

The Centre for Social Justice
9 Westminster Palace Gardens
Artillery Row
London SW1P 1RL

Telephone 020 7340 9650
Website www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk



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POLICE SHOULD BE GIVEN NEW POWERS TO BREAK UP TEENAGE GANGS – SAYS NEW REPORT

(Full report Dying to Belong to be published by Iain Duncan Smith at a media launch on Thursday February 12 at 10am in Room S, Portcullis House, Westminster.)

Tough new control orders aimed at breaking up violent teenage gangs are proposed in a new report from the think-tank led by the former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith.

The orders – known as Gang Activity Desistance Orders (GADOs) – would be aimed at gang leaders and would be backed by serious penalties – which could include imprisonment.

But the report also warns that toughening up anti-gang measures will not be enough to stem the rising tide of gang violence in the UK. Up to 50,000 young people are gang members.

The report recommends a raft of medium and long-term measures designed to steer teenagers away from the clutches of the street gang.

GADOs would be issued by the courts in areas where serious gang violence is intimidating witnesses and informants and stopping them from helping the police mount prosecutions.

The report is critical of ASBOs, saying that they have been over-used and that their credibility has been undermined by the all too frequent failure to punish breaches.

“The Working Group believes that civil orders should be used as a last resort, targeted only at core gang members and used in conjunction with social and education interventions. ASBOs too often do not meet these criteria...

“We recommend that a specialist commission looks into the possibility of creating a gang-specific civil order to tackle high impact players: a Gang Desistance Order (GADO).”

GADOs must be tightly targeted, only used as a last resort and their breach “must have serious repercussions.”

The report *Dying to Belong* from the think-tank set up by former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith recommends that the police actively target gang leaders in line with schemes pioneered by US police and other agencies.

The report also accuses local and national government of a lack of leadership and urgency in tackling the problem.

Drawing on projects that have produced spectacular reductions in gang-related deaths in Boston and other US cities, the Centre for Social Justice study says that ringleaders should be given an ultimatum by police: either stop the violence and we’ll ensure you get support or continue and we will do everything in our power to bring you to justice. This would include sustained, daily attention and even minor infractions – such as driving offences – will lead to prosecution.

Areas where gang crime is prevalent should be designated Gang Prevention Zones and made the focus of intensive efforts involving all agencies – including police and local authorities – to reverse gang culture.

The combination of the police pressure and the work of the other agencies in offering a way out for gang members is critical. Support from statutory and non-statutory agencies should include skills training, remedial education, drug rehabilitation and help in finding work.

Mr Duncan Smith said: “The tragic murder of Rhys Jones in Liverpool has brought home the casual savagery of gang crime in Britain today. Half the 27 teenagers murdered in London last year were the victims of gang crime. That should bring home the brutal truth that street gangs are a nasty and shocking symptom of the broken society.

“We need emergency action in stemming the rise of gang culture which is devastating our most disadvantaged communities. Our report is a practical solution which doesn’t just deal with the narrow issue of knives but the vital issue of the people who are most likely to be using knives or any weapon and is founded on the best practice in the Western world.”

The CSJ blueprint for tackling gangs says that there must be a short, medium and long term strategy for turning the tide of criminality. It warns that the number of gangs and their associated crime is rising in Britain’s major cities and estimates that 20,000 to 50,000 teenagers are members of violent gangs.

The report runs to 210 pages, has taken 14 months to compile and is based on contacts with over 150 practitioners, police, youth workers and gang members in the UK and Boston and Los Angeles in the USA. It has been drawn up by a 14-strong working group of experts chaired by Simon Antrobus, chief executive of Clubs for Young People.

Mr Antrobus said: 'The critical element of this report is that it goes beyond a traditional approach to responding to the challenge of gangs in our communities. It recognises that gang members are children and young people first – increasingly younger. Similarly it recognises that an approach based on enforcement alone is flawed.

“We need an instant response. But we won't make sustainable progress in reversing this worrying trend that is pulling children and young people on to the street and into the gangs in our inner cities unless we are prepared to engage with the less eye-catching but vital work of medium and long-term social renewal among our marginalised and disaffected young people.

“The adult world bears a big share of the blame for the rise of the gang, not least because so many of our young men are experiencing a crisis in masculinity. Father deficit and space restriction lead to anger and rage forcing some young men to search for a sense of belonging which they find in the local gang and the gang leader.”

The report says that the immediate challenge is to break up the gangs and redirect their members towards constructive activity. But medium and long-term measures are also needed to build trust between the police and young people and to prevent a new generation from being lost to gang culture.

The message – that violence will no longer be tolerated – should be communicated through a “call-in” in which members of different gangs are brought together in a single place, such as a courtroom. The tactic has been successfully used in the United States and in Glasgow.

The report accuses local and national government of failing to take the lead on tackling gangs.

In many areas, the task of tackling gangs has been seen as almost solely the responsibility of the police by politicians who have made enforcement their main focus and taken an increasingly punitive stance.

It took a community and media outcry for the Government to produce a strategy for tackling gangs as late as May 2008, the report says.

The report says immediate action is needed to disrupt gangs and prevent violence. The Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire had impressive results tackling gangs and violence in the US city – a 63 per cent decrease in youth homicides per month – and this model should inform the UK's response to gangs.

It finds a number of UK initiatives – including Merseyside's Matrix Gun Crime Team

and Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit – have implemented the Boston model with very promising early results.

The key elements for a successful gang prevention initiative include:

- A thorough understanding of the local problem and what is driving it
- Committed and visible leadership at the highest levels
- Full multi-agency collaboration and communication (data sharing)
- A multi-pronged approach combining enforcement, intervention and prevention
- An honest and targeted approach
- Meaningful community engagement

The report puts forward a definition of a gang – “a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who (1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, (2) engage in a range of criminal activity and violence, (3) identify with or lay claim over territory, (4) have some form of identifying structural feature, and (5) are in conflict with other, similar, gangs”. The report is highly critical of the Government for failing to coordinate the use of a standard definition across the country for street gangs which they believe is one of the reasons why activity has been so confused.

The report finds wide-ranging criminality among gang members from drug dealing and robbery to assault to rape. They are also prolific in their offending. Gang members identified by the Home Office study averaged 11 convictions separate research found that South Manchester gang members averaged 12 arrests.

Another study found that the six per cent of people self-reporting as gang members were responsible for over a fifth of all core offences and 40 per cent of all burglaries.

For media inquiries, please contact Nick Wood of Media Intelligence Partners Ltd on 07889 617003 or 0203 008 8146 or Alistair Thompson on 07970 162225 or 0203 008 8145.

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Centre for Social Justice is an independent think tank established, by Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP in 2004, to seek effective solutions to the poverty that blight parts of Britain.

In July 2007 the group published Breakthrough Britain. Ending the Costs of Social Breakdown. The paper presented over 190 policy proposals aimed at ending the growing social divide in Britain and to reduce the £102bn financial cost of social breakdown.