



**Strategic Partnership Boards**  
SAFETY SAFEGUARDING WELLBEING

Waltham Forest Thematic Review

# Violence Affecting Black Boys

How can we work better together to keep our children safe from harm outside their homes?

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background

Between March and May 2023, five Waltham Forest boys were seriously harmed, with two losing their lives, to knife injuries. Three boys were subsequently convicted for the murders (which were unrelated to each other). Given this worrying succession of incidents with seemingly similar circumstances, and despite the criteria for local child safeguarding practice review (LCSPR) determined to have not been met<sup>1</sup>, the Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Community Safety Partnership elected to conduct a thematic review together. It was felt that looking at these incidents collectively could bring valuable learning to improve systems and practices that exist within our Partnerships to protect our children. Subsequently between May 2023 and July 2024, there were a further six knife related serious incidents involving six children (five boys and one girl) that prompted rapid reviews<sup>2</sup>, some of which did meet LCSPR criteria.

14 children, (mostly boys) came to harm because of knife related violence during these 11 incidents, including those who perpetrated the harm. This review examines the collective experiences of all the children, including the three convicted of murder. It seeks to understand how we can work better together to keep our children and families safe from the harm that exists outside their homes.

The review began in earnest in July 2023, but unforeseen resource challenges led to the subsequent delay in its conclusion. It is important to note that while the final report was not delivered as planned, many of the insights gained throughout the process were quickly put into action. Much of the learning gathered has already been applied to practice and has informed the development of our Serious Violence Strategy<sup>3</sup>, which because of these incidents, among other concerns, has taken a primary focus on reducing knife crime injuries among children and young people under 25 years of age.

Since these incidents of harm to our children, Waltham Forest Council has adopted a mission-based approach that places the protection of young people from knife crime at the heart of our partnerships' community safety and safeguarding efforts. Our response to knife crime is taking a two-pronged approach: working together as partners to protect young people from the harms of knife crime while also working within our communities to mobilise shared action that will increase feelings of safety and wellbeing.

### The children and their experiences

Most of the children in this review are Black British (11 out of 14), from varying heritages, (three were from Asian or Middle Eastern backgrounds – see appendix 1 for an overview). All but one of the children were boys and while this review primarily focuses on them (and will refer, throughout, to their experiences as boys), we recognise and express equal concern for the girl who was harmed in one of the incidents. Her circumstances have been included in this analysis, some of which do align with the patterns observed in the experiences of the boys. However, we recognise that there are gendered nuances that exist

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<sup>1</sup> Using the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's [guidance for safeguarding partners](#), there did not appear to be sufficient reason for the safeguarding partners to suspect that abuse or neglect was present, nor caused or contributed to the harm to the boys

<sup>2</sup> [Working Together 2023](#) requires safeguarding partners to promptly undertake a rapid review on all notified serious incidents as detailed in Chapter 5 of statutory guidance

<sup>3</sup> Serious Violence Strategy - [Keeping young people safe from violence](#): A Waltham Forest Partnership Response

specifically for girls which are equally significant and raise their own separate considerations which form part of our efforts to end violence against women and girls.

Set out below are key characteristics of the 14 children involved in the 11 incidents:

- The children ranged in age from 14 to 17 years.
- Half of them were aged 16 years old including the three boys found guilty of the two murders.
- There was diagnosed neuro-divergence for three of the boys, which comprised moderate learning disability, attention deficit disorder (ADD), Autism, and speech and language difficulties.
- Neurodivergence was suspected for five of the other boys but no formal diagnoses.
- 11 of the boys had experienced some form of disruption to their schooling, with eight subjected to school exclusions at the time of the incidents (seven permanent and one fixed term with two in a pupil referral unit and four in alternative provision).
- 10 boys had varying degrees of previous involvement with the criminal justice system.
- Seven of the boys were known or suspected to have used drugs and many of them were in receipt of support in that regard.
- Nine of the boys had experienced some form of movement between areas.
- While all the children had been victims of violence themselves, including the three who were convicted, a further four were known or suspected to have previously perpetrated violence.
- Eight of the boys were known to have had varying degrees of missing episodes.
- There were adverse childhood experiences for at least eight of the children, which included domestic abuse and early exposure to criminality.
- There were professional concerns for almost all of the children and families and for most, these had been emerging for at least a year.

## Methodology

This review was conducted and authored from resource within the statutory strategic partnerships, by the Head of Strategic Partnerships and the Acting Assistant Director for Violence Reduction and Community Safety Programmes. They were independent of any case work relating to the children involved, ensuring an objective and unbiased perspective in the review process.

The approach to the review was divided into three sections with a view to looking at children's experiences as:

- child victims of serious youth violence within the safeguarding system
- those perpetrating harm (where relevant)
- local children (and families) who have been impacted by violence outside their home

A multi-agency learning event formed the starting point of this review and was followed by a subsequent event. These were a shared endeavour across both the Safeguarding and Community Safety Partnerships. The first session in September 2023 brought partners together to examine the first five children harmed. It drew on other national and regional learning.<sup>4</sup> The second session in February 2024

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<sup>4</sup> National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's review, [It was hard to escape](#) – Safeguarding Children at Risk from Exploitation and Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership's Serious Youth Violence – [Thematic Review](#)

looked at the three children who had been convicted of the murders to explore good practice and / or missed opportunities, as well as what similarities there were to the experiences of the victims.

The collated themes and findings from the subsequent rapid reviews for six children have also fed into this review and its learning.

### *Focus of review*

Lines of enquiry for this review were drawn from national learning and reinforced by a regional learning event at the time, in June 2023, 'Youth Violence with a focus on knife crime', hosted by the Child Death Overview Panel. These echoed some of the reoccurring features in these children's backgrounds:

- School attendance / exclusion
- Neurodivergence / additional and complexity of needs
- Previous criminal justice involvement / intervention / sanction

### *Key lines of enquiry (KLE)*

- One Interrupted schooling increases vulnerability to youth violence
- Two Children with special educational needs and disability (SEND), speech and language (SAL) difficulties and other complexity of need are more vulnerable to youth violence
- Three Previous criminal justice involvement increases vulnerability to youth violence
- Four What were the missed opportunities?

### *Children and families impacted by violence outside the home*

The Partnership acknowledges the importance of perspectives from those with lived experience. Children and families directly impacted by the incidents in this review were invited to participate to help us better understand how services and the community could have better supported them. While none of the families involved in this review took up the invitation, extensive work had been undertaken to engage with other local children and families through various outreach activities. These efforts formed part of our broader work in developing a response to the Serious Violence Duty and is crucial to both this review and to informing and shaping our systems' future responses to the needs of children and families in our community.

### **The local picture**

Waltham Forest is an outer borough in the northeast of London, formed of a network of town centres with Leyton and Leytonstone in the south, Walthamstow in the centre, and Chingford in the north. The urban south is more densely built-up with higher population density; the suburban north is less densely populated and has more green space.

It is home to an estimated 278,400 residents (as of March 2021), which includes approximately 68,000 children. We have a younger than average population with the median age of residents being 35 compared to the England average of 40. Just under a quarter (24.5%) of residents are aged 0 to 19 compared to 23.7% in London and 23% nationally. Our borough is one of the most diverse areas in the country and even more so among young people with an estimated 60% of those under 24 from a global majority background.

Violence is an enduring challenge in Waltham Forest<sup>5</sup>. In the 12 months between October 2023 and September 2024, there were 2,047 serious violence offences, an average rate of almost six serious violent offences every day, with 767 of those (37%) involving a victim aged under 25.

Although we have a relatively low rate of recorded serious violence offences overall, a notable exception, particularly for the most serious violence is the increase in knife injury victims aged under 25. There were 58 young knife crime victims between October 2023 and September 2024, which is up +38% on the previous 12 months and the highest total since before the pandemic. In October 2024 the rate of these offences was the second highest amongst other similar boroughs compared to the 10th highest 12 months prior.

There are seasonal and temporal peaks in serious violence overall and in the last 3 years, serious violence has typically been higher in the early summer months (May – July) with these being the top three months for both actual and grievous bodily harm offences.

For those aged under 18 years, serious violence tends to be strongly associated with the school day. (69% of offences with a victim aged under 18 occur on a school day). Almost one-third of those serious violence offences occurred in the two hours between 3pm and 5pm. Between September 2021 and July 2024, serious violence offences where the victim is a child under 18 tended to occur in proximity to schools on weekdays during term time.

There is racial disproportionality in the way serious violence affects our children and young people. Victims tend to be male, with Black and Asian males suffering higher rates of victimisation than White males across all offence types except for ‘threats to kill’, for which Asian males have a slightly lower victimisation rate. Young Black men face the highest rate of victimisation for knife injury offences, at a rate over double any other group, and in October 2024 this was known to be three times higher than their White peers. Young males under 25 are disproportionately the victims of personal robbery offences and overall rates of victimisation are higher amongst Black and Asian males than their White peers. This is reinforced in a call to action by the Youth Endowment Fund<sup>6</sup> to the Government highlighting the racial disproportionality in violence affecting children and young people.

Socio-economic factors remain central to understanding disproportionality and the heightened vulnerability of Black boys to serious youth violence. The evidence in this review demonstrates that deprivation, disrupted education, and limited access to supportive services intersect with systemic inequalities, disproportionately affecting Black boys in Waltham Forest. These young people are more likely to experience school exclusion, involvement with the criminal justice system, and barriers to accessing early intervention for neurodivergent needs. Such factors are compounded by experiences of racism, adultification, and a lack of culturally competent support, which together create an environment where violence and harm are not only more likely but can become tragically normalised within communities.

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<sup>5</sup> [Waltham Forest Serious Violence Duty Strategy](#)

<sup>6</sup> Youth Endowment Report – February 2025: [Racial disproportionality in violence affecting children and young people](#)

Gangs and drugs are an important factor driving the most serious violence. In addition to deprivation as referenced above, school absence / exclusion and ethnicity are also strongly linked to risks of violence<sup>7</sup>. A recent study<sup>8</sup> showed that “permanent exclusion is associated with approximately a doubling of the risk of having a conviction or caution for both serious violence and for homicide or near-miss homicide in the 12-month period following the exclusion.” Other research carried out in 2018<sup>9</sup> suggested that increases in serious street violence are directly linked to drug business, describing changes in which the earlier models of neighbourhood gangs evolved into more organised drug sales networks. These operate beyond the confines of local postcodes, developing towards an economically driven model.

**“If you’re a kid in this area you’re going to see stuff you shouldn’t see. Gang members are gonna teach you how to make money then make you work for them, pretend to be their friend then you’re trapped. A lot of people speak about witnessing grooming. If you join that life you can’t choose to leave.”**

A group of Black and Asian boys aged 15

More recent research<sup>10</sup> finds that “County Lines organisers continue to use coercion, intimidation and violence (including sexual violence) to control” the County Lines workforce. This workforce is becoming younger, decreasing from an average age of 14-15 years to 12-13 years, with some as young as ten<sup>11</sup>. Embedded gangs are linked to serious organised crime groups (including extortion and money laundering) and sometimes evolve into the role of middle-market drug brokers.

## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### What our children are telling us

Between March 2024 and March 2025, comments from over 200 children and young people (many of whom were Black boys) were gathered through a range of outreach activities, primarily conducted by our Streetbase<sup>12</sup> teams. Their insights are summarised below and shed light on the complex and interrelated challenges they face across their communities, schools, and settings. Their voices underscore the urgent need for comprehensive, multi-agency responses that prioritise safety, support, and meaningful engagement.

**“Youth violence is not an accident, or a surprise”**

Young person on violence

<sup>7</sup> MOPAC Evidence and Insight – September 2022: [A Problem Profile of Violence, Gangs And Young People](#)

<sup>8</sup> Cornish and Brennan (2025), [Exclusion from School and Risk of Serious Violence: A Target Trial Emulation Study](#)

<sup>9</sup> Whittaker et al (2018), [From Postcodes to Profit](#): How gangs have changed in Waltham Forest

<sup>10</sup> Andell, Paul (2023) [Waltham Forest research report](#): co-production in addressing child criminal exploitation. Project Report. University of Suffolk, Ipswich, UK.

<sup>11</sup> [Youth & Policy Article: The End of the Line?](#) The Impact of County Lines Drug Distribution on Youth Crime in a Target Destination

<sup>12</sup> Streetbase is a peer-to-peer engagement programme in Waltham Forest, designed to engage young people, build relationships, and connect them with positive opportunities and services. The programme is delivered by the council’s core youth engagement groups, (Young Advisors and the Youth Independent Advisory Group)

### *Safety concerns*

A significant number of children expressed ongoing fears for their personal safety in their local areas. Knife crime emerged as a prominent concern, with repeated references to stabbings contributing to a pervasive sense of insecurity. Many children linked this fear to the visible presence of gangs and gang-related violence, which they described as an ever-present threat.

**“...it is scary walking around at nighttime because of knife crime”**

13 year old Black Caribbean boy

**“.....apart from knife crime and violence this would be a decent area...”**

Mixed heritage girl (year 7) and boy (year 10)

Incidents of phone robberies and muggings were also commonly reported, particularly in specific hotspots and during certain times of the day. These experiences contribute to an environment where feeling unsafe is often seen as the norm rather than an exception.

### *Police Perceptions*

Children’s views on the police were varied but tended to veer towards scepticism and mistrust. Children consistently reported negative experiences, particularly in relation to stop-and-search encounters, which many perceived as racially motivated or unjustified. Black and Asian children’s (usually boys’) disclosures of their interactions with police were disproportionately negative in comparison to their White counterparts.

**“I think more police would be great, but I know a lot of people wouldn't appreciate that because of how police are to young people so maybe just more car patrols, so we don't have to interact with them.”**

13 year old Black Caribbean boy with SEND

While a subset of young people called for a more visible police presence to deter crime and improve safety, others felt disillusioned. They described the police as either ineffective or focused on the wrong priorities, fostering a sense of resignation and apathy towards law enforcement.

**“....more police in the areas that are most likely known to have things happen.... having police in places where police are expected makes no sense..... police or security in other places like Priory Court, The Drive, St James Street and Leytonstone means that it can help reduce what's going on.”**

Two Black Caribbean Boys aged 17

### *School Environment*

Schools, which should function as safe and supportive environments, were frequently mentioned by children and young people as spaces where they also experience harm. Children participating in the Streetbase outreach sessions shared troubling experiences of bullying, physical confrontations, and racial discrimination within their school environments. These accounts revealed a significant impact on their sense of safety, inclusion, and overall wellbeing as pupils, often leaving them feeling isolated and unsupported within settings meant to nurture their growth.

**“.....it’s shakey going into school post-incident..... the area is a bit sketch”**

Three Black boys (2 mixed heritage) in year 9 – on a “couple of stabbings in the school”

**“5/10 for safety.... because of crime in the area and people getting kicked out of school. More police patrolling the area to make them feel safer.”**

Two boys of Black and mixed heritage on whether they felt safe in their area (Walthamstow)

There was a strong call for improved support systems within schools. Children advocated for more responsive and empathetic approaches to behavioural issues, along with greater access to extracurricular and enriching activities that foster positive development and inclusion.

### *Community and activities*

Children consistently highlighted the lack of accessible, safe spaces where they could engage in positive, age-appropriate activities. Unsurprisingly, many expressed a desire for more youth clubs, community events, and structured opportunities to socialise in safe environments.

**“....reaching out and giving opportunities, more patrols like this (Streetbase), more career-based opportunities like leadership and money opportunities at a young age so they don’t look elsewhere for it.”**

Black boy aged 19 on a solution to grooming

In addition to recreation, there was a notable demand for more career-oriented support, such as workshops, skills training, and pathways to meaningful work experience. These opportunities were seen as critical to helping young people envision and work towards a positive future.

### *Mental health and emotional wellbeing*

Underlying many of the concerns raised was a deep strain on mental health. The cumulative impact of feeling unsafe, experiencing violence or discrimination, and lacking trusted adults or outlets for support has contributed to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional fatigue among young people.

**“People’s mental health is down, if we are more positive or nice not as many people would suffer with mental health.”**

Mixed heritage girl (year 7)

Children expressed a clear need for more accessible and empathetic mental health services. They called for professionals who not only understand their lived experiences but who also actively listen and offer practical support.

These and other comments collected from children over the past year paint a concerning picture of the environments many are navigating daily. Their reflections highlight a pressing need for coordinated responses across policing, education, mental health, and community services. At the heart of these responses must be a commitment to listen to children, value their insights, and co-create safer, more supportive spaces in which they will thrive.

### **What we found from exploring the key lines of enquiry**

The key lines of enquiry have provided a structured framework to test and deepen our understanding in the context of a series of serious incidents that raised significant concerns about the safety and wellbeing of our children, particularly our Black boys.

The stark disproportionality is reflected in local data: young Black men face knife injury victimisation rates over double those of any other group, and three times higher than their White peers. This is not simply a matter of individual risk, but a reflection of broader structural inequalities, where poverty, housing instability, and limited economic opportunities drive both vulnerability and involvement in violence. The cumulative impact of these socio-economic pressures is felt not only by the young people themselves but by their families and communities, who are left to navigate the devastating aftermath of violence.

The analysis of each line of enquiry is drawn from a broad range of sources, including the direct engagement with children, case records, and insights from professionals gathered through learning events and rapid reviews. These have been synthesized into overarching themes and findings, which have informed this review's conclusions and recommendations.

#### **Key line of enquiry one: Interrupted schooling increases vulnerability to youth violence**

Research<sup>13</sup> and extensive learning affirm that consistent school attendance is a protective factor, reducing the likelihood of young people engaging in crime.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, poor attendance strongly correlates with knife carrying, gang involvement, and other risks.<sup>15</sup> In this review, most children (11 out of 14) had a history of interrupted schooling due to exclusions from mainstream schools (seven permanent and one fixed term) or elective home education (one) or transience. Of the children excluded at the time of these incidents of violence, two were in pupil referral units, four were in alternative education providers and two were at college. These types of disruptions contribute to instability in education, negatively impacting attainment and escalating vulnerability, regardless of academic potential, a pattern that is not unique to Waltham Forest.

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<sup>13</sup> [Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership's thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review: Services provided to young people and their families in relation to serious youth violence](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Timpson Review of School Exclusion 2019](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Home Office: An analysis of indicators of serious violence](#)

Some children and young people shared in relation to many of their friends sent to Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) that they are **“now a lot worse than before and are more involved in crime and violence, many have even been arrested and taken to court.”** They shared that **“even students that have joined their school from a PRU don’t last long and if they don’t cause trouble straight away, they eventually do.”** They feel that **“exclusion is outdated, and schools need to focus more on tackling the behaviour and the actual issue within the student.”**

Taken from children and young people focus group feedback in developing our response to the Serious Violence Duty

A recurring theme was the need for services and professionals to proactively “go to children,” rather than expecting children to access services. Information sharing remains a significant gap, especially when children lose service support or families move across boroughs. There also emerged a sense that parental perspectives can often be sidelined in decisions about alternative education provision. The review highlights the importance of actively involving parents in decision-making, emphasising a whole-family approach to support. Alongside this, it is essential that where needed professionals work closely with parents in their home environment to ensure that children’s care is not only safe but developmentally supportive. Understanding the home context enables practitioners to better identify risks, build on family strengths, and provide appropriate interventions to improve the quality of care children receive.

There is an opportunity to learn from schools that successfully retain “high-risk” children by adopting strength-based approaches. Exploring what has worked well in these cases could inform strategies to replicate success. Attention should focus both on children excluded from school and those thriving despite the challenges.

**“PRUs need to be expected to send children back to mainstream schools. Alternative provision is an intervention and not a destination for young people.”**

Professionals at one of the review’s learning events

Discussions within the learning events also pointed to the need to reframe Alternative Provision (AP) as an intervention rather than a destination. Proposals include developing satellite AP embedded within mainstream schools to minimise disruption and support reintegration. Improved use of education data emerged as a further opportunity, with consensus on reviewing current data capture to better understand attendance patterns and their impact.

**Key line of enquiry two: Children with special educational needs and disability (SEND), speech and language (SAL) difficulties and other complexity of need are more vulnerable to youth violence**

Among the 13 boys in this review, only three had diagnosed neurodivergent needs, though many others had suspected or unidentified complexities. This aligns with evidence that children from global majority groups, particularly “Black children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) face systemic barriers to receiving adequate support”<sup>16</sup>. Notably, Black boys are more likely to be labelled as disruptive rather than being assessed for neurodiverse conditions such as ADHD. We recognise the need for schools to be more actively involved in early intervention and prevention approaches as highlighted in the Youth Endowment Fund’s guidance on education, children and violence<sup>17</sup>.

**“Young Black boys, seen as behavioural issues rather than being supported.”**

Comment from a professional at the first learning event (Sept 2023)

Extensive research, including a literature review on school exclusion<sup>18</sup>, highlights persistent inequities in how behaviour is understood and responded to within school settings, particularly affecting children from the global majority. In light of this, and with some education settings identifying as ‘anti-racist’ under our local AP strategy, it is imperative that there is earlier, trauma informed support, and more accurate identification of learning, developmental, and neurodivergent needs. Without this, children from the global majority are disproportionately and unjustly diverted into alternative pathways compared to their White peers.

At the learning events, information sharing repeatedly surfaced as a challenge, including during transitions between boroughs or schools, where vital details do not consistently follow the child, undermining support continuity. Criticism of the current templates used for Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs), which it was noted lack child friendly language led to suggestions that this could be a contributory factor and raised further queries around potential disproportionality as a result.

Gaps in speech and language (SAL) services, especially for children known to youth justice systems, were noted. Unlike other boroughs, frontline staff in Waltham Forest have lacked ready access to SAL assessment and intervention resources. Integration of speech and language therapy into frontline services was recommended to ensure these needs are consistently identified and addressed.

**Key line of enquiry three: Previous criminal justice involvement increases vulnerability to youth violence**

Ten children in this review had prior criminal justice involvement, including the three convicted of murder. This finding aligns with broader thematic inspections of Black and mixed-heritage boys in the youth justice system,<sup>19</sup> and intersects with themes such as interrupted schooling and neurodivergence.

<sup>16</sup> [Black Child SEND](#) - Accessing special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision for Black and mixed Black heritage children: Lived experiences from parents and professionals living in South London.

<sup>17</sup> Youth Endowment Fund Report – [May 2024: Education, Children and Violence](#)

<sup>18</sup> Graham et al (2019) [School exclusion: a literature review on the continued disproportionate exclusion of certain children](#)

<sup>19</sup> [The experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system](#)

Many had been arrested and bailed or released under investigation only to face “no further action,” highlighting concerns about delays and the need for more timely police and court responses. Discussions questioned whether enforcement actions, such as community resolutions for knife possession, are sufficiently robust to protect children and communities. Safe spaces designed with children’s accessibility and needs in mind were identified as vital, moving beyond professional convenience.

Mentoring by individuals with lived experience was seen as valuable in engaging children during “reachable moments” as identified in a previous serious case review<sup>20</sup>. The voluntary nature of prevention services and challenges with refusal of support remain ongoing barriers needing further exploration.

Data use within the partnerships could be strengthened by evaluating successful prosecutions of grooming or exploitation offenders and assessing the impact of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs). Additionally, the role of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in early intervention was acknowledged, with caution advised to avoid profiling.

**“There were a number of missed opportunities – there’s always a missed opportunity if children are not in school.”**

Comment from a professional at the first learning event (Sept 2023)

#### **Key line of enquiry four: What were the missed opportunities?**

##### *Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)*

There is substantial evidence linking ACEs to youth violence and ‘problematic behaviours’,<sup>21</sup> such as ‘aggression’ and criminality. Despite knowledge of ACEs in children convicted of murder, earlier intervention opportunities were missed due to systemic challenges including service resilience and disengagement.

##### *Delayed Safeguarding Responses*

Service delays, particularly in safeguarding, represent critical missed opportunities. One notable case involved a police Merlin<sup>22</sup> report reaching the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) a month after a child disclosed concerns to a school officer, losing a vital ‘reachable moment’.

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<sup>20</sup> Drew, John (2020) [Serious Case Review Child C, a 14 year old boy](#)

<sup>21</sup> Gray et Al (2021), [Serious youth violence and its relationship with adverse childhood experiences](#)

<sup>22</sup> A Merlin alert was a report by the Met Police (MPS) to notify partners of vulnerabilities. (CONNECT subsequently replaced 8 MPS systems which included Merlin)

### *Understanding Intersectionality and Non-Engagement*

Families' reluctance to engage with services often stems from socio-economic, cultural, and historical contexts. Developing cultural competence and probing the root causes of non-engagement is essential for tailoring approaches that resonate and build trust. Crucially, working with parents and caregivers to understand their lived experiences and challenges helps to foster collaborative safeguarding. In doing so, professionals can more effectively support families in creating stable and nurturing home environments that meet the emotional and physical needs of children.

**“It is the bleak overall conditions that must be tackled - not the art that young people make in response to them.”**

From Compound Injustice report

### *The role of social media in violence*

Social media, especially in relation to genres like grime and drill, has complex ties to youth violence. Recent research from the Youth Endowment Fund<sup>23</sup> has shown that violence is widespread on social media including content that glorifies or incites violence, and can escalate into real-world harm, with young people often caught in cycles of retaliation. This echoes what we know anecdotally about how goading videos locally have been the drivers for physical altercations and / or critical incidents when online tensions have spilled offline.

Discussions at the learning events suggested that the partnership would benefit from a greater understanding of how social media tensions are monitored and disrupted amongst established groups, and also among particular children. It was suggested that Waltham Forest could learn from other boroughs and consideration was given to other area partnerships that facilitate information sharing on social media content and monitoring which informs interventions at both individual and community level.

**“We’re just here trying to make TikToks, not everyone’s on violence”.**

Two boys and one girl (Black Caribbean and Filipino) aged 13 and 14

Another recent study<sup>24</sup> challenges the view that certain music inherently promotes violence, instead advocating trauma-informed approaches to understand underlying issues. Criminalising rap music risks reinforcing racial disparities. This is reinforced by a report from the University of Manchester<sup>25</sup> which concluded that “rap music is being used as a procedural tool” for criminalising young Black men and boys. Local partnerships should proactively monitor and disrupt harmful content, coordinate responses, and engage children and young people to prevent online tensions from escalating into real-world harm.

<sup>23</sup> [Youth Endowment Fund Report: Children, violence and vulnerability 2024 - What role does social media play in violence affecting young people?](#)

<sup>24</sup> [University of Central Lancashire study: Criminalising Black Trauma: Grime and Drill Lyrics as a Form of Ethnographic Data to Understand “Gangs” and Serious Youth Violence](#)

<sup>25</sup> [University of Manchester review: Compound Injustice – A review of cases involving rap music evidence in England and Wales](#)

### *Transition Periods and Support*

Transition periods, such as moving between schools, housing instability, or changes in care arrangements present key moments where children's welfare may be at greater risk. In these moments, proactive engagement with parents is critical to ensuring continuity of care and safeguarding both outside and within the home. Building trusting relationships with families helps services to understand emerging needs and respond in a timely and proportionate way.

Transitions between school stages are critical moments requiring enhanced support with assessments and plans needing to follow children through these phases, but often lack sufficient tailored support, particularly for vulnerable children with SEND or those in care, representing missed chances for timely intervention. Stronger parental engagement was emphasised to empower families and improve collaborative working.

The learning events highlighted the need for us to work differently, particularly around those key transition points, namely primary to secondary but also secondary to college. A change in teaching style, an increased workload and a new physical school environment are identified as the main challenges many children experience when transitioning from primary to secondary schools. Research<sup>26</sup> indicates that particular groups of children are more likely to struggle with these aspects of transition than others. This includes children with special educational needs and disability, limited parental support, care experience, anxiety and experience of bullying. Much of this mirrors the lived experiences of the three boys found guilty of murder.

**“....We need to go backwards to the transition between primary for secondary. Not everyone needs an EHCP but we need eyes on those children so that there is support is in place and that they are nurtured.”**

**“Children's engagement with Streetbase have raised this around transition from primary to secondary. Young girls have said that their innocence has been lost within a week of being in year 7. There needs to be continued support for those moving across boroughs when moving schools.”**

Professionals at learning events

### **Additional emerging themes**

#### *Victim-Perpetrator Paradox*

The experiences of the 14 children reviewed highlights the complex and often intertwined roles of victim and perpetrator, particularly in the context of knife crime. Notably, at least half of the children, while having suffered harm themselves, were also known to have perpetrated violence. This overlap underscores the critical need for a nuanced, trauma-informed approach, one that acknowledges that children labelled as perpetrators frequently share similar vulnerabilities, histories, and support needs as those identified solely as victims.

#### *Adultification*

As a Safeguarding Partnership, we have worked collaboratively over the years to champion and embed a child-first approach within practice. However, despite this, case analyses have revealed discrepancies in

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<sup>26</sup> [UCL Institute of Health Equity report: Improving school transitions for health equity](#)

this commitment, with evidence of adultification<sup>27</sup> and implicit bias particularly towards Black children, who it was found were disproportionately framed as “perpetrators” rather than victims. Within the context of the victim-perpetrator paradox, adultification can adversely influence systemic responses to children, thereby intensifying the safeguarding challenges they encounter.

#### *Out-of-Borough Moves*

We know that relocation acts “as a very effective short-term measure, providing an immediate reduction in risk and a breathing space”<sup>28</sup> but it is widely acknowledged that this is insufficient as a long-term safeguarding strategy to protect children. Effective cross-boundary coordination and clear responsibility are vital.

#### *Quality of care at home versus contextual safeguarding*

Child neglect has been a key feature in other recent local child safeguarding practice reviews which have highlighted significant learning and changes in practice. In one of the rapid reviews examined for this learning, professionals contemplated whether the quality of care at home was overshadowed by the contextual safeguarding risks the child was facing. Reflecting on the neglect findings professionals discussed the term “neglect,” considering the impact of issues such as substance use and mental health on parenting abilities. They emphasized the need for a more nuanced understanding of the entire family's situation, including whether child criminal exploitation could mask issues of neglect.

This underlines the need for practitioners to remain cognisant to what is happening inside the home, even when external risk factors are highly visible. High-quality care at home is a fundamental protective factor. Sustained work with families is essential to identify when children's needs are not being met, even in the absence of immediate harm.

#### *Early Help*

Early help is essential as a concept, particularly in addressing familial adversities such as domestic violence and substance misuse at the earliest opportunity. Involvement by services should be proactive, meaningful, and designed to achieve sustained positive outcomes for families facing complex challenges. As evident in many local child safeguarding practice reviews<sup>29</sup>, the employment of professional curiosity or asking the second question is critical when engaging with families, particularly in instances where engagement appears reluctant or challenging.

In Waltham Forest we are committed to relational practice and strengths-based approaches. This supports services to work proactively with families to build trust which in turn will prevent premature disengagement and instead seek to understand the underlying reasons for hesitancy. This includes critically evaluating how support and assistance are communicated to families and addressing systemic barriers that may hinder their engagement. Moreover, engaging families early allows for a more holistic view of the child's experiences, recognising that safety and wellbeing are intrinsically linked to the care and consistency they receive at home. A strong early help offer should support families to provide nurturing care and stability before problems escalate.

#### *Training Needs*

Comprehensive training on trauma-informed practice, cultural competence, and adultification bias across all relevant systems is urgently needed to improve awareness and response.

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<sup>27</sup> Adultification is defined by Davis and Marsh (2020) as: ‘The concept of adultification is when notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children. This is determined by people and institutions who hold power over them. When adultification occurs outside of the home it is always founded within discrimination and bias.’

<sup>28</sup> [It was hard to escape](#) - Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel – national review into safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation

<sup>29</sup> [National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Annual Report 2023 - 2024](#)

### *Accountability Across Systems*

Robust accountability must be maintained across all agencies involved in safeguarding, including education settings, children’s services, the police, and specialist services such as SEND. This requires critical scrutiny of policies and practices to ensure that approaches to children’s education are inclusive, equitable, and do not inadvertently heighten children’s vulnerability. A key component of this is ensuring agencies do not overlook the role of the family environment in either contributing to or mitigating risk. Supporting parents to understand, access, and navigate services and equipping them with the tools to support their children must remain a central feature of any effective safeguarding approach.

## CONCLUSION

This review confirms that some children feel persistently unsafe in their communities due to violence and crime. It reinforces that knife crime, gang presence, and robberies are frequent and visible within some communities, leading to a constant sense of threat. For some young people, safety is a daily concern, not an abstract fear.

Addressing violence affecting Black boys therefore requires a systemic response that tackles the root socio-economic causes, challenges disproportionality at every level, and invests in community-led, trauma-informed approaches. It is only by recognising and acting on these intersecting factors that we can hope to disrupt the cycles of harm and create safer, more equitable futures for all children.

For many young people, trust in police is fractured, especially among global majority children and young people which is echoed in the Casey Review<sup>30</sup>. Many children perceive stop-and-search as discriminatory and unjust, leading to disillusionment with law enforcement. While some still see a role for policing, it is conditional on fairness and relevance.

Schools are not felt by all children to be consistently safe or supportive environments. Children report violence, racism, and bullying within schools. This undermines their wellbeing and contradicts the protective function schools are expected to provide. There are gaps in accessible, positive youth outlets. Children are calling for more safe, local spaces where they can build skills, connect with peers, and be meaningfully engaged. This absence fuels vulnerability to harmful influences.

As evidenced in a post-pandemic synopsis by The Health Foundation<sup>31</sup> we know the growing demand for mental health support for children “increasingly outstrips service capacity”. Anxiety, stress, and trauma are common, driven by unsafe environments and negative experiences. We understand from children and young people that mental health services are often seen as inaccessible or insufficiently responsive to young people’s realities.

The findings in this review are not new, nor unique to Waltham Forest and are replicated in other national and regional learning. Ultimately this review provides us with further indications that children with interrupted schooling, those with SEND, speech and language difficulties and other complexity of need and those with previous criminal justice involvement are more vulnerable to being affected by violence. This is further exacerbated with intersectionality i.e. those children whose experiences feature all these factors alongside their ethnicity and gender. (This relates to over half the children in this review). The

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<sup>30</sup> [Baroness Casey Review](#), (2023) An independent review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service

<sup>31</sup> [The Health Foundation report](#): Children and young people’s mental health

review also signals to the opportunities that the multi-agency safeguarding systems and professionals should be harnessing with parents / carers and communities to help earlier.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As referenced at the onset of this report, many of the insights gained throughout this review process have already been incorporated into practice and have been influential in our response to the Serious Violence Duty and the development of our new strategy<sup>32</sup>.

Given the time between this review starting and being published, its recommendations have been woven into an impact update below which details what has changed since our boys were harmed. The Safeguarding Children and Community Safety Partnerships are committed to maintaining strategic oversight of progress against these recommendations and this has been factored into new strategic plans and forward schedules which will encompass regular tracking of progress / impact over time, (six months, twelve months and three years).

We recognise that there is often an assumption that these review processes provide families with catharsis. However, a recent short research paper<sup>33</sup> by a mother following the death of her son, and her experience of the subsequent inquiry and investigation suggests that “this assumption of catharsis is misplaced and works to erase the considerable emotional ‘accountability’ labour that families undertake during these processes”. She recommends that the ‘lessons learned’ objective underpinning inquiries should be replaced with ‘led to demonstrable change’, which she argues is “what families typically want” and what we have used as a framework for articulating the resultant recommendations.

### What has changed since our children were harmed?

#### Enhanced safeguarding and community safety through prevention and place-based interventions

*(Recommendation 1)*

We recognise that tackling community safety, particularly the protection of children and young people from violence, is a shared challenge that requires a collective, community-led response. This means working with partners, schools and residents, and most importantly, children and young people to build a shared purpose that fosters confidence, resilience, and a stronger sense of safety. The interventions we are committed to are hyperlocal taking into account the need and context of those locations or areas and informed by young people.

- **Investing in violence reduction initiatives that are embedded in communities and co-designed with young people.** We are equipping residents and professionals with potentially lifesaving skills and tools by delivering trauma and first aid training to young people in schools and community settings and installing ‘bleed control kits’ in accessible locations across the borough.

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<sup>32</sup> [Keeping Young People Safe From Violence: A Waltham Forest Partnership Response](#)

<sup>33</sup> Ryan, Sara (2019) NHS Inquiries and Investigations; an Exemplar in Peculiarity and Assumption. Political Quarterly, 90 (2). pp. 224-228. ISSN 0032-3179 <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/627798/3/NHS%20inquiries%20PQ%20Ryan.pdf>

- **Increased community guardianship in high-risk areas, using trusted adults alongside targeted policing.** In January 2025 we launched our Safer Routes pilot, a new initiative we co-designed with local young people. Inspired by a similar programme in the Midlands and based on the Chicago Model (Safe Passage), Safer Routes aims to help young people build confidence and feel safer on their walk home from school and is being delivered across the whole borough at identified routes.

Throughout the development of the pilot the voices of children and young people have been central, including co-producing leaflets, strengthening the pilot framework and ongoing feedback sessions. Trained youth workers from commissioned provider, Creative Engagement Services, will be visible along school routes and at travel hubs for young people travelling home between 3-6pm every weekday during term time. These trained youth workers are engaging with children and young people, offering support and signposting to out-of-school activities or services if required. We are already seeing encouraging outcomes, alongside evidence of increasing numbers of young people accessing, and reporting positive experiences of local support and services.

- **Prioritising early intervention strategies that disrupt gang recruitment and address the root causes of youth violence.** The Integrated Gangs Team is a new council-led service taking a dual approach to tackling violence and gang involvement, combining prevention and disruption strategies grounded in evidence-based practice.
- **Empowering adults within the community to support young people.** We are rolling out Trusted Youth Allies' training, recognising that children and young people will often turn to a trusted adult rather than an official service. The training sessions are designed to equip individuals and organisations with the confidence and knowledge to effectively support young people, particularly those affected by crime and violence.
- **Strengthening our partnership's strategic oversight to identify risks and opportunities for disruption earlier.** Work is well underway to reconfigure and strengthen our strategic response to violence affecting children through our multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) arrangements. We are building on the strong foundations of our local Risks Outside the Home Panel (ROHOP – our equivalent to Pre-MACE operations) which has already demonstrated value in facilitating early identification, coordinated action, and disruption in response to contextual harm.

Our new MACE Panel will provide clearer governance, oversight, and accountability, reviewing complex and systemic issues escalated from ROHOP. The MACE Panel plays a key role in addressing systemic blockages, scrutinising multi-agency performance, and identifying patterns related to locations of concern, persons of interest, and wider environmental drivers of harm. The improvements being implemented will enable stronger information-sharing, clearer escalation pathways, targeted workforce development, and greater use of data and intelligence to inform joint action. In doing so, it will further strengthen our ability to identify risk early, coordinate resources effectively, and disrupt harm at the earliest opportunity.

Through these steps, we will ensure a more coordinated, proactive, and evidence-informed approach to protecting young people from serious harm in the contexts they live, learn, and socialise.

## **Working with schools to make them safer, more inclusive, and more supportive**

(Recommendation 2)

Recent statutory changes<sup>34</sup> have provided us with the opportunity to strengthen the role that education settings play within our Safeguarding Partnership. This will better enable all schools (including independent schools and academy trusts), colleges, early years, and other education and childcare providers in the local area to be fully engaged, involved and included in local arrangements that work to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children.

- **Reconfigured how Alternative Provision is delivered.** This review highlighted the urgent need to strengthen alternative provision (AP), including the targeted pupil referral unit (PRU), to meet increasing demand and ensure all children receive appropriate support. Insights from other boroughs' 'Alternative Provision taskforce' pilots informed considerations around system challenges such as rising demand for medium-term and key stage 3/4 AP placements, pressures on specialist SEND places, and budget constraints.

Previously, PRU places were spread across four settings, limiting capacity and suitability—especially for permanently excluded pupils and those with externalising behaviours at Key Stage 4. In response, we launched a purpose-built Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in 2025 as a satellite of an existing PRU, providing 30 additional places. This unit delivers a core curriculum alongside counselling, therapy, creative arts, and vocational skills, offering wraparound support to vulnerable children. It also reduces travel and safety risks, freeing up capacity for pupils with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs, and enhances system sustainability.

A new operating model and governance structure for AP has been implemented which is strengthening oversight and accountability at a leadership level, and this will be further reviewed in academic year 25/6. The Inclusive Schools and Alternative Provision (ISAP) Partnership, established in 2024, builds on the 2020 strategy to commission high-quality AP and promote inclusive education. Its strategic focus includes safeguarding, improving educational outcomes, and supporting emotional wellbeing of young people. This work will be overseen by an Education Board from September 2025

- **Developing a new Community Cohesion & Resilience team**  
The new Community Cohesion and Resilience team will play a central role in leading and coordinating key initiatives that strengthen community ties and support young people, particularly around hate crime prevention and building cohesion within schools.

One of their flagship projects includes developing a primary school transitions programme, building on the evidence-based Botvin LifeSkills programme<sup>35</sup>, which equips children with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to make healthy choices and avoid risk-taking behaviours. A bid has been submitted to deliver targeted support for children identified as needing additional help as they move from Year 6 to Year 7, ensuring a smoother transition into secondary education.

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<sup>34</sup> [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](#)

<sup>35</sup> [Botvin LifeSkills in Waltham Forest Schools – An early intervention and prevention programme to build resilience](#)

Beyond this, the team will work closely with other school-based workstreams to enhance resource use, avoid duplication, and provide comprehensive support designed to help children reach their full potential.

This includes implementing and monitoring robust anti-bullying and anti-racism policies co-produced with students, expanding access to on-site mental health and wellbeing services such as counsellors and peer support programmes. There will be an increase to enrichment opportunities like after-school clubs and mentoring that foster a sense of belonging and resilience.

By taking a holistic, collaborative approach, the Community Cohesion and Resilience team aims to create safer, more inclusive school environments that empower children and young people and strengthen community connections.

### **Rebuilding trust between young people and police**

(Recommendation 3)

- ***Established a community-led accountability forum where young people were able to safely feedback on policing practices and influence local priorities.*** In spring 2024 we held the UK's first Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Neighbourhood Policing<sup>36</sup>. 130 young people shared their views as part of the community engagement both individually and via schools' workshops.

**“Taking part has given me the opportunity to make change for the first time in my life.”**

Faysal age 19

Ten recommendations emerged from the Citizens' Assembly for how the council; the police and their partners should work together to rebuild trust with communities. Key projects such as the Inclusive Mentoring Scheme (see below) have formed part of the partners' response that have been jointly designed with communities ensuring that residents' voices remain central.

- ***Inclusive mentoring will foster a reciprocal understanding between police and children / young people*** - The idea for this project came directly from local young people and forms part of the response to the Citizens' Assembly. Work has taken place with local young people and the police to design an 'inclusive mentoring scheme' in which small groups of young people will 'mentor' local police officers, to share their experiences of community safety and growing up in the borough. This will be a space for open dialogue and mutual learning of each other's experiences, with the core aim of building positive relationships and understanding that the police can apply to their everyday roles.

In this scheme, young people and policing staff from the local Basic Command Unit (BCU) across different levels will take part in a structured programme of training, followed by five mentoring sessions. The training will take place during the summer of 2025, and the mentoring sessions are scheduled to run from Autumn 2025 to Spring 2026

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<sup>36</sup> [Waltham Forest Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Neighbourhood Policing](#)

- **Reviewed our stop-and-search practices to reduce disproportionality and improve safeguarding.** In July 2024 we participated in a regional pilot project designed to explore and improve the safeguarding of children following stop and search encounters by the police. The project aims to deepen understanding of the potential trauma that such encounters may cause for children and young people, particularly in the context of wider vulnerabilities and safeguarding needs.

Through research and evaluation, the project has identified key themes and safeguarding opportunities, which are informing a series of recommendations. These recommendations are intended to support the sharing of good practice and contribute to wider policy development and change. The initiative has helped to strengthen professional understanding of the safeguarding implications of stop and search, encouraging practitioners, including police to remain curious, reflect on the child's experience, and consider the longer-term impact of such interventions. A robust evaluation is underway to ensure that any recommendations are grounded in evidence and designed to inform meaningful changes to practice. The focus will be on identifying where police and partnership resources can be most effectively targeted to maximise safeguarding outcomes.

#### **Expanded access to youth provision and positive opportunities**

(Recommendation 4)

- **More youth-centred spaces are providing havens of safety.** In 2023, the council implemented its new Space4all programme<sup>37</sup>, in direct response to young people telling us (via The Big Youth Conversation and Streetbase) that they wanted safe spaces, that were free to access and also had food. We now run 26 youth spaces a week, delivered by local and trusted Voluntary & Community Services (VCS) in community settings, particularly in underserved areas, with regular input from young people on activities and priorities. One of our youth spaces at Central Parade in Walthamstow has been named 'The Cotch' by the young people who attend.
- **Dedicated projects are promoting children's safety and providing a legacy for the children we lost** – Facilitated through the Space4all and Community Safety teams, youth workers have supported many of the young people grieving the loss of their friend(s), to develop a clothing line, 'REBORN'. They have also worked to produce a magazine for young people by young people, 'The Zine'. Additionally, a Youth Design Agency, 'LabTwntyFour' has been established which produces the Space4all leaflets and has taken on work from other council teams too. There are plans underway to enlist LabTwntyFour to design comms that can feed the lessons learned from this review back to our children and young people.
- **More opportunities are being provided to support young people's career and skills development** - The youth services team are working closely with colleagues in the Employment and Business Skills service, who run workshops in youth spaces and promote opportunities for young people, in the creative, construction and other industries. This includes apprenticeships, work experience, and mentoring, especially for those at risk of disengagement.

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<sup>37</sup> Space4All is part of the Council's broader Family Hubs programme, directly providing young people with a safe space to socialise and spend time in their neighbourhood - [bit.ly/WF\\_Space4All](https://bit.ly/WF_Space4All)

- ***We have a well-publicised and equitably distributed youth offer*** - we have created a Youth Services Directory<sup>38</sup> which lists all Space4all sessions as well as other youth activities in the borough. Organisations can self-submit information on the portal, and we currently have 75 separate listings covering a diverse range of activities and support aimed at young people of all ages.

### **Strengthening mental health support with youth-centred approaches, particularly focusing on our Black boys and young men**

(Recommendation 5)

- ***Improving mental health services for those most in need delivering provisions, that are easy to access, stigma-free, and culturally responsive.*** A collaboration with the King's Fund, an independent charity working to improve people's health, has explored inequity within our local health systems. This has led to a targeted programme of work to improve the mental health of Black boys and young men led by our Integrated Health Partnership Boards (Health and Wellbeing Board with Place Based Partnership). Cross-cutting work with our other partnerships therefore remains vital.
- ***Involving young people in the design and delivery of support services, ensuring that interventions reflect their lived experiences and needs.*** In October / November 2024 we enlisted a group of children and young people who are Youth Mental Health Ambassadors to collaborate with professionals on a refresh of mental health services. An initial mapping exercise has led to the development of a series of recommendations that will inform the recommissioning of services. These are due to be shared with stakeholders in the latter part of 2025 as part of an agreed workstream within the Integrated Health Systems Partnership's Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing working group to review and strengthen co-production processes in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and wider mental health services. This will also include delivering a plan for improved youth led governance.

### **Enhancing the Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnerships' collective capacity to identify, understand, and respond to risks by strengthening workforce development, intelligence gathering and the use of evidence-informed early intervention** (Recommendation 6)

- ***Strengthened how social media is monitored.*** Since this review started, we have developed a more robust framework and system for gathering intelligence around social media relating to organised criminal group tensions and / or violence. We are also harnessing the services of the Met Police's central intelligence gathering team, Project Alpha, to effectively deploy resources locally.
- ***Creating a more unified safeguarding system that enables earlier identification of vulnerabilities including adverse childhood experiences*** - Recent reforms to Children's Social Care, including the integration of Early Help and statutory services, are provided with a vital opportunity to strengthen our response to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), particularly in

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<sup>38</sup> Waltham Forest's [Youth Services Directory](#)

the context of serious youth violence. There is strong consensus both regionally and nationally that early, preventative intervention leads to better outcomes and reduces the risk of harm.

A more unified system will enable earlier identification of vulnerability and smoother transitions between levels of support, ensuring our responses are timely, coordinated, and trauma informed. This shift reflects not just a structural change, but a strategic move towards a more consistent, relational approach to safeguarding, critical for preventing serious harm and building long-term resilience in our children and young people.

- **Introducing a borough-wide initiative to improve early identification of SEND, particularly for children from global majority backgrounds** - (To include training for school staff on recognising neurodivergence.) This recommendation is taking shape through two working groups that have been set up: Partners in Neurodivergent Schools and the Neurodiversity Awareness Working Partnership.
- **Developing frontline resilience in work with children** - To improve outcomes for children and families, a targeted programme was launched to support the development of resilience among frontline practitioners. This initiative aligns with a broader systemic approach that recognises the importance of resilience within school, home, and community environments.

As part of this work, a resilience training programme is being delivered to professionals working directly with children, with a particular focus on Youth Offending Services (YOS), Children's Social Care (CSC), and in line with the Serious Violence Duty (SVD) action plan. The aim was to enhance the capacity of practitioners to engage meaningfully with children and families, especially in circumstances where consent issues might otherwise lead to disengagement. The training explicitly addresses the need for services to remain proactive and responsive, rather than using non-engagement or lack of consent as justification for withdrawal of support. The sessions explored the concept of resilience, the science behind it, and how this understanding can be translated into practice across different frontline roles. Key themes included adverse childhood experiences, social and emotional learning, and the application of trauma-informed approaches within everyday professional interactions.

By March 2025, three training sessions had been completed, reaching 79 professionals and volunteers across the borough. An evaluation is currently underway and will inform the development of a broader multi-agency approach to resilience training. The findings from this initiative echo wider research, which demonstrates that lasting improvements in outcomes for children and families depend on consistent, systemic work to build resilience across the environments in which children live and learn.

- **Strengthening the training offer in Waltham Forest Safeguarding Partnership.** This forms part of the Safeguarding Partnership's focuses during 2025-26 with plans to provide training around cultural competence and adultification, ensuring appropriate consideration to how Black children are disproportionality affected by adultification.

## Appendix 1 – Overview of children who came to harm

| Features in this review   | Total                                 | Percentage  | Feb – May 2023  | Feb - May 2023  | May 2023 – Jan 2024  |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------|---|---|--|
|   |                                       |             | No. of children   | No. of children   | No. of children  |
| Black ethnicity (includes for purpose of this review three children of Asian and middle eastern ethnicity)  | <b>14</b><br><i>(includes 1 girl)</i> | <b>100%</b> | 3   | 5   | 6  |
| Diagnosed neurodivergence   | <b>3</b>                              | <b>21%</b>  | 0   | 2   | 1  |
| Suspected neurodivergence   | <b>5</b>                              | <b>36%</b>  | 3   | 1   | 1  |
| History of interrupted schooling  | <b>11</b>                             | <b>79%</b>  | 3   | 5 <i>(1 recent elective home education + 1 recent move to UK from abroad)</i> | 3  |
| Excluded from school at time of incidents <i>(Permanent exclusion – PEx, Fixed term exclusion – FTE, Alternative provision – AP)</i>                          | <b>8</b>                              | <b>57%</b>  | 2 permanent exclusions <i>(1 in PRU + 1 in AP)</i>              | 2 permanent + 1 fixed term exclusions <i>(2 in college + 1 in PRU)</i>        | 3 permanent exclusions <i>(all in AP)</i>  |
| Previous involvement with criminal justice system   | <b>10</b>                             | <b>71%</b>  | 3   | 2   | 5  |
| Open to children’s services <i>(Child protection – CP, Child in need – CIN, Early Help – EH, Child looked after – CLA, Child and family assessment – CFA)</i> | <b>11</b>                             | <b>79%</b>  | 1 CP  | 4 <i>(CP x1, CIN x2, EH x1)</i>   | 6 <i>(CIN x3, CLA x1, CFA x2)</i>  |
| Movement across boroughs / areas  | <b>9</b>                              | <b>64%</b>  | 2   | 3   | 4  |
| Known to have perpetrated violence  | <b>7</b>                              | <b>50%</b>  | 3   | 0   | 4  |
| Use or suspected use of drugs   | <b>7</b>                              | <b>50%</b>  | 3   | 3   | 1  |
| Episodes of missing   | <b>8</b>                              | <b>57%</b>  | 2   | 2   | 4  |
| Professional concerns for the child / family for at least 1 year  | <b>13</b>                             | <b>93%</b>  | 3<br><i>(1 child / family for 2+ years and 2 for 10+ years)</i> | 4<br><i>(2 children / families for 1+ years and 2 for 2+ years)</i>           | 6<br><i>(2 children / families for 1+ year, 2 for 2+ years and 1 for 3+ years)</i> |
| Known to have experienced adverse childhood experiences   | <b>8</b>                              | <b>57%</b>  | 0   | 4   | 4  |
| Concerns around social media or music   | <b>4</b>                              | <b>29%</b>  | 0   | 2   | 2  |

## Appendix 2 – References

1. Using the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s [guidance for safeguarding partners](#), there did not appear to be sufficient reason for the safeguarding partners to suspect that abuse or neglect was present, nor caused or contributed to the harm to the boys
2. [Working Together 2023](#) requires safeguarding partners to promptly undertake a rapid review on all notified serious incidents as detailed in Chapter 5 of statutory guidance
3. Serious Violence Strategy - [Keeping young people safe from violence](#): A Waltham Forest Partnership Response
4. National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s review, [It was hard to escape](#) – Safeguarding Children at Risk from Exploitation and Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership’s Serious Youth Violence – [Thematic Review](#)
5. [Waltham Forest Serious Violence Duty Strategy](#)
6. Youth Endowment Report – February 2025: [Racial disproportionality in violence affecting children and young people](#)
7. MOPAC Evidence and Insight – September 2022: [A Problem Profile of Violence, Gangs And Young People](#)
8. Cornish and Brennan (2025), [Exclusion from School and Risk of Serious Violence: A Target Trial Emulation Study](#)
9. Whittaker et al (2018), [From Postcodes to Profit](#): How gangs have changed in Waltham Forest
10. Andell, Paul (2023) [Waltham Forest research report](#): co-production in addressing child criminal exploitation.
11. Project Report. University of Suffolk, Ipswich, UK. [Youth & Policy Article: The End of the Line?](#) The Impact of County Lines Drug Distribution on Youth Crime in a Target Destination
12. Streetbase is a peer-to-peer engagement programme in Waltham Forest, designed to engage young people, build relationships, and connect them with positive opportunities and services. The programme is delivered by the council’s core youth engagement groups, (Young Advisors and the Youth Independent Advisory Group)
13. [Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership’s thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review: Services provided to young people and their families in relation to serious youth violence](#)
14. [Timpson Review of School Exclusion 2019](#)
15. [Home Office: An analysis of indicators of serious violence](#)
16. [Black Child SEND](#) - Accessing special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision for Black and mixed Black heritage children: Lived experiences from parents and professionals living in South London.
17. Youth Endowment Fund Report – [May 2024: Education, Children and Violence](#)
18. Graham et al (2019) [School exclusion: a literature review on the continued disproportionate exclusion of certain children](#)
19. [The experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system](#)
20. Drew, John (2020) [Serious Case Review Child C, a 14 year old boy](#)
21. Gray et Al (2021), [Serious youth violence and its relationship with adverse childhood experiences](#)
22. A Merlin alert was a report by the Met Police (MPS) to notify partners of vulnerabilities. (CONNECT subsequently replaced 8 MPS systems which included Merlin)
23. [Youth Endowment Fund Report: Children, violence and vulnerability 2024 - What role does social media play in violence affecting young people?](#)
24. Hall et Al (2023), University of Central Lancashire study: [Criminalising Black Trauma: Grime and Drill Lyrics as a Form of Ethnographic Data to Understand “Gangs” and Serious Youth Violence](#)
25. Quinn et Al (2024), University of Manchester review: [Compound Injustice – A review of cases involving rap music evidence in England and Wales](#)
26. UCL Institute of Health Equity report: [Improving school transitions for health equity](#)
27. Adulthood is defined by Davis and Marsh (2020) as: *‘The concept of adulthood is when notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children. This is determined by people and*

*institutions who hold power over them. When adultification occurs outside of the home it is always founded within discrimination and bias.'*

28. Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2020), National review into safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation [It was hard to escape](#) - Safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation
29. [National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Annual Report 2023 - 2024](#)
30. Baroness Casey Review, (2023) [An independent review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service](#)
31. Peytrignet et Al (2022), The Health Foundation report: [Children and young people's mental health](#)
32. [Keeping Young People Safe From Violence: A Waltham Forest Partnership Response](#)
33. Ryan, Sara (2019) [NHS Inquiries and Investigations; an Exemplar in Peculiarity and Assumption.](#)
34. [Botvin LifeSkills in Waltham Forest Schools](#) – An early intervention and prevention programme to build resilience
35. [Waltham Forest Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Neighbourhood Policing](#)
36. [Space4All](#) is part of the Council's broader Family Hubs programme, directly providing young people with a safe space to socialise and spend time in their neighbourhood
37. [Waltham Forest's Youth Services Directory](#)