

## BOROUGH / PROJECT :

### Greenwich Council – Greenwich tackling gangs and serious youth violence



## PROBLEM :

Concerns around the level of gang activity in the borough and the number of young people involved in drug dealing and gang-related crime.



## SOLUTION :

Borough funding enabled the creation of a dedicated Violent and Organised Crime Unit (VOCU), an intelligence-led police unit dedicated to targeting known gang members, criminal networks and the most serious offenders. Originally formed in 2008, the focus of the VOCU has evolved over time to co-ordinate with the work of a serious youth violence panel, established in 2010 to manage those at the highest risk of causing, or being victim of, serious youth violence (SYV) in the borough.

## BACKGROUND :

Concerns around the potential level of gang activity in Greenwich began to rise around five years ago when the activities of three known gangs, with strong links to specific postcodes and areas within the borough, came to attention for their involvement in drug dealing and gang-related crime.

In a bid to halt the progress of gang crime in the borough, Greenwich provided local police with significant funding to enable the setting up of a dedicated Violent and Organised Crime Unit (VOCU) within the borough.

## ACTIONS :

At its inception, the VOCU was focussed on targeting known gang members, including organised criminal networks and specifically individuals identified as the most serious offenders.

In its early years, the VOCU had notable success in disrupting gangs in the borough by sending many of the top gang members to prison. This served to weaken the organised drug networks of the gangs.

Increased incidents of SYV in the latter months of 2010 led to a refocus of the VOCU. Originally a team comprised solely of detectives, from 2011 the VOCU was restructured to a mixed team of detectives and uniformed officers (one detective sergeant, one police sergeant, four detective constables and seven police constables) allowing for a greater mix of covert and overt operations.

Ongoing concerns over the involvement of a small group of young people in serious violence were further addressed with the setting up of a multi-agency serious youth violence panel. Meeting monthly, the SYV panel brings together a range of local agencies to collectively review the management of individuals involved in, or at risk of, serious violence in Greenwich.

The VOCU now plays an active role in providing intelligence-led nominations to the panel. The panel addresses young people who are at the highest risk of SYV and those actively involved in gang activity.

The panel brings together responsible agencies (including neighbouring boroughs) to share information and ensure all agencies are working with identified young people alongside targeted enforcement.

Greenwich council has now secured funding to commission St Giles' trust to provide an SOS project in the borough. The project provides an experienced mentor to work with young people, aged 10-19, identified as at highest risk of knife, gun or gang crime. The mentor works closely with the multi-agency panel and the VOCU to help young people wishing to exit a gang lifestyle, including where necessary working with the housing department to support moves to new locations for gang members and families looking to make a fresh start.

## OUTCOMES :

Since its creation, the VOCU has

- arrested more than 310 gang members
- charged and convicted 259 identified gang members with a wide range of offences, resulting in 59 custodial and 83 non-custodial sentences (with further cases pending)
- among a group of highest risk gang members identified at the inception of the VOCU, there have been 39 arrests leading to a total of just under 50 years' of custodial sentences
- SYV is down 53 per cent at the end of September 2012 compared to the same period in 2011; gun crime is down by 51 per cent and knife crime down 38 per cent

## FUNDING :

The council's funding for the VOCU this year is a total of £350,000, made up of £160,000 from the Community Safety Fund via MOPAC and £190,000 of the council's own funding. The funding for St Giles is from the council's Home Office Ending Gangs and Youth Violence allocation.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT :

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