

## House of Commons Home Affairs Committee Serious Violence Inquiry

16 August 2018

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**London Youth**  
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## About this consultation

The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee has opened the [Serious Violence Inquiry](#) and is calling for evidence before 16 August 2018.

The inquiry is investigating the effectiveness of the Government's approach in combatting knife crime, gun crime and homicide as established in the [Serious Violence Strategy](#). Published in April 2018, the strategy is the Home Office's plan for addressing serious violence in the coming years. It includes new initiatives and commitment of funding, as well as linking existing or forthcoming programmes to the countering youth violence agenda.

## About London Youth

[London Youth](#) is a federation of over 370 community youth organisations in London. We are a youth charity on a mission to improve the lives of young people in London, challenging them to become the best they can. Young people need opportunities outside school to have fun with their friends, to learn new skills, to make a positive change in their communities and to shape the city they live in.

We deliver a broad range of meaningful benefits to our members, including funded opportunities, training and professional development, specialist networks, Quality Mark accreditation, and a policy and research voice. With members and partners, we deliver sports, arts, and youth social action programmes, as well as the [Talent Match London](#) employability programme to young people in London.

We also run two residential centres, [Hindleap Warren](#) in Sussex and [Woodrow High House](#) in Buckinghamshire, that help young people develop their skills and confidence through specialist outdoor education. We directly develop the confidence, resilience and relationship skills of over 27,000 children and young people each year on our programmes and reach tens of thousands more through our membership network.

London Youth believes it is vital to connect decision-makers with young people and the 370 community youth organisations in our membership. We are able to facilitate:

- Visits to community youth organisations;
- Consultation on specific issues or programmes with young people and youth work professionals; and
- Young people or youth work professionals speaking or giving evidence.

## About this response

Since 2012, London Youth has been facilitating the [Tackling Youth Violence Network](#). The network meets quarterly and brings together youth work and youth violence professionals from across London to share best practice, network and partner, and connect with policymakers. We have compiled this response based on discussions at a consultation session with London Youth's members and associate members, as well as members of the Tackling Youth Violence Network.

## Our response

London Youth considers that effectively tackling youth violence should be among the highest public policy priorities for the United Kingdom and definitely for London. We welcome much of the Government's strategy, but do not consider it to deliver the change required.

We consider that this will require a fundamentally different approach that brings together all relevant stakeholders – including the Government, devolved administrations, local authorities, the police, health authorities, the voluntary sector, local communities, and young people themselves – to effect real change. This systemic change should be informed by a public health model, focus on early intervention, and commit to sustained multi-agency collaboration on addressing youth violence and its root causes.

It is important to emphasise that serious youth violence is not separate from other instances of serious violence, or their underlying causes, in society. London Youth and our members consider it vital not to only focus on the negative experiences of young people, but also to recognize the huge positive contribution of young people and community youth organisations across London. This Government will be successful in reducing youth violence when it aspires to ensure not only the safety and wellbeing of all young people, but also to ensure they can truly achieve their potential.

We consider it necessary to note that every instance of youth violence leaves behind a powerful and lasting legacy of trauma and grief for young people, their families, and their communities.

What progress has been made on combatting serious violent crime in recent years, and especially since the previous Government set out some of its policies in this area in response to a Home Affairs Committee report on gangs and youth crime in March 2015?

Our members have reported that the prevalence and nature of youth violence has worsened since at least 2015. In London, there has been a steep and sustained rise in the number of victims of serious youth violence since 2013.<sup>1</sup> A common sentiment among our members is that we have gone backwards, as improved outcomes over the last decade have disappeared in recent years. This is echoed by frustration that lessons learnt on how to meaningfully tackle youth violence over the last two decades have been ignored due to political expediency, particularly relating to the effect of austerity on local authorities, the police, health authorities, and youth provision.

Our own polling of 1,000 young Londoners between 15 and 25 years old found that 50% considered the lack of safety and policing the worst thing about living in London and 47% placed reducing crime and violence in their top three choices to improve the city.<sup>2</sup>

While individual boroughs or communities in London have seen improved outcomes in certain areas, there is concern that this been due to a focus on addressing the least complex cases, leaving the most complex cases unaddressed.

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<sup>1</sup> Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) (2018) *Gang Crime and Serious Youth Violence Dashboard*.

<sup>2</sup> London Youth (2017) *Listening to Young Londoners*. NB: Unpublished data, available on request.

Is the Serious Violence Strategy likely to be effective in combatting serious crime?

Our position is that the Government's Serious Violence Strategy is a positive start, but will not be effective in tackling youth violence. We take the position that the strategy is fragmented, tying together a number of separate initiatives and existing Government programmes without providing a cohesive plan for reducing youth violence nationally or in London.

Despite the positive language focusing on prevention, the strategy insufficiently defines prevention and does not commit sufficient resources to deliver meaningful prevention provision. We take the position that community youth organisations are a key stakeholder in reducing youth violence.<sup>3</sup> This is true of open-access universal provision, which provide young people with preventative support and positive opportunities, and targeted programmes, which support young people through specific interventions. The strategy does not lay out a clear vision for engaging with youth organisations, particularly smaller and community-based organisations, which often have the closest relationships with vulnerable young people. The strategy should consider not only ways to distribute funding to the youth sector, but also ways of including the sector in decision-making and information-gathering. Given that youth provision is increasingly being delivered by the voluntary sector, it is vital that the Government consider means for partnership with youth organisations.

We do not consider that the strategy contains an approach that will make a significant change to the occurrence or root causes of serious youth violence. We support a public health approach that to create multi-agency partnerships to implement a holistic and long-term approach to reducing youth violence.<sup>4</sup> We consider that a new settlement for youth provision must be agreed between the Government, local authorities, and the voluntary sector. This must ensure that community youth organisations have sustainable sources of funding and include a statutory commitment to ensure that all young people are able to access high-quality youth provision in their communities.

Community youth organisations are part of the solution to reducing youth violence and must be supported to work effectively with statutory and other services. This strategy does not include a systematic approach to enable and provide resources for efficient referrals between the statutory services, such as the police, and community youth organisations.

We consider that it is untenable to significantly reduce youth violence without also addressing a range of inter-related issues that are largely beyond the scope of this strategy. These include: a lack of affordable housing and the high cost of living in London, austerity and the decline in public services, insufficient mental health support for young people, and a lack of positive employment opportunities. Our members also note negative outcomes in the education system for young people, particularly related to the negative outcomes associated with increasing rates of exclusion and insufficient preparation for non-academic career pathways.<sup>5</sup> A successful strategy to reduce youth violence would mirror a young person's journey, ensuring long-term and coordinated support.

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<sup>3</sup> London Community Foundation (2018) [\*The Violence Virus\*](#).

<sup>4</sup> Youth Violence Commission (2018) [\*Interim Report\*](#).

<sup>5</sup> Commons Education Committee (2018) [\*Forgotten Children: Alternative provision and the scandal of ever increasing exclusions\*](#).

We take the position that the strategy must also focus on providing positive opportunities for young people. This should include greater coordination with the Departments for Education and Work & Pensions to ensure genuine employment opportunities for young people. Our research into 'hidden' young people, those who are not in education, employment, or training and are not accessing statutory welfare support, estimated that there could be as many as 480,000 young people in this situation across the country.<sup>6</sup> We would support the increased roll-out of diversion programmes across London and increased employability support for young people in custody.

Is the new balance between prevention and effective law enforcement described in the Serious Violence Strategy the right one?

We welcome the acknowledgement in the strategy that law enforcement alone will not tackle serious youth violence. We also welcome the Government's commitment to making prevention a genuine priority. However, the strategy includes very few details about how its prevention programmes will work in practice. It also does not provide detail on engagement with the voluntary sector, particularly community youth organisations.

An effective law enforcement approach must empower the police to reconsider the use of force when interacting with children and young people and adopt a safeguarding approach. We regularly hear from our members that they want a much greater focus on community policing, including regular outreach to young people in schools and youth organisations. This would improve relationships between young people, local communities, and the police. Our experience is that these relationships have been strained by a lack of trust and over tactics such as stop and search. We have heard from members and young people that the police are now seen as a purely reactive force and that this negatively affects young people's sense of protection from adults and the authorities. It is our experience that many young people choose to carry knives because they themselves are scared of becoming the victims of youth violence.

Are there sufficient resources in place to make the Strategy successful?

We welcome the additional resources in the strategy, particularly the recently doubled Early Intervention Youth Fund and the Community Fund. However, the resources committed in the strategy are not sufficient to combat youth violence when split across the country.

We consider that community youth organisations are a vital part of meaningfully addressing youth violence. Since 2011, many areas of London have seen significant reductions in local authority funding for youth services. Recent figures indicate that between 2011/12 and 2017/18, £39 million was cut from local authority youth service budgets across London (around 44% of previous budgets), and 81 youth centres or youth projects were closed.<sup>7</sup> The changing role of local authorities in delivering, funding, and commissioning youth provision has meant a greater burden on voluntary organisations in the youth sector. The voluntary youth sector have had to rely on a more diverse range of funding, which has translated to smaller and shorter-term funds being available and a trend towards targeted interventions rather than preventative, universal provision

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<sup>6</sup> London Youth (2017) *Hidden in Plain Sight: Young Londoners unemployed yet unsupported*.

<sup>7</sup> Sian Berry AM (2018) *London's Lost Youth Services 2018*.

youth work.<sup>8</sup> We do not consider that this resources committed in this strategy will effectively counterbalance the effect of these reductions in funding.

To what extent should the devolved administrations be involved in the Government's strategy to tackle serious violence?

We strongly believe that a coordinated approach to tackling youth violence must be adopted in London. This must include greater coordination between the Government, the Mayor of London, borough councils, statutory services, and the voluntary sector. There is a particular need for the Home Office and the Mayor to coordinate their individual activities, as exemplified by the parallel but separate London Needs You Alive and #knifefree campaigns.

The Mayor's £45 million Young Londoners Fund has been the most serious commitment to addressing youth violence in London. We welcome this funding and would encourage the Government to make commitments at a similar scale. However, we have concerned that funding for prevention and early intervention programmes is not coordinated between the Government, London's devolved administration, local authorities, and private funders.

We are calling for the adoption of a multi-agency, public health approach to reducing youth violence in London. This would be impossible to implement without the Mayor's committed support, along with that of the Government and the London boroughs.

The Committee will be particularly interested in evidence on whether the four main themes in the Serious Crime Strategy are the right ones and whether they will provide the clarity and direction needed to tackle the problem. The themes are:

- Tackling County Lines and Misuse of Drugs
- Early Intervention and Prevention
- Supporting Communities and Local Partnerships
- Effective Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Response

We consider the second and third themes, Early Intervention & Prevention and Supporting Communities & Local Partnerships, to be especially relevant to the youth sector and support these as key themes.

We consider that the strategy does not meaningfully engage with disparate outcomes with law enforcement and the criminal justice system according to ethnic background, particularly for young people from black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. As established conclusively in the Government's Race Disparity Audit, young people face a number of hugely disparate outcomes with law enforcement and the criminal justice systems depending on their ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The strategy does not meaningfully address socio-economic inequality. We consider these to be particularly powerful root drivers and root causes of youth violence, which must be meaningfully addressed. These issues are felt particularly acutely within London, where 2.3 million people, or

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<sup>8</sup> London Youth (2017) [\*Young People's Capital of the World? Understanding and responding to young Londoner's changing needs.\*](#)

27% of Londoners, live in poverty (after housing costs are taken into account), significantly higher than the average for England.<sup>9</sup> Of those living in poverty, 58% are living in a working family and more live in the private rented sector than any other type of housing. The main factor explaining this disparity in poverty rates is housing costs.

## Get in touch



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**London Youth** is the operating name of The Federation of London Youth Clubs, a Registered Charity (Number 303324) and a Company Limited by Guarantee (Number 258577)

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<sup>9</sup> Trust for London (2017) [\*London's Poverty Profile\*](#).