Understanding the growth of Knife Crime in East Staffordshire

July 2019

Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services

Contents

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- Communities Against Crimes of Hate (CACH)
- 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: Sally Currie – East Staffordshire LPT Partnership Manager and Loleita Higgins, Public Protection Coordinator – Hate Crime
- 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, etc.

"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

Background to the project

This research is the first of four pieces of work commissioned by the East Staffordshire Local Strategic Partnership on behalf of the local Community Safety Partnership. All four themes have been identified as priorities by partners, and areas of work that would benefit from additional insight prior to determining the best and most relevant interventions to address root cause at the earliest opportunity.

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 life chances and outcomes for individuals, particularly those 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.

SCVYS is a key knowledge holder where the local voluntary sector is concerned, especially on elements which relate to Children, Young People and Families. Some of this knowledge is shared in the report narrative.

Research Aim &Objectives

The aim of the research is to understand the growth of knife crime in East 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

- **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.

- **focus groups** were held by Kinetic Youth Ltd with young people in Rugeley YMCA and Werrington Young Offenders Institute.

- **one-to-one interviews** were held with young people from Eagles Nest Project. These 2 methods involved a total of 50 young people.

Key Findings

♦ The perception that knife crime is both an issue and also one which is growing is higher in East Staffordshire than across the Countywide cohort despite a lower number of people actually admitting to carrying a knife/bladed weapon.

♦ Young people are fearful of becoming victims and have recurring reasons as to why they might carry a knife/bladed weapon including fear, protection and safety. Most of those who are involved, want to break free of the negative cycle they are in but either don't know how or don't feel supported to be able to do so.

♦ More than one in four people don't feel as if they are a part of their community at all in East Staffordshire.

Key Recommendations

♦ The issue of Knife Crime should be responded to by all relevant partner agencies working together appropriately within a wider context of Serious Violence to address root cause, and addressing prevention, early intervention, targeted and complex need support. A Public Health approach is preferable aligned and with reference to the National Strategy on Serious Violence.

♦ The support system for children, young people and families is at financial breaking point with severe pressures on local partners including youth services, Police, Education, Social Care and Health. More investment is required across the board to help resolve this and other challenging issues through a systematic, joined up approach. Young people need to be deliberately included rather than excluded at every opportunity, including in education.

♦ We need to value, celebrate and champion our young people as they are crucial to embedding sustainable community-based solutions to issues such as knife crime, gangs, etc. They need to be meaningfully involved through active and ongoing consultation, engagement and participation and able to hold partners to account for promised actions. Consideration also needs to be given to enable young people to legitimately earn money from a younger age to reduce the allure of illegal earnings.

♦ The data gathered via this survey should be used to build up our understanding of the local picture, to support the work of the Pan-Staffordshire Serious Violence Task Group and to provide a basis to undertake further research to aid partnership understanding of the environment, the issues and the necessary whole system response to Serious Youth Violence.

1. Introduction

1.1   Introduction to the Research

This research project was funded by the East Staffordshire Community Safety Partnership who were seeking to understand the perceived growth in knife crime in the Borough including understanding the reasons why a young person might choose to carry a knife / bladed weapon. Alongside this is the desire to understand the current level of cohesion and resilience in local communities.

This piece is the first of four research and consultation projects commissioned this year, and therefore runs in parallel to the first quarter from April to June 2019.

1.2   Introduction to Knife Crime in Staffordshire

Knife crime is currently a high-profile issue mainly due to recent national media coverage. The local Police and Crime Commissioner called a strategic leadership summit to discuss and start to address the issue in April 2019.

During this meeting it became evident that there was a variance of understanding as to the key central issues (i.e. Serious Youth Violence, Domestic Violence, gangs, educational exclusion, a problem for Stoke on Trent, etc.) and therefore a variance in the level of priority given to it by partner agencies across a diversity two-tier local authority shire County.

Subsequently a task group has been established to better understand the local data, write a serious violence strategy and enable a collaborative approach to delivering more effective solutions. SCVYS represents the local voluntary sector on this task group.

1.3   Where is the research located?

This research sits within the field of Community Safety. In Staffordshire there are two established partnership groups; one for the City and one for the County, in addition to eight district-based governance structures. In East Staffordshire this responsibility sits with the Local Strategic Partnership who commissioned this piece of work. The local community safety priorities for East Staffordshire as identified in the Locality Deal Fund 2019-20 include:

- Domestic Abuse
- Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

- ◆ Public Place Violence (including Youth Violence)
- ◆ Road Safety
- ◆ Substance Misuse
- ◆ Protecting Vulnerability (including modern slavery, honour based abuse, CSE and child abuse, victims of radicalisation, organised immigration crime, hate crime, mental health issues)

Although not a distinct priority in itself, knife crime does feature within several of the above priorities.

1.4   Research Aim & Objectives

The aim of this study will be to understand the growth of knife crime in East Staffordshire. Underpinning this aim are the following research objectives:

- ◆ 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 local community cohesion and resilience

2. Desktop Review

2.1 Introduction

This section will provide a brief analysis on what has already been written in the context of the research aim and its two associated objectives, pulling on both national and local material. 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 business robbery, serious violent crime with injury, serious sexual offences, violence against the person, personal robbery and rape committed by all ages.

2.2 Growth of knife crime

2.2.1 A National Snapshot

Nationally, Home Office data shows that there were 39,818 knife crime offences committed in the 12 months ending September 2018 (excl. Greater Manchester). This is a 66% increase from the low point in the year ending March 2014 when there were 23,945 offences, and is the highest number since comparable data was compiled. (Source: Home Office)

Also, in the year ending September 2018: 21,381 people were cautioned, reprimanded or convicted for carrying a knife in England and Wales. Of those perpetrators, 79% were adults and one in five (4,459) were under the age of 18, which is the highest number for eight years. (Source: Ministry of Justice)

From a youth perspective, knife crime is considered to be the most significant issue facing young people today. The latest UK-wide Make Your Mark (UKYP, 2018) ballot exemplifies this, given that 'putting an end to knife crime' was voted for as the top issue by 18% of the 1.1 million young people aged 11 to 18 taking part in the consultation.

Earlier this year, more than 115,000 people signed a petition demanding a debate on knife crime, resulting in parliament debating the issue in March. Furthermore, research from the

House of Commons Library has found that knife crime, particularly where it affects young people, has been a "persistent and growing concern for successive governments." (British Youth Council Youth Select Committee, 2019). The Youth Select Committee work is still ongoing and is therefore too early to publish their findings and recommendations, however there are a number of submissions to the committee from youth organisations around the Country which can be viewed via the link in the References section.

2.2.2 A Staffordshire Snapshot

Locally, Staffordshire Police data shows that there were 719 knife crime offences committed in the 12-month period spanning March 18 - February 19 (incl. Stoke-on-Trent). This is 5% increase from the previous year, when there were 687 offences. Of those perpetrators, 76% were adults and 24% were under the age of 18. Earlier this year a Staffordshire Police Knife Crime Report (2019) was circulated to partners involved in developing a strategic response to the issue of knife crime. It contained the following key messages and findings taken from the perspective of the police:

Key Messages	Key Findings
♦ Knife Crime is visible in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's communities, and it is not an issue we can tackle on our own. ♦ Staffs Police stop search has increased by 32% in the past 12 months from 333 to 439. 13% relates to weapon finds. ♦ We are doing lots to tackle knife crime and working with partners to drive enforcement and education ♦ Knife Crime cannot and must not be treated in isolation. The threat of knife crime increases when considered with street gangs or drugs activity ♦ Our approach is not to criminalise young people but to safeguard and protect them ♦ We need to understand why young people choose to carry knives ♦ We must encourage conversation about knife crime and look out for signs and concerned.	♦ The volume of knife crime committed by repeat offenders in Staffordshire in the last 12 months is relatively low, with very few repeat victims and locations of significance. We have 61 repeat offenders, with 48% aged under 18. ♦ More individuals are likely to be habitually carrying knives due to a perceived shift in the stigma linked to carrying knives and also due to increased numbers of people feeling they need to carry a knife for protection. Young people are also likely to be pressured by peers into carrying knives. ♦ Possession of knives / blades remains the main type of knife crime. ♦ Robberies where knives / blades are used continue to occur at increased volume. ♦ Knife amnesties are productive in encouraging people to surrender knives, with over 1,900 knives being surrendered in Staffordshire. ♦ Trading standards operations can identify the outlets who are illegally selling knives to underage people and then target them with legislation.

2.3   Why young people might feel the need to carry a knife / bladed weapon

The reasons young people feel a need to carry a knife are varied but there are certainly recurring themes emerging. The British Youth Council's Youth Select Committee research provides useful results from a variety of sources across the country suggesting **fear, protection, safety and image** are all major factors in a young person's decision-making process. Some recent research undertaken in Manchester suggested that **children and young people are afraid of becoming victims** as Traynor (2018) highlights:

> *"Carrying a knife often started as a way to avoid becoming a victim … Most of the people I spoke to who had carried a knife had been threatened, some on multiple occasions. Some had been attacked and a few had been severely injured."*

The research also documented how some young people started carrying knives **to avoid being victimised**. Traynor (2018) also points out that some had gone to the authorities for help, but had largely been ignored:

> *"The one time I went to the police … when I was stabbed … they walked into the house and said how many people done it? I said so and so many people done it from that gang … and they all kind of looked at each other – as if it's gang affiliated or whatever isn't it? So they didn't really care. But if it was just a normal person … they'd have taken it a lot more serious."* (17-year-old boy from London)

This prompts a deeper question as to why young people are afraid for their own safety and protection in their own communities? This could point to gang culture, where people belong to one group, but in belonging then feel alienated and unsafe when around others.

Locally, we can point to the Staffordshire Youth Commission research (Lucas, 2018) which highlighted that **protection** was a primary motivation for carrying a knife. They also noted that **knives were easy to access** either from home or via online shopping websites. Furthermore, young people also associated knife crime with certain geographical areas either because they were more deprived or because of historical incidents which are then perpetuated.

Thinking about the link to gang violence, research participants were also asked about why they felt young people join gangs, the main three reasons highlighted were: a) To earn money; b) They are bored and have nothing positive to do and c) To get "respect" from their peers.

The Youth Commission research made the following recommendations:

♦   Create a curriculum on knife and gang crime to be taught across Primary and Secondary Schools, utilising credible speakers who can talk from experience and with authenticity.

- Give young people the opportunity to earn money before the age of 16, reducing the allure of illegal earnings.
- Raise awareness of existing positive, diversionary activities and also increase the amount and diversity of relevant, accessible recreational activities.

2.4   Levels of Community Cohesion& Resilience

There has been little national or local research published on levels of community cohesion since 2008, following a spate of reports prompted by the local government Strong and Prosperous Communities white paper. (DCLG, 2006)

This is clearly a gap as we have no current baseline data or sense of where we are at locally which is critical especially if we want to be able to evidence progress in this area in future years.

In conclusion, there is a great deal of research, consultation and problem-solving happening around the country, especially in geographical places where knife crime is more prevalent. Much of this is current and ongoing, and this report as well as the wider Staffordshire report which we aim to write as a follow up in the coming months will contribute to our understanding and influence the ways we seek to address the issues raised.

2.5 Societal perceptions of Young People

Looking at potential root causes will involve broadening what is in scope in terms of understanding knife crime. In an example of this, Rooke (2019) writes a compelling article for the Guardian newspaper exploring the way we as a society view and describe young people and how our far too often negative portrayals can formulate both a perceived and actual reality.

In a poll for a report by the Royal Society of the Arts, adults were asked to choose from a list of words to describe teens. The most popular were "selfish", "lazy" and "antisocial". In the same report, 84% of young people surveyed identified with the phrase, "I want to help other people." This seems to demonstrate that there can be a disconnect between perception and reality.

One of the report's authors, Laura Partridge, says: "We really do underestimate teenagers and young people and, when we speak to them, there are so many doing great things; so many have a culture of giving back."

She suggests that such unfair, negative stereotyping can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. "This … could seriously undermine teenagers' confidence about their ability to make a positive change in the world."Whereas, "very often, it is the right kind of support from someone who believes in them that can propel a teenager to do the right thing."

This concept of young people giving back is further supported by Step up to Serve, the organisation behind the #iwill campaign to increase youth social action nationally to 50% by 2020. This gives a powerful endorsement of the capability of young people to bring about change as Hill (2019) articulates: "Give power to young people to take action. Young people have the answers to many of the problems society is facing."

Their latest National Youth Social Action Survey (#iwill, 2018) shows that:

- ◆ 82% of young people want to make the world a better place
- ◆ 6 out of 10 young people have taken part in social action in the last 12 months
- ◆ There is a significant gap in participation between low-income young people and their wealthier peers.

For many of the young people who haven't got involved, it is simply because no one has ever asked them or because they don't know how. But in order to tackle the problems facing society today (including knife crime), we must empower young people and ensure the opportunities to make a difference are open to them. They have the power, energy, resourcefulness, passion and commitment to bring about huge changes both within their local communities and beyond.

2.6   Young people's fears for the future

Personal protection and safety are by no means the only fears young people face when thinking about the future. Recent research published by Barnardo's (2019) suggests there is a 'poverty of hope' amongst young people, with 69% of 16 - 24 year olds surveyed saying they think their generation will have worse happiness and mental health than older generations, in addition to other fears surrounding climate change, house prices, job insecurity and Brexit. Barnardo's recommendations included:

- Children and adolescent mental health services are in need of urgent and sustained investment, which could come from the £20.5bn a year NHS funding settlement

- The Government should commit to increasing investment in community youth work and safe spaces for young people to provide targeted early intervention in vulnerable communities
- The Government should commit to funding a long term, multi-agency strategy to tackle the root causes of youth violence. This approach should provide young people access to housing and a route into education, training and employment, to help them secure a brighter future.

2.7 Relationship between the Public Sector & Communities

Again, thinking more broadly about community-based issues another aspect to consider is the principles and policy approach taken by large parts of the public sector in their interactions with communities in general, and young people in particular.

The New Local Government Network (NLGN) published a paper called the Community Paradigm, whereby its introduction states:

> "With power comes responsibility. This is the essential truth at the heart of this paper. We contend that if public services are to move towards a more preventative approach then individual citizens, and particularly their communities and networks, must take on much greater responsibility for their own lives. However, that flourishing of responsibility will only occur if citizens and communities are given the power to exercise it. This means fundamentally challenging the strong tendency of public services to hoard power rather than share it." (NLGN, 2019)

In order to accomplish this new way of working, NLGN proposed 3 broad principles and 4 policy proposals as detailed below:

The Principles

- **EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES:** Shifting decision-making power out of public service institutions into communities with consequent changes to governance arrangements.
- **RESOURCING COMMUNITIES:** Placing control of public service funding in the hands of communities to ensure that power and responsibility are genuinely transferred. This is increasingly happening with 'discretionary' spend but there is a need to transfer core, strategic budgets as well.
- **CREATING A CULTURE OF COMMUNITY COLLABORATION:** A wholescale shift to prevention can only occur when public service organisations and communities break the hold of hierarchical and transactional mindsets and embody a more collaborative set of behaviours. This must start with the culture of public service organisations themselves.

The Policy Proposals

- **UNCONDITIONAL DEVOLUTION:** Powers and resources cannot be transferred to communities if they remain centralised in Whitehall and Westminster. A precondition for the Community Paradigm is a major process of devolution, led by the principle of empowering communities

- **PARTICIPATORY AND DELIBERATIVE DECISION-MAKING:** Communities must have influence over the big strategic decisions which affect their services, as well as matters of implementation and delivery.

- **COLLABORATIVE DELIVERY:** Reformed public service delivery needs to be shaped by the notion of collaboration both between services and with users. Services need to be incentivised to work together across a place rather than within separate organisational silos.

- **COMMUNITY COMMISSIONING:** The power to commission services needs to be shared between public service organisations and communities or handed over entirely to communities with expert support from public services. Only then can the necessary transfer of powers and resources to communities occur.

3. Evaluation Methods

This section will outline the research approach and evaluation methods utilised in the compilation of this report.

3.1 Research Aim & Objectives

The overarching aim of the research is to understand the growth of knife crime in East Staffordshire. The composite 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.

3.2 Research Approach & Collection

In an attempt to meet the above research aim and objectives, SCVYS decided to adopt a mixed methods approach that comprised both qualitative and quantitative elements, as highlighted below. The timescale allocated to the data collection phase spanned a two-month period during April/May 2019.

3.2.1 Desktop Review

A brief analysis of secondary research was undertaken in the form of local and national reports, articles and data which would provide a broader context to the research aim / objectives. This would also assist in highlighting any similarities or differences within the subsequent findings and analysis section.

3.2.2 Online Community Safety survey

An online survey was developed using Google Forms, which comprised 19 questions in total, including both closed / open ended formats. This would enable quantifiable results to be extracted e.g. demographics / percentages, which would be supplemented by open ended questions to elicit the feelings and opinions of respondents.

The key questions posed within the survey were:

1. Do you think knife crime is an issue in your local community?
2. Do you think there has been a rise in knife crime in your local community?

3. What makes you feel this way?

4. Have you ever carried a knife or bladed object? If so - why and where did you get it from, if not - why do you think people might carry them?

5. How much do you feel part of your local community? What makes you feel this way?

6. How well do you think people in your community work together? What makes you feel this way?

The survey was promoted by both SCVYS and young people from the Staffordshire Youth Union (a Countywide Youth Council including 4 local Members of Youth Parliament), in addition to local schools, youth and children's organisations and through various networks and partnerships.

3.2.3 Focus groups & One-to-one interviews

Focus groups were held by two SCVYS member organisations based in East Staffordshire; Eagles Nest Project and Kinetic Youth Ltd. Both organisations target their work with young people with additional needs and/or vulnerabilities making them an ideal cohort to engage with. Kinetic Youth used the survey questions as a basis for some discussion and feedback gathering quantifiable and qualitative data from Rugeley YMCA and Werrington Young Offenders Institute. SCVYS staff interviewed the young people at Eagles Nest Project on a one to one basis and were able follow additional lines of enquiry that arose. In total 50 young people were involved, spanning the age range of 11-18.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis phase comprised two key elements:

Quantitative Analysis - Data from the survey was downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet to enable the respondent's answers to closed ended questions, to be quantified and presented. For example, Age range demographic, postcode locations, Yes/No or other category-based answers.

Qualitative Analysis - Responses to open ended questions would be analysed from the survey via spreadsheet, and focus group and interviews via facilitators notes. This would enable common themes to be drawn and categorised, supplemented by any pertinent quotes to elaborate on any particular themes.

4. Analysis of Findings

This section will be structured to incorporate the respective findings and analysis against the original research aim and the two associated objectives. It will also include any pertinent comparable statistics and views gleaned from the desktop review that was undertaken.

4.1   Survey Cohort

1,033 online surveys were completed in total between 8th April 2019 and 30th May 2019, of which 18% were respondents from East Staffordshire. The age demographic breakdown of these can be seen in Figure.1 below:

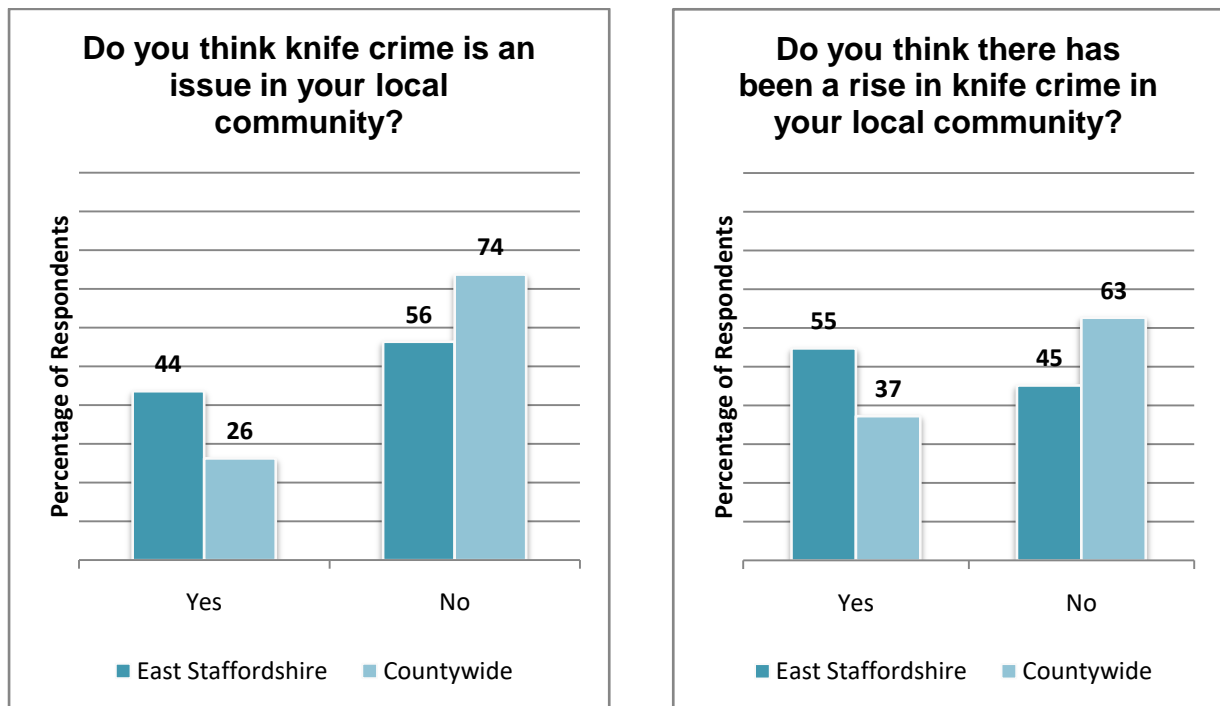| Age Group	Overall online respondents	East Staffordshire respondents
10 and under	5 (0.4%)	2 (1%)
11-18	727 (70.4%)	132 (70%) (+50 in focus groups)
19-25	28 (2.7%)	7 (3.7%)
26-35	42 (4.1%)	12 (6.3%)
36-45	62 (6%)	10 (5.3%)
46-55	77 (7.5%)	12 (6.3%)
56-65	57 (5.5%)	7 (3.7%)
65 and over	35 (3.4%)	7 (3.7%)
Totals	**1,033 (100%)**	**189 (100%)**

Figure 1. Age range of respondents

Although the survey was open to anyone to complete, a significant proportion who responded were young people aged 18 or below (71%). This could be due to the fact that as the survey was being promoted by a youth-focused organisation people assumed it was 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.

4.2 Is Knife Crime growing in East 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. Certainly, the perception from our survey is that 44% of people think it is an issue for East Staffordshire, compared to 26% of people living elsewhere in Staffordshire who think it is an issue in their area. 55% of people responded that it was a growing issue in their local community, whereas only 37% of those from outside East Staffordshire felt it was growing where they live.

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

Percentage of Respondents

Yes — 44 (East Staffordshire), 26 (Countywide)
No — 56 (East Staffordshire), 74 (Countywide)

■ East Staffordshire ■ Countywide

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

Percentage of Respondents

Yes — 55 (East Staffordshire), 37 (Countywide)
No — 45 (East Staffordshire), 63 (Countywide)

■ East Staffordshire ■ Countywide

The reasons given for their responses provide some interesting insights. From those who said they felt there was a rise in knife crime in their local area, **over 65% said that a number of recent local incidents were the reason they felt things were getting worse.** Only 14% felt that increased reporting in the media was their reason for stating rates were rising. Just 7% said it was because of their own personal experience / knowledge that they felt rates were rising.

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 and Coventry. East Staffordshire's diversity might be a reason for this, because if you live outside of Burton upon Trent or in a more rural location like Uttoxeter, the likelihood of knife crime directly impacting upon you or your community is significantly lessened.

4.2.1 East Staffordshire Knife Crime statistics

According to Staffordshire Police's East Staffordshire Knife Crime Dashboard (March 2019) there were 49 recorded incidents in East Staffordshire to March 2019, a drop of 21% on the previous 12 months, the largest fall across the County. All bar 8 recorded incidents took place in 4 neighbourhood areas - Burton Town and Uxbridge (17), Burton Urban (16), Stapenhill and Winshill (8).

This compares to the Staffordshire figure of 687 incidents, down 2% from 700 in the previous 12-month period. Almost half of these incidents were in Stoke on Trent.

In terms of young people and knife crime, East Staffordshire saw a rise of 20% to 25 incidents, in the wider context of an overall slight drop of 4% to 145 across the County, not including Stoke-on-Trent. This placed the Borough second only to Staffordshire Moorlands in terms of incidents. If the City of Stoke is included, the total rises to 256 incidents, meaning that less than 38% of the total knife crime recorded is linked to young people, with around half of these being for possession of a weapon.

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

From people who had actually carried a knife (5% of East Staffordshire respondents) the main reasons identified were:

♦ Of the 19 respondents who said they had carried a knife, 10 had legitimate reasons to do so such as multi-tool devices, using it for work or for their volunteering roles, etc.

♦ Of the remaining 9, the purpose was largely protection and to use if someone else initiated a violent incident. One person said it was for the purpose of self-harm.

> "When I was younger myself, I did not carry a blade. But when it was known other males of the same age may have been looking for me (through verbal/physical disputes) then I may have carried a weapon as the last form of protection in case I was to get caught on my own by these males (who were known for this). So unfortunately like many others it may have been an action that was founded upon my fears and that it may have been a form of protection if running away wasn't an option."
> (Focus group participant)

This was supported by responses of those who had never carried a knife, 26.5% of whom named **protection** as the key motivating factor for carrying a knife. The second highest motivating factor (23%) was felt to be **image**, being seen to be someone who is tough or hard, followed by **personal safety** (15%) and **self-defence** (12%), which are clearly linked to the reasoning of protection.

Less than 7% believed a motivating factor in carrying a knife / bladed weapon would be to intimidate others.
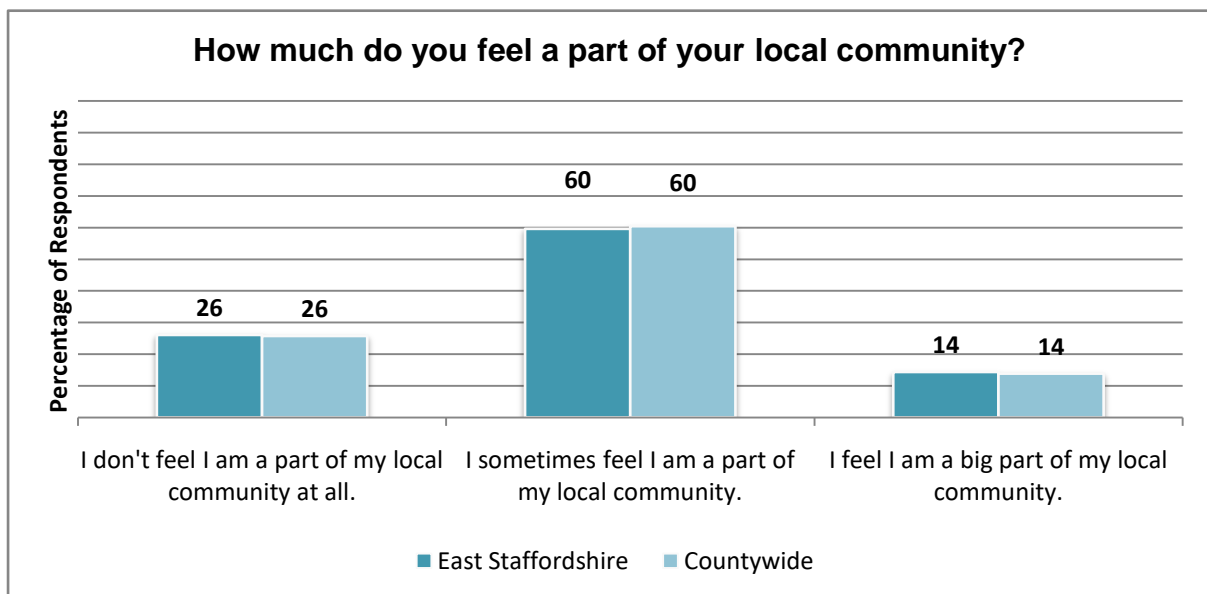
> During one of the interviews with young people, one individual, Steve gave a credible and vivid account of being beaten up by a gang of other young people. This was done in retaliation to something "Steve" had been falsely accused of doing. As Steve recounted the incident, he expressed his disappointment that young people resorted to carrying knives/bladed weapons. He felt that any "beef" (disagreement with others) should be sorted out with an old-fashioned one-on-one fist fight....that would allow people to get it out of their system and move on afterwards, without the potential of longer-term consequences of either being stabbed or of stabbing someone else.

4.4   What about levels of community cohesion in East 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 etc.

4.4.1   How much do you feel a part of your community?

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

Of the responses, **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.

The two key reasons given by respondents for not feeling a part of their community at all were that **'they never get involved in local activities'** and **'they don't talk to people outside of their immediate families and friends.'** A smaller group highlighted a lack of opportunity for involvement in positive activities. This could be solved by awareness of what is available locally or there may be a need to diversify the offer of activities so there is something to meet everyone's needs.
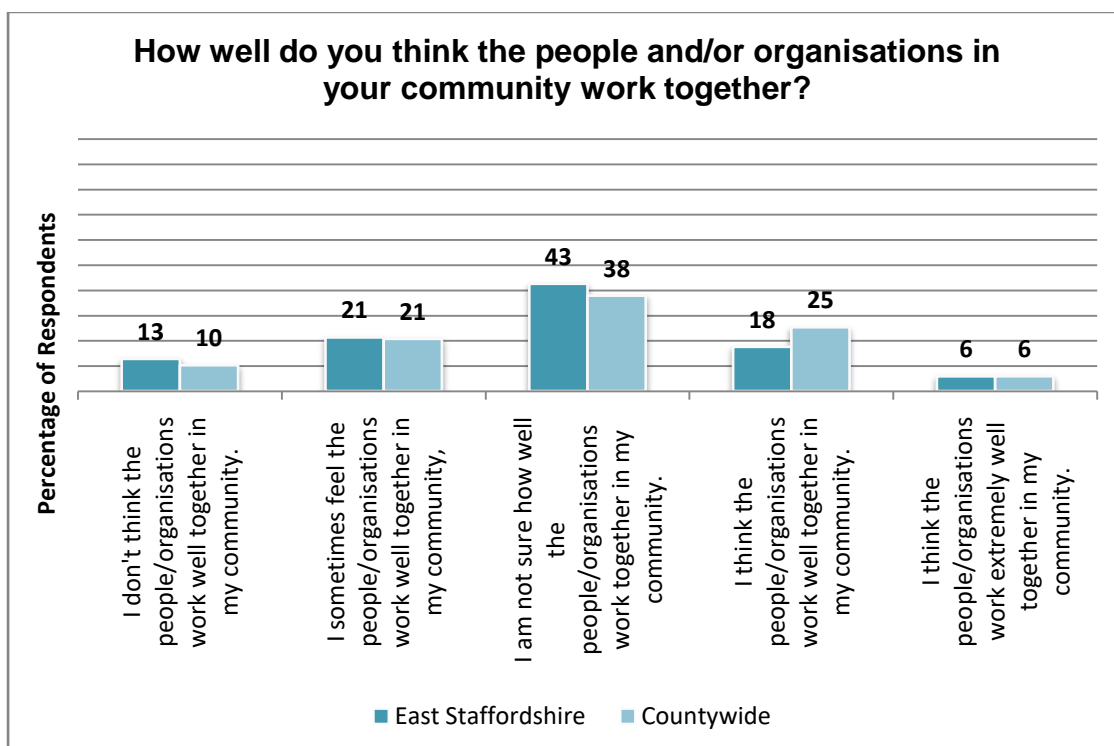
For those who felt a big part of their local community, overwhelmingly this was attributed to regular involvement in activities, commitment and knowing people:

> "I am involved in lots of local groups, activities, etc. I volunteer for several of them. I know quite a lot of people, and have family and friends around me."

What is statistically interesting is that these figures were replicated exactly across the wider cohort of participants, and therefore this seems to be a representative ratio for Staffordshire as a whole, as well as East Staffordshire. In light of the significantly increased diversity of population in East Staffordshire, the equitable comparison could be viewed as an encouraging sign.

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

The second question in this section asked 'how well do you think the people and/or organisations in your community work together', followed by five selectable options as below:

> "There are loads of community groups doing good things. I keep finding out about new ones popping up all over the place - like Beautiful Burton who organise litter pick walks on a weekly basis in different locations, helping to keep the town looking good."
>
> "I see positive work going on first hand, the charity sector is great."

Only 6% of East Staffordshire respondents think that people and organisations worked **extremely** well together in their community, with a further 18% saying they think people and organisations **generally** work well together.

43% are **not sure** how well people and organisations work together:

> **"I'm unaware of any initiatives, this does not mean they are not happening"**

Whereas, 21% say they feel **sometimes** people and organisations work well together and 13% **don't think** that people and organisations work well together in their local community:

> "People expect others or the council to sort everything out. No one takes responsibility for themselves or their community anymore."
>
> "There seems to be no leadership in community life"
>
> "In my direct locality there are good avenues for communication through local village amenities, people often come together to organise. In the wider local community, many of the structures for this have been disbanded or have become outmoded through increased use of social media which are less well organised."

4.5   How can we assess levels 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."**

"While there is great diversity of activities, the picture is quite different when looking at who is involved. Even though overall numbers of people involved are significant, the levels and types of involvement vary a lot according to demographics. The largest differences concern socio-economic status and education, with people in higher social grades and a higher level of education being more likely to get involved. Additionally, a disproportionate amount of time is given by only a small group of people, the civic core. Formal activities (volunteering through a group or organisation, trusteeship, voting or campaigning) are more exclusive and

predominantly attract people who are older, well-educated and from higher socio-economic backgrounds." (NCVO, 2017)

Locally, the data from the Feeling the Difference Survey (Staffordshire Observatory, 2018) results, where 150 local people from East Staffordshire were surveyed, we can state that **95%** of respondents **were fairly or very satisfied with the local area**. A rise of 3% on the Wave 24, March 2018 figure of 92%.

However, **6%** of people **rated community tension or discrimination as a very or fairly big issue in the area** in October 2018. This is a reduction from 7% from the previous survey (March 2018), but is double the overall Staffordshire county rate of 3%.

13% of those surveyed have given unpaid help to groups, clubs or organisations, which rises to 29% if helping friends or neighbours is included. Both of these are significantly higher than the Staffordshire figures of 10% and 21% respectively.

From our knowledge of the local sector, both Burton upon Trent and Uttoxeter have strong contingents comprising small local groups through to larger charities with significant turnover. Notably, partnership and collaboration between these groups is a demonstrable local strength.

4.6   Hate crime as a potential indicator of levels of Community Cohesion?

One potential indicator of current levels of overall community cohesion is the level of hate crime, and whether this is rising or falling.

Communities Against Crimes of Hate (CACH) work across the 6 southern districts of Staffordshire, including since 2015, East Staffordshire.

CACH deliver education and training as well as offering support to victims and demand for this aspect of the service has also increased alongside the higher profile and understanding of hate crime. In 2018/19 they delivered education sessions to 5,278 young people and training/awareness raising sessions to 566 professionals and community members.

In the last year (1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019) CACH recorded 357 incidents of which 89 (24.9%) were in East Staffordshire. This is a 144% increase on the pre-Brexit figure from 2015/16 of 146. (Source: McLauchlan, 2019)

Police data shows a 17% decrease in hate crime incidents for the 12 months until May 2019 to 225. The same neighbourhoods (Burton Urban, Burton Town / Uxbridge and Winshill /

Stapenhill) again feature in the top three in terms of volume of incidents, although all but Burton Urban have seen a fall in the number of incidents from last year.

Of the victims of hate crime, 66% were male, 32% were female and 2% undisclosed. Whilst in terms of perpetrators, 71% were male and 38% were female with 1% undisclosed.

4.7   Other Contributory Factors

Looking at the issue more holistically, research has identified a number of contributory factors which should be considered alongside the development of any local solutions.

4.7.1   Toxic environments for children which are created or worsened by austerity

Anywhere that young people spend their time, i.e. homes, schools, neighbourhoods or in recreational activities, can become toxic environments for children, when relationships and experiences fail to nurture, protect and help them to achieve their potential.

Significant exposure to any of these potentially toxic environments can leave their mark on children and young people. They can become fearful and in order to feel safer might resort to carrying knives, joining gangs and/or committing violent acts. It is no coincidence that the vast majority of knife crime takes place in neighbourhoods suffering from huge social disadvantage and disinvestment. As Case and Haines highlight:

> *"Knife crime is a symptom of the toxic environments that adults create around children, who then become both perpetrators and victims. It is created by politicians and by the politics of austerity." (2019)*

This is further reinforced by the national figures attributed to this disinvestment and the subsequent impact of austerity on young people nationally:

- **£422.3m**: The reduction in spending on services for young people in the last six years
- **3,500:**   The number of local authority youth service jobs lost since 2010
- **600:**   The number of youth centres closed since 2010
- **130,000:**   The number of places in local authority run youth centres lost since 2010
- **199,752:**   Total Police numbers(the same as in 2003), but 18% fewer than 2010.

4.7.2 Children/Young people have little or no trust in the authorities to protect them

Trust is a critical indicator of community cohesion, and in particular trust of those with the perceived authority to protect and look after those in the community.

> *"The link between carrying a weapon and distrusting the police is an important new finding … It's possible that young people who live in high-crime neighbourhoods or who are already involved in crime may not see the police as being able or willing to protect them from harm. In those situations, it is unsurprising that a young person would see carrying a weapon as justified or necessary." (Brennan, 2018)*

5. Conclusion & Recommendations

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.

In the attempt to find solutions, we need to look at the root causes whilst meaningfully involving both young people and communities.

5.1   Recommendations

Based on the results from this research the following recommendations are made:

♦   The issue of Knife Crime should be responded to by all relevant partner agencies working together appropriately within a wider context of Serious Violence to address root cause, and addressing prevention, early intervention, targeted and complex need support. A Public Health approach is preferable aligned and with reference to the National Strategy on Serious Violence. This approach is one which:

> - 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.

♦   The support system for children, young people and families is at financial breaking point with severe pressures on local partners including youth services, Police, Education, Social Care and Health. More investment is required across the board to help resolve this and other challenging issues through a systematic, joined up approach. Young people need to be deliberately included rather than excluded at every opportunity, including in education.

- We need to value, celebrate and champion our young people as they are crucial to embedding sustainable community-based solutions to issues such as knife crime, gangs, etc. They need to be meaningfully involved through active and ongoing consultation, engagement and participation and able to hold partners to account for promised actions. Consideration also needs to be given to enable young people to legitimately earn money from a younger age to reduce the allure of illegal earnings.

- The data gathered via this survey should be used to build up our understanding of the local picture, to support the work of the Pan-Staffordshire Serious Violence Task Group and to provide a basis to undertake further research to aid partnership understanding of the environment, the issues and the necessary whole system response to Serious Youth Violence.

5.2 Considerations for long term sustainable solutions

In light of the complexity of solving an issue like knife crime it would be remiss of us not to mention the critical elements of a longer term more sustainable solution to not only this issue, but other similar ones which seem to pop up periodically linked to the vulnerability of individuals in our society.

The best solutions for any problematic issues come about when communities of interest are involved from the start in a meaningful way. For knife crime this must include young people themselves as important contributors, however local partners need to ensure that opportunities to engage and contribute are undertaken in a meaningful way with a commitment to feedback on the contribution made otherwise the risk is that young people feel alienated from the solution and the problem becomes exacerbated.

Below is a list of factors which we believe need to be considered if tangible and lasting solutions are to be found:

- Stop stigmatising young people – value, champion, listen and involve them instead through a concerted and sustained "good news about young people" campaign

- 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

- Invest 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

- ◆ Work with families and communities to support, educate and empower young people

- ◆ Invest in community-based policing to restore trusting relations and increase reassurance through high visibility and accessibility

- ◆ Create opportunities for training and employment to improve young people's chances finding work and building professional relationships

- ◆ Build on existing community-based assets, to create sustainable long-term solutions which are owned and implemented by local people

- ◆ Stop looking at issues in isolation (i.e. knife crime) and start addressing multiple issues linked to vulnerability through a targeted but broad ranging approach involving trusted adult mentors and youth workers.

If partner agencies, properly resourced from national and local Government, can begin to work collaboratively in this way with local communities then the opportunity to address poverty of aspiration by supporting and inspiring children and young people to maximise their potential within the context of their local community, then the future is indeed bright for East Staffordshire.

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