



Working together for a safer London

Talking the Hardest. Taking on Gang Culture in London.



2010 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem Oriented

Policing

Submission Document.

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SUMMARY

Scanning

Peckham town centre and the surrounding housing estates were crime hotspots. Gang related youth crime was high. Businesses reported anti-social behaviour from gangs on bikes. The 2008 Southwark survey indicated that 35% of residents felt unsafe due to gang and knife crime. Peckham based police had gang related crime as ward priorities.

Analysis

Problems identified

- 'Peckham Young Guns' gang plagued the town centre affecting businesses and alarming the public. Bicycles were used to carry out robberies, running drugs and attending gang fights.
- High attrition rate and under reporting of crime against gang members due to witness / victim intimidation.
- Sentences from youth courts (supervision orders etc) did not curtail gang activity.
- High levels of violent crime against young people.
- Gang culture glamorised by high profile Peckham 'rappers' - social networking websites, such as 'Youtube'.
- Lack of coordination of agencies at 'street level'.

Response

- Identification and targeting of key gang members.
- Gang Anti-Social Behaviour Orders obtained, to disrupt gang activity.
- Zero tolerance policy regarding asbo breaches.

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- Individual Support Orders and Parenting Orders to ensure parental participation.
- New 'Gangs Problem Solver' police post introduced to coordinate council and police departments.
- Fortnightly multi-agency meeting held to review gang related crime and task partnership agencies.
- Early intervention strategy for youths on the fringe of gangs.
- 'Stay Safe' dispersal zone introduced.
- Multi-Agency 'Street-based' team created.
- Strong support and encouragement of community groups to encourage cohesion.

Assessment

The project successfully tackled gang activity in one of London's major crime hotspots. Data analysis and qualitative surveys indicated that key objectives were met;

- 59.3% reduction in youth crime.
- 66% reduction in robberies.
- 50% reduction in violent crime.
- 51% reduction in youth victims of crime.

Qualitative business and youth surveys indicated;

- 100% satisfaction with police / council performance.
- 92% stated that Peckham is now a safer place.
- 92% noticed a reduction in gang related 'ASB'.

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- 71% of youths stated they now feel safe in Peckham.

Recommendations;

- Amendment to Police & Crime Act.
- Gang members to be 'flagged' to Crown Prosecution Service.
- Hospitals to inform police of knife crime victims.
- 'Smarter' policing of gangs using a problem solving approach.

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SCANNING

Peckham is located within the London borough of Southwark. The area is well known for it's rich cultural diversity. Over the past twenty years the area has received significant investment and has been extensively regenerated. A number of high density council estates have been redeveloped and improved. A new town square incorporating a leisure centre and award winning library has been built.

The shopping centre comprises a number of corporate retail outlets and restaurants alongside independent shops catering for the multi-ethnic community.

Despite this, Peckham has high levels of deprivation and a notorious reputation for crime and violence. It endures as Southwark's crime hotspot. Crime figures indicate the majority of violent crime is perpetrated by groups of young black males. In 2008/9 there was a 17% increase in knife and gang related crime. Safer Neighbourhoods teams (SNT) received complaints from residents of an increase in intimidating groups loitering in the town centre. SNT ward panels echoed these fears and demanded action.

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Police intelligence, highlighted bitter gang rivalry and drug 'turf wars' resulting in serious violence, stabbings and shootings some of which were fatal.

A town centre survey revealed that local businesses had experienced repeated incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB). Fast food outlets such as Burger Kings and McDonalds were particularly affected. Gangs used their premises as a base for drug dealing and committing robberies during the evenings. Staff reported fights, abuse of customers and theft of food. The gangs formed an intimidating presence which led to a loss of custom and an increase in staff turn-over. On one occasion youths were seen passing round a hand-gun. Periodic police attendances led only to temporary relief, as gang members would return as soon as police left.

This behaviour was repeated in the Peckham Pulse Leisure Centre and Library. A gang vandalised the changing rooms and threatened to 'stab-up' a manager who asked them to leave.

The situation deteriorated further following the opening on the 'SN1' (spare no one) shop in the indoor market. The shop sold gang paraphernalia including clothing with gang insignia, bandana's and violent 'rap' CD's. The market became plagued by gangs of youths on bikes who cycled recklessly, blocked entrances and caused further intimidation.

An elderly lady was knocked down and injured in the Aylesham Shopping Centre by a gang on bicycles which raced through the mall.

Town centre CCTV was utilised to record youth disorder and identify key perpetrators. Police indices such as crime reports, intelligence reports, Computer

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Aided Despatch (CAD) and stop-search data were used to identify youths who loitered in the town centre.

Information sharing meetings were held with secondary schools which assisted with the identification of influential gang members responsible for recruitment and the organisation of gang fights.

During the scanning process using a range of sources, a consistent pattern of gang related crime and ASB emerged. The priority was to identify the group responsible and find solutions.

ANALYSIS

Operation Hamrow is a multi-agency strategic meeting which reviews firearm and gang related crimes within Southwark. Attendees include specialist police units such as Operation Trident, intelligence officers from adjoining boroughs, Drugs & Firearms Teams, CID and a range of local authority departments such as Youth Offending Teams (YOT), ASB Units, community wardens etc. Each agency is tasked with various coordinated interventions to disrupt gangs. These range from home visits on emerging gang members, up to complex pro-active investigations into serious organised crime. It became apparent that the youths which had been identified in Peckham town centre were an organised gang known as the Peckham Young Guns (PYG).

It was clear that PYG gang members were known to a number of agencies, but there was a lack of coordinated action. They had been dealt with individually through the youth justice system and were subject to sanctions such as supervision and referral orders.

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These orders require attendance at YOT appointments, where offenders receive support and advice to prevent further offending. This may include anger management, victim empathy, restorative justice and strategies to leave gangs. PYG members kept to their appointments and appeared to 'engage well' but continued their usual gang activities.

A Peckham youth worker described the gang as "a wolf pack", circling and watching children using the youth club. Children as young as nine were being coerced into carrying drugs or weapons for older gang members.

It was decided that a fresh approach was required, which would deal with 'group' offending which caused significant harm to the community. PYG gang members were profiled and detailed analysis was undertaken.

PYG Profile

The gang consists of around thirty members ranging in age from thirteen to twenty years. Younger members have typically been excluded from mainstream schooling and have poor attendance. Crime data shows members are involved in drug dealing. PYG members are regularly stopped and found to be in possession of over £300 in cash. They are hostile towards rival gangs in Southwark, Lewisham and Lambeth. 'Post code wars' take place to secure drug markets and to raise the gang's reputation for extreme violence.

Bicycles are used extensively by the PYG to carry out robberies in groups, attend gang fights, to deal drugs, to carry weapons and to evade police. Bicycles they use are often stolen.

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There have been incidents where young people have been kidnapped and beaten by PYG members. There have been few successful criminal prosecutions against gang members for the following reasons;

- Use of uniform black hooded tops and bandanas to conceal identities
- Victims may be rival gang members and refuse to assist police.
- Victims being unwilling to provide evidence for fear of reprisals.
- Weapons and drugs are 'stored' in safe locations and only collected when required.
- 'Wall of silence' in local community due to intimidation.

These factors militate against the possibility of successful prosecutions and the disruption of gangs. PYG members gain respect, income and excitement from gang membership. Once recruited it is difficult to leave the gang lifestyle.

Rap music plays a large part in gang culture. The SN1 shop in the market sells merchandise emblazoned with lyrics by Peckham based rapper 'Giggs', who enjoys a large following in South London. Giggs has received national recognition and has recently won a prestigious music award. His website celebrates gang culture and the SN1 logo is frequently superimposed onto the image of a handgun. It also states that he was imprisoned in 2003 for a firearms offence.

The fourteen year olds selling drugs on behalf PYG 'elders' consider this as a career path. The music videos are seductive, showing the proceeds of gang life being designer clothes, expensive cars, champagne and respect.

One of the telling phrases in a well known Giggs rap "Talking The Hardest" is "I treat my little nig**s like fam(ily) not a boss, my PYG will put your mandem in a box". Gangs are 'sold' as being a family and protection is offered by 'elders'. Giggs will often use young PYG members in his videos, which tend to be filmed on the streets of Peckham. The videos promote gang lifestyle, drug dealing and glorify the use of guns and knives.

The PYG also upload their own rap videos onto 'Youtube' in which they threaten rival gang members and brag about 'shanking' (stabbing) and possessing 'straps' (guns). The lyrics refer directly to actual crimes such as stabbings and shootings which have either happened or are imminent. The videos receive thousands of 'viewings' and help to build the gangs violent profile and intimidate other gangs or the general public.

Dr Tunjii Lasoye, consultant at Kings College Hospital Accident & Emergency Department, has spoken of a year on year increase in teenagers presenting with stab wounds. He reported a high number of repeat victims, whom upon examination have numerous historic scars. Dr Lasoye also stated that many young victims are left permanently with colostomy bags as a result of abdominal knife wounds. These patients are usually gang members who refuse any contact with the police. Due to patient confidentiality, hospitals are prevented from providing the police with the details of knife crime victims.

Evidence of 'silo working' emerged. It became clear that there was a lack of coordination of agencies at 'street-level'. For example, gang members flowed freely across SNT and borough borders. Each SNT dealt with gang members in isolation, rather than adopting a coordinated approach. A similar pattern emerged regarding

other police departments such as, safer schools officers, response teams, cycle squads and council agencies. Gangs slipped through the net of police provision.

Both the criminal justice system and police tend to focus on individuals. Gangs are often highly organised and use this to their advantage. It became apparent that a fresh approach was required to deal with the gang itself as a whole entity.

This analysis provided a clear picture of the causes and underlying conditions which sustained gang related problems in Peckham.

The following objectives were agreed with operation Hamrow;

- Reduce gang related youth crime.
- Reduce the number of young victims of crime.
- Reduce fear of gang related crime and ASB.

RESPONSE

The most urgent requirement was the disruption of gang activity in Peckham town centre. A range of criminal and civil interventions were considered. It was decided that the most effective intervention would be to seek a 'gang' Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) and extensive evidence gathering took place. Due to the gang's reputation, victims and witnesses were reluctant to provide direct evidence. Statements were provided by professional witnesses such as the head teacher of a local secondary school, police or council officers. One advantage of ASBO legislation is that 'hearsay' (anonymous) evidence is permitted.

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Previously closed crime investigations were re-opened in an attempt to find witnesses willing to provide evidence. An enhanced level of victim support was offered including re-housing. The mothers of two boys who required facial reconstructive surgery after being violently assaulted, agreed to give evidence. The boys themselves had been too frightened to attend court.

Town centre CCTV footage was used as evidence showing gangs on bicycles 'taking over' the town centre. Film was also obtained which showed the PYG cycling en masse into neighbouring Brixton and attacking a rival gang. The CPS considered the images to be insufficient for a criminal prosecution. However, it was suitable as evidence for the ASBO proceedings.

Use was made of the PYG rap videos, which corroborated information held on active gang members. The seven most influential and active individuals were selected for ASBO applications.

Prohibitions were carefully drafted in order to disrupt gang activity. The seven gang members were;

- Banned from associating together.
- Excluded from Peckham town centre.
- Banned from riding pedal cycles.
- Subjected to curfews.
- Banned from causing anti-social behaviour.

All seven orders were obtained. The ASBO's were widely publicised amongst police departments and council agencies and within the town centre. All breaches were prosecuted, sending a strong message. PYG activity throughout the borough was

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carefully monitored to avoid any displacement effect. The PYG initially relocated their activities to the Bermondsey area, where two gang members resided. Swift enforcement action was taken which resulted in warrant executions, breach prosecutions and eviction notices being served.

The response was not all about enforcement. Applications were also made for parenting and individual support orders. The youth offending team agreed to bring in a gang specialist to work with the gang members and their families as a large group. Other gang members were monitored and post conviction ASBO's were sought where possible.

A strong preventative approach was required to deter young people on the periphery of the PYG. A multi agency approach was taken to identify individuals at risk. Home visits were made to young people and their families. A police officer, an anti-social behaviour officer, a YOT officer and often the head of community safety conducted the visits. A strong message regarding the dangers of gang culture was given, along with offers of an acceptable behaviour contracts (ABC) and support from a mentor.

To encourage victims and witnesses to give evidence, Southwark council set up a new initiative called 'Serve'. This was coordinated between the police, registered social landlords, YOT and Southwark victim support, to give up to twelve weeks temporary accommodation to individuals / families at risk of gang violence. Whilst in temporary accommodation the witnesses were provided with assistance from advocates, Victim Support and housing. This was a direct response to the gang problems in Peckham.

Another strand of the response was to work closely with the Tenant and Residents Associations and community groups in the area to promote community cohesion and

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to provide reassurance. This regular dialogue encouraged residents to provide useful intelligence and broke down the wall of silence.

Jean M McGloin (Maryland University) in COPS Innovative Problem Solving with Network Analysis says - *“Even if a program appears successful in the short-term, gangs tend to endure because law enforcement can rarely eradicate them completely, nor do they have the resources to sustain such an intensive focus over time and across all gangs and gang members”*. In order to prevent this effect, a new ‘Gangs Problem Solver’ police post was created with a remit of pro-active problem solving around gangs. Key responsibilities included;

- Adopting a problem oriented approach to gangs.
- Maximising the value of existing resources by co-ordination of police / agencies on the ground.
- Improving communication and information sharing.
- Making use of all available legislation.
- Leading periodic reviews and to provide ongoing evaluation.

Another innovation was to make use of the internet by downloading images and films to assist with identification of perpetrators. ‘Youtube blogs’ were monitored and provided virtually ‘live’ updates on gang activities.

To protect all young people in Peckham during the summer, a ‘Stay Safe’ dispersal zone was introduced. This was backed up with a ‘Street Based Team’ of ASB officers, community wardens, police community support officers (PCSO’s) and youth workers. The team sign-posted 300 young people to youth clubs and summer sports schemes.

The use of ASBO legislation in relation to gangs is largely untested in London. Local magistrates were given a briefing on the structure and activities of Southwark gangs. The magistrates commented that they found the information provided to be useful and it was agreed that further briefings would take place.

ASSESSMENT

The main purpose of this project was to reduce the impact of gangs in Peckham. A range of methods were used to evaluate the project, including a detailed analytical report and two qualitative surveys.

Comparisons of crime data were made in the town centre for the quarter preceding service of the ASBO's in June 2009 and the following quarter. Comparisons were also made for the same quarter/s in previous years. The analyst included housing estates adjoining the town centre, described as the 'buffer zone'.

When comparing Feb-May 2009 with Jun-Sept 2009, there was a decrease in youth offending of 46.9% in the ASBO area. There was also a decrease of 59.3% in the ASBO area, for the same period in 2008. (See appendix 1)

"It can be seen there have been significant decreases in youth 'street' crime since the ASBO has been implemented, both when looking at figures from the previous four month period, and also the same period in 2008".

"Furthermore, it appears that there has also been substantial 'diffusion of benefits' across the wider area, with the buffer zone also experiencing a marked decrease in youth 'street' crime." (Kelly Bentley - Police Analyst)

Appendices 2a and 2b give a breakdown of youth crime totals in Peckham town centre between Feb-May 2009 and June-Sept 2009. A steep decline in robbery and violence against the person was noted. An area of concern to the local community was the high level of violent assaults on young people and this was a key objective. A comparison shows a quarterly decrease of 51%.

There was a decrease in crime from June 2009 when responses commenced and crime levels began to plummet. Significant decreases in youth 'street' crime were noted over a twelve month period. The usual summer spike was reversed and crime actually dropped. (See appendix 3)

Crime data indicated that the PYG gang had been a major crime driver in Peckham town centre.

Two qualitative surveys were carried out. Thirteen businesses in the town centre which had previously reported serious anti-social behaviour were surveyed. 92% felt that they had noticed an improvement and that the town centre was now a safer place. (See appendix 4a & 4b). 85% of businesses felt that the police and local authority 'doing a good job' in reducing youth crime and anti-social behaviour. (See appendix 4c)

This represents a real turnaround in the views of the local business community and improved 'feelings of safety' were noted. There were high levels of satisfaction and respondents believed the police and council were now doing a 'good job in reducing youth crime and ASB'. Also, 92% of respondents noted that the project 'had a positive effect on the operation of their businesses'.

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The crime figures indicate that young people are highly likely to be the victims of gang related crime. A second survey was carried out in two Peckham secondary schools, with 328 respondents. (See appendix 5a & 5b)

It was interesting to note that 82% of youths had not directly experienced problems with gangs and 71% felt safe when in Peckham. Unlike the business community, only 32% of young people felt there had been an improvement regarding gang activity with 56% thinking that the situation was 'about the same'. Despite the dramatic decrease in crime, it was clear that the majority of young people had not perceived any improvement.

Ninety-four respondents made 'free text' comments about gangs, of which eighty-four thought gangs, were a serious problem. Below are quotes directly lifted from the survey.

“The gang culture is perceived as a ‘cool culture’, it needs to be de-glamorised and broken, it is not cool to get wasted”

“When you have problems with gangs and get the police involved, you just make it worse for yourself. You are better off dealing with it yourself”.

“They are stupid and pointless, what are they trying to achieve by stabbing”

It is a matter of real concern that only 19% of young people felt they would report being intimidated or targeted by a gang and 38% stated that they wouldn't report it at all. (See appendix 5c) This supports the view that young people are reluctant to come forward and give evidence against gangs. Gang members know that most

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young people will not report becoming a victim and this reinforces their 'untouchable' status.

During the problem solving process, a number of issues emerged which have led to the following recommendations:

Gang Legislation.

At present ASBO's are the only legal tool available for gang disruption of under eighteen year olds, but were not designed for this purpose. The Peckham Gang ASBO applications were successful in this particular case, as wider anti-social behaviour had been caused in the town centre. Much violent gang activity takes place between rival gang members and the wider public are not always directly affected. The courts will not grant an ASBO simply to protect a person from the risks associated with gang membership.

The Policing & Crime Act 2009 introduced civil Gang Injunctions and it is important that they are effective and usable. Breaches will not be criminal offences and are subject to committal proceedings in the county court, which can be lengthy and costly. There is a danger that police and local authorities may decide not to use them. County courts are not designed, staffed or resourced to deal with violent gang members. Many of them do not have cells, probation service, youth offending teams, witness care units etc. An amendment to the act making breaches a criminal offence would overcome these issues.

Criminal Prosecutions

Analysis for this project highlighted high numbers of discontinued prosecutions against gang members. There are many causes for this such as witness intimidation or that the victims themselves being gang members and will not cooperate with

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police. Recently a car containing four PYG gang members was stopped by police. As the car came to a halt, two axes and a knife were thrown from the car window. All four suspects were arrested, but the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to prosecute. The CPS should adopt a positive charge policy for known gang members and ought to be made aware of gang membership when applying the threshold test to charging decisions. This could be facilitated by adding a gangs 'marker' to Police National Computer records. Every opportunity should be taken to prosecute known gang members, to deter them from their activities, remove their sense of being 'untouchable' and reassure the public.

Hospital / Police Information Sharing

It is essential that hospitals should identify knife crime victims to the police. Currently many serious crimes go un-reported and often neither the police nor other caring agencies are informed when a stabbing victim arrives at hospital. This can prevent early intervention and support being made available to young gang members, some of whom may be repeat victims. On balance, the risks associated with the increase in knife related hospital admissions outweigh the concerns of patient confidentiality.

Policing Gangs

The problem solving process extended our understanding and revealed opportunities to improve the policing of gangs. Gangs are hierarchical and the PYG is no exception. Currently specialist departments such as Operation Trident and borough based Drugs and Firearms teams, deal with 'middle' and 'upper' echelons of gangs. The 'lower' members or 'foot soldiers' tend to be younger and more visible on the streets. These 'lower' ranking gang members tend to be dealt with at 'street level' by response teams or SNT officers on an individual basis. As part of the problem solving process a coordinated strategy was successfully adopted to deal with these 'lower'

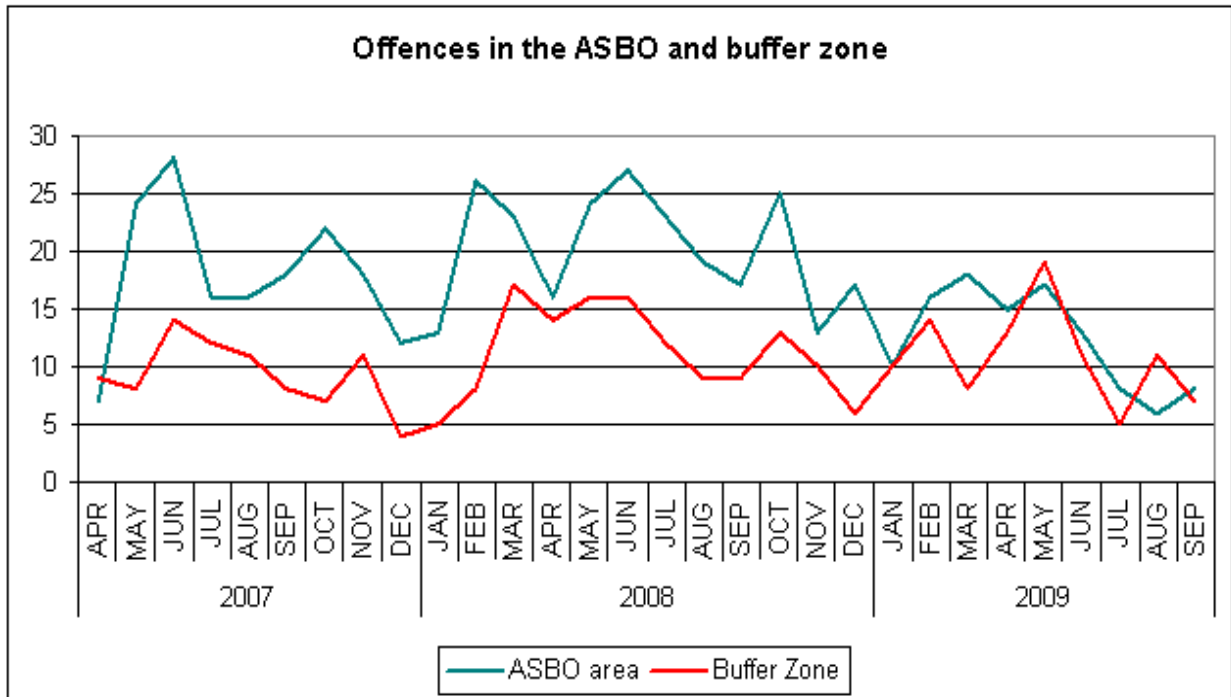
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members, led by the newly appointed 'Gangs Problem Solver'. There is a need to adopt a 'neighbourhood' upwards approach to tackling gang problems.

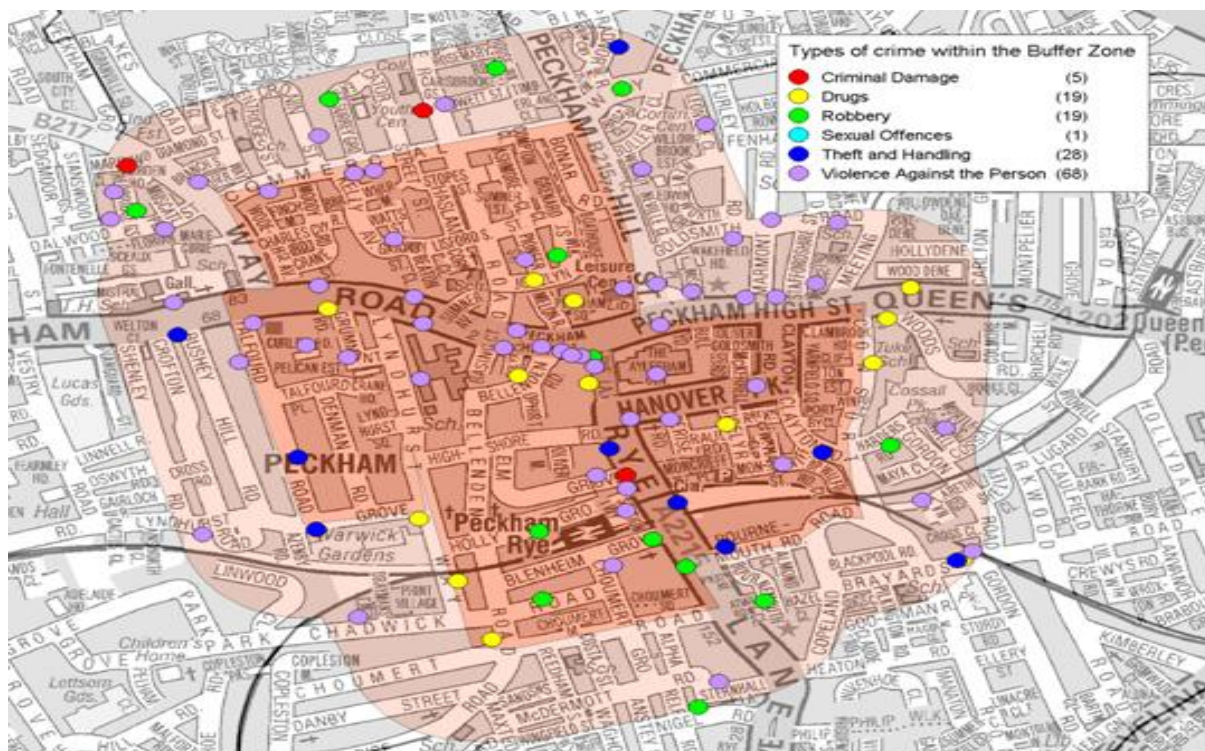
The survey highlighted how concerned young people are about gang culture, even though the majority had not been directly affected. Young people think the police are not doing enough to protect them from gangs. It is important that young people are reassured and their views are heard.

This was a successful and cost effective process utilising existing resources. The legal costs were justified by significant reductions in crime and resulting 'feel good' benefits to the wider public. By using a combined approach of enforcement and prevention, all key objections were met and exceeded. The most difficult barrier to overcome was the fear and intimidation that the 'Peckham Young Guns' had caused. By working in close partnership with Peckham community groups, the entrenched culture of 'suffering in silence' was reversed. Peckham is now a safer place to live and work.

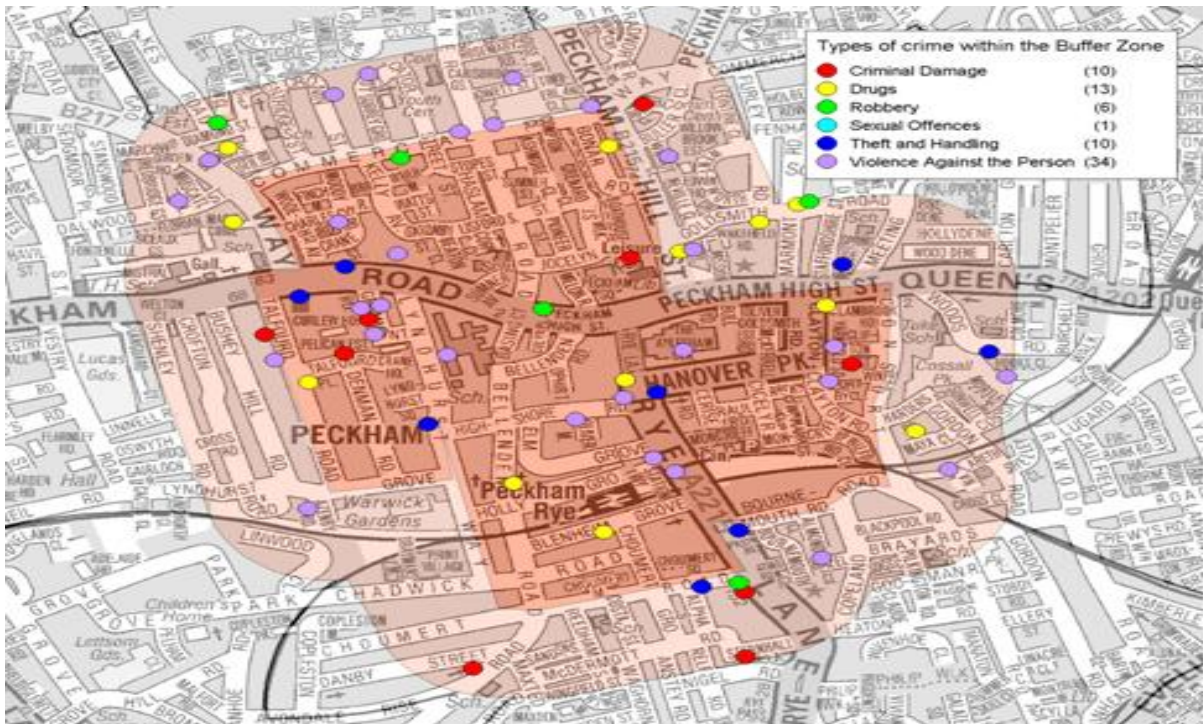
APPENDICES



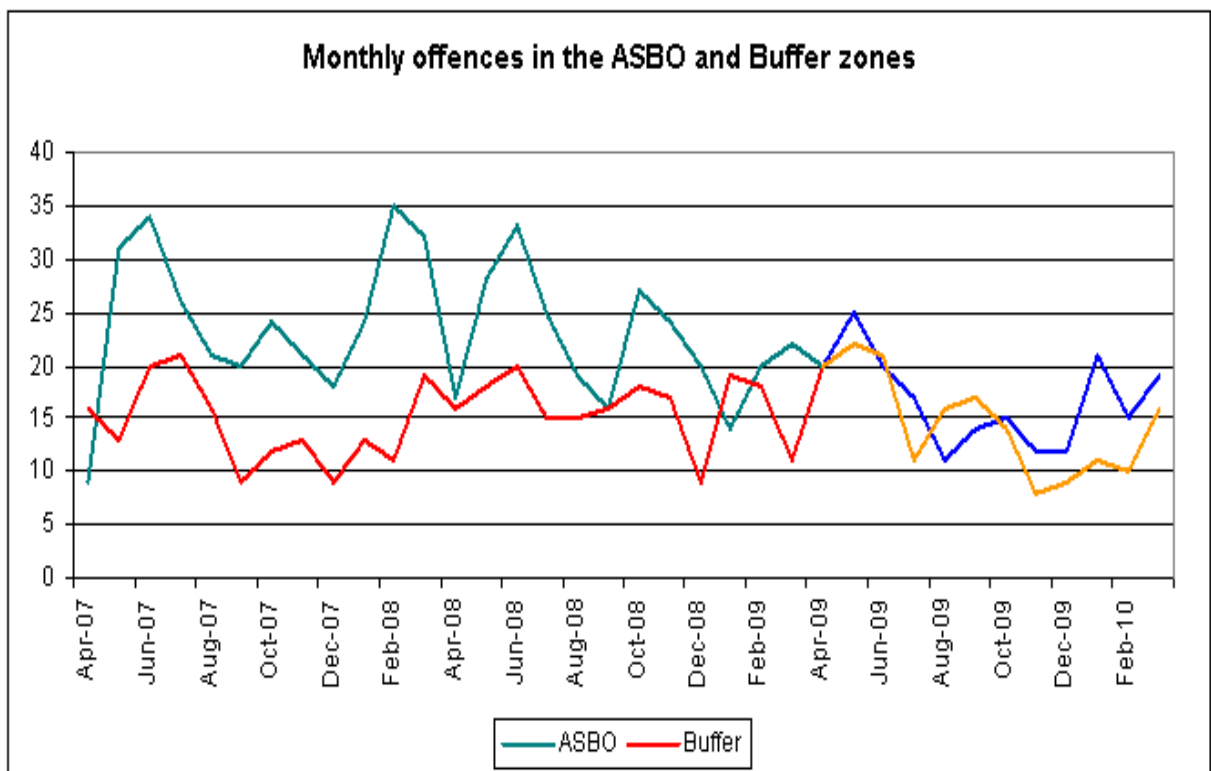
Appendix 1



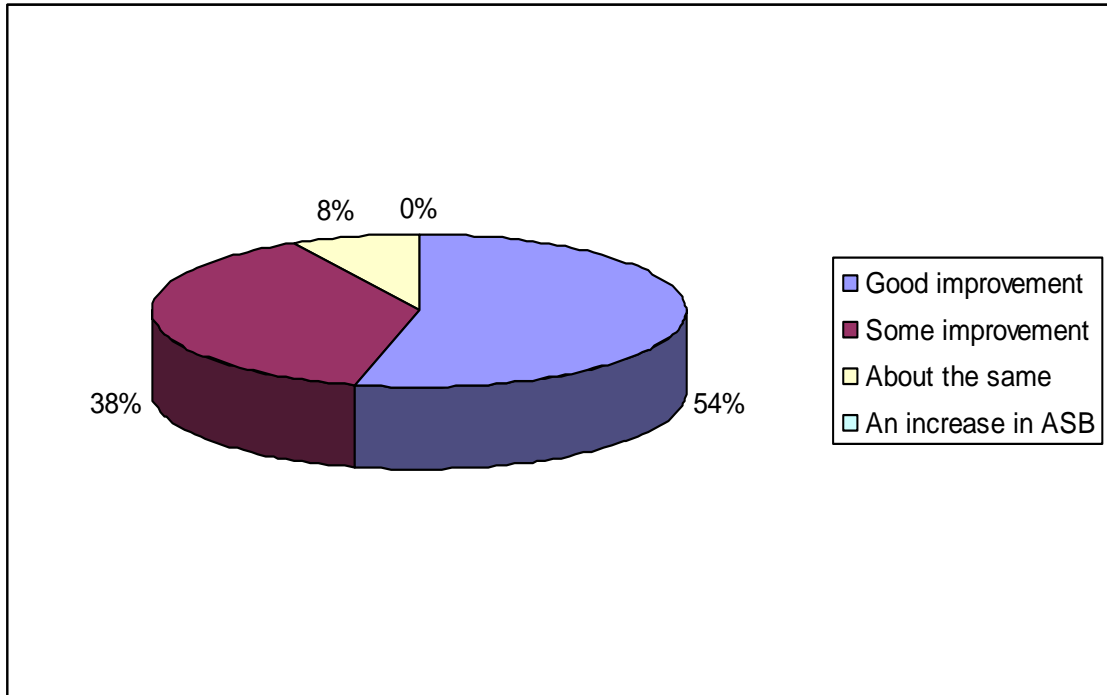
Appendix 2a (Feb-May 2009)



Appendix 2b (Jun-Sept 2009)

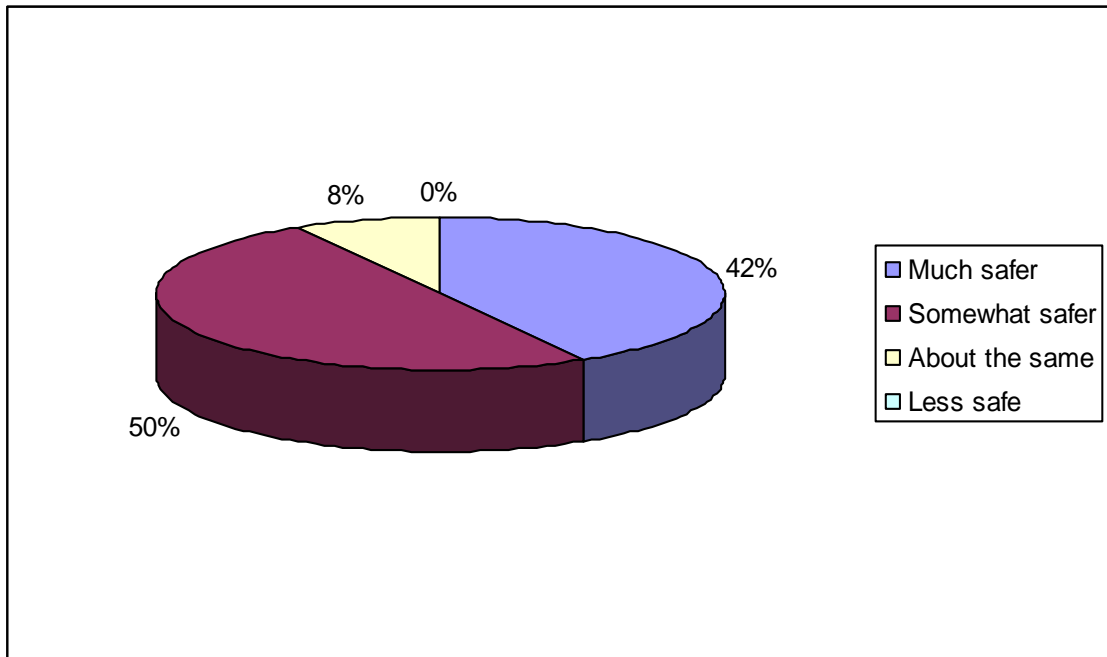


Appendix 3



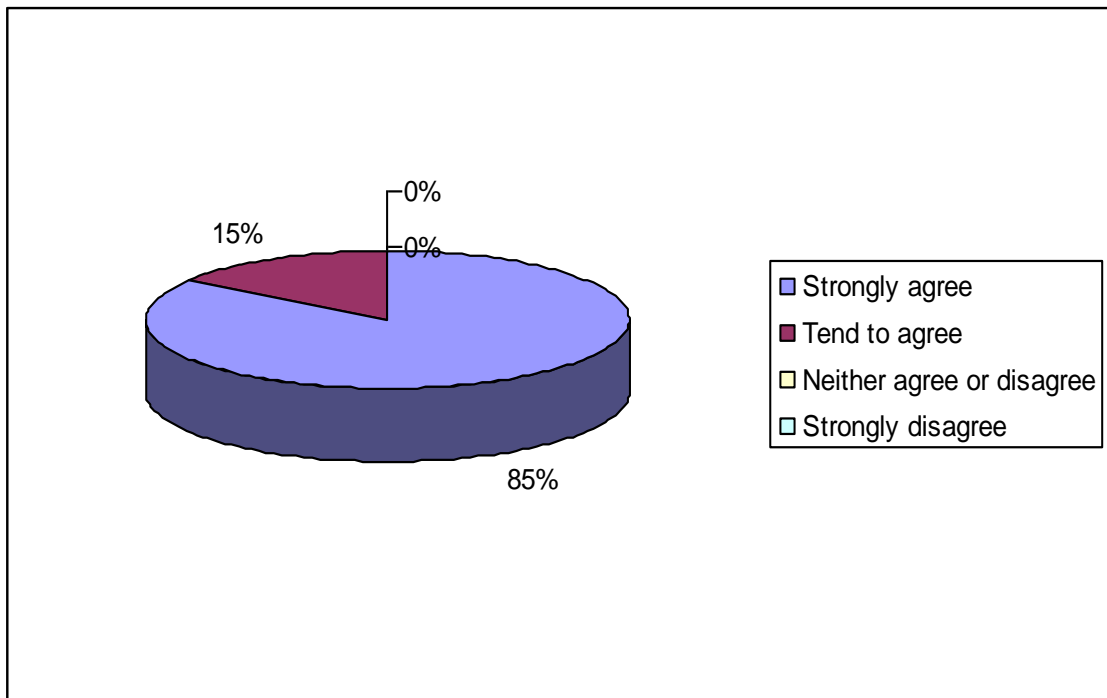
Appendix 4a

“Have you noticed any changes to the amount of youth related anti-social behaviour”?



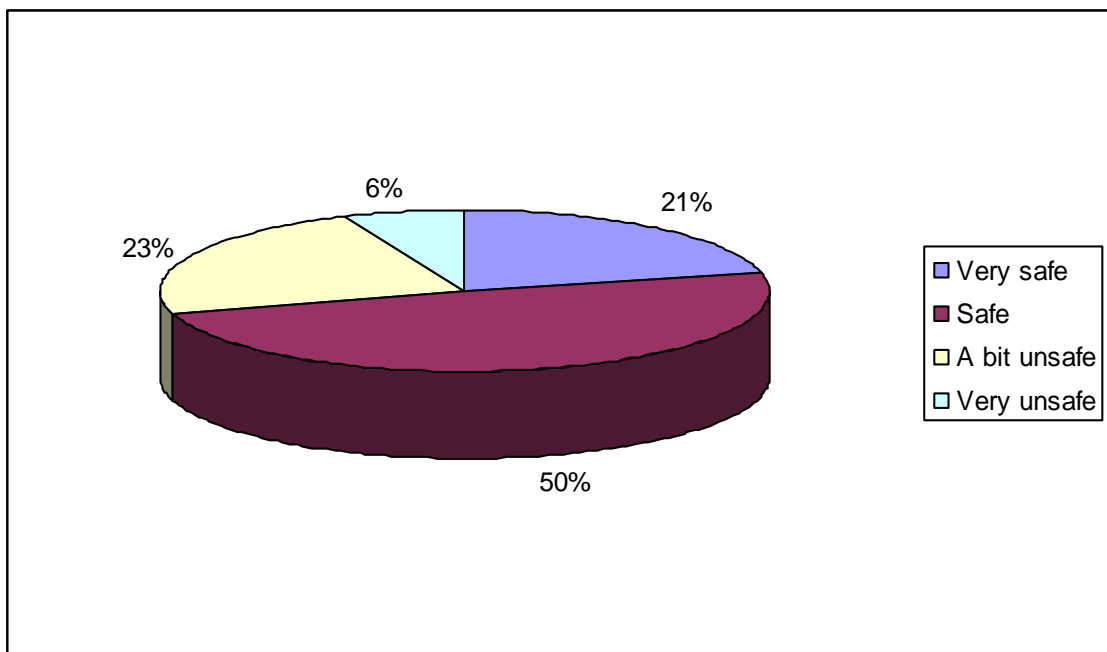
Appendix 4b

“Do you feel that the town centre is now a safer place”?



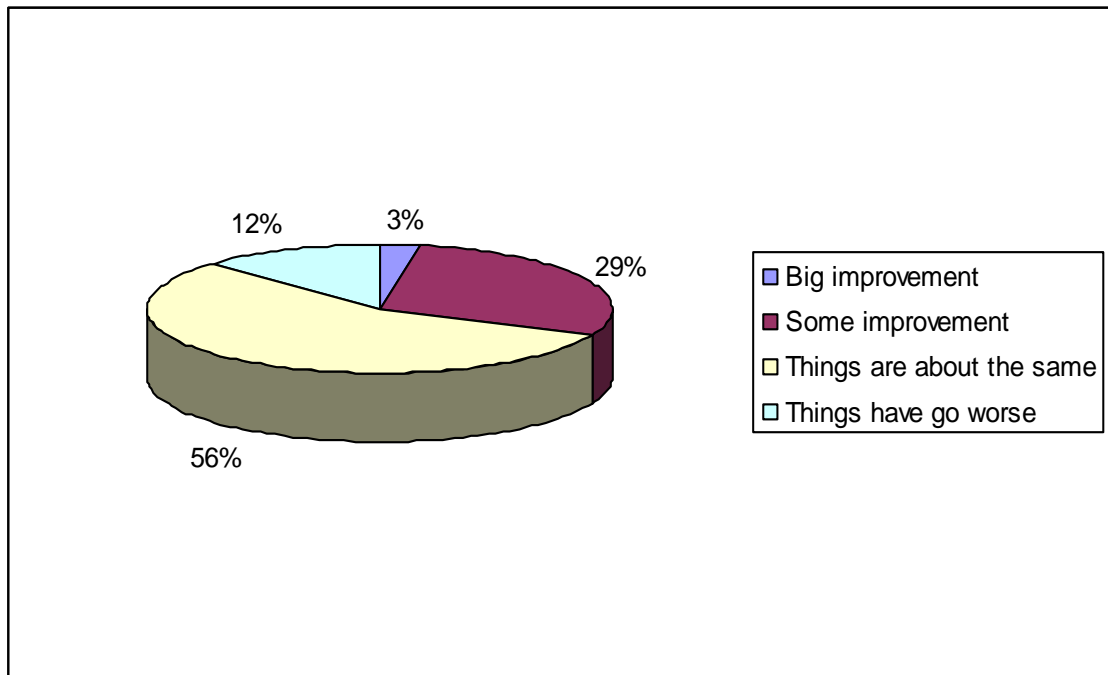
Appendix 4c

“Do you consider that the police and Southwark Council are doing a good job in reducing youth crime and anti-social behaviour”?

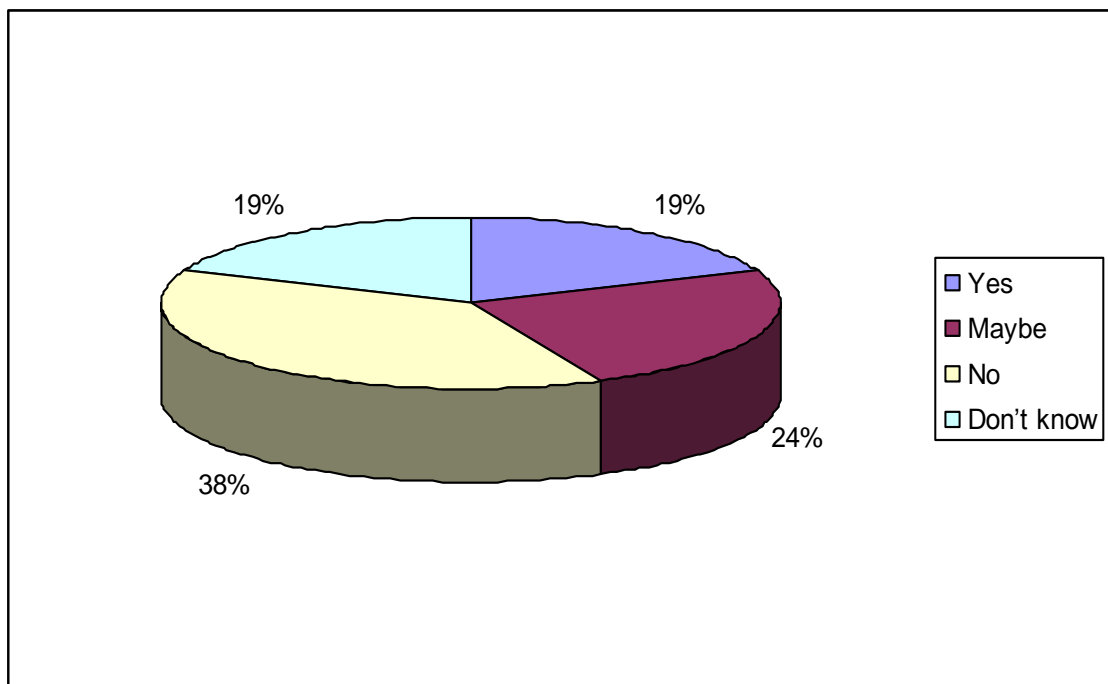


Appendix 5a

“Do you feel safe in Peckham”?



Appendix 5b
"Over the past few months have you noticed any change in gang related problems in Peckham"?



Appendix 5c
"If you were targeted or intimidated by a gang, do you think you would report it to a police officer?"

Glossary of Terms

Acceptable Behaviour Contract - (ABC) Voluntary agreement between local authority and perpetrator of anti-social behaviour. Perpetrator commits to cease negative activity. Contract is monitored by local authority for 6-12 months.

Anti-Social Behaviour Order - A civil court order lasting minimum of 2 years. Containing prohibitions forcing the holder to refrain from causing harassment alarm and distress to other citizens. Prohibitions are individually drafted to address the perpetrators offending profile. Breaches can lead to up to five years imprisonment.

CID - Criminal Investigation Department.

Crown Prosecution Service - (CPS) Government agency responsible for all criminal prosecutions.

Community Warden - Uniformed local authority (civilian) patrol officer. Dealing with low level 'nuisance crime' such as dog fouling, littering and confiscation of alcohol / tobacco. May issue fixed penalty notices. Not police.

Council Tenancy - Low cost state provided housing.

County Court - Court which deals with civil (non criminal) matters.

Youth Worker - Community worker with main remit to engage youths and encourage them away from crime.

Excluded children - Removed from school due to poor discipline and / or challenging behaviour.

Family Intervention Project - Innovative local authority project to support chaotic families at risk of eviction. Families receive intensive practical support from social services and other local authority departments.

Operation Trident - Specialist Crime Division investigating black on black violence.

Police Community Support Officers - Uniformed Civilian Officers with limited enforcement powers .

Post Code - Zip Code

Safer Schools Project - Met Police lead scheme implanting a police officer in participating secondary schools to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. Officers may become involved in discipline, welfare, arrival and dispersal issues.

Safer Southwark Partnership - Strategic body under The Crime and Disorder ACT 1998, obligating local authorities and other agencies to work together with police agencies to address crime and disorder. Having a legal duty to publish a rolling crime reduction plan and to report back on its performance in achieving central government targets.

Secondary School - High School (ages 11-18).

Southwark Anti-Social Behaviour Unit (SASBU) - Police and local authority agency set up to reduce anti-social behaviour and support victims.

Tenant & Resident Association - Voluntary group run by local tenants to protect and advance their collective interests including, housing, crime, environmental issues etc.

Victim Support Scheme - Charity which supports victims of crime.