



Home Office

Crime Reduction & Community Safety Group

Tilley Awards 2007

Application form

Please ensure that you have read the guidance before completing this form. ***By making an application to the awards, entrants are agreeing to abide by the conditions laid out in the guidance.*** Please complete the following form in full, within the stated word limit and ensuring the file size is no more than 1MB. Failure to do so will result in your entry being rejected from the competition.

Completed application forms should be e-mailed to tilleyawards07@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

All entries must be received by noon on **Friday 27th April 2007**. No entries will be accepted after this time/date. Any queries on the application process should be directed to Alex Blackwell on 0207 035 4811. Any queries regarding publicity of the awards should be directed to Chaz Akoshile on 0207 035 1589.

Section 1: Details of application

Title of the project: **“Darkness At The Edge Of Town”: Merton’s Teenage Gangs Initiative**

Name of force/agency/CDRP/CSP: Merton

Name of one contact person with position and/or rank (this should be one of the authors):

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Name of Borough Commander: Chief Superintendent Michael Wood

Full address of Borough Commander: Wimbledon Police Station,
15 Queens Road,
Wimbledon,
London.
SW19 8NN

Name of endorsing senior representatives(s): Supt. Graeme Thomson

Name of organisation, position and/or rank of endorsing senior representatives(s):
Metropolitan Police Service, Community and Partnerships Superintendent

Full address of endorsing senior representatives(s):

Wimbledon Police Station,
15 Queens Road,
Wimbledon,
London.
SW19 8NN

Please tick box to indicate that all organisations involved in the project have been notified of this entry (this is to prevent duplicate entries of the same project):



Section 2: Summary of application

The Gangs initiative emerged following a noticeable rise in the number of street robberies over the Christmas and New Year period of 2005/06. Demand for a response came both from residents and members of the public reporting a significant rise in fear of crime, as well as from local statutory bodies such as the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and the Local Authority (LA) as evidence pointed towards the majority of the robberies involving young people (school-aged) as both victims and perpetrators.

Research carried out by MPS analysts, with assistance from local schools and the LA, revealed that the increase in robberies was symptomatic of an underlying problem: the presence of several teenage gangs, both local and from neighbouring boroughs. Moreover, the presence of gangs was manifesting itself through increased carrying of offensive weapons in schools and rising levels of youth-related crimes.

As a result, the gangs' initiative was initiated in March 2006 through the local multi-agency Joint Tasking Group (JTG) with the aim of developing partnership working to problem-solve the increase in gang-related crime and disorder.

The dynamics of young people forming gangs presented a wide variety of underlying causes that could only realistically be addressed through a multi-agency partnership involving statutory, community and voluntary sector organisations working together. As a result, two strands of interconnected work were identified: Enforcement and Diversion/Prevention. The stakeholders involved in delivering each of the strands are coordinated through the JTG to maximise research, analysis, information-sharing, knowledge, effective-practice and ensure complementarity between all the areas of work.

The JTG quickly established that several barriers existed to addressing gang problems-difficulties in defining gang problems, forming successful partnerships and determining impact. This made the establishment of the project's objectives the first major hurdle. The JTG opted for establishing four Key Performance Indicators that best reflected the strands of work identified. The aim was to achieve the four KPI's.

Moreover, as the JTG discusses the issue of gangs on a monthly basis, evaluating progress via analysis of the KPI's, it allocates resources to targetted initiatives and serves as a forum wherein partners are able to call upon a broad-range of views and expertise in order to discuss bottlenecks and problems. More comprehensive 6-month evaluations on the KPI's and the partnership's work were carried out in November 2006 and April 2007 and serve to stipulate the strategic direction for the future.

Section 3: Description of project

Introduction – Objectives of the Project

With the in-depth analysis revealing that an emerging trend of teenage gangs lay at the foundation of the rise in crime and particularly robbery with a concomitant impact on the feelings of insecurity amongst the community and high resource-allocation by the MPS and partners, the establishment of objectives that reflected the systematic process of analysis and response was needed.

As the research revealed that the structure, identity and membership of Merton's gangs was a constantly changing phenomenon, with factors that impacted with differing intensity on a variety of indicators, the partnership decided to gauge the effectiveness of the initiative through establishing a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPI). The rationale for this was that each strand of work could be broadly represented by the KPI's and that collectively, these indicators would give an accurate overview of the objectives of the initiative.

The KPI's would be analysed and reported upon on a monthly basis with 6-monthly overview meetings to assess the effectiveness of the initiative.

The KPI's were set as follows:

- To reduce robbery of a person by 24 incidents (2%) by March 2007. Given that the most overt symptom of the gangs' emergence was a rise in robbery, a fall in the % of robberies was to be taken as demonstrative proof of a reduction in the main criminal indicator.
- To reduce the number of under-18's accused of possession of an offensive weapon by 10% by March 2007. Research into the gangs question repeatedly raised the question of young people feeling insecure in their environments and carrying weapons as a response. The reduction in the possession of offensive weapons could be considered the result of reductions in feelings of insecurity amongst young people.
- Ensure that 90% of those individuals identified as being "hardcore" members of the key gangs attended ongoing episodes of engagement by March 2007. Once the strands of work had been identified, it became clear that the hardcore members of the gangs could be used in a pro-social manner through engaging them in projects and initiatives that would then result in them feeding back positively to their peer groups. Ensuring a consistent and widespread provision of diversionary activities for those identified members was the key to this area's success.
- To reduce call-outs for graffiti in Figges Marsh, Lavender and Longthornton wards by 20% (150 call-outs) in the twelve months leading to March 2007. These three wards were identified as the main territorial boundaries that the gangs operated within. Research revealed that members that operated on the cusp of gangs, and gradually succumbed to recruitment drives by the hardcore members, often manifested their participation through tagging and graffiti. This is particularly the case with respect to the younger members, who attempt to ingratiate themselves to their elder peers. A reduction in the incidents of graffiti in these areas would be taken as some proof that the younger members of the gangs were less active.

Definition of the problem

Attempting to understand some of the reasons behind young people forming groups and gangs is something that requires a wide-range of information sources and agencies engaging in flexible and regularly evaluated research and analysis.

Initially the problem of gangs manifested itself through the Merton Borough Investigation Unit (BIU) revealing an increase in street crime of 48.2% (from 166 total offences to 246) in the last quarter of 2005 vs. 2004, with a large majority of the incidents concentrated in a specific geographical area, within a one-mile radius of Mitcham Town Centre. In particular, robbery showed an alarming increase of 111% in the last quarter of 2005 vs. 2004, jumping from 81 to 171 offences. More in-depth analysis showed that in 131 of those offences (77%) of the perpetrators or suspected perpetrators were young people and that 84% (144 offences) of young people were the victims. Moreover, in 161 instances (94%) more than one perpetrator was involved with a significant 111 offences (65%) involving a group of more than 2. It was these two statistics in particular that alerted the researchers to the possibility that gangs of teenagers working intensively in Mitcham. There were no identifiable traces regarding days of the week or time.

In-depth analysis of the offenders revealed that many were associated with local gangs that had also been identified by the Local Authority's Graffiti and Enforcement team, through a system of tag-recognition research and analysis. From this point on, the BIU and Local Authority carried out joint research into identifying gangs, members and key characteristics such as street or tag names.

The first phase of gang-specific research revealed that the local gangs, centred around Mitcham, were using websites to publicise their activities, recruit, use message boards and store images of individuals and tags. Further to this discovery, the websites became a central focus of the research and information gathering. In particular, the BIU uncovered the presence of several small, mainly tagging-oriented gangs operating at a very localised level.



Nonetheless, it soon became apparent with this initial phase of research that, whilst revealing the identities of some gangs and their members, it was still only scratching at the surface of the problem. Indeed, once the analysts had collated a list of individuals suspected or known to associate with gangs, this list was shared with the partnership for identification, for example through consultation with local youth workers, education welfare officers (in liaison with local schools) and Youth Offending Service workers. The input of other statutory and external partners, who benefited from face-to-face contact with young people, revealed the presence of an overriding gang which acted as an umbrella organisation through which small individual cells of members identified. The name of this gang is "TZ."

As a result of this new partnership-impulsed development, research took a new direction, focusing specifically on TZ and associate members. Further coordination between the partnership and the gathering of empirical and statistical data by the BIU and several Local Authority departments, the following information was brought to the JTG for the partnership to analyse:

Of the identified hardcore, 19 out of 40 members (47.5%) were IC1 males, 37.5% (15/40) IC3 males, 10% (4/40) IC3 females and 5% (2/40) IC1 females and 72.5% (32/40) lived in the three wards that were identified with the most intense gang-related activity, Figges Marsh, Longthornton and Lavender. 40% of those (16/40) had been excluded from school in the past, raising the issue of schools' role in the initiative.

This initial phase of empirical research allowed for individuals to be identified and targeted, but also gave an overall picture of the demographic questions associated with teenage gangs in Merton.

This was complemented by in-depth studies by members of Safer Merton, the borough's Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP), into some of the theoretical issues underlying teenage gangs and the push and pull factors associated with their formation. This led the team to liaise with numerous external boroughs nationally to share examples of good practice that might be tailored to the Merton case.

In addition, local youth workers and Safer Merton officers were used to gather information at 'grassroots' level from young people they engaged with in the community, through focus groups or in schools. This provided invaluable information relating to the identifying features of gangs, their geographical locations, attended schools as well as interests and activities. This was then used as the foundation around which projects and interventions were designed and tailored according to the needs and desires expressed by young people during consultation sessions.

This multi agency approach revealed the multiplicity of variables that impact upon the formation, consolidation, membership and possible dissolution of gangs. The research revealed that whilst the gangs sometimes satisfied the more expected criteria such as collective identity through clothing and language, in Merton they operated in small independent nuclei, unified by shared territorial domain but fluid in membership, numbers, location and depth of association. In particular, there was not an established, centralised hierarchy that dictated activities and operations, something that made both identifying and discerning between the core and associate members and designing projects and interventions accordingly, all the more challenging.

As a starting point it was therefore necessary to look for identifiable trends within the research. The first of these emerged through repeated consultations with young people who expressed distrust and dissatisfaction with the institutions that represented them and a perceived lack of voice in issues that affected their lives. This manifested itself mainly through high levels of insecurity and the feeling of needing to defend oneself. The need to address these feelings of deinstitutionalisation became a central focus of the diversionary strand of work that was subsequently developed.

At the same time, the feelings of insecurity and the need for personal protection were in turn manifesting themselves through an increase in exclusions from schools demonstrated and an increased trend in the carrying of offensive weapons, which was resulting in high levels of exclusions. It therefore became necessary for a set of enforcement initiatives that addressed the severity of carrying knives and other offensive weapons for reasons of personal protection.

Response to the Problem

In response to this research, the issue was then brought to the multi-agency Joint Tasking Group (JTG), a strategic and resource-allocating group whose membership comprises local statutory stake-holding partners and local community, voluntary and charity organisations. The breadth of membership and experience of the partnership was immediately apparent and proved the basis upon which the bi-strand approach of the gangs' initiative was founded. In order to maintain clear channels of communication and effective partnership working, the JTG meets every two weeks to get both regular updates from partners as well as have new or emerging problems or bottlenecks and barriers brought to the attention of the partnership so that the most diverse range of problem-solving experience and agency can be called upon.

The JTG divided the focus of work and resource-allocation into two areas: Diversion/Prevention and Enforcement. In this way, by centrally coordinating the multiple responses, the group sought to accentuate the use of professional experience in the relative areas and avoided duplication of work or action. At the same time, this also permitted for agencies to share critical information on what might initially have been assumed to be unrelated issues and initiatives. This served to direct the timings and locations of enforcement activities, patrols and also project content and delivery.

The enforcement strand was concerned with those individuals known to be core members of the gangs and who engaged in criminal and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). The on-going intelligence provided by BIU analysts designed much of the interventions around this strand, in particular identifying specific members of the gangs that required individual targeting. Taking the list of identified gang members, the MPS and Merton ASB Unit consulted with the partnership and drew up a "Top 20" list of the young people most deeply entrenched within the gang structures. Evidence was collated relating to their involvement and the individual young people were visited at their domestic addresses early on the 13th June, 2006 and again on 6th February, 2007 where parents were informed as to the activities of their children through the presentation of photographic evidence from websites and such like. Acceptable Behaviour Agreements and ASBO warning letters were issued where appropriate. At the same time, in schools Education Welfare Officers and Head Teachers were liaising with Safer Schools Officers in order to have face-to-face meetings in schools with pupils known to associate with gangs.

On the same days as the home visits, the websites used by the gangs were closed down following consultation with the service providers. There was some discussion within the partnership as to whether the websites should remain open as they were a source of intelligence and evidence. However, it was decided that the websites were easily tracked and that the benefits of having single, all-encompassing days of anti-gang action that impacted on all aspects of the gangs' functioning would send out a stronger message. This has been borne out by the fact that BIU analysts quickly uncovered new websites, and continue to do so.

These specific and targeted interventions have also been supplemented by two initiatives that have focussed on the use of knives and offensive weapons. Operation Blunt, held in May and November 2006, is the MPS response to dealing with knife enabled crime and aims to detect and deter young people from carrying knives. It is an interactive project, combining several approaches: police pro-activity, education through schools engagement, effective use of media campaigns, judicial participation and establishing an Independent Advisory Group to gauge the operations' effects.

In addition, the JTG was faced with difficulties in preventing the rise of street gang membership that is fed by exclusions from schools. Home Office conducted research has found that truants are more than three times more likely to offend than non-truants and that five per cent of all offences are committed by children during school hours. Our own research revealed that 40% (16 of 40) of those visited during the ASB Unit initiatives of June 2006 and Feb 2007 had been excluded from school. Prior to the gangs' initiative, in Merton schools, possession of an offensive weapon resulted in immediate, unconditional and permanent exclusion. However, resorting to permanent exclusions for possession of an offensive weapon was not taking into account the specifics of individual cases or pupil's feelings of insecurity that was feeding the problem of weapons amongst young people. As a response, the JTG designed a protocol for schools to adopt that caters for pupils carrying weapons in schools and encourages the assessment of the specificities of each case. However, so as not to diminish the severity of the offence of carrying a weapon in school, the protocol is very clear in that if the weapon is used to threaten there is a permanent exclusion, but if it is just being carried there is a risk assessment generally followed by fixed-term exclusion. Evaluation of this initiative is currently ongoing.

The JTG was also approached to address a perceived lack of positive interaction between school pupils and the MPS as well as addressing crime levels within academic institutions. As a response, the JTG has also joint-funded the introduction of on-site, full-time Safer Schools Officer in all Merton's secondary schools. These officers are better placed to develop good relationships with the young people, link with other agencies and to identify the need for intervention strategies, particularly at the early stages of gang-association.

The diversionary strand of the partnership was concerned with providing a series of structured and flexible initiatives for engaging YP in, associated with, and on the cusp of gangs. Central to this was the amplification of options, projects and schemes that covered the various layers of association with teenage gangs. Crucially, following the revelation of the phenomenon of *youngers*, generally Year 7 and 8 pupils who act as lackeys for older gang members. Most worryingly, the behaviour of *youngers* is seen as synonymous with some of the more extreme gang-activity as they feel the need to prove their worth to their peers.

Initially, the diversionary strand was concerned with the engaging YP generally on the cusp of or at risk of associating with gangs in projects designed and hosted by statutory organisations, such as local youth centres, whilst the core members would be the concern of the varied enforcement initiatives. As research continued, however, it became clear that the structures that the gangs operated under necessitated a more comprehensive approach and one that allowed the YP ownership and responsibility for their own interventions. The influential role held by many of the elder members within the gangs was revealed as a potential avenue for positive change rather than with the negative preconceptions that had previously guided responses. Thus, approaches were made to the core members with a view to engaging them in activities that would then result in what became known as a positive "ripple effect". The idea of the "ripple effect" was to address issues of concern expressed by the core members through service provision and use the resultant engagement as a vehicle for positive mentoring towards those within the gangs, particularly the *youngers*.

Upon consultation with the gang members it became clear that a gap existed in the provision of services for young people who felt that the statutory bodies and institutions that surrounded them failed to represent their interests. As a result of these feelings, many core members of the gangs were generally unwilling to engage with any of the local diversionary projects. The result was that a variation of tactics with respect to delivery of the diversionary strand was required.

Thus, instead of being restricted to designing "drop-in" gang-focussed projects for young people to attend, several multi-phase initiatives were begun involving outreach workers engaging young people in their estates and blocks. The initial phases were concerned with discussing the young people's experiences as being involved in gangs in Merton. This was followed by the young people engaging in filming, role-playing and interviews which have formed the foundation of a resource pack which has been rolled out in schools as part of PSHE curriculum and in youth centre sessions around Merton. The key factor is that the young people who were involved in the making of the film, namely the core members of TZ, present the resource pack to their peers and lead discussions relating the perils associated with gang-involvement. This has greatly helped the diffusion of the message for the need for pro-social behaviour and the perils associated with gangs, criminal activity and anti-social behaviour.

In mid-2006, it became apparent, initially through young people expressing concern through local youth workers, that the more serious gang-related activity revolved around an emerging rivalry between the Merton-based gang, TZ, and a Wandsworth-based equivalent, SUK which has resulted in the murder of one teenager on 4th November, 2006 and several stabbing incidents. Analysis by the BIU backed these claims, yet rather than maintain unconnected borough-centric responses, approaches were made to Wandsworth with a view to sharing information and also coordinating responses to the emerging cross-borough rivalry. Representatives from Merton now attend the inter-agency gangs meeting together with representatives from Lambeth, and the experience of joint initiatives with regards to outreach engagement of young people, the focus of resource allocation and examples of good practice are all shared.

Evaluation of the intervention

The evaluation of the gangs' initiative has been on-going, with monthly updates fed back to the JTG not only on the identified KPI's, but also the progress and/or barriers of individual parts of the various strands.

The positive results achieved by the KPI's have informed the JTG's establishing new targets for the period Apr-Oct. 07, yet in recognising the fact that much of the work has involved intangible benefits and/or information sourcing, the partnership required feedback from individual partners who have ownership of particular initiatives, which then allowed space for discussion regarding new directions, developments and areas for improvement. In addition, the JTG has appointed a central coordinator for the gangs initiative that liaises with all the independent owners of the various strands of work. This has resulted in a series of working subgroups being set-up that has allowed for more efficient information sharing, coordination and communication between internal and external partners as well as monitoring that the interventions are in line with best practice.

In particular, whilst the KPI's indicate a level of success in curbing gangs' overtly criminal activity, there is evidence that the gangs themselves are transforming, membership is constant and the incidents of criminal or anti-social behaviour have been more targeted to specific gang-on-gang rivalry rather than on the wider public. Despite the fall in non-intra gang crime, fear of crime indices in the areas most commonly frequented by teenage gangs has remained high, registering a fall of just 2% (from 78% 2005-06 to 76% 2006-07) in the Merton Annual Residents Survey. Analysis concludes that this arises from the lack of displacement that has occurred and reflects the highly territorial nature of the gangs.

Therefore, the partnership recognises the good containment work that the first 06-07 phase of the initiative achieved, whilst at the same time acknowledging that more targeted intra-gang work is needed in order to effect positive outcomes with respect to the gang rivalries and that ways of reassuring and informing the public of the successes achieved are necessary.

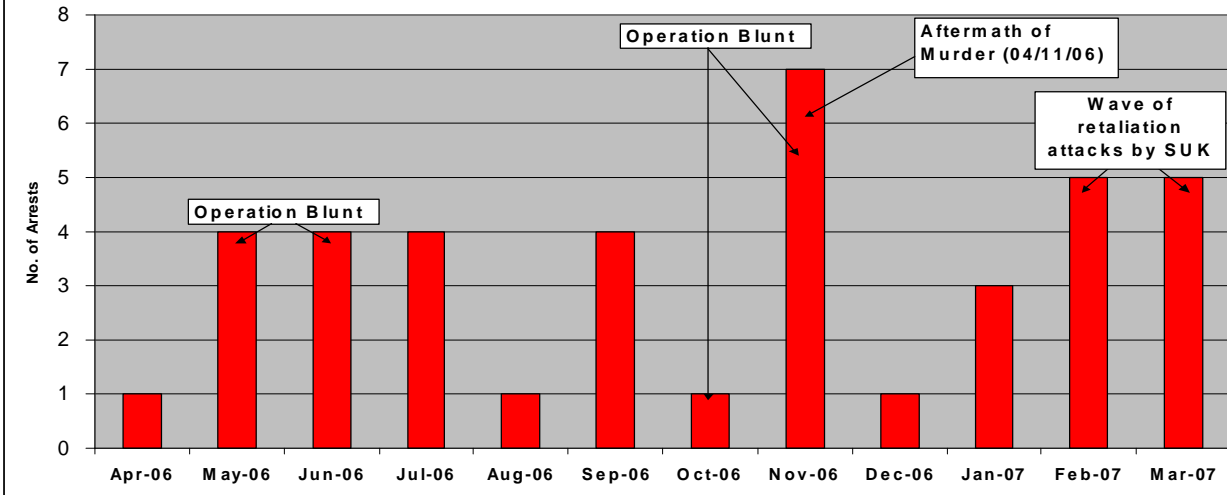
This has led to the identification of the need for increased community engagement (particularly through parent involvement) through mediation and mentoring services for gang members and the addressing of gaps in provision with respect to support services for young people who want to leave gangs but feel that their safety might be compromised in so doing.

By each KPI, the results have been encouraging

- To reduce robbery of a person by 2% by March 2007. ACHIEVED – 4.3% reduction from 625 to 598 robberies. This is a saving of £84,600 according to Cost of Crime figures. Comparison with neighbouring boroughs reveals the following figures: Wandsworth +3%, Croydon –1% and Sutton +1%.
- The reduction of 10% was not achieved. 2005-06 to 2006-07, showed a rise of 21.1% in young people being arrested for possession of an offensive weapon, from 33 to 40.
- Of the 40 identified hardcore individuals 36 (90%) attended a single form of diversionary engagement between Mar 06-07 and 28 attended repeated activities (70%)
- To reduce call-outs for graffiti in Figges Marsh, Lavender and Longthornton wards by 20% in the twelve months leading to March 2007. ACHIEVED – 49% reduction, or £353,940 according to Cost of Crime Figures.

The missed KPI target regarding possession of offensive weapons reduction was a cause for serious concern. To understand the rationale behind this, further in-depth analysis was carried out. The analysis demonstrated (See fig. 1.2) that the intra-gang rivalry that erupted between SUK and TZ, and particularly in the period immediately following the murder of Nov. 4th, 2006, showed a significant rise in arrests for offensive weapon carrying as young people 'tooled up' for fear of retaliatory action. In addition, the success of Operation Blunt was demonstrated by disproportionately high numbers of arrests in the period of the operation's rollout. Moreover, following the murder, many of the Merton-based young people "went to ground" as youth centres and clubs reported drops in attendance. This lasted until Feb. and Mar. 07 when a series of retributory incidents linked to the original murder has signalled the reignition of the TZ-SUK rivalry. It is for these reasons that the work has now taken on the shift in focus outlined above.

**Fig 1.2 - Number of Under 18's Arrested for Possession of an Offensive Weapon
(April 2006 - March 2007)**



In terms of the two-strand approach, results have also been positive:

ENFORCEMENT

40 arrests, 500+ stop and searches and 350 knives recovered in the period. The Enforcement Visits by the police and the ASB Team saw the issuing of six ASB warning letters, thirteen Acceptable Behaviour Agreements, ten ASBO warning letters and one re-issuing of the conditions of an ASBO, for a total of 29 actions. The identified individuals have had follow-up discussion held at ASB Panels, and to date just 2 of the 29 (7%) have since come to the attention of the MPS or other statutory agencies.

DIVERSION

There were 15 diversionary schemes funded at a total cost of £13,150.78 by the JTG. Additionally £22,000 of external funding was obtained. Each strand has been individually evaluated for its contribution towards the overall objective.

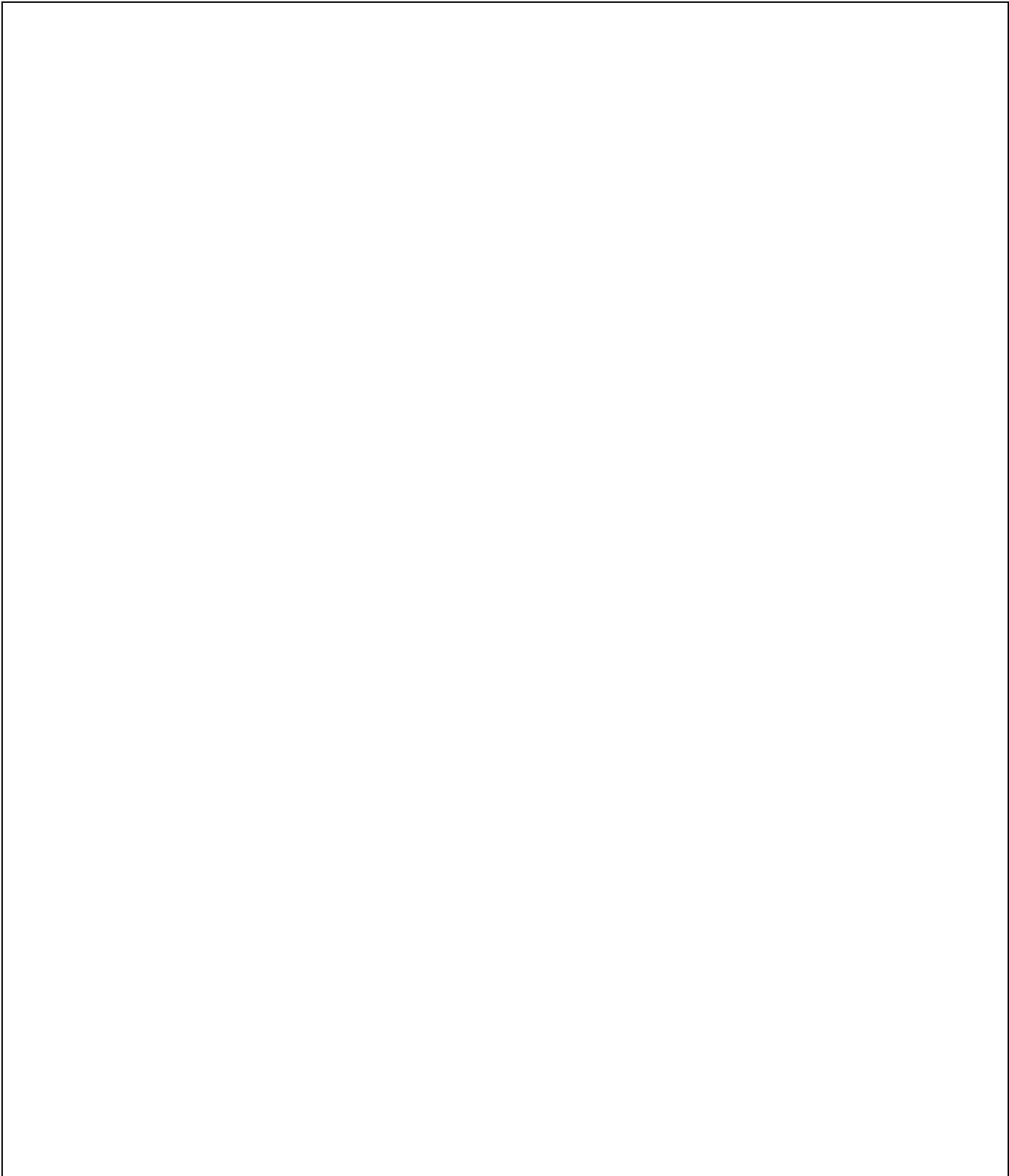
Concluding remarks:

This phase of Merton's gangs' initiative has shown initially encouraging signs. Three of the four the KPI's were achieved as well as large savings through cost of crime calculations and uncovering information. Moreover, gangs' through being an active demonstration of a successful Problem Solving Process, has laid the down foundations for future partnership working and encouraged further take-up of the process of gangs-related work. The nature of gang interventions is such that new problems and issues will constantly emerge, and a flexible, long-term vision is required. The gangs' initiative is merely the first step on this path.

Section 4: Endorsement by Senior Representative

I hereby express my endorsement for the submission of this project to the Tilley Awards, which is supported by the wider partnership as an example of effective problem solving. This has been an excellent piece of work, with full support from a range of partners, and has been supervised through Merton's multi-agency Joint Tasking Group, who have also helped fund several of the initiatives. This submission is not subject to any data sharing restrictions.

Supt. Graeme Thomson, Metropolitan Police Service, Community and Partnerships Superintendent.



Checklist for Applicants:

- 1. Have you read the process and application form guidance?
- 2. Have you completed all four sections of the application form in full including the endorsement from a senior representative?

3. Have you checked that your entry addresses all aspects of the judging criteria?
4. Have you advised all partner agencies that you are submitting an entry for your project?
5. Have you adhered to the formatting requirements within the guidance?
6. Have you checked whether there are any reasons why your project should **not** be publicised to other police forces, partner agencies and the general public?
7. Have you saved you application form as a PDF attachment and entitled your message 'Entry for Tilley Awards 2007' before emailing it?

Once you are satisfied that you have completed your application form in full please email it to Tilleyawards07@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk. Two hard copies must also be posted to Alex Blackwell at Home Office, Effective Practice, Support & Communications Team, 6th Floor, Peel Building (SE Quarter), 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF.