



Home Office

**The Government
Response to the 2019
Youth Select
Committee Report
Our Generation's Epidemic – Knife Crime**

May 2021

Ministerial Foreword

Knife crime has devastating consequences for victims, families and communities across our country. We know this is an issue of huge importance, particularly for younger people, and I am extremely grateful to the Committee for its thorough and thoughtful report.

Keeping the public safe is a key priority for this Government. That is why we are taking concrete action to boost law enforcement, dismantle county lines drugs gangs and stop young people being drawn into the deadly cycle of violence and exploitation. Before a child or young person joins a gang or decides to carry a knife, there are opportunities to intervene; in addition to tough law enforcement, we are using expertise and data to identify, divert and deter more people at an earlier stage.

Our relentless focus on making our communities safer is having an impact. We are making over £130 million available this year to tackle serious violence, including funding for targeted police action, early intervention programmes and Violence Reduction Units (VRUs). VRUs have helped to embed a more joined-up approach in local areas blighted by violent crime and have already invested in over 175 initiatives in their first year of Government funding. These include programmes in schools, communities, prisons, hospitals, Alternative Provision and police custody suites. These interventions have helped around 100,000 young people, supporting those who have largely been identified as potentially high-risk, known to other services, or suspected to be involved in criminal and violent activity.

We have also brought forward legislation to further enhance our response. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, introduced to Parliament in March this year, contains several measures specifically focused on serious violence, including: a duty requiring public bodies such as police, health and local authorities to take a joined-up approach to preventing and reducing serious violence in their area; a requirement for local agencies to review the circumstances when an adult homicide takes place involving an offensive weapon; and Serious Violence Reduction Orders, which give the police the authority to stop and search known knife and weapon carriers.

Ensuring law enforcement partners have the resources and powers they need to do their crucial work is central to our approach, and we are delivering on our commitment to put more police on our streets. More than 8,771 officers have already joined forces in England and Wales as part of our campaign to recruit an additional 20,000 over three years. We are also strengthening the criminal justice system to bring violent criminals to justice and prevent reoffending.

We have invested £106.5 million over two years in Police Surge Funding to boost forces' operational response to violent crime by providing extra capacity for hotspot patrols, knife crime operations, and investigations. In those 18 areas, over 100,000 weapons have already been taken off the street. This activity is crucial - every one of these seizures has the potential to prevent bloodshed and save lives.

We have also stepped up our efforts to tackle the drug gangs that brutally exploit young people and fuel serious violence. Earlier this year we announced £148 million of investment to tackle drugs misuse, supply and county lines activity. Our

crackdown on county lines is having a real impact, with more than 3,400 people arrested, more than 550 lines closed, drugs with a street value of £9 million and £1.5 million cash seized, and more than 770 vulnerable people safeguarded.

I am acutely aware that for some children and young people the COVID-19 pandemic may have brought additional risks and dangers, as well as reducing contact with professionals and trusted adults. During this challenging period, the Home Office has worked closely with law enforcement and local agencies to monitor the changing threats and risks to children and young people. As a Government we have also provided additional funding both to frontline services and the charitable sector, to ensure that they are able to continue to support those at risk of violence.

It is essential that we get this right. No young person should feel unsafe on our streets and no parent should have to worry that their child may not come home. We are making progress, but when young lives are being lost and families left heartbroken, we will always strive to do more, and we remain fully committed to doing all we can to deliver real and lasting improvements that make our communities safer. I look forward to working closely with the Youth Select Committee and young people in our future work on this critical issue.



Victoria Atkins MP

Minister for Safeguarding

Responses to the Youth Select Committee Recommendations

We urge the Government to establish a plan with clear targets and deadlines aimed at tackling the injustices which make a young person more vulnerable to knife crime, including but not limited to poverty, inequality of opportunity and any other socioeconomic challenges. (Paragraph 17)

Government response

The Government is committed to delivering on the people's priorities by tackling violent crime. This includes addressing the drivers of crime and diverting people away from involvement in serious violence. The Prime Minister's task force on crime and justice has enabled the Government to be ambitious in reducing crime, including knife crime and serious violence. The task force involves wider social policy departments beyond the Home Office and Ministry of Justice in order to ensure that all Government departments play an active role in helping to drive down violent crime and addressing the risk factors that make people more likely to be impacted by serious violence.

The 2018 Serious Violence Strategy set out a multi-agency approach to prevent and reduce the causes of violent crime by placing an emphasis on early intervention with young people. This approach involves a range of partners across different sectors such as local government, education, social services, youth offending, health and probation working together to address the root causes of serious violence. We are building on the implementation of the Strategy by introducing new legislation through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which will place a new duty on a range of specified sectors delivering public services, such as the police, local government, youth offending, health and probation, to work collaboratively, share data and information, and put in place plans to prevent and reduce serious violence within their local communities.

We will use every lever at our disposal to create a national and local, full system response to the threat. This means that central and local Government and our public services in law enforcement and criminal justice, health, social care and education will work together and intervene at the earliest opportunity, to support and protect the vulnerable from lives blighted by the devastating consequences of serious violence and county lines. We will create the conditions for an effective local response to serious violence and county lines, by making it the law for public agencies and bodies to work together to understand the root causes of serious violence in their communities and agree how they will combine their powers, resources and capabilities to respond.

Alongside the vast range of activities undertaken by multi-agency strategically focused VRUs, our new investment of up to £23 million for new early intervention programmes will help stop young people from being drawn into violence. This will include programmes of effective targeted interventions. A portion of this will go towards promising interventions which use significant moments in a young person's life – such as when they enter police custody or accident and emergency – as opportunities for trained professionals to engage and divert young people away from violence. This work will improve life chances for countless young people and the Government is building on this by going even further to stop knife crime destroying

the lives of future generations. Government is building on this by going even further to stop knife crime destroying the lives of future generations.

There is not one, simple, quick fix that will end serious violence. Our efforts to divert young people away must be long-term in order to be effective. That is why we have invested over £243 million into early intervention projects over ten years. This includes the £200 million Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), to help prevent young people being drawn into a life of crime and violence. The YEF announced their first award of £17.1 million to 23 projects across England and Wales in October 2019, followed by the Covid-19 grant round, launched in May 2020, to learn the best ways to reach vulnerable children and young people during a period of social distancing.

In 2021, the YEF will be launching two thematic grant rounds investing up to £20 million each, to help find what works to keep children from becoming involved in violence. Grant round one will focus on 'diversion from the criminal justice system'. The first round aims to identify the best diversionary programmes offered before or at the point of arrest and prior to court action. Grant round two, in partnership with Comic Relief, will focus on 'helping families to overcome challenges'. The second round aims to identify the best approaches for supporting families to reduce future youth violence.

We must ensure young people have access to positive alternative pathways and are equipped to achieve their full potential. The Government has established the Creating Opportunities Forum to provide meaningful work-related opportunities and raise the aspirations of young people at risk of serious violence. This is a real cross-sector partnership, bringing together Government, employers and voluntary and community sector organisations.

We are developing plans to pilot the Creating Opportunities Forum in 12 areas impacted by violent crime in 2021/22 and 2022/23. To support the Creating Opportunities Forum we have established a steering group comprising of voluntary and community sector organisations and relevant Government departments with experience in delivering youth employment initiatives and working with vulnerable young people to provide expert advice on the design and implementation of the programme. We are also establishing a national employers forum of large employers and business networks to engage and broker agreements with them to provide employment-related opportunities and skills based activities to these young people. We will also appoint a national provider to deliver tailored wraparound support services to young people in the 12 areas, alongside employment-related opportunities and skills based activities being provided by businesses. The initiative is of particular importance given the impact of COVID-19 on employment opportunities, and we will work closely with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education to maximise the benefits of the announcement by the Chancellor around the new youth offer, including the Kickstart scheme and the additional funding being made available for traineeships and apprenticeships.

We are also acutely aware of the increased vulnerabilities young people have faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to these increased challenges, we provided an additional £4.9 million contingency funding during the summer and winter lockdown periods via VRUs to ensure frontline services could continue to support children and young people at risk of violence. The Department for Education

(DfE) also provided Alternative Provision schools with £7 million to support year 11 students finishing school in 2020 and at heightened risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) due to COVID-19, to make a successful transition to post-16 education, training and employment.

As a Government we have also moved at pace to support the charitable sector, providing unprecedented funding so that their services remain accessible to vulnerable groups during the pandemic. Following the Chancellor's announcement of £750 million funding for the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, the Home Office and DfE launched a £7.6 million joint fund to provide financial hardship relief for national VCSE organisations that support vulnerable children across England and Wales.

The Home Office is directly awarding over £4 million to charities working with children facing specific risks including serious violence, criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation and missing episodes. This includes funding to be distributed by our 18 VRUs on COVID-19 related activity which will invest in 339 small and micro charities supporting over 60,000 vulnerable children at risk of serious violence through face to face or digital engagement.

We urge the Government to commit to consult a diverse group of stakeholders on how to effectively allocate funding to youth services, especially regarding commissioning, to ensure the views of those who are directly affected and 'on the ground' are directly embedded. (Paragraph 32)

Government response

It is vitally important that young people's voices are heard and listened to, especially in relation to decisions on funding which may affect them. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has recently undertaken a review of all its out of school youth service funding; taking in the views of a wide variety of stakeholders, national, local and the contributions of thousands of individual young people. The purpose of this review is to focus future investment more clearly on out of school interventions that improve the wellbeing and life chances of young people. DCMS will also be revising the guidance to local authorities on how they secure services and activities for young people in line with their statutory duty as laid out in the 1996 Education Act.

The Government has also worked closely with the DCMS Youth Steering Group, made up of young people from a diverse range of places and backgrounds, and with youth sector organisations, on the principles that should inform any new investment in youth services. This includes the £500 Youth Investment Fund manifesto commitment.

Through the £13 million Trusted Relationships Fund we are identifying innovative approaches to tackling vulnerability among children and young people at risk of exploitation and abuse. The Fund supports 11 local authority led projects working with children and young people (aged 10-17) who have been identified locally as at risk of child sexual exploitation or abuse, criminal exploitation and peer on peer abuse. Many of these projects have been co-designed with young people and aim to

build resilience to harm through fostering healthy, trusting relationships with responsible adults.

VRUs are also required to include representatives of the local communities and young people in their core membership to inform local strategies and operational activities. In some areas this has included working with engagement leads or specialists who can tap into existing community engagement networks, so their views are embedded into the local VRU programme delivery. In the second year of the VRU programme, we placed a greater focus on communication and engagement with the wider public and young people. Throughout 20/21 we monitored the progress made by VRUs towards involving the community meaningfully in their decision-making processes. VRUs have developed parents and carers panels, advisory boards made up from young people with lived experiences and co-production community pilots based in local communities.

We recommend that funding guarantees are made over a longer period, of at least 5 years, to enable youth services to build their practices, develop effective ways of helping and reaching young people and establishing the trust of the young people in their local area. This will lead to young people having purposeful activity outside of education, keeping them off the streets. (Paragraph 33)

Government response:

The Government recognises the advantages of multi-year funding and will seek to continue our strong track record in this area. For example, the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) described in greater detail within this response, is a 10-year fund designed to provide continuation of funding and certainty over a longer period which will support a number of interventions to ensure those most at risk are given the opportunity to turn away from violence and lead positive lives.

We recognise the value of longer-term funding across the voluntary sector in which we have a record of multi-year funding for youth programmes. The National Citizen Service (NCS) has run since 2011. Our successful Youth Investment Fund from 2017-2020 funded individual community-based organisations for three years and the companion '#iwill' programme to promote social action ran over a similar period. Together they invested over £80 million of funding from the Government and the National Lottery Community Fund in community-based provision, alongside additional investment from other match funders.

There are a number of interventions in DCMS that have focused on preventing and reducing serious violence. For example, Sport England, a DCMS Arm's Length Body, invested in 56 projects in the school holidays of summer 2019, following multiple workshops with the department and other organisations in the sports sector on a scaled up 'Sporting Offer'. These projects delivered a range of sports and physical activities targeting vulnerable young people most at risk of becoming involved in serious youth violence.

The Minister said that the Serious Violence Strategy is a “living” document. We recommend that as it is continuously reviewed and developed it will benefit from embedding the views from young people and/or those with lived experience of knife crime throughout. Examples of how this could be done include co-designing surveys and projects with young people, as well as consulting organisations directly working with young people affected. (Paragraph 45)

The 2018 Serious Violence Strategy set out 61 commitments and actions to tackle serious violence. The Strategy was underpinned by rigorous analysis of the trends and drivers of serious violence. We have already delivered key commitments in the Strategy and continue to develop our response in order to tackle new and emerging issues and drivers.

As set out in greater detail within this response, the Government firmly believes in the importance of young people having their say on what would benefit them best when developing youth policy. DCMS has led the way in enabling effective youth participation in national policy making. We have supported the delivery of UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) and associated youth voice activities including the Make Your Mark ballot and the Youth Select Committee. These give young people the opportunity to highlight issues of importance to them, such as the environment and knife crime.

The Government recognises the value and importance of advice and support for families and young people and that is why we are investing, including through VRUs and the YEF, in a range of preventative interventions for those at risk of involvement in serious violence. Many of these interventions involve parents and families as well as the individual concerned.

The Government is committed to continuing engagement with young people, including people with lived experience of relevant policy areas, and very much values the suggestions made by the Committee. As set out previously, VRUs are required to include representatives of the local communities and young people in their core membership to inform local strategies and operational activities. Some VRUs also fund interventions which provide local mentors with lived experiences as gang members, victims, and family members to guide vulnerable young people. These are delivered to classes in schools, as well as on a one to one basis with young people across many settings such as prisons and schools.

We recommend that the Government consults organisations, charities and community services on what they need in support of the new proposed legal duty. This will enable more effective collaboration and sharing of information to provide young people with adequate support, and truly deliver a public health approach tailored for and championed by local communities to combat knife crime and youth violence. (Paragraph 46)

Government response

The Government held a public consultation on our plans for a new serious violence legal duty, which ran for eight weeks in Spring 2019. In developing our plans for the

legislation, we have taken into account responses received from professionals in health, education, police, social services, housing and the voluntary and community sector.

The Duty forms part of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which was introduced in March this year. Following Royal Assent, guidance will be published which will set out the core principles of the new duty to support and assist local areas to effectively deliver a full system response to serious violence. The guidance will also highlight best practice and explain how different partnership models can work in practice, including with VRUs, to meet the requirements of the Duty. In doing so, it will emphasise the importance of involving the voluntary, community and faith sectors as well as local young people, recognising the key contribution that they are able to make in this area, but also allowing for flexibility at a local level to ensure that appropriate organisations are working together to tackle the specific challenges faced across England and Wales. Prior to formal publication, the guidance will be tested with a range of sectors and organisations, including the voluntary and community sector, to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

We are particularly concerned that previous cuts to the police have resulted in a reduced number of community support officers and school outreach officers. We acknowledge that the Government is taking steps to address this, but we do not think this goes far enough. We recommend that the Government urgently allocates further resources to neighbourhood police officers, as well as police outreach and engagement activities with young people in their communities. This, we believe, will build better relationships and trust between the police and the communities they serve, making young people feel safer as a result. (Paragraph 76)

Government response

The Government is giving the police the resources and powers they need and has committed to the recruitment of an additional 20,000 officers by March 2023.

The Government has provided a total police funding settlement of up to £15.8 billion in 2021/22, which is an increase of up to £600 million compared to 2020/21. As at 31 March 2021, 8,771 extra police officers have already been recruited as part of the uplift, meaning that we are 44% of the way to the 20,000 officer target. A further 6,000 additional officers have been allocated to forces across England and Wales for year two of the uplift.

Decisions about frontline policing, and how officers and resources are best deployed, are for Chief Constables and democratically accountable Police and Crime Commissioners. They are best placed to make decisions with their communities based on their local knowledge and experience.

More generally, police forces recognise that effective community engagement is more than just having a visible police presence. Prevention, partnership working, problem-solving and safeguarding the vulnerable remain key.

We recommend that the Government ensures that police officers allocated to a neighbourhood should reflect the social and ethnic demographics of the neighbourhoods which they serve. (Paragraph 77)

Government response

The police officer workforce is now more representative than ever before. The most recently published quarterly police officer uplift statistics show the highest proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) officers since records began (7.6%), but we are clear there is still more to be done. Our unprecedented drive to recruit 20,000 extra police officers provides a generational opportunity to increase diversity in policing which is why we are committed to ensuring we support forces to recruit officers that truly represent the communities they serve.

Significant work is underway with police forces and policing partners across the country, in a way that is coordinated and aligned to help deliver the increase to police diversity that our communities need. Decisions about frontline policing, and how officers are best deployed, are for Chief Constables and democratically accountable Police and Crime Commissioners. They are best placed to make decisions with their communities based on their local knowledge and experience.

We echo the Timpson review's recommendation that schools should be made accountable for permanently excluded pupils, but recommend that this accountability should extend beyond academic attainment to the welfare of fixed-term and permanently excluded pupils for the period during which they are out of education. (Paragraph 93)

We recommend that the Government should allocate schools with adequate resources to ensure that a young person safely returns to education as soon as possible following an exclusion. The Government should recognise the detrimental effect an exclusion and the risk that the excluded young person never successfully returns to education again, can have on the young person's prospects and to society. (Paragraph 94)

Government response

Currently, too many children and young people are at risk of being drawn into serious youth violence. We know that engagement in full-time education is a strong protective factor against children's risk of involvement in a range of risky behaviours associated with serious violence. It is therefore important that all schools – including Alternative Provision - enable children to achieve and equip them with the skills they need to be safe and to succeed in life.

All children should be supported to fulfil their potential, including those who have complex special educational needs or those who require Alternative Provision. That is why the government will increase school funding by 5% in 2020-21 alone and will allocate an additional £780 million of high needs funding to local authorities for the next financial year. We will back up this investment with an ambitious programme of work on school behaviour across the school system, including through our £10 million behaviour hubs programme. We are also focusing on reforms needed to deliver significantly improved outcomes for children and young people in Alternative

Provision, so that children who are suspended or expelled and children at risk of suspension or expulsion receive a full-time education and support suited to their individual needs.

The government backs head teachers to use their powers to issue suspensions in response to poor behaviour and to expel as a last resort. Overall, the latest published data (for the 2018/19 academic year) show that expulsion remains a rare event - there were 10 expulsions for every 10,000 pupils. Our statutory guidance on suspensions and expulsions is clear that, in all cases, schools should consider early intervention to address underlying causes of disruptive behaviour which may avoid suspension and expulsion of a pupil. We will also be revising the guidance on suspensions, expulsions and behaviour to ensure that the obligations on schools are clear and well understood, to ensure that any suspension or expulsion is lawful, reasonable, and fair. This will ensure that children who may be vulnerable to involvement in knife crime remain in full-time education, which is a crucial factor in keeping them safe, while also receiving the support needed to reduce their risk and vulnerability.

The Government will also ensure that teachers are well equipped to tackle poor behaviour within schools by reforming initial teacher training through the Early Career Framework. This underpins an entitlement for a new fully funded programme of training for early career teachers including training on how to manage behaviour effectively in their first two years in the profession. The Government continues to back head teachers to create calm and disciplined environments within which pupils are able to fulfil their potential, free from low-level disruption that may stop them from learning. Head teachers must consider the welfare of others in the school who have a right to learn in a safe environment.

Recognising school as an important protective factor against harm, the Government prioritised school attendance for vulnerable children during lockdown restrictions. We prioritised getting all children back to school in March and will deliver a £1 billion COVID-19 catch-up plan. This includes £650 million for state schools to lift educational outcomes and a £350 million tutoring scheme specifically for the most disadvantaged. Pastoral and wellbeing checks for children and young people are a key part of our guidance for schools and we are funding £9 million extra for mental health charities, including those supporting children and young people. In addition, we are providing up to £22.1 million to boost educational outcomes of vulnerable children, with up to £16.2 million for more social workers in schools and up to £4.8 million to test and scale which interventions are most effective in helping children with a social worker.

We recommend that each young person identified as being at risk of or already being involved in knife crime should be assigned a youth worker who will coordinate responses from various youth services to ensure they receive the ‘wrap-around’ support they need to live a life free from crime. The factors which make young people vulnerable are often systemic at their core, stemming from wider issues in a community and society more generally. It is important that the Government’s solution focuses not only on tackling knife crime but also on solving these underlying drivers. (Paragraph 96)

Government response:

The Government acknowledges the benefit that the provision of youth outreach workers can have and supports the role of young people in co-designing service provision.

As mentioned previously, to support local communities to tackle the root causes of serious violence the Government has already committed to provide £105.5 million to support the establishment of VRUs in 18 areas of the country most affected by serious violence. VRUs are bringing together a range of partners including the police, health, education, social services and other professionals to develop a multi-agency approach in preventing serious violence altogether. VRUs will ensure there is effective planning and collaboration to support a longer-term public health approach to preventing violence. In 2019-2020, 66% of VRU funding was spent directly on frontline services to provide support to young people and the most vulnerable in order to protect them, or divert them away, from serious violence.

As mentioned previously, we are also identifying innovative approaches to tackling vulnerability among children and young people at risk of exploitation and abuse through the £13 million Trusted Relationships Fund. The Department for Education also provided £11 million to the See, Hear, Respond service led by Barnardo's which delivered, among other things, street-based youth work to identify and support children at risk of harm outside of the home, including criminal exploitation. The service will develop a dynamic sector response that intervenes early, supports and safeguards these children, mitigating against escalation of need and long-lasting harm to children and families.

As set out in greater detail further in this response, the Government is also supporting various programmes and provision, which provide specialist youth-worker led, targeted intervention work, such as our Young People's Advocates.

Different areas of the country have different provisions of youth services. We recommend that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's development of a new Youth Charter should include a review of where in the country there is a specific need for more youth services. Once these areas have been identified, the Department should establish a dedicated fund tasked with aiding local organisations in those areas to establish themselves. (Paragraph 109)

Government response:

As we develop the Youth Offer, we will look at how to get the most impact from Government spending on young people in order to help drive a coherent package of support across Government. We intend to focus on providing a holistic offer, making sure funding across Whitehall is focused on the most effective interventions which will support the Government's priority to unleash the potential of young people.

We recommend that the Government, leading up to the next version of the Serious Violence Strategy, should hold consultations with diverse groups of

parents and legal guardians to find out what support they need to identify and help their children who are at risk from knife crime. This consultation should lead to the formulation of a programme to help equip them with the appropriate tools. (Paragraph 114)

Government response

The Government recognises the value and importance of advice and support for families and young people and that is why we are investing, including through VRUs and the YEF, in a range of preventative interventions for those at risk of involvement in serious violence. Many of these interventions involve parents and families as well as the individual concerned. The latest evidence suggests that family-based interventions are effective, however many of these still need to be robustly tested. This is why we have invested in the YEF which will provide evidence into what works, in particular via the £5 million fund to set up a Centre of Excellence.

In addition, Supporting Families, previously the “Troubled Families Programme”, which is delivered nationally by local authorities and their partners, aims to ensure that families get access to early, practical and coordinated support to transform their lives for the better, by giving them the vital early support they need to overcome complex problems such as anti-social behaviour, mental health issues and domestic abuse. The latest evaluation results show that, compared to families with similar characteristics who have not been on the programme, 19-24 months after starting to receive support the proportion of adults on the programme going to prison has reduced by a quarter and juvenile convictions reduced by 15 percent.

We recommend that the Government amend their approach to role models to focus on people with lived experiences, or people from troubled areas who have been successful in their own lives, who may be best able to inspire vulnerable young people. The relevant role models will be different for different local areas. It is important that individuals acting as role models for young people are drawn from all walks of life and are active in a range of professions, not just rappers and athletes. The Government should seek to encourage relatable role models to positively inspire young people, for example through funding mentoring programmes. (Paragraph 121)

Government response

The Government supports drawing role models from different walks of life and agrees that role models should be relatable for all young people. The Government firmly believes that it is important in youth policy for young people to have their say on what would benefit them best.

Our commitment to embedding youth voice in policy development was outlined in the Civil Society Strategy, and DCMS has led the way in enabling effective youth participation in national policy making. We have supported the delivery of UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) and associated youth voice activities including the Make Your Mark ballot and the Youth Select Committee. These give young people the opportunity to highlight issues of importance to them, such as the environment and knife crime. Our Youth Steering Group has overseen the development and

implementation of policies affecting young people. Young people are recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds, including those with care experience and those with little or no experience of youth voice activities. They have also input into the development of a new digital tool, aimed at using Instagram to provide a new way to engage younger audiences in cross-government consultations. The Young Inspectors Group has involved young people directly and meaningfully in the commissioning, monitoring and evaluation of national programmes affecting young people.

In addition, there are a number of DCMS programmes and Arms-Length Bodies that have already incorporated the youth voice into policy development - for example, Arts Council England engaged with young people extensively in developing their new 10-year strategy, and Sports England has been actively engaging with young people, especially in programmes in response to rising rates of serious youth violence.

We have regularly met with youth sector organisations to test our approach, and to gain insight on how to ensure we are engaging with a wide range of young people from different backgrounds and with different experiences.

As outlined earlier in this response, the cross sector Creating Opportunities Forum has been set up to empower and support young people who are at risk of serious violence to fulfil their potential, develop skills and open up positive career pathways for them. The forum intends to fill a critical gap in wider wraparound support, to open up professional careers in a wide range of sectors. Government is providing funding through the Trusted Relationships Fund of £13 million to 11 different local authorities across England, to help foster relationships between frontline professionals and young people at risk of exploitation including county lines and to provide support to young people at risk of child sexual exploitation, gang exploitation and peer abuse. The Fund aims to support early interventions which will help young people build protective factors to help keep them safe from harm.

Some VRUs also fund interventions which provide local mentors with lived experiences such as gang members, victims, and family members to guide vulnerable young people. These are delivered to classes in schools, as well as on a one to one basis with young people across many settings such as prisons and schools.

We recommend that the Government urgently commissions research to better understand the dangerous ways in which social media can be used to spread violence and increase fear amongst young people, and what could be done to mitigate these dangers. This research should be completed, and findings published no later than March 2021. (Paragraph 136)

Government response:

Social media can be used to glamorise gang or drug-selling life, recruit others into the lifestyle, taunt rivals and normalise weapons carrying; so we also continue to work with social media companies and the police to remove harmful content and to protect the most vulnerable. Rival criminal gangs use social media to promote gang culture and incite violence. This, alongside the illegal sale of weapons to young

people online, is a contributing factor to senseless violence, such as knife crime on British streets.

The Online Harms White Paper set out the Government's plans for world leading legislation to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online. We intend to establish in law a new duty of care on companies towards their users which will be overseen by an independent regulator. This regulator will set clear safety standards, backed up by mandatory reporting requirements and strong enforcement powers to deal with non-compliance.

The Queen's Speech in December 2019, which set out the Government's legislative priorities for this parliamentary session, included a commitment that the Government develop legislation to improve internet safety for all. We are looking to bring forward this legislation in due course. The Government published its Initial Consultation Response to the Online Harms White Paper in February 2020, which set out our direction of travel on a number of key areas.

Our proposals assume that a higher level of protection is required for children than for the typical adult user. This includes measures to prevent children from accessing age-inappropriate or harmful content. Alongside this, the Government acknowledges the importance of expanding the evidence base of online harms. The Online Harms White Paper proposed that the regulator works closely with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to improve the evidence base on tackling activity or content where there is a threat of harm, or where children or other vulnerable users are at risk. We set out our final policy position in a full Government response in December last year.

In June 2018 the Home Office provided £1.4 million to support a new police capability to tackle gang related activity on social media. The hub became fully operational at the end of May 2019. The social media hub was established within MPS, transforming the current capability and extending its reach to other forces. It brings together a dedicated team of police officers and staff to take action against illegal and harmful online material regarding serious youth violence. The Home Office announced a further £3.4 million in March this year to expand the hub's work.

We recommend that the Government roll back the extension of powers of stop and search, which allow inspectors to authorise a search when an incident of serious violence 'may' occur, to the previous requirements of a senior officer when suspicion that an incident 'will' occur, until the disproportionate targeting of stop and searches of Black men is addressed. (Paragraph 156)

Government response

Section 60 conditions were relaxed to enable the police to feel confident, trusted and supported in the lawful application of stop and search.

The police have the Government's full support in the fair and targeted use of stop and search to crack down on criminality and violent crime. The police tell us that stop and search is a vital tool to tackle knife crime. It acts as a deterrent and helps keep knives and weapons off our streets. The extension of stop and search powers allows quicker authorisations, and a greater number of searches to be undertaken, aiding the police in their work against serious crime. The Government fully supports efforts

to protect communities and areas most at risk of serious violence, and we are clear that stop and search should never be based on someone's race or ethnicity. Although black individuals remain more likely to be stopped under Section 60, figures for the year ending March 2020 show a decrease in racial disparities. In 2019/20, black individuals were stopped and searched under this power at a rate 18.0 times higher than white individuals – this was a 59% drop from last year's 43.8x figure.

We continue to keep this recommendation in mind as we work on this area, including as we pilot the Serious Violence Reduction Order (SVRO), a new court order which will give the police powers to target those already convicted of knife and weapon offences – giving them the automatic right to search those who pose the greatest risk. Targeted use of stop and search, as part of a wider approach to intervene and support offenders, will help to safeguard those communities most at risk. SVROs were introduced in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill on the basis of a targeted pilot.

We do not believe that harsher punishments or longer custodial sentences for young people who carry or use knives will remedy the epidemic of knife crime on our streets. We recommend that the Government as a matter of urgency commissions an investigation into measures which could make young people feel safer in their communities and subsequently designate enough funds to make the necessary measures a reality. (Paragraph 155)

We urge the Government to clarify their position on short term custodial sentences for young people, and equally consider whether there is another approach which could replace them. (Paragraph 172)

Government response:

We believe that short custodial sentences should be an absolute last resort and thus avoided for young people who are found to have carried knives.

We believe that sentencing should allow under 18s to get the interventions they need to help them stop offending. We are also clear that custody, including short custodial sentences, should be a last resort for under 18s and the sentence length should be appropriate and proportionate to the offence committed. The police and courts have a wide range of flexible community options and out of court disposals such as youth cautions and youth conditional cautions to address offending behaviour.

There is a minimum 4-month custodial sentence for those aged 16 or 17 convicted of using an offensive weapon to threaten or for second or subsequent possession of a knife or offensive weapon. However, the court can depart from this sentence if there are particular circumstances of the case which would make it unjust to impose the minimum. Given that custody must always be a last resort for under-18s, the seriousness of possessing a knife is reflected by the fact that this offence carries a discretionary minimum custodial sentence if convicted for a second or subsequent time.

When sentencing someone under 18, the court looks at all the circumstances of the case, including the welfare of the child and the principal aim of the youth justice

system, which is to prevent offending. The length of the sentence must be considered on an individual basis, taking into account all the circumstances of the offence and the offender, including age, maturity, emotional and developmental age, and other relevant factors such as their mental health or any learning disabilities. However, we believe that it is right for the courts to have the powers they need to sentence appropriately and that includes custody where necessary.

As mentioned previously in this response, we are investing up to £23 million in early intervention programmes, and £200 million through the YEF which was announced in 2019 by the then Home Secretary. The YEF is focused on targeted early intervention with those children and young people most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence. It operates independently of Government and is administered by a partnership led by Impetus, alongside the Early Intervention Foundation and Social Investment Business.

The YEF works with charities, statutory services and local communities to ensure that support reaches those at greatest risk – such as children who may not be engaged with education, who are displaying signs of aggression or involvement in anti-social behaviour. The aim of the YEF will be to develop a strong evidence base, showing the interventions that are most effective in deterring children and young people away from crime and violence.

Through the first grant round in 2019, the YEF identified 23 successful applicants. The 23 projects are located across England and Wales and will share £17.1 million over 2 years to support children and young people most vulnerable from becoming involved in crime and violence. The projects range from intensive family therapy to street-based and school mentoring programmes. A number of projects are targeted at groups who have a risk factor for involvement in crime and youth violence.

The YEF will be launching two thematic grant rounds in 2021 both investing up to £20 million, to help find what works to keep children from becoming involved in violence. Grant round one specifically will focus on ‘diversion from the criminal justice system’. It will aim to identify the best diversionary programmes offered before or at the point of arrest and prior to court action.

Knife Crime Prevention Orders have been introduced as a preventative civil measure to give the police the powers they need to prevent and tackle serious violence and knife crime. Given the seriousness of the issue, the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 makes breach of an Order a criminal offence.

Knife Crime Prevention Orders will be piloted in London and will be available to the courts to be applied to persons from age 12 upwards. The purpose of these Orders is to prevent those who are subject to them – those who are identified as being particularly at risk – from being drawn into knife crime and serious violence, through the inclusion of positive requirements and restrictions that can be attached to an Order. This will help more young people to avoid being drawn into violent lifestyles and serious offending.

No community should feel unsafe and this Government is committed to safeguarding our streets. VRUs have been asked to report and track measures of public perceptions of community safety and identify key factors which lead to communities

and young people to feel unsafe. VRUs will be using this information to form part of their response strategy so safety can be restored within our communities.

We recommend that a young person with a criminal record should be given regular reviews of how their criminal record is affecting their ability to, for example, gain employment or secure accommodation. The young person should subsequently be provided with services and support to mitigate any barriers identified. (Paragraph 186)

Government response

The Secretary of State for Justice has set “Standards for children in the youth justice system” on the advice of the Youth Justice Board. This is a statutory piece of guidance under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. It defines the minimum expectation for all agencies that provide statutory services to ensure good outcomes for children in the youth justice system. These standards say that youth offending team (YOT) management boards should have mechanisms in place which provide them with assurance that local practice prioritises children’s best interests, constructively promotes their potential and desistance, encourages their active engagement, and minimises the potential damage that contact with the system can bring. The standards also say that YOTs must produce a plan to focus on enabling a pro-social identity and desistance from offending, public protection, mitigating any prevailing issues relating to safety and wellbeing as well as building on the positive elements of the child’s life.

It should be noted that ex-offenders are protected by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974; this means that for the majority of jobs, employers are entitled to ask about unspent convictions only, and may request a basic criminal records check. Spent convictions can only be disclosed to employers in relation to certain sensitive roles and activities, principally those working closely with children or vulnerable adults, or involving a high degree of public trust. These types of role can be eligible for standard or enhanced criminal records checks, which disclose some spent convictions and other information held by police.

On 28 November 2020, the Government implemented legislation to change the rules governing disclosure for sensitive roles. This amendment removed the requirement for self-disclosure and automatic disclosure of cautions, reprimands and warnings issued to people below the age of 18; and convictions where a person has more than one conviction (known as the ‘multiple conviction’ rule), except where disclosed under the other rules. This particularly benefits those with childhood cautions and those with minor convictions who have moved away from their past.

In addition, the Government recently introduced the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which would make changes to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. We are proposing significant reductions to the rehabilitation periods - the amount of time someone has to disclose their record for general purposes - for custodial sentences of under four years and community sentences. These changes will apply to childhood criminal records too, where we have followed the established approach of these being half the time of adult rehabilitation periods. In addition, for the first time,

we have outlined proposals that would enable some custodial sentences of over 4 years to become spent as part of criminal records checks for non-sensitive roles.

With all of these changes we want to improve access to employment and education, promote opportunities for people with criminal records and support those who have offended in the past to move on with their lives. However, it is important to remember that the criminal records system also serves an important public protection function.

We call for the Government to run a consultation on possible ways to clear a young person's criminal record once they become an adult to stop it from being a barrier as they build a life free from crime. (Paragraph 187)

Government response

The Government is committed to supporting children to turn their lives around so they can go on to live rich and fulfilled lives. The criminal justice system recognises that children should be treated differently to adults, and this is reflected in reduced Rehabilitation of Offenders Act rehabilitation periods for childhood criminal records. However, where an offence has been committed, the Government has a responsibility to ensure that the public are adequately safeguarded and that employers can make informed recruitment decisions through the disclosure of appropriate and relevant information, particularly for roles involving children and vulnerable adults. We are not pursuing proposals on sealing criminal records by application, rather focusing on the rules which determine criminal records and their disclosure.

This Government believes firmly in giving ex-offenders more broadly, who have paid their debt to society the chance to prove they can work hard and become responsible members of our communities. We recognise the crucial role employment can play in the rehabilitation of ex-offenders, helping them desist from offending and live crime-free lives.

Our 2018 Education and Employment strategy set out our approach to ensuring prisoners develop the skills they need to secure employment on release. Since then, we have overhauled the prison education system. Governors can now commission bespoke and short-term provision, including vocational training tailored to local labour market needs. The New Futures Network (NFN) is brokering partnerships between prisons and employers, so employers take on serving prisoners and ex-offenders. We are also working with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure prisoners have timely access to Universal Credit. We are continuing with plans to strengthen the current education and careers guidance offer, creating a Prisoner Education Service focussed on work-based training and skills.

In January 2019 the Supreme Court handed down a judgment in the case of *P and Others vs SSHD & SSJ*, which challenged various elements of the criminal records disclosure regime set out in the Police Act 1997 and the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975. The cases challenged the legislative rules determining which records will be disclosed on standard and enhanced criminal record checks, on the basis that they can lead to disproportionate outcomes and are incompatible with ECHR Article 8 (the right to private life). Overall, the Court found

that the disclosure regime is in accordance with ECHR but found two aspects of the legislation to be disproportionate and therefore incompatible with Article 8 (the right to a private life). These are the requirement for disclosure a) where an individual has more than one conviction, irrespective of offence type or time passed (the 'multiple conviction rule'); and b) of certain out-of-court disposals issued to young offenders (in particular, reprimands and warnings).

In response to this, the Government amended the filtering rules that govern what is automatically disclosed through standard and enhanced criminal records certificates issued by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). These changes came into force on 28 November 2020, removing the requirement for automatic disclosure of youth cautions, reprimands and warnings and removing the 'multiple conviction' rule, which required the automatic disclosure of all convictions where a person has more than one conviction, regardless of the nature of their offence or sentence.

We recommend that the next version of the Serious Violence Strategy includes a larger focus on restorative justice and other informal criminal justice responses as a first step. A young person who commits knife crime is first and foremost a vulnerable child in need of help. We agree that all efforts once a young person has been found to be involved in knife crime should be aimed at rehabilitating that young person and give them the best possible chance for a life free from crime. (Paragraph 195)

We recommend that victims of knife crime should be given targeted support as they are statistically more likely to subsequently commit knife crime themselves. If restorative justice is used effectively, it could provide the victim with the closure they need to deter them from future involvement in knife crime. (Paragraph 196).

Government response

The Ministry of Justice are working with the Home Office to tackle the increases in knife possession and serious violence. The police and courts already have a wide range of flexible community sentences and out of court disposals such as youth cautions and youth conditional cautions to address offending behaviour.

The Ministry of Justice is committed to ensuring victims receive the right support at the right time to help them cope and recover in the aftermath of crime. Under the Victims' Code, all victims of crime including those committed by a child are entitled to impartial information about Restorative Justice (RJ) and how they can take part. Where an offender is a child, victims are entitled to be offered the opportunity to participate in RJ by the YOT in the area the victim lives, where appropriate and available. The victim's free and informed consent must be obtained in all cases where RJ is being considered. Furthermore, service providers delivering RJ must be satisfied that RJ is in the interest of the victim.

The department also grant funds Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) who are responsible for commissioning locally tailored emotional and practical support for the victims in their area, including the provision of RJ in some areas. Further, the MoJ has committed to running a pilot project to support young people with experience of

victimisation in a youth offending institution, in order to address the underlying complex needs they face, and to divert them away from re-offending upon release.

There has been a significant increase in incidents of serious violence, and the MoJ recognises that these incidents involve vulnerable young people with complex needs that often have experience as both a victim and an offender. In response to this, the department has ensured that there is a requirement for reachable moment interventions within the nationally commissioned Homicide Service for the first time. This provision delivers additional tailored support to young people in families bereaved through serious violence and works to prevent any further escalation that may lead to these young people becoming victims or perpetrators of serious violence, and includes opportunities to participate in RJ.

We recommend that the Government should adopt the use of ‘teachable moments’ as a national tactic, funding organisations to provide targeted interventions to young people in hospital or police custody following a knife crime related incident. (Paragraph 209)

Government response

Through our new investment of £23 million in early intervention programmes we will be targeting intensive interventions such as one to one support to those most in need in the areas most affected. £2.2 million of this will be rolling out and testing further in ‘teachable moment’ interventions, which is an innovative approach to capitalising at the best moment to offer an individual tailored support.

A ‘teachable moment’ is a time when a message is most likely to be heard and positive life choices are made instead of continued involvement in crime; and examples of this approach include when a young person arrives in A&E with a stab wound caused by serious violence, and when a young person is arrested for the first time. VRUs have already invested in a range of ‘teachable moment’ interventions in areas which are worst affected by knife crime.

Interventions in police custody include DIVERT, which uses a trauma informed approach to diverting young people away from crime; putting strategies in place to break a cycle of offending. Custody Intervention Coaches (CICs) are trained and embedded within this police force’s custody suites to approach suitable 18 to 25-year-old detainees and support them in seeking employment and education opportunities. In 2019 the Youth Endowment Fund awarded £897,863 to Lambeth Council, Lambeth Metropolitan Police Service and Juvenis to fund DIVERT Youth. This, programme utilises works with a younger cohort of people (10-15) to prevent them from becoming first time entrants into the criminal justice system by supporting them to make better life choices and positive behaviour change.

The Home Office has also continued to provide support to the charity Redthread, to support its Youth Violence Intervention Programme which provides youth workers in hospital emergency departments to support to young people who arrive at hospital with injuries likely to have been inflicted by violence including knife crime. Redthread operates in the Major Trauma Centres in London and the Home Office has supported Redthread to expand and pilot its services to Nottingham and Birmingham.