

# 1. Executive Summary

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## 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.<sup>1</sup> 43 of the 44 police forces recorded a rise in knife crime since 2011.<sup>2</sup> These increases have been accompanied by a rise in younger victims and perpetrators.<sup>3</sup>
- 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).<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>
- 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.

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<sup>1</sup> House of Commons Library (2018) Briefing Paper, Knife Crime in England and Wales, London

<sup>2</sup> 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>

<sup>3</sup> HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy

<sup>4</sup> 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>

<sup>5</sup> 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 knife crime training, 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.**