

## Tilley Award 2006

### 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 and within the word limit. Failure to do so could result in disqualification from the competition.

Completed application forms should be e-mailed to Tricia Perkins; [patricia.perkins@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:patricia.perkins@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk)

All entries must be received by noon on Friday 28th April 2006. No entries will be accepted after this time/date. Any queries on the application process should be directed to Tricia Perkins on 0207 035 0262. Any queries regarding other aspects of the awards should be directed to Michael Wilkinson on 0207 035 0247 or Lindsey Poole on 0207 035 0234.

Please tick box to indicate whether the entry should be considered for the main award, the criminal damage award or both;

Main award

Criminal Damage Award

Both Awards

#### 1. Details of application

Title of the project: Silencing the guns across Birmingham

Name of force/agency/CDRP: West Midlands Mediation and Transformation Service

Name of one contact person with position/rank (this should be one of the authors): Insp Iain Donnelly

Email address: [i.donnelly@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk](mailto:i.donnelly@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk)

Full postal address: c/o Staff Office, West Midlands Police HQ, Colmore Circus, Birmingham, B4 6NQ

Telephone number: 0845 1135000 Ext 7800 5111

Fax number: 0121 626 5643

Name of endorsing senior representatives(s) ACC Nick Tofiluk

Position and rank of endorsing senior representatives(s) Assistant Chief Constable (Intelligence)

Full address of endorsing senior representatives(s) c/o Chief Officer Group, West Midlands Police HQ, Colmore Circus, Birmingham, B4 6NQ

## **2. Summary of application**

Until three years ago, Birmingham had been gaining an unenviable reputation for gang-related gun crime. Increasingly frequent and often-deadly shootings posed a significant risk to the communities of Aston and Handsworth, as well as seriously undermining the image of the city. This state of affairs was exacerbated by the heroin and Crack cocaine drugs market and gang members in possession of guns and drugs presented themselves as negative role models for young, alienated and unemployed youths in deprived communities.

The West Midlands Mediation and Transformation Service (WMMTS) was created in November 2004 to intervene in disputes between gang members which if left unresolved, would almost certainly result in further murders or attempted murders. The WMMTS intervenes pro-actively and reactively with gang members, initially to prevent outbreaks of serious violence and then by encouraging gang members to find other non-confrontational ways of reaching an understanding. Ultimately, the WMMTS offers gang members the opportunity to turn away from a gang lifestyle and change their lives for the better by offering them an exit strategy and a less destructive lifestyle.

The project has played a significant role in reducing gang-related firearms incidents in Birmingham to their lowest level for many years and reducing the number of murders involving firearms in the previous twelve months by 45% and the number of attempted murders by 43%. There have also been impressive reductions in offences involving firearms in the parts of Birmingham that have been historically associated with higher than average levels of gun crime.

The project has been fully evaluated by an independent organisation with unrestricted access to police statistics and intelligence as well as mediation service staff and case history information. The outcome from the evaluation is very positive and whilst there is an acknowledgement that there are other strands of work having an impact on gun-crime in the city, the Mediation Service is providing a truly innovative response and is having a real impact on a high-risk threat to community cohesion.

### **3. Description of project**

#### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

During the period between 2000 and 2003, members of two rival gangs, the Johnson Crew and the Burger Bar Gang, were engaged in a campaign of tit-for-tat murders, attempted murders and shootings. Many of these shootings were carried out in a brazen manner and ordinary members of the public were increasingly becoming caught up in the crossfire. These shootings were motivated out of a combination of gang members losing face or respect, a threat to drug revenues or in revenge for earlier acts of 'disrespect' and/or assaults. The drug gangs had a corrosive effect on vulnerable young people and there is an abundance of evidence that increasingly younger boys were aspiring to enter a gang, possess a firearm and assert their authority in order to gain respect and revenue from dealing drugs. The gangs have a deeply destabilizing effect on local communities and they generate a great deal of fear due to the excessive levels of violence used to avenge often-trivial issues. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 2003 a crisis point was reached when gang members shot dead Letisha Shakespeare and Charlene Ellis outside a party in Aston. This attack was carried out to avenge the murder of another gang member a month previously. The killings caused outrage in Birmingham and across the UK and it was clear that urgent action was required to stop the violence. It was immediately clear that a new approach to this problem was required and that the solution needed to take account of the level of risk to the general public as well as the serious threat to the reputation of the city of Birmingham both nationally and internationally.

#### **ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM**

It is recognized that the causes of high levels of gun crime are complex. The geographical locations in Birmingham where gun crime and gang violence have been particularly problematic are Aston, Handsworth and Lozells to the North and North-West of the City Centre. These locations have the highest levels of deprivation in Birmingham with Washwood Heath, Lozells, Handsworth and Aston coming at the top of the 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation. A combination of poor housing, low levels of academic attainment, unemployment, poor health and a relatively high crime rate conspire to create an environment where disillusioned young men from dysfunctional backgrounds shun mainstream society and have developed their own support network within gangs. These gangs identify themselves on the basis of their geographic origins and the rivalry generated by the lucrative drug markets in the city. The issue of music and music/club venues and the promotion of DJs and specific artists add to the rivalry between gangs. The acquisition and use of firearms to settle disputes or for self-defence against rivals had become depressingly common and gang members were regularly resorting to lethal force in order to deal with relatively trivial issues.

In 2003, the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership created the Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence Group (BRGV). The role of the BRGV Group was to find imaginative and effective ways to reduce gang-related gun crime and the de-stabilizing effect that it had on local communities, particularly those of Aston and Handsworth. The BRGV Group set out to intervene to stop and disrupt the criminal activities of gangs, to develop resistance to gang affiliation within young people and their neighbourhoods and facilitate those engaged in gang activity to make life-changing decisions and cease affiliation or activity. Every murder has a huge impact on the family of the deceased, the family of the perpetrator and on the wider community. Every murder also costs the taxpayer, on average, over £1 million for police to investigate, prosecute and for the criminal justice system to incarcerate the offenders.

The BRGV Group has representatives from West Midlands Police, Birmingham City Council Youth Services, the Youth Offending Service, Government Office West Midlands as well as a number of other statutory and non-statutory bodies. Assistant Chief Constable Nick Tofiluk currently chairs the group and the deputy chair is Yousiff Meah, the director of Birmingham City Council Youth Services. The BRGV strategy uses a combination of "carrot" and "stick" tactics to impact on gun crime. There is a strong enforcement element involving the police and the use of overt and covert investigative options and robust street-level interventions. There are also a variety of interventions carried out by partner agencies in schools, youth clubs, the church and community centres aimed at undermining gang culture and values.

#### **MEDIATION AS A NEW AND UNTESTED OPTION**

It was clear that a new and innovative approach was needed to influence the actions of gang members and offer alternatives to those who may wish to pursue a less destructive lifestyle. Research was carried out into initiatives that had taken place in other parts of the world and it was identified that in Birmingham there were a number of parallels with the violence experienced by the communities of Northern Ireland and the deep sense of distrust within and between communities. The Mediation Service of Northern Ireland had begun a process whereby they were able to intervene in disputes that had the potential to escalate into violent confrontations, shootings or so-called punishment attacks. There was recognition that in Birmingham many of the issues that triggered shootings were relatively trivial and as such were suitable for an intervention that could diffuse the situation, facilitate dialogue and

allow both sides to come to an understanding whilst avoiding a potentially deadly loss of "respect".

The Birmingham Community Safety Partnership agreed to fund the Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence Group with £200K in November 2004 to create a bespoke Mediation and Transformation Service. The aim of the project was to provide a trained, skilled and credible repository of expertise, committed to a cessation of gang violence and to assist and encourage a process of transformation, whereby those engaged in armed conflict would feel able to make a meaningful contribution to a safer environment.

### **PROJECT TEAM**

The project is overseen by a Detective Superintendent from West Midlands Police who is part of the Force Intelligence Department and who is responsible for intelligence relating to the criminal use of firearms. He is therefore fully sighted on all current and historical intelligence relating to gangs operating in the West Midlands. This officer manages a team of mediators who were trained by Mediation Northern Ireland and who have an extensive mix of experience and skills. They currently include;

- An ex-police officer from with over 30 years experience working in the community.
- A criminologist with a background in social psychology and originally from the Caribbean.
- An ex-gang leader who founded a listening and negotiating service for prisoners and ex-prisoners
- An ex-DJ and army officer
- A social worker and peace activist
- A life skills coach and consultant

### **PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

The WMMTS initially set itself the following objectives;

1. To identify key gang leaders with influence and power over other gang affiliates
2. Using existing intelligence and community soundings, to prioritise those amenable to an approach
3. Using relevant expertise within the group, to begin a process of selective contact, aimed at support for facilitated peace talks
4. To identify gang affiliates currently in prison who may exert influence on a talks process.
5. To mirror the talks process outside, with a similar process inside identified prison establishments.
6. To intervene where appropriate in post-shooting incidents and to mediate and prevent retaliation
7. To facilitate, in partnership with other agencies and faith groups, an exit strategy for those wishing to leave the gang structure.
8. To engage with the existing regional resettlement strategy to assist gang affiliates to lead peaceful and meaningful lives upon release from custody.
9. To identify a neutral community figure of influence, prepared to chair talks between opposing gang members.
10. To establish a project management structure, capable of assessing risk, transparent governance, professional auditing and independent evaluation.
11. To provide feedback and assistance to public authorities, from the grassroots, to facilitate better understanding of gang related culture.

### **MEDIATION IMPLEMENTATION**

The West Midlands Police Force Intelligence Department quickly identified the key gang members who held positions of influence over other gang members and four individuals were prioritised for initial contact and action. A meeting was facilitated with these individuals and initial feedback was very positive in that there was a consensual view that influence could be brought to bear on the situation and that mutual talks may be possible. A second meeting with opposing gang members was then arranged with very encouraging feedback. WMMTS then went on to establish informal, but regular dialogue with a number of influential gang members, pre-dominantly by telephone but also face to face and over time a degree of trust was established. As the role of the mediators has developed and matured they have assisted in communication between gangs, generating improved understanding of contentious issues, supported creative solutions to problems in real time and facilitated agreements. Some of this work is carried out in very dangerous situations and it can be a very stressful environment to work within.

The WMMTS has become involved in numerous interventions since it's inception in both a pro-active and a re-active capacity. The following three examples describe typical interventions carried out by WMMTS.

- Tensions had been building around the security arrangements for a prominent Birmingham nightclub. Resentment towards a London based gang had increased to the point where members of the Burger Bar Gang had been asked to intervene and intelligence indicated that two people connected with the venue were to be targeted and shot. WMMTS intervened and facilitated a series of meetings over two days between the management of the club, rival gang members and the security company. An agreed compromise option was produced that all sides could live with and the tension was reduced. It is likely that if this situation had been allowed to develop there would have been a "turf war" between Birmingham and London gangs that would have had severe repercussions for both many people and the city of Birmingham.
- A gang member who had been the victim of a serious shooting incident was approached by WMMTS and a rapport was established. He was persuaded not to embark on a violent reprisal attack and to allow police to investigate the offence and to arrest the offenders. This intervention eased tensions and "bought time" for the police investigation. This gang member is now considering turning his back on the gang lifestyle and an exit strategy is being developed.
- A young but prominent gang member was approached by WMMTS because it was recognized that he was at high risk of carrying out shootings to prove his credibility to other gang members. He has responded well to a series of interventions and has expressed a desire to go back to college and learn a trade. WMMTS has also facilitated a meeting between this young man and his estranged family.
- The WMMTS has facilitated the work of another group, Increase the Peace UK (IPUK) and in October 2005 between them they negotiated a formal ceasefire between the Burger Bar Boys and the Johnson Crew.

### **IMPACT AND EVALUATION OF THE WMMTS**

The work of the WMMTS has directly contributed to bringing about the lowest levels of gun-crime in Birmingham in six years and the most recent crime statistics show a reduction of 9.7% between 2004/5 and 2005/6. This is the fifth successive year on year reduction. There have been particular reductions across the three Birmingham BCUs covering Aston, Handsworth and Lozells. The project has played a significant role in reducing the number of murders involving firearms in the previous twelve months by 45% and the number of attempted murders by 43%.

A full, independent evaluation of the WMMTS was completed in March 2006. A review of all of the available literature worldwide and academic research during the course of the evaluation highlighted fourteen critical success factors for effective initiatives aimed at countering gun-crime and gang violence. The work of WMMTS scores well against all of the following fourteen factors.

1. **The initiative must offer a comprehensive package of measures:** WMMTS comprises a range of interventions and is itself part of a wider strategic pan-Birmingham approach via the BRGV Group.
2. **Focus on specific offence/offender/place:** WMMTS focuses on gang members involved in gun crime in Birmingham
3. **Involvement with strategic partnerships:** The service is overseen and funded by the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership and is currently linking into other agencies that can assist with exit strategies and the resettlement of gang members.
4. **Cultural sensitivity:** Almost all of the client group are from specific minority ethnic communities and as such all of the mediators are from similar backgrounds and are well known in the community.
5. **Adopt a problem solving approach:** Every mediation situation is different and therefore needs a unique, dynamically managed response tailored to the specific issue.
6. **Strong management structure and clear leadership:** The WMMTS exists in its own right as a limited company directed by a Detective Superintendent and is managed on a day-to-day basis by a small team of staff and mediators.
7. **Target behaviour rather than affiliation:** The main aim of the project is to stop people shooting one another. Gang membership provides a focus rather than becoming an end in itself.
8. **Offer both a carrot and a stick:** The project offers more opportunities than enforcement, however the full range of enforcement options covered by the BRGV agenda backs it up.
9. **Focus on reducing incidence and lethality:** The project impacts on both of these areas.
10. **Support partnership working by adopting a collaborative approach:** This is becoming an increasingly important part of the work of the WMMTS, particularly in collaboration with Increase the Peace UK.
11. **Exchange information formally and informally:** The project receives formal requests for intervention from a number of agencies and partners and receives informal information from gang members and community organisations.
12. **Engage community groups and voluntary groups via existing networks:** See point 10

13. **Market effectively to the target audience and the wider community:** The project is well-known to the target audience and there is currently significant interest from media organisations including the BBC and independent documentary makers.
14. **Interventions should monitor and evaluate effectiveness:** A full evaluation was completed in March 2006.

#### **OTHER NON-QUANTIFIABLE BENEFITS**

The following non-quantifiable benefits were identified by the evaluation;

- Increased quality and quantity of intelligence relating to guns and gangs
- Individuals expressing a desire to exit the gang culture and pursue a more meaningful future
- Increasing visibility in the community
- Strategic linkages with statutory and voluntary groups
- Stronger linkages to and within communities

#### **COST ANALYSIS**

It is acknowledged that the WMMS is not a cheap option at approximately £300K per year to run, however the Home Office has shown that a single murder costs on average £1.1 million to investigate and prosecute the offenders. There are also significant savings in terms of police resources that become available that would otherwise be tied up in dealing with homicide investigations. It can therefore be seen that the WMMS will cover its costs for over three years by averting a single murder. The crime statistics and available intelligence strongly indicate that the project has prevented numerous confrontations that would almost certainly have resulted in potentially fatal shootings and the cost needs to be seen in this context.