

Knife crime is lowest for decade in Scotland

Figures showing that the number of people carrying offensive weapons such as knives is now at its lowest level in Scotland in a decade have been released.

Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill said that the figures demonstrate that the tactic of combining tough enforcement, through record numbers of stop and searches on Scotland's streets, backed by education, through initiatives such as the No Knives, Better Lives campaign, was beginning to pay off.

However, the Cabinet Secretary said that Scotland's law enforcement agencies would not be complacent in their continuing efforts to tackle knife crime in Scotland's communities.

The figures show that:

- * There has been a 30 per cent decrease in offensive weapons crime since 2006/07 – with substantial falls in each police force area

- * In 2000/01 there were 5,209 crimes of possessing an offensive weapon in Scotland. Latest figures for 2009/10 show this has dropped to 3,839

- * There has been a 22 per cent decrease in offences of possessing an offensive weapon since last year

- * In Strathclyde last year there was a 26 per cent decrease in crimes of possessing an offensive weapon, and there was also a general decrease in offences in other police forces right across Scotland

The figures come just two weeks after a new study concluded that targeted intervention strategies were key to tackling gangs and knife carrying, rather than adopting blanket 'one-size fits all' policies.

Mr MacAskill said:-“Far too many lives are lost and people injured through mindless acts of violence – often because of the knife culture that blights too many communities. That is why we are working to change the culture of violence in Scotland through education and tough enforcement.

“These are welcome trends which demonstrate that our efforts to tackle knife crime through a combination of tough enforcement backed by education are beginning to pay off across the country. However, we cannot and will not be complacent.

“We are taking tough action on those who carry and use knives, doing more than ever before. We’ve seen jail terms for knife carrying increase by almost two-thirds over the past two years and we’ve delivered a record number of police officers – more than a thousand extra – to catch offenders, with recorded crime in Scotland now at its lowest level for 32 years.

“Police officers are carrying out a record number of stop and searches, courts have been given powers to impose four year sentences just for carrying a knife, while our proposed Sentencing Council can take a considered look at sentencing for knife offences – taking into account the views of the public, victims, and police.

“Backed by initiatives on the ground which target young people and educate them about the dangers, we are making real progress. Our No Knives, Better Lives education campaign led to a 23 per cent reduction in knife carrying in the pilot area of Inverclyde earlier this year and the scheme has recently been rolled out to other areas of Scotland.

“Scotland’s law enforcement agencies are united in a shared aim of putting an end to knife crime wherever and whenever it occurs. These statistics are further evidence that the continuing use of ever more sophisticated tactics is making Scotland’s communities safer.

“Whether it’s a totally misguided person who thinks a knife gives extra protection, or a mindless thug with violent intentions, they should be left in no doubt that if they carry or use a knife, they will be punished and they could face a lengthy jail sentence.”