

Deputy Speaker,

I would like to address the House on the issue of knife crime.

Upon being appointed as Home Secretary, I made it clear that my priority this term is tackling the growing and imminent threat of knife crime, and its devastating impact on communities across the country. As someone who's family fell victim to knife crime many years ago, I believe it would be reductive for the Government to pursue a harsher policing stance on knife crime without acknowledging that the reasons people turn to crime are complex and based on a large number of personal experiences or environmental factors. It has been 15 years since Ben Kinsella, a 16-year old boy from Islington, was violently murdered, and despite the efforts of charities such as the Ben Kinsella Trust and the tireless efforts of police officers over the country, Governments of all colours have failed to employ a joined-up strategy and seriously invest in tackling the issue.

It is my aim to ensure that a holistic approach is taken, and therefore I will lay out both the ambitions of the Government, and our next steps forward.

His Majesty's Government will, over the next year, launch a knife amnesty programme in England that will serve as an important initiative to help take knives off the streets and out of the hands of gangs. The programme will be designed in consultation with relevant stakeholders in education, health and police forces, but will encourage individuals to anonymously surrender their knives without facing any legal repercussions. The scheme will involve the set up of designated collection points across the country, starting with police stations and outside nightclubs, and later expanding to other accessible locations.

This Government will issue an order under the Licensing Act 2003, amending the licensing conditions for nightclubs in operation in England to mandate that these premises have a knife amnesty collection point.

In order to facilitate the establishment of these collection points, HM Government will provide additional funding of £1,000 per month to each police station in the UK as compensation for the physical space required for these collection points. The number of active police stations can vary over time due to operational changes and mergers, but there were around 1,100 police stations in England in 2021.

In the private sector, nightclubs will be provided with £2,500 per month for the establishment of these knife amnesty collection points, to be open and accessible during the businesses' trading hours. This additional funding is to reflect the necessary additional staff costs for licensees as a result of the scheme. There are approximately 600 nightclubs in England, according to a report by the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers (ALMR) in 2018.

Therefore, the total estimated annual cost for the premises and facilities rental across police stations and nightclubs is expected to be £31,200,000.

Additional training will be provided to licensed security personnel on the operation of these knife amnesty collection points by police officers and the Home Office, for which the Home Office will be allocated an additional £5 million. In addition to this, the cost of secure disposal and recycling of these knives will vary depending on the efficacy of the programme, but an additional amount of £10 million per annum will be initially allocated for this purpose.

Accompanying this scheme, the Government will launch a widespread campaign to raise awareness about the knife amnesty programme, utilising various channels such as television, radio, social media, and community outreach to inform the public about the initiative, emphasising the anonymous and safe nature of the programme. To support such efforts, the Home Office will allocate £40 million per annum to advertising the knife amnesty programme as well as highlighting the devastating impact of knife crime on communities.

The Home Office, in conjunction with local police forces and the Department of Education, will evaluate annually the efficacy of the Knife Amnesty Programme. This annual review will include, but not be limited to, monitoring the number and types of knives surrendered, geographical distribution, knife crime statistics and any other relevant metrics to assess the impact of the initiative. It is the ambition of this Government that, if the initial launch of the scheme is successful, further amnesty programmes will be launched tackling other areas of anti-social behaviour, including other offensive weapons and narcotics. Such measures may present the opportunity for future economies of scale.

Alongside the Knife Amnesty Programme, in order to address the root causes of knife crime it is crucial to educate young people about the consequences of gangs and knife-related violence. The Home Office will work closely alongside the Department for Education, and will establish and integrate the following educational agenda into our strategy for tackling knife crime:

- **Curriculum Integration:** The Home Office will collaborate with education authorities to incorporate lessons on the consequences of gangs, knife crime, and violence into the school curriculum. We will work with education professionals to ensure that the content is age-appropriate and engaging.
- **Increased Police Talks in Schools:** The Home Office will ensure that police officers are able to visit schools on a more regular basis and deliver talks about knife crime.
- **Guest Speakers and Workshops:** The Home Office will organise regular sessions in schools and further education where individuals affected by knife crime, former gang members, and community leaders can share their personal stories and insights. These interactive sessions can help young people develop empathy, understand the risks, and make informed choices.
- **Peer Support Programs:** The Department for Education will implement peer support initiatives within schools, where older students act as mentors for younger students. This can create a supportive environment, provide positive role models, and discourage involvement in gangs or knife crime.
- **Increased partnership with Community Organisations:** The Home Office and Department for Education will collaborate with local community organisations, charities, and youth

centers to deliver additional educational programs, mentoring schemes, and extracurricular activities focused on preventing knife crime.

While the Knife Amnesty Programme and expanded education are necessary parts of the framework to tackling knife crime, it is also essential that communities feel as though police officers are taking the right action to stop violent offenders. However, sending young people to prison should not be the first point of call and is not always effective at protecting communities, evidenced by the extremely high reoffending rate across the United Kingdom. Therefore, this Government will present a Bill to the House of Commons introducing Knife Crime Prevention Orders, a non-criminal disclosure requirement which imposes conditions on those who have, or are likely to be involved in knife crime. Such conditions shall include, but not be limited to, increased access to mental health support and counselling, as well as regular check-ins with a police officer or social worker, with the aim to effectively reduce offending rates and prevent the cycle of criminalisation which more punitive methods of justice suffer from.

In order to achieve the objectives of the schemes outlined in this statement, the Home Office will be allocated an additional £25 million to support increased staffing levels, community engagement and appropriately resourcing the measures outlined above.

The total cost of the Knife Amnesty Programme and expanded education for tackling knife crime is estimated to be £101,200,000. Taking current budgetary figures for the 2023-24 financial year, this will increase the budget for the Home Office from £16,810,000,000 to £16,911,200,000.

I urge the House to support this statement, and to support investment in tackling the root causes of knife crime. These measures announced today will make a tangible impact on reducing knife crime and protecting our young people, while reducing the impact that the scourge of knife crime has on communities across England.

I commend this statement to the House.

(M: The last available data on national advertising campaigns were during Covid, where Public Health England spent approximately £80m on an annualised basis on public information advertising. We intend for the advertising campaign to be approximately half the size of the PHE advertising during Covid, so a £40m figure has been used)

This statement was submitted by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, His Grace the Duke of Dorset Sir /u/Rea-wakey KCT KT KD KCMG KBE MVO FRS on behalf of His Majesty's 33rd Government.