

# Independent end-to-end review of online knife sales (Executive Summary)

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# 1 Foreword

## Pooja Kanda – Mother of Ronan Kanda



On the 29th of June 2022, my world was shattered when my beloved only son, Ronan, fell victim to a horrific attack in broad daylight. This senseless act of violence was tragically the result of mistaken identity. Ronan suffered devastating injuries: his heart was pierced 17cm deep and his abdomen 20cm deep with a deadly ninja sword. The weapons used in this brutal attack were alarmingly easy to obtain. The perpetrators, Prabjeet Veadhesa and Sukhman Shergil were only 16 years old, they ordered online, the twin set ninja swords and jungle machete from a website and collected it from the post office on the very day of the attack.

The 2023 court trial exposed a series of alarming failures. Prabjeet Veadhesa, the perpetrator, was revealed to be an underage arms dealer who used his mother's bank details

and identification to acquire an arsenal of lethal weapons, all within 6 months before killing my son. The trial highlighted the shocking ease with which Veadhesa acquired these dangerous items, with no age verification or questioning at any stage of the process. This lack of oversight extended to the absence of any inquiry into why an individual would require such an array of deadly weapons. The systemic failures in regulating the sale and distribution of these items ultimately culminated in the senseless loss of my son, leaving a family devastated and a community in shock.

I believe stricter regulation of these lethal weapons in our society will create necessary barriers and reduce the glamorisation of tools designed solely to kill or gravely injure. Banning such weapons demonstrates the government's commitment to public safety and is crucial in preventing these arms from falling into the wrong hands, sparing other families the pain we've endured. My son's death should not have been the catalyst for exposing these systemic failures. The Post Office must recognise the critical importance of thorough ID checks. The retailer has not only produced the sword that took my son's life but has also manufactured weapons that have caused suffering to countless others. Sellers, buyers, and distributors must assume greater responsibility for their role in this deadly trade.

After our findings, my daughter wrote to the owner of the website, whose response was, 'Swords are collectors' items. Our customers buy these to keep at home. Just like people collect stamps.' He blamed the laws and said he wasn't doing anything wrong. My pain meant nothing to him; he was going to continue selling these weapons and help other murderers with easy access to the bladed articles. I was broken but not lost; I was not going to stay quiet, and we directed our fight to bring about stronger laws.

The Government and people in positions of power must ensure laws are being adhered to and that strict procedures are in place to prevent more innocent lives being lost at the hands of lethal weapons. We must constantly think of new ways to implement stronger laws and prevent deadly weapons on our streets.





## Stephen Clayman - NPCC Knife Crime Lead

The proliferation of and accessibility to knives has become of great concern, particularly when they fall into the hands of children and young adults. Through social media, we see videos of knife fights in the street, not only causing potential serious injury or death, but having an impact on communities too. The dreadful events in Southport in 2024 have left so many of us shocked and appalled and my heart goes out to all those families who have lost loved ones, or who have suffered life changing injuries and are affected by this. Whilst all of this is not an everyday occurrence, it is, nonetheless, disturbing. Over the past 18 months, my national knife crime working group has been uncovering the harsh reality of how easy it has become to obtain these knives from online marketplaces.

As the National Police Chiefs Council lead for knife crime, my portfolio's mission is to understand where policing can add value to tackling the issues relating to knife enabled crime. Policing will not mitigate the issues alone and in many areas the police should take a supportive and not a lead role, as other agencies are far better placed to do so. However, there are some very clear elements that wider law enforcement can lead and develop.

To be clear, understanding and dealing with the complex factors behind why someone chooses to carry a knife and then potentially cause harm to others is essential. However, tackling the supply of knives is one important part of the overall mission. We must continue to focus on reducing the availability and ease at which some knives can be obtained, particularly through online sales. Traditional 'bricks & mortar' shops will often offer better safeguards and a means of testing their effectiveness through mechanisms like test purchasing, but even more can be done here too.

The review highlights two aspects of online sales; the first relates to regular online retailers, who are official businesses and registered as such. Most of these retailers do operate within the parameters of the existing law. There are however serious flaws in the system, particularly with age verification at point of sale and delivery. This can leave sales vulnerable and reaching those underage or those who wish to circumvent the law in other ways by using social media platforms to sell to others.

These 'grey markets' are used by individuals willing to bulk buy knives, prohibited or otherwise and sell indiscriminately across their social media accounts and peer networks. Police have already taken action against a number of them, but the law needs to be stronger here. Our goal must be to reduce their presence on these platforms in the first place and look at how effective existing legalisation is to tackle this, certainly in light of the Online Safety Act (OSA). The review team has had the opportunity to engage directly with social media and technology platforms and have got a sense of the way they operate. They have an over-reliance on their global policies to operate here, which is not sufficient. The OSA will ensure that they must focus more on protecting harmful content from UK users, but there is further work necessary with this sector and there are loopholes here in respect of knife sales.

The review ultimately makes a series of recommendations, some of which can be tackled immediately, like strengthening age verification through a move to buyer identification at sale and delivery. Other aspects, such as regulating the knife sales industry and grey markets needs change too, but some of this will take longer given the consultation required to make the changes. It may be possible to deliver some of these recommendations incrementally, concentrating with online retailing first, before turning to the more traditional 'bricks & mortar' retailers.



I have no doubt that the recommendations, if carried out, will very quickly make a difference, especially to the UK market. There is, however, a risk that overseas markets will become more dominant, so extra vigilance will be required moving forward to monitor how knives (including prohibited weapons) are imported. This will require more detailed work with government, industry and partners to further examine the complex processes that need to be understood better if we are to tackle effectively.

Ultimately, we cannot stand by and do nothing.



Commander Stephen Clayman

NPCC Knife Crime Lead



## 2 Executive Summary

### 2.1 Introduction

Between 2020 and 2024 the number of violent and sexual offences involving a knife recorded by police forces in England and Wales has increased. New and more stringent legislation has limited the availability of larger and more dangerous knives. However, advancements in technology, transport and globalisation have opened the door to new knife markets, instantly available to people through the internet. In response to this growing threat, the Home Office commissioned an independent end-to-end review of online knife sales to look at the sale and delivery process crucial to individuals obtaining knives online.

This report aims to deliver a holistic view of the process of online sales within the UK and from abroad, taking views from key stakeholders across each area highlighting best practice and issuing recommendations on improvements. The extent of the review covers the following:<sup>1</sup>

1. An understanding of the different ways a knife is sold online and delivered within England and Wales. This will cover companies based in the UK and imported by companies based outside the UK.
2. The processes followed as part of the online sales process, from the point of sale through to the actual delivery or supply of the knife.
3. Whether law enforcement has effective legislation and whether legislation is applied correctly.
4. The effectiveness of measures currently used by businesses and organisations to prevent the sale and delivery of knives online to under 18s and the sale of prohibited weapons.
5. What gaps and deficiencies exist in current processes and procedures used by online sellers, online marketplaces and companies, delivery companies, enforcement agencies and within existing knife legislation.
6. Examples of best practice are being used by online sellers and delivery companies to prevent the sale and delivery of knives to under-18s and the sale of prohibited weapons.
7. What recommendations should be made to strengthen processes and legislation relating to the online sale and delivery of knives to more effectively prevent the sale and delivery of knives to under-18s and the sale of knives listed as prohibited offensive weapons.

Throughout this review, the voices of victims and their families affected by knife crime is uppermost in our thoughts. Their experiences offer the true value of why this review is necessary and tackling the availability of knives is increasingly important. The recommendations to follow in this report are made with these victims and families at the forefront, ensuring that each one is balanced to increase public safety and ensure fewer people have to experience the grief and injustice that so many families already feel.

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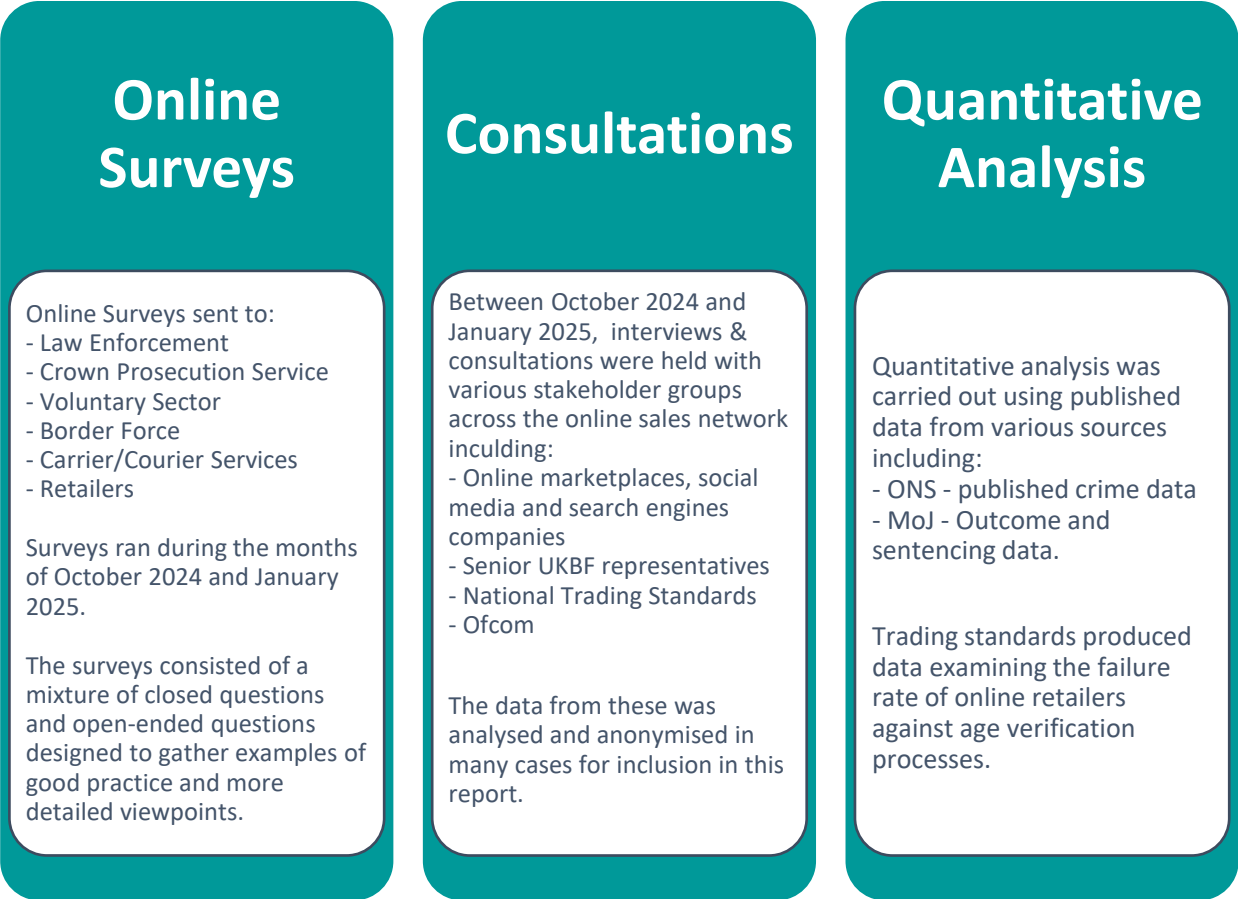
<sup>1</sup> A full copy of the terms of reference is contained within Appendix A.



2.2 Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative analysis has been used throughout this report. In order to maximise the reach, three main methods of data collection were used, as outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Methodology and Sample Groups



The survey participants were not randomly selected and may not reflect the views of those who did not participate. The qualitative findings presented are solely the perceptions of participants; they may not reflect wider experiences of all individuals working in these organisations. All data is likely to be affected by personal biases of the participants. Due to the time constraints involved, Freedom of Information Requests were not used throughout this process.

2.3 Key findings

Knife use and prevalence in crime

Knife crime as recorded by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) has been rising between 2020 and 2024.<sup>2</sup> This increase is recorded following the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 which prevented many from engaging in activity outside of their home. The rise recorded has almost reached pre-pandemic levels, however hospital visits as a result of knife injuries haven’t risen at the same rate. Knife crime is recorded in two main ways - selected violent and sexual offences involving a knife and knife possession offences, neither of which record the type of knife involved. This is a gap which leaves

<sup>2</sup> Please note that this report was finalised prior to the latest release of ONS data due in late January



the prevalence of types of knives involved in crime uncertain and relies on force level data obtained through freedom of information requests. There is no obligation to record this data and as such, many forces may not have this data available. In a large number of cases, the type of knife may remain unidentified, but it is hard to quantify this without the standardised collection of this information.

Similarly, offences regarding the advertisement and marketing of knives are no longer recorded separately, but the historical data suggests the use of this legislation was sparse. More work is required to determine why this may have been the case, but this report details a dearth of trained investigators able to identify these offences or CPS prosecutors with the knowledge to progress them through the justice system.

### **Online knife retailers, sellers, platforms and methodology**

Knives are sold through various methods online, accessible through a variety of different means. There are two categories of seller that are featured throughout this report; retailers and peer-to-peer sellers. Retailers usually host online shops<sup>3</sup> with the ability to buy knives through their own platform, offering the chance to view and purchase knives using their own implemented systems and processes. Peer-to-peer includes what is described in this report as ‘grey market’ sellers, whose activity may be legal or illegal, but often involves the reselling of knives via social media and sales platforms. This leads to the opportunity for children to obtain knives without any form of age verification or screening at all.

The ‘grey market’ offers the possibility of anonymising the purchase of knives and the case studies suggest they facilitate both legal and illegal sales (contrary to Section 1 Knives Act 1997 and Section 141 Criminal Justice Act 1998).

Knives used in violent offences can be traced back to seller categories of both types, but the grey market often fails to offer the accountability required of retailers operating as registered businesses. The social media platforms that the ‘grey market’ sellers operate on not only give them a level of anonymity, but also allow the possibility of inadvertent advertising to children based on the algorithm used to direct content. The thin and often blurry line between legal and illegal allows sellers to continue to operate online, even following reports to hosts and any action taken against them.

Over a period of time, policing has identified at least fifteen grey market sellers, who it is estimated between them, have sold circa 2,000 weapons. This has been done effectively under the radar and with no effort to check who they are sold to. The sale of knives is not a regulated sector and unlike firearms or alcohol, knives can be sold by anyone, anywhere, provided they are compliant with the Criminal Justice Act 1988, the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 (OWA) and the Knives Act 1997. Many marketplaces have banned the sale of knives, however the use of terms such as ‘cosplay’ or ‘tool’ disguise knife sales which allow sellers to continue selling knives despite the platform’s policy. It is recognised that no system is infallible, but few marketplaces have systems in place that allow for these items to be distinguished from other sales.

Although many knife sellers in the UK abide by the current legislation in place, this becomes more challenging with international retailers who can operate with the appearance of being based in the UK. Some retailers were of the opinion that problems with knife sales are caused by insufficient regulations applying to overseas sellers, but it is acknowledged that the UK does have more

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<sup>3</sup> Some may have both an online and shopfront presence



restrictions on import than many other countries. Many cited online marketplaces based abroad as a major problem with the availability of knives in the UK.

### **Age Verification – Point of Sale**

Section 141A of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 prohibits the sale of many knives and sharp instruments, and prohibited weapons to under 18s. Specific defences can be used by sellers if knives are sold to under 18s which include suitable age verification systems, the use of suitable packaging and the provision that it will not be delivered to a locker.<sup>4</sup>

In proving that the purchaser is over 18, there is no set standard for the seller and the legislation relies on the term ‘likely’ to prevent purchases to anyone under 18. The term ‘likely’ is not defined in law but can be taken to suggest 60-75% of the cases would be true (Fore, J. 2019). In 2019/20, UK Trading Standards conducted a comprehensive test purchase operation where only 3% of the transactions failed an age verification process, but only through the delivery terms and conditions. The limitations on the testing meant that some methods of using false identification and accounts that have a previous transaction where identification was verified remains untested. However, anecdotal cases point towards issues in this area. There are also challenges with RIPA/IPA and the extent that Trading Standards are inhibited by these regulations.

There is no UK standard in age verification and retailers do not have to prove a buyer’s identity before agreeing to a sale. Best practice in this area identified systems of ‘buyer verification’ rather than age verification which means confirming the identity of the buyer through the use of identity documents prior to agreeing a sale. These systems are not beyond abuse, but offer a greater level of protection to the seller against underage buyers than other versions of age verification.

### **Age Verification – Delivery**

The Offensive Weapons Act 2019 (OWA) introduced strict guidance requiring all packages containing a bladed article must be clearly marked as well as age verification at the point of delivery. The onus in these situations is on the seller, with a defence available if they took all reasonable precautions to ensure that the item is not being delivered to a person under that age of 18. Age verification on delivery could not be robustly tested, but examples of practice prohibited under the act are available from across a number of courier companies. This includes some contributors to the review reporting deliveries to both lockers and residential premises. Issues identified by couriers are things such as identification of items based on customer declarations or packaging denoting that the package contains a knife. Retailers face an additional cost when requiring age verification and as such retailers packaging and shipping knives paying for this service would have a defence under the act. The ‘grey market’ rarely use shipping that complies with the OWA and relies on face to face, unmarked shipping and locker boxes to complete their sales.

Many couriers stated that trust was an important part of identifying whether a knife is present for a particular delivery. The processes across the couriers are not standardised and data around the misuse of courier services is not shared in as much detail in order to identify any offenders. Like knife retailers, couriers are not regulated and an individual could start a courier service with no resources or systems in place. The lack of governance around this makes deliveries from those using these companies harder to detect.

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<sup>4</sup> Legislation includes self-service lockers or other automated pick-up points.



There are some systems in place for high value items, with retailers sometimes choosing to use couriers that allow for a pin system, in which a pin code is needed to complete delivery, but these are not currently widely used for knife deliveries. Ideas have been put forward from couriers for similar systems that could be used for ID verification but it is unknown whether this could fulfil the requirements of the OWA without further exploration.

Ultimately, there is a clear need to join up the verified person buying the knife with that person receiving it too. There will clearly be some logistics to work out, but there is a requirement to stop the current flaws in the process.

### **Sale and delivery from outside the UK**

International marketplaces and retailers should follow the same process as retailers and marketplaces in the UK. However, many of the laws in the UK differ from other countries where knife sellers are located. This presents difficulties in enforcing the current law against international retailers. Equivalent laws need to be available in the country where the offence is committed in order to transfer a prosecution to their jurisdiction. It is therefore important when considering regulating online sales to also look at the way goods enter the country and restrictions that could apply in that area.

The primary difference in the sales process is how the knives enter the UK through the borders. Border Force have responsibility for ensuring that prohibited articles do not enter the country, however the volume of packages entering the country is extremely large and the scanning capacity is limited. Therefore, it is not certain that all prohibited weapons can be stopped at the border and a number will come into the UK for onwards distribution and supply. When prohibited bladed articles are found, Border Force notify the relevant police force area of the seizure. The police response is not standardised from force-to-force and the intelligence gained is not always prioritised for action.

This is an area that requires more examination as it is complex, involving a number of agencies and stakeholders. However, as an internal market becomes more regulated, there is a need to watch those who operate outside of the UK. The dark web does not currently feature extensively in terms of knife sales, but again will need constant vigilance over time to react should this change.

### **Social Media and its role in online sales**

The grey market is enabled by the access to videos and posts on social media which display and advertise knives for sale online. Sellers do not always overtly label themselves as retailers and use language which is designed to only hint at sales activity. The adverts themselves are often pointed towards larger, more attractive knives and the language used can sometimes contravene s.1 Knives Act 1997. Social media companies do have the ability to scan and remove illegal posts and accounts, sometimes placing positive messaging in its place. This is mainly used for drug sales but there is no evidence of this being used where there is harmful content such as knife display, violence or knife sales.

Many social media platforms do not authorise sales on their platforms unless through specific marketplaces available on their applications. In the main, knife sales are prohibited, but the same issues exist in these spaces as with online marketplaces. When looking at the grey market, typically the sellers do not use marketplaces, but advertise through social media posts and will often move the buyer to another peer-to-peer platform, which is encrypted and unmonitored. Although some platforms acknowledge local legislative restrictions on particular knives, many of the intervention strategies appear to be based on flagging to remove individual pieces of content manually rather



than building this in for automated detection and removal. This overlaps with the issue of regulation in that the focus is on prohibited activity and systemic issues, but global policies appear to present a challenge to them when applying UK legislation.

### **Regulation of online content**

Ofcom are the regulator of online services and have provisions enabled by the Online Safety Act 2023 to take action against platforms for failing to remove specified harmful and illegal content as well as define the standards that social media platforms must adhere to. The onus through the act is on platforms conforming to a standard of self-monitoring and regulation, which in turn can offer Ofcom the opportunity to fine or issue penalties. Ofcom remain committed to combating knife crime online, their supervision team will engage with the largest and highest risk services to proactively address compliance concerns. Ofcom's role in this area is to drive systemic change rather than manage individual complaints or specific content. This works towards ensuring that platforms have robust governance systems to manage the risk of illegal content or the glamorisation of prohibited knives. Ofcom can test and recommend changes to the algorithms. However, in order to recognise where changes are needed, specific systemic issues need to be identified.

Monitoring and enforcement is inconsistent across platforms and police force areas, which has identified gaps in skills, training and equipment within law enforcement. Law enforcement does not currently have the capability to consistently monitor and refer harmful content to the platforms and subsequently make Ofcom aware of the systemic issues that exist. Many platforms proactively target certain types of harmful or illegal content, but posts relating to the sale of knives is often reactive. Platforms often operate under global policies which do not recognise UK legislation relating to knives. The result of this is the lack of opportunities to explore whether platforms are adhering to UK legislation and as such, particularly for knife sales, content removal or investigation is challenging. Community reporting of illegal or harmful content is equally difficult, with platforms using this system relying on a user's judgement that content is illegal or harmful, when many of these posts are designed to attract more users to subscribing.

### **Regulation of online sales**

Online sales regulations are currently enforced by Trading Standards and law enforcement. However, there are currently no requirements for licensing or registration to sell or own knives in the UK. There is legislation introduced under the OWA 2019 which prohibits the sale of certain knives and restricts the way that knives are marketed, but UK retailers operating outside of the grey market are generally selling knives lawfully. The challenge lies in the identification of retailers and the obligations they hold when selling knives. If a retailer is operating lawfully, there is no requirement for law enforcement to be informed as to where knives are being sold, particularly when sold in volume or with regularity to individuals. This has created opportunities for the grey market sellers to buy knives in bulk and resell them, potentially ending up in incidents of violence, without detection. Lessons learned from firearms licensing shows that the regulation of the weapons markets reduces the availability and use of weapons in incidents, but it comes at significant cost to law enforcement.

The introduction of a registration system for knife retailers is a measure that could deliver immediate benefits. From a law enforcement perspective, those involved in firearms licensing are open to the registration of retailers as a potential option to regulate sales, but do warn of significant difficulties in licensing individual knife holders if that was ever considered. Unlike firearms, knives have uses in daily life as either trade or household tools and therefore implementing licenses for



individuals would be prohibitive with legal definitions of knives being particularly difficult. Other challenges include volume, cost and resources, with licensing teams operating at a net loss across the country. These concerns are shared by this review team and it is not making that specific recommendation. However, at this time though, there are no checks conducted on knife sellers in the same way as firearms dealers to ensure they are appropriate to be involved in the distribution of these items.

Knife retailers have expressed concern around regulation and have pointed to importation as the biggest risk in knife supply. However, case studies have shown UK retailers being the source of knives involved in violent offences. A risk in this area will be businesses moving abroad and as such registration of knife dealers with subsequent offences for selling knives without registration may need to be accompanied by regulations covering the importation of knives. Some retailers would be in favour of importation licenses to that extent.

### **Traditional shop front (bricks & mortar) retailers**

Whilst it's recognised that this review is focussed on the online sale of knives, when looking at regulating the overall market, it may be necessary to extend some of this to those traditional retailers based in fixed locations on local high streets and beyond. Many are already signed up to responsible retailer guidelines, but these may need to go further so that both online and high street retailers are moving in the same direction. The public will want confidence that if someone walks into a hardware store, or small business, that they will not be able to buy a relevant knife repeatedly over a period of time, without it being noticed and potentially reported. Given the complexity and volume of these shops, further consultation will be necessary to explore the impact and agree implementation timelines if this was agreed.

### **A prohibited person**

The review has highlighted a need to look at the concept of a prohibited person, both in terms of selling and buying knives. There is already evidence of a minority of owners of registered online retailers having previous convictions for violent offences and are wholly inappropriate to be selling knives to others. This is certainly something that works well where firearms are concerned and is a natural recommendation to make.

There is then the question about those either selling knives through a grey market or purchasing for their own use. Again, existing firearms legislation is helpful from a conceptual point of view. Having more robust action against those that have a propensity for violence and/or found in possession of knives is crucial. They (or anyone on their behalf) should not be able to purchase a relevant<sup>5</sup> knife and an overall registration requirement, along with border notifications would aid law enforcement in both identifying risk and safeguarding individuals.

### **Legislation and sentencing**

The legislative options open to law enforcement and Trading Standards includes prosecution of sellers of prohibited weapons, sellers marketing or indicating the knives could be used for combat and the sale to under 18s. Also within the legislation is guidance on how knives should be delivered and age verified on delivery. The sales and marketing offences that can be used are not commonly identified in policing and is an area where officers may not come across it in their day-to-day business. As such, the legislation is rarely used and attempts to use it can encounter barriers at the prosecution stage, with those CPS prosecutors contacted never having dealt with a relevant offence.

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<sup>5</sup> To be defined



The separation of offence and power to obtain a warrant under s.141 and s.142 CJA 1988 has caused some confusion in courts with warrants sometimes refused on the grounds of s.141 being a summary only offence (low gravity).

The seriousness of the offence as guided by sentencing has an effect on the police response with possession of a prohibited weapon reaching up to 4 years imprisonment, whilst the supply of prohibited weapons is a summary only offence, with up to 12 months imprisonment. This disparity is at odds with other legislation such as drugs where the illegal supply is treated more seriously than possession offences. Difficulties are faced by law enforcement when obtaining data from tech and communications companies in relation to the specified offences above. The majority of these platforms are based abroad and so require Crime Overseas Production Orders (COPO) or Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) applications, which in the main are only available for serious crime and not available for knife offences.

### **Knife possession and perception**

There could be a number of reasons for the increase in knife incidents as recorded by the ONS including accounts from the voluntary sector which point towards the visibility of knives in the public eye. The reality of knife crime may not change, but the images and videos accessible to the public constantly do. The algorithms on social media platforms adjust content to the user, and so if a young person starts watching videos containing knives it may offer more content of the same type. The use of larger more 'especially' dangerous knives may cause people who see these images to feel less safe and as such carry a knife themselves. This in turn could mean young people end up viewing and coming into contact with grey market seller accounts or going directly to a retailer and try and circumvent the age restrictions.

### **Marketing and communications**

Search engines and social media platforms often work on monetisation or views to boost posts or websites into the view of the public. This has an adverse effect on young people in that specific adverts or search results may mean that websites selling dangerous knives become accessible. The algorithms within these platforms are designed to tailor content towards the user and therefore searching or viewing content about knives or featuring knives may lead to advertisements for knife retailers being shown to under 18s. Unlike gambling or other regulated industries, there are not enough warnings on the knife adverts despite knives only being available to those over the age of 18. The lack of any warning may mean that websites are visited more often than they otherwise would have.

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that much more can be done to reduce harm by all involved in the end-to-end process of importation, sale and delivery of knives, including greater collaboration between policing, UKBF, Trading Standards, private sector stakeholders and others. Information and intelligence is not shared efficiently and there is an inconsistent response to the receipt of intelligence across the board.

In relation to advertising, tech companies ensure that algorithms are in place to deal with other illegal content, but the same focus is not placed with knives. This is an area in which a line cannot be clearly drawn between what is legal and illegal content at present. More focus is required to ensure children are not subject to online content that either advertises or displays knives, particularly when glamorised. However, a systems change across the board is required to reprioritise targeting the



availability of knives online and ensure that where they are available, the right tools and intelligence capabilities are given to authorities in the UK to respond to the threat of knife crime. This should include a more effective law enforcement function that sits nationally and coordinates between all relevant enforcement agencies, stakeholders (including regulators) and tech companies.

Overall, this report highlights the need to urgently review the requirements on knife sellers, but this cannot be addressed in isolation. The review has identified a lack of governance and regulation around the sale of knives and knife sellers in general, whether online or otherwise. This raises concerns about the potential for prohibited or particularly dangerous items to be purchased, as well as the risk of such items being obtained by individuals who may use them for any criminality. Many in law enforcement believe that regulating knife sellers is achievable. However, stronger regulation on the UK market alone may push sellers abroad and as such importation regulations for knives must be addressed in tandem. The issue of age verification remains a key vulnerability as it is not done to a minimum standard with both retailers and carriers<sup>6</sup> unable to provide complete confidence in their operating conditions. The lack of minimum standards and poor compliance has led to knives becoming available to under 18s. Where age verification is used, ID is not required in legislation and therefore has left systems open to abuse. This must be tackled now through a standardised and more robust approach.

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<sup>6</sup> Couriers and regular mail services



### 3 Summary of recommendations & further areas to explore

The recommendations are numbered relating to the order that they appear in the report. The numbering does not represent any priority in the importance of any recommendation over another.

#### 1. Data Recording

**Improved data recording across Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice including:**

- a. The types of knives used in offences.
- b. The number of recorded offences for sales, marketing and prohibited weapon offences.
- c. The criminal justice outcomes for sales, marketing and prohibited weapon offences.

#### 2. Age Verification

Age verification at point of sale and point of delivery should change to buyer verification, requiring the provision of identification documents and a necessity for confirmation that the receiver is connected to the buyer.

Further exploration with couriers and retailers around delivery tracking and verification.

#### 3. Couriers

- a. All packages to be clearly labelled as containing a bladed item.
- b. Age/identification verification to be robustly employed at point of delivery and collection.

Further areas to explore

- c. UK couriers to agree to data sharing agreement with UK Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA)
- d. Consider implementation of verification PIN reference number to ensure purchaser and recipient are linked. (similar to fast-food order applications)
- e. Legal review into s38 and 39 Offensive Weapons Act to ensure implementations across UKBF and courier networks. (Prohibition on delivering to a residential address)



#### 4. Social Media and Technology Platforms

##### **Provisions for the removal of knife related content on law enforcement.**

##### **Recommended provisions may be:**

- a. The requirement for social media platforms to remove prohibited material within 48 hours of police notification.
- b. Requires social media companies to provide comprehensive information regarding individuals and companies unlawfully offering to supply weapons and knives online.
- c. Greater awareness for UK LEA to refer and request removal of offending content.

##### Further areas to explore

- d. Social media companies must operate a UK policy, taking into account the specific laws relevant to the UK.
- e. Search engines to ensure prohibited articles are not promoted or available to UK customers.

#### 5. Knife retailer registration (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland).

Set up a registration scheme for online knife retailers. It may be helpful to further explore increasing the safeguards in place for offline stores in future.

##### **Conditions for the registration may include:**

- a. Mandatory reporting of suspicious or bulk purchases.
- b. Details of buyer to be recorded, retained and made available to UK law enforcement upon request.
- c. All marketing material to display clear age verification livery.
- d. Registrants will agree to Police and Trading Standards inspection and test purchasing.
- e. New criminal offences of selling, offering to sell and marketing knives without registration (triable either way)
- f. Unregistered selling of knives is treated more seriously than possession offences.
- g. Retailers will be prohibited from the sale of 'mystery boxes' 'mystery knives' and 'reduced priced add-ons'.
- h. Registered retailer must not be a prohibited person (to be defined).
- i. People and premises will be subject to checks for appropriateness to store and sell knives.
- j. Extends to any business selling relevant bladed items.



## 6. Creation of a prohibited person.

### Potential options that could apply:

- a. A prohibited person would not be able to apply to be a registered knife seller.
- b. The ownership of certain types of knives, or knives believed to be for the purpose of use in violence would be prohibited (an offence would be created)
- c. Police may have additional powers in relation to the person or known premises they occupy.
- d. A prohibited person should not be able to purchase certain types of knives and it is an offence to purchase knives on behalf of a prohibited person.

## 7. Importation

- a. Import licensing scheme to prohibit unlicensed importation of knives and prohibited weapons.
- b. Review the knife import tax levy to ensure knives are identifiable.

### Further areas to explore

- c. Standardise entry routes into the UK for bladed items, restricting use of less intrusive methods.
- d. Training and awareness for UKBF in the knowledge and understanding around prohibited knives.
- e. Use of cease and desist letters to overseas retailers.

## 8. Policing, Trading Standards and Ofcom

- a. Creation of a central (national) function to allow for information and greater collaboration amongst key stakeholders.
- b. Increase law enforcement capability to identify prohibited online sales activity
- c. Increase capability to conduct random test purchase operations.
- d. Upskilling of law enforcement to disrupt and prosecute grey market activity.
- e. Review of current information sharing amongst UKBF, Trading Standards and UK Law Enforcement.
- f. Improve data recording for knife retail specific offences and the types of knives used.
- g. Adjust the sentencing guidelines of offences related to online sales making all offences triable either way.
- h. Work with Ofcom to consider future OSA code changes.



## 4 Glossary

CJA – Criminal Justice Act 1988

COPO – Crime Overseas Production Orders

CPS – Crown Prosecution Service

Disposals – Criminal justice disposal, how a case is dealt with through the criminal justice system

Drop-shipping – A vendor that offers a shopfront service but the supplier directly ships the item to the buyer

E-commerce – The trading of goods or services online

Emojis – Emojis are small cartoon style pictures used often instead of text

Flagging – A process by which content on social media is reported to the platform by a user or law enforcement

HMG – His Majesty's Government

HOCA – Home Office Counting Rules

In Scope – Offences within the jurisdiction of the offensive weapons act

Knife Crime – Specific offences counted by the Home Office when a knife is used

Knife Enabled Offences – Any crime where a knife is a contributing factor

Mislabelling – A process on importation where goods are labelled incorrectly which opposes their correct tax category

MLAT – Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty

MoJ – Ministry of Justice

NTS – National Trading Standards

ONS – Office of National Statistics

Open or clear web – Indexed and accessible to the general public on the internet

OWA – Offensive Weapons Act 2019

RIPA/IPA – Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000/Investigatory Powers Act 2016

SAR – Suspicious Activity Report

Summary Only – A criminal offence which can be heard only in the magistrate's court

Test Purchase Operation – Measuring the compliance of retailers by making purchases. In the case of knife sales, ensuring age verification is present.

Triable Either Way – An offence that can be heard in both a magistrate's court or a crown court



U2U (User to user) - Internet services by means of which content generated directly on the service by a user, or uploaded to or shared on the service by a user, may be encountered by another user of the service

UKBF – United Kingdom Border Force

Voluntary Sector - Organisations whose primary purpose is to create social impact rather than profit



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## 8 Appendices

### Appendix A

Independent end-to-end review full Terms of Reference (ToR)

### Appendix B

Offensive Weapons Act 2019 relevant sections

### Appendix C

Section 141 Criminal Justice Act 1988

### Appendix D

Section 1 Knives Act 1997

### Appendix E

Research on knife price points and availability

### Appendix F

Contributors to the review

### Appendix G

Recommendations



**End to End Review of Online Knife Sales**  
31<sup>st</sup> January 2025

