

From: Mr Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education
Mr Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services
Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport
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To: Cabinet – 23rd September 2019

Subject: Select Committee: Knife Crime

Classification: Unrestricted

Future Pathway: County Council 17th October 2019

Summary: To receive and comment on the report of the Select Committee on Knife Crime

Recommendations:

Cabinet is asked to support the following recommendations for County Council.

- The Select Committee be thanked for its work and for producing a relevant and balanced document.
 - The witnesses and others who provided evidence and made valuable contributions to the Select Committee be thanked.
 - Cabinet's comments on the report and its recommendations be welcomed and the report endorsed.
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1. Introduction

1.1 This timely review was established by the Scrutiny Committee, based on a proposal by the Leader, and started its work in April 2019.

1.2 After falling for several years, knife crime in England and Wales is rising again. While overall crime has fallen rapidly over the last 20 years, knife crime has risen in almost all police force areas in England and Wales since 2014.

1.3 According to the Office for National Statistics, after falling to a low point in 2013/14, when there were about 25,600 offences involving a sharp object, these have increased steadily to peak in 2017/18 at about 40,100. 43 of the 44 police forces recorded a rise in knife crime since 2011. These increases have been accompanied by a rise in younger victims and perpetrators.

1.4 Kent has experienced the largest, recent increase in knife crime in England and Wales. Between April 2010 and September 2018, knife crime in the county increased by 152%, from 346 to 873. However, the *rate* of all crime involving a knife or sharp instrument in Kent is considerably *lower* than the national average, with 50 offences per 100,000 population (the average rate in England and Wales is 76 per 100,000 population).¹ In addition, Youth Offending data shows that the number of knife crime offences in Kent that resulted in an Out of Court Disposal or Court Conviction (for those under the age of 18) has gradually declined, from 145 in 2016, to 127 in 2017 and to 107 in 2018.²

1.5 Kent County Council is determined to take action to help to tackle the recent increases in knife crime in the county and to deal with its consequences, which can devastate the lives of individuals, families and communities.

2. Select Committee

2.1 Membership

The Chairman of the Select Committee was Mr Paul Barrington-King (Conservative). Other members of the Committee were: Mrs Sue Chandler (Conservative), Mr Ian Chittenden (Liberal Democrat), Mr Andrew Cook (Conservative), Mr Paul Cooper (Conservative), Mr Dara Farrell (Labour), Mr Tony Hills (Conservative), Mr Ken Pugh (Conservative) and Mr Alan Ridgers (Conservative).

2.2 Terms of Reference

The terms of reference agreed by the Select Committee on 9th May 2019 were:

- a) To examine the reasons behind the recent increases in knife crime offences in the county.
- b) To consider current initiatives in Kent focused on addressing knife crime in the county.
- c) To identify opportunities for KCC to help reduce the incidence and impact of knife crime in Kent.

¹ Office for National Statistics (2018) Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending December 2018, online, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2018#offences-involving-knives-or-sharp-instruments-are-still-rising-while-firearms-offences-decrease>

² Kent County Council (2019) Youth Offending Data, Kent, April 2019

2.3 Evidence

The Knife Crime Select Committee held 11 formal hearing sessions with a wide range of witnesses, including representatives of the Youth Justice Board, Kent Police, Essex County Council, academics, local organisations, and KCC Cabinet Members and senior officers.

The Committee also received written evidence from a number of sources, including the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, the National Probation Service, the Kent Association of Headteachers, Kent Youth County Council, local NHS Trusts and academics. The full evidence list is set out in Appendix 2.

2.4 Timescale

The Select Committee met formally for the first time in May 2019 to agree the review's terms of reference. It then held a series of hearing sessions in mid-June 2019, and also invited submissions of written evidence during this period. It reconvened on 12th September 2019 to finalise its report. It is planned that the Committee's report be considered by a meeting of the County Council on 17th October 2019.

3. The Report

3.1 The key points of the report are:

- The impact of knife crime on society is significant. Apart from the devastating social cost to individuals, families and communities through the loss of life and the trauma of physical and psychological injuries, there is a substantial economic cost to society.
- Knife crime cannot be solved by criminal justice measures alone. While law enforcement remains central, the most effective approaches tend to be multi-agency and multi-faceted, requiring collaboration from a range of partners in diagnosing problems, analysing underlying causes, examining what works and developing solutions.
- A public health approach provides an ideal framework for understanding the causes of violence and for responding with appropriate interventions.
- Knife crime is not inevitable and it is therefore preventable. Helping young people to make positive choices, improving their critical thinking skills, and providing role models and support for those who may be at risk of being drawn into crime, can all help to dissuade them from becoming involved in gangs and committing knife crime offences.

- Many young people who are involved in gangs and criminal activities are vulnerable victims, as well as perpetrators. They often need support to build the resilience necessary to extricate themselves from criminality and to turn their lives around.
- Clamping down on illegal sales can help to ensure that knives do not get into the wrong hands and on to Kent streets.

3.2 The report's recommendations include:

- The establishment of a multi-disciplinary, operational group whose remit is to ensure the implementation and delivery of strategic objectives to address knife crime and violence through a public health approach.
- An update of statutory guidance to schools to help them manage pupils' poor behaviour and reduce exclusions.
- The promotion of high-quality, standardised training on knife crime in all Kent schools.
- The recruitment and training of volunteers to provide long-term mentoring for young people at risk of offending.
- A more proactive approach to the promotion of the responsible sale of knives by local retailers.
- The piloting and evaluation of a scheme, such as the Youth Zone, to extend youth service provision in the county.

3.3 An executive summary of the report is attached in Appendix 1. To obtain a copy of the full report please contact the report's author (details below). The full report can be access via the link below.

https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/100678/Knife-Crime-Select-Committee-report.pdf

4. Conclusions

4.1 We welcome the report and would like to congratulate the Select Committee on completing this piece of work.

4.2 We would also like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the Select Committee, and the officers who supported it.

4.3 Mr Paul Barrington-King - Chairman of the Select Committee – Mr Ian Chittenden and Mr Dara Farrell will present the report to Cabinet. The Committee would welcome your comments.

5. Recommendations

5.1 The Select committee be thanked for its work and for producing a relevant and balanced document.

5.2 The witnesses and others who provided evidence and made valuable contributions to the Select Committee be thanked.

5.3 Cabinet's comments on the report and its recommendations be welcomed and the report endorsed.

Select Committee Research Officer:

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. Committee Membership

1.1.1. The Committee consisted of nine elected Members of Kent County Council (KCC): seven members of the Conservative Party, one member of the Labour Party and one member of the Liberal Democrat Party.

Mr P. Barrington-King (Chairman - Conservative)

Mrs S. Chandler (Conservative)

Mr I. Chittenden (Liberal Democrat)

Mr A. Cook (Conservative)

Mr P. Cooper (Conservative)

Mr D. Farrell (Labour)

Mr T. Hills (Conservative)

Mr K. Pugh (Conservative)

Mr A. Ridgers (Conservative)

1.2. Scene setting

- 1.2.1. After falling for several years, knife crime in England and Wales is rising again. While overall crime has fallen rapidly over the last 20 years, knife crime has risen in almost all police force areas in England and Wales since 2014.
- 1.2.2. According to the Office for National Statistics, after falling to a low point in 2013/14, when there were about 25,600 offences involving a sharp object, these have increased steadily to peak in 2017/18 at about 40,100.³ 43 of the 44 police forces recorded a rise in knife crime since 2011.⁴ These increases have been accompanied by a rise in younger victims and perpetrators.⁵
- 1.2.3. Kent has experienced the largest, recent increase in knife crime in England and Wales. Between April 2010 and September 2018, knife crime in the county increased by 152%, from 346 to 873. However, the *rate* of all crime involving a knife or sharp instrument in Kent is considerably *lower* than the national average, with 50 offences per 100,000 population (the average rate in England and Wales is 76 per 100,000 population).⁶ In addition, Youth Offending data shows that the number of knife crime offences in Kent that resulted in an Out of Court Disposal or Court Conviction (for those under the age of 18) has gradually declined, from 145 in 2016, to 127 in 2017 and to 107 in 2018.⁷
- 1.2.4. Kent County Council is determined to take action to help to tackle the recent increases in knife crime in the county and to deal with its consequences, which can devastate the lives of individuals, families and communities.

³ House of Commons Library (2018) Briefing Paper, Knife Crime in England and Wales, London

⁴ BBC News (14 March 2019) Ten Charts on the Rise of Knife Crime in England and Wales, online, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42749089>

⁵ HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy

⁶ Office for National Statistics (2018) Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending December 2018, online, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2018#offences-involving-knives-or-sharp-instruments-are-still-rising-while-firearms-offences-decrease>

⁷ Kent County Council (2019) Youth Offending Data, Kent, April 2019

1.3. Terms of reference

- 1.3.1. To examine the reasons behind the recent increases in knife crime offences in the county.
- 1.3.2. To consider current initiatives in Kent focused on addressing knife crime in the county.
- 1.3.3. To identify opportunities for KCC to help reduce the incidence and impact of knife crime in Kent.

Key messages

- **The impact of knife crime on society is significant. Apart from the devastating social cost to individuals, families and communities through the loss of life and the trauma of physical and psychological injuries, there is a substantial economic cost to society.**
- **Knife crime cannot be solved by criminal justice measures alone. While law enforcement remains central, the most effective approaches tend to be multi-agency and multi-faceted, requiring collaboration from a range of partners in diagnosing problems, analysing underlying causes, examining what works and developing solutions.**
- **A public health approach provides an ideal framework for understanding the causes of violence and for responding with appropriate interventions.**
- **Knife crime is not inevitable and it is therefore preventable. Helping young people to make positive choices, improving their critical thinking skills, and providing role models and support for those who may be at risk of being drawn into crime, can all help to dissuade them from becoming involved in gangs and committing knife crime offences.**
- **Many young people who are involved in gangs and criminal activities are vulnerable victims, as well as perpetrators. They often need support to build the resilience necessary to extricate themselves from criminality and to turn their lives around.**
- **Clamping down on illegal sales can help to ensure that knives do not get into the wrong hands and on to Kent streets.**

1.4. Recommendations

Recommendation 1

KCC should work with partner organisations to establish a multi-disciplinary, operational group which includes all the relevant, key agencies and whose remit is to ensure the implementation and delivery of strategic objectives to address knife crime and violence through a public health approach. A task that should be given priority is the development of a more efficient and effective information-sharing mechanism to build a more comprehensive picture of gang activities in the county, so that more timely and targeted early interventions can be undertaken.

Recommendation 2

KCC's Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education should write to the Secretary of State for Education, on behalf of the Select Committee, and urge him to update statutory guidance to schools to help them manage pupils' poor behaviour and reduce exclusions.

Recommendation 3

KCC should review all the training on knife crime and violence that is currently delivered in Kent schools to assess the extent to which it is informative, consistent and balanced. This evaluation should clarify whether KCC needs to promote and commission the delivery of a high-quality, standardised programme.

Recommendation 4

KCC's Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education should write to all Kent schools to encourage them to deliver high-quality training on the dangers associated with knife crime, from primary school (Year 5 and Year 6) to all types of secondary school.

Recommendation 5

KCC's Children, Young People and Education Directorate should conduct a feasibility study to evaluate the effectiveness of a scheme involving the recruitment and training of volunteers to provide long-term mentoring for young people at risk of offending.

Recommendation 6

KCC's Trading Standards service should devise and evaluate a pilot scheme involving a more proactive approach to the promotion of the responsible sale of knives by local retailers.

Recommendation 7

KCC should pilot a scheme such as the Youth Zone to extend youth service provision in the county. The pilot should take place in a particularly deprived area of Kent and should be combined with an evaluation to assess its effectiveness and to inform future policy.

Appendix 2

Evidence

Oral evidence

Monday 10th June 2019

- Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, Kent County Council
- Dan Bride, Assistant Director (North & West Kent), Adolescent Services, Open Access & Youth Offending, Kent County Council
- Louise Fisher, Assistant Director, Integrated Children's Services, Kent County Council
- Mike Hill OBE, Cabinet Member for Community Services, Kent County Council, and Chair of the Kent Community Safety Partnership
- Shafick Peerbux, Head of Service, Community Safety, Kent County Council

Tuesday 11th June 2019

- Joanna Brennan, Head of Innovation and Engagement (South East & East), Youth Justice Board
- Alan Wood, Community Engagement Manager, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, Her Majesty's Prison/Youth Offender Institution Stanford Hill
- Two residents of HMP Stanford Hill
- Tanya Gillett, Head of Service, Youth Offending Service, Essex County Council
- Claire Ray, Head of Service, Education Safeguarding service, Kent County Council
- Claire Ledger, South Kent Area Safeguarding Adviser, Kent County Council
- John Coull, Detective Superintendent, Kent and Essex Serious Crime Directorate Intelligence, Kent Police
- Guy Thompson, Chief Inspector, Partnerships & Communities, Kent Police

Wednesday 12th June 2019

- Dr Erin Sanders-McDonagh, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Kent
- Mark Pearson, Chief Executive Officer, Excelsior Safeguarding

- James Whiddett, Operations Manager, Trading Standards, Kent County Council
- Oliver Jewell, Principal Trading Standards Officer, Kent County Council

Monday 17th June 2019

- Allison Duggal, Deputy Director, Public Health, Kent County Council

Written evidence

- Dr Robert Hesketh, Lecturer in Criminal Justice, Liverpool John Moores University
- Dr Peter Traynor, Senior Research Assistant, Manchester Metropolitan University
- Scottish Violence Reduction Unit
- National Probation Service
- No Knives Better Lives, Crime Prevention Scotland
- Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust
- Kent Association of Headteachers
- Kent Youth County Council
- Seán Holden – County Councillor for Cranbrook, Kent County Council