

By email: SVRO.consultation.responses@homeoffice.gov.uk

Wednesday 28 October 2020

ADCS response to the Home Office's consultation on Serious Violence Reduction Orders (SVROs)

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd. (ADCS) is the national leadership organisation in England for directors of children's services (DCSs) under the provisions of the *Children Act (2004)*. The DCS acts as a single point of leadership and accountability for services for children and young people in a local area, including children's social care and education. ADCS welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Home Office's consultation on proposals for the introduction of SVROs, in response to rising levels of knife crime and serious violence in communities across the country.

The government states that SVROs are required to break the cycle of offending and to protect people from harm. The order will see the removal of reasonable grounds for stopping and searching an individual with a previous knife-related conviction. So, despite the consultation noting the evidence on the use of stop and search as an effective deterrent for crime is limited, the principle mechanism for achieving the government's stated aim is the greater use of police stop and search powers.

The consultation also acknowledges that the introduction of SVROs risks worsening disproportionality in the justice system. A full assessment of how people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds will be impacted by the introduction of SVROs must be undertaken and this should inform the development of clear guidance, to guard against heightening community tensions and distrust of the police. Collection and the close monitoring of data and regular evaluations on usage will be important here as well.

Research and experience show that renewed emphasis on education, prevention and early intervention are crucial in breaking cycles of violence or indeed preventing violence occurring at all. ADCS members recognise the pressure that ministers, and the police, are under to act, but tougher laws and the expansion of police powers will not address the reasons why some individuals, groups or indeed whole communities are more vulnerable to risk and/or harm. The absence of a holistic central government strategy to address the interconnected issues of serious violence and knife crime continues to be felt.

If knife carrying by children and young people is driven by fear, if they are being criminally exploited, are disengaged from education or lack employment options then enforcement activity alone is not the answer. ADCS members do not believe SVROs should apply to under 18s. Instead, our focus should be on safeguarding, education, outreach and support. With this in mind, it is important that guidance addresses the interface between existing community safety legislation, SVROs and the as yet untested knife crime prevention orders (KCPOs), which can be applied to under 18s, even without clear and unequivocal evidence of knife carrying. There must be no backdoor to SVROs being handed down to under 18s.

If any further information is required about the points raised in this response, please contact the relevant ADCS policy officer via katy.block@adcs.org.uk in the first instance.