

## Written evidence submitted by Egginton Bros. Ltd (OWB77)

### Introduction

We are one of the last remaining companies manufacturing knives in Sheffield, the home of knife making. We employ around 30 staff, some with unique hand skills. Our products are exported all over the world but the UK is a key market for us.

Any action which will decrease violent crime and make our country a safer place to live is to be applauded. We completely back the ban on “Zombie Knives” for instance. However, we seriously doubt the proposal ***to ban the sale of knives and other bladed products online unless product is collected in a retail store and 18+ age verification is carried out face to face*** will have any impact on reducing violent crime for the following reasons.

### 1. Knives are Ubiquitous

Knives are available in all UK households. Attempts to limit their sale via age verified collection will not reduce knife crime. It is our understanding that most knife attacks are carried out with kitchen knives used on impulse. The attacks at Borough Market were carried out with cheap supermarket kitchen knives. The consultation report mentions the horrific Bailey Gwynne case however, was it not just chance that the perpetrator had used a knife purchased online rather than others to which they had easy access in the home? (As far as we are aware, was this also a one-off case of a minor having used a knife bought online (from Amazon) for serious crime).

### 2. Not Evidence Driven

The proposed legislation is not driven by evidence. Statistics are not gathered by the police to define if an actual knife has been used in crime, as opposed to other sharply pointed instruments – glass, a chisel, a needle etc. Neither does the Government accurately know what type of knives are used (e.g. kitchen knife versus non-kitchen knife, folding versus fixed blade, knife blade length, legal carry versus illegal etc.), let alone where and how the knife was purchased or by whom.

The Ministry of Justice’s own figures surrounding knife crime are widely available online (please refer to [Knife Possession Sentencing Quarterly, England and Wales](#)). Many of the trends from 2009 to 2017 exhibit decreases. Table 7 is the one giving a breakdown of 10-17 year olds which has also decreased over this period. This is against a background of other factors, such as improved recording of crime, more crimes being reported and so on.

### 3. Wider Societal Issues

Other everyday objects can be used for violent means with equally devastating effect – a bottle, chemicals, a hammer, a car, pretty much anything. It is unfair to penalise legitimate businesses and their legitimate customers buying knives, which are legal to own and carry and are used for legitimate everyday reasons.

Violent crime can be attributed to wider societal problems – inner city poverty, drug and gang culture, marginalised sectors of our society, lenient courts, lack of education, mental healthcare issues, lack of funding for youth facilities and so on. [*The Guardian* newspaper’s

“[Beyond the Blade](#)” campaign is especially insightful in this regard]. Most criminologists will argue that tackling poverty and social exclusion are the cure to a violent society.

#### **4. Knife Sellers are Responsible**

Age checks, age verified delivery for certain products and other measures which are above and beyond the existing laws are already being carried out by responsible knife traders supplying responsible customers – for example chefs, tradesmen, farmers and the multitude of other professions that rely on a knife for their employment.

The proposals ignore the capability of internet sales to be better controlled and provide a superior audit trail than face to face sales. They ignore expert panel recommendations from people like the BRDO (Better Regulation Delivery Office) who have reported on how proper age verification can take place online.

There are a minority that trade unscrupulously or illegally (for example those based outside the UK supplying UK buyers but not abiding by UK laws). Would the proposed new legislation stop them from operating?

#### **5. Proposals are Anti-competitive and Disproportionate**

Larger retailers with many regional shops will be able to deal with age verified collection easily and with little impact on cost. Smaller retailers and knife manufacturers, currently using the internet to reach the niche markets which support their business, will not.

The proposed legislation is disproportionate in its impact on the freedoms of millions of members of the public who need to purchase, own and use kitchen knives, sports knives, chisels, axes and craft or gardening knives without restriction. Additionally those living in remote areas or unable to easily access shops (through disability, old age etc.) and relying on delivered goods are likely to be disadvantaged. Age verified delivery via a reputable courier is likely to be less disadvantageous than age verified collection. We believe that Amazon now successfully use this service for delivering knives in reaction to the Bailey Gwyne case.

#### **6. Sentencing for Offenders**

It is also already a crime to carry certain knife types in a public place if unable to give a good reason. We understand that the policy of tough sentencing for knife possession offences is not being followed through, with some individuals habitually carrying knives appearing before courts without receiving custodial sentences. What are the reasons for the often lenient approaches of our courts?

#### **7. Impact on our Business**

Should the proposals become law, we would expect severe decrease in sales and job losses would be inevitable. We make high value niche products which could not be adequately served by bricks and mortar stores and which sell in volumes too small to be of interest to national retail chains. In recent years our business has faced more than our fair share of issues – the government has allowed our market to be flooded with cheap imports with which domestic manufacturers struggle to compete, much of our domestic military business has been awarded to overseas makers, the marketing of knives has been curtailed by wider societal problems etc. Fortunately, online sales have grown where other areas have

contracted. If this sales platform is removed or obstacles to business are imposed, it could be fatal to our business.

### **8. Suggested Ways Forward**

We believe that the present UK laws on selling knives are sufficient as long as they are correctly abided by and enforced. Further measures which could be taken might include an online knife dealers licensing scheme with a defined age verification standard funded by a nominal dealer license fee. Age verification checks via Equifax and similar and age verified delivery services come at a cost. On higher value transactions it may be reasonable for these costs to be borne by the seller or buyer. On lower value transactions, these costs will be a considerable obstacle to sales. The bulk of knife sales will be made at the lower value end. What action could government take to mitigate the effect of these costs?

### **Summary**

We understand that our voice in this argument is only small, but we would urge you to proceed with common sense. We would appreciate it greatly if our circumstances, and those of other businesses who depend on the market for knives, are considered before your proposals are made legislation. Knife crime is not the fault of knife makers. It is the result of wider problems in society and this is where the government should be focussing their efforts.

We look forward to your comments.

Regards,

James Goodwin  
Sales & Marketing Manager  
Egginton Bros Ltd.

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### **Addendum (dated 20 July 2018)**

As more High Street stores close (House of Fraser, Marks & Spencers announcing closures) and as online trading increases, the latter could well end up being the primary channel for sales for small business and large business alike. Removing this sales channel to those businesses selling legitimate and UK legal knives (by preventing delivery to residential addresses) may potentially prevent businesses dealing in knives from even existing in the future.

Knives themselves are not dangerous. They are vital tools. It is hard to imagine how we would manage to feed ourselves without kitchen knives for instance. It is estimated that there are 400 million kitchen knives alone in ownership in the UK (Source: CATRA) so restricting their sale online is not going to limit a person's access to knives be they under or over 18. These figures do not include pocket knives, Stanley-type knives, craft knives and all the other knives needed to perform everyday tasks. That's the biggest downfall to para 15 of the proposal and why it would not have any impact on knife crime.