

Kent County Council
Knife Crime Select Committee
Written Evidence

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Kent County Council
Knife Crime Select Committee
Written Evidence

Dr Robert Hesketh BA Hons, MA, M.sc Psychology, PhD, CIPPS, FHEA

Criminal Justice, Criminology and Forensic Psychology

School of Law John Moores University.

1. In your view, what are the main reasons behind the recent increases in knife crime offences in the country?

Knife crime¹ in the United Kingdom (UK) is not a new phenomenon despite what the media would have the general public believe. As early as 2008, Marfleet noted that “a review of the literature points to knife carrying becoming a fairly common occurrence among young males” (p.23). Presently, there are several reasons why knife crime is becoming more prevalent. Most notably however, the impact of austerity on marginalised communities, specifically cuts in youth services have seen the number of youth clubs and street diversion activities dramatically reduced. The re-emergence of the street gang phenomenon over the last ten years has seen a growing number of young males become embroiled in gang membership where masculinity and “*edgework*” risk-taking behaviour become a priority as these young men attempt to seek acceptance and identity from older peers as well as escape from the boredom and monotony that social exclusion brings.

In particular, in many marginalised areas, limited opportunities and inequality has seen the boundaries between employment and crime become blurred as young people group together and turn to criminality as a substitute means for making money. This has seen the emergence of what research (Hesketh, 2018) has called “*Deviant Entrepreneurship*” as gangs become more akin to street-based small business enterprises (see also Densley, 2013; pp. 52-61) with the main commodity

¹ To date, there is no Home Office definition of “knife crime” as such this is a term adopted by the media. It has become largely associated with stabbings and the illegal carrying of knives by young people.

being the supply of illegal drugs. It is worth noting, however, that drugs do not originate from gang-affected areas, rather they are supplied to such locations by various adult lead Organised Crime Groups (OCG) because they represent a lucrative target market (Densley, 2013; p.55). Hesketh (2008) has observed that the closer one gets to a central night-time economy, the more entrepreneurial street gangs become. This can be seen in the language used when talking about drugs, i.e., serving “*punnies*” (punters), buying three £40 bags (cocaine) together and saving £20 and in particular, gang members identification as members not of gangs but “*firms*” with “*patches*” (territorial areas for selling). Without doubt however, the best example of such dark entrepreneurship has been the creation of what is now being termed “*County Lines*”². This is a component of new gang culture that has linked gang members from the impoverished Northern locations as well as the capital in the UK to the more affluent, rural and coastal areas such as those around Kent.

Because of the nature of the illegal drug business, particularly at street level and the lucrative territorial patches that gangs have developed, violence becomes part of the business of deviant entrepreneurship. Thus, the need for protection as well as attack and defence has involved the use of both firearms and knives. This latter defensive aspect has been widely chronicled by Pitts (2008) who has observed that many young men and women in the East London borough of Waltham Forest not necessarily involved in gangs or drugs began carrying knives as a result of the fear of being involved in a knife attack.

2. What are the most effective initiatives and strategies that can be implemented to tackle knife crime, both in Kent and in the UK?

Research by Hesketh (2018) noted that the media were drawn to a series of isolated knife crimes involving young people that focused in and around the London area (Marfleet, 2008; Squires, 2009). It was from these incidents, that the government began prioritising the issue of youth crime, with the specific emphasis on gangs, guns and knives. The initial political response was a major increase in the number of stop and searches by the Metropolitan Police in the London boroughs called “*Operation Blunt*” and the start of a Home Office established project called “*Tackling Gangs Action Programme*” (TGAP) in April 2008. Primarily, TGAP was an attempt to tackle gun crime and serious violence in four designated gang hotspot areas. They included Birmingham, Liverpool, London, and Manchester. Later, in July the same year, the government launched a further offshoot programme, called “*Tackling Knives Action Programme*” (TKAP) concentrated on teenagers aged between 13-19 in ten police areas between July 2008 to March 2009. The programme, a follow-up to

² County Lines: the criminal exploitation of young people some as young as 12 who travel across counties using mobile phone lines to supply drugs on behalf of older dealers located in other locations across the UK.

Operation Blunt involved a similar strategy that included 1150 search arches, weapon detection wands and after-school patrolling in violence prevalent hotspots with known groups identified as 'gangs'. Since this period the UK has seen the introduction of "*Ending Gang and Youth Violence*" (EGYV) programme (2011) and in January 2016, the "*Ending gang violence and Exploitation*" (EGVE) programme. While both have focused on a multi-agency model of intervention involving service provision ranging from law enforcement, health, education, employment and local government, the latter which is the present programme has gone beyond identifying just gang and youth violence in a generic sense to recognise six priorities, they include:

1. Tackling county lines
2. Increased protection of vulnerable locations (i.e., care homes and pupil referral units)
3. Reducing violence and knife crime mainly by increasing sentencing powers
4. Safeguarding both girls and older women associated with gangs
5. Promoting early year involvement
6. Endorsing legitimate alternatives to joining a gang through education, training and employment

Tackling county lines:

Tackling county lines has become a major priority to prevent the spread of not only drugs but also Criminal Child Exploitation (CCE) as well as exploitation of vulnerable adults as a result of "cuckooing" (taking over a vulnerable individuals home turning it into a "trap house" to store drugs and cash as well as a base to deal). In 2017, under new laws, gangs faced having the so-called "deal lines" or "graft phones" shut down. Through what was being called the Digital Economy Bill, the relevant network provider would be forced to disconnect the mobile phone, SIM card or phone number if there was credible evidence that such lines were being utilised for offences involving drugs. In other moves, the government teamed up with the Institute for Community Safety (ICS) to support communities facing new gang-related threats such as violence through knife and gun crime. Again the theme has been on a multi-agency approach that involves community policing, school teachers and youth workers trained to identify emerging issues with their respective community and develop tailor-made interventions to counter and eliminate the problem before it is allowed to escalate.

Increased protection/support of vulnerable locations (i.e., schools, residential care homes and pupil referral units):

There has been growing evidence that gangs are targeting sources such as schools and in particular, looked after children based in residential care homes and pupil referral units. The aim is to involve these young people in criminal activities and then return them before being reported as missing. The government has been involved in

an awareness exercise to warn such institutions to be more vigilant but as yet for this category, nothing more concrete has emerged.

Reducing violence and knife crime mainly by increasing sentencing powers:

This category can be viewed more in terms of a damage limitation exercise than any form of intervention that looks at the long-term solution. It targets those young people already criminally active in communities. However, such is the profit that can now be made through drugs that in many cases for disenfranchised young people the temptation to become involved in drug dealing. They will be prepared to carry a weapon for protection. This lucrative business can far out-weigh the deterrent value of increased sentences. For this reason, more emphasis should be placed on multi-agency intervention as opposed to just increasing the presence of police officers and sentences which may address the immediate symptoms but not the long term causes.

Safeguarding both girls and older women associated with gangs:

Until recently, UK research into girls and older women entwined in criminality involving weapons has been scarce on the ground. Firmin (2011) has noted that in the context of women and gangs, there are high levels of exploitation involving young women being groomed by gangs and used for sex initiation purposes. In terms of weapons, such young women were used to conceal firearms and knives. Recent research by Hesketh (2018) found what he has termed “*vicarious edgework*”. That is, young women, being drawn to young deviant males (“*bad boys*” as many young women term them) because of the excitement factor. Hesketh (2018) interviewed several young women for a future pilot study. Many of the young women commented that while they had domestic responsibilities such as children from another relationship which prevented them from directly experiencing exciting risk-taking behaviour in the form of criminality, they could derive it vicariously through young deviant males. This aspect of risk-taking behaviour in addition to direct edgework criminality Hesketh notes has become an emerging and increasingly concerning with very little in the form of intervention.

Promoting early year involvement by identifying risk and protective factors:

The work emanating from the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) has been very productive. Over the past few years, the EIF has attempted to identify pathways young vulnerable people including those with mental health issues can often take as a result of risk factors. The focus has been on the five domains of risk for which research by Hesketh (2018) note are *family, school, individual, peer* and *neighbourhood*. These have been contrasted by protective factors within the same domains. Research by Hesketh (2018) found that in terms of determining the difference between those who become involved in gangs and violent crime as opposed to those who don't, factors of individual, peer and neighbourhood were highly prevalent.

Endorsing legitimate alternatives to joining a gang through education, training and employment:

Research by Hesketh (2018) has identified this as a critical issue. The majority of young people who become involved in gang violence involving firearms and knives are disenfranchised, cut off from opportunities as a result of marginalisation. As previously noted, the impact of austerity in many low-income areas has seen cutbacks to youth services (something that has occurred in Kent) that promote good citizenship through legitimate activities. Such activities in turn, also encourage life investment in further training in education and eventually employment. However, for this process to work, two things need to be addressed. Firstly, there must be increased investment in youth services and secondly, for education/training to work, it must be seen to work. Many local authorities have commented on the lack of role models in communities despite the fact that today there are many unemployed university graduates who return to areas and find themselves excluded from support. These are the individuals who could showcase education at its highest level while also having a supporting input into preventing young people turning to violent youth crime. These individuals are the very role models local authorities ask for.

Most effective approaches:

Many of the young people who become involved in violent crime have complex needs which can only be supported by a variety of agencies. From the overall body of research literature, the most cost-effective and beneficial intervention would be a form that involves a multi-agency approach which is tailored from early years to late adolescent and beyond up to the late 20s, such intervention must also include not just the young people but support for the families of those young people should they require it. Kent has been involved in a variety of interventions that have embraced this ethic. In addition, consideration could also focus on developing ways for young people to bridge communities this could be done through bridging outside the community or by internal bridging with role model mentors.

Impact of Bridging (Social Mixing):

Research by Hesketh (2018) found that from 44 young people interviewed (half involved in gang violence as member/ex-members and half complete gang member abstainers), one of the most significant factors that determined young people's involvement/non-involvement in gangs and youth violence was friendship networks. Specifically, those involved as members remained within their residential location not going beyond the school and the streets that formed part of their living space. As a result, young people in this sample developed restricted friendship networks making acquaintances via the school they attended and the gang prevalent streets they

occupied at night. Subsequently, the values and beliefs of the young people in this sample became bound over time around gangs and violence. In direct contrast, those young people within the complete gang abstainer sample simply went beyond their living space in search of activities. In effect, this latter sample was bridging (also known as social mixing).

3. In your view, in what ways can Kent County Council help to reduce the incidence and impact of knife crime in Kent?

Presently, despite being one of the more affluent thought of areas of the UK, Kent represents one of the countries hotspots for knife crime. There is little doubt that like other rural/coastal areas in the UK, Kent has become the victim of gangs involved in running county lines. It is interesting to read that the only other police force experiencing close to the increase in knife offences to Kent is West Yorkshire, also a hotspot for county lines drug dealing. With profits estimated to be between £2000 to £3000 per day from these lines, it is of little surprise that such operations are fiercely protected on the ground. If KCC has not already done so, it would be productive to carry out a scoping exercise of any existing interventions in terms of what is actually working (i.e., the most effective), and to also, consider approaches tailored to the demographics of the areas within Kent.

Bands of intervention:

Spergal and Curry (1993) highlight what they term the five strategies of intervention which local authorities can use to actually map the type of intervention strategies in their respective areas. They include:

Community Mobilisation: Involvement of local citizens, including former young offenders and community groups, agencies.

Opportunities provision: The development of a wide variety of education, training and employment interventions aimed at targeting young people.

Social intervention: Youth-serving agencies, schools, outreach workers, grassroots groups (the Third sector is always a good option), law enforcement agencies and other law supporting agencies utilising outreach work in schools aimed at the younger most vulnerable young people.

Suppression: Formal informal control procedures also known as catch and convict, three strikes, zero tolerance approach.

Organisational change: and development: Development and implementation of policies and procedures that have resulted in the most effective use of the resources available. In short building on “what works”.

Moreover, it would be beneficial for KCC to examine Scotland’s public health approach to knife crime which has had dramatic results since Strathclyde Police set

up what they called the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in 2005. While the police contributed to the project initially. Two surgeons founded Medics Against Violence in 2008 which began to have an impact within the programme. A similar project was set up by medics in Liverpool some years later and integrated within the Restorative Justice programme as a provision. This approach sees those young people who have been involved in knife crime exposed to the graphic nature and harm knife crime can do not only to the victims who become fatalities but also from the testimony from family members of deceased victims. The results have been quite dramatic and effective.

4. Are there any other issues, with relevance to the review, that you wish to bring to the Committee's attention?

It is clear that knives are now the weapon of choice (mainly because of the relative ease of availability) among many who choose a violent path. It must also be stressed that not all knife crime is gang-related, but in the case of Kent, the majority of instances would appear to indicate a strong gang link. The research carried out by Hesketh (2018) identified a variety of themes that emerged from interviews with gang members. They included:

- High levels of mainly bonding in areas where violent youth crime was prevalent with limited if any evidence of attempts to get communities to bridge. This resulted in values and beliefs of the young people in these areas being bound around criminality. In contrast, those who abstained from criminality were those who simply went beyond their living space in search of legitimate activities that in turn exposed them to new potential new friends and contacts.
- The lack of training and employment opportunities for young people to invest their time in was resulting in the boundaries of crime and employment becoming blurred. This was reflected in many of the young people involved in violent gang crime not perceiving they were actually involved in crime but in actual fact work which they termed "grafting" (drug dealing).
- The presence of high levels of criminal edgework as motivation to become involved. Edgework or the allure of risk-taking behaviour Hesketh (2018) observed was evident in both young males and females (this latter aspect as stated earlier is what Hesketh terms "vicarious edge work"). This is now becoming extremely concerning, with very little in terms of intervention focused around this psychologically rooted aspect triggered by boredom on the street. One avenue noted by Hesketh (2018) was to take a psychological cognitive approach which concentrates on shaming and embarrassment when the young offender is confronted by his/her crimes in front of parents or older siblings. Testimony from ex-gang members who took part in the research admitted that such shameful exposure and the visual turmoil that it caused within the family did have a major impact on their decision to continue on the criminal path.

- The impact of drugs as a commodity. Hesketh (2018) found that the closer to a central night-time economy gang prevalent areas where, the more business like gangs became (mainly due to the increased influence of adult figures from Organised Crime Groups) with more emphasis on drugs (cocaine, weed and in some cases crack) as a commercial product as opposed to personal recreational use. This was reflected in the language (“serving”, “grafting”, “firms of boys” instead of gang/s a term never actually used by those gang members who took part in the research). Hesketh terms this “*Deviant Entrepreneurism*”. With this transition gangs became more violent, possessing both firearms and knives in order to protect their “trading turf”.
- From a local government perspective, Hesketh (2018) found that very little communication between the five borough councils on Merseyside on information sharing in terms of what was working in each of the boroughs. The researcher put in a recommendation that was followed up by Merseyside Police that a regular meeting should be implemented in which all five borough Anti-Social Behaviour Units openly discuss and share best practice.

A recent report by Kent online suggests some discussion regarding bad parenting. While this is an aspect and one that Kent has experienced lately with the relocation of homeless families from London, it is an aspect that is linked to environmental factors such as lack of opportunities and on national level inequality as a whole which has been intergenerational. What is interesting about the bad parent argument which Hesketh (2018) found was that it was more a question of parental inappropriateness, that is, young women who have experienced a breakdown in their relationship finding a new relationship with a new partner who possessed very little if any parenting skills.

The above observations only account for a small summary of what were extensive findings in the research conducted by Hesketh (2018). They do however represent food for thought in terms of developing a way forward. In Kent there has seen a reduction in the number of youth initiatives/clubs which for this researcher represents a step in the wrong direction. Above all, however, For all the multi-agency support that is recommended, the most effective way must always be to create better opportunities and inclusivity that show the system actually works for ordinary people. To coin a recently commonly quoted phrase, for the many, not just a few. Any critical criminologist will argue that to reduce crime there has to be a reduction in inequality, the two are linked. While some areas of Kent in comparison to other locations in the UK are quite affluent, it is the migration of gang influence from other marginalised locations that has become a major contributing factor.

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Dr Peter Traynor, Manchester Metropolitan University

1. In your view, what are the main reasons behind the recent increases in knife crime offences in the country?

- The increases in serious violence are in areas of concentrated poverty, rather than evenly distributed throughout the population
- Nonetheless, the trend could be a normal fluctuation as sometimes happens, or it could be a sign of increasing problems in these communities – continued breakdown, in part because of austerity measures.
- Austerity measures will play a role – withdrawal of services, staff and funding cuts for police, YOTs, youth clubs etc. plus a more general increase in the gap between the ‘have nots’, the ‘have somes’ and the ‘have lots’, the former increasingly isolated and vulnerable, embittered, unhappy
- Stabilisation of local, national, international drug trades (referred to now as County Lines) plus continued high use of drugs among young people generally mean lots of opportunities for poor young men to make quick money, but the cost is high/increasing rates of violence.

2. What are the most effective initiatives and strategies that can be implemented to tackle knife crime, both in Kent and in the UK?

- Anti-knife initiatives that create a sense that everyone is carrying a knife are not always helpful, as they might increase knife carrying. Initiatives that focus on increasing thoughtfulness, participation and empathy among young people/young offenders seem more effective.
- More funding for youth services who do important work with young offenders and non-offenders living in areas with high violence. These people do an enormous and often unseen amount of work reducing violence among young people.

- More work in schools to reduce violence/increase empathy at each age group to reduce the numbers of young people who think violence – verbal/psychological/physical is acceptable.
- Major rethink into how young people – offenders and non-offenders, are policed: negative policing continues to create fear and hostility and places more responsibility on young people to protect themselves and seek collective protection.
- At the same time, find more effective ways of dealing with the hard core of very violent young people/young adults who create fear in communities and draw other young people in. This is where the tightened sentence regime can help.
- Young people who are not the hard core, but get drawn in, and their parents need more support. ASBOs and ABCS did provide some means of restricting such young people's behaviour and provided a way for them to move away from gang life. It seems that these are not being used as fruitfully as they were in the earlier part of the decade. The new Knife Crime Prevention Orders might assist in this.
- 'Supply side' efforts are largely ineffective – specialist knives are used when obtainable, but if not, kitchen knives are used
- More and better training/jobs for young people in poor areas, and alternatives to the drug trade/petty crime.
- Huge investment into making young people feel safer and feel more valued in society: Most of the young people I spoke to who had carried knives believed that harsh sentences acted as a deterrent, and yet they themselves had not been deterred – their own needs, especially for safety, overrode any 'distal' concerns with legal procedure. In effect, in the minds of some young people, it's better to live and be caught than it is to die.

3. In your view, in what ways can Kent County Council help to reduce the incidence and impact of knife crime in Kent?

- First you need a better understanding of the nature and extent of knife crime in Kent – aside from the ONS/Guardian FOI figures that show 152% increase. Is this 152% increase possession offences? What proportion of the offences are for wounding for instance, or robbery? And where are these offences concentrated. Police/hospital data needs to be consulted, plus possible empirical research.
- Second it needs to draw on people/agencies with understanding of the areas where knife crime is most prevalent – police, YOS, etc, and work with them to develop a plan. This might include police from other areas with more experience – I have attached a presentation on knife crime/county lines that I attended recently which will have details of police in west Yorkshire currently working around these issues:

<http://kcc-app610:9070/documents/s90940/Responding%20to%20Youth%20Violence%20Knife%20Crime%20and%20County%20Lines.pdf>

- The plan should include efforts to communicate effectively with local communities, and young people.
- Third, boost credible youth groups and activities in the areas where knife crime is concentrated – these can help bring young people together in positive ways.

4. Are there any other issues, with relevance to the review, that you wish to bring to the Committee's attention?

It's not particularly helpful comment, nor is it realistic in the short-term to think anything will change, but the elephant in the room is the 'war on drugs', which creates a premium on drug dealing and a major economic incentive for gangs to engage in violence. I personally think that much of the county lines activity now revolves around universities and the drug markets that exist there.

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Written Evidence

Scottish Violence Reduction Unit

1. In your view, what are the main reasons behind the recent increases in knife crime offences in the country?

In Scotland we have no discernible increase in knife related violence. However, from an outsiders' point of view there seems to be a perfect storm of challenges in certain areas in England and Wales that may be leading to an increase. The challenge is that no two areas are the same and the current narrative being driven by the media in gangs being the major issue seems to be simplistic in its analysis and therefore both its response and the potential effectiveness in response.

In saying that, there is no doubting that gang violence stimulated through changing gang activity is playing a part, as is the justice response which has proven that criminal justice measures all be it will remove some players from the market, it will ultimately open new opportunities for others and increase profitability (as evidenced from the war on drugs strategy from the US). Removing some gangs does not quash demand and can create increased competition leading to more violence and 'turf wars'. There is no simple solution to this, reducing demand is a long-term strategy as is addressing multiple vulnerabilities in young people that OCGs can take advantage of.

Issues such as reducing services, school exclusions, unemployment, housing, gender, cultural and racial inequalities do impact upon creating an environment in which the vulnerabilities can be exposed.

As stated earlier the violence problem is not consistent, in that in many areas of the country the average age of those committing the violence with a knife is much older than those captured through stop search, partly because of the need, want and desire to commit violence but also because stop search deals with street culture and those intent on committing serious harm may not be the ones that are on the street.

We are also seeing an element of negative reinforcement of negative behaviours taking effect with some young people now feeling that they have to carry a weapon out of protection and fear. This has been driven by the national narrative that almost paints a picture of war zones where every teenager is committing crime and violence despite evidence to the contrary. It is important that regardless of your geography in the UK there needs to be a deeper understanding of the local problem and not necessarily rely on the centralised interpretations.

2. What are the most effective initiatives and strategies that can be implemented to tackle knife crime, both in Kent and in the UK?

This depends on what you want to look at, for example informational style education programmes are good insulation to help shape young peoples' views of carrying a knife, particularly if it is demystifying the narrative. However, this does not work on those seriously involved in either violence or criminality as they are only too aware of the consequences of violence. They either just think that it will happen to them or the perceived positives outweigh the negatives. If working with those more entrenched in this activity the work has to be more in depth with good successes over mentoring, trauma counselling and support in identifying some of the underlying issues such as MASLOW concerns to address them. In Scotland we have also adopted a bystander approach to try and encourage young people to be leaders in their own right and take action against behaviours that are not acceptable. This started out as a gender norms programme and domestic violence as well as bullying, but it now includes work on knife crime, homo/transphobia and CSE. With young people being asked to consider what they would do if.....their FRIEND was carrying a knife. This has been very powerful as the young people themselves develop the solutions as well as discuss the risks and what the potential outcomes may be as many children (and adults) refuse to take action as either they are unsure what to do or what could happen to them or someone else will deal with it. If you want to create cohesive communities then young people have to be empowered and supported **not** dictated to and blamed.

3. In your view, in what ways can Kent County Council help to reduce the incidence and impact of knife crime in Kent?

Firstly, understand what the problem actually is.....the who, where and when and most importantly the why. Invest in long-term strategies that will yield long term sustainable changes and at the same time invest in activity that may include policing for the short term to contain and manage (this will help in the short term but is neither effective in the long term and financially costly). Reduce vulnerability in young people by improving the local care system and reducing significantly the number of young people not in schools either through exclusion or off rolling. PRUs are also not the answer, they need to be in mainstream schooling with additional support given to the schools to help support challenging young people.

Develop your third sector funding models to support smaller community-based organisations in particularly those that are working to improve community wellbeing, economic and social development at a micro level and mentoring and support for those with the criminal justice sphere.

4. Are there any other issues, with relevance to the review, that you wish to bring to the Committee's attention?

In terms of understanding the problem, the police, NHS, education and survey data can be flawed as they each look at different things and have different drivers to record. For a better picture all of this there needs to be a combined approach with testimony from those on the ground working with communities and those with lived experience (both victimisation and offending experience).

You cannot have just a serious violence strategy as it needs to deal with precursor behaviour, it must look at all aspects of violence including petty assault and bullying. The behaviours that are exhibited in early youth can be amplified; causing significant harm a few years later. By addressing it early enough you hope to minimise the transition to the serious end of the spectrum.

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Written Evidence

Tina Hughes
Senior Operational Support Manager, National Probation Service,
South East & Eastern Division, Her Majesty's Prison & Probation
Service

Tracey Kadir
Head of NPS Kent, South East and Eastern Division, Her Majesty's
Prison & Probation Service

Introduction:

The NPS contribution to the review is based on our knowledge and experience of working with partners in Kent and Medway and also informed by a contribution from our seconded Probation Officers in the YOT teams in Maidstone and in Medway (we appreciate that this is a KCC Select Committee).

Links to useful articles:

Scotland's violence reduction unit saw a 47% fall in homicides with a public health approach - <http://actiononviolence.org/about-us>

Whilst there is a rise in knife crime, it is not an 'epidemic' and given the regional variations - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42749089>

1. In your view, what are the main reasons behind the recent increases in knife crime offences in the country?

In terms of the main reasons behind why some young people carry or use knives, these will be many but seem to fall into the following; disaffected young people, Care Leavers with little support, lack of suitable supported accommodation for young people and the potential for street homelessness being a significant factor in increasing risk of harm to self and others, the absence of Youth Hubs and youth services in the locality including Family Centres, the lack of role models and mentors resulting in issues relating to identity and belonging for young people and those excluded from education.

2. What are the most effective initiatives and strategies that can be implemented to tackle knife crime, both in Kent and in the UK?

The link above which cites the Violence Reduction Unit approach in Scotland evidences the impact of VRU's and their establishment across the UK and are useful in understanding how others are tackling the issues resulting in positive change.

Locally, from our agency perspective, the NPS purchases interventions for young adults through the Community Rehabilitation Company Rate Card including one for young males regarding identity and one which offers age appropriate Mentors. Whilst the NPS has a National Framework for Youth Offending Transitions which support young people to transition from Youth Offending to adult Probation providers, we have taken this a step further in Kent and Medway and considered the best resource model for seconded probation officers to meet the needs of young people and so our seconded Probation Officers work across a YOT and a NPS Probation Team (50/50) where they are responsible for managing and supporting young people (in the YOT) and young adults up to the age of 25 (in the NPS) as well as case managing ALL transitions.

The NPS is engaged in both the Safeguarding Children and Safeguarding Adult Boards and their subgroups and was therefore involved in the production of the Gangs Strategy last year. The NPS is also engaged in ARMS Panels across Kent but these function very differently across Districts. Aside from a VRU approach, KCC should consider that they have appropriate levels of attendance from relevant depts. at existing forums which identify, assess, manage and plan around vulnerable young people and adults to ensure full multi-agency working i.e. MAPPA, MARAC, ARMs

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Orielle Taylor, National Coordinator, No Knives, Better Lives

Our key is a collaborative approach and a prevention agenda. However, we would say that treating knife crime as a treatable public-health issue is an effective approach. Our model, one that includes young people and listens to their needs, is one that could be replicated across the UK.

We have developed a number of effective resources, such as films and toolkits, many of which are available via our website – noknivesbetterlives.com.

What is No Knives Better Lives?

No Knives Better Lives is a national programme designed to deter young people from using and carrying a knife. It is a youth-work focused initiative delivered by Youth Link in collaboration with Scottish Government.

Our approach is two-tiered. We work with partners across Scotland and train them to educate young people about knife carrying. We also deliver our messaging directly to young people through social media and programmes in their school.

The programme was launched back in 2009 in Inverclyde. Since then, we have expanded into 32 local authorities across Scotland. We now have a peer education programme available to schools across the whole of Scotland, as well as a national training programme for partners.

We treat knife crime as a public health issue: a disease that has a cure. We have taken a preventative rather than reactive approach to knife crime. That means we try to reach young people as early as possible to teach them the true cost of carrying a knife.

We believe that our success can be put down to our youth-focused, multi-partnered approach. We involve young people in our programme as much as possible. This allows us to listen to the specific challenges facing a given part of Scotland and to adjust our approach accordingly.

How does our approach work in practice?

We develop a number of resources for schools and local authorities, such as our peer education programmes, films, and an educational play. We also develop

prevention toolkits which can be accessed through our website – noknivesbetterlives.com.

Our messaging is focused around the 4Rs of prevention – Reassurance, Risks, Responding and Resilience.

We feel that ‘reassurance’ is one of the most important messages here – if carrying a knife is seen as normal, it perpetuates a cycle of knife carrying, which increases the risk of violence. We want young people to know that carrying a knife is not normal – it’s not widespread in Scotland, and you are unlikely to encounter violence as a result of someone carrying a knife.

Kent County Council

Knife Crime Select Committee

Written Evidence

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust

1. In your view, what are the main reasons behind the recent increases in knife crime offences in Kent?

As the Committee will be aware, the Trust's Emergency Physicians see the results of knife crime after the event and they are therefore not expert in processes to avoid or reduce knife crime.

The Trust does not currently collect data specifically on knife crime, but anecdotally the Trust has not seen a dramatic increase in attendances relating to knife crime, and such attendances remain extremely infrequent. It is likely that due to the Trust's membership of the South East London, Kent and Medway (SELKaM) Major Trauma Network, much of the more serious or potentially serious activity is conveyed into London NHS Trusts. The Committee may therefore find more details on current and past activity levels via the SELKaM Network (see www.c4ts.qmul.ac.uk/south-east-london-kent-and-medway/south-east-london-kent-and-medway) or via data from the Trauma Audit and Research Network (TARN) (see www.tarn.ac.uk).

As the Trust's Emergency Physicians do not therefore believe there has been a profound rise in activity related to knife crime at the Trust (although the Trust recognises this is a reported national trend), they do not feel adequately experienced in the underlying causes of crime to give a view on this question.

2. What are the most effective initiatives and strategies that can be implemented to tackle knife crime, both in Kent and in the UK?

As noted above, the Trust's Emergency Physicians do not feel adequately experienced in anti-crime measures to provide advice on this topic.

3. In your view, in what ways can Kent County Council help to reduce the incidence and impact of knife crime in Kent?

As noted above, the Trust's Emergency Physicians do not feel able to advise on measures to reduce the incidence of knife crime. The impact however can be mitigated through rapid emergency care from home to hospital and a highly skilled emergency team within that hospital. The Trust's Emergency Physicians are of the view that the most effective measure that Kent County Council can make to support the emergency services is to facilitate the rapid flow of patients requiring social care input back out into the community allowing the Trust's acute

hospitals and South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust to focus on those with pressing medical need – such as knife wounds.

4. Are there any other issues, with relevance to the review, that you wish to bring to the Committee's attention?

None with regard to Emergency Medicine.

Kent County Council
Knife Crime Select Committee
Written Evidence

Kent Association of Headteachers

1. In your view, what are the main reasons behind the recent increases in knife crime offences in the country?

Gang culture, the glamorisation of gangs, gang language, music and media are all elements that have increased knife crime offences in the country. Younger siblings in families involved in criminality (especially adolescents) are aspiring to gang culture and knife 'talk'. For those schools that are in an area of deprivation there are no activities for children in the local area, no structured activities, youth club etc. and the local community centre was knocked down.

The vacuum of drugs activity, drugs gangs and county lines exploit vulnerable and marginalised children. Quote often children do not think that the Police will catch them and if they do, they don't think the punishment will be significant.

Media has also played a significant role as media attention on knife crime has possibly created a culture where protection is a perceived need.

2. What are the most effective initiatives and strategies that can be implemented to tackle knife crime, both in Kent and in the UK?

Projects like UpRising www.uprisinguk.org.uk where ex-gang members have more impact explaining the realities of gang life and educate children on how to keep themselves safe from exploitation and methods used by gangs, these methods include befriending, pseudo robberies, gifting etc.

Effective initiatives would be to work with children who are transitioning into Year 5 and Year 6 (secondary schools) and particularly in deprived areas. Some Primary schools may be reluctant to address knife crime, however subjects such as PHSE where students could be involved in work shops would be an appropriate forum to address such issues.

Furthermore, it is quite often the case that students who are unable to cope in mainstream education often move from school to school due to exclusion, however, greater work should be done to introduce specialist provision for those students.

The recent assemblies carried out by the Kent Police team did have an impact - parents informed the school that students had spoken about the assemblies at home. Also, if a student starts talking about having a knife, friends are now

reporting it to the school, enabling us to take pro-active action. Op Jump - small group work - has also helped young people to have an understanding of the consequences.

Example of working in schools with young people to develop places they can access help and support as well as youth enterprise:

<https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/news/duke-of-sussex-to-visit-future-youth-zone>

3. In your view, in what ways can Kent County Council help to reduce the incidence and impact of knife crime in Kent?

It has to come with concerted education initiatives in primary and secondary school. This can include:

- Youth hubs,
- After school activities,
- sports
- funding specialist workshops
- Early Help for at risk families/children,
- CSS focus on children displaying violent tendencies or using a knife
- using rehabilitated offenders to re-educate young people and 'de-glamorise' knife crime

Increase CCTV in underpasses and ensure footpaths and alley ways are well lit. Encourage community wardens including traffic wardens who are constantly walking around the town centre and surrounding streets to engage in conversation with young people, including groups of youths out late, and report any concerns, perhaps to a specific number.

4. Are there any other issues, with relevance to the review, that you wish to bring to the Committee's attention?

Ashford Police have got the parents of friendship group (wannabe gang groups) together to explain their concerns and encourage the parents to exchange numbers so they can also have conversations, check the young person before they go out etc.

An overriding problem however is funding. If schools do not have enough money to provide appropriate levels of pastoral support for students, if children's services do not have enough money to provide support services such as counselling, etc, if social services do not have enough capacity to support vulnerable families, all of this will lead to increase in levels of deviant behaviour which may manifest itself as knife crime. Solutions lie in addressing deep seated issues around mental health, dysfunctional families, absence of parenting skills and so on; knife crime assemblies in schools, whilst of peripheral value, will not solve the problem any more than banning zombie knives.

Kent County Council
Knife Crime Select Committee
Written Evidence

Kent Youth County Council

It has been made clear to the Kent Youth County Council that young people not only in Kent but across the UK are concerned about the levels of knife crime in Kent. For this reason, our MYPs (Members of Youth Parliament) are currently working on what we believe is the most effective way of addressing the topic of knife crime and its impact of young people in our county.

1. In your view, what are the main reasons behind the recent increases in knife crime offences in the country?

We believe gang culture can build up and lead to a situation in which knife attacks occur and therefore there needs to be increased educational awareness of knife crime in regards to the pressure which is caused by gangs as knife crime amongst young people specifically does not usually occur without a pressure placed upon the young person involved- usually by an organised group of people.

2. What are the most effective initiatives and strategies that can be implemented to tackle knife crime, both in Kent and in the UK?

In our view, the most effective strategy to tackle knife crime amongst young people in both Kent and across the UK is to ensure that young people know how to get out of gangs and how to realise if they are getting into a gang.

3. In your view, in what ways can Kent County Council help to reduce the incidence and impact of knife crime in Kent?

The ways in which Kent County Council could help to reduce the incidence and impact of knife crime is through education amongst young people. We would encourage the implementation of this education within schools across Kent to ensure all young people are educated on the risks of gang culture and the impact which carrying a knife can have.

Kent County Council
Knife Crime Select Committee
Written Evidence

Seán Holden - County Councillor for Cranbrook

Knives and Drugs

One explanation for Kent having the highest rise in knife crime anywhere in the country (the Guardian says <https://bit.ly/2wW2bf7>) is the baleful work of the county lines drug gangs. I am sure this select committee will have heard much about them. There will also have been much about how to counter the problem with intelligence led policing, education and various social interventions. I fear not much consideration will have been given to potentially the most complete answer to the problem - to the most radical change in thinking. That would be to end prohibition – to take the supply of drugs out of the hands of violent criminals.

County Lines

The county lines knifing statistics of Kent today provide the opportunity to create a switching point for our views about the nature of the drug scene; about questions of morality; of health policy; of social policy and even political philosophy. The biggest switch would be to recognise that the crime problem of the drug supply industry is a greater threat to society as a whole than the health problems drugs can bring to some users.

War on Drugs - Fifty Year Failure

The War on Drugs was a campaign name coined in America by the Nixon government in 1971. Its basic idea is that drugs are bad for health so people should be stopped from getting them or owning them. That's also the import of the contemporaneous British Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The approach is now widely recognised to have been a disastrous failure across the world as the New York Times says here <https://nyti.ms/2DIVNyi>

Criminal Empires

Prohibition has created criminal empires of such power that in Colombia for instance, the Escobar gang was able to contend with the government for sovereign authority. Prohibition has created a criminal economy of such wealth that no violence is too gross for its service. Afghan heroin producers are the business partners of the

Taliban terrorists; Mexico's War on Drugs has seen 150,000 die for the trade since 2006, CNN reports <https://cnn.it/30S5BNk>
And the ripples from all that are the county lines knifings in Kent in pursuit of the profits of illegal drug dealing.

Use Not Cut

The War on Drugs has failed everywhere to cut drug use significantly among people of all cultures and classes. About a third of adults, 15 million people, in Britain admit to having used illegal drugs at some time of which by far the most popular is cannabis, the Guardian tells us <https://bit.ly/2r5P5bu>.

We see prohibition has not stopped people from getting drugs, so it has not worked. The policy of protecting their health by keeping them away from drugs, therefore, has not worked.

The supply appears to be plentiful and easy with prices generally lower than they have been historically.

Just Say No

The other approach, trying to stanch the problem by blocking off use, rather than supply, led by First Lady, Nancy Reagan's Just Say No campaign launched in 1987, has also failed. The figures in the Guardian report show that. It tells us that children who have been on drug awareness courses are just as likely to take drugs as those who have not. One of the notable failures of all the anti-drugs campaigning has been any apparent show of understanding of why people take drugs. You might have thought that was where they should have begun. Always they give the scary stories – it fries your brain, you can drop down dead, you end up a wreck on the streets, it makes you ill; it's horrible. Why would anybody do it? They do it because it ranges from being rather nice to ecstatically beautiful. People have found spiritual journeys in it (for millennia in fact), they've found artistic inspiration, personal understanding; and fun, fun, fun and many more things. That's why they do it and that's as far as it goes for most users so they don't get or don't believe the "It screws you up" message. Which is why the state needs to see it can never close down that market by force.

Bootleggers

It's not as if we have never been here before and as if we had no lesson to learn from another time and place. The prohibition of alcohol in the United States from 1920 to 1933 created the new feature of organised crime. Ruthless bootlegger gangs leapt into the lucrative space, opened by the ban, to supply illegal booze in operations that came to be worth hundreds of millions. The state was unable to control the market for a product desired by so many citizens and in 1933 the US

government admitted as much. <https://bit.ly/2QMbg1v>. Mafia gangs had by then shaped an underground, international criminal economic structure which they transferred to drug supply when the alcohol market was taken from them. All of their work was, and is, underwritten by extreme, permanent violence.

That is the problem and knife crime in Kent is part of that. We need now to change our attitude to drugs to allow society to accept an end to prohibition of all illegal drugs for the sake of its wider health and for individuals whose health is cut back or cut off by the violence of the drug trade.

Deep Change

My hope is that the select committee can conclude that the resolution of knife crime does not lie in conventional social interventions and conventional toughening of police operations but in making a deep delving change in the attitude to the use and supply of drugs.

Portugal

The process of decriminalisation through which Portugal has gone throughout this century, since 2001, has paid remarkable dividends, the Guardian again tells us: <https://bit.ly/2iPvQTC>. There have been dramatic drops in overdoses, HIV infections and in drug-related crime such as knifings.

Moral Disapproval

The first issue may be to overcome the moral disapproval attached by many to drug taking. There's perhaps a certain Puritan ethic at work which disapproves of the state sanction of pleasure. And fifty years ago moral disapproval was certainly the tone of the War on Drugs which were seen as the most subversive of all the elements of the counter-culture of the Sixties.

Drink, Drugs and Death

The most obvious answer to that and indeed to many objections to ending prohibition is that the state sanctions, controls and taxes the distribution of the intoxicating drug alcohol which killed 7,697 people in 2017, the Guardian reports: <https://bit.ly/2zKtlSe> In the same year there were 2,503 deaths from drug misuse (not counting suicides) according to Paragraph 5 of this report by the Office for National Statistics <https://bit.ly/2OcAB3C>. Nearly half were from heroin and morphine. Deaths related to (often adulterated) ecstasy, much highlighted by the media, are running between 50 and 60 a year currently. It is a statistic which amazes many whom the media had led to believe there was a huge ecstasy crisis. We hear far less from the media about the much more deadly alcohol. The Huffpost tells us no one has ever died of a cannabis overdose <https://bit.ly/31thRV3>. A US coroner's first ever verdict of death

[from a cannabis overdose this week has been greeted with widespread scepticism. There are 20 or so deaths in UK statistics related to this most popular of all drugs but none directly.](#)

Brutal Tobacco

The alcohol comparison pales, of course, when we turn to that other government sanctioned, controlled and taxed, legal drug – tobacco. Claims that drugs policy is designed to protect people's health go up in smoke when we look at the brutal statistics of tobacco use. The Telegraph <https://bit.ly/2ltsl7T> gives the well-known numbers. It kills around 100,000 people a year in the UK and half of those who use this drug will die of it. An Australian study puts it even higher at two thirds: <https://bit.ly/2nWtbcv>. No illegal drugs have the mortality of alcohol and tobacco but because of their long standing conventionality the government is placed in the hypocritical position of implicitly condoning them because it taxes them. It makes them lawful while it seeks to protect us from less dangerous drugs by banning them. Alcohol and tobacco are lucrative markets and yet there is no significant violence associated with their supply because they are legal.

Addiction

The vast majority of illegal drug users, about half of whom only ever use cannabis, do not suffer health or addiction problems – as with alcohol users though not, sadly, with cigarette users. Were the government to regulate and licence the supply it could ensure the quality and safety of the products which of itself would contribute to health protection.

Taking the trade out of the hands of criminal suppliers would stop the casualties caused by adulteration or enhanced purity which would, ironically be protecting health and well being in a way that prohibition cannot. As a TV reporter I covered an inquest in Winchester on three heroin users who had overdosed because the stuff their dealer sold them, for once, was the pure thing not cut with the usual rubbish.

The Libertarian Argument

There is a libertarian philosophical element to this debate too. Drug taking is often referred to as a 'victimless crime'. That being the case by what moral right does the government presume to tell individuals what they can and can't do for recreation? As long as it allows tobacco and alcohol it cannot philosophically justify its stance on banning any drugs.

About More Than Knives

Coming back to the matter in hand for the select committee I hope that it will feel I have offered an answer to a major part of knife crime in Kent by setting it in a wider context. There is a bigger job to do than just for our county. Concern about knife crime here should extend back through all of Britain to the mass killings in Mexico, Colombia and Afghanistan that go with the trade for which the Kent knife boys are the final retail outlet. It would be a significant and brave step if the county council were to find a part solution to knife crime here by lending its authority to a call to end prohibition. We need to take the supply of drugs out of the hands of criminals because:

- they sponsor much of the violence in our society most recently visible in Kent in the county lines drug associated knifings;
- they have a vested interest in creating addicts which a regulated and licensed supply system would not have;
- they endanger health by adulterating their products. Legalising would protect health in a way prohibition has failed to do;
- prohibition makes criminals, for possession, of people who would otherwise never fall into the hands of the justice system and ruins lives – particularly those arrested abroad;
- Portugal has shown the benefit of decriminalisation with less violence and fewer overdoses and even with lower drug use;
- It would be the quickest way for the government to dismantle the lawless and violent drug economy which has resisted all other attacks successfully;
- taxing and regulating would have a positive effect on the economy where currently the secret, black and midnight trade is an economic infection which is a drain on our well-being;
- The billions spent enforcing laws which are still flouted with ease could add hundreds of millions to drug education budgets and still leave change for enhancing policing elsewhere;
- It gives law to citizens' rights to make decisions for themselves in these matters – they are doing that anyway but they should be entitled not to be pursued by the state for it

Recommendation

Of course, the criminals won't just pack up and get proper jobs but they will have been given the most damaging blow they could suffer – the loss of their entire industry and they would be much more vulnerable to police action.

I invite the select committee to include the end of drug prohibition in its recommendations and maybe that it should reconvene to investigate that matter as a new piece of work.