



Home Office



Ministry
of Justice

Policy paper

Crime and Policing Bill: knife crime and crossbows factsheet

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What are we going to do?

As part of the Government's Safer Streets Mission to halve knife crime in a decade, the Bill strengthens the law on the online sale of knives and ensures that the police and the courts have the necessary powers to get offensive weapons off the streets. The Government is also updating the laws on sales of crossbows to support public safety. Measures in the Crime and Policing Bill will:

- a. Strengthen age verification requirements for the online sale and delivery of knives and crossbows.
- b. Introduce a requirement on retailers to report bulk sales of bladed articles.
- c. Hold senior managers of online platforms personally liable for failure to take action to remove illegal content relating to knives and offensive weapons.
- d. Enable the police to seize, retain and destroy knives held in private when they are lawfully on private property and have reasonable grounds to suspect the item(s) will likely be used in connection with unlawful violence.
- e. Increase the maximum penalty, from six months' imprisonment to two years' imprisonment, for the offences of private possession, importation, manufacture, sale or supply of prohibited offensive weapons and knives and of selling knives to those under 18.
- f. Introduce a new offence of possession of a knife or offensive weapon in public or private with intent to use unlawful violence. The offence will carry a maximum penalty of four years' imprisonment. The police will also have a new power to seize knives on any premises if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that the knife is likely to be used in connection with unlawful violence.

How are we going to do it?

Strengthened age verification for knives and crossbows

- At the point of purchase, online sellers of knives and crossbows will be required to check a photographic identity document, either a passport or

a UK driving licence, and a current photograph of the buyer used to demonstrate that they are the holder of the photographic identity document.

- At the point of delivery, the courier must check the photographic identification document provided by the person receiving the package to demonstrate that they are aged 18 or over and that they are the buyer.
- The Bill also introduces a two-step age and identity verification measure for the online purchase, letting (hire) and delivery of a crossbow or part of a crossbow.
- Operators of collection points will also be required to carry out the same enhanced age verification checks before handing over knives to the buyer, or in the case of crossbows or crossbow parts, to the buyer or hirer of the item.
- These additional steps will also bring crossbow deliveries in line with deliveries of knives, by preventing a crossbow, or part of a crossbow from being delivered to a locker, left on a doorstep or delivered to a neighbour or another person in the household.

Mandatory reporting of bulk sales of bladed articles

- The Bill introduces a requirement for companies to report online “bulk” sales of bladed articles to the police. This is where six knives or more are purchased from the same retailer in a single transaction or multiple transactions by the same buyer or to the same residential address within 30 days.
- Disposable razor blade cartridges, non-locking folding pocket-knives with a cutting edge of three inches or less, and cutlery knives (other than steak knives with sharp points) will be exempt from these requirements.
- There will also be exemptions for qualifying sets of knives such as kitchen knife blocks. These will be sets of at least three knives that are each a different size or shape no matter how many knives the set contains. The purchase of multiple sets of knives or the purchase of a single set alongside individual knives where these combinations lead to a total purchase of at least six knives will be reportable.
- Reporting requirements will not apply to business-to-business sales. Businesses will be able to confirm that the purchase is business-related and provide their VAT or company registration number to demonstrate it.

Personal liability for senior executives of online platforms

- The police will be granted the power to issue Content Removal Notices to online companies and one of their executives. These notices will require recipients to take down specified content illegally marketing knives and offensive weapons within 48 hours, subject to various safeguards.
- Content Removal Notices can only require that content which is already illegal be removed. This is content:
 - marketing weapons which are banned in the UK. For example, knuckledusters and zombie knives.
 - which markets a knife as suitable for violence or is likely to encourage use of the knife as a weapon.
- If the specified illegal content is not taken down, the police will have the power to issue a Civil Penalty Notice of up to £60,000 to the company and up to £10,000 to the executive.
- Online companies must designate an appropriate executive when requested to do so the police. Should a company fail to do so it could be liable for a fine of up to £60,000.
- Online companies in scope of these measures are social media platforms, online marketplaces and search services.

Powers to seize knives

- The Bill introduces a new power for police to seize, retain and destroy legally held bladed articles held in private when the police are lawfully on private property and have reasonable grounds to suspect the item is likely to be used in connection with unlawful violence, including damage to property and the threat of violence. The power will be exercisable by any police officer, regardless of rank, when carrying out their policing duties.
- The power will be exercisable where the police are lawfully on private property, for example while executing a search warrant or having been invited onto the property by the owner or occupant.
- The police must leave a written record of the seizure, including a description of the item and the reason for forfeiture. The owner of a seized item will be able to seek an order from a magistrates' court where the court is satisfied that it would be just to make such an order (for

example, if the court concludes that the item had been inappropriately seized).

Increase in maximum penalties

- This Bill amends sections 141 and 141A of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and section 1 of the Restriction of Offensive Weapons Act 1959 to increase the maximum penalties for the offences provided for in each of those sections. Under section 141 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 it is an offence to manufacture, sell or otherwise supply prohibited offensive weapons or to possess such weapons for the purposes of supplying them. Under section 141(1A) of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 it is an offence to possess a prohibited weapon in private. Under section 141A of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 it is an offence to sell knives or other bladed articles to those under 18. Under section 1 of the Restriction of Offensive Weapons Act 1959 it is an offence to manufacture, sell or otherwise supply a flick knife or gravity knife or to possess such knives for the purposes of supplying them. Under section 1(1A) of the Restriction of Offensive Weapons Act 1959 it is an offence to possess such a knife, the current maximum penalty for each of these offences is six months' imprisonment, an unlimited fine, or both. In each case, the Bill increases the maximum penalty to two years' imprisonment, an unlimited fine, or both. As a result, these offences will change from a 'summary only' offence to an 'either way' offence, meaning that more serious cases can be tried in the Crown Court.
- This will bring the maximum penalty of these offences into line with the existing offence of unlawful marketing of knives in section 1 of the Knives Act 1997.
- Increasing the maximum penalty will not only reflect the severity of the crime, but it will also be of operational benefit to the police, allowing them more time to investigate cases without the constraint of the six-month time limit on the prosecution of summary-only offences.

New possession offence

- The Bill introduces a new offence for possession of a knife or offensive weapon in public or private with the intention to use in unlawful violence against another person, or cause them to fear such violence, or to cause serious unlawful damage to property.
- The maximum penalty for the offence will be four years' imprisonment, an unlimited fine, or both.

Penalties against online companies and personal liability on their executives

- The Bill introduces new powers for the police to issue Content Removal Notices to social media platforms, online marketplaces and search services and a designated UK based executive of that organisation. These will require companies to take down specified illegal content relating to the sale of knives and offensive weapons within 48 hours, subject to various safeguards.
- Should online companies and their designated executive fail to comply with a Content Removal Notice, the police will have the power to issue Civil Penalty Notices of up to £60,000 to the online company and up to £10,000 to its designated executive.
- The police will also have the power to issue Civil Penalty Notices of up to £60,000 to online companies that fail to nominate an appropriate executive when requested to do so.

Background

- Tackling knife crime is a priority and the Government is determined to halve knife crime in a decade as part of its Safer Streets Mission.
- These new measures are intended to help the police take action and tackle knife crime by disrupting those who own knives and other weapons, whether prohibited or not, for the purpose of using them in violent crime. These measures were developed in partnership with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) in response to concerns raised about increasing prevalence of machetes and large knives in crime.
- The Home Office ran a public consultation on the seizure powers, increasing maximum penalties and the new possession offence from 18 April to 6 June 2023 and received 2,544 responses. ^[footnote 1]
- The problem of the 'grey market' and its damaging effect is set out in the Independent end-to-end review of online knife sales GOV.UK led by Commander Stephen Clayman, the NPCC Knife Crime Lead.
- These measures implement several recommendations from this review. These include age and identification checks at the points of sale and delivery and a requirement to report bulk sales.
- The measure in regard to personal liability for the senior executives of online platforms measure implements the manifesto commitment to hold

executives of online companies that flout the rules on the online sale of knives to account.

- The Home Office ran a public consultation on personal liability measures on senior executives of online service providers, the response to which has been published here – [Sale of knives: executive sanctions](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/sale-of-knives-executive-sanctions) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/sale-of-knives-executive-sanctions>). The consultation received a total of 74 completed responses and respondents were broadly in favour of the proposals. Respondents included representatives of online companies, trade associations, voluntary sector organisations and councils. Retailers were also represented, as well as Serious Violence Prevention Partnerships and policing.
- Like knives, crossbows are an age restricted item and cannot be sold to anyone under the age of 18. Legislation regulating the sale and hiring of crossbows was brought in through the Crossbows Act 1987 and, unlike knives, there has been little change to that legislation since its introduction. These measures seek to introduce the same age verification requirements for the online sale, hire and delivery of crossbows as are being brought in, or are already in place, for bladed articles including knives. The new measures seek to remedy the gap which currently exists and are preventative rather than punitive.
- The previous Government published a call for evidence paper in February 2024 to seek information and evidence about whether further controls on crossbows should be introduced to help minimise the risk to public safety from individuals who would misuse crossbows and use them to commit criminal offences. We have reviewed the responses, and we will publish the Government response to that exercise later this year which will set out the next steps we intend to take. The measures in the Bill are the first step in strengthening the protection the public from these weapons.

Key statistics

- Police recorded crime data for year ending December 2024 showed that offences involving knives or sharp instruments increased by 2% (to 54,587 offences) compared with year ending December 2023 (53,413 offences)^[footnote 2]
- Knife-enabled crimes continue to be concentrated in metropolitan areas across England and Wales, with 31% of all offences recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service, 9% by the West Midlands Police and 6% by Greater Manchester Police.
- Police recorded “possession of article with a blade or point” offences decreased by 1% in the year to December 2024 (28,150 offences) compared with year ending December 2023 (27,892 offences). This

follows substantial increases in recent years, which may have been influenced by targeted police action to tackle knife crime.

- The police recorded 535 homicide offences in year ending December 2024, a 5% decrease from 563 offences in the previous year.
- Of all recorded homicides in year ending December 2024, the proportion of homicides where a knife or sharp instrument was the method of killing was 41%. This was a slight decrease compared with 45% in the previous year.
- The latest provisional admissions data for NHS hospitals in England and Wales showed a 6% decrease in the number of admissions for assault by a sharp object in year ending December 2024 (to 3,663 admissions). This was 23% below the pre-coronavirus year ending March 2020 (4,769 admissions).

Frequently asked questions

Q. Will the police be able to seize kitchen knives and other household objects?

- The new powers will apply to any knife.
- The police will have the power to seize, retain and destroy legally held bladed articles from private property when the police are lawfully on private property and have reasonable grounds to suspect the bladed article will be used for serious violence or other crime.
- This power can only be exercised by an officer as part of their duties when they are on private property lawfully, for example, under “PACE” powers, and they have reason to suspect a knife will be used for serious violence or serious crime.
- The Bill includes provision for the owner of any seized knives to secure their return by applying for an order from a magistrates’ court. In deciding whether to grant such an order, the court will consider whether the knife had been appropriately seized.

Q. Are there protections in place for sellers who carried out necessary checks and had no reason to suspect believe the buyer was under 18?

- This measure is not intended to be used to charge sellers who have carried out all the reasonable steps to verify age.
- There is currently a ‘due diligence’ defence under section 141A of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 if the seller shows that they took all reasonable steps to verify age. This will continue to apply.

Q. What makes this new offence of possession with intent different to the existing offences for possession of banned knives? Why is this needed?

- It is already an offence to carry a bladed article in public without good reason. It is also an offence to then go on and threaten a person with the bladed article or weapon.
- Under section 52 of the Offensive Weapons Act 2019, it is an offence to intentionally threaten someone with an offensive weapon in public or private.
- The introduction of this new offence bridges the gap between being in possession of a knife (or offensive weapon) in public or on school or further education premises and it being used to threaten or harm anyone. This offence will target those who equip themselves with bladed articles (or offensive weapon) with the intention to use unlawful violence, cause a person to believe unlawful violence will be used against them or another or cause serious unlawful damage but are intercepted by the police before they have had the chance to carry out any attack on the intended victim or property. It will empower the police to bring charges against those individuals.

Q. How will the online sale of knives be policed?

- The Government is providing £1.75m funding in 2025/26 for a new national police coordination unit to tackle the online sale of knives.
- This unit will be dedicated to coordinated investigations into all aspects of online unlawful knife and offensive weapons sales and bringing those responsible to justice.
- The unit will also improve the data collection and analysis capability to expand police understanding of the knife crime problem and how enforcement activities can be best targeted.

Q. Are these a further burden on legitimate retailers when those operating illicitly will continue to flaunt the law?

- Sellers must already take reasonable steps to verify the age of buyers. However, previous legislation did not prescribe what the checks should be. These new measures will provide certainty for sellers about how to verify a buyer's age.

Q. What is a bladed article?

- A bladed article is any knife, knife or razor blade, axe, article which has a blade or which is sharply pointed and which is made or adapted for use for causing injury to the person.
- Non-locking folding pocketknives with a cutting edge no longer than three inches and disposable razor blade cartridges are exempt from this list

Q. What information do companies have to share when reporting a bulk sale?

- Before the bulk sale reporting measure comes into force, the Government will bring forward further secondary legislation specifying the details which sellers will have to provide. This will include how and when sales are to be reported.

Q. Are online knife retailers in scope of the personal liability for tech executives measure?

- No, this measure only applies to search service providers, social media platforms, and online marketplaces.
- Online marketplaces differ from online retailers. An online marketplace provides a platform for multiple sellers to list and sell their products. Whereas an online retailer sells its own products directly to consumers.

Q. What does it mean when it says about letting of crossbows? How will these age verification measures apply?

- There are businesses who hire out crossbows (“letting”), and other equipment, for corporate events or entertainment. Where this is done online then these age verification measures will apply to both the hire and delivery of the equipment.

Footnotes

1. [Consultation on new knife legislation proposals to tackle the use of machetes and other bladed articles in crime \(accessible\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/machetes-and-other-bladed-articles-proposed-legislation/consultation-on-new-knife-legislation-proposals-to-tackle-the-use-of-machetes-and-other-bladed-articles-in-crime-accessible)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/machetes-and-other-bladed-articles-proposed-legislation/consultation-on-new-knife-legislation-proposals-to-tackle-the-use-of-machetes-and-other-bladed-articles-in-crime-accessible>)
2. [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2024)
(<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2024>)



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