

# Youth Select Committee

## Oral evidence: Knife Crime

Friday 5 July 2019 (morning)

Watch the meeting

Members present: Rachel Ojo (Chair), Susuana Senghor (Vice-Chair), James Appiah, Chris Bakalis, Jodie Floyd, Jack Heald, Ewan Jago, Husnaa Mota, Charley Oliver-Holland, Bailey-Lee Robb and Theo Sergiou.

Questions 1-67

### Witnesses

[I:](#) Professor Fiona Brookman, Professor of Criminology and Director of the Centre for Criminology, University of South Wales, Leroy Logan MBE, former Superintendent, Metropolitan Police, and adviser to the Youth Violence Commission, and John Poyton, CEO, Redthread.

[II:](#) Victoria Atkins MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability, and Nick Hunt, Head of the Serious Violence Unit, Home Office.

[III:](#) Hannah Chetwynd, Risk Policy Officer, Children's Society, Nick Darvill, Programme Manager, DIVERT, Jonathan Toy, Operations Manager, Ben Kinsella Trust, and Rashid Bhayat, Founder, Positive Youth Foundation.

[IV:](#) Assistant Chief Constable Sarah Boycott, West Midlands Police, Superintendent Clive Davies, Surrey Police, Niven Rennie, Director, Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, and Edward Timpson CBE, author of the Timpson review of school exclusion.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Brookman, Leroy Logan and John Poyton.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning everyone and welcome to the Youth Select Committee. This is the first hearing of this year's inquiry into knife crime. First, I would like to introduce the Youth Select Committee. My name is Rachel Ojo and I am the Chair of the 2019 Youth Select Committee.

**Susuana Senghor:** Hi everyone. I'm Susuana. I am the Vice-Chair of this year's Youth Select Committee.

**Jack Heald:** Hi, I'm Jack.

**James Appiah:** Hi, I'm James.

**Ewan Jago:** I'm Ewan.

**Charley Oliver-Holland:** Hi, I'm Charley.

**Bailey-Lee Robb:** Hi, I'm Bailey-Lee.

**Chris Bakalis:** Hi, I'm Chris.

**Jodie Floyd:** Hi, I'm Jodie.

**Husnaa Mota:** Hi, I'm Husnaa.

**Theo Sergiou:** Hi, I'm Theo.

**Chair:** I thank you all for agreeing to give evidence to us today. We have quite a few questions to get through. Before that, can you briefly introduce yourselves?

**John Poyton:** Hi, I'm John Poyton, the chief exec of a youth charity called Redthread. Redthread is a youth work charity that specialises in working alongside health professionals and the NHS. We work in primary care alongside GPs, where we look to meet the needs of all adolescents in that vulnerable transition between childhood and adulthood. We also work in hospitals, in emergency departments and across the trauma units of hospitals meeting young people when they are victims of violence.

We look to support and empower those young people to break the cycle of violence that many young people are caught up in in their communities, by wrapping around support alongside the doctors and nurses who are delivering a clinical medical intervention. We aim to ensure that a social or youth work intervention comes alongside those young people when they are often most aware of their vulnerability—when they are in pain—and when they are looking to ask for help. That is what Redthread does.

**Leroy Logan:** I'm Leroy Logan. I am a retired police superintendent. I did 30 years in the Met police. Since retiring, and since 2016, I have been in

an advisory role for an all-party parliamentary commission on youth violence, which is still ongoing.

I am also chair of a youth engagement programme called Voyage Youth. That has been running from its early concept since 2001, so I am already engaged with young people—primarily in east London, but I am invariably working with young people, because I know education is key, as is how we assist those young people to empower themselves to buy into their environment, to change it and not become a victim of it.

**Professor Brookman:** I am Fiona Brookman. I am Professor of Criminology at the University of South Wales in Pontypridd, and some of my research has involved interviewing young people who have committed homicide. My area of expertise, really, is homicide and violence.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you all for introducing yourselves. I would like to present the first question to the panel, which is that last year saw the highest number of fatal stabbings since records began in 1946. Is this part of a long-term increase, or a short-term peak?

**Professor Brookman:** The homicide statistics definitely show peaks most recently. Having said that, if you take a long-term look at the whole of the homicide statistics, there have been some interesting peaks and troughs over time. Sure, homicide has definitely increased since 2015, but there was a long-term decline prior to that.

Compared with some of the other statistics that we will probably discuss as well—you know, the knife crime statistics in general—they do clearly show that there has been an increase, for sure, but what they do not show very clearly is precisely who is involved. For example, you cannot always disentangle the relationship between victims and offenders. You certainly cannot tell where these events are happening. There are lots of things about those statistics that do not reveal the nuances and the complexities of what is actually going on.

**Leroy Logan:** One of the drivers for setting up Voyage Youth in 2001 was issues around knife crime and gun crime in the late '90s, and their correlation with drugs. As a result of that, I have monitored it, realising that it will always go through peaks and troughs.

A key part of it, though, when it did peak in 2008, was that we had the assets in place in terms of community policing. I was superintendent of Hackney, and I had a full complement of Safer Neighbourhood teams, which is one sergeant, two constables and three police community support officers. I also had a full complement of Safer Schools officers. My opposite counterparts, safeguarding agencies, had relatively good complements to assist with the early intervention and prevention programmes. Unfortunately, that is not the case now, since 10 years of austerity. As a result of that, you now have an imbalance where those early interventions and preventions are a fraction of what they were, and as a result of that you get young people who would normally be



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

safeguarded at an earlier age who are really only getting the intervention when they are quite high-risk.

We also have social media, which has hijacked youth culture in a lot of ways—well, it has hijacked all of culture, really, but, significantly, issues that used to be contained 10 years ago are now fuelled by social media, so you've got an increase in this real and massive feuding. It is not necessarily gang-related, because primarily most violent crime is not gang-related. You now also have an increase in exclusions; it is the highest it has been, so as a result of that, if you exclude someone you might as well put a date on when they are going to get into the penal system. As a result of that, the alternative provision that should engage them if they are excluded has also been reduced.

To cut a long story short, the infrastructures are partially what they should be. We have an increase in crime and violence, and people grooming young people into negative peer groups that can result in gangs. I don't think this is just a peak; it is a crisis. I have been speaking about bringing in Cobra. I have been talking about Cobra since last year, because it is critical that we have cross-Ministry action on this, especially if we are really looking at bringing in a public health approach. We have a crisis, and we have to acknowledge it and get on with it.

**John Poyton:** Undoubtedly, the data points to a peak in homicides. Not to try to make it more depressing, but that shows us the tip of the iceberg. We really need to ensure that we look at the whole of the problem. Redthread works in hospitals, and it is important to recognise that doctors and the hospital system are so amazing—there are a lot of young people who come in with similar injuries to those where young people have unfortunately died, and they receive lifesaving medical treatment. When we are thinking about peaks and troughs, I suppose I am very interested in understanding the full complexity, and not just measuring it in a binary “they died or not” way or not being aware of it. Yes, the peak is here now. I don't know whether I can say it will continue into the long term. I think there is acknowledgement and acceptance of a public health approach, where all sectors of society need to acknowledge the problem. We need to understand the size of the problem, which includes the injuries that are happening—often numerous times before a homicide happens. Then we can start to find the solutions. To be positive, the Government's acknowledgement of the need for a wide health approach to tackling violence, where all of society has to take an equal responsibility for looking at the problem and finding solutions, should enable us to reduce the likelihood of this being a long-running peak.

**Q3 Jack Heald:** My question, once again, is to the entire panel. The serious violence strategy suggests that half of the increase in knife crime statistics is due to improved police recording, while the remainder is driven by drug-related criminal activity. What is your opinion on this?

**Leroy Logan:** I really think you can make statistics answer all sorts of questions. I will be real based on my 30 years' experience. There is a correlation between violence and drug dealing—there always has been. If



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

you look at the data on knife crime, you can see that less than half of that crime is due to gangs or gang-related violence. You have to say, “Well, is the strategy being used by the Home Office, local governments and the Mayor of London fit for purpose?” My real issue here is the narrative that is used on a regular basis: there is a war on violence and a war on drugs, which is true. We need to be tough on crime and on the causes of crime, but there is an overemphasis on punitive measures. I don’t think they recognise—again, I take a reference point of 18 years of running a youth educational programme with Voyage Youth—that young people say they are already scared in certain areas. There are also those who do not care whether they live or die, or whether anyone else lives or dies, because they think their shelf-life is below 20. If you have already got that mindset, you have a real toxic mixture of urban deprivation and social exclusion. We need to understand how that has moved on, and I truly believe that any strategy has to have young people at the heart of it. That is why I really welcome this intervention. As young people, you have the answers. That is why I work with young people on a regular basis, even in retirement. I do not see that in any of the strategies, really. I see a certain amount of briefing on the strategy, but nothing involving them from the beginning. So I hope that whatever comes out of here can influence the policy and practice of central and regional government.

That is one of the biggest issues, because unless you know the reality of what is going on with young people—the fact is that they are already scared. I remember in 2007 when I was deputy borough command in Hackney I brought in intervention programmes for young people who could not go directly to school on one bus. They would have to take several buses or get an adult to drop them or get a cab. Or the schools would put on some provision, because they would start to realise that we have a real issue. So if you already have that fear, you need to have proper engagement programmes and proper engagement so that young people in particular will feel safe.

Now, if you get rid of all your Safer Neighbourhood teams and your Safer Schools officers, or you leave just a fraction of them, how will you have those relationships? How will you have those connections? How do you connect? That is what I want to see in these strategies.

I know it takes time, but the important thing is that we want young people and the wider community to say, “Yes, you are trying. We feel safe. If I report a crime to you, it’s going to be investigated and there is no comeback on me or my relatives or friends. I can be safe in the understanding that there is a balance in society.” Unfortunately, those strategies with the Home Office do not recognise that, so they are not having the desired effect. I am not just being gloomy here. I really think we can pull this back, but it really needs significant action.

I will close with this. Through the Youth Violence Commission, our first recommendation was about developing a violence reduction unit, based on a visit that I and colleagues did in Glasgow on a couple of occasions, to ensure that we understand what that means. One of the key things was



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

that they reduced violence through reducing exclusions. I do not see that in the Home Office strategy—not to the extent we should.

Finally, it was about political independence. That means they may need to go to Holyrood or Police Scotland—the various authorities—to say, “You cannot do this, because you are countering the violence reduction unit’s strategy.” Yesterday, I saw a video from the Mayor that says “my violence reduction unit”, so it already has a political angle to it, so it does not have the independence it needs. I am hoping that it will, because that, I believe, is critical to ensuring that it can do its work. I hope they will be given the assets to get into working with young people on a sustainable and practical level.

**Professor Brookman:** To come back to the question of whether the strategy and the Government are correct to say that half of the increase is due to an increase in reporting and the other half is due to drugs, it is simply not possible to say that or know that. You would have to have some incredibly careful assessment of whether people are suddenly reporting more crime and the police are recording more crime of this nature. That definitely has not happened, to the best of my knowledge. The dark figure of crime, which is troubling for all of our statistics, has not been unravelled in this instance.

I agree with Leroy: you certainly cannot suggest that the other half—the rest of it, whatever that is, and we do not know what it is—is linked to the specific problem of drugs, so I think it is an inaccurate statement. I would also add to what Leroy said: all sorts of things about that strategy are troubling, not least the lack of attention—or any reference, actually—to structural disadvantage, austerity and all the things that have been taken out of communities for young people over a very long period of time, which have no doubt impacted. We know from years and years of research that those sorts of factors drive violent crime, and gangs flourish where society has been deprived of the things that young people need to flourish and grow.

**John Poyton:** It is hard for me to comment on the police reporting. What is important across the country is that we do not look at just one data source. There has been great recognition of the brilliant work out of Cardiff by Professor Jonathan Shepherd. If you look at all presentations for violence, between police reporting and hospital attendance to receive treatment for injuries, there is often as little as 23% overlap. Again, it is key that we do not try to come up with quick answers to the problem. We need to delve deep into understanding the size of the problem, rather than making assumptions too quickly before we have looked at that.

Professor Jonathan Shepherd’s Cardiff model has been ratified over the last number of years by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, and all emergency departments collect anonymised data, so that they can say, “This many people attended as a result of violence,” and share that in an anonymised way with the criminal justice partnership in their local area. That is key. That helps us start to understand a little better the size of the problem, and that it is not just about gangs or drugs.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

On whether it is gangs or drugs, we are only just starting to understand the problem the country is seeing with county lines and drugs. *The Guardian* reported just this morning on the brilliant report from the Children's Society. Again, we are getting to grips with this and starting to understand that it is not just an inner-city, urban problem, but a problem that affects the whole country. In that sense, it is hard for me to jump to conclusions without delving into the whole problem.

**Leroy Logan:** I understand about reporting, but there is a big issue with under-reporting. A lot of our young people and the wider public are not reporting, because they are scared of fallout—retribution—from other people. We will never have a full picture until we engage with the constituent group and, in particular, the wider public. That was an excuse 10 years ago, and they are still using it now.

The other thing is county lines. I was investigating county lines 14 years ago, so this is nothing new. They are just regurgitating it. I am not saying it is not an increasing factor, but it has been left for so long that it is now this massive problem. One of the significant gangs in Hackney that I had to deal with, the Holly Street boys—they were the main drug distributors in north London—were doing county lines then. I cleared up that gang. They were a gang—a real drugs gang—with an average age of about 17, and I dealt with them. They were doing county lines then, so this is not a new phenomenon. It has just been regurgitated.

Q4 **Charley Oliver-Holland:** Thank you. I have a question for Professor Brookman. You suggested in evidence that there are currently limitations in recorded crime. Are there any issues with how we record knife crime?

**Professor Brookman:** There are all sorts of problems with how it is recorded and presented back to us to make sense of. Different publications and organisations use different age groups, so it is difficult to compare statistics. Obviously, the accident and emergency data is hugely helpful, but it only reveals certain things. We do not always get access to data in a published format about young people who are not admitted. People always talk about the homicide statistics being the most reliable, because it is unusual not to record a homicide if it comes to light. However, as I said earlier, even those do not capture the kind of details that we need if we want to try to solve the problem.

I have been saying to the Government for a long time that, first, we need to improve the databases. Scotland has two databases, and when you put them together, they are considerably more comprehensive than the homicide index. That said, that is still not as far as we can go. We need a lot more qualitative data from talking to young people, and we can match that information up with the statistics, which will never be accurate, as Leroy says; you will never have all these kinds of crimes recorded, which is why it is difficult to look back at patterns and trends and know for sure.

Something very different could be happening now, in terms of reporting and recording. We know that, 10 years ago, more children had proven offences of knife crime than now. You can use the statistics in so many



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

different ways to present different arguments. They are hugely problematic in all sorts of ways.

Q5 **Husnaa Mota:** Are more young people carrying knives? If so, why?

**Professor Brookman:** Some statistics suggest that they are; others suggest that they are not. In the recent crime survey for England and Wales, fewer young people said that they were carrying knives than before. However, interestingly, they reported that they knew more people personally who were carrying knives, which is slightly contradictory. Other statistics suggest that there has definitely been an increase. That survey relies on self-reports from young people, and I am not sure that it captures some of the young people who we would think about from some of the most disadvantaged areas, who probably don't even get to take part in the survey.

**John Poyton:** We spoke to some people who Redthread teams are working with in hospitals, and I can give you some quotes. They said: "It's really easy and you've only got to go into your kitchen drawer and there is a knife there"; "It's just a trip to the kitchen then you can literally just grab it"; "You've just got to stick up for yourself because they come more than one...they come in like groups, so say if you got caught on your own you'll get stabbed or shot or anything"; "It's a shield, it's confidence as well...if you go out onto the street where anything can happen to you the knife gives you a sense of confidence."

We have young people feeding back some of this narrative, this fear, this worry. I think this goes to the narrative that Leroy mentioned earlier: when we focus on gangs and knives, and when we encourage or allow the press to lead with stories about youth violence and show big pictures of knives, there can be a really negative knock-on effect within our communities. Young people might not read the mainstream press, but I think it trickles down, and people pick up on this sort of trauma, which creates fear.

We know that in lots of different areas of crime—burglary and the like—the perception of safety is often different from the actual statistics. I think that more young people are picking up knives and carrying them because of this sense of fear; when they should be able to feel safe on their streets, they don't. We have to tackle that narrative, to try to ensure that our communities feel safer, so that young people do not feel like they need to carry a knife.

Sometimes the comms piece—the narrative put out there—is about longer prison sentences if you are caught carrying a knife. I think that we know that human beings do not necessarily work in that way. They don't think, "This is the consequence, so I will change my behaviour thusly"—particularly for young people, where the fear of not being safe on the streets will create different behaviour from a long-term, far-off-in-the-distance threat of a prison sentence. That is not dissimilar to the way that humans behave in regards to the speed limit and lots of different things like that.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

We need to ensure that there is a better, more supportive narrative, so that young people, their families and all members of the community feel safer. That, obviously, has to come with action about how we engage, from policing all the way through the community.

**Leroy Logan:** As I said, fear is a big issue. You need reassurance, engagement, support and decisive legal action if you report a crime. It has to be investigated. The commissioner even said a couple of weeks ago that two thirds of certain types of crimes are not being investigated fully. Why is that? They haven't got the officers, and cases are complex—social media has added so much to an investigation of various crimes. If you have fewer officers, a higher case load, more complex cases and work pressure, engaging with people is not a priority as it used to be. That is a big issue.

There was some work done with forces that cut their community officers; they saw that they had less engagement with the wider public, so they were showing the fear factor even more. We could go into this paralysis of analysis, as Martin Luther King used to say about statistics, but we have to strip the issues right down: how do we turn this around? We need to recognise the level of trauma out there—adverse childhood experiences, and not necessarily on the streets, but in the home. There has to be a massive piece of work on that, to understand the extent of the problem. I'm not even talking about mental health—that is another issue—but the toxic stress that builds up in a lot of encounters that normally would not result in fight, flight or freeze, but now do in a way that they never used to.

We need to understand the backdrop of fear and retaliation, and the fact that safeguarding agencies are not doing what they are supposed to. It is now really showing that police services are not doing what they are supposed to do. In fact, you may have read quite recently—this morning, I think—that seven commissioners have said that the police service is at a very low level of being fit for purpose, because of the assets not connecting, and not being able to investigate. During my time, I remember that the solving of murders was 80% or 90%; now, it is half that, depending on where you look. It sends the signal to certain people that you have a one-in-two chance of getting away with a stabbing or a shooting. The victim says, "If someone stabs or shoots me, they will have a 50-50 chance of getting off." For me, the level of non-reporting is impacting. You have to engage to know what the problem is.

One last thing—I know I am going on a bit—is the number of analysts being cut from the police service. I used to have 20 analysts just in the borough of Hackney. Now, with these tri-boroughs, basic command units or cluster boroughs, it is half that. That means that you do not have the proactivity that you should, because you don't have the assets to deploy, and the intelligence information to ensure that the assets are in the right place, at the right time. You may have your violent crime taskforce and various other units, but you used to have borough proactivity. Now, it is firefighting-type policing.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Professor Brookman:** There are some things that we could do to improve that. In a homicide investigation, you normally have a family liaison officer, which is an absolutely fantastic role that, undoubtedly, helps to bring information into the inquiry. I think that role could be used in many more sorts of investigations, not just the lethal encounters, and we could build up relationships between police and communities, which in some parts of our cities have, frankly, broken down. That would be really useful.

Also, coming back to the issue of why young people potentially carry knives, we mentioned the media; I think that is a huge problem. Also, there is some really interesting research about what we call adversary effects—the idea that you start imagining what the other young people out there might be doing. If you imagine that more young people are carrying knives, then you yourself are more likely to arm yourself, and you are potentially more likely to use a knife. It is a kind of “kill or be killed” mentality, and there is some really good evidence that that might be happening in some parts.

There is lots of work that could be done around qualitative information about what young people’s lives are really like in different communities, which would help us to come up with more impressive solutions. There is also great research about when people decide not to engage in violence when they are about to. We call it restraining judgments. That is hardly ever talked about. All we ever talk about are the acts of violence; we don’t talk about those occasions when people make decisions not to be violent. Again, I think there are some things that we can learn about that, and perhaps we can roll out some ideas to lots of our young people about how you make those judgments in those tiny moments when violence happens. It’s over in nanoseconds; those decisions are made right there and then, and we can perhaps think of ways to help young people to make different decisions.

**Leroy Logan:** Especially if it’s a small thing that happens and they have that little encounter. You know, in the days when the likes of John and myself might have had a bit of a disagreement, I would like to think we would have resolved it without going to violence, but if we did it, would have been between us and whoever happened to be in the area. Now, social media has it, so the whole world—in theory—can know it. If your peer group are tapped into that, I might wake up in the morning, having said, “John gave me a beating”, and everyone is calling me all sorts of names—“You’re a wimp, you’re this, you’re that. You’re gonna let him deal with you like that? Something has to change—you can’t carry on like that.” Now, if your identity is in that peer group, you think, “Well, I’ve got to deal with this, to get my respect back.” That sort of respect culture is massive. It fuels things. Minor disputes would normally be resolved, but now are a big thing, and they can have a knock-on effect, potentially for years.

**Chair:** Thank you. Could I please urge the witnesses to remain brief in their answers, as we have many more questions and themes to cover?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

We will go on to the next question.

**Q6 Theo Sergiou:** Yes, please. The use of the word “gang” has already been mentioned. May I ask the panel if they believe it is used accurately and defined consistently when looking at youth violence? How much can knife crime be attributed to gang-related violence?

**Leroy Logan:** The definition of a gang is a very, very vague definition. It is three or more people who are involved in some sort of criminal endeavour, and they can be identified with their clothing, or their types of tattoos—little trig points; they graffiti around that area, on postcodes and everything. However, I have already said that gangs are an issue but they don’t account for all of the crime; in fact, it is less than half in certain areas.

Again, this is where the narrative has been changed. With the 2011 riots, the response of the coalition Government and the Mayor at the time was “violence equals gangs”, and that narrative has continued. It has been finally shown—evidentially—not to be the case, but it has created this perception that gangs and knives are connected.

Knives, mainly, are the weapon of choice, even with gangs, because of stiffer penalties for possession of a firearm. The knife is easily accessible and easily concealable; it could be stashed anywhere. As a result, we have to understand that knives are just an everyday form of dealing with feuds. They never used to be.

What you have to really think about now is what is creating the mindset that a young person in particular will think it is cool or safer—it could be through fear—to pick up that knife, walk with that knife and, more importantly, use it. That piece of work has not really been done. We are trying to do that with the Youth Violence Commission, but until we understand that, we cannot say, “Is knife crime really going to reduce to the level that it used to be?” We have to get to young people and work with them, whether that is educational programmes or leadership programmes—whatever it is. It is about those intervention preventions at an early age and further upstream. We are doing it at year 9, and I think it has to be at primary school. I was involved in the Damilola Taylor investigation. I saw primary school youngsters playing with plastic knives even then, and that was 2000. It has not happened overnight. It is something that has grown to a scale that we need to deal with it, but we need to know the mindset of why they want to pick up that knife and, more importantly, use it.

**John Poyton:** “Gangs” is not really very helpful. It is a bit of a red herring, if we try and use it as a way of putting the problem in the corner by labelling it as gangs. I do not think that will help us get to the bottom of how to make our communities safer for young people and everyone else. It might be used by academics in a certain way, but I think it can be used lazily to just end up labelling groups of young people. If we try to then find solutions for young people by criminalising their peer group or



being negative about young people and their peer groups, that is a terrible way to go.

Focusing too much on gangs is not a good solution. If we ask young people whether they are in a gang, they are undoubtedly going to say no because they know there are criminal descriptions with that. We want young people to be part of finding solutions, so let us not use labels like "gangs". We obviously have to be aware of county lines and organised crime. There is a reality to that, but it should not be used loosely or broadly as an umbrella to try to answer the problem. The country will not get behind finding solutions for society or their local community if we label it as gangs, because it means that sections of society can then say, "That is a problem over there. It does not have anything to do with me."

Although county lines mean that we have had to broaden our view of the problem, it does mean that parts of society cannot now say, "That is just an urban street gangs problem over there. I don't have to deal with it." County lines mean that people in the shires and rural areas have to say, "What do we do as a community together to solve this problem and ensure that our young people do not become victims?" Although it makes the problem look bigger, more complex, more nuanced and wider than just giving it a single label, that helps us then to find the solutions that can be rolled out across every community in our society.

**Q7 Bailey-Lee Robb:** Based on your work, what are the most commonly given reasons by young people for carrying a knife or committing knife crime? Based on your work, do you believe that the majority of those young people who carry knives are prepared to use them?

**John Poyton:** Redthread, in partnership with Barnardo's, runs the all-party parliamentary group on knife crime. We ran a young people's session a while ago. I gave you a couple of quotes directly from young people earlier, but let me just read a couple of others, because the young people are able to share their experience more powerfully than I can. One young person said: "Carrying something and actually using it are two different things. They might be in the situation where their mental state isn't the best and they feel like this is the only way I'm going to be able to survive to see tomorrow." Another young person said: "You know they are not carrying the knife to use it. Just carrying it is a confidence thing. It boosts you up and I feel like, 'All right, I'm safe, because if someone comes at me, I have this.'"

Young people are not carrying knives specifically to go out to perpetrate violence and murder. Again, if we make that assumption, we are writing off an entire section of our youth community, which would be a terrible disservice to future generations.

**Leroy Logan:** As I said before, it is recognising how youth culture, in particular through social media, is getting more and more pressurised into believing that the knife is the solution—that it gives security and a sense of, "If they come at me, I'll get in there first." Obviously, it is not commonplace—it is in certain areas, some of which are crime-infested—



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

but it is the influence now. Again, we do not know the extent of it with social media and how that peer-to-peer pressure works.

Again, in Voyage, we go through all these things in that leadership programme. We say to them, "Okay. How do they come at you?" There are some parents actually telling their children to carry knives. There are some parents who are saying, "Well, listen, if they come at you, get at knife and leave it there." It is amazing that some guardians—some adults—are telling young people to do that.

When you have that sort of influence, much less peer-to-peer influence, it is a massive problem in certain deprived areas. They are deprived in terms of proper role models. I am not just saying that people being poor means there is crime. No; I am talking about clear discipline and boundaries. So there is fear and peer pressure.

Unfortunately, there are some young people—on the streets they call them "haters"—who do not care if they live or die or if anyone lives or dies. They are untouchable, so they think, and they go round intimidating people and influencing others to go and stab someone. Some of you may have heard of a mother pushing a three-year-old baby and a young man wanted her phone. She said no and he still stabbed her. A lot of that thing goes on as part of initiation: "Go and rob that person. Take the knife. If they don't give you what you want, you stab them"—not to kill them, but to as they say wet them.

Then there is this points system. Similar to the gangs matrix that the Met police have brought in where there is a points system on risk—red, amber and green—there is a points system on the streets that the youngsters tell others, "Okay, you want to be in our negative peer group or our gang? Right. So many points for a stabbing. So many points for running drugs. So many points for gang rapes." It is that calculated now. They use that to get some reputation: "Right, I've got so many points." It is crazy, but those are the sorts of issues that, again, we need to find out the extent of.

**Q8 Susuana Senghor:** My question is directed at John. Can you describe any patterns that you have noticed in regards to the knife crime victims that Redthread has worked with over the last few years in terms of numbers, age or background?

**John Poyton:** Redthread has been running our work in hospitals in south-east London for just short of 15 years, in major trauma centres in London in the last five years, and in the midlands over the last year. I have looked with the team at just the last two years across three of the major trauma centres for London—the north-west, the south-west and the south-east.

What we know is that violence and presentations at the hospital for violence have been consistently high over the last number of years. That is why we set the programme up, in partnership with King's College Hospital, back in 2005-06.

In the last couple of years—comparing '17-18 with '18-19—it is interesting to see that, in terms of ages, it goes up and down but there have been



slight rises. There was a 27% rise in the number of 12-year-olds presenting to hospitals, but there was also a 41% rise in 24-year-olds coming to hospitals. That shows that we need to ensure that we are meeting young people in crisis. When we set up in St Mary's Hospital, which was Redthread's second major trauma centre project six years ago, by the time a young person came in with a serious weapon-related injury, they had already come in on average four to five times to the A&E department with a previous violence-related injury. That shows that we need to ensure we meet young people at the earliest point. In terms of the health system, major trauma centres are where the most severely injured young people are going to come, but we can meet young people earlier, when the injuries are often less and a weapon hasn't been used, in local A&E departments, primary care and GP services, where the community to come for any reason. There needs to be a way of looking at how we do that.

In terms of the method of injury, just comparing the last couple of years—as I say, this is only looking at young people presenting in three major trauma centres, so it doesn't show a trend; it is just a comparison of two years—interestingly, we saw a rise in the number of presentations for gun violence between '17-18 and '18-19 of 48%. The Redthread teams were working with young people who presented as victims of gunshots.

Obviously, guns and knives are weapons, but it is important that we don't just get caught up in just talking about knife crime. Redthread jointly runs the APPG on knife crime because it gets us talking, but it is very important that we don't just look at it in a silo and say, "It's a knife problem." Gun violence is part of that. In the last two years, there was an 87% rise in the number of young people presenting to those three hospitals who had been assaulted and a body part had been used as a weapon—punched, kicked, headbutted and the like. That was the difference between 106 young people and 198 young people—a considerable rise. Because of the focus on knives and weapons, sometimes those presentations are missed because it doesn't seem as severe. My concern is that violence escalates, so we need to meet young people when they have been assaulted—when they have been punched or kicked. As Leroy pointed out, sex is often used as a weapon. We need to ensure that we look at all violence, not just weapon-related injuries. I hope that is helpful. I am very happy to share more, but I am trying to keep my answers brief.

**Chair:** Let us move on to the next question, which Chris will be asking.

Q9 **Chris Bakalis:** My question is directed at John. What percentage of the young people Redthread works with are helped by the intervention techniques in the long term? What percentage fall back into the old cycle?

**John Poyton:** For young people who present at hospital, the rate of engagement with the Redthread team is really high—particularly for this very vulnerable, high-risk group of young people. That is because coming to the hospital when you are in pain, scared and have gone through a traumatic event creates a really powerful teachable moment, where you are aware of the need to receive support. A much higher percentage of



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

young people will then engage with the support that is offered. The key is that the young people are asking for help. Redthread is there when the young person reaches out and ask for help. It is not about our forcing an intervention on them; it is very much about empowering the young person to create positive behaviour change for their future and breaking that cycle of violence.

Lots of my staff who have come from backgrounds in detached youth work on the streets and engaging young people in a very informal way will often reflect on their work in the hospital, in the emergency department or up on the trauma wards. They recognise that, while they have been able to have great rapport-building work when they have worked on the streets, in youth clubs or other settings, it has taken them a year or two or three to build the level of trust and rapport with young people that it takes them a matter of hours or days to build up in the hospital setting. That is really powerful.

In terms of long-term, sustained change, Redthread is not trying to be the single intervention over the long term. Redthread's model is about making that teachable moment to be a teachable moment for all professionals and the entire community. It is about saying, "This is what we can do to immediately wrap around this young person in this moment and create a safety plan to ensure that this doesn't happen again." But we then need to look at all the assets in the community that that young person is going to go home to and ensure that we create a safety plan that is about long-term, sustainable change.

That means, if that young person already has a trusted key worker, whether it is their youth worker, their youth offending officer, their CAMHS practitioner, their teacher or a local youth worker, it is about saying, "How do we now wrap around and support that community professional who this young person already trusts?" It is about scaffolding that teachable moment out into the community. That is what creates long-term, sustainable change for young people.

When we look at all the young people who come through hospitals, the percentages always change, but you will have young people who are victims, who have not been involved in any criminality and are not known to any other services, and you have young people who are perhaps victims and also have been perpetrators. It is about trying to work out what we can do for those young people. Some young people are known to services and lots of different agencies, but they refuse to engage with them for some reason. The teachable moment is a great way to re-engage them, or engage them for the first time, with all those other agencies.

Some young people are already engaged, and that is where we ensure that we scaffold that teachable moment out. Some young people have gone below the radar and have not picked up before, and there it is about saying to these young people, "This is not just about Redthread. We are here to support you in the here and now, but when you go back home, what is out there and how can we support you so that you can reach out



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

and ask for help from everyone else before you get to another crisis point?”

**Chair:** Thank you. We will move on to the next question, which will be asked by Jodie.

**Q10 Jodie Floyd:** My question is also for John. Your written evidence indicates that you wish to see greater clarification of the additional support promised in the NHS’s long-term plan for vulnerable children and young people. What would you like to see in that additional support?

**John Poyton:** In terms of a health approach to tackling violence, such as Redthread’s model for developing hospital-based violence intervention programmes, what has been great in the past few years is that criminal justice colleagues and Departments in Government have recognised that they cannot arrest their way out of the problem, and that there should not be a criminal justice solution in isolation. What has been brilliant on the ground has been that doctors and nurses recognise that if they just medically treat patients, they will see that same young person or a young person from the opposing group coming back the next day, the next week or the next month, and it creates a vicious cycle of violence.

It has been interesting to look at how the NHS, or the country’s health system, gets involved on a national policy level in thinking about where it is part of the solution. The NHS long-term plan is interesting, in that it has included elements around the young people who we talking about today, who are caught up as victims and perpetrators of violence, but there are really only two paragraphs on that in the whole 115-page document. One paragraph is in the criminal justice appendix. There is not very much about young people, and I think there should be pages about the opportunity for the NHS to support high-risk, vulnerable young people, but if there are just a couple of paragraphs on pages 118 and 51, then okay, that is great; that gives us some really great hooks to look at how the NHS can get involved over the next 10 or so years.

I could read the criminal justice appendix to you, because it is very short. That is the hook for how we think that the NHS should come alongside criminal justice and create solutions for the future. The long-term plan says, “We will invest in additional support for the most vulnerable children and young people in, or at risk of being in, contact with the youth justice system. The development of a high-harm, high risk, high vulnerability trauma-informed service will provide consultation, advice, assessment, treatment and transition into integrated services. This will provide support to, and help to address the complex and challenging needs of vulnerable children and young people.”

The NHS does not yet have those integrated services or trauma-informed services for our most high-harm, high-risk and highly vulnerable young people, but there are models of good practice out there that need to be brought together to develop integrated services that could be rolled-out across the entire NHS network.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

The NHS has an amazing network, which means that best practice can be relatively easily scaled at a national level, for example. Redthread's hospital-based intervention, or our primary care/well centre/GP clinical intervention, are only two very small pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, but they are two examples that say that there are great opportunities for trauma-informed and health-informed youth workers to work shoulder to shoulder with amazing doctors and nurses in our NHS system, both in hospitals, which are anchor institutions for our communities, and primary care. Those are some of the things that need to happen and that the NHS needs to start developing.

There is a great NHS England conference coming up in a couple of weeks to start to look at some of those things. As it obviously has to divide its budget up and work in certain ways, the NHS can become the most siloed system or service. That often does our young people a disservice. Things are seen through a mental health lens or an emergency care lens. Young people deserve to have an adolescent focus. That should cut across all of the siloes. It should not be just about mental health, or just about substance misuse or sexual health; young people should have an NHS that is fit for purpose for them. That is about joining up the brilliant practice in mental health with sexual health, primary care and emergency medicine, and saying, "This is the integrated, trauma-informed service that we think young people deserve, whether they are in London or Blackpool." Hopefully that is helpful; I was not as concise as I could have been.

- Q11 **Chair:** Thank you. Unfortunately, we are out of time, so I will bring this session to a close. Thank you all for coming and presenting your evidence to the Committee; we will take it on board.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Victoria Atkins and Nick Hunt.

**Rachel Ojo:** Good morning everyone and welcome to the Youth Select Committee. This is our second session on knife crime. First, I would like to introduce myself and the Youth Select Committee. My name is Rachel Ojo and I am the Chair of the Youth Select Committee for 2019.

**Susuana Senghor:** Hi, I'm Susuana and I am the Vice Chair for this Committee.

**Jack Heald:** Hi, I'm Jack.

**James Appiah:** Hi, I'm James.

**Ewan Jago:** Hi, I'm Ewan.

**Charley Oliver-Holland:** Hi, I'm Charley.

**Bailey-Lee Robb:** Hi, I'm Bailey-Lee.

**Chris Bakalis:** Hi, I'm Chris.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Jodie Floyd:** Hi, I'm Jodie.

**Husnaa Mota:** Hi, I'm Husnaa.

**Theo Sergiou:** Hi, I'm Theo.

**Victoria Atkins:** Hello. I'm Victoria.

Q12 **Rachel Ojo:** We have a few questions to get through, but first I would like to ask both members of the panel to introduce themselves and the work they have been doing regarding knife crime.

**Victoria Atkins:** My name is Victoria Atkins. I am the Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability. I am also Minister for Women. The range of responsibilities under my Home Office portfolio include serious violence and knife crime, but also child sexual exploitation, sexual offences, violence against women and girls, modern day slavery and pretty much every crime you can think of—some of the darkest aspects of humanity, is the shorthand I use for it.

I have the great pleasure of being supported by Nick Hunt in the Home Office; he will introduce himself in a moment. The focus of my work on serious violence, as well as knife crime, has been based on the serious violence strategy that we published last year, but is what we call a living document. It is evolving; we are creating actions arising out of the thinking behind that strategy, but also being aware that this is a very fast-moving mode of criminality, and so we have to be very fast-footed in the way in which we deal with it.

**Nick Hunt:** My name is Nick Hunt. I am the head of the serious violence unit in the Home Office. I am responsible for the delivery of the serious violence strategy and I put advice to Minister Atkins and the Home Secretary on issues such as knife crime, gangs, gun crime, county lines and the various early intervention programmes we've put in place.

Q13 **Rachel Ojo:** Thank you for introducing yourselves and for agreeing to offer us some evidence. I will start with the first question, which is to both of you. How is the serious violence strategy different from the previous Government policy in combatting knife crime? What do you hope to achieve through the serious violence strategy that has not been achieved by the previous policy?

**Victoria Atkins:** Thank you to the Committee for tackling this really important subject. I am conscious that you have one subject a year that you tackle, so thank you for this.

For us, the serious violence strategy was an incredibly in-depth piece of work, run by academics, researchers and officials within the Home Office, but seeking advice from across the range of partners who work in the field of tackling serious violence, including law enforcement, third sector and civil society partners. As I said, although the strategy was published in April last year we absolutely view it as a living document.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

For example, in the last year, since the strategy was published, we have legislated on the Offensive Weapons Act, which we said we were going to do in the strategy. As part of that Act, we included knife crime prevention orders, because at the very end of last summer, the police said to us, "Look, we think there's a gap in the provision of wrap-around services for young people, in particular, who are at risk of carrying a knife or being victims of knife crime, and we don't have the power in law to provide these wrap-around services." We legislated very quickly to get the pilot projects of these knife crime prevention orders into law; they will start being piloted in London this autumn. That is just one example.

Since the strategy was published, the Home Secretary lobbied the Chancellor for a significant investment in early intervention projects. In a couple of months we have turned around a £200 million fund—the Youth Endowment Fund—that will be locked into the next 10 years. It will mean that an arms-length body—an independent charity, in fact—can use this money to invest in youth intervention services, which will be very significant.

We have just announced in the spring statement a further £100 million: again, because the police asked us. They needed help with what is called surge policing to target those hotspot areas of serious violence, and we are in the process of announcing the outcomes of how that fund will be spent.

**Nick Hunt:** To add to what the Minister has said, the strategy is very much a multi-agency approach with far greater emphasis on early intervention and prevention than previous policies in this area. We are building on it through the Youth Endowment Fund that the Minister mentioned. It is very much a long-term strategy that we are putting out for the next 10 years, which will be supported by the new legal duty that we have been consulting on.

**Chair:** Thank you. The second question will be asked by Chris.

Q14 **Chris Bakalis:** So far, our online survey has found that half of people under 21 think that the Government's approach to tackling knife crime is ineffective. How will you build young people's confidence for the actions set out in the strategy?

**Victoria Atkins:** We have to recognise that there cannot just be a national response to serious violence. There has to be a regional and a local response. One of the things that we are acting on is to ensure that all the local agencies that can make a huge difference to a young person's life, whether they become involved in criminality or are victims of knife crime, talk to one another. If I had £1 for every time people ask me about how we can get agencies to collaborate and share data better, we would have even more money for the Youth Endowment Fund. This is precisely why we have consulted on the public health legal duty. When we analyse the response, if it comes to the conclusions that we suspect they will, it will mean that we require the health service, schools, the police and local authorities to share data about vulnerable people so that the various



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

agencies can intervene at an earlier stage. We keep coming back to the fact that yes, of course there must be a national strategy, and there is one, to give us a framework, but it is also about what happens on the ground, which is why the public health duty will be so important.

**Nick Hunt:** The #knifefree campaign is very much focused on supporting young people and dispelling some of the myths about knife carrying to get over the point about having a lack of confidence in what is going on. The Committee has seen #knifefree, which has had six million views. The website had half a million hits. It is about encouraging young people to think about the fact that you should not carry a knife and the problems if you do carry a knife. It promotes positive activities in terms of looking at different ways to get involved in the community, in schools and with other groups of young people. A lot of work has gone into #knifefree. It has been promoted across a number of different social media channels, including YouTube channels such as SBTU, as well as Spotify and a range of video demand services, to try and target young people and promote that message of assurance about knife carrying.

**Victoria Atkins:** We are also conscious that during the summer holidays people are free and not going to school. There is a certain amount of free time and we know that that can have an impact in terms of violence, so this summer we have sent out letters to 20,000 PHSE teachers across the country to help them, if they feel it is right and appropriate, to teach their students about the dangers of carrying a knife.

**Chair:** Thank you. The next question will be asked by Bailey-Lee.

Q15 **Bailey-Lee Robb:** How will the Government's proposed public health approach boost young people's confidence that the Government are actually doing something?

**Victoria Atkins:** The point of the public health duty, as I say, is so that we can set up the national framework, but it is about how it works on the ground. London already has what is called a violence reduction unit where the police have a taskforce that has 300 dedicated officers going around London to the hotspot areas, but that is just one element. They also have much more data sharing with, as I say, health, schools and so on. That suits London, but it might be very different from what is required in, let us say, the west midlands. The West Midlands police are in the process of setting up their violence reduction unit. We are very conscious that different parts of the country have different populations and different activities in terms of county lines and other gang hostilities. There will be different approaches for different parts of the country; we do not want a one-size-fits-all approach.

One thing that we are doing among all the looking at the legal duty and so on is holding events across the country whereby we are bringing all the agencies together so that they are building the relationships that they frankly should have, while we are thinking about whether to legislate on this. As I have said, it is about joining up all these agencies that can do so much to help young people and do a great amount to help young people,

but they may be able to use their data in a slightly more savvy way so that we can perhaps spot problems as they emerge.

**Nick Hunt:** As the Minister says, the public health approach is about agencies coming together as they should already have been doing, frankly, and getting them talking together to plan, develop their problem profile and consider how they are going to respond to that in the sense of what they actually need to do in terms of local intervention and local hotspot policing—in many ways like what Scotland has been doing for a number of years—and using those insights to really boost community confidence and young people’s confidence as well.

**Victoria Atkins:** In the strategy itself, a great deal of work has gone into what are called risk factors—there are certain risk factors and certain protective factors—which may be an indicator as to whether a child is at risk of serious violence. One of the strongest indicators of involvement in serious violence, either as a victim or as a perpetrator in later life, is violence at home or abuse at home. That is one of the many, many reasons why we are so keen to bring forward the domestic abuse Bill—because that will help families not just in the immediate term, but in the longer term.

**Chair:** Thank you. I call Jack to ask the next question.

Q16 **Jack Heald:** Evidence that we have received indicates that many of the risk factors that commonly contribute to youth violence, such as poverty, domestic abuse, which you have mentioned, and school exclusions, are increasing. Are the Government committed to reducing each of those factors, and if so, how?

**Victoria Atkins:** If you look at the 22 risk factors, it is clearly a comprehensive list. As I have said, domestic abuse is, if you work back, the most prevalent factor in a child being in contact with social services. Contact with social services is a very, very high indicator of the child being in some form of alternative provision for education, and there are commonalities between a child being in alternative provision for education and their involvement, as either a victim or a perpetrator, in serious violence. There is a certain sort of chain of events.

We are doing an enormous amount of work on what are called adverse childhood experiences. We have given some money to the Welsh police—the various forces in Wales—to do some exploratory work on adverse childhood experiences. Those can include, for example, having a parent in prison. Some 86,000 children have a carer or parent who is in prison. There are 2 million victims of domestic abuse each year, and there will be many children living in those households as well. These are all factors that we are trying to tackle, not just in the context of serious violence but because I want domestic abuse to stop, in and of itself. So yes, a great deal of work is going on with regard to what we call ACEs.

**Nick Hunt:** As the Minister says, in relation to adverse childhood experiences, we are putting a lot of money into what is being done in



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wales. I think we have put about £8 million into supporting that programme. It involves all the Welsh police forces, but also Public Health Wales and a range of local authorities in Wales; and the Welsh Government will be supporting it as well. So there is a lot of work going on to do with this.

In the strategy itself, we identified, I think, 22 different risk factors, and for each of those risk factors there is a reverse protective factor, so it's quite a complex landscape. That is why, to go back to a previous answer, the public health approach of bringing different agencies together to tackle the causes of violent crime is one that we are definitely stressing in the strategy that we have put out there.

**Victoria Atkins:** We are very conscious that if a child or young person has several of the risk factors, that does not mean that they will inevitably be drawn towards violence. We are not in the business of condemning children to that path, because most of the risk factors are not within their control. It is incredibly complex. That is why, through the Youth Endowment Fund, there will be a huge evaluation of the projects that we expect the fund to be looking into in terms of how each project does and whether it achieves a reduction in serious violence and improves the life chances of the children involved.

**Chair:** Thank you. Charley Oliver-Holland will ask the next question.

Q17 **Charley Oliver-Holland:** We have received evidence calling for greater investment in youth services to help to tackle knife crime. When will we see the benefit of investment in youth services such as, as you mentioned, the Youth Endowment Fund?

**Victoria Atkins:** There is a whole programme of projects that we are funding through targeted funding. We have, for example, the trusted relationships fund that tries to help those children who—when I try to explain their work, I explain it as children who have been let down by pretty much every adult in their life. Having met some of the children who are going to be helped by the charities that have won that funding, they are the most vulnerable young people you can imagine—they really have been let down by pretty much everyone. The purpose of the fund is to help those charities and other organisations that can work with those young people and give them a bit of trust and someone to seek advice from. That is targeted work.

We also fund big projects such as Redthread, which is an organisation that sits in the A&E departments of certain hospitals in London, Nottingham and Birmingham. The youth workers are there to reach young people when they come into hospital with an injury at what they call the teachable moment to try to steer them on to a better path when they leave hospital. Of course, by that stage, that means that young person has—we do not want that young person to be injured in the first place, so organisations such as St Giles Trust do targeted work in what we would call hotspot areas with particular groups of young people who we know are very vulnerable.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

We are also conscious that the big charities such as St Giles Trust and so on have if not a national, certainly a regional grip, but that there are lots of really great bodies and organisations at a local level, which is why we have the anti-knife crime community fund. Again, that is focused on the small local groups that are just helping their young people and are doing great work.

That has continued alongside, as I say, the national campaign that we are running, #knifefree. There is all sorts of work going on with that, in particular piloting knife-free advocates, who I met last week. They are sports coaches, rap artists and people in the community who meet young people in their ordinary day-to-day lives, who can give perhaps a bit of light-touch advice in the midst of playing sport or rapping or whatever their specialism is.

**Nick Hunt:** It is very important that we evaluate these programmes, which we are doing. A lot of the effort of the Youth Endowment Fund, which we have talked about already, will go into evaluating what works well. We will have far better information about interventions and what best support to give to young people, particularly between the ages of 10 and 14. We are also doing wider work through things such as the Youth Futures Foundation, where we are putting £90 million of dormant assets money into supporting young people to get into employment. We are evaluating all of that very carefully.

Q18 **Charley Oliver-Holland:** How much of the Youth Endowment Fund will go to address knife crime specifically and youth violence in general?

**Nick Hunt:** The overall £200 million in the Youth Endowment Fund will look at violent crime in the round. It will look in particular at how we work with 10 to 14-year-olds at risk of involvement in crime. We are not going to segment it and say, "x million will go to county lines or y million will go to knife crime"; we will look at it in the round to see what the best policy interventions are. As I said, one of the key roles will be evaluating that work. Practitioners, local councils and youth agencies will have a far better idea of what works in terms of interventions with young people.

**Victoria Atkins:** Intervention is a really important part of this—of course it is. We want to stop the harm from happening in the first place, but we also need to look at what alternative we offer young people. That is why, coming out of the Prime Minister's knife crime summit, which she held recently, I am bringing together a group of very prominent and large businesses to set them a challenge, to see what they can do in these hotspot areas to encourage opportunity for these young people, so that they have a choice away from going down that very dark path of joining a gang. We are also looking at what we as Government can do, because we are a huge employer, across all our various arms. I really want to use the opportunities that we can provide to offer chances to those young people as well.

**Chair:** Thank you.



**Q19 Jack Heald:** Both the Timpson review and the report from Ofsted have found that children who are excluded from school are more susceptible to gang recruitment. How is the Home Office collaborating with the Department for Education to counter this and protect vulnerable people who have been excluded from education?

**Victoria Atkins:** We were really pleased to receive the Timpson review, because we know—from the youth workers for all the charities that we support and from our law enforcement partners—that there are commonalities between the children who are in alternative provision and people who are susceptible or vulnerable to serious violence. We are working very closely with them. I visited an alternative provision provider myself recently to see what difference those institutions can make.

The way I see AP is that I still believe that we should allow head teachers to have the power to exclude when they need to, for the safety of the school community as a whole, but we have to ensure that the children who are excluded go to a place that provides them with the best possible education that they can have. The fact that the report has looked at the original school maintaining responsibility for the child through the rest of their school career is a really interesting step forward.

I am very conscious of this from the former and current gang members whom I meet—we do take seriously the point about listening to young people who are in the middle of this. In a recent meeting I had, I was very struck by two of the young men, who had just been released from prison, and who explained that when they were excluded from school they felt as though society had somehow given up on them. We absolutely need to tackle that, because it should be about giving that child the support they need, rather than them feeling that we have given up on them, because we have not.

**Nick Hunt:** Just to add to that, exclusion, as you know, is a key risk factor for involvement in serious violence, so we work very closely with the Department for Education on this and a range of other issues linked to it. We were very pleased that the Timpson review made the recommendations that it did. You might have seen on the same day the Government response, which welcomed and accepted the recommendations.

Issues such as the school working closely with local agencies on a child who is at risk of exclusion, to try to intervene early to prevent that child from being excluded, are very important. Also, as the Minister said, maintaining responsibility for that child's academic records throughout the rest of their school time is really important as well. The Department for Education will be consulting on that later this year.

**Chair:** Thank you.

**Q20 Husnaa Mota:** The serious violence strategy made 61 commitments to further action to tackle violent crime. How do you measure their success?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Nick Hunt:** We do not have a measure of success as such, but our overall aim is a reduction in violent crime. Out of those 61 commitments, I think we have now delivered well over 50. We are on track to deliver all those commitments in the strategy shortly, but simply delivering on the commitments is only the start of the story; it is about the impact they have on the ground and their delivery.

For example, the National County Lines Coordination Centre, which we set up in September as one of the commitments in the strategy, has already led to over 1,600 arrests, and to around 2,000 vulnerable people being put into safeguarding who had been exploited as part of county lines. There is the early intervention youth fund as well, which is £22 million, which we think is already supporting at least 60,000 children. Those are the sorts of things that interest me. It is more about the impact the commitments have had on the ground to date than how many of them we have delivered.

**Victoria Atkins:** We are very, very alert to the sensitivities of language in this, because every single murder, every homicide, will have an incredibly difficult and awful impact on the loved ones who have lost a beloved son, daughter, husband or father and so on.

Some parliamentary colleagues urge me to have a target—"fatalities will fall by this amount within a year." I am very, very loth to set our ambitions in that way, because it would give the impression that, somehow, whatever figure you fix on is an acceptable number of fatalities. Of course, it is not. In most areas of public life we talk about improving the number of "outstanding" schools and so on, but these are people's loved ones; they are families, communities and neighbourhoods, so when we are talking about the word "success", I think we need to be very sensitive, because actually it is about societal change and accepting that these gangs—county lines gangs in particular—are having a horrendous impact on our communities, and we have got to deal with the human factor in that. They are not statistics; they are people who we have lost.

**Chair:** Thank you. We will move on to the next question.

Q21 **Jodie Floyd:** The serious violence strategy indicated that the reduction in stop-and-searches has not been a factor in the recent increase in knife crime. Why have police stop-and-search powers been changed?

**Victoria Atkins:** If we take ourselves back a few years, there was a great deal of unhappiness, discomfort and distrust between certain communities and the police, because they felt they were being targeted unfairly by the police. The then Home Secretary, Theresa May, wanted to rebuild the trust and confidence of people—frankly, young black men—who at the time were much, much more likely to be stopped and searched. She listened very carefully to representatives and young people who were feeling this. We did not change the law; we just changed the guidance to say, "Stop-and-search should be intelligence-led."



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

We have seen the number of stop-and-searches reduce, but I think I am right in saying that last year the number of arrests arising out of stop-and-searches increased. That suggests that the stop-and-searches are working better, if you like.

I think we have also had a real game changer in the use of body-worn cameras. That gives great confidence, both to members of the public and to police officers, that the body-worn camera will show the circumstances in which a stop-and-search happened. A fantastic statistic is that the number of complaints arising from stop-and-searches has dropped dramatically; I think there were been something like 177 complaints in the last year. That is a big step forward. Of course, stop-and-search is a really important tool in the policing armoury, and used in the right way, it can make a real difference.

Q22 **Chair:** Thank you. You called the serious violence strategy a “living document”. Can you confirm that the commitments announced in it will remain in place under the new Prime Minister?

**Victoria Atkins:** Look, I am not on any leadership team, so I do not have insight into the precise thinking of those teams at this point, but I do know that both candidates are absolutely committed to reducing serious violence. Both candidates, I think, have made announcements recently on law enforcement, police numbers and so on, and they are both absolutely committed to this agenda. I anticipate that we will not only meet the commitment but, as I say, continue our work. We have to keep reviewing what is working and what is not. We were delighted to receive the Children’s Society report, because it is a really in-depth analysis. This all helps inform our collective thinking on how we should be tackling this. I very much anticipate that whoever is the next leader and Prime Minister will be absolutely committed to keeping our young people safe.

**Nick Hunt:** I am not going to speculate on what the next Prime Minister is going to do. Just a quick change, for the record, on stop-and-search: the number of complaints in the last year was 277 rather than 177. That is my fault for misadvising the Minister.

**Chair:** Thank you. The next question will be asked by Susuana.

Q23 **Susuana Senghor:** The number of people receiving custodial sentences for knife crime is increasing, as are the lengths of the sentences they serve. The Government’s public health approach says it seeks “to address the underlying risk factors”. What support are young people getting to address such risk factors, once in custody?

**Victoria Atkins:** If I may address the first point, about prison sentences, this is a very difficult balancing act. We want to send out the message loud and clear that carrying a knife is not normal and not acceptable. This is not new; I think it was in the 1950s that the Government first banned flick-knives, because there was a problem with gangs using them. It has been against the law for the last 30 years for retailers to sell sharp knives to anyone aged under 18. There is a history of work on this. The then Government introduced mandatory minimum sentences for possession of a



knife on the second occasion precisely to send out that very strong public message that this is simply not acceptable. A sentence of imprisonment is of course still available to a judge on the first occasion a young person is caught, but we want to send this message out very clearly.

This is about joining up youth offending teams and probation and so on to help those young people once they are caught with a knife and sentenced. Drawing again on the conversations I had very recently with the two young men I referenced earlier, they were getting a lot of help from one of the charities that we work very closely with. It is about looking at how we can help those young people gain employment in the future. I fully acknowledge that if you have a conviction for a serious offence—if you have served a prison sentence—it is difficult to have that on your job application, so we are looking at the impact that those convictions can have, particularly on young people and their life chances. Nick, would you like to contribute on other work with offenders?

**Nick Hunt:** As the Committee probably knows, the youth justice system is predicated on rehabilitation. Prison and custody are the final resort for young offenders. Youth custody is obviously a very difficult environment to work in, but I know through colleagues on the Youth Justice Board and others that there is work under way in those places to try to work with cohorts of young men in those situations to turn around their offending. It is very difficult work, but we hope that, as the violence reduction units get increasingly bedded in, they will link into the Prison and Probation Service, including the youth custody estate, so there is greater integration, particularly when a young person leaves youth custody, in terms of the support and help they get.

**Victoria Atkins:** We also run the serious violence taskforce, which is chaired by the Home Secretary and brings together not just Government Ministers but all the agencies that have something to contribute in this space. We work very closely with MHCLG, because we know that one of the problems that anyone released from custody or detention can face is housing. That is why we very much want local authorities, which may be able to help young people with housing in the short and longer term, involved in violence reduction units, as well as the national framework. It is about having an environment of support, as well as focusing on that one young person.

**Chair:** Thank you. Let us move on to the next question.

Q24 **Theo Sergiou:** My question is on the judicial system. Many, including the Justice Secretary, have argued that short sentences don't work, and have called for a reduction in their use. The College of Policing found that time in prison significantly increases reoffending rates for those aged 10 to 18. How is the Government supporting and rehabilitating offenders once they are released from prison?

**Victoria Atkins:** That is a very similar question to the one before. I used to work in the youth courts, so I absolutely understand the pressures, and the factors that magistrates and judges will consider before they take that



very serious step of detaining a young person. The reason why we have the mandatory minimum sentence on the second time of possessing a knife is because we want to send out a very public message about how unacceptable it is. The legislation is drafted very carefully to ensure that a judge has the power to take into account the personal mitigating circumstances of the defendant. That will be a balancing act for the judge. You will appreciate that the judiciary are independent, and I am very respectful of that.

The support that young people have in prison, in detention centres and thereafter is something for youth offending teams, probation and others to focus on as part of violence reduction units and the wider rehabilitation work. Nick, do you have anything you want to add?

**Nick Hunt:** To pick up the bit about short sentences, the Lord Chancellor has been discussing that, and there is well-known research about rehabilitation and the impact of short sentences. Even there, as the Minister said, we need to send a signal, and it is also about protecting the wider community. The Ministry of Justice has been talking about exempting some offences from that—sexual offences and violent offences. We still need to protect the wider community, as well as look at rehabilitation.

Q25 **Theo Sergiou:** As has been discussed, if somebody is caught with a knife twice, the Offensive Weapons Act is likely to promote short-term sentences of less than six months. Do you believe it is an effective approach to stopping young people carrying knives?

**Victoria Atkins:** Madam Chair, I am so sorry, but I have to go, I'm afraid. Nick will stay to answer your questions. I am afraid that I have childcare arrangements. I thank members of the Committee ever so much. It has been a very informative and—dare I say it?—enjoyable process.

**Chair:** Thank you.

**Nick Hunt:** To pick up your question, I would look at it from the other direction. I think it actually prevents young people from being involved in crime in the first place. That is where we want to put our efforts. By the time a person gets to court, it is very difficult. We understand what you are saying about sentencing, but in terms of looking at the facts, we need to look at the particular circumstances of the case. The judges and the court have powers available so that whatever the best remedy is in that particular case can be used.

About a third of those who go to court for the first time get custody—that is all ages. About two thirds of those who get a repeat conviction for knife possession go into custody. As I said before, it is about looking more widely at protecting the community as well as at rehabilitation. The whole emphasis of Government policy in this space is on prevention and early intervention with young people. That is where we are putting a lot of our energy at the moment.

Q26 **Chair:** We have heard concerns that knife crime prevention orders will



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

lead to increased criminalisation of children. What do you think of these concerns? Do you agree with them?

**Nick Hunt:** The knife crime prevention orders are devised to be preventive in approach. Working with a very small, targeted group of people—not specifically young people; it affects all ages—allows the police to manage more closely those about whom they have information that they are routinely carrying knives. It allows them to go to the court with that information. If the judge in that court agrees with the police analysis—and indeed the analysis of the youth offending team, who also have to be consulted—that order will be made.

There will be some restrictions in that order, in terms of where that person might be able to visit, or where they might be able to go, but there will also be positive requirements in place. The positive requirements are particularly important in treating the causes of routinely carrying a knife.

One of the things that we are saying is that this always has to be subject to regular review. The younger the person who is subject to an order, the more frequently we would want the court to review the order to make sure that it is still relevant to that person. The whole purpose and principle behind the knife crime prevention orders is to prevent that young person from being criminalised in the first place, so that they do not have a criminal record. It is trying to get into the causes of their criminal behaviour.

**Chair:** Thank you. I invite Ewan to ask the next question.

Q27 **Ewan Jago:** What can we learn from the Scottish model for a public health approach? What differences do you think will need to be made to ensure that it is fit for purpose for England and Wales?

**Nick Hunt:** As I said to your colleague Bailey-Lee, we have been looking to Scotland. If you look at what has happened in Scotland over the last 15 years, although there is no definitive research in this area, you can see that there has been a dramatic decline in violent crime in Scotland over that period of that time, so we are using the insight.

We have already been using some approaches similar to Scotland in England and Wales, but we are going to go further. As the strategy says, it is about having a more explicit look at public health and taking a public health approach that looks not simply at short-term law enforcement, but at longer-term prevention and early intervention.

In our work on looking at the causes of violence, that work in Scotland also very much informs what we are trying to do. We are now creating 18 violence reduction units across the country. Glasgow already has one, but we are looking to create them in England and Wales. The Government has put £35 million into them this year alone; it is investing in them and trying to bring agencies together to work more effectively and prevent young people in particular from getting involved in the first place.

**Chair:** Thank you. Could we have the next question from James?



**Q28 James Appiah:** In May, the Local Government Association found that six out of 10 retailers tested were breaking the law by selling knives to teenagers. It says that funding and support is insufficient to prosecute retailers who are in breach of the law. What is the Government doing to ensure restrictions on knife sales and ensure that there are suitable punishments for retailers, both in store and online, who break the law?

**Nick Hunt:** We are very concerned about some retailers selling knives to under-18s. Trading standards routinely go out and make test purchases from shops, and indeed from online retailers. There is regularly a 20% failure rate with retailers selling knives to under-18s. For online retailers, that figure is even higher, so we are very much concerned about it.

As the Minister said, there have been laws in place for the last 30 years about not selling knives to under-18s, but of course in the last 10 years we have seen a huge explosion in online retailing, and the law needs to be updated to reflect that. The Government has introduced legislation—the Offensive Weapons Act 2019, which became law back in May—that imposes further restrictions on online retailers from selling knives to under-18s. They will not be able to deliver knives to a residential address unless they have a really good age verification system in place, they highlight on the packaging that it should not be delivered to somebody under 18, and the delivery company takes responsibility to make checks at the doorstep that the person they are delivering to is over 18.

So we are updating the law to try to make it clearer that this will not be condoned and ensure that retailers comply with the law more effectively than they are doing at the moment, because clearly we need to do whatever we can to prevent dangerous knives from getting into the hands of people who want to use them for crime.

**Chair:** Thank you. Could Suzy ask the next question?

**Q29 Susuana Senghor:** How much do social media and cultural influences, such as music, contribute to the escalation in knife crime?

**Nick Hunt:** There are a range of different factors here. In the strategy, we talk about how it is quite a complex interplay of factors coming into play here, which have led to the recent increase in serious violence.

Social media is one of the factors at play there. Since the wider ownership of smartphones in the last 10 years, research has shown that the use of social media has led to escalation, more quickly, between different gangs in terms of violence.

It has been used to portray the lifestyle that you can supposedly have if you sell drugs, and flaunt that. Of course there are infamous drill music videos out there, where there are actual direct threats of violence against people, and, very unfortunately, in some cases they have been linked to real-life murders of people on the streets. There are a range of things out there around social media that we are concerned about.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

So we are working very closely with some of the big social media companies, in particular Google and Facebook, to see what more they can do in this space so that they can act quickly when the police, voluntary sector groups, parents or even young people themselves refer material through to them that breaches their guidelines and is of concern to them, and they will take down that material quickly so that it does not encourage real-life violence.

The Government are also putting £1.4 million into a new police unit, based in the Met, which is basically a pilot proof of concept over the next year. If that works, it will be rolled out in other big cities in England as well. And that is about making sure that the police are proactively looking for material to refer through to Google or the big social media companies in order to take it down, but they will also use that as intelligence to support real-life police operations as well on the streets.

**Chair:** Chair. We will now go on to a question by Bailey-Lee.

Q30 **Bailey-Lee Robb:** I come back to the serious violence strategy commitments; you said that you have already met nearly 50 of them. How did you arrive at the 61 commitments in that strategy and specifically how many are focused on knife crime?

**Nick Hunt:** I couldn't tell you how many are specifically focused on knife crime—I don't have that figure—but it will be a lot of them. We also look at crime in the round as well. So they are all aimed at preventing or deterring crime, or enforcing the law, in some way.

As for the strategy and how we have put it together, we talked to a lot of people: police officers, councils, social workers, and people who work in the voluntary sector. We also talked to groups of young people as well. We talked to charities that we work with very closely, and using those charities we identified groups of young people to talk to, in order to inform the development of the strategy. We did a lot of analysis of the evidence, in terms of the trends behind violent crime and what the relevant risk factors are as well.

I very much encourage the Committee, if you have not done so already, to read the strategy, in particular the first two chapters, where there is really ground-breaking material: the evidence set out there and the analysis behind it. A lot of work was done, in talking to huge groups of people and a wide range of different people, informed by the evidence about what works—not simply in this country, but elsewhere.

One of the more interesting things we have brought out of the strategy is that patterns of crime are being reflected internationally in many countries, like the United States, Canada and some European countries. Where we have seen a decrease in violent crime, they have, and, equally, at about the same time that we saw the upturn in violent crime, so did those countries.

We had an international symposium on violent crime last November, bringing together different jurisdictions, with speakers from America,



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Holland, Sweden and other countries talking about their experiences. What came out of that was that local factors are very important in terms of the increase in violent crime, but in particular things like drugs seem to be a major factor that is common to all those jurisdictions.

**Chair:** Thank you. We will move on to the next question, which James will ask.

Q31 **James Appiah:** Coming back to the sale of knives to teenagers, the restrictions that you spoke about are actually already in place and are failing. Is that good enough?

**Nick Hunt:** One of the things that we have done, as I said before, is to update legislation—the Offensive Weapons Act. We are also working with trading standards officers to make sure that they have effective practice on the ground.

For example, this year and last year we had a prosecution fund, where we directly gave money to trading standards authorities in the areas most affected by knife crime so that they could take more positive action against retailers that were routinely breaking the law by selling knives to under-18s. More action was being taken. Also, there was more enforcement against online retailers. We are very much working to ensure that the law is enforced.

We also have Operation Sceptre, which is a police-led week of action. It happens two or three times a year and involves all police forces across the country and trading standards. That involves weeks of action that focus on local retailers, but also going to schools to do early intervention and talking to schools about knife crime, weapons sweeps and stops and searches to try to remove weapons from the streets.

The last week of action was held in March, I think, and about 10,000 weapons were seized from the streets during that week of action across the country. Very significant action is being taken to try to enforce the law in this area.

**Chair:** Thank you. I invite Jack to ask the next question.

Q32 **Jack Heald:** On 1 April, the Government launched a consultation on a new legal duty to support the multi-agency public health approach. How do you see the positives and negatives of such an approach and how will that play out in practice?

**Nick Hunt:** That goes back to some of the earlier answers that the Minister and I gave, in many ways. At the heart of the serious violence strategy is a multi-agency approach so that we tackle not simply the immediate effects of violent crime, but the causes of it, too.

Through talking to a range of different agencies, we have come to the conclusion that although multi-agency work is working well in many parts of the country, in other parts of the country it could be improved. We are looking to see whether a duty would help bring agencies together to focus on serious violence and working together to plan, collaborate and take



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

effective local action together. We are taking a range of actions to do that, and we hope the legal duty will do that.

In the consultation, as you might have seen, we set out three different options. One is setting out a new primary legal duty on agencies, which is the Government's preferred approach. The two other options are not to legislate, as we don't now, or to use the framework of community safety partnerships to improve how agencies work together. We have been consulting on that, and we are currently reflecting on the response. The consultation closed on 28 May. We are currently considering how to move forward based on those things, but we think there is real benefit in having some form of duty.

**Q33 Chair:** Thank you. We have heard evidence that preventive youth services that are keeping young people off the street and in purposeful activity are underfunded. Apart from the targeted things you have already mentioned today, how will the strategy support these initiatives?

**Nick Hunt:** I think the strategy will do that, but I think it is also really important to point to the summit that the Prime Minister hosted back in April. I think one or two of you might have been at the summit. It brought together a wide range of Departments and agencies. There was a real emphasis there about more effective interventions with young people and gaining input from young people into the process. There is the youth charter, which came out of the summit in terms of consulting directly with young people and in terms of the development in youth services, which I hope will have an impact. Work is going on to develop that, led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Work is also going on with the recently launched youth futures fund, which is directly targeted at getting young people back into employment. There are a range of things that are going on to try to support young people. I come back again to the example of the Youth Endowment Fund. It is very unusual for Government to commit to funding over a 10-year cycle in that way. There was the education endowment fund nine or 10 years ago, but there are few other examples within Government of doing that. That will have a major impact as well.

**Chair:** Thank you for your response. I pass to Bailey-Lee to ask the final question.

**Q34 Bailey-Lee Robb:** This is just a follow-up to the previous one. You said that a new unit would be set up in the Met to report things to companies such as Google and Facebook. The Home Office just closed a consultation on its White Paper for a new online regulator. I am aware that is more about child sexual exploitation, but would that online regulator not cover the Met setting their units up?

**Nick Hunt:** The two work together really well. The online harms White Paper has been out there seeking views recently, as you say. It covers a wide spectrum of crime, whether that be extremist material or child sexual abuse, as well as violent crime. As you can see, the proposal is to develop a regulator with various codes of practice that companies in that area will



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

adhere to, subject to checks by the regulator. Underpinning that will have to be close work by the police and others working together.

We see the work that the police are doing around the social media hub and we are very much hoping to mesh into that by bringing material to the attention of Google and Facebook. We also want Google and Facebook, and the other big social media companies—there is a range here; I keep mentioning Google but it is a unfair to pick on them particularly, because it is a range of companies—to be more proactive, not to wait for the police or others to highlight and bring particular material to them, but to be more proactive in that space and responsive in terms of what is going on. We hope that the framework that the online harms White Paper sets out will very much support that.

**Q35 Theo Sergiou:** How would you respond to concerns that recent money promised does not cover the money cut in the past 10 years through austerity measures?

**Nick Hunt:** That question would probably have been better aimed at the Minister, but if the Minister were here, I suspect they would look back at the level of national debt 10 years ago and say that the Government at the time had to take action to reduce the level of public spending.

The Government is now looking to see what it can do to increase the level of activities out there for young people to prevent violent crime. Going back to what I was saying before about the early intervention youth fund, the work through the youth opportunity fund that has been set up, and the troubled families programme, there are a lot of interventions that have been put in place in the last few years that will support and help young people in this space.

There is also a more generalist approach as well. I do not know how many of you have been engaged with the National Citizen Service, but that is a very focused two or three weeks for 16-year-olds. It is about giving them a greater awareness by going on Outward Bound and working together in groups that they would not normally come across. Lots of activity is going on across Government to help young people in terms of the different activities out there.

Also, of course, coming back to the example of the youth charter, I think that will be an important development for the Youth Parliament and other young people who are really interested in public services and what is going on. There will be requirements around that, which will no doubt allow young people to have a greater say about what is delivered locally in terms of their services as well.

**Q36 Chair:** Nick, thank you for all the evidence you have given. I also thank Victoria Atkins for the evidence she gave before she had to leave. We will definitely take all the evidence on board as we continue.

**Nick Hunt:** Thank you to the Committee.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Hannah Chetwynd, Nick Darvill, Jonathan Toy and Rashid Bhayat.

**Chair:** Welcome, everyone, to the Youth Select Committee. First, I would like to introduce myself and the Select Committee. My name is Rachel Ojo and I am the Chair of the Youth Select Committee for 2019.

**Susuana Senghor:** I'm Susuana, and I am the vice-chair of this Committee.

**Jack Heald:** I'm Jack.

**James Appiah:** I'm James.

**Ewan Jago:** I'm Ewan.

**Charley Oliver-Holland:** I'm Charley.

**Bailey-Lee Robb:** I'm Bailey-Lee.

**Chris Bakalis:** I'm Chris.

**Jodie Floyd:** I'm Jodie.

**Husnaa Mota:** I'm Husnaa.

**Theo Sergiou:** I'm Theo.

Q37 **Chair:** Before we start on the questions, could I please ask the panel to briefly introduce themselves and the work that they are here to represent?

**Rashid Bhayat:** I am Rashid Bhayat from the Positive Youth Foundation. We are based in Coventry, but we have a national reach. It is great to be here and really good to see such positive young people. I set my organisation up when I was 17, so anything we can do to share some of that learning is always welcome.

**Hannah Chetwynd:** My name is Hannah Chetwynd and I work for the Children's Society as a policy officer, specialising in young people who are at risk. The Children's Society is a national organisation and we work in England and Wales. Each year we work directly with around 11,000 children and young people.

As an organisation, we aim to work with children and young people who are experiencing multiple disadvantages, which basically means that we are working with some of the most vulnerable children in society. Some of our specialist services are working with children and young people who go missing; they might have experienced sexual or criminal exploitation, or they might have experienced or witnessed violence. Some of the young people we work with are in care or leaving care, and we work with refugee, migrant and trafficked young people as well.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

I just want to add that when I answer questions this afternoon I will be talking specifically about children who have been criminally exploited, because we think that criminal exploitation and county lines are fuelling the violence affecting young people and, in turn, knife crime.

**Nick Darvill:** Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Nick Darvill. I am a consultant for the New Era Foundation and I part-lead the DIVERT programme, which is a Metropolitan police custody intervention programme. It is working at six sites across London, from Haringey in the north down to Croydon in the south. We are working with 18 to 25-year-olds who are detained in police custody, looking at options for their personal development pathway, and hopefully eventually getting them back into education, training and employment. Our overall aim is to reduce reoffending.

**Jonathan Toy:** Good afternoon. Thank you very much for inviting us. My name is Jonathan Toy. I work for an organisation called the Ben Kinsella Trust, which was established in 2008 following the murder of a young man called Ben Kinsella in north London. We are now a national charity that works primarily to prevent knife crime and help to support young people's understanding of choices and consequences in terms of knife crime. Personally, I have been working in the field of tackling serious youth violence for over 20 years. I work with hundreds of young people and families who have been affected by knife crime and help them to make positive choices to change their lives.

Q38 **Chair:** Thank you all for coming here to share evidence with us. I will start by presenting the first question to the whole panel.

We are currently running an online consultation to get the views of young people. According to our survey, the No. 1 reason why young people feel they need to carry knives is because of fear. What should be done to make young people feel less scared in their own communities?

**Nick Darvill:** I think the first thing, when it comes to looking at fear, is for young people to be reassured. I think we need to be reassured that—especially in London, but I am sure it is replicated across the country—over 99% of young people are making their families very proud and contributing to their communities, to their schools and to the activities that they are involved in. It is only a very small percentage who are involved in knife crime. Also, from what we see in the reporting, my information is that knife crime has actually reduced over the rolling year. That positivity needs to be reflected. Finally, the message for young people is similar to what I give to my family: you need to be choosing your friends and your peers very carefully. You have got those areas where you can minimise some of that fear and some of that risk that you may be subject to.

**Jonathan Toy:** Rachel, do you mind if I add something?

**Chair:** Please do.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Jonathan Toy:** Thank you; that is kind of you. I think there are two elements, from our point of view. There is the evidence we get from the surveys of the young people who have come through our exhibition—we have had 16,000 young people come through since 2011-12. Of those young people who prior to going to the exhibition say that they may carry or would carry a knife because they are fearful, 85% of them say that they would change that decision, once they have been through the exhibition. That is partly because we are providing them with alternative choices. We are providing prevention early. So we get young people genuinely to think about the choices and consequences of carrying a knife, and the risks that that increases. It is vitally important that we provide that prevention message really early on and that we continue doing it and put our investment into keeping that prevention going.

The second point for us, which we feel is really important, is that we must invest in people on the ground in local areas and local communities who can genuinely engage with, work with and have a relationship with young people, and provide them with that umbrella of support, which is so often not there within those local areas. However you describe it, there has been a real disinvestment within those kinds of networks. We must go back to how we start creating those in a different way.

**Hannah Chetwynd:** I think it is a really complicated question, and it is one that the Children's Society and I do not necessarily think we hold the answer to yet. The Government need to hold a public consultation on the issue to really try to understand what it is that is driving this fear, and that is before we can start to put effective preventive measures in place.

Like you guys, we have also consulted with some of the young people we work with, and again we hear that fear is a really big driver for weapon carrying. We have heard that this fear exists on a spectrum, so for some young people it is an actual fear that comes as a direct result of experiencing or witnessing knife crime, but for other young people it is more of a perceived fear, which might be perpetuated by something they have seen on social media or something they have heard from their friends and family. It is often things they have seen in the media. We need to think about these two distinct things when we are talking about tackling this fear.

We know there is a general lack of spaces for children and young people in communities, and there need to be more inclusive and positive spaces for young people. It is really important that they have a sense of ownership over them. We also think that local areas need to invest in more detached youth work, because we know that some young people simply will not go to youth centres, even if they are widely available.

Once we have got these spaces in place for young people, we can start tackling this idea of perceived fear and talk about safety planning and start debunking any myths. While we know this is happening in some local authorities, we also know that it is not happening at all in others. We think it is really important to challenge this narrative of fear for lots of young



people, explore the reasons why they feel scared and give them the tools they need to feel safer.

**Rashid Bhayat:** I totally agree with everything that has been said, but in particular with the point Hannah just mentioned about creating opportunities for young people. That is really important to all of us as youth practitioners in the sector on a number of levels. First, you hear a lot about consultation with young people—we are forever asking young people for their views—but we need to do much more with what we are told. We need to listen to what we are being told, and as professionals we need to be held accountable for this a lot more.

Even in my area, we have many youth consultations and youth forums. We need to ensure that they are representative of the young people most affected by this. That is a really, really important point that we keep driving home. We were really delighted to hear about your work and consultation, because it is absolutely credible. What is important is what happens next—what we do with the information that young people are sharing with us. As I say, we must be held accountable.

To go back to the point about young people having more opportunities within the community, such opportunities must be credible. They must be things designed by young people and co-created with young people so that they are driven by young people rather than adults with suits on behind desks saying, “This is the next best idea: we are going to put this club on,” or, “We are going to put this provision on.” That is not good enough, and we know it is not good enough. It is really important that we ensure that we are co-creating and providing credibility around that.

On a note I wrote around fear and the role of police within this, unfortunately a few weeks ago we had quite a severe incident at one of our programmes. When we spoke to the hundreds of young people around at the time, the vast majority would say, “No, we don’t need police around our programmes. It’s cool. We don’t want that.” But when you start to have one-to-one and smaller group conversations, we have to recognise that many young people are experiencing fear, but are not able to express that by saying, “I’m scared.”

We have to work closely with the police on their role around practical and appropriate policing, in particular in inner-city communities where there are youth groups, clubs and programmes going on, so that the police understand their role, and start to change in certain areas around their responsibilities while they are on the ground with young people. That will help the fear factor. There is a lot to be done there. There is a lot of education there. Young people will educate the police on matters like that.

**Chair:** Thank you.

Q39 **Husnaa Mota:** Do differences in young people’s lives, such as geographic location, education, mental health, or socioeconomic status impact the risk of young people getting involved in knife crime?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Hannah Chetwynd:** I am happy to start. We would definitely agree with the list of things that you have just mentioned, but we need to be really careful to acknowledge that we do not believe that these are necessarily causal factors, and that they should be seen as vulnerabilities and treated that way.

I had a conversation with some of our analysts who work in London, Birmingham and Manchester. They focus on disrupting child criminal exploitation. They identified some other vulnerabilities that are quite often missed. I thought it would be useful to share them with you. Age was quite a strong factor, both for older teenagers and younger primary-school-age children as well. Loneliness was a really big factor—social isolation, no matter where you live in the country. Some of them are worrying factors, where family members are involved in organised crime and violence. Other factors include: being victim of another form of exploitation such as sexual exploitation; having an undiagnosed special educational need and problems with speech and language; and substance misuse, especially substance misuse that might result in a young person being left with drug debt. At the Children’s Society we think it is vital to see weapon-carrying as an end result of experiencing these vulnerabilities.

I also wanted to mention this idea of thresholds. We frequently hear that the threshold for preventive work for young people who have been involved in youth violence is too high. That comes from a general lack of understanding of what makes a young person vulnerable to knife crime. We frequently see older teenagers who are showing multiple vulnerabilities not being offered the support that they need, because people are not necessarily recognising it, but also there are not necessarily the services to refer them to. We think that there are lots of things that can be done to tackle this, including offering mandatory training to all people who have a safeguarding responsibility for children, to give them a better idea of the factors that make a young person more vulnerable. We think that this will help with referrals to preventive services.

**Jonathan Toy:** We would agree that the elements that you pointed to are causal factors. The research that has been carried out by not only us, but other organisations indicates that there are five principal causal factors. Issues around trauma and polytraumatic experiences are absolutely key. Status and reputation, and maintaining that status at all cost, is a really big issue. The socioeconomic and environmental factors are also important. To add to that—something that I think you didn’t mention—there are issues of identity: young people exploring their identity, and finding their place within their community and their society.

It is well-researched evidence, whether you look at the work of the Early Intervention Foundation or other organisations, or some of the academic research. It is also borne out by case studies. As I mentioned earlier, we have done very detailed case studies of the young people that I have worked with, analysing their background, where they came from and the different journeys that they had. Those were all very common factors.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

I looked at a case of 45 young people who are caught up in serious violence. Of those 45, 42 have underlying trauma from early childhood. If you look at the scoring on ACEs, you will find similar work. If you look at the work that the Croydon Vulnerable Adolescent Review has just done on 60 young people, you will find exactly the same underlying causes. So, yes; they are very much common features. The issue is how you design your early intervention and preventive work in order to start tackling those, before those young people get to the point of crisis. We are not investing enough money in the early intervention and prevention elements to start tackling that.

**Rashid Bhayat:** I just want to pick up on your point around geography, in terms of a physical location that a young person grows up in. We recently ran quite a large consultation with young people and asked them about their thoughts and feelings about their sense of place. Do they feel connected to where they are growing up? What are the issues within their areas? Quite often, the whole driver around poverty and how an area looks was a key part of how young people felt that they were expected to behave.

I will give you an example that a young person spoke about quite openly. He said, "When I go home and there are dishes in my sink and the kitchen is a mess, I will add more mess to that kitchen. I won't need to wash the dishes, because it's already a mess." It got us thinking a little bit. Is that how we expect young people to treat the areas they are growing up in? If there isn't investment in the physical area that a young person is growing up in and if complex characters are coming into an inner-city area, which aren't from the communities that young people are living in in the first place, the young people are inheriting these issues. They are now expected to deal with these issues that manifest not through their own being; it is almost dumped on them.

There is something about city planning here. We are working quite closely with local authorities to look at how cities are built and how they look, in particular around inner-city areas for young people. A big driver for us here is, how involved are young people in the planning of their own areas? These are the things we need to keep advocating for because if we can give aspirational areas for young people, so they can be proud of where they come from, it actually changes behaviours. That is an important thing for us to keep looking at.

**Nick Darvill:** Some of the conversations that we have with young adults in police custody highlight a number of factors. They include a significant adult in their lives, who can guide and steer them. That leads into the general conversation around loss, in a different context. Also, exposure to existing or previous domestic violence: a violent household that they have grown up in and seen violence within that household from a very early age.

Exclusion from school also features as a factor. The conversations look at gaps in education. The young people who we are speaking to are 18, 19 or 20 years old; they probably haven't been in school or connected with



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

school since year 8 or 9. There is a catching-up process in their education, to look at qualifications further down the line.

Then there is general exposure to violence—what they see on the streets and on social media—that is fuelling a number of factors and a commonality in some of the conversations we hold with young people who are detained in police custody, while we are trying to get a picture of where they are at that particular moment.

**Chair:** We will move on to the next question, which Jodie will ask.

Q40 **Jodie Floyd:** Some of the organisations that have given evidence to the inquiry have said that they are worried that the short-term, more intensive nature of the interventions, which will be funded by the Early Youth Intervention Fund, will mean that it will go to a smaller group of young people, rather than contributing to long-term change. Do you share this concern?

**Jonathan Toy:** Yes. My concern is that I don't think we should be investing in anything that is short term. The success of areas that have maintained long-term changes has been about long-term investment. It is not just the work that Glasgow—or Scotland—has done; other areas of this country have done very good long-term pieces of work that have seen really positive change.

Short-term investment has a place, but if we genuinely want to stop youth violence, and address the underlying causes that Husnaa and others have highlighted, we have to switch our narrative and invest much more for the long term, and start early. We absolutely have to do that. I would absolutely advocate moving away from short-term investment and towards long-term elements.

Another challenge is that how programmes are set up and evaluated can even shorten the investment. You might get a two-year funding stream, but a chunk of that at the beginning and the end is about set-up and then evaluation, and that narrows your window of opportunity to work with people. We should invest in five-year minimum programmes, if not 10-year, and really stick at them to see what difference it can make, because we know it can make a profound difference.

**Chair:** Thank you. We will move on to Rashid.

**Rashid Bhayat:** I agree with everything that Jonathan said—he put it so well. The way organisations and programmes are funded is a real issue on the ground. We need to take a good look at this because we have to accept the short-term funding that is there; of course we do. But we know that it could be equally as damaging, particularly to relationships that young people are then allowed to build or can build with their youth workers or the trusted adults around them. It takes time to build an effective relationship, especially when there are complexities and challenges within that.

There is a challenge there for organisations that have been entrenched within their communities for a very long time. They are very well placed as local experts to be doing the work, and we have to do more to ensure that we support local practitioners and experts. That is not to say that organisations should not be parachuted in, because I have learnt over the years that there is a healthy balance to be had between the two. If you have got an organisation like ours that has been there for 25 years, we tend to do what we always do because we think we know what works. So when there is a new organisation that can step in—maybe one of the big national partners— and bring added value, that then gives a perfect model.

But the short-term intervention dash for funding all the time causes the complexity that people are sometimes unfortunately chasing the money for the sake of having the impact of being able to say, “We are working on violence.” It is really cool right now to say, “We are working on knife crime.” The number of organisations that we see coming into the city, or attempting to come in, on the knife crime agenda needs challenging, and we do challenge it. We are very lucky with the West Midlands police in our area, because they understand that it is not a fad and not a trend. This is young people’s lives and we need to ensure that those working with young people are in it for the long haul. All the short-term funding adds complexities to our sector and industry, so we need to work things out. The new long-term things that are being put out there at the moment are a little bit more encouraging, but there are challenges that need fixing.

**Hannah Chetwynd:** Can I add to that? I agree with everything that you have said and we have in the past raised concerns about short-term funding cycles, but at the Children’s Society we have been trying to circumvent some of these issues and we have tried to adopt a more systems change approach to some of the service design. One thing that we have had quite a lot of success with is to take a contextual safeguarding approach. By that I mean looking at the spaces that young people are in and trying to make those spaces safer. We had really successful experiences working at a train station, and we trained lots of people who worked in that station—people who worked in restaurants and shops, and people selling tickets and working on the trains. We trained them to spot the signs of criminal exploitation and we also empowered them to know how to report it. While I completely agree that there are lots of problems with short-term funding, this was for us a really good example of where we can see quite quick and positive changes.

**Chair:** Thank you. James will ask the next question.

Q41 **James Appiah:** Nick, your website states that DIVERT aims to address a gap “in the statutory provision for young adults”. What exactly is this gap and how do you address it in your work?

**Nick Darvill:** A lot of the young adults who come into police custody are transitioning into adulthood. Everybody we speak to and work with is above the age of 18. Some of them are already parents or are going to become parents. When you look at coming into adulthood, things change



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

for you. Some of those young people have been in an environment with a youth offending team if they had a previous offending history. Some of the provision that they were able to get while they were under 18 is not so easy to get when they come into adulthood. Some of the issues are around housing and benefit claims, which our custody intervention coaches are able to guide them on.

Generally—I think there is a common theme in our conversations across the board today—it is about getting some really effective guidance. We find that many do not have that opportunity. They do not have someone—maybe a family member or an older brother—to turn to for support and guidance on which way to go and how to take the first steps toward applying for a job.

We are able to give young adults our time and our genuine interest. We are in the fortunate position that we can give them as much time as is needed. The higher the risk that someone presents, the more time and interest we are able to invest in them. A lot of those young people feel isolated, alone and stuck in a certain position at that particular time. They do not really know how to move forward. With the experience that we have among our staff, we are able to help them on that journey. The way we work means that that pathway can take as long as it needs.

**Chair:** Thank you, Nick. I now invite Chris to ask the next question.

Q42 **Chris Bakalis:** Jonathan, could you tell us a bit more about the knife crime prevention workshops run by the Ben Kinsella Trust? Could that type of programme be rolled out in schools on a much larger scale?

**Jonathan Toy:** Thanks, Chris. The workshops that we run are primarily aimed at young people in year 6 through to years 10 or 11—that is the area we tend to focus on. We have two fixed exhibition sites: one in Islington and one that has recently opened in Nottingham. The exhibition is a series of rooms that we take young people through. It is very interactive, and we use the story of Ben.

Ben Kinsella was a young man who had just finished his GCSEs. He went on a night out to celebrate with his friends. He was an ambassador for his school and a very talented artist—a graphic designer. There was an altercation at a party, which Ben was not involved in. What happened is that when he came out with his friends, another group came out and chased him. He was caught and stabbed 11 times in five seconds, and he lost his life.

We use a series of things that Ben put together through the exhibition rooms, and we talk to young people about the things the family want to know or Ben's aspirations. There are two pieces of writing that Ben did. He lost his life in June 2008. Six weeks before that incident, he wrote a letter to Gordon Brown, the then Prime Minister, saying that more needed to be done to tackle knife crime. We talk to young people about that letter. He also wrote a piece six months before that, which described him losing his



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

life to knife crime. It is very profound. We talk to young people about those sentiments and that learning.

We show family pictures. We have a gallery that shows Ben's life and talks about the positive things he was trying to do. We have a cinema room where members of his family, Brooke Kinsella, his mum, his dad and his sisters talk about Ben, what happened on that night, and how it has left them feeling.

We then take them into a causes and consequences room and talk about the impact of knife crime—"What would happen if you were stabbed? Do you understand the law? Do you understand joint enterprise?" There is a final room, which I won't describe, that finishes off the exhibition. The idea is that it is a whole interactive journey that we take young people through. As I said before, we survey every young person who comes through, and the feedback we get is that it makes a profound difference to their thought process and the choices that they make.

To answer your question, Chris, about whether it could roll out further—100%. We would love to see a Ben Kinsella exhibition, or a choices and consequences exhibition, in every single violence reduction unit area across the country. The more we can do to educate young people and support them in the choices they make, the better chance we have of tackling this. Thank you for your question.

**Chair:** Thank you, Jonathan. I will now invite Charley to ask the next question.

Q43 **Charley Oliver-Holland:** My question is for Rashid. Why are community schemes such as the ones you run at the Positive Youth Foundation important for young people?

**Rashid Bhayat:** That is a really important question. For me, community-based provision is the very cornerstone and foundation for young people to feel safe, to feel included and ready to feel motivated within their own communities. It is so important that we protect our community provision across the country.

For us to provide a safe space is a really important part of our community programme, because no matter what is going on in a young person's life, we feel that by having access to positive role models and to adults who can genuinely help—listen, care, help them with whatever pathway they need to be going on—is really important. That is because the advantage of a community-based programme is that it is non-stigmatised, whereas many provisions that we have to put on almost through statutory services are referral-based. So a young person may be told, "You've been asked to go here, for your appointment with the youth offending service," or through the police—"You've had to be referred".

By having really effective community services, you can still have all of those routes: police have a referral point; the youth offending service has somewhere where a young person may need support; and social care colleagues and social workers can have somewhere where there is a



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

touchpoint with a young person. But it is completely destigmatised. We are not putting labels on young people, to say, "You are here because"; it is literally an open door for young people to walk through and explore what they want from life. That is why it is really important to run those things.

For us, going back to the fear factor that we talked about earlier, in our experience, and from what people share with us, the only way now that they are really meeting diverse groups of young people, especially from outside the area or not from their school, is by going to the youth clubs, sports programmes or music programmes—whatever it looks like—where they are meeting young people who they would never normally have met. And that is not through social media; that is actual face-to-face meetings and interactions that are really important, from what young people tell us. That is why it is really important to us.

Also, long-standing community provision is really important as well, because it goes beyond funding. Quite often, short-term interventions are funding-led; they disappear, because the funding went. But many of the community provisions that we see across the UK have been there for a very, very long time, because they almost become the bread and butter of the organisations that run them. It is where they meet young people, it is where most of the business happens, so they make sure that that becomes their priority route to ensure that continues to happen.

More than anything for us, community provision is easy to access for young people. It doesn't have barriers attached; it should literally just be an open door where a young person finds something that they are interested in, are attracted to it, they can walk in and then the world is their oyster after that. And that then can have links into education, training and employment. So it is about what happens within that, but to have that open door is really important. I hope that answered your question.

**Chair:** Thank you, Rashid. I will now ask Bailey-Lee to ask the next question.

Q44 **Bailey-Lee Robb:** This question is directed at you, Hannah, so you are not missing out here. You said in your evidence that the Government must recognise that a child carrying a knife is a child protection issue and that it should trigger a safeguarding response. Could you tell us a bit more about that and the Children's Society's stance on it?

**Hannah Chetwynd:** Yes. We would always advocate for a child-centred approach to addressing knife crime. What we actually mean by this is that as soon as a child presents as vulnerable, or maybe having multiple vulnerabilities, we need to put in place a plan to support them, and that plan needs to take a wraparound approach; it should address their welfare and wellbeing needs, and perhaps take a look at some of the criminal justice needs as well. But this support needs to be put in place in all the areas of the child's life where they might need it.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

We know that this is a really complicated issue, and often the young people we work with present as victims and as perpetrators. It is vital that this is recognised and that they are treated as both. We want statutory services to recognise that these young people who have been exploited have not made a choice but are the victims of grooming. We really believe that they have been groomed and coerced, in the same way as we have seen for young people who have been groomed into sexual exploitation.

There are, of course, some really good pockets of practice out there, but in our direct work dealing with young people who have been criminally exploited into knife crime, we find that the response too often takes a punitive approach, and is often led by the police and by youth offending teams.

We believe that a more multi-agency approach is really needed, and it needs to intervene at a really early stage in a young person's life. Today we have published a report called "Counting Lives", in which we show that there has been a year-on-year increase in the number of 10 to 17-year-olds who have been arrested for possession with intent to supply class A drugs. We just think that this increase really should not be happening. We should be getting to these young people before this crisis has taken place. We should be giving them support at an earlier stage. We can break this cycle of exploitation by recognising the symptoms earlier.

All too often we hear that young people are talked about in multi-agency meetings only after a serious event has taken place and after they have been arrested. We think it has to start happening before. We think that one of the reasons it is continually happening is that we are taking a child protection view in our safeguarding. We are just looking at what is happening within a child's home, and so many of these drivers of youth violence are happening in an extra-familial setting, and we need to look to that. Already the Department for Education has recognised that, and it is reflected in its most recent "Working together" guidance, but we think that at the moment that is not aligned with the serious violence strategy. Before we can start tackling the issue, the two documents need to talk to each other and be aligned.

- Q45 **Jack Heald:** My question is initially for you, Hannah. In your evidence you also said that there needs to be a more coherent national structure and strategy to support effective interventions. For example, you say that what makes someone vulnerable can be different in different local areas, and the best time to intervene in a young person's life to prevent crime may also vary. What kind of structure and strategy would help organisations such as yours to work more effectively within circumstances which may be different from area to area?

**Hannah Chetwynd:** We see knife crime as the end result of criminal exploitation, as I mentioned in my introduction. Currently there is no legally binding definition of child criminal exploitation. There is also no guidance for local authorities on how to tackle the issue in their local areas. Again, talking about the research we published today, we found that out of 141 local authorities, only 50 had an actual protocol in place for

how to tackle child criminal exploitation in their neighbourhoods. This leads to varied practice from place to place and a misunderstanding of what constitutes exploitation among different agencies.

One of our services that I think I have already mentioned, Disrupting Exploitation, which is running across London, Greater Manchester and the east midlands, is working to support young people who have been exploited. One of the things that we have learned through this is that there is varied practice across local areas. Some areas are implementing preventive work with children at the age of eight. In other places, that might not start until crisis is reached at the age of 16. These problems seem to have derived from different definitions of vulnerability and understanding of risk factors.

Another good example is that in one local area where we work a child having a sibling being criminally exploited is seen as a red flag, and they would automatically be offered preventive work. In another area that might not be seen as a warning at all, so no preventive work would be done with the young person. We really think that the Government need to amend the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to include a definition of child criminal exploitation. We also think that the new safeguarding partnerships that are going to replace LSCBs need to take an assessment of how many children and young people are at risk of exploitation in their areas. After that, they need to put strategies and plans in place for how they are going to tackle that.

Q46 **Jack Heald:** What does the rest of the panel think?

**Jonathan Toy:** I definitely support Hannah's comment about consistency. We found within a number of areas that consistency of response and understanding are just not there. Anything that can bring that level of consistency would absolutely be welcomed, definitely.

**Chair:** I will ask Ewan to present the next question to the panel.

Q47 **Ewan Jago:** This question is for the whole panel. We have heard evidence that in a cost per outcome culture, organisations might not be able to offer prevention to the hardest to reach and often highest-risk young people. Do you agree that that is the case?

**Nick Darvill:** I am happy to start with that one. When we first put DIVERT into place, we were conscious, because we were just starting the second phase with new staff, not to put hard and fast outcomes in. The reason for that was that we had faith in the quality of our programme and that the outcomes would be a consequence of that. That has proved to be correct. With the work that we are all involved in, dealing with quality and not quantity will be our key factor in moving forward. There will always be the conversation that arises because we are given public money, and money comes in from charities and foundations. How that is spent has to be fully justified, but making those applications and robust delivery plans gives faith in those organisations on the outcomes that you will deliver.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Jonathan Toy:** I think it is a bit more complicated, to be honest. It goes back to some of the other things that we were talking about. To be a bit blunt about it, the cost per outcome suits the commissioners, but it does not suit the deliverers. Going back to what we were talking about, if there is a long-term approach to tackling serious violence and a commitment to a long-term approach, some of those conversations about cost per outcome completely change.

Niven or Karyn from the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit—I know you are talking to Niven later today—will talk about starting with the real basics: what do we need to fix and how do we go out there in the long term and keep doing it to fix? They were not basing it on cost per outcomes or anything of that nature; they were looking much more at how we genuinely start to tackle some of the underlying issues. Who do we need to get on board? There is something about leadership in this, in saying, “Let’s really take a much longer-term approach.” Let’s think about the underlying causes talked about earlier and how we start unpicking those without starting to apply different kinds of funding issues. As organisations, that is where we have struggled. The long-term approach and the money that goes on with that have not been consistent. For me, that would still be the burning issue.

**Hannah Chetwynd:** We do not have loads more to add, but to bring it back to the young person, when we work with really vulnerable young people we tend to find that what works best when trying to set targets is letting them be the leaders, allowing them to say what they want their goals to be and where they want to be. That does not necessarily fit with the cost-per-outcome culture.

**Rashid Bhayat:** That is exactly my point. Nick said some really important words about quality over quantity. That is really important for a young person-centred approach. For us, that is to relay to our funders or commissioners wherever they may be that they should have confidence and trust in the organisations that are delivering this work, because we are closest to the young people and it is the young people who are speaking to the commissioners, in many cases via us as organisations. That is a really important factor to build in to the longer-term models.

**Chair:** Thank you.

Q48 **Theo Sergiou:** Moving away from costing and more to the approach, which has been discussed quite a lot, what is your opinion on treating knife crime as a public health approach? That is to the whole panel.

**Hannah Chetwynd:** We believe that taking a public health approach really is a step in the right direction. It encourages, through its three-tiered approach, different types of prevention and intervention. It also encourages multi-agency responsibility which, if done in the right way, we are really supportive of. We are clear that any distribution of responsibility must be followed by distribution of funding and training, if it is to work effectively. Currently, the Government are consulting on a legal duty to support multi-agency action. That has been branded as a public health



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

approach, but as we have stated, we do not necessarily think that without appropriate funding and training, it will work effectively.

The core components of a public health approach should be to safeguard young people, to protect them from youth violence and knife crime. Implementing that does not have to be hard; it is not about reinventing the wheel—we already have some components in places, such as multi-agency child exploitation panels. It is about joining the dots and providing funding and making sure it works in practice.

**Rashid Bhayat:** Could I add one brief point about the public health approach? When we talk about it, we must ensure that we do not lose sight of the word “public”. The community needs to be very much involved. One of my fears is that this might become yet another systematic, structured framework, with a solution that misses out those who understand it the most, which is local communities. However this looks and however it will play out in different areas—there is absolute commitment to this across the nation—we must understand that the community needs to be at the heart of any public health approach. I have not heard enough of that and I have not been convinced yet, from everything I have read and heard, that the expertise and absolute specialisms of information, response, knowledge and confidence of the communities that this affects the most have been embedded within these approaches. I may be wrong, but I will gladly be proven wrong.

**Nick Darvill:** I agree with Rashid and Hannah; I feel that moving forward, and watching with interest, it will be absolutely key. It is key for us because, working on our programme, we are only as good as our networks. It will be about getting the right networks, and having the right networks communicating in the most effective and responsive way, and choosing the best people to surround this problem and have the greatest effect on it.

**Jonathan Toy:** I have a couple of bits to add, but I completely agree with colleagues here. The whole idea of a public health approach is a long-term approach to tackling violence. It is about defining a problem, working with different organisations to identify how you can intervene early and prevent violence from spreading. That is the whole basis of what we are trying to do. Right at the heart of it is involving the community, getting the community involved in the delivery of what is going on.

On the idea of consulting and making it a public duty, it should be our duty. It should not need to go out, and it certainly should not be limited to institutions. The consultation on the duty of a public health approach talks about institutions or community safety partnerships. What it should be talking about is, “How do we engender our responsibility across the board in taking ownership of this?” Don’t limit it to just the institutions—that just negates the issue.

As Rashid was saying earlier, if we are going to have a public health duty, why don’t we have a duty to involve young people? Every single piece of policy around a public health approach to tackling violence should be with



the involvement of young people in its design—not just designing what the policies look like, but designing the delivery. Where is the public duty to involve young people that should sit alongside that? If you don't do that, we will still be talking about the same issues in two, three or five years' time.

**Chair:** Thank you. Do you want to ask a follow-up question?

**Theo Sergiou:** I feel like that was followed up, so that's okay.

**Chair:** Okay. We will move on to the next question, which will be asked by Susuana.

Q49 **Susuana Senghor:** We heard some evidence stating that the Government's serious violence strategy does not include practical plans for engagement or long-term service delivery with the youth or community sectors. Do you agree with that criticism?

**Rashid Bhayat:** If you don't mind my taking that—yes, in short. That is really based on everything that we as a panel have shared with you today. We have a duty and a responsibility to take this from words into actions. I have been in this area of work for about 23 or 24 years, and I have lost count of the policies and new strategies I have read or been involved in writing. I have got to the stage in my career where I am much more interested in and far more critical of what is happening in the streets where I and young people that I work with live and spend time. That is where I see the evidence of the words that are on papers and in policies. I want to see it—I need to see it when I speak to people walking down the street.

That is the answer, for me, to whether it is working or not: people telling me how they are feeling and what is happening in their lives. On this issue of violence that is affecting our communities at the moment, we only know what people report. We only know what is evident. There is a lot more going on behind the scenes that needs a lot more support. It goes back to the point we have been raising—I will keep raising it—we have to get closer to our young people, to the communities that this affects the most. When we have Government strategies, how much involvement have the people that this affects the most had in them? Regardless of what comes out, those are the questions that we need to ask—who has written this, for whom, by whom and how will it be implemented?

I know that sounds quite negative. I do not mean it to be, but our organisation and many across the UK are picking up the pieces of what is happening here; we are dealing with traumatised young people and we are going to funerals for young people who were in our youth centres only weeks ago. So let's kick this on a little bit more, getting it off paper and on to the streets and the reality of what is happening to our communities now.

**Hannah Chetwynd:** I am going to take it back to what is on the paper. I talked about aligning the serious violence strategy with the working together guidance, and I want to mention something else about that. The

working together guidance includes a section on contextual safeguarding, which I have already mentioned. It would allow professionals not only to see young people through the criminal justice but to assess their wellbeing and welfare. If these two documents were aligned, we would not see policies such as knife crime prevention orders coming into play, which is an example of ill-thought-through and short-term solutions to youth violence.

Knife crime prevention orders can place restrictions on young people, stopping them going to certain places, meeting certain people and using social media. We know, through working with exploited young women who breach their bail conditions, that the fear of the exploiter often outweighs the fear of the law. We don't think placing restrictions on where young people can go will actually have any effect on them, and might put them at further risk. We think that these orders are a really good example of the contradictions between the two sets of guidance, both of which aim to keep young people safe. It is nuances like this that really inhibit any impact that can happen long term.

**Jonathan Toy:** From our point of view, there is an issue about interventions. We feel quite strongly that the serious violence strategy does not hit the mark, because it is limited. It looks at certain types of categories of violence—knife crime, homicide and drug markets. However, Husnaa's question was about the underlying causes. The serious violence strategy doesn't talk about domestic violence or harassment and bullying; it doesn't talk about the things that actually directly impact on serious violence or issues around trauma or those elements that lead people down certain pathways. How can you have a serious violence strategy that does not include domestic violence? It does not make any sense.

This is about join-up—a long-term public health approach, looking at the underlying causes. The serious violence strategy limits it to three particular areas. We have to bring these things together and think about the long-term impact and where we want to invest our money to prevent the end result, rather than just talking about the end result of serious violence result, which is limited in the strategy?

**Nick Darvill:** We were fortunate enough to feature in the serious violence strategy. Some of our most successful interventions have been through working with some of our young people on a long-term basis. Some of those conversations took place in a police cell, with a young adult who, by virtue of the offence they have committed and were convicted for, has actually gone and served a custodial sentence. Such was the impact of some of those conversations that those young adults kept the details of the DIVERT custody intervention coach for their custodial period and contacted them afterwards, nine months down the line.

I think that just shows that the common theme around the long term and the successes of intervention is that it is very difficult to put on an actual timeline. As I say, the young people have been working with us for the duration of the programme. I think that just typifies the need that many young people have. Every young person who comes through the



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

programme—as I am sure is borne out with everybody on the panel—comes with their own particular story of events. Although there are commonalities, the ability to deliver a bespoke intervention to the young person is the absolute key. Being in the fortunate position to be able to do that is a measure of real success in effective intervention.

**Chair:** Thank you. We will move on to the next question, which is from Husnaa.

**Q50 Husnaa Mota:** We have heard a lot of evidence about the importance for young people of having real, relatable role models to help them stay away from a life of crime and to positively inspire them. Do you think this is important, and if so, how could those people be encouraged to take an active role in mentoring and being a role model for young people?

**Jonathan Toy:** I'm happy to start with that one. I think that is absolutely at the heart of what we should be focusing on. How do we do it? We go out and we work right at grassroots level with the organisations on the ground, or with people who live in areas affected by serious violence, knife crime and so on, and we identify those people who have influence.

I can speak about this from personal experience, because that is what we have been doing for many years: going out and having those conversations with people on the ground who can actually start having those positive influences within those areas. We work with them, develop them, train them, and provide them with career opportunities beyond the work of being those negotiators on the ground. They are there, and we need to do more to go out, identify them, invest in them and find those career pathways. The moment we start creating that journey and those pathways, other people will then see those opportunities come through.

It is a proven process, and it is not all about buildings, facilities, youth clubs or whatever else; it is about investing in the very people who are on the ground. Again, lots of areas have done it. Scotland spent a long time investing in, as they call them, interrupters within their area; other areas have called them navigators. Community people absolutely go and identify them, and we have to think about a much more consistent national programme that would help do that.

**Rashid Bhayat:** The power of role models is essential; we have to utilise that. As human beings, regardless of your age, we all have role models, but I think for young people, it is more important than ever.

Just to give some practical examples of what we have been able to support in our area, over the past 20-something years, we have worked really hard to support young people into leadership roles, and that has been the backbone of the organisation. That is why I was saying earlier that it is not always about funding; if you can leave behaviours, morals and values with young people, as they grow older, they become the role models for those in their communities.

When young people from, say, an inner-city area see young people going off to uni, getting apprenticeships or traineeships or getting a job—

whatever it may be—they are the role models, but we are doing a lot more with that locally to ensure that the future of our communities is led by certain people. I mean, Husnaa is here today, and I'm sure you won't mind me saying that the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, in partnership with West Midlands Police, tasked us to establish a youth commissioners programme right across the region. It was seven local authority areas that each had two youth commissioners identified, so they went through an election process, and it was a democratic process; their peers voted them in.

What we found really powerful about that was that the young people who were voted into the youth commissioner posts had absolute credibility within their communities. They spoke for the young people, and the young people in the areas felt represented. That is the danger sometimes, especially—this is not a criticism of local authorities, but we have worked with authorities before that have youth councils, but they have not always been represented, especially in agendas and arenas like this, where it is about what happens on the streets, around violence and safety.

It is really important that role models are identified and supported, and then we as the adults—unfortunately, we've kind of still got that role—do as much as we can to promote them and push them into all the opportunities that we can. You guys here today are absolute role models in your communities, so we need to celebrate that and ensure that others can aspire to be in your roles. With yourselves, now, even us as practitioners are merely custodians of these seats. It is up to you guys, and the ambassadors that we have back in Coventry and across the west midlands, to then open the doors for the next generation to come through. We have to provide that platform.

Finally, we have started a new programme in particular around what we are talking about today, the violence affecting young people, in the Coventry area in partnership with the police. We will be hosting 110 youth ambassadors in the area, so that is a programme over the next nine months. In addition to that, 120 adult volunteer mentors will be trained up as well, and those mentors are coming in at a fairly steady rate, and coming from all walks of life: professionals, those out of uni, those just doing their own thing at the moment. It is really important that we do not put ourselves into a defined mode of what a role model is. Young people will always find their own role models, and it is just up to us to support that process and not dictate who that might be.

**Hannah Chetwynd:** Just to add to that, I completely agree with everything you said, but what came through in our evidence was the important of peers being each other's role models—I know you have already touched on that. It does not always have to be someone older in the community; it is really about letting young people decide who their roles models are and setting goals and aspirations with them.

I heard a really lovely example from one of our practitioners in Birmingham about working with a young person who found out that he was really good at art and really enjoyed creativity. He did not want to sit



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

in the youth centre and do painting like some of the other young people. They sat together and started designing trainers, and that had a really positive impact on that young person. The take-home message from that was about letting young people be, as you say, the custodians of their own journeys, using role models to support that.

**Nick Darvill:** The role models and volunteers that we have on the DIVERT programme are the heartbeat of the programme. It is about people, the work that we do and the engagement that we have with people. We have to put in very intensive training for the environment that we work in, and show investment and value to the people who are doing work for us.

I have always thought that one key thing about working with young people and young adults especially is consistency and continuity. For young people meeting their custody intervention coaches, that first engagement takes place in police custody, and really great importance is put on seeing the same person as the work and intervention follow through. That goes back to the conversation that we have been having for the last hour about building trusted relationships and long-term networks.

Q51 **Chair:** As a follow-up question, do you feel as though people who have lived experience—if they have been involved in crime before, for example—have a role to play by being role models for other young people in the community?

**Hannah Chetwynd:** Again, that is a really complicated question. In some instances, yes, but we have to be really careful about who we champion as role models. I spoke to a practitioner who said that he had gone into a school where someone with lived experience was delivering a preventative assembly and it was just like hearing a war story. While some people with lived experience can be incredibly positive role models, we have to be really careful about who we allow to interact with vulnerable young people.

**Rashid Bhayat:** I absolutely agree with that; it is all about the delivery and the message. We use many people within the organisation to share their message about their lived experiences, and it is so impactful and powerful when it is done appropriately and sensitively. The danger is that if the message is not clear—we have had this feedback—some young people could see it as a pathway and think, “I can live this life and do my thing, and at the end of it, a few years down the line, I can make money telling my story.” There is a danger in that, as well. It is exactly as Hannah said about the intention and how it is delivered.

**Nick Darvill:** I concur. There is definitely a place for it, but it is about the right people with the right messaging. From DIVERT’s perspective, we are keen to do that, but we are also keen for them to work very closely on the training and messaging that are we putting out.

Certainly in our community-based activity, there is definitely a place for it because the young people listen. They listen to them. If they are listening to and learning from them, that is a great responsibility, so the message



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

has to be absolutely clear. That comes back to the organisation; it comes back to us as DIVERT as to who we asked to represent us.

**Jonathan Toy:** Again, I concur. There is an authenticity within people and the young people who you work will know whether or not you are authentic. Authenticity is not always just about lived experience, but about whether you care, are compassionate, want to make a difference, find positive elements and help them on their journey. That, to me, has always been fundamental.

Some people with lived experiences are still dealing with them. They may be coming from a good place, but sometimes and in challenging situations they find it very difficult because they are still dealing with the things—the trauma, the issues or the life journey—that they are going through. They are not right for certain circumstances. You have got to be very, very careful. I have experienced both.

The most important thing is authenticity and willingness to care; that will help people on that journey. We should not be limiting it by what background someone has come from. We all have lived experiences. In many ways the stories that we tell and the connections that we make are more important than whether you have gone down a certain route.

**Chair:** We have come to the end of this session. I would like to thank all the members of our panel for coming here to give us evidence and insight into all your experiences. Thank you all very much.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sarah Boycott, Clive Davies, Niven Rennie and Edward Timpson.

**Chair:** Welcome to the Youth Select Committee. First, I would like to start by introducing myself and the Committee. My name is Rachel Ojo and I am the chair of the Youth Select Committee for 2019.

**Susuana Senghor:** Hi, I am Susuana and I am the vice-chair for this Committee.

**Jack Heald:** Hi, I am Jack.

**James Appiah:** Hi, I am James.

**Ewan Jago:** Hi, I am Ewan.

**Charley Oliver-Holland:** Hi, I am Charley.

**Bailey-Lee Robb:** Hi, I am Bailey-Lee.

**Chris Bakalis:** Hi, I am Chris.

**Jodie Floyd:** Hi, I am Jodie.

**Husnaa Mota:** Hi, I am Husnaa.

**Theo Sergiou:** Hi, I am Theo.

Q52 **Chair:** Thank you all for coming and agreeing to provide us with some evidence. Can you please briefly introduce yourselves and the work you represent?

**Edward Timpson:** Hello everyone. I am Edward Timpson and I have recently done a review for the Government into school exclusions. I also chair the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, which is a bit of a mouthful. I also chair Cafcass, which is the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, which essentially provides social workers to family courts to help resolve issues involving children.

**Niven Rennie:** Hello everybody. I am Niven Rennie, the director of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit—a position I have held for a year. The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit has been running since 2005. Previously, I was a police officer for 31 years and also a chief executive of a homeless charity for two years.

**Sarah Boycott:** Good afternoon. I am Sarah Boycott, and I am assistant chief constable of West Midlands police. I lead on local policing across the west midlands. I have a role in intervention and prevention, and I co-chair the Violence Prevention Alliance with the director of public health, taking a public health approach to violence.

**Clive Davies:** Hello, I am Clive Davies. I am head of custody and criminal justice for Surrey police. Part of that involves our use of what we call out-of-court disposal—diverting people away from the formal court system. That obviously includes young people, and I will talk to you about that a bit later.

Q53 **Chair:** Thank you. Mr Timpson, we will start with some questions for you. During your review, did you find that schools are adequately supported and resourced to help young people who may be involved in knife crime or other violent activities?

**Edward Timpson:** The first thing to say is that I saw some excellent practice. We know that schools can provide really good support, where they know it is an issue in and around the school and the community. It is also true that there is huge variability across the country, not least because schools have different levels of experience in relation to knife crime and other criminal activity.

Having said that, and recognising that there is real room for improvement, one of the things I wanted to do through the review is to make sure that what we found could be turned into solutions that are real and pragmatic, rather than something that has been tried before and didn't work, or that sounds great on paper but is unlikely to cut through and make a difference.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

When it comes to resources, there are two sides of that. It is about schools' capacity to help in trying to prevent and intervene effectively where this might be an issue. We recognise that schools cannot do this on their own. Whether you call it a multi-agency or a multidisciplinary approach—I prefer the latter, because it means that it is more built around the child and the family—they need extra support.

That support and capacity is going to come in two ways. The first is money—you can't do it if you can't pay for it, and clearly schools are under a lot of pressure. Although the overall school budget has gone up, extra costs have been put on top of them. More pupils are going to school—we have 8 million children of school age who need a good education—and other things like pensions have made it harder for schools to find the money to provide the sort of support and activities that we want to see.

That is one side that needs to be addressed. The other is the professional capacity: how well are schools geared up to recognise that this may be a problem, and do they feel confident that they know what to do about it? For me, that is the area where there is still a lot more work to be done with schools, which have a real appetite to understand more about what is driving knife crime and how they can play their part. It is not that they are closed to the problem; it is just that sometimes they do not have the tools or the knowledge and experience to know how to deal with it effectively.

**Chair:** Thank you. Let us move on to the next question, which Chris will be asking.

Q54 **Chris Bakalis:** My question is to you, Edward. In the survey we have been running, most of the respondents said that education is the best way to tackle knife crime. Do you think that people are overestimating what can be done through schools?

**Edward Timpson:** Schools have an absolutely key part to play—there is no doubt about that—so to suggest that they can't help would be wrong. I saw some really good examples of where schools were able to help deal with both the symptoms of what is happening—the fact that there are issues in the community and how the school can help—and the root causes. For me, that is at the heart of everything.

Education is our chance. It is probably the only environment, apart from the family home, where a child's wellbeing and learning, and the safeguarding needed in that environment, can all come together. Education can be a really protective factor for a lot of the children and young people we are talking about—not least some of those really trusted relationships that they need to build up within the school, and with the support that the school has attached to it.

I certainly wouldn't say that schools can do this on their own, but they are in a unique position. When we talk about school, we are talking about all age ranges here. Although we are particularly interested in secondary school, we also need to realise that we can resolve a lot of these issues much earlier by trying to build a better understanding, working with



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

families much more closely and giving children the resilience that they need. It is also about the learning experience, so that they value both education and themselves, and about a sense of belonging. Often those are the things that are missing, and schools can go a long way towards providing them.

**Chair:** I call on Theo to ask the next question.

Q55 **Theo Sergiou:** In your findings, was there a difference in the rate of school exclusion between groups of young people with special characteristics—for example, different socio-economic backgrounds or different ethnicities?

**Edward Timpson:** In short, yes, and for the first time we did a full, comprehensive analysis—what is called regression. For a lot of children who end up having an experience of exclusion, they won't have just one characteristic that makes them more likely to end up on that path; there will be overlapping aspects that can contribute to the likelihood of that happening.

For instance, it might be their ethnicity. The analysis in my review showed that for some ethnic groups there is more likelihood of being excluded when you have taken out all the other characteristics that we can account for—for instance, special educational needs, whether they are on free school meals, whether they are a child in need, and whether they are from a disadvantaged background. Even if you take all those other factors and characteristics away, they are still more likely to be excluded. One such group is black Caribbean—by contrast, Bangladeshis, Indians and Pakistanis had a lower likelihood of exclusion than their peers did.

It is a very complex picture, but we can say that 78% of all children who have been permanently excluded have one of three characteristics. One is that they have some form of special educational need. Another is that they are a child in need, which means they have been identified by children's services as needing extra support because things are not going to plan. The third is poverty—they come from a background of lower socioeconomic environment than their peers do.

From the review, we know that 50,000 children are going out of mainstream school every year. What are the characteristics that define them? In my review, I wanted to say, "How can we identify them as early as possible and put the support in?" because the earlier you put it in, the greater prospect you have of putting them on the right path. Rather than looking at the issue school by school, we should look at it across a local area. This is one of the things that we have gone backwards on.

There is a real incentive for us to try to get back on track: to ensure that all children in a local area are the collective responsibility of all the schools, as well as all the other services—children's services, police and health—and to work together to understand some of the patterns that are developing around children in their community and their likelihood of being excluded.



One of the recommendations in my review is that we should know where every child of school age is being educated, who has made that decision, and whether there are characteristics of some of the children who are falling out of education that we should be worried about, so that we can put in more preventive work in advance of the problem getting worse.

The review has exposed what some people believe to be the case, and now we have concrete evidence of which children we are talking about and how we can work better together in trying to come up with the answers.

**Q56 Theo Sergiou:** On that comment, with your observation on the local and wider levels, what do you believe are the reasons for minority groups being disproportionately excluded?

**Edward Timpson:** As my review says, it is a complicated picture. For every child that you were to look at individually, you would find a different mix of factors that have made them more likely to find themselves in that situation. Essentially, it is a combination of what I call in-school factors and out-of-school factors. In-school factors can be around the way a school is run and the policies that it has, but also around the practice and what they are actually doing to help children who might be at risk of exclusion to divert them so that they stay in mainstream education.

There is also the out-of-school factor and what happens away from school. We talked earlier about poverty and what might be happening at home and whether a child has suffered some trauma or has had difficulties forming relationships because of experiences that they had when they were younger. It can have quite a detrimental effect—a big effect—on their ability to engage with school life, so you need to look at both of those.

The schools that do this really well focus on the child. They get to know them, understand what makes them tick and the things that they are worried about, whether it is the way they behave in school or maybe their absence from school, which is a real indicator of where there might be things outside of school that need to be worked on. It is a combination of all of that, but recognising that there are still some children who are defined by some of their own characteristics, which they should not be, because of some of the cultural misunderstanding within schools and sometimes their reluctance to work with communities.

I saw a great school in south London a few weeks ago that has a large black Caribbean pupil population, and it has worked really hard to make a strong social network between the school and the community to make them feel that it is their school. Interestingly, schools that have a larger number of one group of children from a particular community have lower rates of exclusion among that group than schools that have less, because they are not as exposed to what might be behind some of the issues that are brought into school. For me, that demonstrates that the school needs to invest in not just what is happening in your school, but out of your school as well.



**Chair:** Thank you, Edward. Susie will ask the next question.

Q57 **Susuana Senghor:** My question is for the entire panel. What effect does school exclusion have on young people already at risk of getting involved in gang and/or violent crime?

**Niven Rennie:** Shall I kick off and give Edward a break? I did some research before coming down; as with every piece of research, I stand to be corrected. I understand that in England and Wales, there are 8,000 permanent exclusions. Up to 80,000 children are also excluded—either they move school or get educated at home. In Glasgow last year, there was one permanent exclusion. There has been a recognition that keeping people in school, for any reasons, brings better benefits. Clearly, if you put somebody out of school, they have time to kill and they get involved in activity such as vandalism or shoplifting and they will form associations that can lead to gangs, and that can lead to violence. From the violence point of view, it is better to be kept in school. For their own development, we want to nurture our children and have all our children given the best opportunity to thrive. Sometimes, as has been touched on, they come to school with a whole host of adverse childhood experiences. Trauma that has happened in the home makes them misbehave, for want of a better expression. Sometimes what we need to do is to take time to understand what is causing a person to misbehave, rather than just exclude them because of their behaviour. That has been the positive approach taken in Glasgow and we have seen some benefit from it.

**Sarah Boycott:** On a similar theme, if a young person is excluded from school, they are much more vulnerable to exploitation and connections with gangs and county lines networks. They are more vulnerable to being influenced. Obviously, the protective factor is there if they are within the school environment. I would advocate not just looking at the exclusion piece, but the adverse childhood experiences. We need to understand what is going on in that individual's life that makes them vulnerable to violence and to exploitation, to be able to put that whole service approach around the individual.

Absolutely the police and schools need to work very closely to understand where a young person has been excluded and be part of the network of those services that work with families and around a young person to play a role in protecting them from becoming more vulnerable.

**Clive Davies:** For me, common sense says that if you exclude a young person and their support net is taken away, they will be more vulnerable. It is almost as simple as that. The concern is about people who fall between the gaps. What we find in Surrey is that someone might be excluded but might not be so bad that they go to, say, a referral unit. The individual who falls through that gap is then far more vulnerable without that support around them. Logically, it would expose people more.

**Niven Rennie:** This is looked upon as what we call a wicked problem. You want everybody in your school to attain the best they can, and we have league tables and attainments to be achieved. If some pupils are causing



disruption, that may prevent other children, who you wish to go on and flourish, from getting the education they require. Therefore, that is an incentive to exclude, but actually you are creating further problems for society further down the road, and certainly for the children you are choosing to exclude. So it is not an easy one to solve, but I think that is where a lot of the problems lie.

**Edward Timpson:** To add to Niven's point, that is one of the principal reasons why one of the main recommendations I made was to start making schools responsible for the first time for children they exclude. That is for a number of reasons. We know that at the moment excluded children's outcomes are extremely poor: only 7% of children who are permanently excluded get good maths and English GCSEs, which are the bedrock to getting on in life and getting a good job. Forty-two per cent. of prisoners had been permanently excluded, and Ofsted, the inspector of schools, found that children who had been permanently excluded were twice as likely to carry a knife.

We know that there are risks with exclusion. First of all, those are where exclusions are poorly managed. You can exclude when absolutely necessary—it is a last resort when nothing else will do—but if you have to do it, there are ways of doing so that keep those protective elements of education and school life. If it has to be done, it should be an intervention that makes life better for the child or young person involved, not worse.

A lot can be learnt from some of the good work that goes on in what is called "alternative provision"—outside of mainstream schools—who mainly work with children and young people who have been excluded. Mainstream schools could learn from that to get in front of the issues around adverse childhood experiences—one of my recommendations is for more training in schools on attachment and trauma—and start to reap the benefits of that earlier, so exclusion becomes less necessary.

**Sarah Boycott:** We talk a lot about exclusion, which is a really important area. An area that we do not talk about a lot is colleges. When young people are at college and involved in the next step in education, we need to understand how many hours they are spending in that college. Some courses are for only one or two hours a week, so what is happening to that individual during the rest of the time? How vulnerable are they? What else could be provided to enable them to have that connection and wider opportunities, rather than leaving them vulnerable to exploitation?

**Chair:** Thank you. Husnaa will ask the next question.

Q58 **Husnaa Mota:** Do you agree with Edward that schools should be more responsible for exclusions? If you do, who should be held to account for that?

**Niven Rennie:** That is a very difficult question. I do not know the situation as well as my colleagues. What I see in Scotland is a level of acceptance of accountability by the education authorities where I work. Linking that to Chris's earlier question, I think education is essential, not



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

just to give the best outcome to individuals but to tackle the issue that has been referred to as knife crime—I like to call it violence with a knife. In Scotland, we have education delivered through a violence reduction project—No Knives Better Lives and Medics Against Violence all deliver programmes in schools. The average age of a homicide victim and perpetrator in Scotland is in the 30s. It is not a young person’s issue in Scotland. I think that is largely to do with the responsibility taken by the education authorities.

**Edward Timpson:** I think there are different levels of responsibility. Those who work every day with children, who are tasked with giving them a really great education—schools and colleges—obviously have that principal responsibility, which is where the idea of keeping them responsible for children they exclude comes from. I also recognised in my review that local authorities—councils or education authorities in Scotland—have a lot of responsibility for what we sometimes call vulnerable children and young people. They are the ones who fall into the categories that may need extra care or protection from the state. They may have special educational needs or other profound needs or mental health issues, where local authorities still have that overview to look across an area and say, “How are we faring and tackling each of these issues?”

Above that—this is something you may want to look at as a Committee—are the new arrangements coming in across the whole of England on child safeguarding. As I said, I chair the national child safeguarding panel. Each area is having to bring together what are being called safeguarding partnerships where police, local authorities and health have that joint responsibility for ensuring that they have a clear plan about how they will ensure that children are safe in their area, and where there are specific issues, which may be knife crime or other forms of criminal exploitations—county lines as mentioned before. Education will be part of that partnership, to make sure they are using each other’s intelligence, professional understanding and resources, so they can be as efficient and effective as possible at getting in front of the problem. Also, where things are going wrong, they are in a good position to work together to come up with the solutions.

**Sarah Boycott:** I can speak on behalf of the police but obviously not about the academic. From a police perspective, one of the things we would want schools to do is information sharing, understanding who they are identifying as young people who may be at risk, who are carrying knives in the school. That is absolutely not about criminalising young people but about sharing that information so we can understand, as a collective, what is the right approach for that young person. For example, in some locations in the west midlands we have really good sharing arrangements; we will be told when the young person has come to school with a knife, and officers and PCSOs can work with that young person and their family to help them understand the risk factors and the risk they are putting themselves at.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

The other thing I would ask of schools is to be open to operations with the police; to working with them and having officers in their establishments. One of the most important things is that young people see the police and PCSOs as legitimate: to see, understand and have the right perspective of authorities, so we can build those relationships. That way, when they are in fear of violence, they can feel confident to raise the issues.

One of the other pieces I will just talk about that is really helpful is that when, for example, from a police perspective we understand that a domestic abuse incident has taken place, we then share that information with the school if it is the parent of that young person, so that if the young person is behaving differently in school that day, they can understand what the factors are in that person's life that are contributing to that, to help them understand perhaps why they are behaving in a particular way that would lead to exclusion that day.

**Chair:** Thank you. I will ask James to present the next question to the panel.

Q59 **James Appiah:** My question is to the entire panel. Could you briefly explain your opinion on knife prevention orders?

**Clive Davies:** I am conscious that that is a Home Office initiative, and policing-wise we have to be very careful about commenting on Government policy, because we are obviously impartial and independent. My observation is that certainly, from a policing point of view, we welcome the chance to have more powers. Clearly, there is a lot to knife prevention orders that is very preventive and that looks good in my opinion, and that provides us with real opportunity.

I am aware of some concerns around human rights and the fact that, in effect, young people can have these orders, which can prevent social media usage and so on, given to them on a lower burden of proof—the civil burden of proof. They are quite wide-ranging powers and there are some concerns around that, but my view is that that does go before a court to be decided on before it is brought in, and the court would obviously assess proportionality, so there are checks and balances there. One point I would make is a funding one, in that it is great that police can have more powers, but obviously we need to have the resources to enforce those powers.

**Sarah Boycott:** It is a tool that we should be making use of as part of our toolbox, but it needs to be done in a careful and considered way, looking at the individual young person and the factors that would have the most effect in those circumstances. It should not be a generically applied power, and it should be part of an escalation process. It should be working with the other services, such as the youth offending service, on other opportunities first before we use this legislation. The other thing we must be mindful of when we are using it is that it does not become a badge of honour. Sometimes, some of the other orders that we have applied in the past, such as those on antisocial behaviour, have almost become a badge of honour for that individual.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Finally, one of the challenges we always face is the additional work that comes with this. It affects police resources. The other aspect is, when we have a breach of an order, what happens to that young person at court. The same perspective needs to carry on into the criminal justice system, because if it has no impact, it has no teeth and it has no opportunities to make a change. I would advocate opportunities around orders for a positive duty—not just not carrying or not being in a place, but a positive duty to engage in an activity that might help to keep that young person safer.

**Niven Rennie:** Where people are losing their lives on the streets, there is a need for enforcement; we cannot get away from that. That is what is required to bring about an end to the tragedies we are seeing. I am more concerned not with knife prevention orders, but with the fact that young people are carrying knives in the first place. By the time we have got to bringing in orders to stop people carrying knives, we have lost where we should be. We should be addressing the circumstances that cause people to have a knife, not the fact that they have a knife.

I was listening to the end of the last evidence panel; we are getting stuck at the tactical level of the way in which violence is presenting itself, but a lot of the evidence you are hearing will show you that violence comes from people who have been excluded, who are living in poverty, who feel on the outside of society or who are not getting the opportunity to flourish in the way they see other people doing. I should not get tied up too much with the knife prevention orders, but with addressing the reasons why violence is occurring.

**Edward Timpson:** Can I make one specific point about court? I know that these would, hopefully, be very rare cases, and I agree with what has been said—that once you have got to that point, we have probably failed and we need to think much more smartly about how we can get much further down the line, so that we do not find ourselves in that situation. By the time you go to court, you are starting to provide a route for those young people involved, which is inevitably towards, in many cases, a life in and out of custody. That is hugely costly to them and their family and to us as a society, in terms of both how much money we throw at it and also what message it sends out on the aspiration we had for them when their life started and where they have ended up, and how we break that cycle.

One thing I have found about the way the court process is set up is that you often find the same children and young people who go to the family courts, which I was talking about relating to my role with CAFCASS, where they may have a social worker in their life—they will certainly have some involvement with children's services—treated in a different way when they go to a different court, such as a criminal court or a youth court. There is often not a good linking between the two court processes.

In those situations, it would be helpful if the same judge or magistrates saw any child or young person who is before a court, because they will know more about them, rather than just seeing them as another name on the page. Also, any social worker involved in their life should be involved



at every stage, so that we don't end up punishing the young person in a way that will actually entrench their behaviour, with their ending up back in court again and again.

In terms of an intervention point, court—if it has to come to that; we hope that it never does, but we have to accept that it will—is another opportunity, albeit late in the day, to make changes. It is one area where we are still not very good at recognising that and acting on it.

**Chair:** Thank you. I will now hand over to Jodie to ask the next question.

Q60 **Jodie Floyd:** The serious violence strategy says that interventions need to be tailored to an individual's needs, and that the intensity should match their level of risk. Do you think that that is being done?

**Sarah Boycott:** That is quite a difficult question, because it can apply in different locations. When we are looking at interventions—I am sure you will talk about this more—it is almost about understanding what can be done on a universal basis, what should be done everywhere, what can be done on a targeted basis and what should we do as an intensive intervention. There was talk in the earlier session around understanding the problems. We absolutely need to understand the problems, what works, what works in different locations and what works with different individuals, and we need to look at the targeted approach for those locations and also perhaps at what is needed in all schools, for example.

From a policing perspective, a programme that has connectivity with every school is useful. You would then perhaps do more intensive work with targeted schools, particularly in more vulnerable locations, and then more intensive work in areas where you want to make a greater impact.

**Clive Davies:** On whether interventions should be tailor-made, yes, they absolutely should be, based on the individuals. In Surrey, we have a scheme that tries to keep as many young people out of the formal court process as possible. We deal with people via more informal means, and the approach to every young person we deal with in that way is tailor-made. That is why, in my force area, we do much before it even gets to court or a formal criminal justice sanction. We deal with the majority of young people at a lower level, but with a tailor-made approach, and with the same person working with them throughout, and that works.

**Niven Rennie:** We have a whole load of intervention strategies that are aimed at people in different stages of their life. I spoke to a third-sector partner in the past couple of weeks who is going to try to run a programme across Glasgow in the west of Scotland where they are intervening with 30 or 40 people in each school who are likely to get into the criminal justice system. That is a sort of global outreach, and it provides alternative paths.

To me, the most important thing that we have found with all our intervention programmes is that a lot of people who get into the criminal justice system have no proper adult role models. They have lacked empathy or understanding in their home. People have not shown them the

compassion that we have all had growing up. Sometimes, the first time they have experienced someone believing in them is when they have had an organisation intervening and showing them a different route. For me, it is about a variety of options for whoever may require it. The most important thing is that they are there. We have a programme where we take people who have been serious violent offenders in their lives and have been in prison. We give them jobs. I believe everyone requires a second chance. We should not just write people off at any stage in their lives. The answer to your question is yes, but as long as interventions are there.

**Sarah Boycott:** The other aspect of it is to not just look at the individual, but the risk factors of those around them—their friends and their family. One of the approaches that we advocate in West Midlands police is that when we are dealing with a young person, we should understand their siblings and their friend networks, and work wider rather than just with that individual. It should be tailored, but tailored around those who are at risk around the individual.

**Chair:** I invite Jack to ask the next question.

Q61 **Jack Heald:** In line with what Superintendent Davies said, some of the evidence we have received argues against putting young people through the criminal justice system, and points to other tactics that divert them from it as being more successful. Do you agree that tactics sitting outside the formal criminal justice system could be useful for young people?

**Clive Davies:** Definitely. As I mentioned, in Surrey we led the way with that kind of approach. For me, there are three reasons why it is better to deal with young people outside the criminal justice system. First, I think that there is more support available. When we work with young people, we call it youth restorative interventions. We have one officer or one member from the county council who works with that young person with a bespoke plan for them, and they stay with them throughout. They get a great amount of support that is tailor-made and moulds around them. The support via that means it is strong and victims are happy. While you might think victims would say, "I want my day in court", actually about 91% of victims are happy with the approach we use in Surrey to avoid the court process.

Secondly, by using more formal methods, there is a degree of labelling involved. Someone will have that label of being a criminal. That labelling and that exposure to the more formal parts of the criminal justice system is unhealthy for individuals, certainly in later life.

The third reason is the impact in later life, where it does change life opportunities. I was speaking to one of my team only a few weeks ago about a case they have dealt with where an individual in education had made a silly mistake, but it was a criminal offence. That individual, if they had gone through a formal criminal justice process, would have lost their place where they were studying and their whole life plans would have come to an end. Because we were able to intervene and bring in this more



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

informal approach we have, we could work with the educational provider and that person kept their place. Suddenly, someone whose life chances would have been destroyed in many respects, or massively changed, has been kept well on track. That was really important and positive for me.

**Sarah Boycott:** It is a very similar approach in West Midlands. One of the things we have done is train our police officers in understanding adverse childhood experiences, so they understand the impacts that a young person might have had in their life and what protective factors they might have available and look at that young person as an individual and what the factors are and what the right outcome is for them. Rather than just taking a punitive approach, we look at other opportunities to either signpost them into services or to work on out-of-court disposals and different opportunities. The other thing that I think is really important is working with the young people who are vulnerable, or are already in that pathway of criminality. We have a Prince's Trust programme that is co-delivered by the trust and colleges, and we use those opportunities to again build confidence in policing with police officers and PCSOs involved in it, but also giving them a different opportunity with their life.

**Niven Rennie:** I couldn't be more delighted to hear colleagues south of the border talking about adverse childhood experiences and trauma, which is one of the things that we have looked at in great detail in the past few years. As a society, we lock up far too many people. Prison is not the answer; our prisons are full of people with huge amounts of trauma, mental health problems, or alcohol or drug addiction. A lot of them need help, not prison.

In Scotland, we are not proud of the fact that 1% of our population are care-experienced—they have been through the care system, foster care and care homes. Some 65% of our prison population are care-experienced. These are young people with the greatest trauma that they could experience, and the answer is that they either go homeless or go to prison in their teenage years. We need to do better, and there have to be alternatives to the criminal justice system for people who are struggling, particularly at a young age.

**Edward Timpson:** Many, many moons ago, I spent the best part of 10 years as a barrister doing family and crime, the two courts that I mentioned earlier. I was there long enough to see children and young people initially being taken into care—my parents fostered; I have two adopted brothers, so it is a system I know very well—and a number of years later, I would be representing them in the criminal court. It is a well-trodden path. There is some good news, in that we have fewer children in custody than we used to, but once you are in the criminal justice system, the chances of you then being a repeat offender, finding yourself on a revolving door going in and out as you move into adulthood—you will find many of those in adult prisons across the country—get greater and greater.

We know, for example, that 83% of young offenders have been persistently absent from school, which means that they have missed a lot



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

of school, in one of the last five years before they have ended up in custody. That is another indicator that we already know is going to accelerate the likelihood of them ending up as a young offender, so there is still more that we can do to ensure that cycle does break, because even more depressingly, it becomes generational. I am sure all of us here will have seen that, where it is handed down through a family. Really, what that is telling us is that they need help, and there are plenty of people in prison whose lives could have been so different from what they are.

I don't run our family business; my brother runs it, but 10% of Timpson's workforce is ex-offenders. We take them out of prison. We don't just give them a job, but make sure that they are in a concrete home environment that is going to sustain them, are not in debt, and are out of the area where they were getting into difficulty. We provide mental health support and an opportunity to make a new life, and they actually end up being some of the most reliable, loyal employees that the business has. That shows that they could have offered something so different if they had been given a different opportunity.

Really, there is a responsibility on all of us—whether in the roles that we have, in government, or actually in communities, where a lot of this used to happen—to help build that resilience that those people needed. Because it was lacking, they ended up in a very different place.

**Sarah Boycott:** If a young person is carrying a knife out of fear, once they are criminalised their life chances change significantly, so we need to understand what programme will help them to realise the risks around that and prevent it from happening again, rather than going through the court system.

**Clive Davies:** One thing of interest is that obviously there are numerous different police forces across the country and each force tends to have a different policy on certain things. So, in my force we include knife crime within our restorative interventions, so a young person with a knife need not go to court. It is done on a case-by-case basis, but you will find in some other areas that some forces would not include young people with knives; that would be rated as too serious, so it must go to court, basically. So you see some variation.

Again, from my perspective there are different types of severity of knife crime, and someone who is going out with a knife to harm someone seriously and attack people is quite different from someone who is naively carrying a knife, perhaps because, for example, they are a bit fearful. So, we let young people who carry knives— if appropriate—be dealt with via an out-of-court approach, or restorative intervention.

Q62 **Ewan Jago:** Superintendent Davies, you use informal interventions in Surrey. We would like to hear more about your restorative justice work.

**Clive Davies:** Okay. Basically, when a young person offends, in every scenario, so long as it is not one of the most serious offences going—serious violence is indictable only, but this applies for the vast majority of



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

offences—that case will go to a central team to be assessed. One of my central team will work with the county council as part of a panel, and they will review every single case. Every single crime carried out by a young person will be reviewed, on a case-by-case basis, to look at the appropriateness of the next steps.

For example, they will look at previous history, previous behaviour, previous actions, the circumstances of the offence and the victim's views as well. So, all sorts of things will be considered within deciding what the next step should be. For a lot of cases—the majority of cases—it is through a youth restorative intervention.

As I mentioned previously, that means that the young person will be told, "You will work with a single person"—either a police officer or someone from the country council who is trained in restorative practice—"and there will be set things to go along with." So, there will be a bespoke plan of action, which could be some courses, some community work or some one-to-one sessions. It is all very much tailor-made around that individual, which they must then work through over a series of months.

If that is done successfully, then that crime will be in effect finalised, or ended, as an informal resolution, basically. So it is a very low-level intervention. It says that, yes, they have carried out that offence, but it is not what we call a formal sanction, so there is no formal record attached to that young person. They obviously have to admit the offence to be part of that process and they have to agree to go along with those conditions, but most people do.

How it also works is that there is almost like a sword of Damocles, in that the person knows that if they do not go along with the conditions, the agreement and the courses or the one-to-ones and so on, that kind of non-compliance can then result work in a more serious sanction. We find that having that kind of "If you don't do this, then you get that" approach does work, so people engage in the process and we see some really good outcomes.

Our reoffending rates are only about 18%, which is very good; it is low. It means that we have reduced first-time entrance of young people into the criminal justice system in the last 10 years by over 90%, which is massive. So, over 10 years the vast majority of young people in Surrey have not now been criminalised, but victims are still happy; over 90% of victims are still happy with what we are doing.

So, why we are really passionate about it is that it is tailor-made, victims are happy, it prevents reoffending, it has saved over £1 million, and it absolutely works.

**Q63 Ewan Jago:** So what makes restorative justice successful for some young offenders but not so successful for others?

**Clive Davies:** For the majority, it works. The fact that our reoffending rate is so low means that what we are putting in place is working. It is tailor made, so if a young person has an interest in cars, for example, the



officer or council member working with them will focus some of the interventions around car activity. They will very much tailor it to how best to resonate and tap into that person's interests to keep them engaged, and it works. There is always a minority of people for whom it will not work, but thankfully, that is the minority.

In terms of who is a good candidate for this, we try to include everyone. Everyone is eligible. We will go to the panel of police and council members that I mentioned to see if we can include that person on our scheme. Only if someone has got real history of offending will we know that it is not going to work and we would not try in that case. In the majority of cases it does work.

**Q64 Charley Oliver-Holland:** Have you seen examples of positive role models being able to divert young people from gang and criminal activity?

**Niven Rennie:** Yes, hundreds of times. We employ people with serious violence convictions. I was interested at the end of your last evidence session. Yes, you have to be careful, but we have individuals who have come away from violent activity now mentoring people—it is fantastic. We have had individuals going into schools and not trying to encourage them by saying how life was when they were involved in violence but talking about the fear that they lived with, the impact that going to prison had on them, and the fact that because they were in prison, they were not at home when their children were born. That makes a difference.

When I go to schools and we talk about exclusion, I say to teachers, "Who better to be a role model for a young person than a teacher?" Role models are really important. We have to recognise that a lot of young people grow up in homes where there is no male role model and where they have not been given encouragement, empathy, love and compassion. Somebody who is able to reach an individual at that level and provide them with a role model is worth their weight in gold.

**Edward Timpson:** There is one thing that is important to remember in all this. I have seen example of teachers and other support staff in a school, and in the care system there are amazing foster carers and personal advisers who help those who are moving out of care, and I have seen some who have almost over-committed to that responsibility because they cared about that young person's future.

The key to this is to make sure it is someone that the child or young person, through the development of a relationship with them, decides, "That is the person that I want to emulate. That is the person I want to become." It could be anybody; it does not have to be someone with a particular standing or status, but someone who they can relate to, feel comfortable talking to and build up trust with, so that they are then more open to discovering a different future.

Sometimes you want to formalise it in how you make it happen, but you need to provide them with the opportunity to find who that role model is.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Going into schools is a way of providing them with that opportunity and trying to intrigue and excite them about the possibility of something different and tapping into what makes them tick. It may be a love of cars or they might still be obsessed by Minecraft and have not got it out of their system, but whatever it is, tap into it and use it as a way of developing that relationship.

Too often, you see children and young people who need extra support and who may have half a dozen or more professionals working with them, but they do not feel any more supported and may in fact still feel really isolated because they have not got that role model—that person who they feel that they can trust and invest in. That is in some ways the holy grail that we are looking for, because we know from all the experiences that we have seen—I am sure that many of you have as well—that it is often the thing that works.

**Sarah Boycott:** I think policing works in different ways. We have a number of programmes where there are role models—I talked about the Prince's Trust. One of the other things we do in the West Midlands is have a junior PCSO scheme. PCSOs go into primary schools and work for a six-week period with young people on their understanding of policing, their understanding of the issues, and how they can contribute to the community themselves—for example, getting them involved in things such as speed watches. That is an opportunity to make a connection with young people.

The other one we build on is with the police cadet scheme, which is very much focused on the communities of greatest need. We go into the schools where we want to have the greatest effect. That might be the first time a young person has had an opportunity to speak to a police officer. You hear some of their life stories about how the police have previously been in their home in a very different role and at a very different point in that person's life. They have an opportunity to speak to a police officer and understand what policing does, as well as be involved in projects in the community. Our cadets come out and work on a number of different things—for example, they were involved in Pride in Birmingham this year. They have been involved in some of the activities we have had around knife sweeps and so forth, so they are involved practically in reducing crime.

**Clive Davies:** The point that anyone can be a role model in the right situation is quite relevant. One example is our local fire and rescue service running a youth intervention scheme. For about two weeks a few times a year, a group of young people will go and spend time at the fire headquarters, and they will be taught team building and fire drills. After two weeks, they will show what they have learned to their friends and family. They will show how to equip a fire engine and do all the drills to try to fight a fire. It is really impressive stuff, and very disciplined. They have real pride in what they have done. It is good to see that the firefighters, who have been the young people's mentors and trainers for that two-week period, will be up at the front. The firefighters who speak about what each



individual has achieved have real pride in their class, and you can see the young people really respect the firefighter they have worked with. That is an example; in that case, the fire service is providing good role models, but it could be a wide range of people.

**Chair:** Thank you. I invite Husnaa to ask the next question.

Q65 **Husnaa Mota:** Does increased stop-and-search mean that young people are less likely to carry weapons?

**Sarah Boycott:** Stop-and-search, like every police power, has a role to play. The information, and the evidence picture of what it achieves, is less clear at the moment. Some of the work that the College of Policing is doing is identifying that there is a weak case for the medium and long-term effects that stop-and-search will have.

In West Midlands police, as a result of the escalation in violence that we saw earlier on this year, when we had the tragic loss of three young people in a very short period of time through murders, we took a very robust approach to stop-and-search, but looked very carefully at the correlation. There is no obvious impact at this point in time, but it gives an opportunity to reassure the community. It is part of that effect of providing a visible opportunity to deal with a specific problem at that point in time. One of the things we are very cognisant of when using this power is seeing the effect it can have on how young people perceive policing; it can create tensions and a longer-term negative impact. It needs to be very carefully used, but it is a tool.

One of the things that we advocate when we do our stop-and-search is to stop and talk, and stop and think. That conversation is really important. It is about not just using the power, but explaining what it is about and what other opportunities there are for young people. Once the interaction and the conversation has taken place with the young person, we work very closely with other services, such as the youth offending service and other youth work, on what other opportunities there are to divert that young person away from the vulnerability they are experiencing in their area. It is useful to use it in conjunction with other agencies. In Birmingham, we have been working with the youth services, and getting them into the area either before or after a police operation, so they can make connections with the young people and look at how to divert them away from the vulnerability that they could be open to.

**Niven Rennie:** First of all, if you want to stop people carrying knives and there is a problem in a particular area, there is no doubt that enforcement is required. Searching is one way of doing that. If someone thinks they are going to be searched, they are less likely to carry a knife. We have to recognise that. I totally agree with Sarah. Locard said that every contact leaves a trace. If you are going to search someone, do it in a way that has a positive outcome and does not leave them thinking, "The police are bad people because they searched me." I will repeat my answer from earlier. If we get bogged down in searching, we have got ourselves far too far down the line. If you want to tackle violence, find out why people are inclined to



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

carry knives, rather than getting tied up with how we go about searching for them. We need to start tackling this further upstream.

**Clive Davies:** It is not a clear-cut answer. We find that the vast majority of searches that are carried out are for drugs—specifically, cannabis possession—but that is actually not a priority area. Can it stop young people carrying knives? In certain situations, yes it can. If you have intelligence that there is going to be a fight or disorder in a certain area, you can put stop-and-search powers and officers in there, and use those powers robustly to prevent knives from being carried and prevent serious violence. It can have an effect with the right intelligence in the right situation, but as a broad-brush approach, there is a far weaker link.

**Chair:** Thank you. I am aware that we are running slightly over, but I hope you will all be okay to stay for a couple more minutes for our last few questions. I will now pass on to Bailey-Lee to ask the next question.

Q66 **Bailey-Lee Robb:** In our online survey, which has had over 1,600 responses so far, young people have told us that fear is the primary reason why they carry knives. Do you agree that the Government's proposed public health approach will work to make young people feel less scared in their communities?

**Niven Rennie:** I'll kick this one off, because we have been working with a public health approach for some time. First of all, I 100% agree with that, Bailey-Lee. Most people we come into contact with who have been involved in a life of violence tell us that they carried a knife because of fear. That is why I have a campaign against a number of my colleagues down here to stop putting pictures of knives on Twitter. We know what knives look like; you don't need to put the picture there. I think that is a factor.

A public health approach is more than just tackling that. It is about identifying all the factors that are contributing to violence in a particular area and addressing them. If you can do that, you will reduce the fear, which will mean that people will stop carrying knives. It is a cyclical thing. I am delighted that the Government down here are embarking on a public health approach and are encouraging that to be done. We have shown the results that we have had. I wouldn't for one second say that we are at the end of the journey. We had 59 homicides in Scotland last year, which is 59 too many, but from where we were in 2005, with 137, we have come a long way.

A lot of people have played a part in that. It is important to recognise when you are adopting a public health approach that this is not just about the police. One of the problems that we have been having is that there is violence on the street, so we turn to the police and say, "What are you doing about it?" but it is a society problem. A public health approach requires us all to address it in all the organisations. The success in Scotland has not just been down to the Violence Reduction Unit, the police, the health professionals, education or social work. We have all been working in concert, and I think that is the way forward.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Sarah Boycott:** The public health approach has an ability to do short-term and longer-term. It is about recognising that violence is not acceptable, and about growing a voice in communities around positivity about young people. It is also about positivity about communities, and having an aspiration that is more positive, rather than just a reduction in violence. It is about trying to build those expectations that people can be safe. From a policing perspective, we need to understand more around where young people fear violence—not just that they fear it, but where they fear it. Is it a geography that they go into, or a bus route on the way home? Is it going into a different part of a city where there is a different gang, for example? What is their fear factor and the policing role around that, and what can policing do? We can use visible patrolling and techniques such as stop-and-search where it is appropriate to do so and the intelligence base is there. We need to understand where we need to be to make a difference.

**Clive Davies:** On that point, in Surrey, 60% of knife crime offenders live in the 30% most deprived wards, so there is definitely a link with poverty in certain areas. This is about protecting young people. There is a stigma around young people carrying knives, but it is young people who are often the victim of young people, so the messaging and the support needs to be around supporting and protecting young people, who can often feel that they are being neglected or viewed as involved in knife crime. Our approach must be very much victim-focused.

**Edward Timpson:** If you go back to what I said earlier about the drivers and characteristics behind children being more likely to be excluded, many of those are essentially around socioeconomic factors, disadvantage and deprivation. There are similar issues on which we have taken a public health approach where we have been very successful—for instance, driving down teenage pregnancy rates and smoking. Although the root causes are not identical, we are looking in the same areas when it comes to some of the issues that we are discussing around knife crime and falling into criminality. In my review, I endorse this approach. It is really refreshing, because it takes us into what I think is a much more productive area of really ensuring that we get to the root causes, rather than waiting until things have already gone wrong and putting a sticking-plaster over it. We know it does not work. It might contain the problem, but it does not resolve it, which a public health approach is much more likely to do.

**Niven Rennie:** One of the success factors in Scotland has been the ability for the Violence Reduction Unit to be innovative, to try new things and to look for new opportunities. One of the worries that I have with all of these things—it goes back to the schools league table—is that there will be outcomes placed around the Violence Reduction Units, and that we will therefore be making assumptions about how we will impact on violence by setting these outcomes. If we set the outcomes and the goals and that is what we work to achieve, it takes away the innovative part that, which has been the success. My plea would be: if you are going to set up Violence Reduction Units, give them space to operate.



**Sarah Boycott:** My work with violence prevention has been very much around getting evidence based around what works and where it works. That is key. We talked earlier about the short-term funding challenge. To make it more sustainable, we need to understand what works and build a business case around it, so that we can commission it for longer.

Q67 **Chair:** Thank you. As you are all aware, we will take these and other recommendations to form a report for the Government. For my last question, I want to ask if you could briefly summarise one recommendation that you would like us to consider.

**Edward Timpson:** In terms of an olive branch for you, there is the national child safeguarding practice review panel that I mentioned earlier; it has been in existence for about a year, but it is the first time we have had a national overview of child safeguarding practice. We announced our first ever national review a couple of months ago, which coincidentally—great minds think alike—is into the criminal exploitation of adolescents who are in need of state protection. It is a similar group of children and young people to that which we have been discussing today. The evidence that you have gathered for the purposes of your report is exactly the type of information and insight that would assist our national review. Whether we are reporting before or after you, in terms of the evidence that you have collated, I will pass it on to the review team, so that it will hopefully enrich some of their understanding.

That goes to my recommendation, which is about collective responsibility. No single person or agency can do this on their own. That might include looking across national Government and the different Departments, looking at a local level and the new safeguarding partnerships, looking at schools and working more as a family—seeing this as a joint endeavour. That collective buy-in at all those levels is essential, if we are actually going to make some discernible difference to the lives of children and young people, now and in the future.

**Niven Rennie:** My plea would be around trauma. The research I have done says that the children excluded in England and Wales are four times more likely to have grown up in poverty—Edward has supported this—and they are ten times more likely to have mental health issues. To a certain extent I have always been critical. Down south here you are slightly behind other parts of the United Kingdom in looking at adverse childhood experience and trauma. I shall steer away from adverse childhood experience, because academics get into a fight about it, but I think everybody can agree that if you carry a lot of trauma as a child, it will affect you as you grow older. Any decision that is being made about a child should be based on understanding the background of that individual and the trauma they are carrying. I think that is essential.

**Edward Timpson:** I would endorse that.

**Sarah Boycott:** I endorse everything that has been said so far, and I would add to it that sustainable funding is really key. I fear that we will set things in place that do not have life to them, and then let young people



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

down. Also, we need a whole-Government approach, because policing is not going to solve this. We cannot police our way out of it; it needs that whole system, and every part of that system—every part of the public sector—needs to understand the role that they have to play within violence reduction.

**Clive Davies:** I endorse the funding point. It not only has to be sustainable, but across all the relevant agencies, because clearly solving this is a multi-agency approach; no one agency can solve it on their own. For example, there is talk of police investment at the moment, but actually, the police cannot solve it on their own. We know about cuts to councils, youth services and so on. Various agencies all have key roles to play in working together, and they all need the right funding for this.

**Chair:** Thank you. This brings us to the end of our last oral evidence session today. I would like once more to thank every single member of our panel for coming to share your evidence and your insights into the topic of knife crime. This brings our meeting to a close.