

Chairman of the Police and Crime Committee



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Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
(via email)

Gun crime in London

The number of gun crime offences in the capital is small, but nonetheless it is a crime that can cause devastating effects for victims, families and communities. In October 2017, the Police and Crime Committee examined gun crime in London. We explored the possible reasons for the recent increase in offences; how the Met and other organisations work with offenders and victims; and how the Met and other organisations are responding to gun crime in the capital. We would like to share our findings and observations with you, and set out our recommendations to improve the capital's ability to tackle this high harm crime.

Understanding the nature of gun crime

As you note in your Police and Crime Plan, the number of 'lethal' guns—such as shotguns and handguns—that are fired has increased by around 20 per cent since 2012. Overall, gun crime is on the rise: in the 12 months to October 2017 there were over 2,500 offences involving guns, a 16 per cent increase on the previous year and a 44 per cent increase on 2014.¹

Not all gun crime results in injury to a person, with the Met suggesting that the majority of gun crime discharges are at property.² However, data provided to us by the Met suggests that most instances of gun use are related to violence against the person offences.³ We need to be much clearer about how guns are being used across the board, not just where they are fired, to inform the best possible response.

¹ Metropolitan Police, gun crime, 01/01/2011 to 31/10/2017

² Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

³ Metropolitan Police, gun crime, 01/01/2011 to 31/10/2017

Gangs are closely associated with the most serious gun crime. This may go some way to explaining why the victims and offenders of gun crime are mainly young men. In the year to October 2017, gangs accounted for 41 per cent of offences where a lethal gun was fired. But overall, gangs account for only 10 per cent of all gun crime offences: and even where a lethal gun is fired, half of this is not related to gangs.

The proportion of gun crime offences that are gang related has been reducing slightly each year since 2014: including as a proportion of all offences; of all offences where a gun is fired; and where a lethal gun is fired.⁴ This change may indicate the progress made by the Met's Trident team in tackling gun crime and mirror the Met's efforts in reducing gang related knife crime over the past four years.⁵ However, if gang related gun crime is reducing as a proportion of gun crime overall, it starts to challenge our traditional understanding of the drivers of this type of crime. This will need careful monitoring, and will likely prompt the need for a much more wide-ranging response from the Met and other partners.

Understanding how guns get onto London's streets

It is not clear what type of guns, and how many, are on London's streets. The Met's gun surrenders give some indication—and contribute to a reduction in weapons that could potentially be used in criminal activity—but as the Deputy Commissioner has noted, surrenders tend to result in “trophy weapons” being handed in to the police, rather than guns used in criminal activity.⁶

Neither is it clear how guns are being used. It is often suggested that one gun can be used for multiple crimes. While this can be true, the National Ballistics Intelligence Service has said that in 90 per cent of the cases it examines, where a gun has been fired, ballistic material shows that the gun has not been fired previously. This could, the National Crime Agency (NCA) suggests, indicate that guns are being “freshly stolen or have been held and have not been seen before and then used”.⁷

Guns enter the capital in a variety of ways. We heard that the Met works closely with the NCA and other law enforcement agencies to “make it as hard as possible for individuals to buy weapons.”⁸ But the supply of guns into the UK from abroad is a growing concern, particularly as the use of technology changes the way people can access guns. The NCA suggested, for example, that individuals can “order maybe parts of a weapon or indicative parts of a weapon and [...] with a small amount of effort and sourcing parts within the UK or elsewhere, they can put together a handgun or a pistol that is viable that we would regard as a prohibited weapon here.”⁹

⁴ Metropolitan Police, gun crime, 01/01/2011 to 31/10/2017

⁵ Members heard from the Met that four years ago, around 44 per cent of knife crime was deemed to be gang related at that time. The number fell in correlation with individuals on the Met's gang matrix being placed in custody or being subject to a restriction of some type. Knife crime that is potentially gang related now sits at around 20 per cent.

⁶ Deputy Commissioner Sir Craig Mackey QPM, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 29 June 2016

⁷ Andy French, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

⁸ Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

⁹ Andy French, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

We heard that “surprisingly low numbers” of legally owned firearms are stolen in London.¹⁰ But we know that weapons may be stolen in other parts of the country and brought into the capital. When this happens, it is “very hard for [the Met] to control without specific intelligence relating to such thefts”.¹¹ We heard that the Home Office used to publish information from each police force area, which “included the type of gun, where it was stolen and when it was stolen”, but that this has not been produced since 2005.¹²

Further work is needed to fully understand how guns end up on London’s streets. As Mayor, you are not only well placed to work closely with agencies such as the National Crime Agency, National Ballistics Intelligence Service and Border Force to examine how guns being brought into London from abroad can be stopped, but you can help to determine what more can be done to fully understand theft of legal guns and its impact on the capital. Improving this intelligence will help to shape both your and the Met’s response.

A distinct approach to gun crime?

There is still much to do to uncover about the true nature of gun crime in the capital. But what we do know is that the patterns and trends appear to be changing. What we cannot do is allow it to evolve into the kind of situation the capital faces with other serious violence, most notably knife crime.

The commitments set out in your Police and Crime Plan—including a review of the Gangs Matrix and work with Trident around young people at risk of serious violence—may go some way to responding to gun crime, but will likely not go far enough. We heard, and support, calls, for example, for specialised support for the victims and families of gun violence, including their communities, to reduce the chance of retaliation; and the provision of information to young people about the consequences of carrying a gun, and what to do if they find one or are aware of someone possessing one. Your ambitions around education and appropriate messaging to the public to tackle knife crime apply just as much here and you should ensure that the issue of guns is being addressed in your work to prevent serious violence.

As Mayor, you are well placed to support this kind of action, to ensure that responsibility for preventing gun crime does not sit only with the Met but with partners and communities, and to reduce the risk of people becoming involved in gun crime. The question for you and for MOPAC is whether gun crime, in the same way as knife crime, requires a distinct and specific approach to prevention and intervention, and one that focuses more widely than gang activity. To answer this question, we recommend that you:

- undertake a piece of research with bodies such as the National Crime Agency, National Ballistics Intelligence Service and Border Force to build a clearer picture of how guns enter London from abroad
- examine what more can be done to fully understand theft of legal guns and its impact on the capital and either introduce or lobby for any changes to intelligence gathering

¹⁰ Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

¹¹ Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

¹² Mike Eveleigh, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

- work with offenders and victims of gun crime, including those services that support them, to build up a clearer picture of the drivers of gun use and how their use can be reduced
- publish, through MOPAC, more detail on the levels of gun crime in London, including the number of offences; where a gun is fired; where a lethal gun is fired; and how many offences are gang related, to improve the level of information provided to the public

We would appreciate a response to this letter by Friday 2 March 2017. It would be helpful if you could copy your reply electronically to the committee's Project Officer, Grace Pollard, grace.pollard@london.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Steve O'Connell AM

Chairman of the Police and Crime Committee

Cc Sophie Linden, Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime