

Written evidence submitted by Children, Young People and Families Service, Plymouth City Council (BYC0010)

Background to the inquiry

1. Over 1.1 million young people declared knife crime their biggest concern in a UK-wide ballot of young people aged 11 to 18. Research published by the House of Commons Library in November 2018, stated knife crime, particularly where it affects young people, has been a 'persistent and growing concern' for successive governments.

2. Since the announcement of the Youth Select Committee's inquiry there has also been several announcements by the Government, such as the introduction of knife crime prevention orders and investment in early intervention projects. The Spring Budget also included an additional £100 million; to pay for additional overtime targeted specifically on knife crime and to fund new Violent Crime Reduction Units to deliver a "wider cross-agency response".

3. The Committee has welcomed submissions from a wide range of stakeholders, including young people, charities and organisation which directly support offenders and victims of knife crime as well as schools and businesses.

4. The focus of the inquiry will include answers from young people to the following questions:

- Why do you think young people carry knives?
- Do you know people who carry knives, or have previously done so?
- Have you ever considered carrying a knife?
- How much do you think social media impacts young people's involvement in knife crime?
- Have you been told about the dangers and legal consequences of carrying a knife in public?

This paper sets out the written submission from the Plymouth Members of Youth Parliament.

Plymouth

5. As well as young people declaring knife crime a national issue, in Plymouth it has been declared a local one. In February 2019, Eleanor Lakin was elected as Deputy Member of Youth Parliament for her campaign on ending knife crime.

6. Eleanor's main manifesto pledges were to host assemblies in local schools in order to share statistics and awareness as well as working with Devon and Cornwall police to introduce a knife amnesty aimed at young people.

7. In order to better understand and reflect upon what young people in Plymouth had to say about knife crime, find ways of how people can work together to make a difference, inform others, and support young people to make positive life choices, the Plymouth Members of Youth Parliament, supported by their Youth Cabinet, distributed a questionnaire to young people in our city. The questionnaire was sent out to local schools and to all members of the Plymouth Youth Network which represents youth forums and specialist youth projects.

8. Responses were received from 672 young people and the evidence gathered will not only contribute to the Youth Select Committee on knife crime but will also help to improve awareness and understanding by decision makers in our city.

9. The Plymouth Youth Cabinet members have also undertaken a number of workshops to look at knife crime and who it affects in more detail within their weekly sessions. Their responses have been fed into the data below.

1. Prominent trends in statistics

10. Devon and Cornwall Police have just released figures for the period from May 2018 to April 2019, which show that there were 989 recorded crimes that involved possession of weapons; the figures are up 15.3 per cent on the 858 recorded in the previous 12 months

11. The perception from young people is often perceived as black young men within gangs as being the most likely to commit knife crime although this is not true.

12. Within Plymouth, the police have said they have new concerns that there is an increase in youths possibly carrying weapons through a small number of incidents of disorder. Through county lines, there has been an increase in people carrying knives in order to protect themselves or the product, be it drugs/money that they are carrying.

13. Anyone can be a victim of knife crime; sometimes it's simply a matter of wrong place wrong time. For those in gangs or hanging around with people that carry knives it increases the risk factors. Obviously the person that gets physically injured is the true victim but after looking at the subject of knife crime in more details within our Youth Cabinet workshops we need to highlight that there is a wider scope as knife crime affects everybody, from those involved before the event, those present and then the wider families and communities of those involved. Knife crime is not about numbers, it is about names. Plymouth young people believe that knife crime is not simply to do with gangs, drugs, young people or particular communities, there is a wider picture to consider.

14. In our questionnaire we asked 672 young people if they were concerned or worried about knife crime and 61.8% (415) of young people said they were. 31.1% (209) stating they had known someone who previously carried a knife and 14.3% (96) young people stated they had considered carrying a knife themselves.

2. Government strategies

15. We asked if the Government strategy to combat knife crime is doing enough to effectively: a) prevent b) intervene and; c) sentence those committing knife crime d) rehabilitate those cautioned or sentenced for knife crime?

16. According to the feedback from our young people across Plymouth they do not feel that enough is currently being done to tackle knife crime effectively, they suggest that we should increase the sentences and impose stricter punishments for those involved or caught with a knife.

17. 563 young people thought young people should be educated more on knife crime within schools, this would be a key area of prevention work and it would also allow police/workers/teachers to intervene and make a difference first hand to the lives of those young people.

18. One young person who been involved in knife crime along with friends as either victims or offenders stated that "if they were fully aware of the consequences to their lives and the victims, they would not have taken it as far as they did."

3. Preventative versus punitive action

19. When considering whether the Government's Serious Violence Strategy strikes the right balance between preventative and punitive action, it depends on how it's interpreted and acted upon in key areas across the county as everyone works differently. Young people feel that the strategy failed to consider the impact of cutting services across key agencies. This has had an impact on the increase in anti-social behaviour, especially over the last five years.

20. Young people are particularly concerned that it seems like for months that decision makers in Plymouth have held off saying anything about knife crime even going as far as to deny there are any issues for fear it may cause a panic. What the decision makers haven't realised is that the community is already being affected by the news and stories in the press. As almost a third of respondents stated they had or known someone that carries a knife, it paints a different picture of our city and there seems cause to be concerned.

21. Young people believe that knife crime should be tackled head on by all agencies and the wider community and that professionals all have a duty of care and should all be more realistic to the issues and identify ways to tackle and solve them.

22. One young person explained that “it’s all well and good coming forward with this strategy and announcing various pots of money being made available over the next two years such as the New Early Intervention Youth Fund, additional support to Redthread to expand and the new media campaign but if services had not been cut and youth service provision lost, would we have this increase in anti-social behaviour?”

4. Knife crime as a public health issue

23. A multi-agency approach is a more sensible approach as more than one agency/person often comes into contact with a young person on a regular basis and if all professionals took notice and passed on any concerns then that gives a bigger/clearer picture of a young person’s life so that professionals and other agencies then have the opportunity to make interventions and possible prevent young people committing a crime or joining a gang. It also provides more opportunities to influence and steer the young person in the right direction and less chances of them slipping through the gap in the first place.

24. A multi-agency approach will also help hold those key services accountable for preventing and tackling knife crime in their areas rather than passing it off as a one off, because even one incident of knife crime affects everybody involved on the night, those present and then the wider families and communities of those involved.

5. The effect on services

25. The government has said that they are concerned about the recent increase in deaths linked to gun crime and knife crime. It accounts for around 1% of all recorded crimes, which doesn’t seem a lot but they are aware the impact of serious violent crime on society is significant. This is because there is a huge cost to individuals, families and communities through the loss of life and the trauma caused through both the physical and psychological injuries suffered.

26. Police and health services are over stretched and knife crime is growing and it appears that there is a crisis going on, often in bigger cities but none the less, it increases the work and impact among police, teacher’s, social workers, health care professionals and youth workers. A lot of those services were already at breaking point due to budget cuts and have a lot less staff than they did five years ago.

27. What doesn’t help is when people are under a misguided perception that calls to emergency services by elderly/or serious cases are being left untreated for hours at a time because emergency services rush to treat victims of knife crime. The assumption is that knife crime is not relevant, or seen as an emergency, they need to know you can die from a stab wound regardless of where it is because other factors come in to play, it can takes minutes to bleed out which is why knife wounds are taken very seriously.

28. Young people need to be informed that emergency services are under huge amount of pressure and receive thousands of calls a day and all calls are coded and the most serious or deemed threat to life are treated first and work should be done to educate young people about cuts to services having a negative effect on already strained services.

29. Not all victims of knife crime are criminals, there are also innocent people that were in the wrong place and wrong time and every life is worth saving.

6. Judicial sentencing

30. People are told that if caught with an offensive weapon they could be risking up to five years in prison but yet still out of 672 young people, 209 know people that have or do carry a knife and 96 young people said that they have considered arming themselves.

31. This shows that respondents do not feel that it's a realistic deterrent. The police are aware that gangs/groups of young people could be carrying offensive weapons then surely there is an issue in effective measures at tackling the problem, the possible 5 years in prison is not enough to stop people because it is happening across the U.K and further afield.

7. Impact on vulnerability

32. Young people were asked 'How do differences in young people lives (e.g. geographic location, education, mental health, household income and socioeconomic background) make them more vulnerable to being involved in knife crime?'

33. From the survey it shows that 563 young people think that it does have an effect and could make those young people more vulnerable, 89 young people didn't think it made any difference and 20 young people didn't leave a response to the question.

34. Young people have suggested that other risk factors could play a casual part that would put them at higher risk of being exploited or influenced by violence such as poverty, not having correct family guidance and support, family influences that normalise the behaviour of knife crime, drugs and alcohol along with young people within the care system.

8. Motivation to carry knives

35. The responses to what motivates young people to carry knives have been broken down into key categories as to why they think young people carry knives. Overall, the top three reasons for carrying knives were given as:

- Protection 35%
- Fear 27%
- Intending to commit a crime 24%

36. Many young people suggested people may carry knives for religious purposes and the Offensive Weapons Bill was amended in May 2019, to ensure that it would not impact the right of the British Sikh community to possess and supply kirpans, or religious swords. Large kirpans, with blades over 50-cm, are used by the community during religious ceremonies in Gurdwaras as well as for ceremonies involving the traditional Sikh Gatka martial art. Kirpan is a symbol of respect, justice and authority; it is a reminder that Sikhs are warriors. However, the Kirpan is never used for offensive purposes.

Table 1 - Other responses to suggest why people may carry a knife

Work	Adventure	Gangs	Protection / safety	Religion	Image	Other	Online
Chef / cooking Cut clothes Dress maker Wood work Emergency services Butcher Cut up food Instead of using scissors	Fishing Allotment Camping First aid Bush craft Outdoor activities Rescue pets if get caught up in wire / rubbish Use of a multi tool – quite useful	Peer pressure Cause harm Forced into crime To fit in Made to Reputation Make them feel harder For a dare	To scare people Protection for themselves or family Power – it's a warning to others To feel safe while out Threaten people Fear Bully others Self defence Protection in a fight Scared bad things may happen around them or in an area they are going too	Culture Part of their religion to carry small sword	Look cool Make people believe top hierarchy Friends do it Think they are important To be liked Project an image Ego Stupidity Show off at school Anger issues	Self-harm Revenge Kill others Just brought it Malicious intent Bad home life Mental health issues Family – deemed acceptable Make up of area Previously been assaulted	Online videos promoting violence/ knife crime Online gaming Fantasy inspired stories News – makes It more acceptable to carry a knife

9. Fear as a motivator

37. Is fear a motivator for young people who carry knives? What causes this? What can be done to address it?

38. A lot of young people have stated fear and issues concerning safety and wellbeing are reasons to why they have or know someone that's carried a knife and it seems that in Plymouth, fear is having a bigger impact on young people than first assumed. Young people report feeling scared going to school and what may happen on the way to or from school and that's just not acceptable.

39. Fear has an impact upon a young person's health and wellbeing; it causes emotional distress, added anxiety, restlessness, muscle tension, headaches and can lead to mental health concerns. Fear is something that schools should take seriously and address these concerns for their students.

Table 2 – Is fear an important reason to carry a knife?

% Total	Count	Rated
26.79%	180	Very Important
33.48%	225	Fairly Important
25.00%	168	Somewhat important
9.08%	61	Not at all important
3.72%	25	Prefer not to say
1.93%	13	No response

40. Education is key and professionals need to ensure the messages are loud and clear – knife crime is not acceptable, there will be consequence's and that's why it's better to get help and support those individuals to make positive life changing decision's before something happens that cannot be taken back.

10. Impacts on young people's involvement

41. Young people were asked if they thought that gang culture, social media and/or music impact young people's involvement in knife crime.

Table 3 – Does gang culture impact young people's involvement in knife crime?

Young people responded on a scale of 1-5 with no meaning no impact and 5 meaning it affects it greatly.

Scale	% Total	Number of responses
1	1.93%	13
2	6.85%	46
3	26.64%	179
4	36.76%	247
5	25.00%	168
No response	2.83%	19

Table 4 – Does social media impact young people's involvement in knife crime?

Young people responded on a scale of 1-5 with no meaning no impact and 5 meaning it affects it greatly.

Scale	% Total	Number of responses
1	7.44%	50
2	20.39%	137
3	31.55%	212
4	27.68%	186
5	10.57%	71
No response	2.38%	16

Table 5 – Does music impact young people’s involvement in knife crime?

Young people responded on a scale of 1-5 with 1 meaning no impact and 5 meaning it affects it greatly.

Scale	% Total	Number of responses
1	38.24%	257
2	29.61%	199
3	18.45%	124
4	6.10%	41
5	5.21%	35
No response	2.38%	16

11. Impact of exclusion

42. The responses shows that 502 young people thought that there is a correlation between young people being excluded, or not getting enough support from education and involvement in knife crime and 170 think that’s not the case. Young people also gave reasons why they thought there was a correlation which are detailed in table 6 under four distinct themes.

Table 6 – Why being excluded could put you at risk of knife crime.

Education	Family	Social Isolation	Gangs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of education puts you at more risk ▪ Not being taught the dangers of gangs / knife crime / drugs ▪ If you are excluded you think nobody cares about you ▪ Lack of support / boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Don’t listen to advice given ▪ Lack of support & guidance ▪ Feel like you are not wanted – looking for attention ▪ Parents work so while child excluded nobody to keep an eye on them/challenge behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Angry ▪ No friends ▪ Lack of money – no grades for good job ▪ Effects on mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More likely be targeted by gangs ▪ More vulnerable ▪ Gangs become the family you chose for yourself ▪ Pressure to carry knife/commit crime

12. How to reduce knife crime

43. Young people were asked what they thought could be done to make young people less likely to carry knives or commit knife crime.

44. The young people in Plymouth have suggested a range of methods they think should be looked into to help stop young people from carrying knives or committing a crime with a knife and they

range from holding a knife amnesty to better education and workshops on the risk factors and consequences of knife crime. The themes of the responses are detailed in table 7.

Table 7 – What could be done to make young people less likely to carry knives or commit knife crime?

Schools	Police	Youth Workers	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Education: Including how to stay safe, laws and risks ▪ Workshops on the risk factors and consequences of knife crime ▪ Talks from police or young people that know more ▪ Videos ▪ Better posters about risks around schools ▪ Alter Ego performance ▪ Tackle the fear – help put an end to people carrying knives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More police on streets ▪ Police in key areas identified to have issues ▪ De-arm gangs by having a knife amnesty ▪ Stricter punishments ▪ Tackle people selling drugs and deal knives same time ▪ Increase stop and search powers ▪ Prevention of gangs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Re-open youth centres with more things to do ▪ Access to a worker to talk it through ▪ Trusted adults to talk too ▪ Reassuring advice and information ▪ Self-defence training ▪ Talks to parents within local community to raise awareness and address issues/concerns ▪ Counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Restrictions on selling knives ▪ Having to provide ID or criminal checks before you can buy a knife ▪ Review licensing laws ▪ Increase in security around town ▪ Parents to keep better eye on their children and deal with concerns ▪ Preventing alternatives to poverty/boredom ▪ Rehabilitation of offenders

45. From the information gathered, 84% of respondents think that young people should be educated more on knife crime awareness as part of their school curriculum. They want to better understand the laws and to know what happens if they are caught with a knife and how that sentence will change should they be caught up in a stabbing and someone actually dies.

46. It was also suggested by two young people that education was the family’s responsibility and that schools have more important subjects to teach but that it could be built into citizenship lessons or PHSE lessons or tackled through assemblies.

47. Young people were also asked if they have been told about the dangers and legal consequences of carrying a knife in public with only 28% feeling that they had a full understanding and were aware of the consequences.

13. Support

48. Within Plymouth, we are fortunate to still have a youth service and youth clubs within local communities that offer safe spaces for young people and activities to get involved in. We have other services accessible for support as well, including access to online resources such as Kooth.com along with counsellors in secondary schools that are there to talk to young people should they need help

and support. However, all of these options rely on young people coming forward to request help and support for themselves or if they are concerned about an individual.

49. When asked what support young people think should be available to identify and help their peers at risk of getting involved in knife crime/gangs they gave the following suggestions:

Table 8 – What support should be available to help those at risk

Individual support	Schools	Police	Media	Community
Therapy	Workshops to raise awareness	Protection – dispersal groups	Posters/leaflets	Youth groups – non judgmental
Mental health support	Teach them about gangs/crime	More police and PCSO's	Raise awareness online social media	Self-defence clubs
Counselling	Schools intervening if they have concerns	Anonymous reporting	Better online support that can be accessed	Outreach workers in communities
Confidential support	Optional lessons	Lesser sentences for whistleblowers	Parental support to help them with their children	Talks from youth workers
Advocacy scheme	Assemblies from youth workers	Target hot spot areas in community	Challenge authorities on	Social worker/Youth workers that our friendly that you can talk too
Meetings for support	Be encouraged to tell someone if you know someone with a knife on them	Knife amnesty	Media positive news	Stricter regulation's

14. Local Initiatives

50. Recently around 300 young people from secondary schools in Plymouth had the opportunity to attend a workshop by a drama group called Alter Ego, in which actors take part in piece of drama on the topic of county lines including themes of drug dealing, money, violence and threats. This highlighted how individuals and gangs target vulnerable young people and showcased the dangers.

51. This was supported by Devon and Cornwall police, alongside the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Feedback included that the workshop was a really good way to capture people's imaginations and warn them of the dangers out there.

52. Devon and Cornwall police have also called upon members of the public to contact them if they have any information on people who may be carrying weapons.

15. Are strategies inclusive?

53. The Plymouth Youth Cabinet have reviewed current prevention strategies and feel that the government has considered all groups of young people from all backgrounds and that this is a joined up approach that works differently for different areas.

54. In terms of support available to identify and help young people at risk of getting involved in knife crime/gangs, questionnaire respondents were very clear that we should not judge people on their looks or background and that in order to deal with it more effectively we shouldn't single young people out but we should have a whole group approach instead, so either everybody gets to attend the assemblies or workshops or you make it a sign up process that's fair but that we all refrain from signposting or appearing to target individual young people.

16. Police and communities working together

55. Devon and Cornwall Police continues to build an intelligence picture in terms of young people and whether knives are being carried habitually in our communities. They recently stated "Evidence around this is often very anecdotal, but proactive action will always be taken whenever knives or any other weapon are identified as a threat. Ensuring our communities remain safe and are not put at threat and risk by knives remains of paramount importance."

56. Devon and Cornwall Police work collaboratively with partners through Community Safety Partnerships to share information and intelligence, to undertake analysis to fully understand and assess the threats that exist within their communities, to collectively respond to those risks to reduce and mitigate them.

57. In Plymouth, the police have reached out to schools in the hope of highlighting the lethality of carrying knives and the risks young people in the South West could face if they felt the need to mimic the metropolitan knife culture. Supt Hawley has stated: "Over the course of the last two years, alongside regular participation in the regular Operation Sceptre national knife amnesties, as examples, police and PCSOs in Devon and Cornwall have visited secondary schools and youth clubs in Plymouth to talk about knife crime."

58. If everybody is working towards the Serious Crime Strategy then there will be an increase at community approaches to tackle knife crime moving forward.

59. Devon and Cornwall Police have agreed to work in partnership with UK Youth Parliament for Plymouth in designing and developing workshops that can be delivered in secondary schools together as a joint way of working. It is anticipated that this will be happening in the coming months. It is also hoped that a joint knife amnesty that will be advertised in schools alongside the workshops will take place in September 2019.

17. Stop and search

60. Police officers use their powers to search where information or intelligence indicates it is necessary. For instance in the first six months of 2018, 226 proactive stop-searches were recorded as primarily looking for weapons. As a result 32 arrests were made, and a further 26 searches resulted in action being taken for other offences or items being found. Devon and Cornwall Police continue to use these powers as part, and only part, of the response to the carrying of knives.

61. Questionnaire responses show that young people are suggesting that the police need to increase stop and searches to ensure any weapons are taken off the streets. However this could in turn cause different problems in terms of relationships between young people and officers. The Plymouth Youth Cabinet felt that it would be good if some promotional materials were designed to educate young people about stop and searches and displayed in schools/youth provisions for that purpose.