

OLDHAM YOUTH COUNCIL



Knife Crime 10 Forward Report

#NoMoreKnives



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INTRODUCTION

In the year up to March 2018, in a report by the Office for National Statistics' (ONS), the number of fatal stabbings in England and Wales was at its highest level since 1946 and there had been a 45% increase in the number of knife crime victims aged 16-24. The report also demonstrated that the problem isn't just a London based issue when looking at homicides per 100,000 population. Although Oldham wasn't placed in the top ten, other North West areas were in the top 10 rankings of 'worst place for killings'. [statistics taken from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47156957> accessed on 22nd May 2019]

In the 2018 Make Your Mark consultation, 2,167 young people from Oldham voted for 'Put an End to Knife Crime' as the number one issue that needs to be tackled - higher than ending homelessness and equal pay for equal work. Oldham Youth Council wanted to dig deeper into the issue by consulting with young people to find out why they feel knife crime is an issue and what can be done to reduce it.

AIM

The aim of the "Youth Council 10-Forward" consultation was to investigate why young people in Oldham felt knife crime was such a big issue, to ask them how they felt the issue could be tackled and to gather information that would inform the Youth Council's work.

METHOD

The 10-forward consultation is for each youth councillor to go out and complete the survey with a minimum 10 individuals. In this way we can consult with a good number of young people, a good spread of locations and it can be done quickly with only having to complete.

The Youth Council employed two 10-forward surveys. The first was designed to find out how many young people were carrying knives and if they knew of other people carrying them. It would then try to discover why young people carried knives and what they felt could be done to stop this. Finally, the survey was used to see if there was any particular area in Oldham they thought knife crime was more prevalent, to see if young people's perception of different areas influenced them. A copy of the questions can be found in Appendix 1.

During completion of the first survey it was obvious that many young people do not carry knives and the responses given to stopping knife crime reflected the work that was already going on. To think outside of the box the Youth Council wanted to see why the majority of young people didn't carry knives in the hope that this would give some insight on how to how a campaign or help those who do carry bladed weapons and try to convince them to stop. The second 10-forward survey had just one question:

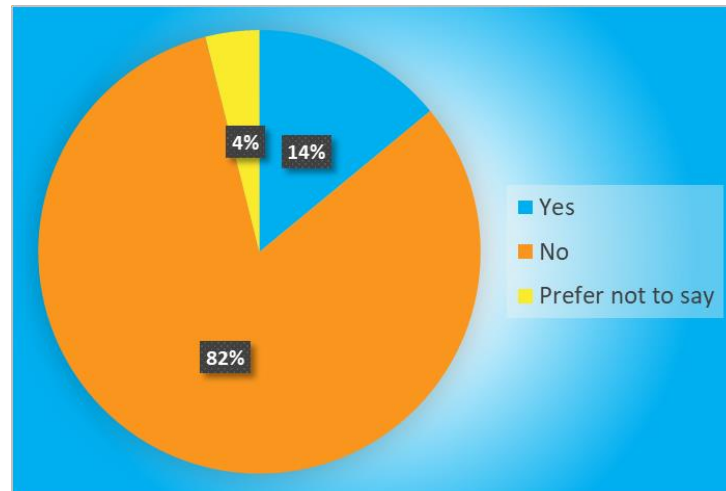
"Why don't you carry a knife or bladed weapon?"

RESULTS FROM SURVEY ONE

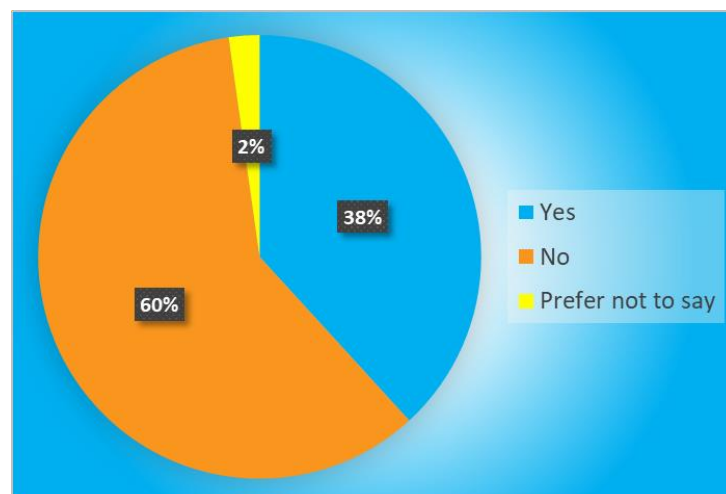
From the first 10-forward consultation 178 people were surveyed.

Below are the charts produced from their responses.

Question 1: Have you ever carried a bladed weapon such as a knife?



Question 2: Do know someone who has carried a bladed weapon such as a knife?



Question 3: What was the reason for carrying a bladed weapon or knife?

This question did not have prescribed answers but allowed young people to write whatever reason they felt. The headings below were created by the Youth Council to collate responses, for example 'Appearance' collated all answers related to looking cool or powerful.

Fear seemed to relate to specific situations not just general fear, with one respondent stating they had carried a knife: *"When the killer clowns were around because I was scared after watching YouTube clips."* Gang related reasons were around fighting and walking through *"other territories"*, although one young person did suggest that you can't be involved in gang activities without carrying a bladed weapon calling it *"tickets to raids"*.

Illegal motives were all based around crime such as muggings, whereas legal motives suggested they needed to carry one to cut their food or for their Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions. One respondent did state that they had received the knife for a *“birthday present and felt cool carrying it”*.



Question 4: What can be done to encourage people to stop carrying bladed weapons such as knives?

Again, this question did not have prescribed answers but allowed young people to write whatever reason they felt.

Education for the respondents ranged from posters in schools, to raise awareness of knife crime and its consequences, to running school workshops on the dangers, using personal stories to get the point across.

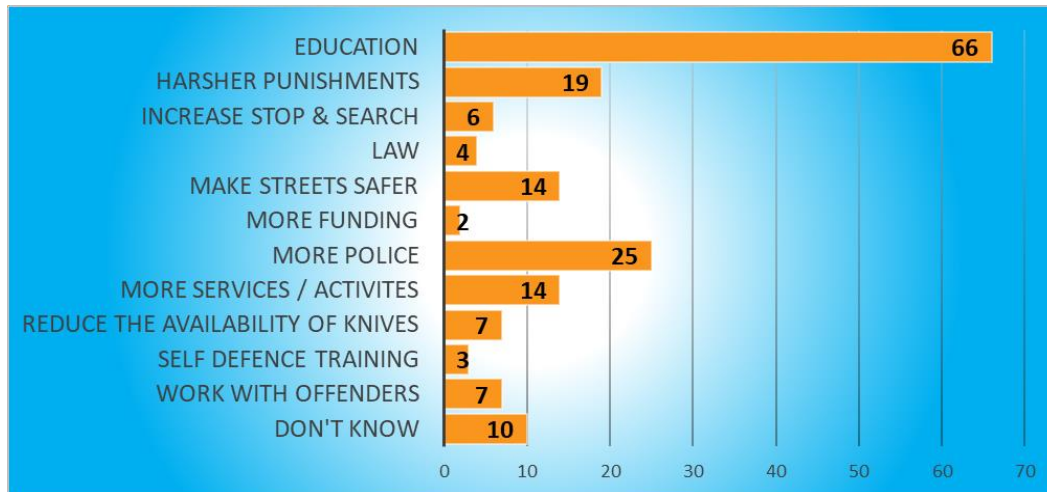
Under the Law heading, two young people wanted harsher laws, while the other two young people did not know it was illegal to carry a bladed weapon citing that we should *“make it illegal to carry one outside of a premises”*.

To make the streets safer, examples given were the need for more CCTV, more street lighting and better lighting such as using blue/white lights rather than the orange ones.

A high number of respondents also requested more police to feel safer, hence why it has its own heading. This request was for more visible police on the streets and community engagement asking for police to *‘show unity’* with young people.

The *“more services / activities”* heading was around places to go and things to do. Young people want decision makers to *“introduce more services in the area to attract the youth’* and asked for *‘more youth clubs and activities to get them off the streets”* and to offer *“more promoted support”*

Under “work with offenders”, respondents want the local authority and other organisations to work with young people to “offer alternatives” and “give me a reason not to” carry knives. They asked for safe spaces to discuss issues and have positive role models.



Question 5: Which areas of Oldham would you avoid because of knife crime?

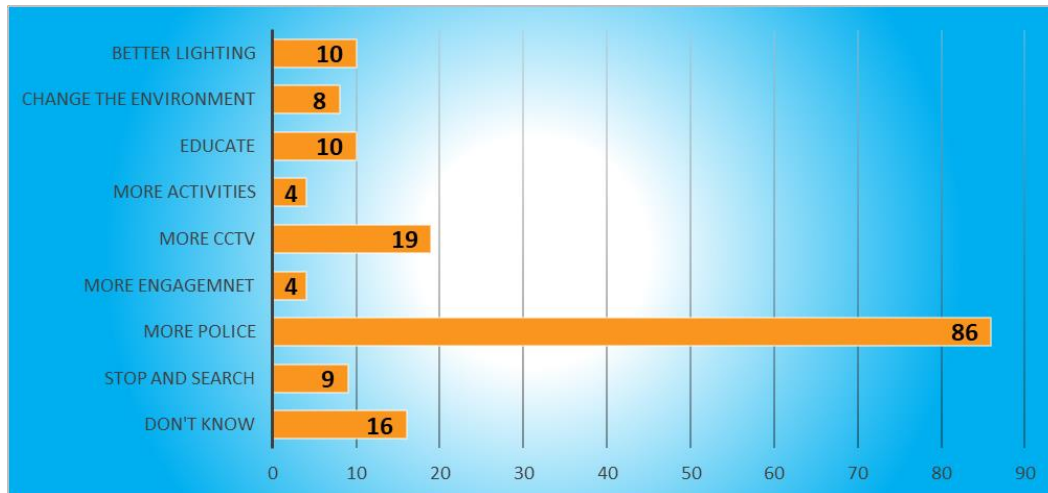
To gain a true picture the question was left open. As well as specific geographical areas shown in the chart below, young people also mentioned generic areas, the highest of those was back streets and alleys with 11 responses. Four young people also mentioned tram stops as a place they would avoid, and quiet, empty and badly lit areas were places that didn’t feel safe.



Question 6: What can be done to make these areas safer?

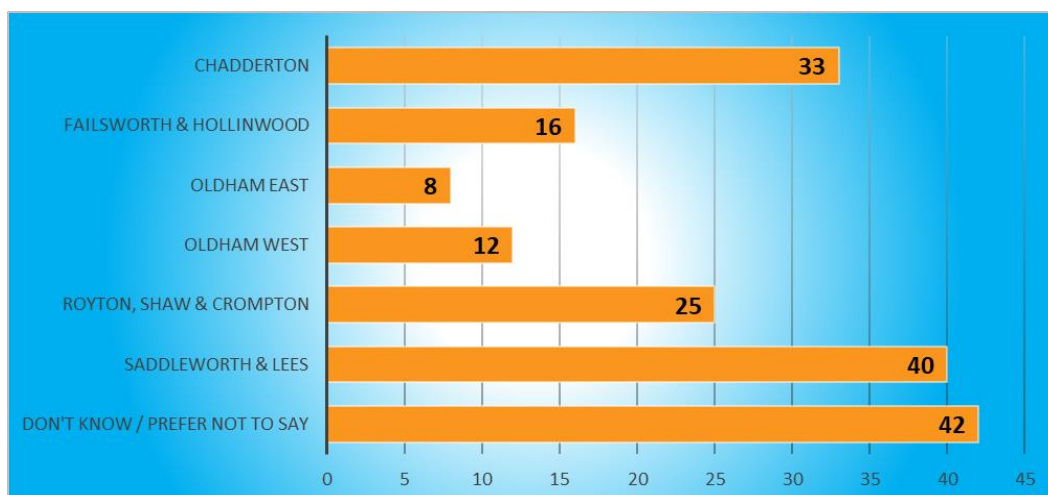
Again, young people asked for more and better lighting to make places feel safer. Under the “change the environment” heading, respondents offered several examples including no alcohol zones, improving the appearance of streets, putting up discouraging signs and putting metal detectors in public places.

For more activities, young people suggested places to go and things to do; such as youth clubs. Extra to these respondents, young people called for more engagement with them. This engagement was to “*have more people around, not even police officers just responsible adults capable of preventing a bad situation escalating*”.



Question 7: Which district of Oldham do you live in?

There was a good geographical spread of where young people are from. The chart below shows that Oldham East and Oldham West had low responses, however, knowing where the “10-Forwards” were taken we can make a reasonable assumption that a high number of those who said they don’t know where they are from are probably from the Oldham East or Oldham West districts.

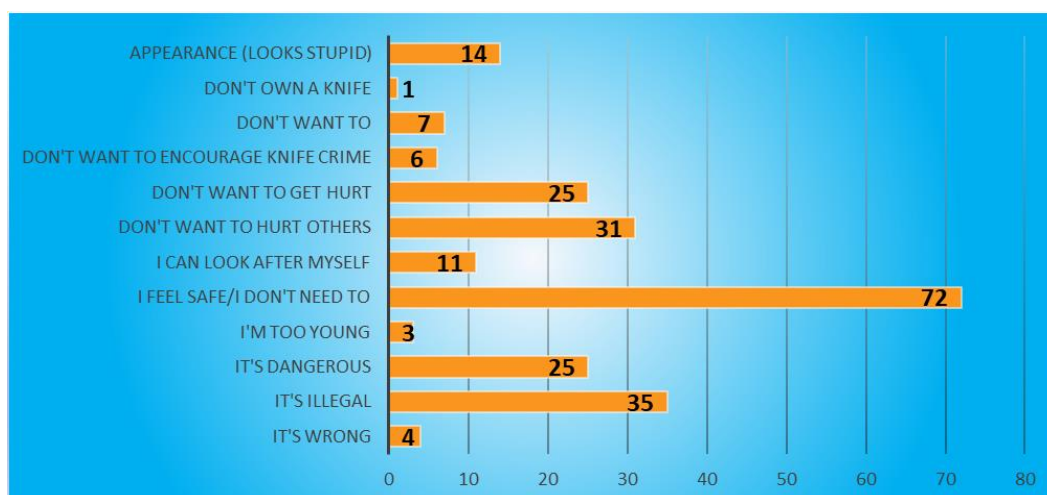


RESULTS FROM SURVEY 2

From the second 10-Forward we were able to gather 234 responses. This survey had only one question and below is a chart produced from their responses.

Question 1: Why don't you carry a knife or bladed weapon?

Again, the question was left open to allow young people to be creative in their response. Most of the responses did align themselves to the headings below. The “Appearance” heading brought together responses about looking “stupid” and bragging about having a knife or knife carriers looking like “cowards”. Young people who “Don’t want to encourage knife crime” correlates to “if I carry a knife other people will carry knives to feel safe near me”. Young people who practice martial arts or confident to talk themselves out of dangerous situations were put under the heading “I can look after myself heading”.



ANALYSIS

UK crime statistics show that less than 5,000 young people aged 10-17yrs were cautioned or convicted of a knife related crime in 2018(source ONS).

This represents less than 1% of the UK 10 to 17-year-old population. The surveys would suggest that most of Oldham’s young people do not carry bladed weapons, but 14% of respondents did admit to having carried a knife.

Half of these suggested they carried a knife for legitimate reasons, such as for Duke of Edinburgh activities or for eating their lunches, but the other half felt they needed it for protection.

If this result is suggestive of the numbers of young people carrying bladed weapons it would seem to be much higher than the number of young people cautioned or convicted. The survey responses also showed that nearly 40% of young people knew someone who had carried a knife.

While this doesn't give an indication of levels of knife crime it may suggest that young people who do carry knives or bladed weapons are happy to share this fact to maybe brag or intimidate, which, may lead to more fear in young people and a need for protection that they assume a knife brings.

With most young people not carrying bladed weapons, when asked why, the biggest response was that they feel safe and didn't need to. This leads us to conclude that it is a perception of places being unsafe rather than real lived experience that leads young people to carrying weapons. Therefore, we feel that work needs to be done, with young people, to challenge the misconception portrayed across the media that UK streets are dangerous. In working with young people to show that Oldham is a safe place to live, work and go to school we would hope to challenge the minority of young people that carry bladed weapons and prevent others from taking up knives.

Making up the top five reasons were that it was illegal, dangerous, could hurt others and could hurt yourself. This suggests that the current education and awareness messages are getting through.

Youth councillors have had the opportunity to attend knife crime awareness training at school and the key messages from this training are that knives are dangerous, you are more likely to injure yourself rather than stay safe by carrying knife and that you will be arrested, or even possibly charged if found carrying a knife. These messages, however, primarily reaching young people who probably wouldn't pick up knives anyway.

Those who do carry knives said the main reason was that a knife makes them feel safe and protection, which suggests that the minority of young people, who are in possession of weapons, do so out of necessity due to perceived or actual fear of being hurt.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) state most knife crimes amongst young people's place near to school grounds, however, young people appear to be more worried about places such as the town centre or tram stops.

These answers could be influenced by the media who have reported recent attacks in Oldham around the tram stops and social media posts.

The need for safety seemed to link to environmental considerations rather than a fear of actual crime. Street lighting was mentioned numerous times with young people worried about dark badly lit areas. This seemed more prevalent in areas, such as the town centre, that use the orange streetlamps instead of the white ones with young people having a fear of coming to the town centre after dark. Solutions taken from responses would be to change the orange street

lighting for white but also to add more CCTV cameras, signage about where CCTV is installed for no alcohol zones to be introduced.

Participants also felt that safety should come from adult support. Responses asked for a higher police presence, not just to catch criminals but to engage the community. They suggested that organisations, such as the police and Oldham Council should work with young people outside of the classroom to divert them from any potential negative behaviours, but also engage young people to help them feel safe and prevent the perceived need to carry knives.

They asked for support from organisations, to provide places to go where they can receive help, advice and information as well as alternative positive activities to dissuade them from knife crime involvement.

We as Oldham Youth Council recognise the benefits of young people engaging with adults, especially professionals whose role it is to work with and support young people. Recently the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Affairs reported that the loss of youth services has contributed to the rise in knife crime, plus, that youth work provides a safe environment and a qualified youth worker to build trust and de-escalate conflict.

The report highlighted that those authorities where cuts to youth services were the largest had the biggest increases in knife crime related incidents.

We want Oldham to be a safe place for all, we want the borough to ensure that all our children and young people are given every opportunity to grow up in a town where they can thrive and where they can reach their full potential. We recognise that young people need access to high quality youth opportunities. Opportunities that enhance life chances, provide learning and development and enable young people to become positive and active citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Promote and support the current education being delivered in schools but work with Oldham Council to offer ways in which it could be developed.

Recommendation 2: Put a motion to Full Council to look at the support, provision and resources that young people have access to.

Recommendation 3: Send this report to Council leaders/officers and cabinet members to ask that 'safety' and 'perception of safety' be taken into account when redeveloping areas especially the town centre.

Recommendation 4: Work with Oldham Partnership to take on reassurance work that challenges the misconceptions that any area of Oldham is unsafe and build up confidence within communities.

APPENDIX 1: First 10-Forward Survey

KNIFE CRIME SURVEY

In 2018 we consulted with over 13,000 young people in Make Your Mark and knife crime came out as the most important issue for young people in Oldham. This survey is to investigate further why young people feel it's an issue in Oldham, it is completely anonymous and your answers will help us decide how to campaign on such an important issue. If you would like more information about what we are doing please contact us at oldhamyouthcouncil@oldham.gov.uk

1: Have you ever carried a bladed weapon such as a knife?

Yes	No	Prefer Not to Say
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2: Do know someone who has carried a bladed weapon such as a knife?

Yes	No	Prefer Not to Say
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3: What was the reason for carrying a bladed weapon or knife?

4: What can be done to encourage people to stop carrying bladed weapons such as knives?

5: Which areas of Oldham would you avoid because of knife crime?

6: What can be done to make these areas safer?

7: Which district of Oldham do you live in?

Chadderton	Failsworth & Hollinwood	Oldham East	Oldham West	Royton, Shaw & Crompton	Saddleworth & Lees	Don't Know