

Speech: Home Secretary speech on protecting young people's futures

Today, we're standing here on the site of a disused pickle factory, next to a very attractive gasworks. In 2013 after a brief spell as a medical storage facility, new life was given to this old unloved warehouse now converted to a trendy events venue.

What we see here today is a thriving business, a cultural asset and a pillar of the local community.

A testament to the Olympic legacy of London 2012, this building speaks to the optimism of those games and the story of regeneration across East London.

We have seen the undoubted benefits of this legacy. Investment, jobs, prosperity – all necessary to changing people's life chances.

But the story doesn't end here. In a way, I wish it did.

Economic prosperity can create the building blocks to stronger communities but that alone is not enough.

A closer look at those streets that are surrounding us will show you that our job is not yet done.

There are still too many places where that longed for prosperity has not reached, streets like the ones surrounding us, up and down the country that are instead dangerous and sometimes deadly.

On an almost weekly basis, we wake up to the news that another person has been stabbed, that robbery is on the rise, that serious violent crime is on the up.

This is not just a concern for those communities who are directly affected by that crime. It rightly causes national alarm.

A recent YouGov poll showed that for the first time, crime was a more important issue to the public than health. Last year saw a 14% increase in homicides a 15% increase in hospital admissions for assaults involving a sharp instrument, a 17% increase in recorded robberies.

This does not make for easy reading and that is exactly why it cannot be ignored. In my job as Home Secretary it is my duty to protect the public. And at the Home Office we work tirelessly to find the right policy solutions to tackle all types of crime. But what affects me more is my job as a father.

Take knife crime. Like everyone else I see the reports on young people feeling the need to carry weapons it makes me worry about my teenage children.

Will they be hurt if they're out in the wrong place at the wrong time on a night out? What if they get into an argument that then escalates?

I may be the Home Secretary but I'm not ashamed to confess; I have stayed up late at night waiting to hear the key turning in the door. And only then going to bed knowing that they have come home safe and sound. And like any other dad, when I watch the news and see the faces of all those young victims of knife crime I despair at the waste of those lives.

Many of those lost were of similar ages to my own children. So sometimes I cannot help but see the faces of my own children in the pictures of those victims.

I find it hard to detach the personal from the policy.

So I know that if we don't feel safe on our own streets, If I don't think they are safe enough for my children, or if we see our communities being torn apart by crime then something has gone terribly wrong.

Dealing with this scourge is not a simple question of turning around the statistics. The reasons for this rise in violent crime are many. Changes in illicit drugs market and the drive for profit has made criminal gangs take bigger risks and exploit even more vulnerable people. Alcohol abuse and the escalation of violence through social media are other factors that contribute to this picture.

The serious violence strategy the Government set out a year ago, has been a major focus of mine, especially trying to understand how we got to this point, and focusing on the immediate steps that are required to bring the situation under control.

The police told me that more powers, more tools and, yes, resources were needed to make a difference. That's why I secured nearly a billion pounds more funding, including council tax, for police forces, in this year's Police Financial Settlement.

That means more money to stamp out drug dealing for tackling serious and organised crime and for local police forces. It means that Police and Crime Commissioners are already planning to recruit 3,500 extra police officers and police staff. And that's not all.

We are supporting the police by changing the law through the Offensive Weapons Bill, making it more difficult for young people to buy bladed weapons and corrosive substances. We know that acid is becoming a new weapon of choice for violent criminals. Now, if you are going to buy or carry acid, you're having to have a very good reason.

We are changing the law in other ways too. I am trialling reforms that return authority to the police and give them the discretion that they need to effectively carry out stop-and-search. I know this is not universally welcome. I know that.

There is concern that in enforcing these powers, BAME communities will be

affected disproportionately, but we must acknowledge that violence disproportionately impacts BAME communities too. And if stop and search rates drop too low, it does perhaps create a culture of immunity amongst those who carry knives. Stop-and-search saves lives. There are people alive today because of stop and search. I can't say that clearly enough.

The Funding settlement and powers went a long way to supporting our forces, but senior officers told me that they needed more. More support and more funding.

They asked for £50 million to be immediately released to tackle the rise in serious violence. I doubled it. There is now £100 million extra. – £20 million from the Home Office, and £80 million in new funding from the Treasury. The forces facing the highest levels of serious violent crime will receive this additional funding for surge capacity so they can tackle knife crime in real-time, and not at half-speed.

And while all these efforts will make a big difference to our immediate efforts, the lasting solutions are not short-term. We know that crime doesn't just appear. It has taken several years for the rise in violent crime to take hold, so we know that the answers cannot be a quick fix.

Before a young person ever picks up a knife, they have been the victim of a string of lost opportunities and missed chances. Any youth worker can tell you that gangs recruit the most vulnerable young people. That drug runners who travel over county lines coerce them into committing crimes.

These children are at risk, and we can detect early on who they are. We can do that. The kid that plays truant. The ones that get into fights. The pupils who struggle at school. And even though we can see the path to criminality, somehow, we still expect these children to make good life choices all on their own.

The sad fact is that many feel that they can't lose the opportunities that they never had in the first place. What they and their families need is our help. It is exactly why I have launched a £200 million Youth Endowment Fund, to invest in the futures of this country's most vulnerable youngsters. This fund helps steer them away from violence and offers them a better future.

This is not a one-off pot of money, the funding is spread over ten years, enabling long-term planning and interventions through a child's most important years. But to address the root causes of serious violence we do need to go much further. We need to tackle adverse childhood experiences in the round, and better identify those children who are most at risk.

Children who grow up with substance abuse, with parental criminality, with perhaps domestic violence. I was lucky enough to realise the dream of every parent – to give your children a better start in life than the one you had yourself, but it could have been very different.

I grew up on what was dubbed by one tabloid as 'the most dangerous street in Britain'. It's not so difficult to see how instead of being Cabinet, I could

have been taken in to a life of crime. There were the pupils at school that shoplifted, and asked if I wanted to help. The drug dealers who stood near the school gates and told you by joining in you could make easy money. But I was lucky. I had loving and supporting parents, who despite their own circumstances gave me security. I had some brilliant teachers who motivated me to go further than what was expected of me. I even had a girlfriend who believed in me and supported me despite my lack of prospects and went onto to become my wife. Thanks to them all I have built a better life for myself and my family. With their help, I suppose, I made it.

But I do not look back at my upbringing and see it as something in the distant past. The lessons of my childhood help shape the decisions I make every day. Shaping what I want to see for other kids who are just like me. That's why I know the problems we face are not within the remit of any one government department. By the time a person becomes a problem for the police, it is often too late.

If we are to deliver meaningful change, and stop the violence before it begins, then the mind-set of government needs to shift. We need to instigate a sense of shared responsibility.

Take the frontline professionals, the teachers and nurses, the social and youth workers, all of them already working tirelessly to protect vulnerable young people and enhance the life chances of young people.

I have met teachers who have watched helplessly as one of their students falls under the influence of a gang. Nurses who, night after night, have seen teenagers brought into hospital with knife wounds. So I asked myself, what more can I do to help the people who work on the frontline?

That is why we have planned a public health approach to tackle violent crime. In practice, this means bringing together education, health, social services, housing, youth and social workers, to work them together coherently. It will enable those agencies to collaborate and share information. They will be able to jointly plan and target their support to help young people at risk, to prevent and stop violence altogether.

It is not about blaming those frontline staff for the violence, or asking them to do more. Far from it. It is about giving them the confidence to report their concerns, safe in the knowledge that everyone will close ranks to protect that child. A public health approach doesn't mean passing the problem onto the NHS or a teacher. Rather, it means that serious violence is treated like the outbreak of some virulent disease. A national emergency.

Our legislation will place a legal duty on all parts of the government to work together not to apportion blame but to ensure there is no let up, until the violence itself is eradicated. We have already announced a new Serious Violence Implementation Task Force, the work of which will be driven by research and evidence starting with the review of drugs misuse led by Dame Carol Black. We already know that the drugs trade is a major catalyst of serious violence. That's why we launched the National County Lines Coordination Centre in September. But the review will also bring home to

middle-class drug users that they are part of the problem. They may never set foot in a deprived area. They may never see an act of serious violence, but their illicit habits are adding fuel to the fire that is engulfing our communities.

If we are to understand violence, we must also understand all its drivers and we in government are at the start of understanding how data can help us do that. Creating and understanding the causes and pathways to crime. Recent analysis by my own department found that the top 5% of crime 'hotspots' accounted for some 17% of the total volume of 'acquisitive crime'. In plain English, crime such as burglaries and car thefts.

That is why the Home Office will be developing new proposals for a Crime Prevention Data Lab. We will be exploring how we can bring together information from the police and other agencies, to enhance our ability to make targeted and effective interventions.

And just as technology can help us prevent crimes, so too can it help criminals. Identities can be stolen online. Credit cards cloned from fake machines. Keyless entry systems tricked to gain access to your car. Criminals are smart, so businesses need to get smarter. I ask myself, if we can do this, what more can business do to help us?

Products and services must be designed to make crime harder to commit. The tech might be new, but the principle is not. In the 1980s, vehicle manufacturers and government came to the conclusion that you could design products to make it more difficult to commit a crime.

It is the reason a modern car comes with central locking, an alarm, steering locks and an immobilizer in all cars as standard. So I will be chairing a meeting with industry leaders, and asking them how they will help us in the fight against acquisitive crime.

Preventing crime can be as simple as fitting locks, alarm systems, and proper street lighting. This may seem like common sense, and in some ways it is, but it works. One trial in Nottingham saw the windows in council houses replaced with more secure versions. Their evaluation showed this intervention yielded a remarkable 42% reduction in burglary from those properties. We have applied the same ideas to moped-enabled crime including a new standard of anti-theft devices on the mopeds themselves. And working with the Metropolitan Police to target hotspot areas, and design more secure two-wheeled vehicle parking.

This work led to a decrease of over 40% of moped crime in a single year. So, we are now looking to apply this similar approach to a wider set of crimes. Just as we can design products to prevent crime, we can also design policy to shape the lives of young people to prevent criminality.

Changing the lives of young people will not be an easy task. Crime has a way of drawing in those who feel a little bit worthless. But when you belong to something greater than yourself, when you have something to lose, it's not as easy to throw your life away.

Undoubtedly, of course there must be strong ramifications for those who commit crime- there must be. I do not shirk from my responsibility, as Home Secretary, to keep the public safe, whatever that takes.

I want us to be able to come back to this venue and know that, for these communities, something has changed. But to do that, we need to change how we see our young people.

No life is less important than another.

No future should be pre-determined by where you're born, or how you're brought up.

We cannot afford to leave anyone behind.