

**County Council Meeting – 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024****Question to Councillor Victoria Wilson  
Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture****By Councillor Syed Hussain**

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**Question**

Knife crime in our communities poses a threat to both individual safety and society as a whole. Will the council consider implementing prevention measures to tackle the underlying issues of knife crime, like youth engagement programmes, mental health support, and educational interventions, while collaborating with local communities to ensure the effectiveness of these efforts?

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**Reply**

Staffordshire County Council is a partner of the **Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire's Violence Reduction Alliance (VRA)** which works together to strengthen the visibility and partnership response to prevent violence including knife crime, with a focus on early intervention and prevention. There is a website (Violence Reduction Alliance) that contains a resource library for partners to use to support violence reduction activity. SCVYS are a key partner and host the resource for Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PHSE) services to provide a consistent approach to prevention in education settings. A Virtual Reality headset project has been created which is a decision-making tool for young people around knives, gangs and violence against women.

Within the County Council, the **Staffordshire Youth Offending Service (YOS)** Prevention offer works with children who are identified as being on the cusp of becoming involved in criminality. This includes children where there may be intelligence which identifies risks of weapon carrying. This prevention has been further strengthened by funding from the Office of the Police Crime and Fire Commissioner's **Weapon Prevention and Diversion Scheme**. The funding enables YOS to purchase bespoke programmes and specialist services to work with children where there are concerns with regards to weapon possession. The funding will also be used to deliver a package of preventative input within schools in Staffordshire, where it has been identified that there may be an increased risk of children becoming involved in possessing weapons.

**Staffordshire Out of Court Disposal** offer is a working agreement between Staffordshire YOS and Police. This offer ensures that ALL children who are eligible to have an Out of Court Disposal are considered for an intervention at the earliest possible opportunity. This includes children who may have offences related to possession of a weapon. This scheme allows for bespoke tailored interventions to be put in place to address the underlying issues related to this behaviour to reduce the risk associated with such behaviour.

Examples of the work and activities facilitated by VRA are provided below:

### **Operation Sceptre (national campaign)**

Staffordshire participate in the national campaigns which are locally branded "**Ditch the Blade**". These campaigns encourage conversations to show why carrying a blade is not socially acceptable to carry a knife and highlight the dangers and consequences of knife crime.

These will be taking place in weeks 13-19th May 2024 and 11-17th November 2024 . Partners work with the Police on a campaign of awareness of knife crime and include local knife amnesties. Over the coming months additional national law changes may also assist and some of the most lethal knives may be taken off our streets.

### **Early Intervention and Prevention in Schools**

Staffordshire Police's Early Intervention and Prevention Unit and the Pan-Staffordshire PSHE Education Service have created a programme designed for primary and secondary schools that can add value to education settings and increase children's knowledge about the law and the consequences of breaking the law. The programme covers:

#### **Primary**

- People who keep me safe - KS1 (5-6 yrs old)
- Keeping safe - KS2 (9-10 yrs old)

#### **Secondary**

- Healthy relationships - KS3 (11-12 yrs old)
- Exploitation - KS3 (12-13 yrs old)
- Knife Crime - KS3 (13-14 yrs old)

### **Responsible Retailer Scheme**

On behalf of the VRA, Staffordshire Police and Trading Standards teams from both Staffordshire and Stoke, have developed a Responsible Retailer Scheme asking retailers to consider how they store and display knives, as well as who they sell them to. To support retailers a Responsible Retailer Pack has been produced, containing best practice advice, a summary of relevant legislation and promotional material. The majority of knives purchased from retailers are not used in crime; however, some may be purchased with this in mind. Therefore, the VRA is asking retailers to assess, challenge and check before a sale takes place; they have the right to refuse a sale if they have concerns about how the knife may be used.

### **Free Awareness Workshops for Parents & Carers on Gangs, Exploitation and Knife Crime**

The VRA has funded two free Ben Kinsella Trust awareness workshops for parents and carers on Gangs, Exploitation and Knife Crime – the topics covered include How we can prevent exploitation/knife carrying as parents and as a community. The workshops are taking place this month and the information has been circulated to partners and included SCC children’s services.

It should be noted that less than 1% of all crime reported in Staffordshire in the last 12 months involved a bladed article.

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