



Violent Crime: Government Strategy Debate on 29 November 2018

Summary

On 29 November 2018, the House of Lords will debate the following motion:

Lord Harris of Haringey to move that this House takes note of the recent increase in violent crime and the case for a cross-Governmental response that includes not only policing, law enforcement and policies on gangs and drugs but also health services, youth provision and opportunities for young people.

Violent crime has been raised as a subject of public concern in both Houses of Parliament, particularly in light of recent press reports of knife crime in London. Whilst data from the *Crime Survey for England and Wales* has shown that people's experience of violence has remained relatively static for the past four years, extreme violent crime, as recorded by the police, has increased over the same period. For example, the number of homicides has increased from 533 in the year ending March 2014 to 701 in March 2018 and the number of police recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument has risen from 25,588 to 40,147.

On 9 April 2018, the Government published its *Serious Violence Strategy*, in which it emphasised the importance of early intervention as well as effective law enforcement to tackle violent crime. It also spoke about the need for a cross-government response. Following the strategy's publication, the Government announced plans in October 2018 to consult on a public health approach to violent crime. This would place police officers, education partners, local authority and health care professionals under a statutory duty to take action and prevent violent crime. On 19 September 2018, the Mayor of London announced a new public health approach to violent crime in the capital, partly inspired by successes in Scotland based on a similar model.

This Lords Library Briefing examines statistics on violent crime in England and Wales. It then provides an overview of the *Serious Violence Strategy* and responses to it and presents information on a public health approach to combatting serious violence.

Table of Contents

1. Trends in Violent Crime: Statistics
2. Violent Crime: Government Policies
3. Further Information

Table of Contents

1. Trends in Violent Crime: Statistics	1
2. Violent Crime: Government Policies	7
2.1 Serious Violence Strategy.....	7
2.2 Commentary on the Strategy.....	17
3. Further Information	22

A full list of Lords Library briefings is available on the [research briefings page](#) on the internet. The Library publishes briefings for all major items of business debated in the House of Lords. The Library also publishes briefings on the House of Lords itself and other subjects that may be of interest to Members.

House of Lords Library briefings are compiled for the benefit of Members of the House of Lords and their personal staff, to provide impartial, authoritative, politically balanced briefing on subjects likely to be of interest to Members of the Lords. Authors are available to discuss the contents of the briefings with the Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public.

Any comments on Library briefings should be sent to the Head of Research Services, House of Lords Library, London SW1A 0PW or emailed to purvism@parliament.uk.

I. Trends in Violent Crime: Statistics

Violent crime has been raised as a subject of public concern in both Houses of Parliament.¹ Particularly, in light of recent press reports of knife crime in London.² In England and Wales, there are currently two main sources used to understand the current ‘count’ of crime and to track trends over time. These, are:

- police-recorded crime, and
- estimates of incidents experienced by victims from the [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) (CSEW).

Police-recorded figures are regarded as more comprehensive, covering a range of crime types as per the Home Office’s [‘notifiable offences list’](#); whereas the CSEW attempts to capture those ‘hidden’ incidents which may have been experienced by victims but not reported to the police.³

In 2014, the UK Statistics Authority announced that police-recorded crime figures did not meet the standards required of an official data source, owing to “concerns over the quality and consistency of crime recording”.⁴ Rolling crime data integrity inspections are now conducted across police forces by [HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services](#) to check compliance with [Home Office Counting Rules](#). Last month, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) noted ongoing improvements to police recording practices, but cautioned that, “for many types of offence, police recorded crime figures do not provide a reliable measure of trends in crime, [however] they do provide a good measure of the crime-related demand on the police”.⁵

The ONS has argued that the CSEW is the best measure of trends in overall levels of violent crime. The CSEW has retained a consistent methodology since it was started in 1981. It also covers crimes which may not be reported to the police. The ONS therefore argue that compared to police recorded crime the CSEW “tends to provide the better measure of more common but less harmful crimes”.⁶

¹ For example: [Debate on ‘Youth Violence’](#), HC *Hansard*, 10 October 2018, cols 253–60 and [Private Notice Question on ‘Knife Crime’](#), HL *Hansard*, 5 November 2018, cols 1537–40.

² BBC News, [‘London Violent Crime Could Take ‘a Generation’ to Solve’](#), 5 November 2018 and *Telegraph*, [‘London’s Murder Rate Hits Grim Milestone After Spate of Bloodshed’](#), 13 November 2018.

³ Mike Maguire and Susan McVie, ‘Crime Data and Criminal Statistics: A Critical Reflection’, in A Liebling, S Maruna and L McAra (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, 2017, p 167.

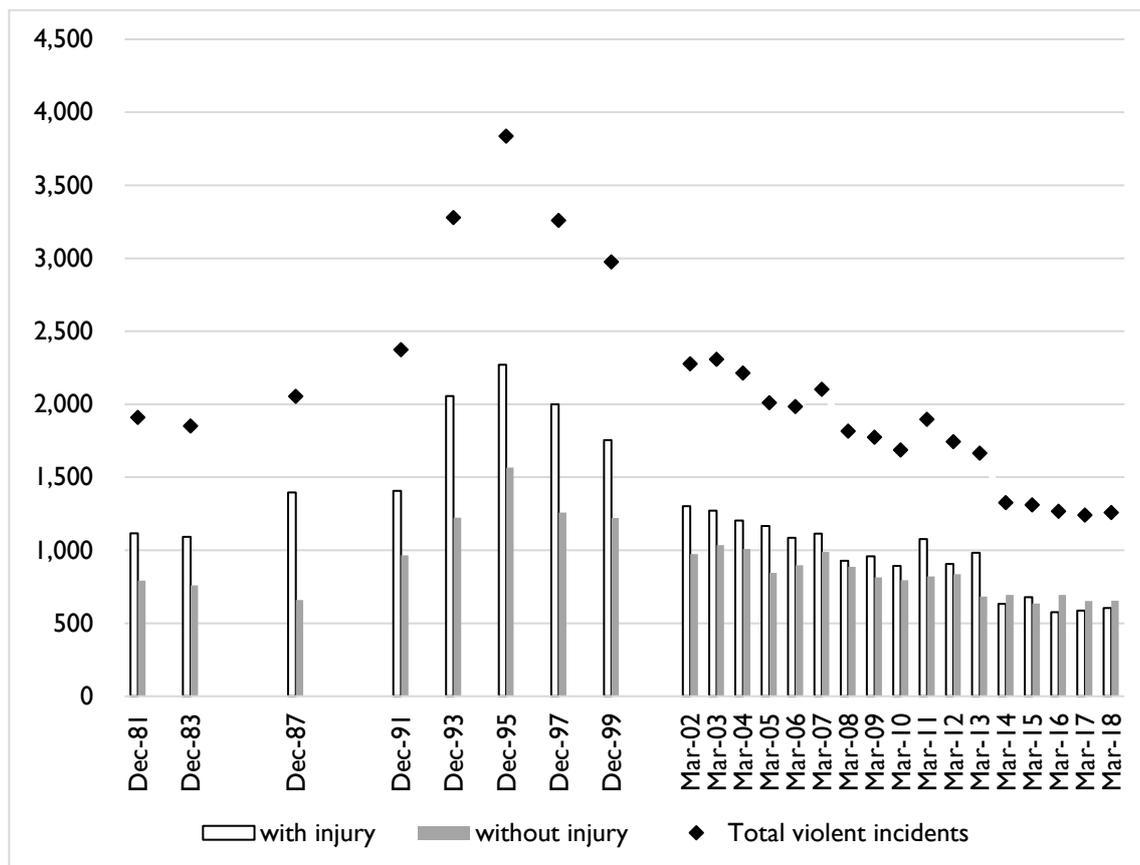
⁴ Office for National Statistics, [Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending June 2018](#), 18 October 2018, p 9.

⁵ *ibid*, p 9.

⁶ Office for National Statistics, [Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending June 2018](#), 18 October 2018, section 6.

Chart 1 shows there were an estimated 1.3 million incidents of violence in England and Wales, experienced in the year ending March 2018 (based on findings from the CSEW). This level of violence has remained relatively consistent since March 2014. It follows a general decline from a peak of 3.8 million incidents in December 1995.

Chart 1: Incidents of Violence Experienced by People Aged 16+, England and Wales, Year Ending December 1981 to Year Ending March 2018⁷

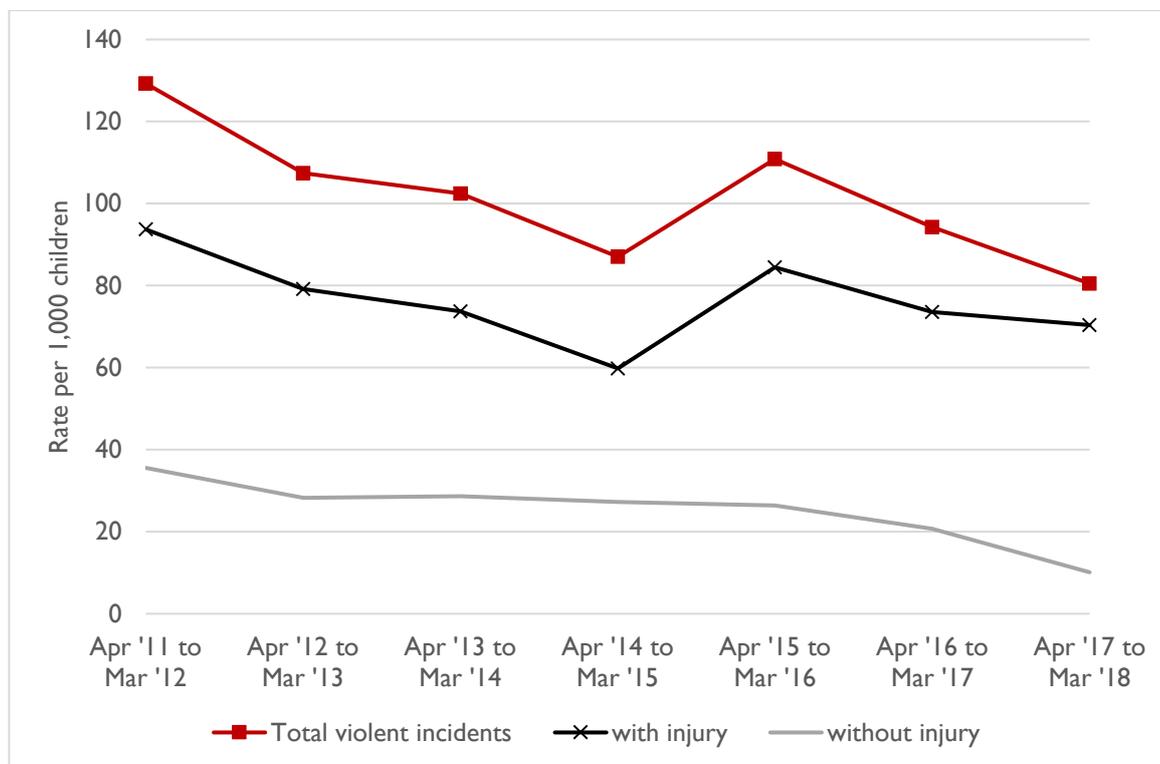


(Source: Office for National Statistics, [Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2018](#), 19 July 2018, section 6)

A trend in reduced violent incidents has also been recorded by the CSEW for children aged 10 to 15 between the year ending March 2012 and the year ending March 2018, as displayed in chart 2 below. However, the ONS state that these estimates are not directly comparable with the main survey result for adults.

⁷ Prior to the year ending March 2002, CSEW respondents were asked about their experience of crime in the previous calendar year, so year-labels identified the year in which the crime took place. Following the change to continuous interviewing, respondents' experience of crime relates to the full 12 months prior to interview (a moving reference period). Year-labels for the year ending March 2002 identified the CSEW year of interview.

Chart 2: Trends in CSEW Violence Incidence Rates Experienced by Children Aged 10 to 15 (Preferred Measure⁸), England and Wales, Year Ending March 2012 to Year Ending March 2018



(Source: Office for National Statistics, [‘Dataset: Crime in England and Wales: Appendix Tables Year Ending June 2018’](#), 18 October 2018, table A10a)

The ONS has argued that the long-term trend in reduced violence is supported by other data sources, beyond the CSEW:

The longer-term reductions in violent crime, as shown by the CSEW, are reflected in the findings of the most recent admissions data for NHS hospitals in England. Assault admissions for the year ending March 2017 (26,450) were 42% lower than the year ending March 2007 (45,890 admissions). In addition, research conducted by the Violence and Society Research Group at Cardiff University showed similar findings. Results from their annual survey, covering a sample of hospital emergency departments and walk-in centres in England and Wales, showed that violence-related attendances in 2017 fell 39% from 2010.⁹

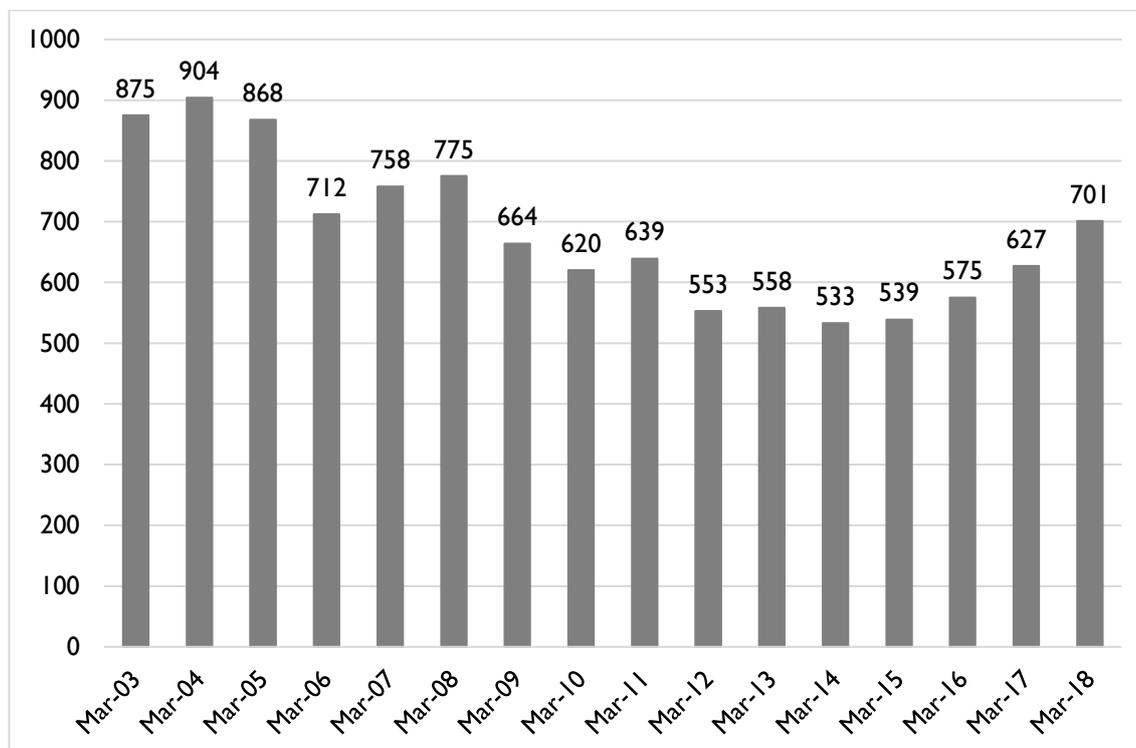
⁸ The ‘preferred measure’ takes into account factors identified as important in determining the severity of an incidence (such as level of injury, value of item stolen or damaged, relationship with the perpetrator).

⁹ Office for National Statistics, [Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2018](#), 19 July 2018, section 6.

The ONS has stated that whilst the CSEW provides a good picture of the overall trend in violent crime, police recorded crime is a better measure of higher-harm violence. Such violence is less common, but includes incidents such as homicide, that the CSEW “is not able to collect data on”.¹⁰

Chart 3 below displays data drawn from police recorded crime (not national statistics) on the number of homicides recorded between year ending March 2003 and year ending March 2018.¹¹ Whilst there had been a general decline in police recorded homicides since a peak of 904 in the year ending March 2004 the numbers have risen from 533 in the year ending March 2014 to 701 in the year ending March 2018.¹²

Chart 3: Homicides (Excluding Exceptional Events with Multiple Victims), England and Wales, Year Ending March 2003 to Year Ending March 2018



(Source: Office for National Statistics, [Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2018](#), 19 July 2018, section 6)

¹⁰ Office for National Statistics, [Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2018](#), 19 July 2018, section 6.

¹¹ Data on homicide offences given in these police recorded crime data will differ from data from the Home Office Homicide Index; these are published annually by the Office for National Statistics, last released as part of [Homicide in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2017](#). Police recorded crime data on homicides represents the recording decision of the police based on the available information at the time the offence comes to their attention.

¹² The data excludes those exceptional events with multiple victims, such as the Manchester Arena bombing.

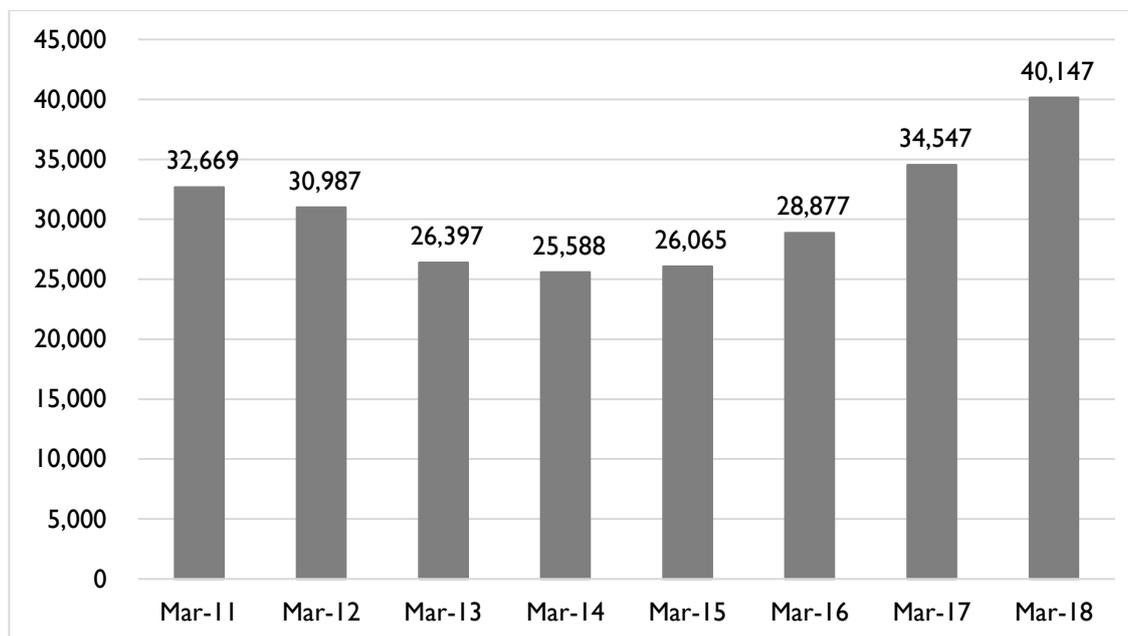
Regarding the use of knives, the ONS stated:

Of all recorded homicides in the latest data, about 4 in 10 involved a knife or sharp instrument (39%). This proportion has increased, in comparison with last year, when about 3 in 10 homicides involved a knife or sharp instrument (30%).¹³

Chart 4 shows that there has been a marked increase in police recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument since year ending March 2014.¹⁴ The ONS explained:

The police recorded 40,147 offences involving a knife or sharp instrument in the year ending March 2018, a 16% increase compared with the previous year (from 34,547 offences). This is the highest number since the year ending March 2011, the earliest point for which comparable data are available.¹⁵

Chart 4: Police Recorded Offences Involving a Knife or Sharp Instrument, England and Wales, Year Ending March 2011 to Year Ending March 2018



(Source: Office for National Statistics, [Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2018](#), 19 July 2018, section 7)

¹³ Office for National Statistics, [Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2018](#), 19 July 2018, section 6.

¹⁴ Police recorded knife or sharp instrument offences data are submitted via an additional special collection. This special collection includes the offences: homicide; attempted murder; threats to kill; assault with injury and assault with intent to cause serious harm; robbery; rape; and sexual assault.

¹⁵ Office for National Statistics, [Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2018](#), 19 July 2018, section 7.

Table I shows that 46.8% of the recorded offences involving knives related to assaults with injury and assault with intent to cause serious harm. Together with robbery (42.9%), these account for 89.7% of the total.

Table I: Breakdown of Crimes Involving Knives and Sharp Instruments, England and Wales, Year Ending March 2018

Type of Crime	Number	Percentage of Total
Assault with injury and assault with intent to cause serious harm	18,787	46.8
Robbery	17,207	42.9
Threats to kill	2,912	7.3
Rape	437	1.1
Attempted murder	372	0.9
Homicide	268	0.7
Sexual assault	164	0.4
Total	40,147	100.0

(Source: Office for National Statistics, [Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2018](#), 19 July 2018, section 7)

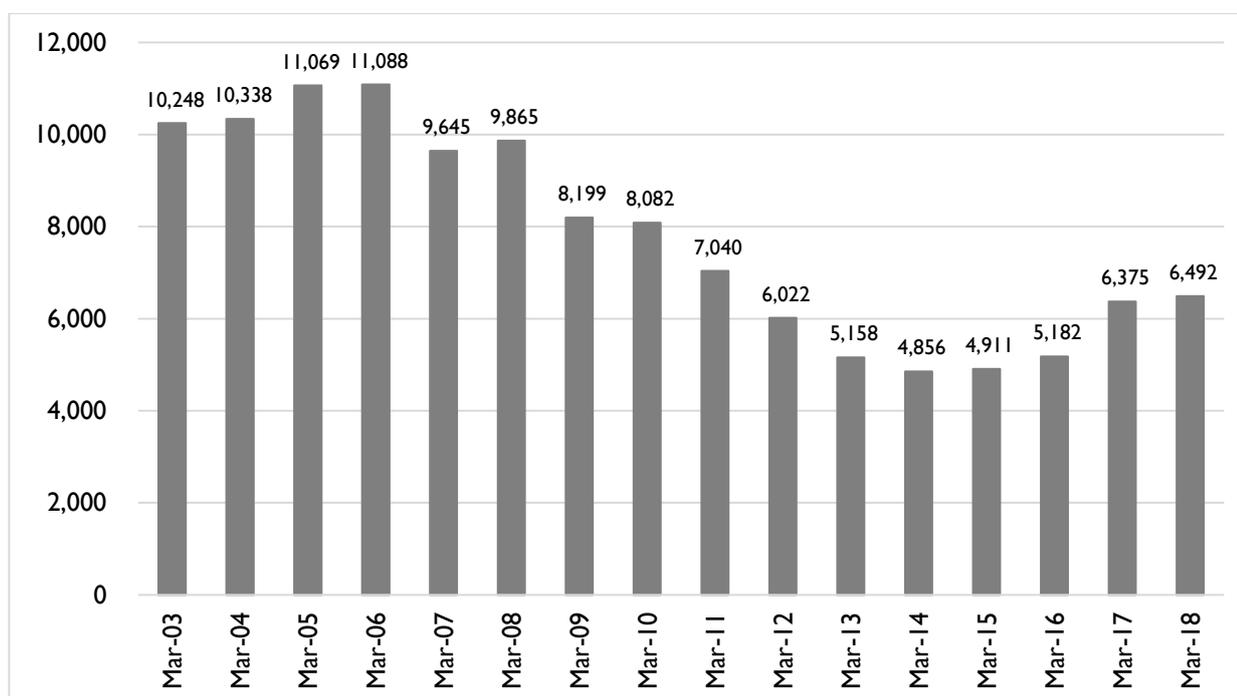
The ONS argues that whilst improved recording practices have contributed to the recent increases in police recorded knife offences, this increase also represents a real rise in occurrences. To demonstrate this, the ONS has compared these data with NHS admissions data:

NHS data help to provide further insight into offences involving weapons. For example, provisional data for NHS hospitals in England reported 4,656 admissions for assault by a sharp object between April 2017 and March 2018, an increase of 14% in the last year. This also highlights that the number of offences resulting in admission to hospital is substantially lower than the number of recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument.¹⁶

Police recorded firearms offences have shown a similar pattern to those involving knives, with an increase in number since 2014. However, the ONS has highlighted that the rise in 2018 was smaller than in previous years. This data is displayed in chart 5 below.

¹⁶ Office for National Statistics, [Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2018](#), 19 July 2018, section 7

Chart 5: Police Recorded Offences Involving Firearms, England and Wales, Year Ending March 2003 to Year Ending March 2018



(Source: Office for National Statistics, [Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2018](#), 19 July 2018, section 7)

2. Violent Crime: Government Policies

2.1 Serious Violence Strategy

On 9 April 2018, the Government published its *Serious Violence Strategy* (the strategy).¹⁷ In its foreword, Amber Rudd, the then Home Secretary, called the strategy a very significant programme of work which involved several government departments and “partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors”.¹⁸ Ms Rudd emphasised the strategy’s focus on early intervention “to tackle the root causes [of violence] and provide young people with the skills and resilience to lead productive lives free from violence”.¹⁹ She also argued that the strategy supported a new balance between prevention and effective law enforcement. The Government has since said that its analysis in the strategy showed that whilst there were a range of complex factors behind recent increases in serious violence, a major factor had been changes in the drugs market.²⁰

¹⁷ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018.

¹⁸ *ibid*, p 7.

¹⁹ *ibid*, p 7.

²⁰ House of Commons, [‘Written Question: Crimes of Violence’](#), 15 November 2018, 188200.

In response to a written question on 8 May 2018, the Government explained that the strategy was concerned with specific types of crime, including homicide, knife crime, gun crime and “areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as in gangs and county lines drug dealing”.²¹ It also looked at “emerging threats” such as the use of corrosive substances.²² However, the Government stated that the strategy did not explicitly address crimes such as sexual abuse, modern slavery or violence against women and girls because there were existing strategies covering these areas:

Serious violence also extends to other forms of serious assault. We know that a significant proportion of violence is linked to either domestic abuse or alcohol, but these two important elements are not driving the increases we are seeing in violent crime. The strategy also does not address specifically sexual abuse, modern slavery or violence against women and girls. They may all involve forms of serious violence but there are already specific strategies addressing those important issues, and so they are not included within the scope of the *Serious Violence Strategy*.

The strategy is framed around four key themes:

- Tackling county lines and misuse of drugs.
- Early intervention and prevention.
- Supporting communities and partnerships, and an effective law enforcement.
- Criminal justice response.

The four themes were considered across the different chapters of the report, which also included a discussion of trends in violent crime (see section I of this briefing for an overview of recent statistics). Each chapter concludes with ‘key points’, a selection of which are reproduced below.

Risk and Protective Factors and Interventions

In the strategy, the Government argued that because a relatively small number of individuals commit the majority of serious violent crime, there was a large potential benefit to focused preventative intervention. The Government said that this should be targeted at individual need and that the intensity of the intervention should match an individual’s level of risk. The Government said that interventions which were focused on establishing “cognitive or character-based skills and/or non-violent norms” seemed to be

²¹ House of Commons, [‘Written Question: Crimes of Violence’](#), 8 May 2018, 140165.

²² Since the strategy was published it is now a criminal offence for members of the public to possess sulphuric acid with a 15 percent concentration without a licence; Home Office, [‘Government Introduces Tough New Measure to Prevent Acid Attacks’](#), 1 November 2018.

more effective than punitive interventions. However, it cautioned that the most important causal drivers of serious violent crime at the individual level remained unknown:

[W]e still do not really know the most important causal drivers of serious violence at the individual level, nor the exact types of interventions that are most effective in England and Wales.²³

The strategy suggested that big data could be used to increase sample sizes for further studies into interventions:

There is [...] a substantial opportunity to refine and improve existing preventative measures through testing with larger samples. In the age of 'big data', when datasets can be linked and analysed more effectively, this is something that should be more achievable than ever before.²⁴

Tackling County Lines and Misuse of Drugs

The strategy argued that drug markets were a major driver behind “recent increases in serious violence with drug related cases accounting for around half the increase in homicide since 2014”.²⁵ The strategy made reference to the Government’s 2017 drugs strategy and highlighted the challenges presented by the concept of county lines:

Through the Government’s 2017 drugs strategy and our ongoing work to tackle serious and organised crime, there is a wide range of activity underway to tackle drugs importation, distribution and misuse. This includes targeted action to better understand criminal markets, to inform targeted interventions aimed at addressing the factors that drive, enable and perpetuate them, and disrupt the criminals operating within them. County lines are one element of this broader market, but it also involves violence and the abuse and exploitation of children and vulnerable adults who are often groomed, coerced and subjected to threats of violence and intimidation in order to support the county lines model.²⁶

The Government has developed a definition of county lines:

County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or

²³ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018, p 45.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*, p 47.

²⁶ *ibid.*

other form of “deal line”. They are 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.²⁷

In the strategy, the Government said that it would deliver a second phase of activity under its county lines action plan, “to consolidate and build on the work undertaken to date and address new and specific threats and challenges”.²⁸ It would also provide £3.6 million of funding to support the development of a new national county line co-ordination centre (NCLCC) and would continue work with leads on the prosecution of county lines at the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). The Government would encourage the use of Modern Slavery Act offences where appropriate.

The Government said that it would update the *Working Together to Safeguard Children*²⁹ and *Keeping Children Safe in Education*³⁰ guidance to reflect the risks to children of serious violence. The strategy also stated that the Government would make additional funding available for different programmes, including to:

- Provide additional support for young people at risk including £175,000 of funding to build upon Mentor UK’s ‘Unplugged’ feasibility study to deliver support to children in schools as well as excluded children in pupil referral units.
- Provide £500,000 of funding over two years to support delivery of a new round of heroin and crack action areas.³¹

The Government said it would continue to work with the NSPCC lead for drugs to encourage the use of drug testing on arrest. It would also support the role of the recovery champion in giving leadership and advice on standards of provision for drug treatment.³²

²⁷ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018, p 48.

²⁸ *ibid*, p 54.

²⁹ Department for Education, [‘Statutory Guidance: Working Together to Safeguard Children’](#), July 2018.

³⁰ Department for Education, [‘Statutory Guidance: Keeping Children Safe in Education’](#), September 2018.

³¹ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018, 54.

³² The recovery champion will provide national leadership around key aspects of the recovery agenda. They will support collaboration between different parts of the system and offer advice on how evidence based practice can be most effectively applied and implemented to enhance elements of the system which are underdeveloped and in need of additional support; HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018, p 53.

Early intervention and prevention

The strategy stressed the importance of prevention for combatting serious violence and proposed “universal and targeted (selective and indicated) interventions to intervene and stop people from getting involved in and committing serious violent offences”.³³ A universal intervention would:

Build resilience in young people through supporting positive choices, improving critical thinking skills, providing healthy, stable and supportive frameworks whether in the home or school.³⁴

A targeted selective intervention would:

Build resilience, role models and support for young people who may be at risk of being drawn into crime and provide interventions and support to reduce that risk. Targeted indicated interventions are targeted interventions for those at the highest risk of potential criminal involvement or who may have already been involved in crime. Indicated interventions include programmes that feature the ‘teachable moment’, which is the moment when a young person may be most willing to listen and engage.³⁵

The Government stated that the Home Office would provide £11 million over two years through a new early intervention youth fund to work with police and crime commissioners and community safety partnerships (or equivalents) to “provide joined up support to youth groups and communities to support early intervention and prevention with young people”.³⁶ The Government would also use the Department for Work and Pension’s work and health programme to “provide young people involved in or at risk of being involved in gangs and serious violence with more intensive, tailored support”.³⁷ The Government set out several other areas where government departments and bodies would work on the early intervention and prevention elements of the strategy:

- The Home Office would work with the Department for Education and Ofsted to explore what more could be done to support schools in England to respond to potential crime risks.
- The Department for Education would also work with the Home Office and other stakeholders to update its school security guidance to make clear the risks of carrying knives and provide advice on dealing with this important issue.

³³ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018, p 57.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*, p 66.

³⁷ *ibid.*

- Public Health England would refresh its guidance for frontline practitioners on the mental health needs of gang affiliated young people and young adults.³⁸

The strategy also stated that the Government would be providing additional funding to prevention programmes, this included:

- Providing £13m over the next four years (years 3 and 4 pending the next spending review) through the trusted relationships fund to pilot approaches which provide support to at risk young people to build positive and trusted relationships with adults who are there to support them.
- Providing £7m to develop a trauma led policing model across four Welsh police forces focused on ensuring the police can better understand and address the impact of adverse childhood experiences on both perpetrators and victims of serious violence.³⁹

It stated the Government would also support the expansion of the DIVERT model based on intervention with young adults in police custody and the rollout of enhanced support units⁴⁰ within the youth secure estate, for “young people with extremely complex and challenging needs”.⁴¹ The DIVERT model is a Metropolitan Police custody programme which is designed to divert 18–25 year olds away from offending and into employment, training and education.⁴² Currently delivered within Brixton, the Metropolitan Police are working to expand the DIVERT programme to other areas including Croydon and Wood Green.

Supporting Communities and Local Partnerships

The Government said it would continue to support local initiatives to tackle knife crime through further rounds of the community fund in 2018/19 and 2019/20. The anti-knife community fund was launched in October 2017 and supports community projects which “reduce knife crime and have a positive impact on young people at risk of carrying a knife and committing crime”.⁴³ It also stated that it had launched a “major new media advertising campaign”

³⁸ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018, p 66.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ “Enhanced support units (ESUs): are being rolled out for young people with extremely complex and challenging needs, which will enable the delivery of more intensive rehabilitation work in a therapeutic environment for those who pose significant risk, require specialist input, and for whom mainstream behaviour management approaches are not working and not likely to be effective”; HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018, p 65.

⁴¹ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018, p 66.

⁴² *ibid.*, p 63.

⁴³ Home Office, ‘[Guidance: Anti-Knife Crime Community Fund](#)’, 2 August 2018.

called #knifefree, which was aimed at raising awareness of the risks of carrying knives.⁴⁴

The strategy also focused on the need to strengthen the links between police and crime commissioners and public health, to “look for opportunities to expand the role of PCCs in relation to public health”.⁴⁵

Regarding incidents involving corrosive substances, the strategy made commitments to address the issue, including to:

- Work with the British Independent Retailers Association to encourage smaller independent retailers to join the voluntary agreement on the responsible sales of corrosive substances, including not selling products containing the most harmful substances to under 18s.
- Add sulphuric acid to the list of substances subject to the Poisons Act 1972, thereby restricting access and making it subject to more stringent controls.
- Seek to better understand the range of motivations of those who carry and use acid and corrosives and how they obtain them, through commissioning research from the University of Leicester.⁴⁶

Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Response

The strategy said that the Government would work with the NSPCC lead to implement measures to prevent the use of online video platforms for the encouragement of gang related violence, and that it would act against illegal material posted online.⁴⁷

The Government stated that it would take measures against the use of knives and corrosive substances as weapons, this included to:

- Continue to support police forces to act against knife crime with co-ordinated national weeks of action under Operation Sceptre.
- Supporting Trading Standards to undertake prosecutions of retailers who sell knives to under-18s through developing a specific prosecution fund to support this activity.
- Following consultation in late 2017, consider tightening up legislation on knives, corrosive substances and firearms, including

⁴⁴ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018, p 76.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p 87.

action in relation to online sale of knives [this legislation has been introduced in the House of Commons as the [Offensive Weapons Bill](#)]

- Ensure that police and prosecutors are considering the need for special measures and of the use of victim personal statements and community impact statements to ensure courts are fully aware of the impact of corrosive attacks on individuals and communities.
- Ensure that there is appropriate support available to victims of attacks with acid and other corrosive substances from the initial medical response and beyond.
- Commission the Centre for Applied Science and Technology to ensure that the police have the capability to undertake street testing to enable them to take action against individuals suspected of carrying corrosive substances in public.⁴⁸

The strategy also said that the Government would strengthen controls on legally owned firearms “to mitigate the risk of them coming into someone’s possession illegally and used for criminal purposes”.⁴⁹

Strategy Conclusions: Delivering Impact and Next Steps

In its conclusions to the strategy, the Government said that its approach would not focus solely on law enforcement and that it would also depend on partnerships across sectors such as education, health, social services, housing, youth services, and victim services.⁵⁰ Its key actions and commitments included:

- The current inter-ministerial group on gangs will be refocused to an inter-ministerial group on the *Serious Violence Strategy* in order to oversee and drive delivery of the strategy.
- Establish a new cross sector serious violence taskforce with key representatives from a range of national, local and delivery partner agencies to oversee delivery of the *Serious Violence Strategy*.
- Hold an international violent crime symposium in autumn 2018 to bring together the international academic community to understand the trends in serious violence in different parts of the world.
- Test and evaluate interventions to identify effectiveness in preventing both victimisation and perpetration of serious violence.

⁴⁸ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018, p 87.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p 89.

- Deliver a series of national and regional events with key sectors to assess changes in the nature and threat of serious violence and to challenge impact.⁵¹

Offensive Weapons Bill

As noted above, the strategy said that the Government would introduce legislation to increase controls on knives, corrosive substances and firearms.⁵² The [Offensive Weapons Bill](#) was introduced to the House of Commons on 20 June 2018.⁵³ The provisions of the Bill would:

- Prohibit the possession of certain corrosives substances in a public place and the sale of corrosive products to those aged under 18.
- Strengthen the arrangements for the online sale of bladed articles and corrosive products.
- Prohibit the possession of certain offensive weapons.
- Prohibit the possession of certain firearms.⁵⁴

The Bill received its second reading in the House of Commons on 27 June 2018 and completed its committee stage on 11 September 2018. Its report stage is yet to be announced, having been originally scheduled for 15 October 2018. The Leader of the House of Commons, Andrea Leadsom, explained that this had been the result of several developments including a statement by the Prime Minister ahead of a European Council meeting held on 17 and 18 October 2018.⁵⁵ She stated the Government would reschedule the Bill “as soon as we can”.⁵⁶ Further information on the Bill’s provisions is also available in: House of Commons Library, [Offensive Weapons Bill 2017–19 \(HC Bill 232\)](#), 11 October 2018.

Public Health Approach

At the Conservative Party’s autumn conference, the Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, said that the *Serious Violence Strategy* had brought together the key parts of government, law enforcement and society. He announced that the Government would also introduce a “statutory duty for all agencies to tackle this problem together”.⁵⁷ He explained that this “means those in health,

⁵¹ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018, p 90.

⁵² *ibid*, p 10.

⁵³ This followed a consultation between October and December 2017; Home Office, [‘Offensive and Dangerous Weapons: New Legislation’](#), 20 June 2018.

⁵⁴ [Explanatory notes to the Offensive Weapons Bill](#), 2017–19, p 4.

⁵⁵ [HC Hansard, 25 October 2018, cols 451–2](#).

⁵⁶ *ibid*, col 452.

⁵⁷ Sajid Javid, [‘Sajid Javid Speech to Conservative Party Conference 2018’](#), 2 October 2018.

education, social services, local government, housing—the whole lot”.⁵⁸ The Home Secretary also announced a £200 million endowment fund to target young people “at risk of starting a life of crime and violence”, and that he would launch a “major review of the market for illegal drugs”.⁵⁹

Following the Home Secretary’s speech, the Home Office issued a press release that explained that the new statutory duty would follow a consultation process.⁶⁰ The new legal duty would underpin a “public health” approach to addressing serious violence:

This would mean police officers, education partners, local authority and health care professionals will have a new legal duty to take action and prevent violent crime. This statutory duty would make serious violence a top priority for all key partners, ensuring that all agencies are working together to prevent young people being caught in the criminal cycle.⁶¹

On 19 September 2018, the Mayor of London announced a new public health approach to violent crime in the capital, partly inspired by successes in Scotland based on a similar model.⁶² This included the establishment of a new violence reduction unit of “specialists in health, police and local government to lead and deliver a long-term public health approach to tackling the causes of violent crime”.⁶³ The unit would improve coordination between the Metropolitan Police, local authorities, youth services, health services, criminal justice agencies and City Hall.

The Mayor of London’s City Hall blog has explained that treating violent crime as a public health issue would involve working to contain the spread of violent crime and to stop it spreading; then, addressing the causes to reduce the chances of reoccurrence:

Throughout medical history, we have learned to combat infectious diseases by containing the spread, and prevent future outbreaks by putting money into designing better public education, sanitation, medical care and housing. The idea is that the same approach used in tackling disease can be deployed to cut knife crime and other forms of violent crime.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Sajid Javid, ‘[Sajid Javid Speech to Conservative Party Conference 2018](#)’, 2 October 2018.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Home Office, ‘[Home Secretary Announces New Measures to Tackle Serious Violence](#)’, 2 October 2018. At the time of writing the consultation has not yet been published.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Mayor of London, ‘[Mayor Launches New Public Health Approach to Tackling Serious Violence](#)’, 19 September 2018.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Mayor of London and London Assembly, ‘[Q&A: A Public Health Approach to Tackling Violent Crime](#)’, City Hall Blog, 12 September 2018.

In practice this would mean intervening at critical moments in a young person's life. The blog said that this meant "giving the right support at the right time".⁶⁵ However, the post stated that "tough, intelligent policing" was still crucial to tackling violent crime and that offenders should be "caught, punished and reformed".⁶⁶

The City Hall blog post referred to Scotland's public health approach to violent crime, which it stated had shown particular success in Glasgow. It said that Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Cressida Dick, and Sophie Linden, deputy mayor for policing, had visited Scotland to learn more about how the public health approach worked and the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, had met the team responsible in London. However, it argued that there several relevant differences between Scotland and London:

Scotland had a few key things on its side—solid funding, a long-term strategy that took a decade to work, and all key agencies in Glasgow on board and accountable to one administration. This is more difficult in London where the system is fragmented. The Mayor's remit includes setting out the police's strategic priorities but he does not have the power to direct other agencies that make a difference, which answer to central government and need to be willing to cooperate to make the public health approach a success.⁶⁷

The approach of treating violent crime as a public health issue has been discussed by journalists, including Ingrid Torjesen writing for the *British Medical Journal*.⁶⁸

2.2 Commentary on the Strategy

Political Party Responses

The House of Commons debated the strategy on 22 May 2018.⁶⁹ Contributing to the debate, the shadow Home Secretary, Diane Abbott, said that Labour supported the themes of the *Serious Violence Strategy*, but had concerns about the resources available.⁷⁰ She argued that the funding

⁶⁵ Mayor of London and London Assembly, '[Q&A: A Public Health Approach to Tackling Violent Crime](#)', City Hall Blog, 12 September 2018.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Ingrid Torjesen, '[Can Public Health Strategies Tackle London's Rise in Fatal Violence?](#)', *British Medical Journal*, 6 April 2018, vol 361 [£].

⁶⁹ [HC Hansard, 22 May 2018, cols 738–810.](#)

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, col 749.

allocated to the strategy, £40 million, was inadequate compared to the number of violent crime offences:

Are Ministers really telling us that the resources that they are promising are adequate? To be clear, in the past 12 months the police recorded almost 40,000 knife crime offences and well over 6,000 firearms offences; the funding allocated to discourage, prevent, divert and detect serious weapons-related violent crimes is therefore just a few hundred pounds for each offence.⁷¹

Ms Abbott also expressed concern about the impact of police numbers on the level of violent crime, arguing that whilst an increase in numbers would not solve the problem on its own, the decline suggested that the Government was not taking the issue seriously.⁷² She argued that the Government was in denial about the resourcing of the police as an issue:

The Government have long been in denial about the effect of their own cuts to the police. They have cut 21,000 police officers since 2010, and more than a quarter of police community support officers have been axed. They have not protected police budgets, which have fallen in real terms. According to the National Audit Office, which I hope ministers will regard as a reliable source, central Government funding to police forces reduced by 25% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2015/16.⁷³

Ms Abbot also referred to Scotland's policy on knife crime, stating that it had been approached as a public health issue and had been successful:

The approach taken there, which itself developed from lessons learned in the United States and elsewhere, was to treat knife crime as a public health issue. That means tackling the gangs and the gang culture, including diverting people from crime and helping young people get out of gangs. It includes work in communities and in schools, and ending the widespread use of school exclusion, rather than class exclusion.⁷⁴

The shadow Home Secretary went on to argue that whilst seizures and arrest would play a part "we also need the right level of resources, and those can only ever be a part of a much broader strategy involving schools, hospitals, local communities, social workers, resources for youth centres

⁷¹ [HC Hansard, 22 May 2018, col 750.](#)

⁷² *ibid*, col 751.

⁷³ *ibid*, col 752.

⁷⁴ *ibid*, col 752.

and recreation and much more”.⁷⁵ Ms Abbot linked the Government’s fiscal policies with an increase in violent crime:

[A]ll those things have been cut as a result of this Government’s austerity, and we are now living with the consequences. We cannot keep people, and our young people, safe on the cheap.⁷⁶

Joanna Cherry, SNP spokesperson for Justice and Home Affairs, argued that, in light of rises in knife crime and homicide in England and Wales, the UK Government’s strategies were not working.⁷⁷ She argued that a more successful approach had been taken in Scotland, particularly Glasgow:

Strathclyde police—now part of the Scotland-wide police force—launched a new strategy in response to Glasgow’s epidemic of knife crime. It was a holistic approach that saw the formation of the violence reduction unit, which sought to treat violent crime as a public health and social problem. By treating violence as if it were a disease, the violence reduction unit sought to diagnose the problem, analyse the cause, examine what worked and for whom, and develop solutions that could be scaled up to help others.⁷⁸

Joanna Cherry referred to the “whole system approach” in Scotland, involving early interventions to keep young people out of “formalised justice settings”.⁷⁹ She said the approach focused on collaboration with schools, social work, the police, the prosecution service and the third sector to prevent offending behaviour from happening in the first place, therefore with the aim to reduce the rates of offending behaviour overall.⁸⁰ However, she stated this did not mean “jettisoning a proper approach to criminal justice” and that serious crimes should be dealt with appropriately.⁸¹ Ms Cherry said it was this approach taken alongside the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice, at Strathclyde University, that “together have led to a vastly improved situation in Scotland”.⁸² She argued it was untrue to suggest that heavy sentences had improved the rates of violent crime in Scotland.

Sir Edward Davey, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Home Affairs, said that the Government’s *Serious Violence Strategy* was “very good” on the issue of county lines. He also described the Government’s use of evidence in the strategy as a positive aspect and welcomed placing an emphasis on

⁷⁵ [HC Hansard, 22 May 2018, col 753.](#)

⁷⁶ *ibid*, col 753.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, cols 762–3.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, col 765.

⁷⁹ *ibid*, col 765.

⁸⁰ *ibid*, col 765.

⁸¹ *ibid*, cols 765–6.

⁸² *ibid*, col 765.

prevention.⁸³ However, he argued two main points were missing from the strategy. Firstly, an acknowledgement of the impact of cuts to the police; and secondly, the cuts in resources available to local government, the health service, schools and the police that were focused on prevention. Sir Edward argued that the extra resources referenced in the strategy were insufficient to compensate.⁸⁴

Responding for the Government, Victoria Atkins, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Home Office, reiterated the Government's focus on prevention alongside law enforcement:

That is why we are committing £40 million to be invested to support initiatives to tackle serious violence. This will focus on early intervention and prevention and on the root causes of the violence. It will look to help young people before they go down the wrong path, encouraging them to make positive choices and to live productive lives away from violence. It will tackle head on some of the theories about why these crimes occur, and explore the reasons behind the violence, including the links to drugs and gangs.⁸⁵

In response to MPs linking a decline in police numbers with a rise in knife crime, Victoria Atkins said she did not believe there was a direct connection:

During the previous spikes in knife crime in the late 2000s and mid-1990s, there were many, many more officers on the street. In addition, there does not appear to be a relationship between the numbers of police officers and the national rise in serious violence. I absolutely understand why hon. Members on both sides of the House have raised this issue.⁸⁶

She also said that the Government understood the issue of youth services and referred to the funding given and the youth initiatives it had invested in:

The Government, in partnership with the Big Lottery Fund, have invested £80 million—£40 million in the #iwillFund and £40 million in the youth investment fund. We are also supporting the National Citizen Service and the troubled families programme, and we are setting up the early intervention youth fund. We have the trusted relationships fund and the anti-knife crime community fund. Colleagues on both sides of the House have said that we need funding for small charities, not for the big ones. The anti-knife crime community fund is

⁸³ [HC Hansard, 22 May 2018, col 779.](#)

⁸⁴ *ibid*, col 780.

⁸⁵ *ibid*, col 808.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, col 809.

doing exactly that, and bids are about to open, so please get charities to apply.⁸⁷

The strategy was also debated in the House of Lords on 11 June 2018.⁸⁸ Baroness Newlove (Conservative), the Victims' Commissioner⁸⁹, said that the "£40 million committed in the Government's *Serious Violence Strategy* is to be welcomed", but she feared it would be "a drop in the ocean given the scale of the problem we have to tackle".⁹⁰ She argued that the Government needed to be "creative" and that "we need a sustainable programme, and we need something that will give respect to the children; in that way, we will get respect back".⁹¹

Other Commentary

The strategy referred to the Home Office's support for the charity Redthread, which provides youth workers in hospital emergency departments to help young people and young adults arriving with injuries likely to have been caused by violence.⁹² Redthread said that it welcomed the focus on the prevention of violence through the Early Intervention Youth Fund.⁹³ The charity acts, alongside Barnardo's, as the secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Knife Crime. In this capacity it said it was "encouraged to see that a joined-up cross-government approach is at the centre of the new strategy".⁹⁴ However, it stated:

[A] public health approach combines resources from the police, health, education and the community to create long-term attitudinal change in society rather than treating serious violence just as a criminal justice issue.⁹⁵

Redthread argued that for the strategy to have a "meaningful, lasting impact" the Department of Health and the Department for Education would need to

⁸⁷ [HC Hansard, 22 May 2018, col 810.](#)

⁸⁸ [HL Hansard, 11 June 2018, cols 1508–47.](#)

⁸⁹ A statutory role established under section 49 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, as amended by the Coroners and Justice Act 2009; Victim's Commissioner, [Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses: Annual Report for 2016–17](#), July 2017, p 5.

⁹⁰ [HL Hansard, 11 June 2018, cols 1513.](#)

⁹¹ *ibid.*, col 1514.

⁹² HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018, p 61–2.

⁹³ Redthread, [Redthread's Response to the Serious Violence Strategy](#), 10 April 2018.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

commit to tackling serious youth violence, as it argued the Home Office had; it stated:

It is important that we move away from working in silos, and move towards a more joined up approach to support our young people.⁹⁶

The St Giles Trust, a charity which works with young people involved in gangs and serious youth violence, also welcomed the strategy.⁹⁷ Like Redthread, it particularly noted the support for prevention through the Early Intervention Youth Fund, and the measures to coordinate county lines interventions through the NCLCC. The St Giles Trust also believed a cross-government response was needed to address “some of the systemic societal issues which help drive serious violence”.⁹⁸

3. Further Information

This section outlines further sources of information on the issue of violent crime and the *Serious Violence Strategy*:

- Nick Hunt, Head of Serious Violence Unit, ‘[Serious Violence Strategy](#)’, Home Office, 12 July 2018

Publication outlining the Government’s Serious Violence Strategy, including statistics on violent crime and a summary of the Government’s commitments to addressing issues such as county lines.

- Scottish Government, ‘[Policy: Crime Prevention and Reduction](#)’, accessed 20 November 2018

The Scottish Government’s webpages on its crime prevention and reduction strategies, including information on the Scottish violence reduction unit, and policies including its mentors in violence prevention programme.

- National Audit Office, [Financial Sustainability of Police Forces in England and Wales 2018](#), 11 September 2018, HC 1501 of session 2017–19

National Audit Office report into the financial sustainability of police forces in England and Wales. The report’s conclusions included that the way the Home Office “chooses to distribute funding has been ineffective and

⁹⁶ Redthread, ‘[Redthread’s Response to the Serious Violence Strategy](#)’, 10 April 2018.

⁹⁷ St Giles Trust, ‘[Home Office Serious Violence Strategy—St Giles Trust’s Response](#)’, undated, accessed 20 November 2018.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

detached from the changing nature of policing for too long, and it cannot be sure overall funding is being directed to the right places”.

- House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, '[Serious Violence Inquiry: Announced on 5 June 2018](#)', accessed 20 November 2018

House of Commons Home Affairs Committee's webpage on its serious violence inquiry.

- House of Commons Library, '[Serious Violence Strategy](#)', 21 May 2018

House of Commons briefing written to support the House of Commons debate on the Serious Violence Strategy.