

Gun crime in London

January 2018

- **Over the last three years there has been a significant rise in gun crime in London.**
- **Gangs account for nearly half of all offences where a lethal gun is fired.**
- **But gun use may be spreading outside of gang disputes.**
- **The Mayor and the Met will need to adapt their approach with a greater focus on prevention.**

Over the last three years, there has been a significant rise in gun crime in the capital. The number of offences is small compared with other types of crime, but nonetheless it is a crime that can cause devastating effects for victims, families and communities.

In October 2017, the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee looked at the levels of gun crime in London, the possible reasons for the recent increase in offences, and ways the Metropolitan Police and the Mayor are tackling it.

We examined data from the Metropolitan Police (the Met) to assess the type of gun crime taking place in London. We spoke to the Met and other organisations that work with offenders and victims, to understand what is driving gun crime, how organisations are responding to it and how victims are being supported. This report summarises our findings

and is accompanied by a letter to the Mayor that sets out recommendations for further work in this area.

How is gun crime recorded?

Not all gun crime is the same. The term 'gun crime' covers both **lethal weapons**, such as shotguns and handguns; and **non-lethal weapons**, such as air weapons and stun guns.

The Met's two main gun crime statistics are 'gun crime' and 'gun crime with lethal barrelled discharge'. The gun crime figure is made up of all offences that have been flagged to identify that a gun has been used, or there was possession of a gun with intent.¹ Gun crime lethal barrelled discharge includes all offences where a **lethal** firearm has been **fired**.

The committee welcomes your comments on gun crime in London, to help us hold the Mayor and MOPAC to account. You can get in touch with the committee via policeandcrimecommittee@london.gov.uk.

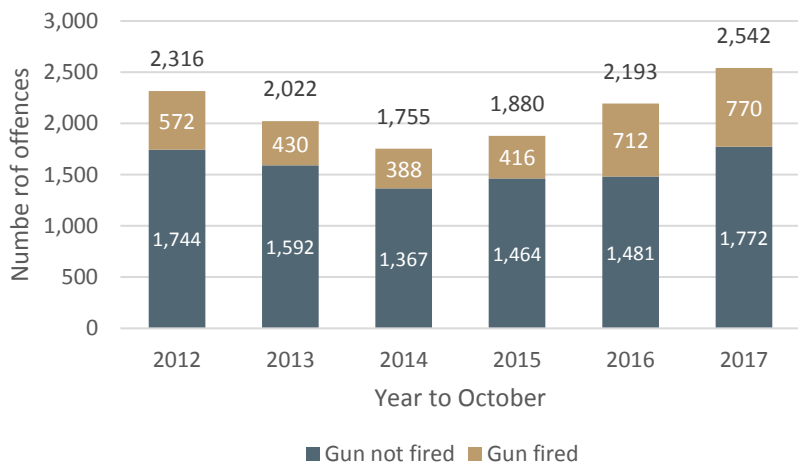
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In the last three years gun crime in London has started to rise

The number of offences involving a gun in London fell up to 2014. But in the last three years it has started to 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 2014.²

The number of gun crime offences has started to rise over the past three years



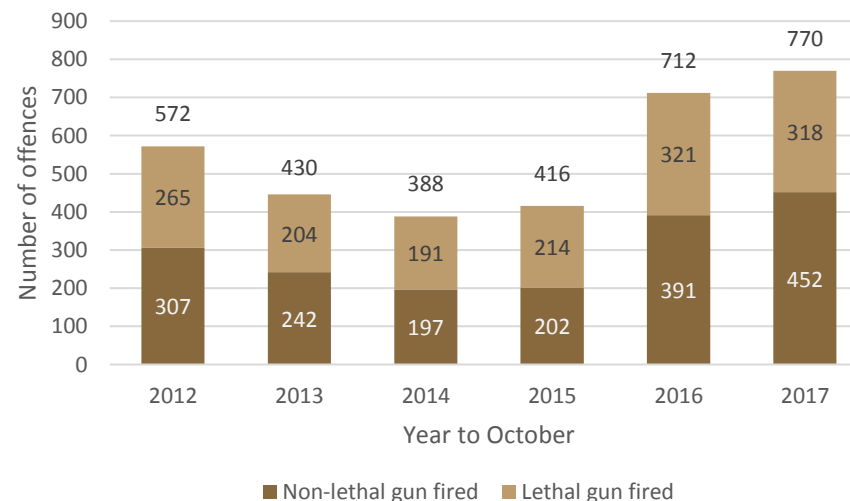
Source: Metropolitan Police

The data appears to show that lethal weapons are used more in offences than non-lethal ones.³ However, where the type of gun used in

an offence is not known, the Met will record it as a lethal weapon: explaining perhaps, in part, the high number of lethal weapons recorded.

Most crimes involving guns do not result in the weapon being fired. In the year to October 2017, of the 2,542 gun crimes, 770 guns were fired: 318 of which were classed as lethal weapons. The number of lethal guns fired has increased by around 20 per cent since 2012.⁴

Around 40 per cent of all guns fired are classed as lethal weapons



Source: Metropolitan Police

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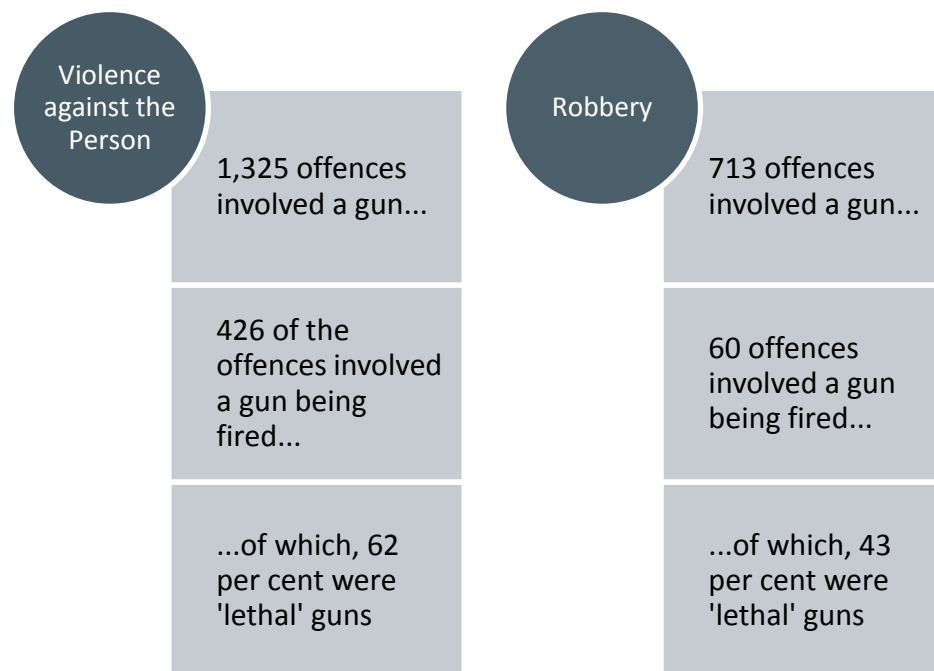
Guns are most often used in violence against the person and robbery offences

Not all gun crime results in injury to a person. The Met notes that “a lot of the discharges can be against property [...] it might be at vehicles or it might be at a house or a front door or something like that. It does not necessarily result in an injury to a person.”⁵

However, the data shows most instances that involve a gun are violence against the person offences. The use of guns in this type of crime—which includes offences such as harassment, Grievous Bodily Harm, and assault with injury—has risen since 2012. In the year to October 2017, around 1,300 violence against the person offences were recorded. A third of these offences involve a gun being fired, and of those the majority were lethal guns.⁶

Personal, rather than business, robbery makes up most of the robbery offences in which a gun is used. Where a gun is used in a robbery, it is almost always a lethal gun, but few of these offences involve a gun being fired.⁷

In the year to October 2017, guns were most often used in violence against the person and robbery offences



Source: Metropolitan Police

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Most gun crime is said to be linked to drugs and gangs

The two main drivers of gun crime in the capital are said to be drug and gang activity. The Met has said that “the gun is very much a tool of the drug dealer [...] to enforce their territory and to enforce their business” and the National Crime Agency (NCA) has highlighted that “with firearms, drugs are very prevalent within that, either seized at the time or as a precursor or as a factor within that crime group’s operating model”.⁸

“we believe that a lot of it [gun crime] is associated with the drugs trade and by that, I mean people dealing drugs at a street level and disagreements between different groups of people in gangs dealing those drugs.”

Jim Stokley, Temporary Commander, Gangs & Organised Crime, MPS

While the proportion of gang involvement in gun offences overall is low, when it comes to the highest harm gun crime—lethal guns being fired—there is a strong link to gang activity.⁹ The Met suggests, and recent data shows, that just under half of all offences where a lethal gun was fired was gang related.¹⁰ Gang related gun offences are mainly linked to violence against the person, whether the gun was fired or not.¹¹

In the year to October 2017,	...10 per cent of all gun crime offences
gangs accounted for...	...18 per cent of the offences where a gun was fired
	...41 per cent of the offences where a lethal gun was fired

Source: Metropolitan Police

There is, however, some indication that the level of gang involvement in gun crime is starting to reduce. Since 2014, the number of gang related gun offences had been reducing slightly each year across the board: as a proportion of all offences; of all offences where a gun is fired; and where a lethal gun is fired.¹² This may indicate the progress made by the Trident team in tackling gun crime and mirror the Met’s efforts in reducing gang related knife crime over the past four years.¹³

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. It potentially indicates a shift of gun possession and use away from gangs. This will need careful monitoring and may prompt the need for change in the hitherto gang-focused approach to intervention and enforcement.

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Nearly two thirds of gun crime offenders are young people

In the year to October 2017, 59 per cent of gun crime offenders were aged 25 or younger. Young people also made up around a third of gun crime victims.¹⁴

While these statistics have remained fairly stable over time, anecdotally we heard that both offenders and victims of gun crime are getting younger. The Met said that, broadly, “it is a slightly older cohort of people who tend to be involved in gun crime acquisition and use” compared to knife crime, but it acknowledged that “generally, people [involved in gun crime] are getting younger”.¹⁵ Similarly, in relation to victims, Martin Griffiths, from the Royal London Hospital and Major Trauma Centre Barts Health NHS Trust, said that in 2012 his hospital was seeing gunshot victims with “an average age of around 25, perhaps a little bit older”, but that now the average age is younger.¹⁶

“our hotspot is about the mid to late teens and so 19-year olds and 20-year olds are being shot”

Martin Griffiths, Trauma surgeon, Royal London Hospital and Major Trauma Centre Barts Health NHS Trust

The majority of gun crime offences are committed by men. In the year to October 2017, 96 per cent of gun crime offenders were male. Men

also make up 65 per cent of gun crime victims. Again, these statistics have remained stable over time.¹⁷

Women’s involvement in gun crime is different to that of men. While only four per cent of gun crime offenders are women, women make up around a quarter of all victims.¹⁸ The Met illustrated some of the ways young women become involved in gun crime in its February 2017 gun surrender campaign. It described the role of women as holders of weapons, often due to the misconception that they would receive a less harsh sentence if caught.¹⁹

There are likely to be a range of complex and interrelated reasons why some young people become involved in gun crime. The Met has highlighted vulnerability, drug trafficking and debts as factors that lead to young people being exploited and involved in gun crime.²⁰ In our previous work on serious youth violence, we highlighted that a driver of young people carrying weapons, particularly knives, appears to be a belief that they need to be prepared to defend themselves, and a perception of the number and severity of weapons on the streets.²¹ It is less clear how much fear for safety drives gun use, but given that much gun crime is linked to drugs and gangs, it is more likely to be an adjunct to other crime, in which the criminal needs to adopt an aggressive, controlling stance, and which elicits the need for a different response.

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The number of guns on London's streets is unclear...

The largely hidden nature of gun crime means it is difficult to know how many guns there are in London, the types of guns and how they circulate between people.

“Is there more prevalence of people exchanging firearms with each other? Have those firearms always been there, are they the sort of thing that people have hidden or stashed away and for some reason a tension has arisen and there is a greater opportunity to do it? Are we getting more multiple discharges when weapons are fired more than once?”

Sir Craig Mackey, Deputy Commissioner, MPS

Many of the above questions have still not been fully answered. The Met seizes a variety of weapons and this sample indicates that the majority of guns are handguns and shotguns. It has seized automatic and semi-automatic weapons, but notes that these are rare.²² Martin Griffiths said many of the injuries he sees in his work are “pistol ammunition and shotgun injuries”.²³

The use of a single gun in multiple offences may not be as prevalent as first thought. The National Ballistics Intelligence Service, which provides forensic and other intelligence to tackle firearms across the UK, 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 indicate that guns are being “freshly stolen or have been held and have not been seen before and then used”.²⁴

The Met has said that by the end of 2017 it will have “seized more weapons than ever before.”²⁵ The Met runs gun surrenders, allowing individuals to hand in weapons they have in their possession. In a two week surrender in November 2017, the Met received 350 guns, including shotguns, pistols and rifles. The Deputy Commissioner has said that while surrenders tend to result in “‘trophy’ weapons” being handed in, rather than guns used in crime, it contributes to a reduction in weapons that could potentially be used in criminal activity.²⁶

In the first week of the Met's November 2017 gun surrender weapons handed to the police included...

- 31 shotguns
- 11 pistols
- 10 handguns
- 9 revolvers
- 6 rifles
- 2 World War Two machine guns

Source: [Metropolitan Police](#) / [BBC News](#)

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...with the supply of guns from abroad being aided by new technology

Guns enter the capital in a number of different ways: from overseas, from other parts of the UK, or through the theft from licensed suppliers and owners.

The Met said that “surprisingly low numbers” of legally owned firearms are stolen in London: “single figures for rifles, pistols and revolvers and low double figures for shotguns.” It highlights, however, that weapons may be stolen in other parts of the country and brought into the capital, and when this happens it is “very hard for [the Met] to control without specific intelligence relating to such thefts”.²⁷

“The business of security is very important because we do not want our guns to fall into criminal hands.”

Mike Eveleigh, British Association for Shooting and Conservation

The available intelligence relating to thefts of legally owned firearms has changed in recent years. Mike Eveleigh, from the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, told us 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. This, he suggests, has left organisations such

as BASC relying on “the media and what our police friends tell us” in monitoring the theft of legally owned guns and any rise in gun crime.²⁸

The supply of guns into the UK from abroad is a growing concern. The NCA says that the “principal supply route” is through ports, via private and commercial vehicles. It suggests that small, “but increasing numbers” of weapons are originating from Eastern Europe, particularly de-commissioned guns which “are easily converted” into a viable weapon, but that there is still “a lot of traffic” from America.²⁹

The use of technology is changing the way people can access guns. The NCA said it is “seeing more activity through technology”, in particular the use of the ‘dark web’. Through this, it suggests, 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.”³⁰

The Met works closely with suppliers and owners of legal guns, and law enforcement agencies across the country to “make it as hard as possible for individuals to buy weapons”. For example, the Met works in partnership with the NCA to tackle the supply of firearms moving internally within the UK. The result, the Met suggests, is that “it is still hard to gain access to guns in London.”³¹

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The Mayor is well placed to help reduce the risk of gun crime in the capital

The Met says that gun crime requires “a slightly different type of enforcement approach” compared to other serious violence, such as knife crime.³² Its approach focuses on four areas: pursue, prevent, protect, and prepare.³³ The operational response is led by its Trident team, which focuses specifically on incidents where guns are fired. Trident pursues firearms intelligence, proactively targets offenders, and responds to shootings. Trident also undertakes prevention work including diversion programmes, programme in schools, raising awareness around gangs and crime, and work within youth prisons.³⁴

The Police and Crime Plan commits to helping the Met “tackle gang crime, gun crime and knife crime more effectively in London.” It makes specific commitments to review the Met’s approach to tackling gang crime, including the Gang Matrix; and to work with Trident to “strengthen the identification of young people who are at risk of serious violence, whether perpetrators or victims.”³⁵

While the focus on enforcement, particularly preventing guns from getting on London’s streets and removing those already there, is important, we were told about the need to focus more on prevention and to reflect the emerging data that indicates that rising gun crime may be moving away from being a gang-related phenomenon. We heard, and support, calls for:

- specialised support for victims of violence, their families and communities to reduce the chance of retaliation³⁶
- 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 one³⁷
- education from an early age in order to challenge attitudes to extreme violence as a way of dealing with disputes or exerting control³⁸
- continuing engagement with tech companies around the issue of gang videos and social media³⁹

“It is not about sticking plasters. Not about sewing up patients. [It’s] about preventing injuries, understanding communities, supporting communities and investing in youth”
Martin Griffiths, Trauma surgeon, Royal London Hospital and Major Trauma Centre Barts Health NHS Trust

The Mayor is well placed to support collaboration to reduce the risk of individuals becoming involved in gun crime. The question for MOPAC is whether guns, in the same way as knives, requires a distinct and specific approach to prevention, one that focuses more widely than gang activity. Our letter to the Mayor, accompanying this report, sets out our recommendations to help answer that question.

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About the London Assembly

The London Assembly holds the Mayor and Mayoral advisers to account by publicly examining policies and programmes through committee meetings, plenary sessions, site visits and investigations.

As well as examining the Mayor's actions and decisions, Assembly Members act as champions for Londoners by investigating issues that are important to the capital.

Assembly investigations are carried out by cross-party committees which cover vital areas like transport, policing, housing and planning, the economy, health and the environment. The Assembly can press for changes to national, Mayoral or local policy.

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References

¹ Flags include a) where a firearm is seen during the offence; b) Physical evidence such as bullet, injury or damage is found at the scene that a victim, witness or police officer believes was caused by a firearm; c) An object is presented as a firearm but obscured e.g. in a bag or pocket; or d) A firearm is intimated and the victim is convinced of the presence of a firearm. CS Gas or pepper spray is not considered a firearm and is not included in the statistics.

² Metropolitan Police, gun crime, 01/01/2011 to 31/10/2017

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

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

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

⁶ Metropolitan Police, gun crime, 01/01/2011 to 31/10/2017

⁷ Metropolitan Police, gun crime, 01/01/2011 to 31/10/2017

⁸ Temporary Detective Chief Superintendent Kevin Southworth and Andy French, NCA, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

⁹ Metropolitan Police, gun crime, 01/01/2011 to 31/10/2017

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

¹¹ Metropolitan Police, gun crime, 01/01/2011 to 31/10/2017

¹² Metropolitan Police, gun crime, 01/01/2011 to 31/10/2017

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Metropolitan Police, gun crime, 01/01/2011 to 31/10/2017

¹⁵ Temporary Detective Chief Superintendent Kevin Southworth, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

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

¹⁶ Martin Griffiths, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

¹⁷ Metropolitan Police, gun crime, 01/01/2011 to 31/10/2017

¹⁸ Metropolitan Police, gun crime, 01/01/2011 to 31/10/2017

¹⁹ Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

²⁰ Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

²¹ London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, Serious Youth Violence, 21 September 2016

²² Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

²³ Martin Griffiths, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

²⁴ Andy French, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

²⁵ Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

²⁶ Sir Craig Mackey QPM, Deputy Commissioner, Metropolitan Police, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 29 June 2016

²⁷ Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

²⁸ Mike Eveleigh, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

²⁹ Andy French, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

³⁰ Andy French, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

³¹ Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

³² Temporary Detective Chief Superintendent Kevin Southworth, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

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³³ Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

³⁴ Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

³⁵ Mayor of London, Police and Crime Plan 2017-2021

³⁶ Martin Griffiths, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

³⁷ Redthread, evidence submitted to the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee

³⁸ Martin Griffiths, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017

³⁹ Temporary Commander Jim Stokley, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 5 October 2017