



**Exploring Key Themes: A Summary  
Report on Interviews with Knife  
Crime Prevention Order  
Implementation Stakeholders**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 4**

**INTRODUCTION ..... 7**

**QUESTIONS ..... 8**

**DATA COLLECTION ..... 9**

**FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS .....10**

**EXAMPLE CASE STUDIES OF KCPO RECIPIENTS.....21**

**REFLECTIONS AND FINAL REMARKS .....22**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

Following the UK government's 2018 Serious Violence Strategy, the 2019 Offensive Weapons Act enacted new measures to prevent knife crime. A Knife Crime Prevention Order (KCPO) is a preventative measure intended to reduce knife-related crime. KCPOs provide the police with an alternative intervention to divert young people from being involved in knife crime and serious violence. KCPOs are intended to be preventative rather than punitive. After conviction, courts can impose various conditions on the order. These enforceable conditions can be used as mechanisms to reduce the likelihood of recidivism and seek cooperation to engage with interventions to help prevent future offending.

UCL was asked to interview a range of participants selected by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to collect data from various perspectives, focusing on how the programme was initiated, the challenges encountered, and how it has progressed and identify factors contributing to gaps in delivery. In parallel, the MPS's Strategic Insight Unit (SIU) analysed the impact of KCPOs on re-offending rates. While the initial intention was to perform a process evaluation, both UCL and the MPS encountered challenges in conducting interviews with insufficient participants and collecting any meaningful quantitative data to complete an evaluation of the KCPO pilot programme. We were therefore not able to directly observe any of the processes in question, nor able to talk to recipients of orders. This report is not, therefore, a process evaluation. Data were collected from participants using online semi-structured interviews. The self-selected sample of participants included key persons responsible for advising on KCPO legislation, the Home Office and police personnel involved in the pilot's implementation, youth justice caseworkers, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) lawyers, and court judges.

### **Summary of Key Themes**

- **Key themes from interviews with participants involved in drafting KCPO legislation:**
  - (a) Origin and context: KCPOs resulted from an effort by the MPS and Home Office to provide an alternative (non-criminal) approach to address youth knife crime.
  - (b) Multi-agency collaboration: KCPOs involve collaborative efforts between Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), CPS, and police to prevent knife crime among persons. Implementation challenges include engaging local officers and stakeholders, addressing judicial interpretations and low numbers of KCPO recipients.
  - (c) Evaluation measures: outcomes should be measured quantitatively and qualitatively, considering involvement in the youth justice system and any self-reporting.
  - (d) Reporting concerns: concerns about youth services' reluctance to report KCPO breaches may hinder implementation and accountability for offending.
  - (e) Focus on prevention: the programme aims to achieve its desired outcomes by focusing on prevention and mitigating the risk of recidivism. By reducing related risk factors and emphasising protective factors, the programme can effectively

divert young persons, especially young black men, away from knife crime and the criminal justice system.

▪ **Key themes from interviews with police staff involved in the KCPO implementation pilot:**

- (a) Operational challenges: implementation faced operational hurdles and needed more effective planning.
- (b) Customised eligibility: a tailored approach to identify KCPO participants was needed, but resource constraints and officer understanding of how to set tailored KPCO conditions posed difficulties for implementation.
- (c) Condition complexity: determining suitable KCPO conditions took a lot of work due to insufficient officer training.
- (d) Resource barriers: funding and staffing challenges hindered KCPO support.
- (e) Perceived redundancy: KCPOs were seen as potentially redundant compared to existing youth justice services, raising doubts about their impact.

▪ **Key themes from interviews with participants from the CPS:**

- (a) Diverse views: opinions on KCPOs vary; they were seen as helpful deterrents or duplicating existing measures.
- (b) Issuance factors: considerations include criminal and mental health histories and justified conditions.
- (c) Condition assessment: thoughtful conditions addressing root causes are favoured, while generic ones are not.
- (d) Procedural enhancement: court procedures need improvement for better notice and legislation familiarity.
- (e) Risk cases: KCPOs may benefit cases with an observable risk of knife-related crime, connecting KCPO conditions to measurable judicial outcomes.
- (f) Implementation progress: KCPO implementation process improved during the pilot, but concerns remain about long-term effectiveness.

▪ **Key themes from interviews with participants from the youth justice services:**

- (a) Negative perception: KCPOs are viewed as punitive, duplicating existing methods and criminalising children.
- (b) Enforcement challenges: policing KCPO requirements is complex, and minor infractions can lead to severe consequences.
- (c) Equity: concerns about unequal provision, inconsistency, and disproportionality in KCPO usage were raised.
- (d) Moral dilemma: staff face an ethical dilemma between police relations and the utility of KCPOs to mitigate the risk of future offending.
- (e) Limited preventative impact: KCPOs are not seen as preventive, and motivating prolific offenders to engage with conditions is challenging.
- (f) Safeguarding: initial safeguarding responses are often overlooked in the political context of KCPOs.
- (g) Limited applicability: KCPOs are only suitable for specific high-risk groups.

## **Reflections on Stakeholder Interviews**

Interviews with KCPO stakeholders uncovered several key themes and their associated implications. The origins and operational context of KCPOs signal a noteworthy shift towards a non-punitive approach to combatting knife crime, indicating a potential policy evolution within this sphere. Despite the vital importance of multi-agency collaboration in preventing knife-related incidents, challenges impeding cooperation among service stakeholders must be effectively addressed.

Furthermore, interviews with police personnel involved in the pilot's execution illuminated operational hurdles, highlighting the pressing need for improved resource allocation, more meticulous planning, and enhanced officer training. There were concerns regarding the potential redundancy of KCPOs compared to existing interventions, exacerbated by funding limitations and personnel constraints.

In conversations with CPS participants, a spectrum of opinions regarding KCPOs emerged, with some perceiving them as efficacious but others questioning their redundancy vis-à-vis current measures. There is an evident necessity for refining court procedures and enhancing familiarity with pertinent legislation.

The programme's overarching focus on risk reduction and prevention, particularly among young black males, suggests a holistic approach to diverting individuals from the criminal justice system. However, discussions with youth justice services revealed a prevailing negative perception of KCPOs as punitive and superfluous, raising concerns about the potential criminalization of minors. Furthermore, issues of inequity, disproportionality, and enforcement complexities underscore the urgency of adopting a more balanced strategy.

According to these stakeholders, KCPOs appear to have limited deterrent effects, especially among repeat offenders, and their applicability is confined to specific high-risk populations. These findings underscore the intricate challenges associated with KCPOs in addressing knife crime, taking into account the diverse perspectives and considerations of various stakeholder groups.

## **Introduction**

In accordance with the UK government's 2018 Serious Violence Strategy, the 2019 Offensive Weapons Act enacted new measures to prevent knife crime. Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs), which are preventative measures designed to reduce occurrences of knife-related crime and violence, are a significant development within the act affecting stakeholders across the criminal justice system.

KCPOs provide the police with an alternative intervention to divert young people away from knife crime and serious violence. KCPOs are intended to be preventative rather than punitive. When used after a conviction, a range of conditions can be imposed by a court using the order. The intention is that these enforceable conditions can be used as mechanisms to reduce the likelihood of recidivism and seek cooperation to engage with interventions to help prevent future offending.

The original goal was to conduct a longitudinal evaluation of KCPOs intervention pilot programme in London. This would have been accomplished by administering surveys and semi-structured interviews to a randomised sample of KCPO recipients. A rigorous assessment of the impact of KCPOs on offending and recidivism would have resulted from such an approach. However, despite attempting various methods of participant recruitment, the UCL research team and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) were unable to secure KCPO recipients' participation in this study. As a result, UCL was later asked to interview a range of participants selected by the MPS to collect data from various perspectives, focusing on how the programme was initiated, the challenges encountered, and how it has progressed.

## Questions

The following high-level questions guided the semi-structured interviews:

- What were the experiences of stakeholders involved in the implementation of KCPOs, and what difficulties arose during implementation?
- How were the components of the KCPOs implemented for the intended population, and if not, what factors contributed to any implementation failures?

## Data Collection

Data were collected from participants using online semi-structured interviews. The essentially self-selected sample of participants included key persons responsible for advising on KCPO legislation, Home Office and police personnel involved in the pilot's implementation, youth justice case workers, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) lawyers, and court judges.

## Schedule of Interviews

Table 1 below displays the range of stakeholders who were interviewed. Despite the small sample size (n = 10), at least one representative from each relevant stakeholder category.

Table 1: Schedule of interviews

Role in Pilot	Stakeholder Group	Number of Participants
Personnel who informed the development of the KCPO legislation	MPS Home Office	n=1 n=2
Police staff involved in the implementation of the KCPO pilot	MPS Central Team MPS Local Team	n=1 n=1
Personnel dealing with other aspects of the pilot	Youth Justice	n=3 n=2

## Findings from Interviews

The following presents the key findings from the stakeholder interviews and key indicative quotes from participants. It is important to note that these findings summarise the reported views (not those of UCL), opinions and understanding of the small sample of participants interviewed about their role in implementing the KCPO pilot. The findings are therefore perceptions of the respondents and not evidenced findings.

### Key themes from interviews with participants involved in drafting KCPO legislation:

- The MPS and Home Office introduced Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs) to address the lack of legislation allowing action against young knife crime victims/perpetrators without criminalisation.

*“One thing I was trying to do was to make sure we had an enforcement response on the streets of London. But looking at the cohort of people that were getting arrested – which were predominately young black men – as perpetrators and also victims of knife crime, I started to realise time and time again that we hadn’t intervened because we had no way of intervening. Overlay that with the complexity of why people carry knives...they do it for all sorts of reasons but there was nothing in the statute that allowed us to put in any preventative measures without criminalising these people. The only time they came into contact with the youth justice system was when we had arrested them. And it was far too late then; they were in the system in a punitive way.”*

*(MPS)*

*“The timing of trying to get KCPOs into legislation was right because of the way knife crime hit. Knife crime remains as part of tackling violence within the MET’s core priorities, so getting it through the government processes was pretty straightforward because we were looking for other innovative ideas. Our commissioner at the time was saying that for every bit of enforcement, we should be doing four times more bits of engagement and diversion and prevention work. So, it was an easy sell.”*

*(MPS)*

- The KCPOs were conceived with a multi-agency approach involving youth offending teams, the CPS, and local policing teams targeting vulnerable young people as a preventative measure. Anticipated challenges in the implementation of KCPOs included getting local officers involved, misinterpretation of KCPO legislation by the judiciary, and a lower number of KCPOs granted than expected.

*“From the policing side, the structure is set, then early implementation is underway. What we did find was that we had to re-educate neighbourhood teams. The use of KCPOs the uptake, wasn’t as great as we thought it was going to be. It was similar to what we had seen with CBOs as well, so we kept on advertising and educating our colleagues on the use of KCPOs. There were some challenges around getting local officers engaged, and we briefed and re-briefed, you name it. We also made sure there was a strategic group that sat monthly.”*

*(MPS)*

*“The other issue – which was very annoying – was that even though we briefed the judiciary, they still held their own interpretation, and they were difficult to deal with. Where the challenge*

*sits is the interpretation by the judiciary around what KCPOs are. It comes from their interpretation of the legislation.”*

*(MPS)*

*“And I think also we are challenged by numbers. We haven’t got the numbers that we thought we would have in order to do a proper evaluation. The smaller the sample size, the less reliable the information so I was hoping there would be more.”*

*(MPS)*

*“Based on MPS views about numbers of KCPOs expected to be granted during the pilot, we anticipated that greater numbers of KCPOs would have been granted by this stage – we were anticipating about 150 KCPOs by September 2022. The impact has been that we have extended the pilot by an additional 7 months until end March 2023 to increase the total number of KCPOs granted.”*

*(Home Office, Serious Violence Unit, Knife Crime Team)*

- The success of KCPOs needs to be measured quantitatively and qualitatively, with the evaluation looking at youth involvement in the criminal justice system and self-reported positive outcomes.

*“Success would be comparing the data - those young people coming into the CJS 2019 onwards vs. before. Qualitatively I would like to have young people saying ‘actually KCPOs saved my life’. That would be success for me. Success for me would be all of these agencies recognizing the potential of KCPOs, coming together, working together, and actually helping these young people – lots more positive activities and lots more diversion as a by-product from crime. But my top line would be fewer young people going into the CJS as a result of carrying a knife or being involved with knives, and our baseline for that are the numbers used in 2018/19. And if there are reductions, can we definitely show that KCPOs are driving that reduction? If the evaluation shows that it doesn’t work, then we should stop it dead.”*

*(MPS)*

*“As with all new orders, it is difficult to estimate the impact of KCPOs. The case for the KCPO has been made to us by the police who are confident that they will make a difference and will provide a useful tool to manage the risk of knife crime-related offenders and those at risk of engaging in knife crime. The outcomes that will be evaluated are the number of new arrests during a follow-up period, Number of charges, Number of convictions, Crime Harm of arrests – measured as a function of the severity of punishment accordingly to the sentencing guidelines; Number of stop and searches; Number and type of breaches.”*

*(Home Office, Serious Violence Unit, Knife Crime Team)*

- Concerns were raised about the reluctance of youth services to report breaches of KCPO conditions, which could reduce the likelihood of offenders being caught and punished for non-compliance.

*“Because charitable organisations are helping us with these positive activities, they didn’t want to be part of reporting breaches. According to legislation you have to report breaches of conditions. They said “look we can’t form relationships with young people and then report on them for breaches.” So that became a challenge. Compared to CBOs, KCPOs has some teeth. If you breach KCPOs, one of the worst things that can possibly happen to you is that you can go to prison for two years. We didn’t want that to happen, but it had to have some teeth for it to*

*work and people were concerned about that. And we looked at CBOs – ASBOs previously – if you breach an ASBO, nothing really happens.”*  
(MPS)

- The MPS believed that the KCPO programme's theory of change primarily revolved around prevention. They aimed to achieve their desired outcomes by reducing risks and emphasising protective factors. According to the MPS, successful programme implementation required unwavering commitment and a deep understanding of its preventative nature. Respondents underlined that the MPS approach was rooted in data analysis, with programme parameters determined based on data insights. They acknowledged that the programme might disproportionately impact young individuals, particularly young black people, but viewed this as a positive diversion away from the criminal justice system, including prison and knife crime. They argued that focusing on prevention through KCPOs could divert these individuals from facing charges and ultimately improve their outcomes.

*“People that are involved in the programme should be absolutely committed to it and understand it. This was more around the preventative space than it was around the punitive space. It was born out of the data. For years, they were telling us to follow our data. That’s why we set the ages that we set. When people talked about disproportionality, I said to them that they are looking at the punitive aspects of KCPOs; you’re not looking at the preventative. Yes, it will be disproportionately impacted on young people and young black people – those are the ones that are going to be diverted more away from prison, away from knife crime, away from the CJS. If it’s disproportionately possible, isn’t it something you want to support? Everyone was focusing on the punitive aspect and forgot about those young people who arrive at court. We have failed for them and we have instead charged them with an offence. We could have prevented that with KCPOs; that’s what it’s all about.”*  
(MPS)

### **Key themes from interviews with police staff involved in the KCPO implementation pilot: pilot**

- Challenges were faced in the implementation process, generated by operational issues and a lack of planning.

*“Right from the outset, I had to come up with a process of how we can actually identify people who could be eligible for a KCPO. It was quite evident that how this was going to operate on a day-by-day basis had not really been thought through. There was this legislation, how it was going to look – there was the infrastructure around, obviously we knew about the randomization, we had the trackers to the actual data bases all set up ready to log cases, we had the randomization all in place. But how do we even start? where are we going to pick the cohort from? that hadn’t been thought out. So one of the first tasks was designing what we were actually going to define the cohort as.”*  
(MPS Central)

- There is a need for a tailored approach to determine eligible candidates for KCPO, but difficulties in practice due to a lack of resources and understanding among mainstream police officers.

*"I think the expectation placed on us initially was unattainable. The idea that we could get the response teams on board thinking about this type of enforcement or diversion. They can't think about this because they are already thinking about their next call, they are already understaffed and running around like headless chickens. The expectation that we were going to be able to get the teams to think about this and to send in their own referrals was unrealistic. For me it took a long time making a lot of noise to get any consistent support. Whilst I've been consistent I've had to shout a lot to get officers to help me to write these applications up. I got some teams on board who had the time or while working from home. I was also given restricted officers, who may be restricted for one month or six months, but in the time it was taking me to get them up to speed, they would be gone again or they had no interest, they were not committed. It's been difficult to implement and I think it's only really worked in the latter six months of the pilot where I've had competent officers on board who are writing the applications. I'm only seeing results now."*  
(MPS, Local)

- Difficulties in determining suitable conditions to apply to individuals under KCPOs due to a lack of training among mainstream police officers.

*"The directive has tried to be that as a police officer, you need to understand the driving factors behind a person's criminality. Then, tailor the conditions. What I would say is that for the mainstream masses of police officers, that is outside their skillset. That's quite bespoke offender management. But what we were trying to achieve was mass officer applications. So, whilst that was our ethos, it was difficult to do."*  
(MPS, Central)

- Barriers in funding and infrastructure to support KCPO conditions, such as a lack of specialised police staff and lack of support from the youth justice system.

*"Then there are barriers to funding conditions in order for conditions to be met. Who's going to fund that gym placement? That infrastructure just was not there. Then, even when funding was granted, KCPOs took ages. If the provision is available why wait for months to attach it to the KCPO? Give the person the provision and let them start because that's the point, divert them away. So, the lack of infrastructure – lack of a catalogue of available provision – meant that even when officers did identify the right conditions, unless the youth justice service or the national probation had a pathway for us, we could never achieve it."*  
(MPS, Central)

- Difficulties in engaging local officers, judiciary, and third sector partners, resulting in low numbers of KCPOs granted compared to expectations.

*"It has not gone as I anticipated – I thought the courts would be more likely to grant orders, I thought the partners would be more likely to support and engage with the process, and I thought the third sector organisations would be willing to support this. Holistically, I thought there would be a collective view that this is a good idea. Now, in fact, I think we're in a position where it's gone as well as it could have; yes, had we been able to change all those bigger structural issues, then I think it could have gone better, but that is not realistic for us to overcome those obstacles. When I look back, Youth Justice opposed it from the very beginning so we were never really going to get them on board; they were very much 'how can you have a preventative tool that risks punitive outcomes?!' You're potentially going to give someone a judicial order*

*that is going to criminalise their behaviour... It's the first time something like this has ever been evaluated. We have not evaluated judicial orders in this way. So, there is no evidence base to try and convince them. There is no published research that shows this kind of thing works. So, I have no evidence to prove to them that this could be beneficial. So, they said, 'so basically you're playing with people's lives to do an evaluation'. Which was a very interesting point; you can't get away from that."*  
(MPS, Central)

- A perception that KCPOs are unlikely to offer anything additional to what youth justice services already offer and are therefore unlikely to produce the desired effects on offenders' behaviour and life.

*"In all honesty, the benefit of KCPOs, I think, will be the officers on the street having an additional power to tackle troublesome individuals. It's not going to benefit us from a diversion point of view; I think that work is being done; it doesn't need to be part of an order. That help is there – or they are working with YOTs, or they are working with probation. Where they are really useful is from a police tool point of view. If we've got a group of youngsters causing ASB or carrying knives, and we don't want them together... So the value of this legislation to me is enforcement for police, and I don't know if that's the right answer because that's a very police answer."*  
(MPS, Local)

#### **Key themes from interviews with participants from the CPS:**

- Views on KCPOs vary, with some seeing them as a useful tool for deterring crime and others believing they merely replicate existing mechanisms.

*"I think that generally, that's my feeling. If you take the currently existing laws and look at criminal offences such as bladed article, offensive weapon, or obstructing a police officer along with anything that can be imposed such as a sentence of the court or even a criminal behaviour order, I think that most of what a KCPO seeks to achieve could have been achieved through other mechanisms that already existed."*  
(District Crown Prosecutor)

*"I think they are a very useful tool because, yes, people get convicted of knife crime in court. But if this tool is there, it will assist in deterring people from committing crimes. Every knife that is carried on the streets represents a risk to the public, but with these KCPOs, it has been designed to prevent this type of behaviour to protect the public."*  
(District Crown Prosecutor)

- Factors considered when issuing KCPOs include criminal and mental health histories and well-justified conditions.

*"My starting point would normally be the offending history of the person, any previous knife offences. I would then look at the statement from the KCPO lead officer to see how they are justifying each condition, and it has to be specific to that young person. A good condition would be not to run from a police officer. In order for that to be a necessary condition, I want the police to provide me with examples of all the cases where they have run from a police officer and why that is relevant. I look for specific information about that young person and why this condition will hopefully assist in the future. These KCPOs should be specialised and individualised. A*

*purely generic one will probably mean that we don't present it to the court; we don't ask the court to consider it."*  
(District Crown Prosecutor)

- CPS respondents note that they often reviewed orders with generic and unnecessary conditions and stressed the merit of well-thought-through conditions tackling root causes of crime.

*"You often see some very generic and unnecessary conditions. The worst ones that spring to mind are not to carry a knife to comply with probation. Completely unnecessary. But they still come through from time to time. I think where they are good and where they are properly justified, I think it does enable the court to look a little bit deeper into the factors that are leading into the young person appearing before the court. That might be that they are associating with certain people, they are in certain areas. So sometimes you can see there is a lot more intelligent thought. I think a good condition sometimes is not to be riding on a bike that is not registered to you from this body because they might be committing bike robberies. Or I quite like it when they are not to have an unregistered SIM card or mobile phone because we know that that is how young people are drawn into drug dealing, with the burner phone. I think when there is a real thought, I think it can be a good toolkit for a court, but it's been mixed; it's gone from a very generic and unnecessary application through to one where it is more evidenced."*  
(District Crown Prosecutor)

- Court procedures need improvement to ensure sufficient notice and familiarity with legislation.

*"As I said, I've been leading on this, and it was initially a very big hurdle for me...it was not easy to explain to the court who were not familiar with the legislation... and the prosecution being made aware of the application by the police at a very late stage. And so there have been occasions where the court have refused to even hear the application because there hasn't been sufficient notice from parties or the court just don't have the time or resources to hear the application then and there and are adjourning the consideration of a KCPO which has caused problems as well."*  
(District Crown Prosecutor)

- KCPOs may be useful in cases with a real risk of knife crime harm and allow for clearer court outcomes.

*"I think they can be useful. The courts were reluctant to grant them initially, and equally, they weren't well justified initially as well. But the KCPOs where there has clearly been thought put into them, they are well reasoned, and they are justified, I think they can be useful for focusing on the factors that lead to knife crime. So, keeping people away from a certain area. If that was part of a criminal sentence, they could be prosecuted for it, but what it didn't allow was that person being removed there are then where they might be creating a risk. So I think in the right case where there's a real risk of harm through knife crime, then I think they have a place, I think they can be effective."*  
(District Crown Prosecutor)

- Improvement in KCPO implementation processes has been observed during the pilot, but long-term effectiveness is a concern.

*"I do think that there has been an improvement in the process during the life of the pilot. I think we are probably only now getting to the stage where the police, the CPS, the courts and the YOS are getting more comfortable with KCPOs. There was a lot of reluctance initially, but I'm seeing more get granted now, so I think there has been an acceptance of the usefulness of KCPOs as a tool to prevent further offending."*  
(District Crown Prosecutor)

### **Key themes from interviews with participants from the youth justice services:**

The key themes from interviews with youth justice/offending services are outlined below. Due to their extensive experience managing London youth justice/offending services, interviewees appeared to understand all roles relevant to youth offending services thoroughly. Most interviewees had negative views of the KCPO programme, what it attempted to accomplish, and the mechanisms for doing so. However, one charitable organisation engaging with KCPO recipients held a highly favourable perception of the programme, noting its potential to prompt self-reflection to help young individuals make better-informed decisions.

### **Criticisms of KCPOs**

- A new label on an old method that could criminalise young people: Many interviewees have negative views of KCPOs, seeing them as a new label on an old method that criminalises children and replicates existing methods.

*"I don't really like KCPOs, I don't think any YOS like them; I think they are pointless. But you know they are what they are. I can see that it's a tool for the police which I'm always supportive of, but I'm not a huge fan. That's just my personal opinion, I think they are pointless. They're similar to old orders; they are a new label on an old method, they criminalise children, sometimes through minimal effort, they're often just replicating what's already in existence. If you're saying to a child 'don't carry a knife', well that's already against the law. So, what are we hoping to achieve here? Often, they want requirements that are already in court orders that children are already exposed to; you know they have to do in on conviction. Often, a child's got a sentence but then you're giving another order that is exactly the same. What's the point here? If they breach one part, they breach two things, which is treated more severely. These are children, and whilst they might have done something wrong and I'm not diminishing some of the children that we work with have done, it's like, why are we doing this?"*  
(YOS service manager)

- KCPO requirements cannot be properly policed: some requirements are so broad as to be essentially unenforceable, while breaches of low-level requirements can have serious criminal consequences for young people.

*"And then sometimes some of the requirements are just so out there, and firstly they can't be properly policed – if they say you're never allowed to be with two or more people, how are you really going to police that 100%? Secondly, some of the requirements are really low level, and you say oh god, this could have a criminal consequence, so for not attending the gym with the youth offending service – I know they always say, 'Oh, we'll be within reason – but legally they could technically breach a child for not going to the gym. I don't really like the onus on the YOS as well – to engage in activities. Actually, they are already engaged in activities with us anyway,*

*so I just don't see the point; I think they are toothless, I think they are pointless. I just don't see the point in them at all."*  
(YOS service manager)

- Generic and often unacceptable KCPO conditions: Generic KCPO conditions are deemed unhelpful. KCPO conditions are often not sensible and even deemed unacceptable for children (e.g., restrictions for a child not to see certain adults).

*"I sat on the KCPO scrutiny board recently, where we looked at cases in detail... In all of those, there were a much larger number of restrictions than sensible for a child that is 13 years old. Or just unacceptable restrictions. For example, restrictions for a child not to see certain adults. For me, that's absolutely unacceptable because it's using a criminal justice tool to deal with a safeguarding issue, and it's the child who has the consequence if that condition is breached. If we think an adult is exploiting a child, we put the restriction on the adult. Putting the restriction on the child means that when the adult turns up it's the child that is then punished. It's just not a just way of dealing with it. The child is always going to be scared of the adult that's trying to exploit them than they are of the police, and so they're going to have potential consequences that lead all the way to prison."*  
(Head of London Youth Justice Board)

- Equality and consistency: Concerns about equality of provision, consistency of application, and disproportionality in using KCPOs were raised.

*"I also think that they've been smacking them on children but haven't really got that sense of histories with knife crime. Actually, I've got children who have far more extensive histories that don't have them. So, you've also then got the issue of equality and consistency. You've got consistency issues because I thought we were being really lenient, so we were always pushing back with police when they said they've got two years; we would say 12 months. Then I spoke to the other YOS, and they were like, 'no, no, we're even more challenging than that; we only let them impose them for six months'. So, if you're a Croydon young person, you're going to get 12 months because I thought I was being lenient, but actually, because no guidance has really come out on the substance of them if you're in Sutton, you get six months."*  
(YOS service manager)

*"We know from our data that young black boys are more susceptible to coming into the system regardless. Therefore, you could argue that actually, by virtue of that context, for our borough, most of those who have one of these open are young black males. Then you've got that double criminality thing. So, it becomes a complex narrative. Certainly, from our figures, we have disproportionality, and we know that policing that is very focused in certain parts of the borough where there are more ethnically diverse communities."*  
(YOS service manager)

- Political dilemma: Staff found themselves in a political dilemma between not wanting to jeopardise their relationship with police and not seeing the value in KCPOs.

*"We've changed it now but we feel that we were in a really precarious position because we didn't really want to go against the police because we respect our relationship with the police, we respect what they're trying to achieve; they are a key partner to us. We didn't want to push back on these orders all the time, understanding that they may be necessary and our partners are using them. But at the same time, it's hard to support something you don't see the value in*

*or don't see the benefit of. So it's been really difficult. It felt they were in a political dilemma – it didn't feel like we could say no to an application, although I think other YOS are slightly more vocal than us and would push back. I know that Lambeth have said no to certain applications being made. We felt that if we do that, we are causing unnecessary tension with a key partner. So it becomes about our relationship rather than the actual what it's about. There's definitely a political context. You feel obliged to support and help and then the only way we can compromise is by negotiating certain requirements or the time length, but like I said the guidelines were not clear. But we've never been in a position where we've said no because of the political background.”*

*(YOS service manager)*

- Safeguarding element missing: The safeguarding element is the initial response that involves determining what is happening in the child's life and environment and identifying any contextual factors that may be contributing to the child's fear or anxiety. The perception is that this initial response is being missed or neglected in the political context of KCPOs involving children.

*“I think there's a need to be seen to do something about knife crime. From my point of view, I think what that missed was the safeguarding element where knife crime involves children. I think that when a young person is found to be carrying a knife, the first response is finding out what's going on in the child's life, if they feel that is something necessary for their safety, what environment is the child living in, contextual factors that are making them feel that scared and what can we as adults do to protect that child?”*

*(Head of London Youth Justice Board)*

- KCPOs are not 'preventative': YOS staff struggled with the word 'prevention' in the title of the order, as they did not think that KCPOs are designed to prevent knife crime.

*“It's a bit bizarre; it says 'prevention order' but actually the child is typically carried a weapon to have the application made. So, they act has already happened rather than prevention. I might see that there is a place for them where knife crime is habitual. That's where, from an enforcement or external control point of view, it might be useful. That's why having 'prevention' in the title is bizarre.”*

*(YOS service manager)*

- KCPOs are appropriate only for a unique cohort of young people – habitual weapon carrying among very high-risk individuals – but it would be difficult to motivate prolific offenders to complete the order successfully.

*“I think they can be useful when you've got someone who can be very hardened, who you know is a habitual weapon carrier and who may have limitations within a sentence or conviction and this can be used to as an extension of trying to put external controls on someone quite risky. On someone who the police is monitoring and having this would allow them to move swiftly onto that person. That's where they probably could be useful. I can see where they may be of benefit. I can see the police need tools to help them police. I'm supportive of that. There needs to be more thought in terms of when and how. This double parallel process of criminalising children is bizarre.”*

*(YOS service manager)*

- Youth services may withdraw their support or cooperation: YOS participants anticipate increased confidence in challenging KCPOs, believing this may initially create obstacles but ultimately make KCPOs less harmful. The London Youth Justice Board is concerned about losing support for youth justice services due to a lack of perceived responsiveness and worries about racial profiling.

*“What do I anticipate? This is what’s happened with all of the orders. They are really popular at the moment, being imposed because they’re new and because they can, it’s new, and it’s being piloted, so there is scrutiny from above on the application of these. I anticipate that they will start to be used less and less, the momentum will go...it will be like a crime prevention order. YOS will grow more confident in challenging and not supporting application. YOS don’t like them – as they get more confident, they will obstruct them, and so I think they will eventually become benign. We won’t be talking about them in a few years’ time. It’s only because it’s new. I do sympathise people trying to find solutions with knife crime and young people. But I think they have to go back to the basics and actually look at why these children are carrying weapons in the first place. It’s all enforcement led but actually some of these children who are carrying weapons do it because they think it’s a necessity and they are really scared. Until you address those factors – fear is going to supersede a KCPO – not much will change.”*  
(YOS service manager)

### **Perceived Benefits of KCPOs**

- One charitable organisation, however, had a positive view of the KCPO programme, citing its potential to promote self-reflection and help young individuals make better decisions. This charity takes breaches of KCPO conditions seriously and will escalate them, demonstrating to young people the importance of compliance. They have seen positive outcomes with KCPO recipients<sup>1</sup> and endorse the programme for its long-term impact and sustainability, with 6 out of 8 cases still actively engaged.
- The charity's CEO outlined their theory of change, which involves mentors offering comprehensive mentoring beyond KCPO requirements. This holistic approach has contributed significantly to the programme's success in positively impacting young individuals during the pilot. Their theory emphasizes shifting the mindset of young individuals, prompting self-reflection on the safety of carrying knives and encouraging better-informed decisions.

### **Operational considerations**

- Charitable organisations in the KCPO pilot followed specific procedures, including referral, collecting contact details, obtaining consent, and facilitating mentor-youth contact. However, the potential for communication breakdowns at each stage highlight the crucial need for streamlined and effective procedures.
- The operations specialist at a charitable organisation praised the KCPO operational lead of the MPS for significantly improving the referral system, resulting

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<sup>1</sup> Success for the charity is measured by the length of time that the young individuals continue without reoffending, a long with evidence of a change in thought processes, ongoing mentoring, avoiding risky situations and experiencing positive changes in employment and accommodation.

in 14 referrals to the charity. However, there were occasional issues with incomplete information about the young person or the charity within the MPS and a lack of follow-up after the initial contact, which created a gap in the referral process.

*“We respected each of the officers. But I think the only practical challenge sometimes has been a lack of information around the young person. One of the early ones for example, I spoke to a police officer in Hackney six or seven times to try and get the contact details, and I never actually managed to get that. I think the intent is always there from the police; by definition, they are the ones contacting us. But the main gap has been around once a contact has been made saying they have someone for us, and there is not a follow-up. I would say that the contact, however, looking at it as a whole, has been good with the MET police.”*  
(CEO of charitable organisation)

- The referral process faces challenges, with one charity receiving referrals exclusively from the MET and none from sources outside of it. Additionally, there are issues with solicitors not grasping the charity's role in the KCPO process and resistance from courts and solicitors, potentially stemming from inadequate communication about the programme's procedures.

## Example case studies of KCPO recipients

A charitable organisation shared summaries on each young person on KCPO for this report. This data revealed that the charity had provided mentoring services to eight young men referred by the MPS due to their involvement in knife-related crimes. The charity worked with these young men to help them avoid risky areas, stay safe, and make better life choices. For example, YP1, a 19-year-old male of Turkish heritage, was referred by a MET police officer after being caught in possession of a bladed article. After a period of disengagement, YP1 has engaged with the charity's mentor and is now employed in a restaurant and looking for accommodation for himself and his girlfriend to move to. YP2, an 18-year-old male charged with possessing pointed articles and blades plus a separate machete possession, was referred by an MPS police officer. YP2 has level two Functional skills, Maths and English, and is currently doing an online software coding course. He wants to enrol for a college place for coding and has a part-time delivery job. The charity has helped him to stay safe and avoid people who might exert a bad influence. He is waiting for a place on a software coding course in September. YP3, a 22-year-old male, was referred to the charity after being caught possessing a lock knife. He has engaged with the charity's mentor and has had a KCPO issued for two years, with one condition being to be mentored by the charity. This is a quote from YP3 given to his mentor:

*“...carrying a knife doesn't keep me safe. When I was in London, I felt carrying a knife made me safe, but my mentor has changed my view. I could have been really hurt or hurt someone badly and end up dead or doing a long sentence. The probation order is great and is helping me a lot since I have been in the West Midlands and safe away from re-offending. [Mentor], your mentoring has helped a lot; thank you.”*

## Reflections and Final Remarks

Based on our interpretation of participant views, several implications and recommendations can be drawn from their perspectives for the future rollout of the KCPO programme:

- **Creation and Context:** Acknowledge the importance of organisational culture and political context in shaping the programme. Ensure that these factors are considered and aligned with the goals of KCPOs.
- **Multi-Agency Approach:** Address challenges related to engaging local police officers, judicial interpretation, and grant allocation to enhance the effectiveness of the multi-agency approach. Foster better collaboration among youth offending teams, CPS, and local police.
- **Evaluation:** Continue to assess the programme's success quantitatively and qualitatively, considering not only justice system involvement but also self-reported outcomes of the participants.
- **Reporting Concerns:** Address concerns about youth services' reluctance to report KCPO breaches to ensure offender accountability and programme effectiveness.
- **Operational Challenges:** Improve planning and address operational hurdles for smoother implementation in the future.
- **Customised Eligibility:** Develop a tailored approach to identify KCPO candidates, considering resource constraints and providing better officer understanding.
- **Condition Complexity:** Enhance officer training to make determining suitable KCPO conditions more effective and consistent.
- **Resource Barriers:** Allocate adequate funding and staffing to overcome resource challenges, which can hinder KCPO support.
- **Engagement Issues:** Address problems in engaging local officers, the judiciary, and partners to increase the number of KCPOs granted.
- **Perceived Redundancy:** Clarify the unique value and impact of KCPOs compared to existing youth justice services to alleviate doubts about their effectiveness.
- **CPS Views:** Recognise the diversity of opinions within the CPS regarding KCPOs and work toward a consensus on their usefulness and role.
- **Issuance Factors:** Ensure that KCPO issuance decisions consider relevant factors, including criminal and mental health histories, and justify conditions effectively.
- **Condition Assessment:** Develop conditions that address the root causes of knife crime rather than generic ones, enhancing the programme's effectiveness.

- Procedural Enhancement: Improve court procedures to provide better notice and familiarity with KCPO legislation among legal professionals.
- Risk Cases: Identify and prioritise cases with real knife crime risk to achieve clearer court outcomes.
- Youth Justice/Offending Services: Address negative perceptions and concerns about KCPOs, emphasising their preventive rather than punitive nature.
- Equity Concerns: Ensure equitable provision, consistency, and reduced disproportionality in KCPO usage.
- Safeguarding: Prioritise the initial safeguarding response within the political context of KCPOs to ensure the well-being of young individuals.
- Limited Applicability: Recognize that KCPOs may be most suitable for a specific high-risk group and develop strategies to motivate prolific offenders.
- Positive Outcomes: Acknowledge and support the positive outcomes reported by charitable organisations engaged with KCPO recipients. Consider the sustainability and long-term impact of the programme on participants.

In summary, the findings from the interviews suggest that the future rollout of the KCPO programme should address various challenges, enhance collaboration among key stakeholders, clarify the programme's unique value, and maintain a strong focus on prevention and comprehensive mentoring to positively impact young individuals involved in the initiative.