



'I'll probably always wait for him'

Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership Thematic Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review into Serious Youth Violence

November 2024

Updated February 2025, with family views

Anna Racher

Caroline Boswell

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Executive Summary

This thematic child safeguarding practice review into serious youth violence in Bristol was commissioned in response to the tragic deaths of Max, Mason and Darrian, and the serious harm suffered by a fourth young person, which occurred within three weeks of each other in early 2024.

The review recognises that harm outside the home, and within that serious youth violence, presents complex safeguarding challenges to which there are no easy solutions. Within complexity, however, it is possible to identify valuable learning in relation to the root causes of harm, which holds the potential to support the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership to make impactful improvement.

This review considers four key lines of enquiry which, taken together, offer a whole-system lens on how Bristol is tackling serious youth violence strategically, operationally and through direct work with children, young people, their families and communities. The review considers:

1. Governance and operational structures for responding to serious violence
2. Improvement activity across the partnership
3. The consistency of responses to safeguarding children from harm outside the home
4. Educational attendance and inclusion correlating to a risk of serious harm to other children.

This whole-system lens is recognised by the review's authors as both brave and necessary. Whilst it is acknowledged governance systems and processes can feel removed from direct practice, the strategic focus of the review should not be taken as distancing improvement activity from the devastating impact of knife crime on children, families and communities. Without systems and processes working effectively the impact of direct interventions, however skilled and dedicated, will be limited. In making strategic recommendations this review holds children and young people relentlessly in mind.

Working through these key lines of enquiry, this review identifies a whole-system response. The recommendations focus on inter-agency working and behaviours capable of delivering the changes which so many dedicated leaders, managers and practitioners in Bristol want and children, young people, their families and communities urgently need to be in place.

By focusing on serious youth violence as a single, acute, form of harm, this review finds that the wider context and drivers for violence have fallen out of frame in Bristol. A clear strategic vision needs to be developed to link responses to serious youth violence and harm outside of the home. Aligned to this a more robust focus is needed on disruption activity, particularly in relation to the adults who are exploiting young people and controlling the spaces and places where harm is occurring.

A relentless, evidence-led, focus is needed on prevention activity is also needed. Within this the disconnect between the wider education system and the rest of the partnership at strategic, operational and practice levels needs to be fully addressed by all agencies. Education settings are crucial to the partnership's ability to identify vulnerabilities early and offer crucial protective support, but education settings also need whole partnership support and expertise in managing and holding risks.

This review recognises that significant reform activity is currently being undertaken across the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership, including with education leaders and providers. Whilst these changes are relatively recent, a stable leadership team is now emerging and is driving shared vision and accountability forward.

These efforts to improve strategic alignment in relation to harm outside the home are welcome. In the preceding five-year period this review has found that the significant instability of senior leadership across the partnership, coupled with a dominant focus on single-agency improvement activity, has underpinned a lack of truly inter-agency responses to serious youth violence.

This review does not find that Bristol is lacking in effort or hard work – very much the opposite. The review heard and saw much expert, highly skilled and knowledgeable work. But this expertise has too often been sitting in isolation in a fractured and siloed system. At strategic, operational and practice levels there is work needed to effectively challenge these siloes, align activity and ensure genuine accountability across the full breadth of the safeguarding partnership.

In responding to the complexity of harm outside the home all agencies need to be alive to the risk of inadvertently mirroring an overly complicated response. The reactive culture which has emerged in Bristol, and which led to an overly 'busy' system, needs to be challenged through the clear reduction in and (re)alignment of the current number of meetings, boards and panels. Multi-agency responses need to be done once and done well.

There is still significant work needed to underpin this response with a whole-partnership-evidence-informed understanding of both the challenges that need to be addressed and the approaches that are needed to respond. The Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership's strategic understanding of individual children, their communities and the harms they are facing has previously relied on description over much needed 'root-cause analysis'. Bristol's named public-health approach to addressing serious violence is important and a potentially powerful approach, but responses are not yet truly systemic, with interdependencies not yet sufficiently understood or addressed.

Attempts to better understand and respond to these interdependencies need to be robustly underpinned by the triangulation of data and intelligence both across agencies and in combination with evidence from children, young people and their families, professionals and the wider-available evidence base. There is still too little known by the partnership in relation to harm outside of the home for agencies to be able to frame an effective response. One of the clearest consequences of this are the concerns that have been raised to this review in relation to disproportionality, adultification and biases that continue to be 'baked into the system' for children, young people and their families. More open curiosity and robust analysis is needed to underpin effective support and challenge across the partnership in relation to issues of equity, equality, diversity and inclusion.

Clear and accountable outcomes for children, young people and their families in Bristol need to be framed and owned across the partnership. Interventions need to align to a tiered response, ranging from those on the periphery of violence to those experiencing the highest harm.

To support this ongoing improvement, this review makes seven interlinked strategic recommendations, designed to embed a 'golden thread' of evidence-informed accountability throughout the system. It is recommended that:

1. The partnership develops a clear, shared, strategic vision that explicitly responds to serious youth violence within wider, interrelated, forms of harm outside the home.
2. Multi-agency governance and co-ordination activity in relation to all forms of harm outside of the home is reviewed at strategic, operational and practice levels. Across the system there is clearly articulated purpose, alignment and accountability that identifies and reduces duplicate or superfluous activity.
3. The cross-government multi-agency [Practice Principles](#) for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm are adopted and used to frame a holistic and evidence-informed approach. The [Partnership Reflective Tool](#) is utilised at its highest to support this.

4. A robust approach to the integration, reconciliation and analysis of whole partnership data and intelligence in relation to harm outside the home is developed at pace. There is a clear approach and accountability for its ongoing application.
5. A robust Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) model is implemented as the sole inter-agency forum for responding to harm outside the home. This includes a clear focus on disruption activity and a contextual approach to safeguarding in spaces and places, as part of an analytical response to risk.
6. A Prevention MACE model or equivalent is established and co-chaired by education colleagues from the school sector, alongside statutory partners, to better identify, understand and respond to early intervention and prevention needs to mitigate against extra familial harm. The Prevention MACE provides a single point of co-ordination and oversight for all prevention activity in relation to EFH across the city.
7. Bristol's broader prevention offer in relation to harm outside the home is reviewed and reframed, taking account of what is known in relation to the evidence-base and outcomes for current services. There is robust on-going strategic and democratic accountability for outcomes and funding arrangements.

These seven recommendations are framed to support a genuinely whole-system response to harm outside the home. All seven recommendations are inter-dependent and work in relation to them should be undertaken concurrently. The Partnership Reflection Tool in particular, will support the partnership to evidence and build upon strengths and prioritise and co-ordinate improvement activity. This is a significant, high trust, task that will need to be underpinned by explicit strengths-based, relational and restorative behaviours. This review is confident that, with a tenacious focus on this approach, the positive change that so many are working so hard to deliver can be effectively realised.

Finally, it is important to note that the specific improvements identified in this review do not in any way minimise the challenges faced by all child safeguarding partnerships in relation to tackling serious youth violence and harm outside the home. The availability of knives and weapons to young people, particularly the ease with which they can be purchased online, was raised to this review by all partners and families. It is an issue that requires a national response: this review underlines the need for urgent and decisive national action.

Introduction

This thematic child safeguarding practice review into serious youth violence in Bristol is in response to the stabbings of Max, Mason and Darrian, and the serious injury of a fourth young person. Three children lost their lives in these incidents; three families lost cherished loved ones. A further young person was seriously injured and multiple children, young people and families now face very different futures. The lives of the children who caused this harm will never be the same again either and nor will the lives of their families or their communities. This review recognises that the harm caused by serious youth violence extends far beyond those immediately affected, impacting whole communities and generations whose perceptions of safety and well-being are deeply altered.

For the most part this report refers to the individuals considered as young people, recognising the importance of adolescent development when understanding behaviour and seeking to frame responses. In doing so both reviewers underline that using the term 'young people' does not in any way diminish the importance of the same young people being seen and treated, legally and in practice, as children, with all the associated vulnerabilities and protections.

Max is described as having been a popular and loyal 16-year-old who would speak to anyone. He was a happy and relaxed young man who loved burgers and pizza and playing on his PlayStation and this is how he spent lots of his time at home. He is remembered as always entertaining his friends, but also for his capacity for reflection, depth and an ability to empathetically connect to others. He would make an effort to include and encourage not only friends but also peers he didn't know as well. Max was academically able but preferred practical-based, vocational education. Max was a talented footballer who enjoyed being part of a team.

Mason was 15 when he died and was known for his gentle, kind and caring nature and for his infectious smile. He was a huge fan of Liverpool FC; an avid gamer and he loved ordering a cheeky take-away; especially McDonalds and Domino's pizza. Mason was a very quiet boy, but he was highly regarded by school friends and staff, who observed him to be growing in confidence in Year 11. He was described as increasingly aspirational and excited about his future. Mason enjoyed Art and Food Tech lessons and had plans to apply for a post-16 place at a local college to study bricklaying and construction.

Darrian was 16 when he died. He had an aspiration to become a lawyer, which would have been well within his reach. He is described as an ambitious and very intelligent young man, who also really enjoyed the extracurricular aspects of school life, particularly mountain biking, Go Karting, and the occasional trip to Greggs. He is remembered for making classmates and teachers laugh with his cheeky sense of humour. He was described as a lot of fun and those who knew him recall some of the nicest moments being simply listening to music with him and his friends. Darrian is remembered as an incredibly loyal friend; the students who knew him still talk about him all the time, sharing memories of their friendship and how much it meant to them. He was a compassionate young man: he would notice if staff at school were having a difficult day, encouraging students to make better choices. He had a strong sense of morality and believed in standing up for what was right. He is described as having hated bullying, including students who may have felt isolated in social situations. He was kind to them himself and made sure others were kind. His absence in school is felt every day.

The fourth young man injured in an attack is described by those close to him as a mature and polite young man with close relationships with his parents, siblings and wider family and a valued member of a local boxing gym. He is described as still trying to process his thoughts as he is learning how to cope with long-term disabilities and life-altering injuries. He is described as looking to the future, although he knows his recovery is not complete. He is aware that he has missed significant parts of his education and is keen to attend college to gain his GCSE's in maths and English before moving on to training and future employment. He has set his sights on eventually working in construction.

In total ten young people are considered by this review across three separate incidents: the fatal stabbing of Max and Mason in late January 2024, the separate stabbing of a young man in early February 2024, and the fatal stabbing of Darrian in mid-February 2024. Max, Mason and Darrian were all stabbed by other young people. All of the attacks took place in busy areas in Bristol and Max, Mason and Darrian were all stabbed in public spaces. Charges have also been brought against several adults linked to the cases.

Max and Mason were White British, Darrian identified as mixed race with White British and Black Caribbean heritage and the fourth young man is of Black Caribbean heritage. The young people convicted of crimes linked to the murders and attempted murder are also a mix of White British, Black and dual heritage.

A considerable volume of information is held across the partnership in relation to all ten of the young people, covering a significant range of vulnerabilities. The young people were all from communities who were all minoritised in different ways, characterised by structural inequalities including racial inequality and bias as well as through poverty and exclusion. They had low levels of school attendance, were children missing education (CME) and/or had experienced multiple suspensions, managed moves or exclusions. A number also had undiagnosed or suspected Special Education Needs and/or had been assessed for an Educational, Health and Care Plan. Some of the young people also had a history of child protection support, including experiences as Children in Care.

Detailed case learning has been considered by rapid reviews¹ into all three incidents, with action plans already in place. Recommendations from both rapid reviews highlighted the extent to which all of the young people involved in these incidents were known to, and supported by, multiple partners across children's social care, policing, health, education and the voluntary and community sector. These were not 'unseen' or unknown children. Understanding the extent to which 'the system' is able to come together to effectively support and protect all of the young people, and so prevent harm from serious youth violence, was identified as requiring further review by the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership.

The review was commissioned by the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership to consider four thematic cross-cutting city-wide issues:

1. What needs to change to governance and operational structures responding to serious violence so that Bristol's partnership are more able to respond to both the local and individual needs of children and communities, whilst enabling improvement of strategic oversight and leadership? The reviewers should consider how the decisions made at a strategic level influence and enable effective responses to individual children's needs and enables information to be shared across the city and cross-border whilst ensuring that information sharing is ethical and proportionate.
2. Using the intergenerational conflict within South Bristol as a focus - how can the partnership improve their assessment, intelligence gathering, community knowledge and response to conflict within an area or group? We are interested in how the partnership's response can be tailored to different types of conflict, violence and exploitation being mindful of social contexts of those involved.
3. What framework should be developed in Bristol to enable a more consistent multi-agency response to safeguarding children from risk outside the home, ensuring partners are working from one plan for the child?
4. How could existing partnership resources and work with education partners be more effective to improve educational attendance and inclusion for children who pose a risk of serious harm to other children and those with severe and persistent low attendance correlating to harm outside the home?

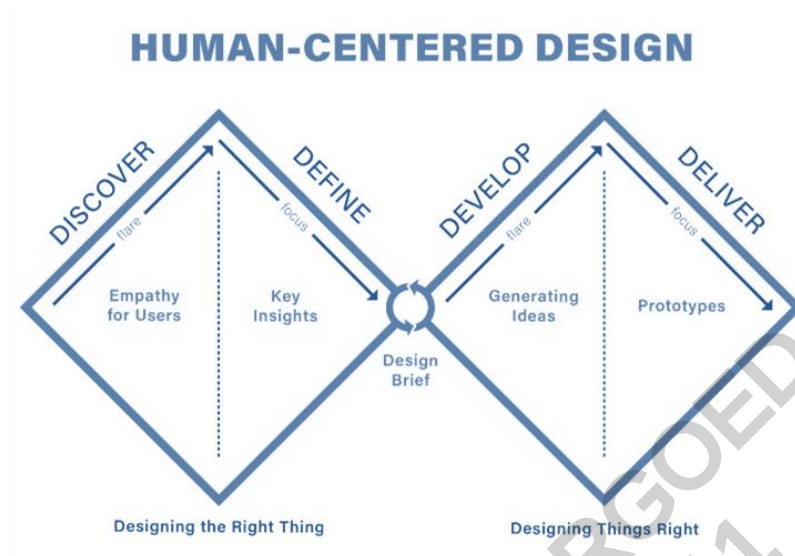
¹ [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](#) p136

The review that follows is ambitious in scope and necessarily high level in detail: it focuses on whole systems learning, rather than re-examining case practice in detail. The report is longer than a child safeguarding practice review would normally be, as the key lines of enquiry represent a root-and-branch consideration of the full multi-agency approach to responding to serious youth violence. This approach was at the request of the KBSP Review Panel.

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Methodology

The high-level methodology for this review used a 'double-diamond approach', which prioritises understanding individual's needs and experiences throughout the process.



The approach has four distinct phases. The first two phases focus on extensive user research, including interviews, observations and mapping to deeply understand the problem from multiple perspectives before defining the core issue. The second diamond involves co-creating solutions, sharing iterative feedback with key partners and stakeholders to help continuously refine the recommendations based on collaborative thinking and shared ownership.

The review also explicitly sought to develop deeper learning using a Triple Loop learning model² to guide review activity and thinking. This model explicitly attempts to move beyond defensive thinking by asking:

- LOOP 1: Am I/are we doing it right?
- LOOP 2: Am I/are we doing the right things?
- LOOP 3: How do I/we know what's right

The Review was led and authored by Anna Racher, a qualified Social Worker and Independent Reviewer. A second reviewer, Caroline Boswell, led on the education aspects of the enquiry. Review activity was conducted between August and November 2024.

Overall, the reviewers:

- Undertook 46 individual and group interviews.
- Ran six multi-agency workshops (practice, operational, strategic, data and two supporting and analysing children and young people's views) and
- Attended multiple multi-agency forums and events across all geographic areas of the city.

² [Triple Loop Learning - NPC](#)

The families of all the victims were offered the opportunity to contribute to the review, with initial contact facilitated through police family liaison officers. As criminal trials were on-going during the LCSPR process the families understandably felt that they needed to concentrate on the criminal justice process.

A second opportunity to contribute to the review was offered once all trials had concluded. Three of the families accepted this invitation, with the families spending considerable time with the reviewers and a representative from the KBSP in early February 2025, where a summary of the report and recommendations were shared. The families were able to reflect on their own immediate contexts, and serious youth violence more widely.

The review team wish to recognise and thank all the families for their emotional strength and bravery in responding to this review. Their honesty, compassion and determination to look for a way forward has been humbling.

The reviewers have not been able to speak to the families of the young people found guilty of the murders and attempted murder, as wider criminal proceedings remain under way.

Activity undertaken by the reviewers under each phase included:

Phase 1: Discover

Establishing the facts of events/ case histories

- Analysis of Rapid Reviews, single agency reports and combined chronology
- Initial interviews with key strategic leads
- Development of a clear and ethical plan for the city-wide engagement of children and young people, in close partnership with existing youth and community groups, utilising the expertise and relationships already held within the partnership.

Full methodology and approach were presented to the KBSP Review Panel for support and challenge.

Phase 2: Define

Synthesis of LCSPR cases within wider local context

- Desk based review of all relevant local need assessments, data and intelligence, inspection reports, internal reviews and strategic and operational policies and reports.
- 1:1 interviews with practitioners, operational managers and strategic leaders from across partner agencies to identify and understand local strengths and challenges.
- Input and feedback from relevant boards, panels and fora across the partnership
- Seeking family and community input.

Emerging themes were presented to the KBSP Review Panel for support and challenge.

Phase 3: Develop

Test and challenge draft findings

- Desk-based review of relevant national evidence linked to the research questions, including the 2023 Multi-agency Practice Principles for tackling child exploitation and extra-familial harm.
- Delivery of practice, operational management and strategic workshops to test, develop and refine working findings, to help promote collective ownership of the review and associated recommendations.

- Delivery of a specialist data workshop with data analysts from across the partnership.
- Feedback on consultation activity with children, young people, parents, carers and communities to check their voices have been accurately heard and allow an opportunity for constructive challenge.
- 1:1 interviews with strategic leads and key stakeholders on emerging findings.

Draft findings, report and recommendations were presented to the KBSP Review Panel for support and challenge.

Phase 4: Deliver

Final version of the report and recommendations was authored and presented to the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership Child Safeguarding Practice Review Sub-Group in early March 2025 for comment and challenge. Recommendations were agreed and the report was approved by the Keeping Children Safe Board Delegated Safeguarding Partners in April 2025.

The reviewers would like to thank all the professionals across strategic, operational and practice levels who so generously gave their time and expert insight to the review.

The reviewers are also grateful to the KBSP Shadow Board and Youth Council, all of the children and young people across Bristol who took part in a bespoke consultation activity as part of the review and all of the education and youth workers who supported their engagement and reflected on the findings with us. We would also like to acknowledge and extend our thanks to the staff across both youth and education settings who allowed this work to be undertaken thoughtfully, safely and with such integrity.

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Serious Youth Violence Context

This opening section identifies the high-level context for serious youth violence in Bristol, identifying what is known from research, data and intelligence, how those undertaking this work in Bristol describe the context in which they see harm happening and what children, young people and families have told us.

Serious youth violence nationally

The Government's Serious Violence Strategy (2018)³ recognised and responded to the steep national increase in rates of serious violence since 2014. The strategy outlined a number of planned interventions to be taken forward at a local level, with a linked Serious Violence Fund. Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) were one of the responses established nationally.

A national Serious Violence Duty was introduced in 2022 to 'prevent and reduce serious violence; taking a multi-agency approach to understand the causes and consequences of serious violence, focused on prevention and early intervention, and informed by evidence'⁴.

The Duty requires specified authorities for a local government area to work together and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence but the Act does not define serious violence, underlining that this is for local authorities to do based on local evidence. Guidance states that 'in considering how to define serious violence within their area [...] specified authorities **should include a focus on public space youth violence** including homicide, violence against the person which may include both knife crime and gun crime, and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as in county lines drug dealing'⁵.

Also relevant to understanding and framing any serious youth violence context is the linked but not synonymous understanding of child exploitation and harm outside of the home. The government defines **harm outside the home** in Working Together 2023 as risks to the welfare of children and young people that arise outside the home environment:

- Some children experience abuse and exploitation outside the home. This is often referred to as 'extra-familial harm'. Harm can occur in a range of extra-familial contexts, including school and other educational settings, peer groups, or within community/public spaces and/or online. Children may experience this type of harm from other children and/or from adults.
- Forms of extra-familial harm include exploitation by criminal and organised crime groups and individuals (such as county lines and financial exploitation), serious violence, modern slavery and trafficking, online harm, sexual exploitation, teenage relationship abuse and the influences of extremism which could lead to radicalisation. Children of all ages can experience extra-familial harm.

³ [Home Office – Serious Violence Strategy, April 2018](#)

⁴ [Serious Violence Duty: draft guidance for responsible authorities \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK](#)

⁵ Op cit s.32

Serious youth violence in Bristol

Bristol's Serious Youth Violence Problem Profile (2020)⁶ adopted a working definition for serious youth violence of: 'Actual and Grievous Bodily Harm (ABH/GBH), offences involving the use or possession of a weapon with intent (such as a knife or gun), homicides, gang violence and drug dealing (including county lines)' with and offender and victim age range of 11-25 years old.

Mirroring the national growth trend, Bristol's Serious Youth Violence Problem Profile evidences a notable increase in incidents of serious youth violence: between 2016/17 and 2018/19, serious youth violence offences in Bristol rose by 24%, with serious knife crime offences increasing by 45%, with over half of knife crime offenders aged 19 and under in 2018/19. The majority of victims were aged between 11 and 25⁷. In comparison with other major national cities, however, Bristol does not have exceptionally high rates of knife crime or serious youth violence⁸ and sees proportionally fewer incidents than other major English cities, including London, Birmingham, Greater Manchester, Sheffield and Liverpool. In common with other English cities however, the prevalence of knife crime and exploitation are increasing.

In a pen picture that those working in large cities across England will recognise, however, there is considerable wealth, cultural capital and economic growth in parts of Bristol, alongside some high levels of poverty, isolation and exclusion. Both poverty and ethnic diversity within Bristol tend to be concentrated within particular geographic communities, although these do not necessarily intersect. As a city Bristol is relatively isolated, with large, rural, neighbouring authorities. The nearest other large towns are Bath and Weston-Super-Mare.

Professionals' understanding of the local context

Whilst the tragic stabbings considered by this review caused profound shock and distress, professionals in Bristol also recognised that city-wide concerns in relation to exploitation and serious youth violence have been known for a number of years.

Operationally many (but not all) agencies and services divide the city into three areas: South, East-Central and North Bristol. These are broadly shared as boundaries by children's social care and policing colleagues, although police combine North and Central, whilst children's social care combine East and Central.

Darrian came from **East-Central Bristol**. This is described by professionals as a lively and culturally very rich area, as well as being the commercial centre of the city. This part of Bristol is described as having a complex and continually shifting balance of economic, racial and cultural diversity. Whilst there is increasing wealth in pockets of East-Central Bristol, seen as a result of professional and cultural 'gentrification', the area also continues to be home to communities who experience significant levels of deprivation and exclusion, including acute housing and accommodation need.

East-Central Bristol is far more ethnically diverse than other areas in Bristol, with a complex interplay between multiple communities' identities and needs. East-Central Bristol is the second/third generation home of significant South Asian and African-Caribbean communities; home to a first/second generation Somali population and home to arriving migrants, including families housed under Home Office dispersal arrangements.

⁶ [bristol-problem-profile-complete.pdf](#)

⁷ [bristol-problem-profile-complete.pdf](#)

⁸ [Multi Map about knife crime](#)

In working with families in East-Central Bristol, professionals described a context in which positive community engagement and relationships can be fragile at times, with variable levels of community trust in professionals. Both historical and more recently arrived minoritised communities were described as having a complex mix of negative experiences of authority in countries of origin, in longer-established communities, historic and inter-generational experiences of discrimination and exclusion and, for all minoritised groups, more recent experiences of racism within the city.

Professionals described and recognised concerns about the disproportionate representation of young Black males experiencing criminal justice and social care interventions, with multiple colleagues voicing active concerns about the level of this disproportionality and the extent to which young Black and Brown males are 'appearing on lists' and being adultified⁹ within a complex context of poverty, racism and exclusion.

In terms of serious youth violence in East-Central Bristol the picture described by professionals is of significant known concerns regarding the exploitation of young people in the area. Professionals identified that younger generations of Black and Brown children as having become normalised to, and drawn into, racialised inter-generational conflict within the area, whilst also recognising the inter-generation biases East-Central communities have faced. It is professionally understood that experiences of racism and exclusion have played a significant role in shaping community relationships. Whilst the current iteration of violence is framed below, this review heard that experiences of racism, poverty and wider structural inequalities have shaped the experiences, including those of risk and harm from serious violence, across generations of communities within East Bristol.

It is important to professionals and community alike that the depth of care families and communities in East-Central hold for their children and their futures is fully recognised in this review.

Bordering between North and East Central Bristol is a community history involving the evolution of two 'urban street gangs' (National Crime Agency language) called the 2-4s and the 1-6s; their names loosely based on their locations. Although characterised as 'urban street gangs' professionals working with the communities described these children and young people as having the type of constrained choices that typify exploitation, with the children and young people effectively being 'groomed' into conflict and violence by the behaviours and culture created by the adults around them.

The 2-4s are historically the more established group, who became known to professionals as a cohort of young people for whom there were concerns in relation to exploitation and the carrying and selling of knives and weapons.

The 1-6s were described to this review as emerging in response to the 2-4s as a 'rival grouping'. The violence between the two groups escalated and became established through the murder of a young person, which ignited a rolling rivalry that was perpetuated through 'dis-tracks' and characterised by retaliatory violence and murders. Tragically, this initial 'cohort' of young people, now adults, have mostly died or been incarcerated for significant terms.

Professionals described the young people now involved in the 2-4s and 1-6s as significantly younger, with those working with them holding real concerns about how fully aware they are/ can be – given their young age – of the very real danger of their actions.

⁹ [Adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding](#)

There was professional concern voiced to this review that it is these young, predominantly Black, vulnerable and exploited boys who are the focus of media, political and professional attention, over those adults who are responsible for their exploitation. Professionals voiced concerns that the way in which incidents have been reported and shared online, has 'created its own legend', making young people less safe. There was also a sense of injustice – voiced by both professionals and community – that this has led to a prevailing perception that Black boys from East Central are 'dangerous', which was seen, at least anecdotally, to have led to high rates of exclusion from education for them.

Max and Mason came from **South Bristol**. The way this area was characterised to the review was as broadly ethnically White-British, with significant levels of intergenerational poverty. South Bristol was described by professionals as relatively isolated within the city, with poorer infrastructure and transport links than other parts of the city, meaning that many families from this community do not travel extensively beyond South Bristol.

Professionals working with the community also described South Bristol as historically being a 'closed' community, with communication with professionals being highly controlled and carefully managed within the community. This was understood to be explicitly linked to the model and impact of organised crime within the area.

It was also recognised that neighbourhoods in south Bristol are changing, and have been for some time, to be increasingly diverse as communities. There was internal conversation and challenge in relation to the scale and impact of this change, and whether service responses and decision making are perpetuating a historic understanding that fails to understand, and so take full account of, the community's needs.

The professional understanding of risk in relation to serious youth violence in South Bristol is that it is inexorably linked to serious organised crime, drug dealing and exploitation. Whilst there are not the same named levels of concern about 'gang' culture as described for East-Central, there is significant professional concern about a street culture that has evolved from the number of children and young people with little to occupy their time; either missing from, or without adequate support in, education. Whilst early concerns for these children centres on anti-social behaviour, anecdotally there was felt to be an established progression from street culture through to involvement in organised crime and dealing.

Professionals working with families in South Bristol also emphasised the deep care that families have for their communities and the passion they hold in advocating for their community's strengths. This pride, coupled with the strength of concern at the deaths of their children and young people, has been recognised by professionals as enabling some relatively recent but effective relationship-building with individuals and wider community members.

The review also heard a strong shared professional frustration for the community that investment and regeneration attempts were felt to have fallen short and that some communities within South Bristol have remained, for generations, communities within which children face significant socio-economic challenges. As a result, many young people within the community struggle to easily see a positive future for themselves. Again, much of the frustration was articulated as concern in relation to an education system that was felt to not be recognising or meeting their needs, especially in relation to SEND and attendance support.

North Bristol is broadly speaking home to more affluent communities but does have overlapping concerns with East-Central where communities border one another. Overall professionals report that they have seen an increase in concerns around exploitation and weapons in the last two years in particular, although caution was voiced whether this was attributable to changing need or increased awareness and other agencies spotting and sharing information more effectively.

Expertise from experience

A vital component to understanding any serious youth violence context is the voices of the children, young people, families and communities affected.

Children and young people's voice

This review worked directly with the Youth Council, Shadow Board and participation groups and projects across the city to collaboratively develop an ethical and safe approach to seek, hear and include young people's views on serious youth violence and harm outside the home in the analysis and recommendations of this review.

To help the review pull together existing participation learning, and to understand children and young people's perspective on serious youth violence and its impact, a specific consultation exercise was developed and delivered as part of this review, inviting all education and youth settings across the city to contribute their views.

Previous work through the Youth Council supported young people to identify four key themes that mattered to them. The Youth Council then worked with the Shadow Board to further develop a set of questions that the review invited young people across the city to consider.

Youth Services

Children and young people who attended youth provision spoke warmly of the value of community youth support. They valued positive relationships, citing both the importance to them of adults who see them in a positive light and the safety they felt in having a protective adult they trust and can ask for help. Overall children and young people were asking for much more youth provision that is easily accessible and universal. Children and young people in Bristol want spaces and places where they feel valued, safe and welcome.

Community

Children and young people who responded to the consultation struggled to define their community and found it a difficult question. They were clear that they want provision close to home and said they often struggle to travel across the city. Many young people could not identify safety and belonging beyond their immediate home.

Knife Crime

Overall children and young people's response to serious youth violence was highly empathetic to their peers. Young people's responses to the review highlighted the context of fear that leads young people to carry weapons and saw their peers as having to make constrained choices in relation to their own safety when choosing to carry a knife. Young people were, however, very conscious of knife crime and its impact on their own feeling of safety. Young people who contributed to the consultation were clear that whilst safety messages and education were important to stopping young people carrying weapons, understanding root causes and professionals 'reading' risky and/or violent behaviour as vulnerability in their peers was crucial.

Safety

Children and young people's responses suggested that the 'outside world' does not feel safe to them at the moment. Most young people reported feeling safest in their bedroom, although there was encouraging feedback that schools and youth settings also offered safe spaces and relationships.

Family

Three of the four victims' families felt able to speak to the review. The whole review team would, again, like to thank the families for their time, emotional bravery and insight. The review is better for it.

The families spoke of being afraid for their children coming to harm from violence prior to the attacks; although they reflected that this was not a fear their children shared. The families shared a common anger and incomprehension at how easy it is for children to purchase or access weapons and knives. They recognised this as a national issue but asked that the review do all it can to highlight this as an issue that they believe needs urgent attention from the Government. Their view is that legislation in relation to knife ownership should mirror legislation on gun ownership with certain knives banned in their entirety; the sale of knives online banned and with a tight system of licensing and regulation where there are exceptions. They also asked for much higher-profile knife surrender bins, with transparent policies for their use.

The families also raised considerable concerns in relation to the education system. They recognised the powerfully protective effect of positive experiences of education, but felt their children had been let down. They perceived education settings as not sufficiently seeing vulnerability or reading changes in behaviour as a trigger for increased support; instead responding with fines, punitive responses, managed moves and exclusions. There was an ask for enhanced, pro-active, pastoral support and easier access to skilled one-to-one support and mentoring.

Family members voiced some frustration and distress at feeling their attempts to advocate for the boys, within what they experienced as an opaque and overly complicated education system, went unheeded. They raised whether childhood experiences of trauma – including where known to professionals - were appropriately understood and learning in relation to this applied when responding to behaviour and situations the young people experienced as triggering.

The families questioned repeatedly why youth violence is still happening when there have been previous reviews. They described a cycle whereby: 'something happens, you react, it gets better, you slack off, something happens again' which they saw as leading to 'another review for another child'. Within this the families questioned why policing and children's social care waited for 'something to happen' before 'doing something'. They felt that information was widely known both in the community and by statutory services, but that repeated 'early' concerns were not responded to appropriately. The families' view is that these should have been seen differently and intelligence used to offer support and intervention far earlier.

One of the clearest frustrations heard was of services not recognising and directly responding to the trauma being experienced by young people who are routinely witnessing violence and exploitation. Darrian's family articulated a real concern that they believe young people are identified and even warned or cautioned in relation to incidents they are known or suspected to be present at, but do not receive any trauma-focused mental health support to process or understand what they have seen. They drew a direct line between this repeat traumatisation and an escalation of violence.

Despite their own grief the families were strongly empathetic towards the other young people and families involved. Whilst clear that the young people were responsible for their actions – and finding it distressing where they perceived this responsibility was not felt – they saw the young people's choices as constrained by the adult context around them. Two families have asked for opportunities for restorative justice and saw 'the answer' as communities and families, coming together to sit down and talk to prevent further deaths: 'we need to heal and love our kids and raise the next generation'.

Community

Professionals working to directly support the families affected in the aftermath of the stabbings of Max, Mason and Darrian described communities profoundly hurt by the stabbings and worried for their children.

Behind this joint concern however, community groups and professionals articulated differences between the two communities most affected.

The communities around Darrian in East Central are grieving Black families who want justice but question how their communities are perceived and supported by professionals, alongside a recognition that their communities often do not feel able to talk to the police. The wider community around Darrian's family see structural racism in both their children's constrained choices and the professional and system responses to these. They voiced race and racism as the primary driver behind Max and Mason's White families getting, what was felt by some in the community, to be a more effective justice response. They see this racism echoed in the press and press reporting of the incidents, with a far-reaching impact on communities and their grief.

The communities around Max and Mason in South Bristol are grieving white families who want to talk and be heard in relation to the discrimination and exclusion they see in their children not having the access and support they need in education. They see schools as not meeting the needs of adolescent boys with low literacy levels who disengage from learning and school. Communities in South Bristol see this as directly linked to violence asking 'Why are you surprised this happens? What hope can they have?'

Two of the three families who were able to contribute to the review spoke of high levels of community trauma and fear related to violence, and the on-going context of adult-led exploitation, organised crime and violence. For these families, their experiences have left them feeling unsafe and exposed, with continuing anxieties and feelings of acute distress. The families described pockets within Bristol's communities in which they see adults as having created and perpetuated a culture in which a of violence is not just the norm, but an aspiration with a clear hierarchy. They described their own lack of hope for the future, sharing an overwhelming preoccupation with 'what happens in fifteen years' time?'. The families spoke of fearing a generation of individuals convicted of community violence being released, with custodial sentences having led to a gain in their status amongst their peers.

The same two families reported experiencing enduring negative, threatening, contact in relation to the murders: both on-line and through wider community interactions. Drill music and 'dis tracks' were also raised as still having a pernicious impact, with families experiencing traumatic posthumous threats and intimidation, impacting their ability to grieve and celebrate their loved ones' lives and friendships, including at important anniversaries.

Transferable learning from Reviews and Inspections

In completing this review, there is a considerable amount of transferable learning which both can, and must, be applied to the analysis in this review.

Whilst serious youth violence, as with all forms of harm outside the home, is context specific and varies in characteristics across neighbourhoods, local authorities, regions and nationally, it is also possible and helpful to identify common themes and to build upon relevant knowledge, experience and expertise. This review therefore has drawn direct learning from the following CSPR and inspection findings.

Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership Learning

- a Joint Partnership Response to the Thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review on Cross-Border Peer-on-Peer Abuse and Child Criminal Exploitation (2021)¹⁰

¹⁰ [joint-partnership-response-thematic-cspr-final-nov-2021.pdf](#)

- **The KBSP and North Somerset** Rapid Review¹¹ in relation to Max, Mason and Darrian's deaths (2024)
- The internal KBSP 'Thematic Review of learning actions from Child Practice Safeguarding Reviews and Rapid Reviews in relation to Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and missing children in Bristol' (2024)
- Bristol Children's Social Care review of Adolescent and Edge of Care services, undertaken through DfE improvement funding (2024).

Regional serious youth violence CSPRS

- **Somerset** published a Good Practice Case Review¹² on serious youth violence (2023)
- **South Gloucestershire** Children's Partnership's LCSRP on Children Exposed to Serious Youth Violence in (August 2024)¹³.

Joint Targeted Area Inspection into Serious Youth Violence in Somerset

A Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) into Serious Youth Violence in Somerset was conducted in May, 2024¹⁴. Although not explicitly authored in relation to Bristol, there is considerable transferable learning to the Bristol context not just for the Avon and Somerset Constabulary, but for the partnership as a whole. The multi-agency inspection highlighted significant concerns. At a high level:

- Partnership working between organisations was found to be ineffective in addressing serious youth violence and criminal exploitation of children.
- Oversight by partnerships, including police involvement, was lacking 'rigour, drive and challenge'.
- Serious weaknesses in multi-agency practice were identified, affecting early risk identification.

High-level challenges

Whilst learning in relation to serious youth violence can feel fractured across the system, there are powerful commonalities in the root causes identified in published data, practice wisdom, the perspectives of children young people, their families and communities and in parallel learning from close neighbours. Taken as a whole the context for serious youth violence in Bristol suggests the importance of:

1. An evidence-informed whole-partnership vision in relation to harm outside the home. Within this children and young people need to be understood as vulnerable to multiple and complex forms of overlapping harm, which should include serious youth violence.
2. A whole partnership approach to tackling harm outside of the home, which is capable of identifying, understanding and responding to the structural barriers, bias and exclusion that children and young people experience.

¹¹ [PowerPoint Presentation](#)

¹² [Good-Practice-Case-Review-Serious-Youth-Violence-2023-1.pdf](#)

¹³ [CSPR-Children-Exposed-to-Serious-Youth-Violence-August-2024.pdf](#)

¹⁴ [Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to serious youth violence in Somerset - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

3. A robust focus – triangulated across data, professional insight and expertise from experience – on equity, equality, diversity and inclusion that understands and responds to young people and their families’ and communities’ experiences of poverty, racism, exclusion (including from education) and housing in particular.
4. Strengths-based prevention as an essential and equal part of any whole system response to preventing serious youth violence and harm outside of the home, including ensuring that the spaces and places where children and young people (want and need to) spend their time are safe and welcoming.
5. A relentless political and professional focus on disruption activity that is capable of identifying, holding responsible and preventing adults from exploiting and harming children.

Collectively this learning offers a strong base to further develop a systemic understanding of serious youth violence in Bristol through this review.

The analysis that follows looks at each key line of enquiry (KLOE) in turn, considering both the questions set by the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership panel (following on from the Rapid Review learning), whilst also holding in mind the high-level challenges framed above from the available transferable learning.

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KLOE 1. Governance and operational structures for responding to serious violence

This key line of enquiry explores the **governance and operational structures for responding to serious violence**. It considers how the decisions made at a strategic level influence and enable effective responses to individual children's needs and enable information to be shared across the city and cross-border.

Under this key line of enquiry, the analysis will review:

- What alignment and accountability need to look like to enable information to be shared across the city (meaning all partnership agencies and organisations, at all levels of the system) and across local borders.
- The need for a clear partnership vision to drive and enable this.

Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership governance and operational structures

Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership

Since its inception in 2019 the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership (KBSP), which holds the city's statutory responsibility for serious youth violence, has combined children's, adult's and community safety partnership arrangements under one structure.

Led by the three statutory safeguarding partners: Bristol City Council, Avon and Somerset Police and Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (formerly the Clinical Commissioning Group) the partnership is responsible for putting in place effective arrangements:

- To support the co-ordination, quality assurance and continuous improvement of activity to safeguard children and young people as laid out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (the functions of a Children's Safeguarding Partnership)
- To safeguard adults with care and support needs in accordance with the Care Act 2014 statutory guidance (the functions of a Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB).
- To deliver duties under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to keep communities safe, alongside the Probation Service and Avon Fire and Rescue as additional responsible authorities (the functions of a Community Safety Partnership)

The KBSP includes education and voluntary and community sector representation (under the Duty to co-operate as named partners) and also fulfils locally the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 in delivering the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and holds the local responsibility for the Serious Violence Prevention Board which coordinates the delivery of the Bristol spoke of the Avon and Somerset Violence Reduction Unit.

The Partnership is Governed by an Executive Board with an Independent Scrutineer (formerly Chair) and includes a core membership of Executive Director of People Bristol City Council, Bristol Police Commander Avon and Somerset Police, the Chief Executive of the Integrated Care Board, the Assistant Chief Officer of the Probation Service and the Chief Officer of Avon Fire and Rescue Service.

At the time of the incidents covered by this review the KBSP Board managed its work through six 'delivery groups': Keeping Communities Safe; Keeping Adults Safe; Family Hubs and Early Help Steering Group; Participation, Engagement and Communication; Keeping Children Safe and Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence¹⁵.

There is a significant programme of strategic review currently being undertaken across the partnership:

- Bristol City Council has now transitioned from its previous Mayoral system to a new committee structure, which has eight policy committees, aligned to the council's Corporate Strategy themes. Area Committees are also extending their remit in overseeing local issues.
- At the KBSP executive board level work is underway to separate and simplify governance.
- Significant improvement activity is being taken forward across and between partnership boards and sub groups, including in relation to the strategic integration of education and to drive work forwards in relation to inclusion and attendance (see also KLOE 4).
- Across individual agencies in response to both improvement imperatives and changes to national guidance (including Working Together 2023) (see KLOE 2 for more detail).

Whilst it is too early for the review to comment on the efficacy of these changes, they are all, on paper, broadly encouraging. The analysis below treads a careful line between robustly reflecting learning from the system 'as was', whilst recognising and attempting to align learning within wider and more current transformational change, through which key recommendations will need to be taken forward.

Alignment and accountability across the city and cross-border

In systems improvement literature there is an important distinction drawn between 'complex' and 'complicated'. Complexity is well defined by Roller¹⁶ as:

- Issues are emergent and so unpredictable as how a number of elements come together cannot be understood just by looking at the parts.
- There is a constant requirement to process 'new' information, which means we are asked to act without fully knowing everything there is to know.
- Adaptive – the issues morph, change and adapt.

Harm outside the home as an issue is complex: it cannot be fully understood by analysing individual components in isolation, as the interactions between elements are crucial.

Complicated systems, by contrast, may be highly intricate, but you can 'take them apart' and break them down into their constituent parts.

Understanding this distinction is critical for understanding the response to serious youth violence in Bristol, where the complexity of the issue means that it cannot be effectively responded to by a complicated system. Responding to serious youth violence, within the context of wider harm outside of the home, needs adaptive approaches, continuous learning, and the ability to respond to changing conditions. In short, it needs collaborative behaviours and effective co-ordination.

¹⁵ [kbsp-annual-report-2022-2023-final-ok.pdf](#)

¹⁶ <https://www.roller.sg/what-is-complexity>

Collaboration

Tackling serious youth violence needs to be a collaborative undertaking. Partnerships have to be able to collaborate effectively across potentially intersecting forms of harm including, but not necessarily limited to serious youth violence; criminal exploitation; sexual exploitation; extremism/ radicalisation; modern slavery; trafficking; teenage relationship abuse; peer-peer harm and bullying.

Alongside this specific harm-based expertise, partners need to collaborate to combine expertise in relation to the interconnected conditions for abuse¹⁷, which articulate the context for harm outside the home:

- **Intersecting strengths and vulnerabilities for children, young people**, their families and communities: including but not necessarily limited to: their physical, relational and psychological health and wellbeing; their identity and their experiences in relation to protected characteristics; their experiences of structural inequalities, racism and bias; their experiences linked to any previous adverse experiences and trauma; their care history; their experiences of education and their experiences of the availability and impact of wider social and emotional protective opportunities.
- **Intersecting characteristics of the spaces and places where harm is occurring** including but not necessarily limited to education settings; parks & leisure; public transport; streets/ neighbourhoods; clubs / activities; commercial spaces; online.
- **Intersecting characteristics, enablers and blockers for those perpetrating harm**: including but not limited to intelligence and the disruption and prevention activity being undertaken.

Strategically the interdependencies between serious youth violence and the wider context of harm outside of the home are not visible enough across the KBSP and structures and accountabilities still mirror individual forms of harm. Formal structures within the KBSP need to explicitly engender a collaborative response to harm outside of the home.

The KBSP 2019-2023 priorities included responding to serious youth violence within a wider context: developing both contextual and transitional approaches to safeguarding were articulated as a focus, alongside establishing Safer Options as a co-ordinating structure. Over time, and without clear strategic drive, the intended response has fractured and fragmented.

The key strategic driver in tackling youth violence is the 10 Year Safer Options Strategy. Despite being titled 'Bristol Safer Options Approach to Serious Youth Violence and Child Criminal Exploitation' there is no definition, analysis or actions exploring this overlap. Indeed, there is almost no mention at all of child exploitation or exploring the wider forms of harm outside of the home anywhere in the document.

Strategic commissioning stems from this framing, meaning that:

- The joint commissioning of the 2021 Child Safeguarding Practice Review (following a series of rapid reviews undertaken between 2018 and 2021 involving eight young people impacted by peer-on-peer abuse and knife crime) had key lines of enquiry which, despite acknowledging exploitation, were closely framed in relation to serious youth violence.
- The Rapid Review into the stabbings of Max, Mason and Darrian identified that there was key learning in relation to improving multi-agency oversight and planning for individuals involved in serious violence, but the framing of this also excluded the multiple interdependencies for serious youth violence with wider harm outside of the home, again focusing on serious youth violence in isolation.

¹⁷For further information on the inter-connected conditions of abuse, see Beckett et al. (2017) Child Sexual Exploitation Definition and Guide for Professionals. Extended Text.

- It is also important to note that the key lines of enquiry for this CSPR were then also framed solely in relation to serious youth violence.
- The strategic Serious Youth Violence Board, re-invigorated in response to the Rapid Review learning, initially carried through the siloed focus on a single, acute, form of harm, although ongoing work intended to address this is noted.

This is not to say that the work undertaken into serious youth violence itself has not had many thoughtful features, particularly in relation to the join up to Community Safety and the embedding of a strong Public Health approach. Ongoing support and challenge for the Serious Youth Violence Board (as is) must be prioritised to ensure interdependencies are meaningfully recognised and – often common - underlying causes to harm are effectively tackled.

Although dealt with in more detail in KLOE 2, it is also worth noting here a similar trajectory has been heard in relation to the Safer Options service: nominally a response to wider forms of harm, in practice Safer Options support is reported as dominated by serious youth violence without the needed focus and join-up to exploitation and wider harms.

With complexity not effectively responded to, a complicated response has emerged and calcified a siloed response to serious youth violence over the last five years. As a result, the system created has responded in a reactive and ever more complicated way to complex interdependencies as they arise. Without a whole-systems perspective a proactive, preventative, response is not possible as the root causes of violence, and so harm, cannot be effectively seen and so understood.

The dynamics of not managing complexity through collaboration are clearly identifiable in the partnership's relationship with its education colleagues. In principle, education leads spoke strongly of wanting to be included as a fourth partner in safeguarding, alongside children's social care, health and the police. In practice senior leaders within children's social care, health and police, as well as education, all characterised the relationship between education and the partnership (and children's social care in particular) as 'very fractured'. A consistent view was shared that past Executive Directors 'didn't get schooling', leading to social care colleagues struggling to understand and respond to a process of academisation effectively and education partners feeling that they weren't being fully engaged with. Colleagues on both 'sides' and at all levels spoke of losing confidence in the wider partnership.

Co-ordination

The strategic serious violence board currently sits within the wider structure of KBSP boards and sub-groups. The original organising principles and accountability through its executive board and subgroup structure were described to the review as 'strong in intention' and it is recognised that significant work is underway both with the serious violence board and wider structures to continue to move towards clearer purpose and broader membership and accountability, but this work is in its infancy.

Over the past five years, without a collaborative approach drawing together the broadest possible expertise aligned to a clear vision, the KBSP structure has grown into a complicated network of sub (often sub-sub) groups and allied 'workstreams' which focus on acute interventions in relation to a single form of harm.

To understand the full context of partnership work to tackle serious youth violence in Bristol this review undertook a mapping exercise, asking all KBSP partners to detail all single and multi-agency strategy documents and meetings occurring both city-wide and regionally, through which the strategic, operational and direct delivery of work to tackle serious youth violence is managed and governed.

This demonstrated a considerable amount of unstructured activity aimed at tackling serious youth violence across the partnership. There were repeated reflections from professionals that, whilst individual projects were valued, they were not connected and that work across the years has repeatedly been lost or duplicated without a clear guiding purpose.

In completing the mapping exercise, and then reflecting on it with partners, three defining characteristics emerged:

- The sheer number of groups, boards and forums with a role in tackling serious youth violence was recognised by partners as overwhelming.
- There was a notable absence of up-to-date, clearly understood and articulated and widely shared terms of reference for all of the groups, which in practice meant lines of accountability between the groups and across the partnership were felt to be opaque at best and non-existent at worst.
- In all of the strategic activity to tackle serious youth violence there was very little overlap with the strategic leadership of other forms of harm outside of the home.

Reflecting with senior leaders, a self-perpetuating cycle was described whereby:

- Siloed working has created a highly reactive culture.
- Within this reactive culture a partnership landscape has been created which is extremely complicated (as opposed to necessarily complex), with new meetings and initiatives being built on top of old, without any review or revision to what already exists.
- Without an overarching conceptual framework or organising principles this felt opaque and potentially unsafe, even to those operating within it.
- Unable to see the wider scheme of work or accountabilities it felt 'safer' for individuals and agencies to respond to every individual incident with new meetings, systems and processes.
- The response perpetuated, building more and more complicated structures, systems and processes.

Through this proliferation of activity and 'busy-ness' it has become very difficult to frame, align and hold accountable a partnership response that brings together the range of expertise required. As a result, the scaffolding to support work in relation to serious youth violence in Bristol has become notably very narrow, with the interdependencies that could help prevent violence structurally separated from it.

The renewed focus within the reconstituted serious violence board on triangulating evidence and directly including children, young people's and community voices is welcomed. But the alignment and accountability of structures that determine workflows across the KBSP for serious youth violence remain largely unaltered. Real consideration is needed at an executive level in relation to the extent to which the structures currently in place still exclude interdependencies and block rather than facilitate connectivity, especially with education and wider safeguarding and child exploitation agendas.

Cross border working

The impact of this lack of strategic alignment and accountability has also been felt beyond Bristol.

Bristol is governed as single unitary authority as Bristol City Council (BCC). Within the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership, however, BCC's joint statutory partners have a much broader footprint: the Avon and Somerset Constabulary covers Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire and the Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB) has a similarly broad, although not exactly correlating, geographic footprint to the police.

Both the Serious Violence Duty and Working Together 2023 are clear that responsibility for safeguarding and serious youth violence both sit at a local authority level. In a challenge mirrored across England, this means that KBSP arrangements also need to take account of non-contiguous geographical borders.

Bristol is by no means alone in having two of its three statutory safeguarding partners working across multiple safeguarding partnerships, with different structures, reporting arrangements and approaches to delivery and accountability. Partners across health and police in particular are clear: this tension is manageable, with colleagues realistic about the need to manage work across local authorities who have different systems and imperatives.

Critically, though, they report the lack of collaboration and co-ordination means there is not the clear 'ask' from BCC in terms of how work needs to be structured and aligned with regional partners. Without clear alignment and terms of reference across so many meetings, health and police colleagues in particular cited often feeling ill at ease with asks to represent their agency in KBSP meetings, where they were not certain they had the specific knowledge or expertise required. The risk is that this then iteratively slides into a culture of 'presenteeism' in which attendance and multi-agency representation are technically happening, but with the right expertise frequently being felt to be in the wrong room.

Colleagues from neighbouring authorities noted that cross-border relationships are strongly driven by the most senior leaders and that without this consistent leadership and drive regional alignment has been negatively impacted. Both health and police leaders reflected on the relational difficulties that can arise from the need to constantly adjust and re-adjust to dynamics across multiple local authorities with very different circumstances and also very different leaders. When leaders themselves are constantly changing this was noted as compounding the dynamic.

Recommendations made in KLOE 2 (below) in relation to both the application of the multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm and inter-agency work to integrate data and intelligence are needed to help guide and inform strategic leaders to give a clear mandate in relation to the balance of activity and accountability across boundaries.

Developing a driving strategic vision

One of the core reasons that collaboration and co-ordination in Bristol have, historically, felt problematic is the lack of a driving strategy in relation to serious youth violence and harm outside of the home.

Leadership here is key. To effectively respond to harm outside of the home the leadership of safeguarding partnerships needs to develop a clear and compelling strategy that all agencies within the partnership can coalesce around; able to effectively work towards collective outcomes by aligning their own expertise. Without a clear and shared strategy, a partnership system cannot effectively drive operational delivery.

A shared strategy requires partners to come together and agree priorities and focus, and in turn give each agency a clear view of their focus and responsibilities; both individually and collectively. The act of setting a vision is a relational one, which at its core involves values and beliefs that need to be shared and agreed openly and transparently. It is both a political and 'moral' task in public service: it is exposing so requires trust.

The evidence that this review has seen and heard is that, for serious youth violence, the KBSP is not yet at this point. Whilst relationships within and between agencies within KBSP have been consistently described to this review as 'positive' they have also been observed to be primarily ad hoc and bilateral; based on individuals and personalities, rather than a culturally embedded relational approach.

There was a consistent recognition amongst the most senior leaders across the KBSP that they did not feel there was a driving vision effectively connecting serious youth violence and harm outside the home.

When pressed, there were a number of recurring reflections amongst senior leaders accounting for the ‘stalling’ of the KBSP as a force for driving strategic change:

- The impact on a young and complex partnership structure of Covid-19
- A lack of whole system accountability, including political leadership
- The extent of leadership changes across partner agencies post 2019

The impact of Covid-19

Multiple senior leaders noted to the review that the formation of the new KBSP arrangements were followed swiftly by the Covid-19 pandemic, which ‘stalled’ the development of meaningful relationships across the partnership. This was seen to be a result of both:

- The sudden and acute pressures on individual agencies in terms of *what* their immediate and imperative priorities were, and
- The impact on how they were (largely not) able to work together and establish a truly interagency approach.

Senior colleagues in BNSSG in particular were at pains to underline the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on partnership working during the period covered by the review, with health effectively having to withdraw from much ‘business as usual’ work, given the breadth and depth of the impact on service demand from the pandemic. They also cited the long coattails of the pandemic and the extent to which it is still negatively impacting on health and strategic capacity.

Positive bi-lateral relationships are accepted to have offered a ‘work around’ to achieve good multi-agency working, but this way of working has also allowed individually agreed agendas to either dominate and control partnership focus or allow things to be dropped and/or lost. Left to embed without clear leadership for the partnership (see below) this approach has allowed a culture focused on siloed workstreams to develop and dominate over one of interdependencies and collective ownership and accountability.

Whole system accountability, including political leadership

Political leaders, although rarely on safeguarding organisational charts, are crucial for driving strategic vision and ultimately holding services and agencies to account. In Bristol’s context, lines of accountability between elected politicians, the Chief Executive and the council officers responsible for children’s social care have been determined by a very particular democratic system.

A 2012 referendum in Bristol established a Mayoral system of governance¹⁸. Under this system, which was in operation until 2024¹⁹, a directly elected Mayor led the council and had responsibility for all major policy decisions with significant executive powers, supported by a cabinet formed from elected Councillors²⁰.

¹⁸ [Mayoral governance in Bristol: Has it made a difference? | Policy Bristol | University of Bristol](#)

¹⁹ In 2016 Marvin Rees was elected as a Labour Mayor, with a Labour led council.

In 2022, a further public referendum was held in Bristol, in which the local electorate voted to replace the Mayoral system with a new committee system with the post of leader of the council re-established as the political leader. Marvin Rees remained as Mayor until May 2024, when the change to the committee system took effect following the national election. At the same time the Chief Executive also left the city.

²⁰ [History of the Mayor of Bristol](#)

Whilst it is not for this review to have a view on the relative efficacy of systems of local governance, the culture under the previous Mayoral system of government in Bristol was raised and separately reflected on by multiple senior leaders interviewed as part of this review. Reflections were that it was a highly political system, with a highly centralised policy agenda creating a very specific leadership culture.

Overall, this review heard that 'normal' lines of accountability were felt to be weakened, with strategic direction and improvement activity in relation to safeguarding described as not being subject to the same levels of either support, or routine and robust scrutiny, as was felt to be needed.

Leadership changes with the KBSP post 2019

Within this political context, the KBSP has experienced a relatively exceptional recent history in terms of senior leadership instability with the partnership.

Since 2019 there have been five new Executive Directors of Children and Education for Bristol City Council. Strategic instability has been highly impactful within Children's Social Care with the impact felt at all levels throughout the system and across partners. All partners also referenced the impact of increasing turnover of staff within social care, police and education more widely. Whilst direct causation is not attributable, the level of instability at the most senior levels has meant that the capacity of leaders to tenaciously focus on the stability and security of the wider workforce has been undoubtedly constrained.

At a local level changes in strategic leadership – and so agendas – have meant relationships and ways of working have also had to be learned and re-learned across the partnership over the last five years. A clear sense has been conveyed to the review that the 'stop start' of leadership change has made it more difficult to establish strong bonds of trust, compounding fragile relationships in local communities. With initiatives and approaches being ended or implemented by each new leader the support landscape has continually shifted and changed for families and professionals. Professionals have voiced a sense that their integrity has felt compromised at times, having to explain changes that they did not understand or were struggling to navigate.

School leaders also identified the impact of the loss of experienced education leaders coinciding with education settings needing to manage post-Covid pressures in the form of attendance challenges, lengthy SEND assessment timeframes, delays in reviews and complex information-sharing imperatives.

When describing both single agency improvement work and their work with children and families, school leaders highlighted the frequent changes in senior leadership at the local authority impacting on a lack of consistency in strategy, loss of organisational knowledge and a lot of moving on to the 'next big thing'. The ability to build trust and take risks is much reduced in a climate of short-termism and, eventually, fatigue.

Similarly, both health and police colleagues within the KBSP recognise that since 2019 their wider organisations have been through periods of significant internal instability, characterised by both interim posts and significant organisational restructures, which have affected their relationships with, and ability to effectively support, local partnerships.

Across all levels of the system – both regional and local – professionals cited previous good work being lost through lack of momentum. For children's social care a Contextual Safeguarding approach was cited most often as having stalled and largely been lost. In education, work done on Belonging²¹, Anti-Racism²² and

²¹ Bristol's Belonging Strategy for Children and Young People: Vision Statement 2021-2024; BCC

²² Bristol's Anti-Racism in education engagement report; BCC (2023)

Behaviour²³ guidance for schools was felt not to have been properly embedded across the school system, along with the lack of an overarching vision to enable more collaborative working.

Overall, this review saw repeated and consistent evidence that a strategy linking serious youth violence with wider forms of harm is needed, underpinned by stable and consistent leadership.

A more stable senior leadership team is recognised to be forming. With the most senior posts across the partnership now filled, or about to be, there is the potential for a newly energised and determined culture to drive forwards effective strategic vision. Recent key developments include:

- The transfer from a Mayoral to Committee system of local governance is complete, with a Children and Young People Policy Committee established (which oversees both children's social care and education) chaired by a new lead member for Children and Families.
- A new permanent BCC Chief Executive has been appointed and approved, with his tenure expected to begin in January 2025.
- The KBSP Independent Scrutineer was appointed at the end of 2023 and will initially act as Chair of the KBSP Executive Board and Independent Scrutineer of Children's Services.
- A new Executive Director for Children and Education has been in post since February 2024 and will chair the newly separated Children's Board.
- Recruitment is underway for a permanent Director of Education.
- The Bristol Police Commander Chairs the Community Safety Board.

Key learning

Learning from this review speaks to the foundational importance of *how* work is undertaken, rather than solely focusing on 'what' needs to be done. Much of what leaders across KBSP expressed they were struggling to understand, is why things still felt so hard when much of *what* they were doing was felt to be 'right'. Much like the corporate maxim that 'culture eats strategy for breakfast' this review has found that the KBSP needs to refocus from constant activity to attend to its relational dynamics, establishing clear, aligned and accountable leadership that support truly collaborative behaviours in order to allow meaningful improvement to be realised. The more structural recommendations (considered in KLOE 2, 3 and 4) will ultimately rely on this for their success.

Developing a driving strategic vision

The Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership does not currently have a complete strategic vision for tackling harm outside of the home, around which multi-agency partners can align and drive forward meaningful change. 'New' and complex partnership arrangements have not had an opportunity to bed in. There has not been the driving vision needed in relation to harm outside the home, capable of underpinning effective systemic improvement. Reform fatigue and learned 'permission to disengage' have become real risks.

Family members welcomed recommendations looking at the whole system. They voiced a clear belief that health, police, education and social care were not working closely enough together to understand and respond to the lived experiences of children and young people in their communities, despite feeling like they had the information and intelligence needed to shape a pro-active approach.

²³²³ Relationships and Belonging: Behaviour Regulation guidance for Bristol, Developing an Attachment and ACE* Aware Approach to Inclusion; BCC.

They felt children's behaviour, when concerning, needed to be better understood in the context of their personal histories, their experiences of poverty, racism and discrimination, of educational attainment and exclusion and in terms of their mental health, emotional wellbeing and any special educational needs or disabilities.

A clear vision is critical to galvanise ongoing reform. The recent LCSPR in South Gloucestershire flagged the importance of an integrated approach to tackling serious youth violence, explicitly locating tackling it within a wider agenda focusing on harm outside of the home. This learning also applies to Bristol.

A strong, shared and consistent strategic partnership strategy for serious youth violence, which frames this specific, acute, form of harm within the wider context of harm outside the home would allow the KBSP to:

- Draw down the widest possible expertise when responding to serious youth violence with a compassionate vision that explicitly puts all children and young people's vulnerability at its centre.
- Direct partnership activity to collectively focus on the root causes of violence, and so harm, including a more equal focus on vulnerable children and young people, disrupting adult who are exploiting children and creating more safe spaces and places for children and young people.
- Adopt aligned structures and put in place more robust accountability.

To realise this the KBSP needs to:

- Fundamentally revise the 10 Year Safer Options strategy, which drives strategic work in relation to serious youth violence, within a much broader strategy addressing harm outside of the home and incorporating learning and proposals from the recent Adolescent and Edge of Care Review.
- Work with the multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra familial harm (Recommendation 4) to ensure the vision developed is a holistic response.
- Use the multi-agency triangulation of data and intelligence, practice wisdom and expertise from experience (Recommendation 5) to ensure the vision is robust and tailored to Bristol's context.
- Ensure strategy includes effective prevention and the operational models are focused on interagency collaboration (Recommendations 6 and 7).
- Support partners to embed the new strategy and operational models at strategic, operational and direct delivery levels, through a central co-ordinating spine of support overseen by the KBSP Business Unit (Recommendation 3).

It is noted, however, that there are already considerable strengths emerging in Bristol which should help the Partnership realise this approach:

- The Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership Strategic Plan (current version 2023-2026)²⁴ focuses on interdependencies well and explicitly recognises the need to focus on key partnership behaviours²⁵
- As a new leadership team is forming, there is a window of opportunity to drive forward a strategy capable of responding to the complexities of harm outside the home, providing the robust foundation needed to (re)align governance structures and ensure accountability. This opportunity must be fully grasped.

²⁴ [Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership: Strategic Plan 2022-2026](#)[Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership: Strategic Plan 2023-2026](#)

²⁵ [Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership: Strategic Plan 2022-2026](#)[Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership: Strategic Plan 2023-2026](#)

Appendix 1 outlines an approach, 'Joining the Dots', that can be used to help manage the development of this vision in a strengths-based, relational and restorative way.

Alignment and accountability across the city and cross-border

Without the clarity of vision and strategic direction articulated above, the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership, has evolved a complicated strategic structure, in which serious youth violence is structurally siloed from wider safeguarding imperatives and both alignment and accountability are opaque.

Within the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership:

- Serious Youth Violence as an agenda needs to be more effectively linked to other strategic safeguarding activity or other forms of extra-familial harm/ harm outside the home.
- Interdependencies between serious youth violence and criminal exploitation in particular need to be better made.
- The lack of strategic link between serious youth violence and exploitation in Bristol risks 'adultifying' vulnerable young people and seeing them as responsible for their own harm, rather than focusing on the adults causing harm and vital wider disruption work.
- The fractured governance structures for harm outside the home have allowed investment in evidence-informed responses, such as contextual safeguarding, to lose momentum and impact when they could have had significant positive impact.

The Somerset JTAI findings flagged the crucial importance of strategic leadership and judgement and the need to evidence robust partnership working (alignment) and oversight (accountability) when working to tackle serious youth violence. Were Bristol to undertake a 'true for us?' exercise in relation to the JTAI findings this review suggests very similar findings would likely result.

Families voiced similar concerns, feeling that community information and intelligence is available to policing colleagues, along with information from education, health, social care and community organisations, but that communities do not see a joined-up professional response that reflects the level of concern communities feel.

Based on a clear vision, reviewing strategic governance arrangements would help the KBSP to:

- Reduce the amount of reactive activity being undertaken across the partnership, allowing partners to proactively focus on interdependencies to address the root causes of harm.
- Re-align core functions, articulating transparent lines of ownership and accountability within the partnership.
- Free up valuable resource.

To realise this the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership needs to:

- Complete and support work to revise board and panel structures to effectively link serious youth violence with exploitation and other forms of harm as a whole-system response to harm outside the home.
- Incorporate spaces, places and disruption activity in these structures – explicitly monitoring effectiveness.
- Ensure that overall KBSP governance structures across interdependent policy areas are clearly aligned with robust lines of accountability.

- All boards and groups working on serious youth violence need to have a clear terms of reference and need to refocus on harm outside of the home
- Membership needs to be (1) inclusive and (2) at the right level
- Reduce the overall number of competing boards/ panels/ subgroups.
- Lead courageously: model and explicitly give permission for colleagues across the partnership to 'stop' doing some things and act with purpose over pace.
- Work with education leaders to explicitly include and fully integrate education as a 'fourth member' of the partnership.

It is noted that much work is already underway in this area, led by the partnership's Independent Scrutineer. This is a leadership opportunity which should be used courageously. This review encourages the senior leadership team across the partnership to reflect on and use the 'bridging boundaries' component of the 'Joining the Dots' framework (see Appendix 1) to support and help ensure a shared sense of agency and ownership across the partnership.

Supporting effective multi-agency responses in complex environments

Without a clear strategy, and with a complicated and fractured governance system, governance and accountability for responding to harm outside the home is not effectively managed at the partnership level.

Within the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership:

- Single-agency language, definitions and thresholds make the alignment of work culturally complex
- Data and intelligence functions are entirely devolved to individual agency level, meaning very little whole system reconciliation and analysis has taken place or been available to effectively support and challenge strategic planning, development, commissioning or evaluation activity across the partnership.
- Training and development activity is largely not shared or co-ordinated at a partnership level, compounding a siloed understanding of harms and effective responses and meaning that learning and improvement activity lacks visibility.
- Interagency work needs to be better owned at a partnership level to avoid both gaps and duplication across single-agency responses.

Whilst this review stops short of a specific recommendation in relation to enhancing central support, it should be noted that all seven recommendations require significant investment in supporting whole partnership functions. Responsibility for supporting interagency working sits with all agencies and common outcomes should be supported – and be seen as supported – through shared resource and expertise.

KLOE 1 Recommendations: Governance and operational structures

1. Develop a strong, whole partnership, strategy for responding to harm outside of the home

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- Serious youth violence is strategically held in the same space as all forms of extra-familial harm/ harm outside the home.

- Spaces, places and disruption are fully incorporated into a response that also recognises and responds to non-contiguous geographic, service and administrative borders.
- The wider KBSP supports educational settings to deliver an effective Early Intervention approach to SYV in the context of harm outside the home and to improve educational attendance and inclusion.

2. Review and revise all strategic, operational and direct practice panels and boards in relation to all forms of harm outside of the home

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- The overall number of meetings are reduced and leaders visibly model purpose over pace and give permission to 'stop' doing some things.
- All remaining panels and boards responding to harm outside the home are clearly aligned.
 - Terms of reference have been (1) reviewed (2) where need, established and (3) (re)focused on harm outside of the home.
 - Membership is (1) inclusive and (2) at the right level.
- Education specifically school leaders in addition to leaders from within the local authority, are included and involved as a 'fourth' partner across all practice, operational and strategic responses.
- Lines of accountability and ownership are strengthened through on-going partnership work. The KBSP Business Unit is able to act as a central co-ordinating and monitoring resource for all improvement activity across the partnership.

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SEPTEMBER 2025

KLOE 2. Improvement activity across the partnership

Under this key line of enquiry, analysis will focus on:

- What and whether the partnership has a clear idea of what its strengths and weaknesses are in relation to harm outside the home and
- What and whether the KBSP is able to draw on the data and intelligence needed to effectively analyse and understand need across these contexts.
- What this means for responding effectively to conflict.

Multi-agency Improvement Context

There are multiple external improvement drivers for all agencies within the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership with, as noted in KLOE 1, a significant pace to activity. With a new senior leadership team (almost fully) in place and significant partnership-level reforms underway, improvement is being driven at both whole partnership and individual agency level.

Bristol City Council's Children's Social Care has had a long improvement journey, predicated on three consecutive findings (under two frameworks), of requiring improvement: most recently in January 2023. 'Requiring improvement' for this length of time is a relatively unusual context, creating its own pressures and culture within a system. Areas noted as needing to improve in January 2023 that are particularly relevant to effectively managing harm outside of the home included:

- The timeliness and consistency with which initial decisions about thresholds for access to services are matched to children's levels of risk and need, to help ensure that they routinely receive timely and proportionate support.
- The effectiveness of some aspects of joint working with partner agencies, in particular health and the police.

In response, the new Executive Director for Children and Education has set-up a new Children's Quality Improvement and Performance Board under the independent chairmanship of the DCS for Hampshire, an Outstanding local authority. This review heard broad confidence from the Independent Scrutineer that the board 'was looking at the right things', including a wholesale review of Adolescent and Edge of Care services. But caution was also noted that the board had only been in place for five months, with some reflections voicing concern that the work was seen as externally driven and required by updates to Working Together 2023, rather than as in response to a recognition that the work is needed.

The recent 2024 JTAI in Somerset raised serious concerns for police colleagues and their partners: the combined inspection noted efforts to tackle serious youth violence across the force as 'lacking rigour, drive and challenge,' with serious weaknesses in multi-agency practice identified as affecting early risk identification.

The most recent 2021/22 PEEL assessment for the Avon and Somerset Constabulary showed a mixed performance, with some areas of excellence but also significant room for improvement in key policing responsibilities. The force was rated adequate in relation to preventing crime and protecting vulnerable people and they were assessed as requiring improvement in recording data about crime.

Colleagues both within and working with the force described relationships with Avon and Somerset Constabulary affected by an agency actively struggling with its own improvement imperatives. At the root

of this leaders across the partnership cited an organisational structure under which there is a significant gap between Bristol leadership (which is tactical) and specific expertise (which is force-wide). Within the constabulary strategic leadership for, for example, children and young people, child exploitation, stop and search and knife crime are distributed at force level (so across four local authorities) leaving geographical access to expertise limited. The most pertinent example of this shared with this review was that the force structure means that the lead for knife crime, however expert, is not based in Bristol and so is without tactical or community understanding of the city.

The policing structure for Avon and Somerset is under review internally, with partners all reflecting on the balance needing to be found. Many colleagues shared the confidence they held in command level policing and a strong community focus, whilst naming 'some real anxiety about police capability and capacity re safeguarding' and 'understanding of vulnerability'. It was acknowledged across the partnership that the recent JTAI findings have framed, rather than revealed, concerns.

The BNSSG also recognised that they have been on an improvement journey over recent years, again citing the structural impact Covid and Covid-recovery continues to have on health partners, with waiting lists in all areas – particularly noted as CAMHS and in relation to SEND – of concern.

In the one-off cycle of joint Ofsted and CQC inspections to evaluate implementation of the 2014 SEND reforms, Bristol was required to produce a Written Statement of Action in relation to required improvements. In October 2022, Ofsted and the CQC carried out a local area SEND revisit. This found that the Bristol area had made enough progress in addressing four out of five areas of significant weakness identified. Difficult relationships with parents and carers were noted to have continued, affecting the quality of co-production between area leaders and parents/carers. An Accelerated Progress Plan was published in June 2023 to address the remaining area of weakness.

The impact of this has enormous overlap with education partners, where challenges in relation to attendance, the assessment and support offer in relation to SEND and the management of children absent from education are all concerns raised and discussed in detail as part of this review (see KLOE 4).

Whilst the most recent Ofsted/CQC joint SEND review (in Nov 22) found that the identification and assessment of children and young people with SEND in Bristol was improving, provision for SEND was described to this review as a major source of frustration for both education and social care colleagues.

Again, significant strategic reform is in train. As noted, actions are in place to improve alignment between the proposed new Schools Partnership Board and the revised Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership Board to ensure broader, deeper engagement across education settings alongside wider children's services and community-based partnership activities. The recently established Quality and Improvement Board and Inclusion Boards should ensure that the local authority, working together with schools and other partners, is able to make progress on this issue in the coming months.

The new Children's Quality Improvement and Performance Board is also focusing on driving improvement and join up across children's and education services including improving school attendance (including Elective Home Education and Children Missing Education) together with a SEND Board which is established and underway.

Significant interagency improvement challenges remain across the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership, in continuing to frame their response to serious youth violence and harm outside of the home:

Strategically whole partnership work needs to be undertaken to ensure:

- The disconnect between education and the rest of the partnership, is directly addressed.
- The level of active engagement, up to and including at the most senior levels, with *cross-partnership* strategic thinking in relation to safeguarding is meaningful.

Operationally whole partnership work needs to be undertaken to ensure:

- The ability to effectively track through the system – across multiple meetings and service divides.
- There is clarity in relation to where responsibility for children in relation serious youth violence and harm outside of the home is held in the system.
- The risks and vulnerabilities created by ‘too many children moving around the city’, particularly through managed moves in education are known, understood and responded to.
- Education is firmly at the partnership table and the partnership as a whole is able to meaningfully ‘hold’ the numbers of children missing education (CME) and/or experiencing severe and persistent absence.

In Practice whole partnership work needs to be undertaken to ensure:

- Safeguarding referrals to the front door are seen – by all agencies – as being met with a clear and consistent understanding of the interrelated nature of forms of harm outside the home.
- That the significant harm that occurs as a result of exploitation or outside the home is consistently and appropriately seen and responded to in the same way as significant harm in the family environment.
- That appropriate interventions are being put in place – and known to be working.
- Referral pathways and individual thresholds for services are not barriers to accessing support and there is a clear and shared understanding of the relationship between parental consent and safeguarding imperatives across the partnership.
- Concerns particularly from education colleagues, about the impact of the loss of data from Operation Encompass and a perceived lack of responsiveness to referrals for support are understood and addressed.
- Those working in educational settings receive timely information on incidents of concern and are being invited into multi agency meetings as standard practice to share valuable information about the child, their peers and wider family networks.

Taken as a whole, the need for and pace of externally driven change has led to a complex picture of, on the one hand, very definite ‘initiative fatigue’, frustration and sometimes defensiveness in relation to improvement activity, yet on the other hand a sense of optimism and encouragement that key priorities are being taken forwards, together with a genuine desire and commitment to improve children and young people’s safety. The improvement culture this review found across the partnership as a result is perhaps best described as ‘fragile’ with a need to build resilience at all levels of partnership work.

This key line of enquiry further asked the authors to specifically consider improvement activity across the partnership in relation to assessment, community knowledge and intelligence gathering and responses to conflict within an area or group (using the intergenerational conflict within South Bristol as a focus).

Assessment

The Rapid Review into the stabbings of Max, Mason and Darrian and the serious injuries to a fourth young person identified whole-partnership learning in relation to the quality and depth of child and family social work assessments and interventions:

- Assessments should consider the child’s extra and intra-familial risks and needs holistically, including the broader context or their history.

- Professionals should take a youth-focused assertive outreach approach (persistent contact, building trusting relationships, elevating youth voice, introduction to resources and services for those disconnected from education and employment, leading to positive life outcomes that reflect their needs, interests and aspirations).
- Ensure there are no gaps in the level of detail and quality of information sought from other professionals when analysing cumulative risk.
- Improve frequency of visiting children and families to support engagement with services.
- Take a more youth-focused approach when strengthening the support (and its speed) received by families experiencing breakdown where the young person is unable to live at home.
- Respond to the intersectionality between a child experiencing harm outside the family, the impact on their family life, exclusion from school and homelessness.

This review further endorses these findings, underlining that assessment across the partnership tends towards single-agency description rather than inter-agency analysis. Whilst individual practitioners demonstrated a strong knowledge of 'their' children and young people, frustrations and concerns were framed across agencies at what *other* agencies in the system were or were not doing²⁶. Whilst this review has seen much evidence of information sharing, it has also seen significant evidence that assessment remains a single agency activity across agencies with deficits almost always being seen as lying with 'other' parts of the system.

At the time of the stabbings covered by this report, the independent Adolescent Review undertaken by Bristol City Council found that services for adolescents and those on the edge of care within children's social care needed increased structure and clarity. Most cases where there were significant professional concerns in relation to adolescents were being held in the children's social care Strengthening Families Teams within the wider Families in Focus service. Whilst nominally an 'early help' service, all professionals working in the system acknowledged that the children and families supported by these teams had significant needs.

Whilst both this review and the adolescent review saw skilled and dedicated teams working directly with young people, children that workers were being asked to hold within the Strengthening Families Team had inconsistent levels of risk and need and were covering a wide range of issues that were not consistently lower than the children open to child protection teams. This concern was echoed by partners, who repeatedly named that the support available to children with complex needs were hard to 'pitch' at the right level to enable them to get the support seen as needed.

Again, this review notes that significant work has already been undertaken by children's social care, with a proposal for a new Edge of Care service accepted and detailed proposals out for consultation at the time of writing. The recommendations in the adolescent review are robust but need to be accepted in full. In conducting this review the authors also found that too few wider partners had been engaged in the review or were aware of its recommendations, despite its multi-agency importance. It is vital that children's social care works in close concert with all its wider safeguarding partners – statutory and not statutory – to help shape and embed implementation of the review's recommendations.

²⁶ ['It's not them, it's us': the making of a child exploitation strategy - Tackling Child Exploitation](#)

Community knowledge

Hand-in-glove with assessing individual need is understanding and working in partnership with communities. This work is vital both in terms of being able to include community voice meaningfully in strategic decisions, but it is also important in public health terms as valuing and investing in communities as a powerful form of primary prevention for violence.

The extent and strength of integration between community safety, public health and child protection in Bristol is relatively unusual and, in this context, a real strength.

Teams across Children's Social Care, Police, Health, Education and wider community and voluntary groups undoubtedly know their local communities well. Multi-agency work is organised geographically and there is a genuine acknowledgement both of the need to work together and of the expertise that colleagues all respectively bring.

Geographically the structuring of service responses into North, East-Central and South allows for effective localised response to harms, with a sharp focus on individual communities and their needs. In Bristol it has also allowed for the effective alignment of children's social care and a strong and committed approach to neighbourhood policing in particular. The level of community knowledge within the system is a real opportunity and resource for the partnership, especially in terms of being attuned to the strengths and opportunities within communities, as opposed to identifying only concerns and challenges.

Education colleagues in Bristol are also keen to work in geographical partnerships as an approach seen as capable of helping redress the complex educational system and previous poor levels of trust between schools and the local authority.

Confidence in community-focused approaches, however, was seen as double-edged. Whilst description and knowledge are undoubtedly good, issues are understood and responded to *only* as hyper local. Again, a fragmented and highly 'busy' landscape of individual initiatives and responses was articulated.

Over time, this has led to important city-wide commonalities being missed in relation to how young people, families and communities need to be supported to prevent harm. In interview, cross-cutting practice conversations across locations were cited as being relatively rare. Multi-agency locality meetings do discuss individual cases, but they are not thematic and they do not routinely triangulate cases with city-wide data, intelligence and insight.

Truly public-health, or whole system, ways of working need strong community insight to be contextualised within a wider picture by triangulating individual children's assessments with wider data and intelligence analysis. The review recognises that the reconstituted serious violence board has made explicit improvements in this direction: directly including community and young people's representation on the board and commissioning a rapid literature review. These are important steps but need to be supported with concrete links back to child exploitation *and* links to robust, integrated, local data (see below) to ensure that truly useful analytical triangulation is possible.

Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

One powerful example of why this triangulation is so vital is the ability to identify and respond to issues of equity, equality, diversity and inclusion (EEDI). Without the effective and 'baked in' triangulation of expertise from experience in communities with partnership level local data and intelligence, and the practice insights described in the first Context chapter of this review, the wider response to serious youth violence cannot be informed by a truly analytical, and ethical, understanding of the root causes of harm. This is work still to be robustly undertaken across the KBSP.

There is recognition across the partnership of the importance of understanding children, young people and communities' experiences of equity, equality and diversity. For example:

- Senior police colleagues openly referenced the force's recognition in June 2023 that they are an institutionally racist organisation and were thoughtful and reflective in the impact this has had both in relationships with the community and in allowing for more forceful and open challenge in relation to disproportionality²⁷.
- Children's social care staff work routinely with and can individually articulate the importance and impact of the Social Graces²⁸ model.
- Health colleagues repeatedly raised the importance of understanding the impact of intersectionality on children and young people's lived experiences.
- Bristol City Council has adopted the Social Model of Disability.

This work is undoubtedly important as a start, however, concerns were repeatedly raised to this review across agencies that work in relation to serious youth violence in the city needs to do considerably more to understand and challenge ongoing disproportionality, concerns around adultification and the low levels of representation from minoritised communities in the wider workforce supporting them.

Understanding and responding to classism as a potentially defining experience for both White and Black minoritised communities was also flagged to the review, with important questions raised, particularly from community development work, about whether an understanding and respect for working class culture and experience is sufficiently voiced and considered in EEDI discussions.

Operationally there were real concerns about the focus and distribution of intelligence activity in particular. Operation Hardy, although nominally Bristol wide, was widely seen as focusing on the racially minoritised children in East Central Bristol. This raised concerns both of a racial bias in seeing violence, but also of adultification in holding children responsible for violence ahead of focusing scant intelligence resource on the adults perpetrating harm. Questions were raised about whether children and young people in South Bristol were viewed in the same way? There were also important professional concerns raised across agencies in relation to the extent East-Central is casually thought of and referred to as a homogenously 'Black' or minoritised community, when within this there are important distinctions in individual and community experiences.

This review also heard specific concerns that space is not being well-held to allow and hear challenge in relation to equity, equality and diversity, including at high-level boards and panels, where concerns were cited that EEDI challenge raised in discussion was experienced as having been shut down, rather than responded to with the necessary curiosity.

Colleagues articulated frustration that their views and concerns weren't always taken on board, with education colleagues citing an example where they felt 'shut down' when they looked to bring difficult conversations around racialised conflict and perceived 'gang' affiliations to the table. Equally health colleagues raised challenge around how well intersectionality's are really understood across agencies, including their own, and so questioned how culturally competent responses could be when professionals working to support minoritised communities cannot even accurately record their identity. All agencies raised the lack of visible diversity at a senior level as problematic, especially when challenging the impact of

²⁷ [Action after words: One year since Avon and Somerset Police declared institutionally racist | Avon and Somerset Police](#)

²⁸ [Social Graces: A practical tool to address inequality | BASW](#)

endemic bias throughout a system takes those holding privilege to be able to invite and explicitly hold space for challenge.

Data and intelligence gathering

To support a more analytical approach to working with both individuals and communities, robust data and intelligence is needed to support triangulation with professional insights and what is known from and about individuals.

Across the partnership high quality data *does* exist. All partners reflected that individually, within agencies, they were relatively data rich. This data took different forms across agencies in terms of being quantitative, qualitative, structured and unstructured, individual and aggregate and formalised and ad hoc.

Collectively this data and intelligence has the capability of painting an incredibly rich and useful picture of harm outside the home. The concern is that at present it is not being routinely or robustly aggregated or triangulated with the wider evidence base.

Historically the data and audit subgroup that existed under previous LSCB arrangements was dismantled when the new KBSP partnership arrangements were established in 2019. Similarly, a partnership-funded data analyst post located within the KBSP Business Unit was historically approved by partners. The understanding offered to this review was that the post was deleted after unsuccessful attempts to recruit to it; not because of a principled decision that the post was not needed.

This impact of this over five years is that not only is a comprehensive picture not available, but often when data is shared it has not been reconciled and so reading the data is complex and, at points, potentially misleading (for example incidents of violence compared to number of individuals). The failure to aggregate data collectively is important on two fronts:

- It is important in terms of being able to see the full partnership picture and identify fully what is known.
- But it is equally an important 'check and challenge' mechanism to identify what is not known and what is not being seen.

The paucity of robust shared data and intelligence informed strategic decisions across the KBSP was openly recognised and named to this review by senior leaders across the partnership.

To better understand the data currently available, the barriers and blockers preventing integration and analysis and the alignment that might be possible, this review identified and brought together data analysts from across all partner organisations in Bristol for a specialist data and intelligence-focused workshop. It is notable that this was the first time most of the analysts had met, despite their considerable collective expertise and energy. Working collectively, these analysts from across the partnership helped to frame a number of key themes:

Whilst data collection could be described, partnership analysts across all agencies felt unable to satisfactorily answer what KBSP data was telling them. Basic questions in relation to what was known and where not enough was known could not be answered without significant further work. Ethical considerations in relation to risk identification, peer-mapping and disproportionality were reflected as not being asked, and in a data and intelligence context are not currently addressed.

Data on perpetrators, spaces and places is not sufficiently balanced against information on children. Data used to tackle serious youth violence is currently overly focused on individual children and their vulnerabilities out of proportion to looking at who is exploiting children and young people, adults perpetrating harm and contextually at where and how harm is happening, including what is known about what keeps children safe. Police colleagues shared this view and noted that previous focus and expertise in

relation to this has been lost through restructuring and perceived changes in funding priority, which was voiced with some level of professional frustration.

It was also noted that pulling a full data and intelligence picture together in relation to harm outside the home is a significant task in terms of both capacity and capability/ data expertise. Information-sharing protocols are possible but require both tenacious leadership to drive forwards and significant co-ordination and support to realise. Even once data is fully shared, rationalisation is a complex task across multiple databases and recording systems.

The approach to balancing regional and Bristol-centric data is also of crucial importance for the partners. To improve the picture Bristol has, it is inevitable that some changes will be needed in terms of individual agencies' data collection and recording across agencies. There was no resistance to this ask – indeed, it was well recognised – but it was emphasised that data cannot be accurately disaggregated or re-focused without clear strategic questions and priorities.

Data does not exist in a vacuum: it can help pose and answer questions, but not without clear parameters and context. Data is needed to answer questions, but priorities and framing for the (certainly initial) questions to be asked are a political, partnership, question. Data for intelligence must start with strategic priorities, rather than the data available. To set these questions a balance is needed between relational and technical work: KBSP needs to (re)establish a mechanism for this.

This review echoes the Somerset JTAI finding that quantitative data is not (but must be) triangulated with other qualitative sources, including feedback from children and young people, their families and communities to understand children and young people's views on violence and safety. Using quantitative data for monitoring and reporting is necessary, but it is not sufficient to address harm. Quantitative performance data must *routinely* be brought together with insights from children and young people, their families and communities, with professional insight from assessment and with local and national published evidence, also including qualitative data and intelligence. It is only with this analytical insight that profoundly important questions about what is known about harm outside the home can be asked and so conflict and violence be effectively understood and responded to.

Work to identify and address the lack of data accountability since 2019 has to be seen within the same context as the wider strategic challenges identified in KLOE 1. Whilst it is this review's understanding that a strategic data and audit group will be re-introduced to the KBSP structure as part of the current partnership review work, this will need support at operational and practice level to re-embed the routine *use* of data and intelligence to direct resource and inform decisions. Strategic oversight and accountability is crucial, but again not sufficient on its own. High expectations, support and challenge are needed at every level within the system to deliver, integrated, whole partnership data and intelligence capable of supporting questions, as well as monitoring.

Response to conflict

It is widely recognised within the partnership that it is possible to leverage a swift and robust multi-agency response when violent incidents occur. This review saw good evidence that agencies bring information together well, co-ordinate their actions and meaningfully lean on public health principles in terms of engaging and working with families and communities as partners to both understand what has happened and its impact, and to work to restore a sense of safety in neighbourhoods and within communities.

Overall, concerns *are* well known across the system: agencies are aware of and acting on the need to improve and better assure themselves that children and young people's needs are truly understood and being met in relation to harm outside the home. Education colleagues, for example, spoke very highly about timely interventions they received from teams such as Safer Options in relation to Weapons in Schools. School settings also spoke positively of the good multi-agency responses put in place when the

stabblings covered by this review occurred, and they valued the regular briefings and information provided. Immediate responses are done well.

Whilst this immediate support is absolutely welcomed, it is also seen as too focused on individual incidents and as such too reactive and too short lived. Operational responses to conflict and incidents of harm both feed, and are fed by, this highly reactive culture. Across teaching, social care, youth work, nursing and policing this review heard a consistent view that the focus that has been allowed to emerge - responding to knife crime in isolation as a single, acute, form of harm – makes it much harder to address the complex causes of risks.

Two particular consequences arising from this culture were repeatedly flagged to the review:

- Firstly, that in responding to incidents individually the harm children are both experiencing and causing is isolated from the context in which it is occurring.
- Secondly, that this reactive culture by design excludes vital colleagues being involved early enough.

Individual incidents of violence and conflict have been responded to as isolated incidents, after the fact, without the strategic focus needed on overlapping root causes. One group of practitioners in health reflected to the review that the prevailing culture is to separate incidents, children, families and communities into 'buckets' of particular risks, which they saw as creating rather than mitigating risk in the system by isolating incidents from their context. The review heard powerful advocacy on behalf of young people that their lived experiences, strengths and vulnerabilities need to be in more than one 'bucket', but a resignation that 'system responses' prevented this. A committed 'public-health' response is not translating into a truly systemic response, in which complex interdependencies are understood and addressed as a safeguarding concern by the whole partnership.

The partnership's struggle in getting to 'root-cause' is in part likely to be linked to the pace and volume of work that a highly reactive system creates. In analysis that echoes findings from KLOE1, without an anchoring strategic framework and clear partnership space to hold complexity, curiosity and uncertainty, violent conflict leaves everyone, including professionals, feeling profoundly unsafe. Ever more individual responses then proliferate without a strong-enough analytical understanding of underlying context and efficacy of response. Without genuine purpose, pace is what engenders a feeling of safety; both creating and perpetuating a highly reactive culture to responding to conflict and incidents of youth violence within Bristol.

Disruption

Another characteristic of a reactive system is the focus on managing children and young people, rather than addressing the context in which harm is happening and the adults causing or allowing harm to occur. There were persistent questions voiced to the review from direct practice, in particular, about whether there was sufficient understanding of and focus on adults exploiting children. Concern was voiced that professional responses to adult criminality are not sufficiently present in responses to incidents of harm.

The lack of focus on disruption was recognised and named within policing, with experienced and insightful colleagues recognising systemic challenges including:

- The operational separation of knife crime (Operation Hardy) child sexual and criminal exploitation (Operation Topaz) and early intervention (which was brought in to manage underlying risk).
- Whether officers investigating exploitation are sufficiently skilled and experienced in engagement work with children and young people.

- The need for intelligence from early intervention teams, who engage with children and families, and are felt to generate a considerable amount of intelligence/ understanding of risks that is not currently effectively fed back into the system.

In relation to knife-crime, policing colleagues felt they were only able to undertake 'small disruptions' through Operation Hardy in relation to 'adults of concern'. The impact of resourcing decisions on wider intelligence capabilities, particularly the reduction of intelligence analytics from child exploitation teams, was acknowledged. Whilst intelligence from Operation Hardy in relation to knife crime is known, used and highly valued across the partnership, the same concerns about its primary focus being children and young people were equally raised across the partnership.

Intergenerational conflict in South Bristol

The KBSP asked that this review explicitly consider responses to conflict in relation to South Bristol, where Max and Mason came from.

With policing, social care and violence reduction services all organised geographically, work tackling serious youth violence in Bristol is strongly orientated around communities. From this structure comes the ability to *describe* communities well, as discussed above.

This tendency towards description has allowed high level characterisations – felt by both communities and professionals – to develop and become 'received truth'. In relation to serious youth violence this is that: 'East Central is framed as a 'gang problem' for black and brown children and the South has a 'long standing organised crime issue' that affects 'poor white children'.

Whilst communities may look and appear to behave very differently across the areas, this elides how much they potentially hold in common. The inter-generational experiences of poverty are a feature for both communities; the (often traumatic) inter-generational experience of exclusion and bias is present for both communities, including from education and opportunity; in both community's violence and harm were seen as linked to substance misuse and drug dealing and, in both communities, children are being harmed by adults exploiting them. Or, as one health colleague framed it: 'no child lives outside of their context'.

Linked to this the review heard a widespread practice perception that focusing on community differences has led to a structural difference in geographical provision. The distribution played back to this review was that higher levels of universal support are available in North Bristol, where relative levels of disadvantage are lower; that East Central has the lion's share of targeted support given the nature of concerns there and a perception that the original Safer Options pilot 'baked in' support; with South Bristol seen as having less resource, despite the significant needs (especially educationally) of its children and young people, and levels of deprivation.

Again, the ability to describe well conceals the lack of effective analysis. This lack of analysis, by turn, means important commonalities in root-cause of harm across communities are potentially being missed, with a direct impact on the partnership's ability to understand and frame effective community-focused interventions. Without effective data, robust analysis and transparent conversations none of these perceived inequities can be fully understood and responded to, whether redressed structurally or through actively challenging unrepresentative cultural tropes.

To respond effectively to harm in all of Bristol's communities, a whole partnership approach is needed bringing together learning from this entire key line of enquiry. Triangulated data and intelligence incorporating children, young people and communities' views and professional wisdom it is required to effectively analyse and reach a view on:

- What is actually known about South Bristol?

- Whether this is accurate?
- Whether what is known is helpful and useful?
- Whether more information is needed?

In this context it would be harmful for this review to attempt to articulate a root-cause analysis *for* Bristol within the scope of this LCSPR. It cannot. Tackling child exploitation and harm outside the home requires 'local approaches to locally evidenced context' (see Appendix 1 and the Joining the Dots approach).

To rectify this the *partnership* as a whole needs to undertake well-structured, meaningful and evidence-informed conversations to agree, develop and articulate *shared* improvement priorities for harm outside the home. Leaders from all agencies need to slow down sufficiently to come together, working with their operational and practice colleagues, to understand what is known, how robust it is, what strengths there are and where purposive²⁹ improvement work is most needed.

The pressure and pace of accountability for improvement under individual inspection regimes is in no way minimised, but across multiple individual inspection regimes the common finding has been that multi-agency responses to harm outside of the home need to improve. This cannot and must not be resolved either on a single agency basis or, as is the defining characteristic within the KBSP, by each agency seeking to establish its own separate multi-agency response. There must be one, comprehensive and robust, conversation and response.

Given it is not possible – or right – to offer a definitive view on the efficacy of improvement activity across the partnership, the most useful role for this review, therefore, is to direct the partnership towards how to develop a clear and evidenced understanding of what its strengths and weaknesses are in relation to harm outside the home.

The cross-government multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm³⁰ (see Appendix 1) are designed to frame these conversations (including through practical resources).

Key Learning

Improvement activity across the partnership in relation to assessment, intelligence gathering, community knowledge and response to conflict within an area or group.

At all levels within the system and across all agencies within the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership, individuals and services are working in a highly reactive culture to single agency improvement agendas. In a context without a clear and unifying strategic vision for harm outside the home 'reform fatigue' is highly visible, as is the tendency to locate primary responsibility for improvement with partner agencies.

Assessment and community knowledge have become overly descriptive, without triangulation with robust data and intelligence, including qualitative sources. This has allowed 'root cause analysis' to slip away into fractured, single agency responses. Again, this was a theme strongly echoed by families who felt that whilst 'behaviour' was seen, responses need to understand and demonstrably address root-causes.

²⁹ Kahneman, D. (2012). *Thinking, Fast and Slow*; [Slowing down for stronger momentum in tackling child exploitation - Tackling Child Exploitation](#)

³⁰ [Multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm](#)

Improvement activity across the partnership

There is unanimous learning from previous CSPRs, Rapid Reviews and the recent Somerset JTAI in relation to the absolute imperative of improved multi-agency collaboration in Bristol. Further, the 2021 KBSP thematic CSPR underlined the need to include children, young people, practitioner and community views in determining effective responses.

Bristol has strong links between Serious Youth Violence and Community Safety, with an embedded Public Health approach. Community links are a powerful component to addressing harm outside of the home, but in what is becoming a refrain they are necessary without being sufficient. Community insight must be triangulated with other agencies' knowledge, skills and expertise and cannot come at the expense of isolating serious youth violence from wider criminal and sexual exploitation, other linked forms of harm outside the home and understanding safeguarding outcomes as central.

An approach to improvement that is inclusive and collaborative is needed, with a clear framework capable of scaffolding conversations but which is not prescriptive in outcome. It is vital that any improvement approach in relation to harm outside the home is capable of flexing to evolve alongside wider improvement and structural reforms both within the partnership, and single agencies.

The cross-government multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm offer a 'compass' to effectively guide improvement activity in relation to harm outside of the home (see Appendix 1). The eight Principles also explicitly respond to the contextual concerns raised by families, including a robust focus on understanding individual, vicarious and community trauma. They also highlight the key importance of working directly with parents as partners where possible, whilst focusing on disruption activity and contextual safeguarding approaches in spaces and places where children spend their time and support the development of a robust response to families' concerns in relation to issues of equity, equality, diversity and inclusion.

Adopting the practice principles – including explicitly and deliberately working through the Partnership reflective tool ([Partnership reflective tool - Tackling Child Exploitation](#)) will allow the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership to:

- Reflect on the eight Practice Principles, and the extent to which these are apparent and evident in local safeguarding arrangements and identify areas for development and improvement.
- Explore the partnership behaviours that underpin an effective multi-agency response to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.
- Consider the culture of organisations that can promote embedding the Practice Principles in day-to-day activities and behaviours.

This work should be done with the partnership's broadest representation – including education colleagues but also community and voluntary partners. The format of the Tool is modular, aligned to each of the eight Practice Principles, and accompanied by:

- A self-assessment exercise to help partnerships agree what is working well and areas for further development.
- An action plan to allow for short and longer-term planning to support partnerships in improvement activities across all levels.

It is only by properly, fully and robustly doing this thinking together – at its broadest - that the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership will be able answer and assure for itself what improvement activity is needed across the partnership.

Data and intelligence gathering

Data and intelligence from across the partnership urgently needs to be brought together, reconciled and analysed as an enabler for, rather than a separate exercise to, informing responses to the Practice Principles. Integrated, whole partnership, data and intelligence must then be routinely available and used to both support and challenge ongoing improvement and development activity. This will, of course, include monitoring, but must not be limited to it. Data and intelligence must be used to ask questions.

This speaks directly to the transferable learning from both the KBSP 2021 thematic CSPA and, again the JTAI, which identified the imperative for the effective triangulation of knowledge, expertise and experience. Key to this, however, is that it must all occur in the same space as wider needs, data and intelligence analysis, not siloed and fractured initiative to 'capture learning' that is not effectively transferred back into the system. It is only through this that responses to conflict can be evaluated as effective or not.

To support this there is considerable data within the system. All individual agencies collect and analyse data and there is considerable knowledge, skill, and expertise in the wider partnership system. It 'simply' has not been brought together.

Data analysts from across the partnership who came together to support the review were keen for the work to continue and would form an excellent starting point as a working group, overseen by a formal data and audit subgroup.

Across all areas the review heard plenty of rich description of activity and risks for both individuals and communities, but there is not the robust, integrated, partnership data, analysis and intelligence needed to effectively address the root causes of harm that occurs outside of the home.

Until this reconciliation and analysis work is done, it is simply not possible for the partnership to currently hold an evidence-informed improvement view in relation to the efficacy of assessment, intelligence gathering, community knowledge and response to conflict within communities in Bristol. It is only through the robust triangulation of local data, the views of children, young people, their families and communities and professional wisdom that local need is vital to predicate service responses on. 'Off the peg' solutions are not capable of responding effectively to harm outside of the home.

Again, the Practice Principles can offer an effective guide in relation to what data and intelligence might usefully help articulate a local approach, including attending to equity, equality, diversity and inclusion, which is one of the eight Principles.

A whole partnership data and intelligence project would allow the partnership to pre-emptively ask questions and inform analysis (not just monitor and assure) in relation to harm outside the home, and in so doing support the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership to:

- Underpin the development of a consistent strategic partnership vision for harm outside the home.
- Review its strategic governance.
- Identify and undertake effective improvement activity.
- Develop and embed a new operational MACE structure, including embedding increased intelligence functions in relation to disruption and spaces and places.
- Improve prevention in relation to harm outside of the home.

KLOE 2 Recommendations: Improvement activity across the partnership

1. Adopt the multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra familial harm as a whole-partnership model of working to prevent harm outside the home.

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- The cross-government Multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm are evidenced in the new strategic vision for harm outside of the home,
- The [Partnership reflective tool - Tackling Child Exploitation](#) is fully completed, with clear oversight from and accountability to the new Children's Board and elected member oversight.
- This work is undertaken by the partnership at its broadest, fully including education but also voluntary and community partners and nontraditional child safeguarding partners such as housing, adult social care and specialist expertise such as in relation to domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse, meaning the Practice Principles are visible across all agencies and services.
- The Principles are embedded and visible at all levels of the system across strategic leadership, operational management and direct delivery.
- The KBSP Business Unit is able to drive forward the creation of a positive partnership identity and behaviours, including through shared language, collaboration, critical thinking and learning and development functions articulated in the Practice Principles.

2. Undertake a whole partnership approach to integrating multi-agency data and intelligence in relation to harm outside of the home.

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- All partnership agencies (including education) are fully included, along with regional partners.
- The work is overseen and accountable to the proposed new data and audit subgroup (or direct equivalent) with management and co-ordination through the KBSP Business Unit.
- A partnership data and intelligence role is (re)established through either recruitment, secondment or co-location, ensuring whole partnership lines of accountability.
- A working group of single agency data leads have co-developed Terms of Reference and a methodology for integrating partnership data. They are able to act as 'champions' for the work within single agency contexts and are able to work together through a community of practice model, or equivalent.

KLOE-3. The consistency of responses to safeguarding children from risk outside the home

Analysis under this key line of enquiry will focus on:

- how to best support truly interagency responses to complex cases of harm and
- Whether there is sufficient preventative support to meet the identified need in the system.

Taken together, this is an analysis of how direct work with children and families in relation to harm outside of the home is managed across agencies to ensure that for each individual child and young person need is properly understood, a shared understanding of risk and protective factors is reached and a clear and accountable intervention plan is collectively owned.

Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership direct delivery context

It is important to acknowledge from the outset the considerable individual and team-level commitment to direct work in relation to serious youth violence evident throughout the course of the review. Those undertaking this complex, emotionally demanding, work across all agencies and organisations in Bristol evidenced a genuine commitment to, and belief in, this work.

Specialist support for children 'at risk' of serious youth violence and criminal exploitation in Bristol is funded through a large commissioned Barnardo's service, conducting return home interviews for young people missing and offering direct support to approximately 80 young people in relation to child criminal and sexual exploitation and serious youth violence; and through the Safer Options regional Violence Reduction Unit hub and spoke model, which combines some direct contextual support with education inclusion managers and commissioned mentoring support.

Broadly, there is a good understanding of the families that teams are working with and the challenges they face and, again broadly, there is an emphasis on interventions and ways of working with a robust evidence base.

- The KBSP as a whole adopted and led on both contextual and transitional safeguarding approaches;
- Children's social care commission targeted youth outreach and mentoring models;
- Public health approaches are deeply embedded in community safety;
- Policing focuses on community engagement with important, child-focused revisions to stop and search policies recently incorporating a trauma-informed approach;
- In education useful work has been done on the Ordinarily Available Offer³¹, which identifies a wide range of external support available to schools, including from health professionals, alongside links to evidence informed practice including trauma informed and quality first practice; and
- Supporting this work there are a number of thorough, co-produced, good practice policy documents in place including, for example, in relation to developing and embedding trauma informed practice which is shared across the wider KBSP.

³¹ Ordinarily Available Provision: Bristol's SEND Local Offer; BCC (2021)

There are, however, significant challenges to note. Again, the recently commissioned Children's Social Care Adolescent Review has trodden much of the same ground. This identified:

- Processes have been developed to support adolescents within statutory services are not delivered consistently across all teams.
- There are varied approaches in practice around strategy meetings, complex strategy meetings and mapping exercises.
- The structure is not in place to be able to consistently act on intelligence and track actions across the complicated network of multi-agency meetings.

Repeating patterns found across this review, the direct delivery intentions laid out in 2020 in the Safer Options Ten Year Plan, have not been realised. As has already been noted the original delivery 'plan' for the Safer Options model had, at least nominally, an equal emphasis on criminal exploitation and a clear focus on contextual and transitional safeguarding approaches. In reality, responses to serious youth violence have dominated over criminal exploitation (with sexual exploitation strategically treated as completely separate and other forms of harm outside the home lacking visibility entirely) and whilst contextual safeguarding expertise has been developed, this has not been transferred or embedded within routine approaches to all work with young people as needed.

The delivery response this review has seen is a 'complicated' response. Over the last five years the strategic location and leadership for Safer Options service has changed multiple times. There is also a patchwork of commissioned voluntary and community funded support, in addition to the Barnardo's and Safer Options support, for which links and referral pathways into statutory processes for assessment and support is unclear. This review has seen multiple overlapping and sometimes contradictory or out-of-date versions of attempts to map activity, none of which could be considered as definitive. The partnership also demonstrably struggled to fully complete the mapping exercise undertaken for this review.

As a result, referral pathways into and out of statutory services are neither clear nor consistent. And in specialist support direct delivery, commissioning and co-ordination roles in the Safer Options model have been conflated, with no real strategic steer or support in relation to the service's form and function within the wider partnership landscape. Although individual members of the team are widely valued for their personal commitment and expertise, this review has been unable to identify any evidence of whole service impact for either the Safer Options approach or in relation to the Barnardo's contract, with leaders being unable to consistently describe the intervention approach or underpinning evidence base.

Creating a consistent multi-agency response

The 'busy-ness' of this multi-agency landscape has already been identified as obscuring the need to pause sufficiently to develop a shared problem definition and collectively articulate an inter-agency approach.

This review has heard and seen that direct practice 'busy-ness' tends to look like multi-agency information sharing in 'broadcast mode', in which the goal is primarily to 'sight' partners on what is known. Whilst information sharing is important, too much too often can obscure the lack of the next steps, linked analysis and problem solving.

The mapping exercise undertaken for this review illustrated a particular culture of multi-agency working in Bristol in which each agency holds its own multi-agency meeting. At the direct practice level, locality children's social care meetings, Safer Options Meetings, Operation Hardy briefings and Community Safety meetings and education inclusion meetings all potentially discussing the same/overlapping young people, families and communities from fragmented angles.

The system is overly crowded and, without any central spine of support to undertake agency checks pre-meeting, the time partners are spending together is being used to describe what is happening, rather than to problem-solve shared concerns and build a shared response.

Whilst this willingness to share information is an absolute asset and strength, how this is being done is actually confounding rather than enabling effective analysis. Without access to data and intelligence, and without a central co-ordinating spine of support, the sheer number of separate multi-agency meetings:

- Creates an increased burden on an already stretched system, rather than improving effectiveness.
- Perpetuates a culture of describing information rather than analysing it.
- Promotes 'baton-passing' rather than shared ownership of risks and issues.

This approach of 'letting a thousand panels bloom' has proliferated into a complicated and overwhelming system of single-agency-multi-agency forums, which collectively serve to obscure rather than make transparent key insights, themes and trends.

Enabling partners to work from one plan for the child.

Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Model

At the time of the deaths covered by this review, Bristol did not have any form of Multi Agency Safeguarding (MACE) panel able to offer a coordinated approach to address the complex nature of child exploitation through inter-agency collaboration and strategic planning (see Appendix 1 for more detail).

The Safer Options meetings in each locality served as the closest proxy, but these meetings were not able to effectively offer either the depth or breadth of a fully constituted MACE meeting. Safer options meetings diverge from the MACE model in that:

- The meetings are locality based, with no formally accountable central co-ordination, data or analysis.
- They focus on information sharing over analysis and interagency planning.
- They do not support individual case co-ordination, including action-tracking/ accountability function.
- They are not the sole multiagency forum, with children's social care locality teams, community safety and police all also independently chairing information-sharing and case discussion fora focused on serious youth violence.
- They have insufficient meaningful focus on spaces, places and disruption.

The recent children's social care review of its adolescent service (Oct 2024) identified the need for a MACE model in Bristol, with a pilot agreed for Children in Care. This is a welcomed first step, but to succeed, the MACE model needs to align to a whole partnership, strategic vision for responding to harm outside of the home and sit in careful alignment with all other strategic, operational and direct practice panels and boards retained in relation to all forms of harm outside of the home.

Given the currently fractured strategic and improvement contexts identified in KLOE 1 and 2 that have led to so many panels proliferating, the transition to a MACE model needs to be managed slowly, relationally and in sync with work on adopting the multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm and structural reforms linked to the Adolescent Review.

In a pressured system, it is understandable that slowing down might seem counterintuitive. But in a constrained system unless you slow down and have relational interaction between agencies (mirroring approaches known to work with children and families) the risk becomes one of entrenched and escalating

action and reaction, which is timely and costly for everyone; most importantly those experiencing serious violence.

To counter this an approach is needed in which professionals are able to develop shared concerns, shared thinking and shared ownership. **Interagency** critical thinking is a vital tool in supporting agencies to work in this way to collectively formulate genuinely co-developed and co-owned approaches. It is a mechanism that enables the whole partnership to slow down and think together.

Bristol's MACE needs to be implemented in such a ways as to act as a catalysing force for a whole-system response to child exploitation and harm outside of the home, driving evidence-led thematic improvement. This is crucially important in Bristol, where the alignment and accountability across partnership panels has not been sufficiently robust.

To realise this interagency approach Bristol's MACE will need terms of reference that effectively:

- Respond to multiple forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, peer-peer harm, county lines, trafficking and serious youth violence, recognising the interdependent challenges posed by risks outside the family environment.
- Adopt a contextual approach to safeguarding, using insights from individual cases to inform broader understanding of (un)safe spaces and places.
- Identify and coordinate disruption activities targeted at perpetrators of exploitation.
- Use the MACE to provide a centralising focus for data and intelligence generation, providing a 'helicopter view' of child exploitation issues in the local area, including identifying patterns, themes, and intelligence gaps,
- Act as an 'early warning system' through which to identify and resolve systemic practice and process issues.

Key Learning

KLOE-3. The consistency of multi-agency responses to safeguarding children from risk outside the home and what is needed to enable partners to work from one plan for the child.

Creating a consistent multi-agency response

There are many strengths in practice notable across the partnership, with previous local reviews chiming with this review in finding that:

- Direct work with children and families' is committed and evidence-led, with a demonstrable passion and understanding of the lives and experiences of the children and young people they support.
- There is a good residual understanding of contextual safeguarding that can be built into a wider, more embedded approach.
- In both Safer Options and Barnardo's, the partnership has specific expertise in relation to extra-familial harm available to draw on.
- There are strong Community Safety and Public Health approaches to understanding areas and locations of risk and harm.
- There are broadly speaking good relationships between different teams and services, and staff at all levels understand the frustrations and gaps in provision.

The transferable learning available to the KBSP to help build on this and shape a consistent multi-agency response to preventing serious youth violence speaks to the need to increase and improve connectivity across and between agencies and, in particular, the need to put inter-agency reflection and expertise at the heart of responses. KBSP-specific learning, including previous LCSPRs, the Rapid Reviews into these stabbings and the DfE-funded Adolescent Review identify core learning for shaping an interagency approach to harm outside of the home as needing to focus on:

- Challenging – across all agencies – the belief and practice that a single agency responses to extra-familial harm are effective
- Ensuring whole partnership support for the most at-risk children and young people
- Establishing a clear, single point of coordination across agencies and services.
- Ensuring rigour and accountability in recording actions and following up on their efficacy and impact.

Key learning across regional reviews highlights the same learning. Collectively they articulate the impact of the lack of case discussion forums to explore components to cases that are not fully known or understood, which can lead to support services being accessed too late and/ or opportunities to intervene being missed.

Families also felt that opportunities to intervene were being missed, with incidents of youth violence being seen as responded to isolation. The families who spoke to the review were able to reflect in detail on the complex intergenerational experiences of multiple adversities intersecting with poverty, low educational attainment and known criminal activity for families within their communities. The families expressed a strong degree of incredulity that services, collectively, were not seen as responding coherently to intersecting risk factors to hold and support families to prevent serious youth violence, rather than responding to serious harm and death after the fact.

In findings across the whole partnership this review found that in Bristol:

- There is no single, coordinating, multi-agency case discussion forum.
- There is the risk of a false sense of security from discussions, without clear accountability for actions.
- There is not shared ownership and support for 'stuck' cases.

At the time of the stabbings there were (at least) five separate forums, meetings and reviews at which children were routinely discussed, with no formal relationship, cross-checking or rationalisation between them.

Working with serious youth violence and harm outside the home requires an approach that can hold complexity and engage meaningfully and effectively in problem solving. To effectively address this the creation of a MACE model must be as **the single authoritative forum addressing harm outside the home within Bristol**. Implementation must also go hand in glove with the recommendations made in KLOE 1 and be genuinely owned and accountable across the wider partnership. Specifically:

- The overall strategic vision of the partnership in relation to serious youth violence should be reviewed and expanded to incorporate all forms of harm outside of the home.
- MACE Terms of Reference need to be explicit in relation to responsibilities and commitments both for individual agencies and for inter-agency working. These terms of reference should establish the MACE as the single co-ordinating body for harm outside of the home in Bristol.
- The new MACE model should not simply be added over the top of existing structures and meetings. The entire multi-agency landscape in relation to harms that occur outside of the home must be reviewed and revised, with work let go of to both create capacity and enable clear alignment and accountability.

- The MACE must include clear and consistent education representation

This work needs to be undertaken with purpose over pace. Using the Joining the Dots (Appendix 1) strategic behaviours as a guide, changes need to be undertaken in a relational, restorative and strengths-based way. It is recognised to be a high trust exercise. To ensure its success all agencies will need to meaningfully engage in change and invest – in all senses of the word - in the MACE model.

KLOE 3 Recommendations: safeguarding children from risk outside the home

3. Implement a single Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) model across all agencies (including education) as the overarching process for supporting children at risk of harm outside the home.

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- Full multi-agency information is effectively identified and coordinated.
- There is meaningful interagency discussion for complex and 'stuck' cases that prioritises analysis and problem solving over information sharing.
- Sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge, skills and experience is represented 'round the table'.
- There is effective co-ordination and review of data and intelligence, including in relation to perpetrators and spaces and places.
- There is effective analysis of risk and protective factors in relation to harm outside the home
- There are effective practice decisions, aligned with clear operational and strategic support and challenge.
- There is accountability for agreed actions and case progress, with effective, central, recording of actions and recommendations.
- There is thematic analysis of data and intelligence seen by the MACE, including in relation to perpetrators and spaces and places.
- A MACE steering group is in place with clear strategic governance and accountability up to revised KBSP board structures.

KLOE 4. Improving educational attendance and inclusion correlating to harm outside the home.

The young people involved in the recent serious youth violence incidents covered by this review (as either victims or those who perpetrated harm) had a range of educational vulnerabilities including:

1. Low levels of school attendance were children missing education (CME) and/or had experienced multiple suspensions, managed moves or exclusions.
2. A number also had undiagnosed or suspected Special Education Needs and/or had been assessed for an Educational, Health and Care Plan. The first of the Rapid Review Reports³² conducted last Spring also identified that provision for children with EHCPs doesn't always appear to meet their identified needs or their needs are identified much later due to their status as a child missing from education.
3. Were from communities minoritised in different ways, but all characterised by structural inequalities, whether through including racial inequality and bias or through poverty and exclusion.

Children and families in Bristol experience higher than the UK average of relative poverty (22% cf 20.1% in 22/23) with a high degree of inequality across Bristol wards and Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)³³ with three wards where more than 1 in 3 children live in relative low-income households and a further six where more than 1 in 4 children live in relative low-income households.

It is concerning that the most recent BCC educational data highlights a *widening* gap at the end of KS2 (primary) between the numbers meeting expected standards in Bristol in comparison to national data³⁴ and *widening* gaps and disproportionality in outcomes across Bristol. The largest gap between Bristol and the national average is for Black Caribbean children and this gap has widened from 2023 to 2024. The gap at the end of KS4 (post GCSE) also appears to be widening across Bristol with a strong correlation to context i.e. levels of disadvantage (with some exceptions).

Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership school attendance and exclusion context

Attendance and exclusion

Bristol historically has, and continues to have, low levels of attendance in comparison with national figures, especially at secondary level and in special schools. Over 15,000 children in Bristol are persistently absent (26.1% in Bristol cf 20.7% nationally) equivalent to missing at least 1 day per fortnight of school whilst 3.2% children in Bristol experience severe absence (missing 50% or more of school).³⁵ Data on severe absence rates isn't published by the DfE.

³² Rapid Review: Max Dixon and Mason Rist, 28 Feb 2024

³³ JSNA Health and Wellbeing Profile 2024/25

³⁴ EISG, Sept 24, BCC.

³⁵ Paper for BCC Children's Quality Improvement and Performance Board, Sept 24.

Attendance rates for pupils with SEN in Bristol are statistically lower than the national average (81.3% in Bristol cf 86.7% nationally for pupils with an EHC plan and 85.9% in Bristol cf 89.1% for pupils with SEN support). Children on Free School Meals, Children in Care, children from global majority communities and the most deprived wards, all experience lower levels of attendance.

Nationally, the number of children regularly attending school has still not reached pre-Pandemic levels. Post-pandemic there has also been a national increase in children's development needs in relation to social and emotional mental health needs, speech and language issues and the presentation of challenging behaviour, which have all had a negative impact on school behaviour and attendance.

A recent report from IPPR/The Difference has made the case that policy makers, local councils and schools should consider the needs of the full spectrum of children "losing learning" when they are "out of class, out of school or moved out of their local community setting". They estimate there has been:

- a rise of over 20% in suspensions and exclusions nationally up to Easter holidays 2024 compared to the same time the previous year.
- 32 million days of learning lost to suspension and unauthorised absence in 2022/23 – up from 19 million pre pandemic.
- 95 per cent of secondary schools concerned about internal truancy; and
- Nearly one in five schools using part-time tables to adjust for children struggling with school.³⁶

And that, across different types of exclusion, lost learning is disproportionately experienced by: children growing up in poverty, children in contact with social services, children with special educational needs, children facing a mental health crisis and children experiencing racism.

This is a foundational concern as poor attendance has been shown to have negative implications both for children's long term educational and economic outcomes as well as putting them at an increased risk of child criminal exploitation and harm outside the home (ibid). Their report identifies the challenges in addressing these needs in siloed ways and identifies suspension as a key intervention point in reducing youth violence.

The National Safeguarding Review Panel Review (2020) into children at risk of CCE identified exclusion from mainstream schools as a key trigger point for a risk of serious harm and concluded that a permanent exclusion results in a lack of structure or sense of belonging and an increased risk of CCE. The review recommended that strategies should be put in place to prevent avoidable exclusions and, where this is unavoidable, an immediate support package should be made available to mitigate serious risks of escalation.

Research also clearly shows that ensuring a safe and nurturing educational context is a key protective factor for supporting the prevention of serious youth violence and child criminal exploitation.³⁷ To be effective, work to improve attendance needs to go beyond ensuring more children and young people are in school to developing their sense of belonging, safety and engagement in a rich, learning environment which both challenges and meets their needs and future aspirations.

³⁶ Gill K, Brown S, O'Brien C et al (2024) Who is Losing Learning? The Case for reducing exclusions across mainstream schools, IPPR and The Difference

³⁷ Harris, J. A Thematic Review of Serious Youth Violence for Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Board; University of Bedfordshire (July 2021)

Reducing preventable exclusions and managed moves

In recent years, Bristol has been successful in putting in place a city-wide approach to reducing permanent exclusions through a system of Inclusion Panels held alongside Fair Access Panels. However, an unintended consequence has been an increase in the use of Managed Moves, raising concerns amongst both school leaders and local authority managers about further disruption to children and young people's education and their potentially increased risks of exploitation with the associated longer travel distances to school.

Concerns were expressed by some school leaders and local authority education leads about the lack of transparency and data around Off-Site Directions and Managed Moves, and the perception that some schools claimed they were full to avoid taking children with high levels of need and/or were excluding children too easily. The whole system was felt not to be responding adequately or in the best interests of the children and young people concerned.

A new approach has recently been agreed which recognises that the priority should always be to maintain a child's placement at their established setting³⁸. These local reforms will put in place an early intervention and prevention approach through the establishment of weekly Inclusion Surgeries to identify suitable alternatives to exclusions and managed moves by putting better, graduated support in place in schools. The approach also looks to track data on outcomes and improve data transparency in relation to managed moves, exclusions and suspensions.

Whilst school leaders expressed broad support for the new approach to this review, it was suggested it would take time for the new approach to bed in and that ongoing challenges around the provision of sufficient high quality Alternative Provision and the need to relieve the pressure on Pupil Referral Units, would remain without further investment. The approach is intended to lead to improved data sharing and clearer expectations of what schools should provide as early help alongside clearer processes to access tiered support. Taken together the ambition is that this new approach should help mitigate the risks identified previously and improve the consistency of responses across the city.

Whilst promising, it remains to be seen whether the new approach will have its desired outcomes as real challenges remain. The approach will need closely monitoring, ongoing engagement with school leaders across the system and the establishment of sufficient early help, training and support for teachers in different settings to succeed. Additional resources may also be required to ensure sufficient high quality alternative school places are available alongside good quality early help provision in mainstream schools.

At this point it isn't possible to reach an evidence-informed view on whether this new approach will meet its desired objectives. In line with recommendations in KLOE 1, this will require ongoing robust and aligned accountability from the Keeping Bristol Safe Executive Board; a full evaluation from the Director of Education (including feedback from PHAB, BASHP and Alternative Providers) to the Board once the new approach has bedded in, towards the latter part of the Spring term 2025, should allow for this.

Support for children with Special Educational Needs

Mainstream Bristol schools have seen SEND support needs increase post pandemic. They have sought to meet this increased demand for SEND support by building in-house capacity and recruiting staff with the right skills on site, sometimes utilising their Pupil Premium grant to do so.

Simultaneously however, schools have experienced a recent large reduction in top up grants for SEND support³⁹ which has resulted in a considerable increase in the numbers of children waiting for an EHCP

³⁸ Draft Bristol City Council and Secondary Schools Guidance on Off Site Direction and Managed Moves, Sept 2024

³⁹ Review of High Needs Block (HNB) element of non-statutory top up funding, BCC Cabinet, 6th Feb 2024.

assessment (1121 at July 2024). Whilst transitional top up funding will continue for those children with an agreement already in place for the length of that arrangement; a much smaller Targeted Support Fund with tighter eligibility criteria has been developed for the start of this academic year (24/25) and new outreach services are being commissioned to support and challenge mainstream schools to improve their inclusive practice and Ordinarily Available Provision.

Responding effectively to children and young people with SEND has also been noted as a considerable area of frustration for all professionals, with big resource constraints and waiting times for EHCP assessments. Children with both diagnosed and undiagnosed SEND are known to be vulnerable to poor attendance and exclusion and are disproportionately represented in criminal justice figures. It was suggested to the review by education colleagues in Bristol that the majority of mainstream settings had a child on roll whose EHCP required a specialist school place but there was a lack of suitable specialist provision available locally.

In relation to the high rates of persistent absenteeism and fixed-term exclusions, the joint Ofsted/CQC Bristol area SEND inspection review in 2022 found there was still “more to do to ensure all children and young people attend school regularly and get a good deal”. Fractured relationships with parents and carers and variable levels of engagement and collaboration were also of concern.

Improving SEND provision and school inclusion

Once again, however, Bristol is not alone in facing this challenge. The National Audit Office report into support for children and young people with SEN recently identified that over the past six years, high-needs funding for pupils with SEND has increased from just over £6 billion in 2018 to a projected £10.7 billion by 2024/25. The numbers of pupils with an EHCP have risen from 2.9 per cent to 4.8 per cent of pupils nationally with an increasing proportion of these pupils being supported in mainstream schools⁴⁰ (48% in Jan 2019 cf 55% in Jan 2024).

The NAO report has concluded that the current SEND system isn't sustainable. Although overall expenditure has increased, funding per plan has fallen by over a third, children and families experience lengthy waiting times for assessments whilst, in spring 2024, only 69% of mainstream primaries and 73% of secondaries nationally were confident they could support pupils with SEN.

Legislation in relation to children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)⁴¹ anticipates that the majority of children should have their needs met in mainstream inclusive school settings. Schools are expected to use their 'best endeavours' to meet the needs of children they educate and make specific arrangements to accommodate the needs of children with SEND whilst local authorities are responsible for identifying and assessing children's needs for an Education, Health and Care Plan (alongside partners including health). There is currently a lack of clarity however in relation to expectations of mainstream schools in this area. There is no nationally agreed definition of inclusion, clearly defined inspection criteria or guidance for schools on how they should deliver these arrangements.

Interviews and focus group discussions during this review confirmed there is a strong willingness and appetite amongst senior staff and practitioners in educational settings to improve inclusion and attendance in Bristol schools. However, recent national data commissioned by *Tes* reveals that only a relatively small proportion of primary and secondary school teachers felt that their training or education had prepared them well to meet the needs of students in the four areas set out in the SEND Code of Practice⁴².

⁴⁰ Support for children and young people with SEN: National Audit Office (Oct 2024)

⁴¹ Children and Families Act, 2014

⁴² How teacher training could make or break the DfE inclusion plan, TES magazine, Nov 24

Both nationally and in Bristol there is a recognition of the need to improve relationships and collaborate more effectively across the school system, local authority and wider partnership to improve support to mainstream settings and achieve a more inclusive system. As has already been noted, school leaders speaking to this review were optimistic about the potential for improvements as they are being invited to jointly lead and shape initiatives across a wide range of areas including attendance, school places, school improvement, data sharing and managed moves.

With the appointment of a new permanent Director of Children's Services and new Interim Director of Education, new governance arrangements have been put in place in Bristol to improve oversight and performance in relation to SEND alongside a more inclusive education system. A new SEND Board has been established with an Independent Chair whilst plans for a new Keeping Children Safe Partnership Board are being developed with 4 key priorities including: an inclusive school system for the most vulnerable, a good experience for children with SEND, early intervention in communities and Family Help – quality social care and safeguarding. New arrangements have also been put in place to improve engagement with parents and carers and a draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028 has been out for consultation until the end Oct 2024.

Although some of the messages which are being delivered by the local authority are quite challenging, for example in relation to educational outcomes, schools places and funding for SEND support, Headteachers speaking to this review broadly welcomed more active engagement from BCC and recognised the need to work together to improve outcomes, including safeguarding, for Bristol's children and young people.

Senior leaders in education suggested there appears to be an emerging consensus that improvements can be achieved through locality-based inclusion groups and schools leading action on what support they can give each other on early intervention and prevention. To succeed fully however and meet the ambition of a truly inclusive education system for all, it is essential that further national reform and investment is made.

Early Intervention and Prevention

Taken as a whole, practitioners across education, children's social care and policing all reported considerable concerns about high numbers of young people who weren't attending school or college (especially in South Bristol and in secondary and special school contexts) but are out in the community at risk of exploitation or at the school gates at the end of the day. Alongside broad support to realign the focus on reducing managed moves and permanent exclusions, the urgent need to develop a better overview of children missing education, including those experiencing persistent and severe absence, was seen as a priority by all concerned.

Feedback from children and young people as part of the review painted a picture of young people hyper-aware of a very complex landscape. Responses in relation to why young people carry knives were hugely empathetic, with young people seeing the carrying of weapons as the result of constrained choices: either as a result of feeling profoundly unsafe themselves or feeling the need to comply with instructions or expectations set for them by others. Often both. Whilst most young people who took part in the consultation could identify spaces, places and people where they felt safe, this went hand in glove with also identifying spaces and situations that made them feel very unsafe. Children and young people themselves noted the reactive nature of professional responses, with multiple young people flagging that they saw adults as only getting involved 'after something has happened'.

There was an identifiable trend in young people's worlds shrinking, with a notable number of young people both hyper-aware of violence and identifying their bedroom, or bed, as the place where they spend the most time in order to feel safe. As an extension of this, children and young people said they do not feel that there is enough universal community youth provision or opportunity to build positive relationships or to allow them to take part in positive activities out in their communities. Many young people cited fear of travelling as a blocker to attending activities and wanted more provision close to home.

Young people's primary ask in order to feel safer, was for readily available relational help and support from a trusted adult. Children and young people who were accessing youth provision articulated their relationships with staff as being of real personal value. They framed this both as someone who routinely saw them in a positive light and as someone to turn to when needed. Responses also articulated a clear ask for education and youth settings to look underneath behaviours. In terms of education young people flagged the need for schools and colleges to respond less punitively to low attendance or poor behaviour and instead focus on understanding what might be driving behaviours. Young people wanted to see more purposeful responses to concerns that offered help and support. They wanted to be seen and heard, but flagged this can be a slow process when they are afraid or uncertain.

In Bristol this review has seen a broadly good understanding from professionals of the challenges faced by local families, but when adolescents begin to struggle, including with attendance at school, there is a limited youth offer across the city to offer early support

What is available is provided through a patchwork of commissioned and VCS funded provision across the city. Youth services in Bristol moved to a commissioned model 5-6yrs ago, at which point maintained youth centres closed. In the last round of commissioning (2022-23) the overall budget was again cut and a 'creative youth and play network' was developed, with local partnerships and devolved budgets for community provision, overseen by Bristol City Council youth workers.

Although BCC retains circa 16 FTE senior youth workers, who sit within the Families in Focus teams, the wider model of support is now diffuse and, as other colleagues noted, not well aligned to wider services and with relatively opaque referral processes. The maintained youth workers do not undertake direct targeted or detached youth work themselves. With limited youth provision and a complicated 'menu' of community support with varied focus and unknown evidence base, it is vital that colleagues are able to work collectively to understand and articulate need and consider all available possible support.

To effectively respond to this, two things are need:

- An overarching approach to co-ordinating and managing multi-agency preventative activity.
- An evidence-informed programme of preventative interventions capable of effectively supporting children to remain engaged with education and wider positive opportunities and activities.

An overarching approach to co-ordinating and managing multi-agency preventative activity

A view strongly reflected to this review was that the actual prevention resource in the system is still largely unknown to referring services, especially in relation to youth provision. Professionals reported frustration at potentially 'wasted' early intervention and prevention intelligence and wanted a collective approach to understand and use what resources there are. There was a unifying call across the partnership for early intervention work to be better coordinated across the system, with work needed to help all professionals identify available support and navigate complicated referral pathways and threshold criteria.

The need to move towards a more co-ordinated and education-inclusive model of early prevention in Bristol was seen by all parties as needing to be two way between universal and targeted/specialist support; recognising that at present neither education nor wider partners are fully getting what they need. Any approach needs to draw down the enormous expertise and support education professionals can bring to the partnership table, whilst also supporting those in education settings working to manage complex concerns.

Leads from across education settings in Bristol cited the considerable soft intelligence and knowledge of local families and communities that those working in schools have to contribute to the wider system. They flagged the strong work of the Safeguarding in Education Team with links to all settings through their

Designated Safeguarding Leads and well attended localities meetings but felt there was a lack of connectivity with work at the strategic level.

A large number of responses, over 2,180, were provided to a workforce survey from those working in educational settings on the LCSPR-SYV. These identified a wide range of ways education colleagues felt they could contribute to improving children's safety and well-being including through the provision of support and signposting (20.7%), reporting and recording concerns (14%), educating children and adults (12.4%) and better communication (11%).

Areas where the education workforce would welcome further support from the wider KBSP included around information-sharing (23.8%), advice and guidance (14.3%), improved communications (11.4%) and raising awareness of concerns (10.5%). This would suggest there is a strong appetite from education colleagues to be better engaged, an awareness of local safeguarding issues and a desire for better information-sharing, advice and guidance in this area.⁴³

Education practitioners articulated a need to be more closely tied-in to receiving support. They cited needing to be automatically 'at the table' when concerns are discussed, with better access and more timely information shared. School practitioners feel it is hard to get external agencies involved early enough and are frustrated by what they perceive to be 'too much form filling'. They feel that an approach where they are able to make a telephone call to an experienced colleague, talk a concern through and decide on an appropriate response together, would be helpful. Better mutual understanding and improved relationships with colleagues in social care would help build trust and lead to an improved multi agency response.

Whilst support offered by educational welfare, Safer Options, the inclusion and early help teams was reflected back to the review as helpful, education in particular felt that thresholds for statutory intervention were too high and often inconsistent. Colleagues in mainstream primary settings contributing to the review also called for more early intervention and clearer pathways and processes for support.

Extending the MACE model

A powerful way to move towards a more effectively co-ordinated model would be to take advantage of the opportunities afforded to the system by establishing a new MACE model to extend the approach to work across early intervention and prevention. In this context a prevention MACE could:

- Better incorporate education and inclusion expertise as a driving force for prevention work
- Work alongside resource in the multi-agency front door / Family Assessment Service helping to align and monitor the impact of referral criteria, thresholds and pathways.
- Develop, commission and evaluate preventative education and support, based on thematic understanding of need based on data and children and young people, family and community voices.
- Monitor the effectiveness of return home interviews for missing children and young people.
- Develop and monitor support for individual children and young people, including escalation to/ step down from statutory safeguarding, education and health services where needed.
- Provide earlier advice and guidance to practitioners in all settings on emerging concerns.

A prevention MACE could also have a powerful role to play in terms of 'tertiary prevention'. Children and young people with complex needs who are coming to the end of current levels of support – either through

⁴³ Workforce survey across all education settings in Bristol conducted by the Safeguarding in Education Team, BCC (Sept 2024)

age or service constraints – are known to face a ‘cliff edge’ of support falling away that can catapult them back into previous risks and concerns.

A prevention MACE would provide the forum and accountability needed to draw in invaluable support from Adult Social Care, Housing and wider welfare services to support both parents and young adults. A preventative MACE is capable of having the expertise to agree and co-ordinate ‘step down’ and transfer support for children up to 25, thereby aiming to both prevent harm from occurring and to prevent repeating cycles of harm by identifying practical, ongoing, support needed to help young adults navigate daily life safely and independently. Crucially this includes strengthening transitional safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable young adults (18-25 years old) and offering on-going support in relation to education, training and employment.

A lead role for education in an inter-agency problem solving forum such a prevention MACE offers a route to help create a wider sense of ownership across the system for some of the challenges education colleagues currently feel they are holding alone. A Prevention MACE would be able to pull diffuse resources together, centralising an accessible pool of expertise, whilst also acting as a further vehicle to embed education more effectively into the wider system, particularly were education and children’s social care to co-chair the panel.

Whilst wide support across the system to address issues of inclusion and attendance are acknowledged to be underway in Bristol, overall, the significant increase in education support needs post pandemic, together with a widening gap and disproportionality in outcomes, is well understood to be directly linked to concerns around exploitation and harm outside of the homes. Practical links between education and the wider partnership addressing harm outside the home need to be established and embedded with some urgency.

A new Inclusion Board, Chaired by the Interim Director of Education with school and Trust input, has recently been established to oversee all aspects of Children Missing Education including low attendance and suspensions, address the needs of priority groups, identify children’s pathways through support systems and design and deliver appropriate interventions to promote good inclusion and attendance. This Board is currently being preceded by an ‘oversight meeting’ held beforehand where children at risk of extra familial harm will be identified by children’s social care. Ultimately this meeting would need to be superseded by the MACE Panel, once formally established.

An evidence-informed programme of preventative interventions

A co-ordinating resource on its own, however, will not address the very real concerns raised during this review in relation to the lack of early intervention and prevention services.

The lack of routinely available preventative support was raised to the review repeatedly, most keenly felt when children and young people begin to struggle with mainstream education. Whilst early intervention isn’t a guaranteed panacea to harm, we now know enough about the underlying vulnerabilities related to harm outside of the home and serious youth violence to be able to support children, young people, families and communities at a much earlier stage.

To achieve a more effective early intervention system, an evidence-informed approach is required. The prevention system as it stands in Bristol is not predicated on a robust, locally triangulated, evidence-base. Whilst there is emerging evidence in the system in relation to the efficacy of a high- intensity enduring support system, this approach and how it translates for Bristol, is not currently articulated. Equally KBSP hold very limited information on the impact of any intervention provision for children and young people in relation to harm outside of the home, and when this review asked to see evaluations of commissioned services noted in reviews, they were not forthcoming.

Both contextual and transitional safeguarding approaches *have* historically been invested in by the partnership. Both managers and practitioners reported this work to have stalled, and expertise to have been lost through workforce transitions. There is residual knowledge, learning and tools available that can be built upon if it is effectively linked to place-based initiatives, but there is currently not the co-ordinating, focused thinking in relation to early intervention and prevention (including interrupting repeating cycles and patterns) that is needed.

Following on from the previous thematic CSPR into Cross-Border Peer-on-Peer Abuse and CCE in 2021⁴⁴ an Action Plan was produced by the KBSP with over 20 actions. A number of new programmes were put in place, including in educational settings. Currently there appears to be a wide variety of programmes being funded, including commissioning of CVS interventions, by different teams with little apparent overview of total spending, outcomes, value for money or impact. Where formal evaluations have been put in place or innovative pilots tested⁴⁵ it has proved difficult to clarify where these are held or how they have informed decision-making going forward.

A range of recommendations were developed in 2021 in response: including the need to strengthen the offer around speech and language therapy to primary school children, improving assessments for health and wellbeing support for children at risk of CCE and knife crime including those with complex needs (e.g. SEN and ADHD); enabling access to culturally appropriate trauma-recovery services following serious assaults and looking for opportunities to develop the evidence base with regard to interventions to prevent the exclusion of children at risk of SYV and CCE.

The interventions proposed in 2021 are still very much relevant and needed within the system. Whilst a number of these interventions *have* been put in place and evaluations were, in principle, agreed this review, despite repeated requests and assurances, has been unable to see any evidence of evaluations or evidence-informed assessment of how successful or otherwise they had been. Whilst the review has received assurance that 'regular meetings' have been held to oversee delivery; actions that are noted appear limited to chasing colleagues for updates with little apparent scrutiny or oversight of what has been delivered (ibid).

Assuring an evidence-informed prevention programme

Given the large financial investment made in interventions post 2021 and the critical nature of effective early intervention and prevention in this area, there needs to be much greater robust and transparent oversight of what has been delivered. It is essential that well designed implementation processes are put in place, with the right level of scrutiny and accountability, before progressing with the design and delivery of major new programme interventions.

To progress this a full programme report on the pilots and programme interventions put in place post the 2021 thematic review is needed, with accountability up to the Chair of the KBSP Executive Board, alongside the Responsible Officers within the three statutory partners and the Director of Education. Such analysis would allow for effective scrutiny of:

- The evidence-base used to inform commissioning.
- The number of programmes commissioned and delivered.
- Referral pathways, thresholds and criteria implemented.

⁴⁴ Dr Julie Harris, University of Bedfordshire; Thematic CSPR: Cross-Border Peer-on-Peer Abuse and CCE for KBSP, SGCP and NSSCP (2021)

⁴⁵ See CSPR – Cross Border Thematic Action Plan (2021)

- The number of young people reached.
- The outcomes achieved for children, young people, their families and communities.
- The total investment committed.

This analysis is required to inform senior level discussion and reflection to develop a clear and evidence-led prevention offer including identifying:

- Programmes and projects with a robust-enough evidence base or sufficient promising practice to continue being funded.
- Programmes/ projects without an evidence base to be either decommissioned or evidence-informed decisions made to evaluate further.
- Programmes/ projects to be decommissioned.
- Gaps to be filled by future commissioning.

Key Learning

The effective use of existing partnership resources to improve educational attendance and inclusion for children who pose a risk of serious harm to other children and those with severe and persistent low attendance correlating to harm outside the home.

Families all raised the importance of education in relation to effectively tackling youth violence. Education was seen as the most powerfully protective factor, and when children start to struggle with attendance, engagement or behaviour there was a frustration that pastoral responses were not experienced by families as the leading response. There were also considerable concerns raised regarding how SEND issues are currently understood and responded to, alongside concerns about young people's mental health and the impact these have on behaviour and attendance within schools.

The establishment of an effective Schools Partnership Board, with a well-regarded independent Chair, should play a key role in driving a strong local vision for high educational inclusion and standards with widespread support from across the variety of educational settings in the city.

Providing clear local shared leadership on this ambition will help the KBSP Board to maximise the value of some of the national education reforms being taken forward in this area. These reforms aim to rebalance current accountability measures to enable a greater focus on the needs of the most vulnerable children and ensure a more inclusive school system for all children. Some of these changes include:

- A new duty on local authorities to maintain a register of children not in school and provide support to home-educating parents;
- Requiring all schools to co-operate with the local authority on school admissions, SEND inclusion and place planning;
- Plans to align regional school improvement support with local area priorities;
- Ofsted to introduce a new annual safeguarding, attendance and off rolling reviews for schools; and
- Ongoing reviews under way in relation to the national curriculum and provision of SEN support.

Ensuring good, ongoing communication across the system will be crucially important, alongside an agreed assessment of the degree of mandation and/or persuasion that will be required across the education system to further sustain change, holding with the maxim 'prescribe adequacy but unleash greatness'.

Given the range of structures and plans currently being put in place around school place planning, school improvement, SEND, inclusion and attendance we are confident that the building blocks are being put in place for future improvement.

To be successful however it is essential that there is a strong and clear alignment with wider partnership activity and recommendations made previously in relation to KLOE 1,2 and 3. Most importantly, consistent, effective leadership with 'staying power' will be required to drive forward and be accountable for change.

An overarching approach to co-ordinating and managing multi-agency preventative activity, coupled with an evidence-informed preventative offer

The need for prevention measures to address serious youth violence *before* it becomes violence is clearly articulated throughout all the transferable learning that has been available to the KBSP since its inception in 2019.

The 2021 Thematic CSPR commissioned by the KBSP underlined that increased prevention activity was needed, anchoring this strongly within an educational context. The BCC CSC commissioned Adolescent Review, both rapid reviews for these incidents and the brief *Thematic Review of learning actions from Child Practice Safeguarding Reviews (CSPR) and Rapid Reviews (RR) in relation to Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Missing Children in Bristol* (June 2024) further underlined these themes. Indeed, every commissioned review touching on serious youth violence since 2019 has articulated the need for a less reactive, more preventative, holistic approach to ensuring children and young people's safety. All the reviews available to the KBSP highlight the need for 'persistent and assertive outreach' and a clearly tiered prevention response ranging from those on the 'periphery' of violence through to those 'experiencing the highest harm'. In all cases education is also stressed as a crucial fourth partner in safeguarding.

There can be no greater moral imperative than the deaths of Max, Mason and Darrian to urgently take forward the clear cumulative learning that meaningful prevention is core work and not a 'nice to have' within a well-funded system. All the families who spoke to the review questioned why more could not be done earlier when so much was 'known' by partners.

The recent South Gloucester CSPR, along with learning in relation to Max and Mason's deaths in particular, underlines that there is not a neat or dependable trajectory for violence and that young people who are not known to children's social care, serious youth violence or exploitation services can still suffer the most serious consequences possible. By the time concerns around serious youth violence and exploitation are 'evidencable', providing effective support to prevent ongoing harm is known to be far harder.

All of the learning available to the KBSP underlines that prevention activity must be clearly articulated and delivered as a joined-up, navigable, part of a whole system response to harm outside the home. To be meaningful, this must incorporate a holistic response including the need for:

- Safe spaces and places for children and young people to learn and grow in (including education settings, community and sports venues and commercial and transport spaces).
- A strong focus on adults who are exploiting young people and responsible for creating cultures in which young people's choices are constrained by intergenerational conflict and violence.
- Early, whole-system, support for children and young people who are currently struggling to attend or engage with education.
- Transition and support planning for young people entering young adulthood, capable of challenging intergenerational cycles.

It is crucial, if a consistent multi-agency response to safeguarding children from risk outside the home is to be achieved, that single-agency reforms are not seen as 'the answer'. No single initiative, however

necessary and powerful, is on its own sufficient to enable partners to work from one plan for the child. Considerable co-ordination work is needed in relation to prevention activity across the city.

Crucially education colleagues are not yet embedded as equal partners and stakeholders in much of this work. Partnership information has not previously been shared well with or from schools promptly. Similarly, the community safety initiatives, including pilot projects to trial some of the recommendations in the Care Review and the development of 'community safety' plans for extra familial harm remain isolated within the operational and governance structures. The siloed way initiatives and pilots have been managed has contributed to a complicated landscape of commissioned support, which is not easily navigable for universal and targeted services.

The creation of an Adolescent Service and Edge of Care teams, which have been accepted as recommendations and will be implemented by BCC Children and Families Services, are important changes that work in this area can align to, but it must be *collective, whole partnership*, work. Similarly significant work has been undertaken by children's social care and education colleagues to review and align inclusion work – this is a strong foundation to build on, again if effectively linked as a co-ordinated approach.

To support this inter-agency approach the **creation of a Prevention MACE** would help the KBSP to:

- Embed education as a fully contributing sector within wider harm outside of the home arrangements.
- Create an accessible multi-agency system where we as professionals can talk through a case and make a decision together.
- Support early intervention in primary schools, including with an intervention pathway/ process.
- Enable support agencies to be involved earlier with aligned referral pathways and thresholds.
- Promote a whole system response to ensuring SEND and disadvantaged children receive the support they need and that supporting attendance and inclusion is seen as needing the expertise of all agencies.

This co-ordinating and problem-solving approach to prevention can only be effective with **a linked, evidence-led, prevention offer**. A full review is needed of the current prevention programme, including any evidence from evaluations. This should inform the on-going development of a robust and accessible prevention offer, with linked plans to support the development of a learning community of practice across the wider system. The offer must be clearly aligned with and have accountability to the governance and operational structures outlined in recommendations under KLOE 1,2 and 3, including direct accountability at the most senior level.

KLOE 4 Recommendations: Improving educational attendance and inclusion

6. Establish a Prevention MACE model or equivalent nested within the wider new MACE structure.

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- The Prevention MACE is co-chaired by education colleagues from the school sector.
- The Prevention MACE acts as a co-ordinating forum for wider youth, community and leisure support, alongside education provision.
- The Prevention MACE has a focus on identifying and strengthening protective factors for children and young people in relation to EFH.

- The prevention MACE is able to support both primary prevention (for children and young people in relation to whom there are emerging concerns) and tertiary prevention (supporting children and young people 'stepping-down from more intensive support and/or transitioning to adult services).

7. Establish high level oversight and scrutiny of early intervention and prevention activity in Bristol

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- The outcomes, impact and cost of previous early intervention and prevention activity commissioned from the 2021 Action Plan has been analysed and reported to the Chair and Executive members of the KBSP Board.
- This analysis has been used to inform the evidence-led development of a multi-agency, tiered, prevention offer in partnership with children, young people, families, communities and professionals across the city, incorporating a clear focus on EEDI imperatives.
- A shared understanding of language, thresholds and tolerances around 'risk' can be evidenced across the partnership.
- Support has been put in place to enable a shared understanding of what is working well, alongside space for professional reflection, learning and development across the partnership.
- Effective reporting and oversight arrangements are in place, focusing on the impact of prevention activity.

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Recommendations

1. Develop a strong, whole partnership, strategy for responding to harm outside of the home

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- Serious youth violence is strategically held in the same space as all forms of extra-familial harm/harm outside the home.
- Spaces, places and disruption are fully incorporated into a response that also recognises and responds to non-contiguous geographic, service and administrative borders.
- The wider KBSP supports educational settings to deliver an effective Early Intervention approach to SYV in the context of harm outside the home and to improve educational attendance and inclusion.

2. Review and revise all strategic, operational and direct practice panels and boards in relation to all forms of harm outside of the home

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- The overall number of meetings are reduced and leaders visibly model purpose over pace and give permission to 'stop' doing some things.
- All remaining panels and boards responding to harm outside the home are clearly aligned.
 - Terms of reference have been (1) reviewed (2) where need, established and (3) (re)focused on harm outside of the home.
 - Membership is (1) inclusive and (2) at the right level.
- Education is included and involved as a 'fourth' partner across all practice, operational and strategic responses.
- Lines of accountability and ownership are strengthened through on-going partnership work. The KBSP Business Unit is able to act as a central co-ordinating and monitoring resource for all improvement activity across the partnership.

3. Adopt the multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra familial harm as a whole-partnership model of working to prevent harm outside the home.

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- The cross-government Multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm are evidenced in the new strategic vision for harm outside of the home,
- The [Partnership reflective tool - Tackling Child Exploitation](#) is fully completed, with clear oversight from and accountability to the new Children's Board and elected member oversight.
- This work is undertaken by the partnership at its broadest, fully including education but also voluntary and community partners and nontraditional child safeguarding partners such as housing, adult social care and specialist expertise such as in relation to domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse, meaning the Practice Principles are visible across all agencies and services.
- The Principles are embedded and visible at all levels of the system across strategic leadership, operational management and direct delivery.

- The KBSP Business Unit is able to drive forward the creation of a positive partnership identity and behaviours, including through shared language, collaboration, critical thinking and learning and development functions articulated in the Practice Principles.

4. Undertake a whole partnership approach to integrating multi-agency data and intelligence in relation to harm outside of the home.

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- All partnership agencies (including education) are fully included, along with regional partners.
- The work is overseen and accountable to the proposed new data and audit subgroup (or direct equivalent) with management and co-ordination through the KBSP Business Unit.
- A partnership data and intelligence role is (re)established through either recruitment, secondment or co-location, ensuring whole partnership lines of accountability.
- A working group of single agency data leads have co-developed Terms of Reference and a methodology for integrating partnership data. They are able to act as 'champions' for the work within single agency contexts and are able to work together through a community of practice model, or equivalent.

5. Implement a single Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) model across all agencies (including education) as the overarching process for supporting children at risk of harm outside the home.

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- Full multi-agency information is effectively identified and coordinated.
- There is meaningful interagency discussion for complex and 'stuck' cases that prioritises analysis and problem solving over information sharing.
- Sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge, skills and experience is represented 'round the table'.
- There is effective co-ordination and review of data and intelligence, including in relation to perpetrators and spaces and places.
- There is effective analysis of risk and protective factors in relation to harm outside the home
- There are effective practice decisions, aligned with clear operational and strategic support and challenge.
- There is accountability for agreed actions and case progress, with effective, central, recording of actions and recommendations.
- There is thematic analysis of data and intelligence seen by the MACE, including in relation to perpetrators and spaces and places.
- A MACE steering group is in place with clear strategic governance and accountability up to revised KBSP board structures.

6. Establish a Prevention MACE model or equivalent nested within the wider new MACE structure.

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- The Prevention MACE is co-chaired by education colleagues from the school sector.
- The Prevention MACE acts as a co-ordinating forum for wider youth, community and leisure support, alongside education provision.

- The Prevention MACE has a focus on identifying and strengthening protective factors for children and young people in relation to EFH.
- The prevention MACE is able to support both primary prevention (for children and young people in relation to whom there are emerging concerns) and tertiary prevention (supporting children and young people 'stepping-down from more intensive support and/or transitioning to adult services).

7. Establish high level oversight and scrutiny of early intervention and prevention activity in Bristol

Realising this recommendation fully would mean:

- The outcomes, impact and cost of previous early intervention and prevention activity commissioned from the 2021 Action Plan has been analysed and reported to the Chair and Executive members of the KBSP Board.
- This analysis has been used to inform the evidence-led development of a multi-agency, tiered, prevention offer in partnership with children, young people, families, communities and professionals across the city, incorporating a clear focus on EEDI imperatives.
- A shared understanding of language, thresholds and tolerances around 'risk' can be evidenced across the partnership.
- Support has been put in place to enable a shared understanding of what is working well, alongside space for professional reflection, learning and development across the partnership.
- Effective reporting and oversight arrangements are in place, focusing on the impact of prevention activity.

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Appendix 1: National research and context

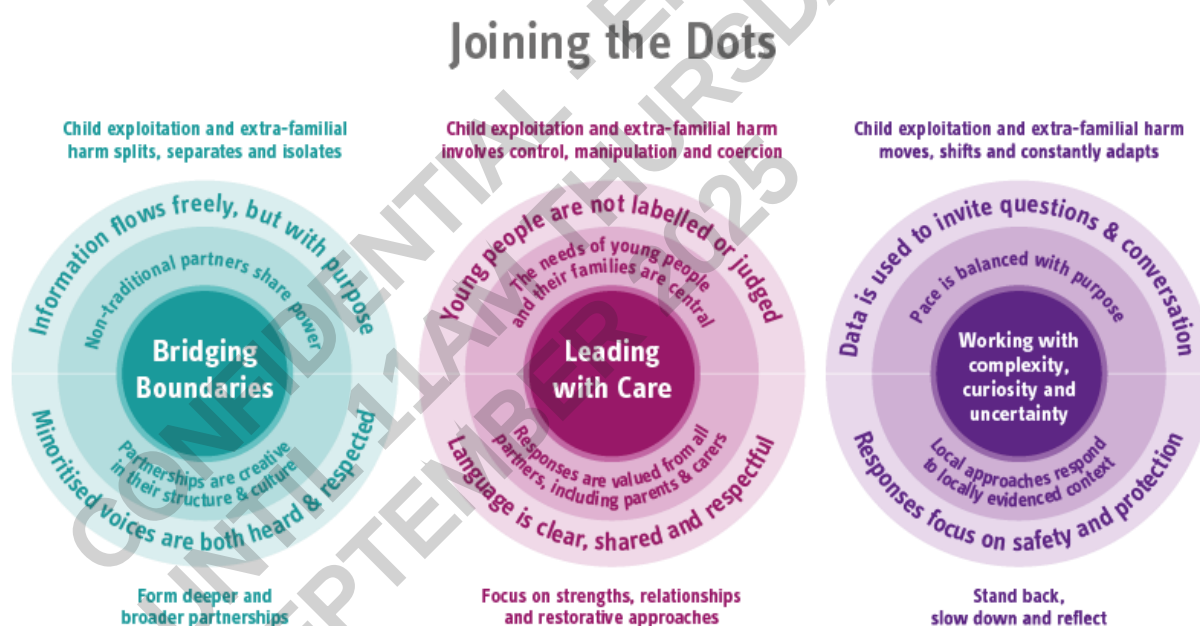
KLOE 1: Governance and operational structures for responding to serious violence

Moving forwards the task for the KBSP is to invert fragmentation and siloes into effective collaboration and coordination, guided by and driven by a clear strategic vision.

Between 2019-23 the Department for Education funded a four-year programme – the Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) Support programme⁴⁶ - to explore what is needed to improve **strategic** (as opposed to solely practice) responses to child exploitation and extra familial harm. The TCE programme spent the first three years working alongside 84 local partnerships across England to understand what helps achieve evidence-informed change, drawing on academic research, practice learning and expertise from experience.

One of the open-access resources created from TCE learning was the ‘Joining the Dots’ framework⁴⁷ which articulates three interdependent principles to support effective strategic leadership in relation to tackling child exploitation and extra familial harm:

- Bridging Boundaries
- Leading with Care
- Working with Complexity, Curiosity and Uncertainty



Tackling Child Exploitation Programme (2022)

⁴⁶ [About TCE - Tackling Child Exploitation](#)

⁴⁷ [Joining the Dots - Tackling Child Exploitation](#)

Underpinning the 'Joining the Dots' framework is a simple but effective parallel of disrupting harm which involves exploitation by anchoring strategic behaviour in an approach that explicitly inverts the dynamics of child exploitation and extra-familial harm. This is articulated by the TCE model as:

- Where child exploitation splits and separates its victims from protective institutions and relationships, by 'bridging boundaries' partnerships can wrap deeper and broader support around children, young people and their families. 'Bridging boundaries' supports communities by effectively bringing different agencies and organisations together.
- Where child exploitation involves control, manipulation and the coercion of children and young people, 'leading with care' asks those with power to use it gently. Ways of working should be specifically strengths based, relational, and put restorative principles at the core of partnership working.
- Where forms of child exploitation constantly move, shift and are adapted, 'working with complexity, curiosity and uncertainty' offers the space needed to stand back, slow down and reflect so 'quick fixes' can be challenged and partnerships can act with purpose. Partnerships will necessarily have a different approach based on their own needs.

These three ways of working are interdependent. They cannot be taken in isolation: change in relation to one will impact the others. But taken together, they are mutually reinforcing and work in sync to support and enable sustainable improvement.

This approach draws heavily on systems improvement literature, including as articulated for the public sector by the Human Learning Systems approach⁴⁸ framed by Dr Toby Lowe, which recognises the complexity of achieving real-world outcomes in relation to public sector systems and process.

*'Outcomes are created by the hundreds of different factors in the unique complex system that is each person's life.'*⁴⁹

Whilst specific models, adaptations and tools vary, a human learning systems approach focuses on:

- Nurturing systems that enable effective coordination and collaboration.
- Building relationships and understanding people's strengths and needs.
- Continuously learning and adapting in complex, uncertain environments.

In terms of public sector leadership, this approach challenges leaders to place less emphasis on pre-planned, target-driven management, focusing instead on a robust understanding of needs and strengths within a system. Or, put another way, focus on leadership behaviour and modelling (*how* activity is undertaken) over individual systems and process (*what* is being done).

These behaviours need to be understood and applied throughout a system, including 'horizontally' across partnerships and 'vertically' within organisations through direct delivery, operational and strategic levels.

KLOE 2: Improvement activity across the partnership

Bristol is by no means alone, nationally, in terms of needing to find its way in framing an effective practice response to serious youth violence and harm outside the home more widely. Practice in this area is intrinsically complex.

⁴⁸ [Transforming public services through the Human Learning Systems approach; Human Learning Systems](#)

⁴⁹ [Managing complexity with human learning systems – Integration and Implementation Insights](#)

Harm outside the home, and serious youth violence within that, presents a challenging context in which responses to harm are necessarily developing. The efficacy of any local response is affected in different ways by:

- the evolving nature of these forms of harm and how they can manifest
- the unique context of every local area (e.g. its size, socioeconomic and geographic characteristics, etc.)
- the system-based challenges within a partnership
- resource constraints
- the range of local and national partners and agencies involved in ensuring an effective response, with diverse policy and practice priorities.

In recognition of this complexity the Government published multi-agency practice principles for responding to child exploitation and extra familial harm in 2023 'designed to support effective partnership working across different local contexts, providing a common language and framework to better respond'⁵⁰.

In line with analysis for KLOE 1, the Principles are not serious youth violence-specific: serious youth violence is one potential form of harm that can occur in the spaces and places outside of young people's homes, which may or may not overlap with exploitation⁵¹. The Principles have the potential to act as a powerful evidence base for the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership given:

- the strongly posited link between serious youth violence and exploitation locally.
- the reality that exploitation can and does occur within families and close community relationships, which Bristol's serious youth violence response also needs to be able to take account of.
- The fact that the Principles focus on 'how' and not 'what', offering a guide in relation to local ways of working, with a focus on the professional behaviours that can support an effective multi-agency response.

There are eight evidence-informed, inter-related and inter-dependent Practice Principles, which all apply to direct work with children, young people and their parents and carers, to operational management and to strategic leadership across different agencies:

1. Putting children and young people first.
2. Recognising and challenging inequalities, exclusion and discrimination.
3. Respecting the voice, experience and expertise of children and young people.
4. Being strengths-based and relationship-based.
5. Recognising and responding to trauma.
6. Being curious, evidence-informed and knowledgeable.
7. Approaching parents and carers as partners, wherever possible.
8. Creating safer spaces and places for children and young people.

⁵⁰ [Multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm](#)

⁵¹ [Department for Education](#)

No one principle on its own can deliver the sustainable change needed, but taken together the Principles can offer unifying partnership behaviours to help support a coherent collaborative and creative local response to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.

It is also important to note that there is a strong and mutually supportive link between the Practice Principles and a public health (or ‘whole system’) approach. Public health approaches to the prevention of harm are increasingly being explored through research into place-based approaches both to child protection⁵² and to violence reduction⁵³. Whilst evidence is very much still emerging, what is available suggests such approaches have efficacy where they:

- Facilitate and engage in multi-agency collaboration that brings together all organisations and professionals whose remit includes (or should include) the reduction of violence.
- Adopt approaches that value and actively engage with the lived experiences of communities, families and young people, so as to ensure services are genuinely tailored to local need.
- Create and promote effective policies, practices and learning opportunities, underpinned by evidence and committed to ethical standards around equality, diversity and anti-racism.

This is supported by emerging evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund on place-based approaches (PBA) to tackling local youth violence⁵⁴ which articulates that:

- **The local context matters** – the involvement of local partners and communities was seen as critical to the success of PBAs. For many PBAs, selecting activities began by identifying and prioritising local needs through analysis of local data and through local consultation.
- **The importance of public health approaches** – most PBAs reviewed aligned with a public health approach to violence reduction, simultaneously addressing multiple factors that can influence a person’s likelihood of becoming involved in crime and violence (e.g. factors at the individual, family, school, and neighbourhood levels). The review found that the most effective PBAs involved secondary and tertiary prevention (i.e. targeted interventions that work with children who are vulnerable to or are already involved in crime and violence), with some combining this with primary prevention aimed at the broader population of young people.
- **Ensuring clarity of outcomes, activities, and mechanisms of change** – one of the striking features of PBAs reviewed is their diversity, which reflects different theoretical underpinnings and their responsiveness to local context. As a result, there is no one single theory of change for all PBAs to reducing youth violence. The review recommends that a theory of change for PBAs should include details of the intended outcomes, the planned activities, details of how the readiness for place-based working will be built and hypothesised mechanisms for change.
- **Make the use of data and evidence central** – this means combining different forms of data, including local data about violence and needs, insights and experiences of local people, evidence about what has worked in previous PBAs, and evidence about effective approaches for a targeted set of outcomes.
- **Prioritise rigorous evaluation, learning systems and data infrastructure** – this means using robust approaches to measure impact and monitor implementation. Although PBAs involve intensive long-

⁵² See for example: [An evaluation of Together for Childhood | NSPCC Learning](#); [Place-based initiatives affecting outcomes for children and young people.pdf](#); [Tackling child poverty - place-based, system change initiatives: learnings - gov.scot](#)

⁵³ [A public health approach to violence reduction: Strategic Briefing \(2021\) | Research in Practice](#)

⁵⁴ [Place-based approaches to tackling local youth violence | Youth Endowment Fund](#)

term investment, the review found relatively few rigorous evaluations of effectiveness that would allow an assessment of the merits of this investment. The review also recommends that the complexity and emergent nature of work involved in PBAs be supported by a culture of learning and evidence use, and assessment and measurement of the effectiveness of implementation and associated strategies would be valuable to those involved in their design and delivery and to the field more generally.

KLOE 3: The consistency of responses to safeguarding children from risk outside the home

The Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) panel model originated from SCRs and learning from the Jay Report (2014)⁵⁵ in relation to child sexual exploitation and as an approach.

MACE panels are a mechanism through which partnerships can recognise and respond to the interconnected conditions of harm, identifying and assessing children at risk of exploitation, as well as potential victims, perpetrators, and locations of concern.

MACE Panels should offer a comprehensive safeguarding response by:

- Addressing multiple forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, county lines, and serious youth violence, recognising the interdependent challenges posed by risks outside the family environment.
- Using contextual approaches to safeguarding, using insights from individual cases to inform a broader understanding of (un)safe spaces and places.
- Developing and sharing intelligence capable of underpinning disruption activities targeting perpetrators of exploitation.

The MACE should not be seen as simply a co-ordination forum for information sharing and referral. It must operate at an analytical level, acting as an interagency problem-solving resource for the most complex and 'stuck' cases, as well as providing the thematic forum described above.

The consistency of responses to complex child protection and safeguarding imperatives by safeguarding partnerships are underpinned by a 'multi-agency' approach to safeguarding, long enshrined in multiple iterations of Working Together Guidance, as well as the legislation and guidance linked to specific forms of harm and responses, such as serious youth violence.

Whilst multi-agency working is a necessary component to achieving consistent responses to harm it is not, in and of itself, sufficient. As has been highlighted throughout this review, the importance of 'what' is put in place (e.g. a multi-agency meeting) has to go hand-in-glove with 'how' this work is undertaken (e.g. shared language, values and ways of working).

Interagency working, as opposed to multi-agency working, means creating a shared space purposely for collective analysis, shared learning and identifying and holding uncertainty. The principles and skills that underpin this work are those of critical analysis and 'formulation', which is made possible by creating the time and space not just for multi-agency information, but for differentiated *expertise* capable of problem solving. It requires a proactive invitation for those with different expertise and insight to offer high support and high challenge to collective thinking.

⁵⁵ [independent-inquiry-into-child-sexual-exploitation-in-rotherham](#)

KLOE 4: Improving educational attendance and inclusion correlating to harm outside the home.

Research highlights the essential role of schools in facilitating effective early intervention. A national review of evidence-based interventions by the Early Intervention Foundation found that strongly associated risk factors for serious youth violence can be identified in children as young as seven years old⁵⁶ whilst an evaluation of the role of primary schools in early intervention to prevent serious youth violence concluded that ‘delivered well, and targeted at the children and families who need it, the evidence is clear that it can have an impact.’

Evaluations which have considered the effectiveness of local multi agency collaborations to reduce preventable school exclusions⁵⁷ have concluded that effective alignment across primary education settings and health (through joint training, helplines and provision of onsite support) can improve teachers’ skills and confidence in understanding children’s emotional and mental health needs, better respond to challenging behaviours, improve inclusive practice and free up professionals’ time to become more solutions focused.

International research highlights the importance of consistency, rigour and discipline for the successful implementation of school improvement interventions. Interventions chosen need to be appropriate to the local context and current level of performance but critically, to be successful, they need to be carried out consistently and pursued with sufficient rigour and discipline.

Evidence also suggests that the opportunity to participate in research-based professional learning and development can improve education practitioners’ confidence⁵⁸ and sense of agency, helping support their recruitment and retention, a key challenge for the sector. Where these approaches are put in place at a multi-agency level they can also support more intensive learning, network building and galvanise system wide approaches to improvement.

Place based partnerships to drive system wide improvements

Numerous evaluations have highlighted the importance of whole school and system wide approaches to tackling issues as diverse as improving outcomes for Black Caribbean Pupils⁵⁹ or improving provision around SEN^{60 61}. These have succeeded in encouraging local collaboration across school systems and mobilising local knowledge and expertise by embedding effective models for peer review and dispersed leadership structures.

The Area-based Education Partnership Association brings together over 30 such partnerships across England. These bridge the divide between different types of schools (maintained, academy, free schools, special etc) and the local authority to develop a shared vision, agree strategic priorities and provide a framework for strong collaborative leadership to deliver improvements together. The Association of Directors of Children’s Services recently identified collaborative, place-based school partnerships driven by a shared moral purpose as having a key role in the drive for a more inclusive education system and being

⁵⁶ Waddell, S. Preventing gang and youth violence and supporting children and young people. London: Early Intervention Foundation (2015)

⁵⁷ Preventing School Exclusions: Lessons from the Front Line; RSA (2024)

⁵⁸ Morris, M. Evaluation of the Mayor’s London Schools Excellence Fund; SQW (2016)

⁵⁹ Demie, F. Raising Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils: Barriers and Good Practice in Schools, LB of Lambeth (2023)

⁶⁰ Whole Education: SEND School Improvement programme

⁶¹ Richards, G and Starbuck, J SENCO Leadership: Implementing Whole-School Practice; Routledge (2024)

beneficial for children at greater risk of exclusion. They called on government “to move to formalise and empower” these partnerships.⁶²

Currently, Bristol schools come together through a number of phase-based associations whilst the local authority hosts an Excellence in Schools Group with representation from school and trust leaders from early years to primary, secondary and post 16. During the process of this review, education leaders have spoken positively about plans to establish a new senior level Schools Partnership Board in Bristol, with an Independent Chair and wide representation from across the sector, to develop a positive and inclusive education vision for Bristol 2024-27 together with a plan to deliver on that vision.

Work on this is developing at pace, with plans for extensive consultation and engagement across the education system to agree a strategy and priorities for collective action by the end of summer term 2025. Early conversations have highlighted a willingness to engage in an open and collegiate fashion and the development of emerging shared priorities to tackle disadvantage and race equity gaps, improve provision around SEND and for vulnerable children, community co-production and workforce development.⁶³

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⁶² ADCS Policy Paper: A future vision for the education system, Nov 23.

⁶³ Bristol write up from workshop and feedback to share, 241128