

By: Benjamin Watts, General Counsel

To: County Council meeting – 17 October 2019

Subject: Select Committee: Knife Crime

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

Recommendations:

- (a) The Select Committee be thanked for its work and for producing a relevant and balanced document.
 - (b) The witnesses and others who provided evidence and made valuable contributions to the Select Committee be thanked.
 - (c) County Council's comments on the report be noted and the report endorsed.
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1. Introduction

A Select Committee on Knife Crime was established by the Scrutiny Committee, based on a proposal by the Leader, and started its work in April 2019.

2. Background

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.

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.

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). 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.

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. Select Committee

3.1 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).

3.2 Terms of Reference

The agreed terms of reference were:

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

3.3 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 evidence list is set out in Appendix 2.

Full details of all the oral and written evidence received by the Committee are available online. Please follow the link below.

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s91444/Knife%20Crime%20in%20Kent%20-%20Written%20Evidence.pdf>

4. The Report

The Select Committee approved its report at a formal meeting on 12 September 2019. The executive summary of the report is attached in Appendix 1. A copy of the full report is available online. Please follow the link below.

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

5. The Report – Key Facts

Key facts and figures from the report are summarised below.

- There are three broad reasons why people carry knives:
 - **self-protection** and fear ('defensive weapon carrying'), particularly for those who have previously been a victim of crime
 - **self-presentation**, particularly for those who want "street credibility" and "respect"
 - **utility** (offensive weapon carrying), particularly for those who use weapons to facilitate other behaviours such as theft, sexual assault, injury and serious harm.^{1 2}
- There is some evidence that the following factors may be associated with an increased risk of violence and/or weapon carrying:
 - **gender** – males are more likely to commit serious violence and carry weapons
 - **age** – self-reported weapon carrying peaks around the age of 15
 - **adverse childhood experiences** – including abuse, neglect, parental criminality and/or substance abuse, being taken into care
 - **educational attainment** – school exclusion and low attainment.³
 - Recent analysis of data collected in the UK indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and weapon carrying.⁴

¹ College of Policing (2019) Knife Crime: Evidence Briefing, Coventry

² Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 10 June 2019

³ College of Policing (2019) Knife Crime: Evidence Briefing, Coventry

⁴ Ibid

- Police-recorded crime figures can be affected by changes to recording practices, rates of reporting, and police activity. Improvements in recording by local forces are thought to have contributed to some of the rises in recorded crime in recent years.⁵ ⁶ Nonetheless, the years 2015/16 and 2016/17 saw increases in admissions to hospital for assault by sharp instrument, reversing a declining trend, which began in 2007/8. These rises, totalling 22% since 2014/15, appear to support the view that police-recorded crime figures reflect a real change in the number of knife crimes committed.⁷
- While the majority of knife crime is not gang-related, research has shown that gang members are more likely to carry knives than non-gang members, and that gang-related knife crimes are usually of a more violent nature than other knife-related offending.⁸ ⁹
- Dealing more effectively with gang crime and violence requires pro-active agency collaboration and intelligence sharing. There are examples of effective and proactive intelligence sharing in the county. Kent Community Wardens contribute to KCC's response to serious violence through their trusted role and relationship with the community, and this in turn enables them to identify warning signs and share intelligence.¹⁰
- As the level of knife crime has continued to grow over the last few years, the UK Youth Parliament believed that the issue must be addressed. In the 2018 "Make Your Mark" ballot, over 196,000 young people aged 11-18 from across the UK voted to put an end to knife crime. Members of Youth Parliament voted at the House of Commons to make this the England only campaign for 2019.¹¹
- Although there is no clear evidence that formal exclusion is a direct cause of a child becoming involved with crime, there appears to be a correlation. A study found that 63% of prisoners had been temporarily excluded from school, and 42% had been permanently excluded.¹² Also, in 2014, 23% of young offenders sentenced to less than 12 months in custody, and 16% of those sentenced to 12

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives: Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Greater London Authority (2017) The London Knife Crime Strategy, London

⁹ College of Policing (2019) Knife Crime: Evidence Briefing, Coventry

¹⁰ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹¹ Youth Parliament UK (2019) Action Against Knife Crime, online, <http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/campaign/action-against-knife-crime/>

¹² Ministry of Justice (2014) Prisoners' Childhood and Family Backgrounds: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) Longitudinal Cohort Study of Prisoners

months or longer, had been permanently excluded from school prior to their sentence date.¹³

- The Children's Commissioner (2019) reports that gang-associated children aged 5-15 are 5 times more likely to have had a permanent exclusion in their previous academic year.¹⁴ The Committee received evidence that it is very challenging to re-engage with young people who have been excluded from school, and to extricate them from gangs once they are involved.^{15 16} It is estimated that there currently are about 27,000 young people in England who identify as gang members. This figure does not include those who are being groomed and exploited by gangs but who would not identify as gang members.¹⁷
- The College of Policing (2019) says that programmes aimed at changing norms and values towards violence at a young age have shown promising results, and that in the UK these programmes are often aimed at children aged between 8 and 13.¹⁸ The youngest person reported to operate in a gang in Kent was only 10 years old.¹⁹
- Many young people involved in gangs and criminal activities are vulnerable victims, as well as perpetrators.^{20 21 22} The links between traumatic experiences – such as adverse childhood environments and childhood maltreatment - and criminal behaviour are widely evidenced.²³ These young people often need support to build the resilience necessary to extricate themselves from criminality and turn their lives around.²⁴ To make positive changes mentors, role models and trusting relationships appear to be essential.^{25 26 27}

¹³ Department for Education and Ministry of Justice (2016) Understanding the Educational Background of Young Offenders: Full Report, London

¹⁴ Children's Commissioner (2019) Keeping Kids Safe: Improving Safeguarding Responses to Gang Violence and Criminal Exploitation, London.

¹⁵ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

¹⁶ Children's Commissioner (2019) Keeping Kids Safe: Improving Safeguarding Responses to Gang Violence and Criminal Exploitation, London.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ College of Policing (2019) Knife Crime: Evidence Briefing, Coventry

¹⁹ Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021: Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

²⁰ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives - Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

²¹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

²² Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 10 June 2019

²³ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives - Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

²⁴ Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021: Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

²⁵ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

²⁶ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

²⁷ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

- There have been several national initiatives to control and limit the sale of knives. The recent Offensive Weapons Act (2019), for instance, makes it illegal to possess dangerous weapons in private, including “zombie knives”, “death star knives” and knuckledusters. It also makes it a criminal offence to dispatch bladed products sold online without verifying that the buyer is over 18.²⁸
- The Government has worked closely with retailers to prevent the sale of knives to young people under the age of 18. In March 2018, 18 major retailers committed to having robust measures to check age verification, ensure appropriate display and packaging, and control the access to knives in stores. Tesco, eBay UK, Lidl UK, Amazon UK, Wilko, Argos, Asda, Poundland, Morrisons, Sainsbury’s, John Lewis, Waitrose, Boots, Co-op, B&Q, Aldi UK, TKMaxx and Debenhams all signed up to these principles.²⁹ However, more needs to be done: as the Serious Violence Strategy (2018) points out, around 1 in 5 shops in the country still fail test purchase checks.³⁰
- Kent has continued to value and fund youth work with a mixed economy of in-house and commissioned provision. Comparable annual budgets from 2015*, which include Youth Justice, Youth Participation, Duke of Edinburgh and HeadStart (excluding building costs), show a funding increase from about £4,523,000 in 2015-16 to about £7,188,200 in 2018-19. Over this period KCC has also continued to fund what was the Community Youth Tutor role (£160,000 per year), despite this income being withdrawn by schools.³¹
- OnSide Youth Zones are designed to offer young people aged 8-19 (25 for those with a disability), who live in deprived areas, a range of leisure activities and an opportunity to learn new skills and to socialise in a safe, positive way.³² The Youth Zone model is based on the successful Bolton Lads Club, which was established in 1889.³³ The Club is now a state-of-the-art custom-built, modern youth club offering a wide range of sport, art and enterprise activities. The club is open every day of the year, and is visited by over 3,000 young people a week.³⁴

²⁸ Legislation.Gov.UK (2019) Offensive Weapons Act 2019, online, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/17/contents/enacted>

²⁹ HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy

³⁰ Ibid

* It is not possible to provide comparable budget data from 2012 to 2019 due to changes in financial coding structures

³¹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

³² OnSide (2019) About OnSide Youth Zones, online, <https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/about-onside/>

³³ The Way Wolverhampton Youth Zone (2019) The Youth Zone Network, online, <https://www.thewayyouthzone.org/about-us/youth-zone-network/>

³⁴ OnSide (2019) About OnSide Youth Zones, online, <https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/about-onside/>

- Over the last eight years, OnSide has set about replicating the success of the Bolton Lads and Girls Clubs in other towns and cities across the country, including Carlisle, Manchester, Wigan and Wolverhampton. More Youth Zones are planned to open in 2020, including in Warrington, and in Hammersmith and Fulham.³⁵

6. Monitoring of Recommendations

In accordance with the process for monitoring Select Committee recommendations, as set out in the Constitution (Appendix 4, Part 4 – 4.26), an action plan from the Cabinet Member/Corporate Director will be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee in early 2020 for consideration. Any such action plan or formal decision(s) needed in order to implement the Select Committee recommendations must comply with all of the necessary requirements for making executive decisions. These include compliance with all legal obligations, the Public Sector Equality duty and consultation where necessary.

7. Recommendations

7.1 The Select Committee be thanked for its work and for producing a relevant and balanced document.

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

7.3 County Council's comments on the report be noted and the report endorsed.

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³⁵ OnSide (2019) Our Youth Zones, online, <https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/the-youth-zone-model/our-youth-zones/>