

Report to Social Sector Forum Deputy Chief Executives-Local Government Group 1 July 2009:

Local-central government workshop on gang issues 22 June 2009

Purpose

1. This paper reports on the gang issues workshop held in Wellington on 22 June 2009.

Context

2. The Ministry of Justice had previously signalled its willingness to convene a workshop at which local and central government perspectives on gang issues could be addressed. In particular, the workshop was to focus on practical tools that could support inter-agency partnerships addressing gang issues.
3. Local Government New Zealand subsequently agreed to develop web-distributed guidance material on the management of gang issues with support from the Ministry of Justice. The guidance will link to, rather than duplicate, existing material such as the guidance on youth gangs.

Overview of workshop

4. The workshop was attended by 35 people representing a mix of North Island territorial authorities (TAs) and central government. A copy of the attendance list is attached.
5. A summary of key points is attached. In brief, there was general agreement on the need to address underlying social issues and, especially, to provide positive alternatives to joining gangs and to undertaking anti-social activities.
6. Measures to increase social inclusion in parallel with the suppression of criminal behaviour by gangs greatly improve social outcomes for both at risk individuals and the wider community.

Next steps

7. Local Government New Zealand will use the workshop notes, contacts made at the workshop and other resources¹ for the development of guidance material for TAs.
8. Because of the importance of inter-agency responses to gang issues, Local Government New Zealand consultants are likely to need additional information and advice from central government agencies. Members of the DCEs-Local Government Group are asked to support the development of the guidance material and note that workshop attendees will be used as first points of contact within central government agencies.

¹ Input will be sought from selected South Island TAs, and other TAs whose gang issues may differ from those presented at the workshop.

9. Local Government New Zealand will update the Group on progress on the guidance material at future meetings and seek advice from the Group if required.

Links to wider work

10. Insights gained and contacts made at the workshop will also feed into other work including the Drivers of Crime work and work on at risk youth.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Social Sector Forum:

1. Note the outcomes of the workshop;
2. Support the development of guidance material on management of gang issues by Local Government New Zealand; and
3. Note agencies will be asked for additional information on resources available to address gang issues.

Alison Handley, Senior Advisor, Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, Ministry of Justice

Cherie Flintoff, Senior Advisor, Local Government New Zealand

30 June 2009

Summary of key points from local-central government workshop on gang issues held in Wellington on 22 2009

Themes

1. There is regional and local variation in gang issues in areas covered by workshop attendees, with the youth gangs being more visible in larger cities and adult gangs in smaller centres. Māori dominate in gangs in rural and some urban areas, while gangs in metropolitan areas may be white power, Pacific peoples or more mixed. Prospecting is underway in some but not all areas.
2. The presence of a prison was noted as a reason why families of out of town gangs had moved into one particular area.
3. Social impacts are largely felt within the gang communities, and include family violence, drug and alcohol problems, social exclusion and crime. Associated school problems include truancy, bullying, violence (including female violence), impact on learning and teenage pregnancies.
4. Social problems underlying gang membership are inter-generational, and require long term solutions. The sustainability of funding for interventions is a concern, and services face the challenge of delivering immediate tangible results while addressing the long term issues.
5. The workshop noted that the primary issue is not gangs per se but anti-social and criminal behaviour by gang members and others (often “wanna-be”s or prospects).
6. The best way to change ‘gang issues’ is to provide alternative social outlets, activities and employment options in conjunction with enforcement against negative behaviours.
7. There is a tension at both local and central government level between the public safety/concern about intimidation (symptom) and the need to address social exclusion (cause). Many of those at the workshop suggested that central government’s position and allocation of resources on gangs emphasised suppression or is inherently unclear.

Guidance material

8. Details provided at the workshop of initiatives which are already underway, views of critical success factors, and ideas on what would constitute useful guidance are being forwarded to Local Government New Zealand.
9. A selection of the advice given at the workshop is noted below:
 - Initiatives to address gangs must focus on behaviours, rather than glamourising or demonising gangs themselves. In particular, initiatives should provide positive alternatives for young people before they commit to gangs and where practical encourage community and even gang leaders to promote positive behaviour such as training.
 - Guidance material should stress the continuum of interventions starting with positive “fence at the top of the cliff” initiatives that can prevent exclusion and trends to crime. “Ambulance at the bottom of the cliff” measures include

early intervention, police capacity to react quickly, arrests, prosecution, imprisonment and high visibility neighbourhood patrols.

- There is no “one size suits all” solution to gang issues. Responses need to be developed in association with communities (community-led).
- Risks may need to be taken in trialling new approaches.
- Social service providers and TAs can make a difference by using existing resources differently. For example:
 - TAs can contract with local gang members for services such as parks maintenance.
 - Services such as libraries and recreation programmes can be made more accessible and relevant to community members with co-located services.
- Critical success factors include:
 - Strong agency partnerships and links with Iwi and community leaders, with agreement on roles. Good links with the Ministry of Education’s regional staff is particularly important.
 - Working jointly and not in silos (addressing ‘privacy’ issues) and coordinating and targeting existing resources more effectively.
 - Sustainable funding.
 - Media principles and tools and a media strategy which seeks to avoid dramatising gang activity, and which emphasises positive community developments.
- Active work might include encouraging diversion to skills-based areas and developing appropriate mentors (eg, motorbike workshops, carpentry, plumbing).
- Ways of engaging effectively and safely with gangs should be encouraged, with tips on handling different types of situation and managing risks. In some towns, for example:
 - Police have established constructive relationships with gang leaders.
 - TAs have established voluntary ‘no patches in town’ agreements with gangs.
- People should feel safe in their communities, and agencies can establish required standards of behaviour (as Housing New Zealand Corporation is doing with its Good Behaviour Code).
- Eradication of graffiti and good quality urban design promote a greater sense of community and safety.
- Case studies should examine both what worked and what didn’t work, and examine multiple viewpoints (central and local government, other agencies, community leaders).
- Success needs to be defined, for example, changing expectations and moving behaviour towards legitimate options such as training, work and altruistic group activity.

- Consider potential indicators (positive such as increased participation in sports or other activities as well as changes in graffiti, crime or other measures) to assist in measuring progress.