

1. At root, the fundamental causes of knife crime and violence that have been recognised in various wide scale studies pinpoint especially the following:¹

- Structural issues such as inequality, deprivation and social trust.
- Cultural issues such as neighbourhood disorder and exposure to violence.²
- Loss of year round and voluntarily accessible youth services.

Risk factors resulting from these broad issues are most commonly found as follows:

- At the individual level, risk factors can include a history of involvement in crime, anti-social behaviour and aggressive behaviour; psychological conditions such as hyperactivity and conduct disorder; and the harmful use of alcohol and illicit drugs.

- At family relationships levels, the risk factors include growing up with poor parental supervision, having experienced harsh and inconsistent discipline by parents, domestic abuse within the family, parental involvement in crime.

- Risk factors at community levels include neighbourhood crime, gangs and a local supply of guns and illicit drugs, ease of access to alcohol; unemployment, high levels of economic inequality and concentrated poverty.

- Other specific factors include; exclusion and frequent absence from school and associating with delinquent peers.

2. There is much evidence to suggest that the prevalence of both the root causes and many of the risk factors are worsening for children and young people across the country at the same time data from ONS also shows knife crime risen by 22% in England and Wales in 2017 with other “high harm” offences also rising. There is also evidence that the number of knife crime offences committed by young people is rising considerably,³ and is most often amongst people known to each other, despite just 0.5% of young people stating that they carry a knife.⁴ Most carry a knife out of ‘fear’ and for self-defence.

3. Despite this relatively low rate of knife-carrying as many as 2.2 million children across the UK aged 10-17 are worried about crime and anti-social behaviour; and c. 950,000 have experienced crime.⁵ These worries are grounded in reality:

- Around 10% of 10 to 15 year olds in England and Wales are victims of crime with just under half of these being crimes of violence.⁶

¹ See; WHO, *European Report on Preventing Violence and Knife Crime Among Young People* (2003). Available at; http://www.euro.who.int/data/assets/pdf_file/0012/121314/E94277.pdf. And; Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, *Young People, Violence and Knives – Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions* (2018). Available at;

<https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/Knife%20crime.%20November.pdf>

² Iain R Brennan; Weapon-Carrying and the Reduction of Violent Harm, *The British Journal of Criminology*, , azy032, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azy032>

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47485867>

⁴ Ministry of Justice, *Youth Justice Statistics 2017/18: England and Wales* (2018), p. 24.

⁵ Children’s Society, *Good Childhood Report* (2017).

⁶ Ministry of Justice, *Youth Justice Statistics 2017/18* (2019), p. 77. Available at; https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/774866/youth_justice_statistics_bulletin_2017_2018.pdf

- Over 70% of young people are exposed to serious violence in real life at least once a month, rising to 90% including via media.⁷

4. At the same time there have been three major shifts in the background context of youth offending in the past decade.

5. Firstly, the numbers of young people offending is decreasing, with far fewer arrests and cautions (over 85% reduction since 2008), and fewer proven youth offences (75% reduction since 2008). However, this is falling slower for black young people than others, leading to large over-representation of black youths in youth offending statistics; with males being especially prominent.⁸ It is also important to note that 41% of first time entrants aged 10 – 17 reoffend within 12 months, with an average of 3.92 reoffences per reoffender (the highest frequency rate in the last decade). Also, young people who are taken into custody with ‘no further action’ recorded against them are not classified as being a first time entrants, despite being at risk of becoming one in the future.

6. The data shows that reoffending rates have increased the most for the 10 – 14 age group, to the extent that since 2014 they are the age group most likely to reoffend (historically it had always been the 15 – 17 age group).

7. Secondly, despite the overall reduction there has been a shift towards offences of robbery, public order offences and knife and offensive weapons offences; the nature of these offences meaning custodial sentences for young people are increasing in length.

8. In short, whilst more young people are being exposed to and are experiencing crime, less are actively engaged in crime. However, that concentrated few are more likely to engage in serious violence, including knife crime, often as a ‘re-offence’.

9. Given this, it could be argued that the current use of dispersal orders, ASBOs, Criminal Behaviour Orders and Knife Crime Prevention orders may have been contributing to reducing crime as a whole, but there is still a ‘core’ that is unaffected by punitive actions and who progress from lower level offences to the use of knives and other offensive weapons. Schemes like RedThread are great for reaching those at a ‘teachable’ moment, but more should be done to prevent this escalation of offences at a much earlier stage. This submission argues that youth work is ideally placed to do this.

10. Using local level data for the number of children (per 100) who have been cautioned or sentenced, and also for first time entrants (per 100) to ascertain this ‘core’ shows a distinct trend of urban areas having the greatest rates of offences; with coastal, and older industrial towns having the highest rates of children cautioned or sentenced.

11. Due to some areas having been calculated by ‘Local Authority’ boundaries, and some by ‘Youth Offending Team’ boundaries, a full mapping analysis is not possible. But there is some distinct congruence between the data sets with 14 areas being in the 20 worst offending areas for both rates of first time entrants and total number of cautions or sentences handed down, and many of the areas being localised in regional ‘pockets’.

12. Excluding London, the most noticeable of these ‘pockets’ are:

- The ‘western half’ of West Midlands (Birmingham to Wolverhampton)

⁷ Youth Violence Commission, *Interim Report* (2018), p. 16.

⁸ Ministry of Justice, *Youth Justice Statistics 2017/18: England and Wales* (2018).

- The major cities within the East Midlands (Derby, Nottingham and Leicester)
- The major urban areas of the North East (The whole of Tyneside and Middlesbrough)
- The area around the Solent (Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight)
- Areas in and around the major North West Cities (Liverpool, Manchester, but also Blackpool)

13. The West Midlands and the North East also have the highest rates of children in custody outside of London.

14. There is also fairly consistent data which suggests that these 'pockets' do indeed suffer from the root causes and risk factors identified in the opening. For example; domestic abuse within households,⁹ school exclusion rates,¹⁰ unemployment, poverty and inequality,¹¹ children in workless households,¹² and higher than average incidences of Children in Need.¹³ Our analysis of spend on services to young people also shows that these areas have suffered from large cuts to their youth service spend.

15. There is therefore seemingly a systemic failure in these areas which requires a more holistic approach to provide a shift away from punitive action to more positive action for those who continue to be involved in serious crime, one which does not always label young people as 'criminals' but recognises them as victims of circumstance and in need of safeguarding and positive support. This support is often not provided for at home,¹⁴ with over 16% of young people do not feel safest at home.¹⁵

16. Thus, provision of such support should largely lie outside of the formal youth justice system for those most in need of this support, and should aim to be more positive than punitive, an approach recognised in a Government review in 2010 which concluded that;

Interventions that embody 'therapeutic' philosophies, such as counselling and skills training, were far more effective than those based on strategies of control or coercion, i.e. surveillance, deterrence, and discipline. In fact, evidence suggests that programmes that mainly focus on

9

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesdatatool/yearendingmarch2018/datatool1718final.xls>

10

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726727/la_tables_exc1617.xlsx

¹¹ See, for example; Social Mobility Commission, *State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain* (2017).

12

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/workingandworklesshouseholdstablemchildreninhouseholdsbyregionandcombinedeconomicactivetystatusofhouseholdmembers/current/tablem.xls>

¹³ DfE. *Characteristics of Children in Need: 2017 to 2018* (2018). Available at;

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/762527/Characteristics_of_children_in_need_2017-18.pdf

¹⁴ Children's Commissioner, *Vulnerability Index* (2018).

¹⁵ *Interim Report*.

*deterrence or discipline can actually have the opposite effect and lead to an increase in offending behaviour.*¹⁶

17. For implementation of this it would be sensible to use youth workers as key intermediaries. A recent APPG on Knife Crime Report evidenced a correlation between areas where youth services had suffered the largest cuts, and where knife crime had risen the most. The Youth Violence Commission also highlights that a well-resourced youth service is a necessary condition in the prevention of knife crime.¹⁷ The same report surveyed the public, asking;

'If there was one thing you could change that you think would make young people safer, what would it be?'

18. Over 2,200 young people responded, with the most popular response being 'the provision of more youth centres, sports clubs and other youth activities in their local areas'.¹⁸

19. In the absence of such spaces and funding for youth services, there has lately been a shift towards family targeted programmes via Youth Offending Teams (YOTs); and across all programmes there is currently heavy youth work involvement.¹⁹ However, despite such 'in-house' delivery that is largely independent of a space or an activity, one area that was summarised as a need of YOTs across England was for; *experienced staff who had the skills to challenge behaviour and support diversion from offending*, good early information from the police through an effective triage process, and that bespoke intervention was *based on a holistic assessment of need and risk*.

20. Well trained youth workers can provide both the skilled expertise required, and are best placed to conduct a holistic assessment of need and risk given their distance from the formal institutions that the most disengaged and vulnerable young people will often actively avoid; but they need support.

21. A strong youth service that would be best placed to help tackle knife crime would work alongside YOT programmes to provide both universal and detached services that can help ensure as wide a population as possible is reached, ideally working in partnership with YOT, Police Crime Commissioners and other stakeholders.

22. However, resources would need to be made available for training of youth workers and wider workforce development to encourage the best suited youth workers into these positions; especially for youth workers who have lived experience of knife crime and the community within which they are serving.

23. There are numerous examples of this approaching working across various contexts, as briefly outlined below.

1. Chicago's 'Cure Violence' Programme

24. This programme recognises that to best convey a message to a target audience the messenger needed to have the most reduced social distance (e.g. they recruited former gang members to educate current gang members, and to intervene in disputes), and this approach was key in acting as an intermediary between law enforcement and individuals,

¹⁶ Department for Education, *Prevention and Reduction: A review of Strategies for Intervening Early to Prevent or Reduce Youth Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour* (IFS: 2011).

¹⁷ The Youth Violence Commission, *Interim Report* (2018).

¹⁸ The Youth Violence Commission, *Interim Report* (2018), p. 8.

¹⁹ Youth Justice Board, *Summary of Responses to the MOJ and YJB Survey on Youth Justice: Prevention of Offending* (2017).

known as a 'violence interruption'. Being separate from Police gave the programme street credibility and, and it looked to provide further support following the 'interruption', e.g. in providing sports, aiding employment etc

25. The Marcus Lipton Centre follows a similar methodology with some success.

26. There is a similar model being deployed in Nottinghamshire also, currently the only police force outside of London to have a dedicated knife crime team, which deploys youth workers in key areas at key times, and also runs programmes through activities such as football to engage young people.

2. Juvenis' Divert Programme

27. Juvenis work with Divert London (funded by Home Office and highlighted as good practice in the Serious Violence Strategy) to provide alternative options for those 18+ who enter into police custody, with a view to 'divert' them away from that lifestyle.

28. To date, Juvenis' youth workers have worked alongside mental health practitioners with 192 young adults in Police custody; achieving a re-offending rate of 7% (compared to London average of 28%), with over 80 people now in employment. Thereby reducing reoffending and improving wider outcomes.

3. Barnet FC's Community Trust – Underhill Kickz²⁰

29. The project realised 5000+ contact hours for young people over a 48 week period, realising a significant drop in crime and anti-social behaviour in the area surrounding the project during running times. This included a 53% reduction in theft of motor vehicles, a 39% reduction of theft from motor vehicles and a 39% reduction of criminal damage. And a 19% reduction of crime overall.

30. Potential savings estimated at over £3.5 million of the public's money was saved, with £273,255 saved as a direct cost to policing. Although there is no indication that those who attend the sessions are the cause of trouble around the community, it does signify that the schemes give young people an engaging, productive environment after school and takes them away from opportunities to take the wrong path.

4. No Knives Better Lives²¹

31. Part of the Scottish Government's *Safer Communities* Programme, this aims at prevention through education via two main strands:

- Communicating prevention messages to young people using
 - Social marketing to help change the narrative of knives and young people and demystify some of the discourse
 - Youth work methods (including training police to deliver sessions in schools)
 - Peer education – to help young people spread messages re: knife crime themselves and amongst their peer groups through various bodies
 - A 'roadshow' around schools with a play that explores choices around knife carrying, with 3 young people acting out a scenario in which they discuss the events leading to one of their friends stabbing someone else, and whether they could have done more to prevent this situation.

²⁰ See; <https://www.barnetfc.com/news/2012/august/figures-show-bfctt-has-positive-impact/>

²¹ See; <https://noknivesbetterlives.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FINAL-NKBL-Annual-Report-201718.pdf>

- Providing community support through police teams and local partners to deliver the above

32. Suggestion: Given that the £100m allocated in the Spring Statement is for 'police overtime', and there is a could this community style work be considered a part of that in improving 'prevention', alongside schemes such as Juvenis' above, which caters for 'intervention'?

5. Street Games Youth Crime Impact Programme

33. By providing community sporting interventions in targeted disadvantaged communities, the programme achieved positive results in bringing together young people and authorities such as PCSOs, and also in reducing anti-social behaviour.

34. This was achieved through ensuring youth work methodology was at the heart of the programme, and by providing long-term action. The youth work methodology reduced the social distance between coaches and individuals and garnered trust. The long-term action provided space and time for participants to come and go, with many not wishing to participate consistently at first, but increasingly introducing the programme into their normal routines and have been shown to have strong efficacy in rebuilding trust; and also some success in lowering anti-social behaviour in disadvantaged communities.²²

Conclusion

35. Knife Crime is a complex and multi-faceted issue for which a public-health approach is best placed to have success. However, for the greatest chances of success youth work (including universal and detached) needs to be incorporated and integrated to current approaches, especially to provide the positive rather than punitive approaches that often work where others fail. Evidence suggests that where this done outside of formal boundaries it will have the best success.

36. Youth workers themselves will also need support for workforce development, safe working practices and for recruitment in and from local communities.

37. Youth work is not a panacea to knife crime or the more structural factors that can contribute to it, but it is both a want and a need of young people today, and will be able to engage many of those that other services cannot, thus providing a key element in a true public health approach.

38. However, it has suffered; Services to young people have been cut drastically as responsibility for spend has been shifted onto local authorities with their spends reduced from £1.028bn in 2008/09 to £0.388bn in 2016/17 – a nominal reduction of 62.25% (without accounting for inflation). As a result of the 2010 spending review, many previously ring-fenced targeted funds were also abolished in 2010/11, and the previous Early Intervention Grant was incorporated into an ever-reducing base funding allowance.²³

²² See for example, the following which evidence a closer relationship between participants and PCSOs through engaged youth work methods;
https://network.streetgames.org/sites/default/files/Community%20Safety%20Evaluation%20Final%20Report_March2017.pdf

²³ APPG on Youth Affairs, *Youth Work Inquiry: Final Report* (2019). Available at; <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/APPG-Youth-Work-Inquiry-Final-Report-April-2019-ONLINE.pdf>

39. Universal services and detached youth work, which are especially conducive to providing responses to knife crime have been hit the hardest, and there is a clear link between the reduction of such services and rises of knife crime in particular areas.²⁴

40. We hope this brief response provides enough clarity that youth services are a working and key part of successful approaches to knife crime and community cohesion, but would be happy to elaborate upon this further if required.

June 2019

²⁴ <http://www.preventknifecrime.co.uk/news/>