

Youth Select Committee

Oral evidence: Knife Crime

Friday 12 July 2019

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Members present: Rachel Ojo (Chair), Susuana Senghor (Vice-Chair), James Appiah, Chris Bakalis, Jodie Floyd, Jack Heald, Ewan Jago, Husnaa Mota, Charley Oliver-Holland, Bailey-Lee Robb and Theo Sergiou.

Questions 68-135

Witnesses

I: Sheldon Thomas, Founder and Chief Executive, Gangsline, Carlie Thomas, Senior Caseworker, Rescue and Response, St Giles Trust, and Kwabz Oduro Ayim, Chief Executive Officer, Mixtape Madness.

II: Jeremey Crook OBE, Chief Executive, Black Training and Enterprise Group, Daniel Willis, Policy and Research Manager, Community Links, Matthew Scott, Police and Crime Commissioner for Kent, and Iman Haji, Research and Programme Co-ordinator, Khulisa.

III: Vicky Foxcroft MP, Chair, Youth Violence Commission, Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers, Lecturer in Criminology, The Open University, and adviser to the All Parliamentary Commission on Youth Violence, and Sarah Jones MP, Founder and Chair, All-party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime.

IV: Sundas Raza (via video link), Rotherham Youth Cabinet, Eleanor Lakin, deputy Member of Youth Parliament, Amaan Iqbal, Youth Councillor, Rochdale Borough, and Representative, Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority, and Bukola Folarin, Student Commission on Knife Crime in London.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sheldon Thomas, Carlie Thomas and Kwabz Oduro Ayim.

Chair: Good morning everyone, and welcome to the second day of oral evidence to the UK Youth Select Committee, investigating knife crime. My name is Rachel Ojo and I am the Chair of this year's UK Youth Select Committee. I invite the other members to introduce themselves.

Susuana Senghor: My name is Susuana Senghor, and I am the Vice Chair of this year's Youth Select Committee.

Jack Heald: Hi, I'm Jack.

James Appiah: My name is James.

Ewan Jago: I'm Ewan.

Charley Oliver-Holland: Hi, I'm Charley.

Bailey-Lee Robb: I'm Bailey.

Chris Bakalis: Hi, I'm Chris.

Jodie Floyd: Hi, I'm Jodie.

Husnaa Mota: Hi, I'm Husnaa.

Theo Sergiou: Hi, I'm Theo.

Q68 **Chair:** I thank our panellists very much for coming in to provide us with evidence. Before we start, could you briefly introduce yourselves and the work that you do in relation to knife crime?

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: First and foremost, apologies for the slight tardiness. My name is Kwabz. I'm from a company called Mixtape Madness. On the face of it, we don't address knife crime as such; we're more a music platform. I guess the reason why I have been called here is that quite a lot of drill content that is connected to knife crime has probably come on to your radar. That said, we have various initiatives that we do with young people, such as MM Talks, which take place bi-monthly, and which help young people to get careers in alternative industries. We feel that, in a way, by trying to eradicate poverty of ambition, we are addressing knife crime.

Sheldon Thomas: I'm Sheldon Thomas, a former gang member. I run an organisation called Gangsline. I don't talk about "knife crime", because it is not separate from gangs; I am not quite sure why we keep talking about knife crime as if it is separate from gangs. I assume that is more political.

The work that we do is quite well known. We have engaged gang members since 1989, when I came out of gangs. We did not have an organisation then, obviously; it was just me going around the country engaging gang members in Manchester and Liverpool. We now run an organisation, which was set up in 2007. We do one-to-one mentoring and gangs prevention workshops in all the schools, whether it be a PRU, college or secondary school. We also train teachers, police officers, NHS staff and mental health workers in understanding gang mentality, because it is not the same as the mentality of a young person involved in ASB—antisocial behaviour. There is a certain gang mentality or state of mind—the way gang members think—which is completely different from what is covered in the normal training that your officers or probation officers might have. That is what Gangsline does.

Carlie Thomas: Hi everybody. My name is Carlie Thomas, and I am the senior case worker at St Giles Trust. I am working on the rescue and response project, which is a county lines pan-London project. To be honest with you guys, I want to have a moment of silence for the number of young people we have lost through serious youth violence, including knife crime, over the past year. I will obviously share my work and lived experiences as we go on.

[The Committee observed a moment's silence.]

Q69 **Chair:** I will go on to the first question, which I will present to the whole panel. There seems to be an ongoing debate on the role of music in youth violence. Are certain types of music inciting violence, or are they a useful means for young people to express themselves? What are your opinions?

Sheldon Thomas: Not all music incites violence—we can all share that view—but there are certain record labels that have an agenda. I will use myself as an example. Before most of you in the room were even born, I was signed to a recording label that wanted me to talk about my life as a gang member. They wanted to push a gangster image. In those days it was not called trap and drill, because that did not exist. It was called gunman lyrics, which was based in reggae music/sound system. There has been a history of recording companies that want to push a certain agenda and a kind of music for their own monetary point of view.

What we have today is completely different. Young people are more in control of their music, because they don't need to be signed to a recording label. You can buy equipment for less than £5,000 and set it up in your house, and you can record an album just as well as an album that costs £150,000. Whereas the record label was spending x thousands on my album, young people can make a good-quality album for far less. They can make videos far more cheaply than the videos out there, and which look just as good as a professional video. That is what we are up against.

I would say there is a small percentage of recording artists who claim to be rappers or drill artists but are actually drug dealers. There are certain platforms that are pushing these drug dealers. I would say about 95% of the artists who make trap and drill in London are black kids who push a

certain style of music. Not every one of them is a gang member, but the vast majority of those that get the big hits and subscriptions on YouTube are gang members. They promote a certain lifestyle, which then causes rivalry with other gang members.

There are going to be people who disagree with that because they have an ulterior motive—they are either in the music industry themselves or they want to go far with their company, so they want to turn a blind eye—but a 10-year study by a professor looked at what happens to 10 to 16-year-olds who listen to violent music on a regular basis, and it was proven that that person's behaviour will change and will mimic what he or she hears. Unfortunately, I believe a small percentage of trap and drill music not only causes rivalry among young people in gangs and knife crime—that is what you want to talk about—but underpins it, because people pretend to be rappers when actually they are drug dealers.

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: Believe it or not, I agree with quite a lot of what Sheldon said. One thing he stated that is very important is the historical context of so-called violent music and working-class communities. It has not just sprung up from this so-called drill generation. It has been there for decades upon decades—even as far back as the '80s—so it is to some degree unfair to lament that the present drill generation are pioneers in violent music.

I will give you a quick example from my lifetime. What inspired me to create a music platform is that I used to listen to a platform called Heat FM, where, as local young people, we would all go to MC and so on. In those sorts of environments, there is an element of freedom of expression. We may be quick to label a certain type of person as a gang member or a drug dealer, but growing up in certain communities or environments, the line can be very blurred. For example, I have met people who could technically, by the legal definition, be termed a gang member, but who are also at university.

In terms of music and violence, or music being used for the greater good, the bottom line for me is that people—especially the generation we have now—choose their heroes. For example, I might upload a gospel track and a drill track to a platform, and not put any marketing budget behind either of them. If the drill track does significantly better than the gospel track, that is based on the democracy of those young people of that generation. As a young person or a teenager, as many of you will be able to comprehend, your parents do not define what is cool to you. If mum says, "Don't listen to this," that is not necessarily going to stop you listening to it. You want to engage in what your peers are engaging in.

It has got to a stage where, as Sheldon illustrated, young people have the resources to create all this themselves. Last year, because of police pressure, a lot of the record labels turned away from drill artists. What happened was that those drill artists just started independently to get traction in the charts, to collaborate with artists from the US and to gain success.

I fundamentally believe that music, as with social media platforms and all things, can be used for positive and negative. If young people are conveying what they depict as their narrative, or a narrative they can connect with, our responsibility as a society is to delve deeper and find out what is causing them to connect with that narrative. My origin is in Tottenham. There hasn't been a year of my life where I haven't been exposed to youth violence. To some degree, there is a normalisation of youth violence, let alone for the generation that has come up below me. For many young people, before knowing how to put out a CV, the reality is that we learned how to bag Os of weed. That is not from music; that is from our local environment. People who make it from our local environment aspire to get out of the area, so I feel that music comes further along in the food chain, as it were.

As Sheldon has illustrated, there have been generations of young people from urban environments who have digested urban music. The only difference now is they have a larger platform and larger reach. On the flipside, the majority of their consumers have no connection to youth violence or anything of that degree; maybe it is the young people who I have had the pleasure of working with. I know for a fact that the problems go much deeper than music. I work with 20-year-olds plus who do not have soft skills—who do not know how to put together a CV or anything to that effect. I feel that there are fundamental social problems at play here.

To put you in the context of a drill rapper, a lot of them face this conundrum: they want to pursue music, but they know that trying to pursue it is at the risk of their own safety. They know that even travelling is a risk. Although Sheldon made the point that many gang members may choose to engage in music—I am not particularly sure what Sheldon would say are the reasons why—I feel there are quite a large percentage of young people who genuinely want to make a better avenue for their lives, using music. They are literally reflecting their narrative, as it were. When young people are rapping and they are naming tens of friends who have passed away, that is about the reality before music.

Sorry if I spoke for longer than expected.

Carlie Thomas: I have to agree with the guys on a lot of areas that they discussed. For me, the root goes deeper than this. This is a platform for our young people. They are trying to tell us how they are feeling; they are not just trying to incite violence, cause more grief on road, or necessarily fight this gang or that gang. They are trying to talk about how they are feeling, so we need to look at why they are feeling like that. We need to look further back. These young people have got a lot of skills and a lot of talent, but we don't take that into account. We just hear what they are saying, and we talk about the violence that they are inciting.

For me, again, it comes down to a lack of funding. If we had the studios that we had 10 years ago, and if we had the services that our young people could have, maybe they would not be making home-grown music in their own houses. Maybe they would have more guys like these two, who could support them, see them and kind of advise them—"Okay, if you are

going to write this down—if you are going to spit these lyrics—then this is going to come back at you. There is a chance that someone is going to be knocking at the door, there is a chance that you are at risk.”

But we don't allow our young people to have a platform. It is amazing that you guys are here today; you have a platform. The young men that I work with don't have a platform. Their platform is music, and this is a heartbreaker: they feel that they have been left, and that this is the only way to get their opinions out there.

The media don't necessarily help; we know that. They don't want to talk about anything positive to do with our young people. They just want to talk about the violence that they are inciting. In the majority, they are talking about young black males, and it is very frustrating, because they do have talent.

I sat with a young man yesterday. We are taking him to a radio station in a couple of weeks, just to let him know what it is like to be in that kind of environment where people aren't smoking weed, drinking or getting off their face. It is a professional environment. I want him to have a taste of that, not in somebody's backyard, somebody's kitchen or somebody's bedroom. I want him to know that he has these skills and these prospects, and he can go anywhere he likes with them, but I have had to discuss with him that with anything we put out on the radio, we have to be very careful. I don't want to leave that radio station and see 20 young men that have just heard his track, waiting outside the front with shanks, machetes and all sorts to get him, so we have been looking at what content he can write. He's not just thinking about violence, anger and murder every day. He's got a younger brother that he absolutely adores. He can write about that, or he can talk about how he feels hard done by, by the Government, or how he does not have any access to funding to do the things he should be allowed to do as a 14-year-old male. He doesn't have those. We need to be looking at the bigger picture, and to see what the root is.

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: Sheldon mentioned a very important point, because even in relation to radio it is very difficult for a drill track to get on radio, due to heavy censorship—

Sheldon Thomas: Not anymore—not anymore.

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: Based on my experience. I submit tracks—

Sheldon Thomas: Not any more. That's the reason why—

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: Are we talking about mainstream radio, as in BBC 1Xtra radio?

Sheldon Thomas: Yes, we are. And that's a problem. I mean, I would say that obviously we all agree on a certain principle, but unfortunately mainstream radio is now trying to get involved in trap and drill, and those radio stations that are promoting it should look within themselves, because they are literally bringing in guys with ski masks, filming it,

putting it out on YouTube, making everybody get excited. I mean, I've been told—I can't mention their names, so I won't—but what I'm saying is that they are promoting trap and drill. And the part they are promoting—this particular radio station, who are well-known—they are literally bringing in guys who are wearing ski masks.

Carlie was saying about the content. They are just allowing anything to be said, and what Carlie's talking about is where adults would come into the situation who have lived this lifestyle, like Carlie and myself—I am not sure if you was on road; I'm just not going to assume that—but Carlie has told me that, so I can mention it. People who have lived this lifestyle who were signed—I was signed, but way before these guys were born—but I refuse to write about gunman lyrics, because I didn't want people to be incited because I did bad things.

Record companies don't get involved with young guys, but the radio station are now literally promoting guys. If you go on YouTube, you can see them. It's a list of guys who either come with ski masks, and if it ain't ski masks they come on and they are literally inciting violence. This is the point that Carlie was saying.

So I think, yes, we have to look deeper than the music; of course we do, because there are social factors that we're going to talk about later. Music is just a symptom of this situation. It's like a way out for them, to release their frustration. But the frustration is what's causing the mayhem on the street and we have to recognise that.

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: Once again, I don't want to take anything away from what Sheldon has said; I can only speak from my experience. The percentage of drill tracks that actually make it to mainstream radio stations is very, very small. Even when they do make it to mainstream radio stations, the drill track is literally butchered, because there is so much stuff they have to bleep or blur, and so on and so forth. Right?

A lot of the popular drill tracks now that do end up on radio is a result of the fact that they have managed to amass such a massive consumer demand. That means radio ignores the track, but because so many people are listening to it online they have to try and find a palatable way to put that song on radio, because Ofcom has been extremely aggressive on the radio stations as well, and every time they put on a song that is a bit too left of centre then they face a massive fine.

On top of that, I personally, in terms of rappers who I know have been associated with some level of gang violence, always have to ask the rappers, "What is your CBO?" A CBO is a criminal behaviour order. Many rappers have CBOs that state that they can't even mention specific gangs.

Chair: Sorry, but can I just stop you there? We're going to have to move on to the next question now. Before we do that, I just wanted to remind you all that today's proceedings are not covered by privilege. So, could you please refrain from mentioning names of individuals or companies? Thank you.

I will pass on to James to ask the next question.

Q70 James Appiah: My question is also to the whole panel: is there any evidence that gang culture, social media and/or music impact young people's involvement in knife crime?

Sheldon Thomas: 100%. What do you mean that you need evidence? It is happening. We have had more than 400 murders. It is quite simple. I don't know why we have to ask for evidence. The fact is that social media impacts on the way young people—as Kwabz quite rightly said, we are in a different world. In my day, there was no such thing as a computer or a mobile phone. There was no such thing as the police knowing anything. There was no such thing as anything like that. However, today we are in a world of social media, which plays a major role in how young people see themselves and see life. They will listen to somebody chat some rubbish on there and take that in more than they listen to their parents. That is a fact.

I will shed some stats for you. The average dad—if the kids have a dad; I said "if"—spends 34 minutes a day with their child. The average mum spends one hour a day. The average child between the ages of 13 and 25 spends nine hours a day on social media. The average child between eight and 12 spends six hours a day on social media. Who do you think is raising the children? We are in a world where parents are not raising their children. There were all those parents who came on TV last year and talked about how their sons had been murdered. Some 90% of their sons were gang members, but they would have you believe that they were not.

Let me tell you about parenting. Parenting has changed. Most parents do not spend a lot of time with their children. A gang member told me: "When you don't spend time with your child, we will." That is why gangs are able to groom children. In my day, you couldn't groom children. When I was a gang leader, it was unheard of to groom a child—completely unheard of. It was unheard of to exploit a girl—completely unheard of. If you exploited or sexually abused a girl, you wouldn't see out the week, because there was a code and an ethic that gangs in the '70s and '80s lived by, which was that you do not groom children or ask them to do your dirty work. Those morals and ethics have been gone for years.

Gang members groom children because most of those children are not loved at home by a parent. If you look at the murder rate last year, and at the kids in Feltham, Cookham Wood, Pentonville and Brixton, 72% of them have no father; 72% have no relationship with their dads. Most who had stepdads did not have a good relationship with the stepdad. We are in a situation where, if a child is not parented, social media will parent your child. To answer your question on whether it has an impact: absolutely.

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: James, would you kindly ask the question again, please?

James Appiah: I think he answered the question.

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: Yes, I know, but could you ask it again.

James Appiah: Is there any evidence that gang culture, social media and/or music impact young people's involvement in knife crime?

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: The reason why I asked you to ask that again is because I think it is a very vague and vast question. Social media, whether we want to lump it or loathe it, has changed the world in many respects. The whole point of social media, in many respects, is to make the world smaller. There is evidence of how people use social media positively, but there is also evidence of how people misuse it. Really, the question is who the responsibility lies with—the social media company, the parents, the young people or the Government—

Sheldon Thomas: It's straight simple. You answered it right there: the people responsible are the parents, because kids are in the home.

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: I am trying to navigate the answer to the question. For example, growing up, across the board the majority of people might come home and watch "EastEnders". Now when young people come home, and people in general, there are so many different mediums through which they can access entertainment, news and so on and so forth. We are more likely to access the news via Twitter than by watching the BBC.

However, by eliminating geographical boundaries, social media also allows you to kind of set your own subcultural groups. When I was growing up, I would be aware of all the road youts in my local area, Tottenham. A young person growing up now is aware of people in Lewisham, Manchester, Birmingham and so on, because social media eliminates geographical boundaries. If we are asking, "What responsibility can social media companies have in trying to reduce that?", that is, I guess, a different question. Do you see where I am coming from?

That question gets a bit tricky. Let me give you a quick example of why. YouTube, based on what has happened in terms of knife crime, took aggressive measures on what music young people can put out there.

Sheldon Thomas: I do not think that YouTube took aggressive measures; I need to correct you on that because it is not true. YouTube was forced to take measures. It was not going to do it until the Metropolitan police said, "If you don't do it, we're going to put out that you are supporting this violent lifestyle." You need to be corrected, because you are making it sound like YouTube or social media—the points that you are making are quite good, but you need to be careful because you are trying to justify. The question is quite simple. There is an impact, but you cannot justify—

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: Yes, but the point that I was making is that there are clearly various impacts. In terms of a solution-based approach, I am trying to give you examples of what certain companies—I know we cannot say names, so apologies for having named a company—have tried to put in place before and how easy it is for young people to circumvent those avenues. As I mentioned before, there are various types of social media platform.

I might take something down from place A, but it lands in a more violent, aggressive or pornographic type of location, place B. Do you understand? All I am trying to illustrate is the potential difficulties and challenges with regards to social media. As it covers so many different geographical landscapes, even if you took one measure in the UK, that same measure might not necessarily be applied in America, for example. I might not be able to watch Mr B in the UK, but I can still watch Mr A, B, C and D in France, the US and so on, who could be doing all sorts of crazy things.

In a nutshell, if we are looking at how we want to address social media, you are really looking for some sort of governmental law that crosses all social media platforms and has a way of tracking each of them to a particular person. For example, you would need each person to have a real digital fingerprint that attaches them to a log-in to that platform, to hold them accountable. As that does not seem to be in play, if I set up my—I will make up another name—"SnapLack" today, and my SnapLack account is closed, I can start my SnapLack account via various other means. Do you see the challenges that we need to overcome if we are trying to hold social media accountable to some degree?

Q71 **Chair:** Thank you. Can I ask Carlie for her input?

Carlie Thomas: I will not talk for long because I know that you want to move on to the next question. Thank you for your question, James. We are constantly looking for evidence, because we need to get it out there to make changes, so I understand where you are coming from with that question.

We know the evidence, we see it every day. We work with young people and at the moment, I am working with 20 young men. They know that they are getting drawn out on social media. Music videos are drawing them out, with comments made about them. What did you call it, Snapbook? Even with Snapbook, we know that our young men go on, see something and they are being dissed or cussed and need to react for their pride. They either want to react or do not want to react, but they have to react, otherwise they are seen to be—I do not want to use certain words in here—a bit wet and not part of the circle, the gang or the peer group, because you are not dealing with what he said to you. He cussed your mum and you do not want to deal with that. "What? He cussed your mum and you're not dealing with it?"—that kind of thing.

I am working with young men who, five months down the line, have said, "Do you know what, Carlie? I don't want my Android phone," or, "I don't want my iPhone." They have small burner phones. We recognise burner phones to be involved in county lines and drug running, but they have them not because they are involved in that at this point, but because they don't want to be drawn out.

For us, back in the day, we had pagers and mobile phones we had to go and top up. If someone made a threat, we had to go to the corner shop and get £5 credit and send a text: "Why are you speaking to me like that?" It's not like that now; you just need to go to McDonald's, hit the wi-

fi and, boom, you can say whatever you want. It is the mindset behind our young people; that is why some of my young men are like, "Okay, I don't want to be drawn out—I don't want to be in that situation. I will replace my Android phone so I don't have to be involved in that." It is about getting them to that place. We can take their phones away and we can shut down all these platforms, but they will find a way if they want to and they don't have the belief that there is something else out there for them.

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: I think the answer will really come from your generation. I think if any other generation was presented with those challenges, they would probably find it perceptible to them, too. The reality is that these guys who we are talking about are all digital natives. I'm not a digital native, so I can remove myself from social media platforms. Many of those people regard a social media platform as their right hand. Do you see where I'm coming from? As soon as they wake up, there are certain people who will show you what they have had for breakfast and lunch, conversations with the mums, and so on and so forth. There is a certain normalisation with young people and social media platforms. We need to address that and how we try to make the next generation aware of the separation. For the generation that is going through that, accountability and restriction of use of those social media platforms would be a better question, or something that maybe we should explore on this panel.

Chair: As we have spent quite a lot of time on the initial questions, could the panel try to keep their future responses as brief as possible? Ewan will ask the next question.

Q72 **Ewan Jago:** Are there specific factors that make young people more at risk of being victims or perpetrators of serious youth violence? Are there specific groups who are most affected?

Sheldon Thomas: Definitely. The attachment theory tells you that, and the Maslow's hierarchy of need tells you that. If you don't know what that is, you need to look that up on the internet because it will take a long time to explain, and we have to keep our answers brief.

It is quite simple: everything we discuss in here comes down to parenting. I know people want to shirk their responsibility and try to look for different interventions, but interventions cannot fix this. Each child we are talking about comes from a home; they don't come from the YOT or probation, St Giles, Gangsline or Kwabz's organisation; they come from homes. Until we address this societal issue, you are talking about our children—simple.

In 2015, the UN released a report on Britain's parenting. It said that children are more likely to grow up in England in a household that lacks love. Children who lack love will go elsewhere looking for it. In my case, going back to the 1970s, I went looking for it. I became a gang leader. Nothing has changed. Today, young people do the same. You need love in a family home; you need a father figure to raise you, to make you understand what it means to be a man, or to raise a girl to make her choose the right partner, not a partner who gets her pregnant and leaves her. If you don't have those, all we are discussing is pointless.

We can talk about music all day, but everything comes down to parenting. We have children between the ages of eight and 12 who spend more time on social media than they do with their mums and dads. If you don't spend any time with your mum and dad, how's your mum going to know who you are? How are you going to know how you can interact? If you're looking at social media, all you're getting is that rubbish that comes up on there from different young people, which tells you to act in a certain way. It tells eight-year-old girls to wear make-up and mini-skirts, and tells guys out there just to go on road.

I am not suggesting that every part of social media does that, but, I'm sorry, most of the things that young people watch on social media are negative, and the reason why is that mum or dad is not in control at home. If you're not in control at home, your child will do what they want. When I go into a parent's home, the child is in the bedroom on their own, on social media. What intervention is going to fix that? That is the problem. We think intervention is going to fix things. Intervention cannot fix societal issues; societal issues have to come from people in society recognising, "What do we want in society?"

At this moment in time, we've got children growing up in houses where there are no fathers, and we have accepted it. We have literally accepted that absent fathers should be absent, so to answer your question, children are more likely to be groomed and exploited because they lack love at home.

Carlie Thomas: Even the word "parents" and trying to put the blame hurts my heart a little bit. I do not want to sound dramatic or emotional here, but the parents I've worked with over the past four years—I've got my mum sat behind me today. My mum was there for me 24/7. She gave me everything I needed growing up. I was provided with a lot of love, a lot of care, a lot of material things. I had everything that I wanted. I didn't feel so great in here, not because of what mum was doing, but because of generally just how I felt in society. She tried to give me that confidence; she tried to build my esteem; she tried to do everything possible for me, but I took the choice. I made the choice to go down a route, because I felt I almost didn't fit into certain parts of society.

I need to strip it back a little bit as well, because the parents that I work with today—you know, Sheldon's right. They are not in the home. They are not in the family home, and I'll tell you why they're not in the family home: because they are out. My parents are out there. They are working minimum wage, zero-hour contracts trying to provide for their young people, their children. They still cannot give their children everything they want, because what our young people see on social media, in these music videos—all the jewellery, the money flashing, the car—they're aspiring. They want that. Mum can't provide that.

Sheldon Thomas: Carlie, let me just say—

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: I don't think it's fair to interrupt.

Chair: If we could just let Carlie finish, and then we'll come to you, Sheldon.

Sheldon Thomas: What Carlie is saying is true, but the stats I'm talking about are parents who are unemployed; I am not talking about the stats that Carlie has mentioned. I'm sorry to interject.

Carlie Thomas: No, that's fine. We are talking about two lots of parents; we are talking about parents across the board, and I can't disagree with Sheldon. We all have our own experiences, our own lived experience and experience of working with families, communities and young people, but I am talking about my parents who I work with, and my parent who's sat behind me. They are out there; they are grafting day after day, minute after minute. They leave the house at six in the morning; they finish their first job at eight. They go on to their next job and they finish that one at 10. They go on to the next one.

Now, what we need to be looking at is the bigger picture. We need to be looking at how we make sure that that doesn't happen—that our young people have long-term prospects and aren't on zero-hour contracts, but are out there, doing a job that they enjoy. This is what we need to be looking at. Intervention is important; prevention is just as important, and we need to give these young people hope. We need to let them know, "Do you know what? You are able to do whatever it is you want to do, at whatever stage. If you want it, we—people like you, who are fighting for young people your age but are older than you—will back you. We will support you."

At the same time, we need the support from the Government as well. Now, I haven't come here today—I'm feeling a little bit angry—to say that the Government aren't doing enough, but the Government do have a responsibility, and we need to be working on this together. It is all very well blaming drill music; it is all very well blaming the parents, this one and that one, but let's look at the people at the top. Let's look at them and see what they're doing. I'm not here with stats and figures today, guys; I'm here with feeling and emotions, because I am sick of every day looking into a parent's eyes and them saying, "Carlie, I don't know if my son is going to come home tonight. I don't know if I'm going to get the knock at the door from the police to tell me that they have killed someone."

I received a phone call last week to say that somebody had passed. My colleague received a phone call the week before to say one of his clients had passed. Guys, this has got to stop, and I know I'm venting now, but it is because it is something I feel so strongly about. We are losing people left, right and centre, and we cannot continue like this. We are looking not only at a load of young people who are losing their life right now to knife crime, but young people who are witnessing losing people to knife crime. Post-traumatic stress disorder is going through the roof for our young people. We are looking at mental health already; in five years, we are going to have a group of young men and women who are walking around

absolutely out of their mind because they cannot cope with what they have seen and heard five years before.

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: I am going to try to be as brief as possible. In short, I feel that it is due to various socioeconomic factors, but I guess as everyone is talking about parenting, I will talk about parenting from two perspectives. I feel that from an economic standpoint it's extremely difficult to be a parent now.

Our aim should be to support different types of parental structures by first acknowledging them. I have come across some young people with two mums, some live with their grandparents, some are from single-parent households, and so on and so forth. Due to the socioeconomic pressures of parenting, maybe there is an increase in latch-key children, but unfortunately this generation of latch-key children differ from the last, because as opposed to just being raised by the local area they are in, they are now probably raised by social media as well.

To keep the answer short and sweet, I feel it is down to socioeconomic issues, which impact on the ability of parents to actually be parents.

Sheldon Thomas: I'm going to answer on the subject of socioeconomics, because both Carlie and Kwabz have made some good points. The fact is that there are lots of poor people in this country who have never committed a crime. This idea that when you are poor you are going to commit a crime is nonsense. The whole thing about economic factors is true, from the point that Carlie is talking about. Look at it from a Government structure point of view. The apprenticeships schemes are an example; they offer a 17-year-old three pounds something an hour, with no guarantee of a job; that is ludicrous, because when a gang member in east London goes up to that 17-year-old and says—

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: That's socioeconomic, though.

Sheldon Thomas: Yeah, I know; I'm going to mention that. When he offers him £150 or £175 a day, that will make an impact on whether he's going to do that apprenticeship course at £3.79 or £4 an hour. The point that Carlie made has to be looked at. The problem is that we have a Government—successive Governments, by the way; I'm not just going to sit here and cuss off the Conservatives. The Labour party didn't do anything. I'm talking about looking at vision for young people, which is the hope that Carlie is talking about. There is no vision for young people.

With no vision, you can't have economic or social things taken into consideration. England needs a Government that has vision for children. In other words, those kids who don't want to go to uni and just want to leave school and get a job should be entitled to a decent wage. Unfortunately, the wage structure doesn't allow kids to start off on the right footing; the child who wants to go to work straight from school would have to pay to go to work, because the pay is so bad.

The point that Carlie has made is quite valid, and the point that you are making about parenting is valid. The point that I'm trying to get across is that no matter how we're looking, whether it is at economic or social factors or at the Government, which is what Carlie was alluding to about not just sitting here and blaming the Government, everything single thing still comes down to expectation levels from parenting. If you choose the wrong partner, and that person leaves you with a child, and then you choose another partner who does the same, you've got two children by two different men who are not going to take responsibility for those children. That has an impact on the woman, trying to do her best in a difficult situation.

I believe that unless we get societal issues right, which are fundamentally about social and economic factors, and the Government's vision for children, we need to have parents' vision for their own children. In other words, we've got make the right decisions with the partners we choose. If we keep choosing the wrong partners, the cycle we are in will never get broken. That's not a dig at parenting and single mothers; it's saying that we as society have to look at these issues more, instead of keep saying, "When you are poor, you are going to commit a crime." That's not true.

Chair: Thanks. Can we move on to the next question, which Jack will ask?

Q73 **Jack Heald:** As a Committee, we received lots of evidence that mentioned the importance of role models to young people. Moving away from the family to lived experiences and role models, how effective do you think positive role models are in deterring young people from gang and criminal activity?

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: First, I think it is unfair to associate violence with young people. I don't know about this year's stats, but I remember that last year's stats said that there were more people who died from domestic violence than there were young people who had died from knife crime. The generation committing domestic violence is clearly above the generation that we are talking about now in terms of knife crime, so let's not just label young people as violent. If we manage to eradicate things like domestic violence from our society, we create role models.

As opposed to role models, we probably need more real models. By saying that, I mean that people who come from certain socioeconomic backgrounds need to be given more incentives to stay in those environments, as opposed to migrating from those environments, when they reach a higher socioeconomic bracket. For example, people of my generation have gone on to work in investment banks or as doctors and so on. They have moved out of what they regarded as "the hood", "the ghetto", or whatever phrase we want to use. They move out to other areas, so I guess we're always going to be having this circular argument about role models, because for the people who we classify as successful, a part of their success involves them migrating away from areas that we feel are plagued with these socioeconomic issues.

We need to provide more avenues for real models to engage with our young people. Maybe we need to work out a way to compensate people who have attained loads of success for coming back and integrating. A prime example of that is a study that illustrated that even in terms of teaching, a student is more likely to do well in their class if there is a teacher that they can connect with, both on a gender basis and a racial basis. Whether that is wrong or right is a separate debate, but that is a study that has just been proven. Yet we know we have a disproportionately low number of black male teachers, for example. I am sorry to racialise the issue, because I know violence goes across different races and cultures, but we have to look at what challenges these individuals face when they get into the teaching profession.

I for one have spoken to quite a few of these teachers, because of the artists and so on, and they tell me the challenges they face working in those environments, and the stereotypes that they thought a lot of our young people come up against. A basic one that we are all familiar with, for example, is that when we crack jokes, we are rather loud, and that could be due to cultural reasons, but even in 2019 it is still perceived as us being rowdy, or us misbehaving. Do you see where I'm coming from? So I feel the focus should be more on real models, as opposed to role models. Sorry if I've overstepped the time.

Carlie Thomas: For me, just on the back of what has been said, society has a role to play in this. Not everybody aspires to be a rapper, a drill artist, a producer. I work with young men who want to be architects, and I'm always, "Oh, wow". Or they want to be mechanics or get into plumbing or something like that. We need the community, society, to be giving that back as well. We need people who maybe have come from the bottom and are working their way up to come and share their story, their lived experience. It doesn't mean they have to be ex-offenders. It doesn't mean they need to be, "You know what, bruv? I was on road and now I'm an architect," and this, that and the other, but we do need to know how these guys got there, how their journey went, and give that back and provide that hope and those dreams. Our mentors need to be credible. Who are our young people's role models right now?

Sheldon Thomas: Footballers. Rappers.

Carlie Thomas: Yeah. Twenty years ago, there were a lot more male role models out there, but there were also a lot more fathers who were in the family home 20 years ago.

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: That poverty of ambition, to give you a prime example, doesn't come from our communities. We can't say names, so let's just say Boris Johnson. I can't believe that he is more intelligent than Sheldon, for example, but we all know that the probability of someone like Sheldon reaching the position of Boris Johnson is extremely small, illustrating that we just don't live in a meritocratic society.

Chair: Thank you. We will move on to the next question, which Theo will

ask.

Q74 **Theo Sergiou:** On that exact point, last week we heard from Ministers that they want to use rappers and athletes as a way to engage young people involved in crime.

Sheldon Thomas: That's an insult.

Theo Sergiou: Before you go into it, all your contributions are valuable and we appreciate them, but we have not got much time. To get the best evidence possible, we are covering a range of issues, so please give your answers briefly. What are your thoughts on that?

Sheldon Thomas: I just told you my thoughts: it's an insult, and that is the problem. Carlie has just mentioned that again, and so has Kwabz. The whole thing starts from school. At the moment, we go into a lot of schools. In the majority of schools we have been into, the percentage of black students has been 70% to 75%, but the percentage of white teachers in those schools has been 90%.

We are talking about rappers or sportsmen, but those very sportsmen, who people all want to be mentors, drink alcohol, crash their cars and buy lots of cars, so it is the wrong image. It goes back to what Kwabz and Carlie are saying. What we need in our community—this is why MPs should never talk; they should keep their mouths quiet, because they do not know what they are talking about and they insult the intelligence of our community—are normal people who have broken the glass ceiling, like ourselves, to get to a certain position. I run a consultancy firm—unheard of in the black community, but I run one.

What I am trying to show people is that if we are going to forever keep using sportspeople who are not ideal role models—I am not saying all sportspeople are bad, but MPs who do not know anything about that lifestyle, and who have not come from those family homes, should not speak about things they do not know anything about. They should go to people like Carlie, and she will set them straight—or Kwabz, or anyone.

What I am saying is if you want role models, it has to start in school. That means we need to employ more black teachers in schools where the percentage of black students is very high. We are in 2019. We came to this country in '48, and by the 1960s we were in schools where quite a lot of young black kids were, and we had all white teachers. We still have that today. That means nothing has changed since the 1960s.

None of you can talk about the '60s, but I can. If we had schools in the '60s that were predominantly black, but all the teachers were white, and in 2019, we have schools that are predominantly black, and the teachers are still white, it tells you that what Carlie and I are talking about here can materialise only when that changes.

Q75 **Chair:** Thank you, but we are going to have to move on to the other panellists.

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: Basically, from the question you asked, you are saying that the Government are trying to find more relatable characters for young people to connect with, but as Sheldon has illustrated, that is not going to solve the problem.

The main issue, beyond music and anything else, is that in these environments there is a poverty of ambition. You are saying, to eradicate that poverty of ambition, you should aspire to make it in the things that we have already proven we can be successful in. That is not the right direction. To eradicate the poverty of ambition, we need to try to connect these young people with more people who have gone against the so-called stereotypical norm of what success looks like in our media, when connected with people from certain environments. This isn't just black; it is also in terms of white people as well.

I feel that even when we look at conversations such as Brexit and so on, the fact that, despite the amount of time we spent having these conversations, we still can't see the fundamental connection between that and what many of our young people are going through shows the level of disconnect. As opposed to empowering sports stars and rappers, we maybe need to empower more local individuals, and connect them more with our social media.

Carlie Thomas: To come in on the back of what the guys have said, we need to be in schools. At St Giles, across our organisation, we have lived experience. I don't want to presume that you do, Kwabz, but I work with a number of young men and women, my colleagues, who have that credible, lived experience, who can sit down and identify with that young person across the board—not with every situation, but they can identify in some way. That does not mean at all that the only people who can help our young people are people with criminal records and lived experience. We need those people, but we need people who recognise difference.

Everybody's hopes are different. Everybody's dreams can be different. We need to treat people as individuals, which I don't think we do enough of in this country. We do not see them as individuals: "Okay, that's the black community, that's the white community, that's the blah blah community." No, actually, each young person is their own person. I want to be treated as my own person. The three of us here are not the same. We might share the same ideas and concepts, but we might disagree as well—as you have heard today, we disagree with each other's opinions. We are individuals, and that is what we do not see our young people as.

Q76 **Chair:** To finish the session, I would like to thank all of you for coming here, providing evidence and sharing your views on this topic. We are very eager to use all your contributions; they will help us with the report we are making for the Government. This session has now come to a close.

Carlie Thomas: Can I just say one thing, guys? I know we have overstepped on some of the questions, and I know you had a lot more questions that you wanted to ask as well. We are all available by email, so

if there is anything that you didn't quite get, or anything that didn't quite make sense, you can make contact with any of us at our organisations, and we will be willing to talk or to share whatever it is that you'd like.

Kwabz Oduro Ayim: On crime, there was one key important point that I omitted: with most young people involved in gang violence, their parents already have about three degrees of separation. We need to find a way to create time for parents to connect with each other. But yes, thank you all again for your patience.

Carlie Thomas: Good luck with everything.

Chair: Thank you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jeremy Crook, Daniel Willis, Matthew Scott and Iman Haji.

Q77 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you to our witnesses for coming here. My name is Rachel Ojo and I am the Chair of the Youth Select Committee for 2019. Please introduce yourselves and the work that you have been doing.

Jeremy Crook: I am Jeremy Crook, chief executive of the Black Training and Enterprise Group. I am not speaking on behalf of HM Prison and Probation Service today. Our charity has been around for 28 years, trying to ensure that black, Asian and minority ethnic young people do well in education and employment. We also do specific work around the criminal justice system, trying to improve outcomes for BAME young people and Muslim groups. Our particular interest is to tackle disproportionality in the justice system and the labour market.

Iman Haji: I am Iman Haji, the research and programme co-ordinator at a charity called Khulisa. If you are wondering about the name, we are originally from South Africa and Khulisa is a Zulu word meaning to nurture. Putting wellbeing at the centre of everything we do is really important to us. We work directly with young people in schools, prisons and the community. We also train professionals who work with them in our trauma-informed methodology, and then conduct research on improving outcomes for young people in the education and criminal justice systems.

Matthew Scott: I am Matthew Scott. I am the police and crime commissioner for Kent, but I also lead for police and crime commissioners nationally on mental health, police performance and leaving the European Union. I am elected on behalf of the people of Kent. We have police and crime commissioners everywhere outside of London and Manchester, to set police priorities, make our communities safer and hold the force to account for its performance and delivery, and we are responsible for finances and commissioning services for victims of crime. I have been working closely with a number of organisations, charities and the police to ensure that we are keeping young people safe, that we are giving people

an exit from potentially risky situations, as well as ensuring that the police have the resources that they need to do enforcement work.

Daniel Willis: Hi everyone. My name is Daniel Willis. I am the policy and research manager at Community Links. Community Links is a social action charity based in Newham in east London. We have been there for about 40 years. We deliver a wide range of employability services, youth and advice services, and projects to help the local community to meet a series of prevailing needs.

The evidence I will be speaking from today is based on a research project that we conducted last year. Early last year there were two quite serious incidents of youth violence that affected us closely at Community Links, so we embarked on a research project to listen to local residents' opinions on what they thought the root causes of youth violence were and what some solutions might be. We listened to over 200 Newham residents, over a third of whom were aged 25 and under. I will be drawing on a lot of what they told us in that project.

We were also involved in the Home Office's delivery of the #knifefree project earlier this year. Community Links is part of the wider Catch22 group, which is a national organisation that runs a series of services in prisons with offenders, youth services and other areas. I will also be drawing on some of the evidence from that service delivery as well.

Q78 **Chair:** Thank you. Before we start, we have quite a lot of questions to get through, so please keep your answers brief. The first question is for Daniel Willis. In one of the papers produced by Community Links looking at tackling youth violence, you talk about the sense of belonging and safety, which gangs provide for young people. What support would you like to see to deter young people from gangs, and make them feel safer and more engaged in their own communities? Who should be responsible for that?

Daniel Willis: For us, one of the key points is building emotional resilience early in young people, and establishing role models and key relationships in young people's lives, so that they always have someone to turn to in a moment when they need advice, and so that they build capacity within themselves to react well to difficult situations. We have experience building that kind of resilience through a peer mentoring programme that we have called "More than Mentors". This programme has been evaluated and has been shown to have statistically significant results in improving the relationships that young people have with each other and with role models and older people as well. We think that those kinds of services, as well as the work done on the #knifefree project, are really crucial for helping young people to build positive and interesting relationships.

A lot of the people we spoke to in the paper that you mentioned, Rachel, also raised the issue of their communities being fast-changing environments, and issues of inequality and regeneration. It is important for us always to reflect on the issues of why young people do not feel that

they belong in their communities, and to think about some of the public spaces, youth clubs and community sector services that have been lost in previous years, where people would have previously gone just to hang out with their friends or to access other services.

For us, there is a balance to be struck between investing in some of that social infrastructure—spaces that make communities strong, where people can come together, work together and make friends—and both statutory and third-sector services to focus on the importance of relationships and positive role models for young people.

Q79 Chris Bakalis: My question is to the whole panel. Does the Government's anti-knife-crime strategy provide effective intervention for someone who has been cautioned for a knife-related offence?

Matthew Scott: I think the Government's anti-knife strategy and the serious violence strategy are a step in the right direction, and are both positive things to have. My main concern about those programmes is how money is being spent locally. I believe that we need to see greater investment in some of those programmes at a local level, perhaps through police and crime commissioners, who can work with those charities on the ground in order to engage with young people who are at risk.

We have a number of programmes locally that do that. We have talks in local schools, and we have youth engagement officers who work with schools and youth clubs, but some of the more difficult work, which is around identifying those young people, engaging with them and giving them someone to work with to extract them from a risk of knife crime, is expensive and requires further investment. We have a number of those programmes running, but my main call to the Government would be to increase that investment, and create a preventive fund that police and crime commissioners could use in order to engage more of those interventions.

Jeremy Crook: I agree with that. Resources are very important, and the Government is increasingly allocating resources to serious youth violence and knife crime. From my point of view, running a BME-led organisation and charity, it is about the extent to which resources actually reach BME organisations that work with young people in communities, and to which they can access resources to do an adequate and effective job. We have seen over the last 30 years lots of public money going into urban areas and deprived areas, but the impact you could look at now has been minimal.

I would argue, from my perspective as a charity trying to support charities locally, especially BME ones, that they are still not accessing resources from mainstream funds, from charitable trusts and from Government. Unless we really track and monitor who is getting the money, and whether they are really connected to the young people who need the help and support, I would question whether we are going to see real change, because of that deficit of proper resource reaching the right organisations at the right time. There are some very good organisations, but they are

very small, under-resourced, and they need scale and capacity to engage with police better, with schools, and with youth organisations.

We know that youth services have been starved of funding for quite a long time and there is a real gap there, but I would encourage the panel to really think about who the real stakeholders are, and who can really make a difference in communities with young people. A big part of the solution is BME organisations that have BME people with lived experience who can connect with those young people, and interface with public authorities and employers, who are a key stakeholder but are often overlooked. There is a big opportunity deficit that we need to close to make sure that young people believe that they can get on if they do well in education, once they have achieved success in that respect.

Iman Haji: There is an overwhelming focus on what happens to young people once they are caught with a knife. I don't think enough attention is being paid to adopting a holistic approach. What can we do to support young people before they get to that stage? We are seeing increasing recognition, whether in the Mayor's knife crime strategy or the Government's serious violence strategy, of the importance of prevention and building young people's resilience. What we are not seeing is a cogent outcomes framework for how we will achieve that. We know that building young people's resilience and social and emotional wellbeing is not just a protective factor preventing them from being involved in crime; it also strengthens life outcomes—whether getting a good job, education or even health outcomes. We argue that not enough attention is being paid to that at the moment.

Daniel Willis: I would echo a lot of what Iman and Jeremy said. The emphasis on early intervention and prevention in both the serious violence strategy and the Mayor of London's work has been really welcome. On the point about cautions and policing, one thing we heard clearly was that there was a lack of trust in the police among young people. Trying to rectify that in a very tense and difficult situation is something that needs some thought.

We would like to see more of a trauma-informed approach. Rather than thinking, like Iman said, about the point at which a young person is caught with a knife, think about the path that has got them to that situation, and about what kind of trauma and suffering has put them in that position and made them want to carry a knife. We have heard numerous times from people across our services that a young person won't carry a knife unless they are scared for their life. Trying to understand that issue a bit more and build that kind of trauma-informed work into policing—I know that there is a lot of effort to do that—would be really welcome from our point of view. On cautioning, anything that takes that on board, avoids a young person getting a criminal record and helps them in later life is potentially a positive step from our point of view.

Q80 **Chris Bakalis:** What more should the Government do to make it work even better or more consistently?

Jeremy Crook: We can't get away from the fundamental point that we have a lot fewer police in our communities. It seems to me that when bereaved parents say they want more to be done, they want more visible policing. Governments are very good at writing strategies and doing analysis. You read all those documents, and they all make sense and are very rational, but it is the implementation, the delivery on the ground, how we connect things up and having the right people working together that is really important. I think we are not doing enough to engage the right people to make sure we can follow through, track how young people are being supported, view them in the right way—not negatively, as we often do in society—and make them feel a sense of belonging, not just to their communities but to society.

We still view too many of our black and Asian young people through a very negative lens, which impacts on how services are delivered, because they are not informed and the premise from which we start is often a narrow, limited, negative one. Those young people are not seen as vulnerable and as needing help and support. The trauma-based approach is obviously very important, as previous speakers on the panel said, but you have to get the right people in the room and in delivery. In my view, it is undermined by stop and search and how it is implemented. It does not breed trust and confidence among young people. Although the system is trying to do good things on the one hand, it is undermining its activities on the other through poor police practices. Things like the gangs matrix are not helpful in the way they are implemented and perceived by communities.

We need a realistic view about young people's experience. What parents see every day in the community makes us feel like the engagement is not worth while, because we cannot see the actual institutional change in the way these organisations deliver services or think about service delivery. As Sheldon said earlier, we need to see BAME people in all these organisations at all levels, but we don't at the moment. There is still a disparity in the workforce of all the partners that need to work together. There is also a lack of resource and a lack of engagement with the right organisations in communities.

Matthew Scott: I would like to pick up on a point that Jeremy made about the engagement of policing with young people and the public at large. Policing is now inspected on those things. We have an inspection regime called "legitimacy", which is about how policing works with the community—how it protects and serves the community and keeps them safe. In Kent, we are lucky that we have a police force that has been deemed outstanding four years in a row for that, which is an outstanding achievement in itself. We have actually got independent reviews going on of how the police engage with the public. There are things that policing can be doing that they are assessed on in order to improve that, particularly when it comes to tactics such as stop and search and the use of force, and maybe some of the other things, like body-worn video as well.

To go back to your question about what we need, we do need more police officers. In a number of police force areas in Kent there will be 450 more police officers by the end of this year than when I was elected three years ago. That is a picture that is being replicated in some other forces—Katy Bourne in Sussex, Roger Hirst in Essex and John Campion in West Mercia. There is a lot of police recruitment going on at the moment to try and turn the tide back the other way in terms of the number of officers that we have lost; but they obviously need to make sure that they are engaging in the right way and that their legitimacy is good.

We do need further investment in prevention, as I mentioned, and I think police and crime commissioners are the perfect vehicle to do that. Again, to pick up on the point that Iman made about outcomes, police and crime commissioners are scrutinised, and we are accountable. Through our local dissemination of funding, we can be held to account for how that reaches the grassroots in different organisations—again, as Jeremy said, making sure that that is getting to the organisations who need it and can do the work.

Finally, it is about having an effective criminal justice system, because it is not just about policing and police numbers, which have reduced in recent years. It is actually about a criminal justice system that works for everybody—that we are not unnecessarily criminalising young people. I believe it takes quite a lot, actually, for a young person to get a criminal record these days, because there are so many community resolutions out there and different mechanisms to prevent young people from entering the criminal justice system; but we need a justice system that works for victims and witnesses, but also that rehabilitates and addresses some of those underlying issues. Those, I would say, are the three things that we need to improve.

Q81 James Appiah: My question is to the whole panel: do you think the Government's serious violence strategy strikes the right balance between preventive, punitive and rehabilitative action?

Jeremy Crook: As I said, you can read those strategies from Government and they do look balanced and they do seem like they have got it right between prevention and law enforcement; and you wouldn't disagree with it. It is about the reality of how those policies impact. For example, in the youth custody system—youth justice—we have got, I think, 51% of the people in youth offending institutions who are BAME, and a large proportion of that is young black children and young men. Their reoffending rates are much higher when they come out. It does beg the question what is being done when they are in custody to help them to be successful when they come out, in terms of learning, education, inspiration. When they come out, why are they reoffending at much higher rates than anyone else, in terms of young people? Is that because of a lack of jobs? Is it negative stereotyping? Is it racism? Are we doing enough to make sure they can actually resettle and reintegrate as young people, or are we not doing enough so they fall back into whatever they were doing before and end up back in the justice system?

I think the whole follow-through needs to be really robust, and we cannot ignore the whole opportunity aspect, which is about getting a good job, including a good apprenticeship. We know nationally we do not have a fair outcome for BAME young people in apprenticeships. Only 11% of apprenticeship starts are from BAME backgrounds. We represent 14% of the population. In terms of apprenticeships, we are also in sectors that are low-paid, as Sheldon said earlier. We do have to tackle the economic side of this equation, or else we are never going, I think, to break the cycle of young black and Asian people being over-represented in the justice system and not having enough opportunity locally, and support.

We do, as I keep saying, need to bring employers into this because prevention is about opportunity—recognising young people have got talent. All young people can offer something, clearly. We have got to be able to draw that talent out, support it and encourage it. If schools aren't doing that enough for all of our young people, there is a problem there, isn't there? If the police aren't adequately engaged in communicating with young people there is going to be a communication gap there—which there often is. Despite some police forces doing better than they were five or 10 years ago, there are still real issues about engagement, communication and trust. We won't, I think, see a lot more steps in the right direction unless we really do come to a position on things like stop and search, to make sure that it is free of bias and is fair.

I saw two young people being stopped and searched recently. You can see the embarrassment and the frustration at the way that is done on the high street, with a group of police officers around two young people. Nothing was found and yet, for 10 or 15 minutes, they were stood up and searched, and then let go. You could see the anxiety among those young people.

I listened to a couple of hundred people in Newham last year in a local consultation with the Mayor of Newham. They talked about their fear in going about their daily lives in their communities—going to school and standing at the bus stop. They didn't feel safe. These were young people from all backgrounds. Clearly, we have got to make sure that young people feel safe in their communities. Part of that is more community police officers—more police officers—but it is people who understand their communities, not those shipped in from outside London who don't really get the communities, don't know the young people and don't talk to them, and can't talk to them because they don't know how to relate to them. All those things make a difference.

I don't think we are ever going to reflect the local population in every London borough, but we have got to get better than we are at the moment, and make sure that the training is really inclusive, robust and challenging, so that police officers and everyone else involved with young people can deal with issues to do with colour, race and faith in a confident manner that can move things forward, rather than just ignoring these things, and then we keep coming up against the same problems, year in, year out.

Clearly, we have got knives off the streets and out of communities. The mindset of young people—why young people tend to carry a knife and use them—has been well researched. You can understand the rationale there. We have got to break that rationale and make people feel safe leading their lives in their communities, in schools, in youth centres and on the streets. We are all pained by what is happening on our streets at the moment, especially in London in the last few days, where there have been a number of murders. That is shocking, but it is not shocking us enough, is it? It is not shocking us enough to really turn the tide on this and get the resource we need to really turn this around and get everyone engaged.

Some parents and guardians and some children in care are not getting enough support. They need support. They need encouragement. While we work with a lot of schools and provide role model programmes, many schools don't even respond to the communication to say, "We would like to work with you." We have got a free service. Maybe it is capacity; I don't know. They just do not respond to say, "We would welcome your support and your engagement." I hope they engage with other charities, but my experience is that not enough schools that need help actually draw down the help when it is being offered, and that needs to change.

Iman Haji: We talked a bit in our written evidence about how there are a number of things that would suggest that the balance is being paid attention to. For example, the serious violence strategy talks about the importance of a multi-agency approach because no one organisation can solve everything to do with serious violence. It also talks about the social and financial impact of adverse childhood experiences and the importance of early intervention in challenging that. The serious violence strategy also talks about the need to adopt diversion where possible in order to get young people away from criminogenic pool of prison.

But when you dig a little deeper from the text and look at the commitments being made, there are arguments to suggest that that balance is not being correctly struck. For example, we talk about how in the serious violence strategy there is a trauma-informed model to be introduced for youth offending teams and the police. But if we are going to get that balance of punitive versus preventative right, where is that same support for teachers and in other arenas where preventative action can take place?

We also see the focus more on older children, where behaviour is more likely to be entrenched, than on younger children, where we can do preventive work. The focus is on teachable moments, but that is a moment of crisis when the young person has already been a victim or a perpetrator of crime. Where is the same level of support for young people before they get there?

We can also look at the amount of thought that has been given to the enforcement-based initiatives, and compare it with where the preventative thought is. I mentioned earlier that there is a recognition of the importance of building young people's resilience, but the same amount of funding is not being given to that or to that being done in schools—also,

what work will be done cross-departmentally to ensure that that is being done across schools, prisons and the community. On balance, I would say that the balance has not been struck.

Daniel Willis: I would echo a lot of that. Community Links co-ordinates a body called the Early Action Task Force, which talks and lobbies a lot about the importance of prevention and early intervention. We would always argue that there is more preventative work to be done, but in this instance there is a strong case to be made that the more the Government can invest in preventative and early interventions at the minute, the greater the longer-term benefits, and there will be plenty of savings to be made.

The point about having a holistic approach is crucial. Early interventions that are specifically designed to tackle youth violence in isolated areas will not work if there is not also consideration of the health, education or housing issues that a lot of young people will be facing with their families. If the networks of support are not provided in those areas, young people's lives will be just as disrupted. A few hours at the youth club every week will not solve some of those more structural issues.

There is a lot of positive stuff in the strategy and there is more evidence to be built through the youth endowment fund, so these are definitely positive steps, but more prevention is always crucial. Prevention is better than cure: the more we can do now, the less we will have to do later.

Matthew Scott: I think the serious violence strategy, when you look at it as a whole with everything else that has been going on and the strategies that are coming out of the Home Office and other Departments, addresses some of the issues the panel has raised. For the first time, the Government are investing properly in mental health and resilience in schools. We are seeing greater investment in prevention. Obviously, I mentioned that I do not feel it is enough. We need to make sure that the comprehensive spending review identifies prevention as a key funding outcome for police and crime commissioners and police forces, as well as some of the other organisations.

One of the key points in the serious violence strategy, which has been touched on, is partnership. Policing cannot solve this problem on its own, nor is it its responsibility to do so. It requires a joined-up multi-agency approach. It needs the Department for Work and Pensions to look at issues such as welfare. It needs local councils to look at issues such as housing. We need public health departments looking at health inequalities as well as police and crime commissioners looking at prevention and police forces looking at enforcement.

A lot gets said about the Glasgow Violence Reduction Unit, which has been running since 2008. We have had a similar model working in Margate, one of the most deprived areas in Kent and an area where crime is higher than in others. They have won awards for their multi-agency approach, and it is a model that I am proud to support. It has been so effective that we are introducing another taskforce in Medway, with the support of extra

resources from my office as well as some wraparound care, which we will be securing from sources such as the early intervention youth fund and my office's own violence reduction fund. We need to make sure that all those agencies are stepping up to the plate, that they are all doing their bit and that there is effective governance in place so they are held to account for their actions. I do that through my office with all agencies in a number of ways, whether it is through mental health or the local criminal justice board, or by holding the chief constable to account on behalf of residents.

The serious violence strategy is good, but I hope that as we go on—it is now nearly 18 months since the strategy was published—it grows, develops and, although I hate the phrase, is a living document rather than something that just gathers dust. I hope it continues to evolve over the next few years through the comprehensive spending review so the efforts of Ministers—the Home Secretary and the Policing Minister—are recognised in that funding settlement.

Chair: Thank you. Before we go on to the next question, I would just like to remind the panellists to keep their answers brief. I will now invite Jack to ask the next question.

Q82 **Jack Heald:** Do you believe that judicial sentencing is effective in serving as a deterrent, preventing reoffending and helping rehabilitation?

Matthew Scott: No, it is not. I do not think it is nearly as effective as it should be. You need a joined-up approach that prevents criminalisation to begin with, but when something serious has happened there needs to be effective punishment as well as rehabilitation in prison. We look at lots of different cases. Taking assaults on police officers as an example, the Government had to change the law to have more people sent to prison for assaulting emergency workers because the sentences being given out were not fair or proportionate. We need to ensure that we consider other options, perhaps such as mandatory minimums, where people go to prison for a specified amount of time, but only in so far as we have the rehabilitation to reduce reoffending to go alongside it. There is no point in locking someone up in a cell for 23 hours a day and leaving them for four years. That will not solve anything. It needs to go hand in hand with the rehabilitation and reoffending. I have been looking at this through my local criminal justice board, which I chair, in conjunction with the Crown Prosecution Service, Victim Support and the Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service, to make sure that, in the criminal justice system, the right people are going to prison, and at the same time that victims and witnesses can have faith in the system.

Jeremy Crook: I agree with much of that. I think we all want to see young people kept out of custody, so far as possible, and that, when they need to go into custody, we make sure that they get the proper support and rehabilitation. Clearly, the evidence suggests that they are not getting the best effective support and learning and opportunities when they are in custody. We need to make sure that we can give the judiciary good options in the community, to divert young people away from the justice

system where appropriate. Maybe we need to use more of that. I think the David Lammy review showed that you are disproportionately more likely to be given a custodial sentence for the same offence if you are from a black or BAME background. We need to keep working with the judiciary to make sure that their sentencing is fair and not disproportionate.

My big concern is that, when young people are in the youth custody system, they should be given the right help. The evidence at the moment seems to be that many are not. Just over half feel that they are given help in custody to come out and resettle. That is young people, with their whole lives ahead of them. They have to be given better. I know that the Government are introducing secure schools, which is a new, important measure. That focuses on education, but we have hundreds of young people in custody at the moment who need a better offer and better support, based on how they connect with the community, their families, institutions and jobs. That needs to be made bolder, in terms of their connection to the labour market and opportunities.

Iman Haji: It is a massive question, and I agree with what everyone said. On judicial sentencing, I refer the Committee to a report by John Samuels and Jonathan Aitken, which proposes adopting a problem-solving courts model. They essentially argue that judges give sentences but do not then review or see the outcomes for the young person. They essentially call for judges to have oversight of what is being done to support the young people they give sentences to. At the moment, we know that things are not working; our reoffending rate is so high. What can we do to ensure that young people get support after they have been sentenced? Allowing judges to have that oversight will hopefully create accountability and will ensure that young people receive that support.

Daniel Willis: I echo what has been said already. For us, the key is to think about the forms of support provided during that sentence and the rehabilitation work that can take place. Equally, those kinds of questions need to be considered earlier. This is not just about custodial sentences but about the way in which exclusions are potentially applied and what kind of support can be provided to young people at an earlier stage. We need to reframe the question to being about earlier action.

Q83 **Husnaa Mota:** In evidence to the Committee, we have heard that young people would rather risk being caught with a weapon and face the consequences—custodial sentences—than risk being without the knife if they meet someone who wants to hurt them. Do you think that the Government have recognised this dilemma in drawing up their response to knife crime? If not, how should it be changed?

Iman Haji: We mentioned this in our written evidence. We have young people on our programmes who say they would rather carry a knife and risk going to prison than lose their life. We have to ask ourselves why young people feel so terrified that it is as normal for them to carry a knife or a weapon as it is to carry a mobile phone. Fear is a massive factor that plays into that. As I said, in the same way that crime is not caused by one single factor does, there is no one response to that. We need a multi-

agency approach, and we need to take into consideration contextual safeguarding—what can we do in our community? The resources are there. How can we work better together?

On whether the Government have recognised that, there are pockets of good practice, such as through the Home Office's early youth intervention fund. In Harrow, there is a community project that is bringing together the council, police, statutory agencies and the voluntary sector to be able to provide direct support to young people in 20 youth centres, schools and community centres in hotspots of violence to ensure that the young people are getting support and have somewhere to go and feel safe. But then information is being shared between the different agencies so that we can create a plan to better support young people.

Because it is being developed by the community for the community, it has some credibility that it might not have had coming from an outside agency. So there are pockets of good practice, but more can be done.

Daniel Willis: Like I said previously, this is something we heard in our research in Newham as well, and something that a lot of young people would recognise as being a reality. We would definitely back a change of approach to be more trauma-informed and to be considering what journey that young people has been on to get to the stage where they feel, "I need to carry a knife."

One of the really key challenges in this area is, as Jeremy raised earlier, getting the resources to a lot of the grassroots organisations and the quite small parts of civil society that will be best placed to recognise these situations early on and identify at-risk young people.

One of the key things to think about in terms of way the Government implements the serious violence strategy is how it invests in some of those really small grassroots organisations and the people doing best practice but who might at this minute not have a really strong evidence base for what they are doing. It has been really positive to hear that in the youth endowment fund, for example, there is an emphasis on supporting grassroots organisations to fund evaluations of their work and build a stronger evidence base. We know a lot of the best work at the minute will not have a randomised control trial or a full evaluation. Some of the evidence they have might be based on case studies or just one-off relationships or other things. Trying to test and learn which of those are the best interventions and try to have a test-and-learn approach to roll those out is the best way the Government could be approaching this.

Jeremy Crook: It kind of implies—this is my understanding—that the majority of young people, and particularly black young males and boys, walk around with a knife every day. I don't believe that is the case, of course. There is going to be a small minority who believe they need to do that, for the reasons they have set out. I am keen that we do not give the impression to society that the majority of young people—particularly black young people—walk around with a knife every day, because I don't believe that is the case. I have not seen any research that shows what proportion

do carry a knife, but clearly that is the perception and explanation given by young people that do carry a knife, so that is obviously valid and we have to listen to that.

The important thing, it seems to me, with all the strategies, is: are young people given the platform to get their voices, feelings and experiences across to Government, at local level, in schools, in local authorities and in care? Are they really listened to, and are they given regular opportunities to say how they feel about what is being done for them, with them and to them? Whatever strategy Government comes up with, we must ensure that young people have got a strong voice and channels to communicate, directly or indirectly, with the powers that be locally and nationally, with that being a regular, systematic communication.

Young people may not want to talk directly to the police; they may prefer to talk to a youth worker or a good organisation like Sheldon's that can work with them—whoever, as long as it is clear how and where they are communicating and their voices are being listened to and heard and responded to. That is really important.

- Q84 **Theo Sergiou:** This is to Jeremy Crook. Some people perceive knife crime as an issue only in larger cities, where it mostly affects young black men both as perpetrators and victims. Is that an accurate perception? Regardless of that, how do you think that affects strategies and the provision of services and resources?

Jeremy Crook: The College of Policing produced a succinct briefing that sets out the data and explains, for example, the proportion of gang-related knife crime, which I think is only 5% of overall knife crime. It is a low proportion—albeit, that element is often more serious in its consequences in terms of serious harm and deaths. But overall it is a smaller proportion. It is obviously very serious at whatever level it is.

It does impact and impinge on how we think about solutions and engagement. We are already dealing with a society that perceives some young people very negatively. Young black men have to deal with a perception or stereotype that is very, very negative—be it the hoodies, the aggression, being lazy, being prone to violence or being prone to drugs. Those things are prevalent generally, let alone when you bring in crime, knife crime and other important aspects. We have to keep challenging ourselves to look at the strategies and what is being done, and at their content, how they are informed and the thinking behind them. There is unconscious bias—sometimes there is direct bias—in how we think about who we are trying to support and help, and about the remedies and solutions. We need to be well-informed and challenge ourselves in the way we think—both in Government and outside, and in communities. At all levels, we have to challenge the perceptions and solutions to ensure they are sensible and effective, which means checking what is working all the time.

- Q85 **Theo Sergiou:** Sorry. Can I repeat part of the question? You have mentioned that it is a negative interpretation, but the question is whether

it is an accurate perception that it mostly affects young people. What are your thoughts on that?

Jeremy Crook: The data would suggest that it is not an accurate reflection that it is just young people in urban areas. It seems to me that there is a national issue across a range of communities. In large cities, where there is more deprivation, we obviously have a higher incidence of that, but the data suggests that gang-related knife crime is a very small proportion of overall crime with sharp weapons. It is really important to understand that. We all want to ensure that we use the available data and explain it, and that we don't exaggerate it and give an inaccurate picture that leads society and communities to view a very narrow group of people as being responsible for all the crime across the country, because that would be inaccurate.

Q86 **Jodie Floyd:** My question is to Matthew Scott. Kent has seen a very large increase in knife crime since 2010. How will the recently announced extra £1.5 million for Kent police be used to combat knife crime?

Matthew Scott: If I may, I want to come back to Jeremy's point on ages. We did a big data analysis of violent crime in Kent over the past 15 or 16 years. The biggest trend we have seen is not that violent crime is a young person's game; actually, the biggest change we have seen is in the number of women who are becoming involved in violent crime. It is more intergenerational: we are now seeing more people in older age categories being involved in violent crime. Our biggest age cohort is between 20 and 25, but more people are involved in forms of violence—perhaps because issues such as domestic violence and sexual violence are being reported to the police more. It is diversifying the age profile of people who are involved in violent crime and being caught by the police.

With regard to the Kent statistics, yes it was a large percentage increase. In Kent, knife crime is very low. As a proportion of the crimes reported, the numbers are very low, but that does not mean we are complacent about it. We have recently received several million pounds. We have received £1.7 million in surge funding, which the police have been using to do more enforcement activity against county lines gangs and people who we know are committing violent crimes. It is very intelligence-led, targeted action, which has led to a number of warrants and arrests. In the past few months we have seen knife crime fall by about 15% as a result of some of that activity.

Crucially, this week we have agreed how we will use the funding to prevent that from happening in the first place. The panel have already talked about some of the schemes, such as the wraparound care for young people to prevent them from becoming in violent crime. Some of the support that we offer to people in other age categories is improving as well. The important thing about the statistic was reported in the media.

Sometimes statistics are probably not the truly accurate picture of what was going on, because we don't know the full picture—we know only what has been reported to the police. We know that the statistic would not have

been just knife crime; it would have been crimes involving shards of glass and any other sharp object, and it would have included crimes in a domestic violence context, too. We are taking a very comprehensive look at everything. We are making sure that we are identifying the right response and not making just a knee-jerk response, and we will continue to do that to make sure that we get the right balance between prevention and enforcement going forward.

Q87 **Susuana Senghor:** My question is to Iman Haji. In your evidence regarding the rehabilitation of knife crime offenders, you state that the “government’s efforts to rehabilitate offenders are largely ineffective”. Why do you think that? Could you expand on that idea?

Iman Haji: If you just look at the reoffending statistics for young people, you will know that something is not quite right. Nearly seven in 10 children will reoffend within a year of release. That is not to take away from the fantastic work that has been done to reduce the number of young people in the youth custodial estate. We have seen in the last 10 years a 70% reduction in the number of young people in prison. At the moment we have, I think, about 800 young people in prison. That is the equivalent of a secondary school that you guys go to.

The problem is that we have a core group of young people with very complex needs in a system that was not created to support them. We were saying in our response that the current strategies are not taking into account those complex needs and responding to them accordingly. We know, for example, that a high percentage of the young people in the justice system have suffered a traumatic brain injury. I think that, in our statistics, we mentioned that more than 65% of the young people have sustained a traumatic brain injury. Even more have suffered adverse childhood experiences. Nearly 40% of young people in the youth justice system have been in care; that is compared with 1% in the general population.

There are a few things that people need to know about trauma and how it affects our brain and the way we respond to anything. One is that when young people sustain trauma and have adverse childhood experiences when they are really young, that can stunt their brain development. You can have presenting to you a young person of 15 or 16 who has a developmental age of somebody who is five years old, because that is when the trauma occurred. Then we are going to them and telling them, “This is how you write a CV” or “This is how you get a job.” We are not making our response context-specific to that particular young person.

Another thing that people should know about trauma is that when any of us are in a dangerous situation, our survival responses are turned on and the higher levels of our brain are shut off. The only part of our brain that is really working is the part of our brain that is in charge of fight, flight or freeze. For young people who sustain trauma, that is their state of being. So when we go into prisons and are seeing that young people have been told, “You have to do 30 hours of education a week”—let’s leave aside the fact that more young people are probably spending 22 hours a day in their

cell. Those who are being told "This is what you need to do for education" can't access that.

We would say that we need to have a trauma-informed approach. Neuroscience tells us that unless a young person feels safe, they are unable to relate to whoever it is they are interacting with, and unless they are able to do that, they can't access the higher levels of their brain, which are in charge of decision making and reasoning, and those are the kinds of things that you would need to be able to put in place in order to respond to rehabilitation initiatives.

In terms of what we propose, we would ask for a trauma-informed prison system. That would require our being able to support young people and help them to feel safe, but of course that requires a whole-system investment, because every person who is working in prison would need to be trauma-aware and to know how trauma presents itself in behaviour and also how to respond to those young people in a way that helps them to feel safe and does not make them feel that they are in danger. That will enable the young person to relate to the professional, seeing them as somebody who is there to support them rather than as somebody who is there to threaten them. Only when we have those systems in place will we really be able to say to young people: this is maths, English or science, or this is how to write a CV. We hope that if those systems were in place, we would see a decrease in the reoffending stats that we have at the moment.

Q88 **Bailey-Lee Robb:** The median stay for a child in youth custody is currently 87 days. What effect do you believe a custodial sentence has on a young person's life once they are released from prison? Do you want to kick off, Matthew?

Matthew Scott: I think that, given the circumstances of the offence, custodial sentences are appropriate. They should always be considered one solution, but we need to make sure that we are looking at things in the whole. The panel has quite rightly identified things such as a trauma-informed approach—"Do we know enough about this young person that we are presenting to a custodial environment, and are we tackling the root causes of it?" I don't think we are at the moment, because we have a very fragmented system. That is why—as Iman quite rightly points out—we see high reoffending statistics, whether that is because youth offending teams cannot be as effective as they want to be; because community rehabilitation companies and probation are not sufficiently engaged or doing the right thing, or they are disjointed; or because the setting they are in is just not conducive to reoffending rehabilitation.

I think there are a lot of things that we need to look at in this area. I hope that whoever is the Justice Secretary in a few weeks' time will take a look at this in its whole approach to make sure that we are absolutely punishing the crime that needs to be punished, and that victims and witnesses can have confidence in the criminal justice system, but also that we are not just—as I said earlier—putting people in a cell for 22 or 23 hours a day and leaving them to rot, effectively.

Iman Haji: I would just add that we know that short-term sentences have higher reoffending statistics than other sentences, whether we look at men, women or children. That is partly because short-term sentences interrupt more or less every single one of the protective factors against crime. They affect employment, housing and whether you are receiving benefits, so we would support that presumption against short sentences. We should avoid them where we can.

Hopefully, that would reduce pressures in the prison system and improve outcomes for everybody. Those on short sentences, or who would have been on short sentences, are avoiding prison altogether, and hopefully that reduced pressure and reduced levels of overcrowding would then be able to support rehabilitative interventions for those on long-term sentences, because they would actually be able to leave their cells and access what is on offer.

Daniel Willis: I would echo a lot of that. One example of how this trauma-informed approach could work that we came across during our research was the example of a young man who had been involved in county lines, but was engaged by a charity that, instead of custodial sentences being the answer, tried to view the trauma and forms of exploitation that that young male had gone through.

They worked to an immediate safety plan—I think that is what it is called—to remove that young person from the potential grooming and forms of exploitation that they are involved in through county lines; to cut off their networks with the people exploiting them, ideally permanently, but also put them for a short amount of time in a place where they are uncontactable; and to start providing forms of rehabilitation immediately from then. There are lots of other charities and services looking at potential alternatives to this and doing some really interesting work, so this is a time for innovative solutions and thinking a bit outside the box on that.

Q89 Charley Oliver-Holland: The most recent youth justice statistics show that a quarter of all children in youth custody are black. Why is this, and what is being done to address this disproportionality?

Jeremy Crook: Very seriously, for many years the Youth Justice Board has not robustly tackled the issue of disproportionality, from my point of view. The system has done very well to reduce the number of young people in custody under 18 over the past 10 years—I think there are less than 1,000 young people now in custody, whereas 10 years ago it was between 3,000 and 4,000.

We are doing very well to reduce the number in custody, but it has reduced at a younger rate for black and Asian young people particularly, and particularly black young people. As I said earlier, they now represent 49% of young people in custody, so it seems to me that we need to drive at that. For stop and search, the high number of arrests needs to be looked at to try to keep young people out of the system, particularly from BAME backgrounds. However, once they are in the system, it seems to me

that the rehabilitation, support and learning needs to be that much more culturally responsive to those young people.

Obviously, it is very important and serious that what Iman has outlined there is tackled and understood, but those young people do need to be given the right support, the right programmes and the right interventions. One point is that we have very few psychologists from BAME backgrounds in the system, developing programmes, interventions and initiatives. There is an issue around staff in terms of how they reflect society. I think we have a dearth of psychologists in the system developing the right kinds of interventions to understand the cultural diversity and the contextual issue around BAME young people, and, hopefully, providing the best type of support interventions.

I am not saying that that can come only from BAME individuals, but is the training that psychologists, probation officers and so on receive robust enough to reflect the ethnic diversity of young people in the system, so that they can provide the best and most effective remedies, solutions and interventions?

Q90 **Jack Heald:** A previous witness spoke to us about their police force's work using restorative justice. Do you think that restorative justice should be a more widespread practice? Matthew, maybe you could start with the restorative justice work that you do in Kent.

Matthew Scott: We first need to understand what restorative justice is, because there are misconceptions about it and I do not think that some of the practices that go on are actually restorative justice—they are community resolutions.

Restorative justice is now the responsibility of police and crime commissioners and victim-led commissions. It is about two things: the victim and the reduction of reoffending. I have commissioned a county-wide restorative justice programme that gives victims greater say and greater empowerment. For example, they can discuss the incident and the crime with the offender in a facilitated setting once the offender has been sent to prison. They can seek an apology and hold the offender to account. They can use it as an opportunity to try to understand why they were targeted. It can be a very effective tool for better supporting victims.

Police and crime commissioners are leading the way in trying to inform on restorative justice and increase its usage—there are some really good case studies on how some people may have felt violated as a result of a burglary. In one case that I am aware of, a lady who was burgled felt so violated that she cleaned her house from top to bottom three times a day. Once she met the offender and discussed with him the crime and its impact, she was able to get some form of closure and start to move on with her life and address the issue that it had caused her. A few months later, that repeat burglar, who had been in and out of prison, was not presenting to the police anymore, so it had an impact on reoffending.

It is important to recognise what restorative justice is and is not. We are starting to see a wider roll-out of restorative justice practices, as commissioned by police and crime commissioners across the country.

Jack Heald: Can I open it up to the wider panel?

Jeremy Crook: I think that Matthew is right about that. We would all like to see more restorative justice that is, as Matthew outlined, good quality and well resourced—it takes a lot of professional input to ensure that it is done properly. If the resource is not there, it seems to me that that would be a poor-quality solution. The evidence shows that it can work and it is important, but it needs to be done properly and professionally, and people need to understand the real rationale for it and what the meaningful outcomes should be. I do not think that it can be done on a low budget without professional input. It needs really to be done properly by professional people who can work for the victim and the perpetrator, and make sure that it works for both parties.

Iman Haji: I want to build on the point about investment. We heard last week from Superintendent Clive Davies about the great work that is being done in Surrey. I would add that while restorative justice conferencing is great, we can adopt restorative practices and approaches more generally. For us at Khulisa, that means building young people's emotional literacy so that they can resolve conflict in a way that does not involve violence. We can adopt the principles underpinning restorative justice more widely.

Q91 **Chair:** As the last question, since we are forming a report of recommendations to the Government, can you very briefly give one recommendation that you would particularly like us to take forward?

Matthew Scott: Quite rightly, we focus a lot on offenders and the reasons they re-offend, and how we can turn their lives around, which is absolutely the right thing to do. I always say in every setting, "Please don't forget the voice of victims of crime." I say that for two reasons. First, some of the individuals who commit violent crimes will have been victims of crime themselves. A high proportion will have been a victim of crime at some point. Repeat violent criminals have been a victim of crime at some stage, so we need to recognise that.

Secondly, the voice of the victims and witnesses need to be heard loud and clear, because it can send a very poor message to victims of crime when they hear that the Government are considering abolishing short sentences. We have to consider what impact it will have on the victims, if they see the perpetrator of something that has happened to them come away with no custodial sentence—they might perceive that they are effectively being let off. Please don't ever forget the voice of victims and witnesses. They are crucial to all this work, which we need to do to reduce offending and reoffending.

Daniel Willis: On this point, I would emphasise that there is a real opportunity in a lot of the serious violence strategy for Government to make connections across sectors and really empower civil society to take a role in tackling youth violence. The closer we get to a position where youth

violence is considered everyone's business, which we have a common responsibility to tackle, the better chance we will have of solving it.

We need to challenge some of the issues framing how youth violence is perceived and who the perpetrators might be, so that we think of it as something that potentially affects all of us. In that sense, we need the Government to work closely in partnership with the third sector, businesses and all sorts of statutory services, to try to create that holistic approach.

Iman Haji: I would say let us not look at young people as just being a risk. Let us not look at them as posing a risk or being violent offenders. Let us look at what they can offer us, because they are assets. Rather than looking at crime in a silo, let us see what we can do to improve outcomes for young people. We know that building young people's motivation, self-confidence and self-esteem works, so let us do that, because it not only reduces violence; it has other beneficial outcomes, including improved prospects in health, employment and education.

Jeremy Crook: The Youth Justice Board and youth offending teams need to work quite closely with the police and magistrates to reduce the numbers going into custody. The youth custody service needs to do a lot more to tackle reoffending among young people. That is about working closely with young people, having the right support and interventions, and reducing reoffending rates. It is critical to crack that part of the equation.

Chair: To bring this session to a close, I thank all our panellists for giving us valuable evidence. Thank you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Vicky Foxcroft MP, Dr Keir Irwin-Rogers, and Sarah Jones MP.

Chair: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Youth Select Committee's second oral hearing. We will start by introducing the Committee. My name is Rachel Ojo and I am the Chair of the Youth Select Committee for 2019.

Susuana Senghor: I'm Susuana Senghor and I am the Vice-Chair of this Committee.

Jack Heald: Hi, I'm Jack.

James Appiah: Hi, I'm James.

Ewan Jago: I'm Ewan.

Charley Oliver-Holland: Hi, I'm Charley.

Bailey-Lee Robb: Hi, I'm Bailey.

Chris Bakalis: Hi, I'm Chris.

Jodie Floyd: Hi, I'm Jodie.

Husnaa Mota: Hi, I'm Husnaa.

Theo Sergiou: Hi, I'm Theo.

Chair: I thank our panellists for coming here and agreeing to give evidence. Would they each introduce themselves briefly?

Dr Irwin-Rogers: My name is Keir. I am a lecturer in criminology at the Open University, and I have been supporting the Youth Violence Commission for the past two years.

Vicky Foxcroft: My name is Vicky. I am the MP for Lewisham, Deptford. I am also chair of the Youth Violence Commission, and I was very recently appointed to the shadow Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport team, in which I am responsible for civil society.

Sarah Jones: I am Sarah. I am the MP for Croydon Central, and I set up the all-party parliamentary group on knife crime nearly two years ago. I am a shadow Housing Minister as well.

Q92 **Chair:** Thank you. The Home Office has announced funding to support the creation of 18 violence reduction units across England and Wales. Do you think that there are lessons to be learned from the Scottish violence reduction units? Are there specific factors that need to be considered when introducing the violence reduction units in England and Wales, to take into account any local differences?

Dr Irwin-Rogers: The establishment of the violence reduction units is a very welcome move, which we called for as part of our work on the Youth Violence Commission, but when you speak to the people who were involved in setting up the Scottish violence reduction unit, they are very clear that there is no fixed blueprint that can be transplanted from one context to another. It is about a way of working, and that is really about taking a long-term evidence-based approach, which I don't think we have been very good at doing in the last 20 years.

Setting up the units will not make a difference on its own, but if they can take that approach and adopt a mantra that this is long term, evidence based, bold, courageous and does things differently, there is huge potential.

Sarah Jones: Let me say a couple of things as an introduction. Someone was stabbed to death in Croydon yesterday. You know this is a huge problem and it is not going away any time soon. When somebody dies in your own area, it particularly brings it home. We need to be doing much more, and the Government need to be doing much more to tackle knife crime and serious violence.

On the Government's approach with the 18 VRUs, one of the messages from Scotland was that you need a really long-term approach. This is not going to be tackled overnight. I think the funding for these 18 VRUs is just for one year: it is a £35 million pot of money, not funding for the long term.

The complexity of a lot of these issues comes from the fact that no single crime is exactly the same as another. There are threads, and there is evidence about correlation between people's backgrounds, experiences and life chances, but every crime is different and every victim is different. You need something that tackles the long term properly. This is going to take 10 years and we are going to be in it for the long term, so I worry that the Government's approach is quite short-term.

I also worry about why we are having only 18. Why is everybody having to compete with each other for these little pots of money? A lot of the London boroughs say to me that when knife crime has gone up in the past—it does go up and down, although it is not going down at the moment, and there is an interesting debate about how confident we are that it will—local authorities and other organisations just say, "Here is a pot of money." Organisations come and bid for money to run campaigns and go into schools, and the problem gets suppressed because the police resources are increased, but it is not really a proper strategy. It is not really about how many children are at risk, where they are, how we get to them and how we make this long-term so that we can educate people who are coming through primary school right now not to get to that point. They are welcome, but I don't think they are anywhere near far enough towards actually fixing the problem.

Vicky Foxcroft: In the Youth Violence Commission, one of our top recommendations was about a public health approach. I know that the all-party parliamentary group on knife crime called for exactly the same thing. We all went up to Scotland and met with people there. One of the things that they said to us was about a long-term strategy. They had a 10-year strategy, but they said that if they were to revisit that, they should have adopted a 15 or 20-year strategy at the start.

The other thing that they talked to us about was the importance of relationships, by which they mean bringing together the different agencies, sharing information, following the evidence and building up those relationships everywhere—that is, in the local communities. We can all do stuff in our local communities, but we have to have those relationships and the ability to share, talk and work through what we need to do.

In terms of following the evidence, sometimes it is very different in different areas. Those from Scotland say, "Don't just do everything that we did in Scotland. You need to work out what you need to do in different areas." If we look at one piece of evidence, we know that our kids are not safe between 3 pm and 6 pm. We know that that is when higher numbers of stabbings are taking place, yet that is when we release our children from school. "Release" makes it sound really prison-like, but what if we

made sure that our schools were open longer, until 6 pm? What if we made sure that everybody had access to youth work between those hours, following the evidence in that way?

The other important thing is that these things need investment. In Scotland, the investment was there. We need to make sure that there is the investment across the piece and, exactly as Sarah was saying, not just for one year—one little splurge of a pot of money and then not continuing with it—but long-term investment over the long run.

Some of these things work like a bit of a pendulum. If we want to save money in terms of police time, police resources, sending our children to PRUs, which are three times more expensive than schools, and saving money in terms of criminal investigations, that is not going to happen overnight. You need to invest and frontload that funding for a number of years before you watch the savings that come in the long term, in terms of making sure that we are keeping our young people safe.

Chair: Thank you. I invite Chris to ask the next question.

Q93 **Chris Bakalis:** My question is directed at you, Vicky. The Youth Violence Commission's interim report states that any future strategy "will need to have the voice of young people themselves at its core." What might that look like, and should the Government change the way it develops strategy to include young people more closely?

Vicky Foxcroft: One of the things that we have to do right through producing our report is make sure that we are working with young people on it. I know that there are a few people around the table who have met in other areas. As we come to produce our full report, this is one of the things that we are really considering. In the Youth Violence Commission, we are working with UK Youth to think about whether there are ways of having young people take control of our social media. Are there ways of making sure that they formulate the foreword? Rather than it just being MPs or politicians, why not have Members of the Youth Parliament doing that?

Let's look to a more localised example: youth work. UK Youth said to us, as an example, that they consulted and worked with young people on some youth work, and young people said, "We want more life skills, and we want stuff around budgeting, applying for mortgages, et cetera." UK Youth were like, "Oh—right." They went and put it on, and they were nervous about whether or not people would come along. It was oversubscribed.

I think that fundamentally young people are part of the solutions, not just part of the problems. It is really important that we listen to young people and make sure that their voices are genuinely heard. You asked me that question, but in some ways the question kind of goes back to you as well. What do you need us to do, and how we can work better to make sure that we actually achieve that?

Chair: Thank you. I invite James to ask the next question.

Q94 **James Appiah:** My question is to the whole panel. Do you think the serious violence strategy is fit for purpose? Is it compatible with the Government's intention of adopting a public health approach to tackling knife crime?

Sarah Jones: Can I very quickly add to what Vicky just said on question 4? The very first meeting that we had as the all-party group was just with kids who had been in prison for knife offences. We had a group of MPs who met a group of about 15 young people who had been in prison. We will make much better policy as a result of hearing what they said, because, for example, some of them were talking about how prison was a bit of a relief for them, because they were not on the streets and it was a safe place for them and a bit of a rest.

Normally you'd think, "Well, let's lock them up and throw away the key. That's punishment." For a lot of MPs, to hear people say that the reality for them was completely different and it was more dangerous for them to be on the streets than in prison, so it was quite nice to have a bit of a rest, and to hear them say, "I missed my mum on my birthday, but apart from that I got fed every day and I was safe," was quite shocking. Hearing things from people's own perspective is crucial for making the right policy choices.

Back to your question about the serious violence strategy, I don't think it is fit for purpose if you think it is about reducing knife crime and serious violence. It is a good piece of analysis—there is some good analysis there looking at some of the issues driving some of the factors behind serious violence—but a proper strategy says, "This is what we want to achieve," and on that there's nothing—there are no targets. I keep asking the Government, "What do you want to do? Do you want to lower the number of deaths? Over what period of time? Do you want to lower the number of violent attacks? Over what period of time? What is your plan? What are you aiming for?"

The other thing that the Home Affairs Committee has asked the Government is, "How many children are at risk?" If you do not know what you are aiming to do, and you do not know how many children are affected, how on earth can that be a strategy? It's not. There are a lot of things in there that speak of the underlying causes. We know that you are much more susceptible to violence in later life if you have experienced violence in the home—if you have experienced domestic violence or your mum has experienced domestic violence—but the strategy will just say, "Well, there are already strategies in place to tackle domestic violence." Maybe there are, but you are not really joining them up at all.

The best example of the problem with the Government's approach at the moment is when Vicky organised a meeting with a Home Office Minister—I can't remember why we went, but the two of us went and we were talking about—

Vicky Foxcroft: The Offensive Weapons Bill.

Sarah Jones: The Offensive Weapons Bill, that's right, and you said something about there being an issue with education and that we needed to bring schools and education into part of this debate, and she said, "Well, that's a different Ministry, you need to go and talk to them." No! The whole point is that all the Government Departments need to be talking to each other and everyone needs to be joined up, until you know what you are aiming for and what the problem is. The will just is not there; it is not a priority for Government to tackle serious violence.

Dr Irwin-Rogers: I agree with all that. There has been a shift in rhetoric in the violence strategy from enforcement and suppression to prevention, and that is very welcome, but if you follow the money, the vast majority of it is still being spent on suppression and enforcement activities. There is not much going into prevention at all; it is a drop in the ocean when you look at the overall Government spend.

One reason I think it would not be fit for purpose is this: while that strategy is a big document—111 pages, I think—how many times do you think that document references inequality? It does not mention it once. Not once is inequality mentioned, in a 111-page document about serious violence. We know from the research that inequality is one of the best predictors of how much violence you will have in society. For me, to have a serious violence strategy that does not even reference it is absolutely astounding, and for that reason alone I think it is significantly limited and flawed.

Vicky Foxcroft: I agree with everything that has been said. The only thing I would add is that, in terms of the warm words in the document—there are a lot of warm words, such as early intervention and prevention—when you see what they class as intervention and prevention, it is not what I would class as that. For example, when a kid turns up at A&E and has been stabbed, they now get a youth worker—maybe. But this is one of the things they are going to showcase, saying, "Oh, this is fantastic." No! Don't call that early intervention and prevention. Why can't they have that youth worker before they turn up at A&E having been stabbed? Why can't they go and work with them then, to make sure that never happens?

There are words that are used, but we need to hammer them to say, "Early intervention and prevention work needs really to be that." We need to start before our kids are at school, to work with them so that by the time they start primary school, they are school-ready. That is stuff such as early childhood centres, nursery schools and all that kind of work, to make sure that we give our kids the best chance in life. Ultimately, all this is about building resilient young people who will go on and have fantastic futures and really believe that they are able to do that.

Chair: Thank you for your contributions to that question. I invite Jack to ask the next question.

Q95 **Jack Heald:** You kind of touched on this: do you think the serious violence strategy and subsequent Government policy announcements on tackling knife crime strike the right balance between a preventive,

punitive and rehabilitative approach?

Sarah Jones: No. To give an example, they talk about knife prevention orders, which they introduced as a preventive measure. The idea is that you do something you shouldn't be doing, or the police might even just think you are going to do something you shouldn't be doing, and they put a prevention order on you. That might send you to some kind of useful activities, or it might say you can't go into certain areas—if the police think you are potentially at risk if you go into certain areas, the prevention order might say, "You can't go into those areas." It can put all kinds of restrictions on you. It doesn't give you a criminal record at that point. However, if you are a 12-year-old boy and the police say, "We are going to put a prevention order on you because we are worried about you going into that area, so we are going to say you can't go there," and you go to that area and you get caught, you can get a criminal record. You have a 12-year-old with a criminal record who hasn't actually done anything terrible.

That is what the Government are calling prevention: they say that they are trying to get to these kids before they get to the point of being involved in serious violence. Backing up what Vicky just said, to me that is not prevention. Prevention is much more early doors. A child might end up with a criminal record, which will completely blight their future and life chances. That really affects how people perceive you and what you can do.

A lot of the answers that the Government are looking for are still from the Home Office and policing; they are not from all the amazing youth services and evidence on everything Vicky talked about—the early-years intervention, the impact of different things that happen to children and what we need to do about that. All that is not being funded properly at all. Child and adolescent mental health services have been cut by 50% since 2010. If you are going to halve the funding you are putting into mental health, how is that prevention? You are just getting kids who are not being treated for their mental health condition, so their condition gets worse and they get to the point there something kicks off because they have not had the treatment they need. You cannot call that prevention. We need much wider funding and focus on prevention to make it work.

Vicky Foxcroft: In terms of the policing element, we keep saying that we need more community police officers. In Lewisham, we used to have eight police community support officers in each constituency ward. Now, we have one in each ward, as well as all the other cuts. We need to make sure we have community policing that can build those relationships in the local community and that has that knowledge. Where are other people getting that knowledge from if they cannot go to someone they see as a trusted person, to have that conversation about stuff?

We talk about all the early intervention and prevention stuff, as we should, but that is very much about the long term. But for tomorrow, we need more community support officers to build those relationships, and to make sure that people feel safe when they are going around their local communities.

Dr Irwin-Rogers: I agree with all those things. Did we mention the cuts to education budgets as well?

Sarah Jones: No.

Vicky Foxcroft: No.

Dr Irwin-Rogers: Obviously, if you are talking about prevention, one of the best ways is to ensure that children have a good experience at school—that is what is going to set them up for the rest of their lives. If we are cutting money from the education budgets, there are fewer teachers in schools. That is not going to be compensated for by small pots that go to services for a year or two. There is just no balance there and that is often overlooked.

Chair: Thank you for those contributions.

Q96 **Husnaa Mota:** The Commission's safer lives survey found that 46% of young people responding would not go to the police if they felt worried about being a victim of crime. Have you heard any anecdotal experiences of young people being reluctant to go to the police? Can you offer any suggestions for how we could improve the relationship?

Vicky Foxcroft: I have one example. I had a young lad who did work experience with us for a week. He had been caught with a knife and was going to be expelled from school. His mum contacted me and said he was a really good lad, so I said, "Okay, let's have him do work experience with us for a week and see if he really is a good lad."

I spent the week with him and he was fantastic—bright, on the ball, absolutely brilliant. Because he spent the entire week with me, I had to take him to the police station a couple of times. We had conversations, because we started relaxing in them. I said, "Would you go to the police on anything?" and he said, "No." I asked the why and he talked about stop-and-search. I asked whether he had ever been stopped and searched and he said "No," so I said, "What's the problem with it then?" He talked about his friends and how they had been aggressively stopped and searched. I then had a meeting with the former borough commander of Lewisham, and during that meeting, he got on with them really well. Afterwards, he said, "Yeah, I'd go to her," and I said, "Could you find someone a little less senior to go to in the future?"

What that says to me is that when they are there and they can build those relationships—this is the anecdotal stuff about the police and building relationships—young people will feel comfortable going to them about stuff and will be able to break down those barriers. But actually, in a wider sense, there is a worry about the way that the police will police them, rather than a recognition that the police want to keep people safe.

Dr Irwin-Rogers: Again, this goes back to cuts to police budgets, because the police do not have the resources anymore to do the proactive and positive policing that they used to do, such as having those positive interactions with young people in schools or youth services, or just around

the community. Policing has been scaled back and most interactions between the police and young people are now reactive and negative through stop-and-searches, so it is really no surprise that young people have a bad opinion of the police when they are their main contact points.

Sarah Jones: When we asked young people—the same group of young people who had been in prison—some of whom were in their early 20s, they said that they used to have relationships with their local neighbourhood police officers when they existed in greater numbers. The local police officers would know the area, get to know the kids and have more of a relationship, and if you got caught doing something that maybe you should not be doing, they might just take you back to your mum. They had that trusted relationship, which is really important.

What worries me about the increase in stop-and-search that we are seeing is that some of that trust will get worse rather than better. You want quite a high proportion of people who get stopped to be found with something to show that it is actually evidence-based and not just random, and therefore not just slipping into something that might be based on what somebody looks like, rather than information about what they are doing.

What worries me slightly about the increase in stop-and-search that we have now in my area, where we see wards or even the whole borough going under a section 60, which means that virtually anybody can be stopped, is that you will end up stopping people because of what they look like, rather than the information you have about what they might have done. That is a bad thing for trust and will not help with that relationship.

Chair: Thank you. We will move on to the next question, which Theo will present.

Q97 **Theo Sergiou:** Can I direct this to you, Sarah? The all-party parliamentary group on knife crime draws links between cuts in youth services and knife crime. Can you explain a bit more about those links? Can you also give us some information about how youth services are useful in keeping young people away from knife crime?

Sarah Jones: Young people always say to us that there is nowhere to go anymore and there are no youth services, and we know there have been big cuts to youth services so we wanted to just look at whether there was any evidence behind this anecdotal thing that people say. We did a freedom of information request to all local authorities and asked them to give us information about their youth services—the number of youth workers they had, the amount of overall funding they spent on youth work and also the amount of money they were spending on premises, because one of the problems is the lack of premises. Then we mapped that—Barnardo's did it for us because they have a data person who knew what they were doing—to see whether there was any kind of trend in the levels of increase in knife crime and the cuts to youth services, and there was an absolute direct trend. It is not the same as saying, "If you cut that youth service, someone will get stabbed." It is not that direct, but if you map the

whole country in terms of cuts, the areas that had the fastest growing levels of knife crime had the largest cuts to youth services.

It speaks to what Vicky said at the start, which is that we know there is a peak in youth violence after school and before parents get home from work. What can we do with those kids? If they were occupied somewhere doing something either entertaining or useful, that would be really good. That is what youth services provide. There are some new models of youth work now: there is an organisation OnSide that does these great big youth centres that are interesting and brand new and exciting and nice places for young people to go. But things like youth work in the community have been really cut back—people going round and working in the community directly with young people, who can also identify risk and young people who are at risk, and then can point them in the right direction to get them help. It is not just the buildings. It is also the people who can help young people.

Vicky Foxcroft: On OnSide youth zones, it might be interesting for you to do a bit more digging on that. The Government have said that they are funding it, but actually they are not. It is philanthropy—businesses and so forth in the local community—and then local authorities that commit the funding to it.

Chair: Thank you. I invite Bailey to present the next question to the panel.

Q98 **Bailey-Lee Robb:** Should a public health approach to knife crime and youth violence include provisions about funding for the youth services that you are talking about? I suppose what that is asking is whether, because the Government are committed to a public health approach, they should invest more money.

Dr Irwin-Rogers: It is a short yes. The Government spend upwards of £800 billion a year—eight hundred thousand million pounds. That is a huge amount of money, so when they talk about not being able to fund youth services adequately, it basically means they do not value the lives of those young people that those services are delivered to. This is a political choice. It is not a necessity that these services had to be cut and it is scandalous that they were, and the consequences will be felt not just in social terms but in economic terms for years to come. It does not make sense long term anyway. If these young people are not given the services and the support early in life, the costs will be massive later on down the line. So, absolutely, there should be ring-fenced, statutory, long-term funding.

Sarah Jones: From our FOI, the average cut to local authority youth services was 40%. That was the average amount lost. You get to those kind of figures and it is not about finding efficiencies; it is just taking services away. You are absolutely right: without doing things like that, and a load of other things, you cannot really talk about a public health approach in a sense that actually means success.

Chair: Thank you. I invite Ewan to ask the next question to the panel.

Q99 **Ewan Jago:** My question is for Vicky. The commission's report identified social media as a factor that could potentially be escalating and inciting violence. You have also previously commented on the need for interrupters in the online space. Who is best placed to take on that role? Should it be the police, the social media companies, other users of the platform or the newly announced online regulator?

Vicky Foxcroft: What we said is that social media wasn't the cause of all this, but it could escalate issues and violence at times, and we were very clear on that because a lot of people were just blaming social media. I think the number of interrupters in the online space is very low—is it something like 12? I think we need loads more to be doing that. I actually think young people are probably the best placed to go and do this, as long as they have appropriate training and so forth to be able to go and do it in the right fashion. The truth is, like us with social media, we lose track of what youths do all the time. I quite often go in and do jokes in a room—like how many people use Facebook? We will just do it quickly—is it just me that uses Facebook?

Sarah Jones: I still do.

Vicky Foxcroft: How many people use Twitter? How many people use Instagram? Are any of the older people in the room putting their hands up? And how many people use Snapchat? Every one of you. That is the kind of example: how are we supposed to say "This is how we go and interrupt things when it's escalating," when actually you know what to do and how to do it? I think that young people, in collaboration with the police and others, need to be a part of that.

Sarah Jones: There is quite an interesting bit of work to be done, I think—well, some people are looking at it—in terms of drugs, not in terms of social media so much, but in terms of the dark web and the role of social media and the internet, in terms of just the sale of drugs. It is a way you can do it much more quickly and efficiently, and you can escalate the quantity of criminal activity you do, because of all this stuff online; and there is something to be looked at there a bit more, I think, in terms of some of the drivers around some of the violence associated with drug use. We need to look at the role that the internet is playing.

Chair: Thank you. I invite Susuana to ask the next question.

Q100 **Susuana Senghor:** My question is to Dr Irwin-Rogers. You have previously questioned how well social media platforms manage to act on reported content containing serious violence. Would you mind expanding on this? Further to that, have there been any improvements in regard to this within the last couple of years?

Dr Irwin-Rogers: Again, I agree with Vicky and Sarah. Social media does play a role and clearly it is going to play a role going forward, because that is where the vast majority of communication goes on now. If it goes on online, you would expect that to affect offline behaviour, so there is no

surprise there. I always hesitate to talk about social media, because I think it can act as a distraction from more pressing problems that are more serious than this. But you have asked the question, so I will answer it; and, because I have written a paper on it, I also think I am under an obligation to do that.

I have worked with the platforms—for the past two months, with one of them. I won't name them specifically; but they seem to be wanting to play ball a lot more and take their responsibilities seriously. Whether that is because they recognise the need for them to act responsibly, or whether it is because they are under pressure from the media or politicians, is another factor; but, yes, I think they are responding. I think they are spending more money now trying to get content back down that violates their own guidelines. I think that is the right thing. I think policing young people's use of social media should be done primarily by the platforms, not the police. The guidelines are already in place on social media platforms not to have a lot of this content up there. It is just that they need to enforce that. I think there is a danger, certainly, of relying on the police reporting this to the platforms, because then it becomes more of a tension between young people and the police again, when it should be the platforms themselves taking responsibility for this. Does that answer your question?

Susuana Senghor: Yes.

Chair: I invite Jodie to present the next question to the panel.

Q101 **Jodie Floyd:** Will greater regulation of social media companies be effective in reducing the amount of violent material on platforms, and what could this look like?

Sarah Jones: I was on the Home Affairs Committee for a while and we looked at hate crime generally—not just what is on there in terms of violence that shouldn't be there, but also what is there in terms of terrorism, Islamophobia, or really acute violent and racist content. They just weren't taking down what they should be taking down, and they weren't investing enough money. Because there was quite a big hoo-ha about it and lots of people were talking about it, they have employed more people, and then it turned out that the people that were employed were based in America and they weren't based in the UK, and they didn't really know what they were doing. We have been shifting them along the way from what was completely unregulated to everyone getting used to the idea that we have to have some kind of regulation, just like you do in the real world, as it were. You have to have a system of what is allowed and what is not allowed, and consequences if they don't take down things.

Serious violence fits into the whole agenda of how we make sure people are safe online by not having content on there that shouldn't be there, and by not driving people to that kind of content if you search for one thing. In our Select Committee, we were searching for some kind of online terrorism, and then all the suggest content was loads of other online terrorism. The model—the way the system works—is about trying to push

you in certain directions and making you see certain things. All that needs looking at, and there needs to be some regulation. I think that will help, but the underlying factors that drive serious violence—poverty and a lack of support—won't change; they will still be there.

Q102 **Chair:** I move on to the next question. Do you think parents or legal guardians can be better supported to protect their children from violent crime? If so, what sort of support do you think should be offered to them?

Vicky Foxcroft: I completely agree with that. One of our recommendations in the report was about early childhood centres—in the past, they would have been called Sure Start. They work with someone when they are pregnant and continue that work and support all the way through. It is about preparing meals, reading to children, time management and all those kind of things. It is really important.

We have to realise that people have busy working lives, and because of that they might not be there all the time. Rather than always being aggressive with those approaches, we either need to find a way to ensure they are better financially supported, so they do not have to work all the time and have more of a balance, or we need to provide extra help and support in other areas. One part of that is that if you know your kid is going to a safe youth centre in the evening, you feel more secure that your kid is going to be okay at that time. Support is very much needed.

Sometimes people—parents, guardians and so forth—can feel frustrated because when they call out for support, they don't get it and they get pushed round the houses. By that, I mean pushed round all the different agencies until it gets really bad. We need to make sure that once they have called out to whoever—this is part of the public health approach, and everybody coming together and working together—the support is provided at that stage. All the different agencies must talk to each other to make sure it is there.

Sarah Jones: I had an event the other day called the Great Get Together, which was set up after Jo Cox was murdered. It is a nice tea party idea. The community comes together, and everybody gets on and has a chat and a cup of tea. We had about 300 people. It was a lovely event—really nice. I was talking to a single mum who is also disabled and had her PIP—her benefit system—assessed. She got a text saying, "We'll let you know in six weeks what benefits you are going to get." In that period of time, she was only on child benefit. I said, "Have you got any food?" She said, "No, not really." I said, "Well, I've got some food vouchers that I can give out for one of the food banks," and I gave her one. Somebody obviously heard that conversation, because another mum went up to someone who works in my office and said, "We've just heard that you've got some food. Could we have some food?" It kept happening. We finished, packed up and were in the office, and there was a knock at the door. It was two other mums saying, "We've heard you have got some food. Could we have some food?"

In one sense that is nothing to do with serious violence, but in another sense it is everything to do with serious violence, because those are mums who had no food. Their pride was less important to them than their need for food—it is very humiliating to come and ask someone for food. If you have a son you cannot afford to buy clothes or trainers for, and if he starts wearing nice trainers, do you turn a blind eye or not? If you're really struggling to put food on the table and your son starts producing food on the table, what do you do? What if you've got other children and they are getting food as well? These are really difficult situations for parents.

This isn't to do with poverty, but to do with knowledge of the system. If your son or daughter gets into trouble at school and gets temporarily excluded, what are your rights as a parent? What should you be asking the school to do? If you think your child needs more support at school, how can you voice that? All these things are very difficult lived experiences for people. Shall I tell the police that my son is involved in something? Will my other children get taken into care? Am I going to lose my other children if I make that choice? These are real decisions that people are making every day. They might know that there's some problem, but it might be easier sometimes to hope for the best and turn a blind eye. Can you blame them for doing that? It's very difficult.

Dr Irwin-Rogers: I agree. All these problems are connected. We can go round in circles and connect all the different things we've been talking about, but one of the things that's often uncomfortable to talk about—and we haven't talked about much—is the fact that if the families of some of these young people involved in illicit drug distribution are living in poverty, and parents are struggling to put food on the table and pay rent and bills, then if there's a £6 billion or £7 billion drug market out there, some young people are going to be involved in that. That brings money into households, especially when we're talking about welfare, education and social services all having been cut. To me it's not surprising we are where we are. It all makes perfectly good sense.

One of the things we haven't discussed is the reform of drug markets. I don't know whether we will come on to that or whether you have taken evidence on that already. I think that's another important thing to be discussed.

Q103 **Chair:** Thank you. For our next question we would like to ask what each of you believe the Government should now be focusing on as a top priority to help combat knife crime.

Dr Irwin-Rogers: How many priorities can you have?

Chair: Just briefly describe what you think is the top thing they should be focusing on.

Vicky Foxcroft: If we were to start from today and where we are, we need a heavy investment in more community support officers and police to try to stem the rise and to start building relationships. In the long run, that is definitely not enough and will just de-escalate where we are at the

moment. When we talk about a public health approach—and I was really glad to see so many questions on that—that is what we need to happen. That needs to be a top priority for the Government, but it has to be properly resourced: that is key. Too many times we see programme after programme resourced for a year or two years; it needs to be resourced long term, not chopping and changing, unless you are chopping and changing because something's not working, so you are stopping it and doing something else that's working. When something is working, we need to keep going with it and make sure it's got the investment it needs.

Sarah Jones: The comparison that I always draw is with what the Government did when we had a real problem with teenage pregnancies, because I think there are similarities. We had the highest number of teenage pregnancies in Europe. Everyone was in a great moral panic, saying, "Oh, these girls are having sex and they just want a council house; it's terrible." That is a completely hopeless response. The Government introduced a 10-year strategy, driven by the Prime Minister, with a whole unit in the Cabinet Office driving the agenda, but with solutions delivered locally; the centre was making sure that everything was evidence based and that the results were there. Over a 10-year period teenage pregnancies halved; they went down by 50%. That is a societal shift that was substantial and hopefully permanent.

Of course it wasn't about feckless girls; it was about the conditions in which they were being brought up and the lack of aspiration and education. It was all the same issues, including poverty. It was way beyond sex education. It was about all the things that were going on in their lives. By doing the right thing and having a strategy, driven by the Prime Minister but delivered locally, you can get that kind of result. Serious violence is the tip of a big iceberg of problems and things that are going on in young people's lives. If we really want to tackle that in the long term you have got to have it driven from the Prime Minister. The next Prime Minister is probably Boris Johnson, and this should be his top priority, absolutely without question. At the moment, I don't get the impression it is. So we will be trying to persuade him, but it should be his top priority. We need the funding for all the things Vicky has just said. But we need a proper, funded plan, where we know where we are trying to get to.

Dr Irwin-Rogers: I think tackling poverty and inequality and investment in youth services are two really important issues. Because it has not been discussed, I'm going to put this as my top priority: tackling illicit drug markets. I cannot stress enough how often I have to say this, and I never get an adequate answer to it. We have got a £6 billion to £7 billion drug market in the UK, and in London alone we have got 700,000 children living in poverty. If you have got that situation, many of those young people will end up involved in the drug markets at street level. Then, because they cannot be regulated by contracts and courts, in the way we deal with the vast majority of our services and goods, violence comes into these markets. That is what we see every single day. We have seen it for decades, and we will continue to see it while nothing gets done about this.

For me, I hesitate to say this, but the prohibitionist approach to drugs takes communities in dire poverty and, instead of supporting and helping those vulnerable communities and individuals, dangles a carrot in front of their face: the vast amount of money you can go and make from drugs now. When these kids take a bite from that carrot, they are held up as a plague to society—kids we need to demonise and criminalise. I honestly think we will look back at this in decades to come and think what we were doing was shameful. In general terms, I would advise avoiding minor tweaks to policy and practice and be bold, be brave and be more ambitious than the adults who are currently letting you down.

Chair: Thanks for those great responses. Charley will ask the next question.

Q104 **Charley Oliver-Holland:** Offender rehabilitation statistics show that younger people are more likely to reoffend. What should be done to ensure that they receive rehabilitation after their sentence?

Sarah Jones: We went up to a young offenders institution in Scotland where they have stopped locking people up for small sentences; they only lock up young people for very serious crime. They have got half the number of people in prison, so they have more capacity to invest in them while they are in prison and try to give them training. For example, the local fire brigade go in and do some training with people, if they want it, to get them first aid trained to become firemen when they come out. Or you can learn a skill: some construction companies go in and teach people construction skills so that they can learn the skills when they come out.

The thing is, you come out of prison and, unless there is something there to support you, you collapse back into doing exactly what you were doing before, because you need the money and you don't know anything different. It is only breaking that cycle that works, and in Scotland they are having some results from that. In our Prison Service, we are so overcrowded and so underfunded, with not enough people working in prisons and not enough support, that a lot of kids can just be in prison, stuck in their cells all day long, and barely getting any exercise, let alone any rehabilitation.

Prison does not work as rehabilitation unless you help people. If you can help them while they are in prison and before they come out, that is great. If you can't, try to give them support when they come out with things like housing. If, say, you have got family breakdown, you are homeless and you haven't got anywhere to go, you are going to get back into whatever you were doing to make some money to live somewhere.

Dr Irwin-Rogers: These are the same problems faced by young people before they go into prison; they are just intensified by that prison experience. One of the things—I am not sure we have spent too much time talking about it—is the lack of decent employment for young people now. So many kids are having to go into fixed-term, poverty wage employment, with no hope on the horizon for a stable future. It wasn't always like that. Kids who didn't do well in school at least used to be able

to have certain jobs in, for example, manufacturing and industry that would never pay unbelievable wages, but there would always be secure and stable jobs and you'd feel a sense of status and that you were contributing to society. That is a decent life. Now, for kids who do not do well in school there really isn't that much there on offer.

That is a really big problem that goes way beyond youth violence, actually. But these are the same problems that face young people coming out of, for example, the secure estate and young offender institutions. Housing and employment are really crucial issues.

Vicky Foxcroft: I agree with everything that was said by both other panellists. We need to make sure that when people come out they are secure and not just pushed straight into needing to do what they did before, because they haven't got housing and haven't got money. And we need to make sure they are trained with the skills to be able to get employment, but we also need to find those employers willing to employ them, and that is exactly what we saw when we went up to Scotland.

Chair: Thank you. I will now invite Bailey-Lee to ask the next question.

Q105 **Bailey-Lee Robb:** I have two follow-ups. The first is for you, Sarah, going back to what you said earlier. Last week we had the Home Office Minister, Ms Atkins, here before the Committee. She basically echoed the point that knife crime is a Government priority, even if there is a new Prime Minister. Do you disagree with that?

Sarah Jones: I think you have to follow the evidence. The funding is not there at the moment. There has been a shift, as we have said, in terms of the way people talk about the problem, and that is a good thing. There is much less talk of hang 'em and flog 'em, and lock 'em up and throw away the key because they're evil. There is much more talk of understanding what the drivers are and who the victim and the perpetrator could be. It's not that one is good and one is bad; it's just luck who gets stabbed and who doesn't.

I think there has been a good shift in terms of language, but in terms of money we just haven't seen it. What has been so painful about this process of who the next Prime Minister will be is the way that people have been throwing around these huge sums of money and saying, "Right, we are going to recruit 20,000 more police," which is what Boris is saying. And you say, "Why did you cut them in the first place?" If money is no problem and you can afford the wrong things—which they suggest about cutting taxes for very well off people—what on earth are your priorities? If you can cut taxes for people on £100,000 and you can't put money into youth services, what are your priorities? They are not the right ones and you can't claim that youth violence is a priority. It's used as a political football. The Tories blame Sadiq and all of that kind of stuff, which is just pointless. It doesn't matter what political party happens to be in power. We are not doing the right things now and we need to do the right things. We are certainly not at the moment.

Q106 **Bailey-Lee Robb:** The next follow-up is to you, Vicky. Coming back to the interrupters, do you believe that the new online regulator, which was in the Home Office "Online Harms" White Paper, has a part to play in helping tackle youth violence and knife crime on social media?

Vicky Foxcroft: Yes.

Q107 **Bailey-Lee Robb:** And how do you think that should look?

Vicky Foxcroft: I wouldn't want to say in terms of the detail on that right now without looking at it a little more bit. I just want to follow on in terms of what Sarah said on this stuff. The Government say that they have adopted a public health approach. This links with teenage pregnancy stuff as well, very much led by the Prime Minister. So is the public health approach being led by the Prime Minister? Have all the Departments bought into it? I asked every single Department what they are doing in terms of the public health approach. The Health Secretary didn't know what the public health approach was and didn't know that his Government had adopted it. That gives you an example, and there are a ton of other examples similar to that. When we had the meeting with Victoria Atkins we talked about building trust between young people and the police. We said that maybe we could do some projects in schools, and we could test them and talk to young people about how we could better improve online safety. We talked about projects like that and she was like, "Great idea. You need to write to the Education Secretary." We went, "Where is your public health approach? Surely you should be able to have this conversation somewhere." Anyway.

Chair: Thank you. I would like Ewan to ask the next question.

Q108 **Ewan Jago:** My question is for Vicky. We were talking about interrupters and online regulators. Who do you think should be responsible for enabling and putting this facility in place?

Vicky Foxcroft: I think there needs to be more of a discussion around how that should happen. We need to work with young people to make sure that we get it right. It needs to be a combination of young people, social media people, the police and schools. It really needs everybody working together to make sure that we get it right as we expand it out.

Chair: Jack will ask the next question.

Q109 **Jack Heald:** My question is for the entire panel. How effective are positive role models in deterring young people from criminal activity? We have heard from the Minister that maybe athletes and rappers would be positive. What is your opinion of that and who do you believe would be the best people to act as role models?

Sarah Jones: I think role models are important, but they do not put food on the table. Do you know what I mean? There are bigger, structural issues at play. Who will influence a young person absolutely? You need trusted adults who will be there for them who they can talk to and try and emulate—maybe their parents, teachers, youth workers, people in their communities. One of the really sad things about the way that a lot of the

services have been stripped away is that a lot of those adults who might have been the trusted adults that you could have looked up to could have said, "I hear what you say about that, but have you thought about doing this instead?", and they have been stripped away. I represent Croydon, and Stormzy is from Croydon. He is a fantastic role model. In many ways he had a difficult experience in his youth, but he has managed to be very successful and a lot of kids in Croydon want to be the next Stormzy. Some of them might, but not everyone can. We need to make sure people have conversations with them such as, "If you want to get into the music industry, have you thought about music production, in case you do not get to be the next Stormzy?" These people are influential. Of course they are, especially online. All these influencers that young people watch and listen to are important, but they are not those trusted adults and they are not a substitute for all the other stuff that young people need in order to make the right choices.

Dr Irwin-Rogers: I agree with that. Role models can come in all shapes and sizes. We spend time with lots of youth services. I have been in pupil referral units and AP before. Sometimes they have some fantastic adults working in those institutions. My problem with PRUs and AP is not with the adults who work there, who can be fantastic role models. The reason why they go and work there is because they want to help young people, and they often do really help those young people in those institutions, but, systemically, when we are pouring lots of young people from mainstream into those institutions together, it is another huge one we have not really discussed today: pupil referral units and AP. Obviously, young people do need role models, but as Sarah said, there are bigger, structural problems. Even if you have a decent role model, it is very difficult to go on and get whatever job it is that you want to get because there is such a lack of opportunity for young people in many different areas of employment at the moment. That is a bigger problem that we have to address. Like with social media, I am tempted to say this could become something of a distraction from more pressing problems.

Vicky Foxcroft: Mentors are important. We need to make sure that people have positive peer mentors that they can work with, have discussions with and voice their concerns and excitement and ask questions. We all know that the first time you ever do anything in your life, it can be quite nerve-wracking if it is something outside the normal routine, so being able to speak to other people about it is helpful. The first time you ever give evidence with loads of young people can be quite nerve-wracking, but after a couple of times it gets easier. You know what I mean. It's about being able to have those relationships. We spoke at the start about relationships being really important in terms of the public health approach. It is the same as making sure that we have those mentors and relationships that are strong and can be life changing.

Chair: Thank you. I thank our three panellists for the evidence that they have given us today, as well as all the useful contributions. This brings us to the end of this session. Thank you very much.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Amaan Iqbal, Eleanor Lakin MYP, Bukola Folarin and Sundas Raza (via video link).

Q110 **Chair:** I welcome our panellists. My name is Rachel Ojo, and I am the Chair of the 2019 UK Youth Select Committee. Before we start with questions, will all of our panellists briefly introduce themselves? Sundas, we will start with you.

Sundas Raza: I am Sundas, I am 16 and I am from Rotherham Youth Cabinet.

Eleanor Lakin: Hello, I am Eleanor Lakin and I am a deputy Member of Youth Parliament. My campaign is on knife crime.

Amaan Iqbal: My name is Amaan. I am a youth councillor for Rochdale borough, and I am a representative of Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority.

Bukola Folarin: Hi, my name is Bukola—call me Buks, if you want—and I am part of the Student Commission on Knife Crime in London, a partnership between Leaders Unlocked and seven FE colleges. We are 30 students commissioned for a social action project that supports colleges with an anti-knife programme. That's a bit of a mouthful.

Q111 **Chair:** Thank you all for coming. The first question is addressed to the whole panel. We have heard a lot of evidence around why young people carry knives and one of the most common reasons seems to be because of fear. What are young people scared of that makes them feel the need to carry knives? What could be done to make young people feel safer?

Eleanor Lakin: A lot of the time, fear leads to stuff like emotional distress, anxiety, headaches and mental health issues. Schools should address those concerns by giving some education on gangs and crime so that people know the real statistics and are calmed by them.

Amaan Iqbal: Where I come from we have seven organised crime gangs, so when young people in my area carry knives it is more for protection.

Bukola Folarin: I feel like we live in a society where there is fear of "take a life or have your life be taken". I feel like that results in young people carrying a knife. There are so many other things to be scared of, like education, not making it in life and insecurities, and on top of that there is safety—fear of not making it home the next day. I think a good way to help tackle that is to educate us on stuff that's happening—for instance, on our rights, including the right to record situations that are happening—and maybe to have more police out there carrying metal detector wands so that they can identify the people who are carrying a knife and get on to it straightaway.

Sundas Raza: I think a big thing is bullying and how people handle stuff in school, so a way to tackle it is by improving pastoral care in schools. I think a big thing is that schools claim that they have solved that, but they haven't. That leaves people feeling scared and like they need to protect themselves, and obviously a way of doing that is by having knives.

Chair: Thank you all for your contributions on that question. I invite Jodie to present the next question to the panel.

Q112 **Jodie Floyd:** Do you think there are any other reasons why young people carry knives?

Bukola Folarin: I feel we live in a very complicated society where people think, "Should I be doing that? They're doing it, so why can't I?" We live in a society where people tend to imitate what other people are doing, because they think it looks cool or they think, "They're doing this because they feel protected by doing it, so I'll feel protected by carrying a knife." It's that kind of mentality. We are constantly drawn to different influences with that kind of stuff. With the research we conducted, we had 400 different students giving us feedback from the student commission—the presentation we did and the film we created. We found 16 other influences, like poverty, mental illness, low self-worth—I could go on; this is just one of many different situations.

Amaan Iqbal: When young people do carry knives, it's amplified by the media to make it seem like everyone is carrying knives, so it becomes the norm for people in different areas to carry knives.

Eleanor Lakin: In our survey, we found that 35% of young people thought that protection was the main cause of people carrying knives and 24% was the figure for intent to commit, but there were lots of other reasons: religion, work, hobbies and stuff like that.

Sundas Raza: I think one thing could be social media and the types of influences that people look up to. Grime artists and people like that make it look like carrying a knife gives you a good image; you're kind of cool. That's what a lot of young people look up to; they want to project that image.

Q113 **Husnaa Mota:** What do you think are the main factors making young people vulnerable to carrying a knife?

Eleanor Lakin: I think that anyone can fall into knife crime. Everyone is vulnerable, but obviously there are people who are more vulnerable, for example young people who have been excluded, because they don't have the support system of school.

Bukola Folarin: We had debate and discussion with fellow young people and we challenged the perception. There aren't really any characteristics for why someone may carry a knife. It shouldn't be a case of judging people on their appearance. For instance, colleges have guardians in place to get to know their students more and get to know stuff they are going through. It's important to have that kind of mentor, someone who has

been through those kinds of experiences, guiding young people, and not to just judge them on what you see—their race or how they dress. What makes them carry a knife may be more to do with home problems or mental illness; there are so many different reasons why someone could pick up a knife.

Amaan Iqbal: Sometimes it has become a status thing where I come from, so now, instead of kitchen knives, people are getting more extravagant things made of different material. Some people engrave their name on the knife. It's obviously concerning that more and more people are doing this and it's rising more and more.

Sundas Raza: I do not think there is one specific factor; it could be anything. Even if someone has had a perfect upbringing, one little event could cause them to do it. It depends on what they have witnessed, and how the people around them treat them.

Q114 **Jack Heald:** What role should schools play in educating students about the dangers of knife crime, identifying students who may be at risk of getting involved in knife crime, and assisting young people who carry knives? How and to what extent should the school play a role in that?

Amaan Iqbal: Obviously, prevention is always better than cure. Giving a set education to show that it is more likely that you will get stabbed yourself, rather than stabbing someone else, will make people more aware. When schools do not report knife crime, it is more to do with protecting the students, so we do not see the full statistics behind what is going on.

Eleanor Lakin: From our survey, we found that 84% of young people think that schools should put more education in, to give students a better understanding of how it affects people, including them—so laws and sentencing. Sorry, could you repeat the question, please?

Jack Heald: What role should schools play in educating students about the dangers of knife crime, identifying students who may be at risk of getting involved in knife crime, and assisting young people who are involved in knife crime?

Eleanor Lakin: I think that they should educate all young people. Don't target specific students because, like I said, anyone can fall into knife crime.

Sundas Raza: As other people said, raising awareness is a really big thing, but obviously they also have to remember that it is for young people, so they have to do it in a way that engages them—interactive assemblies, speakers coming in and stuff like that. In order to help people who have faced it, we need to improve the pastoral care. They will usually have some kind of thing so that teachers are more familiar with it.

Bukola Folarin: I think (a) and (b)—educating and assisting. As young people, we value more responsibility, so we feel that what we say and do

are being taken on board and actually mean something. For instance, on the recruitment of staff, we want to play a role in our future.

Q115 **Susuana Senghor:** The majority of evidence we had from our inquiry was telling us that we needed more youth services and better youth services. Do you think that youth services play a role in tackling knife crime and, if so, what is that role?

Bukola Folarin: Youth services play a big role. They are a safe place—a place where you are out of harm’s way. You have people there to talk to, in case you do not have someone to talk to at home or college, or you do not feel comfortable talking to someone at home or college. It provides you with that kind of care, and you can build a rapport with the youth and get to know them on a deeper level and understand where they are coming from, and what is happening. Colleges build that kind of access. We have extracurricular stuff in place, so if they are not on the streets we have places that they can be instead.

Amaan Iqbal: By giving young people a place to go, you are keeping them off the streets, so they are less vulnerable to crime and getting into more drugs, violence and those kinds of things.

Eleanor Lakin: I agree with what you both said. Youth services are really good safe spaces, especially for young people who may not be in schools—they might have been excluded or something.

Sundas Raza: I agree. I think they are really important, not only to give them a place to talk, but because a lot of youth services work on things like knife crime and raise awareness. Some people will not have as much knowledge, unless it is through youth services.

Q116 **Charley Oliver-Holland:** Have you seen any youth service initiatives in your own communities that you think have been particularly successful, and can you explain a bit about them?

Sundas Raza: Basically we had a trip and we had these speakers come in. I don’t know which company they worked for, but they were people involved with knife crime and they told stories about their lives. I feel like it was a different way of approaching it, but it relates to young people so much more.

Bukola Folarin: Where I grew up, right next to my school was a youth club that I and some boys I grew up with always used to attend. That youth club then got closed down. The boys kind of went on a different path—the wrong path—and are now more out on the streets, having nothing to do and nowhere to go. They are always trying to find something to do and they have just gone into knife crime.

Going into the research that we did and the feedback that we got from students, half our students said, “Youth clubs give you good role models with past experiences.” They also said, “Reopen closed youth clubs, so that people have something to do other than being on the streets”—that is straight from the horse’s mouth.

Amaan Iqbal: Before we had our budget cut, we used to have a football tournament with young people against police officers, which used to build good relationships, so that young people could openly go to a police officer and tell them the problem. That was a while ago, but it worked really well, because then, if they were getting into gangs, they could talk to the police officers—get them out of any situation they were held up in.

Eleanor Lakin: Recently, we had a drama performance by a group called AlterEgo that around 300 young people from secondary schools went to see. It was about county lines, drugs and knife crime, and it was really powerful and I think it worked really well.

Q117 **James Appiah:** My question is to the whole panel. Do you think that there are enough youth services available and, if so, are they resourced enough? That is youth services such as outreach workers, youth clubs, mentors and sports clubs.

Amaan Iqbal: I am lucky enough to have a youth service in my area, but a lot of areas don't have youth services, so young people are on the street. Youth services provide a lot of support for young people, which does have a ripple effect into how they grow up and how they turn out—do they grow into the wrong type of people? How do they grow up, basically?

Bukola Folarin: Could you just repeat that question again, please?

James Appiah: Do you think that there are enough youth services available to young people, such as outreach workers, youth clubs, mentors and sports schemes, and, if so, are they resourced enough?

Bukola Folarin: I definitely think there isn't. Through all the research that I have done, a lot of young people are asking for more youth clubs and more mentors and more of those opportunities, and I feel like if those things were in place—as many as there should be—the knife crime numbers would definitely drop severely.

I feel like if we provide young people with a safe place where you can have engaging activities and someone you can talk to and resonate with—someone on your level and in your kind of age range—you can learn so much, especially about growing up and knowing what you want to do in the future. A lot of young people want to get into music or certain kinds of aspects of it, and you can get those links through people who are on the same level as you and who you can connect with.

Sundas Raza: There are a few youth services out there, but because of funding cuts and stuff a lot of them have closed down, or they don't have enough money to target as many people as they potentially could if they had more.

Eleanor Lakin: I feel the same. In Plymouth, we have quite a few youth services but there are not as many as there used to be and need to be.

Q118 **Ewan Jago:** The Youth Violence Commission's Safer Lives survey found that 46% of the young people who responded would not go to the police

if they were worried about the victim of a crime. What do you think affects the trust between the police and young people?

Bukola Folarin: Communication is a big problem. A lot of young people feel that they are stopped and searched because they are from an ethnic minority or they look a specific way, and that they have been stereotyped and put into a category. Approaching people because they look like the person the police have been told about restricts young people from being able to give the same respect—give respect, get respect. Respect is a key point. If there are good communication levels, we can handle the situation more appropriately. We also need to be aware of our rights. A lot of young people don't know about their right to record a situation or ask for a police officer's badge number. We need to be educated in that.

Amaan Iqbal: There is quite a big divide between young people and the police in terms of how they perceive each other. During a heated argument in a party a knife was brought out, but everyone was afraid to call the police. There is no trust between them, only stereotyping. That isolates young people from the police.

Eleanor Lakin: I think it is about a lack of communication and education. Young people are not taught enough about how and why stop and search is done.

Sundas Raza: I think the big thing is police officers engaging with the community and going out to talk to people. A lot of people have been influenced by negative views towards them. Unless they go and speak to the police officers themselves, they feel that things might be used against them. The police need to engage with the community, so that people feel they can approach the police more.

Chair: Leading on from this topic, I invite Theo to present the next question.

Q119 **Theo Sergiou:** My question is to the whole panel. Do you feel that increased police presence on the streets will lead to a reduction in youth violence and knife crime?

Amaan Iqbal: I agree that police presence is good, because you have more awareness of the police and they can see which groups are more vulnerable to being taken in by knife crime. Also, if young people don't have to be on the streets, you won't have to have so many police officers around. We need more youth clubs and youth services, to give them more places to go. Rather than increasing the police presence, increase youth services.

Sundas Raza: I agree. It could help, but youth services would have a much more positive effect. If they see increased police and stuff, they are not given more of a reason to be scared, but they need to be protected.
[Interruption.]

Eleanor Lakin: Having some police on the streets would make young people's perception of the police more positive, because they could go up

and speak to them before they have to arrest them. They could go up and say, "Hi, how are you?" and then leave, so that they feel closer to the police in a way.

Bukola Folarin: I agree. It all starts with a conversation. To build that connection and trust in the police, you have to start somewhere before action can be taken. For instance, some colleges have police officers constantly—they have a college police officer who is always talking to them and interacting with them. They become comfortable around him and they can speak to him in case they need something or understand certain aspects. That needs to be built upon.

Q120 **Husnaa Mota:** What could the police do to promote more positive relationships with their communities?

Eleanor Lakin: I think police could do stuff like community days and events, and also talks with young people and adults about education on sentencing and stop and searches and stuff related to knife crime.

Amaan Iqbal: As I mentioned before, we used to hold football tournaments with the police and young people, so there was a very good relationship between them, so by increasing funding to do more activities and bridging the divide between the two you can build better relationships.

Sundas Raza: I agree with that. Something that is community—
[*Interruption.*]

Chair: Sorry, Sundas; we didn't quite catch what you just said, so could you say it again please? [*Interruption.*] We will ask other members of the panel and then come back to you.

Bukola Folarin: I agree with the rest of what everyone is saying, to be honest. It is about earlier interventions starting before, and then building up. It is showing that the police care for our wellbeing, our self-esteem, building up rapport, working on mental health, the personal journey of young people, and understanding us.

Q121 **Susuana Senghor:** How do you think a custodial sentence for knife crime impacts a young person? Does the threat of a custodial sentence make it less likely that they would carry a knife in the first place, knowing that they may be caught and sentenced, and do you think it is effective in preventing them from doing it again?

Eleanor Lakin: I think a custodial sentence is a massive deterrent for young people, and not just for them but for the people around them, because they are probably not going to repeat what that person has done if they have got a custodial sentence. So yes, I think it prevents everyone from doing it again.

Bukola Folarin: I feel like it doesn't personally help as much. In a long-term process I feel like it will make an impact, but right now I feel like making it longer would make people—a lot of the youth are very irrational, so they don't have time to think before the situation happens, or they

don't stop themselves and think, "Maybe I shouldn't take this knife out" or, "Maybe I shouldn't do this." It is kind of just do—just act on it. In that sense it is hard for us to—actually, could you repeat the question for me, please?

Susuana Senghor: How do you think a custodial sentence for knife crime impacts a young person? First, does it deter them? Secondly, do you think it is effective in preventing them from reoffending?

Bukola Folarin: I don't think it is affecting very much, to be honest. It is, as I was saying, just acting on situations. I feel that other things that could help would be maybe a day in prison—a "day in the life", seeing the effects of going to prison—or harder prison in general, making it stricter and maybe military service. That is just a lot of stuff that we got from the young people.

Amaan Iqbal: I don't think a custodial sentence would be beneficial. I think reformation services would be better to support the young people, because different things can happen; it could be due to them feeling threatened by people, so they carry a knife. By sentencing them to prison or something like that you are harshly punishing them.

Sundas Raza: I think it does prevent it and have a bit of an effect. The public can see how the *[Interruption]* and how much they can lose out. If they have big ambitions and stuff, to think that a lot of that cannot happen will help prevent it a bit. I agree with what other people have said and that it should be a bit more serious.

Q122 **Chair:** Before we move on, we rushed you a bit on the last question, so can you repeat what you wanted to say for that? I will remind you of it, since it has been a while. The last question was: what could the police do to promote good relationships with the communities they serve?

Sundas Raza: They should go into schools, school events and the community not in the police role, but as a visitor to show people the nicer side of police officers. That will help develop a closer bond and young people will feel like they can trust them more about stuff.

Bailey-Lee Robb: Going forward, what should the Government prioritise to effectively reduce knife crime? Can we start with—is it Buks that you want to be called?

Bukola Folarin: Yes, go for it. Can you repeat the question?

Bailey-Lee Robb: Going forward, what should the Government prioritise to effectively reduce knife crime?

Bukola Folarin: I feel like it is not about our voices being heard, but about having more solutions. We should be involved in the future things we can do together. Putting us in place to make those things happen makes us feel more connected and more a part of the community, because at the end of the day, we are the community. It all comes down to all of us together working on that.

Amaan Iqbal: They should make sure police officers have the ability to build better rapport with the young people. They should make sure things are done more on a case-by-case basis, rather than having fixed sentences.

Sundas Raza: They should offer youth services and education services [Interruption.] They often have good services, but it does not prevent it in the first place. If you put in youth services and [Interruption.] in schools is better, that can help prevent it and not only help [Interruption.]

Eleanor Lakin: I was thinking that maybe there should be more funding for services such as the police so that they can put work in, seeing as they have such a big role in reducing knife crime.

Bukola Folarin: Can I just add something? I know that we are talking more about youth services, but there are places such as colleges and libraries where the local students we spoke to said, "We could use extra time in college—not just college time—to add more extracurricular activities so that young people have somewhere to go and something to do." Perhaps there could be more funding for teachers or mentors so that they can be there for those extra times.

Q123 **Susuana Senghor:** Just following up on what Bailey-Lee said, do you think politicians addressing knife crime actually understand the issues facing young people today? For example, they suggested using rappers and grime artists as the sole role models for young people to look up to and be inspired by.

Amaan Iqbal: I think politicians see it as statistics, rather than what young people face on a day-to-day basis, with demands on society getting bigger and there being more stress. There need to be alternative options to going into gangs and violence and bringing knives with them. It is just a way out for some of them. On role models, if you increase youth provision, those people become role models. They are people you can talk to and people you can pretty much rely on.

Bukola Folarin: We are really surrounded by social media and the media in general these days, so it would be really good to connect us to those musicians as well, but not too much because we don't want everyone to think that we are now going to follow in the steps of the musicians—"They have gone through this, so maybe I should follow in those footsteps." But not everyone wants to be a musician; some people want to be a lawyer or whatever. So it is about catering to those different needs and taking us as individuals; not constantly grouping us together, but understanding us one by one.

Eleanor Lakin: I agree with Amaan. Most decision makers focus on the statistics and not on the actual opinions and what has happened before.

Chair: Next we will hear from Sundas.

Sundas Raza: Could you repeat the question, please?

Susuana Senghor: Do you think that politicians addressing knife crime understand the issues facing young people today?

Sundas Raza: No, I don't think they do. They need to get in contact with young people. A lot of what they do is not getting in contact with young people. They need youth panels to get in contact with youth services to get young people's opinions.

Q124 **Theo Sergiou:** This has been touched on quite a bit when discussing the youth boards, but in terms of the Government's strategy for tackling knife crime, does the panel feel that young people's voices have been consulted, and what are the benefits of consulting young people?

Bukola Folarin: Not as much. A lot of young people feel like they have not got a voice, as they have said. A lot of them feel that their voices are not being heard. They feel that they are not being understood or that their opinions don't matter. That results in not trusting the Government and what they have to say or not communicating with them. It is about more knowledge; educating on knife crime; the financial support we have; and encouraging families as well, because the last thing you want is your parents worrying about you and what is happening on day-to-day knife crime. It gives them the whole process.

Eleanor Lakin: I don't think that the Government pay enough attention to young people's views at the moment. I feel like the benefits of listening to young people's views are that they know not just the incidents that have been recorded, but what is happening in the streets where they live. So I feel like they have that extra information.

Amaan Iqbal: I think that youths should be consulted as much as MPs. We should be equally at the forefront of tackling knife crime together. Rather than them making the entire decision, we should have an equal say.

Sundas Raza: I don't think young people's voices are being heard enough. I don't think it's really important to them. Knife crime does affect young people, but the majority of it is aimed at young people. It affects them. It's a real problem both in terms of making decisions—
[Interruption.]

Bukola Folarin: We need to make the Government understand that the media has a big impact. Constantly reporting another death will not make it go away. Telling us daily that there is a situation and that another 18-year-old got stabbed is not helping, to be honest. I feel like it's about talking about it, not just saying, "This is happening. Now do what you can with it."

Q125 **Chris Bakalis:** This question is to the whole panel. Do you think that parents or legal guardians could be better supported to protect their children from violent crime? If so, what sort of support do they need?

Sundas Raza: A lot of parents are not too sure about knife crime, so they need to be educated about it, and they can educate young people. If

people are like, "I've found these interesting gangs," they are much more likely to get involved in it.

Eleanor Lakin: I agree with Sundas: parents and legal guardians should be educated, because they play a massive role in young people's lives. They should have as much education as the young people.

Amaan Iqbal: We heard from the last panel that sometimes we will turn a blind eye to those on low incomes. They are getting money. They may be using knives to get it, but at least they have money.

Bukola Folarin: I agree with Sundas. I feel like our parents or guardians need to be educated on what is happening and on the actual issues of knife crime. Some people say it all starts with home, so it is about getting that kind of understanding—parents understand that they can project that better understanding to you as well. As I said before, parents being in fear adds to the pressure on you, so with their understanding, maybe they can be at ease so that you are at ease.

Q126 **James Appiah:** Does social media play a role in young people carrying knives by glamorising the use of weapons?

Amaan Iqbal: Social media plays a big part in young people's lives. As I mentioned, where I come from, it is a status thing, with people putting stories on Snapchat like, "Look at my new knife," which normalises it.

Eleanor Lakin: I think social media does play a role, because the majority of young people do use social media, and a lot of the time it advertises online videos and games that promote violence and make it seem more acceptable. Then they get involved in stuff like carrying knives.

Bukola Folarin: I feel that it's a 50:50 situation, because it is not the biggest issue. It definitely plays a role in broadcasting events and things that happen with knife crime, but sometimes it is used as a scapegoat, because social media links to music like drill, and people say, "That's the reason for knife crime—blame it on that." There are so many other issues involved—low self-esteem, mental illness and poverty, as I said before—other than that one problem.

Sundas Raza: I think it does play a big part in knife crime, especially when people post fighting videos and accounts of people getting stabbed. Some people see that as entertainment, but that takes away from the whole point of it. It does get glamorised, and people will think about these flashy lifestyles with knives and guns and stuff. That will influence some of our young people and make them think it is more of a normal thing.

Bukola Folarin: One of the young people said, "Because I saw someone hold a knife in a music video, that didn't lead me later on to go and pick out a knife." It is not a situation where because of what you see, you go and do it. There is a lot of blame like that.

Q127 **James Appiah:** Do you think that greater regulation of social media will minimise or solve this issue?

Bukola Folarin: It could go two ways. It could minimise it, or it could cause more uproar, because people might be thinking, “You’re restricting us in this, but this is not the main issue at hand. You’re trying to hide away from the problems.”

Amaan Iqbal: I think it should be us who enforce it. It shouldn’t be the guidelines of the companies of the social media platforms we use.

Sundas Raza: To be honest, I do not think it will make much of a difference, because people always find a way around that. There are loads of things that are banned but you will still find them all over; no matter what, it is always going to be there. This isn’t that kind of thing where you are trying to hide it. You don’t want to hide it; you want to show that it is an issue.

Eleanor Lakin: I think greater regulation of social media could tackle this issue, but I am not sure that would be the best idea. As the others have said, it is not the biggest issue we could be dealing with. It is not a priority.

Q128 **Theo Sergiou:** My question for the whole panel is: do you think schools should have a greater role in supporting young people at risk of being involved in knife crime? In your answer, can you please consider what exactly you think schools should be doing?

Eleanor Lakin: They should give more education, but not just to the people who could become vulnerable. In many cases, it is not just people who seem like they are vulnerable; anyone could become part of it.

Amaan Iqbal: Yes. If there were education in place, it should be to everyone rather than stereotyping a certain group by saying, “They’re going to become vulnerable to knife crime. Let’s target that group.” It should be for the whole cohort of young people.

Bukola Folarin: I definitely agree. It is not just a certain stereotype of people you should provide that help to. Obviously, colleges build contact with their students, and I feel like it is just building that more. The more you get to know your students, the more you get to see the changes in them if they are a different way—if they have bruises or they are in a different mood from usual, for instance. It is about seeing those things and catering to that and asking them if they need those kinds of things in place. Rather than just saying, “Oh, everyone should get it,” outline them as individuals as well so they feel they are actually being heard or seen.

Sundas Raza: I agree with what other people have said. Support should be offered to everyone, because at the end of the day there might be people who are more prone to knife crime, but you can never make that decision fully because you never know. You cannot make a decision off a stereotype. Anyone can get involved in it, no matter what their background is or what they are involved in. *[Interruption.]* You can never know for certain about people, because it could be anybody.

Q129 **Jack Heald:** Can positive role models be successful in preventing young

people from getting involved in knife crime?

Eleanor Lakin: I think a positive role model would help, because they could be a support system for young people, who would have someone to talk to or go to if they needed it.

Bukola Folarin: Maybe not just a role model; maybe someone who has been through past experiences, understands more, can reflect on their life experiences to show there are other ways, and can talk to them. Mentors really help as well.

Sundas Raza: I agree with what the last person—sorry, I don't know their name—said. With the thing we had with the speakers, because it was their real-life experience, you felt like you looked up to them and you were more likely to take the advice they gave you because they had been through it and come out the other end. If someone else had said it to you, you wouldn't have taken it as seriously, but because it is their life experiences—they have actually been through it—and you have seen how it has affected them, you are more likely to take it positively.

Amaan Iqbal: It is about finding people who can relate to young people on a closer level, in terms of what they have been through and how they can help them, and having that person who can show that they have been there, and what has ended up from it.

Chair: Thank you. I would like to ask the Committee whether anyone has any more questions for the panel.

Q130 **Jack Heald:** Bukola, you talked about a film that you did as part of your commission. Do you want to explain who that was aimed at, and what it was about?

Bukola Folarin: There were groups at colleges. Across the board, we had 30 different students. We put a video tackling 16 different possible causes of knife crime and we went to those colleges and presented it to them. We showed them the video and gave them a survey to fill out. That is where we got our feedback from on how they want to approach things, changes we could make, and what they think the root causes of knife crime are. Just by devising that, we got to know so many different young people and their opinions, and what they have been through. It is about putting that together, and now conducting and showing it. It is on YouTube, by the way.

Q131 **James Appiah:** Amaan, you said that you did a football tournament with teachers and police. Can you explain how that worked, and what you did to gather them?

Amaan Iqbal: We did it during the summer holidays; it was hosted by the police. Our pitch to young people was to come and have a football match against the police officers, to build better rapport and to give young people a place to do that. It was about breaking down the stereotypes between police officers and young people.

Q132 **James Appiah:** What was the turnout?

Amaan Iqbal: There was a great turnout. We had parents on the side watching. We had multiple teams of young people.

Q133 **Theo Sergiou:** Buks, you mentioned at the beginning, listing your factors, that poverty is a main issue, as did Amaan. Can you talk to us about how you feel that in particular affects young people getting involved in knife crime?

Bukola Folarin: Have you ever heard the saying, "Happy home, happy life"? You project out in the world what you go through. It is a natural instinct for young people in general. Let's say a mother is working two jobs to provide for her four children, and she is facing stress, tackling those jobs and the different bills that she has to pay. On top of that, she is worrying about her son or daughter going through the day-to-day challenges that they are facing, and about whether they are going to make it home, those pressures and that scariness. It would take a load off her plate, or anyone's plate, to tackle the income that she is facing.

Q134 **Bailey-Lee Robb:** We have heard from a Government Minister and from two Opposition MPs, and we are getting different views. My first question—just a straight yes or no from you—is: do you believe that the Government is prioritising knife crime? The second question is: what do you believe the Government must do now to address the issue that it is not doing already?

Amaan Iqbal: The answer to the first question is yes. The Government should prioritise making more youth provision, increasing the police budget and putting a stop to social media platforms throwing their own terms and conditions away, and enforcing that.

Bukola Folarin: To the first part of the question I would say no. To the second part of the question, we need to put in action. We can discuss what we need to do, but now we need to do something about it and feel that the Government are actually doing something.

Sundas Raza: My answer to the first part is no. I don't think they are prioritising it enough. We can help by offering more funding. I think a lot of services could raise awareness of knife crime, but they don't have the funding and resources they need, but if they did, they could help more.

Eleanor Lakin: My answer to the first part is also no. They could put more work in to change the curriculum, to include more PHSE and involve more knife crime in the PHSE lessons.

Q135 **Chair:** Thank you. All the evidence that we have received today and in last Friday's session, as well as the written evidence and the survey of young people, will be put together for us to make a report of recommendations to the Government, so, finally, please briefly summarise one recommendation that you would like to go to the Government.

Bukola Folarin: I would say fear and protection. That is something that we can definitely tackle, starting with how the media projects deaths and

things that are happening in the world. They should present a solution, rather than just saying, "Here's a problem" and that's it.

Amaan Iqbal: My recommendation is to ensure that every constituency has a youth service and provision.

Eleanor Lakin: I would agree with Aaman about including more youth services locally everywhere.

Sundas Raza: I think funding for youth services, as well as keeping in contact with those services, and the Government taking in young people's opinions, whether through surveys or online, so that young people have more of a say into what happens.

Chair: Thank you all for answering that question. Is there anything that you would like to say or contribute that has not been covered in our questions? Okay, in that case I thank you all for coming and presenting your evidence, which we greatly appreciate. This brings us to the end of this session.