

**IMPACT OF GUN AND KNIFE CRIME ON PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS**

**OUTCOME OF ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION**

**JULY 2019**

**Background**

UNISON Greater London Region agreed policy earlier this year noting the increase in gun knife and violent crime in London and the fact that UNISON members, as public sector workers, are at the forefront of dealing with the impact of these. The policy went on to note the range of measures the Mayor has adopted to tackle gun and knife crime including creating the Violent Crime Task Force, the London Needs you Alive campaign aimed at young Londoners: providing youth workers in major trauma centres but as it is UNISON members that delivers these strategies and deal with the terrible aftermath of these violent crimes; we know that our members can make a valuable contribution to the debate.

To this end a round table discussion was convened bringing together healthcare professionals, social workers, youth workers, education staff and council employees with a view to their contributions being forwarded to Lib Peck, Deputy Mayor and Head of the Violence Reduction Unit.

The discussion started with a recap on the Mayors announcement of statistical evidence now being available that proves what UNISON has been saying for the past 5 years. There is a direct correlation between the savage cuts to the funding of public services under the guise of austerity and the increase in violent crime in London.

**This led to a discussion of why now? Why not when we had previous economic crisis in the country?**

The following was identified:-

Due to the selloff of council housing in the 80’s and the now uncontrollable rent costs – generation after generation of people have moved further away from family or the community where they were raised. There is no longer a community / family support system around young people.

More people living with mental health illness in the community, often undiagnosed and therefore untreated – forgotten about until a tragic incident happens

Cuts in public health has had a direct impact on support available in the community – drug and alcohol services, women’s refuges shutting (people are staying in abusive relationships as there is no alternative)

10 year wage freeze for public sector workers – which in real terms, because of increases in the cost of living, has been an actual average 20% wage cut, has meant parents are doing two and three jobs to support the family, spending less time with their children

Child care costs and the closure of breakfast and after school clubs often means that secondary school children have to get ready for school and make their way there on their own – and because of the hours parents have to now work, the children often return home to an empty house

Significant increase in in-work poverty and in-work homelessness, means that people are moving more frequently to find cheaper living costs – leaving friends / community behind

Job cuts in every part of public sector (400,000 jobs lost in local government alone) – people taking on much less secure work – zero hour contracts; lower pay; worse terms and conditions, as there is no choice

Those left working in the public sector are over worked – often doing 10 – 15 hours unpaid overtime to deliver what they can for their communities

More and more, victims of violent crime are found to be carrying a weapon themselves – don’t feel safe on the streets

A significant number of perpetrators of knife crime have previously been victims themselves

Young people are angry – the majority want a better life and have become easy prey. They are finding an alternative family / support network in gangs

A perfect storm of circumstances has been created - years of underinvestment in communities added to the stringent cuts to public services; has resulted in young people being no longer supported, they do not feel valued and are finding their own worth by joining a gang and / or carrying out violent crime.

The roundtable then moved onto to three specific questions:-

* What impact has gun & knife crime had on you or your colleagues at work
* Personal testimonies (at work /home)
* What do you think would lessen the violence/impact on public services

**WHAT IMPACT HAS GUN & KNIFE CRIME HAD ON YOU 0R YOUR COLLEAGUES AT WORK:**

London Ambulance Service

* There’s usually eight Incident Response officers per shift and it’s normal that each of us will deal with at least one stabbing per shift, more likely two or three. In the last three months there have been three murders as a result of gun & knife crime plus approx 150-200 stabbings.
* LAS as an organisation are struggling to capture specific stats on violence crime (that aren’t murder/don’t result in death) as not all minor injuries and threats are reported. Victims are lying and saying the fell onto something
* It should be noted that whilst there are usually several stabbings per shift (at varying degrees of severity) they aren’t always gang related. Historically this was more likely the case but now some are linked to mental health, domestic violence and robbery.
* When Ambulance crews are called to a stabbing they meet the police at a rendezvous point, whilst a risk assessment is done before attending to the patient/entering the area. The Police can’t always guarantee the crew’s safety but the message from training is safety first and so the teams have to wait – this results in ambulances and staff waiting and the pressure on the ambulance service ever increasing.
* Particularly amongst young male victims there is a reluctance to report knife crime and medical attention is not sought initially. This affects figures and places ambulance crews in the difficult position of having to then report issues to the Police and parents.

London College

* Behavioural Head in a main stream London college – has a SIA licence (for security), trained in personal restraint, and a senior first aider and also a SFA rapid response volunteer (where I am on duty one day a month and the initiative aims to reach something before or as soon after it happens)
* Convinced Head to allow her to create her own job description – her role did not exist previously
* ‘Saving Londoners Lives’ is run at our college, teaching pupils what to do in a crisis before the paramedics arrive.
* Saved a 15 year old after he was stabbed but unfortunately have had to attend a number of funerals as a result of gun, knife or violent crime.
* I spend a lot of time trying to restrain and disarm when the Police are delayed.
* The college ran a Knife Crime Conference in December – afterwards students came up to me to tell me ‘I carry a knife’, ‘I’m affected’ or ‘I think I need counselling’ – this was just one college but am alarming snap shot of wider society/affecting all backgrounds.
* Most of pupils that carry a knife out of fear or the misguided belief that it protects them.
* It’s certainly not a new issue – the change is the lack of empathy and awareness of the impact – kids, in particular, don’t realise it’s not a movie or video game - you aren’t stabbed and just get up and walk away. There are knock on effects for the victim and the perpetrator and their families.
* In education a non punitive role is needed
* Issue is prevalent in education and member is being asked to go into other establishments to speak on the work being done locally.

A&E Nurse South London Hospital

* The last stabbing was yesterday – although we see them every day, and more than one. Not all come in via Ambulance, some are dropped off in the car park, and others walk in off the street.
* A number don’t want to seek medical treatment and try to self treat at home – such as with rum and salt (guided by a YouTube clip) and only seek medical help when their condition worsens.
* The effect on NHS staff of dealing with victims of violent crime is horrendous, staff are expected to treat patients seriously injured by gun or knife crime – some who survive, some who don’t, and then move onto the next patient without any debrief or time to reflect. In the most serious of cases this can result in staff then going off sick for a period of time and suffering stress/anxiety and trauma themselves.
* Hospitals are becoming an increasingly violent environment and violent behaviour seemingly becoming more acceptable – security staff and nurses have been attacked or robbed when leaving work.
* Whilst treating a patient, staff can be unknowingly caught up in a retaliation or reprisal by friends or family of the victim or perpetrator. In the most serious of cases this has led to the A&E being on lock down for several hours whilst CS Gas was let off by Police to gain control of the situation. As well as leaving NHS staff vulnerable whilst doing their jobs, also leaves vulnerable patients without access to A&E.
* Where NHS staff know injuries relate to a stabbing they are required to phone the Police, wouldn’t ordinarily search the victim but have to wait with the victim until the Police arrive. This puts staff in danger and an additional strain on NHS and Police resources.
* NHS workers often find themselves treating a patient in an emergency situation whilst patient’s friends try to film or live stream onto social media.

Young Persons Worker/Leaving Care Team

* There is a definite link between violence and crime – for crime to become more lucrative the level of crime often has to increase.
* Statistics show that resources have been taken from the major estates. Over a long period of time – sure start closures, preventative services, schools and pastoral care, the Police on the streets have drastically declined.
* Often the perpetrator is desensitised – the gang is their family and as a result they can feel indebted or groomed. With the ongoing cuts to youth workers, youth services and projects things just get worse. Community Engagement Officers and those working with local schools have also been cut.
* Not all kids have parents and some parents are working two or three jobs and aren’t home. Again lack of youth programmes leaves them vulnerable to gangs and crime. Young people are used as informants – there is no support and because of their background/situation they don’t trust anyone.
* Some areas have reported successful local projects such as a charity football match or boxing training with emergency services so kids can see Police/Ambulance workers in a positive environment.
* Stabbing someone can often be a retaliation or initiation – testing what lengths you will go to be one of the gang/proving you have no boundary or filter – initiation is now escalating ‘ cut a nurse’
* Gangs providing what young people think they need – protection; money; credibility; self pride
* On the ground those working with young people who are potentially at risk/involved don’t have the relevant intelligence. Role for the Head of Gangs Unit and others to build communication between services (leaving care team/probation service etc). An example was given where a prison knew that a gang leader in prison has issued an order for retaliation – yet youth services were not warned in advance.
* Early intervention is essential for prevention.
* Unless you can offer a way out (ideally a change of area or time out) it is difficult to stop. Lack of resources means time out of an area, to allow a young person a fresh start, is incredibly difficult to achieve.

**PERSONAL TESTIMONIES (AT WORK / HOME)**

* A number of attendees had direct experience of dealing with violent crime
* Some had lost family members
* Some had lost clients / pupils they worked with
* Nurse colleague stabbed at an A&E – by a young person as part of his gang initiation
* Number of pupils being stabbed in the leg – as a ‘punishment’ from a gang
* Young people appearing de-sensitised to the issue – feeling of inevitability

**WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD LESSEN THE VIOLENCE OR THE IMPACT ON PUBLIC SECTOR?**

* Adequate funding for ALL public services – the services are / were there for a reason
* Realise that the answers are already there, it’s the resources that aren’t
* Resources/people educational tools – we use the voluntary sector as a plaster, but this fails time and again. This needs to stop and we need a proper solution.
* Cuts to the probation service mean probation officers don’t have the time or resources to follow up on kids on an order and then they fall through the cracks.
* Reduce knee jerk exclusions from school. Or the undocumented alternative of off-rolling or a managed transfer (v common especially in academies)
* Violence is a public health issue – prevention is the key, need to proactively treat, particularly with education.
* Consider if London NHS Trauma Centres (as per the Darzi Report some years ago) still make sense. Following a violent crime, LAS take patients to the most appropriate trauma centre in London, which in some cases can be way outside their area – whilst the patient may be getting more specific care, it can impact on the family (if they have difficulties travelling outside their locality) and has an impact on LAS in terms of ambulances travelling / being out of service. The ambulance then needs a deep clean before it can return to the road/treat its next patient.
* Better links between services across the public sector – especially locally
* LAS Funding for education – consider is there a benefit in clinicians explaining the physical effects of gun and knife crime (It’s not just a cut campaign - i.e. to help young people understand it’s not just a cut to your arm/chest etc – there are major blood vessels and organs that once damaged can’t always be repaired and could prove fatal)
* Counselling for staff affected – this would result in fewer days lost through staff sickness etc and a better supported workforce. Presently staff attend an incident or traumatic experience, instead of attending a de-brief or counselling session, due to the pressure on the service (as a result of austerity and high vacancy levels) means staff feel they are forced onto the next job.
* Where employers do provide counselling services adequate time off and a willingness of managers/employers to facilitate and support attendance is needed. I.e. not expecting staff to come in on a day off to attend counselling
* A counselling service should be made available to all public sector staff that directly face violent crime – too many staff off with ‘workplace stress’ which could be PTSD, because of insufficient support at work
* Taking into consideration Social workers are under immense pressure – often feel if they say something, they are immediately attacked or vilified (and scapegoated) and consider how to show them appreciation for the work they do.
* Positive messages and role models for young people.
* Lack of space in prison means there is little or no deterrent
* A ‘lock them up and throw away the key’ isn’t necessarily the answer, punishment may be needed but so is a long term solution and rehabilitation.
* Young people are ‘building businesses’ whilst being punished – they access phones and even order online in prison – it’s no deterrent but seen as a badge of honour
* A less punitive and judgemental approach that the perpetrators aren’t necessary bad and it’s what comes after for them.
* Look at the wider picture – need to see and show real life stories and experiences behind the headlines, it’s not just xx people killed on the streets of London. We need a wider perspective, including perhaps controversially from the perpetrators perspective. People aren’t statistics or numbers on a spreadsheet. Stats alone don’t tell the story we need the narrative to go with them.
* Need to accept that behaviour is a symptom – we need collaboration, education in understanding the consequences
* Planning a programme for adults/parents or family members ‘Parenting the Parent’ – particularly important where the parents/grandparents are very young themselves to highlight the need for awareness of knifes, the difference that being aware, engaged and active in this situation would make.
* Social media needs to be held to account and consider flashing up hard hitting adverts – showing the reality of knife crime (such as those on cigarette packets or the tombstone adverts highlighting threat of AIDS in the 80’s)
* Need real time education – telling young people what is actually happening now in their area then up skilling them and those around them on how to deal with it
* Public service workers need more information so they can signpost service users to appropriate support outside their area of work/knowledge (i.e. if someone stabbed comes into A&E with a young child the focus is on the child protection plan only, whilst this is important may not be the only support needed – as the parent often needs support too)
* We need to find out where kids are being recruited to gangs, who’s running the gangs
* No time for intervention / assistance outside of saving lives or dealing with the incident in hand.
* Social cleansing over the long term has resulted in more people moving out of London, away from friends, family and support networks. Need more thinking of a community approach – it’s ALL of our responsibilities
* Finally - there is a willingness by public sector workers to contribute and make a difference, regardless of the cuts to services and pressure they already under.

UNISON members believe that this is a societal responsibility. We know that we can play a vital role in assisting with providing answers, promoting new initiatives locally and monitoring which of these actually work (qualitative and quantitative results). Our members are committed to delivering to and serving our communities, we will be instrumental in any new initiatives / programmes going forward.

Funding cuts identified and the impact on communities or the staff:-

**Youth services**

* cuts in youth worker posts
* no more youth clubs; or initiatives to engage young people
* significant increase in cases – less time with those who need support
* staff at breaking point

**Education**

* Academisation of most Secondary schools – pupils becoming numbers / stats
* No pastoral care of young adults
* Off rolling – moving the problem to another school to improve league tables
* Exclusions increased dramatically
* PRU’s being oversubscribed or even closed
* Academies cutting support staff – lack of adults for young people to confide in / trust

**Probation Services**

* Privatised
* Numbers cut
* Can take months to develop trust with young client – can be damaged in minutes by other authority figures if they are heavy handed

**Social Services**

* Cuts to jobs and services
* Other services they used to rely on / refer clients to are now gone – drug & alcohol services; mental health beds etc
* Vilified by press if a mistake is made because social workers have too many cases – hesitant to make the wrong call

**NHS**

* Lack of staff
* Stress ignored – lack of counselling support; managing stress at work
* Under direct threat of violence at work – from gangs targeting them; victims families / friends