



House of Commons
Home Affairs Committee

Serious youth violence

Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–19

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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Home Affairs Committee

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Summary

This Home Affairs Committee report considers the rise in serious youth violence in recent years, including the key issues driving these trends, and whether the Government's response matches the scale of the problem.

Police-recorded homicides have increased by over a third in the last five years, and knife offences have risen by over 70%. The number of under-18s admitted to hospital with knife injuries also rose by a third between 2013–14 and 2017–18. A growing number of young males, in particular, are being murdered on our streets.

Our inquiry has found that recent rises in serious youth violence are a social emergency, which must be addressed through much more concerted Government action at a national and local level. We have concluded that the Government's Serious Violence Strategy is a completely inadequate response to this wave of violence blighting our communities. It contains no targets or milestones, few new actions, and no clear mechanisms for driving forward activity at a national and regional level.

We welcome the Government's commitment to a public health approach and the broad analysis that lies behind its Serious Violence Strategy. We agree that action is needed on a wide range of causes of violence, from tackling deprivation and vulnerability to increasing policing and action on serious organised crime. Nevertheless, the Government cannot just refer to any non-police intervention as the 'public health' approach. This rhetoric does not match the reality of the actual interventions taking place in communities.

We have found that there is a serious mismatch between the Government's diagnosis of the problem and its proposed solutions. We believe that its strategy lacks leadership and focus, and that the Government needs to ensure that there is more action to address 'county lines' and changing drug markets, more long term support for neighbourhood policing, and much more early intervention and prevention work to prevent young lives from being lost.

We recommend that:

- The Government must make it a central priority to keep young people safe, and prevent more families from going through this terrible trauma. The new Prime Minister should take personal responsibility for reducing serious youth violence and driving activity in this area, tasking Cabinet Ministers with taking ownership for key actions.
- By the end of September, the Government should provide us with a list of named accountable leaders in every region or county of England and Wales, identifiable locally as the individual reporting directly to 10 Downing Street, and responsible for convening those who need to work together to drive down serious youth violence.

- The Ministerial Taskforce and the Serious Violence Taskforce should be monitoring progress across a common dataset, collected consistently across the country; this should be driving and informing local action to tackle serious youth violence.

We found that ‘county lines’ and the changing drug market is contributing to the rise in serious violence, but that not enough is being done to prevent children from being exploited, communities being blighted and young lives being destroyed. Children have been let down by safeguarding systems that are far too narrowly focused on risks inside the family home, as well as an ongoing failure of agencies to work effectively together to build a package of support around young people.

We call on the Government to prioritise safeguarding in the upcoming spending review, with ringfenced resources for safeguarding partners to ensure that they operate much more effectively. Safeguarding bodies should be given a duty to produce local plans, with clear targets and milestones, to reduce the number of children at risk locally of county lines exploitation, reporting back to the Home Office on a regular basis.

We welcome the additional funding this year for policing to tackle serious violence, as well as the creation of violence reduction units to coordinate the police response with other partners, but we are very concerned by the short term nature of the funding that has been announced. We reiterate our previous calls for the Government to make available substantial additional resources for policing, so that forces can recruit additional officers and staff, both to respond to serious organised crime and to increase community prevention activity, neighbourhood policing and schools officers.

We also found that more needs to be done to increase the confidence of young people in the police—particularly young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, who are experiencing disproportionate levels of stop and search at a time when there has been a marked reduction in community policing. We will explore this subject in further detail when we report on our inquiry to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Macpherson report, later this year. We recommend investing in neighbourhood policing and ensuring that, by the beginning of April 2020, all schools in areas with an above-average risk of serious youth violence have a dedicated school police officer.

Most of all, we are concerned that more action is needed urgently on prevention and early intervention. We have found very strong evidence linking deprivation and vulnerability with knife crime and serious youth violence. The current epidemic of youth violence has been exacerbated by a perfect storm emerging from cuts to youth services, heavily reduced police budgets, a growing number of children being excluded from school and taken into care, and a failure of statutory agencies to keep young people safe from exploitation and violence. We welcome the Government’s funding for youth intervention projects, but these investments are far too fragmented and small-scale.

The Government needs to introduce a fully-funded, statutory minimum of provision for youth outreach workers and community youth projects in all areas, co-designed with local young people. This would be a national Youth Service Guarantee, with a substantial increase in services and ringfenced funding from central Government, to ensure that young people have safe places to go and support to prevent them from becoming caught

up in violence. And we call for urgent action to tackle school exclusions and part-time timetables in pupil referral units, as well as stronger safeguarding mechanisms to reach those who are most vulnerable. With serious action now, young lives can be saved.

1 The scale of the problem and its impact

Introduction

1. We began taking oral evidence on serious youth violence in October 2018, with the intention of giving victims' families the opportunity to make their voices heard. In our first session, we heard from four parents who have lost their sons to serious violence. We are incredibly grateful to Yvonne, Darren, Philippa and Caroline for speaking out about their terrible loss.

2. Yvonne Lawson, whose son Godwin was murdered in London in 2010, told us: "As a mum, when you have a child, the child then becomes your world. When they are taken away from you in this senseless manner, your whole world just rips apart".¹ Yvonne gave us a devastating account of her son's death, which appears in the box below. Since that first evidence session, hundreds more families have lost someone to serious violence.

3. Police-recorded knife crime increased by 71% between 2014 and 2018,² and the number of murder victims aged 16 to 24 rose by 45% in the year to March 2018.³ After several years of these worrying trends, the Government launched its Serious Violence Strategy on 9 April 2018. We had previously questioned Ministers and policing leaders about their response to rising knife crime, but we recognised that the gravity of the situation called for more focused and sustained scrutiny. In June 2018, we launched an explicit inquiry and invited written evidence on a number of subjects, including what progress had been made in combatting serious violent crime in recent years; whether the Serious Violence Strategy was likely to be effective in reducing serious violence; and whether there were sufficient resources in place to make that strategy successful.

4. During the course of our inquiry, we received nearly 60 pieces of written evidence, held seven oral evidence sessions, and met psychologists and community consultants from a youth project in Haringey, North London. We have undertaken a parallel inquiry to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Macpherson report on the murder of Stephen Lawrence, which has taken evidence from Black, Asian and minority ethnic young people about their relationship with the police—we refer to some of their comments in Chapter 5 of this report. Valuable input was also received from two Specialist Advisers, Sir Peter Fahy and Dr Nicola Rollock. We are hugely grateful to all those who contributed to these important inquiries.

5. As we will outline below, youth violence appears to be growing at a particularly concerning rate—as does knife crime—and these two trends inevitably became the focus of a lot of the evidence we received. As a result, our focus throughout this inquiry has primarily been on the Government's response to serious youth violence, in the context of the 2018 Serious Violence Strategy.

1 [Q3](#)

2 ONS, [Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2018](#), 25 April 2019

3 ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2018](#), 7 February 2019

The impact on victims' families

6. Statistics are essential for understanding the scale of the problem we face, but they risk masking the human impact of serious violence. In our first evidence session, we heard from Yvonne Lawson, whose 17-year-old son Godwin was murdered in London in 2010, in a brutal knife attack; Darren Laville, whose son Kenichi Phillips was shot dead in Birmingham in 2016, at the age of 18; Philippa Addai, whose son Marcel was murdered in 2015 at the age of 17; and Caroline Shearer, whose 17-year-old son Jay was stabbed to death in 2012.

7. Yvonne Lawson, whose heart-breaking story is outlined below, is now CEO of the Godwin Lawson Foundation. The Foundation delivers preventative interventions to teenagers, including an annual leadership programme to develop the life skills of young people in North London.⁴ She described some of their achievements to us during the evidence session, including over 3,000 workshops delivered to young people on building resilience and other soft skills.⁵

Yvonne Lawson's story

"I am Yvonne Lawson and my son's name was Godwin Lawson, and he is still Godwin to me. Godwin, at the age of 16, got a scholarship to play football at Oxford United because he was really talented at sports. That meant that Godwin had to leave home and move to Oxford, which was a challenge because Godwin was born and brought up in Stamford Hill. He had never moved away from London before. That was an excitable moment for him. It was a challenge for the family. Nevertheless, he decided to move to Oxford.

"In Oxford he settled and he was really enjoying football. He had a really beautiful future ahead of him. Godwin, however, would come to London every fortnight to see family and friends.

"[...] On that particular night, he went to see friends, and he had known these boys from nursery. I knew the family as well. As they were walking down the street, one brother apparently had a problem with a few of the local boys. When they saw Godwin's group, four boys got out of the car and started chasing his group. One of them had a knife. He ran past Godwin and went to the brothers. He started to stab the brothers randomly. One I think received four stab wounds. I think the other one received about six. Godwin was able to run away from the scene, but for some reason he decided to come back and stop the fight. As he was trying to stop the fight, the boy who had a knife told Godwin, 'This is nothing to do with you'. As he was saying that, trying to push Godwin out of the way, the knife just went to Godwin's heart and within two minutes Godwin collapsed and died on the street.

(continued overleaf)

4 [Charity Commission website, Godwin Lawson Foundation, accessed 24 June 2019](#)

5 [Q10](#)

“I remember being at home. There was a knock on the door. Typically, I just thought it was Godwin knocking on the door. There were three police officers who came to tell us that Godwin lost his life. I remember hearing that word that Godwin died. I was in denial, ‘I don’t think it’s Godwin’, not that I was wishing that it would be somebody else. I just kept ringing Godwin’s number. I just could not believe that the police officers were saying that Godwin has taken his last breath on the street alone. After going through mixed emotions of denial, angry, furious, painful, all emotions are running through you, laying on the floor and rolling from one end to the other, we had to go and view Godwin’s body. I was not able to do that. I just remember going and there was this tent. I looked at the tent and I could not go in to see Godwin. Godwin’s dad came and said, ‘It is actually Godwin’. He nodded his head and he said, ‘It’s actually Godwin in that tent.’”

8. Philippa Addai told us that her son was stabbed 14 times by a gang of seven. When she went to visit the site where he died, “there was still blood on the floor”.⁶ Caroline Shearer told us about the devastating ripple effect of Jay’s death on the rest of her family:

[...] my dad died of a heart attack because of it. We were foster parents for teenage boys and teenage girls, and the foster child that had been brought up with Jay later committed suicide to be with Jay. After that, the young girl that was there when Jay was murdered—our foster child at the time [...]—was found murdered four months ago in Basildon.

[...] Jay was stabbed a few times. He was stabbed in the alleyway and then they ran after him and hit him over the head with a bottle and then they stabbed him again through the heart just for good measure. [...] That is when the new life started and the old me, I don’t know who she was. I can’t remember her.⁷

Caroline now runs a charity called Only Cowards Carry Weapons, which she founded in response to Jay’s death. It delivers weapons awareness sessions in schools and pushes for tougher action in response to knife crime.⁸

9. Darren Laville is founder and CEO of Epiphany People, which supports families with the challenges of bringing up children in urban communities.⁹ He told us that his son’s death had broken his family “completely”:

My son, Kenichi Phillips, was shot dead on 17 March 2016. This was a day where he had quite a positive day. He went out and he went for an interview for an apprenticeship. We later found out that he got the job as a personal trainer, and he was at a point where he was really at a high point in his life. He was looking forward to the birth of my grandson, which he never got to see. This just rocked and broke us. My oldest son was present there. He was there at the time. It just broke us, just broke us. Yes, it just broke us completely.

6 [Q1](#)

7 [Q4](#)

8 www.onlycowardscarry.org

9 theepiphanypeople.org.uk

10. He also spoke of the traumatic events stemming from his son's death, including five criminal trials:

We had to wait four days to see him because he was property of the state, evidence. Even then, we could not touch him because he was behind a glass screen. It was then three months before we could bury him. It was just unbelievable. Before we could really start to see those being held accountable—I struggle to call it justice—in a legal setting, it took five trials. [...] In that time, there were two “Crimewatch” appeals for an offender. [...] It was pretty much a case that rocked the West Midlands. Everybody knew. It was then that I realised also how popular he was and how many people knew him [...].¹⁰

11. Since Philippa, Darren, Yvonne and Caroline gave evidence to us about their sons' deaths and legacies, many more young people have had their lives cut short in tragic circumstances. We cannot hope to tell all their stories on these pages, but we can at least pay tribute to the witnesses who sat before us and laid bare their pain and loss. We cannot express strongly enough our sympathy for them, and we thank them for their determination and bravery. Recent rises in serious youth violence are a social emergency, which must be addressed through much more concerted Government action at a national and local level. The Government must make it a central priority to keep young people safe, and prevent more families from going through this terrible trauma.

Crime figures

12. Every death from violence is one tragedy too many. Nevertheless, figures and statistics can tell us a lot about what is happening on our streets: what forms of violence are increasing, trends in victim characteristics, such as age and gender, and where in the country these crimes are happening.

13. Police-recorded homicides have increased by 37% since 2014, following downward trends during the previous decade. In the year to December 2018, the police recorded 732 homicides: 6% more than the year before, and a 12% rise when the victims of the London and Manchester terror attacks are excluded from the previous year's figures.¹¹ Compared with the year to December 2017, there were 77 additional victims. Homicides involving knives accounted for around four in ten of all murders.¹² After a significant fall in knife crime homicides between 2008 and 2013, they increased by 31% (from 195 to 285) between the year to March 2013 and the year to March 2018.¹³

14. The number of crimes involving knives or sharp instruments has also increased sharply in recent years. Police-recorded knife offences in the year to December 2018 were at their highest since 2011, the earliest comparable dataset, at 44,443 offences (or 40,829 offences excluding Greater Manchester Police (GMP), which has changed its methodology). Without GMP figures, there was a volume rise of 2,287 offences (a 6% rise in the last year), which represents a 71% increase since 2014.¹⁴

10 Q5

11 ONS, [Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2018](#), 25 April 2019

12 ONS, [Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2018](#), 25 April 2019

13 ONS, [Appendix tables: homicide in England and Wales](#), 7 February 2019

14 ONS, [Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2018](#), 25 April 2019

15. Police-recorded crime figures are not always the most reliable measure of offending and victimisation. For more common offences, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is regarded as a more reliable measure of offending and victimisation, because it is a representative household survey of victimisation; in contrast, police-recorded crime figures depend on recording methods, which have changed over time, and not all offences are reported to or recorded by the police. The CSEW suggests that violence overall has shown little change in recent years, after decreasing by 67% between 1995 and 2015. However, the CSEW is not very effective at measuring high-harm offences such as stabbings, because these crimes are much more unusual than robbery or fraud, for example, so not many people will report them during a household survey. CSEW figures on violence encompass minor assaults such as pushing and shoving, harassment and psychological abuse (including offences that do not cause physical harm), as well as attempted offences, all of which are much more common than knife crime and homicide. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) confirmed in recent bulletins that the CSEW is unable to provide reliable trends for knife crime, and police-recorded figures are a better measure.¹⁵

16. NHS data also supports the picture painted by the CSEW and police-recorded crime figures: that violence overall is falling, but levels of serious violence have increased substantially in recent years, following long-term downward trends. A recent analysis by Cardiff University found that the number of hospital admissions related to violent attacks fell by 1.7% in 2018, compared with the previous year.¹⁶ The data on which it was based, the National Violence Surveillance Network survey, has recorded a downward trend in overall violent crime since it was launched in 2002, with some levelling off in recent years.¹⁷ In contrast, admissions for assault by a sharp object rose by 15% between April 2017 and March 2018, and by 36% between 2013–14 and 2017–18.¹⁸

17. The last few years have seen a drastic increase in murder rates, along with enormous rises in police-recorded knife crime. Although violence overall has decreased over the long-term and shown little change in the last few years, the most serious forms of violent crime have spiked in recent years. This is confirmed by NHS data, which shows that more people are being admitted to hospital with knife wounds every year.

Where is serious violence happening?

18. Knife crime is disproportionately concentrated in metropolitan areas, and particularly in London. In the year to December 2018, a third of all knife crime happened in the capital. The medium-term increase in violence in London has also been striking: the Metropolitan Police recorded 52% more knife crime offences in the year to March 2019 than in the year to March 2016 (the earliest available date on [the weapon-enabled crime dashboard](#) from the London Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, or MOPAC).¹⁹ In the same period, gun discharges in the capital increased by 63%, which contrasts with downward trends in firearms offences across England and Wales. Recent research by the

15 ONS, [Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2018](#), 25 April 2019

16 Sivarajasingam, V, Page, N, Green, G, Moore, S, & Sheperd, J; [Violence in England and Wales in 2018: An Accident and Emergency Perspective](#), April 2019

17 Sivarajasingam, V, Page, N, Green, G, Moore, S, & Sheperd, J; [Violence in England and Wales in 2018: An Accident and Emergency Perspective](#), April 2019

18 NHS Digital, [Hospital admissions for assault by sharp object](#), 4 March 2019

19 MOPAC website, [Weapon-enabled Crime Dashboard](#), accessed 5 June 2019

Centre for Social Justice found that over one in ten Londoners said they or a friend knew someone who had been killed in London with a knife or gun in the last 12 months. That proportion increased to over one in five over the last two years, and almost one in three at any time in the past.²⁰

19. The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Cressida Dick, has suggested that these trends might be abating: giving evidence in March, she told us that there had been a 15% reduction in knife injury victims under the age of 25 in the previous year, which she attributed to “the huge efforts we have been making recently”.²¹ In July, she told us that the same figure was down by 20%,²² and in the year to December 2018, the Metropolitan Police experienced a much lower increase in knife crime than in previous years—just 1%, compared with a 31% rise in the year to December 2017.²³ More recent figures from MOPAC are mixed: they show a very small fall in knife offences in the last year (1%), but against the backdrop of a 13% increase between the year to June 2017 and the year to June 2019, and a 52% rise since 2016.²⁴

20. Although the capital has been most heavily affected, knife crime has increased across the country, and rising numbers of lives have been lost in other cities and towns. The majority of police forces in England and Wales (31 of the 43) recorded a rise in knife crime offences in the year ending December 2018. After London, the highest rates were in Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and the West Midlands.²⁵ Merseyside had the largest rise in knife or sharp instrument offences over the last year, at 35%,²⁶ and significant increases have also occurred in the home counties, which may be linked to the growth in ‘county lines’ drug distribution networks (which we explore further in Chapter 4). A recent analysis by *The Guardian* found that knife crime rose by an average of 45% in the counties surrounding London over the previous eight years, compared with an 11% increase in London. In Kent, stabbings increased by 152% during that period.²⁷

21. Crime figures show clearly that it is not just London and other major cities that are being blighted by recent increases in serious violence. There is a clear need for a concerted action across the length and breadth of the country, including the many communities now affected by county lines drugs violence, which we explore further in Chapter 4.

The growth in youth violence and homicide

22. The most alarming recent trend in violent crime has been the growing number of child victims of homicide. Figures obtained by Channel 4’s Dispatches in early March revealed there had been a 93% rise in hospital admissions for knife attacks on under-16s since 2012,²⁸ and NHS data shows a 36% increase in knife admissions for under-18s between 2013–14 and 2017–18.²⁹ The latest statistics on homicide victims, covering the

20 [The Centre for Social Justice, It can be stopped: A proven blueprint to stop violence and tackle gang and related offending in London and beyond, August 2018,](#)

21 [Q274](#)

22 Oral evidence: The Macpherson Report: Twenty Years On, HC 1829, [10 July 2019](#), Q396

23 Home Office Official Statistics, [Knife crime open data year ending March 2009 onwards](#)

24 MOPAC website, [Weapon-enabled Crime Dashboard](#), accessed 17 July 2019

25 ONS, [Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2018](#), 25 April 2019

26 ONS, [Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2018](#), 25 April 2019

27 *The Guardian*, [Knife crime rising more steeply outside London, police figures show](#), 10 March 2019

28 *The Guardian*, [No link between knife crime and police cuts, says Theresa May](#), 4 March 2019

29 NHS Digital, [Hospital admissions for assault by sharp object](#), 4 March 2019

year ending March 2018, show that the most common age-group was 16 to 24 year olds, closely followed by 25 to 34 year olds. The number of victims aged 16 to 24 increased by nearly a half in the year to March 2018, (45%), and the number of victims aged 25 to 34 increased by over a fifth (23%).³⁰

23. In London, almost half of all people killed with a gun or knife are 15–24 years old, despite only accounting for 12% of the capital’s population. People in that age group are over six times more likely to be murdered with a knife than the rest of the capital’s population.³¹ We took evidence in October 2018 from NHS clinicians about the impact of serious violence on the health service, and the types of injuries being seen. Duncan Bew, a leading London trauma surgeon, said that South East of England’s trauma network had seen “an increase of all ages coming in as victims of violence”, but particularly those between the ages of 12 and 18.³² Injuries are more frequent around school closure times, “with peaks in attendance [in hospital] between 4.00 pm and 6.00 pm and then later in the evening, after school time”.³³ Last year, Martin Griffiths, a trauma surgeon at Barts Health NHS Trust in London, told BBC Radio 4: “We routinely have children under our care—13, 14, 15 year olds are daily occurrences. [...] Whereas a young boy being stabbed five or six years ago was a horror story, now it’s normal”.³⁴

24. Dave Thompson, Chief Constable of West Midlands Police, outlined to us the nature of serious violence in his force area, confirming the younger age profile. He told us that rising violent crime locally has “three elements”: stabbings of younger people on the “periphery of urban street gangs, involved in street-level drug-dealing or on the edges of county lines”; violence connected to robberies, including vehicles, which is also connected to county lines and money laundering; and a “proliferation of weapon carrying”, which means that the “fist-fight becomes a knife-fight”.³⁵ He also suggested that murder figures might have been even higher in the past, in the context of current levels of violence, because trauma care has improved significantly.³⁶

25. Increases in youth violence seem to have been driven predominantly by a rising number of young males killing other young males—particularly with knives. The latest homicide statistical bulletin shows that the number of male victims has increased at a much faster rate than females: 54% since the year ending March 2015, versus 23% for female victims. Males account for 69% of victims overall.³⁷ There are a number of different trends affecting male and female homicide figures; for example:

- Females are much more likely than men to be killed by their partner or ex-partner: this form of homicide accounted for a third of all females killed in the year to March 2018, and 59% of homicides in which the victim knew the perpetrator.
- Women are much more likely to be killed in or around the home, with 77% of homicides in the year to March 2018 occurring “in or around a house or

30 ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2018](#), 7 February 2019

31 Centre for Social Justice, [It can be stopped: A proven blueprint to stop violence and tackle gang and related offending in London and beyond](#), August 2018

32 [Q35](#)

33 [Q37](#)

34 *Today Programme*, BBC Radio 4, [5 April 2018](#)

35 [Q277](#)

36 [Q309](#)

37 ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2018](#), 7 February 2019

dwelling or residential home”, compared with 40% of male homicides. Around a third of male homicides took place in a street, path or alleyway (161 offences), compared with only 7% of female homicides (16 offences).

- Fewer women were killed by their partner or ex-partner in the year to March 2018 than in previous year, but there were increasing numbers of women for whose homicides there was no suspect (from 11 in 2013–14 to 50 in 2017–18) or who were killed by a stranger (from 11 in 2013–14 to 33 in 2017–18).
- Linked to those trends, men are more likely than women to be killed by a friend or acquaintance: 25% (115 men) in the last recorded year, compared to 13 women, and over one in three male victims were killed by a stranger, compared with 17% of female victims of homicide. A similar proportion of male homicides had no suspect identified (27%).
- The number of men killed by a knife or sharp instrument increased by 63% between 2013–14 and 2017–18 (the number of women killed in with a knife decreased slightly during that period). The number of males aged 16–34 killed with a knife increased by 89% during the same four year period, compared with a 3% decrease for women in that age group.³⁸

26. We continue to apply vital scrutiny to policy developments relating to violence against women and girls, domestic abuse and domestic homicide: our latest report on this important issue was published in October.³⁹ We are also concerned about the rise in the number of women killed by a stranger, or for whose murder there is no suspect. Based on the trends outlined above and the evidence we received, however, this report focuses predominantly on knife crime and other forms of serious violence among young people, and particularly young males.

27. Black, Asian and minority ethnic people are over-represented among victims and suspects of serious violence. Between 2013–14 and 2017–18, there was a 43% increase in hospital admissions for knife crime among ethnic minority groups, compared with a 17% increase for White victims, and 69% of under-25 knife crime homicide victims in London are people of Black African-Caribbean ethnicity.⁴⁰ We will explore this complex relationship in further detail in Chapter 6 of this report.

38 ONS, [Appendix tables: homicide in England and Wales](#), 7 February 2019

39 House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, [Domestic Abuse \(HC 1015\)](#), 22 October 2018

40 MOPAC, [Review of the Metropolitan Police Service Gangs Matrix](#), December '18

2 The Government's Serious Violence Strategy

Overview

28. The Government published its Serious Violence Strategy on 9 April last year. In the Foreword to the strategy, the then Home Secretary Amber Rudd MP said that the Government was “determined to do all it can to break the deadly cycle of violence that devastates the lives of individuals, families and communities”. She described it as “a very significant programme of work involving a range of Government Departments and partners”, supporting “a new balance between prevention and effective law enforcement”, underlining “the importance of steering young people away from crime in the first place, whilst ensuring that the police have the tools and support they need to tackle violent crime”.⁴¹

29. Large sections of the strategy are devoted to the Government's analysis of the root causes of the rise in serious violence. This appears to be based largely on readily-available data, rather than any clear use of Home Offices resources to gather or analyse new data. The strategy states that “most academics agree that big shifts in crime trends tend to be driven by factors outside of the police's control—like drug trends and markets, changes in housing and vehicle security, and so on”. It rejects claims that rises in violence are linked to a reduction in the use of stop and search, and points to the evidence on the effectiveness of ‘hot-spots policing’,⁴² and other targeted interventions. The analysis identifies a number of factors likely to be linked to rises in violence. These include:

- Drugs and drugs profit: the proportion of homicides involving known illicit drug dealers or users has increased, crack cocaine purity has increased, and violence is linked to the county lines methodology;
- An increase in the number of individuals who are “most vulnerable”: there have been rises in the number of children in care, children excluded from school and homeless people; and
- Social media: there is evidence that “rival gangs are using social media to promote gang culture, taunt each other and incite violence”, and “Some gang members have thousands of followers”.⁴³

30. The strategy identifies a number of risk factors for involvement in serious violence, such as male gender, younger age, adverse childhood experiences, and ethnic background. It also draws on David Lammy's review of Black, Asian and minority ethnic representation in the criminal justice system: it refers to a “significant amount of distrust between children and young people from BAME communities and the criminal justice system”, adding: “Research shows that this lack of trust among children and young people stems

41 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

42 The College of Policing [describes](#) hot spots policing as “a strategy that involves the targeting of resources and activities to those places where crime is most concentrated. The strategy is based on the premise that crime and disorder is not evenly spread within neighbourhoods but clustered in small locations. [...] Activities could include increased police patrols and law enforcement or problem solving.”

43 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

from experiences of being stereotyped and harassed”. We explore the interaction between ethnicity and serious violence in Chapter 6 of this report, and touch on disproportionality in stop and search in Chapter 5.

31. The strategy’s launch was overshadowed by a Home Office paper leaked to the press in advance, which suggested a link between police funding cuts and rising violence. According to *The Guardian*, the leak stated that there is “good evidence that increasing resources dedicated to targeted hot-spots and prolific offenders can be effective, but there are several competing demands for any additional resource”. It noted that “resources dedicated to serious violence have come under pressure and charge rates have dropped”, which “may have encouraged offenders”, and concluded that diminishing police resources were “unlikely to be the factor that triggered the shift in serious violence, but may be an underlying driver that has allowed the rise to continue”.⁴⁴ The final version of the strategy acknowledges that “certainty of punishment is likely to have a greater impact than its severity”, and “The recent downward trend in arrests and charges for some crimes lessens the certainty of punishment”.⁴⁵

Actions and commitments

32. The Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability, Victoria Atkins MP, told us in May that the strategy includes “61 very detailed commitments” for the Government and other public agencies, 45 of which had been completed by that point. This may partly be explained by the fact that a number of the strategy’s “key actions and commitments” were existing Government policies, such as the Troubled Families programme, which has been seeking to ‘turn around’ families with multiple problems since 2012, and the Government’s continued support for co-ordinated weeks of police action against knife crime under Operation Sceptre, which was launched by the Metropolitan Police in July 2015. The strategy does not set out any clear targets or milestones, and the commitments are frequently unaccompanied by any details about how they will be fulfilled.

33. Some of the strategy’s more notable commitments include:

- A new £11m Early Intervention Youth Fund, since increased to £22m,⁴⁶ to enable work with Police and Crime Commissioners and Community Safety Partnerships (or equivalent) to “provide joined up support to youth groups and communities to support early intervention and prevention with young people”;
- £13m over the next four years through the Trusted Relationships Fund, to pilot approaches to providing support for at-risk young people, to build positive and trusted relationships with adults;
- £7m to develop a “trauma led policing model” across four Welsh police forces, focused on enabling the police better to understand and address the impact of adverse childhood experiences on perpetrators and victims of serious violence;
- A refocusing of the Inter-Ministerial Group on Gangs, which became an Inter-Ministerial Group on the Serious Violence Strategy, in order to “oversee and drive delivery of the strategy”; and

44 The Guardian, [Police cuts ‘likely contributed’ to rise in violent crime, leaked report reveals](#), 9 April 2018

45 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

46 Home Office news story, [Home Secretary launches and doubles the early intervention youth fund](#), 30 July 2018

- The establishment of a new, cross-sector Serious Violence Taskforce, to oversee delivery of the strategy’s programme of work and “provide a route for challenge and support on local progress in tackling serious violence”.⁴⁷

Subsequent announcements

34. The Government has announced a number of additional actions relating to serious violence since the strategy was launched. These include:

- A new £200 million “Youth Endowment Fund”, which is being delivered over ten years, and will “build the evidence for early intervention” by targeting 10–14 year olds who are most at risk of youth violence;
- A proposed new legal duty on relevant organisations and agencies to collaborate to prevent and reduce serious violence, “where possible through existing partnership structures” (we cover this in further detail in Chapter 4);
- A new independent review of drug misuse, led by Dame Carol Black, examining drug harms and “the best ways to prevent drug-taking”;⁴⁸
- A new social media hub, staffed by 17 police officers who are tasked with “disrupting and removing overt and covert gang-related online content”;⁴⁹
- A £9.8 million “Supporting Families Against Youth Crime Fund”, run by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, which will “allow keyworkers, community groups, teachers and other professionals working with children and young people to intervene earlier to help them develop the personal resilience to withstand peer pressure and make their own positive life choices”;⁵⁰
- A new youth advocates programme, which will see “respected members of communities, such as sport coaches and youth workers, receive specialist training in order to have safe conversations with young people and provide them positive alternatives to carrying a knife”;
- An additional £100m for police forces (£80m of which is new Treasury funding), announced in the 2019 Spring Statement, a third of which is being spent on “violence reduction units” in 18 local areas;⁵¹
- The Offensive Weapons Act 2019, which prohibits the possession of corrosive substances (acid) in a public place and the sale of those products to under-18s; criminalises the possession of certain offensive weapons and certain firearms; and strengthens arrangements for the online sale of bladed articles, bladed products and offensive weapons;⁵² and

47 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

48 [Home Office news story, Professor Dame Carol Black announced as independent reviewer of drugs, 8 February 2019](#)

49 [Home Office news story, Home Secretary to take action against violent content online, 24 April 2019](#)

50 [Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government press release, £5 million fund to deter young people from gang and knife crime, 20 October 2018](#)

51 [Home Office news story, Home Office allocates £35 million to police forces for violence reduction units, 18 June 2019](#)

52 [Offensive Weapons Act 2019](#)

- Via that Act, the introduction of Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs), which can be handed down by the courts in response to an application by the police, or upon conviction for a relevant violent or knife-related offence, and which could place prohibitions and requirements on individuals as young as 12—breaches of which are punishable by up to two years’ imprisonment.⁵³

Is the Serious Violence Strategy fit for purpose?

35. A key focus of our inquiry has been the extent to which the Serious Violence Strategy is coherent, comprehensive and ambitious enough to match the scale of the problem outlined in Chapter 1, and whether there are sufficient resources in place to underpin it. We assess some of the individual measures and announcements included in the Government’s strategy in subsequent chapters. We consider the issue of funding in detail in Chapters 5 and 6 of this report, but we turn now to the evidence we have received on the quality and content of the strategy and subsequent announcements, before considering broader Government leadership issues in Chapter 3.

36. Policing leaders gave us measured assessments of the strategy: the then Chair of the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC), Chief Constable Sara Thornton, said that “it is a really good strategy in terms of an understanding of the drivers of serious violence”, but that it “needs driving strongly and it also needs more co-ordinated and concerted resources behind it”.⁵⁴ Similarly, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Cressida Dick, said that “the strategy from my point of view is fine”, but went on to criticise the lack of Government action on the ground.⁵⁵ Chief Constable Dave Thompson suggested that not enough had changed since previous Government programmes were delivered:

I have been around policing a long while. I saw the TGAP [Tacking Gangs Action] programme; I was involved in the Ending Gang and Youth Violence programme; and here we are again. What happens is we do not drive forward a sustained, consistent approach, or recognise that if we take our foot off this problem—that problem is the resilience of young people—we get back here really quickly, with a vengeance.⁵⁶

37. In the same vein, the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, David Jamieson, said in written evidence that the Ending Gang and Youth Violence (EGYV) report had very similar themes to the Serious Violence Strategy, and claimed to be the first truly cross-Government approach to the issue. He argued that both EGYV and the Serious Violence Strategy suffer from being “short term”, and that both “lack sustainability”.⁵⁷ Our predecessor Committee’s 2015 report on gangs and youth crime noted the lack of common datasets across the country on gang-related measures, and called for the Government to review the effectiveness of the EGYV programme.⁵⁸

38. Sir Denis O’Connor, the former Chief Inspector of Constabulary, said the strategy was “much more concerned with its narrative and less [with] action”, adding that the analysis is “really inadequate”, and that the “aim is not absolutely clear beyond to make

53 [Part 2](#) of the Offensive Weapons Act 2019

54 [Q149](#)

55 [Q287](#)

56 [Q288](#)

57 Police and Crime Commissioner West Midlands ([SVC0020](#))

58 House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, Gangs and youth crime ([HC199](#)), 27 February 2015

things better”. He argued that the lack of targets was also a problem: “If you really want to engage people and professionals and you want to drive some change, you have to have some aims so you know whether you are on track or not”.⁵⁹ Dame Louise Casey, the former head of the Troubled Families programme, said that the strategy is “woefully inadequate”, and “not a match for what we are dealing with”, adding:

It is not a coherent, overall Government strategy that essentially pushes forward into the communities, with an implementation behind it that is felt. That is the key problem for me.⁶⁰

39. Dame Louise also called for targets to drive action:

[...] When you are sat in the centre trying to work out what to do, my advice to people is always to set targets. [...] I think that this kind of laissez-faire, hands-off approach, in which people make up their own minds what they do, just has to stop, because the problem is too great.⁶¹

When the Minister gave evidence to us May, she told us that “We debate targets at great length at the Home Office”, and said that the Department does not have a target for homicide, but it looks at “other measures to determine the success or the movement that our policies are making”.⁶² When pressed, however, she was unable to name a single measure or target used by the Government to determine the success of its strategy, pointing only to data used by individual police forces, such as the Met.

40. The Serious Violence Strategy contains a relatively coherent analysis of the scale of the problem and the potential causes. It identifies many of the factors likely to be driving the recent wave in serious violence, which align with our own findings, from county lines through to vulnerability. We welcome its assessment of the broad range of causes of serious violence, as well as its commitment to a public health approach. As the Government’s primary response to the wave of violence blighting our communities, however, it is completely inadequate. It contains no targets or milestones, few new actions, and no clear mechanisms for driving forward activity at a national and regional level. Nor does it suggest a clear Government focus on keeping young people safe from rising levels of violence.

41. Although the strategy refers to risk factors for involvement in violence, its analysis is based largely on readily-available evidence. It is not underpinned by any attempt to collect data or gain a clear understanding of the number of people—particularly young people—at risk of serious violence. We fail to see how the Government can get a grip on this problem or pursue a public health approach without a clear understanding of the size and location of the populations most at risk, so that it can target resources effectively. Furthermore, it cannot measure progress effectively without clear milestones, along with timescales for achieving them.

42. The strategy states that serious violence comes at “a huge cost to individuals, families and communities through loss of life, and the trauma caused through both the physical and psychological injuries suffered”. We agree; but there is a serious mismatch

59 [Q221](#)

60 [Q429](#)

61 [Q425](#)

62 [Q457](#)

between the Government's diagnosis of the problem and its proposed solutions. This is symptomatic of wider dysfunctions within the Government's response to this issue, and its approach to crime and disorder more broadly, which we explore in further detail in the next chapter.

3 Government leadership on Serious Violence

Introduction

43. During the first weekend of March 2019, 17-year-old Jodie Chesney was murdered in a knife attack in a park in East London; a day later, Yousef Ghaleb Makki, also 17, was stabbed to death in a village near Altrincham, Greater Manchester. The murders triggered a wave of media coverage and criticism of the Government’s approach to serious violence. The former Home Office Minister Vernon Coaker MP, now a Labour backbencher, said that the Cabinet’s emergency committee, COBRA, should meet to respond to the “national crisis”.⁶³ The NPCC Chair at the time, Sara Thornton, told the press: “When you have an emergency you get all the key people around the table to solve the problem, setting up COBRA with a senior minister holding people to account”, because “it is not just about policing, it’s about all the other agencies and organisation. It’s an emergency and it needs some emergency funding.”⁶⁴ She re-emphasised this message when she gave evidence to us in March:

Early intervention is not really a matter for the Home Office. A lot of the community work similarly is not a matter for the Home Office. We think there needs to be something that is concentrating the minds. [...] getting the most senior people around the table and owning the problem and asking what can we do jointly to solve the problem.

[...] You will get me into a lot of trouble for saying this. I think that where we have so many young people dying in our streets, we need a much more concerted response from Government.⁶⁵

44. The Prime Minister responded by announcing that she would hold a summit in 10 Downing Street “in the coming days”, in order to “bring together Ministers, community leaders, agencies and others” and “explore what more we can do as a whole society to tackle this problem”.⁶⁶ The summit took place during the first week of April. The Home Secretary also chaired a meeting with chief constables from the forces with the highest levels of serious violence, and announced that he wanted knife crime to be treated “like a disease”.⁶⁷ The following week, the Chancellor announced an additional £100m for police forces in his Spring Statement, “ring-fenced to pay for additional overtime targeted specifically on knife crime, and for new violent crime reduction units, to deliver a wider cross-agency response to this epidemic”.⁶⁸ This chapter considers the quality of Government leadership on this issue, including the effectiveness of the Serious Violence Taskforce and the additional actions emerging from the Prime Minister’s knife crime summit.

63 *BBC News*, Knife crime: [Ex-minister wants it treated with urgency of terrorism](#), 5 March 2019

64 *The Guardian*, [Police chief says rise in knife crime in England is national emergency](#), 6 March 2019

65 [Q153, Q171](#)

66 HC Oral Questions to the Prime Minister, Vol 655 [Col 950](#), 6 March 2019

67 *BBC News*, Knife crime: [Treat it ‘like a disease’, says Sajid Javid](#), 6 March 2019

68 HC Spring Statement, [Volume 656](#), 13 March 2016

The Serious Violence Taskforce

45. The Serious Violence Strategy committed to establishing a “new cross sector Serious Violence Taskforce with key representatives from a range of national, local and delivery partner agencies”, to oversee delivery and “challenge the impact of delivery of the Serious Violence Strategy”. The Inter-Ministerial Group on Gangs was also “refocused to oversee and drive delivery of the strategy”.⁶⁹ The Taskforce is chaired by the Home Secretary and includes representatives from the police service and children’s sector, the Minister for Children, and the Mayor of London.⁷⁰

46. We were keen to find out how effective the Taskforce has been at gathering evidence, overseeing delivery of the strategy, driving action against serious violence, and holding the Government to account. Ahead of our evidence session with the Minister for Safeguarding, we wrote to the Home Secretary, Sajid Javid MP, asking him how many actions had arisen for Taskforce members at each meeting; whether it was working to an action plan with clear targets (and, if so, what those targets were); what indicators he was using to measure the Taskforce’s performance and impact; and whether he would share the agendas and minutes from each meeting. He responded at the beginning of May, stating that Taskforce discussions had been “instrumental” in the development of a number of initiatives, including the Youth Endowment Fund, the ‘public health’ duty to share data, and the additional £100m announced by the Chancellor in March.

47. The Home Secretary declined to provide us with minutes of the Taskforce’s meetings. He said that it is “essential” that the discussions are “confidential”, so that “members are able to speak freely”, but he provided us with agendas and lists of attendees for each meeting. These showed that The Taskforce met monthly from April 2018 onwards, but took an extended break last summer, with no meetings held between 17 July and 22 October 2018. The Serious Violence Strategy stated that the Inter-Ministerial Group would meet only on a quarterly basis.⁷¹

48. Witnesses have told us that the Taskforce has focused on the capital, despite rising violence elsewhere. Sara Thornton told us that the group was “rather London-centric”,⁷² and she had not seen minutes from any of its meetings.⁷³ She suggested that responsibility for driving activity at a national level should lie with the Prime Minister. Cressida Dick said that the Taskforce has allowed Ministers to be “better informed”, and has resulted in money being made available “for a particular project”, but she reinforced her desire to see, “from a Government point of view, [...] much more happening on the ground”.⁷⁴ She also told us that it was “set up at a time when a huge amount of focus was on London”, adding: “If that group was to become more obviously and strongly focused beyond London, then of course I would be very comfortable with that”.⁷⁵ Dave Thompson, Chief Constable of West Midlands Police, confirmed that the group has had a “London bias”.⁷⁶

69 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

70 [Letter from the Home Secretary](#) to the Chair of the Committee (and associated Annexes), 1 May 2019

71 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

72 [Q155](#)

73 [Q154](#)

74 [Q299](#)

75 [Q290](#)

76 [Q290](#)

49. **The Serious Violence Taskforce, along with the Inter-Ministerial Group on Serious Violence, has been one of the Government’s main drivers of national action and oversight of the Serious Violence Strategy. We are therefore concerned by the infrequency of the Taskforce’s meetings and the absence of measurable targets or milestones for it to work towards, or on which it can hold to account the Government, local agencies and other organisations involved in delivering the strategy. Criticisms that it is a London-centric group are also cause for concern. The Taskforce did not meet at all between July and October 2018, a period in which knife crime was continuing to rise. This does not paint a picture of focused, sustained and proactive scrutiny and action. There is little evidence of resulting action or policy change, either from the Inter-Ministerial Group or the Taskforce. Moreover, the fact that the Chair of the National Police Chiefs’ Council had not seen minutes from any of the Taskforce’s meetings is an indictment of its profile and levels of output.**

A ‘public health’ approach

50. The Home Secretary and Prime Minister have repeatedly supported the idea of taking a ‘public health approach’ to serious violence, inspired by the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in Scotland. The VRU was established in Glasgow in 2005, with the aim of reducing knife and weapon carrying in the city, then branded the murder capital of Europe.⁷⁷ It was founded in 2005 by Strathclyde Police, and describes the public health approach as treating “violence like a disease”, adding: “We seek to diagnose and analyse the root causes of violence in Scotland, then develop and evaluate solutions which can be scaled-up across the country.”⁷⁸

51. A third of the Government’s additional £100 million for knife crime policing is being allocated to new “violence reduction units”, to drive an inter-agency approach to violent crime. In April, the Home Secretary said: “A public health approach doesn’t mean passing the problem onto the NHS or a teacher. Rather, it means that serious violence is treated like the outbreak of some virulent disease. A national emergency”.⁷⁹ The Home Office’s consultation on the duty for public services to share data, outlined in Chapter 4 of this report, said that a public health approach has the following features:

- Focused on a defined population, often with a health risk in common;
- With and for communities;
- Not constrained by organisational or professional boundaries;
- Focussed on generating long term as well as short term solutions;
- Based on data and intelligence to identify the burden on the population, including any inequalities; and
- Rooted in evidence of effectiveness to tackle the problem.⁸⁰

77 Violence Reduction Unit website, [About the Violence Reduction Unit](#), accessed 2 October 2018

78 Violence Reduction Unit website, [About the Violence Reduction Unit](#), accessed 2 October 2018

79 Home Office, [Home Secretary speech on protecting young people’s futures](#), 15 April 2019

80 Home Office, [Consultation on a new legal duty to support a multi-agency approach to preventing and tackling serious violence](#), 1 April 2019

52. Witnesses to this inquiry praised the Scottish model, but warned against a wholesale ‘lift and shift’ to England and Wales. Professor Simon Harding, an expert in gangs and youth violence, said that the model’s partnership approach would create significant challenges in England, and even in a more contained location such as London:

Glasgow is approximately the size of two London boroughs. It is only 600,000 people. It is a single unitary authority and a single political colouring. In London we have 32 boroughs plus the City of London, each of different political colouring. There are huge challenges there. The Glasgow City Council is very close in its proximity to Government; it is a very flat structure. In England and in London, that is extremely difficult; it is a very extenuated structure.⁸¹

We return to the subject of local safeguarding and partnership work in Chapter 4.

53. The evidence we received suggested that the Government’s rhetoric on public health has not yet been reflected in its actions. Chief Constable Dave Thompson criticised the Home Office for producing “quite a crime-based strategy. If you look at the document, it alludes to a public health based strategy, but it is not yet a public health based strategy”.⁸² Others pointed out that there had been insufficient coordination across Government at a national level, as well as a lack of understanding of the size of the population at risk; both of these concerns are outlined in further detail below. Last year, the interim report of the Youth Violence Commission warned of “an increasing risk that the term ‘public health model’ is being used without a proper understanding of what is actually required to affect lasting change”.⁸³ We consider the ‘public health’ approach again in chapters 4 and 6 of this report, including the need to improve data-sharing at a local level.

54. A consideration of the impact of the Government’s funding of and guidance around the provision of drug and alcohol addiction services is also central to appraising its public health approach to tackling serious violence. The Serious Violence Strategy highlighted that, in more than a third of homicides during 2016/17, either the victim or suspect had consumed alcohol prior to the incident.⁸⁴ The BBC reported last year that spending on drug and alcohol treatment services in England fell from £877m in 2013–14 to £716m in 2017–18.⁸⁵ We return to the subject of drug treatment provision in Chapter 4.

55. The Government and local authorities need to address urgently the widening gap between demand for and provision of public health services, in the context of links between alcohol and susceptibility to serious violence. Serious consideration should also be given to the appropriate provision of services, balancing harm reduction for users with wider public safety concerns. Engagement with mental health services is also crucial to ensuring appropriate provision.

National leadership on serious violence

56. In the first week of April, the Prime Minister hosted a Summit on Serious Youth Violence at 10 Downing Street, attended by Ministers, policing leaders, experts and

81 [Q208](#)

82 [Q288](#)

83 The Youth Violence Commission, [Interim Report](#), July 2018

84 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

85 [BBC News, Drug and alcohol services cut by £162m as deaths increase](#), 11 May 2018

agencies involved in tackling knife crime and other forms of violence. A report on the Summit stated that the Prime Minister would chair a new Ministerial Taskforce to “coordinate Government activity and ensure all departments are playing their part in reducing serious violence”, supported by a new Serious Violence Team in the Cabinet Office.⁸⁶ The Government will also produce an action plan. It is not yet clear how often the Prime Minister’s Taskforce will meet or when the Cabinet Office team will be in place, nor what level of resource it will attract.

57. Dame Louise Casey was scathing about the Government’s leadership on serious violence to date; she was also explicit about what she would consider to be a more effective approach. She highlighted the importance of following up the Number 10 summit, in which victims’ families have invested time and energy:

Some good can come out of those things, but there has to be more than a bloody summit. You have to have a strategy and it has to be implemented. Also, for the victims’ families who go along to those summits, and remember that I have been the Victims’ Commissioner, they take them incredibly seriously. So, if you do nothing once you have had a summit, you are disrespecting the victims and their families [...]. Big hopes arise when people have those summits, and if they are not fulfilled, we are letting down the people who have been let down by everybody else.⁸⁷

58. Dame Louise argued that a much more targeted response was required and called for “fortnightly meetings” chaired by the Prime Minister. These should be serviced by “independent civil servants” who would “put the evidence in place”, ensuring that “people around the table—all Secretaries of State and Ministers—with responsibility for anything in this arena, [...] were brought together”, and “you would push forward”. Although she expressed cynicism at an approach that she described as “Have a summit; appoint a tsar; issue guidance”, she later conceded that the sort of coordinated activity she was advocating “probably does need an individual or a team—a tsar or something like that—who would relentlessly push forward”. She clarified: “It would be their 24-hour job, seven days a week. They would sit next to the Prime Minister and say, “Last time I heard, nothing had changed.”⁸⁸

59. The Children’s Commissioner, Anne Longfield, told us that she had attended the Prime Minister’s Summit, at which she made very clear her views about the need for stronger Government leadership:

When I sat at the summit a couple of weeks ago, I said that I thought the Prime Minister needed to have a phone call every week with the people who had been charged to deliver this. I have written to at least four different Ministers and Secretaries of State asking them to do a whole range of things, such as instruct the safeguarding boards to gather information on the scale of risk and ensure that there are plans in place to deliver it and monitor it.⁸⁹

60. Commissioner Dick and Chief Constable Thompson also made it clear that they wanted stronger national leadership on serious violence. Cressida Dick said that serious

86 HM Government, [Prime Minister’s Summit on Serious Youth Violence](#), 1 May 2019

87 [Q446](#)

88 [Q455](#)

89 [Q427](#)

violence “needs to be more clearly a higher priority for parts of our public sector, stretched though they are, and probably parts of the Home Office, stretched though it is”.⁹⁰ She added later: “We all agree that there needs to be more co-ordination, more step-up and more focus and priority” at Government and Cabinet level.⁹¹ Dave Thompson said that “there is a need for some transformational response to this”,⁹² and also pushed for Cabinet Office involvement (before the new Cabinet Office team was announced), highlighting that it can be “very hard sometimes for Ministers to hold other Ministers to account on a delivery issue that might be seen as confined more directly to their Department”.⁹³

61. Both Dame Louise and the Children’s Commissioner emphasised the need for a clear understanding of the scale of the problem, and for local follow-through. According to Anne Longfield, “on every level”, the Government needs to “put the money in, ensure the leadership is there, and hold people accountable for delivering what they need to deliver on a departmental basis”. She added: “In each of those departmental areas, there needs to be a follow-down to local delivery”, and noted that “there are 11 different interventions around serious violence at the moment across Government, but they are largely departmental, fragmented and small scale”. As a result, “they just get dispersed and do not have the traction they could”. Similarly, Chief Constable Thompson implied that there was a lack of understanding at a national level about the complexity of local partnership work: he called for officials to be “deployed more on the ground [...] to ensure that Government is challenging itself on whether this connects at place level, because the players are much more complex than they were”.⁹⁴

62. A recent report on Serious Organised Crime (SOC) by the National Audit Office (NAO) found that the Government “does not yet have the extent or depth of data that it needs for an effective response [to SOC], and data are not shared consistently”, with the result that “the government’s understanding of the scale of serious and organised crime is incomplete”. Performance measurement in SOC is also “immature and does not yet support effective decision-making”.⁹⁵ In written evidence, the Local Government Association (LGA) highlighted that the Violence And Vulnerability Unit has created a useful data mapping tool, the ‘Vulnerability Tracker’, which can “help councils and other partners bring together all their data to focus on all forms of vulnerability”. This could be used more consistently across the country to measure progress and direct resources.⁹⁶

63. When the Minister for Safeguarding gave evidence to us in May, we asked her a number of questions to establish the Government’s understanding of the scale of the problem, including data, and the amount of targeted action on the ground, including accountability and ownership at a regional or local level. She gave the impression that the Department had done minimal work to gather data: when we asked what her assessment was of the number of young people at particular risk of knife crime, for example, she replied “I don’t have that number”. On local action and accountability for reducing serious violence, she said that “in London, it is the Mayor”, and in other places it will be “for local areas to decide”.⁹⁷

90 [Q288](#)

91 [Q303](#)

92 [Q303](#)

93 [Q304](#)

94 [Q288](#)

95 National Audit Office, Tackling serious and organised crime ([HC2219](#)), 28 June 2019

96 Local Government Association ([SVC0051](#))

97 [Q480](#)

64. We gave the Minister another chance to demonstrate that the Government had a strong understanding of the scale of the problem and the most effective response. After the session, we wrote to her to ask a number of questions about funding, and asked for the Government’s estimate of the number of young people currently at risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of serious youth violence, the number of people currently in contact with youth services, and how many the Government planned to reach as a result of its funding commitments (for example, through the £200m Youth Endowment Fund). She replied citing figures from the Children’s Commissioner on the number of children at risk of gang involvement, but asserted that “to group young people as ‘at risk’ or ‘not at risk’ risks oversimplifying the issue based simply on the presence of a risk factor or factors”. The Minister confirmed that figures on the number of young people using youth services are “not readily available”, and gave us estimates of the number of children reached by a number of different schemes, such as the National Citizen Service and projects financed by the Early Intervention Youth Fund.⁹⁸

Our previous recommendations on policing governance and leadership

65. In October 2018, we published a report entitled “Policing for the Future”, concluding a 20-month inquiry into the current policing landscape. We examined the extent to which the police service in England and Wales has the skills, structures and resources in place to enable it to meet the challenges of the 21st century, from dealing with ‘traditional’ volume offences through to the vast growth in digital crime. One of the key themes emerging from the evidence was the lack of central direction in policing policy, following reforms implemented by Theresa May as Home Secretary from 2010 onwards. These included the devolution of power to Police and Crime Commissioners and a reduced role for the Home Office in determining policing priorities and policy-making. We concluded that this hands-off approach has affected the Government and police service’s response to a wide range of challenges, including tackling serious organised crime, upgrading ICT and communications systems, coordinating online fraud investigation, working with global social media companies, and agreeing on data-sharing protocols with other public services.⁹⁹

66. Our report argued that the Home Office “must step up to the plate and play a much stronger role in policing policy”. We also argued that “the current allocation of responsibilities in policing at a national, regional and local level is broken, and in dire need of review”, adding that “the current structure is a significant barrier to the service’s ability to tackle national and transnational threats, which require an advanced level of specialist capability”. To address these problems, we recommended that:

- The Home Office should launch a “transparent, root-and-branch review of policing, publishing proposals by the end of February 2019, which should focus on the allocation of responsibilities and capabilities at a local, regional and national level”;

98 Home Office ([SVC0058](#))

99 Home Affairs Committee, Policing for the future ([HC 515](#)), 25 October 2018

- At a national and regional level, “forces need to pool resources and capabilities to a far greater extent”, including “in complex areas where crimes often cross force borders, such as organised crime, county lines and modern slavery”;
- The “root-and-branch” structure for counter-terrorism policing, “which is frequently singled out for praise, could serve as a model for other areas of policing”;
- The Government should create a National Policing Council, “chaired by the Home Secretary and comprising representatives of the APCC, NPCC, officer/staff associations, College of Policing and HMICFRS”; and
- Proposals for reform could be put to “a National Police Assembly comprising all PCCs and chief constables in England and Wales”, and the Home Office “should consider key policy areas where decisions of the Council and Assembly could then be binding on all forces”.¹⁰⁰

67. In the Home Office’s response, published in March, the Department conceded that “the Home Office must take a more forward-leaning approach to its engagement with policing”.¹⁰¹ It said that in the last year, it had “convened roundtables” which are making “real progress” on the service’s use of technology, officer wellbeing and serious violence, “to name a few”. It argued that new structures would “take a significant amount of time” to set up, but that, “within the current structure, a great deal more could be done to operate the network in a better, more efficient and effective way”. The Department added that it is “working with all players in the system to embed the operation of a network through the Specialist Capabilities Programme, ROCUs [regional organised crime units], the SOC [Serious and Organised Crime] Strategy, force collaboration and other work”.

68. Our 2018 report, “Policing for the Future”, argued that the Home Office must step up to the plate and play a much stronger role in policing policy, highlighting the many weaknesses created by a fragmented approach to governance and decision-making. This chapter has laid bare the weaknesses of the Government’s response to serious youth violence, including the lack of national or regional ownership of the problem.

69. The Home Office’s response to serious youth violence appears to have been limited to the production of a limited strategy and the convening of a few roundtable discussions. The Department’s approach is not fit for the task at hand, and its lack of national leadership on this issue is evidence beyond doubt of the need for a change in direction. It would be supremely irresponsible for the Government simply to leave it to 43 PCCs and 43 chief constables to determine their own local response to this national crisis.

70. Following the Prime Minister’s summit in April, the establishment of a Ministerial Taskforce on Serious Violence is welcome, along with the Cabinet Office team due to support its work. Although this should have been in place years ago, it does suggest that the Government is finally taking this issue more seriously. We are concerned, however, that any momentum generated by the PM’s summit is being lost, and we are not convinced that the Prime Minister and Home Secretary are treating serious violence

100 Home Affairs Committee, Policing for the future ([HC 515](#)), 25 October 2018

101 The Government response to the Tenth Report from the Home Affairs Select Committee Session 2017–19 HC 515: Policing for the future ([CP62](#)), 15 March 2019

with the urgency and focus it requires, ensuring that the Prime Minister's Taskforce has the resources it needs in order to function effectively and target resources in the right places. We recommend that the new Prime Minister takes personal responsibility for reducing serious youth violence and driving activity in this area, tasking Cabinet Ministers with taking ownership for key actions.

71. We are also concerned by the absence of local or regional accountability for reducing serious youth violence, in the context of a complex network of local stakeholders in policing, local government, education and civil society. We fail to see how the Government can get a grip on this problem without clear lines of communication and accountability for progress on the ground. By the end of September, the Government should provide us with a list of named accountable leaders in every region or county of England and Wales. This might be a PCC, a mayor, or the leader of a local safeguarding partnership or violence reduction unit, for example. They must be identifiable locally as the individual reporting directly to 10 Downing Street, and responsible for convening those who need to work together to drive down serious youth violence.

72. Ministers have spoken repeatedly of the need to take a 'public health' approach to serious violence. It is extremely difficult to target public health interventions without an understanding of the size of the population at risk, and yet the Government has not identified the number of children at risk of involvement in serious youth violence, pointing only to inadequate and readily-available sources of data on crime and safeguarding. A recent National Audit Office report also found that the Government does not yet have the data it needs on serious and organised crime to coordinate an effective response.

73. The Ministerial Taskforce and the Serious Violence Taskforce should be monitoring progress across a common dataset, collected consistently across the country. That data should also be driving and informing local action to tackle serious youth violence, led by the regional or local leads. We recommend that the new Cabinet Office team prioritises the establishment of such a dataset at the earliest opportunity, and reports back to us on its progress by the end of October 2019. It should also inform us what targets or milestones the Government has set in relation to reducing serious youth violence, and by what date it intends to meet those targets.

4 The changing drug market and county lines

Jake's story

Jake came from a loving, caring and supportive family. Until the age of 13, he was doing very well at school and was described as a caring and active child who played basketball and represented his school team in national competitions.

Over a few weeks, his behaviour changed rapidly and he became aggressive, abusive and dishonest. He disengaged from his family and from school. His mother thought initially that he might be being bullied at school and kept asking him about this. In fact, Jake had been introduced to some men by boys at his school. At first, he was approached and asked to take a package to a local house and offered £30 to do so. He did this a few times but was then given train tickets and packages of drugs to transport to a house in a town 100 miles away and promised much more money. It was only when he arrived at the house that he found it was full of adults taking drugs, including injecting heroin, and he realised he was at risk and had become involved in something beyond his control.

Jake was, for a time, not able to leave that house and while he was there he was not given food and found the adults to be very aggressive. One of them stole some of the drugs he was carrying and because of this he was now indebted to the dealer and forced to 'work' for free and threatened with violence if he did not continue to do so.

As such, he frequently went missing from home and was found repeatedly in houses across the country living in very neglectful conditions. He was forced by his dealer to carry drugs internally and on one occasion when he lost some of the drugs he was carrying he was brutally attacked by other boys involved in county lines. Jake would often return home suffering with injuries, such as stab wounds, as a result of the violence linked to county lines.

Jake was eventually taken into care with the agreement of his parents due to concerns about his safety and the safety of his siblings. However, while in care, he moved many times, frequently went missing and his mother feared for his life as he was still subject to threats of extreme violence, as were his family. His mother has lost her job, experienced depression and there has been a severe impact on the well-being and sense of safety for all the family, including his brothers and sisters.

Case study from a report by HMPP, HMICFRS, CQC and Ofsted: Protecting children from criminal exploitation, human trafficking and modern slavery: an addendum, November 2018

Introduction

74. Our inquiry heard significant evidence about the impact of the changing drug market on serious violence, including the way in which serious organised crime gangs are exploiting children, young people and vulnerable adults to distribute drugs and carry out illegal activity. We also heard about the increasing levels of violence linked to drug

distribution and ‘county lines’. The term ‘county lines’ generally refers to the exporting of illegal drugs within the UK by gangs and organised criminal networks, usually from their base in metropolitan areas into smaller cities, neighbouring counties and towns, using dedicated mobile phone lines and other forms of deal-line.

75. County lines criminality generates particular additional challenges, because it operates across local authority and police force boundaries. However, many of the phenomena linked to county lines groups are happening within cities too: the Home Office has acknowledged that gangs are increasingly likely to “exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money”, and they will “often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons”.

76. This chapter describes the evidence we received on the changing drug market, gangs, county lines violence and exploitation; Government action to date; and concerns about the ability of current safeguarding systems to keep young people safe and prevent them from being drawn in to serious violence.

The changing drug market

77. Commissioner Dick said that “we have to really stress just how much of this phenomenon that you are focusing on—serious violence affecting our young people—is connected to drugs in one way or another”; and specifically linked it to “the market and the availability”. She added that this is, “in my view, at the root of it all; it really is”.¹⁰² The cross-party Youth Violence Commission, which published an interim report last year, also concluded that “drug markets generate violence and, in particular, create a crime hierarchy where our most vulnerable young people are being groomed to enter the lower levels of drug distribution”.¹⁰³ Commissioner Dick warned that county lines groups are “constantly learning; they are entrepreneurial; they are aggressive; and they can see a new market. They know where they want to take over, and they know how to target young people”.¹⁰⁴

78. The Government’s Serious Violence Strategy also drew links between county lines and serious violence, highlighting academic research that shows that “drug-selling gangs are generally much more violent than the local dealers who had controlled the market previously”.¹⁰⁵ Professor Simon Harding told us that violence is being driven by a demand among drug users for a service that he described as “24-hour “dial a dealer”, through which “drugs are now delivered directly to your door”. This has led to increased competition within gang markets:

To address that and to build a competitive advantage, the gangs have now expanded their drug markets outside of their turf or their territory and we have the county lines phenomenon and the huge amount of violence that comes with that in control, debt bondage, sanctions against the runners, sanctions against the dealers, sanctions against the users, anybody who grasses or snitches. It is a very violent world.¹⁰⁶

102 [Q325](#)

103 The Youth Violence Commission, [Interim Report](#), July 2018

104 [Q311](#)

105 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

106 [Q181](#)

The evolution of the 'gang'

79. Professor Harding explained to us how street gangs in the UK have evolved over the last five to seven years, linked to rising levels of deprivation in some communities. His research has found that entry to gangs is happening earlier, with people (mostly boys) joining at the age of 12–14. At the “other end”, they are “not maturing out, so when they reach the ages of 21, 24, 25, [...] they are getting stuck in the gang”, which has become “a very adhesive place for young people”. He attributed these trends to public service funding cuts, which he said have “sharpened the edges of poverty and deprivation” and led to “a retraction of the state”.¹⁰⁷

80. Other witnesses agreed that gang violence and membership was being affected by poverty and funding cuts: Junior Smart from St Giles Trust said that the “lack of resources” has led to more children going “under the radar” of social services,¹⁰⁸ and Chief Constable Thompson suggested that there are now more vulnerable young people who can be enticed into criminality, because of “poverty, frankly”. His force had seen examples of people who are “doing this for family food bills”.¹⁰⁹ A young community consultant from a North London youth project, Project Future, summarised his views concisely during a roundtable event we held in April: “My personal opinion is that the root of this all is poverty”.¹¹⁰

81. Professor Harding told us that the expanded age range has resulted in a higher number of individuals involved in gangs and in their “orbit”, meaning that “there is greater competition among the gang affiliates to raise their reputation, raise their status, and to rise above their peer group”. This has evolved into “a form of hyper-violence, ultra-violence if you like”, and a need to develop greater “street capital”, behaving in ways that will “get them noticed”.¹¹¹ Commissioner Dick confirmed that violence has evolved in recent years: “you have a group of teenagers setting upon an individual [...] and inflicting injuries with very large knives. [...] these are huge Rambo knives, hunting knives, and great big kitchen knives.” There is “repeated stabbing, again and again, sometimes associated with other violence as well”, causing “life changing injuries”.¹¹² In June, it was reported that teenagers in Liverpool were being offered up to £1,000 by “gang leaders” to stab other young people in fights to resolve disputes between rival groups, enabling senior gang members to avoid arrest.¹¹³

82. Witnesses linked these trends directly to county lines and the drug market. Junior Smart asserted that “the battle on the street at the moment is for concentration of drugs”, and told us—shockingly—that the youngest client on St Giles Trust’s caseload is just eight years of age:

[...] it is criminality evolved. Why would they target someone who is eight years of age? It is because that person is likely to be under the radar for longer and they are malleable, they are easier to manipulate, and they don’t understand the risks of what they are getting involved in.¹¹⁴

107 [Qq181–182](#)

108 [Q184](#)

109 [Q310](#)

110 [Q381](#)

111 [Qq181–183](#)

112 [Q308](#)

113 *BBC News*, [Liverpool teenagers ‘paid money to stab other youths’](#), 17 June 2019

114 [Q184](#)

83. Written evidence by the Children’s Commissioner outlined the possible scale of the problem in relation to gang membership and criminality. Research completed for them by the ONS, based on the Crime Survey for England and Wales, found that there are around 27,000 children in England (aged 10–17) who identify as being in an urban street gang, amounting to around 12,200 girls and 14,800 boys. There are an additional 33,000 siblings of gang members and 34,000 who know a gang member and have been victims of gang violence. This adds up to a total of 100,000 children whom the Children’s Commissioner describes as being “at high levels of immediate risk” of gang violence.¹¹⁵

County lines as a form of gang exploitation

84. County lines is not a new phenomenon: Evan Jones from the charity St Giles Trust told us that his organisation became aware of it as early as 2012, but police forces have been slower to identify this pattern of criminality. In 2015, only seven forces told the National Crime Agency (NCA) that they were being affected by county lines. Within two years, all 43 forces acknowledged that it was a problem.

85. When we took evidence on county lines in January, the NCA’s Director of Investigations, Nikki Holland, told us that there are now thought to be 2,000 lines in operation, following estimates of 700 in November 2017.¹¹⁶ The NCA’s latest report on this subject clarifies that 2,000 individual deal line numbers have been linked to “approximately 1,000 branded county lines”.¹¹⁷ Simon Ford from the Violence and Vulnerability Unit (VUU), a team of community safety experts commissioned by the Home Office to research county lines and serious youth violence, told us that this form of criminality is “growing”, and that there is a “sustained peak” occurring.¹¹⁸ The NCA has also reported that:

- There is a “continued risk of serious injury and loss of life in relation to county lines offending”, the business model for which “thrives on the exploitation of vulnerable adults and children to move and deliver drugs”;
- Males represent 91% of individuals recorded as associated with county lines offending, but women may be under-represented in police estimates;
- Children displaying vulnerabilities such as poverty and looked-after status are targeted for exploitation;
- Female victims in particular are subjected to “sexual exploitation through forced engagement in sexual activity”;
- Heroin and crack cocaine are the drugs most commonly supplied through county lines; and
- There is evidence of serious violence as a result of “tensions between competing groups”—although there are also reports of “tolerance” between groups, even within small markets, suggesting sufficient demand to serve multiple groups.¹¹⁹

115 Children’s Commissioner for England ([SVC0054](#))

116 [Q82](#)

117 National Crime Agency, [County Lines Drug Supply, Vulnerability and Harm 2018](#), January 2019

118 [Q120](#)

119 National Crime Agency, [County Lines Drug Supply, Vulnerability and Harm 2018](#), January 2019

86. The Violence and Vulnerability Unit produced a report last year based on research in around 70 local areas. It confirmed that older dealers and gangs, including individuals in their early 20s, are controlling people as young as 14 by placing them in debt for drugs, often involving financial and sexual exploitation. It found that the customer base for Class A drugs has grown across the UK, including an increase in women and young people using crack cocaine and heroin, and that there are “price wars between gangs across the country as they seek to open new markets”. As well as making drugs cheaper, county lines groups are “marketing their drugs through texts using enticements such as ‘two for one’ offers”.¹²⁰

87. We were told in oral evidence that this business model “works”, so it is being exported around the country. Its profitability is being sustained by increased user demand, which we will return to later in this chapter.¹²¹ Harry Shapiro, Director of Drugwise, said that there is “a lot of product out there now, certainly a lot of cocaine, and a lot of people involved because they can see the profits that can be made”; particularly in “poor, disadvantaged and deprived communities where the opportunities to make serious amounts of money prove too tempting”.¹²² We were told by the national policing lead, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Duncan Ball, that the picture is fragmented across the country: there is no “all-controlling network” in charge of county lines, but rather many groups, mostly exporting from London, the West Midlands and Merseyside.¹²³ According to the LGA, 23 separate county lines had been identified running into Blackpool alone.¹²⁴

88. This inquiry heard extensive evidence about the links between county lines and serious youth violence. We were told by Steve Rodhouse, Director General of Operations at the NCA, that 13% of the 2,000 deal lines can be linked to violence, but with significant under-reporting suspected, and that around 9% have access to firearms.¹²⁵ Assistant Chief Constable Jacqueline Sebire from Bedfordshire Police said that her force was seeing higher levels of violence as a result of “territorial disputes” between criminal groups, the majority of which are “enforced either through firearms or knives”.¹²⁶ The Children’s Society’s representative, Lucy Dacey, also confirmed that her organisation is “definitely seeing an increased risk of violence and threat to the young people we work with”, including “debt bondage” and “fear of recrimination”. The charity has also seen a “big increase in missing episodes”, both in frequency and duration, as children are trafficked away from their area to sell drugs.¹²⁷

89. The APCC’s written evidence stated that Ipswich in Suffolk has seen a 34% rise in knife crime over the past year, “because of gang and drug related violence directly linked to county lines”.¹²⁸ Harry Shapiro from Drugwise also highlighted how increased competition had driven up violence. Previously, gangs would move into other areas, “but would supply drugs to the local dealer networks and then go home again”. That has now changed, and “when you have [...] people trying to take over turf, inevitably there is going

120 Violence and Vulnerability Unit, [County lines - a national summary & emerging best practice](#), May 2018

121 For example, [Q86](#)

122 [Q242](#)

123 [Q88](#)

124 [Q114](#)

125 [Q240](#)

126 [Q84](#)

127 [Q115](#)

128 APCC written evidence ([SVC0048](#))

to be some violence”.¹²⁹ Evan Jones from St Giles Trust told us that a “real irony” is that “the gap for the county lines model to expand has been created by effective policing”: the police have been “quite good at taking out local drug dealers, which removes the supply, but the demand is still there”. As a result, “instead of a drug market run by nasty local 30-year-olds, you get one run by nasty 18-year-olds from London”. That “tends to create more chaos, more violence and more problems”; he likened it to “like using antibiotics—you end up with superbugs”.¹³⁰ We return to the issues surrounding demand for Class A drugs later in this chapter.

The Government and police response to county lines

90. In Chapter 3, we outlined our concerns about the Government’s fragmented approach to policing policy and governance. A recent NAO report stated that the Government’s response to serious and organised crime (SOC) involves over 100 Government and law enforcement bodies, agencies and other organisations. In the context of a growing threat from organised criminal groups, including those involved in county lines offending, the study highlighted that there had been “significant failings” in the Home Office’s previous serious and organised crime strategy, published in 2013. A Government review found that:

- Its understanding of SOC had been “inconsistent and, in parts, underdeveloped”;
- Work under the “Pursue” strand had “dominated” activity, with improvement needed to work falling under the “Prevent, Protect and Prepare” strands; and
- The efforts of organisations tackling SOC had been “disjointed and uncoordinated”, and law enforcement efforts were duplicated.¹³¹

91. Recent Home Office publications suggest that the Government is making moves to improve national coordination against serious organised crime, including county lines offending. For example, in the latest Serious and Organised Crime Strategy, published in November 2018, the Home Office pledged to “align our collective efforts to respond as a single system” to serious criminality. The Department will work with the NCA to develop a system-wide Serious and Organised Crime Capability Strategy, to improve their understanding of where collective capabilities lie, and which capabilities are most in need of development. This will “ensure that we have a coherent, end-to-end response to complex threats such as drug trafficking and distribution via county lines, for example.”¹³² The Department’s response to our Policing for the Future report made similar commitments, and acknowledged that “There is greater ambition for policing to work more as one system in order to better manage new threats”.¹³³

92. Nevertheless, the NAO found shortcomings in the 2018 Serious and Organised Crime Strategy and the wider Government approach to this issue, despite acknowledging that the Home Office had “acted on learning” from its previous review. The Government continues to organise its work around the ‘four Ps’, but the NAO had “not seen a well-evidenced justification that this is the best approach”, and the Home Office had “not fully estimated

129 [Q242](#)

130 [Q118](#)

131 National Audit Office, Tackling serious and organised crime ([HC2219](#)), 28 June 2019

132 HM Government, Serious and Organised Crime Strategy ([Cm 9718](#)), November 2018

133 The Government response to the Tenth Report from the Home Affairs Select Committee Session 2017–19 HC 515: Policing for the future ([CP62](#)), 15 March 2019

the cost of what it must do to realise its strategy aspirations in full”. Funding overall is “uncertain and inefficient” and regional resources are “variable, putting government’s ambitions for a stronger regional response at risk”. For example, “Some chief constables have [...] prioritised their own forces’ capabilities to tackle serious and organised crime, rather than investing in the development of regional capabilities”. Overall, the Government “lacks a strong accountability framework to drive the implementation of the strategy”, despite making some progress towards consolidating the 37 governance groups that tackle serious and organised crime, and the 59 groups that discuss related topics.¹³⁴

93. Witnesses also suggested to us that the statutory response to county lines has lacked national direction, resulting in piecemeal attempts at local restructures to enable agencies to deal with it more effectively.¹³⁵ When asked whether more national leadership was needed, Simon Ford responded: “Very much so [...]. That is the only way you will get the ownership to deal with such a complex agenda”.¹³⁶ Dr Carlene Firmin, an academic expert in ‘contextual safeguarding’, also called for an “increased strategic response, a cross-Government response”:

We see local authorities developing practice in the absence of any national strategy for safeguarding adolescents. There is no consistency at all, no recognition that the system is not fit for purpose, so local authorities are having to work it out themselves. There is no leadership on that at all, no cross-Government strategy on exploitation.¹³⁷

94. Evidence on the quality of individual police forces’ response to county lines is relatively limited, but suggests that some have struggled to respond to it effectively. In November, the Director General of the NCA, Lynne Owens, reportedly told a conference that she had used her “tasking powers” for the first time to ensure that there was a co-ordinated effort between chief constables over the “significant threat” posed by county lines. She apparently said that there were five towns in which gangs had each been able to run 21 county lines without meaningful law enforcement intervention.¹³⁸ Nikki Holland told us later that the agency’s tasking powers had been used for two reasons: first, to ensure that all forces returned data about local county lines activity; and second, to ensure “prioritisation of county lines packages”. She implied that this had been required to drive activity in the “exporting forces”, such as the major cities.¹³⁹

95. As a result of an NPCC proposal to the Home Office,¹⁴⁰ a new National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) became fully operational in Birmingham in September 2018, comprising a 38-strong team of NCA experts, police officers and regional organised crime units. Officers work together to develop the national intelligence picture, prioritise action against the most serious offenders, and engage with partners across Government

134 National Audit Office, *Tackling serious and organised crime* ([HC2219](#)), 28 June 2019

135 [Q129](#)

136 [Q130](#)

137 [Q217](#)

138 The Times, [Chief constables told to target ‘county lines’ gangs](#), 1 November 2018

139 [Q90](#)

140 [Q107](#)

to “tackle the wider issues”.¹⁴¹ When it was launched, the Home Office said that there are “already 200 active county lines investigations underway, but the introduction of the centre will allow police forces to intensify their operations”.¹⁴²

96. Witnesses from the voluntary sector told us that police officers were becoming increasingly aware of the vulnerability of children exploited through county lines. Evan Jones said there had been “huge progress with the police’s attitude to this issue”, including “much, much better recognition of vulnerability”. The picture is mixed across the country, however, with some forces still prosecuting children who have been exploited.¹⁴³ Others are spending a lot of time returning children to London, handing them over at service stations on the M25.¹⁴⁴ St Giles Trust has recently started to offer a rescue and response service, giving one number for the whole of London and enabling their workers to reach exploited children at crucial moments.¹⁴⁵ We are examining the use of modern slavery legislation to prosecute county lines offending in our separate inquiry into Modern Slavery, as well as the effectiveness of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) at providing support for county lines victims.

97. Government and law enforcement efforts to tackle county lines criminality have been hampered by wider failings in the response to serious and organised crime. Fragmented governance and funding structures and poor coordination of resources have been contributory factors in giving county lines offenders a head start, making it easier for this terrible form of exploitation to flourish.

Safeguarding problems

98. A common theme emerging from the evidence was the failure of statutory safeguarding systems and processes to protect children from county lines exploitation. Evan Jones said that the key piece of safeguarding legislation—The Children Act 2014—is focused on protecting young people from abuse in a domestic setting, and it is “extremely difficult” to use “traditional safeguarding tools and social work practice to identify young people who are [...] enslaved to a group of people”.¹⁴⁶ Children involved in county lines often don’t present with any of the usual indicators of neglect that might trigger a social work investigation, according to the LGA, and may not regard themselves as victims.¹⁴⁷

99. Lucy Dacey from the Children’s Society told us that “we really need to reinvent the thresholds for children’s social care”, and “reframe how we have traditionally assessed abuse and neglect, because it is extra-familial—outside the home—in the case of county lines exploitation”.¹⁴⁸ Evan Jones said that St Giles Trust representatives “regularly have arguments with social services teams” about the way in which they are assessing risk.¹⁴⁹ A scoping report on county lines by St Giles Trust and Missing People, published last year, suggested that “a contextual safeguarding approach would address this issue”. This would

141 Home Office news story, [National County Lines Coordination Centre to crack down on drug gangs](#), 21 September 2018

142 Home Office news story, [National County Lines Coordination Centre to crack down on drug gangs](#), 21 September 2018

143 [Q123](#)

144 [Q124](#)

145 [Q124](#)

146 [Q112](#)

147 [Q114](#)

148 [Q117](#)

149 [Q117](#)

involve greater consideration of the risks outside the home, but the report warned that it requires a change in approach and specialist staff development. It also noted that there is a high demand on “limited” social services budgets, which raises the threshold for support.¹⁵⁰

100. Similarly, the VVU’s research found that referrals to agencies of children showing signs of involvement in criminal exploitation are frequently not accepted, due to “diminished resources and higher thresholds”. One youth offender worker reported that “they had to fight for a case of a child who had possession of a gun to be accepted as neglect”, and the report warned against viewing these young people’s behaviour as a “lifestyle choice” rather than “evidence of a vulnerable child in need of protection”. They compared this approach to the manner in which young girls were viewed in Rotherham, while agencies failed to act on evidence of sexual exploitation and abuse.¹⁵¹ The authors argued that there was an “urgent need to explore a type of Child Criminal Exploitation Protection Order”.¹⁵² Dr Lucy Gore, a psychologist from Project Future, contrasted the approach to sexual exploitation with the support offered to young men being criminally exploited:

The lack of safeguards for certain young men is interesting. There is something about them being young boys. There is a lot about sexual exploitation in women, but young men just do not seem to get the same understanding put to them—for example the vulnerabilities of 14-year-old boys who are found in Scotland. I have actually heard them described as “All criminals” and have heard things such as, “We need to get them out the area and make it somebody else’s problem.”

There seems to be a lack of consideration that they are a 14-year-old who went missing for over a month and was never reported as such. What does that say about their environment and what could be put in place [...]? [...] they are seen as antisocial and difficult, rather than as really vulnerable.¹⁵³

101. Dr Carlene Firmin also confirmed that children exploited by county lines groups are being referred into children’s services but are not reaching the threshold for support.¹⁵⁴ She called for public authorities to “create a child protection system that is adequately designed for adolescents”, and added: “That needs to be co-ordinated through a statutory piece of work. It cannot just be something that you commission to organisations. It needs to happen within a framework, and I would spend [...] money creating and implementing that framework”.¹⁵⁵

102. The Children’s Commissioner told us in written evidence that safeguarding failures may have resulted in underestimates about the number of children at risk of involvement in serious violence, arguing that “As with child sexual exploitation, there has been a reluctance to acknowledge the scale of the issue”. The Office of the Children’s Commissioner asked Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards (LSCBs) to provide them with ‘working estimates’ of the number of local children who are in gangs, related to gang members, and at high risk of gangs or gang association. Many areas did not respond at all—often those areas with the highest level of risk”. Of those authorities which did respond, the quality of responses

150 JH Consulting, St Giles Trust and Missing People, [County Lines Scoping Report](#), May 2018

151 Violence and Vulnerability Unit, [County lines - a national summary & emerging best practice](#), May 2018

152 Violence and Vulnerability Unit, [County lines - a national summary & emerging best practice](#), May 2018

153 [Q380](#)

154 [Q189](#)

155 [Q192](#)

varied considerably, and generally suggested that “very small numbers of gang members are being identified locally”. The Commissioner concluded that LSCBs are “not fulfilling their statutory remit in relation to gang violence”.¹⁵⁶

103. Later this year, Safeguarding Children Boards are due to be replaced by new ‘arrangements’, with clearer responsibilities for contextual safeguarding. Guidance issued by the Government last July said that, by September 2019, the three “safeguarding partners”—local authorities, police chief officers and NHS clinical commissioning groups—must “make arrangements to work together with relevant agencies (as they consider appropriate) to safeguard and protect the welfare of children in the area”.¹⁵⁷ These reforms follow the findings of the ‘Wood Report’ on the role and functions of Local Safeguarding Children Boards, published in March 2016, which found that the duty for agencies to cooperate (under the Children Act 2004) “has not been sufficient in ensuring the coherent and unified voice necessary to ensure multi-agency arrangements are consistently effective”.¹⁵⁸

104. Alan Wood also said that LSCBs were “essentially predicated on interfamilial child abuse”, and recommended that the three safeguarding partners “should determine, for an identified area, multi-agency arrangements for protecting and safeguarding children”.¹⁵⁹ The Children’s Commissioner told us that the new bodies “have the potential to be much more effective, and it is important that this is realised”.¹⁶⁰ There has been considerable criticism, however, that the new safeguarding partners do not include education and schools, which have a key role to play in engaging vulnerable young people.¹⁶¹

105. County lines exploitation is blighting communities and destroying young lives. Children have been let down by safeguarding systems that are far too narrowly focused on risks inside the family home, as well as an ongoing failure of agencies to work effectively together to build a package of support around young people. These systems and processes have failed badly to keep up with county lines groups, who exploit and abuse children who may be perfectly safe in their family home. Later this year, Safeguarding Children Boards are due to be replaced with new arrangements, with clearer responsibilities for contextual safeguarding. The Government must prioritise safeguarding in the upcoming spending review, with ringfenced resources for safeguarding partners to ensure that they operate much more effectively. It is not enough to expect separate agencies—the police, local authorities and the NHS—to resource inter-agency partnership work, given the financial and operational constraints within which they are operating.

106. Safeguarding bodies should be given a duty to produce local plans, with clear targets and milestones, to reduce the number of children at risk locally of county lines exploitation, reporting back to the Home Office on a regular basis via the regional serious violence leads that we recommended in Chapter 3. The Government should

156 Children’s Commissioner for England ([SVC0054](#))

157 HM Government, [Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children](#), July 2018

158 [Wood Report](#): Review of the role and functions of Local Safeguarding Children Boards, March 2016

159 [Wood Report](#): Review of the role and functions of Local Safeguarding Children Boards, March 2016

160 Children’s Commissioner for England ([SVC0054](#))

161 For example, see [HM Government, Changes to statutory guidance: Working Together to Safeguard Children; and new regulations: Government consultation response](#), February 2018

also examine whether changes are needed to the statutory framework and resources underpinning child safeguarding, to ensure that children abused outside the home do not fall under the threshold for social services support.

Data-sharing issues

107. A number of witnesses suggested that data-sharing problems have hindered the statutory response to county lines exploitation. The St Giles Trust and Missing People scoping report on county lines warned that children arrested away from home can enter a ‘no-man’s-land’, with agencies in both areas unable or unwilling to facilitate the child’s return.¹⁶² Lucy Dacey told us that one reason why the county lines business model is “really effective” is that “perpetrators know that when young people and criminals cross boundaries, it’s very difficult for agencies to catch up with them”. The statutory and voluntary sectors “share information a lot more slowly [...] than perpetrators”.¹⁶³ According to Junior Smart, some areas “do not know whether it is their locals who are creating the criminal activity and the violence or whether they are on the import or the export end”.¹⁶⁴

108. Nikki Holland also emphasised how vital it was for the NCA that agencies share intelligence, enabling public bodies to be “more predictive in our analysis by having all the data, not just the law enforcement data.”¹⁶⁵ Simon Harding told us that the county lines issues vary by locality, “and we need to ensure that each local area has an up-to-date, contemporary profile of its young people, its provision, its substance misuse community, and so on, because things are moving very, very, very quickly”. Like Ms Dacey, he warned that “county lines and the people who run them are two or three years ahead of us”.¹⁶⁶ Councillor Simon Blackburn from the LGA suggested that local partnership work had suffered as a result of funding cuts, because “the number and seniority of people present at those meetings has altered”. When he was a social worker, he used to have multi-agency meetings every Friday:

There would be me, somebody from the police and a whole host of other agencies, and we just talked about the half a dozen kids in Fleetwood who we knew were always on some sort of spectrum of risk. We would exchange information about where they had been, who they had been seen knocking about with and what our plan for them was for the next week or two. We ended up stopping those meetings because in the end it was just me and the police officer. All of the other third sector organisations had gradually had their funding cut by local councils or by other bodies.¹⁶⁷

109. The NCA has noted that the use of missing children is a commonly-reported feature of county lines, “but it is often very difficult to get young missing people to engage with the police or partner agencies”. Lucy Dacey told us that early episodes of going missing “need to be seen as higher risk”, adding that young people are being reported missing by one force, which might recognise them as vulnerable, but are then “prosecuted and

162 JH Consulting, St Giles Trust and Missing People, [County Lines Scoping Report](#), May 2018

163 [Q111](#)

164 [Q199](#)

165 [Q109](#)

166 [Q217](#)

167 [Q132](#)

criminalised in another area of the country”. The Children’s Society has been calling for a national missing persons’ database, to ensure a more joined-up intelligence picture on vulnerable young people.¹⁶⁸

110. Following consultation earlier this year, the Government announced in July that it will be introducing a new legal duty to support the multi-agency ‘public health’ approach to serious violence. This will include the police, local authorities, local health bodies such as NHS Trusts, education representatives and youth offending services.¹⁶⁹ The Government will also legislate to require Community Safety Partnerships to set out strategies on serious violence, to ensure that the issue remains a “priority at a local level”. Its response to the public consultation stated: “We want to galvanise the partnerships that are not as effective at preventing and reducing serious violence currently by encouraging them to share data, intelligence and knowledge”.¹⁷⁰ Witnesses to our inquiry were sceptical about the need for additional legislative duties to share data. They asserted that there are no statutory or legislative barriers to sharing information, but people and agencies—particularly in the health service—are nervous about doing so.

111. For example, Simon Ford from the VVU highlighted Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which states: “Any person who, apart from this subsection, would not have power to disclose information—(a) to a relevant authority; or (b) to a person acting on behalf of such an authority, shall have power to do so in any case where the disclosure is necessary or expedient for the purposes of any provision of this Act”. The authorities listed include the NHS, housing providers and probation services.¹⁷¹ He told us that information-sharing varies significantly between areas, adding:

We have the legislation there, but still, when we go to those localities, people in those positions are very reluctant and nervous to share data. But they can do it and there should not be any hurdles in the way of being able to share that data, whether it is A&E data, crime data, safeguarding data or education data.¹⁷²

112. Similarly, Professor Harding said that he “continually” speaks to partners “who throw up the Data Protection Act and the GDPR as barriers to information sharing”. He suggested that the lack of proper structures was to blame, rather than any lack of statutory duty to share data:

[...] I hear a great deal of talk about multiagency partnership working and occasionally about information sharing as if it was invented yesterday. It has been a statutory duty for the past 21 years [...] Information sharing is a statutory duty; partnership working is a statutory duty. Much of this has become focused on the police and police cuts but very little about the statutory-duty role of the other providers—probation, health, local

168 [Q117](#)

169 Home Office news story, [New public health duty to tackle serious violence](#), 14 July 2019

170 Home Office, [Consultation on a new legal duty to support a multi-agency approach to preventing and tackling serious violence: Government response](#), 15 July 2019

171 [Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998](#)

172 [Q121](#)

authorities and so on. All of that needs to be reinflated, reenergised and reinvigorated. [...] We do not have the policing or partnership structures to address this successfully or over the long term.¹⁷³

113. According to the report from the Prime Minister’s knife crime summit, NHS England has “written to all trusts to remind them of their responsibilities to record and share data on attendance in accident and emergency departments as a result of violence—and to provide reassurance that this can be done in compliance with data protection laws”. The Government will also “consider whether the Crime and Disorder Act could be used to ensure that NHS data is shared with Community Safety Partnerships”.¹⁷⁴

114. The Government has proposed a public health duty to share data, but there is also a need to address the non-legislative barriers that inhibit data-sharing. Legislation already requires agencies to share data in order to protect children and reduce serious violence. The evidence we received suggests that problems with data-sharing are more closely tied to lack of resources at a local level, alongside widespread misunderstandings about data protection law. The Government should consider whether a national data-sharing protocol should be established for the new safeguarding structures being created. Ministers should also examine the case for funding the Information Commissioner to establish an advice service on data-sharing between public agencies. The new serious violence team within the Cabinet Office should send us a written update on this issue by the end of September.

Demand for Class A drugs

115. When we took evidence on county lines, we asked witnesses how they would prioritise any additional investment to reduce this form of criminality. Strikingly, the national policing lead for county lines, DAC Duncan Ball, suggested that demand for drugs was the issue that most needed addressing:

As long as there is a user population that stimulates the market, you will have county lines [...]. [...] If we were able to collectively reduce the size and demand from the drugs market, you would find that there was no longer as much money in the criminal networks, and as a consequence, you would expect the amount of county lines activity, and the violence and exploitation, to reduce.¹⁷⁵

Chief Constable Dave Thompson also said that demand needed to be addressed. Without such activity, he argued, any additional work to address drug supply (such as through border seizures) would “create its own problems”, because if it “drives up the price of drugs, that will hit acquisitive crime”.¹⁷⁶

116. To explore this in further detail, we took evidence separately on the changing drug market. We were told that there have been increases in Class A drug use in recent years, along with a significant expansion of “access points” for drugs. Harry Shapiro linked this to the “delivery economy, whereby people can have anything delivered 24/7”, echoing Professor Harding’s previous comments about a “24-hour “dial a dealer” situation,

173 [Q217](#)

174 HM Government, [Prime Minister’s Summit on Serious Youth Violence](#), 1 May 2019

175 [Q110](#)

176 [Q325](#)

outlined in paragraph 78. Global drug production has also increased significantly—including a 120% increase in cocaine production—which may explain increased levels of drug purity in the UK market, and the highest number of drug-related deaths on record.¹⁷⁷ The UK also has one of the highest rates of drug deaths in Europe. In July, figures revealed that drug-related deaths in Scotland are almost ten times higher than the European average. In England and Wales, drug deaths are around three times higher than the European average.¹⁷⁸

117. Witnesses told us that demand for illicit drugs had been affected by cuts to treatment provision, including heroin scripts. Professor Fiona Measham, a drugs expert from Durham University, said:

We have among the highest prevalence rates [of drug use] in Europe anyway. We have very cheap, very easily available drugs [...]. We have high purity, and along with that we have had a massive cut to health services and to treatment services. I guess we have had a perfect storm, which has led to us having the highest drug-related death rate on record, and the highest drug-related death rate in Europe. It is a national disaster at the moment.^{179,180}

118. Although the Serious Violence Strategy suggests that changes to the drug market may have played a role in the recent increases in serious violence, there are few actions related specifically to drug use. The Home Office pledged to work with Public Health England (PHE), frontline practitioners, service users and peer mentors “to understand more about the current cohort of crack cocaine users”, and to “review the availability of evidence-based treatment interventions for this cohort”. It also said that it was launching a new round of Heroin and Crack Action Areas, which “provide local partners and communities with the space to consider their response to a variety of public health issues”, and providing funding for up to seven coordinators to support these initiatives.¹⁸¹

119. Witnesses to this inquiry emphasised that harm-reduction services have closed and public health budgets have been cut.¹⁸² Harry Shapiro argued strongly that Government investment should be focused on drug treatment:

I have been in this field for about 40 years, and the only area where I could see drug policy making a difference to people’s lives is treatment and rehabilitation. [...]. [...] I know of treatment agencies that are refusing to pick up local council tenders for drug-treatment services because they are saying, “We cannot deliver a quality service for the amount of money you are offering us”.¹⁸³

There were 268,390 adults in contact with drug and alcohol services in 2017–18, which is a 13% fall since 2010–11.¹⁸⁴

177 [Q239](#)

178 National Records of Scotland, [Drug-related deaths in Scotland in 2018](#), 16 July 2019; and *BBC News*, [Scotland has highest drug death rate in EU](#), 16 July 2019

179 [Q249](#)

180 As outlined above, Scotland has the highest drug-related death rate in Europe. The combined rate in England and Wales is the fifth highest in Europe, at 66 deaths per million people.

181 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

182 [Q256](#) and [Q194](#)

183 [Q256](#)

184 Public Health England, [Substance misuse treatment for adults: statistics 2017 to 2018](#), table 7.1.1

120. Dr Mike Shiner, a policing and drugs expert from the LSE, said that the direction of Government drug policy over the last decade had been “unfortunate in many ways”, arguing that a focus on abstinence is “at the very least optimistic”, given that “we cannot ensure that contained environments as security-focused as prisons are drug-free”. He called for the success of drugs policing to be measured by harm, such as the number of drug-related deaths, arguing that “the effect of a lot of traditional enforcement activity” appears to have been “increases in drug-market violence”.¹⁸⁵ He added later: “It would be very difficult to make any evidence-based claim that drug policy is a success”.¹⁸⁶ Steve Rodhouse from the NCA conceded that it is “unlikely that enforcement alone” will eliminate the drugs market, adding that it needs to be “supported—I could not agree more with what my colleagues on the panel have said—by demand reduction”.¹⁸⁷

121. The UK has one of the highest rates of drug deaths in Europe—in England and Wales, drug deaths are three times the European average, and in Scotland they are ten times the European average. Government leadership on county lines and drug markets has been woefully inadequate. On all reasonable measures, the Home Office’s Drug Strategy is failing miserably. The Government has acknowledged the link between the drug market and violence: it must now take urgent action to reduce demand by improving the provision of treatment for drug users. There is no need to await the outcome of Dame Carol Black’s review, when the links between violence and demand for Class A drugs are so clear.

122. We have major concerns about the apparent growth of a 24/7 ‘dial a dealer’ drug culture, and the turf wars associated with this profitable market. The explosive growth both in drug gangs exploiting young people and in county lines criminality is damning evidence of systemic failures within current structures and processes for law enforcement and child protection. Combatting county lines requires far more than an acute response from the National Crime Agency and the police service. More action is needed against organised criminal groups, but county lines activity has been sustained by a thriving market for Class A drugs, a growth in the number of vulnerable young people, and a failure of safeguarding and law enforcement agencies to operate effectively across borders and share data on at-risk children.

185 [Q256](#)

186 [Q267](#)

187 [Q269](#)

5 Policing

123. During the course of our inquiry, the Government recognised that additional policing resources were needed to tackle rising levels of serious violence, and announced £100 million of additional funding for policing this year. This chapter looks at the pressures on policing and the impact of different measures on tackling violent crime, including neighbourhood policing, schools officers and stop and search.

Police funding

124. The debate about links between police cuts and serious violence, which initially overshadowed the launch of the Serious Violence Strategy, was reignited in early March after Jodie Chesney and Yousef Ghaleb Makki were killed in separate incidents over the course of a weekend. The then Prime Minister said that there was “no direct correlation” between falling police numbers and violent crime, prompting vigorous disagreement from a range of commentators and stakeholders. The following day, Cressida Dick told LBC radio: “I agree that there is some link between violent crime on the streets obviously and police numbers, of course there is, and everybody would see that”.¹⁸⁸ A Number 10 spokesperson subsequently said that the Prime Minister was simply stating that this is “a complex area”, and that “we need to be addressing the issues in all areas”.¹⁸⁹

125. Central Government direct funding to police forces, excluding counter-terrorism and the funding reallocated for national priorities, reduced by 30% between 2010–11 and 2018–19 in real terms.¹⁹⁰ In December 2018, the Government announced the funding settlement for 2019–20, increasing it by “up to £970 million” compared with 2018–19, with a total settlement of up to £14 billion. Like previous uplifts, this increase is dependent on additional income from the council tax precept: the central Government grant will remain flat in real terms, increasing by £161 million (approximately 2%), while PCCs will be able to raise an additional £509 million per year by levying additional precept charges without holding a local referendum.¹⁹¹ Despite this uplift, analysis by Committee staff has found that, in real terms, the police service will have £1.86 billion less to spend in 2019–20 than it had in 2009–10.¹⁹²

126. Our Policing for the Future report criticised significant cuts to neighbourhood policing since 2010. We asked forces how many officers and PCSOs had dedicated neighbourhood roles in a) 2009–10 and b) 2017–18. Of the 33 forces with data for both years, and excluding those who had restructured the neighbourhood role, all but one (Hertfordshire) reported a decrease in the numbers of neighbourhood officers, averaging cuts of 35%.¹⁹³ We called for the Government to “report back to us within one month of

188 BBC News, [Knife crime: Cressida Dick says violent crime rise linked to policing numbers](#), 5 March 2019

189 *Financial Times*, [Home secretary Sajid Javid calls for extra police funds to tackle knife crime](#), 5 March 2019

190 National Audit Office, [Financial sustainability of police forces in England and Wales 2018 \(HC1501\)](#), 11 September 2018

191 Home Office Factsheet: [Provisional Police Funding Settlement 2019–20](#), 13 December 2018

192 This accounts for: total police force spending power (central government grant funding plus funding raised through the police precept); additional ring-fenced funding of £98m in real terms (£100m in 2018–19); the Police Transformation Fund award for trauma-led policing; funding for the National County Lines Coordination Centre; and reductions to force budgets generated by additional pension costs.

193 Home Affairs Committee, [Policing for the future \(HC 515\)](#), 25 October 2018

the Comprehensive Spending Review, to explain what actions it has taken to maintain core neighbourhood policing functions in all forces, and to prevent officers from being diverted to other policing requirements”. We also concluded:

Neighbourhood officers underpin the police service’s more specialist capabilities in crucial ways. [...] As part of the police response to gangs and serious organised crime, **neighbourhood officers get to know the young people locally who might be tempted to get involved with criminal activity, and can spot patterns of behaviour that other parts of the service might miss. Once lost, these relationships cannot be quickly rebuilt.** Without the maintenance of a consistent and reliable police presence in communities, forces’ efforts to respond to the recent wave in volume and violent crime will be severely compromised.¹⁹⁴ [Emphasis added]

127. Sara Thornton told us that police efforts to combat serious youth violence are being hampered by the fact that “core policing is under such strain”, despite the fact that senior officers know what works:

[...] Chiefs are of the view that we know what tactics work, whether that is patrolling of the hotspot areas where the high-harm offences are happening, whether it is about the use of stop and search [...] whether that is about concerted action on county lines on targeting organised crime groups.¹⁹⁵

[...] I would point to the evidence that there are fewer officers. There is a lot less policing happening and there is more crime. I also think that colleagues around the country will say [...] a lot of the organisations that were heavily involved in prevention and diversion are not there in the way they were five or 10 years ago.¹⁹⁶

128. Sir Denis O’Connor said that “there has been a significant reduction in the deterrent effect of the police” since 2010, as a result of funding and workforce cuts. While evidence for the deterrent effect of policing on violent crime is limited, figures do show that the number of arrests has halved over the last decade, from 1.4m in 2009/10 to 698,737 in 2017/18.¹⁹⁷ In June, data obtained from police forces by *The Guardian* found that the number of detectives serving in “major crime and murder squads” had fallen by 28% between 2010–11 and 2017–18.¹⁹⁸ Commissioner Dick said recently that detection rates for some offences are “woefully low”, partly due to increased levels of complexity and the growth of digital evidence.¹⁹⁹ After we called for extra police funding in our Policing for the Future report, the Home Office confirmed that the Home Secretary has “committed to prioritising police funding at the Spending Review”.²⁰⁰

129. The Government has also recognised the need for urgent additional resources, providing £100 million for policing this year, a third of which is funding violence reduction units. These are intended to bring together the police, local government, community

194 Home Affairs Committee, Policing for the future ([HC 515](#)), 25 October 2018

195 [Q149](#)

196 [Q161](#)

197 Gov.uk, Ethnicity facts and figures, “[Arrests](#)”, published 18 March 2019

198 *The Guardian*, [Fewer criminals being caught after 28% drop in detective numbers](#), 24 June 2019

199 *BBC News*, [Crime solving rates ‘woefully low’, Met Police Commissioner says](#), 26 June 2019

200 The Government response to the Tenth Report from the Home Affairs Select Committee Session 2017–19 HC 515: Policing for the future ([CP62](#)), 15 March 2019

leaders, health providers and other key partners. The Home Office has said they will be responsible for “identifying the drivers of serious violence locally and developing a coordinated response to tackle them”.²⁰¹

130. Cressida Dick told us that the £100 million was a “reasonably small amount” in the context of “the reduction in policing scale and capacity and budgets over the last few years”.²⁰² She also highlighted the challenges of investing in people when the spending is ‘in year’:

£100 million is obviously very welcome. It has not been distributed yet, but our understanding is that it is to be in-year. Recruiting new people takes a while, and getting them skilled takes even longer; being able to keep them if you do not have a budget is difficult.

Similarly, Chief Constable Thompson said that the money can only increase capacity in the “short term”, by asking staff to work days off or overtime.²⁰³

131. The temporary nature of this uplift was confirmed by the Minister for Safeguarding in June, when she wrote to the Committee Chair, stating that “we do not expect forces to take measures which will incur costs beyond the funding period”. She also said that the funds “provide support for surge activity including overtime; intelligence, training and technology to support this activity; along with complementary activities such as police school partnerships”.²⁰⁴ Our Policing for the Future report called for the Government to move to a longer-term funding structure, “to enable the service to frontload investment in the technology that will enable it to make the best use of its resources and assets”.²⁰⁵ The Government did not address this recommendation directly in its response.²⁰⁶

132. We welcome the additional in-year funding for policing to tackle serious violence. We also strongly welcome the creation of violence reduction units to coordinate the police response with other partners. They have the potential to have a major impact on coordinating a cross-agency approach to serious violence, providing there is clear local leadership and commitment from all the relevant agencies. However, we are very concerned by the short term nature of the funding that has been announced. The lack of commitment for future years makes it harder for forces to use the money to recruit and train additional staff, and means that the focus is more likely to be on funding overtime by existing staff. Given that many police officers and staff are already stretched by additional overtime and other demands, we do not believe that this is a sustainable or desirable approach. We reiterate the call we made last year, in our Policing for the Future report, for the Government to make available substantial additional resources for policing, so that forces can recruit additional officers and staff, both to respond to serious organised crime and to increase community prevention activity, neighbourhood policing and schools officers.

201 Home Office news story, [Home Office allocates £35 million to police forces for violence reduction units](#), 18 June 2019

202 [Q289](#)

203 [Q289](#)

204 Home Office ([SVC0058](#))

205 Home Affairs Committee, Policing for the future ([HC 515](#)), 25 October 2018

206 The Government response to the Tenth Report from the Home Affairs Select Committee Session 2017–19 HC 515: Policing for the future ([CP62](#)), 15 March 2019

Social media and online platforms

133. It has been argued that the rise in police-recorded serious violence can also be partially attributed to the rise in violent content online, which is readily accessible and widely shared on social media platforms. The Serious Violence Strategy notes that drug market related violence may be facilitated and spread to some extent by social media, and that it can glamourise gang life while normalising carrying weapons.²⁰⁷ The Home Office announced last year that a 20-strong team of police officers and staff would be tasked with disrupting and removing overt and covert gang-related online content, in a new “social media hub”.²⁰⁸ The Minister told us in April that 17 officers and staff had been recruited into the hub.²⁰⁹

134. While we welcome the news that the Home Office is investing in a social media hub to tackle the roots of online content, we are concerned that a team of only 17 police staff and officers will be unable truly to tackle this issue. Yet again, there appears to have been failure on the part of social media companies to address this issue adequately.

Stop and search

135. Commissioner Dick told us that she had invested any extra funding she received, unless ringfenced for other priorities, into “tackling violent crime on the streets of London”.²¹⁰ Stop and search has been a key priority: the Commissioner said that the tactic had been “an extremely important part of our success in the last few months in suppressing violence in some areas”, and emphasised the importance of good briefing and intelligence, as well as the use of body-worn video. She assured us that her force has been “targeting the people we know to be the most violent, targeting habitual knife carriers, targeting the right places where we know violence is likely to take place”.²¹¹

136. The Commissioner also told us that the force’s use of Section 60 powers, which enable the police to stop anyone in a defined area (for a specific time period) to prevent serious violence, have also increased significantly—from “20-something times” in the year that she took office to “nearly 300 times” in 2017 and early 2018.²¹² She said that Section 60 powers were used “very professionally, and in a measured way” and that the police “have found no difficulty in using it”:

My officers are quick to know when they need to ask for one. They have a very good understanding of what the law says, which is where serious violence may take place, and I have always applied that since I became Commissioner.²¹³

Chief Constable Thornton told us that community engagement to explain the application of Section 60 had improved, and that officers were “very careful about the context in which we are doing it and spend a lot of time trying to explain to communities why that is necessary.”²¹⁴

207 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

208 Home Office news story, [Social media hub announced to tackle gang-related online content](#), 17 June 2018

209 [Qq514–518](#)

210 [Q289](#)

211 [Q312](#)

212 [Q313](#)

213 [Q313](#)

214 [Q164](#)

137. In June, it was reported that the use of stop and search had increased five-fold in London between 2017–18 and 2018–19. Black people were nine and a half times more likely than White people to be stopped and searched nationally in 2017–18.²¹⁵ In January, an analysis by *The Guardian* found that the Met Police had increased its use of stop and search on London’s Black population by 19% in the previous year. A “briefing note for senior officials”, apparently seen by the paper, said that “disproportionality has increased”, with Black people 4.3 times more likely to be stopped than White people.²¹⁶ According to the campaigning organisation StopWatch, under Section 60 powers in London, Black people are 13 times more likely than White people to be stopped.²¹⁷ The Home Secretary has defended the disproportionate use of stop and search against Black, Asian and minority ethnic people, highlighting that “if you’re Black you’re more likely to be a homicide victim than any other ethnic group”, and adding: “If Stop and Search mean[s] that lives can be saved from the communities most affected, then of course it’s a very good thing”.²¹⁸

138. Chief Constable Thompson suggested that the West Midlands is taking a slightly different approach to stop and search:

My observation would be that young people at the moment feel under-protected. If we solely resort to stop and search, they will feel over-enforced against. In the approach we have been taking in the West Midlands, we are doing stop and search. We are now going through a stop-and-talk strategy with young people and a stop-and-think strategy with partners.²¹⁹

He also suggested that Birmingham had been using Section 60 “to safeguard and protect young people”, and “not to over-enforce on them”.²²⁰

139. Evidence on the effectiveness of stop and search at reducing violent crime is extremely limited. An academic review published in early 2018, using ten years of data from London, examined the potential effect of the tactic on different forms of crime. The researchers found that a 10% increase in stop and search (S&S) was associated with a drop in “susceptible crime” of 0.32% (monthly) or 0.14% (weekly)—a statistically significant but very small effect. When drug offences and drug-related stop and searches were excluded, the size of the effects halved. The study “struggled to find evidence of an effect of S&S on violent crime”: a 10% increase in the tactic led to a 0.01% decrease in non-domestic violent crime. The academics concluded that it “seems likely that S&S has never been particularly effective in controlling crime”, and yet “police officers believe that S&S is a useful tool of crime control”.²²¹

140. Echoing Commissioner Dick’s comments, other senior policing figures have also asserted that stop and search is a valuable tool for reducing serious violence. David Lloyd, the PCC for Hertfordshire, told us: “I do not think it is helpful that people feel that if they carry a bladed object, they are unlikely to be stopped and searched. That is why I am very supportive of us using Section 60 powers and various other powers to be able

215 Gov.uk, Ethnicity facts and figures, “[Stop and search](#)”, published 15 February 2019

216 *The Guardian*, [Met police ‘disproportionately’ use stop and search powers on black people](#), 26 January 2019

217 StopWatch website, [Metropolitan Police](#), accessed 15 July 2019

218 Home Office, [Home Secretary Police Superintendents’ Conference speech](#), 11 September 2018

219 [Q286](#)

220 [Q313](#)

221 Tiratelli, M., Quinton, P., & Bradford, B. [Does Stop and Search Deter Crime? Evidence From Ten Years of London-wide Data](#), *The British Journal of Criminology*, Volume 58(5), September 2018, Pages 1212–1231

to stop people and search them”.²²² The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said in a speech in July that “when it’s done professionally, properly and with evidence—Stop and Search can be effective in taking drugs and weapons off our streets, and [is] therefore a vital tool we must use”.²²³ The Youth Violence Commission concluded: “In the main, we believe that stop and search is an ineffective policy, however, we also recognise that there are instances where it can—and should—be deployed intelligently. Police should focus on a truly intelligence-led approach”.²²⁴

141. Commissioner Dick assured us that, alongside surge enforcement efforts, her force has been putting equal amounts of effort into “engagement, information, communication and working with local people to explain why we are there”.²²⁵ Other witnesses have raised serious concerns about tactics in London, however, suggesting that some communities have experienced an increase in enforcement activity alongside a reduction in community policing. Project Future psychologists told us that their young people have “very ruptured relationships with the police”. Dr Bhandari told us that policing “can be very reactive; they have reached a crisis where there are lots of stabbings” and, as a result, local policing has become “quite criminalising and pathologising”.²²⁶ Dr Stringer said that there was an “antagonistic” relationship locally:

Everyone is existing in this threat-based environment, which makes interaction with police incredibly difficult. [...] Time and time again the young people have said to us that what is lacking is much more community engagement from policing. All the times that they get to interact with police are quite intense, which does nothing for the relationship with the community.²²⁷

142. We held a roundtable on stop and search with young people in May. Participants expressed very strong views about disproportionality, with one young person from a BAME background arguing that “We know that the police treat Black people differently”:

I was asked when I was going to come here if I had direct experience [with the police] and it blew my mind, because living in a community where you know your community is treated differently, there is none of us that do not have direct experience. Because the weight of that, it is harrowing and [...] it means that we do not feel safe ever.²²⁸

143. Another young person said that “The only interaction that you have with police nowadays is when you are being pulled over, when you are being stopped and searched”. That witness spoke powerfully about the way in which their relationship with the police service had changed over their young lifetime:

[...] my first ever interaction with the police was in primary school and I remember they used to come in with their police cars, and you’d get the fire trucks. People loved the police.

222 [Q404](#)

223 Mayor of London press release, [Mayor of London speech on the causes of crime](#), 15 July 2019

224 The Youth Violence Commission, [Interim Report](#), July 2018

225 [Q312](#)

226 [Q336](#)

227 [Q376](#)

228 Oral evidence: The Macpherson Report: twenty years on, HC 1829, [15 May 2019](#)

[...] My next interaction after that was being pulled over because there were suspicions that I had a knife on me; and I was about six years old coming home from the park. [...] The only interaction you have with an officer is when he is pulling you to the side, emptying out your pockets. [...] Now you are being looked at and labelled as a criminal when you have done absolutely nothing wrong. What that is now doing, it is creating a state of mind for young people to want to hate the police.²²⁹

144. Several witnesses have suggested to us that a breakdown in trust in the police may be putting young lives at risk. For example, another Project Future psychologist, Dr Lucy Gore, said:

It is worrying, because young people who think they are being followed, or who are in really dangerous situations, don't call the police. We have known of young people in our community who have lost lives; had they felt able to pick up the phone and call the police, they probably would be here today. I don't think that we as a project necessarily have the answer to that; but the breakdown in the relationship—certainly in [Haringey], and it is replicated in a lot of London—is so, so bad.²³⁰

145. In early 2018, the Youth Violence Commission surveyed young people and found that only 46% would go to the police if they were worried about being a victim of crime.²³¹ Outlining those findings, Vicky Foxcroft MP (one of the Youth Violence Commissioners) concluded that “we clearly have an issue with lack of trust [...] among young people and the police”.²³² Dame Louise Casey noted that “you're more likely to reach out to somebody if you know them already”, and suggested that “the hollowing out of neighbourhood policing” meant that “there are not those relationships that you have day to day”. She added:

The police are one part of it; the wider police family is another, and the police officers who were in schools on a regular basis. The relationships were there already, as it were, and then you were more likely to turn to them when you knew them, so that your first interaction with a police officer isn't a negative experience of a stop-and-search, or that your family is having their door kicked in.²³³

146. Giving evidence to us in October, Philippa Addai, whose son Marcel was murdered in 2015, also lamented cuts to neighbourhood policing:

I would like to see, personally, more police on the beat, how they used to be. I remember when I was younger I was out of school and one of the police used to come up to me and say, “Ello ‘ello,” you know, “What are you doing here?” They were more engaging with you. Now you hardly see them. You only see them in cars. There should be more interacting with the young ones to stop the hate as the kids get older towards the police.²³⁴

229 Oral evidence: The Macpherson Report: twenty years on, HC 1829, [15 May 2019](#)

230 [Q376](#)

231 The Youth Violence Commission, [Interim Report](#), July 2018

232 [Q393](#)

233 [Q448](#)

234 [Q28](#)

147. The Youth Violence Commission recommended last year that there should be a police officer attached to every primary and secondary school in the country;²³⁵ Vicky Foxcroft told us that this would build trust in policing and encourage young people to “see the police officer as a human being that they can have a dialogue with and find other ways of resolving situations and issues”.²³⁶ Commissioner Dick emphasised the value of her force’s ‘safer schools’ officers in working with hard-to-reach young people, and told us that she was aiming to increase their number to over 500 by the autumn.²³⁷ In follow-up written evidence, she told us that every school and further education college in London is offered a “named” local police officer.²³⁸

148. The picture is quite different in other parts of the country. When we collected data for our Policing for the Future report, we pre-emptively asked for figures on safer schools officers, which we expected to be relevant to this inquiry. Of the 33 English forces returning data, ten had no safer schools officers in either 2009–10 or 2017–18. The Metropolitan Police had increased its numbers by 138 officers between those two years; excluding the Met, forces had lost 108 officers—a reduction of 37% overall. The Minister for Safeguarding told us that the Home Office does “not collate information routinely on the number of police officers deployed in schools”, which it considers “an operational decision for the local police force in agreement and cooperation with schools in the area”.²³⁹

149. Chief Constable Dave Thompson told us that West Midlands Police now has no schools’ officers at all, and said that his force was not in a position to “even contemplate” resourcing pupil referral units. He implied that other forms of school-related support might be more helpful for reducing violence, stating that he would prioritise “Visibility around school closing times and safe routes for young people to travel in”.²⁴⁰ Mark Burns-Williamson, the PCC for West Yorkshire, said that his force has 40 dedicated schools officers, and “we have done some mapping around where incidents of knife crime or serious violence have occurred”.²⁴¹

150. Intelligence-led stop and search is a core aspect of the ‘surge’ policing response to violent crime. When used properly, in a focused and professional way, it can be an important part of keeping communities safe. Too often, however, it has alienated the most heavily-policed communities and undermined trust in the police, particularly among young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds—especially when many young people do not see their local neighbourhood officers at all. There remains significant disproportionality in stop and search, which is not explained or justified by the increased likelihood of becoming a victim of knife crime if you are Black—particularly without a parallel programme of intensive community engagement. We will explore this subject in further detail when we report on our inquiry to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Macpherson report, later this year.

151. It is absolutely vital that the Home Office prioritises investment in neighbourhood policing and safer schools’ officers in the next spending review, to enable policing to rebuild vital links with the communities and people most affected by serious violence.

235 The Youth Violence Commission, [Interim Report](#), July 2018

236 [Q407](#)

237 [Q279](#)

238 Metropolitan Police Service ([SVC0055](#))

239 Home Office ([SVC0058](#))

240 [Q286](#)

241 [Q408](#)

By the beginning of April 2020, all schools in areas with an above-average risk of serious youth violence should have a dedicated school police officer. We also reiterate our previous recommendation that the Home Office should move to a long-term funding settlement for policing, to allow for much-needed investment in the frontline workforce.

6 Prevention, early intervention and youth services

Introduction

152. The Government’s commitment to a public health approach suggests that prevention should be the most important aspect of its Serious Violence Strategy. This chapter considers the risk factors for serious youth violence, the role of school exclusion, youth service provision, early intervention, and evidence we received about what sort of services might be most effective at reducing serious violence. We will also look at some of the main funding changes over the last decade, and consider the need for increased investment in public services linked to serious violence.

Risk factors for serious youth violence

153. The Serious Violence Strategy analysed a number of factors influencing whether or not an individual becomes a perpetrator of serious violence. These include:

- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including abuse, neglect and parental drug or alcohol use: those experiencing four or more ACEs are almost seven times more likely to be a perpetrator of violence as an adult, and almost eight times more likely to be incarcerated in their lifetime, than those with no ACEs.²⁴² Several written submissions to this inquiry also emphasised the significance of ACEs.²⁴³
- Gender: 76% of people convicted of homicide in 2016/17 were male, and 87% of 14-year-olds reporting weapons-use were male.²⁴⁴
- Age: self-reported violence and weapons-carrying peaks at the age of 15.²⁴⁵
- Peer influence: the strategy cited evidence suggesting that young people who carry knives had experienced less disadvantage than gang members, but showed other signs of vulnerability, such as low self-esteem, lack of support from parents, and social isolation; the strategy concluded that knife-carrying behaviour might be “particularly susceptible to peer influence”.²⁴⁶

154. As we touched on in Chapter 1, there is also evidence that serious youth violence is having a disproportionate impact on people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. NHS data shows that 27% of knife crime victims admitted to hospital in 2017/18 were from a Black, Asian or ‘mixed heritage’ background,²⁴⁷ even though they represented approximately 14% of the UK population (this also reflects the concentration of knife crime in metropolitan areas, which are more diverse).²⁴⁸ In addition, 38% of people

242 Bellis et al, [National household survey of adverse childhood experiences and their relationship with resilience to health-harming behaviors in England](#), BMC Medicine (12), May 2014

243 e.g. NPCC CYP Portfolio (SVC0019), Standing Committee for Youth Justice (SVC0031)

244 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

245 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

246 HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

247 NHS Digital, [Hospital admissions for assault by sharp object](#), 4 March 2019

248 ONS, [Research report on population estimates by characteristics](#), 25 August 2017

sentenced to a knife or offensive weapon offence in 2018 were classified as Asian, Black or “other”.²⁴⁹ This indicates that the majority of knife crime offenders and victims are White: a fact emphasised by the journalist Gary Younge in his ‘Beyond The Blade’ series for *The Guardian*, in which he criticised the media and politicians’ focus on young Black teenagers and drill music.²⁵⁰ Trends in recent years are nevertheless concerning: between 2013–14 and 2017–18, there was a 43% increase in hospital admissions for knife crime among ethnic minority groups, compared with a 17% increase among White people.²⁵¹

155. Clearly, data on suspected and convicted offenders should be viewed in the context of a complex relationship between race and the criminal justice system (CJS), such as the increased likelihood of being stopped and searched, as well as the treatment and experiences of people from minority ethnic groups in society more widely. David Lammy MP’s 2017 review of race and the criminal justice system noted that “many of the causes of BAME overrepresentation lie outside the CJS, as do the answers to it”:

People from a black background are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than those from a white background. Black children are more than twice as likely to grow up in a lone parent family. Black and Mixed ethnic boys are more likely than White boys to be permanently excluded from school and to be arrested as a teenager. These issues start long before a young man or woman ever enters a plea decision, goes before a magistrate or serves a prison sentence. Although these problems must be addressed, this cannot be done by the justice system alone. Prisons may be walled off from society, but they remain a product of it.²⁵²

156. The journalist and commentator Afua Hirsch explored the relationship between race and knife crime in a recent *Guardian* article, in which she criticised those who depict victims of violence as “gangsta”, and as the result of absent fathers:

[Researchers] have found young people living in an “alternative cognitive landscape” in which you stab first and ask questions later; where distrust of the authorities and hostile strangers results in people—and especially young men—arming themselves and acting in aggressive and threatening ways in order to pre-empt attacks.

It turns out there are many predictors of violent behaviour more relevant than “absent fathers”: weak social ties, an absence of constructive social activities in which to invest energy, antisocial peers, poor experiences at school, psychological problems, high activity levels and poor eating habits. All these factors relate to poverty, the lack of resources, opportunities, or—frankly—any love from the institutions whose job is to protect, stimulate and engage young people.²⁵³

157. In his concluding article for the ‘Beyond the Blade’ series, Gary Younge argued that treating knife crime as “a criminal issue that affects black kids in London” can have a

249 Ministry of Justice Official Statistics, [Pivot table analytical tool for previous knife and offensive weapon offences](#), 14 March 2019

250 *The Guardian*, [The radical lessons of a year reporting on knife crime](#), 21 June 2018

251 NHS Digital, [Hospital admissions for assault by sharp object](#), 4 March 2019

252 [The Lammy Review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System](#), September 2017

253 *The Guardian* (Afua Hirsch), [Rod Liddle is wrong about the causes of black teenage deaths](#), 15 January 2019

number of negative effects, including increased levels of stop and search against Black people. It also “makes people who aren’t black or living in London complacent that their children are not vulnerable”. Instead of drawing on stereotypes, he argued, a public health approach to knife crime must “tackle all the contextual elements—housing, employment, mental health, addiction, abuse, as well as crime—that make some people and communities more vulnerable to it”.²⁵⁴

158. Witnesses also warned us against buying into “stereotypes” such as the “dysfunctional family”, with experts telling us that they have worked with young people from stable homes and two working parents who have been drawn into criminal activity and violence. Professor Harding highlighted that parental absence may be driven by “working two or three jobs in order to put food in the fridge and something on the table”, which can mean that they “don’t see their children for a few days”.²⁵⁵ Dr Carlene Firmin warned that children without obvious vulnerabilities may be “surrounded by peers where there are problematic behaviours”; that young person then “fears for themselves, brings in a knife to school because they are afraid, gets excluded, goes into a pupil referral unit”, and “all of a sudden you have created a situation for that child”.²⁵⁶

159. Nevertheless, many witnesses emphasised the significant risks that can be generated by the environment in which young people live and socialise. One of the Project Future community consultants stressed the importance of the role models available to young people:

[...] if they were to wake up in the morning and see businessmen going to work and whatnot, they would not get into it. They are waking up and seeing the sorts of people that we are talking about and drug addicts, so it is in our face [...].²⁵⁷

Dr Hannah Stringer, a Project Future psychologist, highlighted that the risk of violence could be linked to a young person’s postcode or housing estate alone: “That young person might not affiliate themselves with any gang at all, but just the fact that they have grown up in an area is enough for them to be seen as a target by another area”.²⁵⁸

160. Chief Constable Dave Thompson argued that the Serious Violence Strategy lacks a “place-based focus”, and pointed to a “strong correlation” between violent offending and deprived communities. We were also told how easy it is for some young people to become affiliated with ‘gangs’ in some areas. Dr Bhandari, who founded Project Future, told us that in the community in which the project operates, “initial chances and the options available to you are really reduced, and becoming involved in a life of crime is normalised”. Her colleague Dr Gore told us that “exploitation is part of the culture” locally, so “you need interventions at multiple levels”.²⁵⁹ Similarly, Professor Harding argued that, for some young people who are surrounded by criminal activity “all the time”, “Stepping into a gang or affiliating with a group of boys who are criminally active is a very small step”.²⁶⁰

254 *The Guardian*, [The radical lessons of a year reporting on knife crime](#), 21 June 2018

255 [Q187](#)

256 [Q186](#)

257 [Q379](#)

258 [Q354](#)

259 [Q333](#)

260 [Q187](#)

161. Using data from University College London, MOPAC has identified that individuals living in top 10% most vulnerable wards in London are six times more likely to become victims of knife crime than the 10% least vulnerable wards. Vulnerability is measured through a number of factors, including average household income, GCSE scores and rates of criminal damage. Gun crime and sexual offences are twice as likely to happen in the most vulnerable wards compared with the least vulnerable.²⁶¹ A separate analysis published in July showed a very strong association between indices of “Multiple Deprivation”, such as low income and poor health, and the likelihood of being a victim of serious youth violence.²⁶²

162. There is very strong evidence linking deprivation and vulnerability with knife crime and serious youth violence. This points to the need for a broad, population-wide approach to prevention, with enhanced interventions to support the communities most at risk of violence.

School exclusion

163. Evidence to this inquiry has emphasised the vulnerability of children expelled from mainstream education, and their potential exposure to criminal exploitation. Junior Smart told us that the “easiest places to recruit” for gangs are outside schools and pupil referral units (PRUs):

The kids that leave school last will be the ones that are often in detention, the ones that are socially excluded. You only have to look at our county lines evaluation work where 100% of the young people who are involved in county lines came from pupil referral units or alternative learning establishments.²⁶³

Government figures seen by the BBC reportedly showed that almost a quarter of children in England who said they had carried a knife in the previous year had been expelled or suspended from school, compared with only 3% of children who had not carried a knife.²⁶⁴

164. One of Project Future’s community consultants explained how school exclusion can lead to trouble:

When you are excluded, you are at home and you’re bored. Mum’s gone to work. The rest of your brothers and sisters are at work. What are you going to do with yourself? You want to get up to stuff. So you go out and see what you can do. You might meet someone else who’s been excluded. He’s not up to anything. “Alright, cool, let’s go down the road. Let’s see what we can do.” And that is how it starts.

Dr Bhandari also told us that children who are excluded “hang about and get up to all sorts”:

They are hanging about with what we refer to as gangs, but they are just with their peers, and these are in very deprived areas [which] are really

261 MOPAC, [Review of the Metropolitan Police Service Gangs Matrix](#), December 2018

262 GLA Strategic Crime Analysis Team, [City Intelligence Unit, A Public Health Approach to Serious Youth Violence: Supporting Evidence](#), July 2019

263 Q185

264 [BBC News, Knife crime: Excluded pupils ‘sucked into criminality’](#), 7 March 2019

very threat-based environments, so they end up carrying knives for their protection. Then, of course, they get exploited in terms of county lines and so on.²⁶⁵

165. A review of school exclusion by the former Conservative MP and Minister, Edward Timpson, was published in early May, with 30 recommendations for the Department for Education (DfE) and other public bodies. It referred to evidence of “perverse incentives to exclude or off-roll children who might not positively contribute to a school’s performance or finances”. Mr Timpson said that it is “right to recognise exclusion as one indicator, among others, of a higher risk of exposure to and involvement in crime, and we should therefore fully consider the form and content of the education a child receives following exclusions, in efforts to prevent and tackle serious violence”. Analysis conducted for the review found that 85% of all mainstream schools did not expel a single child in 2016/17, but 0.2% of schools expelled more than ten pupils in the same year. Children who have a Child Protection Plan are around 3.5 times more likely to be permanently excluded than those who have not been supported by care services.²⁶⁶

166. The report called for:

- DfE to make schools “responsible for the children they exclude and accountable for their educational outcomes”, consulting on how to take this forward;
- The £200m Youth Endowment Fund to be open to schools, including alternative provision (AP), to enable the development of workable interventions for 10 to 14 year olds most at risk of youth violence;
- DfE to take a number of steps to ensure that AP schools (such as pupil referral units) can attract the staff they need, to provide capital funding for improved buildings and facilities for AP schools, and for PRUs to be renamed; and
- DfE to ensure sufficient oversight and monitoring of schools’ use of AP, and for real-time data on exclusion and other moves to be shared routinely with Local Safeguarding Children Boards and their successors, so they can assess any safeguarding concerns, such as involvement in crime.²⁶⁷

167. The review found that Black Caribbean children were around 1.7 times more likely to be excluded than White British children, and mixed White and Black Caribbean children were around 1.6 times more likely to be permanently excluded. These figures are only partly explained by other factors associated with exclusion, and the report suggests that “a range of interwoven, local factors [...] rise to these differences”. For example, there were “some cases where cultural misunderstanding led to behaviour being misinterpreted, unconscious low expectations of some children or—in a small number of cases— ‘labelling’ of pupils”.²⁶⁸ Dr Zubaida Haque, Deputy Director of the Runnymede Trust, criticised the Timpson Review for failing to “confront racial disparities in exclusions”, and for “the

265 [Q333](#)

266 Timpson Review of School Exclusion ([CM92](#)), May 2019

267 Timpson Review of School Exclusion ([CM92](#)), May 2019

268 Timpson Review of School Exclusion ([CM92](#)), May 2019

absence of recommendations on closing the racial disparities in school exclusions”. She suggested a number of actions that could have an impact, such as mandatory training on race equality and exclusions for teachers.²⁶⁹

168. Giving evidence to the Education Committee in July, Edward Timpson said that the “totality of the recommendations” should benefit all children, and pointed to proposed actions that would help address racial disparity, such as tracking children to identify trends, and extending ‘diversity hubs’,²⁷⁰ which offer training and progression to underrepresented groups in the school leadership workforce.²⁷¹

169. The Children’s Commissioner suggested to us that funding for pupil referral units and other forms of alternative provision would be better spent on support in mainstream schools, pointing out that it costs £33,000 per year to send a child to a PRU. She called for this funding to be directed towards “additional support round the school to keep that child in school”, such as help with communication, speech and language, mental health, and family support: “all the things that that child is going to need to succeed”.²⁷² Evan Jones told us that the PRU model was “originally ‘fix ’em and return ’em’, but now they don’t get fixed and they don’t get returned”. Instead, “They go into PRUs and then they go into young offenders institutions—it is a bit of a one-way street”. He argued that being excluded from school should be a “red flag” for support; it should immediately result in resources being pushed towards that young person, “but sadly that is not what happens”.²⁷³ Other witnesses highlighted the risks created by part-time timetables in alternative provision. Lucy Dacey said that these were a “particular bugbear”, because “you have young people with lots of free time on their hands and perpetrators who know that, and there is no support available to them”.²⁷⁴

170. We are concerned about the links between school exclusion and knife crime, which suggest that our education system is currently failing many children, including those most in need of holistic support and early intervention. There is a pressing need for more investment in wraparound support to keep a child in mainstream education. The presence in a child of multiple risk factors for school exclusion should be an instant ‘red flag’ for additional support, and the Government must act quickly to implement the recommendations of the Timpson Review. Providing only part-time timetables in alternative provision is also a very serious failing. Most of those who have been excluded from school are in need of more social, educational and emotional support—not less. They are already more vulnerable to being drawn into exploitation or risky behaviour, and they should not be left to spend even more time on the streets. Urgent action is needed to ensure that they have full-time support.

171. The Timpson Review has been criticised for its lack of recommendations on closing racial disparities in school exclusion, despite evidence that Black children are excluded at a higher rate than White children, even when controlling for other risk factors. Given the links between school exclusion and serious violence, we are particularly concerned about this form of disparity, and do not regard Mr Timpson’s

269 Tes (Dr Zubaida Haque), [Timpson Review: where was the acknowledgment of race?](#), 13 May 2019

270 House of Commons Education Committee, Oral evidence: Accountability hearings – [2 July 2019](#), HC 341

271 Timpson Review of School Exclusion ([CM92](#)), May 2019

272 [Q444](#)

273 [Q138](#)

274 [Q131](#)

recommendations as sufficient to address it. The Department for Education should take action to tackle racial disproportionality in school exclusion, if necessary via a separate independent review.

Youth service provision

172. Witnesses told us that there had been a reduction in safe spaces for young people to congregate, and to protect them from those who groom them to join gangs. Dr Carlene Firmin said that “the loss of youth services around the country” had resulted in “young people congregating in a range of public spaces where they are exposed to violence”, without access to “any sort of support from youth workers or any other kind of active community guardians who can keep them safe”. Professor Harding concurred that “adults have created unsafe spaces for children”, and Junior Smart agreed with them:

There is a reduction in safe spaces for the young people to hang out and be in the company of an adult or [...] informal educator. [...] in the closure of those spaces where are the young people going? They are hanging out in the local parks and that is attracting intimidation from local residents and attracting the attention of authorities [...].²⁷⁵

173. Our 2018 report, *Policing for the Future*, criticised the manner in which the police are being left to fill in the gaps left by other public services, arguing that “In too many areas, the police are the only emergency service for those in crisis”.²⁷⁶ This inquiry has heard similar concerns among policing leaders regarding youth service provision, and the lack of early intervention to prevent children from being exploited by criminal gangs, or from entering a life of crime themselves. Chief Constable Dave Thompson said that the notion that the police are going to “solve” this problem by “increasing the stop-search or enforcement activities” is “a million miles away from what this problem is”, adding: “This is about the resilience of children”.²⁷⁷ He later highlighted the cost-shunting that occurs when youth provision is cut:

You can decommission youth, and nobody keeps phoning you up to say, “Can you come out at 11pm? I need a youth worker.” The police service can decommission very little, so [...] the demand piece is getting stretched and stretched because of [the] lack of protective factors.²⁷⁸

[...] I would look at the particular groups and schools, and I would invest more resourcing into improving the resilience of young people, their families, and their community, in terms of driving up social capital around those young people.²⁷⁹

Cressida Dick also emphasised the importance of upstream interventions. If she was given additional funds for non-policing services, she said, she would target it at “those young

275 [Q184](#)

276 Home Affairs Committee, *Policing for the future* ([HC 515](#)), 25 October 2018

277 [Q303](#)

278 [Q306](#)

279 [Q330](#)

people who are already getting sucked in, to give them youth workers out on the street in the places that they are and diversion schemes in hospitals and in custody and in other places”.²⁸⁰

174. Community consultants from Project Future linked the rise in youth violence to a lack of opportunities, as well as cuts to youth services. ‘RN’ told us: “I think it is boredom”:

For me as a teenager, and for most of the kids that I see out there now, there is nothing to do. There is only one Project Future [...] and not all people might feel safe going there, because of conflicts they might have, and stuff like that. There are only two active youth clubs running in [***] [...], so people have nothing to do at all—they just stand around, and when they get bored, they start getting into trouble. I think they need way more things to do, like apprenticeships and stuff like that.²⁸¹

He added later: “One thing I’d do is sign some money off for more youth clubs. As clichéd as it sounds, there ain’t none—literally”. His colleague added: “I’d probably have a Project Future in each of the areas that need it”.²⁸² Further information on the Project Future model is outlined below.

175. The community consultants also talked about the value of sport for keeping young people occupied: ‘SC’ told us that he had seen people get involved in criminal activity “when they stopped playing football or doing things that they like”,²⁸³ and RN said that sport “brings people together”.²⁸⁴ Commissioner Dick agreed that sport and “adrenaline-filled activities in which you can get out frustrations are very good”, particularly for “young boys”.²⁸⁵ In April, the Conservative Peer and former Chairman of the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, Lord Coe, reportedly linked youth service cuts to rises in knife crime. He criticised the Government for failing to recognise the “bloody obvious”: that properly funded activities are “the most potent social worker in any community”, adding: “We’ve strangled the life out of the youth services in this country, yet we are surprised that we have big problems in our inner cities [...] Politicians, they still really don’t get that. They don’t understand what sport is doing at community level.”²⁸⁶

176. The Children’s Commissioner also called for investment in youth work, warning that there are “many areas now without any statutory youth services”, despite the “recognition in the public health approach in Glasgow and elsewhere that youth workers are a vital part of that solution”. She emphasised the value of “positive role models” who disrupt and divert young people from negative influences:

There are alternatives to the kind of relationships we have seen some of the most vulnerable kids turning towards in gangs. They want to belong, they want to feel protected and they want to have things to do, but there have not been youth workers there in the numbers or with the kind of skill set needed to be able to divert them to a better place.

280 [Q330](#)

281 [Q341](#)

282 [Q366](#)

283 [Q344](#)

284 [Q361](#)

285 [Q319](#)

286 [The Independent, Tory peer Seb Coe blames soaring knife crime on big cuts to youth services](#), 22 April 2019

[...] I would like to see them populating schools after school and during school holidays. I would like to see them in the estates where at the moment no one dares go.²⁸⁷

Her written evidence asserted that “There is an urgent need to re-establish a high-quality, targeted youth service, starting in the areas of the highest risk”.²⁸⁸ The Ben Kinsella Trust also spoke of the importance of role models, stating that “many of the young people we have worked with describe not having role models in their local community who can help them navigate the challenges they face”.²⁸⁹

177. Early intervention and youth service provision was a key priority for the bereaved parents who gave evidence to us in October. Yvonne Lawson, whose son Godwin was killed in 2010, told us that she is “passionate about prevention and intervention”, and pointed out that there is a “correlation between crime and mental health”.²⁹⁰ Darren Laville, whose son Kenichi Phillips was murdered in 2016, also called for more safe spaces and early intervention:

More visible people that are employed to be able to do the work that engages young people early, and that are accessible. It would be about having safe spaces for young people to go to, for me, and the joint working, strategically looking at how we review a lot of our safeguarding within schools and how the notification process with Ofsted considers issues around county lines and youth violence.²⁹¹

178. Analysis by Committee staff shows that youth services were cut by £800 million between 2010–11 and 2018–19, or £967 million in real terms, and youth justice by £152 million in the same period (£211 million in real terms). Combining these two figures suggest that councils now spend around £1 billion per year less on youth justice and youth services, in real terms, than they did in 2010–11.²⁹² Between 2012 and 2016, more than 600 youth centres closed and almost 139,000 youth service places were lost across the UK.²⁹³ In March, it was reported that the number of London youth clubs had halved since the 2011 riots, with over 100 closures.²⁹⁴

179. The Government has announced a series of new youth initiatives aimed at tackling serious violence, including the Early Intervention Youth Fund, the Youth Endowment Fund and the Supporting Families Against Youth Crime Fund, which will be invested in community-backed projects in 21 areas to help families who are vulnerable to the effects of knife crime. Committee staff have estimated that these announcements amount to around £40 million per year in additional funding for youth projects.²⁹⁵ These programmes mostly require community organisations and local authorities to bid for funds, and are considerably smaller-scale than the youth services that have been cut. The Government

287 [Q438](#)

288 Children’s Commissioner for England ([SVC0054](#))

289 The Ben Kinsella Trust ([SVC0057](#))

290 [Q18](#)

291 [Q29](#)

292 Excluding any funding they receive from other streams, such as the Troubled Families programme.

293 The Local Government Association ([SVC0028](#))

294 The Guardian, [Number of London youth clubs nearly halved since 2011 riots, report finds](#), 22 March 2019

295 This figure encompasses the Youth Endowment Fund, the Early Intervention Youth Fund, the Supporting Families Against Youth Crime Fund and the Trusted Relationships Fund, assuming that they are allocated evenly throughout their designated funding periods.

has also introduced the National Citizens Service (NCS), which provides a three to four week summer programme for young people aged 15–17, some of which is residential, and some follow-up activities—but there has been some criticism that this may have displaced funding for universal youth services elsewhere.²⁹⁶

Community safety teams

180. As well as cuts to youth services, Professor Harding also lamented the loss of community safety teams from local authorities:

[...] we have seen the reduction of approximately 50,000 project workers and staff in community safety. I have a background in community safety in Hackney and Islington and as director of community safety in Lambeth. I managed 56 staff, including crime analysts, drugs staff, anti-social behaviour staff, gang workers, project workers. All of that has gone, effectively, and over the past 10 years throughout England and Wales that has largely withered away. In addition to a reduction in police numbers, we have an enormous reduction in staff who once worked on community engagement, partnership working, setting up the projects, multiagency partnerships. That has largely gone.²⁹⁷

181. The LGA undertook a community safety survey of local authorities in England and Wales in 2016. Just over two-thirds (68%) of the local authorities that responded indicated that the number of staff working on community safety had decreased, with the majority of others (24%) indicating that it had stayed about the same, and 9% indicating an increase in staff numbers.²⁹⁸

Effective youth interventions

182. Witnesses to this inquiry were almost united in recognising the value of preventative approaches that seek to diagnose and tackle the root causes of violence, in line with the ‘public health’ approach, and there were strong views about what sort of interventions are the most effective. In line with the evidence outlined above, several witnesses emphasised the importance of focusing on the most deprived areas of the country. Chief Constable Thompson told us that “the much-vaunted public health based approach is often mentioned and rarely understood”, and argued that the strategy “has to be to increase protective factors around young people [...] particularly in the most deprived communities”.²⁹⁹ He added later:

You treat a disease where it happens; you fight battles where they are happening. If you concentrate on these places and take a more transformational approach to how services are spread, stuff that is very hard to do on the ground now for policing, we can leverage more from what we have. But do I think there is a capacity problem in those areas? I look at my colleagues in Birmingham City Council; in dealing with a knife crime

296 Local Government Association, [Concerns over £10 million to be spent on National Citizen Service brand refresh](#), 15 March 2019

297 [Q194](#)

298 Local Government Association, [Community safety survey 2016](#), December 2016

299 [Q285](#)

issue, we are talking about the deployment of maybe 20 youth outreach workers. One million people live in Birmingham, and half of them are under 25. There is a real capacity problem in services.³⁰⁰

183. Some witnesses argued that services need to take better account of the reality of young lives. Carlene Firmin called for preventative activity to support young people to “actively make safe choices in the place they are”, rather than “these abstracted ideas of just saying no, without a recognition of how do you say no when someone is threatening your younger brother or saying they are going to set fire to your house”.³⁰¹ The Ben Kinsella Trust said in written evidence that young adolescents define their “culture and identity very differently from their parents”, so those delivering interventions must understand that context, and avoid causing “social isolation”.³⁰² One of the Project Future community consultants, RN, told us that mentors were helpful, but “You have to relate to them”:

I couldn’t just sit down in front of someone who is telling me, “[***], you’re being bad; you’re doing this, you’re doing that,” if this person is living a whole different lifestyle to how I live. You ain’t asked me why I’ve been bad. That is what the mentors used to do—ask if you’re in trouble, in the sense of “Do you owe money?”, “Have you eaten today?”. Little things like that. Little questions like that go a very long way.³⁰³

184. To ensure their connection with the reality of young people’s lives, the majority of Junior Smart’s team at St Giles Trust have “lived experience”, including previous involvement in gangs and criminality:

[...] it is about understanding the reality, the complexity of what is involved in gangs, understanding that it is not as simple as to say to a young person, “Right, don’t carry a knife”, because if they are not carrying a knife they may very well become a victim. It is about talking to young people and saying, “Listen, there is going to be some really difficult choices. The next time you are faced with ops [opposition] where you live, you are going to have to run for it but that will be safer than carrying that knife”. It is understanding and being able to position yourself and understand what is happening for the young people directly where they are coming from.³⁰⁴

185. Alongside those with “lived experience of the issues”, Project Future psychologists also stressed the value of services that employ those with mental health skills, “who are able to think psychologically about why a person might be struggling to engage or to access services, or might be presenting in a certain way”.³⁰⁵ The Youth Violence Commission’s interim report highlighted the economic and emotional cost of failing to address trauma in young people, and recommended that “all professionals who have a statutory responsibility for the safeguarding and wellbeing of young people should be trained in the significance of ACEs, in recognising trauma and in the proper processes for helping a child who is displaying trauma-related behaviour”.³⁰⁶

300 [Q307](#)

301 [Q215](#)

302 The Ben Kinsella Trust ([SVC0057](#))

303 [Q347](#)

304 [Q188](#)

305 [Q355](#)

306 The Youth Violence Commission, [Interim Report](#), July 2018

186. Witnesses were enthusiastic about the value of “detached” youth service provision, in which youth workers are available, in Dr Firmin’s words, “in the places and spaces where young people actually feel unsafe”. She emphasised the value of “guardianship and support in that 3 o’clock to 6 o’clock window” (around school closing times), diminishing opportunities for criminals to “approach them and start grooming them into violence”, because “other people are looking out for them”. This sort of support also needs to be consistent: “people who they know they can go to if things are going wrong”. It is “not an intervention; it is about creating safety for young people in a consistent fashion”.³⁰⁷ Without these services, Junior Smart argued that “to recruit or groom any young person” into criminal activity, such as county lines, is actually “very easy”, because “Any child wants to be seen as an adult”.³⁰⁸

187. Evidence we received also emphasised the value of making young people the masters of their own destinies. Professor Harding said that a “national conversation with young people” is “what seems to be missing” at the moment: young people are “inventive, intelligent, creative and they have the solutions where we do not have the solutions. We simply do not understand the world that they are inhabiting at this point in time”.³⁰⁹ Later, he added: “There are many good children out there who have been pulled into doing bad things. They are salvageable and they are valuable, and we need to act now”.³¹⁰

188. In April, we met community consultants and psychologists from Project Future, a youth project based in Haringey, North London, and funded by local partners, including the NHS and the local authority. Dr Suchi Bhandari, who launched and leads the project, told us that it provides a “co-production-based approach”, which positions “young people as experts in their own lives”, recognising that they are “resourceful young men with talent”. Project Future works on a peer-referral basis with boys and men aged 11 to 25, who are “usually described as socially-excluded, gang-affiliated and involved in serious youth violence”, with unmet mental health needs and a reluctance to seek help. The work that these young men have done through the project includes art exhibitions, cooking courses and film-making—during our meeting, we had the pleasure of viewing one of their impressive productions. Dr Bhandari told us that the service generates savings for the public purse:

We have found that young people who are engaged in productive and meaningful activities, keeping them off the streets will lead to reduced police arrests, accident and emergency admissions and criminal justice system/prison interventions, which are very costly services. We therefore have created financial savings and efficiencies in the NHS/statutory sector and the charity/voluntary sectors. We work across the whole system, because in our view the system has failed these young people.³¹¹

189. The Project Future approach shows some parallels with efforts to regenerate communities in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, to reach socially excluded groups in areas suffering from violence and economic downturn. The Community Infrastructure Measure was an intervention described to us in written evidence from Professor Susan Hodgett from the University of East Anglia, who was involved in its development. It

307 [Q181](#)

308 [Q184](#)

309 [Q215](#)

310 [Q217](#)

311 [Q331](#)

involved 65 funded community-based projects; the Government gathered stories from community-based organisations delivering the projects on the ground, using a 1000-word template which enabled it to capture the opinions of hard-to-reach groups, such as young people and the long-term unemployed. This facilitated the design and development of projects by the communities that used and needed them, such as the Magherafelt Women's Group, which bought its own premises and became involved in education, training, networking and social activities involving over five hundred women.³¹² Project Future's written evidence referred to a "growing evidence base demonstrating the value of co-production", and called for practitioners to be trained to coproduce services with children and young people.³¹³

190. We welcome the Government's recognition that it needs to take a public health approach to serious violence, diagnosing and treating the root causes, rather than dealing with the acute outcomes through the criminal justice system and the accident and emergency departments. However, greater thought needs to be given to what sustained and coherent preventative interventions should look like, and how to ensure that public funding is diverted towards the most effective approaches, using data on the populations most at risk. This is linked to the Government's lack of understanding of the reality on the ground, and its failure to get a grip on this problem at the national level.

191. Clearly, it is far better to treat the cause of an illness or problem than to treat the symptoms. Although there will always be a need for a strong police response to serious violence, any criminal justice intervention is almost always an acute treatment for a deeper and longer-term problem. Nevertheless, the Government cannot just refer to any non-police intervention as the 'public health' approach. Its rhetoric does not match the reality of the actual interventions taking place in communities.

192. The current epidemic of youth violence has been exacerbated by a perfect storm emerging from cuts to youth services, heavily reduced police budgets, a growing number of children being excluded from school and taken into care, and a failure of statutory agencies to keep young people safe from exploitation and violence. Young people have been failed in the most devastating way, and they are losing their lives as a result. This country is full of resourceful, intelligent and energetic young people who need empowerment, opportunity, something to strive for, a safe space to spend their free time, and trusted adults to turn to when they need help or advice.

193. Witnesses to this inquiry were almost united in their calls for more youth services, but local authority budgets are being increasingly consumed by statutory services, such as social care. We welcome the Government's additional funding for youth intervention projects, such as the Youth Endowment Fund and the Supporting Families Against Youth Crime Fund, but these programmes are far too fragmented and small-scale. In addition, it is not at all clear how they fit together, where the strategic responsibility for youth interventions in each area lies, or whether communities and councils will get stuck in an endless bidding process to different departments simply to maintain existing services.

312 Professor Susan Hodgett ([SVC0056](#))

313 Project Future ([SVC0032](#))

194. **The Government needs to introduce a fully-funded, statutory minimum of provision for youth outreach workers and community youth projects in all areas, co-designed with local young people. This would be a national Youth Service Guarantee, with a substantial increase in services and ringfenced funding from central Government. It should include enhanced provision in areas with higher-than-average risk factors linked to serious youth violence, such as under-25 knife crime and school exclusion. It must also be coupled with proper mental health provision for young people, informed by an understanding of the impact of trauma and other adverse childhood experiences.**

Public funding for tackling serious youth violence

195. In its submission to this inquiry, the Home Office outlined the range of funding commitments that the Government had made in relation to serious violence, under the heading of “Resources”:

We are providing £40 million of Home Office funding over 2 years to support the initiatives in the Serious Violence Strategy, including £22m Early Intervention Youth Fund, £3.6 million for new National County Lines Co-ordination Centre over two years and over £2.5 million over three years for the (anti-knife) Crime Community Fund. This is in addition to the investment already in place and being provided through previously announced commitments, including £13 million for the Home Office Trusted Relationships Fund; £920 million for MHCLG’s Troubled Families Programme (2015–2020); £7 million of Police Transformation Funding for Wales Police work on Adverse Childhood Experiences; £40 million for the Youth Investment Fund from DCMS and Big Lottery Fund.

The Home Office also referred us to the recent police settlement and rising police precept, as well as the significant investment of £1.26 billion a year in the National Citizen Service.

196. However, this funding comes against a backdrop of overall cuts to policing, youth services and local authority funding. Analysis by Committee staff set out in Chapter 5, along with figures provided earlier in this chapter, show a substantial overall reduction in police funding of £1.86 billion in real terms since 2010, along with £1 billion in real terms cuts to youth service and youth justice funding. Local authority funding overall has also reduced. The NAO’s latest assessment found that councils’ spending power fell by 29% in real terms between 2010 and 2018, following central Government funding reductions of almost 50%, and in the context of rising national insurance contributions and the National Living Wage.³¹⁴ The Government has emphasised to us that the majority of central Government funding to local authorities is not ringfenced, so it is “for local authorities to determine how to spend their non ring-fenced income on the services they provide, including services for children”.³¹⁵ However, Councillor Simon Blackburn highlighted that spending on many statutory services has increased due to higher levels of demand, so “it is everything else that has been squeezed”, including youth clubs and youth workers.³¹⁶

314 National Audit Office, Financial sustainability of local authorities 2018 ([HC834](#)), 8 March 2018

315 Home Office ([SVC0058](#))

316 [Q132](#)

197. NAO figures also confirm that councils have experienced a growth in demand for many key services: between 2010–11 and 2016–17, the number of households entitled to temporary accommodation increased by 34%, the number of looked-after children grew by 11%; and the estimated number of over-65s in need of care increased by 14%.³¹⁷ Chief Constable Dave Thompson expressed particular concern about the funding formula for local authorities: he said that “Every time I look at violence, it is about deprivation”, but there is a “lack of capacity” in many areas: “Children’s services are often running at a critical level, and the Early Help offer is getting stretched in those [deprived] areas”.³¹⁸

198. We heard compelling evidence about the cost/benefit ratio of investment in early intervention. Junior Smart highlighted that cutting back on public services is “creating a cost-heavy service later on, a heavier burden for the police, for example”, because “they are getting called out for quite a lot of mental health issues now”.³¹⁹ One way in which local authorities are trying to mitigate risk is by moving children involved in violence or county lines to other parts of the country. As well as creating data-sharing and safeguarding problems, Carlene Firmin told us that this costs “thousands of pounds every year for every child that is moved”, which could be reinvested in services that work.³²⁰ Chief Constable Thompson also suggested that “Plenty of the money Government spend could be bent around this problem without it always necessarily being new money”,³²¹ and Evan Jones and Vicky Foxcroft MP pointed to the problems generated by separate budgets held by different partners at a local level. Mr Jones said:

What we have found is that when the cost and the potential for paying out are within the same budget envelope, it is easier to make a case to a local authority for spending to save, but sadly, because so many budgets are separate, one organisation [...] think[s] that they are saving money, and they cause massive problems to other organisations, as well as to that family. So yes, I think there is a massive problem around the way budgets influence behaviour here.³²²

Vicky Foxcroft delivered a similar message at a later session, arguing that “the money should follow the issue, rather than each department being its own silo with their own budget”.³²³

199. Given the scale of the problem we face in relation to serious youth violence, we are concerned that public services do not have the resources that they need in order to address it. Recent spending commitments have been fragmented and are not based on an evidence-based understanding of where investment is needed most. In the context of a decade of reductions to police and youth service funding, current levels of Government investment in tackling serious violence are completely inadequate, and do not even begin to match the scale of the problem. Funding announcements have been piecemeal and far too short-term: spending needs to be committed over a three to five year period, to allow for proper planning and frontloaded investment where necessary.

317 National Audit Office, Financial sustainability of local authorities 2018 ([HC834](#)), 8 March 2018

318 [Q306](#)

319 [Q195](#)

320 [Q202](#)

321 [Q307](#)

322 [Q135](#)

323 [Q413](#)

200. Over the last decade, many of the ties that bind communities together have been severed, from youth workers and neighbourhood police officers to community safety teams and safer schools officers. Local authority finances are being increasingly consumed by statutory services such as social care, housing and looked-after children, and council budgets will not benefit directly from savings to the criminal justice system and the health service. The Government must ensure that additional funding is made available to invest in effective activity to reduce serious violence. It needs to recognise that prevention is a far more cost-effective alternative to spending so much money on reactive and acute responses later on, which cost the taxpayer far more in the long term.

201. This report has set out what structures and reporting mechanisms are needed to drive change rapidly, at a national and local level. We have outlined what the Government needs to do to get a grip on this situation. We have focused on the factors most likely to be driving the increase in serious youth violence, including drug use, deprivation, social and school exclusion, and a lack of support services for young people. We have argued for more support for neighbourhood policing and for shifting investment into the early intervention services that need it most, and that have the best chance of turning this terrible tide. We do not need to wait years for this to change: with serious action now, young lives can be saved.

Conclusions and recommendations

The scale of the problem and its impact

1. Since Philippa, Darren, Yvonne and Caroline gave evidence to us about their sons' deaths and legacies, many more young people have had their lives cut short in tragic circumstances. We cannot hope to tell all their stories on these pages, but we can at least pay tribute to the witnesses who sat before us and laid bare their pain and loss. We cannot express strongly enough our sympathy for them, and we thank them for their determination and bravery. Recent rises in serious youth violence are a social emergency, which must be addressed through much more concerted Government action at a national and local level. The Government must make it a central priority to keep young people safe, and prevent more families from going through this terrible trauma. (Paragraph 11)
2. The last few years have seen a drastic increase in murder rates, along with enormous rises in police-recorded knife crime. Although violence overall has decreased over the long-term and shown little change in the last few years, the most serious forms of violent crime have spiked in recent years. This is confirmed by NHS data, which shows that more people are being admitted to hospital with knife wounds every year. (Paragraph 17)
3. Crime figures show clearly that it is not just London and other major cities that are being blighted by recent increases in serious violence. There is a clear need for a concerted action across the length and breadth of the country, including the many communities now affected by county lines drugs violence, which we explore further in Chapter 4. (Paragraph 21)

The Government's Serious Violence Strategy

4. The Serious Violence Strategy contains a relatively coherent analysis of the scale of the problem and the potential causes. It identifies many of the factors likely to be driving the recent wave in serious violence, which align with our own findings, from county lines through to vulnerability. We welcome its assessment of the broad range of causes of serious violence, as well as its commitment to a public health approach. As the Government's primary response to the wave of violence blighting our communities, however, it is completely inadequate. It contains no targets or milestones, few new actions, and no clear mechanisms for driving forward activity at a national and regional level. Nor does it suggest a clear Government focus on keeping young people safe from rising levels of violence. (Paragraph 40)
5. Although the strategy refers to risk factors for involvement in violence, its analysis is based largely on readily-available evidence. It is not underpinned by any attempt to collect data or gain a clear understanding of the number of people—particularly young people—at risk of serious violence. We fail to see how the Government can get a grip on this problem or pursue a public health approach without a clear understanding of the size and location of the populations most at risk, so that it can target resources effectively. Furthermore, it cannot measure progress effectively without clear milestones, along with timescales for achieving them. (Paragraph 41)

6. The strategy states that serious violence comes at “a huge cost to individuals, families and communities through loss of life, and the trauma caused through both the physical and psychological injuries suffered”. We agree; but there is a serious mismatch between the Government’s diagnosis of the problem and its proposed solutions. This is symptomatic of wider dysfunctions within the Government’s response to this issue, and its approach to crime and disorder more broadly, which we explore in further detail in the next chapter. (Paragraph 42)

Government leadership on Serious Violence

7. The Serious Violence Taskforce, along with the Inter-ministerial Group on Serious Violence, has been one of the Government’s main drivers of national action and oversight of the Serious Violence Strategy. We are therefore concerned by the infrequency of the Taskforce’s meetings and the absence of measurable targets or milestones for it to work towards, or on which it can hold to account the Government, local agencies and other organisations involved in delivering the strategy. Criticisms that it is a London-centric group are also cause for concern. The Taskforce did not meet at all between July and October 2018, a period in which knife crime was continuing to rise. This does not paint a picture of focused, sustained and proactive scrutiny and action. There is little evidence of resulting action or policy change, either from the Inter-Ministerial Group or the Taskforce. Moreover, the fact that the Chair of the National Police Chiefs’ Council had not seen minutes from any of the Taskforce’s meetings is an indictment of its profile and levels of output. (Paragraph 49)
8. The Government and local authorities need to address urgently the widening gap between demand for and provision of public health services, in the context of links between alcohol and susceptibility to serious violence. Serious consideration should also be given to the appropriate provision of services, balancing harm reduction for users with wider public safety concerns. Engagement with mental health services is also crucial to ensuring appropriate provision. (Paragraph 55)
9. Our 2018 report, “Policing for the Future”, argued that the Home Office must step up to the plate and play a much stronger role in policing policy, highlighting the many weaknesses created by a fragmented approach to governance and decision-making. This chapter has laid bare the weaknesses of the Government’s response to serious youth violence, including the lack of national or regional ownership of the problem. (Paragraph 68)
10. The Home Office’s response to serious youth violence appears to have been limited to the production of a limited strategy and the convening of a few roundtable discussions. The Department’s approach is not fit for the task at hand, and its lack of national leadership on this issue is evidence beyond doubt of the need for a change in direction. It would be supremely irresponsible for the Government simply to leave it to 43 PCCs and 43 chief constables to determine their own local response to this national crisis. (Paragraph 69)
11. Following the Prime Minister’s summit in April, the establishment of a Ministerial Taskforce on Serious Violence is welcome, along with the Cabinet Office team due to support its work. Although this should have been in place years ago, it does suggest

that the Government is finally taking this issue more seriously. We are concerned, however, that any momentum generated by the PM's summit is being lost, and we are not convinced that the Prime Minister and Home Secretary are treating serious violence with the urgency and focus it requires, ensuring that the Prime Minister's Taskforce has the resources it needs in order to function effectively and target resources in the right places. We recommend that the new Prime Minister takes personal responsibility for reducing serious youth violence and driving activity in this area, tasking Cabinet Ministers with taking ownership for key actions. (Paragraph 70)

12. We are also concerned by the absence of local or regional accountability for reducing serious youth violence, in the context of a complex network of local stakeholders in policing, local government, education and civil society. We fail to see how the Government can get a grip on this problem without clear lines of communication and accountability for progress on the ground. By the end of September, the Government should provide us with a list of named accountable leaders in every region or county of England and Wales. This might be a PCC, a mayor, or the leader of a local safeguarding partnership or violence reduction unit, for example. They must be identifiable locally as the individual reporting directly to 10 Downing Street, and responsible for convening those who need to work together to drive down serious youth violence. (Paragraph 71)
13. Ministers have spoken repeatedly of the need to take a 'public health' approach to serious violence. It is extremely difficult to target public health interventions without an understanding of the size of the population at risk, and yet the Government has not identified the number of children at risk of involvement in serious youth violence, pointing only to inadequate and readily-available sources of data on crime and safeguarding. A recent National Audit Office report also found that the Government does not yet have the data it needs on serious and organised crime to coordinate an effective response. (Paragraph 72)
14. The Ministerial Taskforce and the Serious Violence Taskforce should be monitoring progress across a common dataset, collected consistently across the country. That data should also be driving and informing local action to tackle serious youth violence, led by the regional or local leads. We recommend that the new Cabinet Office team prioritises the establishment of such a dataset at the earliest opportunity, and reports back to us on its progress by the end of October 2019. It should also inform us what targets or milestones the Government has set in relation to reducing serious youth violence, and by what date it intends to meet those targets. (Paragraph 73)

The changing drug market and county lines

15. Government and law enforcement efforts to tackle county lines criminality have been hampered by wider failings in the response to serious and organised crime. Fragmented governance and funding structures and poor coordination of resources have been contributory factors in giving county lines offenders a head start, making it easier for this terrible form of exploitation to flourish. (Paragraph 97)
16. County lines exploitation is blighting communities and destroying young lives. Children have been let down by safeguarding systems that are far too narrowly

focused on risks inside the family home, as well as an ongoing failure of agencies to work effectively together to build a package of support around young people. These systems and processes have failed badly to keep up with county lines groups, who exploit and abuse children who may be perfectly safe in their family home. Later this year, Safeguarding Children Boards are due to be replaced with new arrangements, with clearer responsibilities for contextual safeguarding. The Government must prioritise safeguarding in the upcoming spending review, with ringfenced resources for safeguarding partners to ensure that they operate much more effectively. It is not enough to expect separate agencies—the police, local authorities and the NHS—to resource inter-agency partnership work, given the financial and operational constraints within which they are operating. (Paragraph 105)

17. Safeguarding bodies should be given a duty to produce local plans, with clear targets and milestones, to reduce the number of children at risk locally of county lines exploitation, reporting back to the Home Office on a regular basis via the regional serious violence leads that we recommended in Chapter 3. The Government should also examine whether changes are needed to the statutory framework and resources underpinning child safeguarding, to ensure that children abused outside the home do not fall under the threshold for social services support. (Paragraph 106)
18. The Government has proposed a public health duty to share data, but there is also a need to address the non-legislative barriers that inhibit data-sharing. Legislation already requires agencies to share data in order to protect children and reduce serious violence. The evidence we received suggests that problems with data-sharing are more closely tied to lack of resources at a local level, alongside widespread misunderstandings about data protection law. The Government should consider whether a national data-sharing protocol should be established for the new safeguarding structures being created. Ministers should also examine the case for funding the Information Commissioner to establish an advice service on data-sharing between public agencies. The new serious violence team within the Cabinet Office should send us a written update on this issue by the end of September. (Paragraph 114)
19. The UK has one of the highest rates of drug deaths in Europe—in England and Wales, drug deaths are three times the European average, and in Scotland they are ten times the European average. Government leadership on county lines and drug markets has been woefully inadequate. On all reasonable measures, the Home Office’s Drug Strategy is failing miserably. The Government has acknowledged the link between the drug market and violence: it must now take urgent action to reduce demand by improving the provision of treatment for drug users. There is no need to await the outcome of Dame Carol Black’s review, when the links between violence and demand for Class A drugs are so clear. (Paragraph 121)
20. We have major concerns about the apparent growth of a 24/7 ‘dial a dealer’ drug culture, and the turf wars associated with this profitable market. The explosive growth both in drug gangs exploiting young people and in county lines criminality is damning evidence of systemic failures within current structures and processes for law enforcement and child protection. Combatting county lines requires far more than an acute response from the National Crime Agency and the police service. More action is needed against organised criminal groups, but county lines activity

has been sustained by a thriving market for Class A drugs, a growth in the number of vulnerable young people, and a failure of safeguarding and law enforcement agencies to operate effectively across borders and share data on at-risk children. (Paragraph 122)

Policing

21. We welcome the additional in-year funding for policing to tackle serious violence. We also strongly welcome the creation of violence reduction units to coordinate the police response with other partners. They have the potential to have a major impact on coordinating a cross-agency approach to serious violence, providing there is clear local leadership and commitment from all the relevant agencies. However, we are very concerned by the short term nature of the funding that has been announced. The lack of commitment for future years makes it harder for forces to use the money to recruit and train additional staff, and means that the focus is more likely to be on funding overtime by existing staff. Given that many police officers and staff are already stretched by additional overtime and other demands, we do not believe that this is a sustainable or desirable approach. We reiterate the call we made last year, in our Policing for the Future report, for the Government to make available substantial additional resources for policing, so that forces can recruit additional officers and staff, both to respond to serious organised crime and to increase community prevention activity, neighbourhood policing and schools officers. (Paragraph 132)
22. While we welcome the news that the Home Office is investing in a social media hub to tackle the roots of online content, we are concerned that a team of only 17 police staff and officers will be unable truly to tackle this issue. Yet again, there appears to have been failure on the part of social media companies to address this issue adequately. (Paragraph 134)
23. Intelligence-led stop and search is a core aspect of the ‘surge’ policing response to violent crime. When used properly, in a focused and professional way, it can be an important part of keeping communities safe. Too often, however, it has alienated the most heavily-policed communities and undermined trust in the police, particularly among young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds—especially when many young people do not see their local neighbourhood officers at all. There remains significant disproportionality in stop and search, which is not explained or justified by the increased likelihood of becoming a victim of knife crime if you are Black—particularly without a parallel programme of intensive community engagement. We will explore this subject in further detail when we report on our inquiry to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Macpherson report, later this year. (Paragraph 150)
24. It is absolutely vital that the Home Office prioritises investment in neighbourhood policing and safer schools’ officers in the next spending review, to enable policing to rebuild vital links with the communities and people most affected by serious violence. By the beginning of April 2020, all schools in areas with an above-average risk of serious youth violence should have a dedicated school police officer. We also

reiterate our previous recommendation that the Home Office should move to a long-term funding settlement for policing, to allow for much-needed investment in the frontline workforce. (Paragraph 151)

Prevention, early intervention and youth services

25. There is very strong evidence linking deprivation and vulnerability with knife crime and serious youth violence. This points to the need for a broad, population-wide approach to prevention, with enhanced interventions to support the communities most at risk of violence. (Paragraph 162)

School exclusion

26. We are concerned about the links between school exclusion and knife crime, which suggest that our education system is currently failing many children, including those most in need of holistic support and early intervention. There is a pressing need for more investment in wraparound support to keep a child in mainstream education. The presence in a child of multiple risk factors for school exclusion should be an instant 'red flag' for additional support, and the Government must act quickly to implement the recommendations of the Timpson Review. Providing only part-time timetables in alternative provision is also a very serious failing. Most of those who have been excluded from school are in need of more social, educational and emotional support—not less. They are already more vulnerable to being drawn into exploitation or risky behaviour, and they should not be left to spend even more time on the streets. Urgent action is needed to ensure that they have full-time support. (Paragraph 170)
27. The Timpson Review has been criticised for its lack of recommendations on closing racial disparities in school exclusion, despite evidence that Black children are excluded at a higher rate than White children, even when controlling for other risk factors. Given the links between school exclusion and serious violence, we are particularly concerned about this form of disparity, and do not regard Mr Timpson's recommendations as sufficient to address it. The Department for Education should take action to tackle racial disproportionality in school exclusion, if necessary via a separate independent review. (Paragraph 171)

Effective youth interventions

28. We welcome the Government's recognition that it needs to take a public health approach to serious violence, diagnosing and treating the root causes, rather than dealing with the acute outcomes through the criminal justice system and the accident and emergency departments. However, greater thought needs to be given to what sustained and coherent preventative interventions should look like, and how to ensure that public funding is diverted towards the most effective approaches, using data on the populations most at risk. This is linked to the Government's lack of understanding of the reality on the ground, and its failure to get a grip on this problem at the national level. (Paragraph 190)

29. Clearly, it is far better to treat the cause of an illness or problem than to treat the symptoms. Although there will always be a need for a strong police response to serious violence, any criminal justice intervention is almost always an acute treatment for a deeper and longer-term problem. Nevertheless, the Government cannot just refer to any non-police intervention as the 'public health' approach. Its rhetoric does not match the reality of the actual interventions taking place in communities. (Paragraph 191)
30. The current epidemic of youth violence has been exacerbated by a perfect storm emerging from cuts to youth services, heavily reduced police budgets, a growing number of children being excluded from school and taken into care, and a failure of statutory agencies to keep young people safe from exploitation and violence. Young people have been failed in the most devastating way, and they are losing their lives as a result. This country is full of resourceful, intelligent and energetic young people who need empowerment, opportunity, something to strive for, a safe space to spend their free time, and trusted adults to turn to when they need help or advice. (Paragraph 192)
31. Witnesses to this inquiry were almost united in their calls for more youth services, but local authority budgets are being increasingly consumed by statutory services, such as social care. We welcome the Government's additional funding for youth intervention projects, such as the Youth Endowment Fund and the Supporting Families Against Youth Crime Fund, but these programmes are far too fragmented and small-scale. In addition, it is not at all clear how they fit together, where the strategic responsibility for youth interventions in each area lies, or whether communities and councils will get stuck in an endless bidding process to different departments simply to maintain existing services. (Paragraph 193)
32. The Government needs to introduce a fully-funded, statutory minimum of provision for youth outreach workers and community youth projects in all areas, co-designed with local young people. This would be a national Youth Service Guarantee, with a substantial increase in services and ringfenced funding from central Government. It should include enhanced provision in areas with higher-than-average risk factors linked to serious youth violence, such as under-25 knife crime and school exclusion. It must also be coupled with proper mental health provision for young people, informed by an understanding of the impact of trauma and other adverse childhood experiences. (Paragraph 194)

Public funding for tackling serious youth violence

33. Given the scale of the problem we face in relation to serious youth violence, we are concerned that public services do not have the resources that they need in order to address it. Recent spending commitments have been fragmented and are not based on an evidence-based understanding of where investment is needed most. In the context of a decade of reductions to police and youth service funding, current levels of Government investment in tackling serious violence are completely inadequate, and do not even begin to match the scale of the problem. Funding announcements have been piecemeal and far too short-term: spending needs to be committed over a three to five year period, to allow for proper planning and frontloaded investment where necessary. (Paragraph 199)

34. Over the last decade, many of the ties that bind communities together have been severed, from youth workers and neighbourhood police officers to community safety teams and safer schools officers. Local authority finances are being increasingly consumed by statutory services such as social care, housing and looked-after children, and council budgets will not benefit directly from savings to the criminal justice system and the health service. The Government must ensure that additional funding is made available to invest in effective activity to reduce serious violence. It needs to recognise that prevention is a far more cost-effective alternative to spending so much money on reactive and acute responses later on, which cost the taxpayer far more in the long term. (Paragraph 200)
35. This report has set out what structures and reporting mechanisms are needed to drive change rapidly, at a national and local level. We have outlined what the Government needs to do to get a grip on this situation. We have focused on the factors most likely to be driving the increase in serious youth violence, including drug use, deprivation, social and school exclusion, and a lack of support services for young people. We have argued for more support for neighbourhood policing and for shifting investment into the early intervention services that need it most, and that have the best chance of turning this terrible tide. We do not need to wait years for this to change: with serious action now, young lives can be saved. (Paragraph 201)

Formal minutes

Thursday 18 July 2019

Members present:

Yvette Cooper, in the Chair

Janet Daby	Tim Loughton
Chris Green	Toby Perkins
Kate Green	Douglas Ross

Draft Report (*Serious youth violence*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 201 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Sixteenth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Monday 22 July at 1.45 pm.]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 16 October 2018

Philippa Addai, **Darren Laville**, Founder of the Epiphany People, **Yvonne Lawson**, CEO of the Godwin Lawson Foundation, **Caroline Shearer**, CEO of Only Cowards Carry Weapons Awareness [Q1–33](#)

Duncan Bew, Consultant Trauma & Acute Surgeon, King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, **Maggie Clarke**, Assistant Director – Universal Services, Compass, **Dr Magnus Nelson**, Consultant in Emergency Medicine, Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust, and Assistant Medical Director, South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust [Q34–80](#)

Tuesday 29 January 2019

Deputy Assistant Commissioner Duncan Ball, Lead for Gangs, National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), **Nikki Holland**, Director of Investigations, National Crime Agency, **Assistant Chief Constable Jacqueline Sebire**, Bedfordshire Police and NPCC Serious Violence Co-ordinator [Q81–110](#)

Councillor Simon Blackburn, Chair – Safer and Stronger Communities Board, Local Government Association, **Lucy Dacey**, National Programme Manager, Disrupting Exploitation Programme, The Children's Society, **Simon Ford**, Director, Violence and Vulnerability Unit, **Evan Jones**, Head of Community Services, St Giles Trust [Q111–148](#)

Tuesday 12 March 2019

Chief Constable Sara Thornton CBE QPM, Chair, National Police Chiefs' Council [Q149–178](#)

Tuesday 19 March 2019

Dr Carlene Firmin MBE, Principal Research Fellow, University of Bedfordshire, **Dr Simon Harding**, Professor in Criminology, University of West London, and **Junior Smart**, Business Development Manager, St Giles Trust [Q179–217](#)

Sir Denis O'Connor CBE QPM, former Chief Inspector of Constabulary [Q218–235](#)

Tuesday 26 March 2019

Professor Fiona Measham, Professor of Criminology, University of Durham, **Steve Rodhouse**, Director General (Operations), NCA, **Harry Shapiro**, Director, Drugwise, and **Dr Michael Shiner**, Associate Professor, Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics [Q256–273](#)

Cressida Dick CBE QPM, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, and **Dave Thompson QPM**, Chief Constable of West Midlands Police

[Q274–330](#)

Tuesday 2 April 2019

Dr Suchitra Bhandari, Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Head of Psychology and Psychological Therapies, Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust, **Dr Lucy Gore**, Clinical Psychologist and Deputy Project Lead, Project Future and **Dr Hannah Stringer**, Clinical Psychologist, Project Future

[Q331–337](#)

SC, Community Consultant, Project Future, **RN**, Community Consultant, Project Future, **Dr Suchitra Bhandari**, **Dr Lucy Gore**, and **Dr Hannah Stringer**

[Q338–390](#)

Tuesday 30 April 2019

Mark Burns-Williamson OBE, Chair and Serious Violence Lead, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, and PCC for West Yorkshire, **Vicky Foxcroft MP**, Youth Violence Commission, and **David Lloyd**, Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire

[Q391–425](#)

Dame Louise Casey DBE CB, former Director General of the Troubled Families programme and former Victims' Commissioner, and **Anne Longfield OBE**, Children's Commissioner for England

[Q426–455](#)

Wednesday 8 May 2019

Victoria Atkins MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability, **Dan Greaves**, Crime Director for the Crime, Policing and Fire Group, Home Office

[Q456–575](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

SVC numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Ameri, Gian A. ([SVC0003](#))
- 2 Amnesty International ([SVC0050](#))
- 3 APCC ([SVC0048](#))
- 4 Arun District Council, Adur & Worthing Councils and Chichester District Council ([SVC0010](#))
- 5 Bailey, Mr Shaun ([SVC0016](#))
- 6 Barnardo's ([SVC0046](#))
- 7 The Ben Kinsella Trust ([SVC0057](#))
- 8 Boff, Mr Andrew ([SVC0015](#))
- 9 The British Association for Shooting and Conservation ([SVC0027](#))
- 10 The British Psychological Society ([SVC0047](#))
- 11 British Shooting Sports Council ([SVC0014](#))
- 12 The Children's Society ([SVC0022](#))
- 13 Children's Commissioner for England ([SVC0054](#))
- 14 Community Links ([SVC0029](#))
- 15 Criminal Justice Alliance ([SVC0030](#))
- 16 Cybersecurity and Criminology Centre, University of West London ([SVC0008](#))
- 17 Faculty of Public Health, London ([SVC0013](#))
- 18 Greater Manchester CA ([SVC0035](#))
- 19 Hackney CVS ([SVC0001](#))
- 20 Heritage Arms Study Group ([SVC0026](#))
- 21 Hodgett, Professor Susan ([SVC0056](#))
- 22 Home Office ([SVC0006](#))
- 23 Home Office ([SVC0058](#))
- 24 The Institute of Alcohol Studies ([SVC0005](#))
- 25 Jackson, Mr Jerome ([SVC0053](#))
- 26 The Local Government Association ([SVC0028](#))
- 27 Local Government Association ([SVC0051](#))
- 28 London Youth ([SVC0036](#))
- 29 MAC-UK ([SVC0037](#))
- 30 Madge, His Honour Nic, Crichton, Dr John, Bew, Mr Duncan, and Griffiths, Mr Martin ([SVC0052](#))
- 31 The Magistrates Association ([SVC0025](#))
- 32 Mayor of London ([SVC0040](#))

- 33 Metropolitan Police Service ([SVC0055](#))
- 34 National Crime Agency ([SVC0023](#))
- 35 National Police Chiefs' Council ([SVC0042](#))
- 36 North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner ([SVC0004](#))
- 37 NPCC CYP Portfolio ([SVC0019](#))
- 38 NPCC Independent Advisory Group for Criminal Use of Firearms ([SVC0049](#))
- 39 Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner for Northumbria ([SVC0039](#))
- 40 Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex ([SVC0011](#))
- 41 Police and Crime Commissioner West Midlands ([SVC0020](#))
- 42 Prison Reform Trust ([SVC0034](#))
- 43 Project Future ([SVC0032](#))
- 44 Release ([SVC0044](#))
- 45 Southwark Council ([SVC0017](#))
- 46 Squires, Professor Peter ([SVC0021](#))
- 47 Standing Committee for Youth Justice ([SVC0031](#))
- 48 StopWatch ([SVC0024](#))
- 49 Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner ([SVC0009](#))
- 50 Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance ([SVC0033](#))
- 51 Violence and Vulnerability Unit ([SVC0002](#))
- 52 West Sussex County Council ([SVC0038](#))
- 53 West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner ([SVC0041](#))
- 54 Youth Justice Board ([SVC0045](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2017–19

First Report	Home Office delivery of Brexit: customs operations	HC 540 (HC 754)
Second Report	Immigration policy: basis for building consensus	HC 500 (HC 961)
Third Report	Home Office delivery of Brexit: immigration	HC 421 (HC 1075)
Fourth Report	UK-EU security cooperation after Brexit	HC 635 (HC 1566)
Fifth Report	Windrush: the need for a hardship fund	HC 1200 (HC 1558)
Sixth Report	The Windrush generation	HC 990 (HC 1545)
Seventh Report	UK-EU security cooperation after Brexit: Follow-up report	HC 1356 (HC 1632)
Eighth Report	Policy options for future migration from the European Economic Area: Interim report	HC 857
Ninth Report	Domestic Abuse	HC 1015 (HC 2172)
Tenth Report	Policing for the future	HC 515 (CP 62)
Eleventh Report	Policy options for future migration from the European Economic Area: Interim report: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report	HC 1663
Twelfth Report	Home Office preparations for the UK exiting the EU	HC 1674 (HC 1985)
Thirteenth Report	Asylum accommodation: replacing COMPASS	HC 1758 (HC 2016)
Fourteenth Report	Immigration detention	HC 913
Fifteenth Report	EU Settlement Scheme	HC 1945 (HC 2592)
First Special Report	The work of the Immigration Directorates (Q1 2016): Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 541
Second Special Report	Asylum accommodation: Government Response to the Committee's Twelfth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 551

Third Special Report	Unaccompanied child migrants: Government Response to the Committee's Thirteenth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 684
Fourth Special Report	Home Office delivery of Brexit: customs operations: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 754
Fifth Special Report	Immigration policy: basis for building consensus: Government and Office for National Statistics Responses to the Committee's Second Report	HC 961
Sixth Special Report	Home Office delivery of Brexit: immigration: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 1075
Seventh Special Report	The Windrush generation: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report	HC 1545
Eighth Special Report	Windrush: the need for a hardship fund: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1558
Ninth Special Report	UK-EU security cooperation after Brexit: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 1566
Tenth Special Report	UK-EU security cooperation after Brexit: Follow-up report: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report	HC 1632
Eleventh Special Report	Home Office preparations for the UK exiting the EU: Government Response to the Committee's Twelfth Report	HC 1985
Twelfth Special Report	Asylum accommodation: replacing COMPASS: Government Response to the Committee's Thirteenth Report	HC 2016
Thirteenth Special Report	Domestic abuse: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report	HC 2172
Fourteenth Special Report	EU Settlement Scheme: Government Response to the Committee's Fifteenth Report	HC 2592