

## Learning Together from Case Reviews

How do we use recommendations from case reviews to improve our safeguarding of children and young people?

### **Croydon Safeguarding Children Board - Vulnerable Adolescents Thematic Review, February 2019**

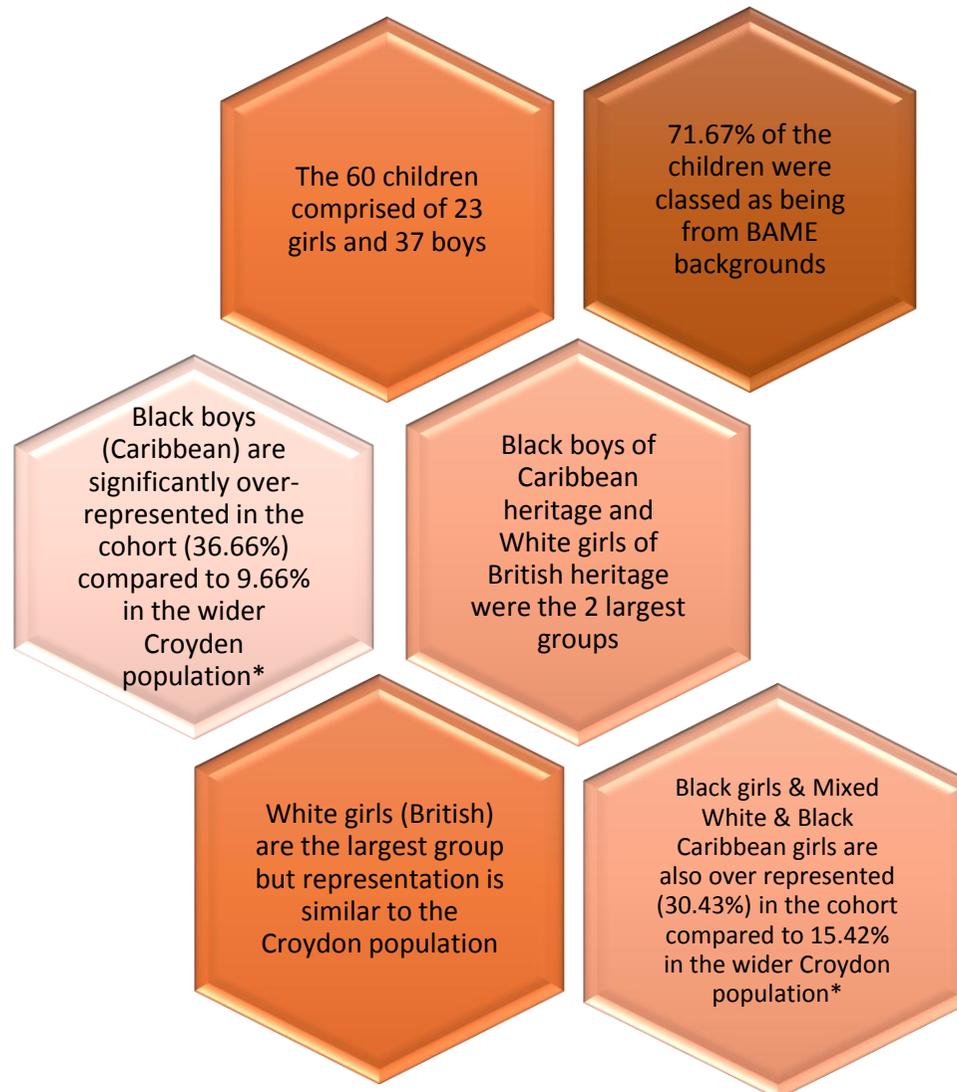
During a period of four weeks in the summer of 2017, three Croydon teenage boys died. One 16-year-old Looked After Child was riding a moped, crashed and died as a result of his injuries. A 15-year-old, subject to a child protection plan, died from multiple stab wounds in a gang related incident. The 17-year-old died after ingesting a highly toxic drug. All three young people had been known to Children's Social Care by the age of 2.

These deaths were brought to the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (CSCB) Serious Case Review (SCR) Sub-group and two Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) were agreed on the 15-year-old and 16-year-old. It was agreed that the 17-year-old would be included in a Thematic Review to be undertaken into a group of vulnerable adolescents, with either poor outcomes or of considerable concern.

Police, Youth Offending, Children's Services and MASE (Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Panel) were each asked to identify their own list of children. Some of the children were mentioned in more than one list. The review is informed by an analysis of the experience of those children identified by agencies because of serious concerns around their safety and well-being. The Thematic Review considered 60 children in total including the two children mentioned above and five children were included in the cohort because tragically they had all lost their lives prematurely. Sadly, another child in the cohort was fatally stabbed within weeks of the Thematic Review commencing.

### **Key Learning: The review identified 5 main areas**

1. Early help and prevention is crucial
2. Greater recognition and response to children's emotional health and wellbeing is required
3. An integrated, whole systems approach is needed across agencies, families and communities
4. Schools should be at the heart of multi-agency intervention
5. Disproportionality, linked to ethnicity, gender and deprivation, needs attention and action.



### **Purpose**

The purpose of the Thematic Review was to determine whether there were any patterns in the children's experiences including where they lived, their school, their experiences of family care and the multi-agency services that were provided or offered. The intention was to learn from their experiences to inform and improve future service provisions.

The review team audited the Children's Services files of 15 children (8 boys and 7 girls) representative of the cohort. The audit looked at referrals, assessments, interventions and identified unmet needs in order to test emerging findings against the wider cohort of 60 children.

\*Compared to the population of 10 to 17 year olds in Croydon

## **Finding 1 – Early help and prevention is critical**

**Early years** – This review provides evidence to complement the established research that a child’s early years lay the foundation on which future outcomes are built. Services are currently not equipped or resourced to provide the interventions that are needed, whether they are short term intensive interventions focussed on the child’s relationship with immediate care givers or interventions that support the child and family over time.

**Primary Years** - The evidence presented to this review suggests there are windows of opportunity to intervene in children’s lives to safeguard them from exploitation and harm or to reduce offending behaviour before behaviour becomes entrenched and/or risks escalate, but the limited range and availability of preventative services means these opportunities are missed.

**Recommendation 1:** Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (CSCB) Multi-Agency partners to work together with the community & voluntary sector partners to consider how non-stigmatising early intervention and prevention services can be delivered. Evidence based models and approaches (such as Family Nurse Partnership) to inform future service design.

**Recommendation 2:** In light of the evidence presented in this review, CSCB to review the new Early Help offer in Croydon and consider whether more is needed to support services such as YOS, Police and the newly established Children’s Services Adolescent Team to deliver preventative work so that services are able to respond to the windows of opportunity in children’s lives.

## **Finding 2: Greater recognition of, and response to, children's emotional health and wellbeing is needed.**

This review has established that the emotional wellbeing of children was the most significant factor that influenced their behaviour and outcomes. It is recognised that this can be difficult to respond to as a child's behaviour often propels, and requires, agencies to respond to the presenting risks. In addition, the child's instability in teenage years means that treatment through established services such as CAMHS makes traditional treatment routes difficult to access. It is recommended that approaches are adopted that seek to address the child's trauma, services provided that are flexible enough to adapt to the child's circumstances and needs. There was a vast array of professionals involved in the lives of the children, it was clear that forming a meaningful relationship with a child was extremely difficult. Service boundaries that are threshold led, rather than needs led, often result in multiple people working with a child and frequent changes of worker, a different approach is needed that places the needs of the child as central to the decision making.

**Recommendation 3:** CSCB to consider best practice examples of implementing a trauma informed response (demonstrated elsewhere in the UK) and consider how the multi-agency workforce might be suitably supported to implement this approach.

**Recommendation 4:** A gap analysis to be completed to establish the current availability of emotional wellbeing services offered in schools and within the community, to inform a flexible approach to the commissioning and delivery of these services.

**Recommendation 5:** The impact of loss & bereavement requires greater focus in understanding the emotional needs of children. CSCB to consider how this understanding might be promoted within the multi-agency workforce and in the services provided.

**Recommendation 6:** The benefits of a key worker relational approach needs to be better understood and the barriers to this approach addressed.

### **Finding 3: An integrated, whole systems approach, is needed across agencies, communities and families.**

**Multi-agency service provision** - This review has found that the current service provision to children is characterised by fragmentation where a child and adults needs are viewed in isolation and agencies respond to the presenting need, in line with the primary duty of the respective agencies, this creates a split in service provision and engenders a culture of referral and re-referral. A holistic approach to the child and family is needed complemented by an integrated multi-agency response.

**Families and Communities** - Changing the trajectory of children's lives, and making a significant difference to children's outcomes, cannot be achieved by professional intervention alone. There is a need to understand and embrace family, kinship and communities.

**Recommendation 7:** The contextual safeguarding approach, outlined in new statutory guidance, provides an opportunity for agencies to adjust their approach to safeguarding children by understanding and responding to a child in the context of their environment. The findings of this review should inform how this approach will be implemented in Croydon.

**Recommendation 8:** CSCB to consider how an integrated holistic multi agency response can be delivered that reduces the current fragmentation of service delivery and explore how the concept of a trusted adult can be implemented in practice.

**Recommendation 9:** The model of an integrated holistic multi-agency response should be extended to include consideration of the risk management panels. Consideration to be given to how schools, including the Fair Access Panel, can be included.

**Recommendation 10:** CSCB to explore what service adjustments are needed to better engage children and families and to consider practice and service changes that may be needed to enable a child's needs to be met when parental engagement is problematic.

**Recommendation 11:** CSCB to consider how improved community, family and business collaboration will be achieved to safeguard children and improve their outcomes, consideration to be given to supporting community-based activities to build resilience and to create more opportunities for children to aspire and achieve.

**Recommendation 12:** CSCB to consider how awareness raising about the impact of ACEs will be built upon to include multi-agency professionals, families and the community.

#### **Finding 4: Schools should be at the heart of multi-agency intervention**

This review has recognised that schools are a critical part of a child's community, often representing a safe place where relationships with trusted adults are formed and hopes for the future lie. This review is strongly recommending that schools are equipped to respond to the challenges presented by children with high risk behaviour and are placed at the very heart of multi-agency service provision.

**Recommendation 13:** CSCB to invite senior leaders representing schools in Croydon to consider what is needed to equip and support schools to manage the challenges presented by children with high risk behaviour and explore how a multi-agency team around the school will be achieved.

#### **Finding 5: Disproportionality, linked to ethnicity, gender and deprivation, requires attention and action.**

This review has evidenced a clear disproportionality: black boys and girls of Caribbean heritage were over represented, as were children whose circumstances rated highly on deprivation indices. National research data confirms the local findings of disproportionality and reveals that black boys, of Caribbean heritage, are over-represented in exclusions and placement in alternative education provision, more likely to be brought into care, more likely to be involved in gangs and be the victims of serious violence. They are also significantly over-represented in the criminal justice system.

**Recommendation 14:** CSCB to build on the work completed by agencies as part of this review and establish a data set about the most vulnerable children in Croydon to inform risk management strategies and service provision.

**Recommendation 15:** CSCB to consider how the involvement of professionals, families and the local community might be achieved, to explore what might be done to address disproportionality.