**‘GANGING UP ON GANGS’**

The gang culture is being targeted in a new initiative in the southside of Glasgow.

Strathclyde Police, the Procurator Fiscal’s Office, Glasgow City Council and head teachers are ganging together to tackle gang culture in the southside of Glasgow.

Responding to concerns from the local community and working on intelligence gained through patrolling the area, Strathclyde Police’s ‘G’ Division, launched Operation TaG - a multi-agency initiative - designed to combat gangs and their associated problems and to make a difference in the community.

Over the next few months, there will be an increased police presence in the area with police officers on foot, in cars, on bikes and in plainclothes taking to the streets identifying and disrupting youth disorder in the area. They will patrol parks and areas where kids congregate to drink, visit licensed premises and disperse groups of troublesome youths. CCTV will also be well monitored.

There are 63 gangs in the ‘G’ Division area with more than 1,700 members. Membership includes both girls and boys, and although mostly aged between 15 and 16, some are as young as 12. Some gangs are more active than others, however, they all still impact on lives. Gang related violence ranges from low level crime such as drinking in the street and vandalism, to horrific levels of crime including murder, attempted murder and drug abuse.

Superintendent John Paisley, the officer in charge of the operation, said:

“Youth disorder and anti-social behaviour is a trend in our community that has ignited the public’s fear. People feel intimidated, frightened and frustrated and want action. Operation TaG is designed to tackle these issues robustly and make a real difference in our communities.

“Those involved are loosely associated with each other and the violence is recreational with no purpose or gain. It is random and sporadic and often fuelled by excess alcohol and drugs.”

Last year, the initial phase of Operation Tag ran for six months. In that time 500 people were arrested or reported for a range of crimes including abduction, mobbing and rioting and attempted murder. Over 2,000 people were stopped and searched and hundreds of weapons confiscated.

Supt Paisley continued:

“Last year Tag was primarily an enforcement operation. This time we are working even more closely with our partner agencies to understand the problems people face, to ensure that action taken is followed up and to make a sustainable impact on the gangs who have a hold in the area.

“It is imperative that we build up relationships with other agencies and make a long term commitment. We can achieve more by working together rather than in isolation.”

If offences are committed, arrests will be made. The Procurator Fiscal and the Reporter to the Children’s Panel will closely examine each case, and where appropriate, bail conditions and curfew orders will be sought.

Parents will be advised where appropriate and required to attend at the relevant police office to collect their children.
The Procurator Fiscal’s Office will have a dedicated Fiscal to deal with cases presented by police.

Speaking today, Anne Currie, Procurator Fiscal for ‘G’ Division said:
“As part of our commitment to tackle persistent offenders and reduce violent crime in Glasgow, G Division of the Fiscal Service is working with Strathclyde Police to ensure that relevant information on the crime, the suspected offender’s known associates and the impact of offending on the local community are taken into account when considering what proceedings are appropriate in each case.

“This information will be used when considering whether to oppose bail, and will also be made known to the courts when there are further proceedings. The Crown Office Procurator Fiscals Office (COPFS) is committed to working with other agencies where appropriate to tackle the concerns of local communities and target persistent offenders.”

As well as patrolling the streets, officers will also be going into schools giving talks and offering advice on other diversionary projects.

It is intended that alternatives for young people in the area be created by developing diversion groups, involving Glasgow City Council Youth Services outreach workers, outward bound schemes, training and employment with local businesses such as the Govan Initiative.

Schools also play a special and important part in tackling the problem. Ken Goodwin, head teacher of Shawlands Academy, one of the biggest schools in Strathclyde, recognises the importance of working together. Speaking today he said:

“There are gang members in every school. I see it as essential that all the agencies work together with the community to improve the life chances for everybody, particularly young people.

“We must never forget that the vast majority of our young citizens are effective contributors to our society.”

Superintendent Paisley concluded:

“If people can see what we are doing they may take more of an interest in where their child is going – who they are hanging around with and what they are involved in.

“Some children are involved gangs but do not want to be, they are dragged along on the periphery. We want to give the youngsters the confidence to leave and move on.”