

## **Street Weapons Commission – Liverpool**

**Alison Stathers-Tracy**

**Stuart Smith**

### **Chair - Cherie Booth**

Well good morning ladies and gentlemen. I'm Cherie Booth and I'd like to welcome you to my home city of Liverpool for this the first of five public hearings which the Channel 4 Street Weapons Commission will be holding up and down the country over the next four weeks.

### **Chair - Cherie Booth**

Today we'll be listening to what the people of Liverpool have to tell us about what's going on in their City and to learn from those who work with the issues of gun and knife crime among young people, what they have to say.

### **Chair - Cherie Booth**

The Commission will then travel to London to Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester to build up a national picture of gun and knife crime among young people. The scale of the problem, its causes, speaking to people who deal with it and fight it every day and most importantly, drawing up concrete proposals based on what we've seen and heard on how to deal with it.

### **Chair - Cherie Booth**

We'll meet with victims, families, voluntary groups and the Police, from those whose lives have been blighted by knife and gun crime, and for this who've been involved in it and we'll hear from politicians, community leaders and policy makers.

### **Chair - Cherie Booth**

The public want to know how we can get these weapons out of the hands of young people and off our streets and I know that this commission wants to play *its* part in making that happen.

### **Chair - Cherie Booth**

So today... good morning, we've got Alison Stathers-Tracy and Stuart Smith from

Liverpool City Council. Can I first of all introduce you to the panel, I have on my left Howard and Liam, and on my right Mark and Fay.

**Chair - Cherie Booth**

Can I start with you Alison? You're the Assistant Executive Director for Community Safety at Liverpool City Council and you're also the Chair of the Liverpool Gun and Gang Crime Strategy. Why did Liverpool City Council feel it was necessary to make your post?

**Alison Stathers-Tracey**

Okay. My post is a historic post, the post has been in place since 1998 when crime disorder reduction partnerships were introduced in the UK and City Council sees this as a critical role in terms of some of the co-ordination of activity across all the partner agencies and internally within the organisation, to get to understand and prevent crime and disorder as it happens, and...

**Chair - Cherie Booth**

So this is not specifically about guns and knives, but about disorder generally?

**Alison Stathers-Tracey**

Yes. My role includes things like anti-social behaviour, to some of the precursory activity that leads to other crimes that can exacerbate if not kind of managed early on, and also looks at some of the diversionary programmes that were in place to [ensure] communities as well as dealing with offenders and supporting victims, so it's a very much a rounded role that looks to co-ordinate a lot of activity in a very, very complex and growing City.

**Chair - Cherie Booth**

And Stuart you're actually the Director of Children's Services, do you see there's a particular role about young people in this area?

**Stuart Smith**

I think that Children's Services by and large comes from the education perspective and therefore we're looking at prevention, but the boundary between prevention and punishment has been blurred I think in the last few years intentionally because we work much more closely together, so the people that work in the section I look after focus largely on prevention but

also to some extent the rehabilitation of young people, and diversion away from some of the things that might draw them into gangs or knife related or gun related activities.

**Chair - Cherie Booth**

Well you say that Liverpool set your post up ten years ago, so in ten years have you actually made any difference?

**Alison Stathers-Tracey**

Yeah, we've made a huge difference in Liverpool. Certainly in terms of some of the crime types that we were set up to manage, we'd agreed quite challenging crime reduction targets with Government of 22 percent and this year we've achieved that and exceeded it, and collectively as a partnership we have achieved an awful lot. What we're starting to see though is a shift

in terms of our emphasis to look at prevention much more around the more serious types of crime that really affects local people both those who might get involved in that type of criminal activity for lots of different reasons which we're starting to understand a lot more about, but also the communities who are affected and also things like the media that also kind of exacerbate that.

So we're starting to turn our attention away from the kind of volume of crime which we've been very successful at challenging to looking at the more serious side and how we can prevent that happening much, much early on.

**Commissioner**

Cherie I'd particularly like to ask Alison and Stuart about your prevention cos you've talked about that and it's a bit of a slippy slope isn't it, being able to try and identify. You talk about in some of the material you sent us being able to identify personality traits and social circumstances where you might be able to predict which children might be getting into trouble in the future, so two questions to really. One is how would you, how would you see that going in terms of managing that as a slippy slope towards labelling and stigmatising, and you can't actually really predict what's going to happen in terms of outcomes, and secondly well what are you actually gonna do if you've identified who these at risk children are, what are you actually gonna do about it?

**Stuart Smith**

We've had quite a lot of success at identifying criteria or indicators that will tell us which children and which families are most likely to be more at risk of becoming involved, and therefore because the services that the Council offers and the other public services in the City are better joined up now than they were say 20 years ago, we're able to target those families and intervene at an earlier stage.

**Commissioner**

What criteria are they?

**Stuart Smith**

Well... I'll give you a number of examples. If, one of the services I run is the school attendance service and we'll know if there's a 16 or 17 year old who had a history of prolific non-attendance at school. If that child has got some brothers and sisters who are younger, or just beginning school or in transferring from primary to secondary school, we'll know to target those

families. If...

**Commissioner**

So you think it's true that truancy sort of infects a family like a contagious disease?

**Stuart Smith**

Truancy is an indicator. Truancy is a good indicator that there is some dysfunction somewhere within a family. If a kid's not getting into school regularly you can't say what that dysfunction might be, it could be ill health, it could be that the child is caring for their father, but it could also be that because of their involvement in anti social behaviour or some other crime

related activity. But there are other ways as well. If we know that for instance a 16 or 17 year old is a gang member of a known gang, then clearly there are staff who would address that young person, but if that young person's got siblings then we can also intervene with those siblings and try and ensure that they get plenty of opportunity to be engaged in positive activities rather than disengaged from their community.

**Commissioner**

Like what? Give us an example of what your intervention would be.

**Stuart Smith**

One of the things that we kind of have as a bit of a mantra amongst the staff that I work with, is that we like to submerge targeted young people within universal activity. You mentioned the word stigma in your previous question and that avoids the stigma. So if we have...

**Commissioner**

So you submerge people early...

**Stuart Smith**

If for instance we've got a, what we call an extended activity at a school, so a school's putting on a large scale activity after school two or three nights a week and in the summer holidays and sometimes at weekends, we will make sure...

**Commissioner**

[INAUDIBLE]

**Stuart Smith**

An extended activity could be arts, crafts, sports, something going on in the evenings. We will ensure that our targeted siblings attend that with the support of some peers, and ensure that they become engaged but it's done in such a way that nobody knows that they're attendance is being supported and ensured, so they're not stigmatised. For me the key indicator for children is

if disengagement, if they start to become disengaged from their family, from their community, from their school and their peer group and they're more likely to want to be part of the group that isn't acceptable, that undertakes or gets involved in some kind of anti-social behaviour. So if we can engage them in one or more things that's positive, than that for me is the thing that

prevents young people getting involved, but also is the route back for those who've been disengaged and involved in criminal activity. The route back is by engaging them in something and very often the trick of the skilled youth worker is finding out what it is that'll re-engage them.

**Commissioner**

Can I ask you, push back on the... in any environment, particularly in the public sector where a target is set, everyone is going through this and we know, you know, we could talk all day about whether those targets are realistic and whether they're being met, in the background papers that we've been presented there are some really startling little facts that jump out. One of them is the Merseyside Ambulance Service where they reckon that 50 percent of stabbings never get reported to the Police. Kid says no I'm not bothered and they go off. So how, you know, so how robust do you think, when you say it's coming down we're winning, if that's what you're saying, give me some, you know, hard evidence that that is actually what's going on and it isn't simply people in a bureaucracy going for a target set in Whitehall that you have to say you're meeting.

**Alison Stathers-Tracey**

Yeah, we're not complacent in that that is only one indicator of success as to whether or not we are making a difference in terms of our numbers coming down. We also want to take a whole raft of perception survey work where we're asking people from different, different sections of Liverpool, what they feel about living in their area, what it means for them, and we try and have a balance between well this looks like what the performance is saying to us in terms of the statistics, but this is what people are saying to us in terms of how it feels to be in that area, and particularly we ask those questions of young people who are often not only considered to be sometimes the perpetrators of violence, and I use my words carefully in terms of sometimes, because we're talking about a very small proportion of, of young people and a lot of the young people in Liverpool from that perception will say that actually they are more worried and more concerned about being a victim of crime and being victimised by a small number, and I think that's where we're very careful in terms of developing our universal approach to services that we're not looking to label, stigmatise, isolate people from what is kind of mainstream society and kind of put

them on a pedestal or make them kind of special in some way, because all that tends to do we're finding is exacerbate the status of what that might mean if you're involved in gang activity or your group of mates as you will find out in Liverpool, we're not automatically talking about gangs, we're talking about groups of mates and peers who wanna be together and wanna support each other, and that brings about some rivalry etc, so...

### **Commissioner**

But don't you think there's a whole lot of unreported crime? It's just not on your official radar because people don't trust the Police, or they don't trust you and they just ... a relatively minor stab wound and go back out.

### **Stuart Smith**

In the last three or four years we've undertaken firstly an annual survey of young people with quite a large focus group, you know, several thousand, to look at issues around bullying and feelings of safety, and obviously we do it annually now so we've got a baseline and we've been able to measure the difference we've made, and one of the things we've been able to do after the first year's survey is target our work in certain places, and you can do that in quite a detailed way. You can ask children for instance, you know, whereabouts in this school building do you feel safe, where don't you feel safe, you know, which corridors are less safe than others and why, and target that, and you can do that on a grander scale with whole communities, and that survey has enabled us to target work and we've seen the change in people's attitudes. They do feel safer because of the work, and the other thing that we've introduced with Merseyside Police has been a third party reporting system, so that most of our larger secondary schools have an attached Police Officer and the children in those schools have been able to leave a message on a website for that Police Officer completely anonymously, and when

we set that up we did it as a pilot a few years ago, the Police Officer and ourselves thought well maybe it'll be 200 rude messages and two or three sensible things, and it turned out to be the other way around, you know. Children were able to express concerns about their own safety but also express concerned when they'd witnessed something that they thought wasn't, you know, wasn't right or proper for other children to experience, and the Police were able to act on it. So we have been able to target and measure the difference we're making. Now, you know, a focus group on bullying across the City isn't a precise art but I think it's, you know, statistically valid to tell us that we are targeting the work in the right place and some things are getting better.

### **Commissioner**

... the Ambulance drivers as well?

### **Chair - Cherie Booth**

Let me bring Howard in here.

### **Professor Howard Williamson**

Thanks. Well I like the philosophy and you talked about making sure that some of these younger children in families that have been identified get involved in this universal stuff, but what if they don't, what if they say no. Because, you know, one of the difficulties is that you end up making this universal provision but you actually still don't reach the actual kids that you really want to make some impact on.

### **Alison Stathers-Tracey**

I mean I think that's probably where my world and Stuart kind of mesh really in terms of there are some elements of early enforcement in terms of engaging parents through alerting them sometimes to what their children are doing because I think often we've found

recently that some of the kind of gang activity that's been reported in Liverpool is actually in some occasions not

known to those parents who are involved, so what we're starting to do is look at early intervention in terms of alerting parents to the fact that their young, the young person in that family is doing X, Y and Z and are they aware, because that kind of community control in a wider sense, and that wider family control is sometimes a much better influence on the behaviour of that

young person than any statutory service or voluntary community service that we could provide or commission. Having said that we do look at a whole range of diversionary activity and get quite creative in that so that we're not just saying don't do this Tom Smith, don't do this and do X, Y and Z, and that's very much our approach, and that can be all kinds of things from

interesting things like fishing for example and that's been one of our key success stories when a young person who may be not wanting to be Wayne Rooney and the next footballer or may not want to get on the stage and sing and dance, but actually likes the time of being with their peers and with some constructive support around a different activity that absorbs their time. So

there are things like that that we're looking into develop whole package and plan and get better at other organisations, understanding what that, those alternatives are for young people, that...

**Commissioner**

How many have gone fishing in the last year?

**Alison Stathers-Tracey**

Well I can't tell you off the top of my head we'd have to go back...

**Commissioner**

100, 1,000, 10,000?

**Alison Stathers-Tracey**

Oh no, not that many, not that many, we're talking about a select few who have been in different areas of the City where fishing is available have been taken out by [detached] youth workers and others and very much on a voluntary basis, but that's a growing kind of cohort of peers doing something that is different from what they would usually do.

**Stuart Smith**

[TALKING OVER EACH OTHER – INAUDIBLE] in answer to your question, you know, when I think about how long that project's been going and the different target groups that have been involved, you know, you're getting on to 100 kids.

**Commissioner**

And you find them the fishing rods and the kits that you need to go fishing, is that the way it works?

**Stuart Smith**

Not always but occasionally where it's necessary that's the case.

**Chair - Cherie Booth**

Let's bring Mark in on this.

**Mark Johnson**

So you've talked about sort of gangs, truancy, being disengaged as a way of identifying, what, I mean you talk about interventions with like fishing and stuff, what about the real causes, what do you do, what sort of programmes do you have to address the real causes? You're talking about, these children you can identify the predisposing factors of children that join gangs, you

know, neglect, abuse, so what do you do, what programmes do you have that address that?

**Stuart Smith**

We were able to, using criteria quite often pick out the most vulnerable families, the ones most likely and maybe do a programme with siblings in those families, but you would do that alongside a programme with the parents as well, and we have a range of parenting courses from those where it's a Court Order that they get involved, to those where we voluntarily get them,

encourage them to participate, and those parenting courses are a different nature depending on the age of the children that they're struggling to look after. So I think there's a number of interventions, you know, you can't just intervene with younger siblings, we try to do the preventative work with the older child but also some parenting work and some support around parenting.

**Mark Johnson**

And who facilitates these, this type of...

**Stuart Smith**

Depending on the age of the children we're talking about. I mean for instance Liverpool's now got 24 children centres in the most vulnerable wards in the City and so staff from those children centres who would be family support workers, health visitors, midwives, would work together to provide support to parents, and then perhaps parents of a child who's had a conviction or a

Caution who is at an older age, there'd be intervention from the defending team and social workers to look at the parenting skills and the challenges they face and the bits of the adolescence life that they struggle with, to try and support them.

**Chair - Cherie Booth**

Let me see if I can round this up by asking you, looking back over the last ten years, what's

the single most effective thing that Liverpool City Council has done to tackle this problem, and looking to the future, what, do you have the right tools and resources and people to do the job and what was the single most thing you would like to have that would help you do it better.

**Stuart Smith**

I think, well from my position the most effective change that's been made in the last ten years is the joining up of services. I think what we struggled with, I mean I worked in Liverpool in the eighties when it was, you know, the place to get your car stolen, whereas your cars are probably safer today in the City than when you're at home.

**Commissioner**

We'll let you know [INAUDIBLE]

**Stuart Smith**

I'm sure you will!

**Chair - Cherie Booth**

Speak to my Police [colleagues], yeah.

**Stuart Smith**

You know the public services, not just the Council but, you know, the PCT, the Health Service and particularly the Police we work together as a single team and therefore we're ganging up on some of the gangs as we get together and we're also ganging up to support some of the families, and I, from my point of view that's probably the most effective change that's been made.

**Commissioner**

In the future, how can we get better?

**Alison Stathers-Tracey**

I think for me one of the key things is in terms of opportunities, and life opportunities for young people cos I think we are very good at kind of creating and nurturing them as young people in terms of things like employers in the City to take some chances and offer some opportunities to young people, that for me is one of our big challenges that we're looking to take on now to make

sure that there are, there is something else other than belonging to a gang and looking after yourself and your peers in whatever kind of organised or semi-organised way you are, that there are routes out, and alternatives, and I think that's probably where we need to get better with, a very small number of young people who seem to be offering all young people of Liverpool a very negative kind of image.

**Chair - Cherie Booth**

[TALKING OVER EACH OTHER – INAUDIBLE] a co-ordinated intelligent cross service policy works and in the end if you give people hope for the future they tend to respond?

**Alison Stathers-Tracey**

Absolutely.

**Chair - Cherie Booth**

Well thank you for that, that's very interesting, thank you.

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