

BOROUGH / PROJECT :

Westminster City Council Your Choice Gang Diversion Programme



PROBLEM :

An unprecedented rise in serious youth violence - which saw the total number of offences leap 57 per cent between 2009/10 and 2010/11 - prompted considerable community concern.

Overall, the spike in incidents saw the borough move from 16th to sixth in the Metropolitan Police's league tables for serious youth violence offences.



SOLUTION :

A range of partners came together to develop a coordinated system of interventions to tackle serious youth violence and prevent Westminster's young people entering a life of gang violence. The programme was designed and reviewed through the Safer Westminster Partnership; the local Community Safety Partnership.

The programme started in October 2011 and will run for a minimum of three years and is built on the principle that by creating and designing a sustainable service offer for young people (aged 16-24) levels of serious youth violence will reduce.

The council and partners came together to launch a bespoke local gang programme. With the right mix of prevention, intervention and enforcement the programme offers our young people a choice; to either desist from gangs with the necessary support or face a range of enforcement options.

The Your Choice programme is built upon a partnership delivery structure. This is highlighted by the creation of a co-located Integrated Gangs Unit (IGU) developed as part of the Your Choice programme. Police, probation, Children's Services, the Neighbourhood Crime Reduction Service and the voluntary sector are now able to work even closer together to swiftly intervene to prevent our young people being victims of gang violence.

The Gangs and Serious Youth Violence work is an end-to-end project that seeks to work across agency boundaries, across age ranges (10 years old up to 24) and as far as possible across local authority boundaries. The IGU benefits from strong bipartisan and cross borough support, as the team work closely with neighboring boroughs in Brent and Kensington and Chelsea, to tackle the gang violence that occurs across borough boundaries.

Partners have also contributed to the funding of the programme, recognising the links between serious youth violence and mainstreamed services, such as community protection, housing and children's services. Local partnerships, specifically those being formed through the Integrated Gangs Unit, were highlighted in a recent Home Office peer review as being a significant strength in the partnership's approach to tackling serious youth violence.

The Your Choice programme has three headline aims:

1. Reducing youth violence in Westminster
2. Reducing overall offending by youths in Westminster (non-violence offences)
3. Reducing gang affiliation of those who participate in Your Choice
4. Reducing community concern about gangs and serious youth violence in Westminster.

OUTCOMES :

- 2012 has seen exceptionally low levels of Serious Youth Violence and Youth Violence compared to the previous three years. A large part of this is due to the significant reduction in robberies on youths 19 or under where weapons have featured in the offence. 2011 saw a significant trend in school boy robberies which led to a large peak in Serious Youth Violence between May and July 2011; this trend has not emerged again in 2012.
- The number of offences in September has been the lowest all year matching figures in May and June this year and is by far the lowest volume since the start of 2009.

Serious Youth Violence September	
2009	13
2010	24
2011	23
2012	8

Youth Violence September	
2009	36
2010	54
2011	53
2012	24

- Neighbouring boroughs are actively monitoring Westminster's Integrated Gangs Unit and Westminster is sharing its experience in order to establish in the long term a cross-border team. This development responds to a significant proportion of serious youth violence incidents taking place across the North Westminster and South Kilburn border.
- The project is exceeding its requirements by recognising that local communities and the problem of gang violence go beyond artificial local authority borders. As such, it is an attempt to cut through administrative and bureaucratic obstacles and tailor solutions to real life, expanding the horizons of the programme to a Tri/Quad borough approach using the proven success of what's been achieved in Westminster.

- The Your Choice programme is an end-to-end process that is cross border, cross agency and cross age groups provides an exceptional service to those young people most at risk. Throughout the course of the programme's development there has been a constant striving from senior officers and political leaders to go beyond the expectations of statutory 'one-size-fits-all' provision, improving the life chances of some of our most vulnerable young people at risk of entering a life of gang violence.

The Safer Westminster Partnership's commitment to tackle serious youth violence has recently been peer reviewed by the Home Office. The Home Office concluded that:

"Your Choice' is an excellent example of commissioning services spanning the prevention/enforcement agenda. With some active engagement at this stage of development, the programme could become an example of good practice nationally."

FUNDING :

The total cost of Westminster's Your Choice programme in 2012/13 is close to £900,000, falling to £700,000 from 2013/14 onwards as we begin to rationalise some services and complete time limited developments.

The majority of this funding for 2012/13 comes from the rollover of Community Safety Fund agreed by MOPAC, £225,000 from the Home Office EYGV team, together with contributions from the wider Safer Westminster Partnership budget, and partners core contributions.

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