

Knife crime

I went to the Urgent Question on knife crime on Monday. MPs all round the Commons are concerned at the escalation in these crimes of violence in various communities in the UK and keen to see more done to reduce and control it. I asked the Home Secretary what action he is taking to spread best practice from those towns and cities that are making progress with prevention to those with the worst problems, and what can be done to ensure extra money and personnel going into policing and responding are being targeted in the right way to tackle this trouble.

During the exchanges there was a general feeling that the Glasgow approach has had some success. Some favour wider use of stop and search powers to remove knives from young people, including random searches without grounds for suspicion. Some think more police in general is what is needed, whilst the Prime Minister has suggested that there is no correlation between police numbers and knife crime.

Clearly having an active police presence in areas of our towns prone to knife crime attacks at times of the day and night when they are most likely must be an important part of the response. We also need to see that this is not a problem which the police on their own can solve. All the young teenagers caught up in this violence have parents or guardians, teachers, adult wider family members, youth and sports club organisers and others who know them and take an interest in them. Any one of these adults could say or do the right thing to reduce the chances of that young person carrying a knife or being drawn into gangland activity.

Some young people are drawn into gangs out of a sense of adventure. Some are groomed by older gang members. Some end up in a gang out of fear. Whilst young people do not want to be subject to home detention, adults in the family do need to take an interest in how much time their children spend out on the streets and what risks that might bring to them. Young people that have been looked after by the authorities or are the products of a broken home are particularly vulnerable to gang grooming according to the Children's Commissioner. The gang culture can lead to drugs and other criminal activity. Once lines have been crossed the young person can be forced into continuing with a way of life they would not have chosen had they known how it ended, or if they had enough support at the beginning to say No.