets and fears of both the victims and perpetrators of serious violence. It expresses the hopes, dreams and plans of young people, a cross-section of community members, business people, faith leaders and city leaders.

The report recommendations seek to offer solutions that effectively respond to the concerns, challenges, hurts, hopes and aspirations highlighted in the research. There are numerous examples in the data of participants from several communities talking about the lack of trust between statutory bodies and local communities. They say that one way to reduce gang violence is to build a community-led partnership with city, business, community and other groups. Such a partnership can make the best use of the city's resources to limit the violence and improve the lives of all its peoples. Simply 'cracking down' on 'hot spots' of violence and gang activity or known individuals is not a long-term solution.

This report acknowledges that there is not a pre-existing consensual definition of community-led approaches. For this reason the research team has come up with a definition based on consultation with community organisations and other stakeholders. Community-led approaches constitute:

agreed responses (programmes and activities) undertaken in defined areas and neighborhoods by individuals, groups or organisations in that location, to achieve positive changes relating to identified concerns and challenges (environmental, social or economic) with objectives defined by participants in consultation with key stakeholders.

Importantly, the above definition does not negate activities that may be facilitated by statutory sector providers, however it cautions against a top-down approach to involving groups in the community (Crisp et al., 2016).

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The Police and Crime Commissioner and the Commission on Gangs and Violence see this report as a first step towards a sustainable programme of changes to address the issues around gangs and violence and wider youth criminality that can potentially progress into involvement with serious crime groups and activities.

Birmingham Context

Gangs, violence, guns and knives continue to plague towns and cities across the UK, with devastating consequences on families and neighbourhoods. According to some media reports and government statistics, the West Midlands have been ‘the gun crime capital’ of the UK over a two year period (McCarthy, 2016). This means that some families, communities and neighbourhoods are damaged by acts of spontaneous and deliberate violence that kill or seriously injure. They are also damaged by the long prison sentences given to some perpetrators. Gangs and violence produce money and power for some and fear and misery for many more.

Across the research data, community participants, victims and perpetrators highlighted the following key needs:

- Individuals and organisations that can be trusted to support them when they are in crisis.
- Employment opportunities, especially if one has a criminal record.
- Statutory agencies, especially the police to acknowledge the pain and mistrust by certain groups/communities that have been advertently or intentionally misrepresented or mistreated, and to commence a conversation regarding a process of ‘healing’.
- Safe spaces and venues in communities that offer advice and guidance regarding personal development.
- Support for parents with youngsters at risk of gang association and criminality.
- For black young men to be given opportunities to progress beyond the labels of gang affiliation as portrayed by the media.
- To get ex-offenders more involved in mentoring and supporting youngsters at risk of involvement in criminality.
- For more early support for schools and parents with children identified as having behavioural challenges.
- Showing genuine love, care and concern for the families of victims and perpetrators and where possible support them in restorative justice processes.

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The research further confirms that some victims fear speaking out for a number of reasons. Some expressed the belief that this would make them 'weak' or 'snitches' in areas where strength and silence are necessary to avoid further violence (Antrobus, 2009). Some are traumatised and carry emotional and psychological pains that require understanding and support (Anderson, 2015; Brown, 2014). Other victims strike back and cause more pain and trauma in families and communities. Other victims simply die.

The present gangs and violence associated challenges should not be seen in isolation of Birmingham's history - the deaths of Charlene Ellis and Latisha Shakespeare, at a New Year's party in Birchfield in 2003 (Beckford, 2004; Dawkins, 2003; Heale, 2008) shocked Birmingham awake to gang and gun violence in the city. 8,700 people gathered at the 'Communities Unite' event in January 2003 at Villa Park around the banner, 'Enough is enough: Youth Cry Life, not Death'. This community-led initiative brought together many ordinary people, community and faith groups, people from voluntary, business, statutory and private sectors and government officials, in the fight against drugs, crime and gun violence (Dawkins, 2003).

There were fatal shootings and stabbings and serious non-lethal gang violence before the deaths of the two young women, but these did not pull people together in the same way. The city's responses to their deaths sparked Birmingham's original partnership to tackle gang violence: the Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence group (BRGV). This became a core priority group in Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (Home Office, 2008) and a turning point in the quest to develop community-involved/community-led responses to organised crime and serious violence.

The problems

This report shows links between the drugs industry, the illegal use of firearms and knives and serious violence. It looks at key points and responses to these issues between 2003 and 2017. It shows the importance of community groups and organisations, families and faith groups in limiting violence and promoting peace in Birmingham. It shows how local, regional, national policies, perspectives and procedures shape what happens on the ground and in people's lives.

The research suggests that there is no single explanation for reductions in gun and knife crime. Many things can contribute to more peaceful streets and lives. The key is to create an environment where people can work together effectively. Recommendations for making things better in Birmingham are laid out. However, they should be considered with the learning and reflections falling under three headings: the breakup of key governance frameworks; the 'criminal justice' or law enforcement model which limits impact; and the mainstream media often makes things worse, by the sometimes, sensational and 'moral panic' responses, which at times lack any detailed or critical analysis or enquiry into the very complex world associated with gangs and violence.

Ensuring enduring leadership, direction and commitment

The first point relates to the disbanding of Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence partnership which led to the breakup of a coherent approach to gangs and violence across the city. Whilst the Multi Agency Gang Unit (MAGU), Youth Offending Services (YOS) and community sector organisations offer examples of good practice around gangs and youth violence, however:

- There are no examples of genuine ‘power-sharing’ between local communities and the statutory, private and voluntary sectors. There are no community-led and no effective community-involved partnerships.
- The victims, perpetrators and others directly affected by gangs and youth violence are rarely included in strategic discussions around the planning of services or interventions.
- There are very limited ways to review and research good or best practice and such initiatives (from all sectors) are seldom celebrated and replicated.

From enforcement to public health

The second point is that established ways of seeing and dealing with gangs and violence lacks credibility as a number of respondents have highlighted in the research. The dominant and embedded ‘criminal justice/law enforcement’ model of ‘cracking down’ on ‘hot spots’ and individuals means more confrontations between communities and police. Community organisations that were interviewed reiterated feelings that statutory bodies often fail to see, let alone address, the lack of trust and confidence created in local communities impacted by serious violence and the police’s efforts to limit it.

The research reveals that there are more possibilities for real change where the criminal justice, law enforcement approaches are considered within a public health framework. From the growing body of evidence relating to public health, it is becoming increasingly clear that its cross-disciplinary nature can bring partners together from different sectors and agencies. These should include credible community groups and organisations, which can help communities to develop, fund, implement and evaluate a comprehensive strategy that supports individuals and families towards desistance.

There are numerous examples in the data highlighting how serious violence and gang-associated activities are related to other social issues. These include: living in poor and under resourced homes and neighbourhoods; school exclusions; educational ‘underachievement’, exposure to violence; family and personal debt; the glorification of ‘materialistic lifestyles’ on social media; negative experiences with statutory personnel/service providers; boredom and a lack of recreational spaces and activities;

minimal parental supervision and ‘father deficit’; ‘disruptive’ family relationships; mental health difficulties; unemployment; trauma; being ‘looked after’ by a local authority, racism and bullying (victim or perpetrator). Whilst each aspect in isolation should not be seen as a tipping point towards gang affiliation or violence, however, when they become interconnected, negative outcomes are likely. This increases the risk of people getting involved in criminal activities (Anderson, 2015; Brown, 2014; Regan and Hoeksma, 2010; Gunter, 2010; Pitts, 2008).

Images and stereotypes: Representation in public debates

Thirdly, there are few balanced and informed challenges to the mainstream media’s ‘stories’ about gangs, guns and violence in certain neighbourhoods. In effect, media representation of the city’s responses to gangs and violence continues to highlight some historical notions of gangs based on old prejudices rather than any balanced community-city partnership representations. This report therefore strongly supports the need to promote and empower genuine, credible authoritative voices at neighbourhood and community levels, to influence the public discourse that can potentially impact on misguided media representations of the issues.

The recommendations to limit the multiplication and interconnection of these issues are grouped under the following key themes that are represented in the findings of the full report:

1. Criminal justice and public health considerations
2. Gang labels - contested and reinforced
3. Community-involved and community-led partnerships
4. Individuals and families (‘street’ and natural) – support structures and interventions
5. Education, training and preventative considerations
6. The voices of young people (‘uninvolved’, ‘gang-associated’, ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’)
7. Specialist providers and culturally competent grassroots organisations
8. Faith groups - an untapped component
9. Prison influences
10. Statutory and Business sector responses

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The report acknowledges that most children, young people and adults in Birmingham are law abiding and not associated with gangs or violence. However, it highlights the absolute devastation that is possible by a small minority of individuals, drawn from different parts of the city and by no means exclusively linked to one geography, community or ethnicity. These individuals or groups are known to be advocates of violence, are involved in illegal drug sales and trafficking and also possess and use firearms and knives in 'protecting their trade'.

There is a desperate need for responses that work to tackle Birmingham's reputation as the UK's gun crime capital. Even though no one intervention, approach or partnership can reduce serious violence and gun or knife-related deaths, the willingness of people from the statutory, community, faith and business sectors to work together to make things better establishes relationships, trust, transparency and accountability (Home Office, 2012). The evidence says that these things cannot be assumed. They are created by the people involved in them.

The evidence also says that these initiatives work best when the people most affected by them are involved at all levels and given aspects of leadership to influence outcomes. The single most important resource in any partnership is the communities that both produce and challenge gang life and its associated violence. A theme amongst a number of respondents is the aspect of working together. Community respondents and community-led organisations were clear that without communities working with others from different sectors to build opportunities and challenge injustices, there can be no limiting of the impact of the drugs and other criminal industries in the city.

This report fully supports the notion and plan for community-involved and community-led partnerships that share and review information and plans and are involved in commission services.

Recommendations and rationales as represented in full research report:

Governance, implementation and review

Recommendation 1: The Gangs and Violence Commission is to provide ongoing leadership, direction and co-ordination to work that will reduce the impact of gangs and violence, working to fill the current leadership vacuum.

The Gangs and Violence Commission should continue meeting quarterly to monitor, review and scrutinise the implementation process and progress related to the recommendations in this report. Importantly, the commission should agree priorities and timeframes for implementation of the recommendations. Furthermore, the commission should establish a community/city-led implementation group who will ensure delivery of the recommendations approved in the report.

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Recommendation 2: The Gangs and Violence Commission will work with a range of partners to collate and analyse data about gangs and violence.

The commission should develop ways to regularly gather and compare local data on gangs and violence with national trends. For example, national data shows that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) youngsters are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system and have fewer life chances than other ethnic groups. This should be compared with the trends in Birmingham. This will enable more rigorous analysis and future planning relating to offending, gangs and violence association and evaluation of outcomes and interventions.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement/Approaches

Recommendation 3: The Gangs and Violence Commission will agree a broad, preventative public health based action plan for addressing gangs and violence, recognising that enforcement does not offer enduring solutions.

The commission partnership should agree on a public health approach to gangs and violence and use this to commission services. The public health approach does not negate the inclusion of criminal justice or law enforcement actions, but considers it within a framework for considering how gangs and violence problems are defined; also the challenges, aspirations, causal factors and support needs for those associated. This should enable more inclusive and effective partnership working and better outcomes.

Recommendation 4: The action plan will include targeted, place-based activity.

The commission partners, with the West Midlands Police should decide which neighbourhoods need more strategic interventions and partnerships to address their specific concerns. The partners should also offer 'doable' strategic action plans with 'measurable' outcomes. These plans should also include the joint training needs that would allow for more effective work with families and communities associated with gangs and violence.

Recommendation 5: The commission should consult with local community-led organisations to support their full involvement in the development of 'local community well-being partnerships' (community, voluntary, faith, statutory and business) in neighbourhoods identified as areas needing interventions relating to gangs and violence.

Recommendation 6: The commission partners should enable community organisations and groups involved in gangs and violence associated interventions to strategise, share and train together. The best practices produced locally can be shared with statutory providers to influence city policy and practice.

Recommendation 7: Our understanding of gangs and violence locally must be underpinned by a sustained academic research programme.

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The commission partners should ask academic partners, in particular Birmingham City University, to host an annual Birmingham partnership symposium regarding best-practice around gangs and violence reduction. The aim is to make a learning, training and empowerment space for 'stakeholders' (victims and perpetrators included) to offer insights and experiences regarding sustainable and effective approaches and interventions.

Community Mapping/Networking

Recommendation 8: The development of a community-led partnership; to use social media and information technology mechanisms to strategically reach key communities and stakeholder audiences regarding gangs and violence awareness /initiatives.

Recommendation 9: The commission partners should ensure a remapping of all community groups/organisations, faith groups and key individuals providing or supporting gangs and violence services and interventions. These groups and individuals should be invited onto an Independent Advisory Group (IAG) to work with the commission to deliver workshops around: gangs and violence reduction; and ways to increase community participation and explore more effective ways to support communities directly affected by gangs and violence.

Offending: Young People/Adults

Recommendation 10: The commission partnership should learn from Birmingham Youth Offending Service and consider a roll out of its family-empowerment approach as a template for working with families, with needs linked to the criminal justice system, youth violence and criminality.

Recommendation 11: A flexible and culturally responsive community based preventative and reactive mediation and conflict intervention capability is required.

The commission should promote a shift away from the 'law enforcement' response towards community-led mediation and conflict interventions and approaches. Community organisations (faith and non-faith) should be supported to appoint and train community mediators and facilitators to mediate in situations associated with gangs, conflicts and violence reduction in neighbourhoods.

Recommendation 12: The commission partners should work to include an 'authentic youth and family voice' in their discussions and planning. This voice can represent the views of victims and perpetrators in service provision and provide relevant information about 'life on the ground'.

Recommendation 13: The commission partners should prioritise supporting community-led organisations that support children, young people and young adults identified as 'at risk' of gang or violence related behaviours and activities. Such early interventions have a greater chance of success and should be available to anyone in need.

Education/Support for Young People

Recommendation 14: The Commission will review approaches to school exclusions, aiming to develop services and support for excluded pupils and their families.

The commission partners should examine patterns of school exclusions and how schools manage them in the priority areas. Processes that lead to exclusion overlap with processes that encourage people to become involved with organised crime and violence. The aim is to understand what leads to exclusion, how exclusions are managed and what support is offered to the child and family once they have been excluded. This includes issues around race, gender, faith, culture and the need for schools or colleges to signpost families affected to local groups (faith, business, parents and community) for support.

Recommendation 15: The new Police Cadet scheme must engage young people in areas most affected by gangs and violence.

The commission should promote the implementation of the Cadets Scheme in specific areas of Birmingham. This will involve a more targeted approach to the recruitment of volunteers from diverse backgrounds to be cadets and a community-city partnership to engage groups and institutions to champion and support the scheme.

Recommendation 16: The Commission will develop, support and review schemes that support young adults at risk and ex-offenders to find work and start businesses.

The commission should set up a strategic working partnership to support young adults and ex-offenders facing challenges around getting a job and starting a business. This group could work with the Birmingham and Solihull Youth Promise Plus project to help 'hard to access' young people to engage directly with key city business leaders and employers.

Recommendation 17: Mentoring schemes should be targeted at young people at most risk.

The commission partners should support the appointment of the Partnership Engagement Manager to develop school-based mentoring schemes to support young people 'at risk' of exclusion/offending and in need of greater support. The engagement and consultation with local community groups will be necessary for this role.

Family and Community Support

Recommendation 18: The Commission will support development of specialist family and trauma therapy services for those affected by gang associated violence.

The commission partnership should ensure that specialist counselling services, including family therapy and trauma therapy services are available to both victims and perpetrators of gang associated violence. This will involve commission partners compiling a comprehensive list of organisations and agencies that offer these specialist services.

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Recommendation 19: Birmingham City Council should engage partners in a review of services for young people.

The commission should encourage the City Council to review its position on youth facilities in priority areas and wards to consider the establishment of partnerships or to re-establish spaces and facilities where meaningful activities (learning, fun, sports, discussions, counselling, coaching, mentoring) can take place.

Recommendation 20: Prisoners associated with gangs and violence should have a comprehensive 'intervention and support package' in place for when they leave prison.

The commission should promote community-involved and community-led approaches to offenders and ex-offenders by setting up a working group. This group can encourage agencies that work with these individuals (the West Midlands National Probation Service, Community Rehabilitation Company, Youth Offending Services, and HMP Prisons link to City of Birmingham) to fulfil their statutory responsibilities to support prisoners towards and on release. Prisoners with gang and serious violence issues need an 'intervention support package' to ease their re-entry to productive community life. This package should follow the government's seven pathways to encourage rehabilitation and reduce reoffending. These include: accommodation; education; employment and training; health (physical and mental); drugs and alcohol; finance, debt and benefit; children and families; and attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

Faith

Recommendation 21: The Commission's action plan should include exploration and review of faith-based approaches to gangs and violence.

The commission should develop a co-ordinated approach to engage all inter-faith and multi-faith forums/groups in Birmingham. The aims are to discuss the role of faith, values and morals in issues around organised crime, gangs and violence and to promote working together, especially in 'priority neighbourhoods', to increase the peace.

Funding

Recommendation 22: There should be investment in capability to seek greater external funding from charitable and non-statutory funders.

The commission should support the appointment of a Fundraising/Community Development Manager to encourage capacity building in community groups and to build a network of voluntary and community groups. Such a network can investigate joint funding and investment strategies to secure substantial funding, e.g. Big Lottery Reaching Communities joint bid, from non-statutory funders supporting gangs and violence reduction initiatives.

Business, Employment, Jobs and Training

Recommendation 23: The commission should establish a community-led 'interdisciplinary business hub' for supporting individuals and families associated with gangs and violence. This hub will show people routes into employment, training, self-employment and business start-up possibilities.

Recommendation 24: The Commission should work with businesses to provide spaces for activity, training, mentoring and advice for individuals and families associated with or impacted by gangs and violence.

The commission should involve the business sector in its work through the promotion of corporate social responsibility. Such social responsibility can lead to partnerships between all sectors to acquire appropriate buildings and premises for establishing 'safe spaces' for learning, personal development, advice, guidance, business start-up and other relevant support for individuals and families associated or impacted by gangs and violence.

The report highlights the willingness of the different sectors in the commission partnership to work together in addressing the challenges linked to gangs and serious violence. It also notes the clear, local, regional and national acknowledgements that arrests and law enforcement approaches are not enough to effectively confront and reduce serious violence in local neighbourhoods or communities (Home Office, 2011; Jamieson, 2016). It is from these acknowledgements that this report confirms that only an active and sustained multi-agency, city-community response to the recommendations will make any significant inroads into what, for some, has been categorised a 'crime epidemic' relating to gangs and serious violence.

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