

Knife Crime Select Committee Report

October 2019



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Foreword



The impact of knife crime on victims, their families and whole communities is devastating.

During our review it has become clear that knife crime is a complex and multi-faceted issue that cannot be solved by criminal justice measures alone; effective responses require concerted action from a wide range of organisations. A public health approach, based on systematic and rigorous evaluations, 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. Delivering early intervention programmes in collaboration with schools, in order to help raise awareness of the dangers associated with knife crime, gangs and county lines amongst young people, is crucial. Youth facilities can also play an important role by providing young people with the life skills and aspirations to overcome adversity. While KCC's Youth Service provision is still robust, its impact could be expanded through the creative development of strong partnerships across different sectors, such as the tried and tested "OnSide Youth Zone" model.

While prevention and early intervention are crucial, they may be less effective for young people who are already involved in serious violence and criminality. They are often victims, as well as perpetrators, who may need support and trusting relationships to turn their lives around.

Alongside collaborative and preventative measures, it is also important to act to keep knives off our streets. A more proactive approach, designed to target illegal sales and to promote age-verification procedures and appropriate display, can help to deter people from carrying and using these deadly weapons.

Knife crime is unacceptable and must not be tolerated. Although there are no quick fixes and solutions, we believe that KCC, in collaboration with partner organisations, can and should do all it can to tackle this form of violence and its devastating consequences for the people of Kent.

Paul Barrington-King

Chairman of the Knife Crime Select Committee

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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 declined 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 40,100.¹ 43 of the 44 police forces recorded a rise in knife crime since 2011.² These increases have been accompanied by a rise in younger victims and perpetrators.³
- 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).⁴ 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 2018.⁵
- 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.

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

² 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>

³ HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy

⁴ 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>

⁵ 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.

1.5. Methodology

- 1.5.1. 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.
- 1.5.2. 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 1.

2. Background

2.1. Definitions

2.1.1. Although “**knife crime**” can be understood as crime involving an object with a blade or sharp instrument,⁶ there is no clear definition and it is not a specific offence.^{7 8} The phrase was adopted by the media and is now popularly used to refer primarily to knife assaults and knife carrying.⁹ Criminal offences related to knives include the following:

- it is an offence to threaten or cause harm to a person with a bladed weapon
- some bladed weapons are prohibited from being sold or purchased, including to anyone under the age of 18
- offences such as robbery or assault can be aggravated if a knife is involved
- it is also an offence to carry a knife in a public place without good reason.^{10 11}

2.1.2. There is also no single national or international definition of a “**gang**” or “gang member”. The definition set out in the Government’s Ending Gang and Youth Violence report, and adapted from the Centre for Social Justice’s report “Dying to Belong” (2009), is as follows:

“a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who: 1. see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group; 2. engage in criminal activity and violence; and may also 3. lay claim over territory (not necessarily geographical, but can include an illegal economy territory); 4. have some form of identifying structural feature; and/or 5. be in conflict with other, similar, gangs.”¹²

⁶ House of Commons Library (2018) Briefing Paper, Knife Crime in England and Wales, London

⁷ Home Affairs Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2007–08, Policing in the 21st Century, HC 364, para 163 Knife Crime

⁸ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives - Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Legislation.gov.uk (1953) Prevention of Crime Act, online, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/1-2/14/contents

¹¹ The Crown Prosecution Service (2018) Offensive Weapons, Knives, Bladed and Pointed Articles, online, <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/offensive-weapons-knives-bladed-and-pointed-articles>

¹² Home Office (2015) What Works to Prevent Gang Involvement, Youth Violence and Crime; A Rapid Review of Interventions Delivered in the UK and Abroad, London

- 2.1.3. 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.¹³
- 2.1.4. The term “**county lines**” is used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas in the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other forms of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money, and they often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.¹⁴
- 2.1.5. One of the key factors found in most cases of county lines exploitation is the carrying of drugs in return for something. The exchange can include both tangible rewards (such as money, drugs or clothes) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived friendship or affection).¹⁵
- 2.1.6. There are recorded cases of children as young as 12 being exploited or moved by gangs to courier drugs out of their local area. The most common age-range is 15-16.¹⁶

¹³ Greater London Authority (2017) The London Knife Crime Strategy, London

¹⁴ HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy, London

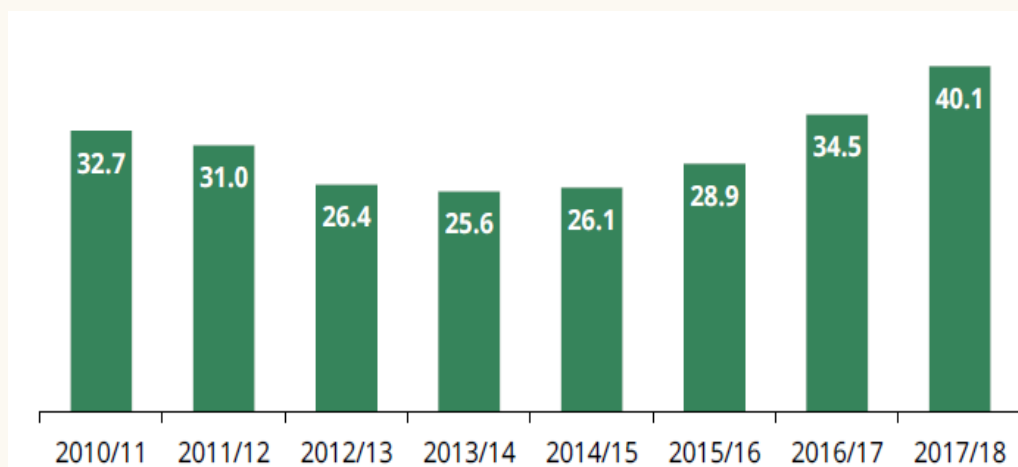
¹⁵ Home Office (2017) Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults: County Lines Guidance, London

¹⁶ Ibid

2.2. National trends

2.2.1. Police-recorded crime figures are just one of a number of sources of data on trends in offences involving knives, but they are those most often cited.¹⁷ According to this data, after falling to a low point in 2013/14, when there were about 25,600, offences have risen steadily to peak in 2017/18 at about 40,100 (Figure 1 and Appendix 3).¹⁸

Figure 1: Selected offences involving a knife or sharp instrument (000s), 2010-2018 (year ending March), England and Wales



Source: House of Commons Library, Knife Crime in England and Wales, November 2018

2.2.2. 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.^{19 20}

2.2.3. 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.²¹ Doctors reported that the injuries they were treating were becoming more severe, and that the victims were getting younger and including an increasing number of girls.²²

¹⁷ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives: Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

¹⁸ House of Commons Library (2018) Briefing Paper, Knife Crime in England and Wales, London

¹⁹ Ibid

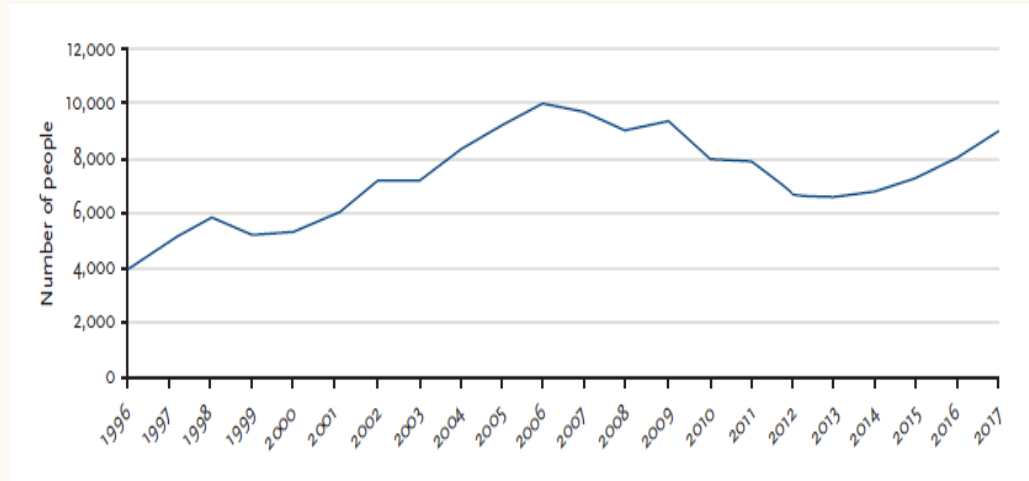
²⁰ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives: Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

²¹ Ibid

²² 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>

2.2.4. When analysing crimes involving knife possession only, which resulted in a caution or court conviction, data from the courts database also shows a steady increase from just under 7,000 offences in 2013 to about 8,500 in 2017 (Figure 2 and Appendix 3).²³

Figure 2: Number of people cautioned or found guilty for possession of a knife, England and Wales



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

2.2.5. To summarise, knife crime presents a complex picture which no single source can adequately capture. It appears that levels of knife crime are likely to have risen in recent years - particularly the more serious instances - although part of the increase is due to changes in the way that these crimes are recorded.

Regional variation in knife crime offences

2.2.6. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reports that knife or sharp instrument offences tend to be concentrated in metropolitan areas. In the year ending December 2018, a third of all crimes involving a knife or sharp instrument occurred in London (167 offences per 100,000 people). The highest rates outside London were in Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, and West Midlands (129, 118 and 111 offences per 100,000 population respectively). These areas had higher rates than the England and Wales average of 76 offences per 100,000 population. The rate in Kent was lower than the national average, with 50 offences per 100,000 population.²⁴

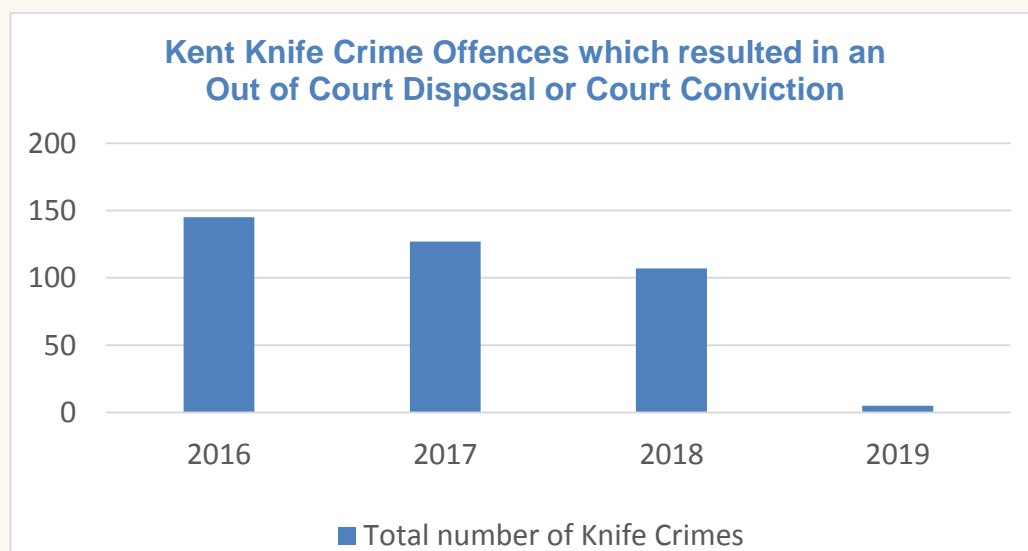
²³ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives - Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

2.3. Local trends

2.3.1. Data from the ONS, which was reported by the media, shows that Kent experienced the largest, recent increase of knife and sharp instrument offences in England and Wales recorded by the police. Between April 2010 and September 2018, the number of offences in the county increased by 152%, from 346 to 873.^{25 26} However, as stated above, the *rate* of all crime involving a knife or sharp instrument in Kent was considerably *lower* than the national average, with 50 offences per 100,000 population.²⁷

2.3.2. Youth Offending data shows that the number of knife crime offences in Kent that resulted in an Out of Court Disposal or Court Conviction has gradually declined, from 145 in 2016, to 127 in 2017 and to 107 in 2018 (Figure 3 and Appendix 3).²⁸

Figure 3: Number of knife crime offences which resulted in an Out of Court Disposal or Court Conviction, Kent



Source: Kent County Council, Knife Crime, Youth Offending data, Kent, April 2019

²⁴ 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>

²⁵ Office for National Statistics (2018), online, Knife and Sharp Instrument Offences Recorded by the Police for Selected Offences, [Table P5: Knife and sharp instrument offences recorded by the police for selected offences, by police force area, English regions and Wales, percentage change for year ending September 2018 compared with selected periods from year ending March 2011](#)

²⁶ The Guardian (2019) County Lines Drugs Blamed for Kent's Big Rise in Knife Crime, online, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/mar/10/county-lines-drugs-kent-knife-crime-rise-cuts>

²⁷ 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>

²⁸ Kent County Council (2019) Youth Offending Data, Kent, April 2019

2.3.3. A study of Kent residents admitted to acute hospitals between April 2014 and November 2018, where a cause of injury was identified as 'assault by a sharp object' (including needles or pieces of glass), found that there were 324 separate admissions involving 314 separate individuals. This equates to around 6 admissions to hospital every month. The majority of victims were males (86.3%), and were under the age of 35, with the greatest number aged between 20 and 24.^{29 30}

²⁹ Kent Public Health Observatory (2019) Assault by Sharp Object: Kent Residents Admitted to an Acute Hospital During the Period April 2014 to 30 November 2018, Maidstone

³⁰ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 17 June 2019

2.4. Explanations for the reported rise in knife crime

- 2.4.1. General explanations for rising knife crime have ranged from police budget cuts, to gang violence and disputes between drug dealers. Anecdotal evidence from the police suggests that young people are now more inclined to carry knives because of growing confidence that they will not be stopped.³¹
- 2.4.2. A more specific reason put forward for the rise in knife crime in Kent is the spillover of violence from county lines – drug dealing that involves urban gangs moving drugs and cash between city hubs and provincial areas.³²
- 2.4.3. The multi-agency Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021 warns of “a steady increase in the number of gangs operating across Kent and Medway – from mostly London-based street gangs venturing into Kent to sell drugs, to the development of local ‘homegrown’ gangs.”³³

Motivations for carrying a knife

- 2.4.4. 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.^{34 35}

³¹ BBC News (2019) Ten Charts on the Rise of Knife Crime in England and Wales, online, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42749089>

³² The Guardian (2019) County Lines Drugs Blamed for Kent's Big Rise in Knife Crime, online, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/mar/10/county-lines-drugs-kent-knife-crime-rise-cuts>

³³ See the Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021

³⁴ College of Policing (2019) Knife Crime: Evidence Briefing, Coventry

³⁵ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 10 June 2019

Risk factors associated with knife crime

2.4.5. 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.³⁶

2.4.6. Recent analysis of data collected in the UK indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and weapon carrying.³⁷

³⁶ College of Policing (2019) Knife Crime: Evidence Briefing, Coventry

³⁷ Ibid

2.5. National policies and interventions

2.5.1. Recent national strategies and initiatives to tackle knife crime include the following:

The Offensive Weapons Act 2019

2.5.2. The Offensive Weapons Act 2019 brings in new measures that strengthen the legal response to violent crime. The Act will:

- make it illegal to possess dangerous weapons in private, including “zombie knives”, “death star knives” and knuckledusters
- make it a criminal offence to dispatch bladed products sold online without verifying that the buyer is over 18
- update the definition of “flick knives” to reflect changing weapon designs
- change the legal definition for threatening someone with an offensive weapon to make prosecutions easier.³⁸

2.5.3. Other measures in the Act include:

- a ban on the possession, manufacture and sale of rapid firing rifles and bump stocks, which increase a rifle’s rate of fire
- a ban on the sale of corrosive products to people aged under 18
- making it an offence to possess a corrosive substance in a public place.³⁹

³⁸ Offensive Weapons Act 2019, online, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/17/pdfs/ukpga_20190017_en.pdf

³⁹ Ibid

Stiffer sentences

- 2.5.4. Public anxiety about knife crime, legislative changes and firmer guidance for judges and magistrates have led to stiffer sentences, although offenders under 18 are still more likely to be cautioned than imprisoned.⁴⁰
- 2.5.5. The average prison term for those jailed for carrying a knife or other offensive weapon has gone up from almost five months to well over eight months, with 85% serving at least three months, compared with 53% only 10 years ago.⁴¹
- 2.5.6. Sentences for all kinds of violent crime have been getting tougher, particularly for knife crime. The Ministry of Justice records the penalties imposed for those caught carrying knives and other offensive weapons in England and Wales. In the year ending December 2018, 37% of those dealt with were jailed and a further 18% were given a suspended prison sentence. The figures for 2008, when the data was first compiled, were 20% and 9% respectively. Over the same period, there was a steady decline in the use of community sentences, and a sharp drop in cautions, from 30% to 11%.⁴²

The Serious Violence Strategy

- 2.5.7. The Serious Violence Strategy (2018) represents a significant programme of work involving a range of Government departments and partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors. This strategy stresses the importance of early intervention to tackle the root causes of violence and to provide young people with the skills and resilience to lead productive lives free from violence.⁴³
- 2.5.8. The Strategy acknowledges the rise of knife crime across in almost all police forces areas in England and Wales. These increases have been accompanied by a shift towards younger victims and perpetrators.⁴⁴
- 2.5.9. The strategy is based on four key themes: tackling county lines and the misuse of drugs, early intervention and prevention, supporting communities and partnerships, and an effective law enforcement and criminal justice response.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ 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>

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy, London

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

2.5.10. Activities set out in the Strategy include:

- the establishment of a new Inter-Ministerial Group to oversee and direct its delivery. This will be chaired by the Home Office and will meet on a quarterly basis. Membership will include Ministers from the Departments for Education, Health and Social Care, Work and Pensions, Housing, Communities and Local Government, DCMS and Justice, as well as the Wales Office and the Attorney General's Office
- the Home Office will also establish a new cross-sector Serious Violence Taskforce which will include key representatives from national and local government, police and crime commissioners and key delivery partners including representatives from health, education and industry
- the testing and evaluation of early interventions aimed at preventing violence
- national events with key sectors, and further engagement with key partners including police and crime commissioners, community safety partnerships, police, local authority and health professionals, and academics.⁴⁶

Youth Endowment Fund

2.5.11. Announced in October 2018 as part of the government's long-term plan to tackle serious violence, this £200 million Fund will provide a 10-year investment to support interventions aimed at steering young people away from becoming involved in violent crime or reoffending.⁴⁷

2.5.12. Successful bidders will need to demonstrate their ability to:

- use sector knowledge and available evidence to identify the best projects to fund
- ensure robust evaluation of the projects, and use this evaluation to build a body of evidence on what works in stopping children and young people from becoming involved in crime and violence
- share this evidence and best practice so that it can inform policy making, academic research and the local commissioning of services

⁴⁶ HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy, London

⁴⁷ Gov.UK (2018) Home Secretary Opens Bidding Process for Youth Endowment Fund, online, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-opens-bidding-process-for-youth-endowment-fund>

- seek to grow the value of the Fund through attracting further contributions
- administer and manage the Fund as a long-term investment from April 2019.⁴⁸

UK Youth Parliament – Make Your Mark

2.5.13. 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 2019.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Youth Parliament UK (2019) Action Against Knife Crime, online, <http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/campaign/action-against-knife-crime/>

2.6. Local policies and interventions

2.6.1. There are many local initiatives and strategies that contribute to tackling knife crime in Kent.

The Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021

2.6.2. This is a multi-agency partnership involving organisations including both Kent and Medway’s Community Safety Partnerships, and Safeguarding Children Boards. The strategy’s vision is to “protect and prevent young people from becoming involved with gangs; to tackle gang-related harm and youth violence; and to pursue effective enforcement action to deal with those embroiled in gang activities”.⁵⁰

2.6.3. The Strategy states that the average age of a gang member operating in the county is 15, although much younger children can also be involved – the youngest reported in the county was 10 years old. This highlights the importance of teaching young children about the risks of gangs and gang-related crime early, so they are equipped to act appropriately if the circumstances should arise.⁵¹

2.6.4. Collaborative work has involved organisations and initiatives such as the following:

- In 2016 KCC undertook a review of its youth justice provision and changed the configuration of its service from a criminal justice based model of onward referral and intervention, based primarily on offending behaviour, to an adolescent risk model which recognises and addresses the broader context of adolescent risk – including a greater focus on ensuring that children and young people are engaged in education, training or employment.⁵²
- Kent Police has adapted to meet the demands from the emergence of ‘home grown’ gangs and ‘county lines’ crime. Under the New Horizon model it has formed “Gangs Investigation Teams”, dedicated to tackling gangs in each division. As part of this process a “gangs matrix” has been developed to help identify and map the individuals involved in gang activities and to assess the threat, risk and harm they pose. Kent Police has also recently been restructured to enable the force to better protect the most vulnerable people in the county from crime and exploitation. As part of this reorganisation, 20 Youth Engagement Officers have been recruited to work specifically with young people at risk of abuse and neglect, including through gang involvement.⁵³

⁵⁰ See the Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

- The Margate Taskforce has achieved notable success in the proactive identification of individuals vulnerable to gang exploitation. This was achieved primarily through the use of peer group analysis, that is by producing a visual network of individuals known to be involved in gangs and employing intelligence from different organisations to map their relationships. This was then used to identify schools that would benefit from awareness-raising sessions on gangs, and individuals who would benefit from a Family Support Panel. In addition, the Taskforce used geo-mapping to assess safeguarding risks by identifying ‘hot spots’ of activity that could then be targeted.⁵⁴
- Medway Community Safety Partnership, in partnership with the Council’s Youth Services and the Woodlands Centre, made a successful bid to the Home Office Knife Crime Fund in 2017. This funding has allowed Medway to pilot early intervention work in schools focusing on negative peer groups, joint enterprise, child sexual exploitation and gang association. It has also enabled the Council to undertake training with professionals to educate and inform its workforce about gangs (including gang recruitment processes e.g. via social media) as well as to run youth engagement work and sports events designed to focus young people on positive activities and to divert them from gang involvement.⁵⁵
- The Integrated Offender Management (IOM) scheme aims to create a coherent framework for partners to manage the adult and young offenders who are committing the most crimes and causing the greatest harm to local communities. The scope of the IOM has recently been expanded to include gang members, which is a positive step.⁵⁶

The Violence Reduction Challenge

2.6.5. When the Government published its national Serious Violence Strategy in 2018, Kent’s Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Matthew Scott launched a Violence Reduction Challenge. This is a year-long study working with victims, residents, charities, statutory bodies and others to learn about people’s experiences of violent crime, its causes, and how it can be tackled. A report detailing the findings and recommendations of the VRC should be published shortly.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Kent Police Crime Commissioner (2019) Violence Reduction Challenge, online, <https://www.kent-pcc.gov.uk/what-we-do/projects-and-campaigns/violence-reduction-challenge/>

2.6.6. The PCC has also created a £1m Violence Reduction Fund to invest in projects which aim to cut violent crime in Kent and Medway, and established a multi-agency task force in Medway to enable partners to work closer together to deal with some of the underlying causes of crime.⁵⁸

Kent Police Campaign - 'Don't let a knife take life'

2.6.7. Kent Police has recently launched the campaign 'Don't let a knife take life' to tackle knife crime and highlight the risks of carrying a knife. The focus of the campaign is prevention. It is delivered through an education and support initiative, which has been designed to assist schools and youth groups to independently talk to students about knife crime. The resource pack includes a class/group discussion exercise, support literature for both students and parents/carers, and posters.⁵⁹

Operation Sceptre in Kent

2.6.8. This campaign, which was designed to support targeted enforcement and raise awareness of knife crime in the country, ran for a week in March 2019.⁶⁰

2.6.9. In Kent, more than 26 weapons including knives, blades, a chainsaw and a baseball bat were recovered by officers on dedicated patrols. Districts such as Canterbury, Dartford and Tunbridge Wells saw proactive weapon sweeps and community engagement events at key locations such as train stations, shopping centres and high streets in partnership with local councils and the British Transport Police (BTP).⁶¹

2.6.10. One of the weapons seized was a large hunting knife found by officers from the Community Policing Team in Medway after they stopped and searched a vehicle in Rochester. Three people were arrested, and suspected class A drugs were seized.⁶²

2.6.11. Following the success of Operation Sceptre, Kent Police announced that it would continue its level of enforcement action targeting knife crime.⁶³

⁵⁸ Kent Police Crime Commissioner (2019) £1m Fund Announced to Tackle Causes of Violent Crime, online, <https://www.kent-pcc.gov.uk/news/2019/03-march/£1m-fund-announced-to-tackle-causes-of-violent-crime/>

⁵⁹ Kent Police (2019) Knife Crime, online, <https://www.kent.police.uk/advice/knife-crime/>

⁶⁰ Kent Police (2019) Robust Stance Against Knife Crime to Continue Following Operation Sceptre Successes, online, <https://www.kent.police.uk/news/policing-news/0319/robust-stance-against-knife-crime-to-continue-foll/>

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Ibid

North Kent and Medway Serious Youth Violence Project

- 2.6.12. KCC and Medway Council, with the support of the Kent and Medway PCC, have secured £1.3m from the Government's Supporting Families Against Youth Crime Fund to help prevent young people becoming involved in gangs and youth violence.^{64 65}
- 2.6.13. The award will enable a partnership of KCC, Medway Council, Kent Police and the Metropolitan Police to deliver a collaborative two-year project to reduce the impact of gang activity in north Kent and Medway and protect children at risk of criminal exploitation.⁶⁶
- 2.6.14. Kent will use the funding to provide support for vulnerable people across the county through peer mentoring and community support workers, linking up services for those who might otherwise become involved in knife crime and gang violence. By educating young people on the dangers of joining a gang, and by providing peer mentors for young people at risk, communities should become more resilient and more able to resist gang involvement.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Kent County Council (2019) Kent Secures £1.3m to Tackle Gangs and Youth Violence, online, <https://kccmediahub.net/kent-secures-1-3m-to-tackle-gangs-and-youth-violence745>

⁶⁵ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence.

⁶⁶ Kent County Council (2019) Kent Secures £1.3m to Tackle Gangs and Youth Violence, online, <https://kccmediahub.net/kent-secures-1-3m-to-tackle-gangs-and-youth-violence745>

⁶⁷ Ibid

3. Issues and Recommendations

3.1. Introduction

- 3.1.1. **The impact of knife crime on society is significant.** There is a devastating social cost to individuals, families and communities through the loss of life and the trauma of physical and psychological injuries. The economic cost is also substantial; the cost associated with a single homicide is over £3 million, and the average annual cost of a prison place in England and Wales is about £38,000.^{68 69 70 71}
- 3.1.2. During the review the Committee identified recurring themes that form the basis for this report and its recommendations for helping to tackle knife crime. These are the **centrality of multi-agency collaboration, and the importance of prevention and early intervention, while also acting promptly once violence is causing harm.**
- 3.1.3. **Much of the evidence that will be presented in this report, and the range of motivations and risk factors outlined earlier, indicate that knife crime cannot be solved by criminal justice measures alone.** The most effective approaches tend to be multi-agency and multi-faceted, requiring collaboration from different agencies in diagnosing the problem, analysing underlying causes, examining what works and developing solutions.^{72 73}
- 3.1.4. For instance, Kent's proximity to London makes the county particularly susceptible to county lines practice where drug dealers exploit vulnerable young people to traffic drugs into rural areas; while law enforcement and criminal justice mechanisms are key, effective intelligence sharing between different organisations, such as the police, the NHS and schools can ensure more focused and agile responses.⁷⁴
^{75 76}

⁶⁸ HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy, London

⁶⁹ Home Office (2018) The Economic and Social Costs of Crime, second edition, London

⁷⁰ Ministry of Justice (2017) Table 1, Costs per Prison Place and Cost per Prisoner by Individual Prison Establishment 2016 to 2017 tables, London

⁷¹ Prison Reform Trust (2018) Prison: The Facts, Bromley Briefings Summer 2018, London

⁷² College of Policing (2019) Knife Crime: Evidence Briefing, Coventry

⁷³ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

⁷⁴ HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy, London

⁷⁵ Local Government Association (2018) Public Health Approaches to Reducing Violence, London

⁷⁶ The Street Weapons Commission (2008) The Street Weapons Commission Report, London

- 3.1.5. **Knife crime is not inevitable and is therefore preventable.** Early intervention and preventative programmes aimed at changing norms and values towards violence at a young age have shown promising results.⁷⁷
- 3.1.6. 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 in committing knife crime offences.^{78 79}
- 3.1.7. In recent years there has been a growing recognition of the value of **public health approaches** to addressing violence. These require collaboration from different agencies in providing a framework which seeks to understand what causes violence and responding with interventions to prevent or reduce it.^{80 81}
- 3.1.8. In Scotland, the development of a public health approach involving the police, social services, youth and community services, offending and probation teams, the NHS and local voluntary organisations, was instrumental in reducing violent crime to a 41-year low in 2017.⁸²
- 3.1.9. While evaluations of this model warn about the challenges associated with simply replicating it elsewhere, the Committee believes that its focus on being evidence-based and collaborative is sound, and that it can strengthen strategies and interventions aimed at tackling knife crime and violence in Kent.
- 3.1.10. **To summarise, there are no quick fixes or single measures that can eliminate knife crime in Kent. An effective response requires co-ordinated action from a wide range of organisations, a focus on prevention and early intervention policies, effective information sharing and an evidence-led methodology.**

⁷⁷ College of Policing (2019) Knife Crime: Evidence Briefing, Coventry

⁷⁸ HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy, London

⁷⁹ Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021: Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

⁸⁰ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives - Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

⁸¹ Local Government Association (2018) Public Health Approaches to Reducing Violence, London

⁸² Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives - Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

3.2. Multi-agency collaboration

- 3.2.1. As indicated earlier, knife crime is a complex issue that requires collaboration; it cannot be resolved by the criminal justice system alone.
- 3.2.2. Although only a small number of young people in Kent are involved in gangs – less than 1% come into contact with the Criminal Justice System – these have a disproportionately negative influence on wider society because of their anti-social behaviour and crimes.⁸³
- 3.2.3. Not only are gang members more likely to carry knives than non-gang members, and commit knife crimes that are more violent in nature,⁸⁴ but their activities may lead to more young people carrying knives for personal protection – especially those who have become victims of knife violence themselves.⁸⁵
- 3.2.4. Interventions aimed at detecting, deterring and disrupting county line activities are regularly carried out by the British Transport Police.⁸⁶ Also, since April 2019 Kent Police executed more than 70 warrants and arrested over 370 people who were linked to county lines and violence.⁸⁷ However, with profits estimated to be between £2,000 and £3,000 per day, it is of little surprise that county lines operations are appealing and fiercely protected.⁸⁸
- 3.2.5. There is much evidence that, **dealing more effectively with gang crime and violence, and preventing vulnerable children from being coerced into county lines and gang activities, requires pro-active agency collaboration and an agreed set of objectives.**^{89 90 91}
- 3.2.6. Together with individual initiatives - such as Kent Police's New Horizon model and its Gangs Investigation Teams, and KCC's reconfiguration of its youth justice provision from a criminal justice-based model to one where young people at risk are engaged in education, training or employment - there are several partnerships that demonstrate a strong commitment to eradicate gangs and their grooming of vulnerable individuals in Kent.⁹²

⁸³ Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021: Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

⁸⁴ Greater London Authority (2017) The London Knife Crime Strategy, London

⁸⁵ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives - Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

⁸⁶ British Transport Police (2018) County Lines Operation Runs Across the South of England, online, http://media.btp.police.uk/r/15436/county_lines_operation_runs_across_the_south_of_e

⁸⁷ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

⁸⁸ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence.

⁸⁹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

⁹⁰ Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021: Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

⁹¹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

⁹² Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021: Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

- 3.2.7. The Kent and Medway Gang Strategy is a commitment between the Safeguarding Children Boards and the Community Safety partnerships of both Kent and Medway to support those affected by gangs. The strategy provides a clear 'statement of intent' and a collective focus on addressing gangs through an agreed set of objectives and outcomes.⁹³
- 3.2.8. The Kent Community Safety Partnership itself - which includes organisations such as KCC, Kent Police, the Kent Fire and Rescue Service, local district councils and Clinical Commissioning Groups - is responsible for tackling issues such as substance misuse, serious and organised crime and anti-social behaviour, as well as safeguarding vulnerable people. The partnership's many initiatives include: the promotion of information sharing through the Safer Community Portal, a recent conference about protecting vulnerable people from serious crime, and several multi-agency operations to tackle vulnerability and violence in the night-time economy.^{94 95}
- 3.2.9. Kent and Medway's Police and Crime Commissioner has set aside a £1million Violence Reduction Fund to support projects which aim to cut violent crime in Kent and Medway. The Fund is one of the recommendations from his lengthy study into the nature, scale and causes of violence in the county.^{96 97}
- 3.2.10. The Margate Task Force is a multi-agency team of staff from 14 different agencies who work together to support the local community.⁹⁸ As indicated earlier, the Taskforce has been particularly successful in identifying individuals vulnerable to gang exploitation by using intelligence from different organisations. This has then been used to deliver awareness raising sessions on gangs, and to target individuals who have benefited from Family Support Panels.⁹⁹

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 10 June 2019

⁹⁶ Kent Police Crime Commissioner (2019) Violence Reduction Challenge, online, <https://www.kent-pcc.gov.uk/what-we-do/projects-and-campaigns/violence-reduction-challenge/>

⁹⁷ Kent Police Crime Commissioner (2019) £1m Fund Announced to Tackle Causes of Violent Crime, online, <https://www.kent-pcc.gov.uk/news/2019/03-march/£1m-fund-announced-to-tackle-causes-of-violent-crime/>

⁹⁸ Educational Life CIC (2018) Margate Taskforce Win Service Champion Team Award, online, <http://educational-life.org/margate-task-force-win-service-champion-team-award/>

⁹⁹ Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021: Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

- 3.2.11. A key task of the new two-year North Kent and Medway project, which is supported by the Supporting Families Against Youth Crime Fund, will be to devise and develop a multi-agency approach for tackling Serious Youth Violence and Child Criminal Exploitation in Kent and Medway. The project will involve organisations such as Kent Police, the Metropolitan Police and KCC's Youth Justice Service, Youth Provision and the new Adolescent Service.¹⁰⁰
- 3.2.12. This initiative will be informed by evaluations of the projects' interventions as well as by national good practice. Staff will be employed to drive partnership working and to ensure the implementation and monitoring of activities such as the effective sharing of information in relation to county lines.¹⁰¹
- 3.2.13. Despite the strong commitment to multi-agency collaboration in tackling gangs' activities and knife crime in the county, **much of the evidence submitted to the Committee indicates a pressing need for stronger data recording, analysis and sharing processes.**^{102 103 104 105}
- 3.2.14. 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. There have been a number of instances where information related to knife possession was given to the local Community Warden who then reported it to the police.¹⁰⁶
- 3.2.15. One particular Warden is looking to set up a project with a local charity that supports anti-knife crime initiatives, where local shops and other businesses offer a 'safe haven' for young people who might feel unsafe or threatened. This initiative is aligned with the Serious Violence Strategy, which stresses the importance of prevention activities to reduce crime and improve health and educational outcomes. The local Community Safety Unit is considering whether it can support and fund the project.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021: Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

¹⁰³ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 17 June 2019

¹⁰⁴ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

¹⁰⁵ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

¹⁰⁶ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

- 3.2.16. In addition, Community Wardens have established the 'Street Life' project in a local library, whose objective is to inform residents of issues that may affect the local community, such as knife crime, drug and gang culture. The Wardens are holding drop-in sessions where they will provide advice and support.¹⁰⁸
- 3.2.17. Nonetheless, more can be done to ensure that intelligence sharing helps to build a comprehensive picture of gang activities in the county, and to undertaking timely and targeted early interventions.¹⁰⁹
- 3.2.18. By resolving some governance and logistic issues, data from organisations such as the police, hospitals' emergency and admissions departments, substance misuse services and schools (with regard to exclusions) could be collated and shared more effectively and efficiently to gain a local-level understanding of the impact of violence on the population, which groups and communities are most at risk, what types of interventions are needed, and how effective those interventions are at preventing violence.^{110 111 112 113}
- 3.2.19. More efficient intelligence sharing is also key to promoting more agile responses to county lines, whose model is very nimble and can change its operations very rapidly.¹¹⁴
- 3.2.20. The Committee identified two approaches that can promote stronger and more coordinated intelligence sharing and the reduction of knife crime and violence in Kent.
- 3.2.21. The first is the **public health approach** to reducing violence. This multi-agency approach depends on gaining an understanding of violence through evidence and of responding to the problem through carefully designed interventions. It recognises, for example, that emergency department and hospital admissions data can give a more accurate picture of some kinds of violence than police records alone. By developing systems that consistently collect the most useful types of data, and sharing it effectively between relevant agencies, interventions can be designed and targeted to maximise their impact.¹¹⁵ As already pointed out, the development of a public health approach in Scotland was central to reducing violent crime to a 41-year low in 2017.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹⁰⁹ Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021: Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

¹¹⁰ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 17 June 2019

¹¹¹ Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021: Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

¹¹² Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

¹¹³ Local Government Association (2018) Public Health Approaches to Reducing Violence, London

¹¹⁴ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

¹¹⁵ Local Government Association (2018) Public Health Approaches to Reducing Violence, London

¹¹⁶ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives - Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

- 3.2.22. The second is the establishment of a **multi-agency, operational group** which includes all the relevant, key organisations and whose remit is to ensure the implementation and delivery of strategic objectives. Good practice evidence from Essex County Council showed that the setting up of a Violence and Vulnerability Operations Board, with an ad hoc Violence and Vulnerability Unit tasked with implementing strategic objectives, was key to their success in addressing violence and vulnerability.¹¹⁷
- 3.2.23. Having considered all the above issues, the Committee recommends the following.

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.

¹¹⁷ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

3.3. School exclusions

- 3.3.1. As well as the need for more effective information sharing about school exclusions, the Committee heard that the number of exclusions has risen recently, and that excluded pupils are more likely to become victims and perpetrators of violence and to carry weapons.
- 3.3.2. Between 2006/7 and 2012/13 the number of permanent exclusions in England reduced by nearly half, but it has risen by 40% over the past three years. In 2015/16, 6,685 pupils were permanently excluded from school. In the same year there were 339,360 fixed period exclusions.¹¹⁸
- 3.3.3. A permanent exclusion is a relatively rare event; 0.1% of the 8 million children in schools in England were permanently excluded in 2016/17. However, this still means an average of 40 every day. A further average of 2,000 pupils are excluded for a fixed period each day.¹¹⁹
- 3.3.4. While accepting that the impact of poor behaviour on teachers and pupils is profound and should not be tolerated, and that exclusion is an important component of effective behaviour management in schools, the outcomes for excluded children are often poor.¹²⁰
- 3.3.5. In 2015/16 only 7% of children who were permanently excluded, and 18% of children who received multiple fixed period exclusions, achieved good passes in English and maths GCSEs - qualifications that are often essential to succeeding in adult life.¹²¹
- 3.3.6. **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.¹²²
- 3.3.7. In 2014, 23% of young offenders sentenced to less than 12 months in custody, and 16% of those sentenced to 12 months or longer, had been permanently excluded from school prior to their sentence date.¹²³

¹¹⁸ House of Commons Education Committee (2018) *Forgotten Children: Alternative Provision and the Scandal of Ever-Increasing Exclusions*, Fifth Report of Session 2017–19, London

¹¹⁹ Gov.UK (2019) *Timpson Review of School Exclusion*, online, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/school-exclusions-review-call-for-evidence>

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Ministry of Justice (2014) *Prisoners' Childhood and Family Backgrounds: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) Longitudinal Cohort Study of Prisoners*

¹²³ Department for Education and Ministry of Justice (2016) *Understanding the Educational Background of Young Offenders: Full Report*, London

- 3.3.8. 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.¹²⁴ 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.**^{125 126}
- 3.3.9. There are many examples of good practice in schools across the country to prevent exclusions. These range from the establishment of on-site units staffed by experienced teachers and support staff who give respite to classroom teachers and are skilled at intervening to address poor behaviour, to schools that help others to deliver appropriate interventions. This includes running transition programmes for children who may struggle with the move from primary to secondary school, or commissioning alternative provision to re-engage children in their education, based on activities that spark their interest.¹²⁷ Evidence submitted to the Committee praised the work undertaken by local schools with the support of KCC’s PRU, Inclusion and Attendance Service to maintain the focus on inclusion in Kent.¹²⁸
- 3.3.10. Nonetheless, the Committee believes that more can be done to support schools to manage poor behaviour and reduce exclusions. The Committee shares the views expressed in the Timpson Review, that **while it is incorrect to suggest that exclusion of any kind causes crime, or that preventing the use of exclusion would, by itself, prevent crime, it should be recognised that school exclusion is one indicator of a higher risk of exposure to, and involvement in, crime.**¹²⁹
- 3.3.11. The Committee therefore makes the following recommendation.

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.

¹²⁴ Children’s Commissioner (2019) Keeping Kids Safe: Improving Safeguarding Responses to Gang Violence and Criminal Exploitation, London.

¹²⁵ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

¹²⁶ Children’s Commissioner (2019) Keeping Kids Safe: Improving Safeguarding Responses to Gang Violence and Criminal Exploitation, London.

¹²⁷ Gov.UK (2019) Timpson Review of School Exclusion, online, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/school-exclusions-review-call-for-evidence>

¹²⁸ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

¹²⁹ Gov.UK (2019) Timpson Review of School Exclusion, online, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/school-exclusions-review-call-for-evidence>

3.4. Raising children's awareness

- 3.4.1. Education, at its most effective, can change attitudes and transform lives. There is a good deal of evidence that education must be central to any long-term strategy to tackle knife crime and violence. While parental guidance is invaluable, developing early intervention programmes in collaboration with schools to help raise awareness of knife crime, gangs and violence amongst young people, appears to be crucial.
- 3.4.2. **A wide variety of sources, including young people, schools and the police, argued that one of the most effective ways of dealing with knife crime in Kent was through prevention and awareness raising amongst young people.**^{130 131 132 133}
- 3.4.3. For instance, in January 2019 the UK Youth Parliament launched the campaign, 'Action Against Knife Crime', which called for a significant reduction in knife crime across the UK. In the UK Youth Parliament's "Make Your Mark" ballot 1.1 million young people declared knife crime a top concern.¹³⁴
- 3.4.4. The anti-knife crime campaign sought to highlight the prevalence of knife crime - which claimed the lives of 37 children and young people in England & Wales in 2018 - and demanded that the Government combat violence through education in schools and community groups.¹³⁵
- 3.4.5. Contributors to the review pointed out to the Committee that there are a number of key messages that have to be conveyed in the awareness-raising sessions. One is that **resorting to knives and violence is neither "normal" nor acceptable.**
- 3.4.6. The cultural context in which young people live – the music they listen to, the films they watch, the video games and sports they play – are all important in articulating values, defining what is fashionable and legitimising social norms.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹³¹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

¹³² Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹³³ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

¹³⁴ Youth Parliament UK (2019) UK Youth Parliament Launch "Action Against Knife Crime", online, <http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/2019/news/uk-youth-parliament-launch-action-against-knife-crime/>

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ The Street Weapons Commission (2008) The Street Weapons Commission Report, London

- 3.4.7. While the impact that these cultural factors have on encouraging violence, desensitising empathy and legitimising anti-social behaviour is contested,^{137 138 139} there have been cases of serious violence associated with confrontational music videos. Such videos were cited by some young people as continuing to normalise and incite violent behaviour.¹⁴⁰
- 3.4.8. The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee on Knife Crime (2008) reported a study which found that children who grew up in a violent environment were more likely to imitate media violence than those who did not. The study also estimated that media violence contributed to about 10% of a person's predisposition to be violent, and argued that it was possible to reduce violence by 10% by being more responsible in the way violence was portrayed.¹⁴¹
- 3.4.9. Although the effects of violent media are debatable, the Committee believes that a good education-based approach should challenge their legitimisation of knife crime and violence.
- 3.4.10. Another message that should be conveyed is that **carrying a knife, even just for self-protection, can lead to devastating consequences.**
- 3.4.11. Some young people carry a knife to portray themselves as fearless and to convey a 'hard' image. Others - especially those who have been victims of crime - carry knives because they believe that this will protect them from those who carry knives.^{142 143 144}
- 3.4.12. It is suggested that it is important to challenge the perception that knife crime and violence are more widespread than they are in reality.¹⁴⁵ It is even claimed that changes in police recording practices are a key factor behind the apparent increase in knife crime, and that it is possible that neither fewer nor greater numbers of people are in fact carrying knives, but that they are simply feeling the need to use them more often, or in more harmful ways.¹⁴⁶
- 3.4.13. Yet, it is crucial to make young people aware that the consequences of being involved in knife crime, even indirectly, can be disastrous.

¹³⁷ Ibid

¹³⁸ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

¹³⁹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

¹⁴⁰ Greater London Authority (2017) The London Knife Crime Strategy, London

¹⁴¹ House of Commons Home Affairs Committee on Knife Crime (2009) Seventh Report of Session 2008-09, London

¹⁴² HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy, London

¹⁴³ College of Policing (2019) Knife Crime: Evidence Briefing, Coventry

¹⁴⁴ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹⁴⁵ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹⁴⁶ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives - Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

- 3.4.14. If a young person is caught with a knife at school, they run a risk of being permanently excluded, as well as receiving a criminal record; this could limit their career options, holiday destinations and relationships with family and friends. If a young person stabs someone, they could be imprisoned for life, regardless of whether or not it leads to a fatality.¹⁴⁷
- 3.4.15. The Committee heard poignant evidence from a prisoner who had been in jail since 2008, when he was 16, because he was found guilty of “joint enterprise” – being only indirectly involved in a knife crime murder, but doing nothing to stop it.¹⁴⁸
- 3.4.16. Finally, **young people should be warned about the consequences of being involved in gangs and county lines, and about the fact that it is very hard to extricate themselves once in a gang.**
- 3.4.17. As the Children’s Commissioner (2019) explains, criminal gangs operating in this country are complex and ruthless organisations which use sophisticated techniques to groom children and chilling levels of violence to keep them compliant. They tend to target marginalised children with multiple interlinked vulnerabilities both at individual level - such as mental health or special educational needs - and at family level - such as abuse and neglect.¹⁴⁹
- 3.4.18. Once a young person is involved in a gang, removing them is very difficult. While gangs may initially entice them with money and bribes, they then use threats, violence and intimidation to keep young people under their control.¹⁵⁰
- 3.4.19. 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.¹⁵¹
- 3.4.20. Together with the importance of conveying clear facts about knife crime and its consequences, **the Committee also heard about the necessity of delivering this information to young people from an early age.**

¹⁴⁷ Kent Police – A Parents and Carers’ Guide to Knife Crime, online, https://www.kelsi.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/96075/A-parents-and-carers-guide-to-knife-crime-leaflet.pdf

¹⁴⁸ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

¹⁴⁹ Children’s Commissioner (2019) Keeping Kids Safe: Improving Safeguarding Responses to Gang Violence and Criminal Exploitation, London.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid

¹⁵¹ Ibid

- 3.4.21. 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 13.¹⁵²
- 3.4.22. Other sources of evidence support this view. As already mentioned, children as young as 12 are exploited or moved by gangs to courier drugs out of their local area.^{153 154} The youngest person reported to operate in a gang in Kent was only 10 years old.¹⁵⁵
- 3.4.23. It is also pointed out that children – especially the most vulnerable ones - can be particularly exposed to grooming during their transition to secondary school, when the limited number of close relationships at primary school may be replaced by briefer relationships at secondary school.¹⁵⁶
- 3.4.24. Both the Kent Association of Headteachers and representatives of Kent Police advised that effective educational activities aimed at tackling knife crime should begin in primary school, in academic Years 5 and 6, before the move to secondary school, and that PSHE lessons would be an appropriate forum.^{157 158}
- 3.4.25. **The importance of providing widespread, consistent, balanced and robust training** was also stressed to the Committee.
- 3.4.26. It appears that the level of engagement of Kent schools in tackling knife crime across the county is varied. The Kent Association of Headteachers said that some primary schools were more reluctant than others to be involved.¹⁵⁹ Representatives of Kent Police pointed out that academies generally posed a greater risk of children moving into gang-related crime and knife crime than Local Authority schools, as it was often harder to engage with them to tackle the issue.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵² College of Policing (2019) Knife Crime: Evidence Briefing, Coventry

¹⁵³ Ibid

¹⁵⁴ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

¹⁵⁵ Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021: Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

¹⁵⁶ Children's Commissioner (2019) Keeping Kids Safe: Improving Safeguarding Responses to Gang Violence and Criminal Exploitation, London.

¹⁵⁷ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

¹⁵⁸ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹⁵⁹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹⁶⁰ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

- 3.4.27. While there are different ways in which schools can educate children on the dangers of knife crime – for example through the delivery of core subjects, assemblies and tutorials – and while some schools may favour the use of outside agencies to deliver this training, concerns were raised about the consistency and robustness of the information provided. The need for a more standardised programme was recommended.^{161 162}
- 3.4.28. These reservations are echoed by Ofsted. The London-based research project Safeguarding Children and Young People in Education from Knife Crime (2019) warns that schools should monitor knife crime awareness activities carefully to ensure they have the desired impact, as doubts were raised about the quality of some externally commissioned work.¹⁶³ As one school leader put it, “you get a very different experience depending on who is delivering. Some sensationalise and don’t set the tone we want. You just can’t tell what the quality will be like...”.¹⁶⁴
- 3.4.29. The Committee is aware of the good practice work carried out by the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, where collaboration between the police and education authorities resulted in a standardised, preventative educational programme to tackle violence and offences such as knife crime.¹⁶⁵
- 3.4.30. The Committee believes that KCC should therefore 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. The Education Safeguarding Service, for instance, already provides training to several local schools on a range of related topics such as gang-related crime and the use of weapons, and could potentially be involved in the development and delivery of such a programme.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 10 June 2019

¹⁶² Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

¹⁶³ Ofsted (2019) Safeguarding Children and Young People in Education from Knife Crime: Lessons from London, Manchester

¹⁶⁴ Ibid

¹⁶⁵ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

¹⁶⁶ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

- 3.4.31. The Committee also believes that, no matter how they decide to do it, *all* Kent schools should be encouraged to deliver high-quality knife crime training, from primary school (Year 5 and Year 6) to all types of secondary school.

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.

3.5. Long-term mentoring

3.5.1. While preventative educational programmes are crucial in raising awareness of knife crime, gangs and violence amongst young people, they may be less effective for those who are already involved in serious violence and criminality.¹⁶⁷

3.5.2. **There is a good deal of evidence that many young people involved in gangs and criminal activities are vulnerable victims, as well as perpetrators.**^{168 169 170} The links between traumatic experiences – such as adverse childhood environments and childhood maltreatment - and criminal behaviour are widely evidenced.¹⁷¹ These young people often need support to build the resilience necessary to extricate themselves from criminality and turn their lives around.¹⁷² To make positive changes mentors, role models and trusting relationships appear to be essential.^{173 174 175}

3.5.3. Since 2013 an increasing number of knife and offensive weapon possession offenses have resulted in a sentence of immediate custody. A prison sentence is now by far the most common mechanism used for dealing with these offences.¹⁷⁶

3.5.4. Yet, as the College of Policing indicates, enforcement interventions such as “stop and search” and sentencing should be used carefully. Despite recent changes to sentencing guidelines for knife offences, which aimed to deter would-be offenders by increasing the severity of sentences, 72% of those convicted for knife and offensive weapons offences in the year ending March 2018 were first-time knife and weapons offenders. For juveniles (10–18 years), prison alone has been found to lead to significantly higher rates of re-offending, compared to non-custodial sanctions such as community supervision with victim reparation, and community surveillance and aftercare.¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁷ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹⁶⁸ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives - Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

¹⁶⁹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹⁷⁰ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 10 June 2019

¹⁷¹ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives - Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

¹⁷² Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy 2018-2021: Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

¹⁷³ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹⁷⁴ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

¹⁷⁵ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 11 June 2019

¹⁷⁶ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2018) Young People, Violence and Knives - Revisiting the Evidence and Policy Discussions, London

¹⁷⁷ College of Policing (2019) Knife Crime: Evidence Briefing, Coventry

- 3.5.5. Whilst the evidence suggests that mentoring can have beneficial effects, programmes vary substantially; on the whole, knowledge about the most effective approaches is limited and predominantly USA-based.¹⁷⁸
- 3.5.6. Nonetheless, **mentoring over the longer term appears to be the most successful way of mentoring young people** and of reducing re-offending, particularly for those going through adolescence.¹⁷⁹ ¹⁸⁰ Indeed, there is some evidence that short-term mentoring relationships, lasting less than 3 months, may even have detrimental effects on the self-worth and perceived academic competence of particularly at-risk youngsters.¹⁸¹
- 3.5.7. It is also suggested that the voluntary sector can be well placed to work with young people at risk, as interventions can be most effective when voluntary groups are rooted in the communities they serve and have a long-term commitment.¹⁸²
- 3.5.8. Finally, there is some evidence that cultural competence and the use of a trauma-informed approach can be invaluable. The evaluation of a local project that assessed the ability of interventions to disengage young people from county lines activities, found that a key success factor was the ‘lived experience’ of caseworkers, which gave them credibility with children and enabled relationships of trust and mutual respect to be established. Caseworkers’ expertise in contextual safeguarding and a trauma-informed approach were also found to be vital.¹⁸³
- 3.5.9. Kent Police calculated that the project made savings of over £270,000 in 7 months from the steep drop in missing episodes alone, and commented that the expansion of this service could significantly reduce time and costs further.¹⁸⁴
- 3.5.10. The Committee is aware of the excellent work already carried out by KCC services in this area. Youth Offending data shows that the rate of young first-time entrants to the Youth Justice System has gradually decreased in the last few years, and is currently lower than the national average (Figure 4).

¹⁷⁸ Home Office (2015) What Works to Prevent Gang Involvement, Youth Violence and Crime; A Rapid Review of Interventions Delivered in the UK and Abroad, London

¹⁷⁹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 10 June 2019

¹⁸⁰ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 10 June 2019

¹⁸¹ Home Office (2015) What Works to Prevent Gang Involvement, Youth Violence and Crime; A Rapid Review of Interventions Delivered in the UK and Abroad, London

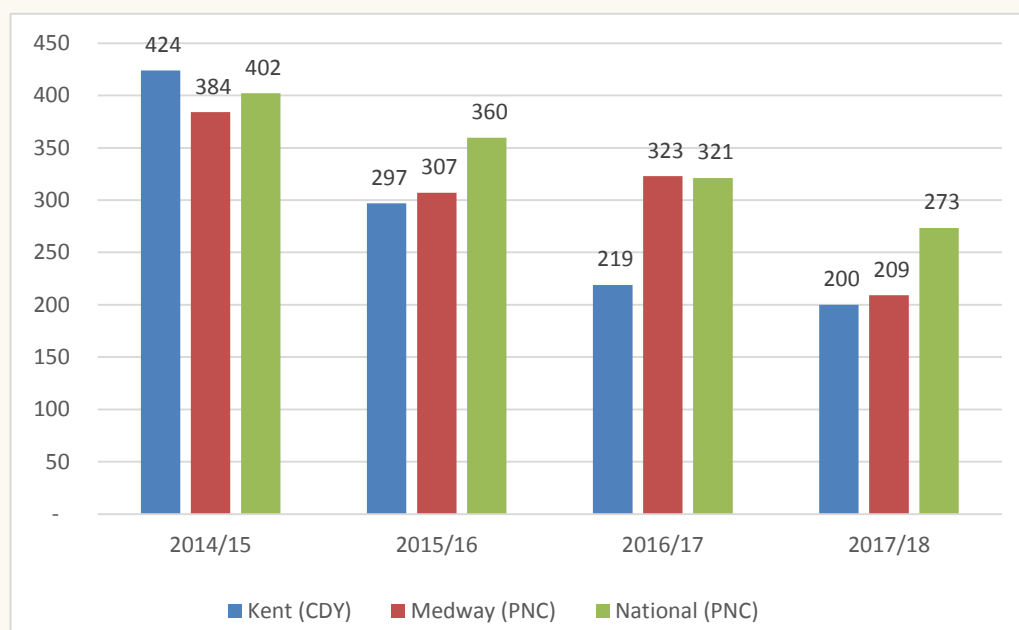
¹⁸² The Street Weapons Commission (2008) The Street Weapons Commission Report, London

¹⁸³ Hudek, J. (2018) Evaluation of County Lines Pilot Project, JH Consulting, St. Giles Trust, Missing

People

¹⁸⁴ Ibid

Figure 4: Kent, Medway and National rate of First Time Entrants to the Youth Justice System (per 100,000 of the 10-17 year-old population)



Source: Kent County Council, Knife Crime Select Committee, 10 June 2019

3.5.11. The youth re-offending rate is also lower in Kent than the national average: between July 2016 and June 2017 it was 33.8% in Kent, compared to 40.1% in England and Wales. The number of knife crime offences which resulted in an Out of Court Disposal or Court Conviction in Kent fell from 146 in 2016 to 107 in 2018.¹⁸⁵

3.5.12. There is a determination in KCC to continue to provide high-quality support by the use of interventions that have been shown to be particularly effective. For instance, the most recent Kent Youth Justice workforce development plan focuses on areas identified by research as having a significant and positive impact on re-offending by young people, such as “desistance” training – that is, the process of abstaining from crime by those who had previously engaged in a sustained pattern of offending - and trauma-informed assessment and support.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 10 June 2019

¹⁸⁶ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

- 3.5.13. In addition, part of the recently allocated Supporting Families Against Youth Crime Fund will be used to support the recruitment and training of mentors from the voluntary sector to support young people who are at risk of serious violence and criminal exploitation. Their remit will include: developing young people’s personal resistance to peer pressure and their ability to make positive choices; reducing gang and youth crime by intervening early and raising awareness of the dangers of gangs; working with parents/carers, and the local workforce, so that they have a better understanding of the dangers of gang crime.¹⁸⁷
- 3.5.14. The Committee believes that, while it is important to tackle knife crime through preventative measures and awareness raising, it is also crucial to act when violence is already causing harm. There is clearly a key role for enforcement interventions, but it is also important to acknowledge that many of the young people who are involved in knife crime and violence are also victims who need support and guidance.
- 3.5.15. Long-term mentoring, underpinned by a public health approach that focuses on trauma-informed practices and systematic evaluations to determine what works best, should be a central part of this process and should be promoted and developed further.
- 3.5.16. The Committee recommends that KCC should conduct a feasibility study to evaluate the effectiveness of a scheme involving the recruitment and training of volunteers – ideally individuals with cultural competence and “live experience” - to provide long-term mentoring to young people at risk of offending. The outcomes of this evaluation should inform the extent to which long-term mentoring initiatives should be further promoted. Existing mentoring projects could provide an opportunity to include evaluations of long-term mentoring approaches that focus on the adoption of public health methods.

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.

¹⁸⁷ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

3.6. Trading Standards

- 3.6.1. Alongside intelligence sharing, early interventions to raise awareness of knife crime, and support for those already involved in criminality, it is also crucial to monitor and restrict the availability of knives.
- 3.6.2. While tackling the availability of knives is only one part of preventing knife crime, clamping down on illegal sales may deter those who carry without intention to commit violence and those who seek to carry certain kinds of illegal knives as a status symbol.
- 3.6.3. The types of weapons found by the police through stop and search and weapons sweeps illustrate the scale of harm that can be inflicted. Combat knives, hunting knives, ‘zombie killer’ knives, flick knives and samurai swords are all designed to cause serious injury, although more common household items such as kitchen knives and screwdrivers can also be very dangerous.^{188 189}
- 3.6.4. Indeed, one of the main reasons why knives account for a high proportion of weapon-related crime is their ease of availability and disposal, compared with guns for example.^{190 191 192}
- 3.6.5. 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 18.¹⁹³
- 3.6.6. Also, 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.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ Greater London Authority (2017) The London Knife Crime Strategy, London

¹⁸⁹ House of Commons Home Affairs Committee on Knife Crime (2009) Seventh Report of Session 2008-09, London

¹⁹⁰ Ibid

¹⁹¹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 10 June 2019

¹⁹² Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹⁹³ Legislation.Gov.UK (2019) Offensive Weapons Act 2019, online,

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/17/contents/enacted>

¹⁹⁴ HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy

- 3.6.7. 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.¹⁹⁵
- 3.6.8. Local measures have also been taken to reduce and control the illegal sale and use of knives in Kent.
- 3.6.9. As part of Operation Sceptre, which was led by Kent Police in March 2019, more than 26 weapons including knives, blades and a chainsaw were recovered by officers. One of the weapons seized was a large hunting knife found during a stop and search procedure in Rochester. Three people were arrested, and suspected class A drugs were seized. Following the success of Operation Sceptre, Kent Police announced that it would continue its level of enforcement action targeting knife crime.¹⁹⁶
- 3.6.10. The actions taken by KCC's Trading Standards service have also been central. The service took part in Operation Sceptre and helped to identify areas of risk of knife supply in the county.¹⁹⁷ Also, because of its work, most Kent retailers no longer sell the extreme knives that are thought to be used solely for knife attacks.¹⁹⁸
- 3.6.11. As a result of a recent inspection, Trading Standards' ports team found 200 knives which were not declared on importation paperwork. One of the knives was a solid metal dagger with a four-inch blade which was inside a child-appealing package with cartoons on it.¹⁹⁹
- 3.6.12. The Committee is aware that the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 will impose additional responsibilities for KCC's Trading Standards service. However, the Committee believes that this legislation also offers an invaluable opportunity to devise and evaluate innovative initiatives to further tackle the illegal sale and use of knives in the county.^{200 201}
- 3.6.13. While Trading Standards has a number of competing priorities, and has to work reactively to meet the changing demands of the marketplace, a more *proactive* approach involving closer collaboration with local retailers could be adopted.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid

¹⁹⁶ Kent Police (2019) Robust Stance Against Knife Crime to Continue Following Operation Sceptre Successes, online, <https://www.kent.police.uk/news/policing-news/0319/robust-stance-against-knife-crime-to-continue-foll/>

¹⁹⁷ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

¹⁹⁸ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

¹⁹⁹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

²⁰⁰ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

²⁰¹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

3.6.14. It is suggested that a “**Responsible Trader Scheme**” be piloted, and evaluated, for a period of two years. The evaluation could then inform future policies and practices.

3.6.15. The additional core responsibilities for the service, resulting from the Offensive Weapons Act 2019, include the following tasks:

- reactive, targeted response to reported knife crime incidents involving young people under the age of 18, to identify the retailer and take appropriate compliance action
- “Challenge 25” audits of identified premises, followed by under-age sales enforcement if required
- advisory visits to traders identified through intelligence, providing in-store information (such as stickers and posters) supported by the Kent Community Safety Partnership through the PCC’s Crime Reduction Grant.^{202 203}

3.6.16. Some extra funding will enable the service to deliver additional, more proactive and collaborative interventions, through the employment of a dedicated officer. These include:

- the proactive targeting of traders in Kent who sell knives illegally, including Kent-based online retailers
- the development and delivery of training to targeted retail staff across Kent. The training will include age-verification procedures, appropriate display, and signing up to a “safe knife sales agreement”
- the establishment of a reporting process to enable traders to share information about attempted, illegal purchases
- the co-ordination of local initiatives in collaboration with retailers, local authorities and partner organisations to combat illegal knife sales
- the collection and analysis of data to evaluate the effectiveness of the project and to inform future policy.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

²⁰³ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

²⁰⁴ Ibid

- 3.6.17. It is estimated that the two-year project will require the employment of a 0.6 full-time equivalent KR8 post (about £22k per annum), plus about £5k for the provision of written materials.²⁰⁵
- 3.6.18. While there is already much work to reduce the availability of knives to children and young people, more can be done to ensure that knives do not get into the wrong hands and on to Kent streets. The Committee believes that a more proactive, collaborative approach that promotes intelligence sharing and targets communities with the highest identified risk can help to achieve this aim.

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.

²⁰⁵ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

3.7. Youth Service provision

- 3.7.1. Youth workers play an invaluable role in our communities and provide vital support to young people. However, the landscape of youth services has changed, and most local authorities have reduced this provision for young people because of funding pressures.²⁰⁶
- 3.7.2. 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.²⁰⁷
- 3.7.3. Although the general decline of youth service provision has not been a direct causal contributor to knife crime, there is some evidence that it has exacerbated the marginalisation which many young people experience.^{208 209 210 211}
- 3.7.4. The provision of creative youth facilities, staffed by professionally qualified youth workers acting as trusted adults and supporters of young people, has contributed to better social cohesion and mutual respect amongst young people.^{212 213}
- 3.7.5. Youth services can provide children and young people with the life skills, resilience and aspirations to overcome adversity.²¹⁴ They can offer a safe space to play, and a vital safety net for young people who face multiple barriers or disadvantages and who are particularly vulnerable to becoming lured into criminality.^{215 216 217}

²⁰⁶ Greater London Authority (2017) The London Knife Crime Strategy, London

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

²⁰⁷ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

²⁰⁸ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

²⁰⁹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

²¹⁰ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 12 June 2019

²¹¹ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

²¹² National Youth Agency (2019) All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs: Report from the Inquiry into the Role and Sufficiency of Youth Work

²¹³ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, written evidence

²¹⁴ National Youth Agency (2019) All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs: Report from the Inquiry into the Role and Sufficiency of Youth Work

²¹⁵ Children's Commissioner (2019) Keeping Kids Safe: Improving Safeguarding Responses to Gang Violence and Criminal Exploitation, London.

²¹⁶ Greater London Authority (2017) The London Knife Crime Strategy, London

²¹⁷ National Youth Agency (2019) All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs: Report from the Inquiry into the Role and Sufficiency of Youth Work

- 3.7.6. While KCC's Youth Service provision is still robust,²¹⁸ the Committee believes that it is possible to expand its impact by the development of strong partnerships across different sectors and by placing young people and the local community at the centre. In particular, **the Committee advocates additional youth service delivery through a model such as the "OnSide Youth Zone"**.
- 3.7.7. 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.²¹⁹
- 3.7.8. The Youth Zone model is based on the successful Bolton Lads Club, which was established in 1889.²²⁰ 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.²²¹
- 3.7.9. 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.²²²
- 3.7.10. **OnSide Youth Zones are based on a dynamic four-way partnership involving the private sector, local authority, young people and the community.**²²³
- 3.7.11. Unlike most youth provision, the private sector provides half of the funding for Youth Zones. By combining substantial private investment with local authority support, Youth Zones are able to provide high-quality facilities and services for their users.²²⁴

²¹⁸ Kent County Council (2019) Knife Crime Select Committee, 10 June 2019

²¹⁹ OnSide (2019) About OnSide Youth Zones, online, <https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/about-onside/>

²²⁰ The Way Wolverhampton Youth Zone (2019) The Youth Zone Network, online, <https://www.thewayyouthzone.org/about-us/youth-zone-network/>

²²¹ OnSide (2019) About OnSide Youth Zones, online, <https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/about-onside/>

²²² OnSide (2019) Our Youth Zones, online, <https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/the-youth-zone-model/our-youth-zones/>

²²³ OnSide (2019) It's a Four Way Partnership, online, <https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/four-way-partnership/>

²²⁴ OnSide (2019) It's a Four Way Partnership, online, <https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/four-way-partnership/>

- 3.7.12. Youth Zones are designed around young people themselves, who are involved at every stage of a Youth Zones' development. Young people are continually consulted on the activities available at their youth zone, which often leads to the introduction of interesting new sports and activities.²²⁵
- 3.7.13. Youth Zones also provide a vital forum for community groups and local services – including other youth service providers, inter-faith groups, the police and social services – to reach local young people, break down barriers and promote local cohesion. Activities include one-to-one interventions with health services, organised workshops with local groups and table tennis matches between young people and local police.²²⁶
- 3.7.14. The Committee believes that the Youth Zone model could be successfully replicated in Kent to maximise and expand current youth service provision.
- 3.7.15. The Committee recommends that KCC's Children, Young People and Education Directorate leads the piloting of 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.

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.

²²⁵ Ibid

²²⁶ Ibid

4. Conclusion

The impact of knife crime is devastating, with considerable costs to individuals, families and communities through loss of life, injuries and trauma. It also has substantial economic costs to society.

During its review the Committee identified a number of recurring themes that form the basis for this report and its recommendations. These are the centrality of multi-agency collaboration, and the critical role of prevention and early intervention - while also acting once violence is causing harm.

Much of the evidence indicates that 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. Early interventions and preventative programmes in schools can help young people make positive choices and dissuade those who may be at risk of being drawn into crime. Youth facilities, staffed by professionally qualified youth workers acting as trusted adults, can also provide young people with the life skills, resilience and aspirations to overcome adversity, and can be a vital safety net for those who face multiple barriers or disadvantages.

While preventative educational programmes are crucial in raising awareness of knife crime and gangs, they may be less effective for those who are already involved in serious violence and criminality. There is considerable evidence that many young people involved in gangs and criminal activities are vulnerable victims, as well as perpetrators. These young people often need support to build the resilience necessary to extricate themselves from criminality and to turn their lives around. To make positive changes, mentors and role models can play a key role.

Finally, it is crucial to monitor and restrict the availability of knives themselves. A more proactive approach designed to target illegal sales, and training to targeted retail staff to enforce age-verification procedures and appropriate display, can deter people from carrying and using these weapons.

There are no quick fixes or single measures that can tackle knife crime in Kent. An effective response requires action from a wide range of organisations, a focus on prevention and early intervention policies, and the use of evidence-led methodology to find out which interventions work best.

Knife crime is unacceptable and must not be tolerated. The Committee believes that KCC should do all it can to tackle this form of violence and its devastating consequences for the people of Kent.

Appendix 1

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

To access the written evidence, please use the following link:

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

Appendix 2

Glossary

CCG: Clinical Commissioning Group

KAH: Kent Association of Headteachers

KCC: Kent County Council

KCSP: Kent Community Safety Partnership

KPHO: Kent Public Health Observatory

KYCC: Kent Youth County Council

LGA: Local Government Association

NHS: National Health Service

ONS: Office for National Statistics

PCC: Police and Crime Commissioner

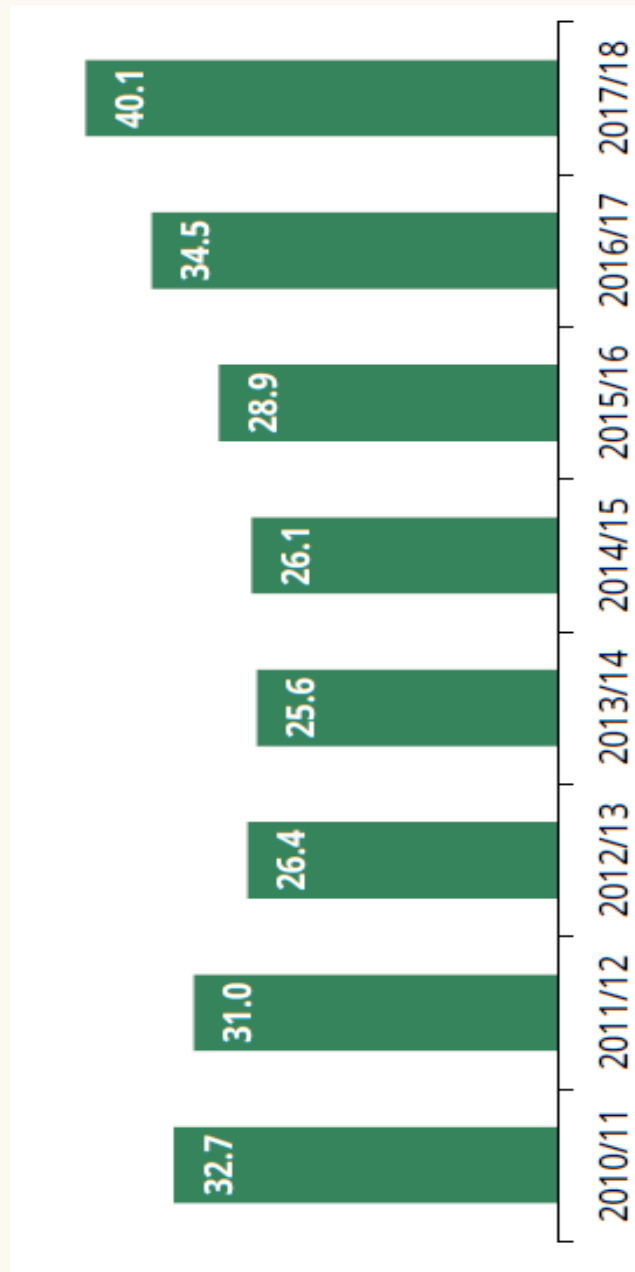
PSHE: Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education

VRC: Violence Reduction Challenge

Appendix 3

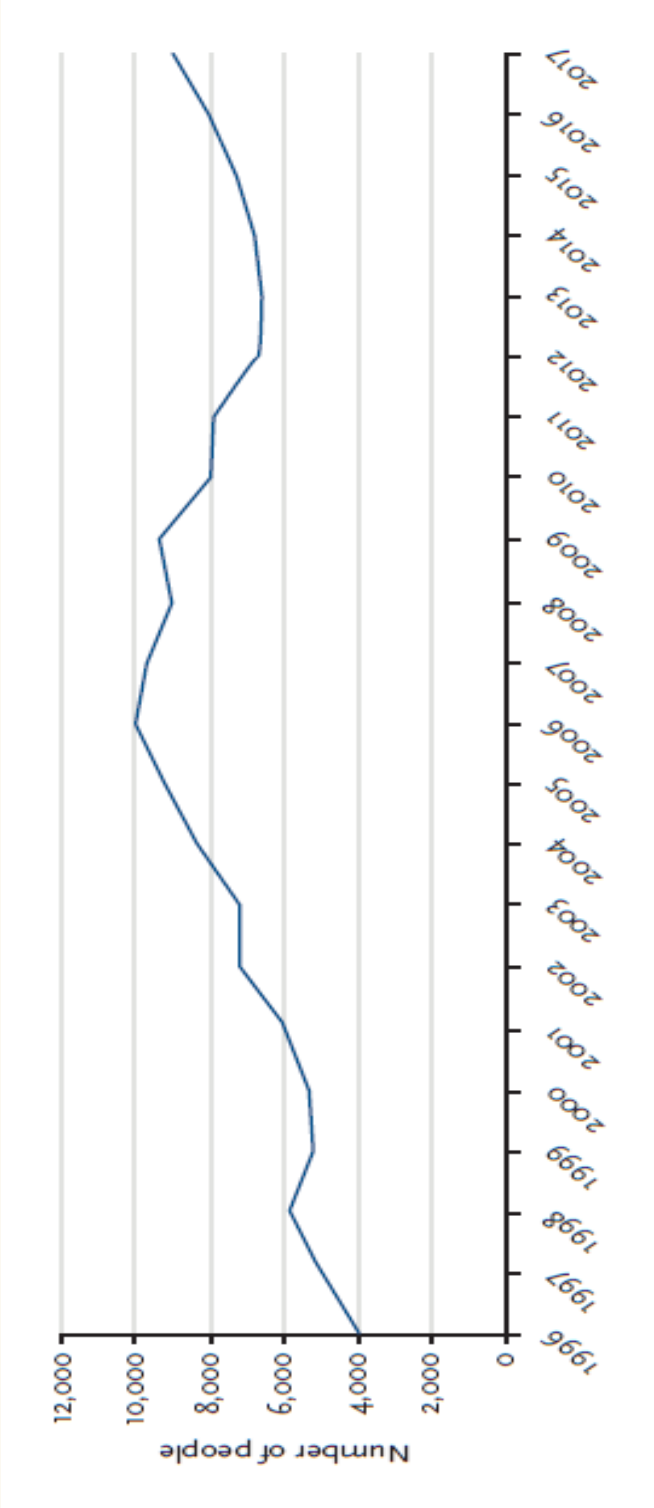
Tables and charts

Figure 1: Selected offences involving a knife or sharp instrument (000s), 2010-2018 (year ending March), England and Wales



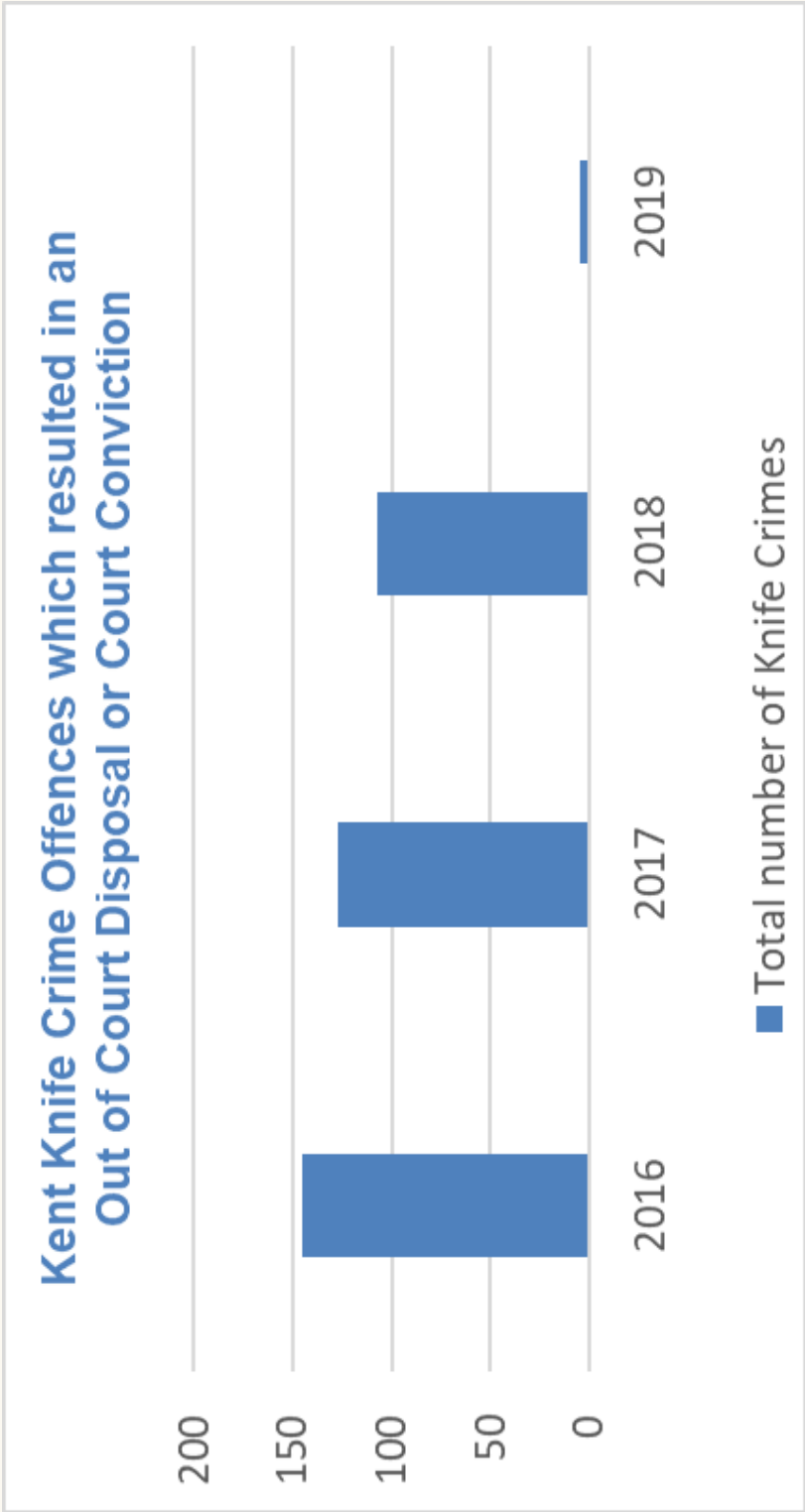
Source: House of Commons Library, Knife Crime in England and Wales, November 2018

Figure 2: Number of people cautioned or found guilty for possession of a knife, England and Wales



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

Figure 3: Number of knife crime offences which resulted in an Out of Court Disposal or Court Conviction, Kent



Source: Kent County Council, Knife Crime, Youth Offending data, Kent, April 2019

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the professionals, academics, colleagues from other local authorities and KCC officers who have taken part in this review. We are indebted to the Kent Youth County Council for their contribution, and to the residents of HMP Standford Hill who provided such a poignant account. Without all of them, the production of this report and its recommendations would not have been possible. We sincerely hope that this report can help to tackle knife crime and its devastating consequences.

The Knife Crime Select Committee

October 2019

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