

Written evidence submitted by Safer Communities Directorate, Scottish Government (BYC024)

Background to the inquiry

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

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

Call for written submissions

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

Written evidence is invited on, but not restricted to, the following Terms of Reference:

General

1. Are there any prominent trends in the statistics on a) who commits knife crime b) who are the victims of knife crime?
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?
3. Does the Government’s Serious Violence Strategy strike the right balance between preventative and punitive action?
4. Is treating knife crime as a public health issue an effective approach?
5. How is knife crime affecting a) public services b) health services c) schools d) emergency services?
6. Is judicial sentencing effective in a) serving as a deterrent and b) preventing reoffending?

Young people

7. How do differences in young people lives (e.g. geographic location, education, mental health, household income and socioeconomic background) make them more vulnerable to being involved in knife crime?
8. What motivates young people to carry knives?
9. Is fear a motivator for young people who carry knives? What causes this? What can be done to address it?
10. Is there any evidence that gang culture, social media and/or music impact young people’s involvement in knife crime?
11. Is there a correlation between young people being excluded, or not getting enough support from, education and involvement in knife crime?

Prevention

12. What could be done to make young people less likely to a) carry knives b) commit knife crime?
13. What support is available to identify and help young people at risk of getting involved in knife crime? Is it effective?
14. Are there examples of local initiatives which have worked well to prevent young people being victims or/and perpetrators of knife crime?
15. Are there particular groups of young people who are overlooked by current prevention strategies?

Intervention

16. Are there any examples of intervention schemes that have successfully rehabilitated young people who have been cautioned, reprimanded or sentenced due to knife crime, back into the community, education and/or employment?
17. What examples are there for whole community approaches to intervention?
18. Are there any examples of how police and communities have worked together to tackle knife crime?
19. How effective are positive role-models in deterring young people from gang and criminal activity?
20. Are the police's stop and search powers effective in promoting safety and/or putting young people off carrying knives?

Response:

1. Alongside tough enforcement, Scotland has adopted a public health approach to tackling violent crime, including tackling knife crime focusing on collaborative prevention and early intervention work. The public health approach looks at tackling the root causes of violence rather than just treating the symptoms – this aims to diagnose the problem, analyse the causes and develop and evaluate solutions that can be scaled up to help others. Tackling violence including knife crime is a key priority for this government. All of the available evidence shows a long-term reduction in violent crime in Scotland. I have attached a link below to our research paper on handling offensive weapons, and from there you can see the reductions around handling offensive weapons, and in particular knife crime.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-handling-offensive-weapons/>

2. Alongside our public health approach, tough enforcement plays a part of our violence prevention activity. In 2016, we increased the maximum penalties for possession of a knife from 4 to 5 years. To further understand violent crimes, we have commissioned some additional analysis and research to identify and better understand what violence remains within our communities. A study on serious assaults and attempted murder cases recorded by the police over the last decade, was published on 4th June - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-attempted-murder-serious-assault-2008-09-2017-18/>. This will help inform us further to focus where and for whom further interventions could be put in place to reduce the levels of violence even further.

3. Our approach has been primarily focused on children, young people and their families. Our partners, including schools, local authorities, police, health and the third sector, all continue to assist in the wider implementation of strategies to prevent and intervene early to support improved outcomes for children, young people and their families. This all contributes towards preventing and reducing the harm caused by violence and knife crime.

4. The Stop and Search Code of Practice for police officers ([Code of Practice on the use of Stop and Search](#)), was approved by the Scottish Parliament and came into force in May 2017. The Scottish Government believe that a wide-ranging approach to knife crime is required and while stop and search, alongside prevention and education, has a role to play in combating knife crime, there must be a balance between protecting the public and recognising the rights of individuals. There is no clear evidence to demonstrate the specific impact stop and search has on levels of violence, including knife crime. That is because it is difficult to isolate the impact of stop and search from other police tactics used to tackle violence.

5. Research from Wales shows a strong association between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and crime. Those with 4 or more ACEs are 14 times more likely to be a victim of violence in the past year and 15 times more likely to be a perpetrator of violence compared to people with no ACEs. In Scotland we take a strong focus on early and effective intervention. This is done in an effective way through a whole system approach to offending behaviour, based on multi-agency partnerships.

6. The Scottish Government fund a programme called No Knives Better Lives (NKBLs), which is co-ordinated by YouthLink Scotland. NKBL is a youth engagement programme which aims to reduce the incidence of violence and knife carrying amongst young people. NKBL is a primary prevention programme targeting young people aged 11-18 years, on the cusp of picking up a knife. The programme specifically addresses the issue of knife carrying but is informed by and complimentary to wider youth diversionary interventions and activities that aim to prevent anti-social behaviour and offending. Here is a link to the NKBL website, for additional information on the NKBLs work <https://noknivesbetterlives.com/>.

7. Given there has been so much media attention on knife crime in the rest of the UK, you may also be interested to know that NKBL recently launched their 'Taking Stock' project as part of their preventative activity. The negative images portrayed by the media on youth violence and knife crime could have unintentional negative consequences that suggest to young people they are unsafe and need to carry a knife.

8. The NKBLs 'Taking-Stock' project, which has been co-designed by young people who've been affected by knife crime, has created a number of 'stock images' that can be used by the media when reporting knife crime. The young people thought that the way knife crime is reported in the media can come across as scary for children and young people alike, and is not very realistic. So by creating and launching the 'Taking-Stock' project, they hope this will give those working in the media an insight into the NKBL prevention approach, as well as images they could use to incorporate into their media reporting on knife crime.

9. Another programme that the Scottish Government support through the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU) is 'Street and Arrow'. Street and Arrow aims to mentor people who have a history of violence who want to turn their life around but who need help to do so. The programme of Street and Arrow aims to back second chances supporting people to successfully turn their life around and contribute positively to their community and Scottish society. The social enterprise provides training, mentoring and paid employment to address and support the needs of people with a criminal record who have made a commitment to move away from their chaotic violent lifestyles. More information on the SVRU and 'Street and Arrow' can be found on the SVRU website, link attached below.

<http://actiononviolence.org/>

10. The publication of Scotland's Crime and Justice Survey in March 2019 - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-crime-justice-survey-2017-18-main-findings/> showed that violent crime has reduced by nearly half in the last decade. Similarly, emergency

hospital admissions for assault have reduced by 55% between 2008-09 and 2017-18. During the same period, the proportion of recorded serious assaults cleared up by the police has increased from 62% to 79%. Between 2006-07 and 2017-18 there has been a 65% decrease in crimes of handling offensive weapons (not used in crimes against the person).

11. However, we know violence including knife crime remains a very real problem in Scotland and the Scottish Government and authorities know we must continue to work hard to sustain this downward trend. One knife crime is one too many. There are still people in Scotland that experience and are affected by violence including knife crime. We know the impact of violence reaches way beyond the victim and perpetrator. This is why the Scottish Government is committed to continuing to develop and deliver innovative ways to reduce the levels of violence that still persists within our communities.

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