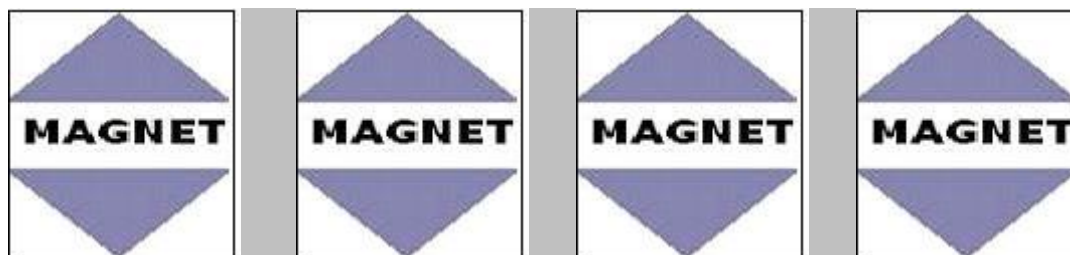


# MAGNET PROJECT REPORT:

## [Modelling analysis of Gun Crime Networks]



## Police perceptions of gang and gun related offending: a key informant survey.

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## **Magnet Project ‘Key informant’ Police Survey findings.**

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## Introduction:

This survey of Police officers (and civilian intelligence analyst staff) within one police force (GMP) offers an important and unusual insight into the problem of urban gun crime. Our findings reflect the perceptions of the problem of gun crime shared by a group of uniquely experienced police officers whose daily work involves dealing with, responding to and forward planning in respect of the problems of gun crime in one major British city with a particular reputation for gun crime.

The survey has been undertaken as part of a much wider 'gun crime research project' funded by the EPSRC during 2005-06. For full details on the overall project refer to the project's website: <http://www.magnetproject.org.uk/> .

The particular survey itself comprises responses from 55 police personnel, ranking from detective constable to chief superintendent, (including a number of civilian intelligence analysts). Those GMP staff included in sample shared 835 years within policing, suggesting a mean duration of police service of some 15.8 years. Respondents were drawn from all of the force's separate geographical divisions. As suggested, the sample also included 20 GMP intelligence analysts, five of these working on attachment with the GMP Firearms Desk and operational gang response units. The intelligence analysts alone had a mean duration of service within GMP of between 8-9 years. Taken together, therefore, these lengths of service in the GMP suggest that our sample is appropriately drawn from an experienced and uniquely well qualified section of the police workforce, and a group we would expect to be able to speak knowledgeably, informatively and constructively about the gun crime and gang crime problems that they work with on a regular basis.

One respondent made the particular point that he had had only limited direct involvement with gun or gang crime in his intelligence analysis capacity and therefore did not fully complete the questionnaire, because *"any answers I gave to questions would only be informed by generally available knowledge and not derived from any direct professional engagement with the problems."* In expressing himself this way, our respondent directly endorsed the central purpose of our enquiry. We were keen to develop a picture of the gun and gang related crime problems of Manchester while drawing upon the knowledge and experience of those who did have direct and unique professional engagement with these issues. While it is acknowledged that police culture and professional experience do not amount to an hermetically sealed universe, entire unto itself, it is also frequently acknowledged that police working cultures often constitute particularly closed worlds (Reiner, 2004 etc) in which particular definitions of police concerns and preoccupations are circulated and reinforced. While widely shared and understood these police discourses and world views can still often be nuanced and inconsistent. Exploring these areas of concern, with all their varieties and inconsistencies, in the picture of gun and gang related crime in the Manchester area shared by

Manchester police officers was a central purpose of this research exercise within the overall MAGNET project.

### **The purpose of the survey within the project**

There was a threefold purpose in reviewing 'key informant' perceptions of the gun crime problem within the project.

First, in a wider sense it is part of our effort to get a clear perspective on how the problem is understood or constructed – this is, in a simple sense, what the 'experts' dealing with the problem think about it, the forms it takes and the means by which it might usefully be tackled.

Second, in a more critical sense the survey is also very much about how these same 'experts' (or 'primary definers' (Hall et al, 1978)) help to construct the issue for the rest of us.

A third issue relevant here concerns how the constructions of these 'experts' represent and yet may also 'misrepresent' aspects of the problems represented by 'gun' and 'gang' crime. For example, the particular professional preoccupations of police officers may tend to distort their perceptions of both the offence and of the offenders (or it may dwell upon some aspects of these matters at the expense of others). Or, to put it another way and recognising the 'political' nature of problem definition in public policy-making, our respondents might perpetuate a perception of the gun crime problem which does not necessarily correspond with views shared by others, or they may hold views uncorroborated, for example, by research findings. All of this is, perhaps, only to be expected. Our group of respondents were selected precisely for their specialist knowledge and experience, and this knowledge and experience may lead them to see the matter in a different way.

In any event, unearthing contested definitions of problems should not deter us for it goes to the heart of the research problem. Where our key informants agree and where their perceptions are widely shared by others and are consistent with other data we produce then any findings will be underpinned by important principles of methodological triangulation. Where we also understand how our key informants construct their conceptions of the problems then our own understanding of these problems will undoubtedly be deeper and better informed. And, finally, where our informants' perspectives differ we are likely to be in a much better position to know why, and how.

That said, there may be plenty of scope for variations in perception in relation to the gun crime question for, although it is actual shootings (killings and assaults, genuine firearm discharges, serious armed robberies etc) which lie at the centre of the issue (and which crystallizes public fears: see Zimring and Hawkins, 1998), a good deal of recorded gun crime (which the police, after all, record) constitutes a much lower grade and less serious problem of replica gun and air weapon misuse (this has been an issue which the police have overlooked in the relatively recent past – now it is much more commonly

acknowledged (Squires, 2000; Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006a)). Even before we begin the gun crime question is already popularly and symbolically constructed as a 'problem of the gun' as if 'gun crime' were a distinct set of offences that made sense and could be understood together. This is unlikely to be the case and probably unhelpful (a point that some of our police informants referred to later go on to make) for although the media have recently gone some way to 'constructing' an issue about 'knife crime' (more prevalent than gun crime anyway) no similar labelling has occurred in respect of 'blunt object crime' (more common still) or 'hand crime' (surely the commonest variety of all). In fact, of course, gun crime can take many forms, much of it having no necessary relation to other crime types facilitated by a firearm and, perhaps with the exception of certain 'supply' and 'availability' questions (and the legal fact that there exists a specified range of offences, now numbering at least 55, even before a firearm is discharged, known as 'firearm offences') there may be little to be gained from an analysis that lumps all these gun crimes together.

For example, until the mid 1990s (Morrison and O'Donnell, 1994; 1996; Taylor and Hornsby, 2000) the extent of the replica and imitation firearm misuse was largely overlooked in the debate about rising gun crime. Even today the collection of statistics on this aspect of the problem is woefully inadequate (the Home Office only began compiling evidence of replicas in 2001 and the analysis of firearms (of all types) recovered by the police has been patchy, unsystematic and inconsistent (cost, evidence vs. intelligence). Yet now, misuse of replica firearms represents the faster growing subtype of gun crime in England and Wales (Povey, 2005). Consequently, at the centre of the serious operational policing and intelligence gathering effort to tackle 'real' gun crime there has to be some attempt to separate out this 'hard core' from the wider less serious 'nuisance' problem – whilst all the time being alert to the fact that serious gang offenders may be recruited from the ranks of less seriously involved youth groups and often initiated into the 'gun and gang' lifestyle through them.

### **Collective policing experience of policing gun crime in Manchester**

A series of both practical, methodological and conceptual issues are reflected in the organisation of this survey and its analysis. These underpin some of the decisions we have taken in proceeding with this analysis.

**ISSUE 1:** We have taken the remarks of the police personnel as a relatively undifferentiated block, not differentiating for rank or role. This seemed appropriate as we were aiming for a composite picture of the police point of view. It may be possible that senior officers believe different things to more junior ranks, after all it is a well understood feature of hierarchical organisations that the working culture and attitudes on the front line may differ from that further up the hierarchy, but here in this survey this was not something especially apparent in the data. In any event, in the context of such a relatively small and specialist sample we do not have enough at each rank to pinpoint differences precisely

**ISSUE 2** A second simple point being made here concerns reinforcing the fact that our collection of comments and observations are not intended to represent any 'truth', or accuracy in relation to the picture of Manchester gun crime being developed. It is simply that these viewpoints represent an accumulated police point of view, and they are significant for that reason.

**ISSUE 3** Any study of an occupational culture and how it sees the world will have to cope with issues of reflexivity. This concerns how an organisation understands its own impact upon the world (in this case the impact of policing on Manchester crime problems) and how its perceptions of the world change what it does (or seeks to do). As we shall see, the GMP is an active intelligence-gathering organisation. It is supposed to change what it does in relation to what it learns. Thus, reflexivity in police operational intelligence – the emerging and developing pictures of the gun/gang phenomenon - will reflect both the activities of the police themselves as well as the police's adoption of the social/ political/ criminological discourses (as well as, for instance, such things as Home Office targets and performance indicators) within which these issues are constructed, discussed and explained. Over time, the police discourse on gun/gang crime also selectively appropriates the social scientific knowledge and latest research evidence. An example would be the introduction of the replica firearm into the mix of understandings and explanations of gun crime trends, something which was largely absent until the mid-late 1990s.

**ISSUE 4** The officers whose ideas and views are elaborated here are directly responsible for collating, and drafting the strategic intelligence assessments that feed into GMP operations and investigations. In that sense they are important for how they may shape or influence police targets, priorities and interventions. The police intelligence analyses are different insofar as they will (indeed should) be more specific and evidenced – nevertheless, both parallels and differences are worthy of noting. In our questions we have asked police personnel to reflect upon these issues, these reflections will be informed by the intelligence they know about but may not be reducible to this. Equally intelligence briefings may draw on evidence/reports/hearsay/informants etc., but may also reflect more than just this.

**ISSUE 5** The discussion we develop here is not meant to be about 'second-guessing' or criticising what police personnel have to say about gun crime in the GMP area. In the first place we are simply hoping to reflect, in all its variety, what these police officers and intelligence analysts have to say about the problem – whilst pointing out where any inconsistencies, nuances or differences lie. And, in the second place, we aim to identify where the 'police point of view' such as it is, may differ from other informed perspectives.

Many of the above themes emerge repeatedly, recurring throughout our discussions of the respondents' views and opinions.

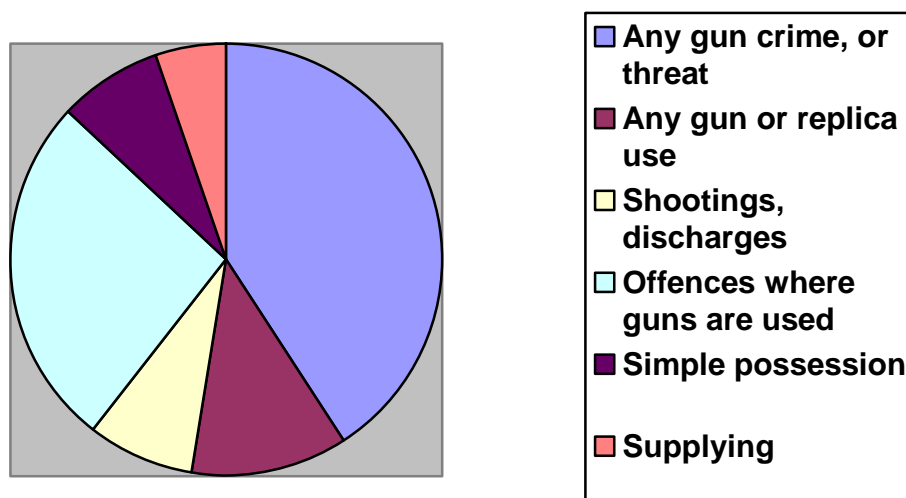
## The themes and issues in the survey

The first question posed within the survey asked respondents to outline, briefly, their understandings of 'Gun Crime' and 'Gang Crime'.

A first issue encountered here concerned the number of respondents who did tend to offer a largely undifferentiated picture of either issue. Thus, notwithstanding the point we have made earlier regarding the doubtful analytical utility of lumping together all 'gun crime' under a single (albeit legally derived) definitional heading this is precisely what some respondents did for us. This may go some way, right at the outset, towards posing a question about the adequacy of the way that existing legislation which, in turn, drives the enforcement efforts and priorities of the police frames the question of firearm related offending.

Thus a significant number of our respondents, when providing us with their understanding of 'gun crime' fell back on a rather simple textbook sounding definition such as: '*gun crime is an all encompassing label that covers all crimes where some form of firearm is used*' or it entails '*any offence involving a firearm/any crime involving guns*'. A virtually identical statement was repeated in the replies of another eighteen of our respondents. A further nine respondents referred to '*any offence where the use or threat of use of a firearm is used to facilitate commission*', specifically linking firearm possession to the facilitation of other offences, and a further five respondents referred to any offence involving a firearm or imitation firearm. Thus, '*gun crime can cover various types of criminality involving the use of a firearm or a supposed firearm of imitation-type of gun,*' and, '*this involves possession of any firearm or imitation firearm to facilitate the commission of a crime, normally by fear and intimidation.*'

**Figure 1: Contrasting definitions of 'gun crime'**



Further respondents referred to firearm dealing, selling, distributing or possessing and other respondents referred to firearm discharges, whether or not any victim was killed or injured in the incident.

So even at a very early stage in this analysis when only the most simple, limited and legalistic definitions of 'firearms offences' have been considered we have already encountered a significant variety of overlapping, but still different, notions of 'gun crime'. It can be any crime committed involving real guns, any crime committed involving imitation guns, any crime facilitated by guns, any crime in which a real or imitation gun is used to threaten, or the illegal sale, transfer, distribution or mere possession of a firearm, the discharge of a firearm whether or not any injury or death results and the shooting of persons resulting in injury or death. Even with this ready variety, other respondents were capable of adding further variation to the emerging picture of gun crime.

In some cases gun crime was seen to be associated with particular types of 'other offending'. Thus one respondent noted, *'I see this as any offence involving firearms – including assaults, robberies and burglaries'* and added, by way of conclusion, *'I also include anyone in possession of a firearm when arrested'*, thereby making the point that gun crime could be an issue of simple possession even if the arrested person had never actually used a weapon in the course of an offence (for example by virtue of minding a weapon – voluntarily or not – for an associate, a practice not unfamiliar in 'gang' circles (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006) or even if the person was inadvertently or unknowingly in possession of the firearm. This issue has practical implications for the policing of gang activity and 'stop and search' practices. For, as a result of the police practice of searching young men, it has now become apparent that other people on the periphery of gangs, family members, girlfriends and even children, are becoming (in some cases the unknowing) carriers, transporters and concealers of criminal firearms (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006) thereby posing a question about the merits of an absolute law criminalising simple possession.

So, while for some of our respondents 'gun crime' appeared as an especial concern by virtue of the criminal use or possession of guns for the furtherance of other crimes, for other respondents the pressing question was more to do with the supply side of the equation. This is to say, the main issues were the supply, trafficking and overall availability of guns to offenders. Thus one respondent remarked, *'I would refer to gun crime as the trade or supply or illegal guns and their use in criminality'*, and a further eight of our respondents referred to the questions of supply and availability. For example, gun crime involves any *'criminal conduct involving the use of firearms – including not only their use to commit offences but necessarily also includes the trafficking of weapons'*. Another commented, *'gun crime is concerned with groups who have easy access to firearms,'* making the point that the significant issue here was the ease of access of certain groups of offenders to firearms. And likewise, *'gun crime is concerned with groups who have easy access to firearms.'*



Perhaps inevitably there is a cyclical relationship to be grasped here, or even a 'chicken and egg' problem, but it does point up a particular dilemma for police tactics and enforcement strategy whilst also going to the heart of a much wider question concerning how the problem of gun crime is best explained and understood. In the responses of our police personnel we are given each side of the coin, and also both at once as well. This debate has much wider salience and has been discussed at length by scholars in the USA where the problem of gun crime is considerably more prevalent. In the USA the issue also takes the form of a more philosophical divide between materialists and existentialists (see for example the discussion in Squires, 2000: 56-96). In relatively simple terms, the latter tend to argue that gun crime is essentially the preserve of a certain type of person whereas the former argue that a liberal supply of guns and their ready availability so thoroughly influence the human environment that they alter the character of social interactions (creating a 'gun culture') such that increased rates of death and injury become almost inevitable.

In policing terms, of course, this translates into potentially different emphases whereby one may seek to control either the gun supply itself or the potential end user. In practice, of course, sensible policing will entail trying to do both. As we have seen (MAGNET Literature Review, 2007), the oft-quoted claim that the UK has probably some of the toughest gun control laws in the world is sometimes taken to suggest that our control of the gun supply has gone as far as is reasonable, leaving us with only the problem of controlling the criminal gun users. There are a number of grounds for regarding this claim a rather complacent conclusion and, as we shall see later in this paper, it is not a view shared by all the police respondents to our current survey. Not least because of the relatively unique 'mixed economy' (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006; Squires, 2007) represented by the UK gun supply and, for some years, the several loopholes through which (reactivated, converted, gas powered, air-powered, BB and replica) firearms entered the country's 'grey' and 'black' firearm pools (not to mention the trafficking of genuine purpose-built firearms) then supply questions still remain appropriate. Nevertheless, however unfounded the assumption may be, with the supply issues believed to be dealt with, attention invariably turns to the context of firearm misuse, and the perpetrators of firearm misuse and their behaviour and activities. Here, as we have seen, our respondents have had plenty to say although for the most part their observations were cloaked in a strictly legal definition of the misuse of given objects (firearms) in the furtherance of crime. In their initial definitions of 'gun crime' only a few of our respondents made the important connection directly between firearm availability and the culture or social context of firearm misuse.

Even the most basic textbook on crime prevention, especially one versed in the contemporary 'situational' paradigm, will recognise that, for any crime to occur, a 'motivated offender' and a 'means, or opportunity' are required (the other elements being a 'potential target or victim' and an 'appropriate context'). In relation to our present discussion of gun crime this clearly means that we need a motivated offender and a gun, but that these might only become especially problematic in certain social contexts. Thus, discussions

of gun crime which neglect the nature of an offender's motivation or the social context or milieu in which he or she is required to act (or chooses to act) are plainly missing something. To cite a contrasting example, the widespread availability of shotguns in the hands of users anxious to fire them has not, thus far, given rise to a major crime wave on the Scottish grouse moors during the days following August 12<sup>th</sup>, yet in some police officers' basic, even 'black-letter', definitions of gun crime, context, motivation and opportunity seemed to be overlooked. While it may appear obvious that the supply of firearms, offender motivations and social context have to be brought together in particular ways to constitute a firearm problem at all, not all our police respondents appeared to do this until pressed to do so later in the survey.

That is to say while not all respondents made these connections explicit, for a few others this was their starting point. In these cases the gun crime label was, associated with a set of attitudes, behaviours and associations where access to guns, or the proximity of guns, or even the (presumed) fact of the availability of guns to a given group, marked out a set of 'gun-related' offending behaviours. For example, this involved the '*use of firearms to assist in the achievement of a crime or to show some form of street cred with their peer groups.*' Similarly, another respondent noted, gun crime involved 'offence[s] with the threat or use of a firearm, for either monetary gain or for esteem or to gain power over others.' In this sense the possession and use of a firearm is instrumental to an entire way of life, status and sense of self, not just the facilitation of crimes. Without wishing to labour the point this is important not just to our own understanding of the nature of the gun crime problem but also for what it reveals about police perspectives on the issue. Here the point is that addressing gun crime as a generic legal category as if it were 'a single type of crime' understandable in its entirety is likely to misunderstand the problem (as we have already discussed) whilst also risking the development of inappropriate and ineffective policing and prevention strategies to address it.

Nevertheless, as we have noted, other respondents also relate their initial definitions of gun crime to their 'context of misuse', the 'targets' or victims against which they are used and to particular patterns of illegality which are assisted by a firearm. Such aims are referred to in the following comments, '*gun crime could incorporate, and often does, many other crimes such as drug dealing or armed robbery where a firearm maybe used as a means to committing these offences,*' and '*gun crime here is generally about drugs, armed robbery and punishment or retaliation shootings.*' Still other commentators referred explicitly to the gang context, and the types of offences that this generates, and which forms such an important part of the gun crime problem in the GMP area. Thus, respondents suggested that in Manchester, '*gun crime covers a whole spectrum of offences that involve the use of guns, it often involves gangs,*' and that 'guns were especially important in the gang context '*because of the extra threat they provided, and this has developed out further in relation to 'taking' out other gang members or taking revenge.*' That said, another respondent sought to correct what he thought was a common misapprehension about gun crime in Manchester by noting that, first, it represented, '*a very small percentage of overall crime (less than*

1% as an educated guess) involving use and supply of firearms' and, secondly, that it '*has tended to be stereotyped, but is not necessarily ethnicity or gang based.*' Somewhat by contrast, another commentator made the point that in the city gun crime and gang crime were '*closely related problems linked to the culture of gangs in specific areas of Manchester who use guns to promote their criminal aims – drug dealing, extortion, turf wars etc.*'

### **Conceptions of Gang Crime**

With the contrasting emphases already identified above, it is now appropriate to turn to our second theme in the initial questions. What did the idea of 'gang crime' mean to our respondents? As in the previous question there were a number of responses couched in fairly basic and generic terms even though these too, betrayed their own specific nuances of meaning and interpretation.

Thus a total of eight respondents referred to gang crime as meaning '*any offence/any type of offence which is motivated by involvement with a gang,*' while four respondents specifically referred to '*offences related to activities conducted by or on behalf of a group of individuals for the benefit of that group, with a common criminal purpose.*' A further four responses referred to '*groups of offenders committing crime, any kinds of crime*', three suggested that 'gang crime' '*relates to criminal activity that involves or is related to groups of individuals who have formed themselves into an identifiable group for a general purpose of pursuing a criminal enterprise,*' and a further five made a point about gangs acting together to achieve a common objective, thus: '*gang crime is where a gang or organisation works together to commit criminal activity*' or '*round here, gang crime involves people working together with a common criminal purpose, this is strongly associated with guns and I often connect it as well to include drug supply.*' Already, therefore, we have a limited and open ended notion of gang crime as any criminal activity undertaken 'by groups', a second notion whereby gang membership forms the motivation for the criminal activity, that crime arises out of pre-existing gang structures, and a third subtly different idea of gangs being formed for the purpose of more effectively perpetrating crime and a fourth notion of gang crime implying a 'common criminal purpose'. Further comments linked gang crime with specific types of criminal activity, as follows: here gang crime involved '*organised or semi organised criminality [which is] predominantly drugs motivated,*' or to a more 'political' conception of group organisation and mutual defence such as: '*gang crime involves groups of persons, mostly youths, forming into territorial groups who believe(d) they control specific areas on their turf.*' There is, of course, an important sense in which we can say that all the above have some truth about them, but it is equally the case that all of them are perhaps partial accounts, emphasising different aspects of the gang crime phenomenon and perhaps giving rise to different intervention and prevention initiatives.

At this point it is perhaps appropriate to add that the point about unearthing these police interpretations of the gang crime phenomenon here is not particularly to compare or contrast these with the latest research evidence on the modern gang phenomenon (a burgeoning area of research in its own right

Smith and Bradshaw, 2005; Sullivan, 2005; Sharp, Aldridge and Medina, 2006) but simply to capture, in all its potential diversity, the police point of view with a view to then comparing this with our own wider researches into the issue in the Manchester context and to draw such conclusions as we are able about the GMP anti-gang strategy (and comment on its effectiveness) insofar as this is reflected in these various understandings of the problem.

Our respondents drew attention to different aspects of gang organisation and behaviour and, while these need not be in any way mutually exclusive they do point to potentially different priorities for intervention and prevention. Significant amongst these aspects of gang formation, identity and activities were issues concerning: (i) the level of organisation of the gang, (ii) the question of leadership and hierarchy within the gang, (iii) hierarchies between gangs and (iv) conflict and rivalries between gangs, (v) the levels at which gangs are behaviourally or criminally involved, (vi) the territory ('turf') claimed by or attributed to gangs, (vii) the identity, respect and reputation of gangs and, finally, (viii) the types of offences typically associated with gang activities. At this stage it is, perhaps worth simply noting that this series of 'gang factors' does reflect a distinctly police perspective. Each of the factors listed above, in our attempt to describe and classify gangs, derives its particular utility from a police intelligence and enforcement perspective. These are eminently useful characteristics of gangs which lend themselves to a police intelligence database and have a very practical worth. In turn they shape both policing practices and, in the sense, as described earlier, that the police represent one of our 'primary definers' of criminal activity, they also shape media and, in turn, public perceptions of gangs and the 'gang problem'. These are, by definition, necessarily selective perspectives and omit, as we will show, certain other features of gangs, other insights, which might prompt different approaches (interventions and prevention) to the issue. First however, it is important to illustrate the police perspective and the factors it addressed in the words of our respondents themselves.

### Gang organisation

The question of gang organisation has been an important issue in recent criminological (and police intelligence) analysis. Partly in order to distinguish contemporary street-based gang behaviour from earlier types of organised 'gangsterism', organised crime and even more temporary groupings ('teams' or 'firms') of armed robbers (Matthews, 2002)), commentators have developed a notion of 'disorganised' crime (Decker and Curry, 2002; Klein et al., 1991). As Walsh explains in the introduction to his 'Inside story of the Manchester gangs' (Walsh, 2003), Manchester police were initially perplexed by the rapid escalation of violence in Moss Side during the 1980s. As one detective commented to the author, 'It came right out of the blue – there was no perception of organisation until then – and at first it was just assumed that [our informant] was gilding the lily. Before, we just thought it was disorganised' (Walsh, 2003, ix)

A great deal is implied in this change of label. Matthews (2002) in particular refers to the new 'disorganised' crime gangs as reflecting processes of

deskilling and 'de-professionalisation' in the armed robbery trade compared to the supposed criminality of a (partly) mythic past where 'honour among thieves' supposedly prevailed and the resort to violence was limited and strictly instrumental. This supposed 'golden age' of criminality, corresponding closely (and quite uncannily) with what Reiner has called the 'golden age of policing' (2004) is contrasted positively with today's brutal and supposedly *expressively* hyper-violent gang activity. In other respects, however, as Lea has argued (Lea, 2002) the changing nature of criminal organisation also reflects the changing social, market and law enforcement contexts in which it operates.

Thus as the fixed structures of family based, or 'cartel' forms of criminal organisation became increasingly vulnerable to police surveillance and investigative methods, so more fluid forms of transient networking (facilitated by new communications technologies) became more criminally effective. What was lost with the passing of the old structures were some of the forms of loyalty and allegiance which contained or mediated violence. Whether these changes are truly sequential, as is implied above, or simply different types of organisation in different contexts, is an issue for another discussion. For our present purpose it is enough to note that this supposed 'dis-organisation' with its expressive violence and volatility is just another form of organisation, driven by other purposes and meanings. As we will see later, even loosely framed and disorganised 'gangs' appear to generate their own hierarchies, patterns of allegiance and rivalry. As one of our commentators expressed it, '*gang crime could be defined as a group of offenders committing crime as a team*'.

Finally, as has been argued already, all these issues strongly reflect both a police enforcement perspective (motivated to understand gang organisation in order to control it; explaining the changes in gang organisation by reference to gang members' efforts to evade policing) and a populist pessimism about the growth of criminal violence and inhumanity (demanding still tougher punitive responses).

So according to our respondents, gangs could be tightly or loosely organised as the following comments suggest: '*Gang crime is organised crime networks who may or may not use guns,*' or gang crime consisted of '*organised criminal gangs who may be in possession of firearms.*' Alternatively, '*gang crime is crime committed by members of a group that have come to give themselves an identity, whether by name or not.*' On the other hand, gang crime could be a more loose and flexible phenomenon, so '*gang crime is about loose knit groups of individuals who commit crime. The term 'gang' glorifies them and gives them some reputation.*' Here, the name of the gang could be central to giving an illusion of permanence and structure to an otherwise relatively informal network of persons, the name itself helping to bolster the group's credibility and reputation. In a similar sense, another respondent suggested '*gang crime is organised activity based on group dynamics and fear. It may or may not involve the use of firearms*' implying that while the gang activity may be organised, the network of people undertaking it may be rather less so. For example, '*gang crime implies a degree of organisation or agreement with*

*others (eg over armed robberies or supplying drugs) this goes on over longer periods of time.'*

### Hierarchy and leadership within gangs

Just as, according to our police respondents, contemporary gangs could be more or less organised, so they could have more or less of a hierarchy and involve more or less explicit forms of leadership and authority. So, at a very basic level one respondent commented, '*gang crime suggests an amount of organisation and hierarchy*' without specifying how much organisation or hierarchy was involved. Another comment, reflecting the fact that 'gang activity could occur at varying levels of criminal seriousness (a point we will return to), suggested that, '*it can be gang crime and fairly low level, or it can be more organised, with a hierarchy and things done to order.*' This notion of gang crime undertaken 'to order' or on the orders of gang leaders was a point made by a number of commentators. For example, '*gang crime covers crimes where the crime is carried out on behalf of, or on the orders of, a group that have a shared identify and usually some kind of hierarchy.*'

### Hierarchy, rivalry and conflict between gangs

There were often subtle differences between the interpretations of our respondents regarding whether gangs were principally organised as collective entities to perpetrate criminal offences against the public or whether they were best understood as criminally active groupings organised to protect their relative position and interests vis a vis other gangs. Undoubtedly, there may be, as other research (Bullock and Tilley, 2002; Hales et al., 2006) and other police intelligence sources (Xcalibre: MAGNET Project, 2006) suggest, different types of gangs, and it is here that the relative absence of racial differentiation in the police respondents comments about gangs becomes apparent. Whereas race is identified as a significant factor in a number of journalistic accounts about gang activity in the UK (Walsh, 2003; Thompson, 2004; McLagan, 2004), emerges in a good deal of the available research (Bullock and Tilley, 2002, Hales and Silverstone, 2004; Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006) and is precisely defined in the original 'black on black; brief of the Metropolitan Police's Operation Trident, Greater Manchester police officers often seemed often rather reticent about acknowledging explicitly the role of race in the picture of gang crime they painted in their city. Instead, euphemisms and other coded allusions to racial difference populated their remarks. It might be that the relative infrequency of explicit reference to the racialised nature of gang activity in the comments reflected the fact that this was something obvious to all concerned, or it may be that other phrases (locations, activities, cultures) served as alternative ways of expressing race, but despite this the absence of race from the definitions seemed at least peculiar. For example, '*there are two distinct types of gun-gang culture. One type is associated with drugs and the other with armed robberies. The majority centres around the city centre areas of Manchester and Salford and involves people local to these areas*'.

Other references were a little more explicit, especially when pinpointing the locations in which the gangs operated, the territories they 'owned': *'Gang crime is all about a culture amongst a group and the crime they do is connected to that group. It does not need to involve a firearm. There can be a gang culture to commit crime, but that can be as little as anti social behaviour or shoplifting. It does not necessarily need to mean that city centre gangs of the Gooch and the Doddington who are also linked to gun crime are involved.'* At another time, the gang crime problem was referred to as follows, *'nowadays we see it as very much part of a South Manchester – Gooch Close type situation.'* Other comments edged a little closer towards acknowledging the racial dynamic, for example: *'gun and gang culture around here currently mimics that of the USA based around the HipHop "Gangsta" lifestyle and "boys in the hood".'* As we discuss later, however, by way of our concluding commentary, other data sources and key informants accessed for this project as well as other published research and commentary (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006a) have come to doubt the significance of popular music cultures in the emergence of gang criminality. Thus, 'the extent to which gang and gun cultures might attributed to popular cultural sources such as the urban music industry and media more generally is unclear, but on balance appears peripheral (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006b: 4)

Yet not all the respondents were in denial about the racialised nature of gang formation, although in one of very few explicit references to race in this definitional section of the survey, the remark is 'distanced' it is merely 'a perception' that some appear to share. And even then, racial difference is merely a factor of socio-economic difference: *'there are strong links in certain parts of Manchester between the gangs and gun use in a variety of criminal activities, there is also a perception of a race association but this may be more to do with the socio-economic link.'* The only other explicit reference to race in this section of the survey concerned networks of 'Asian gangs' said to be distributing drugs in East Lancashire and here the 'racial association' served mainly to emphasise the nature of gang specialisation in certain types of criminal activity, a point we shall come to shortly.

The significance of this discussion of the racialised nature of gang activity in the Manchester area is not to imply any simple association between the race of gang members and the levels of violent conflict in their rivalries with other gangs. However, it is important to acknowledge certain patterns characteristic of gang rivalry (in Manchester and elsewhere) which are sometimes only alluded to (and often concealed) in the comments of our police survey respondents. In the first place, the research by Bullock and Tilley (2002) 'Shootings, Gangs and Violent incidents in Manchester' identifies the marked racial profile of perpetrators and victims and the relatively close territorial links between them. Thus,

'violence in general, gun violence in particular and fatal shootings most specifically are concentrated in some specific small areas of South Manchester. Victims of gun violence in Manchester are

mainly, young, black or mixed race males, who have criminal records [and] suspected perpetrators of serious gun violence in Manchester tend to have similar attributes to victims (Bullock and Tilley, 2002: 1).

Such findings are closely reflected in the statistics released by Operation Trident in the Metropolitan Police area (Brown, 2003) whilst the pioneering study in Boston (Massachusetts, USA) by Kennedy et al., (1996) makes clear that the patterns of conflict and rivalry between gangs are shaped by territorial proximity (the defence of 'turf') and competition over the lucrative criminal markets (drug dealing, prostitution, protection rackets, stolen goods markets, club security etc.). In Manchester, judging from the comments of our police respondents similar relationships of conflict and rivalry are perceived, but whilst both British and American research addresses the racialised nature of these rivalries directly, our GMP respondents seldom referred to it. Thus, according to the GMP respondents Manchester 'gang crime' simply implied: *'offences relating to rivalry between usually local gangs to establish supremacy, in revenge or further criminality, for instance, drugs, turf wars, revenge attacks.'* Similarly, *'gang crime relates to criminality associated with groups .... Most particularly it usually involves criminal conduct between gangs.'* Another respondent added, *'gang crime involves criminal activity by a member or several members of a known gang against one or several members of another gang,'* thereby reinforcing the point that inter-gang rivalry was the central issue in some police respondents conception of gang crime.

Other comments developed the same theme in their depiction of 'gang crime': this was a matter of, *'gangs using violence and threats within certain areas against each other'*, with one respondent specifically refining the gang crime definition. This was not just a question of groups committing crime together, so, for example: *'I don't think that gun crime conjures up a picture of say just an armed robbery. Gun crime up here is part and parcel of gang crime, using guns against one another.'* Furthermore, this could still be 'gang crime' even if the criminal behaviour, violence or retaliation, for example, were the actions of individuals pursuing agendas of their own (seeking retribution or respect) within the gang context, because, gang crime could be *'committed by an individual who is part of an identifiable group (by various means) against another individual or a different group,'* or, it could be *'any crime that implies a level of actual or perceived intimidation by an individual belonging to a gang or by a group of individuals collectively.'* One respondent even made the point that although the notion of 'gang crime' had a particular legal significance, this was not the whole of the story from a policing perspective: *'what makes it a 'gang' from a legal point of view is the commission of any crime by a group of three or more delinquents with some factor to identify themselves whether this be clothing, crime type, territory, name etc., but gang crimes can be committed either individually or collectively.'*

Taken together, our respondents tended to reaffirm the picture of gang crime derived from other work, for this typically involved violent rivalry with other groups concerned with the protection of a particular set of criminal interests, *'gang crime would be crime motivated by the membership of a gang or a group and in particular crime associated with rivalry or conflict over drug*



*markets or territories with other groups.'* And, in turn, these rivalries became the basis upon which the escalation of conflicts proceeded, *'gang crime tends to include things like shootings, robberies, drug dealing and 'protection'.'*

### Levels of criminal involvement

While the picture of inter-gang rivalries being developed in the foregoing discussion referred to some serious and violent 'gun driven' conflicts at its most extreme, there was a further set of observations which noted how gang crime could include a fairly wide spectrum of activity judged in terms of its seriousness. For example, *'gang crime can involve loose and uncoordinated groups of youths involving ASB to sophisticated serious and organised gangs.'* However, even in its least serious forms, considerations of 'protection', 'territory' and 'respect' still featured. So, 'gang crime' could be where *'males or females become affiliated to a group of others usually with a common purpose of association, intimidation, fear, criminality, or anti social behaviour.'* And, furthermore, (in the nature of 'disorganised' criminality) disputes and disagreements could rapidly escalate into lethal violence when weapons were available: *'gang crime, as well as using guns, I think, is often youth related and more like anti social behaviour.'* But also, *'gangs are groups of individuals affiliated together for a common cause – this could be simply anti-social behaviour through to organised crime. Both can involve guns, right across the range from BB guns and air guns right the way up to serious weapons.'*

The wide spectrum gang behaviour, the differing types of gangs, and the ways in which gang activity can escalate in frequency and seriousness over a period is well captured in the following respondents' observations. Interestingly the first two of the (very few) respondents to refer to fear and protection as motives for gang formation. But as we have noted already, the motives for gang formation, as compared with other key characteristics of its organisation and activities are perhaps of less utility for the development of specifically policing interventions. So, as one respondent put it, *'I believe the gang crime came first and was an attempt by those within our community to use their collective skills to protect themselves and maximise their benefits from criminality. Gun crime developed as an extension of gang crime. Guns were introduced because of the extra threat they provided, and this has developed out further in relation to 'taking' out other gang members or taking revenge.'* Another GMP commentator added, *'gang crime is crimes committed by 'organised' groups of individuals and this can range from organised crime, eg. prostitution, trafficking and drugs to anti-social behaviour in younger gangs. The gang is formed for mutual protection and profit.'*

### Territory, identity and respect

As we have seen, territory and identity represent important questions about gangs both from the gang point of view and from that of the police, whereas questions of status, 'respect' and protection are likely to be of more relevance to the motives of gang members themselves. That said, our police

respondents indicated their awareness of these issues as they attempted to summarise the defining features of 'gang crime'. So, gang crime can be: *'crime related to criminality associated with groups who either by their own identity form a 'gang' or can be reasonably defined as such by others. Most particularly it usually involves criminal conduct between gangs,'* or it can comprise *'all offences which involve individuals working under the name of a gang or on behalf of a gang, such offences can include acquisitive crime, but can be larger such as drug dealing, people trafficking and has led to territorial disputes in the past.'*

Considerations of 'territory' reappeared frequently in our respondents perceptions of the purpose(s) of gangs, for instance: *'gangs are intent upon controlling their areas and object to rival gangs operating there. This causes tension, crimes of robbery, and assaults against rivals resulting in gun crime.'* Similarly, *'gangs ... seem to have set aims on property and territorial gains.'* And finally, *'this [gang] culture revolves around power and control. Gang culture is territorial.'*

While territory is vital as an external motive of gang formation, respect and status are seen as central to the more personal motivations of gang members, whilst also linking these individual aspirations for 'respect' and credibility to the fortunes of their own particular gang. For example, *'gang related gun crime is about increasing the status of someone either within the gang, or the status of the whole gang over another gang.'* Another respondent added a comment linking this status and respect to the patterns of localised gang rivalry, *'it is about each 'gang' trying to outdo one another, always endeavouring to boost their 'street credibility'. It's adolescent youths trying to make a name for themselves, to be noticed.'* And as we have seen, through the eyes of our police respondents, this seemingly 'zero-sum' competition for credibility explained the potentially rapid escalation, as serious weapons became available, to the major conflicts and lethal violence the GMP area had witnessed in recent years for, *'the gun and gang culture is most closely associated with the Moss Side gangs who are involved in 'turf' wars with each other. They see that carrying a gun gives them credibility and affords them respect.'* This search for identity, respect and 'credibility' was seen to be rooted in the deprived social circumstances of the young people to whom the gangs offered a sense of belonging, for example, *'gang culture appears to involve disaffected youth looking for an identity and purpose in life. I see this as being distinct from organised crime groups whose aim is to further a criminal enterprise rather than being the purpose of the 'gang'.'* And together these push-pull factors created a situation where young men were seen as willing to risk a great deal for the assumed benefits of gang membership: *'the culture appears to be one where life is cheap and credibility and status are much more important.'*

### Offence types

We have already considered the variety of gang types and the range of criminal activities, varying in levels of seriousness, associated with different types of gangs. There are, in the police perceptions, relatively few hard, fast

and fixed differences but certainly as few patterns based upon factors such as the age, race, and residential geography and longevity of the various gangs. Reflecting these seeming 'primary' factors were a further series of distinctions relating to the degree of organisation evident in the gangs' activities, their inclinations towards more 'instrumental' or more 'expressive' forms of violence and the nature of their rivalries with other gangs. This being noted, the typical kinds of criminal activity that the different types of gangs engaged in could often be overlapping and very similar. For example, *'gang crime can involve a wider variety of offences including various forms of robbery, murder and drugs offences.'*

Another respondent commented, gang crime 'relates to a definition of organised crime groups, including small numbers of associating criminals, committing low tier crime together,' but then went on to add, '[but] *nowadays we see it as very much part of a South Manchester – Gooch close type - situation... gang crime today is really more to do with [this].'* However, just as we have gone some way to unravel a series of distinctions between gang 'types' by reference to the observations of our police respondents regarding certain defining 'gang crime' characteristics we also encountered a number of GM police officers and intelligence analysts who saw things rather differently, for example, *'gun crime and gang crime can be associated with groups of males who are involved in criminality within a particular locality and who use guns to defend their locality, commit crime and create fear or gain a reputation. In the present time for us there is no distinction, really, between the two.'* In this firm suggestion that 'gun crime' and 'gang crime' were, in fact, part and parcel of the same phenomenon it is not necessarily clear if the respondent was referring to a particular selection of the Manchester gangs where, as many more respondents went on to suggest, the relationship between guns and gangs was especially close. One GMP officer sought to clarify the picture, *'the three "traditional" Manchester based gangs with historical and generational links based in South Manchester have both gun and gang associations. They have links to other areas of Manchester and Trafford as well as crews/smaller gang units some of which are gun related and others more crime based. Not all gang activity is therefore gun related although there is strong association for some of the activity.'*

In the next section of the survey we sought to probe these relationships further by asking our respondents to reflect upon the relationship(s) between 'gun crime' and 'gang crime', so we will continue to develop these issues in the next section of our analysis.

### **Relationships between 'gun crime' and 'gang crime'**

There were clear divisions between our respondents as regards the way they saw the relationship between guns and gangs. As many as eighteen respondents commented that gun crime was not always committed by gangs or gang members and seventeen noted the corollary, that gang crime did not necessarily involve the use of guns. Furthermore, even when respondents conceded that *'gang crime does not always involve the use of guns'* it was still acknowledged that, *'firearm use is a well recognised consistent element in*

*gang related criminality.* Another comment acknowledged a common tendency to link the two types of criminal activity together in media reports and popular discourse, but that careful analysis was called for to disentangle distinct crime patterns: *'the two types of crime inevitably have overlaps since in public perception and media presentation the two types are frequently portrayed as linked. [However] a more focused analysis can show that gun crime, some of it anyway, is distinct and separate, in that it takes place without any connection to gangs.'*

Despite the last point, and continuing to explore the various ways in which GMP personnel perceived the complex relationship between guns and gangs, the following comments reflect the fact that at least twelve of our respondents saw these issues (at least in the activities of certain types of gangs) as very closely connected. Respondents made comments such as: *'I believe that gun crime and gang crime are linked,'* or *'gun crime and gang crime are synonymous really,'* and, *'in the present time there is no distinction between gun crime and gang crime,'* or *'I find it hard to draw a distinction between the two.'*

On the other hand, while not suggesting these two forms of criminality were entirely synonymous, other respondents were clear that there were close connections and overlaps, or that they perceived the possession of guns to be an almost indispensable and inevitable aspect of the development of gang activities. Such interpretations appear to be borne out by comments such as: *'gang crime need not necessarily involve the use of guns – although it invariably does,'* and, *'I do not believe there is any distinction, gun crime is an extension of gang crime with guns being used to further the aims and objectives of the gang.'* Developing the point further, in other comments, the particular ways that possession of firearms were seen to embody gang culture, values and identity whilst empowering and supporting gang members in their chosen criminal behaviours. Thus gun crime and gang crime were seen to be related in the way that *'they have common affiliations and a common culture, clearly gun and gang crime can be closely combined.'* Equally, *'my understanding of this is that the two types of crime fall hand in hand with each other. Gang crime is associated with the use of guns and drugs and fights for territories. Guns are highly associated with the activities of gangs and the offences committed by them.'*

At the same time this criminal gang activity could be seen as connected to firearm possession and use across a whole spectrum of relative offence seriousness: *'there is overlap between the two [gang crime and gun crime], gangs are groups of individuals affiliated together for a common cause – this could be simply anti-social behaviour through to organised crime. Both can involve guns, right across the range from BB guns and air guns right the way up to serious weapons.'* However, the perceived role, or chief effect, of guns in gang activity concerned the way they were understood to contribute to the escalation and extension of the dynamics of rivalry, retaliation, violence and hostilities between gangs. In this sense, therefore, gang relations could become 'gun driven'. *'I don't think there is a distinction between gun crime and gang crime. In my experience the two are inextricably linked with the one*

*perpetuating the other. The gangs use guns as status symbols and their use of guns leads to an escalation in gun use by others.'* Another commentator added simply that, *'gun crime is an escalation of gang crime'*. This clearly had significant implications for the gangs themselves and their communities and, as one respondent remarked, for policing and the law enforcement effort: *'at the moment gun crime and gang crime appear to be running hand in hand and will probably continue to increase like this unless steps are taken.'* In the same vein, both types of crime were seen as *'an ever increasing problem which, if left unchecked will continue to increase and have a detrimental effect on society as a whole.'*

Somewhat paradoxically, however, even as gun crime and gang crime were linked in a number of ways, even certain familiar and 'traditional' forms that gun crime have taken were no longer the heart of the particular problem facing contemporary Manchester as one of our police respondents saw it: *'I believe gun crime and gang activity to be intrinsically linked, [but] armed robbery, say on a bank or a post office does not spring to mind as "gun crime", even though firearms are involved, whereas gangs shooting at each other is what we've come to see as gun crime.'*

A complex and nuanced picture begins to emerge of the ways in which 'gun crime' and 'gang crime' may or may not be related to one another. Even crime involving guns is not the essence of the issue, for example there is the suggestion that *'many offenders use guns in business robbery offences or aggravated burglaries where the offender is not related to gangs.'* On the other hand, whereas *'gun crime can be committed by anyone with access to a firearm or imitation firearm,'* respondents tended to see firearm use as especially important to much that they understood as central to 'gang activity' thus, *'gun crime is a tactic of gang crime activities,'* and *'gang criminals use guns to establish authority over rivals.'* So distinctions here were important, *'there are clear differences between the two types... one refers to the general use of firearms whilst offending, the second refers to high profile groups using firearms to commit crime and raise – or maintain – their 'reps,'* and whilst *'gang crime may not always (or ever) involve the criminal use of firearms ... firearms are frequently used as a threat or deterrent or status symbol within the group.'*

As we have discussed already respondents tended to see an important difference in the relationship between 'gun crime' and 'gang crime' in terms of the broader purpose to which firearms were put by the criminal possessors. For example: *'armed criminals may use firearms in the commission of offences in order to perpetrate those offences (eg. armed robbery), the use of the gun is strictly for that offence. When used by gangs, the firearm is more about power and control but it may also be used to assist in criminal activity such as drug control and robbery.'*

Finally, for this section of the survey, and in line with our earlier discussions of the levels of offence seriousness involving gangs, the 'progression' or escalation of gang activity and the significance of individual as opposed to 'group' action (or motives) within gang activities, some of our respondents

reflected upon other more diverse features of the relationship(s) between ‘gun crime’ and ‘gang crime’. So, in the case of younger and less seriously criminally active gangs, *‘gang crime doesn’t always involve guns, it can involve other weapons like knives or baseball bats,’* or, *‘some gang crimes will be at a lower level and do not involve firearms,’* and *‘the younger gangs will be less likely to have guns, they are involved in more anti-social behaviour type activities. The more organised criminal gangs involved in major crime would be more likely to carry firearms.’* But as one police officer noted, the age range for being involved in gun crime could be quite broad, *‘gun crime spreads over wide age groups whilst gang crime is more to do with juveniles and late teens,’* and, conversely, one of his colleagues noted, *‘gang crime is all-encompassing and related to all levels of criminality or anti-social behaviour. At the most serious levels guns are involved.’* One officer even made a distinction based upon gender, an issue arising only very seldom in the survey. He noted, *‘I normally associate gun crime exclusively to males whereas gang crime, while predominantly male, does include females.’*

And regarding ‘individual’ versus ‘group’ forms of offending, two respondents volunteered the following observations. Certain forms of gun crime appeared to occur which were quite distinct from forms of gang-related activity, they could be quite different crimes, as we have seen, undertaken for different motives and seeking different kinds of rewards. The officers emphasised that it was important to make such distinctions. So, *‘gun crime can involve lone and unconnected individuals all the way up to organised gangs carrying out offences using guns to commit these offences. Whilst the former can commit offences for personal reasons they do not necessarily progress to gangs. The latter seem to have set aims on property and territorial gains.’* And likewise, *‘gun crime can vary from being part of offences by singular individuals to obtain their gains, up to organised groups or gangs to conduct serious criminal offences. Gang crime tends to operate around their own areas or territories and guns are used here as part of the enforcement.’*

Having surveyed the complex relations perceived by GMP personnel regarding the major connections and relationships between ‘gun crime’ and ‘gang crime’ our analysis now turns to consider the next theme in the survey, how our respondents understood the idea of a ‘gun and gang culture’ in the Manchester context.

### **Understanding the gun and gang “culture”**

Our respondents had a great deal to say about the gun and gang culture, and there was a good deal of overall agreement in their comments. Furthermore many of the comments were consistent with earlier reflections on gang activity with notions of (i) status and ‘respect’, (ii) expressive violence and ‘bravado’, (iii) inter-personal and inter-gang conflicts and rivalries, (iv) media-influenced life-styles, fashions and behaviours, (v) peer group pressure, ‘codes’ and social values, (vi) protection, belonging, security and safety in numbers, and (vii) a complex (both practical and symbolic) attachment to firearms. These core themes, it must be added, reflect the ideas emerging most prominently in

our GMP respondents' perceptions of the gun and gang culture. In other words, the culture viewed from the outside. This is not the same as suggesting that these may be the chief facets of a gun and gang culture which might be identified by people who may be part of one. Inevitably, of course, any notion of a 'gun culture' will be a social construct, the purpose of this exercise being to understand the notion of a gun and gang culture from the point of view of those who are required to police it. Having reviewed the most prominent and frequently repeated ideas, a number of other emerging themes will be referred to, these relate to notions of community division, deprivation and social exclusion. In this section of the survey a few respondents also drew attention to the significance of racial differences.

### Status and 'respect'

*The gun/gang culture relates to the status and cachet that comes from membership of a gang and its association with the possession of firearms.*

*This is where the carrying of a gun is seen as part of your status within the gang and as a result it is done without any thought as to the consequences.*

*This is to do with groups of young people, predominantly male, associating together in criminal activity. Promoting and enforcing membership of that gang, giving identity and status to their members and their criminal activity and ruling by fear and force.*

*Gang culture ... refers to high profile groups using firearms to commit crime and raise or maintain their reputations.*

*Young people are drawn into the gangs by the lure of easy money, the status of being involved with them and the lack of stronger role models in their community... There is a general acceptance of crime and involvement with a criminal gang carries no negative stigma, in different areas the gangs are generally drawn up along similar lines and have strong territorial and neighbourhood links.*

*A lot seems to revolve around the apparent kudos of having gang associations. In these social circles, association with a gang can provide status and standing that an individual would not otherwise attain.*

### Expressive violence and 'bravado'

*The culture is attractive to under-achievers who are culturally seeped in urban mythology ... Gun crime emerges as gangs and groupings seek to dominate or intimidate others and communities, it also seems exciting and dangerous' and attractive to young males.*

*Gun culture is different to gun crime. In the former, the firearm is more of a status symbol. About displaying bravado. Initially it is about being accepted by others and then striving for a position of importance within the gang.*

*Guns and gangs are inseparable. The culture surrounds the glorification of the gang lifestyle as portrayed in film and music of a fast easy lifestyle with no regard for the consequences.*

*In some areas it can be based upon the 'traditional' images of gangsters (Krays etc) in other areas it can be built upon an American gangland culture (NY Crips etc) and there are also examples of Jamaican (Yardies) and African (Gangmaster) groupings. The common factor here is about gaining power by collective aggression and intimidation.*

#### Inter-personal and inter-gang conflicts and rivalries

*It is about deep rooted rivalries between organised crime groups made high profile through the use of guns against each other rather than against the public from whom they seek to profit.*

*Within Manchester gun and gang culture is well known and situated within certain areas of the city. There are a number of gangs within Manchester who are known to carry guns and take part in 'tit-for-tat' shootings.*

*It is all about the use of firearms to sort out gang disputes*

#### Media-influenced life-styles, fashions and behaviours

*This is associated mainly with youth cultures influenced heavily by Afro-Caribbean experiences in Jamaica and US cities, fuelled by certain music styles and other fashion icons. It is also associated closely with street drug dealing, street and low-level business robbery and anti-social behaviour.*

*The culture is about guns, fast cars, status and women and rivalry with neighbouring gangs.*

*This has become a way of life for some individuals.*

*Within Manchester, specifically the Metropolitan Division, the gun and gang culture runs through everything that certain youths do – schooling, texting, music, films, respect issues and showing affiliation due to where you live at an early age.*

*A growing problem imported from the USA that affects mainly black males in inner city suburbs influenced by peer pressure and music unfortunately.*

#### Peer group pressure, 'codes' and social values

*Gun and gang culture are supported by a whole set of norms and values which dictate how they act and react*



*Gangs work under a peer pressure culture and are influenced by other gang members. They push the boundaries and so the level of crime increases as members try to better one another. Rival gangs try and outdo one another and when guns become involved this is then a recipe for disaster.*

*The culture refers to what is considered to be an acceptable set of behaviour within the group that probably wouldn't be acceptable to a member of the public. This culture includes the way the gang dress, the locations they frequent the MO of the crimes they commit, almost like a code amongst the gang. The culture will be different from gang to gang.*

#### Protection, belonging, security and safety in numbers

*Gun culture is on the increase as criminals attempt to assert their influence and use an ultimate tool of violence. Gang culture can be a number of cowardly people feeling safety or power in numbers*

*Gun crime is exacerbated by the media, but gang crime has been borne of peer pressure and the need to belong. Some of it may be attributable to animosities between varying cultures within a multi-cultural society and the breakdown of social-spatial segregation.*

*'Gang' culture is manifested in the main in urban areas and is linked to a sense of belonging in a non-cohesive community. The culture also develops conceptions of power.*

*The gang culture appeals to the youth in particular, giving them something to belong to – an identity. It provides security around criminal activity and gang honour is defended fiercely.*

#### Attachments to firearms

*The gang is nothing new, nor is its propensity to violence. The change seems to be in the level of violence that the 'gang' is prepared to use to 'police' its area or punish those who it deems to have broken its rules. The weapon of choice has gone from the stick, through to the knife, and now to the firearm, especially the handgun which is a status symbol as well as a weapon. In non gang related crime, the gun is more of a tool of the trade and any weapon is used if it is felt it will assist in the crime.*

*My impression of the gun and gang 'culture' is that firearms are an essential element of the culture. Firearms are seen within the gang 'culture' as an essential tool for the imposition of respect and for protection of the gang, as a fashion accessory and to enforce criminal activity.*

*The gun is a status symbol for these types of criminals, it goes beyond ordinary crime.*

### Beyond criminality?

This final point, about gang and gun culture going ‘beyond ordinary crime’ should not be taken to suggest that the gang and gun culture were unconnected to more routine and familiar criminal involvements. On the contrary, criminal activity appeared, to our police respondents, to be the very bread and butter of gang related activities. As one respondent commented, *‘the gang culture revolves around criminality and that is often drug dealing. The gang can co-operate as suppliers and then use their status to intimidate. Obviously there is no-one to police illegal activities and so it is most credible to have the ultimate threat of a firearm for protection or as a tool to ensure little resistance in your activities.’* Yet here the gang seems just an effective way of organising for criminal activity and the gun just a tool of the trade. Other respondents likewise ‘watered down’ the significance of the criminal ‘culture’ : *‘primarily the ‘culture’ reflects the associations in areas of individuals linked together for a common criminal purpose – usually illicit drug distribution. Other crime types may be involved such as control of people trafficking and prostitution.’* In such a remark, admittedly not one that was typical, culture implied little more than a particular group’s way of organising its chosen criminal enterprise. But for most of our respondents the notion of a gun and gang ‘culture’ seemed to imply something above and beyond conventional criminality.

### Explaining culture: division, deprivation, exclusion and race

At the beginning of our discussions in this section, we noted how a few respondents sought to offer ‘explanations’ of the emergence of the gun and gang culture as they saw it. In this sense perhaps we can suggest that they were attempting to develop a police perspective going beyond the ‘conventional criminality’ we have just referred to (and steeped in the familiar classical, instrumental, situational or ‘social’ paradigms) and instead seeking to grapple with the formation of a criminal ‘culture’ itself. Here the explanations are often quite general, grappling with a range of inter-related factors. What these comments share, however, is a sense of explanation which tries to render the gun and gang ‘culture’ understandable as a predictable reaction of a given group of people to a given set of social circumstances. It is still an explanation, from the ‘outside’ as it were but it aims to put culture ‘into context’.

One respondent tried to capture this in the following fashion, *‘the gun and gang crime culture is inexorably linked, and in my opinion it is a growing phenomenon both globally and in the UK. It is predominantly a male environment and borne in many cases (although this is not an exhaustive list) out of social exclusion, peer pressures, sense of identity, adrenalin ‘rush’, lack of parental control, lack of community and community guardianship and the desire for street credibility and status.’* The comment might at first sight seem very similar to many which have preceded it, but here we have a comment that aims to link a series of global processes, working themselves through into the social context young men’s changing lives in late modernity and which

allows us to glimpse the motives young men may have for being involved in gangs as well as what they derive from this involvement.

Another commentator linked a similar set of points to an idea of young men overcoming a sense of relative deprivation. *'It is all to do with boys who have grown up together from deprived backgrounds and who align themselves to a particular gang. They see guns as a way of putting themselves in power and sometimes put the loyalty of the gang over their own family. Although individuals carry out various offences I think they like to feel part of a group which has an infamous reputation.'* Furthermore, *'it is predominantly a male thing, but can be from a black or white culture within fairly close knit communities in and around cities,'* and *'this is predominantly male and focussed in the age range 16-30 and in the different areas having a different ethnic bias.'*

Someone else volunteered a similar view of this culture as the product of deprivation. The ability to work together to undertake criminal activities was certainly a means to an end, but to many of our respondents, as we have seen, there was much to this than simply committing crimes together: But a great deal followed from working together in a certain kind of way and adopting the means (weapons) to perpetrate criminal acts more effectively. Firearms, therefore, became a particularly important factor in driving the gang culture forwards: *'the gun and gang culture usually refers to a disenfranchised minority who have formed their own associations usually based upon a geographic location and developed over many years of growing up together. Linked to this is a sense of identity which they are willing to defend and desire to attain status within the unit by demonstrating a willingness to resort to violence. Here the possession of firearms is a status symbol.... This said, the use of firearms cuts across this explanation in that such gangs, if this is a correct term, are often involved in drug supplying as a means to control the local illicit economy and for obvious financial reasons. The possession of firearms is thereby a necessity to protection of self and the market.'*

Another respondent made a similar point: *'The perception of a criminal culture developing in an area occurs when the size of the network of associates is such that it provides a controlling influence on the lives of residents in the area where it operates and individuals within the organisation thrive on the kudos of others recognising their affiliation. The use of firearms within the gangs provides two clear benefits – to provide control and loyalty and identify a hierarchy in the criminal association and to provide protection for individuals and the interests of the organisation.'*

A final (for this section of the survey) comment went to some length to outline the context in which the criminal 'culture' emerged. The fact that the account is loaded and largely pejorative is not really the point, what is being offered here is a supposedly 'complete account of criminalising context, racially significant language codes and phrases are subtly employed, although the significance of race in the gang culture being depicted is not directly addressed.

*This [culture] is all about 'macho' image demonstration by disaffected youth from poor social backgrounds, poor education and low self esteem. The gang becomes their purpose and their life outside of normal society. They can be disaffected second and third generation gang members, often whole generations of gang members are involved, entire families, fathers, uncles, brothers etc.. Simply put it is an entrenched 'career' path for certain types. The gun and the 'bling' is their measure of personal worth. Such gang members are often of no fixed abode with multiple girlfriends by whom they father numerous illegitimate children. These women are known as 'baby mothers' and are seen as second class citizens in the eyes of gang members. Their lifestyle is based upon 'macho swagger' and their worth is measured by the 'respect' perceived to be owed to gang members by virtue of their gang affiliations and the territory controlled by the gang, the amount of 'bling' they sport, the cars they drive and the number of children and baby mothers the gang member has. .. This is all show and no substance.*

Such comments, here seeking to 'explain' the gun and gang culture set the scene for the next section of the survey where we address the main factors which, in the opinion of our GMP respondents, appear to influence gun and gang crime in the UK and specifically, in Manchester.

### **Police perceptions of the main factors influencing gun and gang crime in the Manchester context**

While our earlier discussions have drawn attention to the ways in which police respondents felt that the gun and gang culture was understandable in terms of the influences working within and throughout that culture, when we turned to examine the factors they thought responsible for the growth, development and translation of the culture itself, respondents referred to a wide range of, generally understood, sociological processes. Thus, as one police officer argued, processes of globalisation, commodification, cultural transfer and social mobility contributed to the crimogenic contexts in which firearms played a role.

*Culture in the UK seems to follow that of the USA eventually. Gun culture appears to be growing following the expansion of the European borders. Firearms seem to be more readily available, and almost 'disposable' commodities and easy to replace. The culture in particular seems to be related to criminal rivalries, in particular involving drug dealing.*

Such arguments are neither unusual nor unfamiliar and have been the staple fare of media commentary on crime and violence trends for some time. At various times, British gun crime hotspots have been likened to 'the Wild West' in journalistic hyperbole. At other times, the phrase 'staring down the barrel of an American nightmare' has been employed to describe the UK's supposed 'gun crisis'. Whilst, finally, in the House of Commons, in a debate on the school shooting tragedy at Dunblane, 1996, MP David Mellor argued forcefully

that to embrace the 'American way of life' might also entail accepting more victims of firearm violence, which he termed the 'American way of death' (Squires, 2000). Similarly, many of the factors referred to by our respondents to explain the development of a gang and gun culture related closely to the way they saw that culture being lived and experienced. Furthermore, both 'push' and 'pull' factors – deprivations and aspirations - were referred to, including explanations closely resembling the 'strain' theory developed by Merton (1968).

These interlocking pressures are captured in figure 2 (below). One series of factors seems to describe a range of deprivations (poor parenting, low educational achievement, poor social milieu, lack of values, deprivation and unemployment – although no mention of racism or discrimination) while the other factors describe the aspirations of those living in this context (peer pressure, gang culture, financial gain, respect, bravado and self protection).

As our police respondents commented regarding these aspirational factors:

*Aspirational issues are important because, due to their social conditions and their backgrounds, the desire to make money is strong but the opportunities limited. Those who are involved with drugs often seem to make lots of money and this is attractive to those with very little of their own. The hierarchical structures of the gangs are seen as a way to be successful.*

Another added,

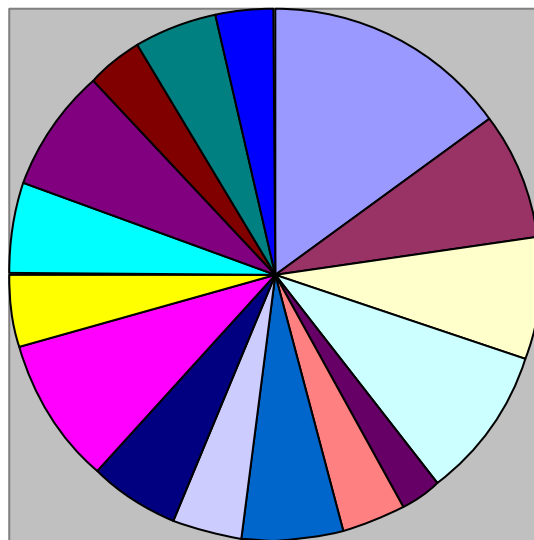
*In most cases there is a definite link to drug supply and control of areas. This, in turn, leads to a need for guns to protection as well as enforcement. With black youths 'aspirational' issues and the notion of status also appear as an important feature.*

Both instrumental (making money, staying safe) and cultural ('respect') factors were seen to be important in this context.

*It is about control of people, places and markets, and peer pressure to carry guns and join gangs, inert community rivalries and an element of "an easy way to make a living".*

*There is no doubt that many factors are involved, however the main factors appear to initially evolve around 'Street Cred', 'Image' and 'Respect'. With regard to gang culture it can vary from wanting to control areas and neighbourhoods ('turf'), using the 'Pack' mentality (a primeval trait) of intimidation by numbers, to self preservation at the street and local level. Above that there is also the more organised and serious gangs networking to achieve their aims, be it drugs markets, human trafficking and other criminal activities.*

**Key factors influencing young people becoming involved in the gang and gun culture as perceived by police respondents in Manchester.**



- Peer Pressure
- Poor Parenting
- Low education achievement
- Social Mileu
- Lack of values
- Gang culture
- Drugs & dealing
- Community links
- Financial gain
- Deprivation
- Media influence
- Personal protection
- 'Respect'
- Violent bravado
- Unemployment
- Gun supply

The concept of 'respect' featured significantly amongst the influences seen to be shaping young men's orientation to the gun and gang culture. With the Government's establishment of a 'Respect Task Force' this has clearly now become something of a deeply contested concept (Burney, 2005; Von Hirsch and Simester, 2006) although for our present purposes it has acquired a much more specifically late-modern cultural meaning which has developed beyond the notions of 'respectability' once said to characterise the dignity and self restraint of working class masculinity (Tolson, 1977). Here a notion of respectability was, arguably, collaboratively achieved and affirmed whereas its late-modern variant is more directly asserted, or even demanded with menaces. However, this is not the place to develop a fuller 'sociology of respect' in late modern Britain (Sennett, 2004), though at first sight it scarcely seems difficult to appreciate the significance of such a code within a culture in which conventional symbols of achievement and success are rather hard to come by and very easily lost. Respect, therefore, and the means and practices by which it secured and the weapons by which it is defended mobilise both instrumental and aspirational motivations. Respect implies a code of the self for gang members which is reinforced through peer pressure and the collective security of gang membership. As the following comment suggests, however, such respect can extend beyond the immediate relationships of the gang and into the community at large and where the demand for respect may be linked to questions of fear and intimidation.

*Status is one key, gang members and especially the leaders, are often seen as having the respect of the community, or at least a kind of power over it. Lifestyle is also a factor, gang members and armed criminals often have a lifestyle that is the envy of elements in their community. The disposable income and access to cars and women is very attractive to young males who are unlikely to ever attain this from legitimate work. Protection is also an issues, immigrant based populations have historically joined gangs for security against real, or perceived, threats from the host population, and vice versa. To prevent all this you have to remove the attractive features of becoming involved.*

*A lot of it is about an idea of respect, peer group pressure and achieving a certain status without participating in legitimate activities.*

*It is about the environments they grow up in and the role of 'reputation' in those contexts. Against that the limited kinds of opportunities open to people don't have much influence.*

*The 'street cred' factor is probably central, joining a gang and being part of a group who are seen as the group to be with. Trying to earn more respect from others, and self preservation (not being isolated from these groups) are reasons for sticking with this life.*

*Resort to guns is to do with the perceived need to protect themselves and those within the gang and their business interests. The need to increase the level of threat (posed to others) is also an influencing factor.*

Another respondent added a comment which, while couched in terms of the 'thrill' of criminality for some young people (Katz, 1998), especially when associated with aspirations surrounding the glamorously expensive lifestyles available to a few, also exposed a further dimension of the 'strain theory': that certain young people might be especially prone to the enticements of the gang culture.

Furthermore, as we have noted before,

*There are some strong cultural stereotypes here with gang members as anti-heroes and role models who are seen to succeed.*

*The media and music videos can be something to blame here because they show images of gangster types in a glamorous way, with lots of money, expensive cars, dripping with gold and with women draped all over them. This will only encourage young people with little real opportunities of their own to want this kind of life. We ought to concentrate more on showing the detrimental consequences of gangs.*

*Factors influencing gang crime with guns include – the ready access to guns in the criminal underworld and the glamorisation of aggression and gang culture in modern music lyrics, music videos and popular electronic games such as Grand Theft Auto ... Other factors would include the success of popular music artists who are former or present members of known criminal gangs.*

*I think that there is a proliferation of violence depicted in the material aimed at youth (films and video games) this must desensitise youth and validate violence*

Such images and 'flash' lifestyles were seen to be especially enticing to those perhaps least able to achieve them. While there are periodic outcries about 'irresponsible broadcasting' allegedly celebrating gangster lifestyles, whether such complaints really add to our understanding of the role of 'aspirational media' in an unequal world is rather doubtful. So called 'gangsta rap' may simply be the latest in a long line of disapproved of, music related, youth cultures, although its media dissemination certainly appears to provide disaffected youth (amongst others) with a series of 'life(style) resources' through which they negotiate their sense of identity, and relationships vis a vis one another and the wider community.

*Without the gang culture the boys would see a bleak future, the key members are often highly respected so it gives them something to look up to. Along with the peer pressure the temptation to impress these key gang members must be difficult to resist... Firearms are used in this context to give power and get respect, when otherwise they might feel quite powerless...*



*Sometimes they put loyalty to the gang over and above their own families. Although individuals carry out offences I think they do so to feel part of a group which has an 'infamous' reputation.*

And likewise,

*In some communities the acceptance of crime and criminality is such that it is apparently celebrated by some sections of the community. [They see] that gang members are apparently successful in terms of their wealth, possessions and lifestyle and the perception comes that you have little chance to succeed through conforming to a normal lifestyle.*

So, as the following remark suggests, it was possible for our respondents to reconcile a belief in underachievement, social and emotional deficits and the absence of certain 'legitimate' ambitions with the adoption of a number of quite different 'aspirations'. For instance,

*'Gun' and 'gang' crime is glorified in the media and in popular music. It is therefore seen as exciting in comparison to what the young people might have achieved with their low educational achievement and lacking ambitions.*

*Certain types of music and films glamorise the gang lifestyle depicting the power and wealth it can bring. The pack mentality relating to the 'ownership' of various estates or areas gives young males the feeling of belonging to an organisation and the 'security' this can bring.*

Taking all of these proposed influences together: deprivation, gang culture, peer pressure, media stereotypes and values and so forth, another police respondent aimed not to condemn the media culture which, some thought helped to foster the aspirations embraced by young males but, rather, speculated about whether the gang culture itself might be rendered less attractive. This respondent also wondered whether the image and role of policing – especially its engagement with youth, one of its more difficult client groups – needed rethinking.

*Peer pressure is a key thing... to make a better life for themselves and to be part of something that may protect you. To prevent involvement in gangs they need something that is more attractive than becoming a gang member. Unfortunately there are not many things as tempting to a young impressionable boy. Working hard at school and getting a good job are the difficult roads to follow. Perhaps if it could be possible to 'de-glamorise' this gang culture it might be a way of discouraging young boys getting drawn into it... Also the police need to improve their image here too, being seen to assist people rather than just enforcing laws...*

Whether this was a feasible line of approach in the face of the deprivation identified by many other respondents is an open question. A deprived social background was seen as the fertile soil in which the gang culture could grow and develop.

*Social deprivation and poor education mixed with a breakdown of social values leaves young people with a sense of hopelessness and it is then seen as the only way of being able to make something of themselves. They start by becoming peripheral gang members and end up as main gang members, with each generation becoming more violent than the one before and with a greater willingness to use violence to commit crimes and run their drug organisations.*

*Young people become involved because they are not equipped to do anything else. They see their older brothers and friends with money and outward signs of success and they want a piece of it for themselves*

*It starts with social deprivation, coupled with indirect peer pressure, ... and seeing the 'successful' gangster with his flash car and the associated trappings. And if there is no viable 'legitimate' route to success then it can make the gang lifestyle seem quite attractive. And if you factor in poor parental controls and relatively limited criminal justice system responses for 'trigger' offences it can lead to people getting off on the wrong path.*

At the same time, there was a clear willingness on the part of our respondents to try to understand the issues from the perspective of the young people themselves. A number of comments reported already have reflected this sense of insight. One respondent made the point quite explicitly:

*In their eyes it is that there are only limited socially acceptable alternatives providing meaningful social opportunities or income to divert young people from criminality*

*Coming from broken homes and having no-one to look up to is important, so the influence of their peer groups takes over and they become involved in gangs because it makes them feel like they 'belong' to something. When they are in a gang they feel like they are untouchable – then you get the media just reiterating this image by showing the gang culture in a positive light and as glamorous.*

*The major factors influencing young people getting involved in the gun and gang culture are to do with where they are born and brought up. When young people reside in a particular area which is a hotspot of gun and gang crime activity, there will be many factors which combine to draw them into this activity.*

The 'deprivation' influence we have already referred to was seen as very directly related to the gun and gang problems of Greater Manchester.

*Deprivation is a key ingredient that influences gun and gang crime activity. The hotspots within Greater Manchester for gun and gang crime are areas which suffer from high levels of poverty and deprivation compared to other areas of GM. More affluent areas of GM do not suffer from the problems of gun crime that is connected to gang activity. The deprived areas are*

*traditionally the strongholds of gun and gang culture and the assimilation of young persons into this culture perpetuates these strongholds.*

*A lot of the factors behind this are closely linked but they are heavily underpinned by social deprivation, poor educational experiences and the breakdown of family units.*

*Those involved have, as we perceive it 'no prospects', little education, little self worth, however, being part of a gang will give them confidence. They may not be as rich or intelligent as their peers but they rely upon fear and violence to control people.*

*The main factors influencing gun crime are deprivation, upbringing and educational achievement (particularly amongst African-Caribbean individuals at high school) also there are issues about the established culture and 'status'*

*The most important factor is parenting – absent fathers are particularly relevant. Education is also a factor, and poor results at school can lead to limited life choices.*

Deprivation is therefore represented as something of a cultural, social and moral vacuum within which malign influences are especially influential.

*Parental influences (or acceptance) and membership of gang culture including pressure from peers makes it difficult for many young people NOT to get involved in gangs.*

*It is a way of finding a sense of belonging, many gang members substitute their friends for the poor family background they have.*

In such contexts peer pressure was seen as especially influential, and influential in a number of ways, as our respondents have already suggested. Hallsworth (2005) refers to this in his own work on street gang cultures, young people join, or align themselves with, gangs for a range of reasons reaching from desire and admiration to fear and intimidation. As he puts it, 'thugging up' becomes a form of self-protection.

*The peer pressures on some weaker youths can leave them with little real choice about being in a gang. They might see it as their only choice. Where youths live and which school they went to can dictate which gang they will belong to.*

*There's a certain prestige and peer pressure to joining gangs and carrying firearms, and being part of the in crowd which generates internal pressures within the groups to go further or gain more respect. This leads to more offending and more conflict as people try to 'prove' themselves to their own groups and others.*

*Once they are actually in a gang, young people will have to some way 'prove' themselves, and this invariably involves the use of a firearm.*

*Peer pressure is the main thing, and living in a community where this is seen as acceptable or even aspired to.*

*A lot of it is to do with peer pressure and self-glorification, and young males who see it as an opportunity to make money.*

*I think peer pressure is at the start of it, but it escalates over time with media influences, disillusionment with authority, loyalties to others and a fast way to make money, have influence and get prestige.*

And a number of the comments reaffirm the point that peer pressure is pressure, sometimes backed by threats and consequences and not merely the relatively benign influence that is sometimes implied. In the form of intimidation of communities, victims and potential witnesses this also extended into the larger community as the following comment made clear.

*The gun and gang crime phenomenon is related to a number of elements: the development and maintenance of criminal markets, the intimidation of law abiding residents to the extent that individuals are afraid to interfere with the activities of the group or pass information on the group's activities to law enforcement agencies, and it is about internal control of the gang membership through the perceived value of fraternity (monetary or kudos).*

Once the gangs were formed a cluster of anti-social tendencies, behaviours and attitudes are seen to follow.

*Lack of respect for society, and getting no proper guidance as to how to grow up. The kids need to be noticed, they are left to their own devices, 'doorstep kids', with no purposeful focus in life, no perceived future.*

And from this excluded and powerless position it is a relatively short step to some quick, perceived solutions to their predicament and 'young people thinking that firearms give them power.' Here a combination of firearm supply and lucrative networks of criminal supply (drugs, stolen goods) provide the vital links connecting the deprived cultural context with the criminal aspirations the culture appears to sponsor.

Three respondents specifically identified the drug culture, especially street drug dealing, as the catalyst for the gang formation and related activities.

*The drugs markets are a key – they make profitable business for organised crime groups who are therefore likely to take high risks to protect the business eg. shootings of rival gangs, taxings etc.*

*Drugs and the supply of drugs are the basis for most of it and there is a large element of peer pressure and the wish to belong to a gang as it is seen as a way of becoming 'someone' and escaping poverty*

*The main factor is drugs, particularly drug dealing and territories. Other factors include movement onto another's patch or territory, bad debts, ethnic background and poverty.*

And with a drug market to protect and preserve firearms had an obvious instrumentality.

*Easy access to firearms and ammunition and lots of drugs in an area seems to be the main things, also dealing in stolen goods, then you'll get opposing gangs and conflict resulting*

*It is concerned with the need to assert power and control, and this power can be used to control the drug supply in order to generate financial gain.*

A final comment on this theme came from an officer who drew attention to two particular strands of explanation for the gun and gang phenomenon, both relate to the cultural and 'aspirational' dimensions of the gun crime question rather than its more instrumental, and perhaps deprivation driven, aspects.

*There are two main influences fuelling gun crime at present. The first is the influence, via media and film, of the American gang culture and its portrayal of the glamour of guns and the gang culture. This can also be observed in the way it influences the fashion of British youth. The second is the importation of a pro-gun gang culture by immigrants from areas such as the Balkans and the Caribbean where there is an established gun culture.*

Such an interpretation tends (albeit rather implausibly) to suggest that the gun and gang phenomenon is a non-indigenous external problem infecting British communities (not unlike the first analyses made of the 'mugging phenomenon in the mid 1970s: Hall et al., 1978). Implicitly racist and xenophobic, ('we have seen the influx of a certain type of gang culture from overseas') by virtue of attributing responsibility to influences beyond British society (Edwards and Gill, 2002), such an analysis also fails to account (as we have already discussed) for the peculiar receptiveness of certain groups in certain communities to aspects of the gun and gang culture. This issue featured significantly, however, when we asked respondents to consider how gun crime might be prevented.

### **Preventing involvement in gun crime?**

Our next theme concerned the measures necessary for preventing gun crime. The responses obtained generally referred either to more effective social policy interventions (forms of social crime prevention) or to more effective enforcement actions. The range and 'balance' of suggested interventions can be seen in the following diagram, although, at the outset it is also worth noting that a small minority of our respondents held the view that '*nothing much*' could be done to 'prevent' the problem arising. This pessimism may be linked with a view arising in a later section concerned with the difficulties of preventing people distributing, accessing, carrying and using firearms.

Just over half of our respondents identified improvements in education, expanding opportunities for those at risk and policies to 'strengthen' communities. An alternative set of approaches (tougher sentencing, more robust enforcement, 'zero tolerance' and 'reaffirming consequences') focussed more upon criminal justice system interventions, although it was not unusual for respondents to advocate both sets of responses together. For example, in their different ways both of the following comments advocate a 'twin-track' approach, the former suggesting a policy of early intervention, education diversion and prevention (when it can work) followed by tough punishments (the only response thought likely to be effective for older offenders)

*The groups likely to cause the problems early on, prior to the 15-16 age group, need to be identified by other agencies (not the police). This is the age that the gang groups start to form, either through peer pressure or intimidation. These are the groups we should target and try to educate them regarding the problems caused by gun crime. I only think that a harsh approach can make any headway after this age.*

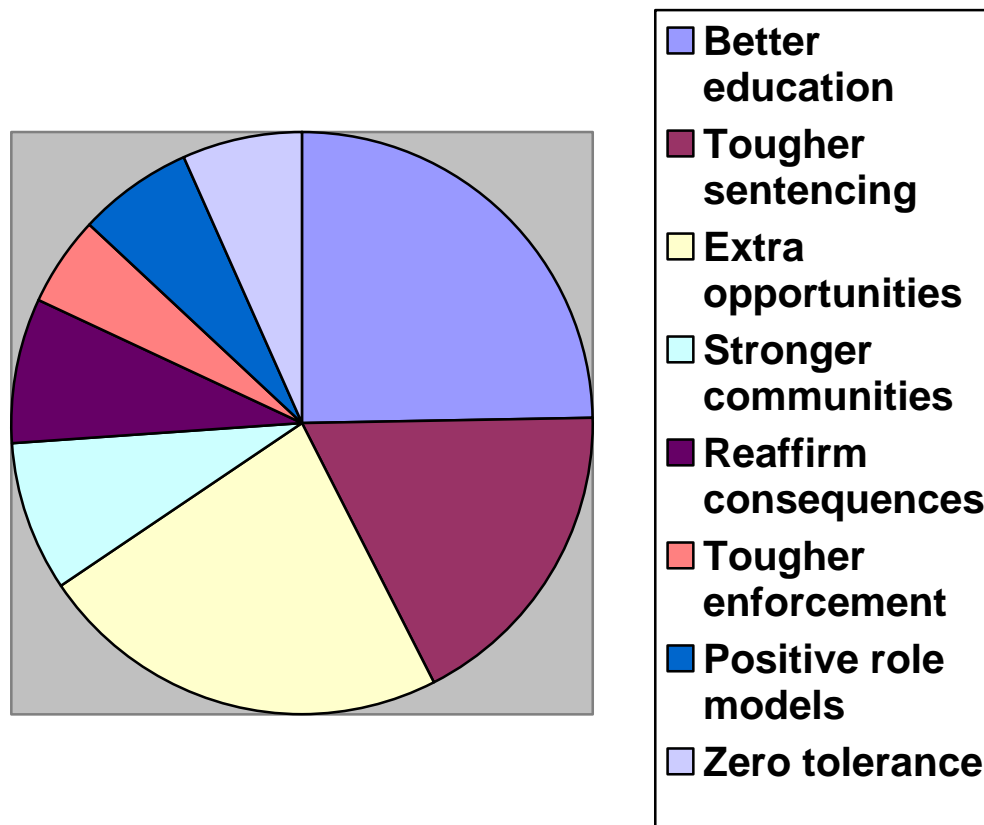
*It is difficult to stop young people getting involved as they often don't seem to see anything wrong with that life and in many ways actually aspire to it. The key is probably to get in as early as possible with any interventions ... the gang life needs to lose its status – through strong enforcement and severe sentencing; through strong and robust legislation to seize financial assets and through a sustained publicity campaign to undermine gangs... The alternatives need to be promoted and made more attractive.*

### **What can be done to prevent gun crime ?**

Typical of the former types of response were arguments drawing upon the 'deprivation' or 'social deficit' interpretations we have referred to previously. As one respondent noted, '*some areas have a historic lack of opportunities for young people, this has helped perpetuate people's involvement in organised criminal networks.*' Accordingly, respondents argued the case for '*better education at a young age – and prevention*', or stressed the need to develop '*extra curricular activities and opportunities for young people from a very early age*' which '*may help to deter young people by giving them hobbies, goals and opportunities.*' Equally it was noted that, '*adults showing a proper interest in the children would go a long way and more youth facilities*' would help to counteract the influence of anti-social peer groups. It was similarly suggested that there had to be, '*more positive efforts to engage and integrate young people.*'

The longer term solutions were seen to lie in the provision of '*proper job opportunities, apprenticeships*' for young people. Another respondent commented that, '*you either have to take the individual out of the problem environment or change the environment itself. You have to be proactive in the offer of opportunities to allow people to develop a better lifestyle,*' although a rather more sceptical respondent saw this as necessarily related to far wider

social and economic changes. *'There needs to be some fundamental economic change for changes here to occur.'*



By contrast, advocates of more robust enforcement and tougher sentencing argued their case in the following terms. There had to be serious *'sentences to reflect the severity of the crimes'* and much more effective police enforcement action. A range of measures suggested here included: *'tighter controls on all weapons, increase the sentences, make it an offence to belong to 'known' gangs, could ASBOs be used to target gangs and gang members.'* Another respondent suggested that, *'one way of marking the non-acceptance of this culture would be to inflict much longer sentences upon those poly-criminals involved in serious gun and gang activity and name and shame all local gangs and gun offenders.'* Although he went on to acknowledge, *'I'm aware that there might be all sorts of human rights issues here.'*

In the manner of earlier respondents who argued the need to 'de-glamorise' the gang culture other responses referred to the need to alter people's perceptions of the gang and gun lifestyle: *'strategies to identify and remove or minimise the impact of negative influences upon young people.'* This, it was suggested, could be achieved either by highlighting the risks associated with

gang related criminal activity or by fostering the growth of more resolute community intolerance of gangs and their activities.

*We have to continue to highlight the dangers associated with life involved in gang crime... including the risks of prison and death*

*We should show young people the real consequences of gun crime – young men killed, injured, being confined to wheelchairs etc..*

*Young people need to be made aware of the consequences of gang life and the fact that there is a high mortality rate. They need to see that the top of the gang structure is only held open for the few and that the material gains of gang lifestyle are not evenly distributed. Essentially we should be demonstrating that the easiest, safest and most lawful way of achieving goods is through employment and proper career prospects.*

Some respondents suggested a need for 'sustained intervention at earlier ages with youths and young people.' employing 'strong identifiable positive role models who can advise against gang involvement.' This was seen as part of a strategy of 'early intervention with positive role models who can show the benefits of legitimate routes to success.' However, other respondents were rather more cautious about the selection and use of 'mentors'.

*I'm not convinced that we should have ex-gang members working with young people and sharing their experiences. From my personal experience this serves only to prove to young gang members that when you are no longer in a gang – you can get a well-paid job trying to persuade younger gang members to choose the 'right path'. Many of the ex-gang members I have seen and spoken to who work with young people on diversionary projects, still carry an aura of being streetwise and tough (indeed many of them still are) and many young people look to them as role models, ie., that 'it is acceptable to be a gang member when I'm young and later I'll grow out of it'.*

Continuing a related theme we have discussed earlier, one respondent argued:

*We have to do something about violent and aggressive rap music, films, television and video-games which glamorise the world of the gangster and often portray the characters as being young attractive males whose sexual prowess is second to none, reside in large gangs in a brotherhood-type society who would die for each other and who have all the trappings that signify success; cars, women, clothes, jewellery, gadgets and so on.*

Empowering communities and helping them become more confident and resilient in the face of gang related intimidation was also seen as an important dimension of the attempt to change perceptions of gang activity: 'this kind of gang-related criminal behaviour has to become seen as unacceptable to young males in the communities where they live.' According to some respondents, strengthening communities was an issue that had to be handled carefully. Whilst it was acknowledged that 'strong communities that can



*police themselves are more important than interventions by authorities, Carisma and MAV etc. may have more influence than probation or police,* there were important areas of policy for official agencies to develop including relocation, victim support and witness protection (issues we will return to later).

### **What factors appear to ‘trigger’ firearm incidents**

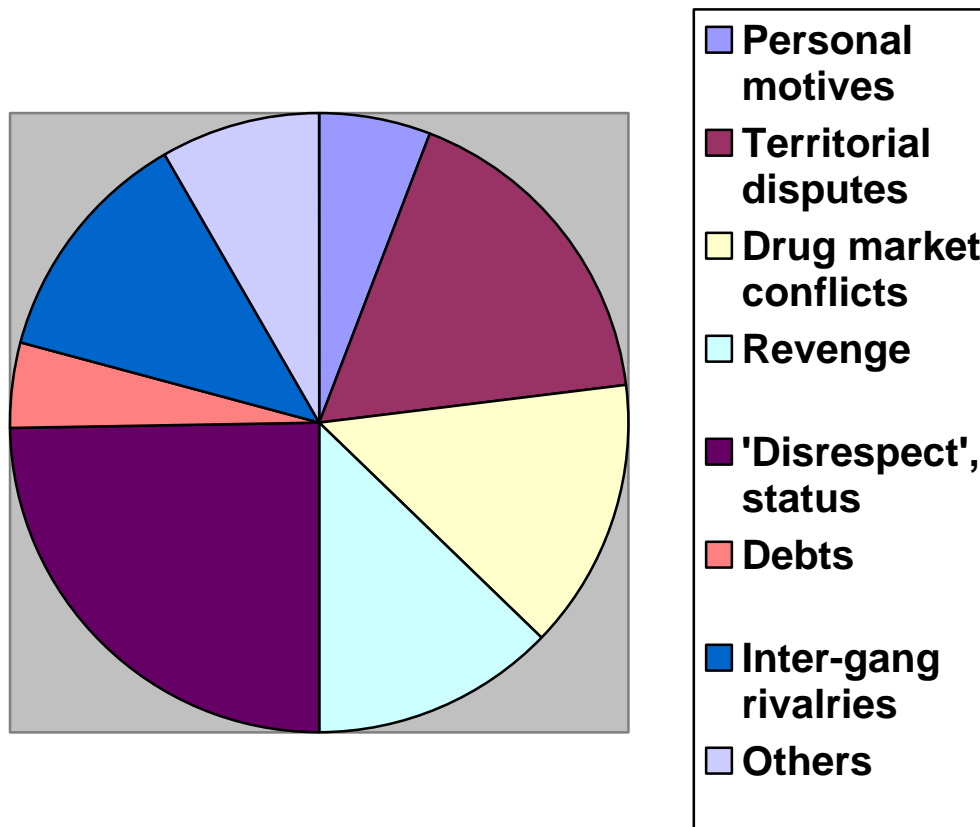
We have noted previously the significance of ‘respect’ and ‘street credibility’ in the police understandings of the values of the gang culture. In view of this it is not surprising to see conflicts arising out of real or imagined affronts to a gang-member’s status and respect emerging as the most frequent ‘trigger’ factor for firearm incidents (at least in the eyes of the police). According to our police respondents, issues concerning ‘respect and disrespect’, ‘personal motives’ and ‘revenge’ accounted for almost a half of their explanations of shootings. A similar proportion of our respondents attributed shooting incidents to ‘territorial disputes’, ‘drug market conflicts’ and inter-gang rivalries. Finally, a small proportion of shooting were thought to relate to the enforcement of debts.

Yet despite these seeming classification of the motives thought to lie behind shooting incidents, gang culture, along with the values sustaining it, the personalities involved in it, the motives surrounding it and the behaviours associated with it are seldom amenable to such neat distinction. In the academic and research literatures, gang culture is often seen as messy, chaotic and ‘disorganised’; (Decker and Curry, 2002, Matthews, 2005) with personal motives blending imperceptibly with group loyalties and animosities, historic grudges and grievances with more recent ‘differences’ possibly exacerbated by a sequence of ‘tit-for-tat’ rivalries, demands for revenge and retribution, and all overlain by a sense of zero-sum competitiveness over territory and criminal markets. However there was little evidence of such judgements being drawn by our police respondents, on the contrary the importance of ‘respect’ in the gang context seemed well understood. As two of our respondents noted,

*One gang doing something the other doesn’t like, like one gang encroaching on another gang’s territory, one gang being more affluent than another, or just individuals just looking at each other the wrong way can trigger an event.*

*Within gangs it can be about things like power and respect, between different gangs there will be grudges and resentments for things done in the past, usually about territory, perceived insults and control of drug dealing.*

### **What are the main trigger events that lead to firearms incidents ?**



Respondents identifying the more personal motives for shootings and other firearm incidents, made comments as follows:

*Minor incidents at parties / events between rival factions where disrespect is perceived are a main trigger in my experience. Any retaliation usually involves a wholly disproportionate response to the original minor slight and usually involves guns. This can then trigger a series of tit for tat shootings as each gang responds to the slight to their status.*

Another respondent referred to the significant issue of 'respect' factor, also alluding to the changing nature of contemporary gang culture whereby the use of firearms by criminal gangs had tended to both escalate and perpetuate gang rivalries whilst simultaneously rendering them all the more lethal. This was a theme that recurred in a number of our respondents comments, the pattern of violence and retribution was seen as self-perpetuating.

*A lot of it is to do with 'disrespect'. Gangs and their members seem to have a heightened sensitivity to incidents they perceive as insulting or challenging them. The culture of most gangs is violent and leaders are expected to fight to attain the top positions and then 'see off' any challenges. Loss of 'face' can have serious, even fatal consequences. Insults or disagreements, which would have led to a fight 10-15 years ago, now lead to someone getting a gun and shooting the other person. In a violent sub-culture like this it is often a case of 'get them before they get you'.*

One police respondent ventured an even more 'historical' overview of youth violence and dispute resolution, something that culture, context and the availability of weapons and, not least, the apparently new patterns of their use has rendered now almost nostalgic

*I believe that disputes between young people can be an invaluable and inevitable part of socialising and adolescent development which teaches young people (amongst other things) about tolerance, patience, conflict resolution and futility. When I was at school young people who had disagreements fought each other with fists to settle disputes [but] today's young people prefer to offer the threat of, and in some instances often use overwhelming force (knives and guns) in order to settle even the most minor of disputes.*

Disputes between gangs having some rather more 'instrumental' triggers were described in the following terms.

*They [gangs] are very wary of anyone encroaching on what they see as their 'business' – this can be drug dealing, car parks or doors – and will respond with a very violent show of force to warn off anyone else.*

*There can be a wide range of things that will set them off, such as a chance meeting between gang members in clubs, gangs crossing over on to each others' 'turf' and other disputes between rival gangs.*

*The stakes can be very high in these disputes over drug markets, expensive property, large sums of money and the like. People's credibility can really be on the line, so if you owe money to someone, perhaps someone older and tougher than you, the fear of reprisals might push you into using a weapon.*

And as the last comment makes clear, even the more openly instrumental conflicts over money, markets and territory were seen to be underpinned by a powerful motivation deriving from the need to maintain 'personal credibility' and authority. In the world of gangs, as we have seen before, 'respect' and 'street cred' were themselves a vital resource. What might seem like a minor provocation or dispute could quickly escalate for a number of reasons: including the need to quickly dispel any sense you have any weaknesses, needing to maintaining authority and control, intimidating potential rivals and trying to prove oneself.

*It can be a range of things but at the bottom it is about earning 'respect' by showing you are willing to be the most ruthless.*

*There is a kind of desperation about it, on the part of the offender, wanting to achieve whatever they think their aim is.*

*They have a real need to be seen as the top dog, this allows for control of others.*

*Young people eager to make a name for themselves can often stir things up by acting rashly in ways that provokes others.*

With firearms factored into this equation of hasty, seemingly no-compromise conflict, our respondents described a context in which grudges might quickly escalate. Although, given the volatility with which the 'gang culture' is described by our police respondents, perhaps the major surprise is how few shooting incidents there are. Indeed, and this seldom seems to attract any commentary at all, it might seem surprising to reflect upon how much restraint these reckless, desperate, insecure, ruthless, armed and dangerous, young men actually practice. Thus, while police respondents referred to tit-for-tat cycles of apparently trivial and 'mindless' violence little seemed to be known or understood about how violence was avoided.

*There are many longstanding disputes between gangs, it doesn't seem to take much to set them off and keep a cycle of 'tit for tat' violence going.*

*One firearms incident is likely to spark many 'tit for tat' shootings following it*

*There can be on-going feuds going on over time, these can flare up from time to time and get settled for a while by the bullet*

*There can be many 'trigger events' disrespect, drug market control issues, territorial claims, status issues etc.*

On particular factor in the 'triggering' of shootings and other gun incidents we have referred to already. It refers to the extent to which guns facilitate or, even more directly, appear to drive incidents along towards a violent confrontation. This notion of incidents becoming 'gun driven' has been referred to earlier in our analysis and also in discussions of police armed response (Squires, 2000). What this implies is that the availability of guns represents an independent variable in the lethality equation and that the act of carrying firearms in public, directly contributes to an increase in the frequency and lethality of violent encounters. This insight also lends itself to specific policing interventions (anti-gun policing tactics, targeted stop and search operations), for if rates of (routine) gun carrying could be lowered or controlled, then the frequency of shooting incidents might be reduced. Such thinking is reflected in comments from two of our respondents: *'[Gun crime] is driven by the willingness to take guns out in public.'* And likewise, the frequency of shootings was said to be explained by, *'people carrying firearms with intent to commit crime or for what they believe is their own personal protection.'*

Similar ideas no doubt also help to underpin the 'waiting periods' (or 'cool-off' periods) imposed in many US jurisdictions for the purchase of firearms (and while background checks may be carried out on the would-be purchaser). In relation to gun carrying by offenders in the UK, tactics which helped reduce the spontaneity of an illegal armed response by an armed offender might therefore reduce the frequency of shootings. However, standing in the way of this is the often reported belief of gang members that they need weapons for

protection or that being unarmed is being vulnerable. An officer remarked, *'there are very few young people I have spoken to who do not use the excuse of "I carry a gun/knife for personal protection".'*

The flurry of shootings of younger teenagers in London and Manchester during late January and February 2007, prompted some speculation (and some anecdotal evidence) that police enforcement action had been effective in discouraging gun carrying by police-targeted gang-related offenders, but that these offenders, in order to keep their weapons close at hand – as protection - were entrusting them to even younger gang members (and girlfriends) not similarly targeted by the police. Lethal weapons in ever younger and more immature hands appear a fatal combination, although more research is necessary in order to assess the extent to which this may be a form of crime displacement consequent upon effective police targeting of gang leaders.

Finally, police or criminal justice system interventions were also acknowledged as playing some part in the fuelling of gang conflicts in other ways. The arrest and detention of key gang members might create so-called 'power vacuums' leading remaining gang members and their rivals to contest for status and power. On the other hand, the release of gang members from prison could lead to them seeking to re-establish their former status and authority in the community.

*Power vacuums can create conflict and disputes, for instance if a prominent gang member gets arrested this can result in a power vacuum with a number of other gang members fighting to take over his place and all that went with it. Or, when a gang member is released from custody there can be trouble as this person may want to reclaim the position they occupied before.*

### **Stopping people accessing and carrying guns**

The next question in our survey sought to directly address the themes arising in our preceding discussion. For, if routine gun carrying by offenders was seen as such an important driver of rates of gun violence, then influencing people's decisions about carrying weapons could be very important in reducing the frequency of incidents. We asked our police respondents how they thought that demand for guns and gun possession, carriage and use might be influenced. The overall results from this section of the survey can be seen in the following diagram. It is immediately apparent that although many officers were willing to venture an opinion on what might be effective – and that these opinions corresponded fairly closely to earlier views regarding their aggregated understandings of the causes of gun crime and how it might be prevented, there were still some who suggested that, ultimately, all gun crime could not be prevented.

Thus, five of our respondents made points similar to the following: *'guns will always be available to anyone with the money and the contacts to purchase*

*one,' or, likewise, 'this [complete prevention] is impossible, where there is a demand, there will be a supply.'*

On a more positive note, over half of our respondents saw some potential in better regulation of illegal firearm trafficking, more effective enforcement action, better police intelligence development and tougher sentencing, a familiar range of responses we have seen articulated earlier in this survey analysis. Thus, reducing the overall pool of weapons available to offenders was seen as critical:

*Greater control of our borders to prevent the illegal importation of firearms is a main starting point and a period of draconian sentencing for those found guilty of importation and possession of illegal firearms.*

Although another respondent, reflecting perhaps a growing lobby of opinion concerned about UK 'border security' felt that existing controls on trafficking were rather inadequate.

*Despite the fact that we are an island, due to European rules this country has totally ineffective and inadequate border controls – the one way to address the flow of guns into this country is through effective border policing.*

There were familiar comments about the need for more robust enforcement action and tougher sentencing:

### **How to stop people accessing and carrying guns**

*Penalties for possession and use of firearms need to be draconian and seen to be used so as to deter others.*

*We should have a zero tolerance of guns and anyone caught with one should expect a really heavy sentence*

*There should be life sentences for anyone caught in criminal possession of any firearm, ammo. or component part.*

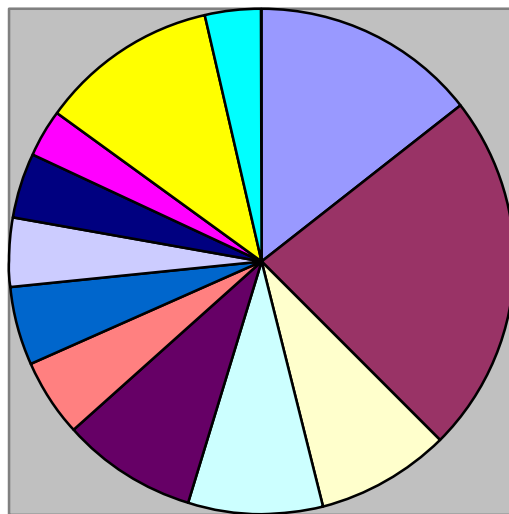
*Much longer custodial sentences for the importation and supply of any and all guns would affect the access to guns.*

While a number of respondents suggested more technological or intelligence development ideas.

*We should publicise the forensic technology we have so that offenders know there is a good chance that if they use a gun it will be traced back to them*

*All weapons should be given a serial number when it is manufactured, marked on it at the production stage so a weapon can be traced more easily*

*Police officers should carry weapon detecting wands.*



- Prevent trafficking
- Tougher sentencing
- Better enforcement
- Better intelligence
- Education and training
- Parent, community partnerships
- Prohibit all guns
- Inform about consequences
- Alternative options
- Targeting 'at risk' groups
- Others
- You can't

There were suggestions about further legal regulation of the gun supply, not just relating to the already prohibited (since 1998) handguns but also shotguns and tougher restrictions on the availability and distribution of shotguns, rifles, air weapons and even BB guns and replica weapons (the latter seen as 'entry-level' firearms for younger 'wannabe' gang members):

*One concern, here, is the ease with which air weapons and BB guns are available as introductions to weapons.*

*The sale of deactivated and imitation firearms should be banned and criminalised in any circumstances excluding the theatre or other licensed users*

*Individuals shouldn't have guns for themselves. They should all be banned and any guns kept in secure armouries and then only taken out on a daily basis by appropriate people such as farmers.*

Other suggestions included attempts to reduce the glamour associated with the gun and gang lifestyle and, as we have seen already, education projects to remind young people of the consequences of firearm misuse. Thus, 'we need to de-glamorise the carrying and use of firearms,' and:

*Tarnish the glamour of guns, and make it unattractive (by long sentences) and dangerous (by the risk of being caught, or worse)*

*There should be more media publicity for prevention, like showing where gun use goes wrong – the picture of the young girl shot in the West Midlands in a drive-by shooting was highly effective.*

On the other side of the issue, police respondents still advocated educational and community oriented initiatives to try to impact upon young people's willingness to carry firearms.

*There needs to be more work and more resources for education and opportunities, tackling underachievement and discrimination especially in black communities*

*[We need to develop] education and training opportunities, if necessary out of and away from the area where the gangs operate.*

However there seemed little enthusiasm for any more gun amnesties amongst our police respondents: 'Amnesties do not appear to work and logic says that criminals who feel they need a gun in order to operate, will not hand over their illegally held weapons. Instead we get uncle Bill's deactivated Luger, brought back from WW2'.

Overall therefore, the majority of the responses we obtained from our police sample for dealing with the issue of illegal gun carrying involved tougher laws, more effective enforcement, and more robust sentencing. One final comment reflects the general flavour of these suggestions: 'I believe it is time that a harder, less tolerant approach was adopted and the difference between 'right' and 'wrong' was forcibly asserted.' Judging by a recent editorial comment in the *Daily Telegraph* which drew upon an opinion piece by the Chief Constable of Merseyside Police, ('Get tough on gun crime – not its causes' : 26.02.07) this is an approach destined to find favour in many circles.



That said, many of our police respondents were far from unwilling to consider ways of offering young people a 'way out' of their current involvements with gun and gang related criminal activity.

### **Offering young people a way out**

As the following diagram details the balance of responses to this theme in our survey clearly focussed upon education, alternatives and diversion, employment and opportunity creation, and relocation and resettlement (the latter, in this case, compulsory, relocation also being a feature of the Merseyside Chief Constable's plan for tackling urban gangs and the 'wall of silence' said to surround their activities (Hogan-Howe, 2007). Taken together the four suggested strategies amounted to over two thirds of our sample's suggestions for helping young people escape the gun and gang culture.

The following comments on this theme were fairly typical:

*These young people need increased opportunities to develop themselves though education and legitimate activities. This can only be achieved through better opportunities in education, training and employment.*

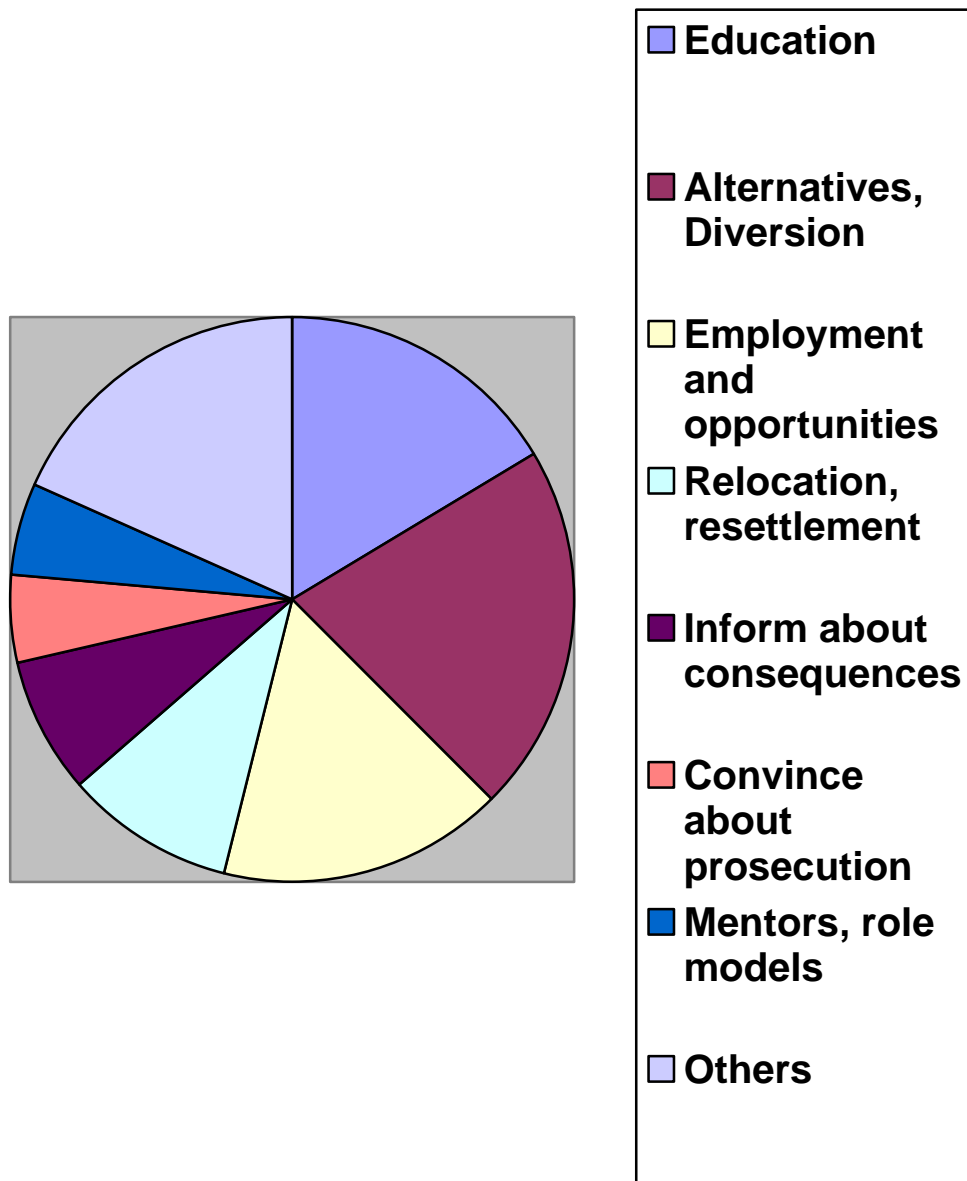
*There needs to be greater educational and employment opportunities for those at risk of this, with an emphasis on social inclusion and services and better opportunities at an earlier stage.*

### **How to offer 'youngsters' a way out of their current involvement in gun and gang crime activity**

Other respondents argued about the need for a broader and deeper cultural change affecting the lives of young people, especially back and mixed race younger people in the poorer areas of the city. It was acknowledged that strategies of this scale and ambition were unlikely to deliver change quickly.

*First the culture must be changed, giving these supposed gang members more opportunities and a direction in life – either through education or other measures to address their situations.*

*There needs to be a more fundamental change in our culture in all respects. There need to be greater and more realistic opportunities for youngsters to lead normal and law-abiding lives. Throwing money at problem areas and places is a short term and counter productive measure for changing cultures and attitudes. Educating youngsters (long term) to the downside of gun and gang cultures needs to be a priority, but do not expect immediate results.*



*There should be more projects in the community that target potential 'gang members' at a young age and work with them to help them find jobs and college places to get an education or acquire a skill so they don't get bored and end up getting involved in gangs. Maybe even they could be offered a move out of the problem area.*

Changing an entire culture involves a fairly considerable (doubtfully achievable) undertaking so significantly more of our respondents suggested strategies to educate, divert or otherwise provide alternatives for young people, either to get them away from the gang culture or in order to

encourage them to reject it. As one respondent commented however these 'diversionary opportunities' needed to be 'seen to be 'cool' by the young people, or they would not be interested in them.

*Youngsters need to be given positive role models that will attract them away from the gun and gang culture.*

*Providing education and employment alternatives that are attractive and worthwhile to show them there are other better ways.*

*They need to have their eyes opened, like opportunities to go on courses or trips away from inner city Manchester, so they can see there are lots of other things to be and to do than live their lives in the gang culture.*

*They need to be educated to see the effect of such activities on themselves and their families and there has to be assistance with alternatives such as training, housing... and trying to remove the kudos associated with gang membership.*

*There need to be firearms amnesties like the GMP's current gun hand in along with other group social activities that give them the same type of 'buzz' that running with a gang gives.*

However there was also a recognition that, by the time the rising generation had reached their teenage years, it was often too late to have much impact upon the socialisation of the young people.

*By the time they are teenagers it is often too late, there should be activities and opportunities available to them from a very early age to help deter them getting involved in the first place.*

*People involved in gun and gang crime are at the most violent edge of criminality, even at ages as young as 13-15 years old. Their parents need to be better role models, we need to find ways of getting to them (schools, youth clubs etc.) before they get to this age or it is too late.*

Early intervention inevitably entailed attention to the family backgrounds of the young people, parenting practices and school attendances. Our respondents had different kinds of approaches to these issues.

*There has to be continuous support available, particularly targeting the parents, especially the mothers.*

*Agencies need to look at bad parenting and to intervene much quicker and more effectively when children are being influenced in their developmental years by parents who are criminals or by parents who simply don't care or don't have the social or morals skills to care effectively. [They also] need to take rapid action to stem the rising tide of truancy which often leads to crime.*

*There is already a way out for young people and it is called 'inclusion' and starts at an early age at school.*

*Some of it is down to the parents showing a little more interest in the youths themselves.*

Respondents argued for a combination of measures that gave young people opportunities to extricate themselves from the gang lifestyle this involved both making the gang lifestyle less attractive or sustainable and, at the same time, making the alternatives to it viable and, especially, credible to the young people themselves.

*The pack mentality must be broken down so that youngsters feel safe and secure not being part of a gang. Once this has been done, diversionary activities can then be offered.*

*Young people will be reluctant to take a 'way out' which is not seen as 'street credible'. It is the underlying causes of gun culture that need to be addressed such as the addictions that require money (such as drugs, alcohol and gambling). If young people did not need £100 a day to feed a drug or alcohol addiction they would not commit the amount of gun crime they do in order to acquire larger than usual amounts of cash or cash convertible items. ... Gang culture is harder to crack because they are social activities where large numbers of people 'gang' together for support and commit crime to boost bravado.*

*They need to feel part of something that is as tempting as a gang or as easy as committing crime to make money. Perhaps some kind of group where, if they put the work in, there are rewards to follow.*

Tackling the lure of the gang, therefore, involved work on a number of fronts including enforcement to tackle the senior gang members holding influence over their junior and less experienced peers – as well as relocation opportunities to allow former gang members to thoroughly escape their former lives.

*There have to be viable alternatives to involvement in gun and gang crime. When a person sees a criminal having the sort of lifestyle that they are never likely to have themselves, there will always be those who are prepared to take the risks associated with gun and gang crime. We need to ostracise the gang leaders ... we need someone to work to prevent youngsters from joining gangs and to have a contact if they want to get out of the gang. Many ex-gang members may also need help in breaking contact with the area in order to start again.*

*There need to be residential education schemes and placements to try and remove them totally from the gang environment, including rehousing and relocation.*

*We need to find ways of letting young men get out from the grip of the gang culture, without the fear of reprisals.*

*We should be able to ensure the effective resettlement or rehabilitation of those currently engaged in gangs.*

*They need to be able to get away from the influence of the gangs, new places to live, relocation, that sort of thing.*

As we have seen before, there were also a number of suggestions about the need to impress upon young gang members the kinds of risks they were running – both in terms of the risk of serious injury or even death that they faced, the risks associated with imprisonment and, more generally, the restricted life opportunities that persistent criminality could involve.

*They need to be made aware of the likelihood of them suffering serious harm, if they go around with guns, it must be explained to them.*

*We have to show them it is a worthless pursuit and a poor excuse for a life. And show the misery that murder and violent crime causes.*

*We need to instill fear in those carrying the firearms that they will be caught, prosecuted and will face long sentences.*

*We should be going into schools to show young people about guns and the damage they cause... And telling them about the law surrounding the carrying and use of guns, and the punishments for gun crime.*

*We could introduce into schools reformed gang members or, possibly, those serving long prison sentences – to explain the pit-falls and their bad experiences of this form of life.*

However, as we have seen already, not every respondent shared this idea of using reformed or former gang members in this advisory or mentoring capacity.

Finally, in this section of the survey, we return to a theme that we have noted before, this involved the need to develop inroads to the community to improve community confidence in the police and open up channels of communication necessary to effective policing. We encounter this issue later in the discussion of specific victim and witness support issues. Here however it simply emerges as an expression of the need to do 'something' to tackle the perceived 'wall of silence' that police officers claim to face when trying to investigate gang related activity.

*We need to do something about the 'barrier of silence' the idea, and the common practice amongst their peers and families that they do not want to tell the police... this and the fear. In both cases it is only support and involvement that will help prevent somebody from becoming involved in gun crime.*

This is a topical issue also insofar as proposals to this effect – even going further - to the extent of attempting ‘break up’ criminal communities by housing evictions and relocations and using ‘ASBO type powers to impose strict conditions on known gang members’ and their families has recently been advocated by Merseyside’s Chief Constable in an article for the Daily Telegraph (Hogan-Howe, 2007).

### **Overcoming the main barriers to tackling gun crime effectively**

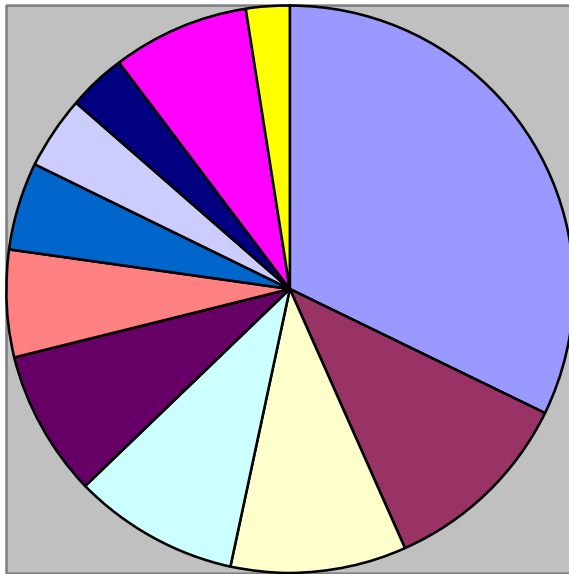
As the final comment above makes clear, our police respondents clearly perceived they faced substantial difficulties in tackling Greater Manchester’s gun and gang related problems by virtue of the more generic problems they encountered in their relationships with the most seriously affected communities. This view is clearly underpinned by the answers to our question about the barriers blocking the development of more effective strategies for dealing with gangs. As the following diagram shows, almost two-thirds of the comments we obtained from our sample cited non-co-operation, fear, distrust of the police or intimidation by offenders as their major concerns here. Such problems also translated into difficulties for the police in intelligence development and were compounded by a police failure to understand gangs and communities, and perceived divisions and tensions within communities. Other problems cited by the police concerned the involved the attitudes of the youth themselves, insufficiently robust policing methods, inadequate legislation and weaknesses in the criminal justice system.

### **Main barriers to policing gang and gun crime - how can these be overcome ?**

One respondent summarised almost all of these problems in a single comment:

*The police have a very poor reputation amongst many of the communities most affected by this and people will not come forwards for fear of retribution. So the criminals feel above the law and know that even if they are arrested they can get away on technicalities. Even if they are imprisoned they can see it as an occupational hazard but they can still continue with their associations (and if they have status, continue giving out orders) whilst in prison.*

However, taking each element in turn, it is clear that many officers acknowledged the problem that the very communities which were most frequently victimised by the gun and gang problems were those which were also least likely to have good working relationships with the police. Unfortunately, recognising an issue is not necessarily the same as taking responsibility for it or being in a position to do something about it.



- Non-cooperation or fear
- Lack of police intelligence
- Distrust of police
- Shortage of police resources
- Witness intimidation
- Youth/gang attitudes
- Insufficiently robust policing
- Lack of understanding of gang culture
- Community divisions
- CJS too weak
- New laws needed

*The communities that are more usually involved are also the communities with an inherent mistrust of police and policing tactics, barriers need to be broken down by improving mutual understanding and community involvement.*

*It is to do with the non-co-operation from the community – either through the fear of intimidation or a lack of confidence in the police.*

*Community fear is the main thing. Witnesses will not give evidence and those with any information fear the gangs more than they fear the legal system*

*The real problem is the combination of resistance and fear amongst communities*

*Fear and intimidation of witnesses and the social acceptance by some communities of firearms are the main problems.*

*Some community members are very reluctant to report anything, or have any dealings with the police.*

Lacking good police/community relationships hampered police responses to gang and gun crime, both in terms of evidence gathering and intelligence development. For example,

*Fear of reprisals in the community means that people are unwilling to come forwards with information.*

And more generally,

*Non-co-operation with the police by communities when gun/gang crime occurs is bred through fear or intimidation.*

And likewise those with possibly the most information to give were often the people with the least favourable relationships with the police. Perhaps it goes without saying but undertaking 'intelligence led policing' in conditions of information scarcity raises important questions about the sources of information, its accuracy and its utility in policing operations. These problems were acknowledged by our police respondents but officers seldom went on to consider the implications of this for the picture of gun and gang crime they had.

*The people who could give vital information about these crimes have no trust in the police, so we need to get more involved with gangs and try to work with them and maybe having a stronger police presence on the streets would help, with more PCSOs in the communities.*

*We are really short on good intelligence sources close to the offenders and meaningful continuous community intelligence by way of local, independently organised, whistleblowing.*



*We have a real intelligence gap, so need to develop our sources through additional funding and enhanced use of provisions for immunity from prosecution and robust witness protection schemes providing confidence in the community to provide information to the police.*

*There needs to be a greater emphasis on intelligence gathering to get a better understanding of gangs and a profile of their activities.*

This 'intelligence gap' also extended to police knowledge about the number of illegal firearms in circulation and accessible by offenders: *'it is difficult to know how many guns are in circulation out there, there is a lack of some basic intelligence on the problem.'*

One particularly important dimension of this 'lack of connection' between the police (and wider crime reduction partners) and the community concerned support and wider provisions for witnesses. This is an issue that has surfaced in earlier commentaries of tackling gun crime, whilst police commentators have often remarked upon the difficulty of securing witnesses for all the reasons we have referred to earlier (Brown, 2003). This was identified as a weakness facing the whole criminal justice system.

*The criminal justice system goes nowhere near enough to meeting the needs of witnesses in cases like this.*

*People here are not confident that the authorities can support them if they become a witness.*

On the other hand, one respondent noted that provisions for witnesses did give rise to dilemmas within the criminal justice process. Although the suggestion was made that the rights of the victimised community deserved higher priority:

*There are problems with granting witnesses anonymity, ... because the rights of the defendant are clear but this must be balanced against the rights of the community to be protected against this sort of criminality.*

A colleague was rather more forthright,

*We have a skewed interpretation of the 'Human Rights Act' giving a leaning towards the criminal's rights over the rights of victims and public large, leading to a lack of public confidence in the police and other agencies to be able to deal with the problem and protect the public.*

By contrast some respondents referred to gun crime and gang related criminal activity flourishing because of a seeming failure on the part of the police to prioritise the more routine forms of criminality with which it was often seen to be associated. This involved the suggestion that police managers should take a rather more strategic approach to the gun and gang problem.

*Many of the criminal activities that are gang related are not usually policing priorities. Drug dealing, prostitution, racketeering are not areas that we are heavily targeted on routinely. An increase in police resources here would be required to impact these activities, and these crimes are the stem of the problem.*

*Criminal activities that routinely finance the gang culture are not recognised as policing priorities – so there needs to be an identification and prioritised enforcement against certain types of criminal activity like drug distribution, prostitution, protection rackets and excise evasion.*

A simpler and more direct observation made by other officers concerned the resourcing of police initiatives against gangs. As one respondent noted,

*We lack the resources for extended targeting of the gangs. The gangs exist and at the moment the law enforcement agencies tend to deal with individual aspects rather than the problems as a whole. There was, as another respondent noted, 'a seeming reluctance to go at the problem really hard.'*

This resourcing question was also identified as a specific issue in relation to the targeting of younger 'at risk' offenders. It was suggested that *'there need to be more dedicated police officers and an increase in the numbers of officers working on this. There is a lack of police officers specialising in youth based projects.'*

Other comments by respondents also approaching the issue, 'laterally' and 'more strategically' referred to tackling the wider illegal markets with which gang activity was often associated and addressing the financial rewards that these activities threw up and which, in turn, underpinned the attractiveness and durability of gang networks. So, it was suggested,

*The biggest barrier to policing the gun and gang culture is the reluctance to look at the problem as a complex and long term issue and thus to make an effort to understand the root causes of gun and gang criminality. Almost without exception, gang members and gang members who use guns also use illegal narcotics and alcohol. Without narcotics being so abundantly available, guns would not be a requirement and perhaps the anti-social and criminal activity of gang affiliation would not look nearly so attractive.*

*We need to stop making crime a realistic career for criminals so we need an effective agency to really go after criminals and their wealth. They need to see a real chance of getting caught and convicted. At the moment even if they are convicted then short sentences are the norm.*

Such suggestions about the need for a more strategic approach to the areas of criminal activity which were associated with firearms overlapped with the themes arising in our next issue, what could be done to prevent offenders gaining such seemingly ready access to firearms when the UK already has what has often been claimed to be one of the most restrictive gun control regimes in the world (Squires, 2000). That said, of course, one of the points

we have already sought to note has been the uniquely 'mixed' economy of firearms (from replica, realistic air weapon, blank-firer, conversion, reactivation, all the way to modern semi-automatic pistols) comprising Britain's illegal gun supply (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006a)).

### **Perceptions of the effectiveness of the legislation surrounding the use and control of firearms**

Five main areas of comment surfaced in respect of the police respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of British firearms control legislation. The largest group (refer to the diagram which follows for the relative proportions) considered the legislation itself, as it stood, generally satisfactory. although a roughly equal number felt that the sentencing powers available to or utilised by the courts were inadequate. A third group believed the existing firearm legislation to be inadequate for a variety of reasons, a fourth group were critical of criminal justice processes and procedures, a fifth group referred to specific 'loopholes' within the firearms control legislation. A final cluster of comments were made mostly relating to questions of policing policy and practice. The following discussion will seek to illustrate these areas of perception shared by our respondents.

Regarding the adequacy of the primary firearms legislation itself, a significant number of our respondents phrased their answers in the following fashion, that 'the basic legislation was satisfactory, but'. The following comments are fairly typical of this.

*The legislation is fine but it is hard to manage unlawful use and possession.*

*On the face of it the legislation looks strong, but in practical terms it is ineffective because offenders are often back out on the street in no time at all.*

*The legislation isn't the problem, it is obtaining the evidence against the perpetrators and the immense difficulties in prosecuting them.*

*The legislation is well set out. The only thing is to consider life without parole for possessing a gun or guns.*

*The firearms legislation is sufficient, however firearms are still easily obtained with the availability from Eastern block countries(sic).*

*The legislation is fine, but the sentences do not seem to provide enough deterrent to divert others.*

### **The effectiveness of the legislation surrounding the use and control of firearms**

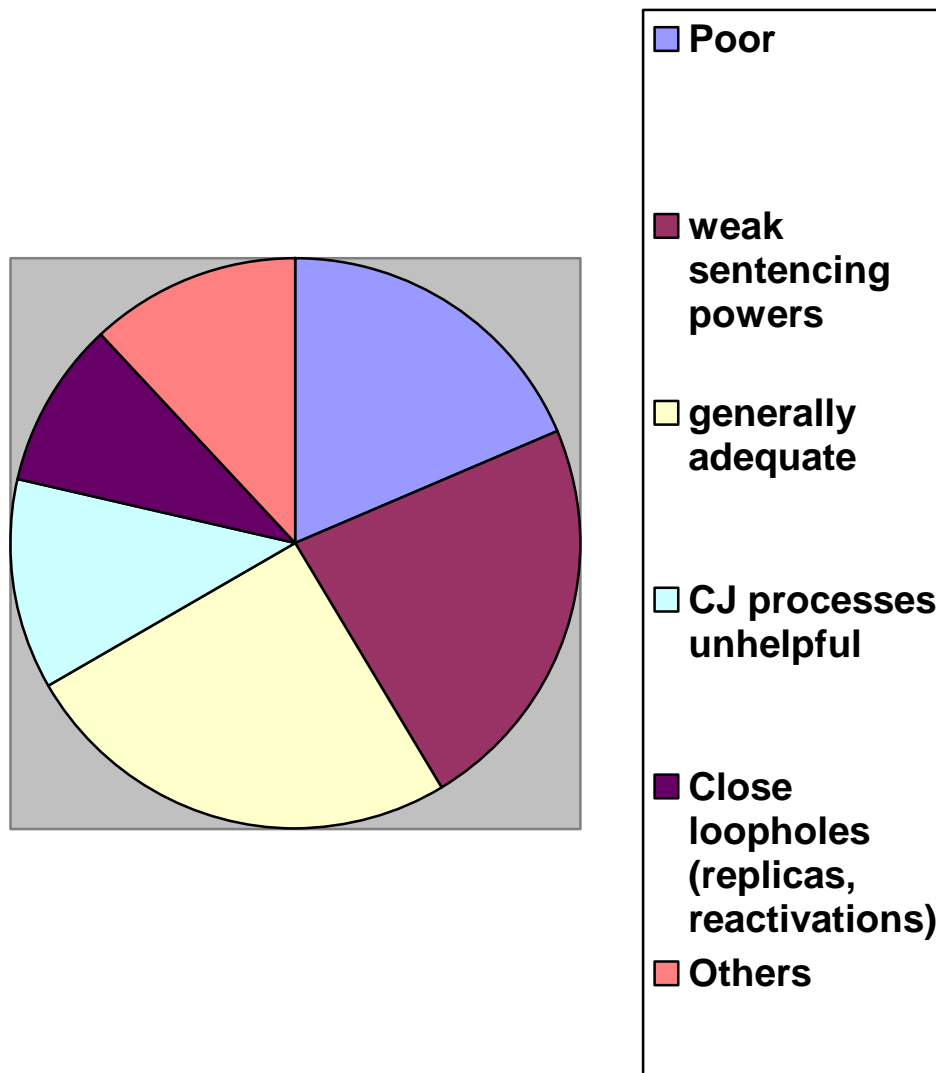
As each of the above comments has indicated, a significant number of our respondents felt the legislation to control firearms in the UK to be relatively

satisfactory, although they were not so happy with other aspects of the enforcement or sentencing processes. Prominent amongst the issues complained about were the sentencing practices of the courts. As one respondent noted: *'the legislation is there, the sentencing isn't.'* Others added:

*Sentencing for possession can be inadequate and sentencing powers need to be stronger.*

*Sentencing for more minor offences (possession) is often derisory and does not provide an adequate deterrent*

*Criminals and gang members will always use firearms no matter what the law says. Stiffer sentences may deter some and those convicted should face stiffer sentences.*



*It is not so much the legislation relating to firearms but more the sentencing powers that lets it down. We need to enforce longer sentences for firearms offences to deter people. I also think the legislation regarding air weapons should be tougher as I think this is a danger that needs to be managed more effectively.*

*The legislation is OK but the sentencing needs to be more robust.*

*The legislation is fine, it is just that using prison and being arrested as a deterrent is not enough to the people concerned*

*It is clearly not working but the real weakness lies in sentencing policy.*

In the above comments it is already possible to see some of the ways in which perceived loopholes in the legislation and aspects of enforcement practice and, not least, sentencing powers were considered inadequate by our respondents. In addition to the sentencing options relating to air weapons, mentioned above, commentators referred especially to what we have earlier described as the complex 'mixed economy' of firearm supply in the UK, making suggestions for the tighter regulation of many of these supply sources. It should be noted, in passing, that the survey being reported on here was undertaken prior to the introduction of the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 which has addressed a number of the 'loopholes' referred to here.

Importation of deactivated weapons was a particular cause of concern particularly as there is evidence of some significant criminal importation of deactivated firearms which have been subsequently criminally reactivated and sold to offenders (Home office Memorandum to the Select Committee on Home Affairs, Session 1999-2000, Controls on Firearms: "of the firearms involved in the recent series of London shootings, some 30 per cent have been firearms which had been made inoperable through a process of de-activation but had subsequently been restored illegally to working order.").

Accordingly, as one of our respondents noted:

*Current legislation does not go far enough. Importation, sale and possession of deactivated weapons is still allowed and this provides a ready source of guns which can be reactivated with rudimentary skills and equipment.*

Legislative controls were also suggested for other types of weapons including replicas:

*The legislation could be stronger outlawing the sale of all weapons including, air weapons, imitations and BB type weapons*

*The legislation is adequate, the weak link is the courts and sentencing of persons involved in gang/gun crime. And consideration needs to be given to the regulations covering BB type weapons and air weapons*

*Access to imitations and air weapons is largely unregulated.*

*Far too many imitation firearms are available, particularly those that can be readily converted into working guns. We stopped genuine people owning handguns and yet we allow blank firing weapons, and imitations, many of which even the firearms officers cannot distinguish from the real thing, to be bought by almost anyone.*

*Our laws are fairly tough in this regard, but could be strengthened especially in relation to imitation firearms.*

However, as noted already the chief weaknesses with regard to the legislation were seen to concern the sentencing powers available to the courts.

*Criminal use of firearms should carry a mandatory life sentence and conspiracy to criminally use firearms should similarly carry a mandatory life sentence*

*A five year sentence for possession of firearms is not hard enough given that the rewards associated with a gang life far outweigh the penalties.*

*The legislation needs to be altered to increase sentencing for all aspects of firearm related offending – importation, selling, carrying, using in crime and so on. The public do not appear to have any faith in the justice system, and it is ridiculous that people get sentenced for a certain length of time and then are out of prison within a third of this time.*

*In my opinion issues surrounding effective sentencing are the main failings behind the legislation. Sentences for possession, importation, manufacture (including reactivation or deactivated firearms) and committing any offence with a firearm should carry the maximum sentence – this should be mandatory – not discretionary if the political will is to reduce gun crime.*

*It [the sentencing powers] is poor – legislation and sentencing options exist all the way up to life imprisonment but rarely seem to be applied by the judiciary, which again, leads to a lack of public confidence.*

Other respondents argued that irrespective of the adequacy of the gun control laws themselves there were a number of aspects of police procedure and enforcement practice which, at times, made it difficult to investigate firearms offences and construct winnable cases through evidence gathering powers. At one level, the suggestion was merely for the simplification and clarification of the law: *'the law on this overall could do with some simplification and clarification, or, 'there needs to be a review in terms of clarity of offence definitions and sentencing.'* Other respondents, however, went rather further to suggest critical changes to police powers and suspects' rights:

*As draconian as it may seem, the right to silence requires serious reconsideration by legislators, not only in relation to gun crime but all crime.*

On the face of it this may seem a strange comment in the light of the changes introduced to the 'right to silence' in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, although the comment is probably intended to imply that courts might make a stronger inference of guilt in the face of silence and a refusal to answer police questions during interviewing than is allowed in the 1994 legislation.

Another pertinent comment made by some respondents concerned the street level management, by the police, of firearm possession. As one respondent noted, *'the legislation is ineffective at the lower levels where the most damage occurs, for example, simple possession.'* Another noted, *'questions about the burden of prove often make it difficult to prove possession.'* This issue, however of 'simple possession' or 'minding an illegal firearm' (and the sentences relating thereto) is another issues addressed in the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006, sections 28-30).

A final area of concern for our police respondents concerned the systems of authorisation for the deployment of armed response officers at firearm incidents and in anticipation of firearm incidents. One officer made a point which is regularly made and, in the light of the British policing tradition, often controversial but a comment that, nevertheless, is often more frequently voiced, often in a tone of frustration by officers who have to deal regularly with firearms incidents.

*The system of 'firearms authorities' to allow firearms officers to attend incidents is beyond comprehension, and seems designed for only one reason: to keep them away from criminals with guns. I have worked in a situation where every officer has a firearm, and it is by far the better system, allowing flexibility and officer safety. It is nonsense and insulting, to say that every officer cannot be trained to carry a gun, and why does Great Britain think it is the only country to have got this right?*

A similar point related to police perceptions relating to the limited availability and 'restricted' deployment of authorised firearms officers:

*There should be more available armed officers and a more flexible and robust approach to the execution of firearms warrants. We need to act upon intelligence relating to the possession of firearms, but at present the administration and rules mean that it is often not worth the effort in applying for a firearms authority that will almost certainly be refused.*

Likewise another respondent noted, *'legislation doesn't go far enough, in particular regarding police powers in attending firearms incident situations. 'firearms authorisation' should be more readily issued.'* And likewise: *'our use of the ARVs is far too slow and bureaucratic requiring authorisation at too high a level.'* In turn, the limited availability and restricted deployment of armed officers or armed response vehicles was said to embolden offenders who were (it was suggested) confident that they would not encounter, or be confronted by, armed officers. *'At the moment [offenders] see crime as worth*

*the risk and with the police not being armed in Britain there is almost no chance of meeting an armed officer when carrying guns.'*

By way of concluding our discussion of this section of the survey, it is worth noting that a limited number of comments related to the essential difficulty of regulating the criminal supply of (any) illegal commodities. Respondents noted that laws tend, anyway, to have most impact upon the law abiding while one comment returned to the criticisms made of the gun control regime established in the UK after 1997 which, it was suggested, could never be wholly successful because: *'legislation will never stop the black market. The only people feeling the effects of the legislation are those honest gun owners who abide by the law.'*

### **Extra resources for policing initiatives**

The final two themes of our survey entailed asking respondents what, if they were to be given additional resources for tackling gang related gun crime, they would choose to prioritise. It must be remembered that we asked this question of officers and analysts of the Greater Manchester Police, so this represents a very particular sample of views, but we did ask respondents to specify both 'policing' and 'non-policing' priorities.

As the diagram shows, when asked about policing priorities just over half of our respondents identified a need for special anti-gang task forces and specialist firearms units, more targeted operations against gang activity and more investment in intelligence development. However almost a quarter of the responses were keen to specify that they thought any additional resourcing should go to the separate GMP Divisions (rather than headquarters based operations) and used to augment 'divisional activities', 'frontline detective work' or the provision of more armed response units. Respondents advocating more divisional resourcing made comments such as the following:

*[We should] have dedicated units to deal with gangs. These should work locally (and not from HQ) and have a patrolling element. Gang members who do not engage should be rigorously targeted until they do engage.*

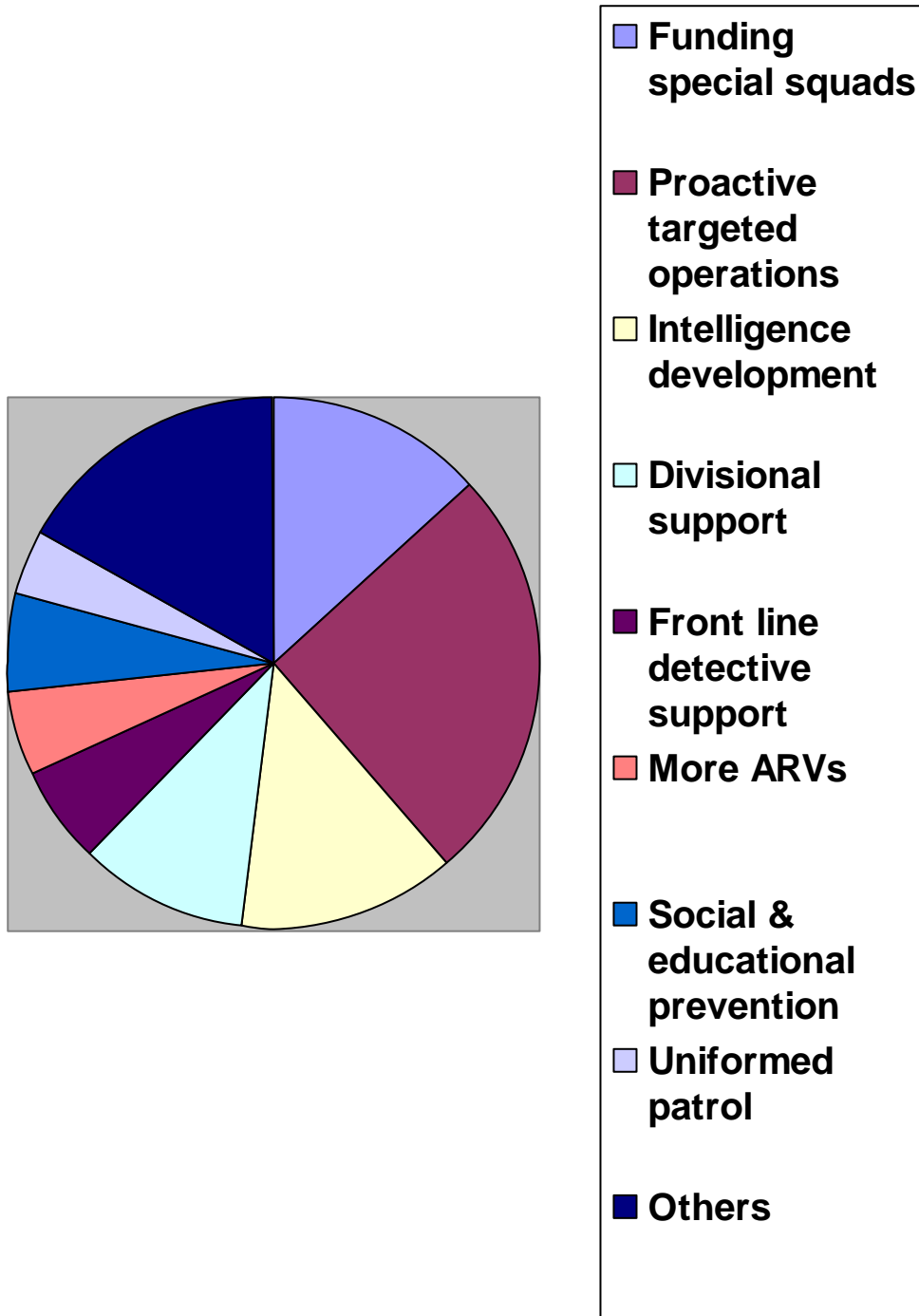
*There needs to be more frontline dedicated staff on divisions, not central squads.*

### **Utilising Extra resources for policing priorities**

*Any extra resources should be allocated to prevention and enforcement, not only through the specialist units but to divisions for local initiatives targeting, in particular, the supply of controlled drugs and the investigation and prevention of gun-enabled crime such as cash in transit and commercial armed robbery.*



Yet just as some respondents advocated more resourcing for the local GMP divisions, others advocated strengthening a more specialised central intelligence capacity



*The funding would be well spent if it went to specialist units around the force area who researched and analysed purely gun and gang culture issues and whose proactive arm was equipped and supported from the highest levels*

*(not divisional resources) to tackle the underlying causes such as drugs, alcohol, social exclusion etc..*

*Another respondent added,*

*We need a specialist gang unit that works purely on disrupting and preventing gang activity. Currently Xcalibre has too many other commitments.*

Other suggestions included a variety of intensive community policing activities: extensive use of stop and search, reassurance and high-profile saturation policing initiatives.

*Running 'Beat Sweep' style operations across Moss Side targeting offences across the board in conjunction with partner agencies, followed by a street level up approach targeting gang members.*

*There needs to be more officers deployed on the streets as a high profile presence in the areas plagued by this type of crime. Gang members may curb their activities under the watchful eyes of more patrols as the fear of being caught may outweigh the risk of committing crime. This has been proved to work in other areas as key offenders have moved out of the areas concerned.*

*Increase the numbers of armed patrols in gang areas. It has already been shown to reduce crime when used in the aftermath of gang related shootings. Send armed patrols directly to all armed crimes, to let criminals know that there is a good chance they will meet an armed police officer if they carry firearms.*

The possibility that the intensive policing of known gang areas – if successful - might simply displace gang activities to other areas was not raised or foreseen as an issue. Other respondents, however, saw it as essential to conduct such local operations in conjunction with partners and, so far as possible, with the community.

*There needs to be a twofold approach promoting enhanced community engagement combined with a major push to arrest and prosecute key targets in the gangs. This should be targeted at some of the older gang members who appear to have made it.*

*A combination of more alternatives, projects with social prevention and schemes providing opportunities along with more disruption and enforcement operations for those who persist.*

*It needs the improvement of youth services [in key areas] and an increase in the numbers of interested and dedicated police officers to these areas for the foreseeable future.*

Rather like the last comment, even though the question posed specifically asked about policing priorities, a number of our respondents stressed community and social prevention initiatives as their foremost priority. Thus there were suggestions for: *'community engaged activities to generate understanding of causation factors and solutions,'* and *'more projects identified by and developed within the communities most affected by the problems of gun and gang crime.'* Similarly,

*We need to be able to get a proper idea of why young people get involved in the gun and gang culture, there needs to be more projects getting to grips with it and tackling the reasons behind the problems.*

And, likewise, it was suggested that extra resources should be used to, *'to fund community initiatives to support better education and creating opportunities and employment prospects.'* Another added, there should be more *'education projects in schools aiming to target the age groups susceptible to the gang influences and then doing guns and drugs awareness. We also need to work more with the communities themselves to see what they regard as the ways forward.'*

We have already noted an underlying police concern about the shortage of information resources in the most affected communities and the consequent 'intelligence gaps' facing them. While the community initiatives referred to already could undoubtedly contribute to the cultivation of intelligence sources, a number of our respondents specifically saw intelligence development as a priority call on any additional resources that might become available. Priorities were identified as *'intelligence led operations to seize firearms and arrest key offenders,'* and *'improved surveillance and evidence gathering against gang members leading to prosecutions.'* Similarly, it was suggested that GMP should *'invest more on increased intelligence and to proactive work around 'chasing down' where guns are kept.'* Other respondents referred to a broader targeted multi-agency policing agenda:

*Use [additional resources] to gain intelligence to target key gang members, and we need a dedicated unit to target intervention points within criminal networks. Target initially the organised gangs. The unit should work in close liaison with other agencies , eg. customs and excise.*

This could also involve the deployment of new specialist staff and/or the purchase of additional surveillance technology. Thus, extra resources should go on the,

*recruitment of dedicated staff to undermine gang activity and the use of innovative recording techniques to recover evidence and intelligence, including the purchasing of technology to provide enforcement and intelligence opportunities.*

*There should be CCTV in firearm hotspots, perhaps with some sort of sound source detection system so that immediately after an incident the camera could turn automatically to capture the offenders.*

Other proposals included the need to establish '*effective guns and gangs intelligence cells*' that could support the identification of '*problem profiles and the make up of gangs, to identify the market profiles of the gangs and target their money laundering outlets and then confiscating the assets of known gang members.*' Another respondent proposed '*special units to identify and target gang members and develop intelligence about those possessing firearms and then proactively tackling those suspected of either gang affiliations or in possession of guns.*'

There were a number of similar suggestions for intelligence development, proactive enforcement and targeted anti-gang operations. These were either intended to tackle armed gang operations directly by reference to their areas of criminal activity, or to focus upon the issue of firearm supply or finally, to tackle gang profits via asset recovery procedures. Suggestions here included the need for more '*intelligence gathering exercises to make links between the criminals (drug dealing, robbery, vehicle crime, burglary) and the gangs they may or may not be working for,*' and, '*tackling the drug dealing that much of this crime stems from. Using covert opportunities to proactively investigate and prosecute offenders.*' Alternatively other respondents suggested a need to, '*improve intelligence gathering and conducting proactive operations into those who carry firearms or imitation firearms and, in particular, those who supply firearms.*' And finally, '*we need to strip the criminals of the wealth they have accrued from their crimes.*'

Amongst a range of 'other' proposals for tackling gang activity were a wide variety of suggestions for innovative, targeted, proactive and intelligence led enforcement operations against gangs and their areas of criminal activity. Such initiatives shared diverse goals including targeting ring leaders, diverting 'at risk' youth, containing or disrupting criminal activity, intercepting firearm supply and confiscating assets. Suggestions included:

*Sustained disruption by police, of the criminal activity funding the groups through additional funding of covert sources and proactive initiatives.*

*Extend the use of ASBOs to prevent identified gang members from associating in the areas where intelligence tells us the gangs are known to be active*

*Pro-active operations targeting the 'untouchable' gangsters. especially targeted operations against the key suspects, or ringleaders*

*More police interacting with youngsters at risk of becoming involved.*

*More focused operations on targeted individuals aiming to disrupt their activities.*

*More initiatives to tackle the importers or converters of firearms.*

## Extra resources for non-policing initiatives

The final section of the survey sought to ask our police respondents their views on other resourcing priorities. As the following diagram shows, four related suggestions accounted for almost three-quarters of the responses we received. These were proposals for: education, prevention and diversion initiatives, the establishment of training or employment opportunities, community based projects and the enhancement of facilities for youth.

Typical of these kinds of suggestions were a number which focussed upon broadly 'preventive' education for young people perceived to be 'at risk':

*Education and mentoring schemes with targeted youth... There needs to be more education – with an anti-gun message in the curriculum.*

*We should have better education projects and diversion schemes offering opportunities but at the same time these should also be trying to target the next generation of 'gangsters'.*

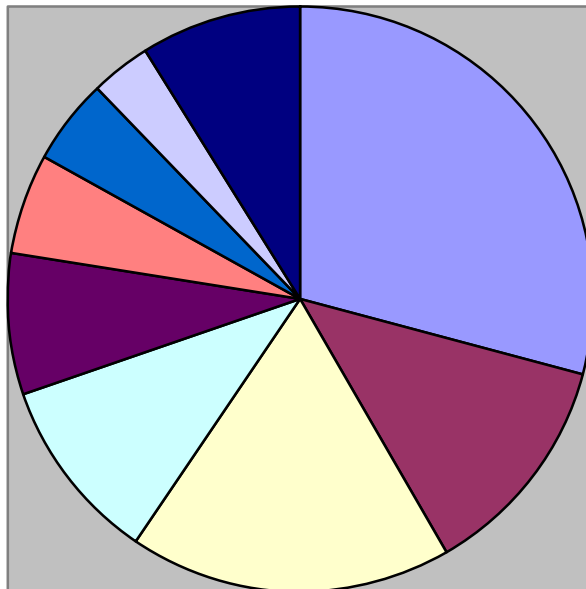
*There have to be ways of giving young people alternatives to the low level types of criminality that can draw them into gang lifestyles. So it has got to start with education and training opportunities.*

*Education and opportunities at an early stage in their lives, with an emphasis on breaking ties with gangs, and more emphasis on support services.*

*Better funding for education and local projects to help steer young people away from gang cultures.*

Implicit in such suggestions was an idea that the lure of 'gang life' could be countered by appropriate education, mentoring and diversion and that, without it, the attractions of gang involvement might prove insurmountable. In some senses this seems to imply that respondents considered existing educational provision was not capable of offering young people considered 'at risk' a meaningful way out of the gang lifestyle. A similar message was entailed in a second series of suggestions. This time however, interventions were seen to be necessary to engage those already being drawn into gang lifestyles. Respondents here argued for '*community outreach projects to work with young people before (or as soon as) they get involved in gangs.*'

Extra resources for non-policing initiatives ?



- Education, Prevention, Diversion
- Training, Job opportunities
- Anti-gun community projects
- Youth Clubs and facilities
- Media campaigns
- Target the next generation at risk
- Community mediation projects
- Witness protection schemes
- Other

Other suggestions here included proposals for *'activity groups and other projects to offer boys alternative and exciting things to do, with rewards for good behaviour like holidays and activities.'* A number of respondents made similar suggestions although such ideas were not universally popular with some respondents remarking upon the so-called 'treats for cheats' issue regarding such initiatives.

Such comments aside, a significant proportion of our respondents were convinced of the need to target diversion interventions at the group of young people whose activities were, to our respondents at least, already beginning to suggest some 'anti-social' potential, a group described as 'potential gang members' by another of our respondents.

*[We need to] invest in early intervention plans and programmes to manage those young males who show early indications of being drawn into low level criminality and then onto the serious crime and involvements of youth gang culture*

*Give the very young potential gang members (6-10) year olds other options. Perhaps link good behaviour of children to increased financial benefits to the parents.*

*Used for developing longer term prevention projects in schools, and in the areas where future gang members might be growing up.... There need to be more youth clubs, classes and activities to give young people some focus, or some hope.*

A next tier of 'community based' interventions were suggested in order to target those who may have had some gang involvements and were looking to get out. As we have already seen, opportunities to make a complete break with the gang lifestyle were seen as extremely important, but rather few and far between.

*[There needs to be] a group to work with gang members, to identify those who want out and to help them to do so. Give viable alternatives, to include training and realistic job opportunities, to those who are vulnerable to joining gangs. Work to encourage immigrant communities to integrate and stop the alienation of young males from these groups. People join gangs for a reason and we have to remove those reasons.*

Other respondents argued:

*[There have to be] rehousing and long term diversionary interventions, youth training schemes and work placements etc... finding employment opportunities for (ex-) gang members and education... To assist those who demonstrate that they wish to leave gang activity behind to develop a new life elsewhere.*

Furthermore interventions such as MMAGS (Manchester Multi-Agency Gang Strategy) were very positively viewed, *'there need to be more projects like*

*MMAGs which provide a multi-agency approach for targeting offenders' even though some respondents felt that policing interventions and social intervention strategies could only be effective working together. 'Only once the ring leaders have been arrested and imprisoned [can] targeted education and employment related programmes for other gang members be developed successfully.'*

Finally, a number of respondents referred once more to media led interventions which might, they suggested, seek to 'de-glamorise' the gang and gun lifestyle and begin to expose some of the real consequences (death, serious injury, imprisonment) of becoming involved in gun crime.

*There should be pressure on the media – the film industry and the music business - to de-glamourise gangs and guns.*

*The media should do more to make people more aware of the dangers of getting involved in guns and gangs instead of constantly glamorising the lifestyles of gangsters.*

*Give media publicity to the results of gun use, show victims and publicise dates when offenders can expect their earliest release dates (like 2030!)*

*[We should] use the media to show teenagers the real effects of gun crime and recruit media personalities to promote an 'uncool' tag to gang membership.*

And, last of all, our respondents did not overlook the deeper social contexts of gang activity and gun crime, arguing for a wider social and economic regeneration of opportunities in some of society's more deprived communities. This is 'a long term problem requiring culture change. In the short term perhaps [resources] could be used to help destroy the perceived images of gun and gang culture through community involvement.' But above all, 'there needs to be major regeneration in the areas where these problems exist to improve standards of living generally and in order to impact upon young people's self-esteem in a positive way.' In the longer term, it was argued, 'all members of the community and other agencies have a part to play in relation to education and providing better services to improve community spirit. [Including] encouraging younger people to take respect and pride in their communities, giving them some ownership and responsibility of those communities.'

Above all it cannot be said that our police respondents were short on ideas for tackling gang and gun related offending. Neither did they lack a commitment to addressing these issues. From the evidence reported here, from an admittedly relatively small survey, it is clear that these 'expert' police opinions tended, a good deal of the time, to cluster upon certain perceptions of the gun and gang crime problem whilst also leaning towards certain preferred strategies for dealing with it. However, it is equally clear that they did not always agree with one another and some significant disparities exist within the 'police point of view'. By way of conclusion we will attempt to draw out what



these areas of agreement are and what they might mean and what the chief disagreements have been, and what their significance might be.

## **Conclusion:**

### **Agreements and disagreements, meanings and significances.**

At the beginning of this project we made the point that the responses obtained by our survey reflected the views of a uniquely qualified group of key informants regarding the problems of gang and gun related crime in Manchester. For obvious reasons, the qualifications of this group derive from the fact that they, collectively, have to deal with – or ‘police’ – the problems arising from criminal gun usage and gang activity on a daily basis as part of their working lives. When we refer to ‘dealing with’ or ‘policing’ the problem(s) associated with gun crime we are referring to a range of activities (typical of contemporary policing) which will include such processes as: investigating, information and intelligence gathering, surveillance activities, arresting, case preparation, risk assessment, crime analysis, profiling, interviewing, operation planning, liaison, advice-giving, crime prevention planning, evidence presentation, and so on. Such a list is unlikely to exhaust the policing activities in question but it is from such a range of activities, undertaken in respect of a particular target group (gang-related, firearm-using offenders in the Manchester area) that the particular expertise and qualifications of our respondents derives.

That said, however, it will be immediately apparent that the adoption of a police perspective brings a very particular viewpoint and some fairly specific experiences to bear upon the issue of gun-related crime. In other words police expertise on this issue reflects a very particular point of view based upon some very obvious police organisational imperatives (and the roles that particular officers have to perform within these) as well as officers’ practical policing experiences. In simple terms, we could say that the police view derives from what they have had to do, the evidence collected and information gained, and officers’ own direct experiences and the ‘shared memory’ or their organisation (such as stories, anecdotes and jokes, as well as their training). It goes without saying, that this will be a necessarily selective view but that no-one else (no other professional group) is charged with the same very specific responsibilities shouldered by the police in respect of gang-related gun crime. On the other hand, whilst acknowledging that the police are likely have a very particular perspective on the question of gun crime, and that they will be privy to sources and types of information not generally available to members of the public, we would still accept that the police (especially in the UK, with its civilian and traditionally ‘consensual’ approach to policing) are not usefully seen as a distinct class apart or even that their attitudes to crime problems *in general* might be dramatically distinguished from those of an ‘informed’ public opinion.

Information exchange is said to work both ways, police are often valued insofar as they ‘reflect’ general public opinions and priorities and, post-

Scarman (1981), public 'consultation', multi-agency working and, later, the introduction of independent advisory groups (IAGs), has been seen as an important corrective to a purely police-led problem solving. At the same time, however, police officers are regularly reported as opinion leaders, even 'primary definers' (Hall et al., 1978) of social problems when crime questions are being discussed. They interpret problems, discern trends, impute motives and propose solutions (see for example the comments of the Chief Constable of Merseyside, Feb. 2007) so it is not unreasonable to assume that public perceptions of crime problems are to some degree influenced by police pronouncements. In this sense, it also seems fair to suggest that at least some of the 'public priority' afforded to given policing interventions is itself an indirect reflection of certain *a priori* police preferences. By such means consultation with the public may become a means of legitimating and reinforcing a police point of view.

From the point of view of our survey of police gun crime 'experts', however, two further related factors are important. The first concerns the role of 'police culture' itself in establishing and reinforcing a particular and privileged view of the 'truth' of contemporary gang related gun crime. The second concerns what we refer to as the 'intelligence construction cycle' by which certain conceptions of gun crime come to be operationalised, and used to inform policing interventions thereby generating more information (both evidence and intelligence) and, in the process, further validating certain preconceived conceptions of policing problems and the most effective means by which they might be tackled. These processes are reasonably well documented in sociological analyses of 'police culture' (Reiner, 2004; Fielding, 1994; Young, 1991) and are not necessarily confined to studies purely critical of police professionalism (Waddington 1999) such as was developed within the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. In the case of the latter, the Inquiry's conclusion that, incompetence alone could not explain the catalogue of failures displayed by the police when dealing with the incident, pointed to the need to consider other factors.

Mere incompetence cannot of itself account for the whole catalogue of failures, mistakes, misjudgements, and lack of direction and control which bedevilled the Stephen Lawrence investigation...in the actual investigation including the family's treatment at the hospital, the initial reaction to the victim and witness Duwayne Brooks, the family liaison, the failure of many officers to recognise Stephen's murder as a purely "*racially motivated*" crime, [and] the lack of urgency and commitment in some areas of the investigation. (Para 6.44-6.45)

The missing element, 'institutional racism', itself a product of police culture, supplies an important insight for our own study. The ability of police culture to supply the categories and assumptions which inform and sustain (sometimes in the face of contrary evidence) conceptions of certain types of offender, certain forms of criminality, certain patterns of influence or 'causation' whilst also reinforcing the merits of certain potential policing interventions and 'solutions', should not be underestimated. At the same time, as other commentators have noted, neither should it be regarded as a solid mass of

undifferentiated opinion (Holdaway, 1989) for, as the evidence we have already revealed has clearly shown, there appear significant variations of opinion and important disagreements between our police respondents in respect of their understandings of firearm related and gang related criminality. Within police culture, therefore and within the uniquely informed 'police point of view' on guns and gangs, we find both fluidity and difference as well as important areas of agreement and disagreement concerning the problems of gun and gang related criminality and how they might most appropriately be tackled.

On some occasions the differences amount to simple differences of approach in a wide menu of available policing responses (such as requests for more divisional detectives as opposed to more armed response units) at other times the differences expose fundamental (though not necessarily incompatible) differences in approach and at other times clusters of similar or related comments reveal other conceptions of the question. A first issue which, when discussing gang and gun crime, it is difficult to avoid involves the question of race. Here, to a degree at least, in reviewing the comments of our respondents we are discussing both what is not said as well as what is made explicit.

### **The racialised profile of gun crime**

Race cannot be avoided as a theme in relation to gun and gang activity but its significance is neither simple nor straightforward. To some extent this is reflected in the comments of our respondents but at times these comments introduce a degree of ambiguity which can both obscure and misrepresent the influences and relationships in play. There has long been a popular association, reiterated by much media reporting (Wilcox, 2005) that gang activity is significantly racialised although it remains a question as to how far this reflects a number of significant incidents and/or Police agendas. The 2003 NCIS 'Threat Assessment' (NCIS, 2003) profiled four types of problematic gun related crime (organised crime, Turkish armed gangs, 'Black on black' gang crime and armed robberies) while, in London at least, Operation Trident was specifically targeted on gun crime affecting London's black community and the 'black on black' mission descriptor has stuck. In depth, essentially journalistic, accounts of the gun and gang phenomenon in both London and Manchester have likewise both drawn particular attention to the racial patterns which prevail in these areas of criminal activity (McLagan, 2004; Walsh, 2003).

Academic research, likewise, points to a significant racial profile to the gun and gang phenomenon in general and in these two cities specifically. A study of gun crime in Brent in 2004 found that approximately two-thirds of offenders were black as were just under a half of victims (Hales and Silverstone, 2004). These figures correspond closely with those data arising from Operation Trident in London. On the whole, offenders (and their victims) tended to be relatively young, male, black or mixed race and not particularly criminally experienced. Seventy percent of the London shootings had black victims while similar proportions of Manchester shootings were linked with the black

community there (8 of 11 murders, 22 of 35 attempted murders and 44% of serious woundings) (Bullock and Tilley, 2002). Finally, the more recent extensive Home Office study of gun crime (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006a) based on interviews with 80 convicted firearm offenders drew upon a sample just under half of whom were of black or mixed race. While this report, probably the most extensive research study on gun crime in the UK, pointed to a complex 'mixed economy' of firearm procurement and supply it also confirmed something of the different profiles of gun offending, differentiated between 'instrumental' and 'complex and symbolic' gun cultures and outlined the cultural and contextual processes through which firearm related offending had lately become more prominent. These included: the ascendancy of criminal role models, the market(s) in illegal drugs, and cultures of gang or crew membership (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone, 2006). Given the racialised profile of each of these – especially the latter, the particular focus of our Manchester based study, then, arguably, we might expect to see a significant racialised commentary arising from our police respondents. Concluding their discussion of these issues, Hales, Lewis and Silverstone end with a cautionary note.

In the use of language such as 'Black-on-Black gun crime' by statutory agencies and the media, it could be argued that race has often been positioned as the most significant variable in explaining involvement in gun and other criminality. The evidence collected for this research suggests that such an analysis is significantly limited. Nevertheless, the importance of race, ethnicity and culture remains to be fully explored. (2006a: 102)

In fact our respondents' comments point a different way; the emerging picture was rather more ambiguous. Many GMP officers seemed somewhat reticent about directly discussing the racialised character of gang activity in the city. Instead, euphemisms and other coded references to race characterised their remarks.

Only one respondent suggested that the real issue involved socio-economic factors (relative deprivation, unemployment, exclusion) rather than questions of race, but at other times race went often both unmentioned but simultaneously heavily implicated in the officers' descriptions of the particular locations, activities, behaviour, lifestyle, and fashionably conspicuous consumption. Most commonly of, all the racial implication was made indirectly by reference to suggestions that Manchester based offenders members derived their inspiration from American models: HipHop and 'Gangsta' music and the 'boys in the hood' lifestyle.

Similar suggestions reappeared throughout the survey in relation to the conceptions of the 'lure' of violence and especially in relation to a key sequence of comments on media influences on gang lifestyles. We have tried to address this perceived cultural influence behind gun crime in the discussion in the main body of the report and the extent to which it may or may not be significant. It is quite possible that police respondents, unfamiliar with precise typologies of contemporary popular youth music will tend to lump it altogether

as a single type, therefore what they refer to as 'Gangsta Rap' may simply be the music appreciated by the young men they encounter. In any event, an appreciation of such types of music is scarcely confined to offenders (any more than only police officers might watch *The Bill*), this particular type of music is a mass market international phenomenon. Furthermore, the values and lifestyles celebrated in the music (affluence, designer fashion, expensive cars, 'trophy' girlfriends, and conspicuous consumption writ large) are hardly unique to this particular music. In a sense this may be just another way of saying that the music is a symptom of the culture, the soundtrack to a lifestyle, rather than a cause of it.

Hales, Lewis and Silverstone make the point that music represented an essential dimension of the identity and lifestyle of the offenders they interviewed, but they concluded overall that

On balance, while music – particularly urban music (hip-hop, garage, R&B) – does provide an important cultural reference point for the majority of the offenders interviewed, be they Black, White or Asian, its relationship to crime and violence remains unclear and appears peripheral. It seems likely that if anything the most significant factor is the aspirational lifestyle portrayed by some sections of the music industry, rather than the specific lyrics of any particular artist or genre. (2006a: 100)

This does not mean, of course, that culture is unimportant to gang lifestyles, quite the contrary, but it does suggest that the culture is more indigenous, rooted in the young men's material social contexts, peer group influences and socialisation experiences on the streets of Manchester rather than simply consumed whole via musical preferences. At the same time the experiences of racial discrimination, economic marginality and social exclusion also fundamentally shape these experiences, returning explanations of street gang crime to the more familiar criminological territories of strain theory, relative deprivation and sub-cultural analysis.

The fact that police officers' understandings of youth gang culture can be significantly wide of the mark (although in ways that are reasonably consistent with large sections of the media and 'public opinion'), that they might mistake appearance for substance, confusing the novelty of the symbolic firearm 'fashion accessory' with its mundane instrumentality in a dangerous lifestyle can suggest a number of things, not least that police officers may be prone to the same populist misunderstandings as the rest of society. However police officers are also required to construct profiles of 'suspect communities' and target these for law enforcement. Yet when this turns into a potentially self-fulfilling process premised upon certain superficial symbolic cultural assumptions then problematic consequences may follow for police community relationships and for the wider community as erroneous conceptions of the causes of gun crime crystallise into police intelligence data and subsequently into socially and politically constructed policy priorities. A concluding point, at this stage, is simply that if the police can be wrong about this issue, they can also be wrong about others.

However, having demonstrated the potential for misperception and misunderstanding in the police point of view – and speculated as to its potential consequences - the remaining paragraphs in this conclusion will refrain from seeking to critically re-interpret the police respondents perceptions and will simply attempt to pick out some of the key areas of disagreement or ambiguity to be found amongst them.

### **Contrasting definitions of ‘gun crime’**

Our respondents offered a variety of views as to what constituted ‘gun crime’ range from a largely undifferentiated picture of ‘all crime involving guns’ to a much more varied catalogue of offence types facilitated by firearms. We have made a point earlier regarding the doubtful analytical utility of lumping together all ‘gun crime’ under a single definition. Other respondents provided a more layered portrait of the issue, stretching from low-level anti-social behaviour perpetrated by young offenders with imitation or low powered air weapons at one end to serious and life threatening criminal activity by motivated offenders with real weapons at the other. Defining a continuum of gun crime opens up questions about if and, if so, how people move along such a continuum especially in the light of a recent sequence of shootings in London and Manchester during early 2007 involving young people aged only 15 and 16 years old. This question of ‘offender progression’ relates to issues arising in another dimension of the Magnet Project (see below).

Differences also emerged in relation to whether firearms were seen as more instrumental (merely tools to facilitate crime) or more symbolic (the ‘fashion accessory argument). Again, accepting that such orientations to firearms represent ‘ideal types’, the truth, for most illegal gun carriers, will fall somewhere between these contrasting explanations but the precise combination of offender motivations is likely to have important implications for the policing of firearms-related offending. The same is likely to be true in relation to questions of gun supply or gun use. Our respondents voiced opinions identifying different conceptions of the underlying gun crime problem – focussing, in turn, on the supplier (questions of trafficking, procurement, armouring, conversion and reactivation, distribution, circulation, concealment (weapon minding) and possession) or the user. If factors relating to gun supply are thought to be a major influence upon rates of firearm offending, different intervention priorities are likely to be called for than if emphasis is placed upon the contexts of criminal gun use.

Finally, there were wider questions raised by a specifically ‘police perspective’ on gun crime, as opposed to a more widely defined multi-agency perspective. While some of our police respondents sought to define gun crime in ways that paid attention to questions of contexts and motivations, others adopted much narrower, legally framed (‘black letter’), definitions of the phenomenon. While this is understandable from an enforcement perspective it is also the case that in a number of areas (ASB management and anti-terrorism policing being

cases in point) multi-agency enforcement practice has already largely outgrown the bounds of a narrow legalism (notwithstanding the civil liberty questions arising).

### **Contested definitions of Gang Crime**

At a time when definitions of 'gangs' and concerns about gang-related criminal activity have become increasingly contested (Sharp et al., 2006; Young et al., 2007) it was interesting to see our respondents provide a range of definitions and interpretations of gang activity and its significance. Broadly speaking our respondents addressed similar themes to those arising in the burgeoning academic literature on gangs and criminally active youth groups and this concerned the extent to which gangs were defined by their criminal activities and the impact of gang membership on the scale and seriousness of youth offending. Respondents offered four differing conceptions of 'a gang' and these involved: any criminal (or anti-social) activity undertaken 'by groups', secondly, situations where gang membership forms a motivation for other criminal activities (where crime arises out of pre-existing gang structures), thirdly, that gangs form in order to commit offences and, fourth, where gang membership generates a common criminal purposes and identities (reputations, respect, 'turf' or markets).

Academic work (cited already) has outlined a concern that resort to the language of 'gangs' can typically over-define and inflate perceptions of youth related offending. Gangs can become generators of criminal activity, they can also accelerate levels of criminal involvement, but criminal activity can also lead to the establishment of gangs which, in turn, develop their own social relations which can both increase or lower patterns of violence.

Our respondents drew attention to different aspects of gang organisation and behaviour and, while these need not be in any way mutually exclusive they do suggest differing priorities for intervention and prevention. Significant amongst these aspects of gang formation, identity and activity were issues concerning: (i) the level of organisation of the gang, (ii) the question of leadership and hierarchy within the gang, (iii) hierarchies between gangs and (iv) conflict and rivalries between gangs, (v) the levels at which gangs are behaviourally or criminally involved, (vi) the territory ('turf') claimed by or attributed to gangs, (vii) the identity, respect and reputation of gangs and, finally, (viii) the types of offences typically associated with gang activities. We have discussed each of these components of gang related activity in turn in the main part of the report. While each of these dimensions of gang activity relate to differing components of the definition and understanding of the forms that gang activity might take, they also relate directly to different kinds of enforcement potential. And, as was noted earlier in relation to questions of context and motivation concerning gun crime, appreciating aspects of the problem which fall outside of a purely enforcement based paradigm is likely to offer a wider purchase on the underlying issues.

### **Understanding Relationships between 'gun crime' and 'gang crime'**

Whilst noting that gun crime and gang crime were often associated with one another – often in media reporting – large proportions of our respondents were clear that gun crime was not always gang related or that that gang crime did not necessarily involve the use of guns. That said, many respondents saw substantial social, cultural and contextual connections between gang activities and gun use, issues which relate directly to the question of offender progression (from minor/sporadic/opportunist offending behaviour to serious and persistent gun use), a transition we have elsewhere identified in this project as the movement from ‘susceptible’ to ‘gun user’ (Magnet Epidemiological Modelling Paper, 2006).

Our respondents had a great deal to say about the gun and gang culture, and there was a good deal of overall agreement in their comments. Furthermore many of the comments were consistent with earlier reflections on gang activity with notions of (i) status and ‘respect’, (ii) expressive violence and ‘bravado’, (iii) inter-personal and inter-gang conflicts and rivalries, (iv) media-influenced life-styles, fashions and behaviours, (v) peer group pressure, ‘codes’ and social values, (vi) protection, belonging, security and safety in numbers, and (vii) a complex (both practical and symbolic) attachment to firearms being prominent amongst the themes and issues raised. These elements of the (Manchester) ‘gun culture’ are inevitably a social construct, a definition established from the outside and from the point of view of those who are required to police it. For all that, these perceptions are persuasive and widely subscribed to. Further (qualitative, ethnographic) research would need to establish the accuracy (or not) of these perceptions of the gun culture phenomenon precisely because to misunderstand the phenomenon is to invite inappropriate responses. As we saw, in this area of the survey a number of respondents also drew attention to the significance of racialised factors relating to gun crime which other research has recently sought to question.

### **Risk factors and involvement in gun crime**

Respondents identified two broad sets of factors relating to people’s involvement in gang and gun related criminal behaviour. These could be described either as either simple ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors or perhaps more insightfully as ‘deprivation’ and ‘aspiration’ factors. These interlocking pressures were captured in the comments of our respondents, one series of factors described a range of fairly familiar risk factors (poor parenting, low educational achievement, poor social milieu, lack of values, deprivation and restricted opportunities and unemployment – although there was no mention here of racism or discrimination: see Magnet Project Risk Factors paper, 2007) while the other factors describe the aspirations of those living in this context (peer pressure, gang culture, financial gain, respect, bravado and self protection).

Such a complex range of issues entails many partial truths and potential misunderstandings, as we have noted already, however, effective intervention demands an adequate understanding of the complexity of the question. Neither deprivation inspired interventions, which deny individual agency, nor deterrent based approaches (enforcement driven) which assume that choice



is the only issue are likely to give a sufficient grasp on the problems. In turn these differing interpretations of the gun/gang phenomenon upon how our police respondents felt that the problems might be most effectively tackled.

### **Preventing involvement in gang and gun crime?**

The range and type of suggested interventions for addressing gun crime included making improvements in education, expanding opportunities for those at risk and policies to 'strengthen' communities and enhance 'social capital'. An alternative set of approaches (tougher sentencing, more robust enforcement, 'zero tolerance' and 'reaffirming consequences) focussed more upon criminal justice system interventions, although it was not unusual for respondents to advocate both sets of responses together. For example, many respondents advocated a 'twin-track' approach, suggesting the need for both policies of early intervention, education diversion, prevention and opportunity creation followed by tougher punishments for older offenders. As in other cases where the suggested responses polarise the issues (diversion and deterrent) effective solutions are likely to lie somewhere between these extremes.

### **Factors 'triggering' shooting incidents**

Notwithstanding the dual nature of our respondents understandings of the broader context underpinning gang related gun crime (deprivations and aspirations) and the twin track responses arising from these, there was a significant clustering in the accounts given to explain the immediately precipitating causes of shootings. Here our police respondents offered their view that most actual shootings arose from very personalised conflicts with 'disrespect', revenge, inter-personal conflicts, and turf and market disputes accounting for three quarters of the explanations provided for shooting incidents. Aside from issues regarding wider social factors, if accurate, these findings appear to suggest particular kinds of harm reduction intervention strategies for those already involved in the gun and gang lifestyle.

Such proposals were also reiterated by continuing enthusiasm amongst our respondents for initiatives to reduce gun supply (gun control measures) to (so far as is possible) reduce weapon facilitation effects exacerbating the lethality of gang related conflicts and disputes. Suggestions here seem broadly consistent with the work of Hales, Lewis and Silverstone (2006a).

### **Offering young people a way out**

Education, alternatives and diversion, especially employment and opportunity creation, and relocation and resettlement predominated amongst the suggestions for helping young people escape the gun and gang culture. More generally, these proposals suggest a rethinking of ideas about 'victimhood' and the policy options attaching to this label. Victim and witness protection are generally very specific responses to immediate risks or threats and are often fairly directly associated with criminal justice processes. By contrast, the suggestions of our respondent suggest the need for some extension of this

idea to those 'at risk' of gun crime in its widest sense, although not the forced relocation recently proposed in some policing circles it is likely that such responses may further entrench a distrust of the police in precisely those areas worst affected by these issues. Such ambiguities were reflected in our next theme.

### **Overcoming the main barriers to tackling gun crime effectively**

Our police respondents clearly encountered substantial difficulties in tackling Greater Manchester's gun and gang related problems by virtue of the more generic problems they encountered in their relationships with the most seriously affected communities. This is reflected in the fact that almost two-thirds of the responses we obtained cited non-co-operation, fear, distrust of the police or intimidation by offenders as their major concerns here. Such problems also translated into difficulties for the police in intelligence development and were compounded by a police failure to understand gangs and communities, and perceived divisions and tensions within communities. Other problems cited by the police concerned the attitudes of the youth themselves, as well as what some officers regarded as insufficiently robust policing methods, inadequate legislation and weaknesses in the criminal justice system. Here the polarity in the comments suggest a number of problems and frustrations, a particular difficulty being the possibility that 'more robust policing', tougher sentencing, stronger legislation might further undermine the relationships between the most affected communities and the police.

Similar considerations apply to our respondents' views on the adequacy of the legislation for dealing with gun and gang related offending. Again, opinion was significantly divided, with approximately a quarter of respondents commenting that the legislation was adequate. A similar proportion felt that the sentencing powers available to or utilised by the courts were inadequate. A third group believed the existing firearm legislation to be inadequate for a variety of reasons, a fourth group were critical of criminal justice processes and procedures (which hindered 'effective policing'), and a fifth group referred to specific 'loopholes' within the firearms control legislation.

### **What is to be done?**

The final sections of the survey dealt with questions about additional resources and the development of new policing methods and interventions. While a variety of responses were given emphasising different aspects of the policing task and wider social crime prevention initiatives, many of these proposals reflected the ambiguities already discussed earlier in this report regarding the underlying understandings of the gun and gang related crime phenomenon. In addition there still appears a strong tendency for professionals to search largely within their professional silos for putative solutions for their take on the gun and gang related crime problem. This survey has emphasised our unique study of police perceptions of the gun and gang crime phenomenon. Not surprisingly it has unearthed many 'police driven' solutions although not without much ambiguity and uncertainty about

whether these are really enough. Evidence such as that presented here undoubtedly needs collating with and alongside other agencies takes on gun crime problems and gun crime solutions – and not forgetting the perspectives of those at the centre of the issues themselves, young people, gang members and those with direct experience of the problems of contemporary urban gun crime.

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