



Local Safeguarding Children Partnership for Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, and Westminster

Serious Case Review: Adam and a wider review of services provided to combat serious youth violence

Executive Summary

**Independent Lead Reviewer
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1. INTRODUCTION

Circumstances of Adam's death and reasons for undertaking the review

- 1.1. Between March 2019 and May 2021, the Local Safeguarding Children Board for Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, and Westminster ('the LSCB') carried out a Serious Case Review ('the review') of the services provided for a 17-year-old boy and his family. Adam, as he is referred to in the review, was murdered by another teenager in a knife attack in 2019. Adam was a young black man, who was born in London. His parents had migrated to the UK from East Africa shortly before his birth.
- 1.2. Hammersmith and Fulham Council notified the death of Adam to the relevant government bodies and brought it to the attention of the LSCB in March 2019. The LSCB undertook the rapid review required by statutory guidance.¹ The LSCB independent chair decided that a review was required, noting that concerns about serious youth violence fall within the definition of contextual safeguarding in the statutory guidance. Adam and his family had been well-known to a number of services (detailed in Section 2 of the full report). Initial review of the facts pointed to possible concerns about the way in which agencies had worked together to safeguard his welfare and important learning for local agencies.²
- 1.3. The review was carried out under the guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015*. The purpose of the review is to undertake a '*rigorous, objective analysis...in order to improve services and reduce the risk of future harm to children*'. The LSCB is required to '*translate the findings from reviews into programmes of action which lead to sustainable improvements and the prevention of death, serious injury or harm to children*'.³ This document summarises the SCR findings and recommendations of the report. The review is published in full on the website of the Hammersmith and Fulham Local Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Agencies involved

- 1.4. The review obtained information from all of the local agencies and contracted professionals that are known to have worked with Adam and his family:

¹ *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2018) Sections 4.20 - 21

² *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2018) Sections 1.30 – 33. Contextual safeguarding refers to children and young people '*vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families*' and is discussed at a number of points in the report.

³ *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2015), 4.1 and 4.6. In September 2019 Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, and Westminster introduced a new set of safeguarding partnership arrangements, in line with the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018*. However as part of the transition to these arrangements the LSCB retained the responsibility for completing this work. In April 2020 Hammersmith and Fulham created its own separate Safeguarding Children Partnership (the LSCP) which has overseen the completion of the review and taken responsibility for publishing this report.

- Hammersmith and Fulham Council, including social care, housing, and education services
- Hammersmith and Fulham Youth Offending Service (YOS)
- Metropolitan Police Service
- Imperial Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- Schools and academy trusts
- Voluntary sector organisations

- 1.5. Details of the principles underlying the approach to the review and the steps taken to carry it out are set out in the full report.
- 1.6. The LSCP has involved Adam’s mother in the review. The independent reviewer met Adam’s mother twice in Spring 2021 to hear her views about the services that had been provided by agencies. Her views have been integrated into the full report. She has been told of the review findings and had an opportunity to discuss them ahead of the publication. The review is grateful that Adam’s mother was prepared to talk about such very painful events.
- 1.7. Adam’s father lived abroad throughout the period under review and was not approached as he had had no contact with the services that worked with the family.

2. KEY EVENTS

A more detailed narrative is provided in the full review report

2000	Adam’s parents moved to the UK from East Africa, via Italy. His mother subsequently took her children back to East Africa and the Middle East at times when she believed their welfare was best served by living there.
2001	Adam was born in London. His parents separated soon after. His mother remarried and had two more children.
2006 - 2012	Adam had some behavioural difficulties at primary school and it is reported that he sometimes lacked the ability to control his emotional response to events.
2012	Adam’s step father left the family. There had been a small number of reports of domestic abuse. The incidents reported were screened by the police and referred the local authority. None was considered to merit a detailed local authority assessment of possible risk to the children. Adam’s mother told the review that she did not believe that he had been badly affected by domestic abuse.
2013	Adam’s mother withdrew him and his siblings from primary school when he was in Year 6. She told the review that she had decided to take the children back to her country of origin because she thought they would be better off and safer there. The family stayed in East Africa for two and a half years, where

	Adam's mother says the children did well.
2015	Adam's mother described how, on his return to the UK, he wanted to spend time outside the family home, but that the groups of boys he became involved with were a negative influence. Adam was arrested twice in 2016 and he was also involved in fights outside his school resulting in minor injuries. His mother started to report him missing.
2015-2016	<p>Adam began Year 9 in a school in Hammersmith in September 2015. The review has only limited records of his education during the year in which he attended this school, and no evidence of his academic progress. Some behaviour problems were documented. Almost all of the reported incidents were of persistent, low-level disobedience, such as disrupting the work of others, talking over or insulting the teacher and leaving lessons without permission. Only a small number involved any sort of physical aggression or threatened use of force. There was no incident that caused injury or would be classified as serious violence.</p> <p>After an incident in which he had gone missing and was found with adults whom he did not know, the family arranged for Adam to stay with relatives in South London. Then the family moved overseas again. A local authority social care assessment judged that Adam's mother was caring and concerned, and that she had a strong support network.</p>
2017	<p>Adam's family returned to the UK in January 2017. On his return his former secondary school refused to readmit him. The specific grounds for this are not clear. The local authority Fair Access Panel did not challenge this decision. From this point Adam did not return to mainstream school, attending first an independent school, then the local authority alternative provision, and finally a further education college. His attendance and engagement at all of these was limited.</p> <p>Adam was drawn further into further criminal activities with other youths. The incidents became more serious over time, though the evidence strongly suggests that Adam was always a peripheral figure in these, either forced to be involved or participating to please others.</p>
November 2017	Adam was stabbed for the first time. The wound was not serious. For some time Adam pretended that the wound had been caused in a fall, making it very difficult for the police to investigate. After this incident Adam was allocated to a family support service linked to the Hammersmith and Fulham Youth Offending Service
January	Adam was seriously wounded in a knife attack by a group of

2018	<p>youths. His nose was also broken. Friends he had been with escaped without injury. Intensive emergency medical intervention was required to save his life. Adam told the police that he thought he had been the victim of mistaken identity. The police investigation was closed in March 2018 as it had been impossible to identify the assailants.</p> <p>There were child protection enquiries under Section 47 (Children Act 1989) following a number of earlier early help and social care assessments.</p>
February 2018	<p>Adam's name was added to the police Gangs Violence Matrix, meaning that there was intelligence linking him to a specific gang and that he was either vulnerable to harm or presented a risk to others. He was twice arrested outside London in circumstances suggesting that he was being used to sell drugs.</p>
April – September 2018	<p>Adam was allocated a local authority social worker as a child in need. Four child in need meetings took place during this period. In May 2018 the family agreed to move to a neighbouring borough. This was understood by professionals to be a temporary arrangement and all of the Hammersmith and Fulham agencies remained involved. Despite the move, but in line with statements made to professionals about what he would do, Adam continued to be seen in his home locality and involved in criminal activity. Risks to him increased and he was the victim of further violent attacks.</p> <p>Although there was no reduction in the risk to Adam social care closed his case, believing that his siblings were not at risk of harm and that Adam could be adequately supervised by the Youth Offending Service (YOS) and that there was no role for social care.</p>
June 2018	<p>Adam was convicted for the possession of a knife in a public place, an offence committed 9 months earlier. He was sentenced to a Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO) with conditions including a night-time curfew and tag, restriction on his movement in certain postcodes unless accompanied by his mother and 2 weekly YOS contacts. Adam's mother told professionals that things had been much quieter and that she felt safer where the family was now living</p>
September 2018	<p>The court sentenced Adam to an 18-month Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO) for involvement in a violent conflict between gang members that had occurred a year previously. The additional conditions included a 90-day curfew with a tag, a weapons awareness course, a 20-day activity requirement and a 2-year Criminal Behaviour Order which restricted his freedom of movement and could be in place for up to two years.</p>

October 2018	The family moved back to Hammersmith and Fulham
December 2018	Between September and December 2018 the YOS intervention centred around the safety of Adam and his family. He initially complied with the requirements of his order, but from December 2018 Adam missed more appointments.
January 2019	Adam again began to come to police attention more often. His mother told professionals that he was being collected at night in minicabs by adults and that a weapon had been found in the home of a close friend
February 2019	<p>Adam's mother reported to the police that he had been missing for two days. He had refused to go to the police station to be interviewed saying that it was '<i>too dangerous</i>'. The police graded Adam as a medium-risk missing person and details were circulated urgently.</p> <p>Soon after his mother reported that Adam was being held against his will and that threats had been made to hurt his siblings if he spoke to the police. Subsequently Adam returned but provided no further information.</p>
	These events led the YOS to convene two further strategy meetings. The first was attended by YOS members and focused on Adam's circumstances. The second, which considered risks to Adam in the context of his relationship and contact with two other young men, had a wider attendance including social workers for the two other young people, and workers with specialist exploitation roles.
	Very concerning new information was available indicating that one of the three young people had been stabbed some days earlier and that another was being pressured to participate in drug selling outside London. There was no specific new information about Adam. However it could be assumed that if these two close associates were being placed at serious risk, it would have implications for Adam.
March 2019	There are no further agency records that have been seen by the review until a week later the YOS family worker's work was reviewed by her supervisor. This noted the recently agreed action plan and the emphasis on moving the family away from the borough.
	Adam was fatally stabbed by another young person. Little clear information has come to light about the reasons for the attack on Adam. There is no firm evidence that the stabbing was linked to the specific risks in relation to Adam identified in the previous weeks.

3. REVIEW FINDINGS

The impact of criminal exploitation and the response of services

- 3.1. Adam's history should be understood as part of a pattern of child criminal exploitation. This had a devastating impact on his physical safety and wellbeing, his mental health, his education, and relationships with his family. It harmed relationships between his family and other members of the community.
- 3.2. In order to safeguard children and communities successfully, professionals need a model that addresses the following:
 - specific risk factors facing individual children that arise both from within their own family (these risks might be current or may have occurred in the past)
 - the experiences of young people in the places they live, socialise and go to school, including risks from other young people
 - the role of street groups and gangs
 - the impact of organised criminal activity.
- 3.3. This approach needs to be accepted as having legitimacy by all of the public bodies with a role in this work, primarily local authority social work and youth services, youth offending services, and the police. It will only make an impact if it successfully addresses the experiences of young people and their families, offers practical solutions, and has the support of affected local communities.

Adam's fragmented school and college attendance

- 3.3. Adam's history highlights the heightened risks when a child is left without a school place. Adam's involuntary removal from mainstream education and subsequent poor attendance in alternative provision added to his difficulties and made it harder for his family and professionals to protect him.
- 3.4. The findings of national and local safeguarding reviews, building on wider research, show how the removal of a young person from mainstream education, though whatever route, can lead to the weakening of day-to-day integration into ordinary society that takes place spontaneously in schools and colleges. They also highlight the protective role that schools are likely to play in reducing the likelihood of young people being drawn into criminal activity and gangs. Not surprisingly, poor secondary school attendance is one of the factors found to strongly correlate with self-reported knife carrying or gang involvement.⁴
- 3.5. Adam lost his school place because he had been taken out of the country,

⁴ Victoria Smith and Edward Wynne-McHardy (2019) An analysis of indicators of serious violence: Findings from the Millennium Cohort Study and the Environmental Risk (E-Risk) Longitudinal Twin Study, Home Office Research Report 110. This study systematically reviews 'factors linked to more serious types of violence like weapons carrying or use and gang conflict', following a large cohort of young people over a number of years. Findings are summarised on pages 1-16

for his own protection. In these circumstances it should be a priority for schools and the local authority to enable children to return to school that they have previously attended, unless there are compelling reasons why that should not happen.

- 3.6. As well as having the best possible internal arrangements to support difficult pupils, schools should be able to rely on there being effective multi-agency responses when children experience serious difficulties at school. Too often children who are involved in violent or serious incidents in or around a school are referred for support, but do not receive it because it can only be offered on a voluntary basis. When services fail to engage parents or the young person, schools can be left managing high levels of risk with limited options as to the actions they can take.

The effectiveness of social work interventions and collaborative working with youth offending, early help and family support services

- 3.4. The narrative of key events above highlights the number of assessments carried out by social care professionals, early help and the YOS. Despite these assessments, agencies struggled, both individually and collectively, to know how to respond to the increased risks to Adam in the last two years of his life. Over this period professionals were unable to turn their concerns into meaningful, practical support that matched the nature, scale or complexity of the problems confronting Adam and his mother. Although Adam's circumstances deteriorated, the plans proposed were largely similar, though they may have led to more frequent visiting or contacts.
- 3.5. Genuine efforts were made to address specific problems, such as the steps taken to help the family move out of the borough. However the intervention as a whole lacked the scope and authority necessary to deal with the nature and extent of Adam's difficulties, and did not escalate as his problems worsened. There was a lack of direct senior management engagement and oversight, given the level of risk. The collective sense of powerlessness led to the assumption that workers already allocated to the family were the best intervention that agencies could offer. In the weeks before his death, responsibility for Adam was held by the Youth Offending Service as the local authority social work service had closed the case. This should not have happened.
- 3.6. The exploitation of children and young people is an integral feature of organised criminal drug supply. It has a sophisticated division of labour and hierarchies; roles are allocated in recruitment, training, management, sales and enforcement, just as they would be in a legitimate business.⁵ Violence and coercion are endemic and escalate when there is competition or instability in drug markets. An effective response to this requires a detailed

⁵ See for example, 'The business of organised crime and exploitation'; Simon Harding (2020) County Lines: Exploitation and Drug Dealing among Urban street Gangs, Bristol University Press

understanding of the way in which exploitation is occurring in specific local circumstances. The work of professionals responsible for the safeguarding of children can only be successful if it is part of the action taken by wider society against those who are responsible for the organised criminality that underpins it.

Relocation of children and their families when there is a risk of serious youth violence

- 3.7. The proposal that the family should move in 2018 was an understandable response to Adam being stabbed. However there is a growing recognition, shared by professionals who have contributed to this review, that relocating families because of the risk of serious youth violence is not always the best solution. It would be wrong to say that relocating a family should never be considered as an option, but in order for this to be an effective approach, a number of conditions should apply.
- 3.8. Risks to the young person as a result of the family moving or not moving need to be balanced. This should include topics identified in this report and other case reviews, as well as the national child safeguarding practice review:
 - Risks in the locality to which the child is moving
 - The possibility that the young person's behaviour will not change because their most important social connections remain in place
 - Risks of weakening professional networks so that there is less professional knowledge and oversight
 - Practical difficulties (including financial difficulties) created for other family members.
- 3.9. The young person and other key members of the family need to understand why the plan is necessary and agree to implement it. That agreement needs to be genuine and realistic. Part of a more structured approach to assessing both sets of risks would be to understand the extent to which the young person and his family would accept the proposed arrangements and implement the plan.
- 3.10. As far as possible it should be clear whether the plan is intended to be a short-term measure or a permanent alternative. If the move is an emergency, short-term measure professionals need to work with the family to create a long-term plan. This will shape decisions about the professional network of support around the child and family. If the move is intended to be a short-term measure, it would make sense to maintain some or all of the existing professional network around the family. If the move is intended to be permanent, then careful planning is needed to put in place a new support network. Account would need to be taken of the difficulty in securing successful professional engagement with some adolescents. Arrangements for the transfer of professional responsibilities should always be considered as part of the plan, particularly as these may vary between agencies.

- 3.11. This points to the value of professionals from two localities being simultaneously involved in making the assessment: those from the original location being fully aware of the history and the reasons for risk; those from the proposed relocation locality able to complement this assessment with their own local knowledge of the environment in which the child will be living such as local criminal activity, school cultures, and community strengths and available supports.

The significance of Adam's family's race and ethnicity

- 3.12. It is of concern that (despite the assessments that were undertaken) none of the records seen by the review set out the details of the family's history or the specific significance of race and ethnicity, or sought to understand its significance.
- 3.13. Young people from black and other minority ethnic communities are at a far greater risk of fatal youth violence. Comparing Office of National Statistics (rate of homicide per 100,000 population between 2008 and 2019) and census data from 2001 and 2011, Kumar et al report very large disparities in homicide rates between racial groups: *'Black homicide victimisation ranged from 200 to 800% higher than that for the White population during that time period, at an average of 5.6 times higher for Blacks. While Black victimisation dropped by 69% from 2001 to 2012, it almost doubled (79% increase) from 2013 to 2019, rising seven times faster than the White victimisation rate. Asian rates remained stable at about twice as high as White rates.'*⁶ The greatest disparities are found among victims age 16-24, the age group within which the largest number of homicides generally occur.
- 3.14. The review is aware of a number of young men who have been victims of serious youth violence who have been taken overseas by family for their own protection. Sometimes this turns out to be a good experience but it is sometimes more difficult for the young person to readjust on their return. It is impossible to say how often this is a significant factor, however professionals should always consider the potential impact of a move abroad.
- 3.15. Adam's father lived only briefly in the UK and played a very limited role in his son's life. The record suggests that Adam had a poor relationship with his stepfather. As a young male, Adam believed that it was right for him to spend a lot of time with other males outside the family home. This is not an unusual thing for a young man from many different cultural backgrounds, but without the positive influence and authority of his father, or men in his extended family, and without positive role models, he was vulnerable to

⁶ Kumar, S., Sherman, L. W., & Strang, H. (2020). Racial Disparities in Homicide Victimization Rates: How to Improve Transparency by the Office of National Statistics in England and Wales. *Cambridge Journal of Evidence-Based Policing*, 4 (3-4), 178-186. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41887-020-00055-y> Rates of disparity vary greatly from year to year because the numbers in any age group are relatively small.

becoming involved with local street groups and gangs. This in turn appears to have given him a sense of excitement, comradeship and belonging.

Development of services in Hammersmith and Fulham since the death of Adam

- 3.16. Senior managers working in the local authority at the time told the review that between 2017 and 2019 the local authority explored the idea of developing an approach to harms to young people caused outside the family, based on a contextual safeguarding approach.⁷ The council commissioned initial training for key groups of professionals. However the full range of activities and service development was not completed, as a result of which new practice approaches to exploitation that had been envisaged were never implemented. The local authority and its partner agencies can now revisit its thinking about contextual safeguarding, recognising that there is a need to situate this in the wider context of action that is being taken against organised criminal activity.
- 3.17. Through discussions during the review the local authority has provided information about its current integrated gangs and exploitation work. In line with the approach taken in many London boroughs and elsewhere, the Hammersmith and Fulham Gangs, Violence and Exploitation Unit has brought together professionals, who had previously worked in a number of services, to focus activity on children at risk of exploitation. Information provided to the review about the systems used to identify levels of vulnerability and risk among young people referred to the team suggests that they are innovative and practical, making good use of management information to enable risks to young people to be understood, ranked and tracked as plans are implemented. The effectiveness of any developments needs to be tested by the multi-agency safeguarding partnership as part of its overall scrutiny of safeguarding arrangements for children.

Effective practice identified during the review

- 3.18. The clinical medical and psycho-social care provided by at Imperial Healthcare Trust by the staff in its intensive care unit at St Mary's Hospital. The work of the hospital is supported by Red Thread. This is a voluntary organisation that seeks to enable young people who have been victims of a violent attack to make constructive use of the crisis of a hospital admission, alongside statutory agencies.
- 3.19. Adam was able to speak to a Red Thread worker on a number of occasions, though at the time of his hospital admissions Adam usually already had an allocated worker, so there was no need for anyone new to take on a key worker role. However Red Thread sought out relevant information about events and communicated it quickly and effectively to the existing network of professionals.

⁷ <https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/>

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The review has made recommendations in the following areas of practice and service provision:

- Collaborative strategies to combat exploitation and serious youth violence
- Education, school attendance, behaviour and involuntary school transfer
- The effectiveness of social work interventions and collaborative working with youth offending, early help and family support services
- Relocation of children and their families
- Working with the community to address needs arising from the family's ethnicity and religion

Collaborative strategies to combat exploitation and serious youth violence

1. The Metropolitan Police Service and the local authority should collaborate to develop responses to serious youth violence and criminal exploitation that draw together work on the following: individual and family safeguarding; child criminal exploitation and extra-familial harm; locality policing; and the proactive disruptive policing of organised criminal activity. This may be best done with the involvement of other boroughs across the police Basic Command Unit. It needs to go beyond the arrangements for cooperation set out in the current London exploitation protocol.
2. The statutory safeguarding partners should begin work to prepare and implement a strategy to prevent and reduce serious youth violence in the area in anticipation of the legal duties that will be placed on the local authority under the forthcoming Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (2021).
3. Hammersmith and Fulham Council should work with partner agencies to complete the development of its contextual safeguarding approach, taking into account identified gaps in the work undertaken with Adam and his family.
4. The Hammersmith and Fulham Safeguarding Children Partnership should develop a programme to test the effectiveness of work being undertaken to combat serious youth violence under its independent scrutiny responsibility. If one has not been completed within the past 12 months, this should include a multi-agency audit of complex exploitation and serious youth violence cases. The effectiveness of current multi-agency panel arrangements should be tested.

Education, school attendance, behaviour and involuntary school transfer

5. The Hammersmith and Fulham Safeguarding Children Partnership should reassure itself that the local authority and its schools have effective approaches to the following issues:
 - improving school attendance
 - reducing other routes through which children involuntarily leave mainstream education
 - oversight of managed moves between schools

- the tracking and support of children who are out of mainstream school.
6. The multi-agency partnership should ensure that FE colleges are fully integrated into local safeguarding partnership arrangements and that they are providing an effective response to the safeguarding concerns affecting their students

The effectiveness of social work interventions and collaborative working with youth offending, early help and family support services

7. The local authority should review the assessment framework and approach used in cases of extra-familial harm to ensure that it takes better account of contextual influences on children and young people. The revised framework should be multi-disciplinary and multi-agency.
8. The local practice framework chosen for extra-familial harm should reduce the likelihood of multiple assessments being undertaken and ensure that where there are concerns about exploitation the assessment provides a cumulative account of possible risks. This should identify fundamental aspects of the child's circumstances and not just be a response to current concerns.
9. The local authority should provide clear guidance to social work managers as to their role in assessment and management of risk arising from serious youth violence and set criteria for the involvement of the social care service. This should include mechanisms for resolving disputes when there is disagreement about the need for a child to be considered as a child in need / protection) and a social worker involved.
10. When more than one of the local authority's early help, YOS or social work services are working with a child or family at risk because of serious youth violence, arrangements should be made for there to be a shared plan and joint or shared supervision of staff.

Relocation of children and their families

11. The partnership should produce a protocol for the relocation of families as soon as possible, engaging with other agencies and local authorities, and with the London Safeguarding Children Partnership as necessary.
12. Once implemented Hammersmith and Fulham Safeguarding Children Partnership should test the implementation of this protocol to ensure that it is effective.

Working with the community to address needs arising from the family's ethnicity and religion

13. The multi-agency safeguarding partnership should satisfy itself that assessments (whether that be Early help, YOS or social care) always explore the relevance of family history, influences and experiences that are specific to the ethnic, racial and religious background.
14. All professionals should take account of the experience of young people who have been taken abroad in order to protect them from risks associated with

serious youth violence. Agencies need to devise the best available steps to identify young people on their return to the UK and to be mindful of the need to support their reintegration.

15. The local authority should consider how further to develop its links with young people and families in the community from which Adam's family was drawn in order to improve arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
16. Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel should make racial and ethnic disparities in child criminal exploitation and serious youth violence, and the effectiveness of responses to black and minority ethnic communities, the subject of further investigation in its 'Phase 2' examination. It should consider compiling a research overview of these issues to support this.