



HM Inspectorate
of Probation



Care Quality
Commission



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Julie Longworth, Director of Children's Services, Leeds City Council
Rob Webster, Executive Lead, Integrated Care Board
Tracey Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire
John Robins, Chief Constable, West Yorkshire Police
Helen Burton, Youth Offending Service manager
David Derbyshire, Independent Scrutineer

Dear Leeds Local Safeguarding Partnership

Joint targeted area inspection of Leeds

This letter summarises the findings of the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to serious youth violence in Leeds.

This inspection took place from 4 to 8 March 2024. It was carried out by inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP).

Context

The findings in the report evaluate the effectiveness of the multi-agency response to children aged 10 and over who are at risk of or affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. Even where the report does not specifically refer to this group of children, all findings relate to this scope.

The inspectorates recognise the complexities for agencies in intervening to address serious youth violence when risk and harm occur outside of the family home. As a consequence, risk assessment and decision-making have a number of complexities and challenges. A multi-agency inspection of this area of practice is more likely to highlight some of the significant challenges to partnerships in improving practice. We anticipate that each of the JTAIs of this area of practice that are being carried out will identify learning for all agencies and will contribute to the debate about what good practice looks like in relation to the multi-agency response to serious youth violence. In a proportion of cases seen by inspectors, children had also experienced other forms of abuse, which reflects the complexity of the needs and risks for children.



Headline findings

Most children in Leeds who are affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation benefit from an effective and well-coordinated multi-agency response. Strategic partnerships in Leeds are well embedded and mature. Strategic leaders across all agencies are invested in the partnership and in reducing the risks to children to make Leeds a safer city. Leaders have driven a clear, tiered response to address serious youth violence at strategic, tactical and operational levels.

A strong and coherent culture, based on a relational approach, trauma-informed work and the Leeds model of practice, underpins the partnership. Strategic and operational partners share the same principles, vision and values. There is a clear and mutually agreed focus on locally based early intervention and prevention. This includes a high level of engagement and consultation with children and families. This helps develop tailored and effective services and interventions informed by the communities and children throughout Leeds.

Numerous interventions and projects have been developed to support children at risk of serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation and their families. Practitioners are astute and committed and many work relentlessly and passionately with children and families to reduce risks and inspire and divert children away from serious youth violence. Children's diverse needs are considered, and services are designed to address the disproportionality of black and ethnic minority children involved in the criminal justice system, and additional vulnerability factors.

Until recently, serious youth violence has not been one of the previously published priorities of the Leeds Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP). The LSCP Executive has undertaken a review of its governance arrangements and the structure of its Business Unit and subgroups. Due to the review, several subgroups have not met for some time, including the risk and vulnerability subgroup. The LSCP review has now concluded and has led to the establishment of a revised Child Exploitation Silver MACE subgroup, which includes a focus on serious youth violence as well as a newly established Audit and Review subgroup. This group will monitor the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding practice through multi-agency audit activity and scrutiny of multi-agency progress on key performance indicators.

Many children at risk of serious youth violence and criminal exploitation who have emerging mental health needs and/or neurodiverse needs are waiting too long to be assessed by child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). The impact of this delay means not all children have their mental health needs fully addressed, nor are they easily able to access therapeutic treatment.



What needs to improve?

- Consistent and timely sharing of police protection notifications (PPNs) when police officers identify risks to children. The quality of PPNs should include detailed information, including a child's ethnicity and culture, to assist with multi-agency decision-making.
- Waiting times for children to receive CAMHS assessments and therapeutic treatment in line with needs arising from their mental health conditions and neurodiversity.
- The frequency of multi-agency partnership auditing of children affected by serious youth violence, to inform a partnership learning and development strategy that builds on and enhances the existing training available to professionals working with children affected by serious youth violence.

Strengths

- Strong multi-agency relationships with a shared vision and culture, both strategically and operationally, resulting in effective communication and effective partnership working.
- Collation and analysis of data across the partnership has informed a detailed strategic needs assessment and action plan.
- Targeted multi-agency interventions and projects across the city are helping to divert children away from youth violence and support children affected by criminal exploitation.
- Multi-agency formulation meetings provide a helpful insight into children's risks, vulnerabilities and needs through a trauma-informed lens.
- The partnership information portal (PIP) enables practitioners across all agencies to contribute vital information in an accessible way. This improves the partnership understanding of risk to children and their vulnerabilities.
- The research unit within the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) provides regular and detailed analysis of data, research, community feedback and children's views and experiences. This builds a rich picture and understanding of where, when and why children are at risk of serious youth violence.
- The partnership's 'Project Shield' includes daily multi-agency information-sharing to provide an immediate response when children have been affected by serious youth violence.
- Children at risk of significant harm from serious youth violence or exploitation are responded to through the risk outside the home (ROTH) pathway. The ROTH pathway enables partners to work under statutory child protection planning to effectively address risks and enable children and families to work in partnership with agencies using a non-blaming relational approach.



- Police analysts use information from their own systems and other organisations to profile crime and thematic topics across the whole force, local authority and locality areas. These profiles contain detailed information about risks to children, including places and times. They are used practically to drive interventions and disruption activity and to engage multi-agency practitioners in educational and prevention activities, such as engagement with cohorts of school children.

Main findings

Leeds is the 86th most deprived local authority in England. 138 of its areas are among the most deprived 20% in England. 32% of pupils in the area are eligible for pupil premium, compared with 27% for England overall. 33.1% of children in Leeds are from ethnic minority groups.

The work of partner agencies in Leeds is supported by the West Yorkshire VRP. The VRP provides funding to the Safer Leeds executive board, which acts as the community safety partnership within Leeds City Council. Both these partnerships have a clear vision and objectives underpinned by a number of different approaches that support a public health approach to tackling serious violence, including child- and family-specific approaches for serious youth violence. This is supported by a thorough and detailed strategic needs assessment that includes a specific focus on under-18s. As a result, the partnerships have a good insight and understanding of local issues, places and spaces, and the needs of children at risk of criminal exploitation and serious youth violence.

The work of the VRP research unit is impressive. Data is gathered regularly from key sources, such as hospitals, schools and police, in line with a wide range of indicators, and collated into a dashboard. It is used to good effect to provide overarching data against the Home Office indicators. The research unit can also drill down into the dashboard to understand the local picture and the impact for the local community and children in Leeds. This helps to understand where and when serious youth violence is occurring and where resources and interventions need to take place. The partnerships continually look to improve their understanding of the reasons why violence occurs, by interweaving research, community engagement, children's views and partner intelligence, to achieve a rich analysis and understanding. This enables them to work in partnership with the Safer Leeds executive board to target training, interventions with children, and direct funding streams for community and third sector projects.

The LSCP has recognised the need for improvement and explicit scrutiny of all aspects of safeguarding in line with recent changes to Working Together guidance. An independent scrutineer has been appointed and has made a valuable contribution, informing and enhancing the review that had been initiated by the LSCP



Executive into its governance and structural arrangements. Positively, the LSCP has identified safeguarding adolescents with a focus on criminal exploitation and knife crime as one of three priority areas for action this year. It is slowly starting to align the LSCP's work in this topic with existing strategies. It has been recognised by the LSCP that access to the right level of training and development in relation to serious youth violence for practitioners across agencies could be enhanced through a more consistent multi-agency strategic approach. The LSCP acknowledge that there needs to be frequent and high-quality multi-agency auditing via the LSCP to identify and collate themes of good practice and areas for development. This will help to develop a training needs analysis and ensure that there is a coherent workforce learning and development plan across the whole of the partnership.

When children are referred for concerns of serious youth violence or exploitation, they receive a timely and mainly effective response through the 'front door' or from the emergency duty team. Children who require strategy discussions to ensure that professionals understand risks are immediately referred to the children's social work area teams for a multi-agency discussion. When an incident requires a rapid response, partners work effectively together to ensure that children are safeguarded at the earliest opportunity. However, there are some inconsistencies in how partners share information at the front door. For example, there is no consistent access to youth justice information, and health and education practitioners are co-located only one day a week. Police officers do not always record information about risks to children on PPNs. Some officers do not record enough information about the voice of the child or about a child's ethnicity or cultural heritage, or make it clear why they are making a referral for a child. These omissions can mean that a full picture of the child's circumstances is missing and not considered in next steps decision-making. Audits completed by the police have identified this issue and managers have initiated additional training to improve compliance with the police force policy.

Information about children who attend the hospital accident and emergency department (A&E) for reasons relating to violence is shared at weekly multidisciplinary meetings. This ensures that children are signposted to the right services. A&E youth work navigators accept referrals for 11 to 25-year-old victims of serious youth violence and aim to make prompt contact with the child, build a rapport and identify appropriate ongoing support. For serious incidents, the navigators will triage and offer support within 24 hours; however, for less serious incidents, there are waiting lists. This means not all children get immediate help, and this creates a missed opportunity to intervene at the point of crisis for a child.

When children are arrested for incidents relating to serious youth violence, police custody staff work closely with multi-agency partners to provide a child-centred approach within the criminal justice system. The vulnerability of detained children is well recognised. They are treated accordingly and seen by healthcare professionals,



liaison and diversion professionals, with timely referrals to social care. Alternative accommodation arrangements are in place and community-based help is quickly arranged for these children. This ensures that, in line with their risks and needs, children do not remain in custody longer than is necessary.

Multi-agency partners forge positive professional relationships with each other. This supports the work they do as individual agencies, and as a network around the child and family. The Leeds practice model and the trauma-informed approach is evident in workers' consideration and planning. All the professionals inspectors spoke with know their children and speak warmly about them. They understand their risks and needs, are aspirational and tenacious advocates for them. They understand the impact of serious youth violence on children's safety and well-being and the contextual risks for them. As a result, many children are having their risk of serious youth violence or exploitation managed and reduced.

Social workers are developing their knowledge and understanding of the links between exploitation and serious youth violence, although there is no bespoke specialised training for this scope. ROTH plans are incorporated with vulnerability risk management assessments and plans. Actions focus on reducing risks to the child as well as considering wider issues linked to exploitation, including peer mapping and mapping of significant information. Monthly multi-agency meetings are held to review the plan and are well attended by relevant professionals, with clear lines of accountability. Plans often identify who is the child's most trusted person, so they can maintain positive relationships. When appropriate, family networks are developed to add a further layer of safeguarding. ROTH plans consider the places and spaces in local communities where children may be at higher risk of youth violence and exploitation. Safeguarding is viewed as everyone's responsibility and includes non-statutory agencies such as licensing, highways and local businesses, who are all involved in plans when appropriate.

Risk assessment matrixes for children are updated monthly with new information being shared through the PIP, as well as emails to all professionals involved. This means that new concerns are quickly shared with partners and, when necessary, action is taken to safeguard the child. The multidisciplinary 'Safe' team works with children who are at risk of exploitation and serious youth violence. They visit children frequently and use a wide range of tools to work directly with children, helping them to understand the risks relating to exploitation. Workers also work closely with families and their networks to raise awareness and provide an additional layer of safeguarding. When risks are reduced for the child, workers continue to work with parents and other children in the family to ensure that safety plans are embedded and sustainable.



There are multiple regular professional forums and meetings taking place for children who are at risk of serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. While these meetings ensure timely information-sharing, there is inconsistency in the clarity of actions from some of these meetings. Many of these multi-agency children's meetings are time- and resource-inefficient, as they are attended by the same professionals who discuss predominantly the same issues. The sheer number of meetings and professionals can be confusing and overwhelming for many children and their parents. Some multi-agency meetings lack efficient coordination to serve multiple functions and reduce bureaucracy. Multi-agency partners recognise there is some duplication and are working towards better alignment of key meetings to make them more efficient.

The youth justice service has introduced a tiering model to help manage the risk of harm to the children they supervise. This is still in its infancy. These are well structured and organised in line with multi-agency public protection (MAPPA) practice. The relatively recent development of the 'tiered system' of risk management panels, to better align the response from the YJS and partners with identified risk, is to be fully embedded. It is hoped that this will lead to an enhanced and improved response to children both at and presenting a very high level of risk.

Youth justice practitioners have all been trained in trauma-informed practice and understand its relevance to their work. Formulation meetings are used effectively to help manage complex cases. They review children's experiences and behaviours through a trauma-informed lens and help the partners reflect and adapt their planning and focus. Inspectors saw numerous positive examples of formulation meetings helping to provide effective trauma-informed planning for children involved in serious youth violence.

Multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) arrangements review individual children's risks. Child-focused meetings are held to discuss children where there is an early emerging risk of exploitation. Professionals at the meeting consider push and pull factors to enable a clear analysis of risk. They agree further actions with an aim of intervening early and prevent children's risks escalating. Trends, themes, locations and suspected perpetrators are collated and inform an additional monthly contextual MACE meeting to ensure that action plans that address contextual harm can also be put into place.

In response to delivering a focused multi-agency response to serious youth violence and organised crime, the partnership has developed 'Project Shield'. This project was developed in collaboration with children and young people in Leeds, who have chosen the name for the project and designed its logo. Project Shield has clearly improved partnership information-sharing about violent crime affecting children. The daily meeting shares information about incidents of youth violence that have



happened the evening before. It is well attended by a range of multi-agency professionals, with the exception of health. The VRP has agreed to fund a multi-agency-crewed 'focused deterrence car'. This responds to taskings from Project Shield meetings and engages with children and their families affected by serious youth violence and exploitation. A parent-led group helps families who have been affected by serious youth violence to support each other. In addition to the daily meetings, locality meetings are held every six weeks to review children and incidents. This helps to build information and intelligence about serious youth violence and criminal exploitation between partners to ensure joined-up planning and responses.

Information and intelligence submitted by partners through the PIP helps with the understanding of risk to children from violence and exploitation. Positively, it is used to share information from return home interviews for children who go missing from home. This inclusion shows that the partnership understands the significant risk experienced by children who go missing. The use of this fast-time communication channel helps to reduce risk to these children.

Schools have increasingly built up their knowledge and expertise to recognise the triggers for children being groomed into exploitation and involved in serious youth violence. Tracking of children missing education is regular and comprehensive, to ensure that children are reintegrated into education at the earliest opportunity. The multi-agency partnership has recognised some gaps in post-16 education provision for vulnerable children and has taken significant and useful steps to begin to address this. This includes increased engagement and agreement with post-16 providers to accept children at risk of serious youth violence onto appropriate courses and to offer a menu of delivery. There is inbuilt contingency planning to avoid children being left without any educational provision.

A police youth engagement officer coordinates the activities of the safer schools' officers, anti-social behaviour officers and personnel from early help hubs. Neighbourhood police officers are trained in problem-solving techniques. This means they follow a considered approach that is proportionate to each situation and community. As a result, they develop multi-agency solutions to prevent violent crime and reduce risk to children.

'Operation Precision' is an effective part of the police's tactical and investigative response to serious youth violence. The force assigns investigations to specially trained officers, who work with multi-agency partners to pursue and bring to justice those responsible for serious crime, for example organised crime groups and urban street gang members. There are also flexible terms of reference to allow 'Precision'



to respond to other concerns and levels of crime. This is helping to reduce risks to children from organised crime.

Health staff demonstrate tenacity in safeguarding the wider family as victims of serious youth violence and exploitation. Most health staff are well supported to work with this cohort of children, receiving safeguarding supervision and reflective practice opportunities. Safeguarding supervision in the ambulance service is ad hoc and not all staff have had appropriate training. This means that some ambulance staff are less aware and knowledgeable about children's vulnerabilities for exploitation and violence.

Strategic leaders recognise that in the cohort of children affected by serious youth violence and exploitation there are many children with underlying unmet health needs, such as needs arising from emotional and mental health conditions and neurodiversity. There are unacceptably long waits for children to be assessed by CAMHS. Those children under the Youth Justice Service CAMHS receive an initial assessment and are offered trauma-specific support. Although these children are prioritised for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) medication, neurodevelopmental assessments and more specialised CAMHS support, there are still some delays in them receiving assessments and interventions. This means many children within the scope of this inspection do not have their health needs assessed, identified and responded to in a timely manner.

There are also short waiting lists for other specialist services, such as the 'Safe' team, and there are delays in children being considered by MAPPA panels. Some children at high risk of serious youth violence are being turned down as not meeting the criteria, where there would be value in bringing greater attention and resources to their needs.

The Youth Justice Board is a strong partnership. It contributes effectively to the understanding of serious youth violence in the city. It routinely and systematically reviews incidents of serious youth violence and identifies key issues, for example concerns in relation to children's access to education and the delay in the response to MAPPA referrals. There is evidence of challenge between partners facilitating actions at a strategic and operational level.



Practice study: highly effective practice

For some children, there is a strong multi-agency team of practitioners advocating for them. The multi-agency teams around the child use a range of assessment, formulation and risk matrix tools effectively so that all practitioners have a shared understanding of a child's strengths, aspirations, circumstances and challenges.

This was particularly evident for one child who had been excluded from school. The team of practitioners working with the child used their risk matrix and assessment tools to understand the wider context of the child's experiences and their circumstances. The team ensured that there was clear analysis and information-sharing between all agencies. An important action from the practitioners' risk analysis was to enable the child to return to school safely. Practitioners recognised that the links between the risk of serious youth violence and exploitation are increased when children do not attend school.

A formulation meeting provided an in-depth understanding of the child in the absence of an assessment of ADHD. This supported the professionals who work with the child to understand the child's learning style and for the professionals to adapt their communication accordingly.

The virtual school worked directly with the education setting, offering support and challenge to remove the barriers that were preventing a safe return to school. The social worker and youth justice worker maintained consistent contact with the child and their carers. Their work supported the transition back to school and provided stability and focus on the other areas of the child's life, for example exploring their opportunities post-16. The multi-agency team around the child ensured a safe and positive return to school, reducing the risk that a school exclusion may have meant for this child and reducing the risk of further incidents of serious youth violence.



Practice study: areas for improvement

Some children have had a less cohesive response across agency partners. For a child whose need was identified and referred promptly by the school, there was a significant delay in the completion of the social work assessment and many months before a risk matrix assessment was completed and a 'Safe' referral made. Multiple incidents involving the child were each responded to individually; however, these were not initially seen as part of a pattern of risk. There were also occasions when PPNs were not submitted following police incidents, which would have added to the multi-agency analysis of risk. As a result, concerns escalated before a holistic understanding of the child's needs was reached across all agencies.

A significant issue for this child has been the lack of assessment for needs arising from neurodiversity due to long waiting times, despite the potential additional vulnerabilities indicated. There are multiple referral routes for assessment that lead to inconsistency and delay. The child's mother was advised to access an assessment via the GP due to the long waiting list. This was a challenging and confusing process for the family.

More recently, professionals have worked together with greater focus on therapeutic support, including working with the family to help the child feel safe and valued. Those providing education continue to provide effective advocacy. However, the current level of support for this child has not had a positive impact on reducing risk.



Places and spaces: highly effective practice

Children in the north-east of the city have access to an exceptional resource, 'CATCH', that promotes their education, employment and positive alternative actions that divert them away from exploitation and crime within the community. The centre is resourced by police, education and social care, as well as accessing specialist and third sector services. Over 1,400 children have or are accessing the service.

Staff are committed to all the children and are passionate about their care, with a culture of restorative action and 'not giving up', even when children present with challenging behaviour in the centre or out in the community. Children are encouraged to develop building and craft skills, which has led them to refurbishing a number of shipping containers into lounges, games rooms and a gym. Children are encouraged to care for the different animals at the centre, including goats and alpacas, which is helping them develop their emotional intelligence and build a sense of responsibility. 'Restore' is a part of the centre that supports children who are having difficulties in school. Children are referred from within the 'cluster' of schools and are supported through focused work to re-engage in education.

Children's views and feedback have helped shape the services. As they get older, they are encouraged to become volunteers for the centre and act as role models for other children.

As well as producing quantitative data for the violence reduction partnership about the numbers of children attending, staff also measure the impact of their interventions through pathways and destinations and case studies for children who have been volunteers. A significant number of children have gone on to gain employment or progressed into further education through the support they receive from staff.

The overall impact is that a high proportion of children in the local community are being diverted away from crime and are reducing their risks of being affected by serious youth violence and criminal exploitation through positive activities, strong role models and dedicated staff.



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Next steps

We have determined that Leeds City Council is the principal authority and should prepare a written statement of proposed action responding to the findings outlined in this letter. This should be a multi-agency response involving the individuals and agencies that this report is addressed to. The response should set out the actions for the partnership and, when appropriate, individual agencies. The local safeguarding partners should oversee implementation of the action plan through their local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

Leeds City Council should send the written statement of action to ProtectionOfChildren@ofsted.gov.uk by 23 August 2024. This statement will inform the lines of enquiry at any future joint or single-agency activity by the inspectorates.



Yours sincerely

Yvette Stanley
National Director Regulation and Social Care, Ofsted

Dr Sean O'Kelly BSc MB ChB MSc DCH FRCA
Chief Inspector of Health Care, CQC

Michelle Skeer OBE QPM
His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary
His Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Martin Jones CBE
His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation