

Written evidence submitted by The Children's Society (BYC013)

About The Children's Society

1. The Children's Society is a leading charity committed to improving the lives of thousands of children and young people every year. We work across the country with the most disadvantaged children through our specialist services. Our direct work with vulnerable young people supports missing children, children with experiences of sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, children experiencing and witnessing violence and abuse, children in or leaving care, refugee, migrant and trafficked children. We can place their voices at the center of our work. For the purposes of this inquiry submission we consulted with our youth groups and practitioners across England. This submission specifically looks at youth violence and knife crime.

Introduction

2. We welcome this call for evidence from the Youth Select Committee on Knife Crime. Our recommendations are based upon our frontline practice and research of working with young people who access our services, whom either are witness to youth violence and knife crime or have personal experience of it. We have chosen to respond to questions within the consultation where we believe we can offer insight derived from this extensive pool of knowledge.

Key Recommendations

1. It is vital that young people affected by knife crime are seen as victims in need of a safeguarding response. The phrase 'serious violence affecting young people' should be adopted at both the national and local level. The language of exploitation should be used both nationally and locally.
2. The Government must recognise that a child carrying a knife is a child protection issue and should trigger a safeguarding response, 1) any child caught in possession of a knife should be given a needs assessment under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, 2) Children in Need and Child Protection Plans should take a greater focus on disruption where the risk of exploitation is recognised.
3. Support should not just be aimed at young people involved or at high risk of experiencing youth violence. By funding wider preventative programmes and early intervention it would ensure young people are supported and moved away from youth violence before it manifests.
4. All adults working with children should have training in how to recognise and respond to all vulnerabilities that might result in challenging behavior and all children presenting with difficult behavior should receive a holistic needs assessment and be offered appropriate support. Targeted therapeutic work should be conducted with all children and young people who have early life experiences that might make them more vulnerable to school exclusion.
5. A child being caught in possession of a knife should be met with 1) a holistic assessment of need and where possible support 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.
6. A whole-system approach, across all government departments is needed to address violence affecting young people. This involves the government creating a flexible, fully funded model that can be adapted to local needs and represents the views of young people within that area. Empowering the younger generation through understanding their aspirations and providing them with opportunities to

achieve their own goals is key to not only preventing youth violence but ensuring young people become healthy and productive citizens.

1. **Are there any prominent trends in the statistics on a) who commits knife crime b) who are the victims of knife crime?**

Knife Crime Statistics

3. Arguably, over the past decade, societal perceptions of young people in the UK have hardened. Since the London riots, sensationalist media stories of out of control youths fuelling violence, and notable knife-related violence, have led many to conclude that youth violence is a now at national epidemic levels. It is important that this national conversation looks beyond the headlines and tries to understand the demographics and external factors that lead young people to carry weapons. The Children's Society believe that youth violence should be given much more political focus but cautions the use of reactive measures which often come from treating knife crime as an 'emergency'.

4. The Children Society have analysed three types of datasets to develop a detailed understanding of knife crime statistics; police recorded crime data, hospital admissions (including A&E and Minor Injury admissions) as well as qualitative findings from speaking with our young service users and practitioners across the UK. There is no single measure that can accurately capture trends in knife crime or serious violence more generally. Through analysing three different datasets, we can develop an understanding of what is being reported to the police, who has sought medical attention and personal depictions of offending and victimhood.

5. All three datasets suggest that knife crime has risen annually since 2014¹ with 40,100-recorded incidents in March 2018. The statistic most commonly used is the rise in homicides using a knife, which shows a 33% increase from March 2017 to March 2018 at 285 deaths². These homicides tend to be concentrated in London and other metropolitan areas. It is difficult to point to one specific explanation for the overall increase in recorded incidents of knife crime – this was echoed from interviews we conducted with practitioners in Birmingham. It is important to note however, that police and hospital data collection have both improved over the past five years, which is more than likely an attributing factor to this recorded increase³. This means it cannot definitively be stated – although it often is – that 2018 saw the highest rates of knife crime ever recorded. What is interesting to note however, is this recent rise of knife crime and related injuries is against a backdrop of overall declines in youth crime over the past decade⁴.

6. Breaking the 40,100 figure down, it shows most knife-related offences recorded by the police were used within assaults or robberies, totaling 18,000 and 17,000 respectively⁵, as well as 3,000-recorded incidents of threats to kill. Very few of the 40,100 police-recorded knife crimes involved murder. NHS data also reflects a rise in hospital admissions since 2014. Recent analysis of A&E Departments and Minor Injury Units shows a different story however, that violence-related injuries has overall fallen by 1.7% from 2017 to 2018, and this follows an overall pattern of decline since

¹ <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN04304>

² : <https://fullfact.org/crime/knife-crime/>

³<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmar2016#main-points>

⁴ Youth Justice Board / Ministry of Justice., (2018). Youth Justice Statistics 2016/17: England and Wales. Youth Justice Board, Ministry of Justice & National Statistics: Online. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/676072/youth_justice_statistics_2016-17.pdf

⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalesotherrelatedtables>

2010 by 41%⁶. What this suggests is that whilst overall 'low-level' knife-crime or related injuries are falling, serious violence has recently increased.

Victims and Offenders of Knife Crime

Age Groups, Gender and Ethnicity

7. Looking beyond the statistics, examining age and gender, hospital data shows that most patients reporting injury from violence were males (70%) aged between 10 and 30 years old (43%). The overall decline in violence-related injuries referenced above is entirely due to decreases in violence affecting males (violence against females remained constant). Despite these decreases, the data suggests males aged 18-30 years are almost two and half more likely than females to sustain a violence-related injury that resulted in ED treatment. A theme from our focus groups with young people also implied that knife crime and consequential injuries predominately affected young men. However, the young people also highlighted that this is not just an issue that affects boys. Whilst our practitioners also echoed this, they were cautious to state this was not just a gendered issue. Our practitioners reported that serious violence was affecting young girls, but it was not being recognised, recorded or reported in the same manner.

8. Police recorded data shows there has been an 11% increase in proven knife-possession offences by children between 2011/12 and 2016/17, compares with a 10% decrease during the same period for the adult cohort. Across England and Wales in 2017, [38%](#)⁷ of knife possession convictions were minority ethnic offenders under 25s – this figure rises to 2/3 of overall convictions when specifically looking at convictions within London. The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) released statistics showing that in 2018 those from the BAME community were 4.6 times more likely to be searched than white people, compared with 2.6 times in the previous year⁸. This was mirrored within our interviews with practitioners, they too stated that young people from BAME communities were more likely to be targeted by the police and be brought through criminal justice proceedings.

9. It is important to note that these rises in recorded knife crime and injuries is occurring at a time when there is increased political focus on the topic, leading academics to suggest that the recent increase is at least in part a consequence of changes in policing practice. Children's self-reporting within the Crime Survey provides no demonstrable increase in knife possession⁹ for example. This was reflected in our own findings as well, with very few young people stating that they have carried a weapon.

10. The trends in overall statistics suggest that whilst overall rates of youth crime have fallen over the past decade, knife crime has risen. The Children's Society's Good Childhood Report 2017 estimated that as many as 2.2 million children across the UK aged 10-17 are worried about crime and anti-social behavior. This cycle of fear and societal damnation has been sighted by young people themselves as reasons for carrying weapons.

11. Whilst the fear of violence seems to be a concern for most children, the statistics show that you are far more likely to be a victim and an offender of knife crime if you are male aged between 18-30 year olds living in a metropolitan area. Whilst the differing statistics often seem contrary, disproportionately against minority ethnic young males in already violent environments increases

⁶ https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1477055/Trends-in-violence-in-England-and-Wales_-NVSN-REPORT-2019.pdf

⁷ Criminal Justice System Statistics publication: Outcomes by Offence 2007 to 2017: Pivot Table Analytical Tool for England and Wales

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2019/jan/26/met-police-disproportionately-use-stop-and-search-powers-on-black-people>

⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforhouseholdsandindividuals/householdandindividualsurveys/crimesurveyforenglandandwales>

their risk of offending and victimisation. This suggests that examining the environmental factors and demographics behind the statistics could provide more definitive conclusions, thus more definitive solutions to addressing youth violence.

12. Recommendation: The Government need to undertake a public consultation on the causes of youth violence, to understand the peaks and risks beyond the statistics.

**2. Is the Government strategy to combat knife crime doing enough to effectively:
a) prevent b) intervene and; c) sentence those committing knife crime d)
rehabilitate those cautioned or sentenced for knife crime?**

13. As concluded in our response to Q.1, in order to tackle youth violence the government needs to understand its causes, drivers and levers. 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.

A) Prevention

14. Whilst the terms are often used interchangeable, prevention and intervention have different meanings. The distinction between the two is better illustrated. Prevention is done to minimize the exposure of individuals to a societal problem, whereas intervention is applied to individuals whom are at risk or are already exposed to the societal problem in question. Prevention begins earlier on an individual's journey, arguably before risks intensify and that individual needs specialist, or intervened support our intelligence officer in Greater Manchester told us it is vital that any prevention work takes place *'before the knife is picked up'*.

15. We spoke with our intelligence officers within The Children's Society from Manchester, Birmingham and London. All three practitioners reported problems and varied practice with how their local areas defined prevention, intervention and vulnerability. With some areas starting prevention programmes from the age of eight, and others focusing on crisis prevention at the age of 16.

16. The problem seems to have derived from different definitions of vulnerability and local understanding of risk factors. Without first defining and understanding vulnerability, prevention and intervention services cannot be designed and tailored to young people's needs and aspirations. The Children's Society have repeatedly stated that the Serious Violence Strategy needs to align with the Working Together Guidance in order to adequately define vulnerability and thereby ensure that every system engaging with young people who are involved in youth violence initiates a safeguarding response.

17. Whilst the Government's Serious Violence strategy makes repeated reference to prevention, The Children's Society believe this section of the strategy needs urgent improvements. This starts with recognising the effects cuts to children and youth services is having on young people's outcomes and aspirations. Our practitioners point to this reason as to why violence amongst younger people has risen since 2014.

18. Research from leading children's charities has found that funding for children and young people's services has reduced by £3bn since 2010-11. Resultantly, across England spending by councils on youth provision has fallen by 72% from £1.2bn to £352mn – a fall of almost £900mn¹⁰. There is no statutory duty to provide youth services, and therefore in such difficult financial circumstances, many councils have had no choice but to cut back on effective early intervention

¹⁰ https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/childrens-services-funding-csfa-briefing_final.pdf

work provided by youth centres and youth workers. Recent analysis from Barnardo's on behalf of the APPG on Knife Crime has revealed that since 2014, those areas that have seen the largest reductions in spending on youth services have seen bigger increases in knife crime¹¹. This analysis revealed the scale of reductions in youth provision the number of youth centres supported by local authorities having halved since 2011 and the number of youth work staff having reduced by more than 40% over the same period.

B) Intervention

19. Re instating youth centres and funding more preventative programmes would result in improved specialised services for young people already involved in knife crime. However, our intelligence officer in Manchester highlighted the need to ensure that the geographical spread of youth centres reflect local need. The over centralising of funding was cited as a barrier to disrupting and preventing serious violence, *'if it's all on one place then 50% of the community cannot access that space because of rivalries etc., it seems to happen a lot in Manchester they seem to amalgamate all services into one big "super youth centre".'*

20. By putting a safety net under everyone, it would enable professionals to identify, safeguard and support young people displaying risky behaviour before they become involved in criminality. Our practitioners stated that older adolescents are often overlooked when designing prevention and intervention services. Both types of services should not be designed or restricted to age groups, and should be based on contextual factors and vulnerabilities. The Children's Society believe the current threshold for support and safeguarding interventions is too high, meaning children do not receive support until they have reached crisis point. Our practitioners regularly report that their service users were not identified as in need of support early enough, and are now entrenched within cycles of abuse, violence, criminality and exploitation making intervention less effective. This is reported from practitioners that attend local strategic violence and safeguarding boards. Police and statutory services use the Green, Orange, Red system to identify young people at risk. Our practitioners report this system as too simplistic and does not account for cumulative and evolving contextual factors, which can increase the risk of young people being involved in serious violence.

21. In order to successfully intervene, statutory services need to ensure they have the correct mechanism in place to identify children in need of safeguarding from knife crime and youth violence. Serious youth violence is a risk often emanating from the community and neighborhoods, not the family environment; yet, the child protection system and the measures available to social workers are centered around the family environment and family function. The Children's Society recognise that the child protection system needs to be better equipped to respond to contemporary risks facing children.

22. Child protection interventions from children's social care are based on risks of significant harm. Clearly, a child who carries a knife, or is involved in knife crime, is at risk of or experiencing significant harm. The Children's Society are clear that serious youth violence is a child protection issue. We advocate for a contextual safeguarding approach¹², where risks and environments outside of the family home are viewed through a child protection lens and seen as the business of children's social care. Local strategic forums are vital to coordinating support for a child identified as in need of support, but often these forums assess and provide support at the point of crisis and not before. Most of the guidance and protocols for such strategic forums place a joint onus on a range of services to identify vulnerabilities in children prior to and during exploitation to

¹¹ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/new-research-draws-link-between-youth-service-cuts-and-rising-knife-crime>

¹² https://www.rip.org.uk/assets/userfiles/images/general/News%20images/Safeguarding%20during%20adolescence-Briefing_Jan19_v3.pdf

safeguard accordingly. The government urgently need to ensure all areas follow similar protocols and identify children prior to when violence.

23. Our practitioners recognise the diversity of young people involved in serious violence. Whilst every child's story is different, what remains consistent is the normalisation of violence and their fear of it. This in part stems from a lack of trust in statutory authorities to protect them and act in their best interests. As youth services are being cut and agencies are unable to safeguard at the earliest stage, responses are often only delivered at crisis point. Positive interventions during moments of vulnerability can be very effective, and therefore the government's focus on intervention programmes is welcome. There are excellent examples of community and national projects providing such support. The Children's Society run several projects that support criminally exploited young men, often involved in serious violence. Our STRIDE service¹³ delivers relationship based support for young men, empowering them to build up their own support networks and thereby enabling them to access services. The priority for our team is to ensure safeguards are in place, and thereby reducing the harm surrounding the child. Whilst the government is focused on funding intervention programmes, we know however that these services are not widely available. Often the only service that intervene at a point of crisis, when a young person has been involved in serious youth violence, are the police.

24. The Home Office's recognition that a co-ordinated response is needed to tackle youth violence is welcomed by the children's sector. The Youth Endowment Fund is an example of this. This fund spans over 10 years, and thereby acknowledges that empowering children can take time. This step away from short-term funding cycles for such project is most welcome. However, The Children's Society have been critical about the amount of funding issued compared to what has already been lost. The £51m packet of measures in the strategy amounts to around an eighth of the total cuts to youth services since 2010. Youth service workers report that councils are closing "open access" services, as targeted services are prioritised.

25. The Children's Society also welcomes the focus the Home Office is giving to 'county lines'. Whilst not the sole cause of youth violence, it is increasingly a contributing factor. The establishment of the new National County Lines Coordination Centre, and the roll-out of the Independent Child Trafficking Advocate¹⁴ (ICTAs) support scheme – for children formally identified as being domestically trafficked – does show the government is committed to supporting and safeguarding children exploited through county lines. However, this is often not equated in practice. For example during recent county lines raids in January 2019, 600 children were offered safeguarding advice yet this only resulted in 40 referrals¹⁵ (both adults and children) to the National Referral Mechanism for formal identification, safeguarding and support.

¹³ <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/tackling-criminal-exploitation/our-work-to-stop-county-lines>

¹⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730098/assessment-of-independent-child-trafficking-advocates-horr101.pdf

¹⁵ <https://safeguardinghub.co.uk/county-lines-2019-update/>

26. Whilst The Children's Society are critical of aspects of the interventionist programmes outlined above, they do show a willingness from Government to develop and improve crisis support for young people involved in youth violence. This focus on intervention however, should not be to the detriment of wider preventative measures, the two systems of support should be funded in tandem with one another.

National Disrupting Exploitation Programme

The Children's Society were awarded funding from the Big Lottery Fund to develop and run a three-year national Disrupting Exploitation Programme. The programme is running in Greater Manchester, London and the West Midlands and is built on partnership working, and we have created partnership forums in each region, that guides and shapes the delivery of our work. Each region has a multi-disciplinary response team, including case workers and intelligence officers. We work both directly with young people, and in addition identify systems change issues and 'focal points' in the system where there is the potential to affect longer-term disruptive change. We work with partners to contextual safeguard areas or 'hotspots' in which we know exploitation is taking place, working with the community and other stakeholders to disrupt and support young people identified. This could mean working with an at risk peer-group of young people, joining the police on raids to ensure vulnerable children are treated as victims or working with local schools to review their safeguarding procedures around child criminal exploitation.

27. Recommendation: The Government need to recognise that youth violence is a child protection issue, and that young people involved need to be safeguarded at the earliest opportunity. The government should adopt a contextual safeguarding approach as outlined in the latest Working Together Guidance, to ensure a child protection approach is taken to risks outside of the family home.

28. Recommendation: Support should not just be aimed at young people involved or at high risk of experiencing youth violence. The Government should urgently address the funding gap in children and young people's services and prioritise spending on wider preventative programmes and early intervention, it would ensure young people are supported and moved away from youth violence before it manifests.

3. Is judicial sentencing effective in a) serving as a deterrent and b) preventing reoffending?

29. Government responses to deterring knife crime and anti-social behaviour over the previous two decades have been to enforce criminal and punitive civil deterrents. Sentencing guidelines make it clear that children should only be given custodial sentences as a matter of last resort, when the serious nature of their crime requires it. This is reflective in the statistics of children serving custodial sentences over the past decade; the total number of children detained in custody has decreased steadily over the past ten years, from 2,726 at the end of January 2009 to 812 at the end of January 2019¹⁶.

30. The Children's Society believe the mandatory custodial sentencing of children¹⁷ is not effective at reducing violence as there is no evidence the threat of custody deters children from committing crime¹⁸. Patterns of offending in adolescents are different to adult counterparts; adolescence is a

¹⁶ <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/cco-who-are-they-where-are-they-may-2019.pdf>

¹⁷ mandatory minimums of 4 months and training orders for 16- and 17-year-olds who are convicted of two or more knife or offensive weapon possession offences; or of threatening a person in public with a knife or offensive weapon

¹⁸ <http://scyj.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FINAL-SCYJ-response-Home-Affairs-Committee-Serious-Violence-Inquiry.pdf>

period of development that is more likely to involve risky behaviors¹⁹. Therefore, the threat of custodial sentences, which has grown since the passing of the Offensive Weapons Act, will not necessarily have the same impact as on adults. Even if a child is aware of the sentence and able to act rationally, the fear of punishment might be outweighed by the fear to their own safety. We know from working with exploited young women who breach bail conditions that the fear of the exploiter outweighs the fear of the law.

31. It is this grey area, where the line between victim and offender is often blurred that needs to be addressed more thoroughly in government policy. Blanket mandatory sentences, and the introduction of other punitive deterrents such as Knife Crime Prevention Orders are not effective deterrents for marginalised young people. The latest available statistics found that 68% of children released from custody went on to reoffend within a year²⁰. Thus showing that such deterrents are having limited impact.

32. Recommendation: The government need to balance the scales between punitive and preventative measures for addressing youth-related knife crime. This begins with developing a more nuanced understanding of offending in young people. It is vital that the Government sees the HM Courts and Tribunal Service Reform Programme as an opportunity to look specifically at the needs of children and young people, using a child-centred approach would enable the courts to develop rehabilitative sentences that would be tailored to the child and therefore effective.

4. Does the Government's Serious Violence Strategy strike the right balance between preventative and punitive action?

33. This submission has sought to evidence that the current Serious Violence Strategy is not striking the right balance between preventative and punitive action. The current package of interventionist measures within the strategy are delivered in silos, what is lacking is a national package of preventative measures which would ensure less children are in need of specialist interventionist measures and tackles the underlying causes of youth violence.

34. This lack of balance is best illustrated through the introduction of the Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs); the orders were branded as preventive measures that would deter young people from carrying weapons. Much like the other strands of the strategy, the term preventative is being used loosely. These new deterrents can be imposed on any person aged 12 or over to prevent vulnerable young people from becoming involved in knife possession and knife crime.

35. These orders could place restrictions on the recipients preventing them from:

- entering certain geographical areas;
- associating with certain individuals;
- using social media.

They could also instruct young people to work with a youth worker or attend an educational programme.

26. In an Urgent Question on 4th February 2019 to the House of Commons the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, for the Home Department, Victoria Atkins MP, emphasised that these orders were preventative and aimed at a small cohort of young people. The Home Office should place greater priority on disrupting youth violence by targeting adults who coerce, control and

¹⁹ 1 Steinberg, 2004 in Chein, J., (2015). 'Peers and Adolescent Risk Taking'. Emerging Trends in Social and Behavioural Sciences. Ed. Scott, R., & Kosslyn, S., (2015). John Wiley & Sons: London

²⁰ YJB (2018) Youth Justice Statistics 2016/17 England and Wales Youth Justice Board/Ministry of Justice https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/676072/youth_justice_statistics_2016-17.pdf

threaten young people instead of sanctioning a small number of young people. These Knife Crime Prevention Orders are targeted at children and young people who themselves could be victims of exploitation rather than the perpetrators themselves. Nor is there a recognition within these orders that a child carrying an offensive weapon should unambiguously prompt a safeguarding response under the duties set out in the Children Act 1989.

37. What is more, these orders can be issued on the balance of probability. These orders can be issued if the police suspect a person as young as 12 could have carried a knife twice in the last two years, rather than arrested, charged or convicted for doing so. This suspicion can be 'intelligence' led, meaning the police do not have to necessarily evidence their suspicions. Our practitioners have raised serious concerns that intelligence gathered on young people in a safeguarding capacity- i.e. where The Children's Society workers suspect a child is being exploited - could also be used as the justification for issuing a KCPO. The Children's Society organisations are deeply concerned that that these orders would infringe of the rights of children and could be disproportionately issued to children from a BAME background.

38. The Home Office have framed these KCPOs as preventative as they can be applied with positive requirements attached, such as a young person engaging with a youth worker or placed on an education programme. Voluntary and community organisations will have to monitor the compliance of young people they are instructed to work with and report any breaches to the authorities. The Home Office must understand that organisations on the frontline of serious youth violence are often the only support system trusted by communities because of independence from statutory agencies. Requiring voluntary agencies to report a breach of an order is deeply troubling, placing workers who have strong relationships with young people in an impossible situation.

39. As currently drafted, these orders risk criminalising young people and pushing them further from support. Orders restricting movement or association, for example, misunderstand child exploitation. For exploited children, even a risk of a two-year prison sentence will not act as a deterrent as the threats from their exploiter are much more real to them. Our practitioners are concerned that these orders could even pose a safety risk to criminally exploited young people. We know that children in our services who are being criminally exploited have received the following threats for not complying with the orders of their exploiter:

- Physical or sexual violence against family members
- Threat of physical harm
- Threat to life

40. We know through working with exploited young women who breach bail conditions that the fear of the exploiter outweighs the fear of the law. We would urge the Home Office to ensure alternative interventions were given to children identified as being exploited.

41. Recommendation: The Children's Society are still opposed to the new Knife Crime Prevention Orders, it is vital that before they are rolled out the Government consult on and publish separate accompanying guidance for their use to ensure that they do not risk criminalising young people rather than safeguarding them.

5. Is treating knife crime as a public health issue an effective approach?

42. As a society, we tend to seek out definitive causes of crime in order to create solutions. This way of thinking is too straightforward to explain youth crime. The government must remember that youth violence is a complex issue, one that needs a multifaceted strategy to tackle it. The public health approach is a step in the right direction. Viewing youth violence through a public health lens would help enable a more effective, multiagency response. It could shift the discourse

from solely viewing these young people as criminals to a more nuanced understanding of the contextual factors that have contributed to young people becoming involved in violence, including the exploitation many have themselves faced.

43. The Children's Society are clear that a core component of the public health approach should be to safeguard any young people involved in youth violence and knife crime. To certain extent, the mechanisms for doing so are already in place. Multi-Agency Child Exploitation meetings (MACE) are one such safeguarding tool that can be utilised effectively by local authorities to identify and protect young people involved in often serious violence. Local strategic forums such as this are vital to coordinating support for a child identified as in need of support, but often our practitioners inform us these forums assess and provide support at the point of crisis and not before. Our practitioners also state that these meetings often show a disconnected between services not only based on differing definitions of vulnerability and thresholds, but also because on competing goals – to safeguard or to gather intelligence and criminalise. Whilst services need to be adapted to local needs, such models require national protocols and guidelines.

44. 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. The government is currently consulting on a legal duty to support multi-agency action this has been branded as a public health approach. The Children's Society are clear imposing a duty on services that support children in times of crisis to refer needs to be approached with caution.

45. Recommendation: The Government should publish National Guidance on how to effectively embed Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) panels into local structures to better identify and support children and young people at risk of exploitation.

6. How is knife crime affecting schools?

46. Schools have a vital role to play in keeping the children and young people that attend their settings safe from a host of threats, including knife crime. The statutory safeguarding guidance for schools, Keeping Children Safe in Education²¹, is primarily focused on reactive safeguarding, led by child disclosures of abuse and neglect perpetrated in the home. For children to be identified before the risk becomes acute, the safeguarding must be proactive. This means early identification and intervention. A proactive safeguarding culture involves every child and every adult, and also encourages peers to protect and empower one another. Anti-knife and violence initiatives work best when young people are engaged and feel part of the solution.

47. The Children's Society run an anti-knife program in Birmingham. The program is school-based, offering school assemblies, workshops and 1:1 support based upon the four R's principle²² - Reassurance, Risk, Resilience and Responsibility. Whilst many schools engaged with the program and allowed our practitioners to present in assemblies, our offering of 1:1 support and targeted workshops was less popular. Our practitioner stated that schools were reluctant to engage with our more targeted work as they did not want to single out students. This is echoed in other literature²³ which reports that young people do not agree with overly targeted programmes of support. Our practitioner in Birmingham described how a school he worked with allowed children and young people to self-refer into his group sessions which elevated some of the stigma associated with being '*singled out*'. However, he was quick to point out that often schools are best placed to identify young people who would benefit from this type of intervention. It is important

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

²² <https://noknivesbetterlives.com/practitioners/nkbl-overview/>

²³ <http://thenayi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Youth-knife-Crime-Briefing-May-19.pdf>

that schools create safe inclusive environments which enable all students to receive the support they may need. Encouragingly, the same practitioner reported that in many of the schools that he delivered assemblies, a range of school staff would also attend resulting in them gaining an increased awareness of the types of risks facing some children and young people in their care.

48. Our 1:1 support as part of this program is not just focused on educating young people on the dangers of knives. The support is tailored to what the young person wants to focus on and channel their energy into. Our practitioner spoke of a young boy he was working with that was interested in art, so their sessions focused on channelling the young person's creative talents into designing shoes for example. The Children's Society believe that young people should be at the centre of designing services that work for their needs and aspirations.

49. The focus on the symptom - knife crime, stifles wider conversations being had on its causes. This is seen in the lack of commissioning of services that provide alternative opportunities and positive spaces for young people to express themselves. Whilst such services do exist, they exist in silos at local levels and are undermined by cuts to youth services.

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

50. We consulted with one of our participation groups in Greater Manchester, the group comprised of 4 young people, 1 male and 3 females all aged between 14-16 years-old. The individuals who young people felt were more vulnerable to becoming involved in knife crime were largely expected, given what we see in the national data. That is, young males living in urban areas.

51. Statistics from the Office of National Statistics (ONS)²⁴ on the geographical distribution of offenses involving knives or sharp instruments demonstrates that urban police forces tend to record higher proportions of crime involving knives than forces that cover more rural areas. In 2017/18, London accounted for the bulk of the offences with 11% of recorded serious offences involving a knife. In Greater Manchester, Leicestershire and West Midlands police forces the picture is similar with between 7 and 8% of recorded serious offences involving knives, our disrupting exploitation programs operate in three out of these four areas. On the other hand police forces that cover more rural areas such as; Devon and Cornwall, Sussex and Surrey reported that between 1-2% of their serious offences involved knives.

52. Indeed, the young people suggested that those most at risk were those '*people who live in cities*'. Young people highlighted that there will likely be parts of a city that are riskier than others. One young person suggested that you might be more likely to come across someone carrying a knife in parts of the city where you might, '*go for weed of something*'.

53. This relationship between serious violence and selling drugs, such as cannabis, is something that we often hear in our practice. For many children and young people selling drugs at street level is a sign that they are being criminally exploited. However, all too often we hear that statutory services take a punitive rather than safeguarding response to these young people who may be being exploited.

54. One of our practitioners described a general lack of understanding of criminal exploitation across statutory agencies with responsibility for safeguarding young people. This acts as a barrier when it comes to keeping them safe.

²⁴<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/compendium/focusonviolentcrimeandsexualoffences/yearendingmarch2016/offencesinvolvingtheuseofweapons#prevalence-and-trends-of-offences-involving-firearms>

55. He described how the point at which a young person is caught in possession of drugs is an opportunity for statutory services to intervene but there is often a consensus that at this point it is too late. He went on to say, there is often a lack of clarity around what *'can'* and what *'should'* be done for the young person. This can have devastating consequences if the young person is left with drug debt, for example. It is vital that statutory agencies such as the police adopt a safeguarding response at this point and actively explore where the drugs have come from, whom they have come from and if the young person is in debt.

56. The young people we spoke to also suggested a link between poverty and an increased likelihood of involvement in knife crime with one of the groups of young people they deemed more vulnerable to being involved in knife crime were those young people *'who don't have loads of money'*. Young people often report factors relating to experiences of poverty as making them more vulnerable to being affected by knife crime and serious violence. Our knife crime prevention worker in Birmingham told us that many of the young people he works with are on the streets doing what they are doing because they *'want to provide for themselves and often their families too.'*

57. In addition to geographical location and poverty, our disrupting exploitation practitioners told us that they often see mental health, undiagnosed special educational needs, problems with speech and language and a lack of sufficient education as additional vulnerabilities present in the young people they work with who have been affected by knife crime and serious violence.

58. Recommendation: statutory agencies should take a safeguarding response to children and young people caught in possession of controlled substances, possession should be seen as a warning that a young person could be being exploited.

59. Recommendation: training on child criminal exploitation and the wider risks and vulnerabilities associated with this form of exploitation should be included in all safeguarding training.

8. What motivates young people to carry knives?

'Scared people, people who are scared' - young person, Manchester

60. The children and young people that we work with up and down the country frequently tell us they feel compelled to carry knives and other weapons due to fear and the need to protect themselves.

61. One of the young people we consulted with as part of this inquiry told us that *'there are lots of people out there like me who will do it [carry a knife] because they are scared, because of things that have happened in the past to people like us'*.

62. The same individual described how for some young people who are involved in fights, both in and out of school there is often the perception that they need to carry a knife for protection, *'you are showing the other person you are strong because you have a knife, they could have a knife too or a gun or a machete.'*

63. Our disrupting exploitation intelligence officers echoed this sentiment. They described how fear pertaining to knife crime and serious violence exists on a spectrum for the young people they work with, for some young people it comes as a direct result of threats made to them or due to experiences. For example, for young people that are being criminally exploited, they might feel the need to be *'strapped'* when they are being coerced to sell drugs using the county lines model. However, for others the sense that they need to carry a knife may stem from vulnerabilities such

as having a family member that has already been criminally exploited or is involved in organised crime in some way.

64. Similarly, our knife crime worker in Birmingham told us that the young people he works with experience a mixture of feelings related to risk and the need to protect themselves, some might feel that they need to protect themselves from a real risk that they are facing and others might feel the need to protect themselves from a perhaps over inflated idea of the risk they face. He described how news items that young people see in the media often perpetuate this feeling of fear.

65. On the other hand, however, one of the young people we spoke to discussed how he had been put off carrying a knife due to what he had seen covered in the media, *'I think the media puts fear in young people but not to carry knives - I think it puts fear in them to watch out and be careful.'*

66. The young people also discussed how carrying knives and other weapons may be influenced by peer pressure, reflecting a need to assert power and status within a friendship group, *'people just want to show that they are strong so they do it for their own dignity and position in their own friendship group'*.

67. There are always different reasons why young people perceive risk and this is reflected in the different levels of vulnerability facing the children and young people that we see through our services. However, it is important to make clear that irrespective of the extent to which the risk that children and young people face is perceived or actual, their experience of fear is still very real and this should be taken into account when young people are found to be carrying knives and/or other weapons by the police and other statutory agencies.

68. Recommendation: The Government must recognise that a child carrying a knife is a child protection issue and should trigger a safeguarding response, 1) any child caught in possession of a knife should be given a needs assessment under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, 2) Children in Need and Child Protection Plans should take a greater focus on disruption where the risk of exploitation is recognised.

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

69. As stated above, the resounding motivating factor for knife carrying for the children and young people we support is fear, fear perpetuated by social, national and local media and fear directly resulting from young people's real life experiences.

70. At The Children's Society, we believe that providing children and young people with early and detailed education centred on healthy relationships and keeping safe would be a good first step towards reducing the levels of fear experienced by many. It is also vital that children and young people are provided with the tools to critically assess situations that they may find themselves in and are aware of how to speak out when they feel in danger.

71. Whilst we were encouraged to learn that the Home Office has been working with the PSHE Association and teachers to create new curriculum materials on knife crime to be brought into action with immediate effect, we were disappointed to learn that this programme of education is only aimed at children aged eleven years and up.

72. Through the test and learn part of our disrupting exploitation programme we identified that the crucial age for preventative educational work is between 8 and 9 years-old, around year 5. It was

found that children of this age already *'know a lot more than we thought, they often hear things, do things and might not know who to tell or what to do with that information'*. It was felt that any later than year 5 risks being too late for the cycle of change to take place.

73. Our knife crime prevention worker experienced positive engagement from many of the primary schools that he approached. However, our service, which was soon ending, is the only commissioned service in the area. It is vital that local authorities provide adequate funding for specialist education for children around risks around exploitation and knife crime and keeping safe.

74. Furthermore, it is important that highly skilled and well-trained individuals deliver this training. In recent years there has been a move towards people with 'real life experience', delivering awareness raising sessions.

75. Whilst, the children and young people that we consulted with reflected that it had been positive *'hearing from people who have been part of that lifestyle'*, we know from direct work that hearing from people with direct experience of serious violence can be re-traumatising for some young people. One practitioner described a session in a school that they had attended as being delivered like a *'war story'*.

76. We are not in a position to comment on the quality of sessions such as these, but we think it is important that anyone entering a school setting to deliver training is skilled in working with young people and delivering sensitive sessions such as these.

77. Recommendation: Specialist education around knife crime and how to keep safe should be embedded in the ethos of the school and become part of the PSHE curriculum and rolled out in primary schools from year 5, this training should be delivered by individuals with specialist training on this subject.

10. Is there any evidence that gang culture, social media and/or music impact young people's involvement in knife crime?

78. This is not something that The Children's Society have consulted with the children and young people that we work with extensively enough about, therefore at this stage we are not in a position to answer this question.

11. Is there a correlation between young people being excluded, or not getting enough support from, education and involvement in knife crime?

79. Through our frontline practice and well-being work in schools, we often observe school settings in which staff appear blind to the risks and vulnerabilities that children and young people experience in and out of school.

80. Too frequently, professionals in a child's life fail to understand the demands that a mainstream classroom setting can have on high-risk vulnerable children. Rather, they are expected to be part of school life with little offer of additional help or support.

81. Schools have a unique opportunity to provide children and young people with support, structure and relationships with peers and trusted adults. They have a clear, but not sole, responsibility towards children and young people and can, with support, help prevent them from becoming involved with serious violence, including knife crime. Despite financial pressures, many schools are already doing this. However, Ofsted's recent report into knife crime shows inconsistencies across different schools approaches in London.

82. The report from Ofsted much like the Timpson review into school exclusions²⁵ found no evidence to support the notion that exclusions are the root-cause in the surge in knife violence. The Children's Society in part in support of this conclusion, specifically that it is not the exclusion that causes involvement in knife crime, it is a lack of support generally, in all aspects of a child's life that can be perpetuated by a school exclusion.

83. We know from our direct work, that anecdotally there is an association between children being excluded from school, being in alternative provision or on reduced timetables and their risk of criminal exploitation and becoming victim of serious violence. However, it must be made clear that it should be down to all professionals, not just school staff, in a young person's life to identify 'needs' that are not being met at an early stage and put support in place to reduce the risk of for example, of involvement in knife crime.

84. There is a general assumption that, because most children are in school and it is school staff that come into contact with children the most, that it is their duty to identify needs and secure the right support get the right support but it does not and should not always work like that.

85. The latest statistical report on schools, pupils and their characteristics showed that there were nearly 38,000 children and young people attending pupil referral units (PRUs) or other local authority alternative provisions (AP) in January 2017. 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 DfE²⁶, 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.

96. Alternative provision settings are frequently catch all places, made up of children and young people with a wide variety of vulnerabilities and needs. However, promoting a causal link between exclusions and knife crime risks damaging the opportunity to direct resources to support specialist, long-term and holistic interventions being directed towards AP settings.

87. Our intelligence officers told us that across the three areas that they work in, schools are taking a zero tolerance approach and permanently excluding pupils as soon as they are caught in possession of a knife or bladed instrument. Whilst we recognise that schools have responsibility to keep all the young people they are responsible for safe we are extremely concerned that vulnerable young people are not being offered the support they need before after permanent exclusion for possession of a knife.

88. Our practitioners tell us that all too often they see a failure on statutory agencies to take a safeguarding approach once a young person has been caught with a knife. Rather a young person will be referred to the youth offending team and is often cautioned, it is vital that statutory services work together at this stage to identify why a young person is carrying a knife and take a multi-agency approach to intervention and support for that young person.

89. Exposure to harmful experiences is not directly caused by exclusion; rather they are often the product of challenging and traumatic early life experiences. However, this does not change the fact that many children and young people attending AP's are being placed at increased risk of being exploited for criminal exploitation.

²⁵https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/799979/Timpson_review_of_school_exclusion.pdf

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england-2015-to-2016>

90. Through our direct work with children and young people who have been excluded from school, we know that many of them have missed out on, and will go on to miss out further, on parts of the curriculum. We frequently see vulnerable young people on part time timetables, these young people are entitled to full time education. It is highly likely that this could result in a young person missing out on vital components of education that could teach them valuable lessons about keeping safe – specifically RSE and PSHE.

91. At a public hearing held by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on missing children and adults the National Crime Agency reported that they had seen evidence of young people being targeted whilst at AP settings with some young people being coerced to recruit others.

92. It is vital that more is done to prevent children and young people being excluded in the first place and that for those that have been, targeted prevention activities should be put in place to help lessen the risk of these young people being criminally exploited.

93. Recommendation: all adults working with children should have training in how to recognise and respond to vulnerabilities that might result in challenging behavior and all children presenting with difficult behavior should receive a holistic needs assessment and be offered appropriate support. Targeted therapeutic work should be conducted with all children and young people who have early life experiences that might make them more vulnerable to school exclusion.

94. Recommendation: a child being caught in possession of a knife should not result in immediate exclusion. It should be met with 1) a holistic assessment of need and where possible recommended support should be put in place within the school setting to help tackle the root cause of the knife carrying behavior and 2) all statutory services that come into contact with the child should take a safeguarding rather than punitive approach to supporting them.

95. Recommendation: all alternative provision settings should be fully funded to 1) deliver holistic support to help tackle the root causes of a young person's vulnerability 2) deliver full time timetables including lessons in RSE and PSHE and deliver targeted preventative activities around the risk of being targeted for criminal exploitation.

12. What could be done to make people less likely to a) carry knives b) commit knife crime?

'The profile of knife crime started rising around 5 years ago, at a time when youth services and youth centres were cut' – Knife crime prevention worker

96. Cuts to youth services has resulted in a reduction in the number of professionals employed in the sector and closure of many youth centres and programmes, including many mentoring programmes. The Youth Violence Commission reported that a lack of positive role models was frequently raised through their evidence sessions²⁷.

'Having provision for young people, having somewhere for young people to go and sit down and chill out, get the support they need and have positive role models is important.' – Knife crime prevention worker

97. Cuts to youth services has resulted in a reduction in the number of professionals employed in the sector and closure of many youth centres and programmes, including many mentoring

²⁷ <http://yvcommission.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Interim-Report-FINAL-version-2.pdf>

programmes. The Youth Violence Commission reported that a lack of positive role models was frequently raised through their evidence sessions²⁸.

98. 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 other 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.

99. Spotlight, a series of youth centres in East London, provide a space for young people to form positive relationships with peers and youth workers. Spaces such as this need to be championed by central government. This involves reinstating funding nationwide for youth services to not only prevent violence, but to provide young people who need it with alternative opportunities to succeed.

100. Additional Children's Society practitioners reflected on the importance of peer led support, they suggested that what is missing from the current government strategy is recognition of the power of peer-on-peer support. The need for more organisations that are run by young people, delivering the types of work that they think is important was highlighted.

'Young people might not feel they can relate to adults, a 14-year-old might not feel that they can relate to a 30-year-old, it might be better if it is a 18-year-old or something'.

13. What support is available to identify and help young people at risk of getting involved in knife crime? Is it effective?

Taking a contextual safeguarding approach

101. Whilst we were pleased to see the inclusion of contextual safeguarding in the most recent Working Together guidelines²⁹, we were concerned that the level of detail contained within the guidance did not give sufficient detail or direction for local areas to effectively implement a contextual safeguarding approach in their work.

102. As part of our disrupting exploitation programme, our intelligence officers have been working with local areas to help them embed contextual safeguarding into their practice to help them identify and support those young people at risk of involvement in knife crime and other types of serious violence. They have found evidence of a general lack of understanding of the warning signs that a young person might be at risk of becoming involved in knife crime which hampers any chance of early identification.

103. Additionally, they have found a general lack of understanding of criminal exploitation which is a barrier to implementing a contextual safeguarding approach, one practitioner told us that in their area intelligence is drawn on from a narrow place and often just using police intelligence, the tactics used to identify who needs early intervention comes from that perspective and tends to be perpetrator focused. It was said that often more weight is given to someone who might be high up in the police rather than someone with a direct relationship with a young person who may have had a disclosure made to them that the young person is being exploited.

²⁸ <http://yvcommission.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Interim-Report-FINAL-version-2.pdf>

²⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779401/Working_Together_to_Safeguard-Children.pdf

104. Furthermore, a disconnect between the strategic picture of how well complex safeguarding is being implemented and how an officer in a division might behave on the ground was raised as an issue. An example was given where a young person disclosed they were being criminally exploited and that their perpetrator lived locally, the police responded by sending uniformed officers out to interview the mother and the young person demonstrating a lack of understanding on the additional danger that that might put the young person in.

Language

105. The intelligence officers reported a wide variation in the language used to speak about young people. We heard evidence that within London different boroughs social services, statutory services and to some extent different borough police were all employing different words and definitions when talking about young people who were involved in knife crime and serious violence.

106. In one target area we heard that none of the agencies in that area have adopted the language of exploitation at all meaning that many young people who are the victims of violence are overlooked, our practitioners working on the ground believe that a shift in narrative is needed to support the identification of children at risk of serious violence and knife crime as victims in need of support. Currently both national and local government are using the term 'Serious Youth Violence', we believe that this should be reworded to; 'Serious Violence Affecting Young People'.

Return home interviews

107. A child going missing should be seen as an early indicator that they could be being, or be vulnerable to becoming, criminally exploited. All children who go missing should be offered a Return home interview (RHI), to help identify and offer support to those in need.

108. A RHI is a statutory instrument, it is a conversation between a child and a trained professional after a child has returned from a missing episode. Its purpose is to *'provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from the risks they may have been exposed to whilst missing or risks they might be facing at home.'*³⁰

109. RHIs should be recognised as a key opportunity to identify children and young people who are at risk. In a recent report by The Children's Society³¹, we found that whilst RHIs are offered to all missing children after every missing episode in most local authority areas, in a small number of local authorities RHIs are only offered on a case-by-case basis for some groups of missing children, such as those missing from home. This means that a potential opportunity to identify the risk of involvement in, or being vulnerable to, knife crime is lost.

110. Furthermore, the same report found that the uptake of RHIs is patchy, with wide variation in uptake rate reported (from around 20 – 100%), with an average of 50% of offers resulting in RHIs taking place across the local authorities who responded to our FOI.

³⁰https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf

³¹ <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/the-first-step.pdf>

111. There is a need for further exploration around why some groups are less likely to receive an offer of a RHI and why the uptake across the board is so low. Encouragingly, we heard evidence of local authorities putting interventions in place to address these issues, for example doing outreach work with parents to inform them of the benefits of consenting to a RHI taking place, contacting young people in multiple different ways and visiting schools to conduct RHIs if parental consent was not gained, this suggests that local areas can make changes which could have an impact on the number of vulnerable young people that their RHI services reach.

112. Recommendation: The Department for Education should include detailed guidance for local authorities with practical support for implementing a contextual safeguarding approach in their areas.

113. Recommendation: It is vital that young people affected by knife crime are seen as victims in need of a safeguarding response. The phrase 'serious violence affecting young people' should be adopted at both the national and local level. The language of exploitation should be adopted at both nationally and locally.

114. Recommendation: local authorities should encourage flexibility around the delivery of RHIs and adopt models which allow staff doing interviews to be young person centred in their approach to contacting young people to make the offer, arranging and conducting the interview and facilitating ongoing relationships with young people who are reported missing more than once.

14. Are there particular groups of young people who are overlooked by current prevention strategies?

115. At The Children's Society we frequently hear that thresholds for prevention and intervention work are too high, a lack of general understanding of criminal exploitation has resulted in a wide range of children and young people slipping through the net and missing out on vital prevention work that might have supported them to stay safe. Too often pathways for prevention work are defined by characteristics rather than vulnerability, it is vital that there is a shift in understanding across agencies with safeguarding responsibility for young people towards recognising the additional factors that make a young person vulnerable to being exploited and becoming involved in serious violence and knife crime.

116. Some of the vulnerabilities that The Children's Society's disrupting exploitation programme intelligence officers have identified as being overlooked across agencies in the areas that they work in are: older teenagers, primary school aged children, socially isolated young people living in affluent areas, victims of other forms of exploitation such as child sexual exploitation and family members of individuals who are or have been criminally exploited themselves.

117. Recommendation: mandatory training on factors that might make a child or young person vulnerable to exploitation should be rolled out to all statutory agencies with safeguarding responsibility for children and young people. Referrals for preventative work should be vulnerabilities based.

15. Are the police's stop and search powers effective in promoting safety and/or putting young people off carrying knives?

118. Government responses to deterring violent crime and anti-social behaviour over the previous two decades have been to enforce criminal and punitive civil deterrents. So far these sanctions have ranged from ASBOs to Dispersal Orders, from Criminal Behaviour Orders to Gang Injunctions and now to the latest proposed initiative, Knife Crime Prevention Orders. So far, such

deterrents have not made a substantial impact on reducing levels of youth violence. And as previously mentioned, knife crime in particular has risen.

119. Further, in relation to stop and search, a study published by the Home Office in 2016 found that, between 2008-11 as part of Operation BLUNT 2 in London:

“there was no discernible crime-reducing effects from a large surge in stop and search activity at the borough level during the operation.”

120. However, we continue to see an increase in police stop and search powers. Our knife crime prevention worker in Birmingham discussed how stop and searches could only ever be a short term deterrent as young people might become less likely to carry knives whilst searches are going on but that wouldn't do anything to get to the root of the problem. Furthermore, we have heard anecdotal evidence that in response the increase of stop and searches young people are simply changing the way that they carry knives and weapons, leaving them in parks or hidden under plants and bushes easily reachable, picking them up when needed.

121. It is wholly appropriate for a Government to develop policies that will act as a deterrent to violent crime, however there is a body of evidence to suggest confrontational interventions, such as stop and searches, frequently do not reduce crime rates. 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.

122. Recommendation: The Government should provide additional funding for children's services in the Spending Review to ensure that all local authorities have the resources to sustain a consistent offer of early intervention.

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