Innovation Unit
New solutions for thriving societies

Community views on violence affecting young people in Greater Manchester

Final Report

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THANKS TO

We spoke to over 350 people across Greater Manchester during our research, including young mothers, faith leaders, school students and adult offenders. In addition, we received 326 survey responses from teachers in Greater Manchester schools.

Thank you to the many organisations and individuals who kindly gave up their time to speak to us:

St Catherine's Academy Bolton; youth workers in Bolton;
Bolton Homes Community Navigators; Bolton Youth Offending Services;
Stockport Youth Offending Services; Stockport Academy;
Stockport Life Leisure Youth Services; youth workers in Rochdale;
Heybridge School, Rochdale; the Bangladeshi Centre, Hyde;
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The Shed, Tameside; Noahs ART, Tameside;
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A Bed for Every Night,Tameside; Mahdlo (Oldham) Youth Zone;
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Wigan Integrated Offender Management Services;
Wigan Youth Offending Services; taxi drivers and bus station assistant in Salford;
shopkeepers and security guards in Salford; Salford Youth Justice Service;
Ellesmere Park High School, Salford; Winton Children Centre Nursery, Salford;
Bounce Central UK trampoline park, Salford;
Salford Red Devils Rising Stars Rugby League Group.

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New Solutions for thriving societies

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Introduction

This research was jointly commissioned by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and the ten Greater Manchester local authorities. It is intended to inform these organisations' shared action plan to tackle violent crime; in particular, violent crime involving weapons in which young adults and young people are perpetrators or victims.

Between 2015 and 2018, knife crime offences in Greater Manchester (GM) rose by 89%. This included 127 knife crime offences in schools, a 108% increase since 2015 and the equivalent of more than three knife offences occurring in schools across Greater Manchester each week. Over half of offences relating to possession of a weapon involve 10-24 year olds. One in 10 knife crimes in Greater Manchester is committed by 15-19 year olds against victims of the same age.[1]

This research is grounded in the voices and views of over 650 people, community groups and organisations from across Greater Manchester. The aim was to understand the drivers of recent increases in violent crime in GM by talking to a range of people beyond the 'usual voices' about their perceptions and experience of violent crime in their communities, to add depth and insight to the statistics.

During this research we heard a perception that adult violence and domestic violence is prevalent in Greater Manchester, and is often linked to drug and alcohol misuse. However, violence associated with young people (10-25 year olds), including incidents in which a weapon is carried, was cited repeatedly as a key community concern, and our fieldwork focussed more on what was influencing the lives, decisions and behaviours of this group. In particular we spoke to many young adults and young people (10-25) about their perceptions and experiences, as well as those people who work with young adults and young people in statutory services and in community organisations.

Combining views gathered across this consultation has highlighted six key concerns shared by young people and adults alike:

1: Social media is viewed as amplifying and exacerbating violent conflict.

2: There are concerns that young people are growing up in school, home and community environments in which conflict and violence are normalised.

3: Changes to neighbourhood policing are seen as the cause of a worsening relationship between communities and police.

4: Vulnerability and fear are important drivers in the increase in young people carrying weapons.

5: 'Toxic masculinity' and pressure to conform appears to increase the likelihood of young men being perpetrators or victims of violent crime.

6: Communities feel there is an urgent need to create safe places and strong relationships to divert young people from violent crime.

1. 'The Extent and Nature of Knife Crime in Greater Manchester', Manchester Metropolitan University, July 2019

This report includes a number of recommended next steps for agencies across GM to further explore and address these concerns.

The authors would like to note that, unless otherwise specified, when referring to *young people* throughout this report we are referring to children, adolescents and young adults up to the age of 25.

1. Social media is viewed as amplifying and exacerbating violent conflict

Social media is viewed as having a significant influence on violent crime in Greater Manchester, and on young people's involvement in violence in particular. Though it may not be a direct cause, social media is seen as having amplified, facilitated and exacerbated aggressive and violent conflict.

A. Young people described a feeling of there being fewer consequences for what they do online. They described finding it hard to let go of conflicts with peers, and that the unrelenting presence, pressure and public nature of social media meant less time to process thoughts, feelings and actions. We heard that social media is used to organise fights or attacks, which are then filmed and shared, providing an ongoing warning or reminder and resulting in some victims reliving traumatic events.

B. Many of those we spoke to with a history of violence told us about the influence of drill music in normalising and inciting violence. However, we also heard, particularly from youth workers, that the emergence of drill music and its proliferation on social media has given some young people a voice that they may not have had before.

C. Many of the parents that we spoke to, told us that they struggle to supervise their children's use of social media, due to a combination of a lack of social media transparency and a lack of parents' technological savvy. We also listened to parents' difficulties in setting rules around phones, building their child's resilience and dealing with the perceived addictive nature of social media. As one parent from Trafford put it, "we can barely cope [with social media and phones] ourselves as adults and we have the life skills to deal with phones. How are we expecting 11 year olds to cope?"

D. We heard that social media has expanded the market for illegal drugs and weapons in Greater Manchester. Historically, these markets have been controlled by a small number of gangs who used violence to control supply in specific postcodes. We heard that social media has helped to break down these boundaries and enabled a new 'gig economy' to emerge, resulting in an unpredictable and chaotic street power struggle. The picture painted by young people was one in which a handful of organised gangs had been superseded by a large number of much smaller groups - loose and fluid affiliations with individuals operating more like sole traders whose allegiances shift on a daily basis.

It is important to note that this is by no means the experience of the majority of young adults and young people in Greater Manchester, and that social media is not necessarily in itself a cause of conflict. However, for too many young people, particularly those who are already vulnerable; social media can exacerbate an already difficult, and unsafe community context.

2. There are concerns that young people are growing up in school, home and community environments in which conflict and violence are normalised

We heard from people across the board – including parents, teachers, youth workers and former offenders – that children and young people were more likely to become involved in violence if they were exposed to violence in their family home, local community and school.

A. People described how violence involving older siblings, parents or extended family members affected young children whether it occured in or outside the home. We heard that parents feel they lack the skills, tools and support to cope with young people's behaviour, leaving them struggling to manage. We also heard stories of young children growing up in chaotic and violent family environments, creating poor parental attachment, complex vulnerability and a normalising of violent behaviour.

B. It was noted by the teachers in our survey that school violence has increased, particularly at secondary school, and that some young people felt unsafe in school and on the way to school. Some parents raised the role of exclusions - whether fixed-term or permanent - in making at-risk young people more vulnerable to criminal recruitment and activity.

C. We heard a perception that violence and illegal drugs has become normalised within communities, both affluent and low-income, alongside the grooming by adults of young people in the community for criminal exploitation.

D. Many young people told us that peer groups had a strong influence over their involvement in violent crime. We heard in some instances how peer pressure can be particularly strong when joining a new group of friends. Many of the young people we spoke with agreed that the age at which peer pressure peaks is around 13 or 14.

3. Changes to neighbourhood policing are seen as the cause of a worsening relationship between communities and police

A. Many participants felt that **neighbourhood policing was insufficient**. Very few people we spoke to from across the community said they had recently spoken to police officers or PCSOs, and many felt that this lack of police presence has resulted in a breakdown of mutual respect, trust and positive relationships with the police, particularly for young people.

B. There were concerns raised that both **low-level and violent crime was not seen to be being dealt with adequately**. However, many community members expressed sympathy for the police as they felt that the police lacked the resources and deterrents to deal with crime at a community level. *"There is a lack of respect and no deterrent. I feel for the police because their tools have been diminished."*[1]

C. Teachers were vocal about their **desire to have more police presence** in schools to educate and engage young people. We also noted that a reluctance to report crimes – in part because of a perception of inaction – is making it much harder for the police to tackle violent crime.

4. Vulnerability and fear are important drivers in the increase in young people carrying weapons

A. Throughout the research, we noted that fear and a feeling of vulnerability appears to be driving people to carry weapons. Many young people said they – or other people – **carried weapons because they were afraid for their own safety**. The choice was, in the words of a Salford young offender, *"10 years or life"* - a 10 year prison sentence or risk losing your own life. We also heard how the act of carrying a weapon can create an expectation and pressure from others that the weapon will be used, rapidly escalating conflict situations.

B. The perception of how many young people carry weapons may not match the reality of how many actually do carry. **This fear that 'everyone' is carrying a weapon is as important a driver** of behaviour, as the reality of others being armed. We noted that young people are just as likely to carry an alternative weapon to a knife or hide the weapon nearby, partly in the knowledge that carrying a knife is a more easily punishable offence.

C. Our survey of teachers on the action they would take if a pupil was found to be carrying a weapon shows a **disconnect between the response young people say they need and the ways in which schools tend to act**. Young people were clear that properly listening to a young person found with a weapon was crucial. In contrast, of the teachers responding to the survey: 52% would exclude the child on a fixed-term basis and 20% on a permanent basis.

"Young people are scared but this is not fuelled by reality."[2] *"They think more people carry than actually do. It is that perceptions versus reality thing."*[3]

1 & 2. Youth worker, Rochdale
3. Oldham MAHDLO youth worker

5. 'Toxic masculinity' appears to increase the likelihood of young men being perpetrators and victims of violent crime

National evidence shows that young men are much more likely to be both perpetrators and victims of violent crime.[1] Our research suggests that social norms and expectations of masculinity are affecting the behaviour of young men, resulting in aggressive and violent behaviour.

A. We heard that many boys and young men in Greater Manchester are being told more than ever before that retaliation is a strength and emotions other than aggression are feminine: *"Don't cry", "don't be a pussy", "act tough"* and become the *"top dog"*. We heard that unhealthy attitudes towards women and girls are resulting in girls being coerced into carrying weapons on behalf of boys, in addition to violent abuse towards them. Teachers and youth services spoke in particular of the need for more anger and conflict management education: *"I don't know the stats, but I think a lot of them get into fights because someone looked at them wrong, it is just about what they think a man is."*[2]

B. Social media has increased the pressure to build and uphold a strong masculine image both online and offline. We heard that this focus on image has increased the social pressure on young men to behave and interact in a certain way, and to create and publish content to reinforce a highly edited version of themselves. We heard that this pressure was beginning at an earlier and earlier age, resulting in young boys being drawn into violence and criminality to achieve and maintain a reputation, image and status.

1. Home Office, Serious Violence Strategy, April 2018 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-strategy)
2. Probation Officer, Adult Offender Management Unit, Central Manchester

6. Communities feel there is an urgent need to create safe places and strong relationships to divert young people from violent crime

Many of the people we talked to remarked on how a greater sense of purpose and more opportunities could divert young people away from serious violence.

A. We heard how **bored children and young people end up in unsuitable and unsafe places**. Many people described a significant need for safe places where young people can "*hang out*" and build positive relationships with other adults in the community and with their peers, exploring boundaries and taking risks in controlled environments.

B. This does not necessarily entail new buildings; people felt that **safe places could be found in existing community assets**. Money could instead be focused on youth outreach by adults who can help build relationships for the long term. This included more positive role models and local mentors who were willing to "*walk life with them*"[1] and who were "*people from that area who care*"[2]. We heard that interventions targeted at young people already involved in serious violent crime should be timely, demanding, physical, motivating and designed to break negative routines and thought patterns.

C. We also heard that **more education on the consequences of violent crime** would create a better understanding and encourage fewer young people to become involved: *"When they stab someone I don't think they realise they are taking someone's life away. I don't think they realise that people love them [the victim]."*[3]

D. Alarmingly, we were told that some young people would not apply first aid to a stranger who had been stabbed in the street, but instead walk past, due to **fears of responsibility and culpability for the situation** as well as a lack of confidence in their first aid skills: *"If they died you'd feel like it was your fault."*[4] and *"If they die, your fingerprints are on them."*[5]

1. Faith leader quoted at a Community Cohesion Event
2. Youth worker, Trafford
3. 11-year-old girl from a Stockport girls' sports group
4. All boys school workshop, Trafford
5. Young person from Oldham MAHDLO

Recommendations

This research was jointly commissioned by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and the ten GM local authorities. It is intended to inform these organisations' shared action plan to tackle violent crime; in particular, violent crime involving carrying weapons in which young people are perpetrators or victims.

The people we talked to during the course of our research have provided a wealth of material and insight into violent crime across Greater Manchester, from which we have developed recommendations across 10 themes drawn directly from the insights above.

Some of these recommendations have been inspired by good practice from Greater Manchester, internationally and elsewhere in the UK, including the Bolton Homes Community Navigators Scheme; the Glasgow Violence Disruptors; and Redthread's Youth Violence Intervention Programme operating in Accident & Emergency departments in south London.

1. Social media education and reporting of violent content

a) Introduce a social media education programme for all Year 6 children and their parents

Develop an educational programme delivered through schools, and co-developed by young people and leading social media companies for all Year 6 children (age 10-11) and their parents. This could focus on equipping young people and parents to be able to better navigate the pressures and understand the potential dangerous consequences of social media use. The programme could also look to empower the user – young people – to use social media in a healthy and positive way, as well as empowering the parent or guardian to use social media as a way to communicate with their child on subjects such as fear and hopes for the future. Year 10 students (age 14-15) could also be involved with the delivery of the programme to younger pupils.

b) Lobby social media companies to improve the reporting of violent content

Lobby social media companies to improve their reporting processes for violent content. This includes understanding how best to market reporting to young people; improving the workflow and communication channels between social media companies and the police; and making violent content less accessible by changing algorithm options. The focus should be on empowering the user by giving them the ability to report inappropriate content coupled with visibility of changes being made. The emphasis should be on a nuanced and thoughtful approach to violent content, rather than sending it underground through broad-brush bans and restrictions.

2. Provide single-sex lessons addressing violence and identity
Revise and develop a universal single sex PSHE curriculum in Year 8 for both boys and girls. The curriculum could teach young people the skills to be more risk aware and manage aggression, hostility and conflict; understand peer pressures and develop identities and aspirations which do not rely on violence or exploitation. The single-sex nature of the lessons could help young people to understand and navigate the gendered pressures they experience as well as better facilitate spaces where they can be vulnerable. It could be taught by a shared pastoral team (see recommendation 7) or by local youth outreach (see recommendation 5).

3. Introduce Community Guardians in housing estates with high levels of violent crime
Introduce community guardians in areas experiencing high levels of violence. Guardians act as community representatives by building an ongoing communication channel between the community and the landlords and locality teams. This would be in order to: help share community intelligence with those who can productively use it - including to help the police to make more pragmatic and worthwhile interventions; better safeguard and reassure residents about the actions put in place to combat violent crime; help to address issues with housing earlier and more effectively as well as build better relationships between the police and the community. This could be implemented on an estate-by-estate basis.

4. Create locality-based violent crime reduction teams
Develop multidisciplinary locality-based violent crime reduction teams that utilise A&E and police data to proactively respond to local violence. This team could also provide local intelligence to the GM-wide Violent Crime Reduction Team. The number of locality teams could vary per local authority to reflect local context and could include neighbourhood police officers, local youth outreach, A&E nurses, children's social workers and school staff.

5. A review of locality-based youth outreach and neighbourhood policing
Review locality-based youth outreach. These roles could be played by youth workers, mentors, community members or other professionals who are best placed to reach out to young people in the community. This role focuses on providing more consistent relationships and guidance to young people; utilizing community assets; and helping to build young people's sense of purpose and ownership.

In addition, review the current approach to neighbourhood policing, including how to build better relationships with communities and how to better work with schools. This could involve school-based officers who may build closer relationships with young people, look to understand the full context and be better placed to inform young people of the consequences of violence.

6. Introduce an 'Opportunity to Change' targeted youth intervention
Create an 'opportunity to change' targeted youth intervention, which could have both junior (age 10-12) and senior (age 13-16) pathways. The programme could include elements such as conflict management, emotional awareness, residential sessions and a long-term mentoring programme. Content could be tailored and delivered by an appropriate place-based multi-agency team. It could be aimed at young people referred by local services for offending, at risk of offending or victims of violence.

7. Create shared pastoral teams for pupils in Years 5-9
Establish a shared pastoral team across primary and secondary schools to provide better continuity for children and families during the transition between schools. This could improve the flows of information from primary to secondary schools and provide a point of contact for parents and children during this difficult phase, in addition to enabling secondary school teachers to make more informed preventative steps to proactively de-escalate behaviour.

8. Support parents to tackle unwanted behaviour

a) Universal information sessions for parents of 10-11 year olds
Deliver multiple universal information sessions that would help empower and educate parents to support their child through the transition from primary to secondary school. The sessions could help parents to better understand their child's development, share concerns and strategies with one another, prepare for future challenges and create a parental peer support network. It could be delivered by the shared pastoral team, who are responsible for years 5-9.

b) Targeted parenting support offer
A targeted parenting offer for parents of young people where there are multiple risk factors. The risk factors could include social care involvement, truancy, conduct problems, youth offending and parents or siblings in the criminal justice system. Parents would be invited to receive parenting support on an evidence-based parenting programme to build family relations, improve parental behaviour management and attachment and create a support network.

9. A review of non-custodial sentences, to increase their effectiveness at deterring people from carrying weapons
Review how and when non-custodial sentencing is most effective as a deterrent for carrying, hiding and using weapons. In particular, this could incorporate the review of the use of tagging and restorative justice. The focus of the review could be to improve public confidence in the police, justice system and sentencing process, and also increase the transparency of sentences for offences involving a weapon.

10. Raise public awareness of the causes and impact of violent crime
Raise awareness around the dangers, consequences and impacts of knife crime. This could be targeted at 11-17 year olds in Greater Manchester. Messages which displayed empathy with the young person's situation and messages around the human consequences of violent crime were received best by the people we spoke to. Young people also told us that advertising on buses, tailored video content – with well-known role models – and campaigns on Snapchat would be most accessible.

Introduction

This research was jointly commissioned by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and the ten GM local authorities. It is intended to inform these organisations' shared action plan to tackle violent crime; in particular, violent crime involving carrying weapons in which young people are perpetrators or victims.

The majority of violent crime is not committed by young people; similarly, the vast majority of young people are not involved in violent crime. However, there is some evidence that the proportions of both are rising. In February 2019 the NHS England released data[1] showing that, while admissions for all injuries caused by an assault with a sharp object had risen by almost a third between 2012 and 2018, admissions of those aged between 10 and 19 had risen by around 55%. In 2018, children and young adults aged 10-29 accounted for 60% of admissions for assault involving a knife or sharp object.

Similarly, ONS data[2] for England and Wales for the year ending March 2018 shows that young people aged 16 to 24 were more likely to be victims of violence than those in older age groups, and more than twice as likely than the general adult population to know their attacker. For victims aged between 10 and 15, the perpetrator was also: in the same age bracket in 78% of cases, a pupil at the victim's school in 86% of cases, and a friend (including boyfriend or girlfriend) in 13% of incidents.

Between 2015 and 2018, knife crime offences in Greater Manchester rose by 89%, to 6,196 crimes in 2018. Of these offences, 41% related to possession – a 129% increase. 127 knife crime offences occurred in schools, a 108% increase since 2015 and the equivalent of more than three knife offences occurring in schools across Greater Manchester each week. Over half of offences relating to possession involve 10-24 year olds, with one in 10 knife crimes in Greater Manchester committed by 15-19 year olds against victims of the same age.[3]

Aim and scope

There are many bodies of evidence of what works in tackling violent crime but less evidence on understanding what it is like to live in communities that experience violent crime. The objective of this research was to generate a set of insights from a range of people across Greater Manchester, beyond the 'usual voices' to add depth and insight into what the statistics tell us.

During this research we heard a perception that adult violence and domestic violence, is often linked to drug and alcohol misuse; and that these are prevalent in Greater Manchester. However, violence associated with young people (10-25 year olds), including incidents in which a weapon is carried, was cited repeatedly as a key community concern, and our fieldwork, insights, and recommendations focussed more on what was influencing the lives, decisions and behaviours of this group.

1. https://www.england.nhs.uk/2019/02/teens-admitted-to-hospital/
2.https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/thenatureofviolentcrimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2018
3. 'The Extent and Nature of Knife Crime in Greater Manchester', Manchester Metropolitan University, July 2019

Much of our research chimes with the Home Affairs Select Committee Report on serious youth violence, published in August 2019[1]. That report looked at drug-related violence, changes to neighbourhood policing, the effect of poverty in families and communities, and the need for youth outreach and co-designed community projects at a national level.

Where our analysis differs is the inclusion of:

- the impact of social media on amplifying violent conflict and shaping the market for illegal drugs and weapons;
- the impact of toxic masculinity and pressure to conform to masculine stereotypes on violent conflict; and
- the relationship between fear and vulnerability and carrying weapons.

Our analysis is specific to Greater Manchester and may not relate to the national situation on violent crime. It is important to note that this research is not informed by expert evidence and datasets; instead, we have spoken to people living and working in communities affected by violent crime – both young and old; victims and perpetrators; and concerned residents.

Although we spoke to people from every Local Authority in Greater Manchester, and we met a diverse group of people and gathered a wide range of different views, our sample was not scientifically constructed. Instead it did focus more on violence committed and experienced by young people and young adults within the community. We remained flexible and opportunistic throughout, to gain as wide a range of perspectives as possible.

This report does not, therefore, present a necessarily accurate picture of the views of all residents of Greater Manchester; it also, importantly, does not state as fact the views that we have heard. But we believe it is an important piece of the picture – a set of insights into the perceptions, views, feelings, fears and ideas of communities in Greater Manchester that can help to shape a whole-community response.

1. Home Affairs Select Committee – Serious Youth Violence (Aug 2019)
https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmhaff/1016/101602.htm

Methodology

The fieldwork involved interviews and workshops with over 350 individuals, community groups and organisations, and included:

- structured interviews with young offenders and adult offenders convicted of violent offences;
- workshops with primary and secondary school pupils, young people with special educational needs or disabilities and teenagers attending a Pupil Referral Unit;
- consultations with young people (aged 7-18) taking part in sports programmes and at youth centres;
- conversations with parents of children and young adults in a variety of settings, including at children's centres;
- conversations with professionals working with families and in the community, including youth workers, children's centre staff and community navigators;
- conversations with shopkeepers (Salford only), taxi drivers, faith group leaders and older residents;
- interviews with residents of homeless hostels with experience of crime;
- a survey of 326 teachers in primary and secondary schools across Greater Manchester.

The key lines of enquiry that have structured this research are:

1. The level of fear in communities and how this manifests: how individuals and communities process hostility and conflict and respond to trauma, bereavement and loss.
2. The influence of peer groups (both positive and negative) on conflict and violence.
3. The extent to which adult behavioural norms is influencing violent behaviour in young people.
4. The influence of parents, siblings and extended family on norms around conflict, masculinity and pressure to conform.
5. The influence of drugs and alcohol on violence, both on individuals directly and through the structures of the drug economy.
6. The attitude of schools towards violence and strategies to support and educate young people to avoid conflict.
7. The ways in which police and other community safety roles can help to reduce violence.
8. The extent to which gangs and organised crime are driving violence.
9. How local geography (territory, boundaries and significant places) and the built environment affect patterns of violence.
10. The influence of social media on norms around conflict and violence.

Insight 1: Social media is amplifying and exacerbating violent conflict, and influencing the market for drugs and weapons

Our research indicates that social media is having a significant – and underestimated – influence on the increase in violent crime in Greater Manchester. As one Bolton youth worker put it, "*10 years ago things were very different. The influence and pressure social media has caused cannot be underestimated. It is the top reason why serious violent crime has increased.*"

Social media includes everything from YouTube to Instagram to WhatsApp. It is ubiquitous, widely accessible and changing the way we interact with one another. This is equally true for adults as for young people, but we heard in our research the additional pressure that social media can place on already vulnerable young people, and its perceived role in exacerbating and amplifying already difficult and confrontational contexts. For young people we heard about *"keyboard warriors"*, the unrelenting pressure from social media and the *"need and addiction for likes"* [1]. We also heard about the struggle to build offline relationships; the ease of organising and recording violent content; and the widespread view – including held by young people themselves – that social media is causing a desensitisation and normalisation of violence.

From parents we heard about a struggle to supervise social media, due to a combination of a lack of social media transparency and a lack of parents' technological savvy. We also listened to parents' difficulties in setting rules around phones, building their child's resilience and dealing with the perceived addictive nature of social media. As one parent from Trafford put it, "we can barely cope [with social media and phones] ourselves as adults and we have the life skills to deal with phones. How are we expecting 11 year olds to cope?"

Finally, we heard that social media is helping to reshape crime in neighbourhoods by bypassing the conventional structures and hierarchies. Increased access to weapons and drugs has meant that *"any 13 year old could be the top dog on the street"*[2] and there is now a proliferation of hundreds of small loose groupings rather than just a small handful of gangs. This new context and landscape is more unstable, chaotic and unpredictable.

1. Teacher, Bolton
2. Offender from central Manchester

1.1 Social media is amplifying and exacerbating the way people behave, resulting in more aggressive and violent conflict

People feel that there are fewer consequences for what they do online, leading to less consideration for other people's feelings

A common phrase we heard from parents, young people and youth workers from across Greater Manchester was the term *"keyboard warriors"*. This is the idea that people can "*peck people's heads online*"[1], meaning to continuously harass through messaging, whether they knew them or not.

We heard a belief that people felt there were fewer consequences for the way they behave online; *"no one ever thinks they can get caught for what they do online"*[2], *"it is not face to face so there are no feelings of consequence"* [3]. A youth worker in Bolton told us, *"on social media they just call each other every name under the sun".*

Social media creates relentless pressure, exacerbating conflict

Regardless of whether the conflict started online or offline, we found that many young people were finding it harder to let go of conflict because of social media: *"Where you used to leave school you could forget about it [conflict], now there is no chance."*[4]

Social media now means that anyone – including people for whom they might not have contact details for – are a touch of a button away. Young people described finding it hard to let go of conflicts with peers, and that the unrelenting presence, pressure and public nature of social media meant less time to process thoughts, feelings and actions: *"on Facebook and Snapchat 'beef' gets flamed up."*[5]

The increased intensity of interactions means conflict which may have once taken weeks, can reach boiling point in days or hours: *"Things just get passed on through classes and friends of friends… the thing [conflict] travels through online really quickly."*[6] The Trafford boys in a school workshop agreed with this: *"fights happen on that day [of the conflict]. There is often disagreement at lunchtime, then they [fights] are like planned over the next few periods over social media before the fight after school."*

Where once people might have had time away from the conflict, because of the proliferation of phones and social media this time no longer exists. The pressure is now unrelenting and can build to a point where the lid of a situation may blow off in dramatic fashion.

1, 2. Trafford boys school workshop
3. Parent at a community navigators workshop
4. Bolton youth worker
5. Young offender, Bolton
6. Bolton boys school workshop

Social media is used to organise violence

We heard that social media is used to organise fights or attacks, which are then filmed and shared, providing an ongoing warning or reminder and resulting in some victims reliving traumatic events.

The Girls Sports Group Leader in Stockport suggested that there is now *"more violence because it is just so easy to communicate to rival groups in turf wars"*. Where once it might have taken some planning to organise a fight, now the access to communication has made it much easier to coordinate. As one of the boys in the Oldham school workshop mentioned, you do not even need to plan it or be in someone's network: *"it is so easy to find out where people are right now. Like their location is on social media. You do not even need to plan a fight."*

Nearly all the school-age children we spoke to said that fights usually occurred after school: *"fights happen after school, like 10 minutes after school. They are often like 2 minutes away from school, so just far enough away from the school premises"*[1]. A boy from Trafford spoke about how despite there being few verbal conversations *"the funny thing is that everyone knows about it [the fight], because everyone is standing there with their phones out recording it. So they must all know what is about to happen [because of social media messaging]"*[2]. The Salford Red Devil boys pointed out that many of the current measures taken by schools don't tackle the problem: *"If teachers just exclude or put culprits of fights in detention – this doesn't solve the problem as it can just push it online and after school."*

We also heard how fights are more likely to involve a number of people: *"no one ever meets to have a one-on-one anymore"*[3]. Instead, using social media and access to a large group of allies, it is now easier to engage networks and friends to join the conflict: *"It used to be just small groups but now there is 1,000 friends getting involved"*[4]. In Salford we heard how *"Fights are just 10 guys there fighting for no reason"*[5].

Social media can quickly escalate conflict from trivial roots

We frequently heard that social media can help to trigger violent crime from trivial starting points. A young person from Oldham said, *"people just fight over shoes"*; a teenager in Bury said: *"The fights are usually over petty things, like 'you been texting to my boyfriend behind my back'"*; an ex-offender from central Manchester said it was normally about *"girls, drugs and other stupid things";* a Rochdale youth worker summarised it well by saying how *"arbitrary things can turn into huge violence with big consequences".* As we will come onto in Insight 4, one young person in Wigan remarked, *"there's no such thing as fighting with your hands anymore"* – that is to say because of weapon-carrying the jump from normal dispute to serious violence is now much smaller, with trivial disputes spiralling quickly out of control.

Multiple young people spoke about fights and violent crime being started without a reason: *"I don't remember the reason...I think it started with 'Tik Tok' [a social media video app]";* and a Wigan young offender said he'd *"just start beef with someone just walking past or something I see online".*

1, 2. Trafford boys school workshop
3. Offender, central Manchester
4. Youth worker, Bolton
5. Young person from Salford Red Devils
6. Girls sports group workshop, Stockport

Recorded violence means that people re-live trauma

In the past, these fights may have once remained localised. However, we heard numerous accounts of young people capturing the violence and spreading it to a much bigger audience: *"All the fights get put on Facebook and Snapchat"*[1], and *"people screen record it and put it on their snapchat stories"*[2]. This creates a permanent and undeletable record of events that is accessible for more than just the small immediate audience who were present.

A teacher in Trafford commented that, *"the biggest problem is not the fight after school it is the Snapchatting then resharing… I just don't think [children] know what is out there in the big bad world".* The re-sharing of content can cause additional anxiety and suffering for the victim: *"Once you get beat up, it can be quite embarrassing on social media. People just pecking at you."*[3]

Some of the teenagers we spoke to were aware of this and knew not to share violent images and videos because of the further consequences: *"I wouldn't send it on... it's humiliating for the other person."*[4]

Nearly all young people we spoke to watch and see violent images and videos on their phones. About a third of girls and two-thirds of boys we met were willing to share them through social media sites such as Snapchat and Instagram. An interesting finding throughout the school workshops is that many young people said they do not share fights or violent content, and yet when probed would still send it to their friends via Snapchat and WhatsApp.

The willingness to re-share videos of fights depended on their relationship with the perpetrator and victim. If they liked the victim they would be less likely to share this type of footage as they understood that sharing could cause them more distress; if the victim was someone they didn't get on with they would be more likely share through more 'public' channels such as on their public Snapchat stories. Nearly all of the 15 boys we met in Trafford would share the fight if the victim was someone who they didn't like, because they would *"want to show everyone that he is an idiot".*

The teachers and youth workers we spoke to, were concerned about how this permanent digital footprint impacts on young people as they move into adult life. A youth worker from Bolton remarked, *"It's almost funny how bad the system is. There is like that timehop feature on Facebook which will then remind you about the trauma you faced exactly one year ago".*

1. Boys school workshop, Trafford
2. Girls school workshop, Salford
3. Boys school workshop, Salford
4. Year 6 school workshop, Rochdale

A key reason for sharing violent content is a desire for peer approval

One of the key factors driving young people to re-share violent content is the *"need and addiction for likes"*[1] – or a desire for peer approval. The best content to share online, and that attracts the most likes, is content that is relatable, grabs your attention and is authentic. Violence ticks all of those boxes, particularly if it is a fight involving someone you know. A 13-year-old girl from Stockport remarked that, *"People do it [share violent content] so that people like them and to show how hard they are".*

A young offender from central Manchester commented that this influences young people to not only video other fights but create their own violent content: *"People do shit they wouldn't normally do for videos."* When asked about what was the best moment of his life, he stated: *"Copping [stealing] a Bentley was my best moment, I got thousands of followers on Instagram after I posted that video."* A young offender from Wigan admitted to videoing part of his own armed robbery for his social media account.

The increase in user-generated content, joined with other media content, has led to a proliferation of violent content online

The amount of user-generated violent content has created a huge increase in the proliferation of online violent content that is available and accessible to young people. A parent from the children's centre in Trafford said, *"it is scary the content they can access. I leave my four-year-old kid on YouTube and it is scary where it can get to".* A young offender from Bolton said: *"Everyone likes watching stuff like that [fights online], some of it is covered up, but all you have to do is uncover it and you can watch people getting their heads chopped off."* He went on to add that *"there was that one with that guy in the church just spraying everywhere [bullets], then he goes outside and shoots a woman in the head then runs her over. Her brains are all over the floor".*

As well as the easy access to violent content, we found instances in which social media had allowed adults to contact children to request this footage. A teenager in Oldham mentioned how there were *"fight channels on Snapchat that add you and they ask you to send in fights".*

The Year 6 pupils we spoke to said that they "*did not see fights on facebook*"[2] which highlights a potential age to educate and help prepare them for future exposure to online violent content.

1. Teacher, Bolton
2. Year 6 workshop, Rochdale

Drill music is seen as having a negative and positive influence

Most of the young and adult offenders we talked to disclosed that drill music was playing a significant role in glamorising and sensationalising violence. One adult offender from central Manchester said, *"drill music has a massive influence on [violence in the community]… everything that comes out of their mouth then just comes out of your mouth".* Another offender spoke about how, *"all that energy just encourages violence and yeah get me in a room with it playing and I just start swinging knives around".* The parent of an offender described drill music as: *"it's all about slitting throats… it gives him confidence and attitude".*

An offender from Wigan spoke about the normalization of violence through drill music: *"drill music tells you that violence is alright… everyone sees it and it just becomes the norm".* A Bolton Youth Worker gave an example of this: *"One of the kids was videoing some drill music with violent lyrics that he wrote. Some of the lyrics were really quite violent, but the thing is he is a really nice lad. Which was just really surprising".* At the Tameside Islamic Resource Centre they thought music was one of the "*biggest influences*" in creating violence as it *"makes it the thing [violence and drugs] to do, programming the youth".*

In the northern parts of Greater Manchester in particular we heard about more localised and targeted drill music: *"drill music is getting localised, it's BL against Oldham and they're dissing each other's areas"*[1]; *"someone makes a diss track about another area then it goes off"*[2] *and "the drill music battles are becoming more localised, like Bolton versus Wigan. It is all influenced by London and America."*[3]

However, a youth worker from Trafford pointed out the difficulty in the current approaches to tackling this culture: *"you can't ask them to change the drill music as they don't have any other content. It might not be directly their life, but it is their culture. You need to help change them and the music will then change. It is a process. We need to understand the dialogue of youth culture".*

1. Youth worker, Oldham
2. Offender, Wigan
3. Youth worker, Bolton

1.2 Parents and trusted adults lack the visibility, knowledge and confidence to help their children to navigate social media

Social media fundamentally relies on user-generated content. This freedom is both brilliant and brutal. It means that anyone can post anything at any time. But it also means the content is not organised, policed and does not come with a rule book.

Adults who once were able to see disagreements between young people escalating, now lack awareness to be able to meaningfully comment or influence behaviour. We experienced this first hand at a workshop with young people where teenagers were sending messages to each other and we had no visibility of what was being said. Many of the young people from the school workshops described how *"most parents don't really know"*[1] that *"social media is not something they [parents] can understand, it is not something they know. So I can't talk to them about it".*[2]

Most parents felt like they were in the dark about what their child does on social media and phones and yet access to phones at schools polarised opinion. Some parents describe how phones are *"antisocial and insular"* and how social media *"causes bullying"* and *"creates anxiety"*[3]. Other parents described how they felt reassured knowing that their children have phones: *"[She's] been through so much, I like her having it on her… I hate her being on her phone, but also hate the idea she wouldn't have it on her"*[4]. This parent's child had been through depression, self harm and fights at school, and having a phone reassured them both.

Other parents, particularly those that were younger, talked about the internal conflict and addictive nature of phones. When asked about restricting phone access in school one parent said, *"I agree but I'd have killed someone if they had taken the phone off me!"* [5] We repeatedly heard about this issue from teachers: *"When we were on a school trip, it was so difficult to get them to put their phone away, there is such a need for likes"* [6] and from parents *"He is constantly on his phone; I don't think they ever switch off, he even takes it in the shower"* [7].

If young people are persistently on their phones but will not talk to their parents about what is happening, this can be difficult for the parent. *"He is on his phone all the time… Snapchat is the bane of my life as you can have private conversations and then they disappear so you don't know what was said."* [8]

Some parents mentioned how they used apps on their children's phones to track their children's whereabouts. But as another parent at the Trafford Community Cohesion Event said, *"At the minute young people are not allowed to be young, they have to act as a mature 25 year old"*.

1. School workshop, Salford
2. Boys school workshop, Oldham
3. 5. Parents at Children's Centre, Salford
4. Parents at Trampoline Park, Salford
6. Teacher, Oldham
7, 8. Parent of a young offender, central Manchester

There were disagreements about how much monitoring it was appropriate for a parent to do, without curtailing the child's freedom: *"I just think checking their phones is like a breach of human rights, it takes away their childhood. What I would want when my child is old enough to have a phone is to be in an open relationship and we can talk things through. At the same time I still want her to have the freedom. I remember when I was a kid I would pretend I was going to the park when really I was off to my mates house. As much as I want to know what is on her phone, I don't want to rob her of her freedom as a child."*[1]

We heard from parents the responsibility they felt to build up the resilience of their children and teenagers to what they see online and in their interactions with peers: *"kids see one post on Facebook and they are crushed. We need to help them to see the bigger picture"* [2] and *"it is not that children are clueless, it is more that as you become an adult you understand more what is right and what is wrong"*. [3]

Finally, we heard a potential role for older teenagers in helping their younger peers to navigate the stresses of social media: *"I think it would work as we are not that far away. I think they'd listen to us… they [the Year 10 facilitators] would need to have lived the life a little though and know the consequences".*[4]

1. Parent at Children's Centre, Trafford
2. 3. Parent, Bolton
4. Discussion with teenagers at Pupil Referral Unit in Bury

1.3 Social media has helped to create the chaotic state of profit wars and a gig economy for drug dealers

We heard that social media has expanded the market for illegal drugs and weapons in Greater Manchester. Historically, these markets have been controlled by a small number of gangs who used violence to control supply in specific postcodes. We heard that social media has assisted the break down of these boundaries and helped a new 'gig economy' to emerge, resulting in an unpredictable and chaotic street power struggle. The picture painted by young people was one in which a handful of organised gangs had been superseded by a large number of much smaller groups – loose and fluid affiliations with individual dealers operating more like sole traders whose allegiances shift on a daily basis.

Within this new more profit-orientated context, we heard how the access to resources such as drugs has developed through social media: *"it is easy. You can just log onto Facebook and then search for like 'Bolton Flavours'. Then once you have ordered, they have your number and they'll send you discount codes. It is really quite sophisticated"*[1]; and "*you can just order the Cali ['good quality' drug] online, and you can buy ingredients, mix it up and you can make spice [drugs]".*[2]

In addition to easy access to drugs, several school children talked us through how easy it is to order weapons such as knives through Snapchat and Wish *"It's so easy to buy a knife from Snapchat"*[3] and a young offender in Bolton told us, "*You can order every piece of a gun online straight to your front door. Like the Royal Mail guy who is delivering it has no idea what he has in his hands."* [4]

What this has meant is that where once the resources such as weapons and drugs used to be reserved for the established gangs, now *"any 13 year old can become the main man on the street, without really knowing what that means"* [5]. An adult offender from Wigan told us that, *"back in the day there used to be head lead guys. Now there are kids running wild and killing the top guy trying to take the top spot. Everyone is out for what they can take"*. Elsewhere in Greater Manchester we heard how, *"there are no gangs around here, just a ton of groups"* [6] and *"on my estate there is three groups, it all depends on which street you are from…I would say there are around 10-15 in each group…There are like 300 gangs in [the borough] fighting for control of their 'patches'"*.[7]

It appears that the technology has resulted in the redistribution of street power where rankings are temporary, status fleeting and competition rife. We heard that social media has played a large role in this through increasing access to drugs and weapons, escalating petty conflict and building image pressure to be the "top dog" (see Insight 5).

It is important to note that this is by no means the experience of the majority of young people in Greater Manchester, and that social media is not in itself a cause of conflict. However, for too many young people, particularly those who are already vulnerable, social media can exacerbate an already difficult, and often traumatic, social environment.

1. Parent, Bolton
2. Offender, central Manchester
3. Girls school workshop, Oldham
4. Young offender, Bolton
5. Youth leader, Trafford
6. Young offender, Wigan
7. Secondary school pupil, Oldham

Insight 2: There are concerns that young people are growing up in environments in which conflict and violence are normalised

There is a strong perception in the communities and organisations we spoke to that young people from certain backgrounds, or who are growing up in particular kinds of family environment, are much more likely to be involved in violence. We heard about a range of risk factors for young people that were seen as influencing their propensity to be involved in violent crime, and a set of protective factors that could prevent this.

Which area of Manchester someone grows up in is seen to be particularly important. One offender from central Manchester summed it up for us by saying: *"Where you're from makes you who you are… if I'd been born in Cheadle I'd be alright."*

We heard of the importance of factors including a lack of male role models, chaotic homelives and experiencing trauma at a critical stage of development. As an offender from Wigan remarked, *"it's just luck of the draw. That's what crime is about;"* a resident of a homeless hostel in Wigan summed it up as: *"everyone has problems. Some people just have the support to get out of it."*

Unsurprisingly, a number of the life stories we heard from those who had been involved in violent activity included significant physical or emotional trauma, often at a formative age. A young homeless man told us his path into heroin dealing began at the age of 11, when his dad was involved in a serious road traffic accident: *"I'd just started high school and my dad was run over. He broke every bone in his body. I went off the rails since then."* A 55-year-old ex-offender in Wigan told us he was in a car accident at 22 and he has not worked since. A teenager from Oldham summed it up perceptively: "*The only reason they hurt people is because they have been hurt. They need counselling to help them to get their life back on track."*

In particular, we heard that:

- chaotic or violent home environments are increasing the likelihood of young people's involvement in violent crime
- violence is increasing in schools, leading to more young people feeling unsafe around school
- young people's peer groups, particularly around the age of 13-14, have a large influence on their propensity to be involved in crime
- violence and involvement in drugs are becoming normalised in some communities, making this acceptable behaviour for some young people

2.1 Chaotic or violent home environments are increasing the likelihood of children's involvement in violent crime

We heard that violence involving older siblings, parents or extended family members affected young children whether it occured in or outside the home. We heard that parents feel they lack the skills, tools and support to cope with young people's behaviour, leaving them struggling to manage. We also heard stories of young children growing up in chaotic and violent family environments, creating poor parental attachment, complex vulnerability and a normalising of violent behaviour.

Young people with family members involved in violent crime are more likely to become involved in violent crime themselves

We heard numerous accounts of how older siblings, particularly brothers, had influenced younger siblings to turn to violence and crime. *"I used to hang out with my older brothers, there was nine of us under the age of 15, and only Dad looked after us. We used to run riot, I did burglaries with my older brother when I was 11 – dad would have killed us if he found out."*[1] A young offender in Bolton told us: *"All three of my big brothers are in prison; last one was for robbery and he got five years. I don't see my dad, not seen my little brother for two years."* Some teenagers spoke of a perceived inevitability of the pull into crime, including one from Bury who said of her friend: *"He is a good person, the problem is that his family is a drug dealer family, and he will become a drug dealer. I really don't want him to."*[2]

We also heard stories about the role of older cousins and siblings as protection for younger children: *"My big brother would text someone if they were bothering me".*[3] A Year 6 pupil in Rochdale said: *"If I got into a fight, I would tell an older sibling or cousin"*. This was framed as being a positive factor in helping younger children to feel safe, being the first port of call over a teacher, parent or other responsible adult.

Pressured, chaotic and violent family environments are seen to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities

In addition to speaking to children and young people about their lives, we spoke to many adults about their experiences in childhood and how this may have contributed to their involvement in criminal behaviour. It was widely acknowledged that witnessing violence at home had contributed to a 'normalisation' of aggressive behaviour that made engaging in violent activity more likely.

The chaos of some family environments was seen as a cause of children, adolescents and young adults seeking to build relationships and bonds elsewhere: *"Kids are growing-up without loving families. Groups befriend them. They look up to these other youths. Have to show them they're willing to do something to be part of it."* [4] One Integrated Offender Manager we spoke to told us that, *"there's a load inside [prison] with nobody and come out with nobody. They want to go back to prison so commit a crime to go back".*

1. Adult in living in a homeless hostel in Wigan
2. Teenager attending a Pupil Referral Unit in Bury
3. Teenager in Stockport
4. Mother of a 13-year-old, Bolton

Parents also noted that, even in relatively stable family situations, the pressures and stresses of work, health, finances and other commitments could make it hard to give adolescents the time, attention and support they needed. One Trafford parent remarked that, *"so often the teen years become transactional as parents are so busy themselves: 'have you done your homework?', 'have you got x?', and it's harder for relationships to develop. There need to be safe places for meaningful conversations".* A Trafford youth leader echoed these sentiments: *"they are often only in contact with adults when they are in trouble, when adults say they are not happy with their presence."*

Many of the young people we spoke to, particularly those who had been involved in crime, said they felt they lacked a trusted adult relationship in their lives. We heard at a workshop for girls in Oldham that parents *"need to listen to teenagers more… parents need to look at who you hang around with sit down with them and talk about situations. I'd appreciate a mentor, one person you can trust".*

Parents feel they lack the skills, support and tools to cope well with their children's behaviour

We heard from a large number of people that a critical cause of youth violence was parents struggling to manage their child's behaviour. This was seen as being particularly difficult during adolescence. Several parents told us they didn't know where their children were at weekends: *"He'll come in for some food, but then he's gone for the rest of the weekend… I don't know where he goes… he hasn't got a phone as I've taken that off him."*[4] Others expressed concern that they did not have the knowledge or tools to parent well; one mother in Bolton remarked that: *"My 14-year-old is running rings around me and I can't physically lock my son in the house as that is illegal."*

Our impression of these parents was that they were highly engaged in their child's behaviour and motivated to change it, but were struggling to cope with the lack of support and resource needed to make change happen. Many were also highly aware and fearful of the consequences of making mistakes in how they handled complex situations. Parents told us on numerous occasions that they were at a loss and felt helpless in tackling social media use, drug use and managing aggressive adolescent behaviour. In some circumstances this had escalated to a point of desperation, with parents searching their children each time they left or entered the family home, looking for drugs and weapons. A parent from Bolton told us, *"I buy weekly drug tests for my children… It's crack that I'm scared of."* Another parent of a 14-year-old in Bolton said, *"I found a cosh on him once… it's his dad's cosh, we just have it in case. It's usually in the wardrobe, but he took it out one day."*

We were told by teachers that they strongly believed a clear route to combat violent crime would be to find ways of educating and engaging parents effectively and to provide more information to parents and students through external agencies.

A perceived generational difference in parenting style was discussed often by older members of the community. Older residents talked about mothers of teenagers not being able to 'get the basics right', with examples cited including making sure children attended school on time and providing a proper breakfast. A lack of discipline was seen to be a significant issue; one older resident summed up the consensus as: *"there's not much education at home. Parents are kids themselves. There's always been bad kids but there's no discipline anymore"*.[1]

The importance of parenting support was flagged by a wide range of people including parents, youth leaders, teachers and children's centre staff. The reduction of children's centres was cited as resulting in a withdrawal of parenting support not only professionally but also through peers; one manager told us that, "*we used to have proactive parents who acted as role models for others, but now they've all gone"*.[2]

Most parents suggested that the timing of parenting support was crucial – that it needed to be proactive, before problems emerged, but not so early as to become irrelevant as children got older: *"We need to be ahead of the curve, rather than looking back retrospectively and trying to change habits. At the same time if we get training now, it is too far out as it will all have changed in five years' time."*[3] The end of primary school, and the primary-secondary transition, was cited as a particularly important point at which parents were most in need of – and most receptive to – support.

A consensus emerged across parents, teachers and youth leaders that parents needed particular support to create safe and engaging learning environments in which children and adolescents can test boundaries safely, create good routines and maintain consistent norms and behaviour.

1. Attendee at adult day care centre in Tameside
2. Manager at Children's Centre, Trafford
3. Parent at Children's Centre, Trafford

2.2 Violence is increasing in and around schools, resulting in young people feeling unsafe at school

Over a fifth of all teachers who responded to our survey thought that incidents of violence had become more frequent in schools in the last year, particularly in secondary schools. This perception is backed up by the data from Greater Manchester: in 2018 there were 127 knife crime offences in schools, a 108% increase since 2015. This equates to over three knife offences are occurring in schools across Greater Manchester each week.[1]

Parents frequently spoke about the transition to secondary school precipitating a downward turn both in their child's behaviour and in how the adults around them dealt with such behaviour. We heard parents express their frustrations about the ineffectiveness of exclusions in tackling the causes of bad behaviour; one father from Bolton remarked that, *"he's been suspended 12 times this year, five days each time. He's falling more behind."* Some parents raised concerns about how exclusions – whether fixed-term or permanent – can make at-risk young people more vulnerable to criminal recruitment and activity. One parent of a 12 year old in Bolton remarked: *"I can keep him away from the kids on the estate [at home], but when he gets put into isolation at school he's in there with them all."*

We listened to several young offenders who spoke about their experiences of bouncing around the school system, including a young offender from Salford who had told us he had been to 13 Primary schools and excluded from two secondary schools.

At the school workshops, we heard that young people felt unsafe at and on the way to school: *"it's hard to feel safe anywhere, even at school as there was a stabbing"*. At a primary school in Stockport, young children recounted stories of illegal items that had been taken into school: "*there is no security… anyone can bring anything in without the Head noticing"* and *"people bring in drugs... Teachers don't search your bags"*.

At a workshop in Oldham, young people commented on a perceived lack of proactive intervention, stating that, *"teachers don't fix it until it gets to fighting. We need to have conversations to sit down face-to-face before that"* and *"We don't get to hear the consequences of fights. We need to understand why people are excluded. [Violence] needs to be talked about more in school through assemblies... these are normal people that have slipped up once - it can happen to anybody"*. Some teenagers thought that schools should be firmer in their approach to violence: *"you get more punishment for your eyebrows than fighting"*.[2]

There was a collective view that if schools treat young people as 'naughty children' they will 'act up' to their label. A teenager at attending a Pupil Referral Unit in Bury told us: *"We had a new headteacher who got all of the paperwork then basically got all the naughty kids from the whole school in a room in isolation. She treated us like dickheads, so we acted like dickheads and before you knew it, half of us had been kicked out of school."*

1. 'The Extent and Nature of Knife Crime in Greater Manchester', Manchester Metropolitan University, July 2019
2. Girls school workshop, Oldham

2.3 Young people's peer groups, particularly around age 13-14, have significant influence on their involvement in violent crime

The influence of peers is felt at all ages, but is particularly strong at the beginning of adolescence. We heard numerous stories of young people being drawn into criminal or risky activity by teenagers a little older than themselves. An ex-offender in Wigan, reflecting on his adolescence, admitted: *"I first got into trouble when I was 11. I got done for breaking into a nursery with two kids that were older than me"*. Many of the young people we spoke with agreed that the peak age to be influenced is around 13 or 14, as friendship groups change and re-form in the transition from childhood to young adulthood, and again at 17 as teenagers leave school. One teenager attending a Pupil Referral Unit in Bury told us: *"During Year 9 you get some bad peer pressure around drugs and violence."*

Affiliating with a gang or with peers who are violent can lead people into violence. A Youth Offending Officer told us, when discussing a teenager in his care: *"he was doing ok until they moved a boy from Blackpool into his care home who is really violent, and now he is hanging around Bolton town centre with him."*

Bonds formed in adolescence can be intense. Young people told us that not only are they influenced by their peers, but that there is an expectation of loyalty above all else; they would do anything for their friends: *"My mates are my problem because I'm with them... if it's my mate's problem it's my problem."* [1] We heard that, once part of a group, it is hard for teenagers to disentangle themselves. Another teenager at the Pupil Referral Unit in Bury told us: *"It was only when I changed my social circle did things start to change for me. I needed to get away from those mates, we used to bounce off each other. It was tough as I liked them, but stepping away was good for me."*

Peers are not always close friends. A resident of the Wigan homeless hostel told us of his journey into drugs (and crime): *"I was at a work's party when I was 14 and a guy gave me a bag of coke and I liked it. I then ended up spending my wages before I got them"*. A Stockport youth worker told us how *"children of the older drug dealers would recruit other kids"*. We heard similar stories from teenagers in Oldham: *"Gangs are making younger kids do it. They have little kids to do stuff."* The 'normalisation' of turning to crime to 'fit in' with your peers was heard several times. *"When you grow up around people who commit crimes, it just becomes normal...There are only two places you end up when you choose to be on the street: dead or in prison."* [2]

We noted in some instances that peer influence can be so strong that negative friendships become all-consuming, crowding out positive healthy relationships: *"I've lost all my friends through crime."* [3] An adult offender in central Manchester said, *"I was a decent kid playing football, but then I started chillin' on the estate because my mum didn't want me in the house so she sent me out to play [and that's when I met others]"* [4]. Another offender told us: *"It's who you get involved with once you leave school... your 'elders'"*[5].

1. Young offender, Salford
2. 4. 5. Adult offender, central Manchester
3. Homeless hostel resident, Wigan

2.4 Involvement in violence and drugs is becoming normalised in some communities

Throughout our research we heard a perception that involvement in violence and illegal drugs has become normalised within communities, both affluent and low-income. In particular, we heard:

- this normalisation has increased drug-related crime in particular
- professionals and community organisations draw a clear link between deprivation and violent crime
- grooming by adults of young people for criminal exploitation

The normalisation of drugs in some communities has increased drug-related violent crime

The correlation between drugs and violent crime is not new, but what became apparent through our research was a perception of widespread prevalence, openness and normalisation of drug taking and drug-related crime. This was true of young people of all ages, and it was common for us to hear of young people starting to smoke cannabis (or claiming to have done so) at the end of primary school.

We heard a perception that attitudes towards drugs had changed over the last ten years. Representatives of the Tameside Islamic Resource Centre told us that, *"If a young person had taken drugs in 2010, you would have been shamed. Now because there is so much of it, it means nothing… The drugs aren't hidden anymore."* A resident of the Tameside homeless hostel told us: *"Drugs are the same, but they used to be more hidden. Now it is more acceptable for people to flaunt it."* In Wigan we heard similar stories from young offenders: *"Drugs have taken over. It's now more open."*

Many of the conversations we had involved discussion on the open nature of drug taking, dealing and crime. A father of a two year old who has recently moved to Trafford told us that *"there were two sets of drug dealers on my street in X. It's an all-hours shop... there was a 30-man brawl on our front lawn, I didn't see any weapons, but my step-daughter was watching it out the window crying. It was every day. The drug dealer was 15 and he had a group of lads from lunchtime to late."* In Bolton the parents of a 10 year old stated: *"They stand in the middle of the street grinding their weed"*, and girls at a school workshop in Oldham told us, *"drugs are just really common"*.

Across Greater Manchester people made the correlation between drugs and violence, and how the nature of the drugs economy had changed: *"twenty years ago it was all about ecstasy, but now it's all crack"* [1]. This is seen to be fuelling more violent crime: *"crack came from Liverpool about 10 years ago, and it's made crime a lot worse as people are so desperate for this crack. It's £10 a go, the same as heroin."* [2]

1. Resident of a homeless hostel, Tameside
2. Resident of a homeless hostel, Wigan

Within some communities, there is a perception that violence and 'exposures' to violence has desensitised people

Research by Manchester Metropolitan University highlights that knife crime occurs disproportionately in the most deprived areas – 41% of all knife crime occurs in the top decile of deprived areas.[1] We heard frequently from professionals working with young people that violence was linked to deprivation. A targeted youth worker in Bolton summed it up as: *"Poverty leads to boredom, then getting involved in trouble."* A youth worker in Rochdale said, *"I think deprived areas is the biggest driver of violent crime"*, while a teacher commented that:

> *"Austerity is having an enormous impact on the well-being of our families. Increasing numbers of children are growing up in families where there are complex needs such as substance abuse, mental health difficulties and domestic violence but no support. This has an impact on the children's capacity to develop appropriately and makes them more vulnerable to negative outside influences."*

There is a perception that the networks of family, community and neighbours that used to act as a protective factor have become weaker. *"There was some kids letting off fireworks in the park. So I went to go sort it, but telling a kid off on the street does nothing. Instead I used to go to their parent's house and their family will sort it. Now I don't know who their family is."* [2]

Violent crime and low-level anti-social behaviour and hostility to police are seen as being widespread. Numerous taxi drivers in Salford and Bury talked about "*kids throwing bricks and stones on the estates"* and *"nothing shocks us anymore. If I heard about a stabbing a few years back it would be a surprise, but now it doesn't"*. A leader of the sports club in Stockport said: *"it's getting that often you're expecting it to happen".*

Professionals and parents alike were concerned about this desensitisation to crime. A youth worker in Rochdale told us that *"young people are numb to gunshots"*, while the mother of a young adult offender who had been violent towards her told us that, *"at the time I didn't realise how stressful it was, only now when looking back... they don't see violence or domestic violence as violence"*.

Youth workers told us that *"there is a different scale and measure of violence for adolescents versus adults…young people are being desensitised to ultra violence by exposures [seeing violence on the streets]"*, with a teacher in Trafford stating: *"What I see as violence is different to what they see as violence."*

1. 'The Extent and Nature of Knife Crime in Greater Manchester', Manchester Metropolitan University, July 2019
2. Bangladesh Community Centre Worker, Tameside
3. Young offender, Wigan
4. Resident of homeless hostel, Wigan

The proliferation of drugs and the lack of opportunities for young people sometimes results in adult grooming

Hanging about on the estates is seen to draw people into drugs as they seek independence: *"At 13/14 you get given a phone and people will ring you."*[1] We noted numerous stories about younger children entering crime through drug running and possible criminal exploitation. A parent in Bolton told us: *"There's one house that has all the kids doing their runs… they look up to those people as he shows them respect… I'll give you this smoke, but tomorrow you'll have to go and sell it."* We heard this pattern in direct accounts from people who had started criminal activity at a young age: *"I ended up doing bits for this guy [at 14], then money took over my mind."*[2]

We also heard from parents in Bolton and school children across Greater Manchester about their worries regarding online communities from the local area, particularly WhatsApp groups and grooming: *"There are organised groups on WhatsApp and Snapchat, that is what I am most worried about as a parent. As you have adults and children all on this one group. And for the kids it's great, there is loads of prestige if you are a young kid and you have been invited onto it."*[3] Leaving – or being left out of – social media groups creates a feeling of being left behind, which can be very difficult to cope with: *"WhatsApp messages can make you feel left out."*[4]

While a number of the school children we spoke to did not understand the concept of 'grooming', many of them could tell stories of friends being asked to *"drop something off for £50. Next day it is something else for £200".*[5] Many adults expressed sympathy for the young people involved, with one parent in Bolton explaining, *"kids are doing it to help put food on the table for their mum"* and a faith leader at the Tameside Islamic Resource Centre stating: *"Why work in a take-away for £40 for 10 hours when you can work for a few minutes and get paid double?"*

1. Young Offender, Wigan
2. Resident of Homeless Hostel, Wigan
3. Parent at Bolton Community Navigators
4. Teenager a Stockport girls' sports group
5. Boys' school workshop, Oldham

Insight 3: Changes to neighbourhood policing are seen as worsening the relationship between communities and police

Since 2010 there has been a 19% drop in police funding in England and Wales[1], with former Metropolitan Police Chiefs and Commissioners commenting publicly in July 2019 that there has been a *"virtual destruction of neighbourhood policing and the undermining of powers such as stop and search."*[2]

Cuts to police numbers and funding were discussed in nearly every conversation we had with residents across Greater Manchester, even with primary school children. A father of a two-year-old at a toddler group said: *"it's appalling, they think it's ok to cut 10,000 police, it's becoming a lawless state. I cannot forgive the Government for putting everyone's safety at risk".* Another member of a community group in Trafford, a retired police officer with over 25 years' service said: *"my role was to serve and protect, but that protection has now gone… we used to have confidence in the police and trust each other, but that's all gone".*

Most of the people we spoke to said that they felt the presence of the police is diminishing. However, a few of the young adult offenders we spoke to remarked that local police were visible but highly predictable: *"The police are everywhere, but you get to know your estate and when's good to go out... They circle round about 12 and then come back about 3/4pm".* Two of the adult offenders exchanged notes on the registration plates of the undercover police cars; one boasted: *"I know every police car in Manchester".*

At the same time, teachers spoke of their desire for more police presence:
"Police inputs in school please"
"Visible policing"
"To see community and police officers in and around our communities and schools more, engaging and educating youngsters."
"More police engaging with students and police presence in the community, education and working with families"
"Larger police presence and more engagement at a positive level with GMP."

Further comments relating to the police fell into three broad areas: a perceived lack of mutual respect, a perceived lack of relationship and the apparent lack of deterrents.

1. 'State of Policing: the annual assessment of policing in England and Wales 2018', Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, July 2019
2. Letter to *The Times*, 5 July 2019, signed by Lord Condon, Lord Stevens of Kirkwhelpington, Lord Blair of Broughton, Sir Paul Stephenson, Lord Hogan-Howe, Sir Keith Povey, Sir Hugh Orde and Sir Mark Rowley.

3.1 Diminished police presence has led to a loss of mutual respect

"What I can't understand is how police and local authorities can't track down drug dealers and yet 12 year olds can?" (Oldham Boys School Workshop)

Many of the older people we spoke with talked about the era of knowing your 'bobby on the beat', and how everyone would know their name. The taxi drivers in Bury and Salford talked about the *"feeling of abandonment"* and no longer seeing *"bobbies on the beat anymore"*. Salford shop owners expressed their feelings of frustration that there are *"no officers on the beat"* so have taken it into their own hands with security. An older man from Tameside said *"you used to have respect for the police, but now you wouldn't give them the time of day"*. A Salford young offender told us: *"police don't give us respect so we don't respect them. If I hit a police officer I go to prison, but if they hit me they don't… how's that fair?"*

We heard numerous accounts of how young people were 'playing' with the police: *"There's no visible presence. The kids play cat and mouse with them and just chase them round the parks... Kids see it as a game. They get chased off from the parks so they go to the drug dens."*[1] In Tameside parents had similar comments: *"they laugh at the police and give them false names."* One teenager in Oldham admitted: *"We want the police to chase as it's fun – they always get lost over the back fields."* A parent in Bolton told us: *"The new play is egging on the police and running away."*

We heard a lack of faith in what the police can do: *"Police don't really do much. If there are some kids accumulating, they say they dispersed them, but really they just end up moving them around. Like they say they have dispersed 3 sets of kids, when really it was the same group of them. To the kids it is just like playing cops and robbers. Every time they see a van they run."*[2]

Many of the young people said there was a lack of respect shown by the police towards young people. One young adult offender explained why he does not relate to the police: *"I don't like them… they just don't ask what was done to you. Like I got stabbed in my head and had to have 16 stitches and yet all they cared about was searching me… and yet nothing happened to them… They used it [knife], I didn't and yet I was the one to go down… they just don't give a fuck about you"*. Another young adult offender told us how he felt degraded by police actions: *"They bully me… every time PC X and X see me they strip search me there and then… and then everyone watches me like I am a drug dealer."*

There is a perceived sense of abandonment and apathy from the police by some people in the community. A youth worker from Rochdale told us that, *"there was this one time we had them [young people] on the roof of the youth club. So we had to phone the police, only to receive a phone call back 20 mins later to say no one was coming. Which the kids realised pretty quickly. The problem is that not only does it say to the kids 'you can do what you want, no one can stop you' but it also says 'we don't care about you'. We felt pretty abandoned too."* [3]

1. Parent in Trafford
2. Parent at Community Navigators Meeting, Bolton
3. Youth worker, Bolton

Another Bolton youth worker told us: *"Once the kids just started jumping up and down on the riot van, they could not give a toss".* Similarly, the bus station manager in Bury noted that: *"when I call 999, they know I know, they've got a good couple of hours. The police aren't coming… Whereas if we phone about a gun, they are here in seconds,"* while a taxi driver, also in Bury, stated: *"The police do nothing. Once a guy threatened me with an iron bar, but they did not care. I feel like I have no basic human rights."* We also heard some people question the perceived drug strategy: *"The police tactic is to wait for the big drugs guy, but does that big guy exist?"*[1]

However, it was not all negative. Some offenders respected the police when the law was 'done fairly': *"I have nothing against the police. Every time I deserved what I got."*[2] A resident of the homeless hostel in Wigan, who had served a conviction for dealing heroin, said: *"I like the police, I deserved it. I'm happy I got caught, I was ruining people's lives and my own life…the only way for me to walk away was to get caught."*

3.2 Diminished police presence has weakened relationships between police and the community

"Not only is there less respect but there is also no relationship. The cuts just mean they are not around" (Bolton Youth Worker)

Linked to lack of respect is the lack of relationship people feel they have with the police. Not only do they not see the police around, but when a crime happens in their area they are not told about what happens, but *"We never hear what's going on, a few months back someone got stabbed in the street but we didn't find out what happened – we never get told."*[3]

We heard numerous stories of crimes being reported to the police and no further actions being followed-up. A taxi driver in Bury said: *"When taxi drivers call the police they don't bother to come… when a big stone was thrown at my cab I reported it to Bury Police Station, but they didn't bother to look at my vehicle and that's the attitude we get… we would like more attention from the police."* A young person in Oldham also told us: *"I got robbed but the police did nothing."* An resident of the daycare centre in Tameside stated: *"You get a case number but no one ever comes round. The police don't care."*

To build relationships, some people said they would like to see more neighbourhood police walking around more, getting to know areas, and *"I would just say they need to be nicer, ask questions and try and understand"* [4] and *"Five people were assaulted and the police turned up but they wouldn't get out of their van."* [5] Teachers called for *"an increased police presence in communities including outreach work to schools to enable key messages to be shared and reiterated".*

1. Member of Tameside Islamic Resource Centre
2. Offender, Wigan
3. Taxi driver, Bury
4. Young offender, Wigan
5. Noahs ART, Tameside

More police in schools would help to build better relationships with young people

Police in schools was an issue discussed widely and there was a mixed opinion between children and adults. Some of the school children said: *"why bother? It's not like someone is going to get stabbed at school… there are more important things happening, and they're better off being on standby than being here [school]"* or that it makes you *"feel like you are in prison"* or that *"it would be really intimidating as you think what reason are they there".*

Numerous teachers mentioned via the teacher survey that there needs to be more social contact and relationship building with the police, such as *"community network meetings on tackling violent crime perhaps held in schools where parents and school leaders and services such as police, fire service and ambulance service can talk about how to keep communities safe and what everyone can do".* Similarly a Bangladesh Community Centre worker from Tameside said: "*there used to be the police, church and us in the room every two months to discuss the community. Now it no longer happens.*" Other teachers commented that there needs to be *"more compassion from authorities/professionals for families living in areas where violent crime is an issue - break down the 'them and us' culture and the judgmental nature with which a lot of professionals appear to approach cases".*

Other teachers commented *"links between communities and school have to be made. School, police and youth services need to demonstrate or provide more on the ground services that allow students to follow the lawful path. This can filter through to communities on the ground"* and *"increased community police to build up relationships with police. Police able to come into primary schools to educate, and build links - not happening due to reduced police numbers and increased violence in area".*

Parents, Youth Workers and Teachers were very keen for police to be in school to help children understand the consequences: *"They don't take much notice of them [police] because there are no consequences. They know their rights… they should come into school more as it might just stop the 'them and us' situation".* A Teacher from the school survey said there needs to be *"School based police - to build positive relationships between pupils and police. Break the cycle of negative perceptions of police".*

Some of the primary school children we spoke with had ambitions to be police officers (though this was not the case at the secondary schools we visited). This perhaps highlights an opportune age to advertise activities such as police cadets and, in areas such as Rochdale, Oldham and Bolton, an opportunity to help diversify the force and further build relationships with ethnic minority communities.

Some of the boys from Oldham school were thoughtful as to why ambitions to be a police officer and respect might be lost in secondary school: *"When I was a kid, we all wanted to be police. Then you see the dangers [on the media]", "Social media changes your opinion, especially all the stuff you see from America"* and *"I think it is all about angles though. Like the police might be trying to stop an armed gunman, but then on social media it is portrayed that the police just came along and brutally murdered a guy. Facts can be changed by angles."*

A place-based police community offer working with schools could help to provide an authoritative presence for children to feel safer as well as would be able to respond quicker to situations as they arise. It would help the police to gather improved intelligence about what is happening in communities, especially given (according to the teachers' survey) only 60% of weapon possessions in schools would currently be reported to the police. The learning the police officer gains through the school presence in terms of how to interact with young people could be applied to neighbourhood policing.

3.3 A lack of deterrents has resulted in a perceived lack of consequences for violent crime

Clearly related to the lack of respect and relationships for the police is that people are not seeing the consequences of violent crime, and many believe the deterrents are not severe enough to prevent violence from happening. However, some did not place all the blame at the police but at sentencing. An offender in Wigan who has spent several years in prison for violent assaults told us there should be tougher sentences: "*if you knew you were going to get the electric chair you wouldn't do it"*. Others remarked that, "*it is too easy, there are no consequences and there is no risk. We need tougher sentences.*" [1]

Some people had sympathy for the police: *"There is a lack of respect and no deterrent. I feel for the police because their tools have been diminished".*[2] Many of the children we spoke to knew that their actions would not be investigated further: *"police make a big deal about things, but are not actually doing anything about it".*[3] Similarly, a headteacher in Oldham said that: *"If you get caught, there is no consequence, no clear message."*

During this research we heard how media coverage of high profile cases can influence community perceptions of violent crime. Youth workers are keen on a 'tough love' approach: *"kids would think twice about disrespecting them again next time"* [4] . Some of the children were calling for the police to be tougher; one Bury teenager told us: *"police could be harder… my mate got caught with a weapon (three screwdrivers) in a stolen car and got sent home".*

Even when the police or Crown Prosecution Service do issue consequences for violent crime, these do not always have the intended outcomes. We heard boasts *"I got my first ASBO at 12 that's sic isn't it?!"* [5], *"prison was sic, I made loads of top mates."*[6] One Young Offender who had just been released said: *"Prison is like education for criminals. Like I learnt all about how to make money through county lines in there".*[7] An Adult Offender also commented *"Prison was alright… after 2 days I had everything, like a proper pad. I had the shower gel, the cookies… like you can just get the small nice things."* [8] Boys with family, friends and connections in prison were particularly unperturbed by a custodial sentence, but young people new to the system were more hesitant: "I don't want to go to prison, I like my privileges. No money in the world is worth jail."[9]

1. Faith Leader at the Islamic Resource Centre, Tameside
2. 4. Youth worker, Rochdale
3. Teenager in Pupil Referral Unit, Bury
5. Teenager at school in Oldham
6. 7. Young offender, Bolton
8. Adult offender from central Manchester
9.. Young offender, Wigan

There were mixed views on the use of community sentences. Some were keen that offenders were seen to be *"repaying damage"* [1]; others did not think community sentences were strict enough: *"I see them [when on Community Service] they're having a smoke and a laugh"* [2]. However, tagging with a community sentence is seen to be a really valued deterrent: *"The tag is really blimmin' annoying. Like it rubs in the shower then it holds onto the water so is really heavy. It is particularly annoying in the first couple of weeks…I have tried to cut it off, believe me I've tried everything, like greasing it up with butter and everything and nothing was doing…It kinda sorts your head though, as I don't want to commit any more armed robberies as it is constant reminder of prison."* [3] We also heard how the tag gives permission to young people to say no to their peers as they are already on a 'warning'. A young adult on probation in Wigan told us: *"The tag is a good reminder of what I should not be doing."* [4]

PCSOs do not have the power to enforce consequences at the same level as other police officers, and young people know this

Arguably though it is not the police presence that communities desire, but the feeling of reassurance. Several people mentioned that *"PCSOs were a good thing as there was a presence and they had that connection with the community and you'd see the same ones"* [5] Similarly, a parent in Stretford said: *"see more PCSOs than police. It's nice having something than nothing."*

However, many people spoke of "*the plastic police*" and a youth worker in Stockport said: *"It needs to be the police and not a PCSO as every child knows a PCSO can't touch you and won't touch you and won't do anything… they all know that"*. A parent in Bolton echoed this view: *"PCSOs have no teeth… they try to be one of the kids but the kids mock 'em, they don't get any respect."* A resident of a homeless hostel in Tameside commented that: *"PCSOs have as much right as we do…They are just a cheap way of visibility, they are plastic police."* There was a general view that PCSOs might be well intentioned, but a non-uniformed professional (such as a youth worker) who is from the area and respected by the community might be able to connect better with young people.

Taxi drivers, shop workers and parents were frustrated at the low level crime that was not being dealt with by PCSOs and consequently the risk of escalation of problems. One teacher stated that *"we need to deal with lower level issues to stop escalation."*

1. 2. Day Care Attendee, Tameside
3. Young offender, Wigan
4. Adult offender, Wigan
5. Parent in Salford

There is a reluctance to report crimes in part because there is a perception that nothing will be done about it, which is making it much harder to police communities

"Conspiracies of Silence" – "Snitches get stitches" (Oldham Pupil)

There was a strong consensus across many of the people we spoke with that they would not report crime, even if they could report anonymously: *"I'd still be frightened of reporting something anonymous, and also would anything be done about it?"* [1] The fear of recrimination is felt across many communities: "I *keep a tight-lip as don't want a brick through [the window]*"[2]. Others fear reporting as they have prior involvement with the police: *"Don't wanna be a snitch...snitches get stitches I've got a track record so wouldn't want to involve the police."* [3]

Even at school, children are unlikely to report acts of violence to a teacher *"If I got into a fight, I wouldn't tell a teacher as that would be snitching"* [4]. Teachers told us that children would rather be excluded from school than be called a "*grass*".

Fear of being a witness was felt across every community in Greater Manchester. We heard numerous times that people would not call the police as they do not want to be a witness *"because they might come after you"* [5] and *"You can put yourself in a bad position if you're a witness"* [6]. While many people we spoke with would not report violence to the police, many of them would phone an ambulance *"if there was blood"* [7], as you do not have to be a witness to a paramedic.

A distinction was made between a 'snitch' who is someone who reports to help themselves, and a community representative who reports crimes to make a difference and help other people in their community.[8] We heard several stories of young people reporting violent images and videos to social media companies, but no one we spoke to had a response. Others we spoke with did not see the point of reporting as they did not think it would make any difference.

To improve reporting in communities, we heard of the need for a place-based approach with a neighbourhood co-ordinator who *"could say all of the little things you wouldn't report to the police"* [9], but that it would be difficult to recruit to the role as *"people don't want to dirty their hands".* [10]

1. Attendee at adult day care centre, Tameside
2. Noahs ART, Tameside
3. Pupil in Oldham
4. Year 6 pupil, Rochdale
5. 6. Teenagers at Stockport girls' workshop
7. Boys school workshop, Oldham
8. Adult offender, Wigan
9. Parent, Tameside
10. Faith Leader Islamic Resource Centre, Tameside

Insight 4: Vulnerability and fear are important drivers in young people carrying weapons

Throughout the research, we noted that fear and a feeling of vulnerability appears to be driving people to carry weapons. Many young people said they – or other people – carried weapons because they were afraid for their own safety; that the choice was, in the words of a Salford young offender, *"10 years or life"* - that is to say a 10 year prison sentence or losing your life. While *"everyone carries a knife,"* they are *"not looking for a fight"* [1].

We also heard how the act of carrying a weapon can create an expectation and pressure from others that the weapon will be used, rapidly escalating violent situations. *"There's always going to be knives… you either carry a knife or you get stabbed these days… it's self defence."* [2] We also heard of a normalisation of weapons being visible in family settings; one young girl told us that *"my dad keeps a knife under his bed just in case."* [3]

4.1 Personal fear is driving the vulnerable to carry weapons

Many of the young people and adult offenders either admitted or thought that people carried because they were scared of a knife being pulled out on them and felt like a target if they did not carry one: *"Just in case one [knife] is pulled on me...I feel safer with one than without one."* An adult offender in Wigan said that: *"I didn't want to take that chance [of not carrying a weapon]. I stabbed two people… he had a knuckle duster".* At the school workshops, we frequently heard about self-protection: *"it's hard to feel safe anywhere, even at school as there was a stabbing"*, *"people carry knives by fear, they fear someone is going to stab them"* and *"I don't want to get arrested, but don't want to leave my house without a weapon".*

Many young people said that the problem is that if they carry and then don't get their weapon out in a conflict, it will not result in a favourable outcome for their reputation. If they are the only one in their group carrying then they will be responsible for protecting everyone else *"If anyone starts on me or my group, I'll stab them...this is my protection"* [4].

Our research with schools on the action they would take if a pupil was found to be carrying a weapon shows a disconnect between the response young people say they would like and the ways in which schools tend to act. Young people were clear that listening was a crucial first step – *"if you're just trying to defend yourself, but you get caught you'll end up more scared and confused. Don't know what else we are supposed to do."* In contrast, of the teachers responding to the survey: 52% would exclude the child on a fixed-term basis and 20% on a permanent basis.

1. 2. 4. Young offender, Salford
3. Girls' sports group, Stockport

The fear of bullies was strongly felt by many people we spoke with. We heard from teenagers at school that carrying a knife gives them confidence and protection against bullies: *"He carries because he feels bullied and scared of getting jumped."* Even some of the younger children we spoke with admitted to having weapons. A ten-year-old girl from Stockport told us: *"I used to keep a knife in my room because of my anxiety. I had it there for two years and then brought it back down and my mum and dad never even realised it had gone missing."* But many people understood you are just as likely to get the knife used against you: *"the person who has a knife, might feel secure and try and scare the other guy off. But I heard of many times of when someone drops it and he then gets stabbed"* [1].

The fear appears to be more associated with vulnerability and insecurity than with poverty or social class. The solution may lie more in listening to the young people than anything else. When talking to the young people in the school workshops we frequently heard that the fictional boy who carried a knife *"should be listened to more"* while a Wigan youth worker echoed many other professionals in stating that, *"we should have more trauma informed counsellors, as the perpetrators are usually already victims".*

4.2 The perception of how many young people carry weapons does not always match the reality of how many actually do carry

"Young people are scared but this is not fuelled by reality" (Rochdale Youth Worker). "They think more people carry than actually do. It is that perceptions versus reality thing" (Oldham MAHDLO Youth Worker)

The perception of how many young people carry weapons may not match the reality of how many actually do carry. This fear that 'everyone' is carrying is as important a driver as the reality of others being armed. We noted that young people are just as likely to carry an alternative weapon to a knife, partly in the knowledge that carrying a knife is a more easily punishable offence, or to hide the weapon nearby.

In Stockport, Salford and Bolton all the girls thought over 50% of 15 year old boys in their local area carried knives. Some of this perception was through experience and they would say comments, such as *"my brother carried a pocket knife because he was scared but then he lost it on the field"* (Bolton girl). During the workshops with male students they estimated that between 20-30% of boys carried a weapon. However, only one or two of the participants admitted to carrying a weapon in their past.

1. Boys school workshop, Oldham

One teacher in Salford made the analogy of children losing their virginity: *"everyone thinks they have, so they feel pressured to"*, and thought the same applied to violence. Others blamed the media, with one young offender from Wigan stating that, *"the news is just full of negativity and media bullshit. People grow up just hearing knife crime like there is nothing else going on in the world"*.

4.3 Personal fear can spread from person to person creating a whole community living in fear

Personal fear seemed to spread from person to person resulting in a community "living in fear". We heard how people felt afraid on their estates: *"I'm always checking behind me"* [1], while a young girl in Bolton said that *"after the Maggie murder [in Bolton] everyone was scared to go out...I wouldn't go to the shop...it terrified the whole area as it was right next to our school"*.

It is not only young people who are fearful; a father in Trafford told us that, "*I'm always on alert, and looking over my shoulder"*. A Tameside Bangladesh Community Centre worker told us: *"I won't be in the building by myself, I am too frightened because of the gunshots last year"*, while a parent in Bolton told us *"when you hear someone's been stabbed the first thing you do is phone your son to check he's okay"*.

4.4 People are just as likely to carry an alternative weapon, and hide it, as they know that carrying a knife is a more easily punishable offence

"It is blade crime rather than knife crime... people use bottles, glass, rocks, plastic" (Bolton Boys School Workshop)

While knife crime is the most often cited violent crime in the media, there is a multitude of different weapons being used for violence, and the older and more experienced perpetrators are no longer carrying weapons, rather hiding them for later use. The young offenders we talked to described why they would carry alternative weapons: *"Wouldn't carry a knife, get 5 years for that… carry a weight bar"; "Carry a cosh"; "why would you carry a knife, when you can carry a baseball bat?"; "I'd beat them with a stick because you can't get done for beating with a stick."*

1. Girls school workshop, Stockport

While the older offenders knew the consequences of knife carrying, we also heard some of the younger children are carrying different weapons including hammers, screwdrivers and scissors. Some of this appears to be down to what is available: *"It could be bats, coshs, knives… whatever people can get their hands on."* [1]

We heard that weapons in school are not commonplace. However, we also heard that, for some children, putting a knife in their bag was part of their daily routine: *"People just get into the habit of putting knives and hammers into their bags."* [2] One Bolton parent of a 12 year old told us: *"he carries a hammer around with him, but that's just to knock down fences".* An adult offender told us he got 'nicked' for a knife as he 'forgot' he had it and couldn't feel it because he was wearing two coats. Another offender in Manchester said he *"Just found it in my pocket… I didn't know it was there"*.

People hide weapons in public and private places so that they can use them when needed but not get caught with them

We also heard that it is equally likely for someone to hide a weapon than to carry one. Asking a young offender in Bolton how many 16 year olds they think carry knives, he said: *"I would say none, but seven would stash"*. Another said about three or four would stash a weapon *"in the trees, under a bin, anywhere"*. Another said they stash them in grit bins and backstreet bin containers, the woods and bushes. Other offenders (both young and adult) agreed you would *"Stick it in a bush… better than being caught with a knife".* Others said they had no choice due to the restrictions of their licence: *"I can't carry a weapon as I'd be sent to prison as I'm on licence."*

The danger of hiding weapons was highlighted by an eight-year-old girl at a youth club in Oldham: *"I found a knife in a bush a few months back"*. A boy attending the Bury Pupil Referral Unit told us: *"mine have all been took from where they've been stashed people always find them".* We also heard that often one person is left to carry the weapons so not everyone will be caught: "*They [young people] carry weapons in their bags one person sticks with all the weapons in the bag and if something happens they will get passed around"*. [3]

We only heard one story of a boy being asked to hold weapons and drugs: an Integrated Offender Manager told us about a 21 year old (with a learning age of 14): *"he liked a bit of cannabis, they've befriended him…next minute they're in his flat and using it to store drugs. They preyed on him because he's vulnerable".* A community safety manager told us about the increasing practice of 'cuckooing': *"girls get cuckooed to hold weapons and are told they have to carry it by their boyfriend. Girls get asked to hold drugs and weapons at home".* We also heard from one of the young offenders in Bolton that: "*I don't carry a knife as I can call someone and I've just come out of prison [he said he had done his 'time' after going to prison for other people]."*

1. Young offender, Bolton
2. Teenager from Bury
3. Youth worker, Rochdale

Insight 5: 'Toxic masculinity' appears to increase the likelihood of young men being perpetrators or victims of violent crime

National evidence shows that young men are much more likely to be both perpetrators and victims of violent crime.[1] Similarly, according to the Greater Manchester data, the victims and perpetrators of serious violence are most likely to male with 88% of all offenders reported and 74% of all victims reported male.[2] Our research suggests that social norms and expectations of masculinity are affecting the behaviour of young men, resulting in aggressive and violent behaviour.

Across all of the Young and Adult Offender Institutions, Pupil Referral Units and SEND schools we visited, there was a marginal number of women and girls and an overwhelming representation from boys and men.

We heard that many boys and young men in Greater Manchester are being told more than ever before that retaliation is a strength and emotions other than aggression are feminine: *"Don't cry", "don't be a pussy", "act tough"* and become the *"top dog"*. We heard that unhealthy attitudes towards women and girls are resulting in girls being coerced into carrying weapons on behalf of boys, in addition to violent abuse towards them. An Integrated Offender Manager said: *"I don't know the stats, but I think a lot of them get into fights because someone looked at them wrong, it is just about what they think a man is."*

1. Home Office, Serious Violence Strategy, April 2018 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-strategy)

2. 'The Extent and Nature of Knife Crime in Greater Manchester', Manchester Metropolitan University, July 2019

5.1 Social media has increased image pressure on young people, but without the 'means' to get there, young boys are driven towards criminality and violent crime to achieve the image and status

"It's all about building the name" (Salford Rugby League Rising Stars)

Finding their identity is important for all adolescents as they grow up. What we have heard is that for young males this identity and feeling of significance has become increasingly linked to violence.

We heard from numerous places about young people's desire for status. The boys from the Salford school workshop said it was *"all about being the top dog"*, while a resident of a homeless hostel in Wigan said it was "*about making a name for yourself*". In Bolton we heard from a youth worker that, *"image is as big for boys as it is girls"* and at the Bury Pupil Referral Unit a young man added that, *"people who cause violence in Year 8 are just doing it to impress their mates, they want to be big"*. A Rochdale youth worker gave us this example: *"It is all about status for young people. There were some young people who beat up a librarian the other day. The adults around were disgusted. For the young people it was the only way to raise their self-esteem."*

Taxi drivers in Salford spoke about earlier expectations and how serious violence used to be reserved for just *"hardmen, but now you see 14/15 year olds on the streets [causing serious violence]" wanting to be seen as "hard"*. Some of the girls from the Salford School Workshop described some teenagers as *"wannabe gangsters"*. The increased image pressure has led to young people feeling societal expectations at an earlier age: *"The expectations are just different now. Like you are supposed to have this phone, that piece of clothing etc. which is not that much different. But the age and stage has been shifted to much younger and physically and mentally the kids can't cope. I think social media has definitely created this pressure earlier, where it might have 16-19 year olds and now it is 9-13 year olds."* [1]

One young man who we met at the Wigan homeless hostel, who had previously been involved in the drugs trade, described how, *"at 19, I used to make £4k profit every week from selling heroin and crack cocaine. I remember shelling out £1k for a tracksuit as I knew I could walk in and buy what I wanted."*

However, as one of the Bolton youth workers remarked: *"The problem is that you have everyone telling you that you need to be a certain image, but then you have no means to get there. So they end up looking for quick money [drugs] to get them there… there are things you are supposed to have, but when there is no job and you don't go to college, it is like good luck!"* An adult offender in central Manchester stated: "*you see people who have never worked a day in their life driving around in flashy cars – who do like robberies and sell drugs – doing way better than people who work 5 days a week. Why would I work?*"

1. Youth worker, Bolton

We heard that social media adds a new layer of complexity to image, as it can further blur reality and bravado. The Salford Rugby League Rising Stars described how people often just *"put on a front"* on social media to make them seem cooler; one of them described the people for whom image is more important than the reality as the *"guys in rented cars"* who then post on social media. A Trafford youth worker added to this: "*You see these 14-year-olds kids standing next to these cars and they can't even drive. It is all a status thing saying 'I am this person'".* A Bolton youth worker concluded our conversation by saying: *"There are so many images of people with BMWs and a Vodka bottle with fire on it on holiday, like they have made it. But that is not the reality behind the screen and it just creates so much pressure".*

This image pressure extends to weapons, with a Salford bus station manager saying how it is now *"cool to carry"* and they *"carry [knives] like toys or fashion statements".* We heard at the Stockport girls sports group that people carry knives to *"make them look harder or because they want to act solid or pretend they are roadmen* [1]]".

5.2 Young boys are being told to show no other emotion except aggression, which is resulting in the bottling of emotions and sudden 'explosions'

We noted again and again the pressures of masculinity on young boys. From *"I wouldn't admit to being scared"* [2] to *"people make fun of boys that cry"* [3] to the ever-present "*don't be a pussy"* [4] .

A teenage girl from Oldham told us that *"boys don't feel comfortable talking about violence, they don't sit down to talk to each other which means they can explode because they can't show their emotions."* Another girl in the same session went on to add that, *"girls make a big deal when boys cry, when really sometimes they need to be left today and told its okay to cry. But boys think they look stupid if they cry and people make fun of boys that cry then say to them 'come on you wimp'".*

We heard that this pressure was particularly felt in areas of intergenerational crime where the children or even the grandchildren of former gang members were held up to be the "*hardmen*" of the area. Those we spoke to from those areas more than anyone had the pressure to be tough and strong, when it was clear that most of them still had insecurities and emotions that were being suppressed.

We saw some variance in maturity in the young people who attended our school workshops – particularly between boys. We did meet some incredibly mature young people who were aware of the consequences of their actions, but this was not always the case.

1. A young man who spends a lot of time on the streets and may use or sell drugs, or cause trouble.
2. Young boy at Youth Forum, Trafford
3. Girls' school workshop, Oldham
4. Boys' school workshop, Oldham

5.3 Young boys are being told retaliation is a strength, which leads to an escalating cycle of conflict

"Boys react, react, react" (Trafford School Assistant Head)

A consistent message we heard across Greater Manchester was that some boys struggle to stop and think before they act.

In Rochdale, one Year 6 pupil said that those who get in fights are *"those who don't think twice"* or *"people who get angry"*. These triggers could be minimal: *"the triggers for me to get angry could just be someone looking at me wrong or saying something wrong"*[1]. During the school workshop in Trafford a few of the boys said that *"fights usually come from misunderstandings"* – that is, boys lacking the emotional intelligence and empathy to understand why someone may be behaving in that way.

Many of the offenders that we spoke to said they struggled with anger and conflict management. One said that he used drugs as his coping strategy: *"Weed chills me out. I get pissed off easily, so weed helps, but I do get migraines from it. I am just scared that if I cut down I will go psycho"* [2]. A Parent of an adult offender in central Manchester told us that *"something will have happened on his phone and he'll just erupt … sometimes he is on the phone, then he just gets in a rage says he has to go to the cashpoint or transfer money… it is just like something happens on his phone, which switches the light on and creates a hot potato"*.

Similarly, several teachers spoke about the need to educate children on conflict resolution: *"Lots of children grow up with an ill-advised perception of how to stand up for what they believe in. Education on resolving conflict and how to walk away is very important"* and *"It is really important for the children to ensure that they can be resilient as this often enables them to avoid confrontations and for insignificant incidents to escalate and become more violent. We need to give the children the skills to be able to self regulate their emotions and not be pressured by peers"*.

We heard that this lack of emotional intelligence and control for young boys can often lead to violence. One of the girls attending a Pupil Referral Unit in Bury said that: *"boys are more likely to do the gory stuff. Like a boy will just go up and stab them"*. A 19-year-old offender from central Manchester described what he would have done if presented with a confrontational situation when he was 16: *"I would have cheffed [stabbed] him in the neck"*.

1, 2. Young offenders, Wigan

5.4 Many young people say it is not manly to carry weapons

"It's the wet kids that carry" (Bolton Youth Offender)

Carrying a knife was not always perceived as cool; in fact, in the school workshops we repeatedly heard that it was a "cowardly" thing to do. We heard young people calling those who carried knives as *"pathetic"*, *"idiots"*, *"muppets"*, *"little geek[s]"* and "*arseholes"*. One young offender from Wigan said: *"There are bare wet kids who get scared so pretend to be a roadman [1]"*, while a teenager in Oldham remarked: *"The guy who is carrying is just a muppet, he is fucked in the head".*

It was suggested multiple times that carrying a knife implies that someone cannot fight: *"If you can't use your fists, you don't deserve to fight"*[1]. A female resident of a homeless hostel in Wigan stated that: *"I've never been about someone who is carrying a knife. I see them as cowards. I got brought up being told that if you can't fight with your fists then you cant fight at all".* At the Shed in Tameside we heard that *"you used to use your fists to get respect"* and in a workshop in Bolton one boy said: *"It's a bit weak. If you need to protect yourself, why do you need a knife?"*

5.5 Unhealthy relationships and attitudes towards girls and women

We heard in the school workshop in Oldham that many conflicts start with *"fighting over girls"*. We heard multiple times about the poor attitudes towards women and girls, particularly in terms of treating them as property and conquests.

We heard multiple instances of girls being used by boys, with one girl in an Oldham school workshop explaining that *"I think girls carry knives but don't use them... if you have a relationship with a dodgy boy you're going to get dragged in... girls will do anything to please their boyfriends and they have pictures as blackmail"*. During an interview at the Bury Pupil Referral Unit one teenage boy remarked: *"Have you seen that girl who got done for carrying? I know for sure that those two boys just gave it to her to carry".* A Salford young offender spoke about how young people use their girlfriends' social media accounts to spy on rivals: *"You notice a girl starts following you on social media, and you think great. When really it is a guy using his girlfriend's account to spy on you".*

We repeatedly heard misogynist language and attitudes towards women and girls. A targeted youth worker from Bolton remarked that, *"there has definitely been a rise in sexual inappropriate behavior. I think the reason is that they don't know how to communicate".*

1. A young man who spends a lot of time on the streets and may use or sell drugs, or cause trouble.
2. Young adult in homeless hostel in Wigan

During the Salford school workshop, the boys spoke about *"body shaming"* and the girls spoke about the normalisation of unhealthy attitudes towards sexual relationships. They told us of a particular social media account set up privately on Instagram by boys to 'rate' the girls in their school. We heard that this type of behaviour could quickly escalate to include violence and threats of violence against young women: *"I saw this 13-year-old girl at the bus stop who had been slashed by her ex boyfriend. I took her to my dad as she didn't want the ambulance involved – I think she was doing something wrong – he patched her up."* [1] An adult offender in central Manchester told us that, *"If a girl cheated on me, I would beef [beat] her up as well. I would smash her up".* We spoke to a 10-year-old girl who said she had received an anonymous message through Snapchat *"out of the blue saying I'm going to find you and rape you"*.

We also collected a handful of examples of girls fighting. One of the female Pupil Referral Unit pupils in Bury said: *"[when] a girl gets into a fight... if they are losing [they will] get out the knife"*. Similarly, the boys in the school workshops we ran thought the same amount of girls would carry knives but *"guys are more likely to use it and prove their dominance and aggression".*

Masculinity is undoubtedly having an impact on youth violence from the way young men treat women to the way they bottle their emotions.

1. Teenager in Bury

Insight 6: Communities feel there is an urgent need to create safe spaces and strong relationships to divert young people from violent crime

Many of the people we talked to remarked on how a greater sense of purpose and more opportunities could deter young people away from serious violence. We heard about bored kids who end up in unsuitable places: *"hanging out at the crack den… if there is nowhere to go and nothing to do, young people get dragged into things. First they buy some weed, then you see them running for them. It is all cumulative."*[1]

From what we heard, there is a significant need for safe places where young people can not only *"hang out"* and develop projects that increase their sense of ownership in the community, but also build positive relationships with peers and adults alike. This does not necessarily entail new buildings; people felt that safe places could be found in existing community assets. Money should instead be focused on youth outreach by adults who can help build relationships for the long term. This included more positive role models and local mentors who were willing to "*walk life with them*"[2] and who were "*people from that area who care*"[3] We heard that interventions targeted at young people already involved in serious violent crime should be timely, demanding, physical, motivating and designed to break negative routines and thought patterns.

We also heard that more education on the consequences of violent crime would create a better understanding and encourage fewer young people to become involved.

1. Targeted youth worker, Bolton
2. Faith leader at Community Cohesion Event
3. Youth worker, Trafford

6.1 Children are bored and in unsuitable places because they are lacking opportunities, suitable places and ownership

A lack of opportunities means there are bored children looking for something to do

"What is a youth club?" (Stockport Year 6 Young Person)

We consistently heard empathy for young people across Greater Manchester as it was felt that there are not enough things for them to do (that they can afford and access). We talked to one man at the Men's Shed, Tameside, who said *"I feel sorry for the youth as there is nothing for them to do"*. An assistant headteacher in Oldham stated, *"the community is bored"*, while a targeted youth worker in Bolton said, *"we have loads of issues out of hours, there just isn't enough for them to do".*

In numerous conversations we heard about the cuts to youth services and the lack of opportunities for children. A Salford youth leader told us: "*open access youth provision has been cut by 98%. There needs to be more positive alternatives for young people, who are already challenged by poverty and parents being on drugs."*

Parents felt at a loss for what they could do: *"it seems like everywhere you go a door is shutting"*[1]. There was a particular worry about summer, particularly between the ages of 13-15 years old, which is when teenagers were viewed as being at their most vulnerable, being *"too young to work, but too old for holiday clubs"*[2]. Teachers stated that there was an urgent need for *"as many out-of-school activities as possible – youth clubs, boxing, athletics, choirs etc. Be proactive rather than reactive".*

A number of teachers who completed our survey commented on the need for more positive after school activities, which are structured and affordable for children to engage in. This included engaging with local churches and faith organisations, and those that offer positive role models and mentors – in and outside of school. Others suggested a reward scheme in communities whereby young people could be rewarded with vouchers for positive community actions.

Additionally, some of the young people we spoke to also described their frustrations. One boy in Oldham told us: *"you can't even play football on the street because you get your football robbed".* Another boy from the same school added: *"I smashed up the rugby club because I was bored there's nothing else to do, it's that or egg the buses."*

1. Mother of a young offender, central Manchester
2. Parent of a 13 year old in Trafford

A lack of suitable places to take risks and explore boundaries safely leaves young people experimenting in unsuitable places

A parent from Bolton said: "*if there were youth clubs and workers that's where they'd be, instead they go to the drug dealers den and for a tenner they can stay over – that is the only thing they can do"*. We repeatedly heard that young people need safe spaces: *"We need to create space for young people where they can be young and take risks in a positive way. The street isn't a safe place to do it."*[1] Places where *"kids can be kids and make mistakes"* because at the minute they are doing it "*in a very public place."*[2]

Throughout Greater Manchester we learned of a large amount of community assets present in every community or area which were not being tapped into. A Stockport youth worker said: *"We have lots of awesome facilities, but no youth services to use it"*. In Trafford we heard that *"Youth services have been annihilated. We need the local little ones back, that safe chilling place. We should be using the leisure centre [resources they already have] to do it."*[3] In Tameside, the Bangladesh Community Centre focused on what used to happen within their building: *"the place used to be buzzing every evening. The council paid for the youth workers and they'd use our building… Our homework clubs used to be chocka [full], but the funding got cut."* A Stockport youth worker offered a tongue-in-cheek answer about what a building requires to attract the youth: *"offer children shelter and wifi – it's like moths to a flame."*

Young people need more ownership in order to feel like they have a stake in the community

We heard that ownership is key for any intervention aimed at young people. A Bolton youth worker said this was one of the major issues for young people: *"They just have less stake in the community. They don't have any ownership over anything that is going on"*. One of the best ways we saw this working across Greater Manchester was through mini-projects. A Trafford youth worker told us: *"I think there needs to be a mix of activities and projects. Ping pong is great but actual practical projects are even better"*.

In Wigan, a youth offender who had been involved in a series of violent acts proudly presented his work to us: *"I've built this great chair, do you want to see it?"*. Another young person at a Trafford youth group spoke about using their creative skills to write music lyrics and the benefit this has for him: *"Sometimes I get to speak to people without speaking to people."*

A Wigan youth worker summarised this all as: *"Kids need local groups, not Wigan Youth Zone. The older kids need places they can hang out and do projects if they want to. We should use our buildings better."*

1. Youth worker, Rochdale
2. Bus station manager, Bury
3. Parent at Community Cohesion Event, Trafford

Young people need schemes where they can build long-term relationships with adults who can help guide them

From what we have heard, there is a significant need for safe places where young people can not only "hang out" and develop projects that increase their sense of ownership in the community but also build positive relationships with peers and adults alike.

Regardless of the form this takes, we heard strong agreement that it should be planned for the long term. This is in the interest of young people *"we know that the most important thing for young people is the consistency of relationships"*[1] in addition to being important to secure commitment and buy-in from existing community and organisations: *"These schemes can't just be a 1-2 year thing though. There needs to be a long term investment of five years in combination with community based charities, so that they know they can invest in training, volunteers etc."* [2]

Staff at the children's centre described the uncertainty of volunteer-led organisations: *"the only way to keep our programmes going is to have it run by volunteers, but we are worried about the year when no one steps up".*

One of the youth workers in Trafford summed it up well: *"There is no consistency to activities at the minute. It is around for three or six months then funding gets cut and that is it. The biggest problem is that is there no consistency in the relationships and we know for those youths relationships are the most important thing... the only times they then end up interacting with adults is with negative encounters with police and teachers".*

Finally, a Trafford teenager highlighted the focus of any future funding: *"The youth club is not just about the building, it is about investing in the people. You are looking at the future mentors of Trafford here".*

It is important to note that however future youth services are set up, they will also need to take into consideration some cultural challenges of the local context: *"There are religious challenges with after-school integration as most of our kids have to go to mosque so can't go to football"* [3] and *"The Bolton Lads and Girls Club is the only one left, but people won't go because people are coming from different groups and postcodes"*.[4]

1. Bangladesh Community Centre worker, Tameside
2. Adult Probation and Interchange Manager, central Manchester
3. Assistant headteacher, Oldham
4. Parent attending Community Navigators session, Bolton

6.2 Young people need help to have more purpose and higher aspirations in order to choose the 'right' path

"It is about giving them a rock to carry, that purpose" (Tameside Islamic Resource Centre)

Many of the offenders we encountered appeared to lack purpose and, therefore, fell more easily into criminal activity. A Bolton youth worker spoke about getting some young people to see the bigger picture: *"It is about creating something more than money. Like they are always going to be able to get their hands on a large sum of cash quickly [through drug dealing]. But it is about getting them to think about the bigger picture, their family, the fact they don't have to always be looking over their shoulder etc."*

We repeatedly heard about young people struggling to turn down immediate cash: *"We need more positive alternatives like with music and media where they get build skills and mental resilience. Like we can't ask them to turn down money they've never seen the like of before [through illegal activities like drug dealing], we need to offer an alternative."*[1]

We heard that this is also about giving some young people purpose beyond money. At the Tameside Islamic Resource Centre, we heard that *"in order to go from being a boy to a man, you need to give them responsibility… it is about giving them a rock to carry, that purpose".*

If young people were encouraged to have higher aspirations or at least keep onto former aspirations, they would see the alternative paths to 'success'

"If only they knew the career they could have... they wouldn't get in half as much trouble" (Parent at Children's Centre)

We noticed that many young people in school workshops, particularly in more deprived areas, lacked aspirations. We found that some young people either didn't know what they wanted to do at 15/16 years old or were not enthused by their career path. This is not abnormal, but the easy slip into criminal activity was then not a big leap of imagination – largely because of the environment they found themselves in at school, at home or in the community.

Some of the Year 6 children we spoke to talked freely and eagerly about dreams for the future, but somewhere these opportunities appear to get lost as children moved through to secondary school. In the teacher survey this was one of the key themes that was picked up, with one of the teachers asking for *"aspiration work with young people – pathways to success that are not illegal".* A potential area to tackle this is through PSHE: "*PSHE should be about raising aspirations.*"[2]

1. Youth worker, Trafford
2. Youth worker, Rochdale

Education and jobs offer a positive opportunity for young people to develop and give them direction

For some people we spoke to, education was the way to feel progress for themselves or their family and friends; one offender told us, *"I tell my nephew and niece to work hard in school."* An ex-offender from Manchester had decided that: *"uni is the place to be"*, as it ticked both boxes of making money in the future and acceptance from the family, but getting there felt totally out of reach.

We saw a brilliant scheme at the Salford Red Devils Rugby League club in which young people accessed both sport and education. The teenagers and young adults we met there said they could have gone "*two ways*", but that their programme has given them the "*right direction*" and they feel "*proud that they have made the right choice*". A young man at the Trafford Community Cohesion Event wisely pointed out though that "*it is important that young people know there are different ways to get from A to B. University isn't the only option to achieve success".*

We heard on several occasions about the opportunity of apprenticeships and the more informal jobs market and economy. A probation manager from central Manchester stated: *"I think what they need is accessible apprenticeships. At the minute they are unqualified and unemployable. They need an introduction to employment, so three days a week 10-3pm and that will be a good first achievement."*

When talking to offenders, we were curious to hear how they might look to get back into the jobs market with a criminal record. They told us about some of the benefits of the informal labour market: *"I want to work in construction. And my mate's mate has a company I can join. Like he took on Luke when he was a bastard, so he should take on me".* It could be argued that this is just offering an easy way back in, but it could be equally argued that, without those informal labour opportunities, some young people would fall back into criminal activity. A Salford shop worker and recovering alcoholic heralded the routine that work provided him: *"work got me out of stuff"*. However, we did also see the challenge with jobs versus criminal activity; as a young offender from Wigan asked: *"I can get a bag of weed for £120, split into 32 bags and sell for x. So why work?"*

We heard from particular individuals about unusual interests that could have sparked a deeper purpose. One parent said of her son: *"yeah one thing I am really surprised about was gardening. Like he came back one day saying how he had found this green shoot of a new leaf, I could not believe it."* An offender in Wigan disclosed to us that, *"I enjoyed history, I like learning about the past, I find it fascinating"* despite being permanently excluded from every school he had attended. Other passions that gave people a sense of purpose were more family orientated: "*I like going to my gran's and caring for her*"[1] and "*my kids have given me purpose*"[2] .

1. 2. Youth Offender, Bolton

6.3 Interventions targeted at young people already involved in serious violent crime should be: timely, demanding, physical, motivating and break negative routines and thought patterns

In addition to universal youth group services, we discussed targeted youth interventions for those involved in serious violent crime.

Some of the key factors we heard that were needed for any intervention to work were that it was timely, demanding and a young person motivated to change. A Bolton youth worker said: *"whatever it is the interventions need to be in real time. At the minute everything is a 10 week wait away and the situation is out of hand by then"*. At the Community Navigators Forum in Bolton a parent said: *"Good kids want to be kicked out of school as there are things they can then get, it is like we are rewarding bad behavior"*, any intervention must therefore be demanding and not just *"go-karting"* (Bolton youth worker). A teenager attending a Pupil Referral Unit cautioned that for any activity to be a success required "*a kid motivated to change, else it ain't worth it*" (she added that she spoke from experience).

With many groups, particularly young people, we discussed the role of sports and particularly martial arts and boxing in channeling aggression. A parent of a pre-teen in Tameside said, *"when at school if you're not academic you need another channel. I've tried to get him into sports so he doesn't want to abuse his body"*. At a homeless hostel in Tameside one resident said: *"I think Karate was really good for my discipline and good for the mind"*. Boys in the Trafford school workshop said that they like to channel their aggression through *"hitting something or football"*.

We had some interesting discussions about martial arts with people both keen and sceptical. In Rochdale, youth workers debated the trade-off between "discipline" and "channeling of aggression" versus "bad role models" and *"upskilling kids who struggle with the blur between sport context and real life context"*. In the case of boxing they said *"there needs to be the support around it, else it just turns into that brawl we had the other week where a grudge fight ended up with 30 people in the ring"*. We also heard the worry that although *"it would be good for stress, the skills you'd learn would make you more dangerous"* (Trafford school workshop). We saw evidence of this in one of the Youth Offending Institutions, where a young man had used his boxing skills inappropriately.

On the other hand, some of the Oldham boys remarked that, *"If they want to fight, push them towards sport and boxing. A place where they can push their aggression. A place with referees and discipline"* and *"yeah talking is okay, but there is something in the physical embodiment of the release of anger in mixed martial arts… boxing gives you a sense of discipline and you get to know your limits."*

Starting good routines and stopping the bad ones is important for young people looking to change

We also discussed youth interventions and routines. We noted how many offenders talk about stopping good routines, and falling into bad habits and routines that led into criminal activity. In central Manchester we heard an offender reflecting, *"It was when I stopped playing football, kicked out of school that is when it all started [criminal activities]"*. And yet when we attended some of the YOT venues, one of the things that seemed lacking was the breaking of negative routines: *"there is not enough interaction at the YOT, it is just paperwork. One meeting a week is no good for nobody"* [1] and *"a once a week meeting [at the YOT] is not going to help anyone"* [2].

We picked up on a few instances where the breaking of routines had worked, including a particular adult offender from central Manchester: *"I went to Mecca for Umrah [islamic festival] which was amazing. I'd never done anything like that before. When I came back I was off drugs"*. A parent at the Bolton Community Navigators event said: *"I think it is about showing them an alternative way of living… like take them out to the countryside and see what change you can make"*. A pupil from Bury Pupil Referral Unit said this extended to breaking routines online: *"You should have short adverts on snapchat with messages, that can disrupt a person after they have been watching story after story"*. It was therefore suggested that there should be a focus on helping young people to maintain good routines and break negatives ones.

6.4 Positive role models and mentors are important

"Everyone's looking up to someone, for some that is the wrong people" (Bury Young Person attending the Pupil Referral Unit)

We frequently heard about the importance of role models and mentors, because of the influence they have on young people. We heard about the lack of positive male role models in the media: *"There is a lack of positive male role models. Music videos do advocate a particular lifestyle, and what is appropriate in a rap video, might not be on the street. Then people end up dead"* [3] and *"there are some bad role models in UFC"* [4].

We also heard about some bad role models closer to home: *"it is about where you grow up, you just follow what they do"* whether that is *"your cousin or those on the estate"* [5] because *"people just follow the role models they can see, whether that is the rappers or their brothers that they follow"* [6]. A Salford headteacher echoed the views of many adults by stating the need for a *"society-wide culture change, developing aspiration through hard work and not media celebration of celebrity bad behaviour. People need to aspire to be good citizens and we should not glorify gangs, criminals and those who treat others with a lack of respect and dignity."*

1. Young offender, Wigan
2. Teenager from Bury
3. Targeted youth worker, Bolton
4. Youth worker, Rochdale
5. Young offender, Bolton
6. Teenager at Trafford Community Cohesion Event

We also heard of the *"need for people to walk life with them [young people]"*[1] from numerous people from across Greater Manchester. A Salford parent said *"they need more people in their lives and positive mentors through sports, arts and relationships"* else *"they'll just live what they see on the streets"* [2]. Teachers spoke about the need for more mentoring schemes and youth workers spoke about the need for *"informal education"*. A Trafford youth worker noted that, *"we need mentors from that area, people who care. It is all about building relationships not just bringing in outside services"* while a parent from the Bolton Community Navigators Scheme added: *"it was always the conversations enroute to the activity rather than the activity itself that would have the impact"*.

Some people also spelt out to us the benefits of there being locally-based mentors: *"when we know their names it changes our relationship, they know it is traceable"* [3] and *"youth workers are good at diffusing situations. We had this one time where we turned up before the police, and when they turned up it ended up being only one arrest – when it could have been a lot more"* [4]. Crucially, this is about *"building relationships with longevity"* and having *"continuity, a thread of who they see at PHSE and after school"* [5].

6.5 Education on the causes and consequences of violent crime would encourage fewer young people to become involved

Many of the people we spoke with commented on the need for education on the consequences of violent crime. It became clear that most young people do not know what happens if they were caught with a weapon or used it.

Several of the teachers to the school survey commented on the need for more education, including the need for an education programme on violent crime to be developed for both children and parents, and delivering improved education for young people so they know there are options other than violent crime. Many that said this reported that training is best delivered by external agencies, as *"teachers are not experts in knife crime"*.

An 11-year-old girl from a Stockport girls sport group said: *"When they stab someone I don't think they realise they are taking someone's life away. I don't think they realise that people love them [the victim]"*. A resident at a homeless hostel with a background in county lines drug dealing said: *"I was grateful I got caught selling heroin. I was ruining my life and other families. I wish I knew the consequences at 11"*. A parent of an adult offender remarked: *"He had the attitude of 'I can do what I like' and 'broke every rule we made to prove he could'… he just didn't realise the consequences it was having until I developed vitiligo [skin condition triggered by stress]... I don't think they realise what the consequences are"*.

1. Faith Leader at Community Cohesion Event, Trafford
2. Girls' sports group leader, Stockport
3. Bus Station Manager, Bury
4. 5. Youth worker, Rochdale

One teacher commented: *"We need to do much more prevention - youth workers and community workers. We have got to see violence as preventable - not inevitable. This means us all developing a protocol in schools. For instance, if a child has a fight in school, how do we involve and engage parents after the event - what support do we put in place for the bystanders so it isn't normalised."*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most teachers thought the solution was more education: *"Show teenagers what knives do, get offenders & victims to talk through 'warts and all' what the impact is", "training for key groups on violent crime (as we do with PREVENT and Safeguarding)", "victim impact education: Workshops showing the dangers of knife crime".* We did also hear about the benefits of victim awareness; for example, a young offender from Wigan said: *"the offending work and victim support work is good. It made me think about how I affected my mum, my family. How it will have affected the shopkeeper, shows you the effects of the trauma, but also you get to explain it."*

Some of the people we spoke to said about the need for a shock factor. One of the residents at a Wigan homeless hostel said his wake up call came "*when I walked into the crown court, that was when I realised now is the time to grow up".* An adult offender from Wigan said: *"I lost my mum and dad in the last sentence [prison] and I just realised I needed to swap this around. I am a grandfather at 39, it is time to change".* Another offender from central Manchester stated that: *"I had a good mate who died when I was 16, he got shot in the head… it just made me start to think".*

Finally, we heard about first aid and treating victims of violent crime. Alarmingly, we heard repeatedly that, though the majority would attempt first aid or get help, some young people would not apply first aid to someone who had been stabbed in the street, for fear of being responsible or culpable if that person died: *"If they died you'd feel like it was your fault"* [1]; *"if they die, your fingerprints are on them"* [2]; and *"I'd just carry on walking, it is not my problem… he might be a crackhead or he probably did something wrong."* [3] Though most young people would attempt first aid, fewer than 10% of those we spoke to in school workshops felt confident to know what to if they had been stabbed in the torso: *"I know what I would do if someone was stabbed in the leg, but no idea if stabbed in the chest."* [4]

There is evidently a need for first aid skills to be taught, while at the same time highlighting some of the consequences of violent crime. But as a young person attending the Bury Pupil Referral Unit pointed out, it is impossible to control everything: *"[the] only thing you can do is tell them about the consequences and the risks, then it is their choice".*

1. Boys school workshop, Trafford
2. Teenager from MAHDLO centre, Oldham
3. Teenager from Oldham
4. Boys school workshop, Salford

Recommendations

This research was jointly commissioned by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and the ten GM local authorities. It is intended to inform these organisations' shared action plan to tackle violent crime; in particular, violent crime involving carrying weapons in which young people are perpetrators or victims.

The people we talked to during the course of our research have provided a wealth of material and insight into violent crime across Greater Manchester, from which we have developed recommendations across 10 themes drawn directly from the insights above:

1. Provide social media education to young people and parents and improve reporting of violent content.
2. Providing single-sex lessons addressing violence and identity.
3. Introducing Community Guardians in housing estates with high levels of violent crime.
4. Creation of local violent crime reduction teams.
5. A review of locality-based youth outreach and neighbourhood policing.
6. Introducing an 'Opportunity to Change' targeted youth intervention.
7. Creation of shared school pastoral care teams for pupils in Year 5-9.
8. Supporting parents to tackle unwanted behaviour through a combination of universal information sessions for parents of Year 6 pupils and a targeted parenting support offer.
9. A review of the use of non-custodial sentences, with a view to increase their use.
10. A public information campaign to raise awareness of the causes and impacts of violent crime.

Some of these recommendations have been inspired by best practice from Greater Manchester and elsewhere in the UK, including the Bolton Homes Community Navigators Scheme; the Glasgow Violence Disruptors; and Redthread's Youth Violence Intervention Programme operating in Accident & Emergency departments in south London.

1: Provide social media education for young people and parents, and improve reporting of violent content

a) A social media education programme for all Year 6 children and their parents

Develop an educational programme delivered through schools, and co-developed by young people and leading social media companies for all Year 6 children (age 10-11) and their parents. This could focus on equipping young people and parents to be able to better navigate the pressures and understand the potential dangerous consequences of social media use. The programme could also look to empower the user – young people – to use social media in a healthy and positive way, as well as empowering the parent or guardian to use social media as a way to communicate with their child on subjects such as fear and hopes for the future. Year 10 students (age 14-15) could also be involved with the coaching and delivery of content for younger pupils.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Insight 1: Social media is viewed as amplifying and exacerbating violent conflict.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">"No one ever thinks they can get caught for what they do online" (Trafford Boys School Workshop)
"On social media 100 people can peck someone's head" (Bolton parent)
"The biggest problem is the fight after school then everyone is snapchatting then resharing… I just don't think they know what is out there in the big bad world." (Rochdale Teacher)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Proposed recommendations: An educational programme that helps young people to manage and use social media in a healthy way. This could be delivered through schools for a) young people b) parents.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who is it aimed at?</td><td>Year 6 Pupils and their parents</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who delivers it?</td><td>a) Year 10 Pupils (with Outreach Worker support)
b) Outreach Workers</td></tr>
<tr><td>What does it involve?</td><td>The educational programme could be:
Co-developed with young people and leading social media companies
Co-delivered by Year 10 students and youth outreach
Y10s could facilitate the workshops on a voluntary basis – encouraged to do so by their schools and youth outreach to further their skillset
For the parents this could be part of the transition events that occur during their child's Year 6 year
The programme could contain content on:
Understanding the consequences of sharing violent content
Navigating keyboard warriors</td></tr>
</table>

	• Understanding how conflict sometimes arises from trivial sources • Creating pro-social content for the 'likes' • Relentless pressure, how to cope • How to supervise phone usage appropriately • What is being shared without parents knowing • How to create a social media code of conduct • How to have ongoing open conversations about issues stemming from social media		
What are the benefits?	• The purpose of the training is to facilitate conversations around social media, phone usage and code of conduct • It is also a vehicle to open up the communication channel on other deeper subjects such as fear, image pressure etc. Encouraging both young people to open up and giving permission, tools and confidence for parents to ask the questions • The vulnerable children who are susceptible to social media pressures and carrying weapons for self defence are not defined to a particular socio-economic class – these sessions will help address all vulnerable children		
What are the challenges?	• The workshops will have the greatest impact if ran concurrently, but this will need strong direction to ensure this happens • Requires a careful selection of Year 10s. It will need to be those who have a strong awareness of the topics, but been through process and have matured so won't glamorise it		
Timeframe	Trial in Jan in one local authority, can quickly rollout to other areas		
Indicative Costs	Low	Likely Impact:	High

b) Lobby social media companies to improve the reporting of violent content

This includes understanding how best to market reporting to young people; improving the workflow and communication channels between social media companies and the police; and making violent content less accessible by changing algorithm options. The focus should be on empowering the user by giving them the ability to report inappropriate content coupled with visibility of changes being made. The emphasis should be on a nuanced and thoughtful approach to violent content, rather sending it underground through broad-brush bans and restrictions.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Insight 1: Social media is viewed as amplifying and exacerbating violent conflict.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">"I just scroll past [the violent content] because there is nothing you can do, nothing will happen" (Bolton Young Person)
"Drill music tells you that violence is alright… everyone sees it and it just becomes the norm" (central Manchester adult offender)
"You should have short adverts on snapchat with messages, that can disrupt a person after they have been watching story after story" (Pupil in Bury)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Proposed recommendations:

1) Lobby social media companies to improve reporting processes for violent content and review the actions from reporting.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who is it aimed at?</td><td>Social Media Companies, GMP and GMCA</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who helps with reforms?</td><td>TBC</td></tr>
<tr><td>What does it involve?</td><td>Working with social media companies and GMP to improve reporting:

1. Review 'report feedback' button looking at what might encourage more people to 'report' violent content online:
• Reporting to more of an authority: "report to the police?"
• Think: "Is this video appropriate for an 11 year old?"
• Think about consequences: "Is this okay to be online?"

2. Review Reporting Processes
• What currently happens with reporting of social media content? What is the workflow and communication channels between social media companies and the police?
• What communication and feedback is sent to those who have proactively reported violent content?</td></tr>
</table>

	3. Making Violent Content More Inaccessible • Look at options to change/influence algorithms so violent images do not feature in internet recommendations, and do not appear in under 18 homescreens. Can companies make violent content an unlisted video that people can share, but can't be stumbled upon, and isn't promoted on sites		
What are the benefits?	Banning violent content will could raise it's profile, send it underground and it is also hard to police. Instead these reforms look to empower the user: • Educate young people and parents on using social media (see part 1 of the recommendations) • Give them the power to report inappropriate content and the belief it will go somewhere, with robust processes, workflows and communication channels Instead of outright banning content, reducing it's appearance will minimise impact without raising it's profile		
What are the challenges?	• Violent content has more complexity and nuance to it than indecent images so is a less simple policy – how much is too much violence? What is too violent? And to whom? • Technology is always moving forward, so there will need to be an annual review of which social media companies need to be involved in these processes		
Timeframe	Start discussions now		
Indicative Costs	Low	Likely Impact:	Medium

Recommendation 2: Provide single-sex lessons addressing violence and identity

Revise and develop a universal single sex PSHE curriculum in Year 8 for both boys and girls. The curriculum could teach young people the skills to be more risk aware and manage aggression, hostility and conflict; understand peer pressures and develop identities and aspirations which do not rely on violence or exploitation. The single-sex nature of the lessons could help young people to understand and navigate the gendered pressures they experience as well as better facilitate spaces where they can be vulnerable. It could be taught by a shared pastoral team (see recommendation 7) or by local youth outreach (see recommendation 5).

Insight 4: Vulnerability and fear are important drivers in the increase in young people carrying weapons. Insight 5: 'Toxic masculinity' and pressure to conform appears to increase the likelihood of young men being perpetrators or victims of violent crime.	
"There is just no guidance, they just live what they see on the streets" (Life Leisure youth worker, Stockport) "Would be good to have continuity, a thread of who they see at PHSE [in school] and after school" (Rochdale youth worker)	
Proposed recommendations: To revise and develop a single sex PSHE curriculum to help boys and girls to create a positive gender identity without violence and without power inequality between boys and girls. Teach young people the skills to be aware of their own emotions, how to manage their emotions, how to manage relationships with others and manage conflict by avoiding violent responses.	
Who is it aimed at?	Year 8 and refresher in Year 10
Who delivers it?	This could be delivered by a shared pastoral team (across primary and secondary schools)
What does it involve?	A half term course delivered separately to boys and girls which could cover the following areas: 1. Image and Fear – digital and physical image and link to their aspirations. What does fear mean, how do you manage fear? Who do you talk to? 2. Drill music and video games - desensitizing young people to violence 3. Unhealthy ideas about sex and relationships, violence, exploitation, power and gender equality gained from porn 4. Understanding consequences of actions – law and family 5. Street Doctors First Aid – practical 6. Status – what defines you? How do you want to be recognised virtually and physically? And how does this fit with your future aspirations? Commitment card completed on who you want to be

What are the benefits?	Help young people to discuss and share the challenges of growing-up in a world focused on image and the glorification of violence. Encourage young people to discuss their emotions, develop identities and aspirations for their future through positive male/female role models.		
What are the challenges?	Maturity and engagement of young people Commitment from school to ensure time in the curriculum		
Similar example	Becoming a Man Programme Chicago A Band of Brothers		
Timeframe	Less than 6 months		
Indicative Costs	Low	Likely Impact:	Medium

Recommendation 3: Introduce Community Guardians in housing estates with high levels of violent crime

Introduce community guardians in areas of high violence. Guardians act as community representatives by building an ongoing communication channel between the community and the landlords and locality teams. This would be in order to: help share community intelligence with those who can productively use it - including to help the police to make more pragmatic and worthwhile interventions; better safeguard and reassure residents about the actions put in place to combat violent crime; help to address issues with housing earlier and more effectively as we as build better relationships between the police and the community. This could be implemented on an estate-by-estate basis.

Insight 2: There are concerns that young people are growing up in school, home and community environments in which conflict and violence are normalised. Insight 3: Changes to neighbourhood policing are seen worsening the relationship between communities and police.	
"They just have less stake in the community. They don't have any ownership over anything that is going on" (Youth Worker, Bolton)	
Proposed recommendations: Appointment of community guardians to connect communities, landlords and community policing teams with the aim of reducing violence in the community	
Who is it aimed at?	Housing estates where the RSL or private landlord has 100+ properties
Who delivers it?	The landlord appoints and rewards residents to play the role of community guardians for their estates.
What does it involve?	• Community guardians better connect landlords and local communities on issues of safety, crime and anti-social behaviour • Community guardians work in their communities, make positive inter-generational connections and provide reassurance to communities on safety and action on crime • Responsible for updating the online community with news stories about action on crime and safety • Share community intelligence with RSL and neighbourhood policing team.
What are the benefits?	• Share intelligence and addressing concerns quickly to address anti-social behaviour • Properties are better cared for, repairs are reported and addressed quicker.

What are the challenges?	• Influenced by personal agendas and politics • Risk of gatekeeping communities • Avoid the perception of community 'snitches' • Attracting people with the right skills and motivations		
Similar example	Bolton Homes Community Navigators, Community Wardens, Youth Community Wardens		
Timeframe	6-18 months		
Indicative Costs	Low	Likely Impact:	High

Recommendation 4: Create locality-based violent crime reduction teams

Develop multidisciplinary locality-based violent crime reduction teams that utilise A&E and police data to proactively act on local violence. This team could also provide local intelligence to the GM-wide Violent Crime Reduction Team. The number of locality teams would vary per local authority to reflect local context and could include neighbourhood police officers, local youth outreach, A&E nurses, children's social workers and school staff.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Insight 3: Changes to neighbourhood policing are seen worsening the relationship between communities and police.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">"We could do with more information sharing. We as youth workers don't get linked in. One of our kids might have committed a serious crime on the weekend and the police are after them, they then turn up to our sessions and we are none the wiser. We can't help anyone if we don't know" (Youth Worker Bolton)

"Engage with community leaders to invite police to the table to have a discussion around violent crime and the contextualise impact on the community" (teacher)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Proposed recommendations: Develop placed-based violent crime reduction teams, utilizing A&E data and police data to understand local violence, prevent and intervene. They would feed intelligence to the GM-wide Violent Crime Reduction Team.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who is it aimed at?</td><td>Target people who have attended A&E with a weapon injury, first time offenders, repeat offenders, and work with families and siblings</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who delivers it?</td><td>A multi-agency place-based team to meet and discuss local intelligence and data: This could include neighbourhood police officers, youth outreach workers, A&E staff, local school pastoral team lead /headteacher, children's social worker, youth offending team</td></tr>
<tr><td>What does it involve?</td><td>A multi-agency discussion, sharing information and developing a planned response to:
hospital admission involving a weapon injury,
offenders found in possession of a weapon,
Incidents of serious assault
Concerns from or about families members and siblings</td></tr>
<tr><td>What are the benefits?</td><td>Better information sharing in each locality between police, NHS, schools, children's social care
Enabling earlier intervention
Coordinating support to victims and families</td></tr>
</table>

What are the challenges?	Availability of staff and attendance at team meetings		
Similar example	Trafford Locality Panel, Cardiff Violence Prevention Board		
Timeframe	6-12 months		
Indicative Costs	Medium	Likely Impact:	Medium

Recommendation 5: A review of locality-based youth outreach support and neighbourhood policing

Review locality-based youth outreach. These roles could be played by youth workers, mentors, community members or other professionals who are best placed to reach out to young people in the community. This role focuses on providing more consistent relationships and guidance to young people; utilizing community assets; and helping to build young people's sense of purpose and ownership.

In addition, review the current approach to neighbourhood policing, including how to build better relationships with communities and how to better work with schools. This could involve school-based officers who may build closer relationships with young people, look to understand the full context and be better placed to inform young people of the consequences of violence.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Insight 6: Communities feel there is an urgent need to create safe places and strong relationships to divert young people from violent crime.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">"Youth clubs are not really about the building, it is about investing in the people. You are looking at the future mentors of Trafford here" Trafford Young Person "We need to create space for young people where they can be young and take risks. The street isn't a safe place" Rochdale Youth Worker "when we know their names it changes our relationship, they know it is traceable" Bury Bus Station Manager</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Proposed recommendations:
a) Review locality-based youth outreach and develop a more comprehensive place-based youth outreach offer in each locality across GM
b) Review current approach to Neighbourhood Policing</td></tr>
<tr><td>What does it involve?</td><td>A) Review locality-based youth outreach and develop a more comprehensive place-based youth outreach offer in each locality across GM including:
Investing in people rather than buildings. Reaching out and engaging with young people, especially 10-14 year olds
Using existing local community assets more and building better relationships with local organisations
Developing community projects with young people on a wide range of topics from the local built environment, to music, sport, social media and enterprise
Contributing to 'Opportunity to Change' programmes
Contributing to PSHE curriculum in schools, and training about safe use of social media for young people and parents (see recommendation 1)
B) Review current approach to Neighbourhood Policing and in particular review the work of neighbourhood police in secondary schools</td></tr>
</table>

What are the benefits?	• Investing in people rather than buildings, can help unlock existing community assets • Youth outreach is about bringing young people into safe spaces, and more positive safe contact with adults • Building relationships with young people, providing diversionary activities, and disrupting violent behaviour • Police officers working closely with schools would bring an important authoritative presence, increase speed of response, improve relationships and intelligence • Children and young people would better understand about the consequences of crime and anti-social behavior		
What are the challenges?	• Need thoughtful recruitment • Need to have a good relationships between young outreach, neighbourhood police team and schools • The benefits may take time to accrue as it is about building relationships		
Similar example	Glasgow Violence Disruptors, HAGGRID in County Durham, West Midlands Gang Mediators, Redthread A&E based youth workers Detached Youth Worker model,		
Timeframe	6-12 months		
Indicative Costs	Medium	Likely Impact:	High

Recommendation 6: Introduce an 'Opportunity to Change' targeted youth intervention

Create an 'opportunity to change' targeted youth intervention, which could have both junior (age 10-12) and senior (age 13-16) pathways. The programme could include elements such as conflict management, emotional awareness, residential sessions and a long-term mentoring programme. Content could be tailored and delivered by an appropriate place-based multi-agency team. It could be aimed at young people referred by local services for offending, at risk of offending or victims of violence.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Insight 6: Communities feel there is an urgent need to create safe places and strong relationships to divert young people from violent crime.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">" when at school if you're not academic you need another channel. I've tried to get him into sports so he doesn't want to abuse his body" Bolton parent "Any youth intervention has to have a kid motivated to change else it ain't worth it" Bury Young Person</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Proposed recommendations:

Introduce an 'Opportunity to Change' Programme for 10-12 yrs olds and 13-16 yrs olds</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who is it aimed at?</td><td>Young people referred for risk factors linked to violence, for example: possession of a weapon or drugs, antisocial behavior, poor behaviour at school, school exclusions, offending behaviour in the family, being a victim etc.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who delivers it?</td><td>Multi-disciplinary team who could include youth workers, ex-offenders, social workers, police, sports coaches, teachers, third sector support workers etc</td></tr>
<tr><td>What does it involve?</td><td>Typically, examples of these programmes last 10-12 weeks, followed by mentoring and could include:
Physical Fitness – cardio-based fitness
Developing identity – exploring feelings, vulnerability and emotional states e.g. Becoming a Man
Conflict Management – how to channel anger and negotiate peer pressure
Consequences – looking at impact on victims with A&E doctors, ex offenders and victims
Work Aspirations – what they'd like to do in the future and earning money
Community Connection/Purpose – finding ways of contributing positively to your local community
Residential – outdoors education, getting away from the locality, and addressing issues e.g. A Band of Brothers
Mentoring – continue the relationship meeting the young person to discuss challenges and progress.</td></tr>
</table>

What are the benefits?	• *Relationships:* Helps to build a relationship with their mentor during the programme which will continue beyond the programme • *Building Skills*: "about building skills not going go-karting" Bolton Youth Worker • *Identity:* help build sense of self and significance away from violence • *Emotional Intelligence:* helps them to be aware of their own emotions and understand not only their behavior but others • *Aspirations:* helps to develop purpose and aspirations for the future		
What are the challenges?	• Quality of provision • Delivering in each locality		
Similar examples	Becoming A Man programme, A Band of Brothers, Street Doctors, Manchester Cares, Merseyside Prevent Model (Working with Everton Charity Arm), Bristols ROUTES project, Suffolk Thinking Skills Programme, Khulisa UK (psycho-education programmes)		
Timeframe	12 months		
Indicative Costs	High	Likely Impact:	High

Recommendation 7: Create shared pastoral teams for pupils in Years 5-9

Establish a shared pastoral team across primary and secondary schools to provide better continuity for children and families during the transition between schools. This could improve the flows of information from primary to secondary schools and provide a point of contact for parents and children during this difficult phase, in addition to enabling secondary school teachers to make more informed preventative steps to proactively de-escalate behaviour.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Insight 2: There are concerns that young people are growing up in school, home and community environments in which conflict and violence are normalised.

Insight 4: Vulnerability and fear are important drivers in the increase in young people carrying weapons.

Insight 6: Communities feel there is an urgent need to create safe places and strong relationships to divert young people from violent crime.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">“He’s been suspended 12 times this year, 5 days each time. He’s falling more behind”
(Bolton Parent)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Proposed recommendations: To create a shared pastoral team across primary and secondary schools</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who is it aimed at?</td><td colspan="3">Year 5-9 children</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who delivers it?</td><td colspan="3">Schools. Multi-Academy Trusts with primary and secondary schools may be best suited to delivering this approach</td></tr>
<tr><td>What does it involve?</td><td colspan="3">There would be a shared pastoral team employed by both the primary and secondary schools comprising of senior teachers responsible for child welfare, learning mentors, parent liaison workers, administrators, counsellors, teaching assistants etc.</td></tr>
<tr><td>What are the benefits?</td><td colspan="3">• provide better continuity for children and families during the transition between schools
• improve the flows of information from primary to secondary schools
• provide a point of contact for parents and children during this difficult phase
• enable secondary school teachers to make more informed preventative steps to proactively help to de-escalate issues and behaviour</td></tr>
<tr><td>What are the challenges?</td><td colspan="3">• It could be difficult to ask separate schools to co-fund
• The biggest impact won’t be until the Year 5s reach Year 8 and 9</td></tr>
<tr><td>Indicative Costs</td><td>Low</td><td>Likely Impact:</td><td>Medium</td></tr>
</table>

Recommendation 8: Support parents to tackle unwanted behaviour

a) Universal information sessions for parents of 10-11 year olds

Deliver multiple universal information sessions that would help empower and educate parents to support their child through the transition from primary to secondary school. The sessions could help parents to better understand their child's development, share concerns and strategies with one another, prepare for future challenges and create a parental peer support network. It could be delivered by the shared pastoral team, who are responsible for years 5-9.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Insight 2: There are concerns that young people are growing up in school, home and community environments in which conflict and violence are normalised.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">"My 14-year-old is running rings around me and I can't physically lock my son in the house as that is illegal" (Bolton parent)

"Parenting your teens programmes to be more widely promoted and be more hard hitting re drugs, gangs and boundaries" (headteacher in central Manchester).</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Proposed recommendations:
Universal Parent Information Sessions for year 6 children</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who is it aimed at?</td><td colspan="3">Parents of children in Y6 (with possible option for Y2 parents)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who delivers it?</td><td colspan="3">Shared pastoral team, working across primary and secondary schools (see recommendation 8)</td></tr>
<tr><td>What does it involve?</td><td colspan="3">• Empowering parents to understand their child's development, particularly around emotional developments as they transition to secondary school
• Information, advice and guidance for parents to help them be better prepared for adolescence including risk taking behaviour, safe social media use, behaviour, conflict, avoiding drugs and violence, anger management and discipline</td></tr>
<tr><td>What are the benefits?</td><td colspan="3">Parents better understand their child's development and better equipped to manage their transition to secondary school, keeping their child safe</td></tr>
<tr><td>What are the challenges?</td><td colspan="3">Encouraging parents to attend
School's buy-in to a shared pastoral team.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Similar example</td><td colspan="3">Teen Triple-P Parenting programmes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Timeframe</td><td colspan="3">6-12 months</td></tr>
<tr><td>Indicative Costs</td><td>Low</td><td>Likely Impact:</td><td>Medium</td></tr>
</table>

b) Targeted Parenting Support Offer

A targeted parenting offer for parents of young people where there are multiple risk factors. The risk factors could include social care involvement, truancy, conduct problems, youth offending and parents or siblings in the criminal justice system. Parents would be invited to receive parenting support on an evidence-based parenting programme to build family relations, improve parental behaviour management and attachment and create a support network.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Insight 2: There are concerns that young people are growing up in school, home and community environments in which conflict and violence are normalised.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">"I know some parents who let their children walk around with knives to protect themselves" (school workshop Oldham girl)

"They've got those behavioural problems and then are living in chaos" (Pupil Referral Unit Manager, Bury)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Proposed recommendations: Targeted parenting programmes for parents of children at high risk</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who is it aimed at?</td><td colspan="3">Parents of young people referred for risk factors linked to violence, for example: possession of a weapon or drugs, antisocial behavior, poor behaviour at school, school exclusions, offending behaviour in the family, being a victim etc.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who delivers it?</td><td colspan="3">Shared pastoral team, working across primary and secondary schools (see recommendation 8)</td></tr>
<tr><td>What does it involve?</td><td colspan="3">Evidence based parenting programmes are well established in this area and typically include a 12 week licenced programme, by a qualified trainer covering topics such as, boundaries, routines, behaviour management, risk taking behaviour, safe social media use, anger management and discipline</td></tr>
<tr><td>What are the benefits?</td><td colspan="3">• Reduce risk to young people
• Build family relations.
• Improve parenting capacity
• Improve behavior and attendance at school
• Fewer young people out of school</td></tr>
<tr><td>What are the challenges?</td><td colspan="3">• Parental voluntary engagement
• Trained and qualified workforce with the time available to run courses each term</td></tr>
<tr><td>Similar example</td><td colspan="3">IY Solihull Parenting Programme,
Teen Triple P</td></tr>
<tr><td>Timeframe</td><td colspan="3">12+ months</td></tr>
<tr><td>Indicative Costs</td><td>High</td><td>Likely Impact:</td><td>High</td></tr>
</table>

Recommendation 9: A review of the use of non-custodial sentences

Review how and when non-custodial sentencing is most effective as a deterrent for carrying, hiding and using weapons. In particular, this could incorporate the review of the use of tagging and restorative justice. The focus of the review could be to improve the effectiveness of deterrents, public confidence in the police, justice system and sentencing process; and also increase the transparency of sentences for offences involving a weapon.

Insight 3: Changes to neighbourhood policing are seen worsening the relationship between communities and police.			
"I got my first asbo at 12 that's sic isn't it?! (student, Oldham)			
Proposed recommendations: To review how non-custodial sentencing can act as a greater deterrent for carrying, hiding, procuring and using weapons. This could include the use of tagging and restorative justice orders to deter violent crime.			
Who is it aimed at?	Those at high risk of offending, especially those at high risk of carrying a weapon.		
Who delivers it?	GMCA		
What does it involve?	Review of how non-custodial sentencing can act as a greater deterrent for violent crime, especially carrying, hiding, procuring and using weapons.		
What are the benefits?	Improve public confidence in the police and the justice system and sentencing process. Increased transparency of sentencing for offences involving a weapon (particularly possession) Fewer people will carry weapons Improved understanding of the consequences of carrying a weapon.		
What are the challenges?	Cost of delivering non-custodial sentences. Alignment with court sentencing decisions.		
Similar example			
Timeframe	12+ months		
Indicative Costs	Low	Likely Impact:	High

Recommendation 10: Raising public awareness of the causes and impact of violent crime

Raise awareness around the dangers, consequences and impacts of knife crime. This would be targeted at 11-17 year olds in Greater Manchester. Messages which displayed empathy with the young person's situation and messages around the human consequences of violent crime were received best. Young people also told us that advertising on buses, tailored video content – with well-known role models – and campaigns on Snapchat would be most accessible.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Insight 2: There are concerns that young people are growing up in school, home and community environments in which conflict and violence are normalised.

Insight 4: Vulnerability and fear are important drivers in the increase in young people carrying weapons.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">"knife crime is like water, it is everywhere" Tameside Islamic Resource Centre</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Proposed recommendations:

A public awareness raising campaign to divert people away from carrying weapons in Greater Manchester.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who is it aimed at?</td><td colspan="3">People at risk of carrying weapons.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who delivers it?</td><td colspan="3">GM Mayor Campaign</td></tr>
<tr><td>What does it involve?</td><td colspan="3">The aim would be to divert people away from carrying weapons and away from knife crime. It could focus on the consequences and dangerous impacts of knife crime. And it could be delivered via social media such as snapchat, tailored TV programs or advertising on buses. We tested some of these messages with the people we met in Greater Manchester
"Don't lose 10 years of your life for 10 seconds of anger"
"A knife's not worth a life"
"14% of people who carry knives get stabbed with their own knife".
"Bring a knife, lose your own life"
"It is not our job to bury our children, it should be the other way round" (Parents)</td></tr>
<tr><td>What are the benefits?</td><td colspan="3">To reduce knife carrying in GM</td></tr>
<tr><td>What are the challenges?</td><td colspan="3">Difficult to demonstrate the impact of any awareness raising campaign to behavior change.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Similar example</td><td colspan="3">Public health campaigns on smoking and drinking and drink driving</td></tr>
<tr><td>Timeframe</td><td colspan="3">6-12 months</td></tr>
<tr><td>Indicative Costs</td><td>High</td><td>Likely Impact:</td><td>Medium</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix A: School Survey Analysis

A survey exploring teaching professional's views on violent crime was distributed to every school in Greater Manchester by a trusted professional in each local authority. We received 326 responses across Greater Manchester. While we requested the survey was to be completed by either the head teacher or the pastoral lead, in some cases there is more than one response from a school. The survey was completed by a range of teaching roles including headteachers, heads of pastoral care, class tutors and, in some cases, teaching assistants.

Violence in schools

Violent/aggressive activity	% of respondents who agreed this activity had become more frequent in the last 12 months
Fights at school	21%
School exclusions	23%
Violence in the community	19%
Criminal gang exploitation	26%
Physical abuse at teachers	23%
Verbal abuse at teachers	26%
Peer bullying	17%
Violence involving parents or siblings	20%

Training, education and engagement

Forty-six percent of respondents agreed that they had received adequate training on contextual safeguarding, including violent crime, but just over a quarter (26%) said their school used the resources from the Home Office #knifefree campaign. Several teachers commented that their training had not been specific around violent crime.

Just over a third (34%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their pupils had access to high quality inputs, assemblies or workshops on violent crime delivered by external organisations. There were more requests for additional presentations by external agencies such as the police and people with lived experience. One teacher commented that this information is *"more powerful if it's from someone who has been involved".*

Fewer than a quarter of all respondents (24%) agreed that they are effective at engaging parents in discussions about violent crime.

Keeping children safe

We asked teachers to select the top three factors that they thought could keep children safe. The top factors identified by teaching professionals were:

- positive role models
- positive peer influence
- understanding consequences
- engaged parents
- conflict resolution skills

Tackling violent crime

Nearly all respondents did not have any violence detection facilities at schools. Over a third of respondents (not including Salford where this question was not asked) have a mobile phone ban in place. Twenty percent of respondents say they have a police liaison officer, and 10% have a safety school officer. Only one school (a secondary in Rochdale) reported having a police officer on site.

If a school detects a pupil with a knife they will do the following (respondents were able to select more than one option):

Option	Percentage of respondents
Retain child and considered early intervention support	35
Exclude child for a fixed-term	52
Exclude child permanently	20
Move child to a different school	5
Make a safeguarding referral to the LA	55
Report to the Police	60

Appendix B: Summary of Recommendations: potential costs and impact

Recommendation	Where does it target?	Potential cost	Potential impact	Possible timeframe
1. a. Social Media Educational Programme for all Year 6 Children and their Parents	Prevention	Low	High	Trial in next 6 months
1. b. Lobby Social Media Companies to Improve the Reporting of Violent Content	Prevention	Low	Medium	Immediate
2. Single Sex Lessons addressing violence and identity	Prevention	Low	Medium	>6 months
3. Introduction of Community Guardians	Prevention	Low	High	6-18 months
4. Locality-based Violent Crime Reduction Teams	Intervention	Medium	Medium	6-12 months
5.Locality-based Youth Outreach Support and Neighbourhood Policing	Prevention/Intervention	Medium	High	6-12 months
6.'Opportunity to Change' Targeted Youth Intervention	Intervention	High	Medium	12 months =
7. a. Universal Parenting Information Sessions for Parents of Year 6	Prevention	Low	Medium	6-12 months
7. b. Targeted Parenting Support Offer	Intervention	Medium	Medium	12 months +
8. Shared Pastoral Team for Years 5-9	Prevention	Low	Medium	6-12 months
9. Review non-custodial sentences	Intervention	High	High	12 months +
10. Raising Public Awareness on Violent Crime	Prevention	High	Medium	6-12 months