



## HMCPST Inspection of CPS' handling of Knife Crime 2025

### Scoping Paper

#### A. Introduction

This scoping paper sets out the proposals for an inspection of Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) handling of knife crime.

1. Over the last 10 years knife crime has increased. A key strand of the government's safer streets mission is to reduce knife crime by a half over the next decade. On 27 February 2025, the Crime and Policing Bill 2024-25 was published. The government says that the Bill supports the delivery of its safer streets mission.
2. Part 2 of the Bill includes the introduction of a new offence of possessing a knife or offensive weapon with intent, increasing the maximum penalty for manufacturing, selling, hiring or lending prohibited weapons, and gives the police greater powers to seize knives from properties.
3. The overall number of knife and offensive weapon offences dealt with by the Criminal Justice System has increased by 24% over the last decade. In the year ending September 2024, the number of knife and offensive weapon cases dealt with by the Criminal Justice System (CJS) was 20,126.<sup>1</sup> Here is a breakdown of some key statistics:
  - 30.1% of cases resulted in immediate custody.
  - Possession of an article with a blade or point represents the highest proportion (68.5%) of all knife and offensive weapon offences.
  - Possession of an offensive weapon offences accounted for 26.8% of total offences.

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<sup>1</sup> [Knife and Offensive Weapon Sentencing Statistics: July to September 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

4. The volume of serious offences involving knives or sharp objects has also risen over the past 10 years. Here is a summary of the data published by the Office for National Statistics data (excluding GMP).<sup>2</sup>

	April 13- Mar 14	April 23 – Mar 24
Att Murder	226	401
Threats to Kill	1295	5411
Assault with injury and within intent to cause serious harm	12203	22167
Robbery	12451	21226
Rape	234	751
Sexual assault	92	321
Homicide	193	233
Total	26694	50510

5. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) figures, revealed by the [Telegraph](#) on 21 May 2025 showed that only 54.8 per cent of repeat knife offenders had been jailed in the last quarter of last year – the lowest proportion on record.
6. In our Business Plan for 2025-2026, we set out our intention to undertake an inspection which focusses on assessing CPS's approach to prosecuting knife offences. We will assess the quality of legal decision making and compliance with CPS's policy and guidance in both possession of knives and bladed article offences, as well as those relating to the sale and manufacture of knives, if suitable cases can be identified.
7. The CPS updated its legal guidance on Knife and Other Weapons Offences on 02 April 2025. Their internal gateway explains that the guidance has been updated, consolidated and streamlined to assist prosecutors by outlining key offences and introducing an approach to selecting the appropriate charge. The aim of the guidance was to remove duplication and assist in streamlining and accessibility of the information for prosecutors. There is no new content in the guidance. We will assess whether the revised guidance is clear and concise for prosecutors.

<sup>2</sup> [Crime in England and Wales: Other related tables - Office for National Statistics](#)

8. There is a wide range of knife offences. It is for the prosecutor to consider all the circumstances and facts of the case to arrive at a decision on the appropriate charge(s), applying the principles set out in the [Code for Crown Prosecutors](#), in particular paragraph 6 'selection of charges'.
9. CPS have not had a knife flag on their Case Management System (CMS). However, we understand that a new knife crime monitoring flag will be introduced (likely from 1 August 2025). It will not apply retrospectively. As such, it will not assist with identification of finalised cases up until then, which will be most of our file sample. CPS also do not publish any data on knife crime. As such there is no way of monitoring knife related offending. Against this backdrop, we did some testing to see which offences we can examine to answer the inspection question and concluded that the following offences should be the focus of this inspection, so far as practicable:
  - Possession of a bladed article in a public place.
  - Threatening with a bladed article or offensive weapon in a public place or on school premises.
  - Possession of an offensive weapon in a public place.
  - Threatening with an offensive weapon in a private place.
  - Having a bladed article or offensive weapon on education premises.
  - Unlawful marketing of knives.
  - Publications in connection with marketing of a knife.

## **B. Inspection question**

10. How effective is the CPS in consistently applying policy, guidance and the law in prosecuting crime involving knives?

## **C. Objectives**

11. To assess the quality of the CPS's legal decision making and compliance with its policy and legal guidance in relation to both possession of knives and bladed articles. We will also examine the consistency of approach to the prosecution of young people aged 10-17 found to be carrying knives and other sharp instruments in making the decision whether to charge or divert from the CJS.

## D. Inspection Criteria

12. Underpinning the overarching question are the following sub-questions, namely:

- I. Are prosecutors making quality legal decisions in line with the Code for Crown prosecutors, policy and legal guidance?
- II. Are prosecutors selecting the most appropriate knife-related offence(s)
- III. Are prosecutors charging knife offences separately where a weapons offence is accompanied by other serious offences such as assault or robbery. The CPS guidance suggests that the weapons offence should be charged as well as the other offence.
- IV. Are prosecutors accurately considering 'second strike' and ensuring this is part of any review and instructions to court prosecutors.
- V. Is there consistency of approach to the prosecution of young people aged 10-17 found to be carrying knives and other sharp instruments in making the decision whether to charge or divert them away from the CJS? Where an offence has been committed by a child i.e. someone aged under 18 years old, prosecutors should consider the joint CPS and NPCC [Guidelines on the Cautioning and Charging of Knife Crime Offences](#).
- VI. Are prosecutors assessing the victim's eligibility for special measures (e.g. screens, video links) and considering their specific needs and vulnerabilities when preparing the case?
- VII. Is the communication with the victims appropriate and fully accessible, taking into account their needs?
- VIII. Are advocates addressing knife sentencing guidelines, referring to any mandatory minimum sentence, seeking appropriate ancillary orders and respecting victim's wishes regarding use of VPS at court?

## **E. Methodology**

13. This inspection will focus on the performance of the CPS and will therefore not involve any other criminal justice inspectorate. The inspection will include several modes of evidence gathering.
14. The inspection will consist primarily of a file examination. A sample of cases involving knives and bladed articles will be drawn from all Areas and examined against a question set and guidance based upon the CPS's knife crime guidance, policy and existing legislation.
15. Interviews will be held with key policy staff in CPS Head Quarters (HQ) and knife crime leads in CPS Areas. At present, it is not clear if there are any knife crime leads in Areas as there is no national CPS requirement for such leads to be appointed, although early engagement with the CPS has suggested that some Areas may have knife crime expert leads.
16. The document reading and interviews will assist HMCPST in gathering evidence to answer the inspection question. HMCPST will use the emerging findings from its file examination and document reading to inform its approach during the interviews.
17. At the end of the inspection activity, a report will be published that sets out HMCPST's findings and judgments and, if necessary, make appropriate recommendations designed to identify best or good practice and improve the CPS's approach to handling offences involving knives.

## **F. File examination and questions set**

18. To test the inspection question, we will examine a total of 210 cases involving knife offences. The file examination will primarily focus on possession of a bladed article. In addition, we will review a sample of cases involving the possession of offensive weapons (specifically knives), as well as instances where these weapons were used to threaten individuals in public, private, and school settings. We will also assess a selection of cases relating to the unlawful marketing and publication of materials connected to the promotion of knives.
19. This approach will allow us to examine 7 different types of knife offences and test how these cases are dealt with by the CPS. Of the selected files, we will endeavour to examine the following types of cases:

- 140 cases relating to possession of a bladed article — 10 cases from each CPS Area.
- 28 cases relating to possession of an offensive weapon — 2 cases from each CPS Area.
- 42 cases involving other knife offences, as outlined above, will be identified nationally due to the volume and complexity of locating these cases on CMS.
- A sample of cases where CPS decided to take no further action (NFA), on the basis of the evidential stage and the public interest stage of the Code for Crown Prosecutors.
- Cases which had successful and an unsuccessful outcome.
- Crown court and magistrates' court cases.
- Youth and adult cases.

20. An internal consistency exercise will be held in the early stages of the file examination phase, and we will also hold an external consistency exercise with the CPS. The lead inspector and an inspector appointed as quality assurance lead will carry out dip sampling during the file examination phase. The dip sample will comprise a minimum of 21 files (10% of the total) in accordance with HMCPST's inspection methodology.

#### **G. CPS Areas to be visited**

21. It is not our intention to visit any Areas at this stage. We will review this as the inspection develops.

#### **H. Interviews/focus groups/national interviews**

22. We will limit our onsite work to interviews with CPS HQ and Area knife crime leads as follows:

- Deputy Director - Policy Directorate.
- Knife crime policy lead.
- Area knife leads, if such leads exist.

#### **I. Documentation to be requested from the CPS**

23. We will be requesting the following documents from the CPS:

- Confirmation of any training delivered around knife/weapons offences in the last 12 months- CPS to provide the training materials from the last training session.
- Confirmation of whether there are knife crime leads in Areas.

#### **J. Proposed timescales & resources**

24. The inspection team consists of the lead inspector plus four legal inspectors. The inspection will commence in mid-August, and we will publish the inspection report within six months of commencing the inspection.

#### **K. Risks to the project**

25. We appreciate the ongoing burdens on the CPS at the present time and have designed this inspection to be tight and focused. We will endeavour to ensure the impact is mitigated as best as we can. We are not going to hold the external consistency exercise during the summer holiday period.

#### **L. Equality impact assessment**

26. We will carry out an equality impact assessment in accordance with our methodology before finalising the scope.