

**Our Generation's Epidemic:**

# **KNIFE CRIME**

British Youth Council



Supported by





British Youth Council  
Youth Select Committee 2019

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Knife Crime**

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**Foreword by Rt Hon John Bercow,  
former Speaker of the House of Commons  
2009-2019**

I am honoured to have been involved with the Youth Select Committee since its inception and to introduce its eighth report on knife crime, produced by the British Youth Council with the support of the House of Commons. Knife crime is a problem in communities right across the country, and this report makes a significant contribution to the work in tackling it.

Successive Youth Select Committee reports have been recognised for their in-depth scrutiny - with recommendations and conclusions based on the unique viewpoints of young people. This year's offering is no exception.

I am very impressed with the quality of the work undertaken on this occasion, and I hope very much that Members of the new House of Commons are informed by the important contribution made by this report.

Rt Hon. John Bercow  
Speaker of the House of Commons, 2009–2019

## **The Youth Select Committee**

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## Summary

Knife crime affects people of all ages and backgrounds across the country, and all too often both perpetrator and victim are young people. However, throughout our inquiry we heard evidence that a young person's risk of getting involved in knife crime is dramatically different between different groups of young people. Young people who for example experience mental health issues, adverse childhood experiences, have learning difficulties, live in poverty or are excluded from school are more likely to be vulnerable to involvement in knife crime.

We welcome the Government's recent commitment to the public health approach which we agree can, if done effectively, identify and help young people at risk. As there are complex, and often numerous, factors making a young person vulnerable to involvement in knife crime, one public service will not be able to tackle knife crime independently. There is an urgent need for services to be empowered to work together and share information and knowledge as well as being guaranteed adequate resources and long-term funding security.

All too often the blame for increase in knife crime is assigned to music, social media and popular culture. We believe that it is through creative means such as music that young people express themselves, share their concerns and frustrations and paint a picture of their reality. Rather than penalising young people, an effort should be made to understand the often violent reality which is depicted in music and address it. We do however also acknowledge that social media is a tool which can be used to intimidate and threaten young people. We have also heard that social media can be used to glamourise a criminal lifestyle. It is therefore vital that the Government urgently investigates the scale and severity of the problem.

Parents and legal guardians are frequently assigned blame when their child is involved in knife crime, which can make them feel isolated, helpless and guilty. We argue that parents should be taught how to spot signs of their child being involved in knife crime, learn how to address it and where they can turn for help. Parents and legal guardians should be empowered and supported to act to prevent their child from getting involved in knife crime.

We also heard arguments for the importance of real, relatable role models. The emphasis on role models should be on ensuring that they come from a diverse range of professions and backgrounds so that young people can relate to them and feel inspired and hopeful for the future.

Education has a major role to play in tackling knife crime. Not only through teaching the dangers, risks and consequences of involvement in knife crime but also to facilitate contact with the local police and through safeguarding a child who may be at risk. We are extremely concerned about the rates of exclusions in schools, especially as statistics show that young people of Black Caribbean backgrounds are more likely to be excluded than their White peers. We strongly believe that exclusions should be the absolute last tool used in long line of measures taken when a young person misbehaves.

We are very concerned with the Government's increasingly punitive approach to tackling knife crime. Serious youth violence such as knife crime is a symptom of various underlying socio-economic issues following years of cuts to public services. We therefore do not see how the Government could arrest and sentence their way out of this crisis. Statistics also show that stop and search disproportionately targets Black men. This disproportionality needs to be addressed before stop and search powers are extended. We also argue that an increase in stop and search powers should be balanced with a campaign to let young people know what their rights are when they are stopped and how they can submit complaints about how a stop and search has been carried out.

Police officers should have the resources and time to get to know the area they serve and build relationships with the local community. We therefore recommend that a large number of the recently announced 20,000 police officers who will be recruited over the next three years will be dedicated safety officers in schools and neighbourhood police. We also believe it is crucial that the police better reflects the demographics of the communities they serve.

To conclude, the reality is that many young people today feel so afraid in their communities and believe that carrying a knife is the only way to prevent themselves being stabbed. We are convinced that, when seeking to tackle knife crime, reducing poverty as well as injustice and other socio-economic issues must be at the heart of all efforts. No amount of police officers, short-term funding for youth programmes or increases in custodial sentences will be successful tactics in reducing knife crime until young people feel safe and are given the opportunities they need to feel hopeful for the future. A young person should never be made to feel that the only way to stay safe is to carry a knife.

## Introduction

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1. The number of fatal stabbings in the year ending March 2018 in England and Wales was the highest on record since data collection began in 1946.<sup>1</sup> There were 285 killings in 2018/19 using a knife or sharp object<sup>2</sup> and 132 people were killed in London alone (which is the highest figure for 10 years).<sup>3</sup> In our online survey, we found that 35% of respondents knew someone who carried or had previously carried a knife.<sup>4</sup> Knife crime is arguably one of the greatest challenges that the Home Office, police forces and communities face right now. Whilst there is not a consistent view of what is driving knife crime, most will agree that the causes are complex, and that one single approach is unlikely to provide a solution to the issue. In our survey respondents told us that the reasons people carry knives are predominantly for protection and because of fear.

2. More than 100,000 people signed an online petition demanding a debate on knife crime resulting in a debate in the House of Commons second Chamber Westminster Hall, on the issue in March this year.<sup>5</sup> From the beginning of 2019 until our final evidence session on the 12 July there were two debates, four urgent questions and three Select Committee inquiries on the issue in Parliament.

### Our inquiry process

3. Each year, the United Kingdom Youth Parliament (UKYP) carries out a UK-wide ballot called 'Make Your Mark', in which young people aged 11 to 18 years old vote for their top issues of concern.<sup>6</sup> This ballot gives a mandate for the Members of the UKYP to debate the top five topics in the House of Commons and two issues become national campaigns during the subsequent year. The issue of knife crime was referred to the Youth Select Committee following the UK-wide ballot in which 1.1 million young people declared knife crime their biggest concern. The 2019 Committee consists of eleven young people aged 15–19 years old. The Committee includes both elected and reserved seats to ensure a broad representation of interests and experience from all parts of the UK.

4. We approached this inquiry with open minds and the recommendations in this report are based on the evidence we gathered.

### Our evidence

5. We welcomed evidence to the inquiry in several ways; through written submissions, oral evidence sessions held in the House of Commons and through an online survey. We also visited the organisation St Giles Trust, which works with young people at risk of or involved in serious violence or crime. In addition, the Houses of Parliament's Education

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1 BBC News, [Knife crime: Fatal stabbings at highest level since records began in 1946](#), 7 February 2019

2 References to knife crime statistics will also include 'sharp objects', as categorised by the police, which can consist of any item which is sharply pointed and able to pierce skin, such as broken glass

3 Office for National Statistics, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2018, 7 February 2019](#)

4 This online survey had 1502 respondents; it was conducted between April-September 2019. We recruited participants through social media and through the inquiry page on the British Youth Council website and on the Parliamentary website. To obtain the anonymised dataset, please contact [bycouthselect@parliament.uk](mailto:bycouthselect@parliament.uk).

5 HC Deb, 25 March 2019, [col 2WH](#)

6 ['Knife crime epidemic a top concern in ballot of over 1 million young people'](#), UK Youth Parliament, 25 October 2018

Service conducted polling during their visits to schools across the country, the responses to which we have drawn upon throughout the report to guide our conclusions and recommendations.

6. We received over 1500 responses to our online survey which ran from April to August 2019. The responders were predominantly under 21 years old. The survey gave us an indication of the areas of concern for young people regarding knife crime and helped inform our questioning during oral evidence sessions. The survey results and quotes from it will be used throughout this report. We received over 30 written submissions from various organisations working with young people and submissions from youth cabinets and youth groups across the country as well as from academics and statutory bodies. We held evidence sessions over two days during which we heard from 27 witnesses across 8 panels.

7. We would like to thank all of those who provided written or oral evidence to the Committee. We know that doing so involved dedicating a great deal of time, thought and, in some cases, courage. We would particularly like to thank the young people who wrote to us or came to London to give oral evidence as it provided great insight into their personal experiences and the ways in which they would like to see the issues addressed. Witnesses approached this inquiry with the same professionalism shown to a parliamentary select committee and this report owes much to the quality of their evidence.

8. We have focused our inquiry on the following aspects regarding knife crime:

- the Government's current strategy to tackle knife crime and what still needs to be done in chapter 1;
- the vulnerabilities and circumstances in a young person's life which may increase their risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of knife crime in chapter 2;
- how to effectively help young people at risk of becoming, or who are already, involved in knife crime in chapter 3; and
- what can be done to effectively intervene once a young person has committed a knife crime offence, in chapter 4.

9. In the text our conclusions are set out in bold and our recommendations, to which we expect a Government response, are in bold italic.

## Finding a solution

10. Whilst there is not a consistent view of the factors driving knife crime in the evidence we received, nor in society more widely, many of the witnesses we heard from agree that the causes are multifaceted, and that a one single approach is unlikely provide a solution to the issue.

11. We do however believe that there is compelling evidence showing that social injustices and inequalities increase a young person's vulnerability, and therefore make them more susceptible to the draw of gangs and violent crime.<sup>7</sup> We are confident that young people

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, [Q39](#), [Q78](#), [Q94](#), [BYC007](#), [BYC018](#), [BYC025](#).

who feel connected to and safe in their communities, have a stable home life and are given equal opportunities to prosper are less likely to commit such violent crimes. John Poyton from the charity Redthread told us:

Young people are not carrying knives specifically to go out to perpetrate violence and murder. Again, if we make that assumption, we are writing off an entire section of our youth community, which would be a terrible disservice to future generations.<sup>8</sup>

12. In our online survey one respondent told us:

Tackling poverty - you have to get at the root cause which is essentially fear. People are more likely turn to crime and gangs when they live in impoverished areas with little hope of opportunities. One group of people carrying a knife will inevitably impact the whole community as they aim to protect themselves. This isn't a knife problem - it's an issue of inequality.

13. The Youth Strategy, Engagement and Schools Team at the Metropolitan Police Service told us that areas which have higher rates of poverty may have higher levels of crime “against the person”, concluding that there is a “clear link between young people from socio-economically deprived areas being more vulnerable to being involved in knife crime, although this is linked to the vulnerability rather than the location”.<sup>9</sup> Carlie Thomas from St Giles Trust told us that we needed to look at the bigger picture, ensuring that young people have long-term employment in a field that they enjoy and that they have belief in themselves and hope for the future. Carlie argued that it is vital that the Government provides the adequate support to make this happen:

It is all very well blaming drill music; it is all very well blaming the parents, this one and that one, but let's look at the people at the top. Let's look at them and see what they're doing.<sup>10</sup>

14. We asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability, Victoria Atkins MP, whether the Government was committed to reducing the risk factors commonly associated with criminal behaviour in young people and children, such as poverty. The Minister mentioned youth funds and interventions and how these would be evaluated.

We are very conscious that if a child or a young person has several of the risk factors, that does not mean that they will inevitably be drawn towards violence. We are not in the business of condemning children to that path, because most of the risk factors are not within their control. It is incredibly complex. That is why, through the Youth Endowment Fund, there will be a huge evaluation of the projects that we expect the fund to be looking into in terms of how each project does and whether it achieves a reduction in serious violence and improves the life chances of the children involved.<sup>11</sup>

**15. Inequality within communities and the difference in opportunities provided across the country make some young people particularly vulnerable to the draw of violence**

8 [Q7](#) [John Poyton]

9 [BYC033](#)

10 [Q72](#) [Carlie Thomas]

11 [Q16](#) [Victoria Atkins MP]

and gangs. Cuts to important and arguably life-saving services such as community police officers, youth community groups, health and education services means that the support previously in place for vulnerable young people has been weakened or in some cases completely removed. We believe that this is a fundamental cause of the rise in violent crime, including knife crime, amongst young people.

16. We are not convinced that the Government is committed to address and improve the difficult circumstances many young people today grow up in. The current limited interventions, for youth violence specifically, will only ever be able to remedy the symptoms but never the causes of knife crime. Therefore, we firmly believe that any action to prevent knife crime must begin by committing to address the damaging inequalities in our communities.

17. *We urge the Government to establish a plan with clear targets and deadlines aimed at tackling the injustices which make a young person more vulnerable to knife crime, including but not limited to poverty, inequality of opportunity and any other socio-economic challenges.*

# Chapter 1: What is the knife crime situation, and what is the Government's approach to it?

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## Where we are now

### *The prevalence of knife crime*

18. The year ending March 2018 saw the highest ever recording of homicides with sharp objects (including knives).<sup>12</sup> NHS England hospital admissions for injuries caused by an assault by a knife or sharp object have increased by almost a third since 2012–13, from 3,849 to 4,896 in 2017–18.<sup>13</sup> There has been a 93% rise in hospital admissions for knife attacks on under-16s since 2012<sup>14</sup> and 51% increase in admissions of under-18s since 2014.<sup>15</sup> 25% of knife crime victims who are admitted to hospital are men aged 18–24.<sup>16</sup>

19. The Government published its Serious Violence Strategy on 9 April 2018, announcing a range of measures aimed at addressing recent increases in knife crime, gun crime and homicide. The Strategy estimates that approximately half of the rise in reporting rates for knife crime (but also for robbery and gun crime) is due to improved police recording. The Strategy suggests that drug-related crime is likely to be one of the leading contributors and explains the other half of the increase.<sup>17</sup> When we asked Professor Fiona Brookman about this statement, she said that “you would have to do some incredibly careful assessment of whether people are suddenly reporting more crime and the police are recording more crime of this nature”.<sup>18</sup> She went on to say that, as far as she knows, this had not happened and that “the dark figure of crime, which is troubling for all of our statistics, has not been unravelled in this instance”.<sup>19</sup>

20. The Centre for Social Justice argued that gangs are not responsible for all serious violence, but estimated they are responsible for up to half of all knife crime with injury.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, in 2017 ‘The London Knife Crime Strategy’, published by The Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime put the proportion much lower, pointing to statistics in London which showed that gang-related cases accounted for 5% of all knife crime with injury during 2016.<sup>21</sup>

21. The House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee concluded the following in their recent report on Serious Youth Violence:

Although the [*Serious Violence*] strategy refers to risk factors for involvement in violence, its analysis is based largely on readily-available evidence. It is not

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12 Office for National Statistics, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2018](#), 7 February 2019

13 NHS England, ‘Hospital admissions for youths assaulted with sharp objects up almost 60%’, 9 Feb 2019

14 The Guardian, [No link between knife crime and police cuts](#), 4 March 2019

15 Local Government Association, [Breaking the cycle of youth violence](#), 4 March 2019

16 NHS England, ‘Hospital admissions for youths assaulted with sharp objects up almost 60%’, 9 Feb 2019

17 The Home Office, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018, p. 9

18 Q3 [Professor Brookman]

19 Q3 [Professor Brookman]

20 Centre for Social Justice, ‘It can be stopped’, August 2018

21 The Mayor’s Office for Policing And Crime London City Hall, [The London Knife Crime Strategy](#), June 2017, p. 15

underpinned by any attempt to collect data or gain a clear understanding of the number of people—particularly young people—at risk of serious violence. We fail to see how the Government can get a grip on this problem or pursue a public health approach without a clear understanding of the size and location of the populations most at risk, so that it can target resources effectively. Furthermore, it cannot measure progress effectively without clear milestones, along with timescales for achieving them.<sup>22</sup>

### *The provisions for youth services in our communities*

22. The then Home Secretary (the Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP) stressed “the importance of early intervention to tackle the root causes and provide young people with the skills and resilience to lead productive lives free from violence” in the foreword to the Serious Violence Strategy when it was published in 2017.<sup>23</sup> The Strategy itself states that “punitive activity is less effective than preventative support”<sup>24</sup>, and summarises evidence suggesting that “socio-economic improvements, strengthening ties to family, school and non-violent norms are key areas for reducing violence”.<sup>25</sup>

23. The Minister, Victoria Atkins MP, told us that the Strategy is a “living document”, further stating that it is “evolving; we are creating actions arising out of the thinking behind that strategy, but also being aware that this is a very fast-moving mode of criminality, and so we have to be very fast-footed in the way in which we deal with it.”<sup>26</sup>

24. However, we agree that the causes which make a young person more vulnerable to serious violence like knife crime are not “fast-footed”. During the inquiry it has been argued by various witnesses that the underlying causes are long-standing issues such as poverty and inequality. For example, the Children’s Society argued that the Government needs to properly investigate the causes and drivers of youth violence in order to tackle it:

Whilst the government have made steps towards this within the Serious Violence Strategy, The Children’s Society would argue this understanding is not yet there. We recommend that the Government consult civil society on their understandings of the causes of youth violence in order to provide a range of durable solutions.<sup>27</sup>

25. The Standing Committee on Youth Justice argued that children and young people affected by or involved in serious violence are often faced with mental health problems, special educational needs and adverse childhood experiences:

We know that children with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are much more likely to become victims or perpetrators of violence. ACEs include physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect, bereavement, experiencing or

22 The Home Affairs Committee, Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–19, ‘[Serious Youth Violence](#)’, HC1016, para 41

23 The Home Office, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018, p.7

24 The Home Office, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018, p.41

25 The Home Office, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018, p.43

26 [Q12](#) [Victoria Atkins MP]

27 [BYC013](#)

witnessing domestic abuse, family breakdown, and household substance misuse, mental illness, or incarceration. The more ACE's a child experiences, the higher the likelihood of involvement in violence.<sup>28</sup>

26. We acknowledge, and are encouraged by, the £200m 'Youth Endowment Fund'<sup>29</sup> and the £22m 'Early Intervention Youth Fund'<sup>30</sup> announced to tackle serious violence. However, these two funds do not go far enough in providing the long-term security for youth services. As indicated by research undertaken by the All-Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime, local councils have experienced severe cuts in recent years and consequently youth services have received less funding and in some areas been forced to close.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the Youth Justice Board told us:

The YJB's funding to frontline services has fallen by over 50% since 2011/12 from £145m to £72.2m in the last financial year. Funding from YOTs' partnership agencies has reduced from £228m in 2010/11 to £188.5m 2016/17, a reduction of 17%. More broadly, the Local Government Association (LGA) have estimated that councils are expected to face a £2bn funding gap for children's services by 2020.<sup>32</sup>

27. The Children's Society said that although the 10-year commitment to funding through the Youth Endowment Fund was a step in the right direction, the £51m funding packet of measures announced in the Serious Violence Strategy amounts to "around an eighth of the total cuts to youth services since 2010".<sup>33</sup> This is especially concerning to us as the Minister told us that the Serious Violence Strategy, as a "national response" itself, is not enough but that there must be a regional and local response.<sup>34</sup> It is unclear to us how the Government envisions their national strategy will be translated and adopted at local levels, when the local and regional infrastructure to do this in practice is underfunded following years of cuts to budgets.

28. In much of the evidence we received, organisations have emphasised the importance of establishing a long-term funding structure extending past the 10-year commitment of the Youth Endowment Fund to reverse the cuts made to the sector.<sup>35</sup> Rashid Bhayat from the Positive Youth Foundation told us:

We need to take a good look at this because we have to accept the short-term funding that is there; of course, we do. But we know that it could be equally as damaging, particularly to relationships that young people are then allowed to build or can build with their youth workers or the trusted adults around them. It takes time to build an effective relationship, especially when there are complexities and challenges within that.<sup>36</sup>

29. Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers, Lecturer in Criminology, The Open University, and adviser to the All Parliamentary Commission on Youth Violence, similarly emphasised the need to

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28 [BYC019](#)

29 The Home Office, '[Home Secretary announces new measures to tackle serious violence](#)', 2 October 2018

30 The Home Office, '[Early intervention youth fund](#)', 30 July 2018

31 The APPG on knife crime, [News](#), 7 May 2019

32 [BYC007](#)

33 [BYC014](#)

34 [Q14](#) [Victoria Atkins MP]

35 See for example [Q40](#), [Q98](#), [BYC030](#)

36 [Q40](#) [Rashid Bhayat]

have a rigid funding framework, telling us that “if these young people are not given the services and the support early in life, the costs will be massive later on down the line. So, absolutely, there should be ring-fenced, statutory, long-term funding”.<sup>37</sup>

30. We are also concerned about whether the intervention programmes currently funded by the Government reach the people who need them. Jeremy Crook, Chief Executive of the Black Training and Enterprise Group, told us that resources are important, and that the Government is increasingly providing resources to tackle serious youth violence and crime. However, Jeremy Crook went on to say that from his point of view, as someone running a BAME-led organisation that he was not convinced that central resources reach BAME organisations within certain communities. He argued that although public money had been dedicated to urban and deprived areas, the impact had been “minimal”.<sup>38</sup>

31. **We note that the Government has put some provisions in place for long-term funding, but the overall funding structures are still focused on short-term interventions. We are concerned that the lack of long-term guarantees will make it difficult for organisations to run programmes encouraging the permanent change needed to ensure young people feel safe in their communities and supported to live crime-free lives. Even when there are services tackling different aspects, there may be long gaps in their delivery which cause progress to be lost. Support should be provided before young people get involved in crime or violence, not just once it has happened. We recognise that early interventions are often the most cost-effective way, in the long run, of tackling serious violence.**

32. *We urge the Government to commit to consult a diverse group of stakeholders on how to effectively allocate funding to youth services, especially regarding commissioning, to ensure the views of those who are directly affected and ‘on the ground’ are directly embedded.*

33. *We recommend that funding guarantees are made over a longer period, of at least 5 years, to enable youth services to build their practices, develop effective ways of helping and reaching young people and establishing the trust of the young people in their local area. This will lead to young people having purposeful activity outside of education, keeping them of the streets.*

34. *We fully endorse the Home Affairs Select Committee’s recommendation: “The Government needs to introduce a fully-funded, statutory minimum of provision for youth outreach workers and community youth projects in all areas, co-designed with local young people. This would be a national Youth Service Guarantee, with a substantial increase in services and ring-fenced funding from central Government. It should include enhanced provision in areas with higher-than-average risk factors linked to serious youth violence, such as under-25 knife crime and school exclusion. It must also be coupled with proper mental health provision for young people, informed by an understanding of the impact of trauma and other adverse childhood experiences.”*

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37 [Q98](#) [Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers]

38 [Q79](#)

## The Public Health Approach

35. The Serious Violence Strategy argued for a multi-level approach, termed the 'Public Health Approach'. The Strategy explains that tackling serious youth violence should not just include law enforcement measures but requires a "multiple strand approach involving a range of partners across different sectors".<sup>39</sup> Nick Hunt, the Head of the Serious Violence Unit, told us:

The public health approach is about agencies coming together as they should already have been doing, frankly, and getting them talking together to plan, develop their problem profile and consider how they are going to respond to that in the sense of what they actually need to do in terms of local intervention and local hotspot policing—in many ways like what Scotland has been doing for a number of years—and using those insights to really boost community confidence and young people's confidence as well.<sup>40</sup>

36. Much of the evidence that we have heard throughout our inquiry has been calling for a public health approach. This would see young people being supported by various agencies and bodies to address the underlying causes of why they might have become involved in violence.<sup>41</sup> The Youth Justice Board stated:

A multi-agency, or public health model can help address involvement in criminal behaviour by taking into account any additional needs/vulnerabilities and looking to address the causes of the criminal behaviour, rather than taking a purely punitive approach. We support a multi-agency approach to tackling knife crime that considers all aspect of the child and we believe that taking this approach provides an opportunity to deliver a 'child first' response to serious violence.<sup>42</sup>

37. The Ben Kinsella Trust emphasised the importance of involving young people directly in the development of a public health approach, suggesting a "duty to involve young people" in those considerations, not just the public sector institutions.<sup>43</sup>

38. On 1 April 2019 the Government announced a consultation seeking "views on options to support a multi-agency approach to preventing and tackling serious violence."<sup>44</sup> While the consultation paper set out 3 different options for how the proposed new duty would be introduced, it failed to produce a consensus about the way forward. The Government therefore committed to running a further, more targeted, consultation to establish which organisations should be subject to this new duty. The largest percentage of support from respondents to the consultation (40%) was for introducing the new duty through legislation to revise Community Safety Partnerships.<sup>45</sup>

39 The Home Office, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018, p.9

40 [Q15](#) [Nick Hunt]

41 See for example [BYC009](#), [BYC010](#), [BYC012](#), [Q48](#), [Q66](#).

42 [BYC007](#)

43 [BYC005](#)

44 The Home Office, '[Serious violence: new legal duty to support multi-agency action](#)', 1 April 2019

45 The Home Office, [Serious violence: new legal duty to support multi-agency action](#), 24 July 2019, p. 8

Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) are made up of representatives from the police, local council, fire service, health service, probation as well as many others. Their purpose is to make the community safer, reduce crime and the fear of crime, reduce anti-social behaviour and work with business and residents on the issues of most concern.

39. In the response to the consultation the Government announced its intention to introduce a bill when Parliamentary time allows to create a new duty “on relevant agencies and organisations to collaborate, where possible through existing partnership structures, to prevent and reduce serious violence”.<sup>46</sup> The proposed new legal duty aims to “complement and assist” the recently announced Violence Reduction Units<sup>47</sup> in their aim of preventing and tackling serious violence.<sup>48</sup>

40. However, we heard concerns that already-stretched youth services and other bodies would struggle to implement the public health approach without also being allocated additional funding. The Children's Society told us:

The public health approach encourages partnerships and should therefore ensure that responsibility for tackling knife crime does not fall to one statutory body. However, The Children's Society believe that distribution of responsibility also needs to come with distribution of funding and training to do so.<sup>49</sup>

41. Similarly, Vicky Foxcroft MP told us:

When we talk about a public health approach—and I was really glad to see so many questions on that—that is what we need to happen. That needs to be a top priority for the Government, but it has to be properly resourced: that is key. Too many times we see programme after programme resourced for a year or two years; it needs to be resourced long term, not chopping and changing, unless you are chopping and changing because something's not working, so you are stopping it and doing something else that's working. When something is working, we need to keep going with it and make sure it's got the investment it needs.<sup>50</sup>

**42. We are encouraged by the Government's support of the public health approach, but we are concerned that services are not adequately supported and funded by the Government to provide the integrated care which the public health approach relies on. Organisations, charities and community services need to be able to work together and share information to provide the 'wrap-around' support set out in the public health approach.**

**43. A successful public health approach will require extensive research into the culture and specific context across local communities to fully understand those affected, in order to tailor support and achieve the best possible outcome.**

**44. We are concerned by the absence of youth voices and understanding in the Government strategy, evidenced in the Minister's view on what constitutes appropriate role models: “They are sports coaches, rap artists and people in the community who meet young people in their ordinary day-to-day lives, who can give perhaps a bit of**

46 The Home Office, [‘Serious violence: new legal duty to support multi-agency action’](#), 1 April 2019

47 Violence Reduction Units are local collaborations between police, local government, health, community leaders and other relevant partners. These units will be responsible for identifying the drivers of serious violence locally and developing a coordinated response to tackle them. For more information, see: Home Office, [‘Home Office allocates £35 million to police forces for violence reduction units’](#), 18 June 2019.

48 The Home Office, [‘Serious violence: new legal duty to support multi-agency action’](#), 24 July 2019, p.3

49 [BYC014](#)

50 [Q103](#) [Vicky Foxcroft MP]

light-touch advice in the midst of playing sport or rapping or whatever their specialism is”.<sup>51</sup> We believe that this is a narrow and stereotypical view of specific demographics of young people and their aspirations.

45. *The Minister said that the Serious Violence Strategy is a “living” document. We recommend that as it is continuously reviewed and developed it will benefit from embedding the views from young people and/or those with lived experience of knife crime throughout. Examples of how this could be done include co-designing surveys and projects with young people, as well as consulting organisations directly working with young people affected.*

46. *We recommend that the Government consults organisations, charities and community services on what they need in support of the new proposed legal duty. This will enable more effective collaboration and sharing of information to provide young people with adequate support, and truly deliver a public health approach tailored for and championed by local communities to combat knife crime and youth violence.*

## Chapter 2: How circumstances affect a young person's risk of getting involved in knife crime

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### What motivates young people to carry knives?

47. A recurring response in our survey was that young people are primarily motivated to carry knives out of fear, and a desire to protect themselves. We have heard that young people feel unsafe<sup>52</sup> and that they live in a society in which they fear they must “take a life or have your life be taken”.<sup>53</sup> We were told that this fear can stem from both real and perceived threats to safety.<sup>54</sup>

### *Music, social media, and popular culture*

48. We were told that in some cases young people carry knives because they perceive threats to their safety which are disproportionate to the risks they face in their everyday lives.<sup>55</sup> Some young people may feel this heightened sense of threat because of the way in which the media reports on knife crime and possession.<sup>56</sup> Bukola Folarin, representative from the Student Commission on Knife Crime in London, told us that the media normalises knife carrying by “mak[ing] it seem like everyone is carrying knives”.<sup>57</sup>

49. Hannah Chetwynd, Risk Policy Officer for the Children's Society, told us the fear young people feel can be actual, for example arising from a direct experience of or from witnessing knife crime, or perceived, and perpetuated by something the young person may have seen on social media or heard from their friends or family.<sup>58</sup> The Children's Society stated that this fear may also stem from direct threats having been made to them, their family or their peers.<sup>59</sup> They further stated that the way young people perceive risk, and the actual fear that they feel, is linked to their vulnerabilities.<sup>60</sup> Regardless of the extent to which the threat young people face is perceived or actual, their fear is real, and the Children's Society in conclusion recommended that this should be considered by statutory agencies when young people are found carrying knives and other weapons.<sup>61</sup>

50. Young people stated that social media and popular culture might be factors which motivate young people to carry knives through the ways in which they can be used to normalise knife carrying and violence.<sup>62</sup> Sundas Raza, member of the Rotherham Youth Cabinet, told us that social media, grime artists and other popular culture figures “make it look like carrying a knife gives you a good image; you're kind of cool”.<sup>63</sup> Amaan Iqbal, Youth Councillor for Rochdale Borough, and Representative for the Greater Manchester

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52 [BYC016](#), [BYC014](#)

53 [Q111](#) [Bukola Folarin]

54 [BYC014](#)

55 [BYC017](#), [Q38](#) [Hannah Chetwynd]

56 [BYC014](#), [BYC017](#)

57 [Q112](#) [Amaan Iqbal]

58 [Q38](#) [Hannah Chetwynd]

59 [BYC014](#)

60 [BYC014](#)

61 [BYC014](#)

62 See for example [BYC017](#) and [BYC026](#)

63 [Q112](#) [Sundas Raza]

Youth Combined Authority, and Eleanor Lakin, deputy Member of Youth Parliament for Plymouth Youth Parliament, echoed these concerns, saying that carrying knife can be a “status thing” where social media is used to broadcast the fact that a young person owns or is carrying a knife.<sup>64</sup> Eleanor and Sundas told us that social media and popular culture not only normalise knife carrying and violence but, in some instances, promote and glamorise it.<sup>65</sup>

51. Despite citing them as potential drivers behind the fear which motivates young people to carry knives, witnesses were also clear that we should not place too much emphasis on the role of the media, social media and popular culture. Bukola Folarin, representative from the Student Commission on Knife Crime in London, told us that social media “is not the biggest issue”.<sup>66</sup> She acknowledged the role that social media can play in broadcasting events but told us that sometimes it is used as a “scapegoat” and that there are many other issues which drive youth involvement in knife crime.<sup>67</sup>

52. Kwabz Oduro Ayim from Mixtape Madness told us that the argument that music negatively impacted behaviour, especially of young people, was not a novel phenomenon. He also argued that music is a tool which young people use to express themselves, and tell the stories of their own lives:

I fundamentally believe that music, as with social media platforms and all things, can be used for positive and negative. If young people are conveying what they depict as their narrative, or a narrative they can connect with, our responsibility as a society is to delve deeper and find out what is causing them to connect with that narrative.<sup>68</sup>

**53. We believe that young people do not grow up wanting to commit knife crime. We believe it is something which some young people get drawn into or become a victim of due to circumstances outside of their control.**

**54. There have been suggestions that music and social media cause knife crime, however we strongly disagree with this. We acknowledge that social media can amplify already existing conflicts in a community for example, but ultimately both social media and music are mediums which young people use to express themselves. Young people are likely to post and make music about their own situations and events in their lives, which in some cases may portray violence.**

### ***Family and childhood***

55. We agree that the family circumstances of a young person can affect them in a wide variety of ways, whether they have a strong bond with family members, have had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) within the family home, or have left the home. Khulisa, a charity working with vulnerable and at-risk children and adults, told us that young

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64 [Q126](#) [Amaan Iqbal and Eleanor Lakin]

65 [Q126](#) [Eleanor Lakin and Sundas Raza]

66 [Q126](#) [Bukola Folarin]

67 [Q126](#) [Bukola Folarin]

68 [Q69](#) [Kwabz Oduro Ayim]

people who have had four or more ACEs are 14 times more likely than their peers to have been a victim of violence over the last 12 months and 15 times more likely to have been a perpetrator in the same period.<sup>69</sup>

56. Sheldon Thomas, founder of Gangsline, placed a great deal of significance on the role of the family in preventing young people becoming victims or perpetrators of knife crime. He told us that “everything comes down to parenting” and that “you need love in a family home”.<sup>70</sup> He also told us that children who lack love in their family home “will go elsewhere looking for it” and are “more likely to be groomed and exploited”.<sup>71</sup> He told us that in his experience that meant becoming part of a gang.<sup>72</sup> Anne Longfield, Children’s Commissioner for England, published a report on the characteristics of gang-associated children and young people and identified family factors such as neglect, parental substance abuse and violence as vulnerabilities which are prevalent amongst gang-associated children and young people.<sup>73</sup>

57. Carlie Thomas, a caseworker at St Giles Trust, told us that the blame should not just be placed on parents and that in her experience parental absence in the home is often due to challenging circumstances rather than the parent actively choosing to be absent:

They are working minimum wage, zero-hour contracts trying to provide for their young people, their children. They still cannot give their children everything they want, because what our young people see on social media, in these music videos - all that jewellery, the money flashing, the car - they’re aspiring. They want that. Mum can’t provide that.<sup>74</sup>

58. Sarah Jones MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime, and Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers, Lecturer in Criminology at the Open University and Adviser to the APPG on Youth Violence, told us that even where parents notice signs indicating that their child could be involved in gang crime or serious violence, they may choose to turn a blind eye because in some cases it brings money into the household.<sup>75</sup> Sarah Jones MP underlined the difficulty of the decisions faced by parents living in poverty when their child’s involvement in crime may be “producing food on the table”.<sup>76</sup>

59. Similarly, Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers told us:

If the families of some of these young people involved in illicit drug distribution are living in poverty, and parents are struggling to put food on the table and pay rent and bills, then if there’s a £6 billion or £7 billion drug market out there, some young people are going to be involved in that. That brings money into households, especially when we’re talking about welfare, education and social services having all been cut.<sup>77</sup>

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69 [BYC009](#)

70 [Q72](#) [Sheldon Thomas]

71 [Q72](#) [Sheldon Thomas]

72 [Q72](#) [Sheldon Thomas]

73 The Children’s Commissioner for England, [The characteristics of gang-associated children and young people: Technical report](#), February 2019, p.15

74 [Q72](#) [Carlie Thomas]

75 [Q102](#) [Sarah Jones MP and Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers]

76 [Q102](#) [Sarah Jones MP]

77 [Q102](#) [Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers]

## Personal

60. Eleanor Lakin, Member of Youth Parliament, argued that anyone can become a victim or perpetrator of knife crime, and that when we discuss the vulnerability of particular groups of young people it is hard to determine the extent to which they are vulnerable in comparison to their peers.<sup>78</sup>

61. We also believe that mental health is a significant factor playing into young people's vulnerability. At least 30 per cent of children who have been in trouble with the law have experienced mental ill health, a rate which is three times higher compared to the general population.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, one third of young people in custody have been identified as having special educational needs, 60 per cent of children who offend have a communication disability, and around 30 per cent of children in custody with 'persistent offending histories' have IQs below 70, signifying a learning disability.<sup>80</sup>

62. The Children's Society runs a programme titled the 'National Disrupting Exploitation Programme' in which their Disrupting Exploitation Practitioners work across Greater Manchester, London and Birmingham to try to tackle and disrupt child exploitation.<sup>81</sup> The Children's Society stated that its Disrupting Exploitation Practitioners often see "mental health [issues], undiagnosed special educational needs, problems with speech and language and a lack of sufficient education" amongst the at-risk young people with whom they work.<sup>82</sup>

63. In the evidence we have received, certain factors which have been frequently suggested to make young people vulnerable are: poverty and social inequality<sup>83</sup>; race<sup>84</sup>; poor community relationships with the police<sup>85</sup>; having a family member who is or has been involved in criminal activity<sup>86</sup>; geography<sup>87</sup>; trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)<sup>88</sup> and poor school experiences<sup>89</sup>.

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78 [Q113](#) [Eleanor Lakin]

79 [BYC019](#)

80 [BYC019](#)

81 The Children's Society, [Our work to stop county lines](#), accessed 11 September 2019

82 [BYC014](#)

83 See for example [BYC001](#), [BYC004](#), [BYC009](#), [BYC010](#), [BYC014](#), [BYC019](#), [BYC026](#), [BYC029](#), [BYC030](#) and [BYC032](#), [Q59](#) [Niven Rennie], [Q66](#) [Clive Davies], [Q72](#) [Kwabz Oduro Ayim], [Q101](#) [Sarah Jones], [Q103](#) [Dr Irwin-Rogers] and [Q112](#) [Bukola Folarin].

84 See for example [BYC018](#), [BYC019](#) and [BYC032](#). Statistics published as part of the Government's [Serious Violence Strategy](#) show that BAME individuals are overrepresented among victims and principal suspects of homicide, although the vast majority of individuals in both groups are white.

85 See for example [BYC004](#), [BYC006](#), [BYC015](#), [BYC017](#), [BYC019](#), [BYC026](#), [BYC029](#), and [Q8](#) [Professor Brookman].

86 See for example [BYC009](#), [BYC014](#), [BYC017](#), [BYC019](#), [BYC029](#), and [Q39](#) [Hannah Chetwynd].

87 See for example [BYC001](#), [BYC006](#), [BYC014](#), [BYC016](#), [BYC021](#), [BYC030](#), [BYC033](#), and [Q66](#) [Clive Davies]. Geographic factors which may make a young person vulnerable to knife crime include living in a deprived area, large city, an area with high levels of gang and criminal activity, or an area of lower social mobility. St Giles Trust told us that county lines operations have changed the geographical spread of knife crime beyond cities to more suburban and rural areas, [BYC030](#).

88 See for example [BYC005](#), [BYC007](#), [BYC009](#), [BYC019](#), [BYC021](#), [BYC024](#), [BYC025](#), [Q16](#) [Victoria Atkins], [Q61](#) [Sarah Boycott], [Q67](#) [Niven Rennie], and [Q87](#) [Iman Haji]. ACEs include physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect, bereavement, experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse, family breakdown, and household substance abuse, mental illness or incarceration.

89 See for example [BYC004](#), [BYC009](#), [BYC010](#), [BYC014](#), [BYC016](#), [BYC018](#), [BYC021](#), [BYC026](#), [BYC028](#), [BYC030](#), [Q19](#) [Nick Hunt], [Q39](#) [Nick Darvill], [Q57](#) [Niven Rennie, Sarah Boycott and Clive Davies] and [Q113](#) [Eleanor Lakin]. Poor school experiences may include school exclusion, low academic attainment in comparison to peers and not being in education, employment or training (NEET).

64. **We strongly believe that certain factors make young people more vulnerable to becoming victims or perpetrators of knife crime. In its steps to address the knife crime epidemic the Government must remember that ultimately any young person is vulnerable to becoming a victim or perpetrator of knife crime.**

### **Societal**

65. There is a strong correlation between the rates of violence and crime and deprivation within a community.<sup>90</sup> Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers told us that there is often a higher rate of drug-related crime in deprived areas because it brings money into the community.<sup>91</sup> Geography therefore plays a key role in determining a young person's risk of becoming involved in knife crime. St Giles Trust told us victims and perpetrators of knife crime tend to come from "areas of lower social mobility, communities with lower income thresholds".<sup>92</sup> St Giles Trust also argued that county lines operations have "changed the geographical spread beyond cities and urban areas to more suburban and rural communities" by promising "quick money".<sup>93</sup>

66. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime published an analysis of council youth service budgets and knife crime data since 2014. The APPG, supported by Barnardo's and Redthread, obtained the figures on youth service budgets using Freedom of Information requests, to which 154 local authorities,<sup>94</sup> approximately 70 per cent of local authorities in England and Wales, responded. The APPG's analysis suggested that the areas which have experienced the largest cuts to spending on youth services have seen bigger increases in knife crime.<sup>95</sup>

67. Sarah Jones MP told us that youth services provide more than just a place for young people to be when they are not at home or in school. She told us that it is important to have youth work in the community in the form of people working directly with young people, identifying those at risk and directing them towards resources and services which can help.<sup>96</sup>

68. Since 2010 police numbers have been reducing year on year<sup>97</sup>, reaching 122,404 (full-time equivalent) police officers in March 2018 in comparison to a peak of 143,734 in March 2010.<sup>98</sup> Dr Irwin-Rogers told us that cuts to police budgets have impeded the police's ability to do more proactive policing and build relationships with young people within a community.<sup>99</sup> He told us that this has degraded previously positive community relationships with the police because policing has necessarily become more reactive and interactions more negative in nature:

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90 [BYC031](#)

91 [Q102](#) [Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers]

92 [BYC030](#)

93 [BYC030](#)

94 The respondents included county councils, unitary authorities, metropolitan districts and London Boroughs. APPG on Knife Crime, [News](#), 7 May 2019.

95 APPG on Knife Crime, [News](#), 7 May 2019.

96 [Q97](#) [Sarah Jones MP]

97 On 5 September 2019 the [Home Office launched a campaign to recruit 20,000 police officers](#). £750million of funding was allocated to support the recruitment of 6,000 police officer in 2020 to 2021.

98 [Police Workforce, England and Wales, 31 March 2018](#)

99 [Q96](#) [Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers]

Policing has been scaled back and most interactions between the police and young people are now reactive and negative through stop-and-searches, so it is really no surprise that young people have a bad opinion of the police when they are their main contact points.<sup>100</sup>

69. Sarah Jones MP told us that community relationships with the police used to be more trusting:

[Young people] used to have relationships with their local neighbourhood police officers when they existed in greater numbers. The local police officers would know the area and the, get to know the kids and have more of a relationship, and if you got caught doing something that you should not be doing, they might just take you back to your mum. They had that trusted relationship, which is really important.<sup>101</sup>

70. Amaan Iqbal from the Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority told us:

Before we had our budget cut, we used to have a football tournament with young people against police officers, which used to build good relationships, so that young people could openly go to a police officer and tell them the problem. That was a while ago, but it worked really well, because then, if they were getting into gangs, they could talk to the police officers—get them out of any situation they were held up in.<sup>102</sup>

71. Home Secretary Rt Hon Priti Patel MP was asked about what she had to say in response to the concern that police officers “rolled out in stealth” may undermine the relationship and trust between the Police and the community in August 2019, she responded:

That’s completely wrong and yesterday I met with families who’d been the victim of knife crime, families who have lost their children through the most appalling violence and tragedies and they themselves were saying they’re from those communities that want to see more policing, they’re from those communities that want to see more stop and search and they themselves from within those communities, that have suffered such trauma and pain are saying that they want to see our police officers to be empowered to get on and do their job and use stop and search.<sup>103</sup>

72. Following our evidence sessions, the Government announced that it would be recruiting another 20,000 police officers over the next 3 years.<sup>104</sup> We welcome the commitment, as the police force urgently need to be allocated the resources they require. However, we are worried that there is a focus on the numbers of officers and expansion of police powers rather than a focus on what type of policing is needed to build trust and increase feelings of safety in communities, such as through neighbourhood police.

**73. Areas where many people live in poverty are more likely to be places where youth violence such as knife crime is widespread. We strongly believe that poverty and inequality in communities needs to be acknowledged as the major cause of knife crime**

100 [Q96](#) [Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers]

101 [Q96](#) [Sarah Jones MP]

102 [Q116](#) [Amaan Iqbal]

103 BBC News, [Home Secretary Priti Patel: ‘Stop and search works’](#), 11 August 2019

104 The Home Office, [National campaign to recruit 20,000 police officers launches today](#), 5 September 2019

and given the attention it requires in order to be able to address it. No prevention, intervention, increase in police numbers or police powers will be successful in tackling knife crime without also addressing societal issues such as poverty.

74. We acknowledge the cuts in police numbers over the recent years, and the impact that this has had on police forces across the country. This significantly reduces the capacity of the police to engage in their communities in a positive way and build constructive relationships with young people in schools and on the streets. Instead of being able to work to prevent knife crime, it forces them to work reactively once a knife crime offence has already taken place.

75. We are encouraged by the recent announcement of an additional 20,000 police officers. We are however not aware of any announcement outlining whether a proportion of these officers will be permanently based neighbourhood police who will have the opportunity to build up local knowledge and trust in the community.

76. *We are particularly concerned that previous cuts to the police have resulted in a reduced number of community support officers and school outreach officers. We acknowledge that the Government is taking steps to address this, but we do not think this goes far enough. We recommend that the Government urgently allocates further resources to neighbourhood police officers, as well as police outreach and engagement activities with young people in their communities. This, we believe, will build better relationships and trust between the police and the communities they serve, making young people feel safer as a result.*

77. *We recommend that the Government ensures that police officers allocated to a neighbourhood should reflect the social and ethnic demographics of the neighbourhoods which they serve.*

## The role of schools

78. Much of the evidence we heard suggested that not being in education, whether that is due to persistent absence or exclusion from school, is one of the factors which make children and young people vulnerable to becoming victims or perpetrators of knife crime.<sup>105</sup> Edward Timpson, author of the Timpson review of school exclusion, told us that education can be a “protective factor”, providing an opportunity for young people to build “really trusted relationships” within their schools and because of the support that schools have attached to them.<sup>106</sup> He told us that aside from the family home, schools are probably the only environment in which safeguarding and a child’s wellbeing and learning can all come together.<sup>107</sup>

79. Edward Timpson also acknowledged the preventative role education could play in keeping young people away from involvement in knife crime, but he also stressed that tackling crime cannot be the responsibility of educational establishments alone. He told us that there needs to be “collective responsibility” and that “no single person or agency can do this on their own”.<sup>108</sup>

105 See for example [Q95](#) [Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers], [BYC003](#), [BYC004](#), [BYC007](#), [BYC009](#), [BYC010](#), [BYC018](#), [BYC026](#), [BYC028](#) and [BYC030](#).

106 [Q54](#) [Edward Timpson]

107 [Q54](#) [Edward Timpson]

108 [Q67](#) [Edward Timpson]

80. **The protective effect of education can be life changing and extends beyond the time spent in school. We think that, when resourced properly, education can provide a strong foundation which sets children and young people up to achieve their aspirations. It plays a key role in protecting young people who are at risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of knife crime by providing positive role models and support services.**

### **School exclusion**

81. A report by Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner for England, found that gang associated children and young people under the age of 16 are more likely to have experienced school disruption than children and young people not associated with gangs. The report stated that this disruption usually occurs as a result of either school moves or exclusion.<sup>109</sup>

82. In March 2019 the BBC published an article on the relationship between exclusions and knife crime, plotting data derived from the Home Office<sup>110</sup> and the Department for Education<sup>111</sup> and suggested that there was a correlation between rates of school exclusion and knife crime.<sup>112</sup> In March 2019 Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, and six Police and Crime Commissioners from England and Wales wrote a letter to the Prime Minister in which they warned that children who have been excluded from school are at risk of being "sucked into criminality".<sup>113</sup> The Timpson Review of School Exclusion and the Government's Serious Violence Strategy state that exclusion is a marker for being at higher risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of crime<sup>114</sup>, with 23% of young offenders aged 10 to 17 who had been sentenced to less than 12 months in custody having been permanently excluded from school prior to their sentencing<sup>115</sup> and 83% of young offenders having a record of being persistently absent from school.<sup>116</sup>

83. Exclusion and absence from education have been shown to affect the academic outcomes of students, with excluded pupils achieving poorer academic outcomes on average compared to their peers in mainstream education.<sup>117</sup> The Timpson Review of School Exclusion recommended that schools should be made responsible for the academic attainment of excluded pupils. Edward Timpson told us:

We know that at the moment excluded children's outcomes are extremely poor: only 7% of children who are permanently excluded get good maths and English GCSEs, which are the bedrock to getting on in life and getting a good job.<sup>118</sup>

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109 Children's Commissioner for England, [The characteristics of gang-associated children and young people: Technical report](#), February 2019, p.25

110 Home Office, [Knife crime open year data ending March 2009 onwards](#), 18 July 2019

111 Department for Education, [Statistics: exclusions](#), 25 July 2019

112 BBC News, [Knife crime: Are school exclusions to blame?](#), 8 March 2019

113 The Guardian, [PM urged to fix school exclusion system to tackle knife crime](#), 7 March 2019

114 [Timpson Review of School Exclusion](#), May 2019, p.8, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018, p.29.

115 [Understanding the educational background of young offenders](#), p.16.

116 [Q61](#) [Edward Timpson]

117 [The Timpson review of school exclusion](#), May 2019, p. 7

118 [Q57](#) [Edward Timpson]

84. Furthermore, the Timpson review also concluded that exclusion rates were different between different ethnicities:

In relation to ethnicity, some ethnic groups are associated with a lower likelihood of being permanently excluded, including Bangladeshi and Indian children who are around half as likely to be excluded as White British children. Children from other ethnic groups are more likely to experience exclusion, in particular Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Black Caribbean pupils.<sup>119</sup>

85. The Children's Society stated that children and young people who are excluded are among the most vulnerable in society:

Historically, the groups of young people overrepresented in school exclusion rates are some of the most vulnerable in society. The latest statistical release from the DfE, demonstrates that this is still a pressing issue with children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) making up the bulk of permanent exclusions in 2016/17. In addition to this, we know from our direct work that those children and young people most likely to be excluded are also likely to have experienced abuse, neglect and bereavement at home and those who often have undiagnosed and unsupported SEN.<sup>120</sup>

86. Niven Rennie, Director of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, similarly told us that young people who have been excluded often display other characteristics which make them vulnerable:

The research I have done says that the children excluded in England and Wales are four times more likely to have grown up in poverty [...] and they are ten times more likely to have mental health issues.<sup>121</sup>

87. Ofsted stated that children who are excluded from school and referred to Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) "have self-reported higher instances of knife carrying than children who are not excluded".<sup>122</sup> Ofsted highlighted the findings of The London Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime 2018 youth survey which showed that 42% of PRU attendees say they know someone who has carried a knife, compared with 25% of non-PRU attendees, and 46% of PRU attendees say they know someone in a gang, in comparison to 22% of non-PRU attendees.<sup>123</sup> Ofsted stated that although there was a correlation between PRU attendance and exposure to knife and gang crime, it is not possible to conclude that exclusions are the cause of these behaviours or that it increases their likelihood.<sup>124</sup>

88. Furthermore, Ofsted stated that schools, local authorities and the Government need to consider that children and young people who are being groomed by gangs "may be being coached by dangerous adults to get themselves excluded."<sup>125</sup> Ofsted also stated that exclusion can make children and young people more vulnerable because it removes

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119 [The Timpson review of school exclusion](#), May 2019, p. 9–10

120 [BYC014](#)

121 [Q67](#) [Niven Rennie]

122 [BYC028](#)

123 Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime [Youth Voice Survey 2018](#), p.17

124 [BYC028](#)

125 [BYC028](#)

protective factors such as access to trusted adults.<sup>126</sup> Ofsted also stated that in cases where an excluded young person is not admitted into another mainstream school or good quality alternative provision they are particularly vulnerable to criminal exploitation.<sup>127</sup>

89. **Children and young people who are excluded are often subject to factors which make them more vulnerable to becoming victims or perpetrators of knife crime. Education can be a protective factor and being excluded from school or an absence of after-school activities may mean that many young people do not have contact with positive, relatable role models in their immediate surroundings, nor a connection to their local communities. We believe that excluded children and young people are more vulnerable to becoming victims and perpetrators of knife crime than their peers in full-time education.**

90. **We believe that having a dedicated safety officer in schools can lead to an improved relationship between young people and the police. Schools can also play a valuable role in facilitating visits by neighbourhood police officers in schools to let young people get to know the neighbourhood police officers in a calm situation in a safe environment.**

91. **We are very concerned that children from some ethnic groups are more likely to be excluded from education, specifically young people from Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Black Caribbean backgrounds.**

92. **We believe that all efforts should be made to prevent a young person from being excluded in the first instance, and exclusions should only be used as a last resort. Schools should be required to clearly demonstrate which steps they took before escalating the intervention to an exclusion.**

93. *We echo the Timpson review's recommendation that schools should be made accountable for permanently excluded pupils, but recommend that this accountability should extend beyond academic attainment to the welfare of fixed-term and permanently excluded pupils for the period during which they are out of education.*

94. *We recommend that the Government should allocate schools with adequate resources to ensure that a young person safely returns to education as soon as possible following an exclusion. The Government should recognise the detrimental effect an exclusion, and the risk that the excluded young person never successfully returns to education again, can have on the young person's prospects and to society.*

95. **Trauma from childhood, adversity, poverty and school exclusion amongst other factors make young people more vulnerable to getting involved in knife crime and serious violence. Young people who do not feel part of their community end up seeking a sense of belonging from gangs, and young people who are not hopeful for the future may see crime as the only feasible way forward and out of the situation they find themselves in.**

96. *We recommend that each young person identified as being at risk or already involved in knife crime should be assigned a youth worker who will coordinate responses from various youth services to ensure they receive the 'wrap-around' support they need to live a life free from crime. The factors which make young people vulnerable are often*

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126 [BYC028](#)

127 [BYC028](#)

*systemic at their core, stemming from wider issues in a community and society more generally. It is important that the Government's solution focuses not only on tackling knife crime but also on solving these underlying drivers.*

## Chapter 3: How do we prevent young people from getting involved in knife crime?

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### Purposeful activity

97. Once the school day is over many young people have nothing to do until they go home for the evening. A study conducted at Queen Mary University of London found that it is during this time, after school, that children are most likely to be victims of knife crime.<sup>128</sup> Ofsted similarly stated that this time is particularly unsafe, stating that the most dangerous time is once school has ended between 4pm and 6pm: “while children might be safe on site, their safety after school is a concern for children, their parents and their teachers”.<sup>129</sup>

98. During our inquiry we heard from a panel of young people representing both youth parliaments and youth authorities from various areas in the country. They all agreed that youth services had a very important role in tackling knife crime.<sup>130</sup> Amaan Iqbal from the Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority argued that by ensuring young people had activities to go to after school there would be less of a need to protect them in the streets:

If young people don't have to be on the streets, you won't have to have so many police officers around. We need more youth clubs and youth services, to give them more places to go. Rather than increasing the police presence, increase youth services.<sup>131</sup>

99. We believe that there is only so much that schools can do unless funded and supported to provide free after-school activities to keep young people in school longer. Youth groups, community initiatives, charities and youth services similarly need appropriate long-term funding to run after school activities. Hannah Chetwynd from the Children's Society told us:

We know there is a general lack of spaces for children and young people in communities, and there need to be more inclusive and positive spaces for young people. It is really important that they have a sense of ownership over them. We also think that local areas need to invest in more detached youth work, because we know that some young people simply will not go to youth centres, even if they are widely available. Once we have got these spaces in place for young people, we can start tackling this idea of perceived fear and talk about safety planning and start debunking any myths.<sup>132</sup>

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128 The British Medical Journal, '[Under 16s are at highest risk of being stabbed going home from school, UK study finds](#)', 7 November 2018.

129 [BYC028](#)

130 [Q115](#)

131 [Q115](#) [Amaan Iqbal]

132 [Q38](#) [Hannah Chetwynd]

100. Nacro, a national social justice charity, similarly argued for the importance of providing positive community activities of a varying nature for young people:

We know from our experience of working with young people, that having access to a range of activities of interest to young people can play a significant role in providing a positive focus, with some structure and the opportunity for interaction with positive role models. Some participants told us that the traditional image of 'youth clubs' would be off-putting, but there was wide support for a range of activities including boxing clubs and other sports activities. One person mentioned a bike scheme as being a good idea.<sup>133</sup>

101. Dr Jo Deakin and Dr Claire Fox, from the Centre for Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Manchester, stated that young people need support to establish "foundational rights", including schooling, mental and physical healthcare and socio-economic wellbeing:

Investing in services and initiatives that can support this is essential; this can provide 'safe spaces' for young people and support them in building positive relationships with adults, which can include those adults who were once deemed 'risky youths' themselves and are now positive role-models.<sup>134</sup>

102. Rashid Bhayat from the Positive Youth Foundation told us that the advantage of community-based programmes is that they are non-statutory, and therefore do not warrant a referral to take part: Mr Bhayat argued that this makes participation less stigmatised.<sup>135</sup> However, the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales stated that non-statutory work with young people "is often the first to be cut when local services are facing budget constraints"<sup>136</sup>, and expressed their concern over the short-term nature of many of the recently announced Government funding schemes:

During the last year, the Government have announced a number of additional funding opportunities to help tackle knife crime and serious violence. Whilst the YJB welcomes these additional opportunities, we are concerned that this additional funding may not be sufficient to plug the gaps left by the long-term budget cuts described above. Moreover, many of the funding opportunities available through these schemes are for short term projects or are available on a short-term basis. Short term funding could lead to a lack of sustainability and consistency in the interventions that are delivered to children; in turn, this may have an adverse impact on the children who would otherwise benefit from these much-needed interventions.<sup>137</sup>

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133 [BYC026](#)

134 [BYC004](#)

135 [Q43 \[Rashid Bhayat\]](#)

136 [BYC007](#)

137 [BYC007](#)

103. Vicky Foxcroft MP, Chair of the Youth Violence Commission, told us that investment in youth services would be needed over a long period of time before overall benefits were seen:

Some of these things work like a bit of a pendulum. If we want to save money in terms of police time, police resources, sending our children to PRUs, which are three times more expensive than schools, and saving money in terms of criminal investigations, that is not going to happen overnight. You need to invest and frontload that funding for a number of years before you watch the savings that come in the long term, in terms of making sure that we are keeping our young people safe.<sup>138</sup>

104. Professors at the University of Manchester and authors of the PROMISE study stated that the young people they had been in touch with had told them that community youth groups provided lifesaving and life-changing opportunities. The relationships these young people had established with peers and staff made them feel accepted and like they belonged somewhere, which they had not felt before:

Sadly, as austerity hits, many of these organisations face losing their funding. The impact of their work is lessened through reductions in staff and opening hours, presenting fewer of these positive opportunities for young people.<sup>139</sup>

105. When we asked the panel of young people whether they thought there were currently enough youth services around the country, they described a mixed picture based on their own experience in their areas.<sup>140</sup> Bukola Folarin from the Student Commission on Knife Crime in London told us:

Through all the research that I have done, a lot of young people are asking for more youth clubs and more mentors and more of those opportunities, and I feel like if those things were in place—as many as there should be—the knife crime numbers would definitely drop severely.<sup>141</sup>

106. We asked Nick Hunt, Head of the Home Office Serious Violent Unit, about how the Government's strategy would support youth services. He told us about the "Youth Charter" which he explained would, in conjunction with the Serious Violence Strategy, work to address the gap in provisions around youth services:

There is the youth charter, which came out of the [*Prime Minister's Serious Violence*] summit in terms of consulting directly with young people and in terms of the development in youth services, which I hope will have an impact. Work is going on to develop that, led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.<sup>142</sup>

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138 [Q92](#) [Vicky Foxcroft MP]

139 [BYC004](#)

140 [Q117](#)

141 [Q117](#) [Bukola Folarin]

142 [Q33](#)

107. On the Government's website there is an announcement mentioning the Youth Charter, stating that it will "set out a new vision for young people over the next generation and beyond", and will be developed by the Government alongside youth sector organisations:

The charter will reaffirm Government's commitment to give young people a strong voice on the issues they care about such as combating serious violence and knife crime, addressing mental and physical health challenges and concerns about the environment and climate change.<sup>143</sup>

108. **A collection of services around a young person, including educational institutions, youth centres and community activity groups, enables that young person to have purposeful activity and support as they grow up. If these services are in place, they can also identify a young person in need of additional support and help.**

109. *Different areas of the country have different provisions of youth services. We recommend that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's development of a new Youth Charter should include a review of where in the country there is a specific need for more youth services. Once these areas have been identified, the Department should establish a dedicated fund tasked with aiding local organisations in those areas to establish themselves.*

## Parental support

110. We do not believe that putting all the responsibility or blame on the parents whose child gets involved in knife crime is helpful. Some parents are not able to be present with their child as much as they want to, for example, due to having to work long hours, struggling with a language barrier, holding several jobs or having to commute far to a work place. The panel of young people we heard from all agreed that it was important to involve parents and legal guardians and to provide them with the education they need to positively influence their children and possibly also spot signs of involvement in gang or violent crime.<sup>144</sup>

111. We agree that parents need help to be able to spot the signs that their child is involved in something such as knife crime. We also agree that there are different family structures to consider in tailoring such support, as Kwabz Oduru Ayim from Mixtape Madness told us:

Our aim should be to support different types of parental structures by first acknowledging them. I have come across some young people with two mums, some live with their grandparents, some are from single-parent households, and so on and so forth. Due to the socio-economic pressures of parenting, maybe there is an increase in latch-key children, but unfortunately this generation of latch-key children differ from the last, because as opposed to just being raised by the local area they are in, they are now probably raised by social media as well. To keep the answer short and sweet, I feel it is down to socio-economic issues, which impact on the ability of parents to actually be parents.

143 The Department for Digital Culture Media and Sports, [New Youth Charter to support young people across the country](#), 11 April 2019

144 [Q127](#)

112. In the evidence we have seen, it has been suggested that improved parental and family involvement could prevent young people from feeling scared in their community<sup>145</sup> and help to prevent young people's involvement in knife crime.<sup>146</sup> Westminster City Council described several initiatives that they are conducting which seek to include parents in work to prevent and intervene. One example is an initiative run by their Youth Offending teams (YOTs) for parents:

The YOT have also provided a number of parenting workshops jointly with police and IGXU [*The Integrated Gangs and Exploitation Unit*] to provide a safe forum for parents to be able to highlight risks for children linked to violent offending and to consider ways of working together to reduce those risks.<sup>147</sup>

**113. Parents and legal guardians need to be equipped with the knowledge of how to spot signs that their child is involved in knife crime and how to stop it, including knowing which services they can receive assistance from. Parents and legal guardians need to receive support and positive encouragement to help their child at risk of, or involved in, knife crime. They should not be blamed for a young person's violent behaviour when there are so many other factors contributing, many which are out of their control.**

*114. We recommend that the Government, leading up to the next version of the Serious Violence Strategy, should hold consultations with diverse groups of parents and legal guardians to find out what support they need to identify and help their children who are at risk from knife crime. This consultation should lead to the formulation of a programme to help equip them with the appropriate tools.*

## Role models

115. We have heard some arguments about the importance of positive role models to deter young people from a life of crime<sup>148</sup>. The Minister told us that as part of the Home Office's #knifefree campaign, the Department is piloting "knife-free advocates".<sup>149</sup> However, we are concerned about the extent to which these advocates are relatable people whom the young person regularly sees in their own communities. We are also sceptical as to whether these advocates have themselves had lived experience of knife crime, poverty or exclusion. We are furthermore not convinced that "light-touch advice" is what these young people need, but rather a role model who can help mentor and support them consistently. The Ben Kinsella Trust suggested a role model should be a "navigator":

Many of the young people we have worked with describe not having role models in their local community who can help them navigate the challenges they face. Establishing these networks, particularly in areas which are dominated by serious violence and knife crime is vital. There are people in these areas who have influence and by developing them, training them and using a defined "Navigator" role we can create the alternative pathways that so many young people are seeking.<sup>150</sup>

145 [BYC007](#)

146 See for example [BYC008](#), [BYC009](#), [BYC010](#).

147 [BYC016](#)

148 See for example [BYC003](#), [Q78](#) [Daniel Willis], [Q129](#) [Eleanor Lakin]

149 [Q17](#) [Victoria Atkins]

150 [BYC005](#)

116. Jonathon Toy from Redthread told us that those with lived experience of knife crime could be guided and trained in to how to be a good, relatable role model for young people:

We work with them, develop them, train them, and provide them with career opportunities beyond the work of being those negotiators on the ground. They are there, and we need to do more to go out, identify them, invest in them and find those career pathways. The moment we start creating that journey and those pathways, other people will then see those opportunities come through.<sup>151</sup>

117. Nick Darvill from DIVERT also emphasised the importance of identifying people who through their experience could be trained to provide support as role models:

It is about people, the work that we do and the engagement that we have with people. We have to put in very intensive training for the environment that we work in, and show investment and value to the people who are doing work for us.<sup>152</sup>

118. Mixtape Madness argued that we should focus on real and relatable role models:

Instead of focusing on words like role models, we need to focus on phrases like real models or relatable models. The reality of certain socially deprived parts of the UK, is that youth violence has been an issue for over a decade. Many people aspire to leave these environments once they climb the class/income/wealth ladders. This is not to criticise as everyone has the choice to determine what they deem as a better life; plus other socio-economic factors are at play such as house prices. We need more incentives to encourage these people to stay or at least engage more in these environments. A massive issue in deprived environments is a poverty of ambition.<sup>153</sup>

119. The Children's Society had found that, in situations where young people did not have a role model around, they tended to turn to each other for support:

Our knife crime prevention worker told us that without the availability of positive role models in youth centres many of the young people he works with are turning to each for support, he made clear that for most young people these relationships are positive. Furthermore, it has been documented that as relationships with statutory authorities break down, young people increasingly look to one another for support. Through sustaining positive relationships and providing one another with alternative opportunities, young people can empower one another. However, it is important to support young people to understand when situations and 'friendships' are not safe.<sup>154</sup>

**120. Young people at risk of or already involved in crime respond well to hearing people share cautionary experiences from their own lives. These people can understand the young person, the feelings they may be experiencing and the reasons compelling them to get involved in knife crime. It makes it more relatable for young people; examples from real life are often more hard-hitting and impactful in changing their behaviour.**

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151 [Q50](#) [Jonathon Toy]

152 [Q50](#) [Nick Darvill]

153 [BYC023](#)

154 [BYC014](#)

121. *We recommend that the Government amend their approach to role models to focus on people with lived experiences, or people from troubled areas who have been successful in their own lives, who may be best able to inspire vulnerable young people. The relevant role models will be different for different local areas. It is important that individuals acting as role models for young people are drawn from all walks of life and are active in a range of professions, not just rappers and athletes. The Government should seek to encourage relatable role models to positively inspire young people, for example through funding mentoring programmes.*

## Social media

122. The Serious Violence Strategy states that some may be using social media to “glamorise gang or drug-selling life, taunt rivals and normalise weapons carrying”.<sup>155</sup> The Strategy furthermore states that:

[...] while popularity of social media pre-dates the rise in serious violence, growth in smart-phones between 2011 and 2014 has transformed social media accessibility and created an almost unlimited opportunity for rivals to antagonise each other, and for those taunts to be viewed by a much larger audience for a much longer time period.<sup>156</sup>

123. Rotherham Youth Council described social media as another tool which can be used for intimidation or bullying, amplifying some young people’s fears and their conviction that they need to protect themselves from physical violence by carrying a knife.<sup>157</sup>

124. Carlie Thomas from St Giles Trust told us that in her experience social media is also being used to incite violence by people “dissing” each other online, encouraging retaliation:

We work with young people and at the moment, I am working with 20 young men. They know that they are getting drawn out on social media. Music videos are drawing them out, with comments made about them. [...] we know that our young men go on, see something and they are being dissed or cussed and need to react for their pride. They either want to react or do not want to react, but they have to react, otherwise they are seen to be—I do not want to use certain words in here—a bit wet and not part of the circle, the gang or the peer group, because you are not dealing with what he said to you.<sup>158</sup>

155 The Home Office, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018, p. 9

156 The Home Office, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018, p. 30

157 [BYC002](#)

158 [Q71](#) [Carlie Thomas]

125. Leroy Logan, retired Police Superintendent and advisor to the All-Party Parliamentary Commission on Youth Violence, told us that the decrease in police numbers has made it harder for the police force to adapt to the changing context in which gang and violent crime occur:

They haven't got the officers, and cases are complex—social media has added so much to an investigation of various crimes. If you have fewer officers, a higher case load, more complex cases and work pressure, engaging with people is not a priority as it used to be. That is a big issue.<sup>159</sup>

126. Sheldon Thomas, Founder and Chief Executive of Gangline, told us about the influence social media can have on young people who do not have a strong role model in the form of a parent or carer, for example, and that many young people take what is being said on social media as a fact:

We are in a situation where, if a child is not parented, social media will parent your child.<sup>160</sup>

127. Similarly, Westminster City Council stated that social media could be used by perpetrators to locate victims:

Worryingly the use of social media extends to being used to support [and] perpetrate violent attacks - we are aware of incidents where snapchat has been used to locate where someone is who then consequently was targeted.<sup>161</sup>

128. However, Khulisa told us that it is not the videos themselves, nor the content of specific music spread on social media which influences a young person to commit knife crime:

Videos posted on social media, (eg. YouTube) don't encourage young people to pick up a knife, they pick up a knife in response to what they hear and witness with their own eyes on the streets of their community, as a survival instinct. For many young people, their neighbourhood resembles a battle ground. As in all wars, there are those who get caught in the crossfire and become innocent victims and those, for whom victimisation comes in the form of exploitation in all its forms.<sup>162</sup>

129. Nick Hunt also told us that he had seen how social media had been used to portray a glamorous lifestyle that “you can supposedly have if you sell drugs and flaunt that”.<sup>163</sup> The Greater Manchester Combined Youth Authority similarly argued:

For some young people gang culture and its portrayal on social media is a problem. If you lack other opportunities and you don't belong a gang can seem attractive as alternative 'family'. Social media can glamorise the lifestyle and downplays the negative aspects. Young people can be groomed through social media.<sup>164</sup>

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159 [Q5](#) [Leroy Logan]

160 [Q70](#) [Sheldon Thomas]

161 [BYC016](#)

162 [BYC009](#)

163 [Q29](#) [Nick Hunt]

164 [BYC017](#)

130. The Government Online Harms White Paper was released in April 2019, and the executive summary concludes:

Rival criminal gangs use social media to promote gang culture and incite violence. This, alongside the illegal sale of weapons to young people online, is a contributing factor to senseless violence, such as knife crime, on British streets.<sup>165</sup>

131. However, the Youth Justice Board stated that through their work with young people they have also heard that social media can be an effective tool to share messages from age-relevant celebrities or personalities, to reinforce the message not to carry knives.<sup>166</sup> The Home Office is currently running a campaign called “#knifefree” aiming to provide support and advice for young people for how to live a life free from knife crime.<sup>167</sup> Nick Hunt told us that the campaign had been promoted across various social media channels:

The #knifefree campaign is very much focused on supporting young people and dispelling some of the myths about knife carrying to get over the point about having a lack of confidence in what is going on. The Committee has seen #knifefree, which has had six million views. The website had half a million hits. It is about encouraging young people to think about the fact that you should not carry a knife and the problems if you do carry a knife. It promotes positive activities in terms of looking at different ways to get involved in the community, in schools and with other groups of young people.

132. The Online Harms White Paper set out:

- We have provided £1.4 million to support a new national police capability to tackle gang related activity on social media.
- This will bring together a dedicated team to take action against online material, focusing on investigative, disruption and enforcement work against specific gang targets, as well as making referrals to social media companies so illegal and harmful content can be taken down
- Prior to this, a new action group was established to bring together government, social media companies, police and community groups to tackle violent material available via social media.<sup>168</sup>

133. Although the #knifefree campaign is a welcome step forward, as well as the aspirations of monitoring harmful and violence inciting content<sup>169</sup>, we are not convinced that the Government’s current work truly seeks to consult with young people about how social media is impacting on them, the fear they feel in their communities or how it might work to instigate conflicts.

**134. We believe that social media in some instances works as a tool to amplify the fear already felt by young people in their communities, rather than as the source of**

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165 [Online Harms White Paper](#), April 2019

166 [BYC007](#)

167 [#KnifeFree website](#)

168 [Online Harms White Paper](#), p.15, April 2019

169 [Online Harms White Paper](#), p.15, April 2019

**threat, fear, or the instigator of violent acts. Social media has created a new context in which this violence, intimidation and fear may transcend the boundaries of the local neighbourhood and can spread at an unprecedented speed.**

**135. The Government has not convinced us that it fully understands the extent to which social media can magnify this fear felt by young people, and how social media can be used to spread violence, or to glamourise a criminal lifestyle. It is important that more research is commissioned to find out how young people can best be protected in this new context, rather than focusing on social media as a vehicle for gang activity.**

***136. We recommend that the Government urgently commissions research to better understand the dangerous ways in which social media can be used to spread violence and increase fear amongst young people, and what could be done to mitigate these dangers. This research should be completed, and findings published no later than March 2021.***

### **Making young people feel safe**

137. As we have argued previously in this report, it has been made clear throughout our inquiry that fear is a major driver behind why young people decide to carry a knife. In our online survey, we found that protection and fear were the most common answers to why young people carried knives. Several witnesses have told us that young people feel like they need to carry knives to protect themselves from possible attackers within their community, whom are carrying knives.<sup>170</sup> Khulisa stated that this fear of being attacked could overtake a young person's worry of possible conviction for carrying the knife:

Many would rather risk the consequences, being caught in possession and a jail term, or even worse, inflicting harm or causing death, rather than walk the streets without carrying protection. This is how real the fear is for many young people. In our experience, so many young people carry knives but never intend to use them yet end up faced with a situation where someone confronts them with a weapon & they are panicked into using the knife to avoid this attack.<sup>171</sup>

138. The Metropolitan Police Service's Youth Strategy, Engagement and Schools Team stated:

Fear is indeed a motivator for many young people carrying knives. Living in geographic areas where violent crime is prevalent or where gangs operate can cause fear of harm to a young person. Carrying a knife is often seen as the answer by young people to protect themselves from potential knife wielding attackers when in fact this makes them more likely to become a victim of knife crime, whereby their own knife can be used against them. What the MPS is currently doing to address this, is preventative work in schools to myth bust and highlight the reality. More campaigning around this by partners would be helpful in educating young people.<sup>172</sup>

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170 See for example [BYC010](#), [BYC012](#), [BYC002](#), [BYC026](#), [Q5](#) [John Poyton], [Q111](#) [Amaan Iqbal], [Q112](#) [Eleanor Lakin]

171 [BYC009](#)

172 [BYC033](#)

139. The Home Secretary recently announced that the pilot removing some of the previous requirements for a police officer to conduct a stop-and-search is to be expanded.<sup>173</sup> Previously, only a senior officer could authorise a stop and search if they reasonably believed an incident involving serious violence would take place. The required level of authorisation has now been lowered from a senior officer to inspector; and the degree of certainty from 'will' occur to 'may' occur.<sup>174</sup> The news story on the Government's website states:

The Home Office is making it simpler for all forces in England and Wales to use Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, which empowers officers to stop and search anyone in a designated area without needing reasonable grounds for suspicion if serious violence is anticipated.<sup>175</sup>

140. The Met Commissioner Cressida Dick had been positive about the change in stop and search powers when the pilot was announced. The Commissioner said that "stop and search is an extremely important power for the police. It is undoubtedly a part of our increasing results suppressing levels of violence and knife crime".<sup>176</sup> In an announcement made by the previous Home Secretary, Sajid Javid MP, in June 2019, the Home Office referenced the Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner Sir Steve House, who had told the London Assembly that the use of stop and search by the Metropolitan Police increased by 423% in 2018/19 compared to the previous year. The same news item also stated that "at the same time as searches rose, killings in the capital dropped by 30 per cent and knife injuries among the under-25s fell 20 per cent".<sup>177</sup> Sajid Javid MP then stated:

The fall in knife injuries reported by the Met is hugely encouraging and the police have been clear that when used in a lawful and proportionate way, stop and search can help cut crime.

141. The Home Secretary, Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, told the BBC in August that:

Stop and search works. We hear again and again from police that [they] need to be empowered.<sup>178</sup>

142. Westminster City Council were positive about the changes to stop and search powers:

We anticipate that the recent changes to Stop and Search powers will help to deter young people from carrying knives. Stop and Search powers are vital to the police to help them deter and tackle knife crime. They also help our community feel safer knowing that any knives found are removed out of circulation. Whilst we recognise that these powers have their challenges, there is currently no other alternative and it is important that the police have the right tools available to them to ensure our communities can remain safe and serious violence is reduced.<sup>179</sup>

173 The Home Office, '[Government lifts emergency stop and search restrictions](#)', 11 August 2019

174 The Home Office, '[Greater powers for police to use stop and search to tackle violent crime](#)', 31 March 2019

175 The Home Office, '[Government lifts emergency stop and search restrictions](#)', 11 August 2019

176 The Home Office, '[News story](#)', 31 March 2019

177 Home Office, '[Home Secretary statement on stop and search, 5 June 2019](#)

178 BBC News, '[Home Secretary Priti Patel: 'Stop and search works'](#)', 11 August 2019

179 [BYC016](#)

143. Stop and searches have, however, been criticised for disproportionately targeting Black people. According to the latest statistics from the Home Office there were 277,378 stop and search incidents in England and Wales (excluding vehicle-only searches) in the financial year 2017/18, occurring at a rate of 5 per 1,000 people. White people accounted for 86% of the total population of England and Wales in 2011 and for 60% of stop and searches in 2017/18 (where ethnicity was known). There were 3 stop and searches for every 1,000 White people, compared with 29 stop and searches for every 1,000 Black people.<sup>180</sup> Nacro expressed the following concern:

In view of the fact that increased use of stop and search does not lead to a drop in violent crime, Nacro remains concerned that increased use by the police of the power to stop and search will exacerbate racial discrimination within the criminal justice system, and result in further damage to public confidence in the police, particularly amongst young people.<sup>181</sup>

144. The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit emphasised that stop and searches need to be conducted responsibly:

The Scottish Government believe that a wide-ranging approach to knife crime is required and while stop and search, alongside prevention and education, has a role to play in combating knife crime, there must be a balance between protecting the public and recognising the rights of individuals. There is no clear evidence to demonstrate the specific impact stop and search has on levels of violence, including knife crime. That is because it is difficult to isolate the impact of stop and search from other police tactics used to tackle violence.<sup>182</sup>

145. The Home Secretary, Rt. Hon. Priti Patel MP, was asked by BBC News how she would ensure that stop and search would not disproportionately target Black young men. She responded that, while it is important that the powers are used in a “professional and legal way”, from “all the Police forces” that she had been speaking to:

I have heard that crime under 25s, the age group of 25-year-old, has gone down by 15% because of the increased use of stop and search and that means taking more weaponry off our streets. So, of course, the use of stop and search in the right legal and professional way drives the right kind of outcomes and that’s effectively what we are seeking to do.<sup>183</sup>

146. Jeremy Crook argued that the police could provide a way to make young people feel safer in their communities, but emphasised the importance of these police officers understanding the specific local contexts of the communities they are serving:

Clearly, we have got to make sure that young people feel safe in their communities. Part of that is more community police officers—more police officers—but it is people who understand their communities, not those shipped in from outside London who don’t really get the communities,

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180 The Home Office, [‘Ethnicity Figures: Stop and search’](#), 15 February 2019

181 [BYC026](#)

182 [BYC024](#)

183 BBC News, [Home Secretary Priti Patel: ‘Stop and search works’](#), 11 August 2019

don't know the young people and don't talk to them, and can't talk to them because they don't know how to relate to them. All those things make a difference.<sup>184</sup>

147. The Children's Society stated that, while they agreed that the Government must enact policies which deter young people from getting involved in violent crime, stop and searches and other confrontational interventions may not be the most effective:

The Government need to carefully balance the need to ensure adequate police interventions where crimes are committed with the need to build strong community relations and relationships with young people.<sup>185</sup>

148. Another tactic employed by the Home Office to reduce violent knife crime is Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPO). A KCPO can be enforced on any person aged 12 or over with the aim of preventing vulnerable young people from becoming involved in knife possession and knife crime. It can be put on anyone who police believe is carrying a knife, is a habitual knife carrier or a person previously convicted of a knife-related offence. What it means in practice is that a KCPO is a so-called "civil order" which can put a young person on, for example, a social media ban (to stop further gang interaction) or on a curfew. If a young person under this order breaks the conditions set, they could face up to two years in prison. The Home Office has stated that these are intended to work as deterrents from further involvement knife crime.<sup>186</sup>

149. The Standing Committee for Youth Justice expressed concerns over the impact of the new sanctions introduced by the Government, which they argued may lead to more young people getting a criminal record instead of addressing the reasons why young people carry knives.<sup>187</sup>

**150. A constant theme of our inquiry has been the testimony from young people telling us about the fear they feel in their communities. We believe this needs to be addressed urgently, and not just by increased police presence which could potentially have the opposite effect in some instances.**

**151. The fear young people feel is real and it makes some young people feel that the only way they can protect themselves is to carry a knife. We strongly urge the Government to listen to young people, and to take their fears seriously and work together with them to tackle the issues from which their fears stems from.**

**152. If the response to this knife crime crisis is an increased police presence, stop and searches and knife crime prevention orders, we are very concerned about the effect this may have on young people's trust in the police. Stop and search disproportionately targets young people of certain ethnic groups, specifically Black men, and until this disparity is rectified, stop and search powers should not be expanded.**

**153. We argue that an increase in stop and search powers should be balanced with a campaign to let young people know what their rights are when they are stopped and searched and how they can submit complaints about how a stop and search has been carried out.**

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184 [Q81](#) [Jeremy Crook]

185 [BYC014](#)

186 The Home Office, '[Government lifts emergency stop and search restrictions](#)', 11 August 2019

187 [BYC019](#)

154. We are extremely concerned that the Government's recent announcements seem to be shifting toward a more punitive approach to knife crime, rather than seeking to address the fears experienced by young people in their communities. We do not believe that this is a situation which will be remedied by an increase in stop and search, convictions or additional time in custody.

*155. We do not believe that harsher punishments or longer custodial sentences for young people who carry or use knives will remedy the epidemic of knife crime on our streets. We recommend that the Government as a matter of urgency commissions an investigation into measures which could make young people feel safer in their communities and subsequently designate enough funds to make the necessary measures a reality.*

*156. We recommend that the Government roll back the extension of powers of stop and search, which allow inspectors to authorise a search when an incident of serious violence 'may' occur, to the previous requirements of a senior officer when suspicion that an incident 'will' occur, until the disproportionate targeting of Black men in stop and searches is addressed.*

## Chapter 4: How do we effectively intervene to stop young people from continuing to be involved in knife crime?

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### What do we mean by 'intervene'?

157. Intervention and prevention are general terms applied to measures which take place before a serious crime is committed or with the aim of preventing further crimes from being committed by an individual. These measures can be delivered alongside and integrated into the criminal justice system and may be provided by Government and independent providers who work alongside the criminal justice system.<sup>188</sup>

158. The Government's Serious Violence Strategy uses two different classification systems to define types of early intervention. It classifies early interventions as either universal, selected or targeted and either primary, secondary or tertiary.<sup>189</sup> Universal programmes are administered to everyone within a defined population regardless of risk; targeted programmes are for individuals who have already committed violence; and selected programmes are directed at groups who have been identified as high-risk but who have not committed acts of serious violence yet.<sup>190</sup>

159. The Serious Violence Strategy defines primary, secondary and tertiary interventions in the following way:

Primary programmes attempt to address violence before it occurs; secondary programmes take place immediately after violent acts and try and prevent short-term consequences, while tertiary programmes also take place after violence has occurred but try and prevent long-term consequences.<sup>191</sup>

### What do young people think?

160. One of the questions posed to respondents in our online survey was about what they considered to be the most helpful way of combatting knife crime and provided them with a range of options. Approximately 7 per cent of respondents thought that there should be greater use of stop and search; 33 per cent told us that education would be one of the most effective ways to combat knife crime; approximately 21 per cent told us that they thought there should be greater restriction on the sale of knives; approximately 22 per cent told us that there should be more police officers on the streets; and approximately 17 per cent told us that they thought there should be tougher judicial sentencing.

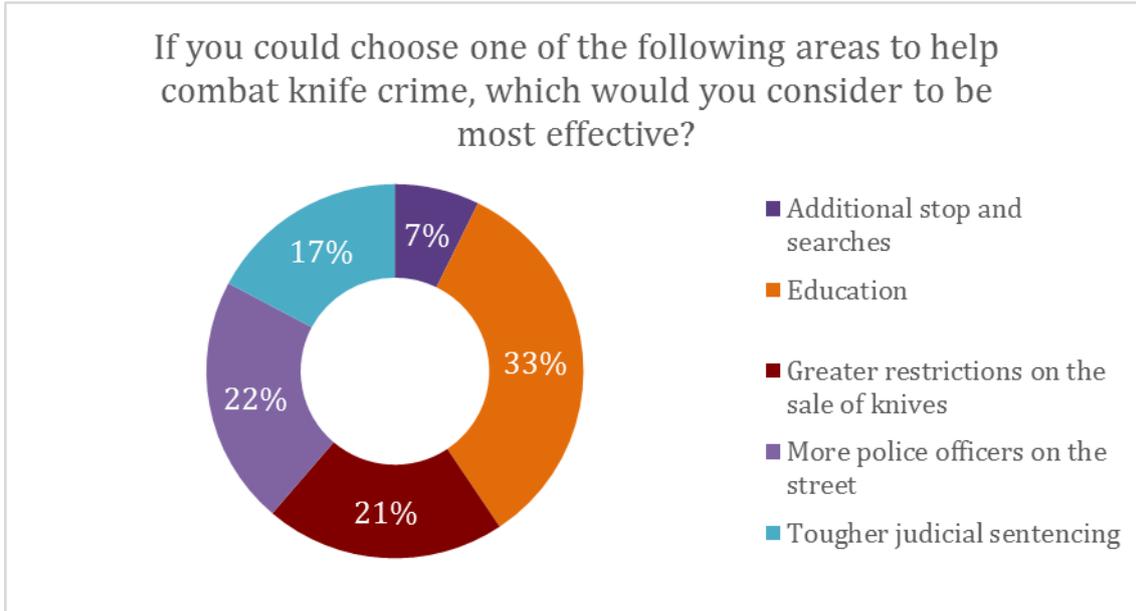
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188 For a fuller definition and explanation of the different types of intervention see [Early Interventions to Reduce Violent Crime](#), Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, April 2019

189 [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

190 Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, [Early Interventions to Reduce Violent Crime](#), April 2019

191 [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018



## The impact of sentencing

161. Sentences for all forms of violent crime have been getting tougher, and knife crime is a leading example:

- The average prison term for 16- and 17-year olds jailed has gone up from 5.8 months in 2016 to 8 months in 2018;
- In 2018 over a third (37% or 7,943 offences) of all knife and offensive weapon offences resulted in immediate custody compared with just 5,734 offences or 20% in 2008.
- the proportion of offences resulting in a caution is at the lowest level since the series began – 30% (8,523) of offences resulted in a caution during 2008, falling to just 11% (2,410) in 2018.<sup>192</sup>

162. Official advice to police in England and Wales sets out that there is “an expectation to prosecute all those who illegally carry and use knives”<sup>193</sup> and indicates that children aged 16 or 17 should be treated the same except in specific circumstances. However, children under the age of 16 who are caught with a knife are likely to be given a caution, providing there are no aggravating factors. The College of Policing guidance also states that no one should be issued multiple cautions, meaning that an offender caught with a knife a second time should be prosecuted.<sup>194</sup>

163. Opposition to longer sentences as a deterrent for young people who are involved in knife crime was expressed in several pieces of evidence that we received.<sup>195</sup> Between March 2009 and March 2019 the use of custodial sentences following knife and offensive weapons offences increased by 15 per cent and that the average length of these sentences

192 The Ministry of Justice, [Knife and Offensive Weapon Sentencing Statistics, England and Wales - 2018](#), 14 March 2019, p.3

193 College of Policing, [Major investigation and public protection Knife crime](#), last reviewed May 2017, p.3

194 College of Policing, [Major investigation and public protection Knife crime](#), last reviewed May 2017, p.3

195 See for example [BYC030](#), [BYC026](#) and [BYC007](#)

increased from 5.5 to 8.1 months for offenders aged 10 and over.<sup>196</sup> Nacro pointed out that although the use and length of sentences had increased for offenders aged 10 and over, the number of offences committed is rising, Nacro therefore concluded that custodial sentences may not prevent young people from offending.<sup>197</sup>

164. In February 2019, the then Justice Secretary David Gauke MP set out his long-term plan for justice. On sentencing, he said that the high rate of reoffending for those on sentences of less than 6 months showed that for them and wider society “prison simply isn’t working”. He went on to say that there is a “very strong case to abolish sentences of 6 months or less altogether, with some closely defined exceptions, and put in their place, a robust community order regime”.<sup>198</sup>

165. We asked the Minister Victoria Atkins MP whether she thought that custodial sentences were effective as a deterrent for future offending:

We want to send out the message loud and clear that carrying a knife is not normal and not acceptable. This is not new; I think it was in the 1950s that the Government first banned flick-knives, because there was a problem with gangs using them. It has been against the law for the last 30 years for retailers to sell sharp knives to anyone aged under 18. There is a history of work on this. The then [2015] Government introduced mandatory minimum sentences for possession of a knife on the second occasion precisely to send out that very strong public message that this is simply not acceptable. A sentence of imprisonment is of course still available to a judge on the first occasion a young person is caught, but we want to send this message out very clearly.<sup>199</sup>

166. The Policing Minister Kit Malthouse MP told Sky News:

We know the greatest deterrent to crime is the perception of the likelihood of getting caught. Prevention is really what we’re after.<sup>200</sup>

167. Although we agree that someone breaking the law needs to face the consequences of their actions, we are very sceptical about the notion that the threat of a custodial sentence will stop a young person from carrying a knife. In direct contradiction to this notion our online survey, as well as most of the evidence we have received, instead suggested that young people feel scared in their communities, and therefore feel that they have to carry knives or other weapons to protect themselves.<sup>201</sup> We find it hard to believe that a young person would be persuaded not to carry a knife due to the “perception of likelihood of getting caught”, when they feel like their life is in danger. One of the respondents to our survey told us:

Most people carry knives out of fear or protection, it’s the minority of people who carry knives and kill. Those are the people that the government is

196 Ministry of Justice, [Knife and Offensive Weapon Sentencing Statistics, England and Wales - Year ending March 2019](#), June 2019

197 [BYC026](#)

198 The Ministry of Justice, [‘Justice Secretary David Gauke sets out long-term for justice’](#), 18 February 2019

199 [Q23](#) [Victoria Atkins MP]

200 BBC News, [‘PM to create 10,000 new prison places and extend stop-and-search’](#), 11 August 2019

201 See for example [BYC001](#), [BYC003](#), [BYC012](#), [BYC026](#), [Q38](#), [Q66](#)

trying to target. The government should also help society to be less afraid of walking on the streets alone instead of just grouping the criminals together with the fearful.

168. Hannah Chetwynd told us that it is vital that services recognise young people involved in knife crime are often both victims and perpetrators:

[...] often the young people we work with present as victims and as perpetrators. It is vital that this is recognised and that they are treated as both. We want statutory services to recognise that these young people who have been exploited have not made a choice but are the victims of grooming.<sup>202</sup>

169. Matthew Scott, Police and Crime Commissioner for Kent, told us that on judicial sentencing as an effective deterrent from crime:

I do not think it is nearly as effective as it should be. You need a joined-up approach that prevents criminalisation to begin with, but when something serious has happened there needs to be effective punishment as well as rehabilitation in prison.<sup>203</sup>

170. Leroy Logan, Chair of the organisation Voyage Youth and advisor to the Youth Violence Commission, told us:

My real issue here is the narrative that is used on a regular basis: there is a war on violence and a war on drugs, which is true. We need to be tough on crime and on the causes of crime, but there is an overemphasis on punitive measures. I don't think they recognise [...] that young people say they are already scared in certain areas. There are also those who do not care whether they live or die, or whether anyone else lives or dies, because they think their shelf-life is below 20.<sup>204</sup>

**171. The Government has recently recognised that short custodial sentences are associated with high levels of reoffending. In our opinion the threat of a custodial sentence is unlikely to deter young people who feel scared for their lives from carrying a knife out of protection.**

***172. We believe that short custodial sentences should be an absolute last resort and thus avoided for young people who are found to have carried knives. We urge the Government to clarify their position on short term custodial sentences for young people, and equally consider whether there is another approach which could replace them.***

### **Rehabilitation of young offenders**

173. In some of the evidence we have received, it has been suggested that long sentences are not just a poor deterrent from further involvement in crime, but that in some cases custodial sentences can increase the likelihood of a young person reoffending, particularly if they are issued shorter sentences.<sup>205</sup>

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202 [Q44](#) [Hannah Chetwynd]

203 [Q82](#) [Matthew Scott]

204 [Q3](#) [Leroy Logan]

205 See for example [BYC019](#), [BYC026](#) and [BYC031](#)

174. Research conducted by the Ministry of Justice found that rather than reducing reoffending, short term custodial sentences of under 12 months issued to offenders aged 18 and over were associated with higher rates of reoffending than if a community order and/or suspended sentence order had been issued.<sup>206</sup> The SCYJ argued that sentencing children and young people to custody is not an effective way to rehabilitate them.<sup>207</sup> The SCYJ cited a briefing by the College of Policing which concluded that for children involved in serious violence “prison alone has been found to significantly increase reoffending, compared to non-custodial sanctions”<sup>208</sup>.

175. Although prisons set out to offer rehabilitation to young people in custody, those who have had previous experience in custody tend to reoffend. The latest statistics for England and Wales published in January 2019 show that 40.9% of children and young people (10–17 years old) reoffended.<sup>209</sup> Iman Haji from the organisation Khulisa told us:

That [*Reoffending*] is partly because short-term sentences interrupt more or less every single one of the protective factors against crime. They affect employment, housing and whether you are receiving benefits, so we would support that presumption against short sentences. We should avoid them where we can. Hopefully, that would reduce pressures in the prison system and improve outcomes for everybody. Those on short sentences, or who would have been on short sentences, are avoiding prison altogether, and hopefully that reduced pressure and reduced levels of overcrowding would then be able to support rehabilitative interventions for those on long-term sentences, because they would actually be able to leave their cells and access what is on offer.<sup>210</sup>

176. The West Midlands Police (WMP) concluded that short sentences do not generally have a positive impact and that people who receive them have a high reoffending rate. Consequently, the WMP argued that short sentences do not act as a deterrent from future crime, and that offenders have described them as “easy time”. They stated that lower level convictions may be seen as a badge of honour and often promote gang culture. They told us that there needs to be national consistency around dealing with knife crime and low level, first time offenders. An example they suggest could be the use of Community Resolutions and Resources which seek to divert young people away from further offending in an informal way outside of the justice system. However, the WMP also suggested that these community-based sentences for first offenders need to be combined with severe consequences for more serious offences. They stated that young people who commit knife crime need to know that there will be tough sentences when they are no longer first-time offenders.<sup>211</sup>

177. Furthermore, the SCYJ stated that the childhood criminal records can become a barrier for young people trying to access employment, housing and education. This barrier, they argue, works against any rehabilitative potential of the criminal justice system and prevents young people from moving away from violence and into legitimate

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206 Ministry of Justice, [The impact of short and custodial sentences, community orders and suspended sentence orders on reoffending](#), Georgina Eaton and Aidan Mews, 2019

207 [BYC019](#)

208 College of Policing, [Knife crime evidence briefing](#), April 2019

209 The Youth Justice Board, [‘Youth Justice Statistics 2017/18 England and Wales’](#), 31 January 2019, p. 2

210 [Q88](#) [Iman Haji]

211 [BYC031](#)

employment, training and education opportunities<sup>212</sup>. To resolve this the SCYJ proposed that the criminal justice system should be reformed in line with the 2019 judgement from the Supreme Court on criminal disclosure, to make the disclosure of criminal records less widespread.<sup>213</sup> In its judgement on the case in question the Supreme Court ruled that the way criminal records are disclosed to employers infringed human rights.<sup>214</sup>

178. Jeremy Crook, the Chief Executive Officer of Black Training and Enterprise Group, told us that more needed to be done to ensure that young people in custody have access to the right support in their rehabilitation. He told us that young people in custody are not given effective support and learning opportunities, and that only half of young people in custody feel that they have been given support in resettling once they are released.<sup>215</sup>

179. Iman Haji, the Research and Programme coordinator at Khulisa, told us that nearly 7 out of 10 young people will reoffend within a year of release from custody. She attributed this figure to the lack of a trauma-informed approach in the criminal justice system and told us that this made the Government's efforts to rehabilitate offenders ineffective. She told us that the criminal justice system does not account for the complex needs of the young people who pass through it, referring to the high rates of young people in prison who have experienced traumatic brain injury, ACEs, or have been in care.<sup>216</sup>

180. Matthew Scott, Police and Crime Commissioner for Kent, agreed that the current system does not allow for a trauma-informed approach. He called the system "fragmented", saying that this fragmentation prevents the different components within the system from being as effective as they could be.<sup>217</sup>

181. Sarah Jones MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime, told us that without the right support following a custodial sentence it is difficult for young people to break a cycle of criminality:

[...] you come out of prison and, unless there is something there to support you, you collapse back into doing exactly what you were doing before, because you need the money and you don't know anything different.<sup>218</sup>

182. Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers told us that many young people are facing the same problems when they leave prison as they did before they were arrested, with prison only intensifying those issues. He told us that the key problems young people face upon release are access to housing and employment.<sup>219</sup>

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212 [BYC019](#)

213 [BYC019](#)

214 Supreme Court Judgement, [R v Secretary of State for the Home Department and others](#), January 2019

215 [Q82](#) [Jeremy Crook]

216 [Q87](#) [Iman Haji]

217 [Q88](#) [Matthew Scott]

218 [Q104](#) [Sarah Jones MP]

219 [Q104](#) [Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers]

183. The Children's Society emphasised that a child or young person committing a crime should always be considered in the context of their age and vulnerability:

A child being caught in possession of a knife should be met with 1) a holistic assessment of need and where possible support [which] should be put in place within the school setting to help tackle the root cause of the knife carrying behaviour and 2) a safeguarding response from all statutory services that come into contact with the child.<sup>220</sup>

**184. It is vital that young people get the support that they need to build a better future for themselves, and that past criminal convictions do not stop them from building a life free from crime. If a previous conviction stops a young person from finding employment or accommodation, they will become more vulnerable and likely to re-offend.**

**185. If a custodial sentence is the only option for a young person who has committed a crime, there has to be a rigorous rehabilitation plan in place to address the underlying issues which may have caused them to offend in the first place.**

*186. We recommend that a young person with a criminal record should be given regular reviews of how their criminal record is affecting their ability to, for example, gain employment or secure accommodation. The young person should subsequently be provided with services and support to mitigate any barriers identified.*

*187. We call for the Government to run a consultation on possible ways to clear a young person's criminal record once they become an adult to stop it from being a barrier as they build a life free from crime.*

### **Restorative justice**

188. During our inquiry we have heard about restorative justice interventions, which centre on an informal way of resolving a crime committed. A restorative justice intervention can take place before a case goes to court, as well as following a conviction.<sup>221</sup> Clive Davies from Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner told us that:

[...] there will be a bespoke plan of action, which could be some courses, some community work or some one-to-one sessions. It is all very much tailor-made around that individual, which they must then work through over a series of months.

[...] Our reoffending rates are only about 18%, which is very good; it is low. It means that we have reduced first-time entrance of young people into the criminal justice system in the last 10 years by over 90%, which is massive. So, over 10 years the vast majority of young people in Surrey have not now been criminalised, but victims are still happy; over 90% of victims are still happy with what we are doing.<sup>222</sup>

220 [BYC014](#)

221 The Crown and Prosecution Service, '[Restorative Justice](#)'

222 [Q62](#) [Clive Davies]

189. Although we understand that not every offender or every offence is appropriate for a restorative justice intervention, we believe that each case involving a young person should be considered for it. The Serious Violence Strategy also mentions restorative justice interventions as a successful tactic to prevent reoffending when tailored to the individual.<sup>223</sup>

190. Sarah Boycott, from the West Midlands Police, told us that they have a similar approach to Surrey Police when it comes to restorative justice interventions. She also highlighted the effect that acquiring a criminal record at a young age may have on a young person's prospects:

If a young person is carrying a knife out of fear, once they are criminalised their life chances change significantly, so we need to understand what programme will help them to realise that the risks around that and prevent it from happening again, rather than going through the court system.<sup>224</sup>

191. It is however important to always consider the welfare of the victim of the crime, and a restorative justice approach will only work if the victim, just like the perpetrator, is properly supported. Matthew Scott, Police and Crime Commissioner for Kent, told us:

It is about two things: the victim and the reduction of reoffending. I have commissioned a county-wide restorative justice programme that gives victims greater say and greater empowerment. For example, they can discuss the incident and the crime with the offender in a facilitated setting once the offender has been sent to prison. They can seek an apology and hold the offender to account. They can use it as an opportunity to try to understand why they were targeted. It can be a very effective tool for better supporting victims.<sup>225</sup>

192. We believe it is very important to ensure that victims are suitably supported so that they can recover from their trauma and to preserve their belief in the criminal justice system. Victims of knife crime are also more likely to carry knives and possibly commit knife crime themselves.<sup>226</sup> This, again, we believe comes back to the perceived threat and fear that young people feel, and consequently the need to protect themselves by carrying a knife.

**193. We agree that restorative justice interventions can be an effective alternative to shorter custodial sentences or other formal criminal justice interventions, where suitable for the offender and the victim. Receiving a custodial sentence at an early age can have a detrimental effect on a young person's life and their future and should always be the last resort.**

**194. Restorative justice may also positively impact the victim and decrease the risk of the victim later becoming a perpetrator themselves.**

***195. We recommend that the next version of the Serious Violence Strategy includes a larger focus on restorative justice and other informal criminal justice responses as a first step. A young person who commits knife crime is first and foremost a vulnerable child in***

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223 The Home Office, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018, p.43.

224 [Q61](#) [Sarah Boycott]

225 [Q86](#) [Matthew Scott]

226 Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, ['Knife Crime, A review of evidence and policy'](#), p.21.

*need of help. We agree that all efforts once a young person has been found to be involved in knife crime should be aimed at rehabilitating that young person, and give them the best possible chance for a life free from crime.*

196. *We recommend that victims of knife crime should be given targeted support as they are statistically more likely to subsequently commit knife crime themselves. If restorative justice is used effectively, it could provide the victim with the closure they need to deter them from future involvement in knife crime.*

## Education as intervention

197. Nacro stated that in the focus group they had conducted with young people, participants did not think that the current penalties for knife crime offences were a deterrent because young people were more worried about protecting themselves. In one focus group Nacro were told “it is only when people are arrested that they think of the consequences of what they have done.” Nacro also stated that they had found that there was very little knowledge amongst participants of what the penalties for knife and offensive weapon offences were.<sup>227</sup>

198. Amaan Iqbal, from the Greater Manchester Youth Authority, argued that schools should educate young people about the dangers of carrying a knife. He said that “prevention is always better than a cure,” and that schools should teach young people that they are more likely to get stabbed themselves rather than stabbing someone else.<sup>228</sup>

199. Bukola Folarin, representative from the Student Commission on Knife Crime in London, told us that a good way to tackle knife crime would be to educate young people on what is happening: for example, the statistics surrounding knife crime and knife carrying, and their rights.<sup>229</sup> Eleanor Lakin, Member of Youth Parliament and representative of the Plymouth Youth Parliament, told us that schools should teach young people about gangs and crime and the statistics on knife crime offences. She suggested that this would address the concern many young people have around their safety, and help them to deal with their fear and any mental health issues which may arise as a result.<sup>230</sup> She said that schools should also educate young people about how knife crime might affect them, with a particular focus on laws surrounding knife crime and the sentences a knife crime offence can carry. She told us that these interventions should be universal:

I think they should educate all young people. Don't target specific students because, like I said, anyone can fall into knife crime.<sup>231</sup>

## Teachable moments

200. The Government's Serious Violence Strategy talks about early intervention and prevention in terms of “prevent[ing] people from committing serious violence and being drawn into exploitation by building resilience, supporting positive alternatives and providing timely interventions at the “teachable moment”.<sup>232</sup> Redthread, an organisation

227 [BYC026](#)

228 [Q114](#) [Amaan Iqbal]

229 [Q111](#) [Bukola Folarin]

230 [Q111](#) [Eleanor Lakin]

231 [Q114](#) [Eleanor Lakin]

232 [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

which runs a Youth Violence Intervention Programme (YVIP) in hospital A&E departments in London, defines a 'teachable moment' as a "moment of intense crisis" which "can be a catalyst for self-reflection and pursuing change".<sup>233</sup> Two such 'teachable moments' which we have heard about over the course of our inquiry are following injury and following arrest.<sup>234</sup>

201. However, Khulisa criticised the Serious Violence Strategy's focus on 'teachable moments', arguing that this may take away focus from helping young people before they get hurt or arrested:

[...] by focusing on providing interventions at 'teachable moments' when a child has already been a victim or a perpetrator of violence, the Serious Violence Strategy does not focus enough on the most effective forms of preventative action.<sup>235</sup>

### *Intervention following arrest*

202. DIVERT, an example of an intervention programme, was set up to divert 18 to 25-year-olds who come into custody, into employment, education and training opportunities. The overall aim of the programme is to reduce reoffending.<sup>236</sup> The programme provides participants with a work coach and the re-offending rate amongst participants is low, standing at 8 per cent<sup>237</sup> in comparison to a re-offending rate of 28.5 per cent amongst offenders aged 18 and over in England and Wales in 2017.<sup>238</sup>

203. Nick Darvill, Programme Manager for DIVERT told us that the young people with whom DIVERT works need effective guidance because they do not have enough support and guidance in their day-to-day lives.<sup>239</sup> He told us that young people who are transitioning to adulthood often find it harder to access support provision which was in place before they turned 18. He told us that what makes DIVERT effective is that the programme can give young people tailored support for as long as they need it<sup>240</sup>:

We are in the fortunate position that we can give them [young adults] as much time as is needed. The higher the risk that someone presents, the more time and interest we are able to invest in them. [...] The way we work means that pathway can take as long as it needs.<sup>241</sup>

### *Intervention following injury*

204. Redthread identified the situation when a young person has been hospitalised as a result of a knife crime related incident as a "teachable moment".<sup>242</sup> John Poyton, Chief

233 [BYC012](#)

234 See for example [BYC011](#), [BYC012](#), [BYC033](#), and [Q9](#) [John Poyton]

235 [BYC009](#)

236 [Q37](#) [Nick Darvill]

237 [BYC033](#)

238 Figure reflects the proven reoffending statistics amongst adult offenders (over the age of 18) in the year spanning April 2016 - March 2017, the most recent period for which data is available, [Proven reoffending tables \(annual average\), January 2017 to March 2017](#), 25 July 2019.

239 [Q41](#) [Nick Darvill]

240 [Q49](#) [Nick Darvill]

241 [Q41](#) [Nick Darvill]

242 [BYC012](#)

Executive Officer of Redthread, said that the organisation aims to help young people “break the cycle of violence” in which many are caught up.<sup>243</sup> He told us that Redthread helps to provide wrap-around support by delivering a social or youth work intervention alongside the healthcare professionals providing the clinical medical interventions. Redthread stated that there is a significant overlap between the victims and perpetrators of knife crime and serious youth violence, and that exposure to violence is a key factor which can make a young person vulnerable to becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence later in life.<sup>244</sup>

205. Redthread describes the interventions delivered through its Youth Violence Intervention Programme (YVIP) as “relatively short-term but intensive” with the aim being that they will enable the young people who receive them to make long-term changes.<sup>245</sup> Youth workers aim to meet with young patients as soon as possible to build a rapport which will enable them to provide support. The youth workers aim to help young patients make long-term positive plans to break away from cycles of violence and offending.<sup>246</sup> The support is not just offered to the young patient who is receiving the intervention; through the YVIP, Redthread also offers support to the patient’s family members and friends, recognising that the traumatic impact of the violence will affect not only the victim but their networks and community too.<sup>247</sup>

206. Victoria Atkins MP referenced the work of Redthread as an example of the kind of interventions funded by the Government, but acknowledged that at the stage at which Redthread is involved a young person has already been injured. She told us that the Government wants to prevent young people from coming to harm in the first place and as a result also works with organisations which deliver preventative interventions to vulnerable groups of young people.<sup>248</sup>

**207. Young people at risk of getting involved in knife crime or serious violence need to receive targeted interventions as a matter of urgency. We strongly believe that every effort should be made to prevent a young person from ever getting involved in knife crime, but also that when it does happen measures are put in place as a matter of urgency.**

**208. Interventions focused on identifying and meeting a young person in a ‘teachable moment’, – for example, when they have been arrested for committing a knife crime or when they come in to the emergency room after being injured – may be very effective in deterring that young person from future involvement in serious violence. Although we agree that focus should be on preventative measures, there should still be required provision for seizing the ‘teachable moment’ as an intervention tactic if a crime has been committed.**

**209. *We recommend that the Government should adopt the use of ‘teachable moments’ as a national tactic, funding organisations to provide targeted interventions to young people in hospital or police custody following a knife crime related incident.***

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243 [Q1](#) [John Poyton]

244 [BYC012](#)

245 [BYC012](#)

246 [BYC012](#)

247 [BYC012](#)

248 [Q17](#) [Victoria Atkins]

## Conclusions and recommendations

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### Finding a solution

1. Inequality within communities and the difference in opportunities provided across the country makes some young people particularly vulnerable to the draw of violence and gangs. Cuts to important and arguably life-saving services such as community police officers, youth community groups, health and education services means that the support previously in place for vulnerable young people has been weakened or in some cases completely removed. We believe that this is a fundamental cause of the rise in violent crime, including knife crime, amongst young people. (Paragraph 15)
2. We are not convinced that the Government is committed to address and improve the difficult circumstances many young people today grow up in. The current limited interventions, for youth violence specifically, will only ever be able to remedy the symptoms but never the causes of knife crime. Therefore, we firmly believe that any action to prevent knife crime must begin by committing to address the damaging inequalities in our communities. (Paragraph 16)
3. *We urge the Government to establish a plan with clear targets and deadlines aimed at tackling the injustices which make a young person more vulnerable to knife crime, including but not limited to poverty, inequality of opportunity and any other socio-economic challenges.* (Paragraph 17)

### What is the knife crime situation, and what is the Government's approach to it?

4. We note that the Government has put some provisions in place for long-term funding, but the overall funding structures are still focused on short-term interventions. We are concerned that the lack of long-term guarantees will make it difficult for organisations to run programmes encouraging the permanent change needed to ensure young people feel safe in their communities and supported to live crime free lives. Even when there are services tackling different aspects, there may be long gaps in their delivery which cause progress to be lost. Support should be provided before young people get involved in crime or violence, not just once it has happened. We recognise that early interventions are often the most cost-effective way, in the long run, of tackling serious violence. (Paragraph 31)
5. *We urge the Government to commit to consult a diverse group of stakeholders on how to effectively allocate funding to youth services, especially regarding commissioning, to ensure the views of those who are directly affected and 'on the ground' are directly embedded.* (Paragraph 32)
6. *We recommend that funding guarantees are made over a longer period, of at least 5 years, to enable youth services to build their practices, develop effective ways of helping and reaching young people and establishing the trust of the young people in their local area. This will lead to young people having purposeful activity outside of education, keeping them off the streets.* (Paragraph 33)

7. *We fully endorse the Home Affairs Select Committee's recommendation: "The Government needs to introduce a fully-funded, statutory minimum of provision for youth outreach workers and community youth projects in all areas, co-designed with local young people. This would be a national Youth Service Guarantee, with a substantial increase in services and ring-fenced funding from central Government. It should include enhanced provision in areas with higher-than-average risk factors linked to serious youth violence, such as under-25 knife crime and school exclusion. It must also be coupled with proper mental health provision for young people, informed by an understanding of the impact of trauma and other adverse childhood experiences."* (Paragraph 34)
8. We are encouraged by the Government's support of the public health approach, but we are concerned that services are not adequately supported and funded by the Government to provide the integrated care which the public health approach relies on. Organisations, charities and community services need to be able to work together and share information to provide the 'wrap-around' support set out in the public health approach. (Paragraph 42)
9. A successful public health approach will require extensive research into the culture and specific context across local communities to fully understand those affected, in order to tailor support and achieve the best possible outcome. (Paragraph 43)
10. We are concerned by the absence of youth voice and understanding in the Government strategy, evidenced in the Minister's view on what constitutes appropriate role models: "They are sports coaches, rap artists and people in the community who meet young people in their ordinary day-to-day lives, who can give perhaps a bit of light-touch advice in the midst of playing sport or rapping or whatever their specialism is". We believe that this is a narrow and stereotypical view of specific demographics of young people and their aspirations. (Paragraph 44)
11. *The Minister said that the Serious Violence Strategy is a "living" document. We recommend that as it is continuously reviewed and developed it will benefit from embedding the views from young people and/or those with lived experience of knife crime throughout. Examples of how this could be done include co-designing surveys and projects with young people, as well as consulting organisations directly working with young people affected.* (Paragraph 45)
12. *We recommend that the Government consults organisations, charities and community services on what they need in support of the new proposed legal duty. This will enable more effective collaboration and sharing of information to provide young people with adequate support, and truly deliver a public health approach tailored for and championed by local communities to combat knife crime and youth violence.* (Paragraph 46)

### How circumstances affect a young persons involvement in knife crime

13. We believe that young people do not grow up wanting to commit knife crime. We believe it is something which some young people get drawn into or become a victim of due to circumstances outside of their control. (Paragraph 53)

14. There have been suggestions that music and social media cause knife crime, however we strongly disagree with this. We acknowledge that social media can amplify already existing conflicts in a community for example, but ultimately both social media and music are mediums which young people use to express themselves. Young people are likely to post and make music about their own situations and events in their lives, which in some cases may portray violence. (Paragraph 54)
15. We strongly believe that certain factors make young people more vulnerable to becoming victims or perpetrators of knife crime. In its steps to address the knife crime epidemic the Government must remember that ultimately any young person is vulnerable to becoming a victim or perpetrator of knife crime. (Paragraph 64)
16. Areas where many people live in poverty are more likely to be places where youth violence such as knife crime is widespread. We strongly believe that poverty and inequality in communities needs to be acknowledged as the major cause of knife crime and given the attention it requires in order to be able to address it. No prevention, intervention, increase in police numbers or police powers will be successful in tackling knife crime without also addressing societal issues such as poverty. (Paragraph 73)
17. We acknowledge the cuts in police numbers over the recent years, and the impact that this has had on police forces across the country. This significantly reduces the capacity of the police to engage in their communities in a positive way, building a constructive relationship with young people in schools and on the streets. Instead of being able to work to prevent knife crime, it forces them to work reactively once a knife crime offence has already taken place. (Paragraph 74)
18. We are encouraged by the recent announcement of an additional 20,000 police officers. We are however not aware of any announcement outlining whether a proportion of these officers will be permanently based neighbourhood police who will have the opportunity to build up local knowledge and trust in the community. (Paragraph 75)
19. *We are particularly concerned that previous cuts to the police have resulted in a reduced number of community support officers and school outreach officers. We acknowledge that the Government is taking steps to address this, but we do not think this goes far enough. We recommend that the Government urgently allocates further resources to neighbourhood police officers, as well as police outreach and engagement activities with young people in their communities. This, we believe, will build better relationships and trust between the police and the communities they serve, making young people feel safer as a result.* (Paragraph 76)
20. *We recommend that the Government ensures that police officers allocated to a neighbourhood should reflect the social and ethnic demographics of the neighbourhoods which they serve.* (Paragraph 77)
21. The protective effect of education can be life changing and extends beyond the time spent in school. We think that, when resourced properly, education can provide a strong foundation which sets children and young people up to achieve

their aspirations. It plays a key role in protecting young people who are at risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of knife crime by providing positive role models and support services. (Paragraph 80)

22. Children and young people who are excluded often have factors which make them more vulnerable to becoming victims or perpetrators of knife crime. Education can be a protective factor and being excluded from school or an absence of after-school activities may mean that many young people do not have contact with positive, relatable role models in their immediate surroundings, nor a connection to their local communities. We believe that excluded children and young people are more vulnerable to becoming victims and perpetrators of knife crime than their peers in full-time education. (Paragraph 89)
23. We believe that having a dedicated safety officer in schools can lead to an improved relationship between young people and the police. Schools can also play a valuable role in facilitating visits by neighbourhood police officers in schools to let young people get to know the neighbourhood police officers in a calm situation in a safe environment. (Paragraph 90)
24. We are very concerned that children from some ethnic groups are more likely to be excluded from education, specifically young people from Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Black Caribbean backgrounds. (Paragraph 91)
25. We believe that all efforts should be made to prevent a young person from being excluded in the first instance, and exclusions should only be used as a last resort. Schools should be required to clearly demonstrate which steps they took before escalating the intervention to an exclusion. (Paragraph 92)
26. *We echo the Timpson review's recommendation that schools should be made accountable for permanently excluded pupils, but recommend that this accountability should extend beyond academic attainment to the welfare of fixed-term and permanently excluded pupils for the period during which they are out of education.* (Paragraph 93)
27. *We recommend that the Government should allocate schools with adequate resources to ensure that a young person safely returns to education as soon as possible following an exclusion. The Government should recognise the detrimental effect an exclusion and the risk that the excluded young person never successfully returns to education again, can have on the young person's prospects and to society.* (Paragraph 94)

### How do we prevent young people from getting involved in knife crime?

28. Trauma from childhood, adversity, poverty and school exclusion amongst other factors make young people more vulnerable to getting involved in knife crime and serious violence. Young people who do not feel part of their community end up seeking a sense of belonging from gangs, and young people who are not hopeful for the future may see crime as the only feasible way forward and out of the situation they find themselves in. (Paragraph 95)

29. *We recommend that each young person identified as being at risk of or already being involved in knife crime should be assigned a youth worker who will coordinate responses from various youth services to ensure they receive the 'wrap-around' support they need to live a life free from crime. The factors which make young people vulnerable are often systemic at their core, stemming from wider issues in a community and society more generally. It is important that the Government's solution focuses not only on tackling knife crime but also on solving these underlying drivers. (Paragraph 96)*
30. A collection of services around a young person, including educational institutions, youth centres and community activity groups, enables that young person to have purposeful activity and support as they grow up. If these services are in place, they can also identify a young person in need of additional support and help. (Paragraph 108)
31. *Different areas of the country have different provisions of youth services. We recommend that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's development of a new Youth Charter should include a review of where in the country there is a specific need for more youth services. Once these areas have been identified, the Department should establish a dedicated fund tasked with aiding local organisations in those areas to establish themselves. (Paragraph 109)*
32. Parents and legal guardians need to be equipped with the knowledge of how to spot signs that their child is involved in knife crime and how to stop it, including knowing which services they can receive assistance from. Parents and legal guardians need to receive support and positive encouragement to help their child at risk of, or involved in, knife crime. They should not be blamed for a young person's violent behaviour when there are so many other factors contributing, many which are out of their control. (Paragraph 113)
33. *We recommend that the Government, leading up to the next version of the Serious Violence Strategy, should hold consultations with diverse groups of parents and legal guardians to find out what support they need to identify and help their children who are at risk from knife crime. This consultation should lead to the formulation of a programme to help equip them with the appropriate tools. (Paragraph 114)*
34. Young people at risk of or already involved in crime respond well to hearing people share cautionary experiences from their own lives. These people can understand the young person, the feelings they may be experiencing and the reasons compelling them to get involved in knife crime. It makes it more relatable for young people; examples from real life are often more hard-hitting and impactful in changing their behaviour. (Paragraph 120)
35. *We recommend that the Government amend their approach to role models to focus on people with lived experiences, or people from troubled areas who have been successful in their own lives, who may be best able to inspire vulnerable young people. The relevant role models will be different for different local areas. It is important that individuals acting as role models for young people are drawn from all walks of life and are active in a range of professions, not just rappers and athletes. The Government should seek to encourage relatable role models to positively inspire young people, for example through funding mentoring programmes. (Paragraph 121)*

36. We believe that social media in some instances works as a tool to amplify the fear already felt by young people in their communities, rather than as the source of threat, fear, or the instigator of violent acts. Social media has created a new context in which this violence, intimidation and fear may transcend the boundaries of the local neighbourhood and can spread at an unprecedented speed. (Paragraph 134)
37. The Government has not convinced us that it fully understands the extent to which social media can magnify this fear felt by young people, and how social media can be used to spread violence, or to glamourise a criminal life style. It is important that more research is commissioned to find out how young people can best be protected in this new context, rather than focusing on social media as a vehicle for gang activity. (Paragraph 135)
38. *We recommend that the Government urgently commissions research to better understand the dangerous ways in which social media can be used to spread violence and increase fear amongst young people, and what could be done to mitigate these dangers. This research should be completed, and findings published no later than March 2021.* (Paragraph 136)
39. A constant theme of our inquiry has been the testimony from young people telling us about the fear they feel in their communities. We believe this needs to be addressed urgently, and not just by increased police presence which could potentially have the opposite effect in some instances. (Paragraph 150)
40. The fear young people feel is real and it makes some young people feel that the only way they can protect themselves is to carry a knife to themselves. We strongly urge the Government to listen to young people, and to take their fears seriously and work together with them to tackle the issues from which their fears steams from. (Paragraph 151)
41. If the response to this knife crime crisis is an increased police presence, stop and searches and knife crime prevention orders, we are very concerned about the effect this may have on young people's trust in the police. Stop and search disproportionately targets young people of certain ethnic groups, specifically Black men, and until this disparity is rectified, stop and search powers should not be expanded. (Paragraph 152)
42. We argue that an increase in stop and search powers should be balanced with a campaign to let young people know what their rights are when they are stopped and searched and how they can submit complaints about how a stop and search has been carried out. (Paragraph 153)
43. We are extremely concerned that the Government's recent announcements seem to be shifting toward a more punitive approach to knife crime, rather than seeking to address the fears experienced by young people in their communities. We do not believe that this is a situation which will be remedied by an increase in stop and search, convictions or additional time in custody. (Paragraph 154)
44. *We do not believe that harsher punishments or longer custodial sentences for young people who carry or use knives will remedy the epidemic of knife crime on our streets. We recommend that the Government as a matter of urgency commissions*

*an investigation into measures which could make young people feel safer in their communities and subsequently designate enough funds to make the necessary measures a reality. (Paragraph 155)*

45. *We recommend that the Government roll back the extension of powers of stop and search, which allow inspectors to authorise a search when an incident of serious violence 'may' occur, to the previous requirements of a senior officer when suspicion that an incident 'will' occur, until the disproportionate targeting of stop and searches of Black men is addressed. (Paragraph 156)*

### **How do we effectively intervene to stop young people from continuing to be involved in knife crime?**

46. The Government has recently recognised that short custodial sentences are associated with high levels of reoffending. In our opinion the threat of a custodial sentence is unlikely to deter young people who feel scared for their lives from carrying a knife out of protection. (Paragraph 171)
47. *We believe that short custodial sentences should be an absolute last resort and thus avoided for young people who are found to have carried knives. We urge the Government to clarify their position on short term custodial sentences for young people, and equally consider whether there is another approach which could replace them. (Paragraph 172)*
48. It is vital that young people get the support that they need to build a better future for themselves, and that past criminal convictions do not stop them from building a life free from crime. If a previous conviction stops a young person from finding employment or accommodation, they will become more vulnerable and likely to re-offend. (Paragraph 184)
49. If a custodial sentence is the only option for a young person who has committed a crime, there has to be a rigorous rehabilitation plan in place to address the underlying issues which may have caused them to offend in the first place. (Paragraph 185)
50. *We recommend that a young person with a criminal record should be given regular reviews of how their criminal record is affecting their ability to, for example, gain employment or secure accommodation. The young person should subsequently be provided with services and support to mitigate any barriers identified. (Paragraph 186)*
51. *We call for the Government to run a consultation on possible ways to clear a young person's criminal record once they become an adult to stop it from being a barrier as they build a life free from crime. (Paragraph 187)*
52. We agree that restorative justice interventions can be an effective alternative to shorter custodial sentences or other formal criminal justice interventions, where suitable for the offender and the victim. Receiving a custodial sentence at an early age can have a detrimental effect on a young person's life and their future and should always be the last resort. (Paragraph 193)
53. Restorative justice may also positively impact the victim and decrease the risk of the victim later becoming a perpetrator themselves. (Paragraph 194)

54. *We recommend that the next version of the Serious Violence Strategy includes a larger focus on restorative justice and other informal criminal justice responses as a first step. A young person who commits knife crime is first and foremost a vulnerable child in need of help. We agree that all efforts once a young person has been found to be involved in knife crime should be aimed at rehabilitating that young person, and give them the best possible chance for a life free from crime. (Paragraph 195)*
55. *We recommend that victims of knife crime should be given targeted support as they are statistically more likely to subsequently commit knife crime themselves. If restorative justice is used effectively, it could provide the victim with the closure they need to deter them from future involvement in knife crime. (Paragraph 196)*
56. Young people at risk of getting involved in knife crime or serious violence need to receive targeted interventions as a matter of urgency. We strongly believe that every effort should be made to prevent a young person from ever getting involved in knife crime, but also that when it does happen measures are put in place as a matter of urgency. (Paragraph 207)
57. Interventions focused on identifying and meeting a young person in a 'teachable moment', – for example, when they have been arrested for committing a knife crime or when they come in to the emergency room after being injured – may be very effective in deterring that young person from future involvement in serious violence. Although we agree that focus should be on preventative measures, there should still be required provision for seizing the 'teachable moment' as an intervention tactic if a crime has been committed. (Paragraph 208)
58. *We recommend that the Government should adopt the use of 'teachable moments' as a national tactic, funding organisations to provide targeted interventions to young people in hospital or police custody following a knife crime related incident. (Paragraph 209)*

# Annex

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## List of evidence

[001 - The Scouts](#)

[002 - Rotherham Youth Cabinet](#)

[003 - Newcastle Youth Council and Youth Parliament](#)

[004 - Dr Jo Deakin and Dr Claire Fox](#)

[005 - The Ben Kinsella Trust](#)

[006 - Dr Iain Brennan](#)

[007 - The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales](#)

[008 - Phoenix Education Consultancy](#)

[009 - Khulisa](#)

[010 - Children, Young People and Families Services, Plymouth City Council](#)

[011 - DIVERT](#)

[012 - RedThread](#)

[014 - The Children's Society](#)

[015 - Leap Confronting Conflict](#)

[016 - Westminster City Council](#)

[017 - Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority](#)

[018 - National Youth Agency](#)

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[021 - Street Doctors](#)

[022 - SAMM National](#)

[023 - Mixtape Madness](#)

[024 - Safer Communities Directorate, Scottish Government](#)

[025 - XLP](#)

[026 - Nacro](#)

[027 - Loughborough University](#)

[028 - Ofsted](#)

[029 - Leaders Unlocked](#)

[030 - St Giles Trust](#)

[031 - West Midlands Police](#)

[032 - Professor Fiona Brookman](#)

[033 - Metropolitan Police Service](#)

[034 - The National Lottery Fund](#)

## Witnesses

### Friday 5 July, Morning session

*Question number*

**Professor Fiona Brookman**, Professor of Criminology and Director of the Centre for Criminology, University of South Wales, **John Poyton**, Chief Executive Officer, Redthread and **Leroy Logan MBE**, former Superintendent Metropolitan Police and advisor to the All Parliamentary Commission on Youth Violence

Q1-Q11

**Victoria Atkins MP**, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability and **Nick Hunt**, Head of the Serious Violence Unit, Home Office

Q12-Q36

### Friday 5 July, Afternoon session

**Hannah Chetwynd**, Risk Policy Officer, Children's Society, **Nick Darvill**, Programme Manager, DIVERT, **Jonathan Toy**, Operations Manager, Ben Kinsella Trust and **Rashid Bhayat**, Founder, Positive Youth Foundation

Q37-Q51

**ACC Sarah Boycott**, West Midlands Police, **Superintendent Clive Davies**, Surrey Police, **Niven Rennie**, Director, Scottish Violence Reduction Unit and **Edward Timpson CBE**, Author of Timpson review of school exclusion

Q52-67

### Friday 12 July, Morning session

**Sheldon Thomas**, Founder and Chief Executive, Gangsline, **Carlie Thomas**, Senior Caseworker Rescue and Response, St Giles Trust and **Kwabz Oduro Ayim**, Chief Executive Officer, Mixtape Madness

Q68-Q77

**Jeremy Crook OBE**, Chief Executive Officer, Black Training and Enterprise Group, **Daniel Willis**, Policy and Research Manager, Community Links, **Matthew Scott**, Police and Crime Commissioner for Kent and **Iman Haji**, Research & Programme Coordinator, Khulisa

Q78-Q91

### Friday 12 July, Afternoon session

**Vicky Foxcroft MP**, Chair, All Parliamentary Commission on Youth Violence, **Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers**, Lecturer in Criminology The Open University and advisor to the All Parliamentary Commission on Youth Violence and **Sarah Jones MP**, Founder and Chair, APPG on Knife Crime

Q92-Q109

**Amaan Iqbal**, Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority, **Eleanor Lakin MYP**, Plymouth Youth Parliament, **Bukola Folarin**, The Student Commission on knife crime in London and **Sundas Raza**, Rotherham Youth Cabinet

Q110-Q135

## About the British Youth Council

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The British Youth Council works to ensure that every young person is empowered to create social and political change. As the national youth council of the UK, the British Youth Council brings young people together to find their voice and use it to improve the lives of young people. We work with others to amplify young people's voices to create an environment in which young people's views are valued, sought and acted upon.

### **We are youth led**

Young people are agents of change and will always be at the forefront of our work. As a youth-led charity, young people are our leadership through our government structures. They lead and shape our work, and we support them to define their own action for change. We champion youth leadership across all sections of society, evidencing the benefits of engaging young people in decision making and delivering and supporting that to happen.

### **We are collaborative**

We actively seek to collaborate with others to make positive change happen. We seek to work with relevant partners to add value to our campaigns and activities, and to be more creative in our approach to making change happen with and for young people. We recognise the skills, knowledge and experience of young people, volunteers, staff and partners, and strive to achieve more by maximising the opportunities that collaboration provides.

### **We are inclusive**

We respect and value diversity and act in a way that includes all. We ensure that all our activities are inclusive, recognising the needs of young people across different communities, and bring young people and partners together to learn from each other. For more information about the British Youth Council visit [www.byc.org.uk](http://www.byc.org.uk), email [info@byc.org.uk](mailto:info@byc.org.uk) or call 0207 250 8374.

## Youth Select Committee 2019



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