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Dear Serious Violence Legal Duty Consultation team

**Re. Home Office consultation: on a new legal duty to support a multi-agency approach to preventing and tackling serious violence**

This response is sent on behalf of Unite the Union, Britain and Ireland's largest union. Unite's members work in a range of industries including manufacturing, transport, financial services, print, media, construction, not-for-profit sectors and public services, with 100,000 members in the National Health Service, 80,000 members in local authorities and around 50,000 in charities and community organisations many of which work with communities and individuals on the frontline of serious violence. These include members delivering social work, social care, housing, youth services, children's centres, schools, waste and refuse, advice, libraries, craft and maintenance, as well as in public health functions such as school nurses and health visitors.

Unite is supportive in principle with taking a public health approach to tackling serious violence in our communities but does not think a statutory duty as proposed is the right approach. It is Unite's belief that acute social ills, such as violence, are far better solved through early intervention and prevention, as opposed to costly acute services and the criminal justice system.

A preventative policing strategy involves many vital non-police services such as legal and advice, education, youth work, homeless support, social work, mental health and drug and alcohol services, as well as victim and survivor support organisations e.g. women's refuges. Many of Unite's members are specifically involved in these early intervention activities and providing support for people at risk.

Both poverty and inequality are strongly linked to crime. It is therefore imperative that the government's crime policy is firmly rooted in an economic strategy that prioritises prosperity, driving greater equality and a fairer distribution of wealth.

It is ironic therefore that this consultation comes on the back of huge cuts to those services best placed to deliver preventative interventions over the last decade. Virtually all sectors of the public sector have been chronically underfunded by this government, and the Coalition before it, yet preventative services such as in public health, police staff, youth work and other local authority funded services have been particularly hard hit. Many local authorities have simply stopped delivering or commissioning services such as school nursing, youth and play work. CIPFA analysis recently revealed that council spending on youth services has fallen by 18% over the last four years<sup>1</sup> alone, over the last decade health visitor<sup>2</sup> and school nurse numbers have tumbled<sup>3</sup> and 10,000s of police staff have been cut<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.publicfinance.co.uk/news/2019/03/council-spending-young-peoples-services-drops-18>

<sup>2</sup> <https://fullfact.org/health/health-visitor-numbers-england-down-fifth-2015/>

Since 2010 local government has faced the brunt of the cuts to public spending with 37% cut from the local government budget between 2010 and 2015 (IFS) with a further 56% due to be cut by 2019/20. Local authorities' spending power per household is on course to fall by an average of 23 per cent (£243) between 2010-11 and 2019-20.

Despite government assurances, cuts have not fallen on those with the broadest shoulders, but rather appear to have been targeted at the poorest areas of the country<sup>5</sup>. Urban inner-city areas with the highest rates of poverty and deprivation have tended to face far higher cuts due to higher and growing demand for services, as well as central government's regressive policy of changes to local business rates, council tax and local authority funding formulas. Nine of the ten most deprived councils in the country have seen cuts of almost three times the national average cut, when these are precisely the kinds of areas most in need of support.

Public services in all parts of the country urgently need more funding to deliver the services that our communities rely on. Crucial to this is a fair funding formula that sustainably addresses the significant extra demands in deprived areas and makes sure that resources reach the areas of highest social need. This is clearly not the direction of travel as in the last few months this government has been consulting on several proposals that will do the complete opposite<sup>6</sup>, redistributing funding from poorer areas of the economy to more affluent areas, while shuffling money between public services rather than providing vitally needed additional resources.

Imposing a statutory duty on these services is therefore setting them up to fail, as many are already struggling or failing to meet current statutory duties such as safeguarding.

Unite is concerned that the government's approach is seeking to pass the buck for solving knife crime onto services such as schools and hospital staff which is wholly inappropriate. Unite believes that government must accept the impact the decimation of preventative services, particularly youth services, has had, leaving few safe places for children to go outside of school hours or during the holidays.

Bringing all public sector workers under scope risks replicating many of the failures of other government policies such as the hostile environment and Prevent. Unite shares the concerns of Liberty<sup>7</sup> and others that the strategy being proposed may emulate the failings and abuses of the government's Prevent strategy. An imposed statutory duty could do a huge amount of damage within communities, enabling discrimination, prejudice, stigma and racial profiling, while also putting public sector staff at risk and undermining their professional duties and capacities to do their job.

For professionals such as health visitors, there is a risk that such an approach becomes another tick box/KPI exercise rather than a meaningful intervention. Data on vulnerable children and families is already shared under safeguarding protocols and arrangements therefore to add this into the mix as a separate requirement could mean that health visitors and school nurses are no longer seen as

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/school-nurse-drop-uk\\_5bacd2f5e4b0353bd2d1a66f?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAMUrKYYMalv0uly0aT-tMbSLTs125Ds0ANUbjYFpJT0zCHbdHo7kKw56U\\_z7ycVc1tdjm1Ju5s1b\\_rpvGm\\_EbV\\_fw6D9SD2xnvGN\\_dr1CPyb5piZSHQv3OOCXzYBMNe2IICpde6eoRF\\_SNjcHBICX6-3XyjTyhXBksbTJeMF8S](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/school-nurse-drop-uk_5bacd2f5e4b0353bd2d1a66f?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAMUrKYYMalv0uly0aT-tMbSLTs125Ds0ANUbjYFpJT0zCHbdHo7kKw56U_z7ycVc1tdjm1Ju5s1b_rpvGm_EbV_fw6D9SD2xnvGN_dr1CPyb5piZSHQv3OOCXzYBMNe2IICpde6eoRF_SNjcHBICX6-3XyjTyhXBksbTJeMF8S)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-spend-100m-for-staff-cuts-of45-000-m5nr6qtrt>

<sup>5</sup> IFS, *A time of revolution? British local government finance in the 2010s*, October 2016  
<https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/comms/R121.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.publicfinance.co.uk/news/2019/02/local-government-funding-formula-must-include-deprivation-levels>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/02/knife-crime-prevent-teachers-doctors-youth-violence>

trusted professionals and potentially more children and families would go undetected or supported.

Similarly, while youth services should be central to strategies that prevent violence among young people their involvement within any multi-agency response must not undermine their essential mission and role. For youth work to be effective it must be seen as separate and independent from the police or social services. Youth work delivers a service that helps young people to learn about themselves, others and society through non-formal educational activities which involves enjoyment, challenge and learning. Youth Work operates on young people's own personal and recreational territory - within both their geographic and interest communities. The young person's life experience is respected and forms the basis for shaping the agenda in negotiation with peers and youth workers. Youth work should help to build the capacity of young people to consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control.

Youth work has three essential and definitive features:

- Young people choose to participate
- The young person takes part voluntarily. She/he chooses to be involved, not least because they want to relax, meet friends and have fun. The young person decides whether to engage or to walk away.
- Youth work must build from where young people are.

Any involvement in a multi-agency response should be within these parameters and should not be part of the 'policing' of young people.

Unite therefore believes that this policy needs a rethink. It must be driven by the staff and communities who understand the problem, rather than top down dictats from central government. That means promoting a voluntary approach that develops around local circumstances and crucially does not lead to a surveillance state or undermine other professional in the process. Crucially there must be sufficient resources throughout the public sector to put in place the preventative services our communities need and deserve.

Unite opposes the requirement on employees to share data about people, but are clear that if there is a vulnerable adult who is a danger to themselves or others then there is already a duty for employees to share concerns with relevant health and police professionals and that this framework of legislation is already adequate.

The consultation document isn't specific as to how a new duty to share information about serious crime is extended and this is where there is undoubtedly a cause for concern.

Unite would be happy to provide further written or oral responses to any of the issues covered in this submission.

Yours Sincerely,

**Gail Cartmail**  
**Assistant General Secretary**

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