



SYSTEMIC LEARNING REVIEW ON SERIOUS YOUTH VIOLENCE

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and reasons for conducting the review

1. Between June 2019 and April 2020 Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) ('the partnership') carried out a review of the response of safeguarding services to serious youth violence in the borough of Hounslow ('the review'). The review was triggered by the violent killing of a local teenager (referred to further below as Child S) but has looked more widely at the services provided to a group of young people whose lives shared many common features with that of the victim. At the time of writing the report, the young person's death remains the subject of a criminal investigation. Further details of the circumstances are therefore not provided in order to protect the privacy of family members or to risk prejudicing the criminal investigation.
2. HSCP carried out a rapid review of the death in line with the statutory guidance, though this gives no specific direction as to whether the deaths of young people as a result of violence outside the family should be the subject of a statutory review and few such reviews have been published.¹ The rapid review decided that the death of Child S should not be the subject of a Serious Case Review (now Child Safeguarding Practice Review).² Instead it agreed to carry out a thematic review which would evaluate the services being provided to a cohort of young men in the borough and make recommendations. Deliberately, no attempt was made to look at the experience of girls and young women.
3. The review would be 'systemic' in that it would look at the backgrounds of the young people, their family circumstances and the way in which agencies with safeguarding responsibilities had responded to their needs over time. It would look at information about their wider environment (commonly now referred to as 'contextual' information) in so far as this was documented in their records or could be identified from professionals who knew them. The proposed approach was subsequently endorsed by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, the body that oversees safeguarding reviews on behalf of central government.³ The safeguarding partnership commissioned an independent reviewer to lead the review. He had carried out a number of reviews of incidents in which young people had been victims of knife crime in other local authority areas in London and a thematic review triggered by a similar incident in a county council.⁴
4. In order to fulfil its objectives, the review has had to take account of sensitive personal information about a number of young people and their families. The violent death of a young person will often be the trigger for retaliatory violence which may be indiscriminate or targeted on the basis of speculation. The review has therefore taken steps to reduce the risk that any of the young people are identified in this report and will continue to do so as the findings of the review are circulated and discussed. A number of professionals in the borough may know who these young people are (or think they know). In discussions that might arise from this report, they have a particular responsibility not to speculate about their identities or to share further information about them.
5. For the purpose of this report the term 'serious youth violence' is used to include the following types of offences committed by young people: more serious violent assaults,

¹ [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#) (Section 4)

² Ibid

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/child-safeguarding-practice-review-panel>

⁴ https://www.bucksscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Serious_Case_Reviews/SYV-Thematic-Case-Review-Report.pdf

possession of offensive weapons including knives, robbery using a knife and more serious drug supply offences.⁵ The importance of this cluster of offences is that they tend to point to the influence of organised criminal activity in the lives of young people. This is discussed further in Sections 22 - 30 below.

1.2 The national and local context

6. The review took place at a time when there was a considerable public and political concern about the large number of young people being killed or seriously injured, often by other young people or young adults. This continues and is given regular focus by the violent death of another young person. The deaths abated during the Covid-19 lockdown though if the underlying causes of violence remain in place then there is no reason to think that the violent deaths of adolescents in London and elsewhere will not also resume.
7. Child S was one of 23 teenagers stabbed to death in London during 2019 (the figure was correct at 23 November 2019). This is the largest number of fatal stabbings since comparable records began in 2008.⁶ There were 14,480 crimes involving the use of a knife in London in 2018-19, the highest figure since current records began in 2010-11.⁷ Of these just under 4,500 were committed by 10-17-year olds.
8. In England and Wales, offences involving the use of knives have increased by about 64% compared with five years ago, and there have been year-on-year increases since the year ending March 2014 (with an increase of 7% in the most recent year). The number of these offences remains lower than its previous peak in the years ending March 2009 and 2010.
9. In the year ending March 2018, 51% of children received a community sentence following a knife or offensive weapon offence. Although the number of children in custody has fallen consistently over recent years, the number of custodial sentences given to children for a knife or offensive weapon offence has been increasing as the number of such crimes has been increasing. In the year ending March 2018, nearly 600 knife and offensive weapon offences resulted in immediate custody, which is nearly double the volume in the year ending March 2013.⁸
10. Although the Youth Offending Service (YOS) in Hounslow generally performs well and was rated by independent inspectors in January 2019 as providing a 'good' service, its latest annual plan reveals some concerning local trends in relation to serious youth violence:
 - An increasing trend towards crimes involving knives and a spike in violent offending during the first part of 2019 (including the death of Child S)⁹

⁵ There are more specific definitions of the term in government guidance which focus on the victimisation of young people. For the purpose of this report we use the term in a much more generic way to include the following types of offences: more serious assaults, possession and use of knives, when committed by young people

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-50507433> one more was shot and there was one other recorded violent death

⁷ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/864736/knife-crime-in-london/>

⁸ YJB statistical bulletin

⁹ London Borough of Hounslow, Youth Justice Plan 2019-20.

- An increase (compared to 2017-18) in the number of young people sentenced to custody (and the total number of custodial sentences) despite reduction of this figure being an explicit national and local YOS policy priority ¹⁰
- An increase in the proportion of violent crimes against the person committed by young people that involved a knife (or bladed article); young black people were disproportionately represented in the total, and specific nationalities were over-represented within the black and minority ethnic community.¹¹
- An increase in the proportion of drug offences committed by young people that are for possession with intent to supply (as opposed to possession for personal use)

None of these statistics diminish the value of what is being done by the YOS and other agencies, or trends in other outcomes for children. They point to the emergence of forms of organised crime in the borough that have a direct impact on the lives of young people and demonstrate the nature of the challenge faced by communities and professionals.

1.3 **Review terms of reference**

11. The review terms of reference were agreed by a multi-agency panel, drawing on the experience of other reviews but including specific questions that agencies in Hounslow said they wanted to be addressed. The Terms of Reference were shared with the Community Safety Partnership which had offered practical and financial support to the review. These are summarised here:

Review objectives

The objective of the project is to seek to combine the following:

- i. Information from a cohort of individual case histories which can provide
 - a. a valid understanding of the stories of young people who have been offenders or victims (or both) of serious youth violence, and
 - b. common themes (history, risk, needs) that emerge from these case examples
- ii. Themes emerging from the patterns of service provision (e.g. educational disruption, involvement with the YOS)
- iii. This should be considered within the context of wider information about crime statistics from Hounslow and London
- iv. An evaluation of the organisational framework that currently exists for responding to the needs of this group of young people

From this should emerge

- v. A better understanding of risk factors in individual cases, including individual, family and community (contextual) factors
- vi. A better understanding of the challenges that services face and areas for possible improvement

¹⁰ The plan does not give a detailed breakdown of the reasons for custodial sentences and some may be for the persistent breach of community orders; however this suggests a growing number of convictions for the most serious offences.

¹¹ Youth Justice Plan 2019-20 (page 31)

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| vii. | Recommendations to changes in approach – which may include questions about how the areas of children’s safeguarding services and colleagues whose brief is to improve community safety can collaborate in the most effective way |
| viii. | Any recommendations should take account of learning from other local authority areas, particularly taking into account approaches that are believed to be making a positive impact elsewhere |

12. The value of this approach is that it starts with the experience of a number of young people, living in a particular local context, building from this to seek to understand the risk factors that applied in their cases and the strengths and weaknesses in the services that they received. This should be seen as complementing other work such as the Croydon Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) review (a review of a larger number of what it termed ‘vulnerable adolescents’); the Tower Hamlets LSCB review of six adolescents involved in violent incidents in the borough;¹² as well as a number of academic reviews of the literature on youth crime.¹³
13. The academic reviews tend to generate similar findings about the type of services that are said to have been found to be successful. This review offers an understanding of the organisational realities of putting such approaches into practice in a specific, current, local context.
14. It is important to understand that this is preliminary work. In some of the areas discussed specific recommendations will be identified. In others, current challenges may need to be better understood and prioritised by local agencies and partnerships.

Review method

The review considered the following material

- Multi-agency chronologies on 13 young people were compiled by the safeguarding partnership business unit, covering services provided from the point of secondary school transfer to August 2019 (March 2019 in relation to Child S). These were discussed at panel meetings attended by representatives of partnership members. An update on the boys’ subsequent journeys was provided by the YOS shortly before the review was finalised.
- Attendance at a small number of MACE and Community Safety Partnership panels (curtailed because of Covid-19)
- Discussion with service managers and leads
- Review of background materials including Hounslow, London and national documents
- Direct engagement with the families and young people was curtailed by the Covid 19 pandemic and the fact that a number of the young people spent periods in

¹² Croydon LSCB (2019) Vulnerable Adolescents Review, <https://croydonlscb.org.uk/2019/02/croydon-vulnerable-adolescent-review-report-2019/> Tower Hamlets LSCB Alex Chard (2015) Troubled Lives Tragic Consequences – a thematic review, Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Board

¹³ A public health approach to serious youth violence for policy making in the London Borough of Lambeth: an evidence review, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)32882-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)32882-X/fulltext) The local authority version of this report is found at https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Lambeth_SYV_201819.pdf; an earlier review by the Early Intervention Foundation / Home Office (2015) What works to prevent gang involvement, youth violence and crime - a rapid review of interventions delivered in the UK and abroad

custody or faced further criminal charges. It is proposed that further work will be undertaken on this for a follow up to the report.

2 THE YOUNG PEOPLE

2.1 The young people

15. A group of 13 young males was selected from the current group of service users of the YOS with a view to identifying patterns in their histories and service provision. The aim was to work outwards from the murdered Child S in an attempt to understand the experience of a group of young people who were involved in – or appeared to be becoming involved in - serious youth violence or organised criminal activity. Brief details of the cohort of young people are provided below along with three pen-pictures.

The cohort was made up in the following way and included:

- i. Child S and a second young person in his family (who though younger was involved in more serious offending than Child S at the time of the death)
- ii. 6 young men, all known to the YOS, who had been involved in serious offending at the time of Child S's death. They had links with Child S or his brother and with one another. When the review began its work in September 2019, 3 of the young men were aged 17, and 3 aged 18.
- iii. 5 young men, all known to the police and the YOS, from the same part of the borough who were believed to be on the threshold of becoming involved in more serious criminal activity. Some had known links to the older cohort. Their ages were 14 (1), 15 (3) and 16 (1).

The aim was to capture the experience of a group of young men, recognising that this did not provide a random or typical sample of those involved in serious youth violence.

With this in mind it is to be noted that 12 of the 13 selected were from black or minority ethnic backgrounds (including 2 whose families came from Eastern Europe). One was from a white UK family. Four had moved to the UK as asylum seekers or refugees late in their latter primary school years.

Three had grown up with their father. Two grew up with a stepfather. Eight were looked after by their mothers. Ten had been excluded from school or college (either for fixed terms or permanently) or had experienced other 'involuntary' moves out of mainstream education (described in more detail later). However, six remained in mainstream school until they took their GCSEs. These characteristics and the involvement of services with the young men are explored further in this report.

The review has highlighted some aspects of disproportionality, but it does not seek to do so in a comprehensive way. The study had no comparator group. This selection was not made because this group of young people were largely black or from a minority ethnic background; nor should it be taken as suggesting that their involvement in offending is linked to their ethnicity. But if there is a concern to understand why it is that black and minority ethnic young people are over-represented in some parts of the criminal justice system, there is no alternative but to seek to obtain a better understanding of their lives.

The majority of the young people lived in, went to school or college in, or had other strong links with one locality in Hounslow. A cohort drawn from another part of the borough would probably have had fewer black and minority ethnic young people and might be different in other respects. For example, other families might have longer term, cross-generational patterns of being involved in offending and have developed a better understanding of the criminal justice system.

Although there would be differences, this may not be predominantly determined by locality. The evidence from other parts of London is that as organised criminal activity becomes more prevalent, it become less focused on postcode and local loyalty and more focused on business opportunities; criminal groups become more geographically mobile and more ethnically diverse.¹⁴

The following brief case examples illustrate the routes taken by three young people and a variety of risk factors

Child 1 was the brother of Child S. He was born in 2002 and moved to the UK in 2011 (age 9) from a country with a long history of civil conflict and war. His experiences in his country of origin and coming to the UK are not known as the family have never wanted to discuss them with professionals.

His poor behaviour and violence at school led to exclusion in year 8. He joined another school after a managed move but his attendance at this school is unclear. He twice enrolled at college but never attended.

From age 14 he was reported missing, used cannabis and was suspected to be carrying knives. He regularly went missing and it was never established where he had been.

Social care assessments were made in May 2017 and Feb / April 2018. They always identified risks but took the view that interventions were best made through the YOS as social workers would have no additional role to play. The family rejected voluntary involvement on the grounds that he was 'OK at home'.

Reported offending over the following three years included: robbery of mobile phones, vehicle theft, being in a group armed with knives and a sword, possession with intent to supply, possession of large amounts of cash and burglary (in hindsight it is clear that a group had taken over a house in order to supply drugs, an example of what is termed cuckooing).

YOS orders were made in 2017 and 2018 but there was very limited compliance.

He has subsequently served a custodial sentence and been remanded in custody for repeatedly breaching remand conditions.

Child 2 was born in 2005. There had been a long history of social care involvement with his family due to violence in the household

He had CAMHS involvement at age 10 because of conduct disorder and 'emotions'.

¹⁴ Whittaker et al, From Postcodes to Profit: How gangs have changed in Waltham Forest, South Bank University

His attendance at secondary school was irregular and his mother was unable to control him at home

He was permanently excluded from secondary school due to persistent disruptive behaviour and problems outside school at age 13. Attempts were made to help through the local authority pupil referral unit (PRU) but from this point he was spending time with older peers and gradually disengaged from education.

Social care had contacts and involvement in 2005, 2010, 2014, 2014, and from 2016 – August 2019

He had a high level of involvement with older offenders, going missing several times and has been the victim of several serious attacks.

The YOS offered preventive work in 2018 but he refused to engage

In June 2019 he was referred to the PEACE project and a supportive bail package was developed after arrest for involvement in a number of robberies, some of which are still to be fully dealt with in court.¹⁵ A referral was made to the National Referral Mechanism which would allow the police to prioritise his protection rather than prosecution.

During late 2019 appointments with the YOS and social care had not been kept. But subsequently he started engaging well with the YOS and is planning to attend college in September.

Child 3 was born in 2002. There were child in need and protection plans because of his mother's alleged violence towards his sister. These interventions have had no impact on the emergence of his difficulties.

He was excluded from school on several occasions in years 7,8 and 9 having made serious threats and been violent to both staff and pupils. His mother did not want him living with her at one point.

The family has strong educational aspirations, but he was unable to attend or achieve very much. He was assessed at the PRU, but his behaviour was considered to be too violent to attend a mainstream school.

There have been numerous missing episodes and he was involved in a significant number of robberies in which threats were made with knives. These took place across London, some with other members of this cohort.

In his final year at the PRU, there was a prolonged period of poor attendance and his offending escalated. There have been a series of YOS orders with little compliance, then finally a Criminal Behaviour Order.

He has been stabbed and has been referred to the National Referral Mechanism because of fears of exploitation. He is currently on remand awaiting trial for a serious violent offence.

¹⁵ The PEACE (Protecting and Empowering, Against Child Exploitation) Project aims to address issues of both child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation across the borough by utilising a mixture of assertive outreach work, systemic family therapeutic intervention and a contextual safeguarding approach to safeguard young people from exploitation outside of the family home.
https://www.hounslow.gov.uk/info/20059/children_and_families/1921/peace_project

2.2 Further information about the young people: educational experiences, involvement in offending, victimisation and experience of exploitation

16. This section of the report provides an overview of the experience of the young people in relation to education, offending and exploitation. From Section 36 onwards the report provides more information about the involvement of individual services in their lives.

Education, schools and colleges

17. The children's journeys through the education system varied greatly, with some recurring patterns. Almost all experienced poor attendance or behaviour problems in the first three secondary school years (Years 7-9). The behaviour problems ranged from persistent and serious disruptive behaviour to examples of violence against other pupils and staff members. Almost all of the young people were excluded for fixed terms. Three pupils were permanently excluded but more commonly boys experienced what the review will term 'involuntary' school moves (managed move to another school, transfer to alternative provision including the PRU or college, and home education) which are sometimes just as disruptive. Many of the moves were arranged specifically to avoid permanent exclusion.

18. The chronologies occasionally highlight other specific educational and learning needs, but these were rarely the main focus of attention. It is therefore possible that other educational needs were not fully investigated because poor behaviour became the major concern. Some of the young people had higher than average ability but were unable to capitalise on it. This was sometimes linked with having experienced trauma or loss in their family, or because of negative pressure from other young people. Some of the families evidently had high educational aspirations, which at certain points enabled parents and professionals to form a common purpose in their contact. Some of these boys and their families found it difficult and frustrating to reconcile their considerable academic potential with the negative consequences of their behaviour.

19. Despite a number of fixed-term exclusions, six of the 13 boys remained in their original mainstream school, most taking some GCSEs though often achieving results below their potential. These boys seem as a rule to have been more academically able. Outside school they are believed to have lived a parallel life on the streets with some offending, particularly dealing drugs. Some of the academically able boys became much more prolific drug dealers on leaving school.

20. Once placed outside mainstream school, the boys' attendance tended to fall off, sometimes immediately and sometimes after a period of engagement at the PRU. Attendance services achieved some successes but securing a return to school was often complicated by risks from the community, for example boys finding that the journey to school or the PRU was not safe. Sometimes flexible education arrangements were made to take account of this.

21. Exclusion from college was always the result of either very poor engagement and attendance such as to make the placement unworkable, repeated possession of drugs in the college, drug dealing, or serious violence in or in the vicinity of the college.

Crime and anti-social behaviour

22. Reports to the police that became part of agency case records indicate that these young people were involved in a range of offences including:

- i. Acquisitive crime often involving the use or threatened use of knives

- ii. Possession with intent to supply drugs and behaviours that point to associations with organised crime and exploitation (including possession of knives, associated violence against other young males and possession of large amounts of cash)
- iii. Most of the offences took place in a small area of Hounslow, though a small number of incidents, suggested 'county line' activities outside London. One group carried out robberies in several localities in south and west London
- iv. In addition, a number of the young men had a history of aggressive behaviour towards females (threats made against their mothers and other family members, girlfriends and others, and violence or sexual threats made towards members of the helping professions such as teachers). Most of these incidents were not investigated as potential crimes. One young person received a criminal caution for making threats to a female teacher.

23. In any discussion about youth crime it is important to underline the distinction between the real levels of crime experienced by young people, and proven levels of offending and reoffending as measured by convictions. Brief examination of the young people's case histories shows that their lives are more violent than proven offending figures suggest. Many crimes that would fall within our definition of 'serious' go unreported or undetected. Reasons include the following:

- Victims are unwilling to make a formal complaint, especially if the victim is vulnerable or knows the alleged perpetrator.
- Victims or witnesses refused to provide a formal identification.
- The perpetrator could be recognised, for example on CCTV but there was insufficient additional evidence to make a conviction likely.
- There was plausible intelligence of a suspect's involvement but no useable evidence.
- Forensic or circumstantial evidence linked the individual to the crime without sufficient corroboration to reach the criminal burden of proof.

This is important both for the assessment of risk for the individual young person and in obtaining a wider picture of the impact on the public of serious youth violence.¹⁶

24. All of the young people were known to the YOS, though only one or two have engaged successfully in work required. Since the death of Child S, four have been referred to the PEACE project which can work more flexibly as the involvement is not determined by a statutory order. The project focuses on attempts to achieve engagement over the long term. At the time of writing the report three of the group had sustained some contact workers from the project.

25. In mid-2020 when the review finished its work, six of the group had served custodial sentences, four of which were for serious violent offences, and two more for repeatedly breaching the terms of non-custodial sentences for possession with intent to supply and robberies. Six young men had not come to further notice or were believed to be working well with the YOS. One of these was experiencing deteriorating mental health, probably linked to his exposure to violence before moving as a refugee to UK with his family.

26. The group of young people who were being drawn into criminal activity during 2019 were, for the most part, achieving more positive outcomes than the older group described above. The following explanations have been offered:

¹⁶ Standardised figures of offending and re-offending are of course needed for statistical submissions and comparisons over time. It is vital to be clear which offences young people have been convicted of, but it is misleading to take too much assurance from their low level.

- The older group exerted considerable influence over the younger boys (sometimes a very personal, individual influence). This was weakened when members of the older group were remanded or sentenced for very serious offences. One member of the older group narrowly avoided being found guilty and subsequently changed his behaviour.
- The YOS thinks that the quality of its prevention and diversionary work has improved in the past three years, though these interventions are still rarely offered as part of a wider early help package for the family.

Victimisation and exploitation

27. These young men were also often victims of serious crime. In addition to Child S, three young men are known to have been stabbed (and been seriously enough injured to require medical care) and one had been shot. Others may have been stabbed but not come to the attention of the authorities. The specific circumstances in which a young person becomes the victim of serious violence are often not clear because victims were rarely willing to say who they thought had committed the attacks. Some incidents were provoked because a member of a rival group was the victim or a robbery or assault. Some suggest a less specific group or personal rivalry.
28. All of these young people were reported missing on many occasions. This appears to be the strongest single sign of vulnerability to exploitation. None provided useful information as to their whereabouts. Some missing episodes seem to have initially been triggered by ordinary family conflict while others are reported to have been provoked by peer pressure. Others may have been organised by criminal groups but the lack of specific disclosure in return interviews makes it impossible to be certain.
29. Taken together the experience of these young people strongly suggests the following:
- i. Involvement of a small but significant number of young people in acquisitive crimes such as robbery, increasingly involving violence or the threatened use of knives
 - ii. Young people participating in criminal activity organised by others (including drug selling, delivering drugs, holding large amounts of cash and occasionally weapons, and sometimes in drug dealing in so called 'county lines' outside the borough)
 - iii. Patterns of exploitation serving organised crime, through which some young people are progressing as they grow older, becoming involved in more serious offences, more prolific drug dealing and more violence. Individual case records show how some younger children are drawn gradually into this, though there is no one specific pattern.
30. Review of individual chronologies, discussion with key professionals, and attendance at the local multi-agency exploitation panels, confirmed that professionals had little detailed knowledge of the criminals who are organising this activity. As a result, there are only a limited number of targeted police or multi-agency disruption operations, a pattern that has been identified nationally.¹⁷

¹⁷ The national child safeguarding practice review on children at risk of criminal exploitation states: *'It is also of note that we heard virtually nothing about work to stop or disrupt the activities of the perpetrators of criminal exploitation.... This was a marked difference to the strategies employed by local areas to address child sexual exploitation, where there is often a dual approach to victims and perpetrators'*. They visited one locality *'where a disruption and support plan is developed for each child'*. Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2020) *It was hard to escape - Safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation*, HM Government.

3 A COORDINATED MULTI-AGENCY RESPONSE DURING CRITICAL POINTS IN CHILDREN'S LIVES

3.1 What types of interventions are needed and what principles should underpin them?

31. This section of the report illustrates the need for a coordinated multi-agency response in the lives of children and young people. Section 4 of the report sets out learning for individual organisations and services.
32. To make progress, agencies must be able to intervene at a number of critical points in the lives of children and young people. This will include:
- i. Preventive services to reduce risk factors and help parents make their children more resilient. Such interventions may apply universally or may be targeted at particular localities and groups of children. For example, support and positive activities for children in families who arrive as refugees from countries where there has been armed conflict. These children are currently expected to settle into life in the UK with no specific support. Case reviews and research in other boroughs have highlighted particular difficulties for parents who do not speak English.¹⁸ This points to the need for opportunities and strong encouragement to learn English at an early point.
 - ii. Parenting services that help parents deal with their children in a more authoritative way. Feedback from many parents is that:
 - this needs to happen at an early point, before their children's behaviour starts to cause difficulties at school and in the community but that
 - it needs to anticipate the problems that adolescents growing up in communities affected by crime will encounter.
 - iii. Targeted interventions at the point of key episodes that may alter a child's direction decisively. This might include work to reduce the risk of involuntary school transfer and exclusion or to support young people transferring to education at the pupil referral unit, especially those who have begun to offend or are believed to be associated with young people who offend. It might include mentoring for young people who are beginning to engage in offending or anti-social behaviour or positive activities which can open up new possibilities for young people, and help provide a bridge to education, training and employment.
 - iv. Safeguarding interventions tailored to extra-familial risks. This should give greater recognition to the influence of the social environment on children and their families children. Children's surroundings may unintentionally create conditions that make youth violence more likely to occur and should to be addressed in order to reduce harm to children.
 - v. Interventions that help young people who are already involved in more serious criminality make the decision to change their behaviour. This might mean improving the review and update of YOS risk assessments and developing a better understanding of the traumatic experiences that some young people have experienced. These may in part explain why many do not comply with orders.
 - vi. More effective law enforcement and interventions to disrupt exploitative relationships and networks, closing the gap between the number of offences committed and the number of convictions. Steps to protect young people cannot be successful without more disruptive and punitive action being taken against those

¹⁸ For example, Camden Council (2018) Camden Youth Safety Taskforce, page 18, www.camden.gov.uk/youthsafetytaskforce

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- involved in the 'management' of organised crime who are exploiting young people. Some of these individuals will be adults but others will be under the age of 18.
- vii. This might also include consistent efforts to improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system by reducing the time between offences and court appearances. Current substantial delays in court appearances mean that there is a disconnect in the mind of the young person between their action and its consequences. Addressing this was one of the original reasons for the 1998 reform of the youth justice system.
33. These interventions need to co-exist alongside one another and be coordinated at the strategic and local tactical level. No intervention can make a significant impact in isolation. The way in which agencies work together is critical in providing services, not least because different risk factors operate simultaneously in young people's lives. No matter how well-researched and evaluated each is individually, a series of discrete interventions will have little impact unless collectively they address the most important sources of potential harm. Coordination must begin with statutory agencies working effectively together, they cannot rely on short-term funded projects to take the initiative.
34. This is very well illustrated in relation to a critical period in the lives of the young people in the cohort, years 7-9 at secondary school. Many of the multi-agency chronologies highlighted the following features of this period:
- i. During this period school attendance and behaviour often deteriorated, leading to a series of fixed term exclusions and an involuntary school move for a majority of the young people
 - ii. Overall, parents were much more open to receiving support to become more authoritative, but services were not provided. As their sons' behaviour deteriorated, many parents (primarily mothers) felt disappointed with the services offered and become less confident in their ability to influence their child's behaviour. This often led to a demoralisation (and sometimes fear of their child) that made it more difficult for professionals to engage with parents later on.
 - iii. During this period the young person often engaged in behaviour that (had it led to a conviction) would have been considered as a serious crime, such as a serious assault or possession of drugs in sufficient quantity to suggest involvement in drug supply. This very rarely led to a caution or conviction. The chronologies of this group of young people consistently show a significant gap between the first recorded significant offending and the first serious intervention. As these events received no formal sanction in the community, schools and families were left to deal with their implications alone, adding to pressures on them.
 - iv. If there is no effective intervention at this point, the authority and influence of peers (who may have gang or criminal associations) becomes much more difficult for families and professionals to combat
 - v. If during this phase of the young person's life there is no lead professional (i.e. no early help professional, no social work allocation and no active involvement from the YOS because there is no current order) there may be no one with oversight of the young person's circumstances and no one to ensure that information about different aspects of their life are shared.
35. Similar patterns highlighting the need for coordinated intervention could be found at other points in children's lives.

4 SINGLE-AGENCY AND SPECIFIC SERVICE RESPONSES

4.1 Responding to difficulties identified in education settings

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36. Most discussions of the role of education in relation to serious youth violence focus on the link between permanent exclusion and offending or gang involvement. Other reviews have described how permanent exclusion and other involuntary departures from school are often seen by families as a tipping point in the child's journey out of full-time education, from which there is no way back, and a blow to the family and the child's self-esteem which exposes the young person to greater levels of risk.¹⁹
 37. While the focus on permanent exclusion is a useful starting point, review of the Hounslow cohort and discussions with teachers and leaders from a number of schools, colleges, the PRU and the borough's education service have provided a wider understanding of the role of schools, colleges and other education services.

Exclusion and other involuntary moves, alternative provision and attendance

38. The Timpson review considered in detail the role of school exclusion. Whilst confirming that there is '*no evidence that formal exclusion is a direct cause for a child becoming involved with crime... we do know that there is a correlation*'.²⁰ Timpson also finds '*evidence to suggest that children who have a history of either fixed period or permanent exclusion from school are more likely to be both victims and perpetrators of crime*'. Conversely academic success can be an important protective factor.
39. Whilst it is important to highlight the impact of school decisions on individual children, it is equally important to recognise the legitimate concern that schools have to ensure the safety and promote the learning of all of their pupils. Schools approach this dilemma in different ways.
40. It has been claimed that in secondary schools nationally, pressure to improve examination results may drive the exclusion of pupils predicted to perform very poorly in GCSEs.²¹ This is based on the finding that the peak time for admission to PRUs is at the start of the final GCSE year (11). The evidence from this review did not fit this hypothesis. In the cohort, most school moves (including exclusions) occurred much sooner, commonly in school years 8 and 9. The review found no evidence that head teachers had acted in bad faith in excluding or transferring young people out of their school for reasons linked to likely GCSE performance. Individual case studies suggest wider factors at play relating to the individual child, family and school.
41. As almost all the young people considered by this review were from minority ethnic backgrounds, it can offer no comment on disproportionality. There may be differences in the treatment of pupils from different backgrounds that would merit further evaluation. This would require a level of detailed investigation of individual incidents and the response to them which it was not possible to undertake within a review of this nature. Some Hounslow schools have responded positively to anecdotal evidence of weaknesses in the response to black or minority ethnic children, for example employing mentors to work with specific groups of young people.
42. Permanent exclusion can be a particularly negative event because it will almost always severely limit the young person's future educational options. However, few of the young

¹⁹ For example see Croydon LSCB (2019) Vulnerable Adolescents Review, <https://croydonlscb.org.uk/2019/02/croydon-vulnerable-adolescent-review-report-2019/>

²⁰ HM Government (May 2019) CP92, Timpson Review of School Exclusion

²¹ RSA response to the Timpson review of school exclusion, <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/rsa-blogs/2019/05/timpson> This is at best a tenuous link because any child starting at a PRU in September of year 11 would have been permanently excluded (if indeed that had happened) several months earlier as a result of a process that had gone on for several months

people in the cohort had been permanently excluded. This is mainly because (as with the national approach) the local authority and schools have devised procedures to avoid that. More commonly, young people had experienced upheaval in their secondary education as a result of managed moves between schools, transfer to the PRU, removal from the school roll for home education, or moves to other kinds of alternative provision.

43. From the school perspective, some moves were justified on educational grounds, such as transferring a child to a setting which offered vocational training. Many were preceded by periods of very difficult behaviour, a series of fixed term exclusions and poor attendance. School moves also occur in the context of events taking place in the wider community. Some of the young people had been involved in increasingly serious criminal activity but, for the reasons set out in Section 23 above, these incidents were often not reported to the police. If they were, they were often not investigated successfully or brought to a clear outcome, with either sanction or support being made available. In the absence of an effective wider societal response, schools could be left to handle the impact of these events which manifest in deteriorating attendance and behaviour, sometimes including violence between pupils. All of the college exclusions were preceded by periods of very poor attendance or engagement, violent conduct or drug dealing in the college or violence outside of the college, often in its locality.
44. The borough makes arrangements for alternative provision, usually at its own PRU. Some young people settled well into alternative provision but (as would be expected from other reports and research) there is evidence that these young people sometimes drew one another into criminal behaviour or were targeted by criminals. The review found examples of violent behaviour in alternative provision, directed at other pupils and on a small number of occasions at members of staff (often women).
45. More commonly the main difficulty was of poor attendance at the PRU. The Education Welfare Service works within the statutory framework of warnings and fines for families but also tried to offer some tailored support. Parents do not understand or support the statutory approach and professionals in the education service find it hard to justify. On a number of occasions, it achieved short-term success but once the attendance target was reached the Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) was expected to close the case, sometimes having made some inroads and engaged with the family. This is not a helpful approach.

Poor sharing of information

46. Schools and colleges say that their task is made more difficult by the lack of information sharing about their pupils. This includes limited information about:
 - i. previous behavioural difficulties, exclusion, family background or services provided when children and young people join the school, college or PRU
 - ii. significant family history, unless the parent of the young person shares the information
 - iii. suspected involvement in criminal activity or possible exploitation, such as missing episodes.

Sometimes this is because relatively few of these young people have an allocated social worker, who would be likely to have access to and share such information. The reasons for this are discussed in Section 4.4, but there also appear to be more general weaknesses in the professional system. It is recognised that there should be limits to what a school is told, but the approach to confidentiality should reflect reality of the risk, which for this group of young people is often very high.

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47. Schools and colleges received very little information from schools previously attended by this group of pupils. Only one young person transferred to secondary school with recognised special educational or behavioural needs, but many began to show high levels of difficulty in Year 7. A number of pupils had been in the UK for only a short time before secondary transfer, which may account for the unrecognised needs. It was suggested by one head teacher that the lack of information about behavioural and other educational concerns available on secondary transfer may be because these pupils 'cope' successfully in a protected primary school environment. If there were a more explicit recognition of risk factors at primary school and if early help and family support services were targeted there, secondary schools would be better placed to anticipate the kind of adjustments that they would need to take.
 48. The PRU told the review that it received little information about the wider environment in which its pupils were living and socialising, leaving it to focus more narrowly on young people's attendance and behaviour. It is possible that if the PRU and other alternative education providers received more contextual information, they would be better able to spot the changes in the level of risk to young people and make better informed referrals to other services (which would then receive a higher priority response).
 49. Direct information sharing between the police and schools is limited by the large number of potentially relevant incidents and the capacity of the police. There is no equivalent of Operation Encompass which shares information with schools about domestic abuse incidents for incidents involving adolescents in the community. The 'safer schools' officer system is seen as important but varies according to the availability and approach of the individual officer. Schools did not believe that maintaining capacity in this service had always been a priority for the police.

An enhanced role for schools and colleges

50. While in some regards, they perceive themselves to be semi-detached members of the system safeguarding children from serious youth violence, schools and colleges often hold critical information about individual young people and about groups of children who may be at risk of exploitation, including future groups of young people whose problems are emerging. They are well aware of changes in behaviour and sometimes of links between pupils, former pupils and other young people in the community. One such example emerged during the case discussions that formed part of the work of the review.
51. There is a critical need to spot such groups of young people ahead of time and plan responses. At present there is no agreed mechanism for such information to be shared so that it can inform decisions about individual young people as well as strategic thinking and tactical planning. One potential route would be to enable schools and colleges to make a formal contribution to the borough's safeguarding and exploitation panels. Schools would need to be reassured about the legal basis for sharing such information and its potential impact on children and their families and would need to include references to this in their safeguarding policies, if they do not already encompass this sort of approach.
52. The following recommendations are made to the safeguarding partnership and its members:
 1. When the young person is at risk of exploitation or serious youth violence, Hounslow Council should enable the EWS to work outside the statutory guidance in order to maximise opportunities for young people's long-term re-engagement in education.

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2. Hounslow Council and primary schools in the borough should take steps to improve the identification and response to pupils with behavioural difficulties, improve support at school and in transition to secondary school.
 3. When risk factors for serious youth violence are present, deteriorating behaviour and attendance in Years 7-9 need to be treated as a multi-agency concern and prioritised for an early help service.
 4. The Metropolitan Police Service should consider how to improve the sharing of information about vulnerable pupils with schools, through the Safer Schools police officer system or in some other way so as to make information sharing more consistent.
 5. Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership should ensure that there is a stronger, multi-agency response to incidents of violence in the community (some of which will not lead to prosecution or other formal action) so that schools are not left dealing with their impact on pupils alone.
 6. Hounslow Council and Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership should ensure that schools and colleges (including the PRU) are better integrated into the systems that seek to reduce serious youth violence so that they can receive information about individual children and groups who are potentially at risk. Schools should be able to provide information on groups of children through the borough's exploitations panels (including Operational MACE) or another suitable forum working transparently with their pupils and parents about why this might be necessary.

4.2 Youth justice services and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system

53. A recent study by Crest Advisory sought to understand the factors contributing to increases in serious violent crime.²² One of its four initial lines of enquiry was '*the decline in effective enforcement*' against drug crime and serious violent crime. The research summary noted that '*charge and arrest rates have collapsed whilst the time from offence to charge has steadily increased, even for the most serious crime types, reducing both the 'swiftness' and 'certainty' of punishment*'. Responsibility for this is widely placed on government under-resourcing of the criminal justice system.
54. For many of the more serious alleged offences there are now substantial delays before youth or crown court hearings. As a result, there is sometimes little connection between the offence and the consequences for the young person. Often the circumstances of the young person have changed to a considerable degree by the time the case is heard or further and more serious offences have been committed.
55. For the reasons described in Section 23, the disparity between offences committed and convicted is exaggerated in relation to serious youth violence. The review showed that suspect involvement in unproven crimes was not always fully reflected in risk assessments which often focus only on proven offences. To ensure that risk properly reflects the reality of children's lives there needs to be rapid sharing of information

²² Serious violence in context: Understanding the scale and nature of serious violence - A report by Crest Advisory, https://static.wixstatic.com/ugd/b9cf6c_654f5b6fab914780bd3f895df353e231.pdf The other three factors cited are: 1) changing drug markets, particularly the increasing supply of cocaine; 2) the vulnerability of victims and offenders: children 'at risk' of falling into violence – including children in care and children excluded from school as well as vulnerable adults; and 3) opportunity presented by social media: which can rapidly escalate petty conflicts / spread the contagion of violence

between the police and other agencies and an acknowledgement that some young people's lives are more violent and risky than their proven criminal records often suggest.

56. Several of the young people in the review cohort had been either shot or stabbed and some had been both victim and suspect at different times. As such investigations are complex, suspects are usually released pending further investigation (RUI) or on police bail conditions.²³ Concerns are heightened because of the risk of further attacks on the victim or retribution against the assailant. Even if there are arrests, YOS involvement can only be offered on a voluntary basis, unless the court agreed the implementation of a bail support package. Children who have been involved in these very serious incidents (either as victim or alleged perpetrator) are often in an extremely precarious position, and often face the risk of retaliation.
57. The review understands that in Hounslow a multi-agency response is usually coordinated and there is a specific protocol for the most serious incidents. It is not possible to tell from the young people's individual written records whether this was used or how effective it was. The review was told by a hospital with a major trauma unit serving the borough that the local authority did not always respond as quickly as it would have expected when strategy meetings were needed. It is not clear if these concerns were brought to the attention of more senior managers at the time.
58. Due largely to the complexity of investigations into serious offences, suspects may remain RUI for long periods of time. There is a need to ensure that a coherent multi-agency strategy is always developed and sustained. Sometimes the lack of a conclusive outcome to the investigation leads to pressure to close the case. This should only happen after agreement at sufficiently senior level and after all options have been thoroughly explored with the young person, the family and between professionals.
59. The following recommendations are made:
 7. Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership should ensure that there is a strong multi-agency response to serious incidents of youth violence (to include serious knife attacks, shootings, serious affray) which draws up a coherent plan for every child who is known to be affected. This may need consideration of reducing the threshold for use of the current serious incident protocol.
 8. Hounslow YOS should ensure that as part of the response to serious violent incidents support to individual children and their families is provided whenever possible. If legal difficulties prevent this, the support should be commissioned from another source
 9. After such an incident contact with victims and suspects should only be closed down with sufficiently senior management agreement, otherwise review strategy meetings should continue.

Disproportionality

60. These young people were predominantly from black or minority ethnic backgrounds (see the table in section 2.1). The group was selected from young people who lived in a similar part of Hounslow and either went to the same schools or associated with and influenced one another. The purpose of the review was to understand the specific experience of these young people and not to make comparisons with others. It cannot therefore identify any disparities in the services provided.

²³ Released pending further investigation <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/bail>

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61. Hounslow YOS has recognised that within the local youth justice system there are disparities in outcomes between different young people from different ethnic groups, as measured by the data that the YOS is required to collect by central government.²⁴ These show that, relative to young white men, young black men are over-represented in the small group of young people sentenced or remanded into custody. They are also over-represented in the group who have been convicted of offences involving violence against the person such as assault and wounding. In this case the disparity is with the Asian population, which is under-represented, while young white people are represented in line with the local population.
 62. The YOS is taking action to understand factors contributing to this better with the aim of reducing disproportionality in custody rates to reduce by 20% per year until better in line with the overall population.

4.3 Early help and diversion from the criminal justice system

The overall impact of early help services

63. Early help and targeted family support service involvement with this group of young people was very limited. Only one young person had received a substantial early help intervention. The PEACE Project (see footnote 15) is now offering specific support to a small number of young people who are at risk of exploitation in a way that did not exist at the time of Child S's death.
64. The multi-agency chronologies do not indicate that any young person in the cohort had any substantial contact with local authority youth services. There may have been contacts with voluntary organisations that are not referred to, but if that is so they did not make a significant impact.
65. In hindsight there were points when early help services might have made a difference in these cases, so their role needs to be increased and focused on points where an intervention will have the most impact (e.g. to help reduce the risk of exclusion or involuntary school move or to address negative pressure from peers). In order to achieve this, the early help offer needs to be made more readily available to secondary school pupils in years 7-9 and to primary schools.
66. Hounslow has characterised itself as a 'model violent crime prevention borough'. This strategy can only be meaningful if it is recognised that 'prevention' must operate simultaneously at each level at which the symptoms or precursors of serious youth violence manifest themselves. For example:
 - Boys with behaviour problems in primary school need to be helped to be less violent; that may mean help with past trauma or family problems, or help with speech and language difficulties
 - The same children are likely to need help when transferring to secondary school
 - Early help support services should do more to help schools reduce the number of involuntary school moves and exclusions. When a boy has been excluded from mainstream school, services need to respond in order to help the child attend the alternative provision made and to increase the chances of it succeeding.

²⁴ Other disparities such as differences in arrest rates and sentencing (for comparable offences) fall outside the brief of the YOS. Many of the steps required to reduce disparities in these areas would need to be taken and measured by other individual organisations such as the police and the judiciary.

- YOS prevention programmes need to be employed at an earlier point so as to reduce reoffending; and the police must work more closely with communities in order to make estates feel safer so that other young people do not feel obliged to carry knives or turn to violent youths for protection.
 - MASH screening of referrals and initial social care decision making need to be better attuned to the signs and symptoms of criminal exploitation so they will be more likely to trigger a full assessment.
67. Some interventions aim to reduce risk factors that are believed to be associated with youth violence, for example services designed to reduce the impact of family violence on boys. Interventions aimed at young children, though important, can only have a long-term impact on youth violence and it is difficult to weigh their significance in comparison to contemporary contextual influences on behaviour such as exposure to gangs in a neighbourhood. If their value can be demonstrated, such interventions should be pursued because they have merit in their own right (by protecting women and promoting the wellbeing of children) not because we hope that they will reduce serious youth violence in the medium to long term.

What sort of intervention should be made for young people aged 12 – 15?

68. Discussion of the role of early help focuses attention on the type of early intervention that will help young people at key points. For the last decade youth justice provision has strongly favoured minimising young people’s early contact with the youth justice system. This is because there are research findings suggesting that *‘repeated contact with formal youth justice agencies is in fact more damaging to children in the longer term and ... targeted diversionary strategies are better placed to encourage desistance’*. Put bluntly, *‘contact with the youth justice system is inherently criminogenic’* because *‘by formally drawing children into the youth justice system you heavily increase their chances of offending later in life’*.²⁵
69. The policy implication of this is that when they first commit offences, young people should be diverted from involvement in the criminal justice system and that attention should be focused on supporting their education and addressing other social, health and psychological problems. This raises a number of issues.
70. The Hounslow multi-agency chronologies prepared to support this review show that:
1. the older group of young people did not engage in or benefit from diversionary activities in the period when they started coming to attention
 2. there were few preventive or diversionary activities and
 3. less than one in five (24 out of 124) of the young people offered involvement in YOS diversionary activities participated.²⁶

The review has been told that more recently the services have become much better-established in the YOS and there is much greater uptake and success rate. Outside of the YOS Hounslow has relatively few early help services for this group of young people, in comparison to some boroughs.

²⁵ McAra, L & McVie, S 2013, Delivering Justice for Children and Young People: Key Messages from the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime. in A Dockley (ed.), Justice for Young People: Papers by Winners of the Research Medal 2013. Howard League for Penal Reform, pp. 3-14.

²⁶ Hounslow Youth Justice Plan 2019 (Section 5.5 at page 25). In contrast in the first quarter of 2020 up to 75% of young people referred for diversionary activities engaged.

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71. In practice this means that for individual children and their families there was often a long gap between young people's first noted involvement in criminal activity – which often took the form of a violent assault, possession of a knife or of a sufficient quantity of drugs to cause suspicion of supplying - and the first serious intervention made by the YOS. In a context when it is known that organised criminal groups are actively seeking to select, recruit and exploit young people, there is a need to consider whether the traditional policy of diversion and voluntary offers of support remains the most effective.
 72. During this period risks to the child had increased (school problems, exposure to drugs and negative community influences) and the capacity of the family to respond had diminished. For some young people patterns of reported offending continued and grew more serious, leading to greater difficulties at school. Rather than support their inclusion in education, by not 'labelling' them as young offenders the current approach may risk placing more pressure on the young people, their schools and families.
 73. It is also not clear which diversionary interventions work best or work at all. As one research summary puts it: *'it is currently not possible to determine what specific aspects of different diversionary programmes are most effective for reducing reoffending. Nor are we able to evaluate what types of diversionary practices are likely to be most effective for different levels of offending / need'*. This means that at the moment *'those involved in making decisions on whether children who commit low-level offences should be diverted from the system (such as police and YOTs), and if so, what kind of support they require, are doing so in the dark – without any empirical evidence to draw upon'*.²⁷
 74. The first formal intervention for the Hounslow young people usually came in the form of supervision under a referral order, commonly made some years after the first reported involvement in serious offending. Compliance with referral orders was mixed.
 75. The following recommendations are made:
 10. Hounslow Council should ensure that the early help offer is developed and made as relevant as possible to the families of young people aged 12-15. This needs to be part of a wider approach to service provision that avoids stop-start involvement.
 11. Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership should promote a better understanding of the impact of past trauma on young people's behaviour and develop training for professionals, including those in schools. Specific attention should be paid to children moving to the borough from areas of the world where there has been protracted war or civil conflict.
 12. Hounslow YOS should review the effectiveness of its diversionary schemes for young people that share the characteristics of the group of young men who were the subject of this review.
 13. Hounslow Council should review whether decision making in the MASH is sufficiently informed by an understanding of signs of child criminal exploitation.

4.4 Social care assessment and involvement

Social care assessments

76. Social care made concerted interventions in only two of the young people's families. One family was open to the local authority for a number of episodes over several years, but this did not resolve problems of family violence. The children in the second family

²⁷ Manon Roberts, Gemma Buckland and Harvey Redgrave, Crest Advisory (November 2019) [Examining the youth justice system: What drove the falls in first time entrants and custody, and what should we do as a result?](#)

were the subject of a child protection plan which professionals believed had been closed successfully.

77. More commonly social care professionals carried out initial screening or assessment that identified the need for early help support, rather than a full child and family assessment. Sometimes social care managers closed cases when the YOS became involved with the young person on the basis that the allocation of a social worker could add nothing to the work already being done. Often this proved to be a short-term measure because voluntary YOS involvement was rejected and / or the statutory YOS order ended, leaving a gap in support and leading in due course to another referral for social care assessment.
78. Most assessments in the cases reviewed did not take full account of previous episodes or indicators of risk, or of information from schools and other agencies. There was little evidence of 'think family' approaches incorporating the factors affecting parenting such as mental health or the issues for other children in the family. This suggests the need for a better approach to assessment when there are risks of exploitation, taking advantage of more comprehensive chronologies so that assessments can be based on the full history as well as an assessment of the risks to the young person from outside the family.

Missing episodes

79. Information about missing episodes, exploitation and other peer group influences is much less well documented in the records than information about events in the family. Every young person's case history included missing episodes, but few return home interviews revealed much useful information. This limits later assessment. It is important to find ways to improve the quality of 'missing' assessments to increase the likelihood that concerning incidents and contacts are identified and patterns over time can be recognised.

Matching the skills of different professional groups to the challenge of harm from child criminal exploitation

80. In the author's work in other local authority areas, social workers have often said that they do not feel equipped to work with young people and their families when there are risks of serious youth violence. The reasons given include:
 - The differences in the type and level of risk present for professionals more used to dealing with intra-familial risk
 - the volatility of the young people involved making it particularly hard to predict what will happen
 - differences in the skills and time required to work with young people
 - and the uncertainty about the legal and procedural framework based on criminal law youth courts rather than the family courts.
81. Uncertainty is heightened because although there is a growing recognition that traditional social work approaches may not necessarily be relevant, there is as yet no shared understanding of the sort of adaptations that need to be made. Social workers often struggle to recall cases that have had successful outcomes in this type of work. They can identify a role when some specific procedure requires their involvement – such as accommodating a child or moving a family away from the risk of violent retaliation.

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82. YOS workers believe that they have many of the skills required. Except when working in preventive services, which must be taken up voluntarily, their brief is shaped and limited by the YOS statutory responsibilities.
83. Only a small number of youth and family support workers were spoken to during the course of this review. In other local areas, these professionals believe that they have more chance of engaging the young person, though it is important to note that they also often do not succeed. Their more informal approach to engaging young people has often not been characterised by a structured approach to case coordination and supervision. As a result, they often do not have the skills and experience required in assessment, planning and coordination in complex work where a number of types of risk factors need to be considered.
84. The following recommendations are made:
14. Hounslow Council should seek to improve the standard of social care child and family assessments of young people involved in offending to:
 - improve the use and review of chronologies so that they take a full account of past events, highlight past trauma if it exists and provide an overview of problems
 - take account of contextual information, including recent serious incidents that have not yet resulted in a conviction
 - include and take account of information from all relevant agencies.
 15. Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership should confirm the procedures to use for risk assessment and management of cases in relation to serious youth violence and monitor compliance and effectiveness. If it believes that the current pan-London safeguarding partnership procedures do not address specific features of this activity, this should be brought to the attention of the London Safeguarding Children Partnership.
 16. Hounslow Council should work with partners to improve the assessment of young people who go missing. In particular there needs to be a better assessment of risk to children who refuse to engage in discussions with professionals after missing episodes.

4.5 Engagement

85. Strategies to work with young people centre on the need for their engagement. Services commission and employ staff who they believe are likely to achieve this. Among the group whose records we reviewed, engagement was poor, and agencies often gave up when young people did not engage, leading to episodic case closure. Cases were often re-opened at the next crisis and assessment begins again.
86. Agencies should not continue to close cases in these circumstances. Individual efforts at engagement need to be supported by a persistent effort from the network as a whole. When a child refuses to engage, in some form the professional network needs to remain in place to monitor developments.
87. The following recommendation is made:
17. Before Hounslow Council or the YOS close any case of a young person suspected of involvement in serious youth violence, a detailed plan, involving other agencies working with the child and family, should be coordinated with a nominated lead professional.

4.6 Child and Adolescent Mental Health and other specialist health services

88. Only two of the multi-agency chronologies showed evidence of CAMHS involvement prior to the young person becoming involved with the YOS. One young person had a number of CAMHS therapy appointments for anger and emotional management during primary school, but then his family stopped taking him to appointments. Later a further referral was made, but not taken up. The second young person was referred because of anger problems at the age of 14 but refused to attend. These concerns appear to have been longstanding and it is not clear whether they had been referred earlier. Given the scope of the review, it has not been possible to establish why other families had not been referred to or benefited from these services, so this issue is addressed in a recommendation.
89. The young people in the review cohort who were known to the YOS saw the attached mental health worker as part of their standard health assessment and screening, but at the time none was considered to be in need of continuing mental health service involvement. One young person is now receiving help for difficulties, most likely linked to events in his country of origin.
90. There was no evidence of specialist children health service involvement by services such as Speech and Language Therapy (SALT). The apparent lack of SALT involvement is of interest because research suggests a high level of speech and language difficulties in children involved in the criminal justice system. In Hounslow 60% of young people assessed by the YOS had either a severe or moderate speech, language or communication need. It remains unclear why these services had not been involved at an earlier point with young people in the review group.
91. At present it is only possible to say that further research is required in relation to the lack of earlier referral or take-up of provision and whether:
- 1) referrals are being made and
 - 2) CAMHS priorities are sufficiently attuned to this area of need.
92. The following recommendation is made:
18. The Clinical Commissioning Group should ask CAMHS and specialist health providers (including SALT) to establish whether primary school children with behavioural problems and conduct disorders are being referred in expected numbers and taking up offers of services, or whether there are specific issues preventing this.

4.7 Services to support authoritative parenting

93. The large majority of the parents directly responsible for the day to day care of these young men were single women. Child S and his brother lived with their stepfather. Two boys in families from conflict zones lived with both parents. One boy whose family came from Eastern Europe lived with his father. Records suggest that few had a positive, male role model in the family. From the records, parenting support was an undervalued area of activity.
94. Although there was little evidence of neglect by parents, at times most struggled to exert authority over their children or resolve difficulties in setting and negotiating the

boundaries ordinarily needed by adolescents. This pattern worsened as peer influences became more powerful and the boys' offending became more serious. A number of factors inhibited parenting including in small number of cases, the death, illness or disability of a parent. Some parents had high educational aspirations for their children, who were sometimes of above average ability. In these cases, both parent and child found it difficult to cope with the fact that their poor behaviour in school was disrupting their education.

95. There has been no opportunity for this review to speak directly to parents. However, the chronologies suggest a clear pattern. Most of the parents wanted to be effective and recognise the need to be more authoritative with their sons. In almost all the cases there was a point, early on in the development of the problems, when families were asking for help and willing to implement suggestions from professionals.
96. Later many families did not welcome 'parenting advice' or similar services, particularly once their sons' problems had escalated to a serious level. As pressure on parents mounted and the relative influence of professionals on their sons diminished in comparison to external criminal influences, relationships with professionals often soured. In some professional records, parents came to be portrayed as not understanding or not cooperating.
97. If we believe in expanding and supporting the authority of parents, we need to pay this area attention as is given to direct work with children.
98. The following recommendation is made:
 19. Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership should challenge agencies to provide parenting support at an early point with an agenda based around identified positive parental aspirations for their children. The work should anticipate the specific problems that pressure from organised crime groups may create for the family as children grow older.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the problem of serious youth violence requires a systemic response. The three statutory partners that form the Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership recognise the responsibility of all member agencies to work collaboratively with the community to address the problem of serious youth violence. Work on this will be given priority through the development of the local adolescent strategy. The following recommendations are made in relation to the specific issues identified in this review.

Schools and education services

1. When the young person is at risk of exploitation or serious youth violence, Hounslow Council should enable the EWO service to work outside the statutory guidance in order to maximise opportunities for young people's long-term re-engagement in education.
2. Hounslow Council and primary schools in the borough should take steps to improve the identification and response to pupils with behavioural difficulties, improve support at school and in transition to secondary school.
3. When risk factors for serious youth violence are present, deteriorating behaviour and attendance in Years 7-9 need to be treated as a multi-agency concern and prioritised for an early help service.

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4. The Metropolitan Police Service should consider how to improve the sharing of information about vulnerable pupils with schools, through the Safer Schools police officer system or in some other way so as to make information sharing more consistent.
 5. Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership should ensure that there is a stronger, multi-agency response to incidents of violence in the community (some of which will not lead to prosecution or other formal action) so that schools are not left dealing with their impact on pupils alone.
 6. Hounslow Council and Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership should ensure that schools and colleges (including the PRU) are better integrated into the systems that seek to reduce serious youth violence so that they can receive information about individual children and groups who are potentially at risk. Schools should be able to provide information on groups of children through the borough's exploitations panels (including Operational MACE) or another suitable forum working transparently with their pupils and parents about why this might be necessary.

Multi-agency response to serious youth violence incidents

7. Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership should ensure that there is a strong multi-agency response to serious incidents of youth violence (to include serious knife attacks, shootings, serious affray) which draws up a coherent plan for every child who is known to be affected. This may need consideration of reducing the threshold for use of the current critical incident protocol.
8. Hounslow YOS should ensure that as part of the response to serious violent incidents support to individual children and their families is provided whenever possible. If legal difficulties prevent this, the support should be commissioned from another source
9. After such an incident contact with victims and suspects should only be closed down with sufficiently senior management agreement, otherwise review strategy meetings should continue.

Early help

10. Hounslow Council should ensure that the early help offer is developed and made as relevant as possible to the families of young people aged 12-15. This needs to be part of a wider approach to service provision that avoids stop-start involvement.
11. Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership should promote a better understanding of the impact of past trauma on young people's behaviour and develop training for professionals, including those in schools, CAMHS and specialist health services. Specific attention should be paid to children moving to the borough from areas of the world where there has been protracted war or civil conflict.
12. Hounslow YOS should review the effectiveness of its diversionary schemes for young people that share the characteristics of the group of young men who were the subject of this review.
13. Hounslow Council should review whether decision making in the MASH is sufficiently informed by an understanding of signs of child criminal exploitation.

Social care practice and services, case closure and coordination, missing episodes

14. Hounslow Council should seek to improve the standard of social care child and family assessments of young people involved in offending to

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- improve the use and review of chronologies so that they take a full account of past events, highlight past trauma if it exists and provide an overview of problems
 - take account of contextual information, including recent serious incidents that have not yet resulted in a conviction
 - include and take account of information from all relevant agencies.
15. Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership should confirm the procedures to use for risk assessment and management of cases in relation to serious youth violence and monitor compliance and effectiveness. If it believes that the current pan-London safeguarding partnership procedures do not address specific features of this activity, this should be brought to the attention of the London Safeguarding Children Partnership.
 16. Before Hounslow Council or the YOS close any case of a young person suspected of involvement in serious youth violence, a detailed plan, involving other agencies working with the child and family, should be coordinated with a nominated lead professional.
 17. Hounslow Council should work with partners to improve the assessment of young people who go missing. In particular there needs to be a better assessment of risk to children who refuse to engage in discussions with professionals after missing episodes.

CAMHS and specialist health provision

18. The Clinical Commissioning Group should ask CAMHS and specialist health providers (including SALT) to establish whether primary school children with behavioural problems and conduct disorders are being referred in expected numbers and taking up offers of services, or whether there are specific issues preventing this.

Parenting support

19. Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership should challenge agencies to provide parenting support at an early point with an agenda based around identified positive parental aspirations for their children. The work should anticipate the specific problems that pressure from organised crime groups will create for the family.

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