

New stop and search powers for convicted knife criminals

Police will be given new, personalised stop and search powers targeted at known knife criminals under plans outlined by the Government today (Monday 14 September).

Serious Violence Reduction Orders (SVROs) are designed to ensure repeat offenders are more likely to be caught and put in prison.

SVROs could apply to individuals previously convicted of carrying a knife or an offensive weapon, including those who have received non-custodial sentences such as community orders or suspended sentences.

The orders would be imposed by a court, which could also decide on the exact length of the order.

Police could then stop and search those who are subject to an SVRO to check if they are unlawfully carrying a knife or offensive weapon again.

If caught and convicted a second time, offenders could then expect to receive a custodial sentence under the existing 'two strikes' legislation brought in by the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015.

The new orders, which build on existing stop and search powers, will help the police to better target the small minority of persistent offenders who repeatedly flout the law.

The proportion of offenders who have already committed one or more previous knife and offensive weapons possession offences has risen from 20% in the year ending March 2010 to 29% in year ending March 2020.

Crime and Policing Minister Kit Malthouse said:

Knife crime has a devastating effect on young lives and our neighbourhoods.

Our ambition is for these new powers to transform the way stop and search is used by targeting the small number of the most serious and persistent criminals.

The law-abiding majority should not have to live in fear, which is why we are taking action across all fronts to keep them safe.

National Police Chiefs' Council lead for Serious Violent Crime, Assistant Chief Constable Jackie Sebire, said:

We welcome this consultation and the opportunity it gives

communities and partners to contribute their thoughts on the proposed power.

We know that it is only by listening and working together that we can bring about the sustained changes needed to tackle the harms of knife-crime.

Patrick Green, CEO of the Ben Kinsella Trust, said:

We are pleased that the Government is setting out to do more to take knives and those who chose to persistently carry them off our streets.

Reoffending rates have been one the scourges of knife crime. SVROs give us a chance to look again at stop and search and what more can be done in the courts to reduce offending. We welcome the Government's decision to open SVROs to consultation, this will enable front line organisations to lend their expertise and experience to these orders.

Today, the Home Office has launched a public consultation to seek views on the design of SVROs.

They are a key part of the Government's wider commitment to reducing violent crime and making our streets safer.

The consultation will run for eight weeks and end on 8 November. Views will be sought on how SVROs could work, including monitoring and reporting requirements to ensure transparency and accountability.

The aim is for SVROs to help the police to take an intelligence-based, targeted approach to those who pose the most serious threat – keeping communities safe and strengthening police-community relations.

The orders, which were a manifesto commitment, were proposed by the Centre for Social Justice in a 2018 report.

Andy Cook, Chief Executive of the Centre for Social Justice, said:

This consultation on Serious Violence Reduction Orders (SVROs) is an important step in the right direction. SVROs send a strong message that violence and carrying weapons can and will be stopped.

It is also about understanding the need to step in and help those caught up in violence to turn away from gangs and seek help. This is both tough and compassionate and shows that decisive action is being taken to put an end to violence.

Our research tells us that these measures are supported by the great majority of people living in some of our most deprived

communities, who want to see the scourge of knife crime and the routine carrying of weapons brought to an end.

SVROs will complement Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs), which will be available to the courts when the police believe a person aged 12 or over is regularly carrying a knife, or upon conviction for an offence involving a knife or violence.

KCPOs are intended to be preventative, to help people avoid being drawn into knife crime and include positive requirements such as attendance at educational courses or drug rehabilitation.

The Government is also bolstering the police by recruiting 20,000 additional officers over the next three years and providing the most substantial increase in police funding in a decade.

Other measures include investing £70 million to develop Violence Reduction Units to divert people away from crime and changing the law to make it a legal requirement for public bodies to work together to address the root causes of serious violence.