



**Child Safeguarding Practice Review:  
Serious Youth Violence - Breaking the Cycle**  
BSCP 2022-23/02

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The subjects of this Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) are Mohamed (not his real name but the name his mother asked for him to be called in the report) and Hassan (not his real name). They are both under 18 years old and are children. Any mention of them being a young person in the report is because this is the language that some agencies or individual practitioners have used but it should be borne in mind throughout the reading of the report that Mohamed and Hassan are children.
- 1.2 During the Summer of 2022, West Midlands Ambulance Service were deployed to an incident in Birmingham following a phone call from a member of the public advising them that they had found a young male, Mohamed, (16 years old, a migrant from Spain and of Black African ethnicity) with a stab wound to his chest. Mohamed was pronounced deceased from his injuries. West Midlands Police (WMP) commenced a murder investigation and two young people have been charged and convicted with the homicide of Mohamed. One of these individuals is Hassan (16 years old at time of offence). Following a trial he received nine years imprisonment for manslaughter. Another adult male (18 years old) was convicted with him.
- 1.3 The aim of this review is to identify learning improvements that can be made to help safeguard children and to prevent, or reduce, the risk of recurrence of similar incidents. The review team and the author have undertaken an objective analysis of what happened and why, suggesting learning, bearing in mind that the involvement of children in Serious Youth Violence quickly evolves at the hands of organised urban street gangs that they become a part of, either as members or are associated with.

## **2. Terms of Reference, Contributions and Methodology**

- 2.1 This Child Safeguarding Practice Review was commissioned by Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership as prescribed by Chapter 5 of Working Together 2023, which states:

When a serious incident becomes known to the safeguarding partners, they must consider whether the case meets the criteria for a local review. This includes whether the case:

- Highlights or may highlight improvements needed to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including where those improvements have been previously identified.
- Highlights or may highlight recurrent themes in the safeguarding and promotion of the welfare of children.
- Highlights or may highlight concerns regarding two or more organisations or agencies working together effectively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

## **2.2 Time Period to be Considered by the Review and Rationale:**

2.3 The time period to be examined within this LCSPR is focused on the extent and impact of agency intervention with Mohamed and his family from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 2020 up until the date of the incident in 2022. The commencement date relates to when the West Midlands Police made a referral to Birmingham Children Trust (BCT) following concerns being received in respect of Mohamed and the individuals he was associating with and him being on the periphery of an urban street gang.

2.4 In respect of Hassan, this is from the 20th of April 2020 until the date of the incident in 2022, when Birmingham Children's Trust (BCT) received a referral following his arrest for being in possession of a firearm.

## **2.5 Key Issues to be addressed by the review agreed by the Serious Cases Sub-Group:**

- The effectiveness of implementation of learning from the LCSPR published by the BSCP in 2021 (BSCP 2019-20/02) that focused on serious youth violence, gang affiliation and the wider context of county lines and the benchmarking exercises undertaken around the fifteen priority areas set out in the National Review, 'It was hard to escape'. The purpose of this will be to review progress, identify gaps in the city's response to criminal exploitation and refocus on what the next steps are.
- Review and implement improvements to the ongoing assessment of risk and the coordination of partnership intervention, and the effectiveness of the disruption planning process for those children at higher risk of criminal exploitation. This work will build upon the learning from a previous LCSPR and other Rapid Reviews involving serious youth violence.

## **2.6 Contributors to the review**

2.7 A number of agencies from Birmingham have contributed to this review. The review author was very taken with their knowledge, passion, and commitment to be effective for the children of Birmingham who are involved in similar circumstances.

2.8 A chronology of key events was produced utilising information shared by agencies as part of the Rapid Review process, this helped focus and stimulate discussion at the Practitioners' Reflective Learning Events and inform this Child Safeguarding Practice Review report.

2.9 The compilation of this report also benefited greatly from those two practitioner events held with individual professionals that had worked with both Mohamed and Hassan.

- 2.10 The review author has also met with the mother of Mohamed; he passed on the condolences of the review team for the loss of her son. Mohamed’s mother talked of her son being a good boy who loved her and loved football. She also talked of a boy who after being present when his friend was stabbed to death, suffered great trauma and was terrified for his own life. She also spoke of the trauma of him being stabbed twice himself and ending up in hospital.
- 2.11 The emerging learning was shared throughout with agencies. Safeguarding leads from agencies involved were asked to reflect and analyse their agency’s intervention, consider the outcome of the excellent rapid review and the reflective learning events to identify how internal and multi-agency learning will be taken forward in their agency and across the partnership to provide evidence of effective implementation to the review.

**2.12 Membership of the Review Team**

2.13 Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership commissioned an independent author to carry out the review. The lead reviewer is Dr Russell Wate QPM. He is independent of any agency within Birmingham. He is a retired senior police detective who is very experienced in the investigation of homicide and in particular child death. He has contributed to a number of national reviews, inspections, and inquiries, as well as being nationally experienced in all aspects of safeguarding children. He was one of the reviewers of the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report ‘It was hard to escape - Safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation’ (March 2020). He has carried out a large number of Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and is also an independent scrutineer for Safeguarding Children Partnerships.

**2.14 Review Team members**

2.15 The review team members are from the following agencies and are all really experienced and supported the review author greatly in the production of this report and the learning developed:

Birmingham Children’s Trust
Youth Offending Services (Birmingham Children’s Trust)
West Midlands Police
Birmingham City Council, Education Safeguarding Team
Empower U Hub (Birmingham Children’s Trust)
Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care Board
Community Safety Partnership- Violence Reduction Board/Gangs, Serious Violence and Organised Criminality Operational Group
Independent Author
Business Support: Serious Cases & Communications Programme Manager Administration Officer

### **3. What happened in the lives of Mohamed and Hassan?**

#### **3.1 Mohamed: Key relevant issues in his background and lived experience.**

- 3.2 Mohamed was aged 16 and of Black African heritage. He arrived in the UK with his mother and siblings from Spain in 2015. His mother told the review author they came to the UK due to Mohamed being a talented footballer and the opportunities for him to develop his talent were far greater in the UK than where they lived in Spain. However, although he was pursuing developing his football talent, he quickly became involved in gangs. His mother says these were just his friends from the area he lived in and from his school and were not a gang. He was known to carry offensive weapons and was associated with other male children who had been murdered as a result of knife crime and gang affiliation.
- 3.3 An application in respect of Mohamed for settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme was submitted in December 2019. In April 2021, his application was reviewed and further placed on hold due to his fresh impending prosecutions. As a result, he was never granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK.
- 3.4 As early as 2017 (11 years old), West Midlands Police referred Mohamed to the 'The Foundation Programme' due to concerns around gang affiliation. As a result of this he then received 1:1 mentoring and support to try and steer him away from criminality and reduce the risk of exploitation.
- 3.5 The family first became known to BCT in July 2019 when a referral was received from Mohamed's school with regard to a deterioration in his behaviour at home and at school; his mother stated to the school that she was struggling to cope with his challenging behaviour. By September 2019, following support, his mother felt she was again able to manage and had established suitable boundaries.
- 3.6 The family became further known to BCT in September 2020 when Mohamed was arrested for being in possession of an offensive weapon. There were also incidents of him going missing from home and concerns that he was associating with other males on the periphery of urban street gangs. At this point he was attending the City of Birmingham School, a Pupil Referral Unit, having been permanently excluded from his previous school. Mohamed was the subject of a number of Criminal Exploitation Risk Assessments, and he was, at various points, categorised as low, medium, and high risk. He was supported by intensive work co-ordinated through multi-agency Disruption Planning Meetings.
- 3.7 In December 2020, Mohamed was suspected of stabbing another child in a gang related incident. A strategy meeting was held and attended by representatives from the Empower U Hub (Specialist partnership- Child Criminal Exploitation Unit) and Youth Offending Service. It was agreed that a single agency assessment would be undertaken, focusing on Mohamed's gang affiliation.

- 3.8 On the 21st January 2021, a friend of Mohamed's was killed. There was growing concern about Mohamed's involvement in gang activities. There was a notable change in Mohamed's behaviour following his friend's death: for example, he would attend school wearing five pairs of tracksuit bottoms and stated that they were to protect him from a knife attack. His mood, behaviour, and engagement also changed and as a result the school made a referral for Multi-Systemic Therapy but it was assessed that he did not meet the threshold. The murder of this friend was the subject of a Rapid Review. The friend's rapid review has been considered as part of this review. Mohamed's mother says this murder was, without doubt, the turning point in Mohamed's life and he was never the same after this. He was terrified for his life.
- 3.9 In February 2021, following the single agency assessment, a Child in Need Plan was agreed to provide family support due to the ongoing issues of gang-related harm for Mohamed and the impact this was having on his family and his relationship with his mother.
- 3.10 In May 2021, he was present when another child was fatally stabbed. This was his second friend killed through gang-related violence. Following this friend's death Mohamed started to attend school wearing blue jogging bottoms and was carrying a purple bandana. Intelligence shared by the Police indicated that the purple bandanas were believed to have been worn by groups/gangs in the Highgate area of Birmingham, which was not the area that Mohamed came from. The murder of this friend was also the subject of a Rapid Review. His rapid review is also considered as part of this review.
- 3.11 In June 2021, Mohamed was found to have a quantity of cannabis on him with a street value of around £100. Mohamed advised he was "holding" it for someone. He was very upset and scared that the cannabis was being confiscated. As a result, a further assessment was completed which resulted in escalation to a social work assessment. The outcome was a further Child in Need plan to support Mohamed and his mother. A criminal exploitation assessment identified him as medium risk and at a disruption planning meeting on the 7th July 2021, it was felt that Mohamed was not entrenched, but on the periphery of gang activity.
- 3.12 In August 2021, the social worker voiced concerns that Mohamed was moving from affiliation to more actual criminal activity.
- 3.13 On the 3rd October 2021, Mohamed was arrested for affray following an incident where nine males with knives chased a man into a pub. Mohamed received a police caution.
- 3.14 Eleven days later he was admitted to hospital having been stabbed in his lower right abdomen following a violent disorder that involved weapons, amongst a group of males outside a local shopping centre. A complex strategy meeting was held which agreed that mentoring and preventative work with Mohamed would continue. This

was seen as a 'reachable moment'<sup>1</sup> with Redthread<sup>2</sup> working with Mohamed prior to his discharge from hospital. At discharge Mohamed advised Redthread that he rated his safety as "6/10" (the higher the rating the safer the young person claims to feel) and advised that he was involved with the Handsworth gang and was known to the Newtown gang. As a result, Redthread liaised with partners to ensure that they were aware that Mohamed was due to be discharged, and to ensure all safety measures were considered and implemented.

- 3.15 Later in October 2021, Mohamed was arrested for affray following a conflict with his neighbours and was bailed to live outside of his home area. As a result, he was accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, which his mother said she fully agreed with as he wasn't safe to stay at home and he was placed in unregulated supported accommodation where he remained until his death.
- 3.16 In December 2021, Mohamed was involved in an incident in Birmingham City Centre where he sustained several stab wounds, three in his arm and two in his back. He attended hospital and again engaged with Redthread. At this point, Mohamed rated his safety as "8/10" but said he didn't feel safe to leave hospital yet. Emotional support, safety planning, liaison between statutory partners, WMP and his mother was undertaken.
- 3.17 Mohamed was arrested in respect of this incident, bailed to the supported accommodation and was not to enter the city centre. A strategy meeting was held in respect of criminal exploitation.
- 3.18 On the 10th February 2022, a Complex Strategy Meeting was held and noted that Mohamed had links to the "GRD" gang in Birmingham. These links were confirmed by Education, YOS, Police and mentors.
- 3.19 The following day Mohamed was reported missing and did not return to the supported accommodation until the 15<sup>th</sup> February, at which point he was moved to being at high risk of criminal exploitation.
- 3.20 On the 27th February 2022, Mohamed was found hiding in a house in Northampton, believed to be the property of a vulnerable adult, and was a location involved in the illegal supply of drugs. A strategy meeting was held which identified increasing concerns that he was involved with county lines and cuckooing<sup>3</sup>.
- 3.21 A Disruption Planning meeting was held on the 18th March 2022, and Mohamed remained being at high risk of criminal exploitation.
- 3.22 In May 2022, there was an incident at school whereby Mohamed attacked another student. A knife was found in Mohamed's coat pocket by a teacher. He was arrested

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<sup>1</sup> 'Reachable moment' described later in report, but in essence an opportunity to positively alter a child's life course.

<sup>2</sup> A youth work charity aiming to support and enable young people to lead healthy, safe and happy lives.

<sup>3</sup> Coercion or intimidation of often vulnerable persons to use their premises for drug use and dealing.



and held in custody. He attended court the following day and was released on bail with conditions to live/sleep at his accommodation address, with an electronically monitored curfew tag between the hours of 7pm to 7am. At this point Flexible Learning (where he had been enrolled since October 2021) did not feel Mohamed was safe to attend the centre and it was agreed his learning would now be delivered online.

3.23 In June 2022, a complex strategy meeting was held, and in July 2022 a Disruption Planning meeting was held (further on in this report some of the interventions are highlighted that took place in these disruption planning meetings). Mohamed was assessed as medium risk for criminal exploitation.

3.24 In Summer 2022, Mohamed was murdered.

### **3.25 Hassan: Key relevant issues in his background and lived experience**

3.26 Hassan is 16 years old, of Black African ethnicity and Sudanese heritage. Prior to coming to the UK with his mother, father and his older sibling he was living in France. He was granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK under EU Settlement Scheme in December 2019.

3.27 Hassan first became known to Birmingham Children Trust (BCT) in April 2020 when he was arrested, along with three other males, in possession of a firearm. A strategy meeting was held. A Section 47 enquiry was undertaken, with no further action recommended as there was no evidence of criminal exploitation at that time. A referral was made to Phoenix United<sup>4</sup> for peer mentoring.

3.28 In September 2020, further concerns were raised about gang affiliation. A referral was made to family support and an assessment was completed in November 2020. Mother declined additional support as she felt Hassan was working well with his mentor from Phoenix United and the case was closed.

3.29 In December 2020, Hassan was approached by the police, he ran away and was suspected of disposing of an offensive weapon (a bladed article) which was recovered nearby. It was also noted that Hassan was involved in a drill video which had caused tension between rival gangs. The police referred the incident to BCT which led to a Child in Need assessment. The assessment became a Section 47 enquiry, and a Complex Strategy meeting was held. The outcome of the Section 47 enquiry was Child in Need of intervention, and family support and the subsequent Criminal Exploitation Risk Assessment identified him as being at medium risk, recognising his links to urban gangs and violent criminality.

3.30 On the 22nd January 2021, Hassan was arrested on suspicion of being involved in the murder of Mohamed's friend (this is the first of Mohamed's friends murdered). The

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<sup>4</sup> Phoenix United are a community interest company and as part of their offer run mentoring support to reduce place-based youth violence in particular knife enabled crime in the under 25 age group.

assessment became a Section 47 enquiry and a Complex Strategy meeting was held. The outcome of the Section 47 enquiry was again a Child in Need of intervention, and family support.

- 3.31 In February 2021, the police indicated that Hassan was no longer suspected of involvement in the murder and the subsequent Criminal Exploitation Risk Assessment identified him as being at medium risk, recognising his links to urban gangs and violent criminality.
- 3.32 On the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2021, Hassan was present at an incident when a firearm was discharged. A Complex Strategy meeting was held. It was agreed that a risk assessment meeting for Hassan would be arranged, along with a home visit to discuss concerns with his mother, which appropriately involved an Arabic speaking interpreter to support the mother's engagement in the meeting. This resulted in further family support.
- 3.33 On the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2021, Hassan was sent home from school as he had been observed to smell strongly of cannabis. His mother reported that he was out at a party the previous evening. A Disruption Planning meeting was held which agreed that Hassan should continue to receive mentoring support from Phoenix United and that a referral would be made to the Children's Society. A Criminal Exploitation Risk Assessment was completed and his level of risk was increased to high.
- 3.34 On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2021, it is noted that Hassan would no longer be attending Aston Manor Academy due to risks to himself, and others, and a plan was being developed for his continued education.
- 3.35 On the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2021, a Strategy Meeting was held in relation to the increasing risk of criminal exploitation and continued concerns about gang affiliation and increasing risk of violence. A Section 47 enquiry was undertaken and a Child Protection Conference convened.
- 3.36 In June 2021, a Disruption Planning meeting was held which again identified his risk of criminal exploitation as high. An Initial Child Protection Conference was held which agreed that his needs should be addressed through a Child Protection Plan with a category of physical abuse. This decision was made due to escalating concerns of violence that he was involved in, his affiliation with gang activity, his substance misuse, concerns that his education provision, which had been supportive, was now less than stable, and his mother's limited understanding of the risks he was exposed to and the challenges she faced in safeguarding him.
- 3.37 Between August 2021 and October 2021 Hassan and his family visited Sudan, even though his social worker and others hadn't been informed of them going, it was viewed as a positive step and an opportunity to sever links with gang members.
- 3.38 In January 2022, following the second Child Protection Review Conference meeting, there was recognition of a lowering of concerns, which stemmed from the time he had

been away from Birmingham abroad. This resulted in a step down in support through a Child in Need plan, which was in hindsight found to be a concern to the review team as Hassan's mother needed to consent and be part of interventions when she had displayed a limited understanding of risk posed to Hassan, and by Hassan to others.

- 3.39 In May 2022, a Criminal Exploitation Risk Assessment was completed and Hassan was considered as low risk. This was based on a lack of new intelligence of any criminal exploitation activity.
- 3.40 On the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2022, BCT closed the Child in Need plan as he was engaging well in education and had applied for post-16 education from September 2022. Hassan was also continuing to engage in his mentoring with Phoenix United and had made links with a youth group at the Lighthouse in Birmingham.
- 3.41 In Summer 2022, Mohamed was murdered and Hassan was arrested, charged, and subsequently convicted with his homicide and being in possession of a firearm.

## **4. Analysis of the Terms of Reference**

- 4.1 **The effectiveness of implementation of learning from the LCSPR published by the BSCP in 2021 (BSCP 2019-20/02) that focused on serious youth violence, gang affiliation and the wider context of county lines and the benchmarking exercises undertaken around the fifteen priority areas set out in the National Review, 'It was hard to escape'. The purpose of this will be to review progress, identify gaps in the city's response to criminal exploitation and refocus on what the next steps are.**
- 4.2 The embedded learning from the BSCP 2019-20/02 CSPR was fully endorsed and adopted by the safeguarding partnership and was to be implemented by the Birmingham Gangs, Violence and Serious Organised Crime Strategic Board. In essence the main coordinator of the activity was the Contextual Safeguarding Board.
- 4.3 The focus was on the following themes which were taken from the National panel's report 'It was hard to escape.'<sup>5</sup>:
1. Problem identification
  2. Supporting your staff
  3. Service design and practice development
  4. Quality assurance
- 4.4 To assist the learning an action plan was established which had fifteen priority areas to progress as a combined partnership for safeguarding and community safety. There were also an additional eight areas to focus on progressing.

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<sup>5</sup> The child safeguarding practice review panel (March 2020) 'It was hard to escape' Safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation.

- 4.5 The updating of the action plan to show a current position seemed to take, in the review authors opinion, an inordinately long time to complete. This just shows, not only what a complex problem there is in tackling Child Criminal Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence, but also that there is, in fact, a high level of activity taking place in Birmingham to tackle this issue.
- 4.6 The allocation of a grading (Green, Amber, Red) in relation to completion of the action plan shows that of all of the actions, and subsets of those actions, thirty- nine are self-assessed as green and are complete. Four are amber and still in progress. This demonstrates substantial progress in all areas of the action plan. There is an ambition that the action plan will be signed off as complete in the spring of 2024.
- 4.7 The action plan itself is forty- three pages long. In order to try and achieve brevity, but also relevancy for this CSPR report, only the key selected highlights are outlined in the next few sections of this report.
- 4.8 There will be mention later in the report in relation to overarching governance for CCE needing to be firmly established within Birmingham. The response in the action plan to this point states that: ‘The Gangs, Violence and Serious Organised Crime Board (GVSOC) reframed as Violence Reduction Board (VRB). VRB will have oversight for the implementation of the Serious Violence Duty and development of Reducing Serious Violence Strategy.’
- 4.9 The response further states that in relation to serious youth violence (which is what is mostly relevant to this review): ‘The Reducing Serious Violence Strategy is a draft document due for completion and submission to the Home Office in January 2024 and will be developed into a delivery plan within 12 months. Implementation of the work within this strategy is currently ongoing and will continue during completion of the strategy and delivery plan. Deadline for development of Strategy is 31.01.2024.’
- 4.10 This response makes it clear to the author of this report where governance sits and what the future journey to establish this further firmly lies within the reducing serious violence plan. It is less clear however, how those operationally will understand this governance and where they, their agencies, and their actions sit within it.
- 4.11 The Empower U Hub was seen at the time of the development of the action plan and also undoubtedly seen within this CSPR review and report as a strength for the partnership. The action plan response shows that in order to strengthen this further a Memorandum of Understanding has been developed by the Contextual Safeguarding Board. There are also members of WMP, YOS (who are now seconded to the Hub, but weren’t at the time of the case for this CSPR) and Education and Health in the Empower U Hub. Good progress has been made in relation to performance datasets and with whom and where they are shared on a quarterly basis. This dataset is also shared on a regional basis, with more development of the dataset planned to help assist with need, demand and commissioning.

- 4.12 The CCE screening tool has been updated and there is an improved use of the Home Office Disruption toolkit. Use of intelligence from WMP is also helping, not just locally, but across the region including with specialist squads. The Contextual Safeguarding Board continues to work in partnership with all agencies such as VRP, St Giles, Children's Society and other services such as SOLVE (lived experiences) workers and Barnardo's to enhance awareness around CSE/CE missing and serious youth violence.
- 4.13 Some of the activity in the action plan relates to agencies and individuals being flexible to re-act to critical and reachable moments. This includes being aware of adverse childhood experiences. The response in the action plan is extensive and covers a number of individual children, it states: 'For BCT, an Edge of Care team is in place to respond out of hours, although this is not specifically for County Lines/Child Exploitation. There are not the resources available to facilitate the whole team that would be needed and which would be separate to daytime staff. CATCH 22<sup>6</sup> (commissioned by WM VRP) also provide a rescue and response (out of hours) service and mentors are present in custody suites when children are arrested. Redthread are based in hospitals around the city (apart from City Hospital) to respond to the needs of children who attend A & E departments with injuries that may be indicative of peer-on-peer violence to provide support within those reachable moments and thereafter. In the event of significant incidents, VRP have also commissioned Black Jackets who provide detached mentoring out of hours and engagement within demand parts of the city to children.'
- 4.14 There is also a pleasing flow of information from St Giles Trust and Redthread into the Empower U daily meetings and disruption planning meetings. This includes the 'Reachable moments.' WMP chair Consequence Management Meetings following serious incidents of Serious Youth Violence (SYV). YOS and Empower U amongst other agencies attend the meetings. Consequence management meetings aim to; reduce the adverse impact West Midlands Police operational activity can have on local communities, police staff and officers and departmental operational delivery; promote community cohesion; and build trust and confidence in West Midlands Police and their partners.
- 4.15 This will be achieved by:
- Identifying the key facts and support the investigation
  - Leading on the communications strategy agreed between WMP in consultation with communications and the senior investigating officer.
  - Creating risk management plans aimed at reducing risk to individuals and locations in conjunction with local policing resources, other WMP departments and partner agencies
  - Identifying Key facts and supporting the investigation and criminal justice process and impact on victims, families and local communities – providing reassurance and supporting community cohesion.

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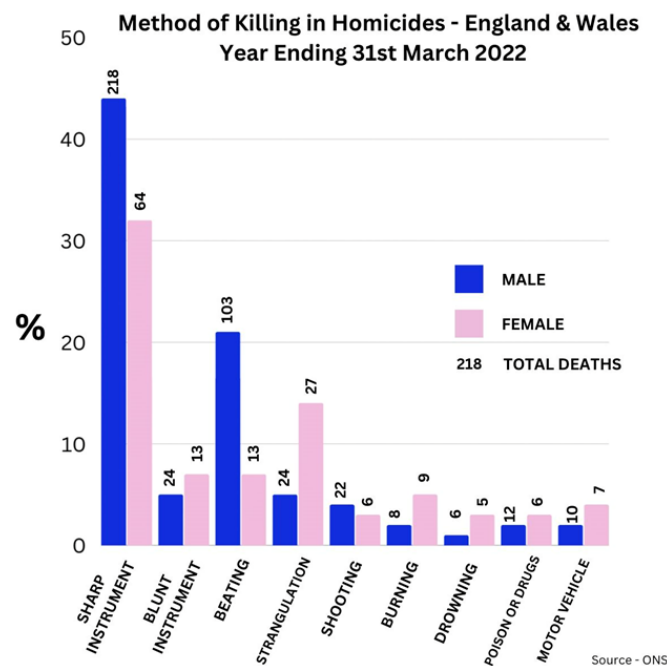
<sup>6</sup> Catch22 designs and delivers services that build resilience and aspiration in people of all ages and within communities across the UK.

- Supporting Force Intelligence in creating impact assessments and community tensions summaries by ensuring all relevant communications and intelligence is fed through intelligence processes in a timely manner.
  - Maintaining communications with relevant internal and external stakeholders
  - Monitoring and mitigating the potential impact on capability and resilience
  - Ensuring partners involvement and support
  - Identifying and acting upon any local or organisational learning.
- 4.16 The BCT reviewed the parameters of the YOS in regard to Early Help and as a result a YOS prevention team started in December 2022, so pre-statutory intervention. They use a 'Think Family' approach. In December 2022, the BCT Youth Offending Service launched their prevention team. This was a new additional offer providing voluntary support and early help to children at risk of entering the youth justice system, becoming involved in gangs, or, at risk of criminal exploitation.
- 4.17 One of the learning themes discussed later in this report, and discussed widely at the practitioner events, was an alternative model which is complementary to the existing Child Protection arrangements for children subject to Child Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence. The action plan has a response to this which states: 'The Contextual Safeguarding Board continues to explore and develop effective practice for children criminally exploited and/or involved in serious youth violence. Two principal officers are overseeing further work to develop Contextual Safeguarding Conferences and learning around this framework. A review of the Safeguarding Risk Assessment matrix and development of the Serious Youth Violence pathway is being undertaken. There is a good, close working relationship between the principal officers and Child Protection chairs, and a different way of working has been developed for those cases where there is no compromised parenting and it doesn't go to conference.' This will be discussed later in this report as there is clearly still work to be completed in this area.
- 4.18 In terms of Education exclusion, Birmingham's threshold guidance 'Right Help, Right Time,' advises early intervention in these cases. There has also been a deep dive audit that has looked at education exclusion. This has been presented to BSCP in September 2023.
- 4.19 Engagement with adult services is another area highlighted as of importance for this review, especially bearing in mind the ages of some of the children. The action plan response states: 'Preparation for Adulthood (PFA) Service launched 2021. The new service has formed links with Empower U, and attends their disruption meetings and morning briefings with a view to offering support around the PFA's four main drivers: employment, independent living, health and friendships/relationships. The service also collaborates with Police, YOS and Probation, as well as the voluntary sector including St Basils and Redthread.'
- 4.20 The engagement with Housing Services is featured in this review as an important theme in relation to the unregulated accommodation that Mohamed was placed in. It

also featured in the action plan, with the following response: ‘The VRP Task and Finish Group reviewed the Housing-Partnership Protocol, to look at improving the partnership response around Serious Violence and exploitation as learning from the Serious Case Review (Action BM-14). Protocol has been shared on Managed Housing Reciprocals toolkit and wider Whole Housing Approach (based on a London Model) into WM VRU Strategic Exploitation Leads interface meeting. Development of Regional Protocol for out of area placement of families subject CE. The Violence Reduction Board are leading on the development of a regional model, and whilst this has been challenging in terms of agreeing practice regionally, it has been agreed in principle by the seven other regions.’ It has been reported to this review that Housing Services are in meetings when they can be, although the BSCP needs to challenge inconsistent attendance.

- 4.21 An overarching theme throughout the whole of this report is the pull of ‘Place’ for children to join gangs and become individuals that carry and use knives. The response to the action on this as raised in the previous CSPR is extremely encouraging and gives a high level of confidence in future actions to tackle Place and gangs: ‘Operation FRESCO is focussed on stopping gang related violence in and around Birmingham. WMP have also established a Serious Youth Violence Forum with a Place Board and People Boards. In June 2021, BVSC Research and its delivery partners, the University of Wolverhampton and University of Birmingham, were commissioned to undertake the ‘Community Research and Co-Design’ (CRCD) for the Birmingham Youth Endowment Fund, Neighbourhood Fund. The CRCD activity spanned three phases: ‘Feasibility’ (Jun-Sept 2021), ‘Discovery’ (Oct 2021 – Aug 2022) and ‘Co-design’ (Aug – Dec 2022). The Co-design phase was informed by the insights generated through both the Feasibility and Discovery activity, and continued effort to develop awareness, understanding and trust through open dialogue and power sharing. The Co-design phase resulted in an action plan which sets out to reduce serious youth violence through a combination of ‘strategic development’ and ‘direct delivery’. This scheme of activity seeks to enable a joined-up, place-based approach which puts local people at its heart through empowerment and inclusion in local decision making. The YEF signed off the Action Plan and appointed a Lead Organisation at the end of December 2022. The YEF Neighbourhood Fund will bring investments support actions that will address serious youth violence in the Newtown and Lozells areas. YEF agreed to invest £1,000,000 to support the action plan and have confirmed Aston Villa Foundation would be the new Lead Co-ordinating Organisation who would be responsible for supporting the Steering Group and overseeing the action plan to implementation over the next 4 years. WMP still continue with operations in those areas, and works alongside the Community Safety Partnership Delivery Group through CSP.’
- 4.22 The Birmingham Violence Reduction Board, the Serious Youth Crime Steering Group and the Preventing Serious Youth Violence Board are just three of the forums that discuss how to tackle, intervene, divert and disrupt serious violence within Birmingham.

- 4.23 Extensive targeted work is also being undertaken with children who are disaffected and at risk of being drawn into criminal child exploitation and gang affiliation, coordinated through the 'Safe Taskforce' and Empower U Hub.
- 4.24 **Review and implement improvements to the ongoing assessment of risk, the coordination of partnership intervention and the effectiveness of the disruption planning process for those children at higher risk of criminal exploitation. This work will build upon the learning from a previous LCSPR and other Rapid Reviews involving serious youth violence.**
- 4.25 The main method of killing in homicides is the use of a knife or a bladed weapon, as the below graph from the ONS (2023)<sup>7</sup> shows:



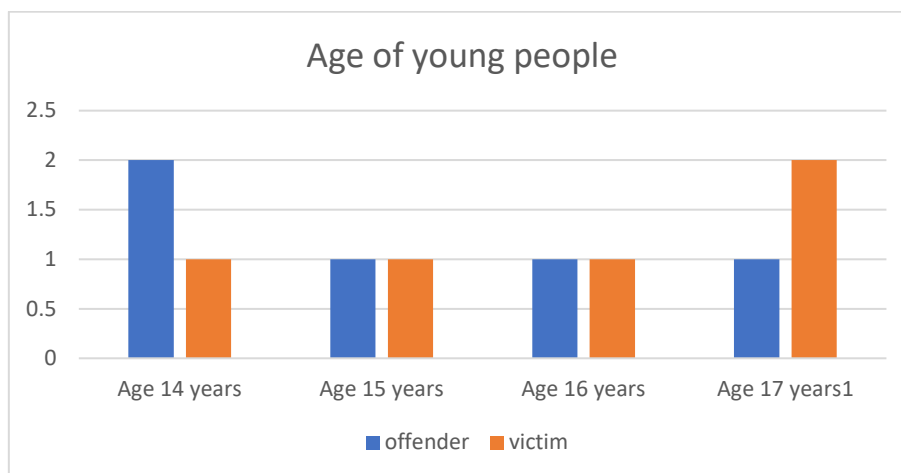
- 4.26 In all of the cases analysed for the purposes of this review, knives were involved in not only the killings but also causing serious injuries. Mohammed himself attended hospital on two previous occasions with stab wounds before he was killed. An important piece of learning arising from this review is a need to ensure that tackling knife crime is seen as a priority by the partnership.
- 4.27 The Rapid Review incorporated an in-depth case study of both Mohamed and Hassan and included an analysis of the assessment of risk and impact of agency intervention to disrupt, deter and protect these two children. The analysis identified several similarities in the lived experience of both of them.
- 4.28 For the purposes of this review report, analysis has also taken account of three other Rapid Reviews from Birmingham which involved similar circumstances. The review has

<sup>7</sup> Office of National Statistics (2023) Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022  
Analyses of information held within the Home Office Homicide Index, which contains detailed record-level information about each homicide recorded by police in England and Wales.

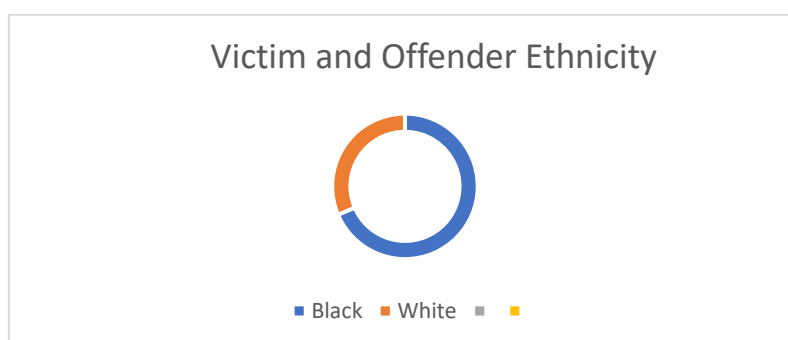


therefore analysed the lived experiences of 10 teenage children. Four of the children died, one was seriously harmed and the other five children were offenders. Some of the offending children were also previous victims of serious youth violence.

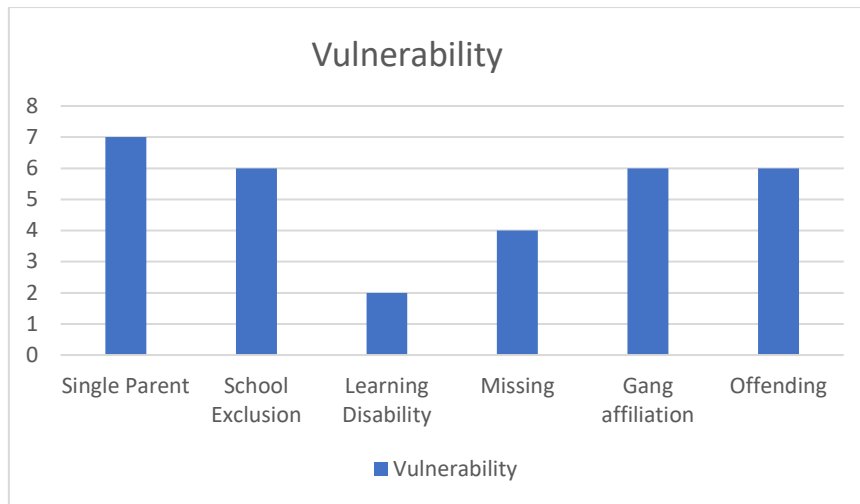
- 4.29 The age of these victims and offenders from Birmingham, in the chart below shows the age that they were at the time of the murders, however, it must be borne in mind their involvement with agencies began when they were a lot younger than this.



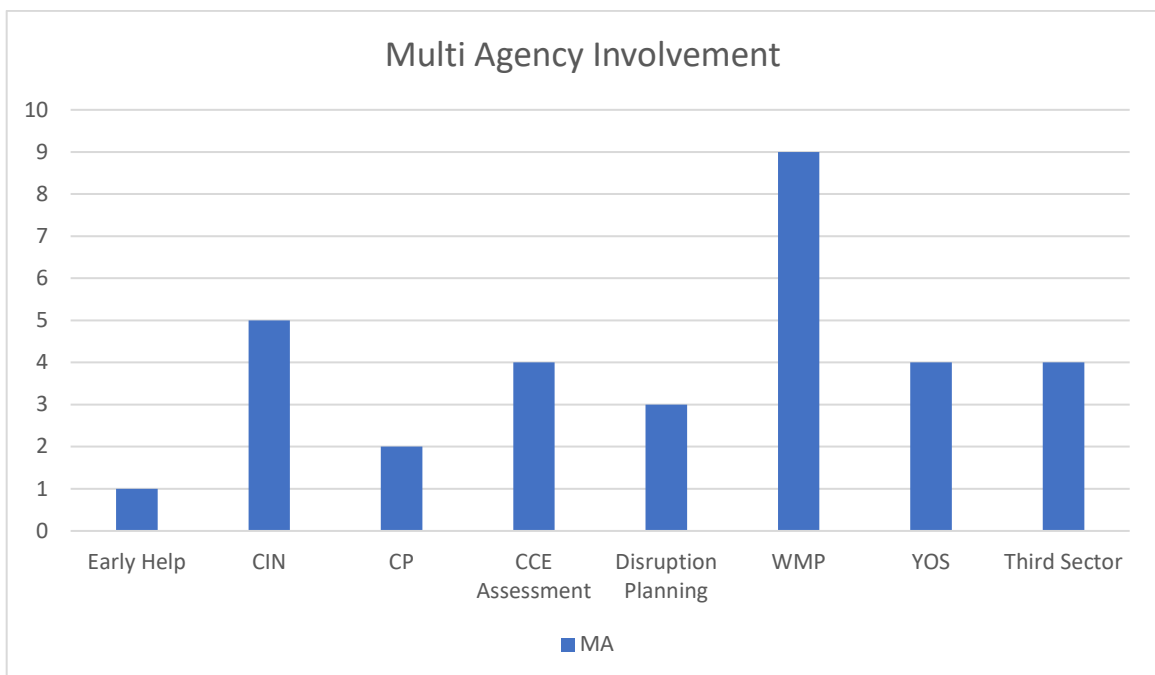
- 4.30 The ethnicity of these children is predominately black, either Black/Caribbean or Black/African, other than the three offenders in only one case who were all white. This case therefore might be an outlier and if further in- depth analysis took place of other cases the percentage of black victims and offenders may be higher than this reviews cohort. This ethnicity feature of intersectionality is really important for professionals to understand. Mohamed’s mum also highlighted to the review author that language was a further issue. Mohamed spoke no English on arrival, which isolated him to begin with. She herself, even to this day, struggles to fully understand spoken English.



- 4.31 On examination of the boys lived experience a number of vulnerabilities were found as shown in the below chart:



4.32 A number of key agencies had involvement with the ten boys and as a result attempted various interventions. Education as an agency was present with all ten boys. In terms of BCT, for example, the main process they tried to use was the use of a Child in Need plan, which was not always very successful, mostly due to lack of commitment to be involved in the plan by the boys themselves, and then, subsequent, withdrawal of consent by their parents.



4.33 A number of cross-cutting themes and factors have been identified from these four rapid reviews of the ten children involved:

- The majority of the ten boys suffered significant childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences. Both Mohamed and Hassan were arrivals into the UK and initially were identified as victims of crimes, they did though quickly go on to become entrenched in gangs and/or criminal activity. There was an absence of positive paternal role models within these boys' lives and in some of the cases, those that were present were a negative influence, encouraging or condoning violence.

- The majority of the boys were known to carry offensive weapons and were associates of other young males who had been murdered as a result of knife crime and gang affiliation, and were subject of BSCP Rapid Reviews.
- Significant disruption and breakdown in the boys' education with recurring patterns of the extensive use of fixed-term and permanent exclusions from school, with one of the boys excluded on ten occasions and another being taken off school roll and being home educated for 2 years.
- Mental and emotional wellbeing: a number of the boys had SEND or difficulties with their emotional wellbeing.
- Several of the boys, including Mohamed and Hassan, were actively engaging with mentoring programmes and found this a positive and rewarding experience.
- Partnership intervention for almost all of them focused on an attempt to break the cycle and divert them from gang affiliation and also criminal exploitation.
- Several were subject of Criminal Exploitation Risk Assessments and at varying stages of involvement categorised as low, medium, and high risk. There was inconsistency in decision making to determine the changing level of risk, and adjustment or withdrawal of support and intervention to prevent child criminal exploitation.
- There were some missed opportunities to engage more effectively with the boys when they were at crisis point; these 'reachable moments' were when they had been stabbed or arrested and when return home interviews were carried out following periods when they were missing from home.
- They were subject of intensive work co-ordinated through multi-agency Disruption Planning meetings. Whilst it was acknowledged as good practice, the system targets intervention based on risk and it was felt that further assurance was needed of the effectiveness and impact of these arrangements.
- The appropriateness of Mohamed's placement in unregulated supported accommodation. (BCT have undertaken a separate internal management review of the decision to place Mohamed in unregulated supported accommodation, which has been shared with the lead reviewer.)

## 5. Learning Themes

5.1 As a result of the analysis of the activity against the action plan from the original review BSCP 2019-20/02 into serious youth violence in Birmingham and the four current rapid reviews. Taking account of the two practitioner events and the review teams thoughts and views, a number of key learning themes have emerged.

- Governance of Serious Youth Violence
- Assessments- Traditional Safeguarding -CCE-SYV

- Place
- Trusted adult-mentoring-reachable moments
- Unregulated premises (Mohamed only)

## **5.2 Governance of Serious Youth Violence**

5.3 Already mentioned within the action plan and within this report is the need for there to be a high level strategic decision on who leads in Birmingham on Serious Youth Violence. Contained within the Change for Children and Young Peoples plan<sup>8</sup>, produced by the Birmingham Children and Young Peoples partnership, one of the ambitions is for children and young people to feel SAFE at home, and in places and spaces outside of their families and schools. This plan is supported by the delivery outlined in the Birmingham Youth Justice Plan.

5.4 This has been mentioned earlier in this report but worthwhile to repeat here: ‘The Reducing Serious Violence Strategy is a draft document due for completion and submission to the Home Office in January 2024, and will be developed into a delivery plan within 12 months.’ The tackling of Serious Youth Violence will be encompassed within this strategy and delivery plan.

5.5 This lead in governance though doesn’t need to happen only at a strategic level but also at an operational level. Who was leading as a professional or as an agency at any one time, for, in particular Mohamed, but also for Hassan. It was not clear who was leading in governance to all of the professionals who were working with them. So, if not clear to them it must have been confusing for the children involved and their families. There is need in these cases to identify a Lead Professional to help coordinate agency intervention, through the provision of whether it is Early Help and Support, Children in Need or Child Protection. This is an important learning point from this review.

## **5.6 Assessments – traditional safeguarding-CCE-SYV**

5.7 Both Mohamed and Hassan first became known to BCT when they were arrested. Strategy meetings were held and, after a further arrest, a complex strategy meeting was held. It was clear that there were links to gangs and wider tensions along with the complexities of being in the middle of the COVID- 19 pandemic, also highlighted was that there were older adult gang members involved.

5.8 A lot of information was shared and actions were agreed which looked at trying to disrupt the adults that the partnership knew of and looking to take civil action. The meetings explored how they could intervene with Mohamed and Hassan and divert them from this lifestyle that they had not really chosen, looking at parenting support, early help offers- including mentoring, and for both, the involvement with football. Good use was made of the Home Office Disruption Toolkit.

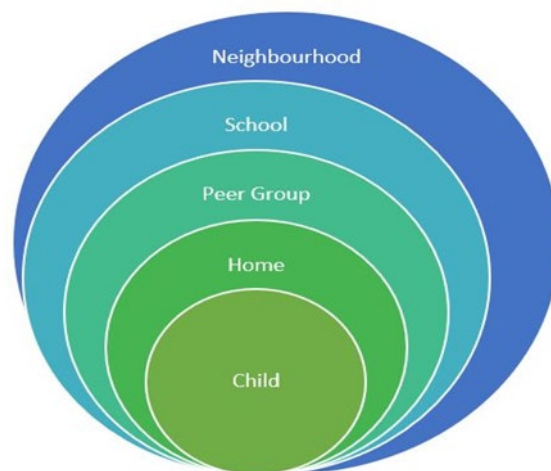
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<sup>8</sup> Change for Children and Young People Plan 2023-2028 | Local Offer Birmingham

- 5.9 The Child Criminal Exploitation risk assessment was used at the time to identify children who were at risk of SYV as this was the only way to identify children at the time. Both Mohamed and Hassan were scored either low risk for exploitation, or, at times medium risk. There wasn't for them the evidence of them being involved in criminal exploitation, for them it was much more around serious youth violence, so missed here was the context of peers, community and gangs. The CCE risk assessment tool was not highlighting those children that were almost solely engaging with SYV.
- 5.10 During this period, Empower U were still always looking at ways to disrupt the risks for Mohamed & Hassan around SYV which was outside of the home.
- 5.11 Although Hassan, for example, was engaging well with his mentor and in education, not going missing and things seemed to be more positive, there was in fact a lot going on in the background in relation to gang involvement and SYV. For Mohamed there were issues around the trauma, around the murders of his friends, and a referral was made to use a black therapist to address trauma which Mohamed had agreed to work with. His lead professional from the BCT was also doing bail support work with him and incorporating reachable moments. They had built positive rapport and he had applied for college, he had aspirations, there was believed to be a change within him. The professional spoke with Mohamed the day he was murdered and Mohamed was not portraying any indication that he was going to be going into other gangs neighbourhoods and areas.
- 5.12 A number of Complex Strategy Meetings were held, in particular following the deaths of the other young people involved and following Mohamed being stabbed. Mapping was completed, not only for all of the boys (10 of them) involved in this review, but others that they were connected with who were associated with gangs and SYV. Disruption tactics were discussed and implemented.
- 5.13 The traditional 1989 Children's Act processes were used for both Mohamed and Hassan. The CIN process was used for both of them and lasted various lengths of time. This then shifted when there were CP concerns to a CPP plan. There were also, at times, social work assessments that had taken place. These traditional processes, which are well established, work best for children harmed within the home and family environment, and, as such, could miss helping and supporting children involved in SYV, such as Mohamed and Hassan.
- 5.14 Right Help, Right Time (RHRT) is the name of the threshold process in Birmingham. At times neither child fitted within some of the thresholds, for example, Child Protection Plan, when looking purely at what were the known concerns at that time, so these boys and others like them involved in Serious Youth Violence are difficult to fit within that framework. The RHRT consultation period closed in September 2023 and is due to be finalised in 2024. Based on what we have learnt from this review about where they fitted in the process and how that influenced decision making, and knowing what we know now in hindsight, it would be helpful if they could have fitted into this process.

- 5.15 The RHRT needs to acknowledge that the issues for children involved in SYV and contextual safeguarding are very complex. It needs to consider whether the way of current working is fit for purpose and is there a need for an agency risk management pathway in respect of non-familial (external risk) notably which includes the interface between CEE and SYV. For example, with the hold that the gangs have on children, is there training for staff to understand how gangs work? Staff also need to be trained in a trauma approach to work with children, for example, Mohamed was stabbed twice himself, he witnessed a friend being stabbed to death and another friend dying as a result of being stabbed. What can also be done to help the parents to help the children is needed to be known.
- 5.16 As highlighted in the above section from the responses in the action plan about looking at alternative ways of working, work is being done in Birmingham to resolve some of these anomalies. They have recently implemented a Serious Youth Violence classification within current risk tools. This means that they can now start to report on children that are at risk of violence from peers or at risk to peers of violence.
- 5.17 Where there is exploitation and SYV this will follow the same pathway as that which is in place currently through the Empower U hub as exploitation will supersede the influence of SYV violence, but for those where it is apparent at the time that it is only SYV, they still need to continue to develop a pathway /process. The secondment of two members of YOS staff to Empower U will greatly assist this process.
- 5.18 A draft Contextual Safeguarding risk matrix has also been completed and it is hoped to pilot this, once there has been both local and regional agreement.
- 5.19 Place**
- 5.20 There are a number of Urban Street Gangs operating in these relevant inner-city neighbourhoods of Birmingham. These gangs involve children and young people who are 14 to 19-years-old, and in some cases even younger.
- 5.21 Throughout agency involvement with both Mohamed and Hassan there is mention of them firstly being on the periphery of a gang and then suspected of being involved in a gang. This was re-iterated by professionals at the practitioner event. Almost all of the practitioners that worked with them said they were engaging children who wanted to change. However, the professionals felt that membership of a gang seemed to be an inevitable consequence of the boys' allegiances to their inner-city neighbourhood in Birmingham, as within these gangs were their peers and friends. This equally applied, even when Mohamed was moved out of his neighbourhood and into the unregulated home. The draw of his neighbourhood pulled him back there all of the time. Mohamed's mother told the review author that as well as her sons' friends being where he wanted to be, it was also his love of football that kept him firmly in the neighbourhood. She discussed moving back to Spain or going to France to keep him safe, but Mohamed was against it as he had aspirations for football and had applied to college.

- 5.22 It was believed that Hassan was a member of rival urban street gang. There are believed to be some subcultural elements in terms of commitment to being a member of the gang and these subcultural elements involve associated conflicts, some of which are part of this review but include many other incidents that had not led to death. It was believed that Hassan was at risk of reprisals from rival gangs in relation to death of a member of another gang, not Mohamed.
- 5.23 There was a discussion in relation to Mohamed wearing a coloured bandana at school after one of the stabbing deaths of one of his friends. It was felt at the practitioner event that this wasn't the bandana normally associated with the gang he was affiliated to. It was staff at the Bridge Centre who also reported him wearing the same coloured bandana, this was, they believed, because he was scared going through a rival gangs area on the bus so wore the bandana of that local gang. This is important to note that young people have to navigate through other gangs' areas to go to appointments, go to school etc and this is a risk to them.
- 5.24 Professor Carlene Firmin, from Durham University and the Contextual Safeguarding Network, often talks about safeguarding organisations needing to tackle 'Place' to break young people's cycle of being harmed through involvement with gangs.



- 5.25 For Mohamed and Hassan, the 'Place' influence was the inner-city neighbourhood in Birmingham where they lived. There is a history of gang violence (generational) within this area.
- 5.26 Educating children and young people to the dangers of both gangs and carrying knives needs to be co-ordinated and targeted to those of secondary school age, but with consideration to those in their last years of primary school. It would be prudent for this to be a multi-agency approach which needs to be managed and able to draw on current and emerging themes. This needs to be 'hard-hitting' and serve to deter, and may best be demonstrated by actual case studies, for example, the four cases we have looked at in the Rapid Reviews for this report, this will demonstrate the raw realities of what is happening in Birmingham here and now. Mohamed's mother told the review author that she felt that this was the single most important action to save children's lives from knife crime that needs to be taken is this education process.

- 5.27 Educational exclusion may well only have served to increase their exposure to a criminal gang. It is a fact that the networking within organised crime is significant, and that like law enforcement agencies, criminals have their own 'intelligence' systems targeting young and vulnerable victims. To many this can result in a devastating impact on their lives within a very short time frame having been lured by promises of significant rewards which quickly transpose to threats of assault, intimidation and invariably threats to their family's lives, with drugs debts building up. Weapons are a common feature of 'gang culture'; knives or other bladed weapons appear to be the weapon of choice, although access to, and the use of firearms is common. In this review the use of knives was found to be widespread.
- 5.28 A question posed by the review author at the practitioner event was in relation to 'Place', and the 'Place' Mohamed and Hassan were living in and the 'Place' their lived experience was, if you pulled them out of that 'Place' would that have helped to keep them safer?
- 5.29 This did happen to a certain extent for Mohamed when he moved into the unregulated premises. The issue with him being relocated from Handsworth and King's Norton, was that every week a taxi was arranged from Kings Norton, and in order to take this he would wear a stab proof vest. Mohamed wasn't always able to take a taxi for football and mentoring sessions so he had to catch a bus from Kings Norton to Perry Barr. On the day he died he caught the early bus, normally he would have been at the sports hub for 6-6.30 p.m. but was there earlier and was spotted by members of a different gang. This was when the incidents that led to his death happened.
- 5.30 This risk for children moving through other gang neighbourhoods needs to be recognised as significant by professionals when making appointments for them to either be seen in agency buildings or by professionals individually, or when commissioning other services to work with them. In support of strengthening the wider partnership understanding of the risks and challenges children face within the city, the YOS have committed to working with Birmingham University to understand from children working with the service the challenges they face in travelling around the city and what would make them feel safer.
- 5.31 The previous stabbing occurred at Newtown shopping centre, which was in another area where Mohamed knew not to go, but it appears that Mohamed and other members of his gang may have gone there to show themselves in that area. It is of note that a professional at the practitioner event said that there seems a be culture within small groups of young people in Birmingham to go to rival territories and take pictures and videos to show they're able to go to these areas. Mohamed himself produced antagonistic music going through a rival gangs area.
- 5.32 There needs to be a concerted effort to tackle the gangs operating in the relevant inner-city neighbourhoods in Birmingham. The work of all agencies on individual cases may be successful but the gangs will just recruit the next young person to take their place unless their network can be successfully disrupted. This is where the crucial work



of the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership and the Serious Youth Violence Strategy should, can, and will have influence.

5.33 This is why the Operation Fresco and the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), Neighbourhood Fund is so exciting and such a promising development. As it states in the response in the action plan: 'The YEF will bring investment, to support actions that will address serious youth violence in the Newtown and Lozells. YEF agreed to invest £1,000,000 to support the action plan, and have confirmed Aston Villa Foundation would be the new Lead Co-ordinating Organisation who would be responsible for supporting the Steering Group and overseeing the action plan to implementation over the next 4 years. WMP still continue with operations in those areas, and works alongside the Community Safety Partnership Delivery Group though CSP.'

#### **5.34 Trusted adult-mentoring-reachable moments**

5.35 One of the main diversion tactics used for children like Mohamed and Hassan is to refer them for placement on a football programme and enlist a mentor from there. For example, the Aston Villa Foundation – would have provided a series of 1-2-1 mentoring and small group intervention to try and steer them away from criminality and reduce the risk of offending and exploitation, usually somewhere close to where they lived. Both Mohamed and Hassan were reported to the review as always engaging really well, they looked forward to seeing their mentors and enjoyed the football sessions and open access sessions with their friends there. Mohamed's mother agreed that her son found his mentors really helpful and supportive.

5.36 The Aston Villa intervention programme currently has 25 children on a liaison and diversion programme, this is partnered with NHS. They also work with about 400 young people a week on open access diversionary activities.

5.37 Another programme involved with these children was Phoenix United which is a community interest grassroots company who have workers with lived experiences. They are funded by the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership. They have other strands as well as mentoring and trying to be the trusted adult, including developing a football incorporating and academic course. They are very established in the Birmingham area. They highlight the importance to have trusted adult relationships that understand the lived experiences of the child and who are culturally competent as important to try and divert the children from SYV and/or exploitation.

5.38 Hassan was working well with Phoenix United mentoring and his mentor offered a lot of support in terms of understanding risk, cannabis use, risk of knife crime and diverting activities. The mentor was being seen very regularly, including sitting down with parents talking about risk. Hassan, it was felt, had a good relationship with his mentor.

5.39 There was a concern that at one stage Mohamed had four different mentors. There clearly was a need at meetings about the child to find out who was involved and why. There is also a need to hold mentor services to account as to their plans and outcome

intentions, and to hold regular reviews. The review author is not convinced this was as developed as it could have been.

- 5.40 The review author felt that those professionals who were working with Mohamed and Hassan and were acting as mentors, or spoke about mentors from within their organisation, were constantly trying to establish moments when the children might have been amenable to make changes to their behaviour and lifestyle. Some research calls this a 'reachable moment', or in Education a 'teachable moment'. In the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's report on safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation (March 2020) it is called a 'critical moment':

'There is a concept in systemic theory literature described as a critical moment which changes social worlds. Systemic therapists promote the importance of acting wisely to identify when the words used at a particular critical moment can have a powerful influence on the direction taken after the conversation has ended. In a similar vein, the notion of the teachable moment is well established in education, youth offending and health sectors.'

- 5.41 When Mohamed was in hospital after being stabbed, this was seen as reachable moment. Redthread started working with him then, and again, at the second incident later that year. Risk assessment work took place, talking to him about exploitation, then before going out into the community they ensured he was safe to discharge. It was felt that he engaged with Redthread and wanted to get back into school. It was a reachable moment with him understanding the risks around him at that moment.
- 5.42 Redthread worked with around 300 young people in 2021 who attended hospitals within Birmingham with violence injuries and exploitation concerns. They don't yet have contracts with City Hospital and Good Hope Hospital.
- 5.43 There were other reachable moments with Mohamed, as an example in May 2022, he was invested in trying to change and make decisions, his key worker had simple conversations with him such as do you know how to cook, would you like to learn? He was shocked and asked are you going to spend that time with me? They did cooking sessions, spoke about college, his dreams and aspirations, he was excited for the next time. A very positive response. His worker saw a desire to want to change at that point.

#### **5.44 Unregulated premises**

- 5.45 This learning theme relates solely to Mohamed when following a violent dispute with his neighbours he was placed in an unregulated children's home. The rapid review raised concerns in relation to this, hence it is examined within this review.
- 5.46 At the practitioner event one of the mentors highlighted that fact that Mohamed was in an unregulated home, they had evenings covered with playing football, but at the home there was no key worker, and, in their view, didn't meet children's needs. When the mentor went to the home, the bedroom furniture was, in their view, not fit for purpose, it was drab and broken, like a squat. However, they never shared this concern

with any other professional. It is worth noting that Mohamed's mothers told the lead review author that she felt the home was a good place for her son to be staying in.

- 5.47 During Christmas 2021, the home had confiscated his laptop, so Mohamed had no access to any entertainment over Christmas, he only had his phone and snapchat with all the conversations with gangs on there. So, the fact is, that he was at a home that didn't meet his needs, there were no activities planned, all support came from mentors, no effort was made to make food that met his cultural needs, nor supported and helped the lived experience for Mohamed.
- 5.48 Another professional at the event explained that the reason he was moved to that premises was due to his bail conditions stopping him from going home. This led to tier one<sup>9</sup> re-housing not being activated properly, causing further delays in offering the family a move. Mohamed and his mother expressed to professionals that they wanted to be together. Foster placement was considered but was not considered to meet his needs. The professional wasn't aware it was an unregulated placement at the time, but it was supported accommodation. This was unregulated due to the context of local BCT policy of not placing young people at 16 into supported accommodation until they have finished their full-time education. Mohamed's mother wasn't aware the home was unregulated; in fact, she expressed a view to the review author that she liked it and felt that the manager was really good with Mohamed.
- 5.49 Another professional at the meeting did highlight an alternative view that needs recognition, they pointed out that there were significant issues around his own home when he was with mum, for example, they believed lack of nurture, conflict with older brother, lack of stimulation in home with no entertainment, other than his phone. So, although conditions weren't great when he was accommodated in this unregulated home, they did see nurture from the staff there, although they were limited in what they could offer.
- 5.50 The review author asked the question, what assurance is available in terms of unregulated accommodation – is this still being used, or is there a move away from this? The BCT state that children should have a different service and be in regulated placements, this is being rolled out as a coordinated plan. There is definitely a move away from unregulated premises for children of school age as a priority.
- 5.51 The action plan response did highlight some developments that could assist with this issue: *The Violence Reduction Partnership* have developed a Good Practice Guide for Safeguarding Partners when relocating a young person due to significant risk of harm from serious violence and/or exploitation.

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<sup>9</sup> The tier one scoring system in order to get a priority move have to score 17 and above, which means a move for the whole family, predominantly revolves around immediate threat to safety in family home and can relate to transferred risk to siblings. This type of scoring system requires a close link between housing and police but often seems to break down.

- 5.52 Birmingham Children's Trust have carried out an internal management review into the decision-making process for Mohamed's placement in unregulated supported accommodation, this has been shared for learning with the BSCP and the lead reviewer.

## **6. Conclusions**

- 6.1 The lived experience of Mohamed, Hassan and the other eight children within this report shows that agencies and professionals tried hard to intervene and to have influence in their lives. The carrying and use of knives is a regular occurrence in Birmingham.
- 6.2 Today's society is so complex and so layered for the young people in Birmingham and, in fact, across the UK. What this review and its recommendations should be mindful of are the following words that one of the professionals at the practitioner event said: 'What I don't think any of us here (the practitioner event) has an answer to, is the draw and the pull into becoming part of a gang. When we talked to children and children tell us that they have to act a certain way because of where they live, behave a certain way, talk a certain way, walk a certain way, dress a certain way just to feel safe. So it's OK for us to sit here and think about how we get children to not become a member of a gang but we are not walking and navigating the harm and risk and the uncertainty, the anxiety and the fear within the community that our children are today and I just wanted to say that, so that we think about everything that we want to do, plan to do, hope to do but not take our mind off what it is like to be empathetic and walk in those children shoes.'
- 6.3 Professionals need to have this understanding that to be involved in a gang helps you to feel safe. This is so much stronger than anything that professionals and agencies can offer. So professionals have to get in really early when they see those added vulnerabilities to becoming involved in gangs. These vulnerabilities are for children whose parents and siblings are gang affiliated, gang associated or imprisoned, or/and they've got parents that are in prison because of that. There are behaviour problems at school which should be acted upon, rather than waiting until they're at risk of being excluded or have been excluded. Being in education is seen as a safe place for children and any efforts to prevent exclusion, where possible, would be a good preventative move.
- 6.4 Improving mentorship: ensuring flexible budget and resources to enable agencies to pay for this when it falls outside of budgetary availability. There is evidence of children falling in the gaps when this support is withdrawn if it's not funded through the Home Office or Police and Crime Commissioner.
- 6.5 The findings from the Rapid Review drew a conclusion which is also the findings from this CSPR that the BSCP needs to work in close collaboration with the Community Safety Partnership, West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit and the Contextual

Safeguarding Board to continuously improve the City's response to tackling serious youth violence.

6.6 At the time of the completion of this report, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023, was in its consultation stage and it highlighted in a section on Harm outside the home the following: 'We are currently testing new approaches to children who experience significant harm from outside the home through our Risk Outside the Home pilots and we will use the Families First for Children Pathfinder to test these approaches further, with a view to informing longer-term changes to the statutory framework.'<sup>10</sup> The BSCP and partners should consider approaching any of the pilot areas to see if their demographics are similar and if there are any lessons that Birmingham can learn from them to assist local practice.

6.7 In 2023 'Multi-Agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm'<sup>11</sup> was published. It is a DfE funded research project, which was supported cross government. They have developed eight practice principles in cases of CCE and harm outside the home:

- Put children and young people first
- Recognise and challenge inequalities, exclusion and discrimination
- Respect the voices, experiences and expertise of children and young people
- Be strengths-based and relationship-based
- Recognise and respond to trauma
- Be curious, evidence-informed and knowledgeable
- Approach parents and carers as partners wherever possible
- Create safe spaces and places for children and young people.

There is an incredible amount of learning from this report that is worth agencies and practitioners exploring further to assist their practice.

## 7. Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

- (i) Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership should work in close collaboration with Birmingham Community Safety Partnership to seek assurance on the effective implementation of the Reducing Serious Violence Strategy 2024-2034, particularly assessing the impact of multi-agency intervention to tackle serious youth violence
- (ii) BSCP should seek assurance that all relevant statutory and voluntary sector organisations at both strategic and operational levels are committed and actively involved in the long-term implementing of the Reducing Serious Violence Strategy. That all strategic leaders, Managers and Practitioners understand their role in

<sup>10</sup> DfE (June 2023) Changes to statutory guidance: Working Together to Safeguard Children, Government consultation.

<sup>11</sup> <https://tce.researchinpractice.org.uk/>

preventing serious youth violence. This will greatly assist with coordinated operational delivery.

### **Recommendation 2**

There is a need for individual children that may be at risk of serious youth violence (either as a victim or perpetrator, or both) to be identified at the earliest opportunity. If following the review of the Right Help Right Time (RHRT) threshold guidance, the majority of these children are subject to either early help or statutory child in need processes as opposed to being subject to child protection planning, then these processes as an alternative method of protecting that child, must be as strong and robust.

- (i) The BSCP should ensure the Contextual Safeguarding Board reviews the current screening tool so that they ensure that they pick out serious youth violence where it is a separate risk to CCE.
- (ii) The BSCP should ensure that Empower U and its partners continues to develop a model that looks at alternative but complementary pathways for SYV and CCE to those that are currently used in child protection cases if they are deemed not suitable for an individual child.
- (iii) The BSCP should ensure that for all cases, whether statutory intervention or not, there is a lead professional in place to coordinate multi-agency activity for children who are at risk of serious youth violence. This should include families who are receiving support in via the early help offer within the city.

### **Recommendation 3**

The BSCP should help and support education efforts to raise awareness of the dangers of knife crime in secondary, primary schools and in those settings providing alternative school provision. (The Ben Kinsella knife crime campaigns and learning resources for practitioners are seen nationally as good practice that can assist with this awareness raising.)

### **Recommendation 4**

The BSCP and the Birmingham Contextual Safeguarding Board should ensure that all partners and practitioners are fully aware of the range of community-based support within neighbourhoods and availability of mentoring services across the city and their effectiveness in supporting children at risk of serious youth violence and criminal exploitation, including initiatives such as Operation FRESCO and activities operated under the auspices of the Youth Endowment Fund and through the leading of the Aston Villa Foundation.