

# Understanding the growth of knife crime in Staffordshire

December 2019

Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services



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Police | Fire and Rescue | Crime

# Contents

Acknowledgements

---

Executive Summary 4

---

1. Introduction 7

---

2. Desktop Review 9

---

3. District Analysis 19

---

4. Conclusion & Recommendations 32

---

References 35

---

Appendices

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# Acknowledgements

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- ◆ Burton Albion Community Trust (BACT)
- ◆ Eagles Nest Project and the young people who participated in the one-to-one interviews
- ◆ East Staffordshire Local Strategic Partnership / Community Safety Partnership
- ◆ Kinetic Youth Ltd and the young people who engaged with the 2 focus groups
- ◆ Staffordshire Police
- ◆ Staffordshire Youth Union – a countywide council of young people aged 11-18, including 4 who represent Staffordshire as Members of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament.
- ◆ The Voice Project – Staffordshire County Council’s in-house youth participation team focused mainly on Children in Care
- ◆ Office of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Staffordshire who have funded the analysis of the Staffordshire wide data collected during the initial East Staffordshire Research.

**“People have the misguided belief that they are better protected if they carry a knife, whereas the opposite is probably true”**  
(Survey respondent)

# Executive Summary

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## Background to the project

The data for this report was collected with the support of Staffordshire Youth Union (a countywide youth council of young people incorporating locally elected members of the UK Youth Parliament). The Office of the Commissioner for Staffordshire has kindly funded the analysis and publication of the wider geographical data, building on the East Staffordshire report funded by the Local Strategic Partnership.

Knife Crime is a complex issue which requires a comprehensive response to the underlying root causes. These include a poverty of hope and aspiration which is more prevalent in some areas of higher deprivation and disadvantage. People have a desire for meaning, identity, belonging and purpose which often comes from a sense of being a part of a family and/or community.

As an offence, Knife Crime can also be complex. The media attention is on young people killing or injuring other young people in often poor urban neighbourhoods, seemingly random or gang-related rather than the more prevalent offence of possession.

## Research Aim & Objectives

The aim of the research is to understand any growth of knife crime in Staffordshire.

The research objectives of the project are:

- ◆ To understand why young people might feel the need to carry a knife / bladed weapon from those who have, as well as perceptions from those who haven't
- ◆ To understand present levels of community cohesion and resilience.

## Evaluation Methods

Utilising both quantitative and qualitative research approaches, SCVYS conducted the following evaluation activities:

- ◆ **desktop analysis** of local and national reports / commentaries published since July 2019 building from East Staffordshire report.
- ◆ **online survey** promoted by SCVYS through local schools; youth and children's organisations and various networks / partnerships.
- ◆ **Small focus groups** and **one to one interviews** gathered feedback from a total of 50 young people.

## Key Findings

- ◆ **A perceived distance between decision makers and communities.** People commented on Councillors being out of touch, only interested in their own agenda, etc.
- ◆ **The importance of certain organisations** who play a major role in connecting up the fabric of local communities. Examples mentioned included churches (other faith groups could also play this role), uniformed organisations, sports clubs, etc.
- ◆ **Reinvestment across a range of services** including education, youth and community services, police and family support is required to enable high quality support for children, young people and families.
- ◆ Young people are **fearful** of becoming victims and have recurring reasons as to why they might carry a knife/bladed weapon including fear, wanting to appear powerful, protection and safety.

## Key Recommendations

- ◆ **Stop stigmatising young people** – value, listen and involve them instead and champion their contribution
- ◆ Embed a **whole family support approach** creating positive environments for children and young people to grow and thrive in.
- ◆ **Divert** children and young people into positive, nurturing activities that meet their broadest basic needs
- ◆ Provide **educational support to reduce school exclusions** and **increase aspiration**
- ◆ Invest in **community-based policing** to restore trusting relations and increase reassurance through high visibility and accessibility
- ◆ Create more and better opportunities for **training and employment** to improve young people's chances of finding work
- ◆ Utilise **community-based assets**, through co-production of sustainable long-term solutions which are implemented by local people
- ◆ A **devolution of both power and resource** is required to re-engage communities in the task of building on their community strengths and self-solving local issues and challenges.
- ◆ **Address issues holistically by using resources effectively and efficiently.**

# 1. Introduction

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## Background to the project

This research began as the first of four pieces of work commissioned by the East Staffordshire Local Strategic Partnership on behalf of the local Community Safety Partnership. The initial report, published in July 2019 and focused on East Staffordshire, provoked enough significant interest to suggest that analysing the 800+ survey responses received from other areas of Staffordshire may have additional value to both County and District partners. This additional report has been funded by the Office of the Staffordshire Commissioner through their Proceeds of Crime Fund and will feed into the partnership work addressing the challenges of Serious Violence.

Knife crime is a complex issue which requires a comprehensive response to the underlying root causes. These include a poverty of hope and aspiration which is more prevalent in some areas of higher deprivation and disadvantage. People have a desire for meaning, identity, belonging and purpose which often comes from a sense of being a part of a family and/or community. If these environments become toxic, they can adversely impact on outcomes throughout life for individuals, particularly those who are already vulnerable.

As an offence, knife crime can also be complex. The media attention is on young people killing or injuring other young people in often poor urban neighbourhoods, seemingly random or gang-related. This type of offence is a relatively small proportion of incidents in this category with possession being the most common offence.

## Research Aim & Objectives

The aim of the research is to understand the growth of knife crime across Staffordshire. The research objectives of the project are:

- ◆ To understand why young people might feel the need to carry a knife / bladed weapon from those who have, as well as perceptions from those who haven't
- ◆ To understand present levels of community cohesion and resilience

## Evaluation Methods

Utilising both quantitative and qualitative research approaches, SCVYS conducted the following evaluation activities:

- ◆ **online survey** promoted via SCVYS through a variety of channels including young people from the Staffordshire Youth Union (a Countywide Youth Council including 4 local Members of Youth Parliament); local schools; youth and children's organisations and through various networks and partnerships throughout Staffordshire.
- ◆ **focus groups** were held with Kinetic Youth Ltd and with young people in Rugeley YMCA and Werrington Young Offenders Institute.
- ◆ **one-to-one interviews** were held with young people from Eagles Nest Project in East Staffordshire. These 2 methods involved a total of 50 additional young people.

To conclude this introduction are some powerful words from Richard Taylor OBE, reported by London News, which highlight the importance of working together to bring about positive and lasting change. 20 years on from the death of his son, Damilola who was killed a few days before his 11<sup>th</sup> birthday he said:

*“It still pains me today as much as it did at the time. The years have not extinguished the anguish of losing him so young. I do not want to talk about pain though – I want to talk about hope.*

*Something has gone badly wrong with society and I believe that only as a society can we put it right. Let us stop demanding changes be made by politicians and instead start working closer together to effect the changes needed. Start by challenging each other to be more caring and compassionate. Less competitive and more collaborative.*

*The Damilola Taylor Trust has done much to try and help young people since we launched in 2001. But perhaps like all the other organisations that are doing great work we need to stop talking about what we are doing individually and start talking more about what we need to be doing more of collectively – to effect cohesive change!”*



## 2. Desktop Review

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### 2.1 Introduction

The original report focusing on East Staffordshire contains significant desktop analysis of national and local reports published prior to July 2019 and has not been reproduced here, however we have highlighted recent additional pieces of research which are most noteworthy.

By introduction it is important to provide a definition to the term 'Knife Crime' to provide some clarity to its use throughout this report. For the purpose of this report, knife crime shall be defined as:

*Any offence involving assault with injury or intent, robbery, sexual assault, rape and homicides where a knife or sharp instrument has been used in the commission of the offence. (Kumar, 2019)*

This definition also illustrates the complexity of recording incidents and of separating knife crime from wider serious violence as it includes personal and business robbery, serious violent crime with injury, serious sexual offences including rape and violence against the person, committed by all ages.

### 2.2 Growth of knife crime

#### 2.2.1 A National Snapshot

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Knife Crime continues to develop the understanding of potential root causes and identify enabling factors.

The APPG in collaboration with Barnardo's and Redthread (2019), have recently published a report establishing how school exclusions exacerbate the increase in knife crime, and what can be done to support vulnerable young people both before and after exclusion. The inquiry involved meeting with young people who had been excluded and their parents; educational professionals and other interested stakeholders.

Their recommendations include:

- ◆ School rankings and results must take account of all pupils, including those they exclude
- ◆ All excluded children must have access to the full-time education they are legally entitled to – too many do not currently get this
- ◆ All education providers must have the funding and backing they need to support vulnerable children
- ◆ Schools must be recognised for the central role they play in a multi-agency response to keeping children safe, with funding to support this work
- ◆ Everyone working in the education sector must be trained to understand vulnerability and trauma. Best practice should be identified and spread
- ◆ Schools should be supported to focus on prevention and early intervention
- ◆ Every council should have a leader responsible for children excluded from school

UK Youth (2019) and their partners have compiled a report called 'Harnessing Lived Experience' which consulted with 123 young people in 6 different locations across England on the causes and solutions to serious violence against young people.

This work highlighted the importance of understanding both the **national** and **local** environment with young people identifying a range of contributing factors and potential solutions.

**Social divisions, financial troubles, and substance misuse** were factors which played a part across numerous locations suggesting that some common interventions could fulfil a valuable role.





When we looked at the research about what works, there were three areas we read a lot about that have been tried in the UK and USA, and which had resulted in positive impact. These are:

### **Support for parents and families**

These interventions help parents learn new ways to communicate and nurture their children. They learn ways to interact positively and how to discipline in an appropriate way.

### **Communities taking action**

Community interventions are about working with whole neighbourhoods to bring about change. When communities design interventions, they do what works for them, for their environment, culture and other unique factors.

### **Working in partnership**

This is about how groups like the NHS, police, and social care work with each other. The best partnerships are created when all stakeholder groups and the community work together to problem solve and plan how best to tackle issues.

The report concludes with the statement below:

***“We want to start a revolution. A movement that makes our streets, neighbourhoods, and schools safer for young people, but the only way this will happen is when young people, and those that care for them, have the confidence to join the debate, ask questions and speak their truth to power.”***

## 2.2.2 A Staffordshire Snap shot

According to Staffordshire Police, knife crime has seen a decrease of 8% in the year to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019, with 55 fewer recorded incidents across the County. This statistic does not include possession. East Staffordshire saw a 22% reduction in crimes, Stoke on Trent North and Newcastle a 15% reduction and Stoke on Trent South a 12% reduction. Lichfield saw the highest increase followed by Stafford.

In terms of knife crime and young people (under 18s) possession of a bladed article remains a significant proportion and incidents increased slightly (4%) from 398 to 415 during the year with Stoke on Trent, East Staffordshire, Lichfield, Cannock and Stafford reporting the largest numbers.

The Serious Violence Oversight Group is also coordinating a series of partnership responses to further understand causal factors and reduce incidents through a variety of approaches including the innovative [#ditchtheblade](#) communications campaign involving young people and multiple agencies. A data collection and prioritisation exercise is underway to identify a cohort of young people (10-24) who can be supported with targeted interventions to reduce the likelihood of them progressing down any kind of criminal or serious violence pathway. A specific task force is also being established in Stoke on Trent by Police, City Council and partners to ensure an effective response. Additional resource is also being applied for as funding streams such as the Youth Endowment Fund come on line.

Of particular interest to our subject matter, is the desire of young people to “End Knife Crime” reflected in the Make Your Mark 2019 vote organised by the UK Youth Parliament. In Tamworth almost one in two young people (48%) put this as their top priority. In Stafford and Lichfield this dropped to 43%, which is still above, perhaps surprisingly the West Midlands and National scores, as Knife Crime is seen as being far more prevalent in cities such as London, Birmingham and Coventry. 24% of young people in Tamworth also voted to tackle Child Poverty, one of the root causes of young people’s sense of disengagement from society and a factor in them expressing that sense of disempowerment through gang involvement, violence and other illegal activities.

## 2.3 Levels of Community Cohesion & Resilience

Since undertaking our initial research, the Young Foundation (2019) have developed a twin track approach to what they describe as Community Wealth outlined in their 'Flipping the Coin' report published in November 2019. The report found that:

- ◆ Continuous blocs of urbanised areas suffer from low or very low amounts of funding and affluence in Lancashire, the Midlands and across the East coast of England.
- ◆ An unbroken stretch of very high funding and affluence exists from Bath in the west to London in the east.
- ◆ Districts with lower funding and affluence were more likely to vote in support of Brexit.
- ◆ Strong communities thrive in some of the most deprived districts in England, yet are notably absent in some of the least deprived.
- ◆ Amounts of funding and affluence do not predict levels of community strength.
- ◆ Community strength is particularly high in rural parts of the West Country and East Anglia, and much lower in cities and suburban areas across the country.
- ◆ Some urban districts like Norwich, Camden, Reading and Salford still retain strong community ties and resources.

The Young Foundation rank each locality (out of 315) using a formula combining the *Funding and Affluence Matrix* and *Index of Community Strength* calculations.

### Funding & Affluence Metric

Financial data including core local government spending, charitable spending, and trust & foundation funding was collected for the period 2017-18. We then combined the funding score with the indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) score for the district, returning a Funding & Affluence metric that weighs funding and multiple deprivation equally.

## Index of Community Strength

The Index of Community Strength brings together a range of data sets, combined into two sub-indicators. Within community resources we include physical assets under community control, or identified as of local value, cooperative housing, and socially-oriented businesses. Within community ties we include community-led activities which are focused on bringing people together, be that purely for social purposes, or to meet a local need for support or change. Each of these measures of community wealth are projects, resources or initiatives that take place across the country and often involve hundreds of thousands of participants nationwide.

The ranks for localities in Staffordshire can be seen in the table below:

Locality	Funding & Affluence Matrix	Community Strength Index
<b>Cannock Chase</b>	257/315 (Very low)	310/315 (Very Low)
<b>East Staffordshire</b>	232/315 (Low)	169/315 (Medium)
<b>Lichfield</b>	133/315 (Medium)	135/315 (Medium)
<b>Newcastle</b>	225/315 (Low)	220/315 (Low)
<b>South Staffordshire</b>	150/315 (Medium)	225/315 (Low)
<b>Stafford</b>	137/315 (Medium)	138/315 (Medium)
<b>Staffordshire Moorlands</b>	173/315 (Medium)	106/315 (High)
<b>Tamworth</b>	266/315 (Very Low)	261/315 (Very low)

For most areas (Cannock Chase, Lichfield, Newcastle, Stafford and Tamworth) the correlation between the level of Funding and Affluence and Community Strength is clear. However, of more interest is where the scores do not correlate in terms of league table ranking. For example, East Staffordshire is **LOW** in its Funding and Affluence score but **MEDIUM** in terms of Community Strength, and Staffordshire Moorlands is **MEDIUM** in its Funding and Affluence and **HIGH** in its Community Strength. Alternatively, South Staffordshire is **MEDIUM** in its Funding and Affluence but **LOW** in terms of Community Strength.

We can say that Staffordshire only somewhat supports the findings of the national report as where financial investment is lowest (Cannock and Tamworth), Community Strength is also very low. Certainly, several districts would benefit significantly from an increased level of long-term financial investment, wherever that comes from, to support and enable the community strength.

The Young Foundation humbly admit that this a first attempt for them, and that although they have utilised partner data where possible, they are keen to develop this approach further to improve the accuracy and resonance of their reporting. This information can be viewed online [here](#).

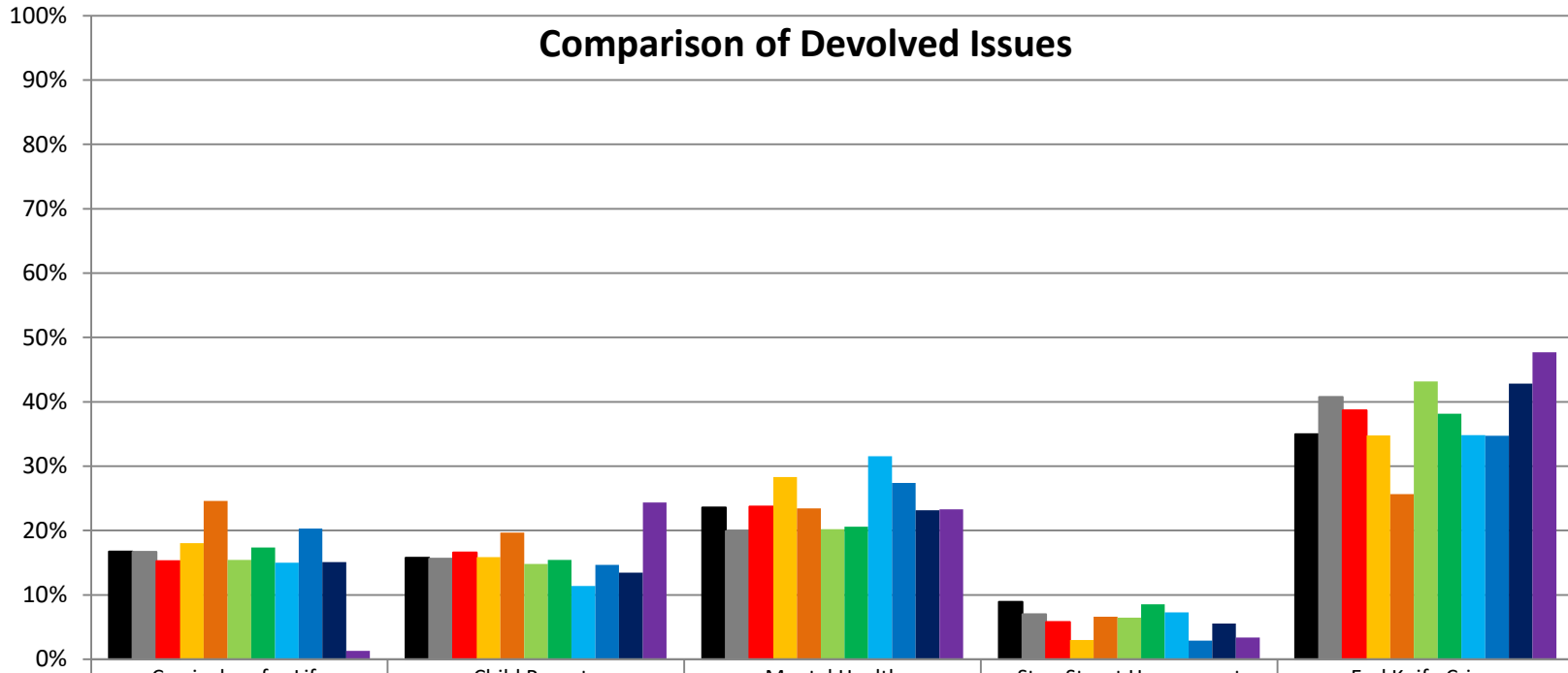
An interesting and relevant finding from a recent report by Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services (2019) into understanding the perception of crime, found that in culturally diverse communities, behaviours that are the norm for one cultural group are often perceived as anti-social to others. An example would be street drinking in groups which is normal for some residents but might be considered as anti-social to someone who doesn't drink alcohol due to their religion or beliefs or indeed someone elderly who may consider this behaviour as intimidating or threatening.

[Make Your Mark](#) is Europe's largest youth consultation and is run by the UK Youth Parliament and British Youth Council. 2019 saw a change of approach with young people able to vote for one of five UK issues, one of five Devolved issues (i.e. England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland specific) as well as a free text box to indicate the most important local issue for the voter, as illustrated by the Ballot Paper in **Appendix 1**. A number of issues on the ballot paper (Child Poverty, Hate Crime and Knife Crime) are connected to serious violence and personal safety and the comparable results for districts, Staffordshire as a whole, West Midlands and UK are summarised in the subsequent charts. The full results of UK and Devolved issues from the national report and Staffordshire as a whole can be found in **Appendix 2**.



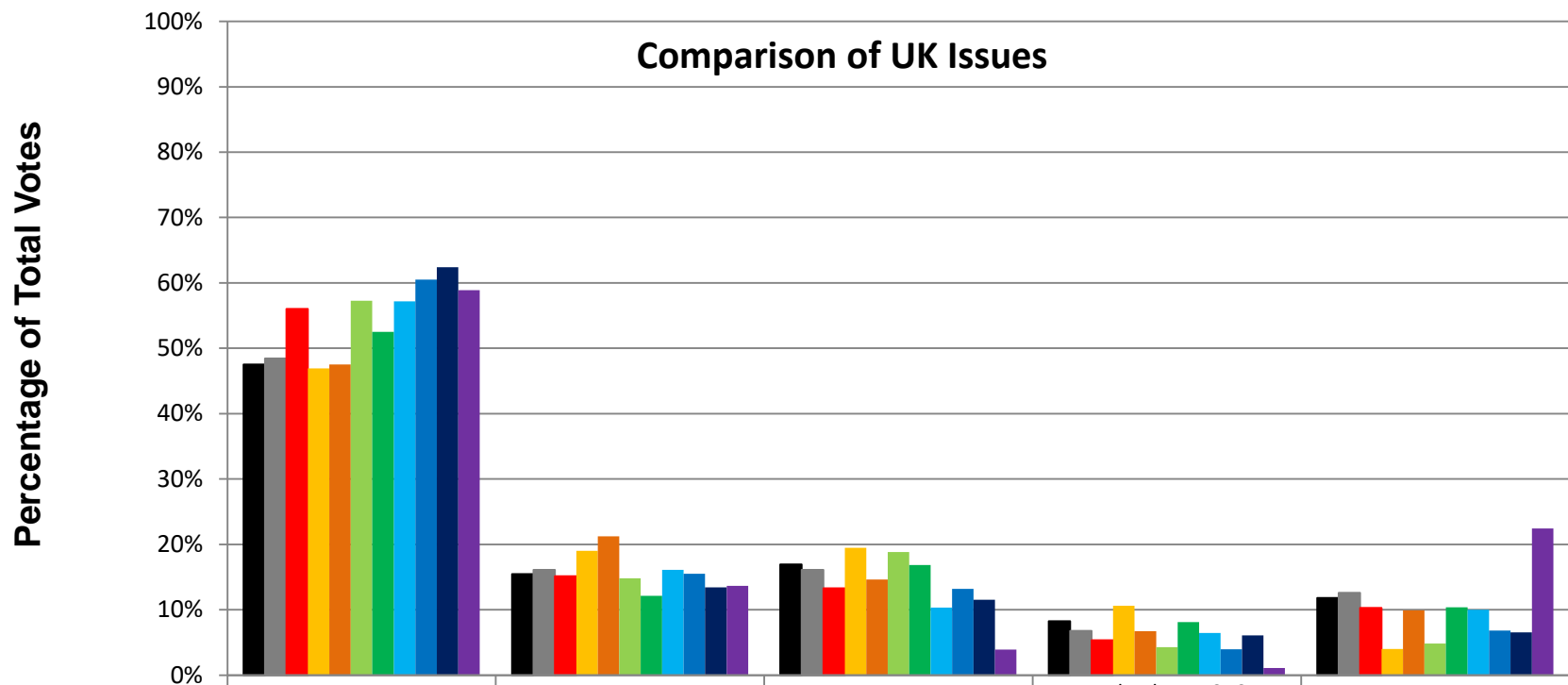
## Comparison of Devolved Issues

Percentage of Total Votes



	Curriculum for Life	Child Poverty	Mental Health	Stop Street Harassment	End Knife Crime
■ National	17%	16%	24%	9%	35%
■ West Midlands	17%	16%	20%	7%	41%
■ Staffordshire	15%	17%	24%	6%	39%
■ Cannock	18%	16%	28%	3%	35%
■ East Staffordshire	25%	20%	23%	7%	26%
■ Lichfield	15%	15%	20%	6%	43%
■ Staffordshire Moorlands	17%	15%	21%	9%	38%
■ Newcastle-under-Lyme	15%	11%	32%	7%	35%
■ South Staffordshire	20%	15%	27%	3%	35%
■ Stafford	15%	13%	23%	6%	43%
■ Tamworth	1%	24%	23%	3%	48%

## Comparison of UK Issues



	Protect the Environment	Votes at 16	Tackling Hate Crime	Make the UNCRC Statutory Law	Welcome Refugees
■ National	48%	15%	17%	8%	12%
■ West Midlands	48%	16%	16%	7%	13%
■ Staffordshire	56%	15%	13%	5%	10%
■ Cannock	47%	19%	19%	11%	4%
■ East Staffordshire	48%	21%	15%	7%	10%
■ Lichfield	57%	15%	19%	4%	5%
■ Staffordshire Moorlands	53%	12%	17%	8%	10%
■ Newcastle-under-Lyme	57%	16%	10%	6%	10%
■ South Staffordshire	61%	16%	13%	4%	7%
■ Stafford	62%	13%	12%	6%	7%
■ Tamworth	59%	14%	4%	1%	22%

## 3. District Analysis

This section has been structured to incorporate the respective findings and analysis against the original research aim and the two associated objectives as outlined in the introduction. Information from across all districts of Staffordshire is included although the sample size from each area varies significantly due to the original focus being on East Staffordshire. It will also include any pertinent comparable statistics and views gleaned from the desktop review that was undertaken.

### 3.1 Survey Cohort

1,033 online surveys were completed in total between April and May 2019. The age demographic breakdown of these can be seen in the table below:

Age Group	Overall online		Cannock Chase		East Staffordshire		Lichfield		Staffordshire Moorlands		Newcastle		South Staffordshire		Stafford		Tamworth		Out of County	
<10	5	0.4%	0	0%	2	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%
11-18	727	70.4%	13	41%	132	70%	176	94%	117	74%	12	27%	21	58%	179	67%	26	74%	54	64%
19-25	28	2.7%	1	3%	7	4%	0	0%	3	2%	5	11%	1	3%	5	2%	2	5.5%	4	5%
26-35	42	4.1%	4	12%	12	6%	1	0%	4	2%	3	7%	0	0%	10	4%	1	3%	6	7%
36-45	62	6%	5	16%	10	5%	4	2%	11	7%	5	11%	2	5.5%	16	6%	3	9%	6	7%
46-55	77	7.5%	1	3%	12	6%	3	2%	15	10%	11	24%	5	14%	19	7%	2	5.5%	7	8%
56-65	57	5.5%	6	19%	7	4%	0	0%	3	2%	7	16%	5	14%	22	8%	1	3%	6	7%
66+	35	(3.4%	2	6%	7	4%	3	2%	5	3%	1	2%	2	5.5%	15	6%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1033</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100%</b>

Although the survey was open to anyone of any age to complete, a significant proportion who responded were young people aged 18 or below (almost 71%). This could be due to the fact that as the survey was being promoted by a youth-focused organisation targeting schools and local youth organisations and therefore people assumed it was only for young people, or due to the fact that this issue is seen as more important to young people than others.

The support and involvement of Staffordshire Youth Union (SYU), a countywide youth forum for whom knife crime is currently a campaign priority, in promoting the survey may also be a contributory factor to the younger cohort being significantly represented.

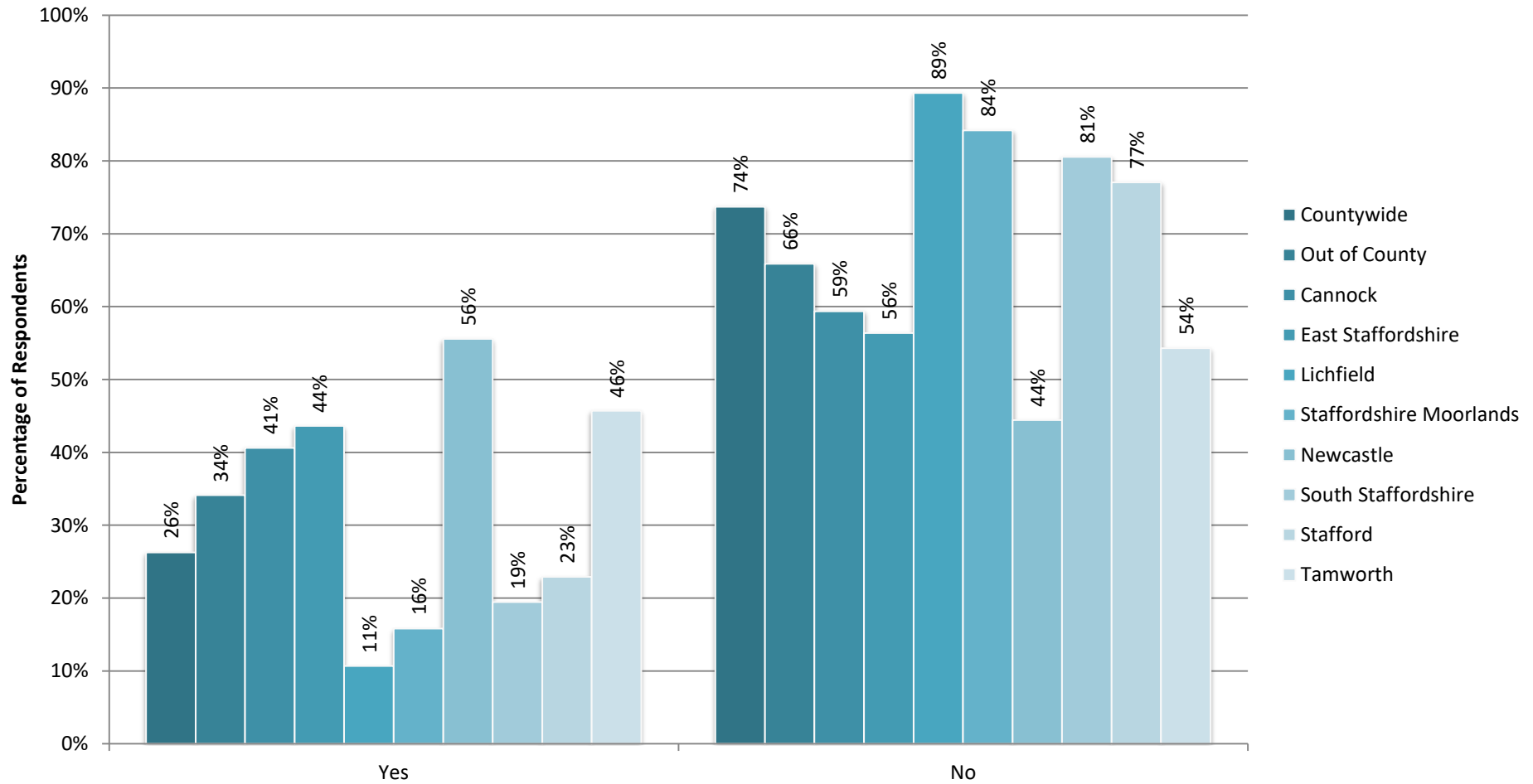
### **3.2 Is Knife Crime perceived as an issue in Staffordshire?**

This should really be a very easy question to answer, and the fact that it isn't points to the complexity of this particular issue. We asked the question "Do you think knife crime is an issue in your local community?" and collated a diverse range of district responses.

89% of respondents from Lichfield said knife crime is not a local issue, followed by Staffordshire Moorlands with 84%, South Staffordshire at 81% and Stafford at 77%. In comparison, 56% of respondents in Newcastle said it is an issue locally followed by Tamworth with 46%, East Staffordshire with 44% and Cannock with 41%. Across the whole County 74% said it isn't an issue locally, with just 26% saying it is an issue. 34% of the respondents from out of County, who are mainly from the fringes of Staffordshire County, e.g. in Stoke, South Derbyshire and North Warwickshire, thought that knife crime was an issue where they lived, whereas 66% did not think it was an issue.

The difference in sample size may result in less robust representation from some areas with 187 from Lichfield, 158 from Moorlands but only 45 from Newcastle and 36 from South Staffordshire.

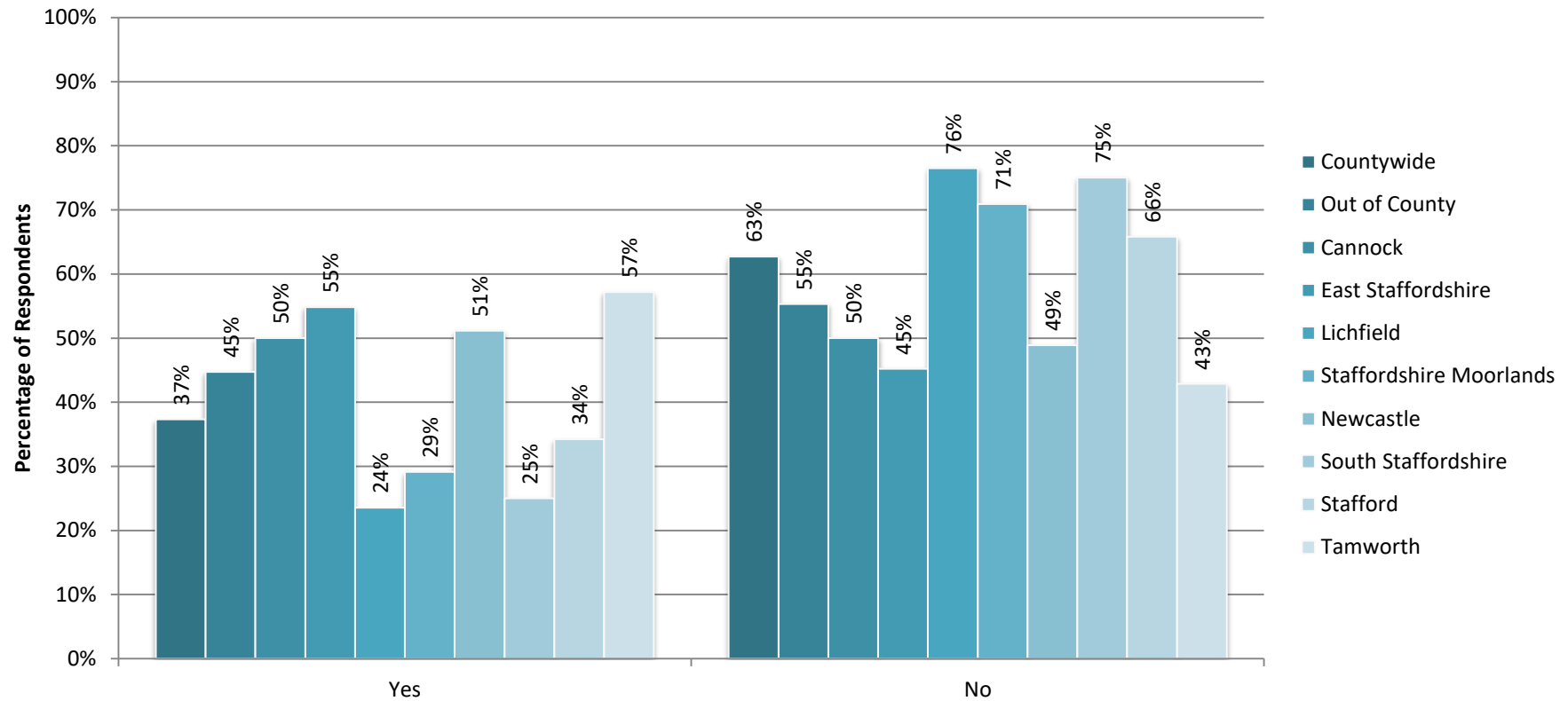
## Do you think knife crime is an issue in your local community?



### 3.2.1 Is knife crime growing in Staffordshire?

Our survey asked the question “Do you think there has been a rise in knife crime in your local community?” The results are shown in the chart below.

## Do you think there has been a rise in knife crime in your local community?



The majority of respondents in Lichfield (76%), South Staffordshire (75%), Staffordshire Moorlands (71%) and Stafford (66%) felt this was not a growing issue against a Countywide response of 63%. Whereas a minority of people in Tamworth (43%), East Staffordshire (45%) and Newcastle (49%) said it was not a growing issue. Cannock was equally split 50:50 on whether respondents felt there had been a rise in knife crime locally. Again 45% of “Out of County” respondents felt that knife crime was a growing issue, against 55% who felt it was not growing.

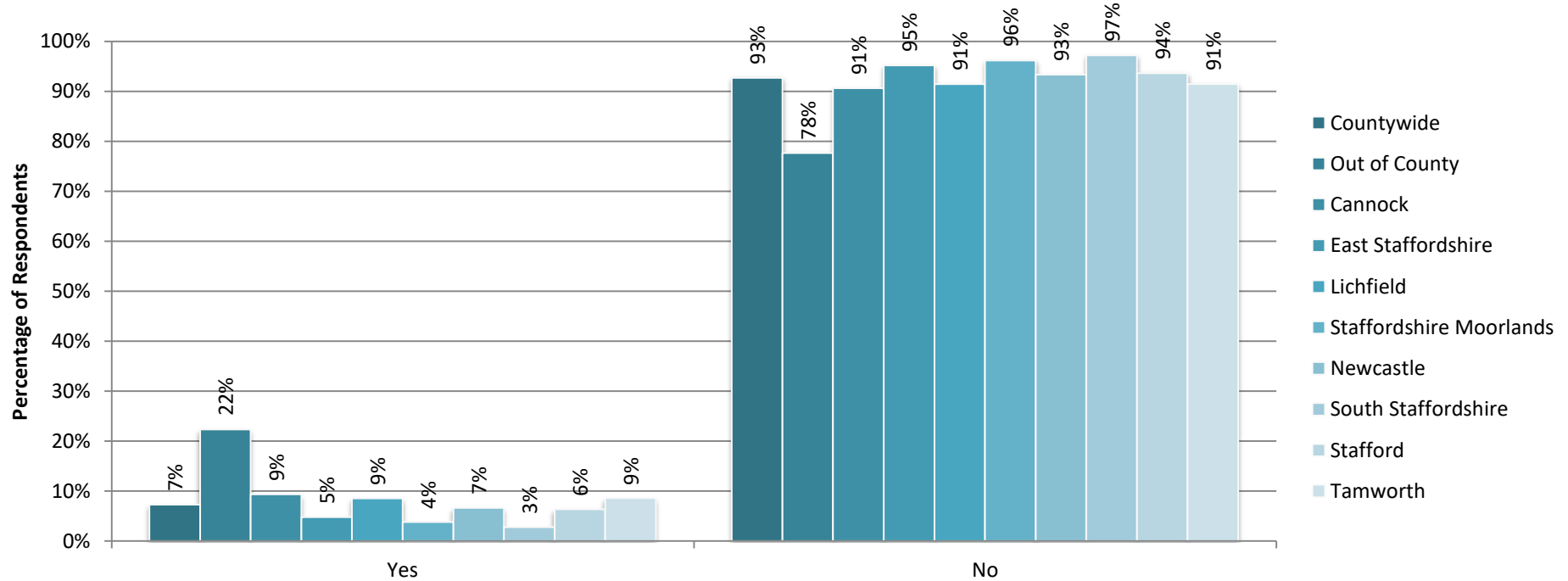
The main reasons given for their responses provide some interesting insights. Those who said they felt there was a rise in knife crime in their local area cited media coverage of local stabbings (Sutton, Hanley, etc.), personal experience of local low-level incidents of antisocial behaviour, criminal damage, gangs, etc. or raised awareness of knife carrying among young people as their rationale that it was perceived to be on the increase. The main reasons for thinking there has been no rise include '**no awareness of any local incidents**' and a feeling that '**it just doesn't happen in this area**', just in larger cities such as London, Birmingham, Manchester and Coventry.

It is clear that variable factors relating to everyday life, for example where you live, friendship groups, where you spend your leisure time, how you travel between places all shape and influence an individual's perception as to whether or not knife crime is growing, which supports the findings of the **Harnessing Lived Experience** and **Serious Youth Violence** reports mentioned in the desktop review.

### 3.3 Possession of a knife or bladed object

We asked those we surveyed “Have you ever carried a knife or bladed object?” The results from this survey are shown in the chart below.

#### Have you ever carried a knife or bladed object?



The overwhelming majority of people, at least 9 in every 10 across all of the district or borough areas of Staffordshire, who were consulted have never carried a knife or bladed object. Interestingly for this survey the “out of County” respondents recorded a significantly higher rate with 22% saying they have carried a knife or bladed object. The reasons for this are unknown. We can speculate that people drawn to responding to a survey such as this may be more likely to do so if they have direct experience of the issue, but this would be equally true for Staffordshire respondents.



### 3.3.1 Why do young people feel the need to carry a knife / bladed weapon?

From all of the respondents who had actually carried a knife (8% of respondents) the main reasons identified were:

- ◆ 50 had legitimate reasons to do so such as multi-tool devices, using it for work or for their volunteering roles
- ◆ 18 claimed it was for protection, 7 because they “felt like it”, 3 boredom and one each for “self-harm”, “don’t know”, “getting rid of it” and “it was the 1960s”.

*“Some people think that they are “baddass” or they are “better” than the rest of us, and some people carry knives to “be safe” but if they truly felt unsafe, they should've talked to somebody about it.”*

Survey respondent

This was supported by responses of those who had never carried a knife, 56% of whom named **protection** as the key motivating factor for others carrying a knife. The second highest motivating factor was around **image** (19%), being seen to be someone who is **cool, tough or hard**, and including **peer or gang pressure**. The third highest response was the attempt to **scare, hurt or intimidate** others (10%).

Why do you think other people might carry knives or bladed objects?

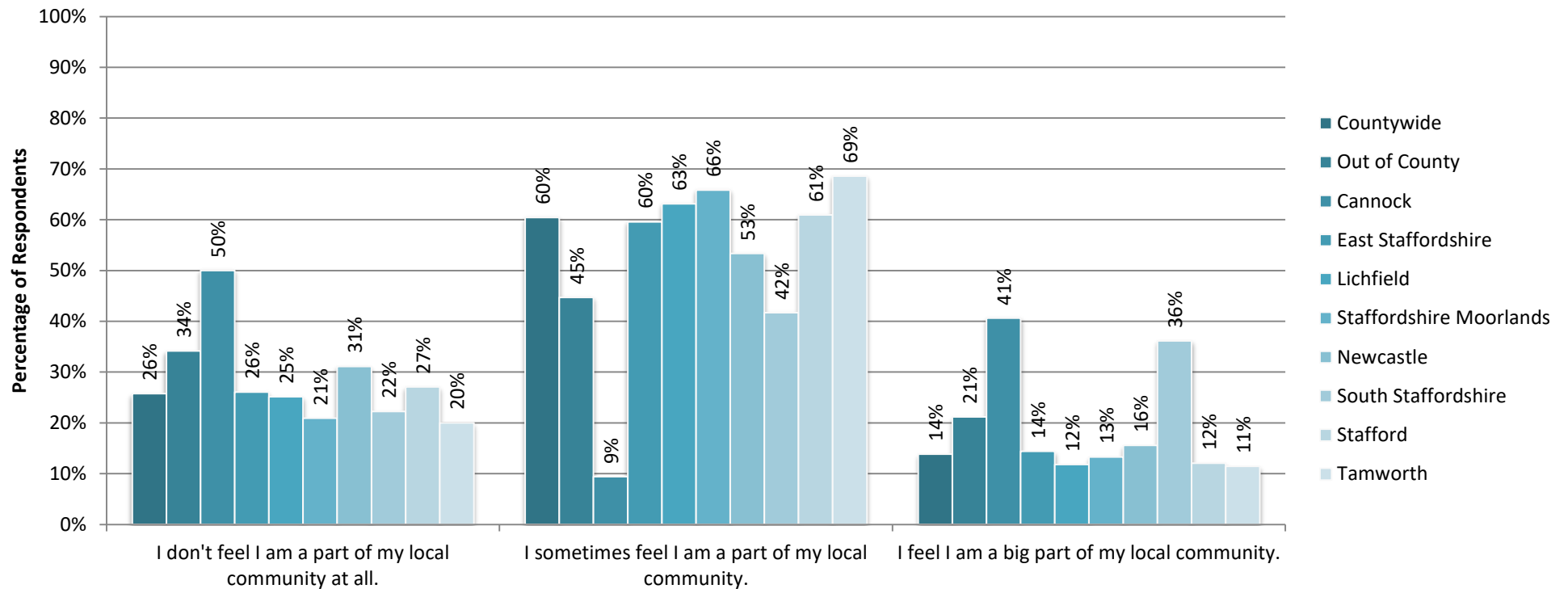
- ◆ “Misguidedly for their own protection or to fit in with the gang culture they associate with”
- ◆ “People in my village may carry knives to protect themselves from gangs that are from different local areas”
- ◆ “Media creates image that all young people carry them so you must for self-defence”
- ◆ “A misguided sense of self defence or a need to feel powerful in relation to others.”
- ◆ “Because other people do and it’s a cycle of “if he carries one so do I”

### 3.4 What about levels of community cohesion in Staffordshire?

To try and ascertain respondents' views of community cohesion in their community, we posed two questions within our survey. We deliberately didn't define what was meant by 'community' preferring to leave it to those participating to define their own community whether that be linked to a particular geographical area, interest group or ethnicity.

The first question asked was 'How much do you feel a part of your community?', followed by 3 selectable options as follows:

#### How much do you feel a part of your local community?



Taking the County as a whole, **26%** stated that they didn't feel a part of their community at all. **60%** said they sometimes feel part of their community and **14%** said they feel a big part of their local community. Individual areas vary significantly with **50%** of Cannock respondents saying they don't feel a part of their community at all, followed by Out of County (**34%**), Newcastle (**31%**), Stafford (**27%**) above the countywide average.

*“Doesn't seem too much going on in the area, especially for my age group, there also never seems to be any community event or schemes at all that make a person like myself interested. Again the age group is a big factor”*

19-25 respondent, Newcastle

*“I attend the local park run and running club and I am a DofE (Duke of Edinburgh Award) leader locally. However, within my direct home, I say hello to people and we chat if we meet walking the dog, but we don't do anything as a group or street. Everyone works long hours/weekends etc.*

46-55 respondent, Out of County

*“I have friends in the immediate area and as neighbours we do try and help each other and keep an eye on each other, particularly the elderly. I work full time however and don't have as much time as I would like to commit to community events and activities.”*

56-65 respondent, Stafford

The middle response does provide respondents with a “sit on the fence” option, so it is interesting to see that in Cannock only 9% responded saying they sometimes feel a part of their community. Tamworth scored highest with **69%**, closely followed by Staffordshire Moorlands **66%**, Lichfield **63%** and South Staffordshire on **61%**.

Again, Cannock scored highly with **41%** saying they feel a big part of their community, with South Staffordshire at **36%** and Out of County at **21%**. The rest of the localities scored between 11 and 16%.

The two key reasons given by respondents for feeling a part of their community were that **'they are regularly involved in local activities'** and **'they have friendships outside of immediate family and close friends.'**

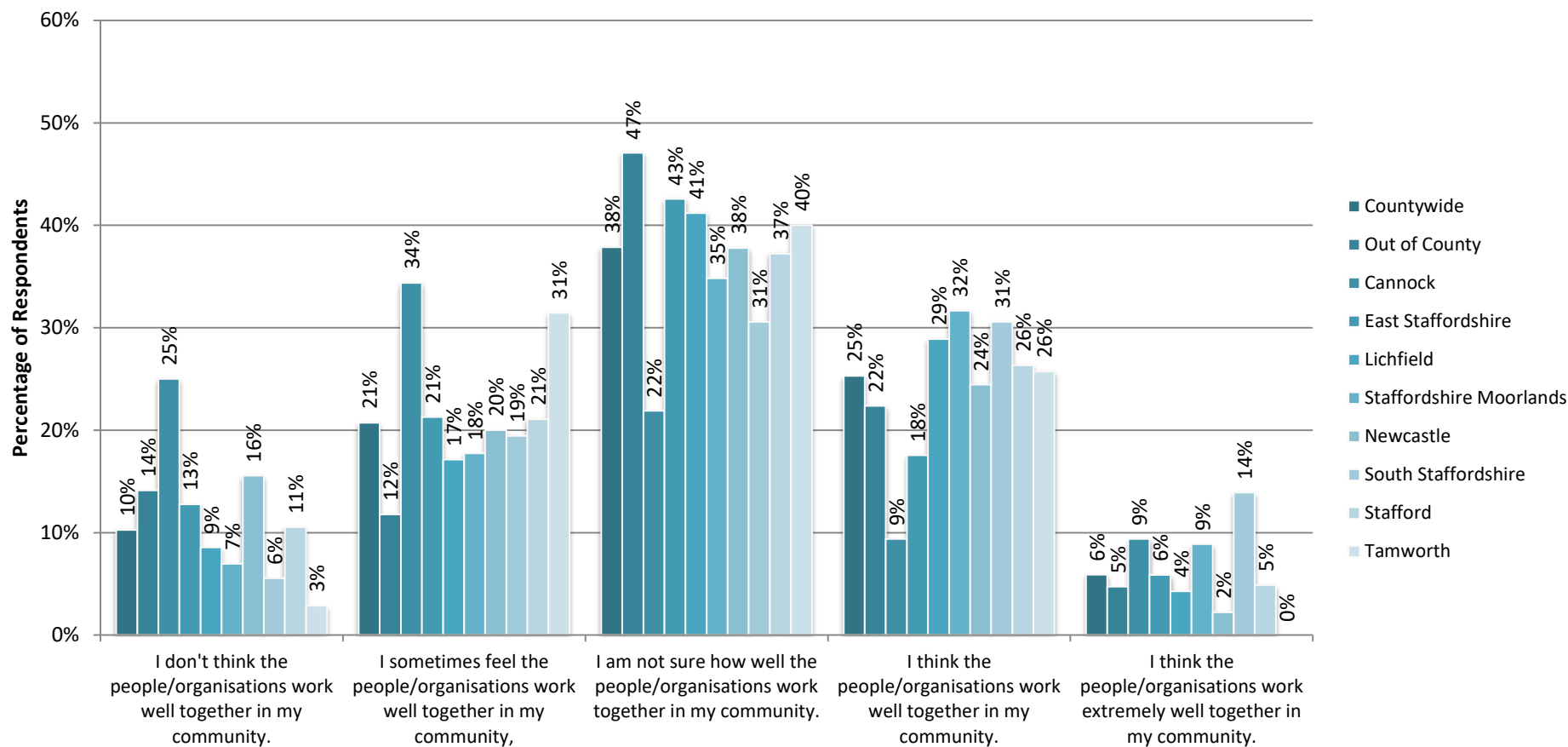
For those not feeling a part of their community, they cited **'a lack of awareness of relevant local accessible activities'**, **'busy work lives – often a distance away from where they live'**, and **'a growing distance between decision makers and communities'**

**“I just think differently and act differently than people around me, and sometimes I feel out of place”**

**11-18 Survey respondent**

The second question we asked about community cohesion was 'how well do you think the people and/or organisations in your community work together?' followed by five selectable options as below:

## How well do you think the people and/or organisations in your community work together?



In South Staffordshire, 45% of people said they thought people and organisations worked well or extremely well together, whereas only 18% of Cannock Chase respondents said the same for their area. 25% of Cannock Chase respondents stated that they did not think people and organisations work well together, with the next highest being Newcastle at 16%, whereas only 3% of respondents in Tamworth said the same for their area. Again, Cannock Chase respondents were less likely to select the middle option, preferring to come down on one side or the other. 38% of overall respondents are not sure how well people and organisations work together. Some of the comments made by respondents are highlighted below:

*"I don't feel that the concerns of the people in the community are taken into consideration. I know that regular complaints are made to police and councils regarding anti-social behaviour, speeding and parking but to no avail."*

*"Since the local community sports hall and youth club closed there has been an increase in anti-social behaviour. There are very few positive activities young adults can engage with."*

*"I am only young so I haven't experienced being a full part of the community but I know this area is safe so that's why I think our community does work together."*

*"Consistent communication via social media platforms keeps me informed."*

*"There is a lot of skill amongst the villagers in different fields. Most are only too willing to help others, whether it's providing lifts, looking after pets, help with bush and tree pruning etc. If we have a problem, someone will know someone else who can fix it!"*

*"They do the best job possible with the amount of funding they receive. I believe a better job could be done with more social based funding but the amount of voluntary organisations is both uplifting and depressing at the same time. The fact we need food banks is depressing, but people offering this service shows great social cohesion."*

### 3.5 Indicators of community resilience

In helping us to assess the levels of community resilience we looked at various available research including the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) Getting Involved report from 2017, which found that over one in four people formally volunteer once a month and about one-fifth of the UK population is involved in social action in their local community. The report also noted that those from higher social grades and with a higher level of education are more likely to volunteer. Formal activities (trusteeship, voting or campaigning) predominantly attract people from these backgrounds. Additionally, a disproportionate amount of time is given by only a small group of people.

Locally, using the data from the latest Feeling the Difference Survey (Staffordshire Observatory, 2018) results, where 1200 local people from Staffordshire were surveyed, we can state that **94%** of respondents were very or fairly satisfied with their local area. **10%** of respondents had also given unpaid help to a group, club or organisation and **21%** of the respondents across the county had given unpaid help to friends or neighbours. A breakdown for the districts across Staffordshire can be seen in the table below.

	<b>% very / fairly satisfied with the local area</b>	<b>% who have given unpaid help to groups, clubs or organisations</b>	<b>% who have given unpaid help to friends or neighbours</b>
<b>Cannock Chase</b>	94	12	19
<b>East Staffordshire</b>	95	13	29
<b>Lichfield</b>	95	5	7
<b>Newcastle</b>	95	7	7
<b>Stafford</b>	93	13	22
<b>Staffordshire Moorlands</b>	94	11	29
<b>South Staffordshire</b>	95	8	25
<b>Tamworth</b>	94	10	30

SCVYS latest Annual Census (2019) of the voluntary youth sector reveals there are 10,215 active volunteer roles being fulfilled across 195 organisations. These roles complement 840 paid roles in delivering positive activities to 31,494 regularly participating children and young people (0-25 years) annually across Staffordshire. As seen in the following table, these numbers have increased over the past three years. This indicates a level of commitment, engagement and investment in their local community, and in the well-being of others and therefore a greater degree of connection to the community they identify with.

	2017	2018	2019
<b>SCVYS Members</b>	155	170	201
<b>Regular Participation</b>	27,658	28,479	31,494
<b>Active Volunteer Roles</b>	9,242	9,631	10,215
<b>Paid Workforce</b>	613	903	840

### 3.6 Summary of Findings

Free text comments from survey respondents gave some fascinating insights into how people were thinking and feeling. Themes that came up in most, if not all areas included:

- ◆ **A perceived distance between decision makers and communities.** A number of people across districts and age groups commented on “Councillors being out of touch with their local community” and “only interested in their own agenda”
- ◆ **The importance of certain organisations** who play a major role in connecting up the fabric of local communities. Examples that were specifically mentioned included churches (other faith groups could also play this role), uniformed organisations, sports clubs, etc.
- ◆ **Reinvestment across a range of services** including education, youth and community services, police and family support is required to enable high quality support for children, young people and families.
- ◆ Young people are **fearful** of becoming victims and have recurring reasons as to why they might carry a knife/bladed weapon including fear, wanting to appear powerful, protection and safety.

## 4. Conclusion & Recommendations

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As we have seen knife crime is complex both in terms of understanding how it is categorised and subsequently how partners seek to address it. It is also linked to other issues of vulnerability and seems to be more prevalent in areas where deprivation is higher, aspiration is lower and when people feel disconnected to their community as highlighted by the 'Harnessing Lived Experience' and 'Serious Youth Violence' reports previously mentioned. In the attempt to find solutions, we need to look at the root causes whilst meaningfully involving both young people and communities.

It is worth noting that since the initial report focusing on East Staffordshire, a multi-agency task group has been set up locally to address the challenges of Serious Youth Violence. This group continues to meet regularly to drive a partnership response to the strategy forwards. Work so far has included:

- ◆ A local strategy has been written, taking a Public Health approach and aligned to the national Serious Violence Strategy (2018).
- ◆ Complex predictive data needs assessment exercise initially focusing on Stoke on Trent, seeking to identify those most at risk of involvement in serious violence and which agencies if any are already involved, with a view to early intervention to divert them towards more positive life choices and outcomes.
- ◆ Development of a Communications Strategy and multi-agency communications group including running the #ditchtheblade campaign, exploring the potential visit of the [Knife Angel](#) to Staffordshire.
- ◆ External funding applications including Early Intervention Fund (successful), Youth Endowment Fund and West Midlands Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, and scanning for future partnership funding opportunities. Locally based community organisations have also been successful in accessing small funding pots to address local need.

### A Public Health Approach:

- Takes a population approach, not one which just focuses on high risk individuals
- Is preventive: by tackling 'upstream' risk factors, it aims to lessen 'downstream' consequences
- Takes a system wide multi-agency approach including involving business and volunteers
- Takes brave decisions that require a long-term commitment
- Recognises the complexity of the issue, and seeks to build an evidence base that reflects this.



- ◆ Ongoing work to ensure the appropriate and relevant governance and assurance aligned to existing strategic partnerships.
- ◆ Exploration of the development of a local multi-agency serious violence response unit including learning visits to Glasgow and West Midlands.

## 5.1 Recommendations

Based on the results from the desk top review and the analysis of the research data, the following recommendations are made:

- ◆ **Stop stigmatising young people** – value, listen and involve them instead and champion their contribution through a concerted and sustained “good news about young people” campaign to build joint trust. Consider supporting SCVYS campaign to be launched in 2020 or other national campaigns such as #standwithyouth or #powerofyouth.
- ◆ Embed a **whole family support approach** creating positive and healthy environments for children and young people to grow and thrive in.
- ◆ **Divert** children and young people away from potentially toxic environments and into positive, nurturing activities that meet their broadest basic needs as **early as possible**, by **investing in youth services**, children’s social care and other extracurricular activities.
- ◆ Provide **educational support to reduce school exclusions, increase aspiration and improve outcomes** through **early support such as mentoring programmes, high quality alternative education programmes** thereby reducing risk factors and strengthening resilience factors.
- ◆ Invest in **community-based policing** to restore trusting relations and increase reassurance through high visibility and accessibility
- ◆ Create more and better opportunities for **training and employment** to improve young people’s chances of finding work and building professional relationships. Consideration also needs to be given into the means of young people legitimately earning money from a younger age to reduce the allure of illegal earnings.

- ◆ Build on existing **community-based assets**, through co-production of sustainable long-term solutions which are owned and implemented by local people. The loss of an authentic community development workforce due to austerity has inadvertently resulted in communities who feel disconnected with decision makers and those who hold power.
- ◆ A **devolution of both power and resource** is required to re-engage communities in the task of building on their community strengths and self-solving local issues and challenges.
- ◆ **Address issues holistically by using resources effectively and efficiently** (i.e. knife crime) and start seeing that multiple issues are often causally linked to similar vulnerability factors, and can therefore be simultaneously resolved through a targeted but broad ranging approach involving communities, families, young people and trusted adults such as youth workers.

**To create a sustainable solution to issues around knife crime the focus needs to be on effective multi-agency partnership working, proper resourcing of all services for young people and involving communities especially young people and families in local responses.**

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# BALLOT PAPER



## Who makes decisions about what issues?

Important decisions are made by different groups of people depending on where you live in the UK. Some power is shared between the UK Parliament in London, the Scottish Parliament, the Assemblies in Northern Ireland and Wales and some Mayors in England (Devolved Issues). Other decisions that affect all the UK can only be made by the UK Parliament in London (UK Issues).

**YOU HAVE 3 VOTES.** 1 UK issue, 1 Devolved issue and 1 local issue important to you.

*Put a cross next to one UK issue you want to vote for*

- Protect the Environment** We believe that we have a responsibility to protect the environment from the effects of climate change for the next generation; and that the Government should look towards carbon neutral alternatives.
- Votes at 16** Give 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote in all elections/referendums.
- Tackling Hate Crime** We should be educated on how to report hate crime. We believe the Government should invest in creating safe spaces that promote unity in communities.
- Make the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) Statutory Law** This is important for children's rights. The UK government agrees with it but they don't currently have to follow it; we believe they should and make sure our voices are heard in all decisions that affect us.
- Welcome Refugees** Everyone deserves the right to live without fear of death and persecution so we believe that refugees should be welcomed into communities in the UK.

UK

*Put a cross next to one devolved issue you want to vote for*

- Curriculum to Prepare Us for Life** Schools should cover topics like finance, sex and relationship education and politics.
- Tackle Child Poverty** No-one should have a disadvantaged start in life just because of their financial position; the Government should do more to put an end to child poverty.
- Mental Health** Services should be improved with young people's help, and should be available in schools.
- Stop street Harassment** We think it needs to be recognised more. It could be stopped through investment in local strategies; and by both consulting young people and educating young people.
- Put an End to Knife Crime** Too many young people's lives are lost to knife crime; the Government need to do more to help end the knife crime epidemic.

DEVOLVED

*Write down the one local issue most important to you in the box below*

LOCAL

## Appendix 2

UK Votes			
UK Issues		Devolved Issues	
Protect the Environment	392,487	Put an End to Knife Crime	291,199
Tackling Hate Crime	139,947	Mental Health	196,293
Votes at 16	127,597	Curriculum for Life	139,344
Welcome Refugees	97,676	Tackle Child Poverty	131,184
Make the UNCRC Statutory Law	68,196	Stop Street Harassment	74,303

Staffordshire Votes			
UK Issues		Devolved Issues	
Protect the Environment	3,745	Put an End to Knife Crime	2,639
Votes at 16	1,011	Mental Health	1,619
Tackling Hate Crime	887	Tackle Child Poverty	1,132
Welcome Refugees	687	Curriculum for Life	1,041
Make the UNCRC Statutory Law	357	Stop Street Harassment	395

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