

Joanne McCartney AM, Chair of the Police and Crime Committee

London Assembly  
City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
London, SE1 2AA

**Boris Johnson**

Chair of the London Crime Reduction Board  
Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime  
10 Dean Farrar Street  
SW1H 0NY

**24 October 2012**

Dear Boris

I am writing on behalf of the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee to set out our response to the London Crime Reduction Board's draft partnership anti-gangs strategy. The Committee supports the current drive to reduce the growth of gangs in London as key to reducing overall crime levels and supporting the development of safer communities across London.

Achieving a sustained, long-term reduction in gang crime is not an unrealistic goal. The evidence from cities in the UK and abroad demonstrates that the key is balancing police enforcement with an effective programme of prevention and diversion activities. According to the MPS's Commander Steve Rodhouse, who spoke to the Committee on this issue in January, it is these preventative programmes which are key to long-term behaviour change in young people and prevent a costly and ultimately futile "revolving door of police activity".<sup>i</sup>

The Committee therefore welcomes the opportunity to comment on the LCRB's draft strategy. Our aim is to suggest ways that it can be made more robust in its approach, easier to monitor and evaluate during implementation and better support local authorities and communities in tackling their own particular range of issues. We have based our response on evidence heard during our meeting with a wide range of stakeholders in January 2012,<sup>ii</sup> as well as extensive follow-up work with local authorities, public sector agencies and charities.<sup>iii</sup> The effect of gang crime is also an issue raised regularly by the Committee at its monthly Q+A with the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime and the Commissioner. The sections below follow the structure of the draft strategy.

## **1. Enforcement**

The Committee supports the strategy's aim to create a more accurate and detailed measure of gang activity in London. Past attempts to tackle the growth of gangs have been hampered by a poor understanding of the number of people involved in gangs and where they are active.<sup>iv</sup> Without this understanding, the MPS and support services cannot be sure that resources are being effectively targeted, nor can the success of their actions be accurately demonstrated. Though the various actions to improve communication, data sharing and analysis amongst partners are overdue, they face daunting legal and logistical barriers.<sup>v</sup> Their importance in the final strategy should be underlined with a more specific timetable for scoping and implementation and the resources necessary to ensure success.

We would also like the final strategy to specify which crimes are included under the MPS's "gang related offences" category. The MPS has described to us the difficulty in benchmarking current performance against the past because of changes in how crime types are categorised and measured.<sup>vi</sup> This underlines the importance of either retaining current measures such as Serious Youth Violence or

providing sound justification for any changes which does not reduce transparency on this important issue.

The strategy should also focus more strongly on addressing the growing gap between the speed and scale of the MPS's renewed enforcement drive and the development of prevention and diversion work. The early success of Trident is to be welcomed, but it is taking place against the backdrop of continued difficulties in funding and developing support and prevention services across London, with grass roots organisations facing particular difficulties.<sup>vii</sup> This will make reductions in gang activity more difficult to consolidate and we risk reverting to the cycle of repeat offending affecting more lives and communities.

Finally, major changes are proposed to the structure and operation of neighbourhood policing in London. The strategy does not refer to the larger context of budget cuts, the forthcoming Police and Crime Plan and the new model for local policing, which are under development by the MPS and MOPAC.<sup>viii</sup> These changes offer opportunities and risk for the LCRB's aims over the next five years and the final strategy should discuss their likely impact.

**The draft strategy discusses in detail present enforcement activity, identifying problems with the current monitoring and assessment of gang activity and suggesting some useful ways to address those problems. The final strategy also needs to set out precisely how the MPS measures gang offences as well as a long-term view of how enforcement and support and prevention services can be developed in parallel, and also explain how broader changes to policing in London might shape the response to gangs.**

## 2. Partnerships

The strategy is right to identify the importance of multi-agency partnerships to successful prevention and diversion work. Without the resources and expertise of partners from the criminal justice system, probation, health, education, housing, community groups and charities, London's ability to reduce the number of new gang members or repeat offenders will be limited.<sup>ix</sup> While the strategy is useful in outlining the complexity of establishing and operating these partnerships, its approach to improving the situation through better communication and data sharing, is unlikely to address the underlying structural barriers to co-operation.

Partnerships in London are often weakened by the difficulty of engaging larger regional or national agencies in individual borough strategies. The contrasting socio-economic profiles of boroughs will often produce unique gang problems, making local authorities a natural focus for anti-gangs work. While local authorities can use an array of mechanisms such as funding and licensing to encourage support from local agencies and the voluntary sector, they report major difficulties in engaging with larger regional and national agencies which have their own strategies, funding priorities, timescales and organisational cultures.<sup>x</sup> This disconnect prevents proper joined-up working between borough partnerships and key national stakeholders, particularly in health, education and housing. Over the long-term this is likely to lead to less effective prevention and support programmes for young people.

The Committee believes the current situation has created both a need and an opportunity for the LCRB and/or MOPAC to play an enhanced role in bridging this gap. The final strategy should contain a commitment to explore how larger agencies currently engage with borough-based gangs programmes and identify improvements for implementation over the life of the strategy.<sup>xi</sup> This will help maximise the effectiveness of local responses to gangs activity as well as acting as a longer-term legacy for crime reduction programmes in London.

**Despite the positive advances made in developing more inclusive partnerships across London, there remain major barriers at borough level to engaging larger regional and national agencies in anti-gang initiatives. To ensure the effectiveness of local authority support and prevention programmes, MOPAC and the LCRB should commit to clearly identifying and addressing these barriers as a priority.**

### **3. Effective Prevention and Diversions Activity**

In terms of prevention and diversion, the Committee agrees that the LCRB's goal of addressing gaps in service provision and varying levels of quality across London is amongst its most important. With budgets being cut in key areas such as youth services and community safety, there will be greater pressure on commissioning bodies to prioritise the most effective gang prevention and diversion work.

To plan effectively for the future, organisations require clarity about the availability of future funding. The final strategy should include information of the wider context of any planned changes to community safety funding, an issue which relates directly to the role of MOPAC as distinct from the LCRB. In 2014/15, the ring-fenced budgets for policing and community safety will be brought together in a single funding stream over which MOPAC will have sole discretion.<sup>xii</sup> This will provide MOPAC with direct control over how anti-gangs work is funded and organised. It is therefore important that MOPAC provides greater clarity about the likely effects these changes might have on the commissioning of prevention and diversion work and implements them in partnership with local crime and disorder partnerships.

While the principles outlined in the strategy provide useful guidance for what commissioners should prioritise in the future, more could be done to help develop and sustain long-term programmes. The Committee recommends that a commitment to more flexible funding timescales (i.e. across two to three years instead of one) would help a greater number of established organisations with good track records to invest in the long-term development of services and resources.<sup>xiii</sup> This in turn would help to ensure greater continuity for young people receiving support.

The LCRB places effective community engagement at the centre of anti-gangs work which makes the relative absence of the voluntary and community sector from the strategy particularly marked. It is this sector that often provides the vital street-level links which encourage meaningful engagement with marginalised people, and in particular victims. These groups also help to support the vital early preventative work which takes place in schools and youth centres in educating and supporting younger children in avoiding gang membership, and the long-term personal and social costs that can result.

We would caution against any move to make all future funding for this sector under the payment by results model. We note that the London Assembly's report on the Mayor's Time for Action programme highlighted the possibility that smaller community and charitable projects could be disadvantaged by the necessity of having a substantial cash flow to succeed under payment by results.<sup>xiv</sup> This would stifle development of the more innovative, riskier approaches which are often trialled and developed at this level.

We support the continued roll-out of Project Oracle and the LCRB's aim to widen the process to include re-offending programmes for young adults. We would like a commitment for Project Oracle to be properly resourced so activity in London is fully captured and that constant analysis of the drivers of gang activity in London can be provided to help better target activity.<sup>xv</sup> The final strategy should

also recognise that much good practice already takes place in London. This can include one-to-one key-working, neighbourhood conflict resolution programmes and innovative borough-led commissioning and delivery models. With Oracle still developing its reputation and functionality, the final strategy should examine other methods to disseminate this work. Examples could include network events where best practice from London providers or abroad can be shared or peer mentoring for those developing first prevention and support programmes..

**The Committee supports the enhanced commissioning process outlined in the draft strategy and continued resourcing of Project Oracle. Both of these measures should help to ensure that prevention and support services deliver meaningful and measurable outcomes and are evidence based. The final strategy should also go further to include a commitment to more flexible funding timescales and models, as well as exploring how it can better support the voluntary sector and disseminate best practice from London providers**

As a statement of principle, the Committee supports much in the strategy. It follows best practice as developed in other UK cities and abroad, while recognising some of the uniquely complex challenges in London. The Committee is concerned that the strategy fails to grapple with the longer-term challenges of sustaining any drop in gang related crime achieved after spending tens of millions in ramping up enforcement. The draft action plan contains much that is worthwhile, but the lack of detail about the level of resources and timescales attached to each workstream makes it impossible to identify the LCRB's strategic priorities or the strategy's likely outcomes. We look forward to the inclusion of a more specific and costed action plan in the published strategy in early 2013 which will allow a detailed and realistic evaluation of its likely impact.

The reality now is that hundreds of younger people are being arrested and charged due to the success of the Trident Gang Crime Command, while many boroughs are struggling to fund the type of support services that would turn that short-term gain into a long-term success. In light of this, the final strategy needs to be much more robust in how it can improve prevention and diversion programmes in the present and work towards the overall improvement of multi-agency partnerships in the future. MOPAC must also provide much more clarity about its own role (as distinct from the LCRB) and how it can use its increased powers to help support prevention and diversion work in London.

The Committee will return to examine the progress on reducing gang crime early in 2013. We look forward to working with the LCRB and MOPAC during the implementation and assessment of the final strategy.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. McCartney', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

**Joanne McCartney AM**  
**Chair of the Police and Crime Committee**

cc Stephen Greenhalgh, Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime

---

## Notes

- <sup>i</sup> Transcript of the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee meeting, 26 January 2012.
- <sup>ii</sup> At this meeting the Police and Crime Committee discussed current best practice on prevention and diversion work, including the experiences of other areas in the UK (specifically Glasgow). Guests at this meeting included Commander Steve Rodhouse (MPS), Karyn McCluskey (Co-Director of the Violence Reduction Unit), Councillor Chris Robbins (leader of the London Borough of Waltham Forest), Rob Owen (Chief Executive of the St Giles Trust) and Kathryn Uche (Chief Executive of CAYSH).
- <sup>iii</sup> Follow-up work included a questionnaire sent to local authorities and charities on the issues raised during the 26 January meeting. This was followed up with a series of meetings between Committee officers and representatives from key borough-based gang programmes, charities, housing associations, London Councils and the Home Office.
- <sup>iv</sup> Transcript of the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee meeting, 26 January 2012.
- <sup>v</sup> Data sharing has generally been highlighted by boroughs as a particularly difficult issue to manage. Not only do individual organisations have their own protocols on data sharing which would need to be harmonised, but the Data Protection Act contains strict measures which need to be adhered to. This is exacerbated by the fact that much of the data concerns children and young people who require more stringent protections.
- <sup>vi</sup> Transcript of the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee meeting, 26 January 2012.
- <sup>vii</sup> Community safety funding, from which much prevention and diversion work is funded, will be halved in 2013/2014 from £11 million to £5.8 million. Responses to the Committee's questionnaire repeatedly mentioned the struggle to find funding, with Southwark in particular raising concerns about a potential 70 per cent shortfall. A Westminster MP has also revealed a £500,000 shortfall in that borough's innovative Your Choice anti-gangs programme.
- <sup>viii</sup> We understand that information on the local policing model will begin to be released in October, with further information on budget cuts and the Police and Crime Plan following at the end of the year.
- <sup>ix</sup> Transcript of the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee meeting, 26 January 2012.
- <sup>x</sup> Transcript of the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee meeting, 26 January 2012 and subsequent follow-up meetings between officers and stakeholders.
- <sup>xi</sup> The strategy's action plan provides a vehicle for the LCRB and/or MOPAC to undertake this work. The proposed report on the Peer Review system for the Home Office's Ending Gang and Youth Violence funding should provide an evidentiary basis from which further work can be commissioned.
- <sup>xii</sup> Deputy Mayor Decision DMPCD 2012 68 sets out the expected changes to Community Safety Funding.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Charities in particular have outlined to the Committee the difficulty of going through the entire process of application to decommissioning in a single year, which they claim inevitably leads to poor monitoring. Monitoring and evaluation is often an area which is squeezed due to pressure for projects to start delivering results immediately, a situation which can lead to reporting of questionable long-term value. The churn of projects and organisations can also lead to the loss of valuable institutional memory.
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Time to Reflect*, The London Assembly, March 2012, page 8 and 9
- <sup>xv</sup> The Assembly expressed concern that Project Oracle would receive enough funding to develop from its initially promising pilot stage (*Time to Reflect*, The London Assembly, March 2012, page 8 and 9). In 2012/13, Project Oracle received £375,000 in funding from the GLA, MOPAC and the Economic and Social Research Council.