

Background Papers for the 2019 Annual Meetings

Motion 1 FROM THE FOY SOCIETY

Knife Crime

We are all painfully aware of the rising incidence of knife crime in British towns and cities. The fact that the victims are predominantly school children and young people is particularly distressing. Knife attacks often result in fatal or desperately life changing injuries with devastating effects on the family and friends of victims, and their communities.

Part 1 of this motion simply places on record the deep concern of the Unitarian community about this escalating scourge in our society.

Part 2 of the motion recognises the complexity of the problem. Poverty, lack of worthwhile jobs and opportunities for young people, pressures within the education system, cuts in local services, reductions in community policing, broken homes, drugs and gang culture are some of the many structural problems in modern Britain which can be said to contribute to the insecurity which leads young people to feel the need to arm themselves with knives. Tackling knife crime requires a co-ordinated campaign across all the agencies involved with these issues, and it must be adequately funded, reversing the damaging effect of austerity on public bodies and charities struggling to make things better.

Part 2 of the motion places Unitarians firmly in support of this approach, drawing on the work of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU), particularly in Glasgow where just such a programme has been put into practice and achieved significant reductions in the incidence of knife crimes. The core principle of the Glasgow approach is a multi-agency programme that treats violence and knife crime as a public health issue rather than simply a matter of policing. A detailed article on the work of the SVRU can be found on the following link:

<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/glasgow-crime>

Parts 1 and 2 of this motion are intended to set the scene for the issue we want to raise in part 3. The key aim of this motion is to highlight a matter which has, so far, received little attention in the extensive media coverage of knife crime. That is the wide availability of **sharp pointed knives** in retail outlets, supermarkets and through the internet.

There is a great deal of evidence that blades with sharp points are responsible for the most devastating and often fatal injuries associated with knife crime incidents. Pointed blades quickly and easily penetrate deep into the body, damaging vital organs. Even with immediate medical attention victims often die within minutes, or suffer injuries from which they never fully recover.

The sale of knives is already tightly controlled by legislation. However, anyone over the age of 18 can walk into a supermarket or hardware store and purchase viciously sharp pointed knives for domestic purposes. Knives of this type are also easily obtained through the internet where age controls are notoriously difficult to enforce. Our kitchen drawers are full of sharp pointed knives obtained for perfectly legitimate purposes but which are lethal weapons in different circumstances. These are readily accessible to young family

members wishing to protect themselves without understanding how dangerous such knives can be.

In 2005 a team of A & E doctors published research findings in the British Medical Journal indicating that kitchen knives were used in as many as half of all stabbings. They said that a pointed long blade pierces the body like “cutting into a ripe melon”. They consulted 10 top UK chefs and found that such knives have little practical value in the kitchen. The doctors called for them to be banned – see the following links for further details:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4581871.stm>

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/may/27/ukcrime.prisonsandprobation>

More recently, in May 2018, retiring Crown Court Judge Nic Madge, speaking at his retirement ceremony, called for the points of kitchen knives to be rounded and blunted to reduce the number of young men dying from stab wounds in street attacks. He said that the existing measures, imposing tight controls on the sale of knives to youths, have little effect because “the vast majority of knives carried by youths are ordinary kitchen knives” likely to have come from their mothers’ kitchen drawers. Further details can be found on the following links:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-44278556>

<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2018/07/20/nic-madge-rise-in-knife-crime-is-a-public-health-emergency/>

Clearly blunt ended knives can still cause nasty, slash type injuries but the medical evidence is that these are much less likely to penetrate inner organs thus significantly reducing the incidence of fatal or life changing results.

We recognise that there will be much detailed work to be done to establish an effective programme to achieve the changes we are seeking. For this reason the motion calls for the authorities to “investigate ways and means . . .” rather than prescribing specific actions. Such a programme would involve working with manufacturers and distributors to make blunt ended knives the default design, restricting availability of sharp pointed knives to essential purposes with appropriate controls, ‘amnesties’ to encourage people to dispose of existing pointed knives in favour of new blunt ended stock and, possibly, campaigns to enable existing sharp knives to be modified to the safer configuration.

We believe that effective action to reduce, over time, domestic stocks of sharp pointed knives would be a valuable contribution to multi-agency programmes to bring down the tragic effects of knife crime on our young people and their families.

Motion 2 FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The considerable contribution of Martin West will be presented to the Annual Meetings, rather than in a background paper, in line with normal practice.

Motion 3 FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Findhorn Unitarian Network (FUN)

The Executive Committee request that the Findhorn Unitarian Network be welcomed into Membership of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches as an Affiliated Society. The Executive Committee considers that the FUN meets the criteria set out in By-laws:

2.3.1 A society to be affiliated shall exist on an international, national (UK) or cross-regional basis.

FUN exists on a national basis. All members of the Unitarian Movement are invited and encouraged to attend this annual event.

2.3.2 It shall have existed at least two years before seeking affiliation.

FUN has existed for more than 2 years. FUN started as an ad hoc interim committee in March 2016 and objects were as stated in promoting the 2017 FUN Experience. In April 2017 FUN held its first AGM and adopted a constitution with revised objects. FUN held its first week at Findhorn in January 2017, the second in January 2018. The next FUN week is organised for May 2019.

2.3.3 Minimum membership shall be 12.

Membership includes all of those who have attended a FUN week and the committee (which is comprised of a Treasurer, a convenor and two other members). Total number of members is 32.

2.3.4 Constitution and rules shall be duly stated and observed.

A Constitution has been agreed.

2.3.5 Objects shall be clearly stated.

- a) to benefit from an experience of living in a community in which daily spiritual practice is part of the ethos
- b) to learn from the experiences of the Findhorn Foundation community, ideas that could be applied to leadership, renewal and growth within Unitarian communities
- c) to foster a collective commitment toward renewal and growth among the Unitarians who participate
- d) to report to our Congregations, Districts and Unitarian Societies on what we have learnt from our experiences at Findhorn
- e) to mentor individual or joint initiatives that emerge from our experiences
- f) to provide a report to the GA Annual Meetings in order to seek a wider dissemination of the ideas and initiatives
- g) to provide members of the Findhorn Foundation community with an awareness of the Unitarian ethos, especially commitment to social action, care for the environment and mutual support for each person's spiritual journey.

2.3.6 An Annual General Meeting shall be held to appoint officers and committee and adopt reports and audited/independently examined accounts, which shall be supplied to the General Assembly.

AGM's are held annually at the GA meeting. Financial statement for the last 2 years presented.

2.3.7 An annual subscription shall be paid to the General Assembly, as determined by the Executive Committee from time to time.

FUN are prepared to pay this subscription on request.