

Chairman: Brandon Lewis: Spring Forum 2018

Thank you, Rob, for those warm words.

But thank you, above all, for your leadership of the National Convention.

And for all that you do, day in and day out, for our Party.

And – I know from all your phone calls and emails – night in, night out...

RENEWAL

I can't tell you how *proud* I am to be standing here today as the Chairman of our great Party...

Over the last couple of months, I've travelled right across our country, *meeting* and *listening* to so many members...

I even had to battle through the Beast from the East... (And I don't mean Dennis Skinner...!)

So I'm rather pleased that in three days, it'll officially be the beginning of spring – despite what the weather may tell us...

There cannot be a better time for us to launch our plan for renewal and our roadmap for the future.

Ours is a party that's always seeking to improve – to raise our game, politically and organisationally;

That's *how* we've kept going all these years.

That's *why* we're the oldest political party in the world.

And not just the oldest: also the most successful.

And we must – and will – do it again!

I want to thank my predecessor, Sir Patrick McLoughlin, for his leadership in steering the Party over the last year.

And I want to pay tribute to my *extraordinary* team.

Our new Deputy Chairman and Vice Chairman have hit the ground running, whilst our hardworking staff at CCHQ, led by Sir Mick Davis, have *thrown themselves* into building our election machine with energy and dedication.

To all of them – and to all our staff across the country who go that extra mile – I want to say thank you.

And so today, I want to tell you about my priorities as your Chairman.

Priorities that have been shaped by more than twenty years of political life:

- By the politics I learnt in Brentwood and Sherwood, in Great Yarmouth and Great Britain;
- And by my experience as an activist, as a councillor, as a parliamentary candidate and as an MP.

1.

I'm going to talk about our membership,

2.

I'm going to talk about how we are changing the way we campaign across our country and on social media...

3.

And I want to talk to you about the steps we are taking to ensure that we develop a more diverse pool of candidates...

So that – across *all* of these key issues – we can continue to build upon our recent successes, and deliver a Conservative campaign machine that is *fighting fit* for the next general election.

THE GENERAL ELECTION

A lot of our success is

down to the help and support of all of you.

At last year's General Election, I know many of you worked *relentlessly, tirelessly, selflessly*... to try to secure the result we all wanted.

We have learnt lessons, and I want to thank Sir Eric Pickles for his review and Sir Mick Davis for his business plan setting out how to ensure our team that is fighting fit for the next election.

I just wonder... How many of you thought about how much time and energy you put into the campaign?

Do you know how many calls you made?

(Don't worry...the interactive part comes later!)

But let me tell you: it was *one hundred and thirty-six thousand*.

And do you know how many leaflets we delivered between us?

It was 50 million!

And you talked, too, to millions of voters on the doorstep.

For all of this, and for all you continue to do as we look towards the local elections, I want to say thank you.

But right now, let's think for a moment about why we are proud to be Conservatives.

Let me tell you a story...

It's the story of Jack.

Jack is born in a hospital with extra doctors and extra nurses taking care of him thanks to our investment in the NHS.

When Jack's ready for nursery, his mum – if she wants to – can go back to work because we've introduced free childcare.

Along with nearly 2 million extra other kids, he'll go on to get a good or outstanding education

because of the conservative government's reforms

And Jack can go to a well-funded university or he may decide that academia is not for him, and because we've introduced apprenticeships, he'll have the skills to get a great job in the workplace – one of the thousands of jobs created since 2010.

And if Jack falls in love...

And he might fall in love with somebody of the same sex...

Thanks to the legislation that we as Conservatives introduced, he will be able to get married.

And Jack will be able to get on the housing ladder

and he'll get a deposit using Help to Buy,

and he'll live in a house built by the Conservatives.

And as Jack gets on in life, he'll have confidence that there's a well-funded NHS to look after him, and a pension that's sustainable thanks to our reforms.

And that's why, although over the past 8 years we have had to make difficult choices, I am proud of – we should all be proud – what the Conservative government has achieved.

And by the way, Jack's story is also Jane's... and Rashid's and Aisha's.

This is a Conservative government that works for everyone.

MEMBERSHIP

We know that we can't continue to improve the lives of people in this country unless we *win* elections.

And to *win* elections we must have an effective campaigning force.

Our members *lie at the heart* of our ability to do

this.

As members and supporters,
you are the backbone of this Party.

I'm in politics to make a
difference.

My guess is that that's why
you're in politics, too.

And believe me, you do make
a difference.

Every door you knock on...

Every one of those 50
million leaflets you pushed through a letterbox...

(And the ones I hope you'll
be delivering in the weeks ahead of the local elections)...

Every post you share
online...

It makes a difference:

- A *difference* to the debate;
- A *difference* to our democracy;
- A *difference* to our party's chances of victory and of government.

We will be going out there
to make a difference as a *family* of
members that is *growing* in numbers...

You know, in recent years
there has been much speculation about the number of members we have.

Apparently we have 100,000...70,000... or 30,000 members.

None of these figures were
correct.

It is time to end that
speculation.

I can tell you, that as of
today, we have 124,000 members.

And *thousands* have joined since the general

election – and in fact we have 6,000 new members since January.

But it could, and should, be higher still.

And let's not forget that the *Conservative family* extends way beyond our party membership...:

...The *thousands of* activists, who aren't full members...

...The 350,000 members of Conservative Clubs, many of whom go out at the weekend to make the case for us on the doorstep.

I want us to find ways of making sure that *everyone—all 500,000—* in our Conservative family feel like they are part of the team.

We can do this by bringing forward a vision of *modern* Conservative membership.

And one of the most important things we *need* to do – as part of that modernisation process – is to start administering our membership centrally.

Members will *always* belong to constituency associations.

The constituency association is the *rock on which* the Conservative party is founded.

It is *fundamental* to our internal culture, *fundamental* to our approach to politics and *fundamental* to our success.

CANDIDATES

On which note, I want to make clear that local associations will *always* have the *right* to choose their own parliamentary candidates.

I want to make sure that we have the best pool of candidates for you to choose from...

And I believe that we can have the very best candidates without using shortlists and quotas, which do not get to the root of the problem.

There is one area, in particular, that we should be focusing on as a Party: *women*.

It's *why* the Prime Minister co-founded Women2Win and *why* we are working with CWO to reach out to women up and down the country.

There are so many talented women in this country who would make excellent Conservative candidates.

And we need to go out and find more of them to join our already inspiring group of Conservative female MPs.

Just for the record, at CCHQ, we are leading by example:

We are today publishing gender pay figures that demonstrate across CCHQ – whether that's at director level, executive officers or managers – we are giving our male and female staff equal pay for equal work.

We must and can do more – in particular, we need more women in CCHQ.

This is a challenge across parties, politics and our society....

We need to create an environment in which we proactively reach out and encourage women to join our Party, run for local council, stand for Parliament and work for our Party.

CAMPAIGNING AND DIGITAL

And finally, as Party Chairman, I will be doing everything I can to renew our party machine and to build on our successes.

For example, we have now hired 81 new campaign managers and ramped up our digital operations since the election.

We're producing far more online content and we're doing it every single day.

But what we do at CCHQ is only part of the battle:

I need you to get involved!

To spread the message:

- On Facebook, engaging with friend and political foe, alike... but *nicely*...
- On Twitter, re-tweeting

positive news and supporting your local candidates...

· And on Instagram, sharing pictures of yourselves and your fellow campaigners, taking the fight to Labour...

CONCLUSION

The point is that we all have a part to play...

And you are as important in helping us as I am.

We are only six weeks to our next electoral test.

There is so much at stake.

Because the consequences of inaction are just so serious...

In some of your areas, the difference between winning and losing is a handful of votes.

That *extra hour* we put in could be the thing that makes the difference.

That *extra hour* that means we win one extra seat, in one extra ward, that gives us the right to govern....

So I would ask all of you – our Conservative family:

To let us go from here...

To take the fight to Labour...

In every town, on every street, on every doorstep...

To earn the right to build a Britain that is fit for the future!

Thank you.

Prime Minister: Opening of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, Secretary-General, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am extremely proud to be welcoming you all to London – the first full Heads of Government meeting here in almost forty years.

I want to begin by expressing my gratitude to Prime Minister Muscat and his team: thank you for your incredible hard work. You represent a Commonwealth truth, that the size of a country does not limit its ambition and impact.

I hope that over the coming days and months we can build on the work you have begun as we forge a future for our common good.

Over many decades this organisation has brought together nations young and old, large and small, to celebrate our common bonds and to work to our mutual benefit.

There have been difficulties, successes, controversies. But I believe wholeheartedly in the good that the Commonwealth can do.

And this week as young people from our many nations gather and contribute their views, our responsibility as leaders is to ensure their voices are heard, and to build a Commonwealth that we can be proud to hand on to the next generation.

For in the Commonwealth we have an incredible opportunity.

An opportunity to show just what can be achieved through co-ordinated action and co-operation, to seize the possibilities open to us as member countries, and together, to take on some of the 21st century's biggest questions.

How we support our most vulnerable member states as we tackle climate change and improve the health of our oceans, creating a more sustainable Commonwealth?

How we develop through trade, pushing back against protectionism, for a more prosperous Commonwealth?

How we respond to threats to the rules based international order and from cyber-attacks, creating a more secure Commonwealth?

And how, in all this, we advance those common values which our organisation has always stood for – democracy, human rights, tolerance, and the rule of law – so that we establish a fairer Commonwealth?

These are problems nations cannot solve alone. But by working together, we can make a real difference.

Over the past three days, we have seen the power of the Commonwealth in action at the Forums for business leaders, young people, women, and civil society.

These discussions have demonstrated the vibrancy and creativity of our organisation – focusing on issues such as improving trade, youth unemployment, education and health – all of which have the potential to transform people's lives.

And I am looking forward to taking these issues further with the heads of government over the next two days.

Finally, on behalf of all of you assembled here in Buckingham Palace, I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to Your Majesty, Head of the Commonwealth.

This week you have opened your homes to us – here in London and in Windsor. Over many years you have been the Commonwealth's most steadfast and fervent champion.

You have been true to the deepest values of the Commonwealth – that the voice of the smallest member country is worth precisely as much as that of the largest; that the wealthiest and the most vulnerable stand shoulder to shoulder.

You have seen us through some of our most serious challenges.

And we commit to sustaining this Commonwealth, which you have so carefully nurtured.

For your service, for your dedication, for your constancy – we thank you.

Prime Minister: Commonwealth Business Forum

Prime Minister Theresa May speaks to members of the Commonwealth Business Forum.

Good morning everyone.

I would like to start by thanking the Lord Mayor for hosting us here today at the beautiful Guildhall, the home of the City of London's administrators for almost 600 years.

As we have just heard, the building has witnessed its fair share of history

over the centuries. And today it is a privilege to add to the rollcall of great events with the 11th Commonwealth Business Forum.

We are here today to discuss how best to make this a more prosperous Commonwealth for all, with contributions from leading figures in some of the world's top businesses.

And this is just one of four such fora running this week ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, giving a voice to hundreds of people who, in so many different ways, do so much to make our Commonwealth the amazing institution it is.

There is the People's Forum, providing a platform for the Commonwealth's incredible Civil Society groups. The Women's Forum will look at ways of overcoming the challenges still faced by a great many women and girls. And, perhaps most important of all, there is the Commonwealth Youth Forum.

It is so important because, while the Commonwealth itself is a venerable institution, its citizens are much younger: almost two thirds are under the age of 30.

The young people of today are the Commonwealth of tomorrow, its business leaders, its innovators, its heads of government.

They have incredible potential, and we as a Commonwealth have a duty to help them reach it. That is why I have put youth at the heart of this week's agenda, and why I began this morning by meeting with some of the Youth Forum's delegates.

As we talked about their ideas and aspirations, about their vision for the future of the Commonwealth, I was struck by the vital role that businesses like yours have in tackling their concerns and giving substance to their ambitions.

They called for cleaner oceans and greater sustainability.

You can help deliver that by changing business practices and creating innovative new products and solutions. They called for action on youth unemployment.

You, as entrepreneurs and business leaders, create the jobs and opportunities our young people need and, by driving our economies, you fund the schools and colleges that equip them with the skills they need.

And the members of the Youth Forum called for an inclusive Commonwealth where greater prosperity is enjoyed by everyone.

That is something that simply cannot be achieved without strong, successful businesses. Because the best way to raise living standards for all is through economic growth based on free enterprise operating in inclusive, fair and open rules-based markets.

A key part of that, one that has become more important in the years since the

Commonwealth was founded, is international trade – and it is an area in which the Commonwealth is flourishing.

The 2018 Commonwealth Trade Review predicted that trade between member states will be worth \$700 billion by 2020. Here in the UK, for example, the value of our exports to fellow members is roughly double what it was 20 years ago.

Yet risks remain. Global growth is fragile. The challenges posed by protectionism are all too clear. And the world economy is changing, as new technology creates new jobs in some industries while supplanting them in others.

If Commonwealth businesses are to flourish in such times, if we are to deliver and secure the prosperous future our young people want and deserve, then the Commonwealth and national governments must not be afraid to act.

Because although the system of international commerce has done much good for the world, it can always be improved. Playing fields can be levelled, barriers removed, the benefits opened up to all.

So while we should be unapologetic in our support for free and inclusive trade, we should also work hand in hand with businesses to make it more efficient and effective, for example by supporting the use of international standards.

Shared standards have huge potential to stimulate trade.

They create a common language for trading partners across the globe, enhance trust in supply chains and stimulate innovation.

Greater use of these international standards across the Commonwealth will reduce the costs of trade between members, as well as with partners beyond the Commonwealth, for greater global benefit.

That is why the UK will be funding an all-new Commonwealth Standards Network, which will support developing countries in particular to better meet existing international standards.

The network will provide a significant opportunity for national standards experts to collaborate and share best practice.

And it will empower developing countries to have a stronger voice in the international standards community – something that has benefits on a global scale.

We will also be funding a Trade Facilitation Programme, supporting and providing technical assistance to selected Commonwealth countries in implementing the World Trade Organisation's Trade Facilitation Agreement. Full implementation of the WTO agreement is estimated to reduce trade costs by up to 16 per cent for the less-developed countries.

It will cut the average time needed to import goods by 47 per cent, and the time taken to export by as much as 91 per cent, a huge boost for businesses

across the Commonwealth.

But no amount of action on these fronts will truly be successful if half the Commonwealth's citizens continue to face significant barriers to participation in the economy.

If our family of nations is to realise its full potential, then we must take action to boost women's access to economic opportunity, and empower them to create and build their own businesses.

Many members have already signed up to the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment, which seeks to remove barriers to, and support, the participation of women in trade.

It is an impressive start, but I believe we can go further.

So, over the next two years, the UK will work with the International Trade Centre to deliver a new programme: SheTrades Commonwealth.

SheTrades will offer Commonwealth-wide support to help countries break down gender barriers in international trade.

It will provide a forum for member states to work collectively and share best practice.

And will compile the data needed to identify what works and track progress over time.

The programme will also deliver targeted interventions in a number of countries, providing training for women entrepreneurs, connecting them to market and investment opportunities, and helping firms overcome barriers to engaging with women-owned businesses.

Boosting women's participation is the right thing to do, but business equality is not just about doing what is right – there are real economic benefits.

It has been estimated that if women played the same role as men in labour markets, as much as \$28 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025.

If Commonwealth members are not giving women an equal opportunity to succeed in business and in trade, they are trying to take on some of the biggest economies in the world with one hand tied behind their backs.

That will not change overnight. But SheTrades represents an important step in the right direction – one that, like the other initiatives I have talked about today, will deliver benefits across the Commonwealth and beyond.

When we all work to the same standards, when we break down barriers to trade and when we empower women to take their rightful place in the economy, the benefits are felt not just by countries and individuals involved.

Freer, easier trade means stronger economies, more jobs, more choice and

lower prices – and that is true here in the UK, across the Commonwealth and around the world.

With its unique scope and global voice, such a Commonwealth can set a powerful example to the world, one that demonstrates and underlines the importance of protecting free trade and the rules-based international order.

Today's initiatives are an example of what can be done to make that happen, of how governments can lay the groundwork for growth. But you in business also have a vital role to play.

The discussions here will feed into the full summit, so I hope you take the chance to share ideas and insights, to identify new challenges and new opportunities, to highlight where Commonwealth governments can step up and do more and even where, perhaps, we should step back and do a little less.

The Commonwealth has never just been about heads of state and government.

It has always been an organisation in which people and businesses from around the world can come together and work together to improve all our lives.

This is your forum, and this is your Commonwealth.

So let us make it an organisation that works for all of us, and shape a future of which we can all be proud.

Prime Minister: PM's press conference statement on Syria: 14 April 2018

Last night British, French and American armed forces conducted co-ordinated and targeted strikes to degrade the Syrian Regime's chemical weapons capability and deter their use.

For the UK's part four RAF Tornado GR 4's launched storm shadow missiles at a military facility some 15 miles west of Homs, where the regime is assessed to keep chemical weapons in breach of Syria's obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

While the full assessment of the strike is ongoing, we are confident of its success.

Let me set out why we have taken this action.

Last Saturday up to 75 people, including young children, were killed in a despicable and barbaric attack in Douma, with as many as 500 further casualties.

We have worked with our allies to establish what happened. And all the indications are that this was a chemical weapons attack.

We have seen the harrowing images of men, women and children lying dead with foam in their mouths.

These were innocent families who, at the time this chemical weapon was unleashed, were seeking shelter underground, in basements.

First-hand accounts from NGOs and aid workers have detailed the most horrific suffering, including burns to the eyes, suffocation and skin discolouration, with a chlorine-like odour surrounding the victims.

And the World Health Organisation has received reports that hundreds of patients arrived at Syrian health facilities on Saturday night with "signs and symptoms consistent with exposure to toxic chemicals."

We are also clear about who was responsible for this atrocity.

A significant body of information including intelligence indicates the Syrian Regime is responsible for this latest attack.

I cannot tell you everything. But let me give an example of some of the evidence that leads us to this conclusion.

Open source accounts allege that a barrel bomb was used to deliver the chemicals.

Multiple open source reports claim that a Regime helicopter was observed above the city of Douma on the evening of 7th April.

The Opposition does not operate helicopters or use barrel bombs.

And reliable intelligence indicates that Syrian military officials co-ordinated what appears to be the use of chlorine in Douma on 7th April.

No other group could have carried out this attack. Indeed, Daesh for example does not even have a presence in Douma.

And the fact of this attack should surprise no-one.

We know that the Syrian regime has an utterly abhorrent record of using chemical weapons against its own people.

On 21st August 2013 over 800 people were killed and thousands more injured in a chemical attack also in Ghouta.

There were 14 further smaller scale chemical attacks prior to that summer.

At Khan Shaykhun on 4th April last year, the Syrian Regime used sarin against its people killing around 100 with a further 500 casualties.

And based on the Regime's persistent pattern of behaviour and the cumulative analysis of specific incidents we judge it highly likely both that the Syrian

regime has continued to use chemical weapons since then, and will continue to do so.

This must be stopped.

We have sought to do so using every possible diplomatic channel.

But our efforts have been repeatedly thwarted both on the ground and in the United Nations.

Following the sarin attack in Eastern Damascus back in August 2013, the Syrian Regime committed to dismantle its chemical weapon programme – and Russia promised to ensure that Syria did this, overseen by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

But these commitments have not been met.

A recent report from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has said that Syria's declaration of its former Chemical Weapons programme is incomplete.

This indicates that it continues to retain undeclared stocks of nerve agent or precursor chemicals – and is likely to be continuing with some chemical weapons production.

The OPCW inspectors have investigated previous attacks and on four occasions decided that the Regime was indeed responsible.

And on each occasion when we have seen every sign of chemical weapons being used, any attempt to hold the perpetrators to account has been blocked by Russia at the UN Security Council, with six such vetoes since the start of 2017.

Just this week, the Russians vetoed a draft Resolution that would have established an independent investigation into this latest attack – even making the grotesque and absurd claim that it was “staged” by Britain.

So we have no choice but to conclude that diplomatic action on its own will not be any more effective in the future than it has been in the past.

Over the last week the UK government has been working intensively with our international partners to build the evidence picture, and to consider what action we need to take to prevent and deter future humanitarian catastrophes caused by chemical weapons attacks.

When the Cabinet met on Thursday we considered the advice of the Attorney General, the National Security Adviser and the Chief of the Defence Staff – and we were updated on the latest assessment and intelligence picture.

And based on this advice we agreed that it was both right and legal to take military action, together with our closest allies, to alleviate further humanitarian suffering by degrading the Syrian Regime's Chemical Weapons capability and deterring their use.

This was not about interfering in a civil war.

And it was not about regime change.

As I discussed with President Trump and President Macron, it was a limited, targeted and effective strike with clear boundaries that expressly sought to avoid escalation and did everything possible to prevent civilian casualties.

Together we have hit a specific and limited set of targets. They were a chemical weapons storage and production facility, a key chemical weapons research centre and a military bunker involved in chemical weapons attacks.

Hitting these targets with the force that we have deployed will significantly degrade the Syrian Regime's ability to research, develop and deploy chemical weapons.

A year ago, after the atrocity at Khan Shaykhun, the US conducted a strike on the airfield from which the attack took place. But Assad and his regime hasn't stopped their use of chemical weapons.

So last night's strikes by the US, UK and France were significantly larger than the US action a year ago and specifically designed to have a greater impact on the regime's capability and willingness to use chemical weapons.

And this collective action sends a clear message that the international community will not stand by and tolerate the use of chemical weapons.

I also want to be clear that this military action to deter the use of chemical weapons does not stand alone.

We must remain committed to resolving the conflict at large.

The best hope for the Syrian people remains a political solution.

We need all partners – especially the Regime and its backers – to enable humanitarian access to those in desperate need.

And the UK will continue to strive for both.

But these strikes are about deterring the barbaric use of chemical weapons in Syria and beyond.

And so to achieve this there must also be a wider diplomatic effort – including the full range of political and economic levers – to strengthen the global norms prohibiting the use of chemical weapons which have stood for nearly a century.

Although of a much lower order of magnitude, the use of a nerve agent on the streets of the UK in recent weeks is part of a pattern of disregard for these norms.

So while this action is specifically about deterring the Syrian regime, it will also send a clear signal to anyone else who believes they can use

chemical weapons with impunity.

There is no graver decision for a Prime Minister than to commit our forces to combat – and this is the first time that I have had to do so.

As always, they have served our country with the greatest professionalism and bravery – and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

We would have preferred an alternative path.

But on this occasion there is none.

We cannot allow the use of chemical weapons to become normalised – either within Syria, on the streets of the UK or elsewhere.

We must reinstate the global consensus that chemical weapons cannot be used.

This action is absolutely in Britain's national interest.

The lesson of history is that when the global rules and standards that keep us safe come under threat – we must take a stand and defend them.

That is what our country has always done.

And that is what we will continue to do.

Amber Rudd: Launch of the Serious Violence Strategy

I want to start today by taking you back to the night of the 20 February in Camden, North London.

A distraught mum watches her teenage son die after he's stabbed outside a shop.

She only realises it's him after she calls his phone and it rings from his jacket pocket behind the police cordon. This young man is Abdi Karim Hassan and he's only 17.

Less than 2 hours later – a separate incident.

A promising accountant leaves a tragic voicemail for his mother after he too is fatally stabbed with a samurai sword just a few minutes' walk away from the first murder.

The victim tells his mum – "I'm wounded, I got wounded".

This second victim is Sadiq Aadam Mohamed and he's the third in his family to be stabbed to death.

His mother later tells a journalist that the family escaped to this country from Somalia for peace but "found only blood".

The family also release a statement.

Violence is a "constant theme in our community" they say.

"We have a lot of questions and need answers. Somebody has to listen to us".

And more recently – more tragic news.

Devoy Stapleton stabbed to death in Wandsworth on Easter Sunday.

Tanesha Melbourne-Blake gunned down in Tottenham.

Amaan Shakoor fatally shot in Walthamstow.

And Israel Ogunsola fatally stabbed in Hackney.

In each of these cases the recurring question has been "why, why, why"?

And as Home Secretary, I've been searching for the answer.

That's why last October, I commissioned a review into violent crime to explore why it is that there has been an increase in homicides, knife crime and gun crime and what we should do about it.

I knew then, just as I do now, that this is a problem which we must get a grip on.

And today I am pleased to announce that I am publishing our Serious Violence Strategy. This marks a major shift in the approach to recent rises in knife and gun crime and is being supported by £40 million of Home Office funding.

This strategy represents a real step-change in the way we think about and respond to these personal tragedies which dominate the front pages of our newspapers with seemingly depressing regularity.

But before I tell you what the evidence shows, I want to start by addressing head-on some of the theories that have been circulating.

One of the contentions is that there are not enough officers on the streets. The evidence however does not support this. In the early 2000s, when serious violent crimes were at their highest, police numbers were rising. In 2008, when knife crime was far greater than the lows we saw in 2013 to 2014, police numbers were close to the highest we'd seen in decades.

And the head of the Metropolitan Police has said she does not believe the recent spike in attacks is due to cuts to police budgets either.

Equally, to those who blame the recent spate of violence on changes to the

provision of youth services, I say that that too is far too simplistic.

And in my view, simplistic arguments are no substitute for a serious strategy. And that's what I want to spend my time talking about today.

In our Serious Violence Strategy, we explore the reasons behind serious violence.

We find that there is a strong link between drugs and violent crime and that changes to the drugs market appears to be the biggest driver of the increase in violent crime.

We know that since 2014, over half of all homicides involved a victim or a suspect using or dealing drugs. We know that the use of crack-cocaine is rising in England and Wales and that there's a strong link between violence and crack-cocaine.

We also know that 'county lines' drug dealing has become an increasingly popular way of dealing drugs around the country.

This involves gangs grooming and using children and vulnerable young people to traffic drugs using dedicated mobile phones or 'deal lines' into new locations outside of their home areas.

The wider the reach of the gang, the further their violence, drug dealing and exploitation spreads.

So this is the situation we are faced with.

Serious violence is on the up, and in many cases, drugs are an important contributing factor.

So first off, our response to violent crime must address the misuse of drugs.

Last year we launched our new Drugs Strategy and we will be going further.

We will focus on reducing the number of people who take drugs and we will also increase the number of people who recover from drug dependency.

We will also work towards putting a stop to the 'county lines' gangs who are selling drugs around the country. A few weeks ago I was talking to the Chief Constable of Norfolk Constabulary and he made it clear what a problem this is for local police forces. In fact, 70% of police forces have reported significant increases in violent crime linked to county lines. And what we're talking about here are murders, torture and other types of extreme violence. For example, in one reported case, a man in Liverpool had his hand severed by a machete and both legs broken in a punishment attack.

That's why I'm pleased to announce that this government will provide £3.6 million to support a new National County Lines Co-ordination Centre which is currently being developed by the National Police Chiefs' Council and the National Crime Agency to support more effective action against these types of gangs.

This will help the police catch the perpetrators and will also support measures to protect vulnerable people who have been drawn into county lines drugs dealing networks. It will also provide vital intelligence about illegal drugs markets across the country and it will support police forces to close down the mobile phone numbers used for county lines drugs dealing.

In addition to this, we will be running a nationwide campaign in partnership with the charity Crimestoppers, to raise awareness of the problem of county lines and to prevent and protect more people from being exploited and drawn into these gangs.

And while I do not think we can arrest our way out of the problem of violent crime, I do believe the police have a vital role to play in tackling it.

I've heard what the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick and others have said about officers losing confidence in using stop and search, and I must say that really worries me.

Let me make my position absolutely clear. I stand fully behind stop and search and I see it as a vital tool for the police.

Of course, stop and search will always need to be used appropriately – like any other police power – but thanks to the introduction of body-worn video across police forces, I have greater confidence than ever before that this is the case.

I believe that a combination of stop and search, hot spot policing strategies to focus on those areas where crime is concentrated, as well as a better use of data so police forces can routinely monitor, adjust and test their response to violent crime – will make a difference.

But I also want to make the police's job easier by making weapons harder to come by. I've seen what's going around our streets – the zombie knives, axes and bayonets. And let me tell you, it might have had a place in medieval warfare but it certainly doesn't have a place on our city streets.

That's why I will be introducing new laws within weeks that make it harder than ever before to purchase and possess guns, knives and acid.

There will be new restrictions on online sales of knives to make it harder for under 18s to buy them. This will include stopping them from being sent to residential addresses. There will also be a complete ban on the possession of offensive weapons like zombie knives. In addition, we will make it easier to prosecute cases of threatening someone with a knife.

And to reduce the risk of acid attacks, we will make it a criminal offence to possess corrosive substances in public and prevent sales to under 18s. I will also consult on extending stop and search powers to enable the police to search for and seize acid from suspects carrying it in public without good reason.

But policing, legislation and making weapons harder to come by just isn't enough. A crucial part of our approach will be focusing on and investing more

in prevention and early intervention.

We need to engage with our young people early and to provide the incentives and credible alternatives that will prevent them from being drawn into crime in the first place. This in my view is the best long-term solution. Because what better way to stop knife crime than by stopping young people from picking up knives in the first place?

And I've seen first-hand that early intervention really makes a difference.

I recently visited New Horizons, a youth centre in Camden which helps young people who are often caught up in violence, to build more positive futures. Whether that's by helping to find them housing, counselling or a job. One young man I met had exchanged being in a gang for fashion and was being supported to build his own clothing line.

And earlier today I visited Leap Confronting Conflict, an organisation which successfully intervenes even earlier – helping young people who face multiple challenges in their lives to manage conflict before they can be drawn into gang activity.

This is exactly the type of work I want to see more of.

That's why I'm pleased to announce a new £11 million Early Intervention Youth Fund to help communities run early intervention and prevention programmes for young people at risk of getting involved in violence.

Because I want local communities to be front and centre of our response to violent crime.

This £11 million fund is in addition to the money we are committing to other projects helping young people start off life on the right track, including £13 million for the Trusted Relationships Fund, £40 million for the Youth Investment Fund and £920 million for the Troubled Families Programme.

But it's a sad fact of life that there will always be people who pick up knives or other weapons. I need to make sure that they put them down again before they cause irreparable damage.

That's why I've just launched a new online advertising campaign – #knife free – to raise awareness about the risks and consequences of carrying knives and to inspire young people to do something more positive instead. But those of us in government aren't the only ones who should be doing work online.

As I speak, gangs are posting videos and music online that document, encourage and glamorise violence and goad and threaten others.

And the repercussions can be deadly.

For instance, last August 15-year-old Jermaine Goupall was knifed to death in South London in the climax of a feud between rival gangs posting mocking videos on YouTube.

It is already an offence to incite, assist or encourage violence online and I expect to see social media companies standing by their obligations to remove this kind of content as necessary.

But that alone isn't enough. Social media companies must do more. So today I am calling on them to review their terms and conditions and make it clear that they will not host any content linked to gangs or gang violence. Some might say that this is impossible. But when I called on social media companies to deal with terrorist content on their platforms, they listened and took action. I'm asking them to do so again. Because it's the right thing to do.

Because fighting crime and keeping each other safe isn't just the responsibility of government, it's everybody's responsibility.

And based on what I've said here this morning, I hope you'll agree that there's a full programme of work ahead. This morning I met with the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, the Mayor of London and representatives from key agencies to outline my plan and to listen to their views.

I will also urgently convene and lead a new, cross-party Serious Violence Task Force which will bring together PCCs, representatives from the voluntary sector, local government, the police and other key sectors as well as MPs from different parties, to make sure that everything I have talked about today is being delivered effectively.

And I'm pleased to say that Chuka Umunna is the first Labour MP to agree to take part.

The cross-party dimension to this work is important.

Because as tempting as a blue versus red spat can sometimes be, the safety of our neighbourhoods is just too important and we cannot afford to be distracted by party politics. I want to hear some solutions from the opposition front bench, rather than just the constant shouts of "cuts, cuts, cuts".

I will also host an International Violent Crime Symposium to bring together leading international academics and experts to understand what else is known about trends in drivers of violent crime and what sorts of interventions are working around the world. Because we are not alone in having seen a spike in violent crime. In fact, serious violence trends have been similar across many developed nations, suggesting there's a global component to it. I truly believe that while there is more to learn, what I have outlined today is an important start.

We will take the comprehensive approach necessary to make sure that our sons and daughters are protected and our streets are safe.

As a government we will never stand idly by while acid is thrown or knives wielded.

And I am clear that we must do whatever it takes to tackle this so that no

parent has to bury their child.

Thank you.