

Police hit squads to tackle teen gangs

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Scotland Yard today announced a blitz on gang violence in a bid to halt the rate of teenage murders.

Met Commissioner Sir Ian Blair said the current spate of youth killings was "unacceptable" and pledged to take on the violent gangs.

His action comes as deputy assistant commissioner Janet Williams described the teenage murders as the worst she has seen in her 23-year career.

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Murder victims: Sian Simpson, Ben Hitchcock, and Annaka Pinto

Since 1 January, 15 victims aged between 14 and 19 have died from stabbings and shootings in the capital.

Five teenagers have died in the past seven days.

Police are to launch an immediate action plan, codenamed Operation Curb. Measures will include:

- Police hit squads in every borough to target gangs and violent young offenders.
- A hit list of the five most violent young offenders in every borough.
- Aggressive "in your face" policing tactics to take on gangs.
- Daily bulletins on gang action to Scotland Yard.

Sir Ian, who was announcing the measures to the Metropolitan Police Authority today, said: "The current spate of teenage murders is completely unacceptable and I fully understand the fear and anxiety that they cause children, parents and the wider community."

"We are not prepared to tolerate this continuing sequence of senseless killings.

"However this is not something that the police can tackle in isolation and families, schools, communities and authorities have an important role to play in preventing and tackling these dreadful crimes."

The latest teenager to lose his life has been named as Abu Shahin. The 18-year-old was repeatedly knifed when he was attacked by two men - believed to be brothers - in a street fight in Ilford early yesterday.

He died in hospital. Police arrested one man - the other remains on the run.

Detectives are still hunting the killers of 14-year-old Martin Dinnegan who was stabbed to death in Holloway on Tuesday night.

His mother Lorraine Dinnegan believes he may have been attacked for looking at a gang "the wrong way".

Martin was on his way home when he was chased and set upon by up to ten teenagers.

Mrs Dinnegan, 39, also called on Gordon Brown to halt Britain's knife and gang culture, saying: "How many more victims are there going to be? It has got out of control with young people."

Sian Simpson, 18, and Ben Hitchcock, 16, and Annaka Pinto, 17, were also stabbed or shot dead in the past week.

Commander Sean Sawyer, who will take charge of Operation Curb said: "Where these gangs are offending we will be relentless and we will be kicking in doors.

"We will be saying to these violent youngsters we do not want you to be doing this and wherever you are we will be there as well until we are confident that you are not doing it any more.

"You might say that this a return to old fashioned policing. This will certainly be in your face policing."

Commander Sawyer added that police would also use diversionary tactics to help people get out of gangs.

He said: "Ultimately we simply want to help young people get out of violent offending.

If people want out, we want to be there to help them. People have a choice: if they choose violence and carrying weapons then we will deal with that."

Senior officers are to be appointed to oversee the teams of six officers to be set up in every borough.

Offenders under the age of 20 will be the focus for the clampdown.

Commander Sawyer admitted police could not "throw millions" at the problem but have pledged Operation Curb will continue at least throughout the summer.

Police examined the possibility of curfews for youngsters across London but dismissed the idea as impractical.