



A 10 Point Action Plan to tackle knife crime and support young people

The church has long been and continues to be committed to tackling knife and gun crime on our streets that blights communities and destroys families. Over ten years ago, a CTE report *'Who is my neighbour – a church response to social disorder linked to gangs, drugs, guns and knives'* by Bishop Dr Joe Aldred, Dr Sophie Hebden, Dr Keith Hebden¹ made a number of practical recommendations to tackle knife crime and provide opportunities for young people. In 2015, a NCLF – A Black Christian Voice Manifesto recommended that churches should seek to find effective ways to work with local and national agencies and organisations to provide outreach programmes targeting vulnerable youths.² However, the seriousness with which we take the current situation with our young people, means none of us can carry on business as usual.

'Young people and their futures', says Dr Joe Aldred (Executive Secretary for Pentecostal and Multicultural Relations at Churches Together in England), 'are so important that we must resist temptations to treat knife and gun crimes as a political football. Government, police, churches and communities should work together to help bring about a society in which young people feel and are safe'.

As a Christian agency, we are therefore calling upon churches to dedicate all or a portion of every service during Lent (6 March – 18 April) to raise awareness, engage with young people, practitioners, families, communities and others to address these issues prayerfully, theologically and practically.

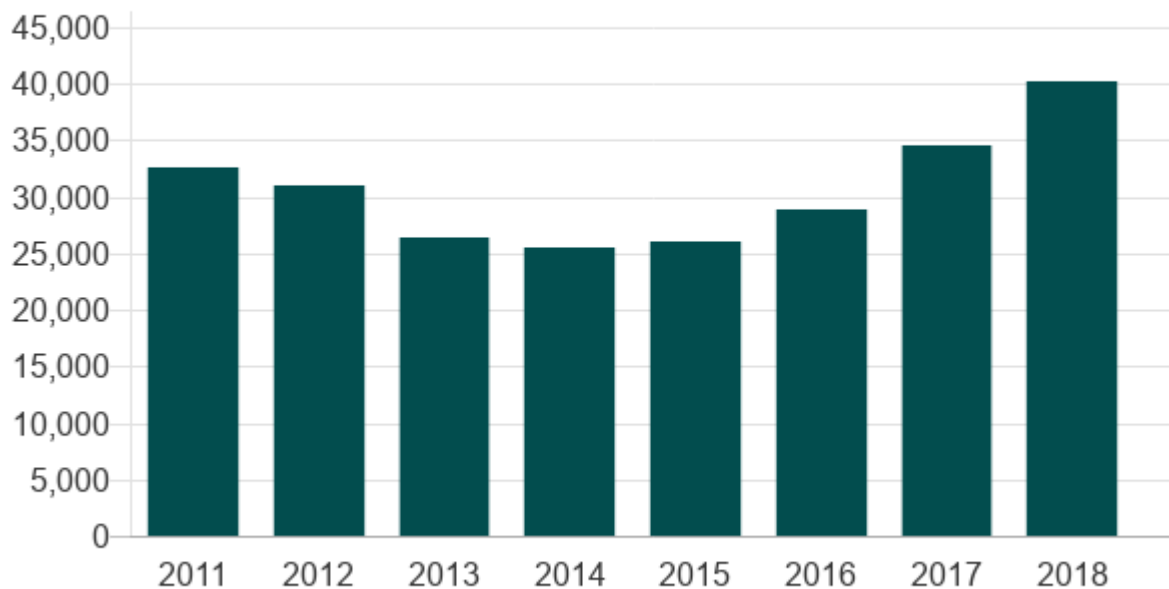
According to BBC Home Affairs correspondent, Danny Shaw, 'There is nothing new about knife crime: sharp objects, blades and knives have been used as weapons for thousands of years. But after falling for several years, knife crime in England and Wales is rising again.'

¹ *Who is my neighbour: a church response to social disorder linked to gangs, drugs, guns and knives*, 2008, CTE (written by Dr Joe Aldred, Dr Sophie Hebden, Dr Keith Hebden).

² *Black Church Political Mobilisation: a manifesto for action*, 2015, NCLF (co-authored by Pastor Ade Omooba MBE and Dr R. David Muir).

Total knife offences in England and Wales

Offences involving a knife or sharp instrument, England and Wales



Source: Home Office, year ending March



There were 40,147 offences in the 12 months ending in March 2018, a 16% increase on the previous year and the highest number since 2011, the earliest point for which comparable data is available.³

In light of the current spate of murders, and the increase in the incidents of knife crime, we call upon our churches and other key partners to redouble their efforts and resources to tackle knife crime and youth violence as a matter of urgency. Dr R. David Muir, Co-Chair of NCLF, says: “Knife crime is a national emergency. Like all national emergencies, we must treat it with the urgency and resources it deserves to protect young people, families and communities.”

Call to Action: A 10 Point Plan

In the *'Who is my neighbour'* report, there were 29 Recommendations to Churches, Government and the Police Service. These recommendation are still relevant today. We have extracted 10 of these to inform and guide our Call to Action on knife crime.

Recommendations for the church

1. Educate members to raise awareness of young people's needs and the pervasiveness of child abuse, as well as providing training for youth leaders and young people on the issues around guns, drugs, knives and gangs.
2. Focus youth work on developing young people's skills and confidence through serving the community, providing an environment where they can find a sense of worth that families and schools may not be able to provide, as well an opportunity to befriend adults who may become role model figures.

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42749089>, report by Nine charts on the rise of knife crime in England and Wales by BBC Home Affairs Correspondent Danny Shaw.

3. Hold listening events where you hear from young people and/or members of the community directly, but these should initiate further interaction rather than being an alternative means of engagement.
4. Host events to promote peace and integration, such as community barbeques, peace concerts, visits and exchanges with other communities, etc.
5. Have a prayer strategy attached to voluntary groups and businesses in the community, asking them regularly what they would like you to pray for.
6. Ensure there are safeguarding policies in place so that both church and gang members are protected in case of difficult disclosures.
7. Give young people responsibility and leadership roles within church.

Recommendations for the government

8. Many church members feel that the government carries responsibility for 'doing something' about the problem of negative gang activity and violent crime in inner-city areas. The government should counter this view by encouraging and empowering local community members to tackle the problems themselves, in partnership with professional organisations and the police.
9. Support training for church and volunteer organisations working with young people who use drugs, guns and knives.

Recommendations for the police

10. The police should recognise the role that churches can play in bringing together communities to fight crime and holding community forums. Strive to work with churches in a training, informing and capacity-building role.

Over the period of Lent, we will initiate a national conversation about the causes and consequences of youth violence and knife crime, as well as the strategies and solutions for combatting the crisis facing our communities. When NCLF conducted the consultation to inform its 2015 Manifesto we travelled around the country to hear from church leaders, young people, activists and academics. We want to hear from all our communities, including these key groups. We especially want to hear the voice of young people and parents. In our Manifesto, we highlighted the importance of strengthening families and providing greater opportunities for young people. During our consultation, there was a strong message about the role of fathers and other role models for young men. 'The phenomena of absentee fathers', says Co-Chair of NCLF Pastor Ade Omooba MBE, 'must be given considerable attention in our conversation.' Please add your voice to the conversation on our Facebook page here www.facebook.com/NCLFNEWS

The full CTE report is available [here](#).

The NCLF manifesto is available here <https://nclf.org.uk/download-black-church-political-mobilisation-a-manifesto-for-action/https://nclf.org.uk/download-black-church-political-mobilisation-a-manifesto-for-action/>