

## Written evidence submitted by Youth Strategy, Engagement and Schools Team (BYC033)

### **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?

In the last 12 months ending May 2019, compared to the previous 12 months ending May 2018, knife crime victims who suffered an injury dropped by 12%, and for those victims aged under 25 the reduction was 19%.

In these last two years the group that features most as both victims and accused are males aged 15-19.

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?

Geographic location can have a huge impact on a young persons vulnerability to knife crime. Typically cities see the largest number of knife related crimes, which may not be surprising due to the population dense urban areas. Areas of poverty may have higher levels of crime against the person, drug and alcohol issues and gang issues. Household income and socioeconomic background links in with this due to the housing situation of a young person. There is a clear link between young people from socioeconomically deprived areas being more vulnerable to being involved in knife crime, although this is linked to the vulnerability rather than the location. At the heart of this, and proven by science is the effects of untreated trauma on the developing brain.

Education is important to equipping young people with the life skills and confidence to be more resilient against becoming involved in knife crime. Mental health can and does affect a young person's vulnerability and susceptibility to knife crime. .

8. What motivates young people to carry knives?

There are many factors at play here. Many young people carry knives through fear, harbouring the common misconception that they will be safe carrying a knife for self-defence when in fact it statistically puts them at a higher risk of being a victim of knife crime, i.e. being stabbed with their own knife.

Other motivations may include the intention to use it in the commission of crime i.e. to cause harm or fear of harm such as committing a knife-point robbery.

Another motivator is peer pressure. This may come back down to a young person's environment or affiliation. If other young people in a geographic location are carrying knives, this can have a knock on effect in somewhat of a vicious cycle.

And, returning to the science, untreated trauma leaves the developing brain with an overactive amygdala, which is the part of the brain that is the threat response, meaning that many vulnerable young people are constantly jumpy, and sensing fear and danger everywhere they look.

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

A trauma informed approach can help professionals and everyone who comes into contact with vulnerable young people, in particular to help them build resilience. Addressing and discussing the issues with young people in safe environments is also beneficial and the Met is undertaking some of this work through its network of schools officers. Social media and the counter-narrative to violence could also play a role here.

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

There is no doubt that gang culture impacts on young people's involvement in knife crime. Gangs, or more specifically, illegal drugs markets and knife crime go hand in hand. Gangs are often concerned in the supply of drugs and with this comes tension between rival gangs. Gang members will routinely arm themselves with knives and/or other weapons either to attack others or in anticipation of being attacked themselves.

Music, media and social media can glamorise gangs, knife crime and serious violence. The genre of grime music can emit an aggressive or violent undertone whereby gang culture, knife crime and violence is normalised. Grime artists often defend this and supporters of the genre, of whom believe that the lyrics are simply telling the story or gritty reality of what some young people live through. On the other hand, the genre of drill music is much more concerning as it is defined by its dark, violent, nihilistic lyrical content. Drill music is a style of trap music that originated in the South Side of Chicago in the early 2010s. British gangs have since joined the drill scene, which explicitly threatens and antagonises rival gangs, which has led to killings from something as simple as an unmasked young person appearing in a gang's music video. This genre perpetuates gang culture and serious youth violence. Where mainstream media and radio do not promote this genre, it is accessed and promoted via social media platforms in what can be described as a growing underground scene.

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

Evidence shows us that there is definitely a correlation between exclusions and susceptibility to criminality, and/or exploitation, and the Department for Education have also recognised this. When young people are excluded from mainstream education, currently they are typically placed in pupil referral units (PRUs) or Alternative Provisions (APs). While those referred pupils may not have been

excluded for committing knife crime, it is typical that many of the pupils in PRUs and APs are there for bringing knives into school or similar. Inevitably, these pupils will begin to interact within the PRU/AP environment meaning that the knife carriers have a higher chance of influencing the pupils referred for non-knife related reasons. It is not uncommon for Gang nominals and habitual knife carriers to be placed in PRUs. Pupils that are excluded for behavioural issues may need more support in their schools. These same pupils may not associate with gang nominals or habitual knife carriers until being excluded to a PRU/AP. The DfE is very much aware that schools and academies should be more mindful and indeed accountable for who and why they exclude pupils.

- The Croydon Study of Adolescents looked at 60 at risk children, of whom 19 had been excluded from primary school, and all 19 went on to get a criminal conviction
- In Cardiff, 100% of County Lines referrals had been excluded from school at some time
- The 2017 Children in Custody Report said 90% of young people in custody had been excluded from school at some time.

## Prevention

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

Many things could be done and are indeed being done to make young people less likely to carry knives and commit knife crime. Investing in preventative services could be key to success. Educating young people around the dangers and consequences of knife crime is a step in prevention. This has to be a multi-agency approach starting with parents/carers and supported by communities, schools, and other key stakeholders in addition to the work of the police, to build resilience in our young people.

Prevention is at the core of everything Safer Schools Police Officers do in the MPS. Across London, they deliver knife crime classes to pupils and mobilise partners to educate these children and young people about the dangers and consequences of knife crime. Diversionary activities, giving young people a healthy sense of belonging also have value here, e.g. sports clubs and particularly working with the Premier League and its Kicks programme,, Volunteer Police Cadets, and DIVERT, a programme run in custody to help young people get the education and employment skills they want and need to secure work.

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

The Met has schools officers, and youth officers, who work in schools and the community. In addition there are designated ward officers, as well as every Met officer who comes into contact with the public. The Met recognises the importance of prevention, although far too frequently, we are called when the immediate need is enforcement. However, the Met is committed to working with partners and communities to ensure our young people can thrive and not become exploited and or enter into criminality.

The Met currently has over 400 safer schools and youth police officers, and are looking to increase this number to around 600.

14. Are there examples of local initiatives which have worked well to prevent young people being victims or/and perpetrators of knife crime?

There are good examples of local initiatives on every London Borough.

It should be noted that the MPS' primary youth engagement and diversion programme is the Volunteer Police Cadets. The VPC has approximately 4500 cadets volunteering regularly with police officers across London to support operational policing, crime prevention and community safety.

The VPC programme is richly diverse with 51% from BAME backgrounds and 52% being female. Cadets range in age from 10 - 19 years old, and currently 29% come from vulnerable backgrounds, including a significant proportion of cadets from extremely disadvantaged and poor socio-economic backgrounds. The VPC is the most representative part of the organisation in terms of BME and gender statistics so cadets have the look and feel of London. The cadet programme provides a cadre of young people who are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the Police Service. In a 2012 survey, whilst over 30% of cadets stated that they joined cadets because they wanted to be Police Officers, this figure rose to around 80% by the time they came to leave cadets.

- The cadets are taught about knife crime, dangers and consequences and champion the key police messages to peers.
- Cadets support operational policing by taking part in test purchase operations for the sale of knives to under 18's.
- The VPC undertakes social days of action in the community specifically to conduct weapons sweeps in public areas such as parks, estates and outside of school grounds.

15. Are there particular groups of young people who are overlooked by current prevention strategies? Current prevention strategies are inclusive of all groups of young people, but we know that we have to keep building trust in our communities to ensure all vulnerable young people have the chance to thrive and be included in programmes, whether run by the Met, or, more frequently, by local and community organisations.

### **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?

There are many good examples of schemes across London, some of which operate locally and others that operate Pan-London. Some of the successful and evidence based schemes are listed in the annex below:

The flagship programme for the Met is DIVERT and DIVERT Youth which operate in partnership with the third sector to work with young people who enter custody. DIVERT which is for 18-25 year olds gives participants a work coach, and currently 56 young people have started employment as a result of this intervention. The re-arrest / re-offending rate is 8%

17. What examples are there for whole community approaches to intervention?

As previously mentioned, the MPS utilises its volunteer police cadets, alongside police officers and members of the community to conduct weapons sweeps in public areas.

Not only do these weapons sweeps prove to be a success in recovering knives and weapons from the streets, but it also shows collaborative intervention from the community. This sends out an important message within the community that knives and weapons will not be tolerated on London's streets.

18. Are there any examples of how police and communities have worked together to tackle knife crime?

In addition to the above answer, schools and youth police officers regularly refer children and young people to grass-roots community clubs to divert them away from knife crime. In many cases, schools and youth officers will actively engage with these young people through diversion schemes to help build positive relations, confidence and trust. Many of these police and community collaborations include but are not limited to; boxing clubs, football (Kicks, Kickoff@3 etc.) athletics (Met-Track), Music (Music Vs Crime), other emergency services (LFB – LIFE) and many more.

19. How effective are positive role-models in deterring young people from gang and criminal activity?

Positive role models can play an important role in deterring young people from gang activity and general criminal activity, and are a key factor in building a young person's resilience. Safer schools officers, like teachers are themselves role models to the children and young people that they work with. Safer Schools Officers are encouraged to identify and collaborate with youth organisations that offer coaches and or long term mentors by exploring programmes that can be offered in their respective schools, PRUs/APs and colleges.

Role models in the form of ex-offenders (success stories) and motivational speakers are often identified and used by safer schools officers to engage with pupils in their schools during assemblies and lessons.

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

As mentioned at the start of this piece, the rates of knife crime are falling across London, but we are definitely not complacent in any way, as we want all our young people to thrive. We have increased our stop and search tactics and given that we have taken over 4200 weapons off the street in the last 12

months, it is clear this tactic is contributing towards making London a safer place, but this reduction is not down to one thing alone.

July 2019

## **ANNEX**

### **Trident Youth Engagement Seminar**

#### **Diversions and Interventions**

**Prince's Trust Achieve** programme provides an opportunity 13-16 year olds to try out new activities, boosting confidence and gaining a recognised Prince's Trust qualification.

Can be delivered in a variety of settings such as youth centres, pupil referral units, and at Prince's Trust centres in Kennington and Poplar.

**[www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk) - 0800 842 842**

**Mosaic** mentoring programme boosts aspirations and selfbelief, enhancing 'soft skills'- personality traits, communication, social graces, language, etc. – which are necessary for success at school and in the job market.

A team of mentors is assigned to one school and a group of up to 30 students. Each mentor will work with a smaller sub-group of 3-6 of those students. Mosaic mentoring takes place during the school day.

**Referral process: 02075668650 - [mosaic@bitc.org.uk](mailto:mosaic@bitc.org.uk) - [www.mosaicnetwork.co.uk](http://www.mosaicnetwork.co.uk)**

#### **London Gang Exit**

-To be affiliated with or involved in gangs.

-To be at significant risk of harm from gang activity, or a risk to themselves, or posing a risk of harm to others.

-To show some motivation to end their gang involvement and a willingness to cooperate with the London Gang Exit service.

#### **The young person will not be eligible:**

If they are not yet motivated to end their gang involvement.

If they are already receiving extensive support from the borough that they are residing in,

or from other statutory organisations, or if the services they require are already available locally to them.

All referrals need to be initially discussed with the London Gangs Service Referral Unit:  
**07850 282499 - [LondonGangExitReferral@londoncrc.org.uk](mailto:LondonGangExitReferral@londoncrc.org.uk) London Fire Brigade**

**LIFE (Local Intervention Fire Education)** is a week long course during term time for 14-17 year olds.

Runs in all 32 boroughs, in 8 venues across London

The course involves a range of activities that teach young people the role of a firefighters.

Gain an AQA accreditation during the programme.

Referral process: LIFE only considers applications submitted by education and other youth provisions. MUST have consent from the young person's parents or carers.

**Life4@london-fire.gov.uk**

**Firesetters** is for young people up to the age of 18, who demonstrate a fascination with fire, including playing with lights and matches, or who have set fires. Specialist team offers tailored, one-to-one fire safety education to the young person as well as advice for their parents or carers.

Referral process: Firesetters considers applications from schools, parents/carers, police, social services, YOT etc... MUST have consent from the young person's parents or carers.

**firesetters@london-fire.gov.uk - 020 8555**

### **1200(x30842) Safer London**

**Empower** reduces sexual violence and exploitation across London. We deliver intensive support and education

programmes for young people affected by sexual exploitation, combined with high quality

training and advice for the adults involved in their care.

Empower programme delivers group education prevention courses for young women and

young men, training for professionals who work with young people, workshops for parents

carers and intensive one to one support for young women who have been sexually exploited.

**Referral process: 0207 021 0301 - empower@saferlondon.org.uk**

**Aspire** programme provides support for 11-17 year olds at risk of gangs and crime and for

those who have become involved in offending.

Provide intensive mentoring support for young people to develop self confidence, self esteem, improve behaviours and skills which enables them to re-engage with education, successfully complete training and gain employment.

**Referral process: 0207 021 0301- aspire@saferlondon.org.uk**

### **St Giles Trust**

**SOS+** offers preventative work with young people at risk of gang crime. Ex-offender volunteers inform students on the dangers of getting caught up in gang crime - particularly with regard to weapons – de-glamorise the lifestyle, challenge myths and raise

awareness. Can provide one-to-one support to young people identified as being at risk.

**Expect Respect** supports teenage girls and young women at risk of sexual exploitation, violence against women and girls and gang-related criminality

**Referral process: 020 7708 8000 - info@stgilestrust.org.uk**