

Report to OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Youth Council Motion: Knife Crime

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Chadderton, Cabinet Member Children's Services

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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of the Youth Council Motion agreed at the Council meeting held on 10th July 2019 on the topic of knife crime.

Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council was asked to carry out an overview and scrutiny of the current youth offer across Oldham to ensure there was a broad range of high-quality activities available to all young people there were accessible, regardless of where they lived.
- 1.2 Overview and Scrutiny Board discussed the motion on 10th July 2019 and agreed to discuss the motion with the Youth Council. The Chair met with the Youth Mayor on 24th September and it was agreed that representatives attend the Overview and Scrutiny Board to discuss the motion and discuss ways forward.

Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Board review the youth offer available across the Borough.

Youth Council Motion: Knife Crime

1 Background

1.1 The following motion was presented by the Youth Council on 10 July 2019:

“In the Year up to March 2018, in a report by the Office for National Statistics’ (ONS), analysis of knife crime figures showed that the number of fatal stabbings in England and Wales was at its highest level since 1946. With just less than 5,000 young people, aged 10 to 17, cautioned or convicted of a knife related crime and an 45% increase in the number of people, aged 16 to 24, that had been a victim of knife crime, it appears to be at epidemic levels.

It must be mentioned as well that this is not a London based problem as suggested by some media. Thankfully the report showed Oldham was not in the top ten when looking at numbers of homicides per 100,000 population, however, other North West areas were in the top 10 rankings of ‘worst place for killings’.

In our 2018 Make Your Mark consultation, 2,167 young people voted to ‘Put an End to Knife Crime’ as their number one issues that needs to be tackled in Oldham. This was the top issue, coming higher than ending homelessness and equal pay for equal work. Given this was voted by our constituents we have made this a priority. As such Oldham Youth Council wanted to dig deeper into this issue so used 10-forward survey, going out into our communities to consult with young people to find out why they feel knife crime is an issue and what can be done to reduce it.

Our surveys would suggest that most of Oldham’s young people do not carry bladed weapons, but 14% of respondents did admit to having carried a knife. Half of these suggested they carried a knife for legitimate reasons, such as for Duke of Edinburgh Award or for eating their lunches, but the other half felt they needed it for protection. If this result is suggestive of the numbers of young people carrying bladed weapons it would seem to be much higher than the number of young people cautioned or convicted, which represents less than 1% of the 10 to 17-year-old population. The survey responses also showed that nearly 40% of young people knew someone who had carried a knife. While this doesn’t give an indication of levels of knife crime it may suggest that young people who do carry knives or bladed weapons are happy to share this fact to brag or intimidate, which, may lead to more fear in young people and a need for protection that they assume a knife brings.

Those who don’t carry knives were concerned that they could be arrested and that they could be injured by carrying knives. This would appear to show that current awareness and education is working for young people but probably only for those who wouldn’t pick up knives anyway. We as Oldham Youth Council have pledged to work with local schools and Oldham Council to help develop that training to keep getting the message across but also try and mitigate any fears coming from moral panics around knife crime.

We wanted to flip the questioning on its head by asking why most young people do not carry knives. The biggest response was that young people didn't need to because they felt safe. This leads us to conclude that it is a perception of places being unsafe rather than real lived experience that leads young people to carrying weapons. Therefore, we feel that work needs to be done, with young people, to challenge the misconception portrayed across the media that UK streets are dangerous. In working with young people to show that Oldham is a safe place to live, work and go to school we would hope to challenge the minority of young people that carry bladed weapons and prevent others from taking up knives. Indeed, participants indicated that they felt that safety should come from adult support. Responses asked for a higher Police presence, not just to catch criminals but to engage the community. They suggested that organisations, such as the Police and Local Authority, should work with young people outside of the classroom to divert them from any potential negative behaviours, but also engage young people to help them feel safe and prevent the perceived need to carry knives. They asked for support from organisations, to provide places to go where they can receive help, advice and information as well as alternative positive activities to dissuade them from involvement in knife crime.

We as Oldham Youth Council recognise the benefits of young people engaging with adults, especially professionals whose role it is to work with and support young people. Recently the All-Parliamentary Group for Youth Affairs reported that the loss of youth services has contributed to the rise in knife crime, plus, that youth work provides a safe environment and a qualified youth worker to build trust and de-escalate conflict. The Report highlighted that those authorities where cuts to youth services were the largest had the biggest increases in knife crime related incidents.

We want Oldham to be a safe place for all, we want Oldham to ensure that all our children and young people are given every opportunity to grow up in a town where they can thrive and where they can reach their full potential.

We recognise that young people need access to high quality youth opportunities. Opportunities that enhance life chances, provide learning and development and enable young people to become positive and active citizens.

We propose that Oldham Council recognises that Oldham is committed to providing quality support and opportunities for all its young people and we ask that Oldham Council carry out an overview and scrutiny of the current youth offer across Oldham to ensure there is a broad range of high quality activities available to all young people, that are accessible, regardless of where they live."

2 **Current Position**

- 2.1 The Youth Council have pledged to work with local schools and the Council to help develop training to keep getting the message across.

3 **Key Issues for Overview and Scrutiny to Discuss**

- 3.1 Members are asked to:

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- discuss the current youth offer across Oldham;
 - awareness and training available for young people; and
 - support and opportunities available for young people.

4 **Key Questions for Overview and Scrutiny to Consider**

4.1 The impact on the current youth offer in Oldham.

5. **Links to Corporate Outcomes**

5.1 The links to Thriving Communities through nurturing and safeguarding strong neighbourhoods that work together to improve lives and the communities around them.

7 **Consultation**

7.1 Consultation undertaken with representatives from the Youth Council.

8 **Appendices**

8.1 None.