

***Violence and Radicalisation in Communities: The Role of Multi-Agency  
Partnership in Detection and Prevention***

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**Abstract**

After 52 murders in London during the first 100 days of 2018, and the 2017 UK terrorist attacks by religious extremists, concerned commentary on this state of affairs emerged among politicians and in the UK media. Some UK media commentary questioned the Conservative Government cuts (LGA, 2015) to public spending, including the Police, and posited this as a possible cause for the spike in violence (BBC, 2018). Kevin Campbell, former London gang member, commented in a BBC interview for the Victoria Derbyshire programme that “When there are less police officers on the street, members of gangs see this as a window of opportunity” (BBC, 2018). This interview questioned whether the fall in police numbers could be a major contributory factor to the rise in gun and knife crime in London. It was followed by a series of stories in the broadcast and print media investigating the reaction to the murders. Some of these commentaries have been included in this paper alongside interviews with former prison officers, a former gang member, youth workers, charity support person, and community safety personnel. All interviewees except one referred to the need for collaborative working between communities and statutory agencies to address the violence, signifying levels of complexity that exceed a single, isolated cause such as the loss of police personnel. Multi agency partnerships include a range of membership from statutory agencies to members of the public, reflecting local demographics and the complexity of local problems (Roberts, 2016). The most serious concern is that the early warning signs that can lead to violence of the kind witnessed in the 2017 attacks (UNISON 2016) and the murders of early 2018 in London, seem to be missed, and there appear to be causative factors. The research considers the societal and political background to the London murders and the reasons why local information about crime, shared through multi-agency partnerships and coalitions, is important to policing and community safety. The paper also examines policing, community safety, social policy changes in the UK and their effects since 2010. The paper goes on to present findings about contributory factors to the violence and the significance of shared information in detecting violent intent, violent action, radicalisation and terrorism. The final part of the paper reviews the question of how involved agencies can address ongoing violence and extremism in communities through local intelligence gleaned through partnership working.

Keywords: Community violence, knife crime, extremism, terrorism, partnerships, collaboration, coalition

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# Killings in London in 2018

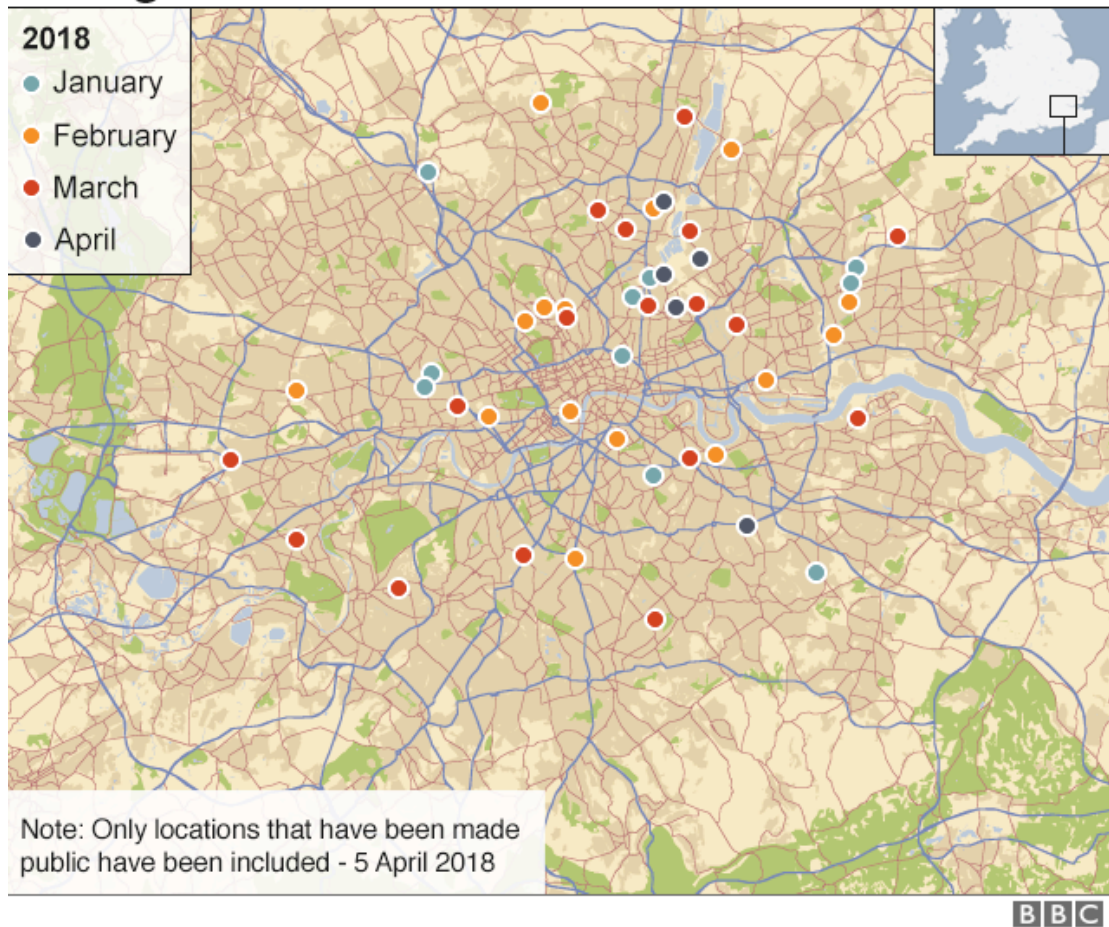


Figure 1: London Killings. Source: BBC News.co.uk.

## Introduction

The focus of this paper is the political and societal complexity involved in the recent rise in UK gun and knife crime during 2018. Alongside government policy developments since 2010 and the recent 2018 media coverage, the paper considers the modern social landscape in the UK, particularly in London, and an apparent environment of marginalisation, isolation and division expressed by young people and public services professionals interviewed for this study. Furthermore, analysis is undertaken relating to some media statements made on the theme of cuts to police resources by former Conservative Home Secretary Amber Rudd, serving Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick, London Mayor Sadiq Khan and the present Home Secretary, Sajid Javid.

## Research design

To address the issues, the research is based on a qualitative design using mixed methods. This was chosen because both narrative and documentary analyses can elicit a rich picture of causative factors as perceived by those working and living among the violent communities in question. Qualitative research gives us the tools to help achieve an in-depth picture of the research subject, focusing on activity in its natural setting to interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning that people might bring to it.

Creswell (2014, p.15) suggests that qualitative research can be understood as a process of enquiry intending to enhance understanding, and there seems little doubt that the rise in gun and knife crime in UK cities has prompted those in authority and ordinary communities to seek to understand the reasons behind this phenomenon.

The object of qualitative research in the context of this study is to achieve a nuanced understanding of social realities in groups, individuals and cultures, through the subjective experiences of these groups and individuals in their natural setting. Qualitative research design is linked to social constructions, placing an emphasis on subjectivity wherein the insights offered by interviewees for this paper can be analysed in relation to questions about the societal and political causative factors. A common critique against qualitative research concerns its internal validity and reliability when considered with quantitative approaches based on scientific, deductive logic (Flick, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Hull, 1997). However, the rise in gun and knife crime in the UK during 2018 is not just a question of numbers, which are in themselves a concern. This paper seeks to uncover the story behind the numbers. In considering the effects of political and societal changes, these effects are more immediate among those that experience them.

Denzin and Lincoln (2014) highlight links between qualitative research designs and interpretivist epistemologies. In this study, an interpretivist epistemological framework is adopted to support a qualitative approach. Although epistemology is not an observable construct it can affect the world view and assumptions made in any research. However, the reasons for selecting the qualitative approach are based around an experiential or grounded rationale for investigating the human aspects of social disorder. Myers, (2009, p.38) says that in the interpretivist epistemological framework, “access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments”. Quantitative approaches alone are more aligned with some limitations in enabling in-depth, multi-level explanations for social phenomena.

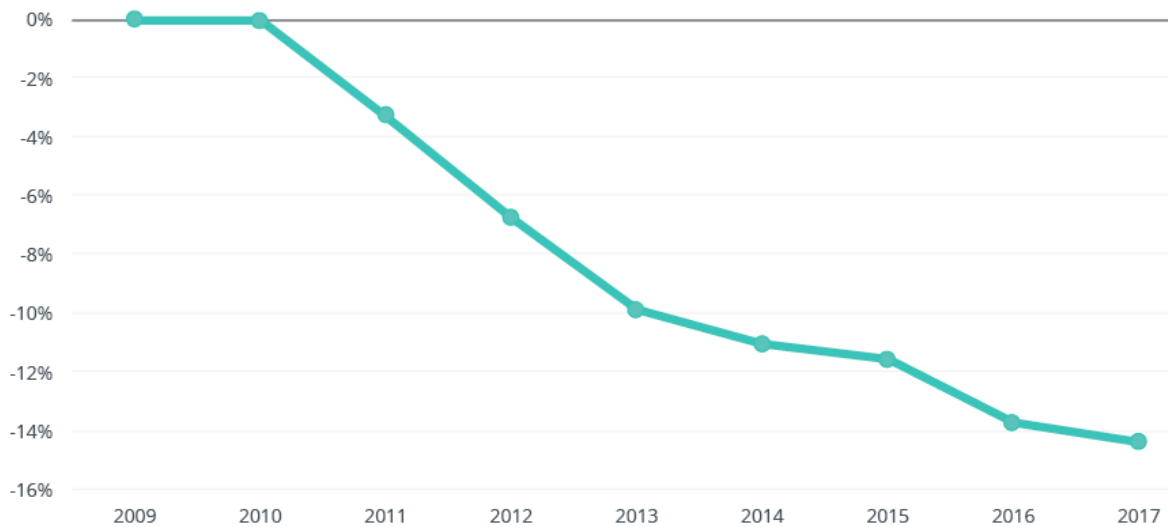
The research also includes participatory observation at a large community meeting involving community safety and police professionals, local government officers, Health professionals, youth workers and members of the local community held in May 2018 in Portsmouth, Hampshire. This approach enabled interaction between the researcher’s direct experience of the meeting and individual contributions to matters of concern about local community violence. Semi-structured interviews, lasting from a few minutes to one hour, were undertaken. Questions were similar for each interview, but where time allowed, deeper questioning took place. The rationale for including media interviews is that the subjects are from political circles and local communities offering insight into specific social norms and expressions which are germane to the subject, and bear direct comparison to the interviews undertaken for this study.

The complexity of the subject area indicates that a structured approach should be taken in analysing the data and this will relate themes identified by each of the interviewees in London and Portsmouth. These are:

1. Government cuts to policing resources
2. Government policy of Austerity, affecting Local Authorities
3. Housing

## Government cuts to policing resources

There is little equivocation about the extent of cuts to policing and community safety since 2010. National Audit Office figures (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2016, p.6) show that direct government funding for policing fell by 25% (£2.3 Billion) over the years 2010-2016. The Institute for Government (2017) has published figures showing a further drop in police funding and the concomitant fall in police numbers by 14% to 2017.



Source: Home Office, Police Workforce England and Wales Statistics, March 2017



Figure 2: Declining police personnel numbers

There is no question that police numbers fell, and continue to fall, with a loss of 21,000 police officers, 18,000 police staff and 6,800 police community support officers since 2010 (House of Commons Library, 2018; Disney and Simpson, 2017, p.2). This equates to nearly one quarter of the police force for England and Wales. The House of Commons debate pack quoted above records concerns about the ability of the UK police to maintain public security and community safety and these concerns are echoed by Chief Constables and the Community Safety staff in this paper. The present UK Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Cressida Dick, appeared before the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee in June 2018 where she admitted that it would be “naïve” to think that the fall in police numbers had nothing to do with the rise in gun and knife crime in 2018 (Parliament TV, 2018). The office of the London Mayor published figures in January 2018 saying that £600 million had been cut from the Metropolitan police budget since 2010 (Mayor’s office, 2018) whilst in Hampshire, the Police Federation recorded their concerns over cuts to local policing during 2011 (Hampshire Police Federation, 2011).

In October 2017 the Guardian newspaper reported concerns about police numbers expressed by Metropolitan Police deputy commission Craig Mackey (a. Guardian, 2017). In a later Guardian story, Met. Police Commissioner Dick stated that police cuts will have contributed to the rise in violent crime (c. Guardian ,2018).

The question must be asked: how much are these statements supported by the facts? In 2017 the Institute for Fiscal Studies published their findings confirming that 20,000

police officers were lost between 2009-2016 and further cuts to police funding are planned by the government until 2020 (Disney and Simpson, 2017 p.3). The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners reported in 2015 that “Budget Cuts will Radically Affect Policing” (APCC, 2015) saying that “a fundamental rethink” would be necessary to help maintain services. A compelling argument comes from Lumsden and Black’s 2017 paper on “austerity policing”. Here they refer to Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary’s (HMIC) warning, on page 60 about the way in which austerity had affected police forces in England. The study uncovered evidence of “deliberately suppressing demand, not responding to crimes and not making arrests due to a lack of resources”. If the police are not making arrests due to lack of resources, it may be expected that such intelligence could have leaked into the criminal community and local areas of concern in large cities such as London. The comment about police officers not making arrests chimes with Kevin Campbell’s comment in the BBC interview on 4 April 2018 signalling a “window of opportunity” for those seeking to perpetrate violent and other types of crime (BBC,2018). “I know I ain’t gonna get caught. They don’t even bother to come out no more” (Interview 10).

On the other side of the argument, the former Conservative Home Secretary, the Rt. Hon. Amber Rudd MP, made public statements about the rise in knife and gun crime in London, referring to “evidence”, which she stated did not support the idea that larger police numbers have a greater effect on reducing crime. It is important to examine these statements and the evidence referred to by the former Home Secretary in light of the statements to the contrary from academics, statutory agencies, HMIC, the Police and representatives of affected communities. The evidence that Rudd appears to refer to is that high numbers of police officers coincided with equally high figures in violent crime in 2008 during the Labour Government administration. Sajid Javid, former Conservative Communities Secretary, supported Rudd in a Guardian article saying that both police numbers and violent crime were both at their highest “ten years ago” (b. Guardian, 2018). For the purpose of comparing like with like: if this constitutes the “evidence” that Rudd cites, it is important to note the changes in both crime types and patterns during the last ten years (Loveday, 2017; UN 2015; PERF, 2018). This 2008 “evidence” has tenuous links with the changing pattern of modern crime in Britain and further afield where criminals are moving towards a less obtrusive means of committing criminal acts through use of the internet. This criminal activity was cited by Commissioner Dick in her assessment of the present crisis in gun and knife crime in London when she referred to so-called “Drill” music and social media as key influencers in inciting violence among young people (a. BBC news 2018). Evidence in the research for this paper states that both social media and “Drill” are symptoms and expressions of a much deeper problem (Interviews 3,5,6,7 and10). Youth workers and prison officers concurred in their opinion that Drill and social media are part of a far wider picture of youth disaffection with the loss of youth services, local youth clubs, youth workers, community centres and support workers in local communities. A former gang leader, interviewed by the BBC on 6 April 2018 said "Due to spending cuts there has been less policing, community centres are closing. There's been no money directed at the third sector for a while and with all these cuts and reductions we've got more young people falling out on to the streets." (BBC, 2018. c.) indicating that this is not merely a question of fewer police officers on the streets of the capital. One former prison officer who was interviewed for this research stated “These are kids who no longer have any support, either at home or in

the community. There are very few youth workers or local services since the cuts to local authority budgets. They literally feel they are on their own and it's kill or be killed". The former gang member who contributed to this research (Interview 10) said "I got a knife because all the bad boys got one. I'd rather be arrested and sent to prison for having a knife and still be alive. If I didn't, I'd get shanked [stabbed] soon as I went out the door." Drawing parallels between the media commentary cited above and the primary research for this paper helps to support the notion that the recent rise in gun and knife crime is not just a question of reduced police numbers.

London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, announced a rise in the precept for London Policing in April 2018, enabling the deployment of an enhanced force of 120 officers to tackle the problem of gun and knife crime in the capital. This force has greater powers to stop and search (b. BBC News 2018), but it is also noteworthy that in this interview, Mayor Khan cites cuts to both policing and local youth services as contributory factors to the recent spike in violent crime in London. It should be remembered that Sadiq Khan is a Labour party Mayor and this view could represent an ideological opposition to public sector cuts, but his concerns are also echoed by Commissioner Cressida Dick, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC), Lumsden and Black (2017), Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) and all interviewees for this research. It seems that anxieties about cuts to police numbers are not merely the concern of a single political party with ideological differences to the present Conservative government.

### **Government policy of Austerity, affecting Local Authorities**

Since the Coalition Government of 2010 and the subsequent Conservative Government, a succession of policy changes have impacted the provision of public services at local level (UNISON,2018; Buck, D. 2018; Emerson, 2017; Hastings et.al, 2015), many negatively. Contributors to this research mention aspects of government policy in the years since 2010 with reference to the effects of cuts to local services (interviews 1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9). Services referred to are cuts to youth services, community support workers, community centres, probation, policing, housing and housing staff plus benefits changes, and these concerns are echoed by the Local Government think tank LGiU in their 2018 report (LGiU, 2018). Cuts to public spending were and are part of the Coalition, then Conservative strategy of Austerity instituted after the financial crash of 2008 (Roberts, 2018). The Local Government Association published their concerns in 2014 where they warned that statutory services could not be maintained in the face of swingeing cuts to public services (LGA, 2014). The majority of the cuts to public spending under Austerity have been shouldered by local government (JRF 2015) and by services such as the NHS and the Police.

### **Cuts to youth services and housing**

Since 2010, there have been cuts to youth services provision (Eichler, 2018) in local areas as part of the government policy of austerity (MacLeavy, 2011). Warnings have been issued by statutory agencies regarding the loss of youth provision in local areas, not least of which are in the cities. The Local Government Association warned of the dangers of cutting Youth Offending Teams, sited with local authorities, who provide support to young offenders. Richard Watts, chair of the LGA's Children and Young People's Board said

‘Increases in knife crime amongst young people highlights the challenge still facing youth offending teams, and we’re worried that cutting back on funding risks undermining the progress that’s been made over the last decade’ (Cited in Eichler, 2018).

It is not just the Youth Offending Teams that have experienced cuts. UNISON published a report in 2018 called *The Damage* in which it warns that cutting youth services will inevitably lead to a rise in youth crime. Deprivation, says the report, has affected children under the age of 18 more seriously than others:

“it is clear that deprivation is far more acute among young people. And yet it is this group which has borne the brunt of the government’s austerity agenda, with the Education Maintenance Allowance cut, higher education tuition fees trebled to £9,000, and housing benefit slashed” (p.3)

This encompasses many of the issues raised, both by the young people who contributed to this paper and the statutory services interviewed. Drill music and social media seem to be part of the overall picture of deprivation, isolation and social exclusion experienced by many young people at the heart of the current rise in gun and knife crime. Those who spoke to me but did not want to be identified, either indirectly or directly, affirmed that they feel “pushed out”, especially in London. Interview 10 confirmed that young people in deprived areas and those involved in gangs feel that there is no hope, no chance of getting out from the cycle of deprivation. “I can’t afford no room. I sleep on the floor at my mums when she lets me. I got four brothers and we live in a flat. I can’t get no room because I’ve got a [police] record, I can’t pay for it with no job, and anyway, the council can force me to take private [rentals] I can’t afford, then when I can’t pay, the landlord throws me out and I’m homeless again.” Interview 10 stated that he can go home with a pocketful of cash from committing crimes, pay his mother and buy what he needs. The pull for young people in this situation can be seen in such criminal activity as so-called County Lines (Childrens Society, 2018; NCA, 2017), in which children are being sent by gangs in cities to the regions to transport drugs for sale. Interview 10 confirmed that County Lines are sometimes operated by gangs joining together in a larger city to make money and for children involved, this is easy money. Achieving a stable home life, or just somewhere to live appears to be seen as impossible for many. Single, lone men in particular are not a priority for housing. Changes to housing policy since 2010 mean that Interview 10 is still unable to access accommodation via Universal Credit. Because he has a criminal record, private landlords are refusing him accommodation – even if he had the money.

There are restrictions on how much housing benefit an individual can claim under the age of 35. If people are single and rent from a private landlord (Shelter, 2018) support is only provided for a room in a shared house. In 2015, Tunstall warns in her paper on the Coalition government’s record on housing that housing policy changes have resulted in “setting housing association rents above traditional ‘social rent’ levels, undertaking social housing development without public subsidy, ending the assumption of security of tenure for council tenants, and setting housing benefit at sub-cost levels, leaving tenants with ‘shortfalls” (p.5). Lone young people seeking work may still be unable to afford to rent, even with welfare benefits. Interviews 2, 3 and 4 confirmed this is a problem for young people in other cities.



In 2015, Conservative Chancellor, George Osborne, announced the removal of the entitlement to the housing element of Universal Credit (UC) for 18-21 year olds from 2017. This was amended in March 2018 when it was announced by the Conservative administration that young people aged 18-21 would now be able to apply for support for housing as part of UC, but no implementation date was announced (Wilson, Keen and Barber, 2018, p.3). Interviews 3,4,5 and 9 documented feelings of strong resentment among young people over housing difficulties, the lack of youth services in the form of clubs and support workers, and a defined resentment around the affordability of housing. This, they said, causes feelings among the young that they are being deliberately “pushed out” of London, away from their friends and family. Interviews 4,5,6,7 and 10 commented that this felt like “ethnic cleansing” meaning that poverty, deprivation and membership of gangs seem to be treated as “markers” for displacing young people. Whatever the truth of the situation from a policy perspective, these are the feelings recorded by both the young people themselves and those involved in providing services for them. In that sense, such feelings could be said to be the effects of policy. Interview 4 elicited comments such as

“These kids have been abandoned by us since the cuts. They’re left to themselves in homes where there is usually one parent struggling to cope with overcrowded accommodation and deprivation. Why are we surprised when this happens [increased gun and knife crime] when we have taken support mechanisms away from them?”

### **Changes to Probation and local authority support**

Offending children under the age of 18 are dealt with by the Youth Offending Teams (YOT) who are separate from the Justice System, being hosted by the local authority in any given area. When a young offender is arrested, the YOT will get involved with a view to supporting youngsters in a different way to that of the Justice system. They work jointly through local authorities with other agencies such as the Probation Service, Police, Health, Housing, schools, local charities and other support organisations (Gov.uk, 2018) to tackle some of the complex issues that may accompany a young person involved in crime, especially in such cases as County Lines. With fewer resources and the Probation Service struggling with changes brought about in 2015 in which the privatisation of part of the Probation Service was introduced, resources are scarce to support young people at every level.

Robinson, Burke and Matthews’ 2015 paper discusses changes to the Probation Service under the Coalition government. The most serious offenders are dealt with by experienced Probation staff under the Probation Service, whilst less serious offenders, including those under the age of 18, are assigned to private sector staff in a Community Rehabilitation Company or CRC (p.162). The paper also talks about a “Probation ethos” (p.163) which derives from its public sector roots, specifically those in social work. This indicates a strong allegiance to the idea of service as it relates to working with individuals to support and help them, which emerged in interviews 3,4,7 and 11. Comments from interviewees stressed the importance of supporting young people in communities where there are problems such as violence, deprivation and feelings of isolation and exclusion. Interviewees 5 and 6 commented that by the time young people arrive in prison for serious crimes, it is “probably too



late” (Interview 6). Early intervention appears to be key to tackling community violence and youth crime.

A further issue emerged during interviews 5 and 6 in which prison officers stated that due to privatisation in the prison service, jails tend to be run for profit. This, they said, resulted in the employment of younger personnel with little life experience who are less expensive to employ than older, more experienced prison officers. The economic and political rationale suggests that private management may operate more efficiently than public management, meaning that private management would lead to a more effective service being delivered at a lower price, especially if less expensive personnel are involved. The free market competitive principle that operates when public services are privatised is in line with the economic ideals of the UK and US neoliberalist viewpoints (Hood, 1991, p.5). Private companies may benefit from being able to function with comparatively less government regulation, often called “red tape” by authors such as Scott & Pandey (2005, p.155), as opposed to public services which are heavily regulated (Pollitt, 2003, pp.14-15). Here in UK prisons, young officers are sent into potentially life-threatening situations to protect or control those barely younger, and sometimes the same age as themselves (Interview 6). Whilst many are competent and able to tackle such situations, equally many are not (Interview 5).

### **The role of other agencies and partnerships**

In times of diminishing resources, multi-agency meetings and groups can help to share information about local concerns. With reduced resources, many organisations are struggling to support multi agency meetings. At the same time, it is here, as experienced in the Community Conversation meeting during May 2018 in Portsmouth, that agencies can exchange information about areas of concern and individuals who have come to the attention of services.

“If I can’t share what I know about local trouble spots with people I know can help, how can we tackle the problems together?” (Interview 9).

### **The route to violence and radicalisation**

The Community Conversation referred to above was attended by over 70 representatives of the Community and statutory agencies such as the Police, Community Safety and public Health. The researcher asked a group including Police officers, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and charity workers supporting communities the question “Who is it that gets radicalised?”. The replies from all participants included “isolation”, “poverty”, “social exclusion”, “lack of support to integrate”, “exposure to people with extreme views”. Similarly, interviews 5,6,8,9,10 and 11 confirmed that those involved in gangs and violence are often those young people who feel socially excluded and find it hard to integrate with communities. The similarities are clear between the two types of extreme behaviour on the part of young people. Decker and Pyrooz (2012) state that gangs and radicalisation do not necessarily co-relate, and their research is based in the US, but in the present study on UK gun and knife crime, it seems clear that there are indeed some social similarities in the type of individual that may be attracted to extreme behaviour, either through terrorism or through violent behaviour in gangs. These, Decker and Pyrooz (2012)

call “risk factors” (p.153). Isolation and social exclusion are not necessarily “explanatory variables” (p.153) but they do appear to be factors present in the interviews for the current research into the 2018 London killings. Hesketh’s 2017 article for Liverpool John Moores University cites his own research into groups and gangs on Merseyside in which he says that the process by which members are recruited to gangs can be seen as a kind of radicalisation (Hesketh, 2017). He goes on to cite such issues as poverty, social inequality, isolation, unemployment, loss of local services and child poverty as factors in the process of attraction to gangs. HM Government’s Serious Violence Strategy (2018) notes on page 35 that some of the risk factors involved in serious violence are “family socioeconomic situation” and “local deprivation”. This view is firmly reflected in the interviews for the current study. As the social landscape in cities changes, it could be that the “explanatory variables” (Decker and Pyrooz, 2012) are changing and that we are now seeing a stronger correlation between the social conditions and processes used to recruit young people to gangs and the route to radicalisation in communities.

### **How can we tackle this?**

Without doubt, there is a role for the many multi-agency groups, coalitions and partnerships in communities and local areas in sharing information about radicalisation and violence (Roberts, 2018). Shared information between both statutory agencies and local groups can help support the police and community safety professionals to identify and take action to prevent radicalisation and violent behaviour. But how can we take action to address the underlying issues of poverty, social exclusion, hopelessness, housing problems, isolation, unemployment and loss of local services to support young people in cities such as London? This multi-faceted action must be addressed in a joint way, as indeed the UK Government’s Serious Violence Strategy, published in April 2018, has affirmed. Tackling serious violence “depends on partnerships across a number of sectors such as education, health, social services, housing, youth services, and victim services” (HM Government, 2018, p.7). There is recognition in this statement that the problem of gun and knife crime among the young is a complex issue with many contributory factors. The strategy underlines the importance of a joint approach throughout, devoting an entire chapter (5) to the role that partnership working plays in addressing the complexity of the issues involved. In many areas, existing multi-agency partnerships are undertaking this role (Roberts, 2016; Roberts, 2018) and support the work of local groups in addressing violence, but there is a crisis of resources. Without further support from central and local government, it is hard to see how multi agency partnership working can help to tackle this spike in violence. If we are to make any impression on the current community problems in London and elsewhere, and the tragedies that result from them, adequate resources are essential in terms of policing, community safety, support for communities, youth work, education and health. A policy change is clearly needed, but it remains to be seen whether this is in time to stem the surge in violent crime in London and further afield.

### **Acknowledgements**

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Interview 1: Serving PCSO Hampshire Constabulary

Interview 2: Serving police commander, Hampshire Constabulary

Interview 3: Youth worker, Portsmouth

Interview 4: Local Charity support worker Portsmouth and former Probation Officer

Interview 5: Former Prison Officer, London Pentonville

Interview 6: Former Prison Officer, Belmarsh

Interview 7: Serving Youth Worker. London Borough of Hackney

Interview 8: Serving Police Officer, London Metropolitan Police

Interview 9: Local Authority Community Safety officer

Interview 10: Former gang member Inner London

Interview 11: Youth worker, Croydon