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JAMIESON SETS OUT RADICAL BLUEPRINT TO TACKLE CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

A strategy aimed at tackling the cultural acceptance of violent behaviour in some of our communities is to be rolled out through 2006, Justice Minister Cathy Jamieson confirmed today.

This new strategy to challenge the culture, and in some cases acceptance, of violence in Scotland is in addition to radical licensing reforms to break the link between binge drinking and crime, and the five-point plan to address knife crime in Scotland.

Speaking as statistics released today confirmed that there were 137 homicides in Scotland last year, the Minister spelled out action on a number of fronts including:

- expanding Strathclyde Police's Violence Reduction Unit to create a national 'centre of excellence' for violence prevention, which will provide consultancy advice and share best practice across Scotland.
- establishing an Executive-led national working group to tackle violence, featuring senior policy makers from a range of key departments, and drawing in a range of anti-violence experts to share their experience of violence prevention.
- working with ACPOS and the VRU on a series of focused national campaigns, to tackle specific types of violence such as weapon carrying.
- creating a dedicated national website for those working in this field to share best practice, highlight successful initiatives and provide ideas for local solutions to violence issues.
- doubling the penalty for possession of knives in public from two to four years.
- enhancing police powers to allow them to arrest anyone suspected of carrying a knife or offensive weapons in public.

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- increasing the minimum age for buying a knife from 16 to 18.
 - consulting on creating a licensing scheme for the sale of non-domestic knives.
 - consulting on banning the sale of swords.
 - cracking down on 'irresponsible promotional activities' which will ensure drinks have to be sold at the same price for at least 72 hours and a ban on specific irresponsible promotions such 'happy hours' that encourage binge and speed drinking like two-for-ones.


Ms Jamieson said:

“For too long, violence has been a fact of life - cutting short too many young lives and undermining our collective hopes to create a safer, stronger Scotland. While this problem is neither new nor unique to Scotland, it is one which must be addressed.

“Serious violent behaviour is a problem which rarely affects those living in our leafy suburbs. It is however, a harsh daily reality for too many people in hard-pressed communities. Violence which, as last year’s homicide statistics remind us, often involves a victim and attacker who know each other, is often carried out by young men between the ages of 16 and 24, mostly occurs between 6pm and midnight at the weekends, and too often is fuelled by drink.

“In the past year, the Executive has brought forward legislation to tackle the twin problems of knives and irresponsible drinking. But we have also been developing a ground-breaking new national approach to tackling violence, focusing particularly on weapons crime amongst young men. This builds upon successful anti-violence initiatives already in place, for example the work of the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in Glasgow.

“An approach that involves a range of partners from the NHS to transport bodies, from local authorities, to families and schools. Our approach recognises that such a long-term problem cannot be solved overnight, but is clear that we also need to take action now to prevent more lives being cut short.



“Strathclyde – which accounts for around 60 per cent of Scotland’s violent crime – has demonstrated this. While the VRU is still in the early stages of its work, violent crime statistics for the first 6 months of this year show significant improvements. Compared to the 2004 statistics murder is down almost a quarter, and attempted murders are down by 31 per cent. We need to build on that kind of approach throughout the country.

“Tackling this problem is not just about greater efforts by Government, police and other public services. It is also for individuals and their families to set standards of behaviour for themselves and the people they know, and to create a climate in which respect is earned by the way a person carries out their life – and not what they carry in their pocket. Where communities look up to strong men and women – not just so-called ‘hard men’.”