

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

28 NOVEMBER 2018

**STATEMENT FROM COUNCILLOR EVELYN AKOTO, CABINET MEMBER FOR
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PUBLIC HEALTH**

Youth violence is not just a London issue but now a national problem. Knife crime, a key indicator of youth violence, saw a significant increase in 2016/2017 and sadly, many of these cases resulted in the death of a young person and immeasurable devastation to their family and the wider community. Southwark has felt the impact of this rise in youth violence: for the last five years knife crime levels in Southwark have been above the national average.

The root causes of youth violence are both complex and longstanding, and there are no quick fixes. Having said that, a difficult financial climate has undoubtedly exacerbated youth violence, with ongoing government cuts to council funding, police numbers, and continuing austerity meaning fewer opportunities for young people, not just in Southwark, but across the country.

We are working hard as a council to reduce the levels of youth violence, knife crime and knife carrying. We are currently implementing a knife crime and serious violence action plan, which takes a multi-agency approach, and has been developed through consultation with a broad range of stakeholders.

Our work has already had some success, as in the last rolling 12 month period ending September 2018 Southwark has seen a decrease of over 15% in knife crime. This is an extremely positive step forward, but we are not complacent: the number of incidents of knife crime and youth violence still remain too high and the public remain rightly concerned about knife crime and carrying in the borough.

Tackling youth violence and knife crime will remain a priority for us, as is shown by our Council Plan for 2018-22, which devotes an entire section to the ways we are going to create a safer community. The plan highlights that everyone has the right to feel safe and be safe with a clear commitment to investing in our young people and finding new and innovative ways to support their futures. It also acknowledges that this will need the commitment of different stakeholders and all parts of society, but most importantly, it will need to have the voice of young people themselves at its core.

I am therefore proud to announce the council is creating a Positive Futures Fund that aims to support community organisations to provide inspiring opportunities for young people that divert them away from crime.

The Positive Futures Fund will support voluntary and community sector organisations and groups working with disadvantaged young people within Southwark. It can contribute to up scaling existing projects or the creation of new ones, but the key element of the fund is that young people will be given the opportunity to frame the desired outcomes from the fund, and funding recommendations will be the responsibility of a board – with at least half of the board being young people aged between 16-24 – ensuring that young peoples' voices are dominant throughout the process.

Southwark alone does not have the solution for knife crime and serious youth violence. The council, our schools, the police, community and other groups need to come together to find solutions. This Positive Futures Fund is just one part of this, but I hope it will be a step forward in reducing knife crime and ensuring that more of our young people can have the positive future that they deserve.