

# Building Safety

Safeguarding black young men and boys in Lambeth

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## Introduction

*I think that we have struggled to have a conversation, an honest conversation about structural inequalities, I think we have struggled to have the conversation about narratives that are established around particular groups, marginalised groups. I think young Black boys are seen in a particular way, they will speak to you about that that they know that they are perceived in a particular way. So I think that we have to start with ourselves, and kind of we have to think differently, we have to be willing to kind of look at the context and our role within that (BSIP4)*

In the first 9 months of 2021, 2 children from Lambeth lost their lives and 17 were seriously injured with a weapon as a consequence of risks and harms they faced beyond their family homes – referred to as extra-familial harm<sup>1</sup> throughout this report. A further 4 young people were remanded into custody for the murder or attempted murder of other young people. All were young men, and a disproportionate number were of Black African or Black Caribbean descent. Most had been in contact with children’s social care in early childhood or adolescence and critical questions were therefore being asked about why professionals were struggling to provide the appropriate levels of support to keep these young men safe.

In response Lambeth Safeguarding Children’s Partnership commissioned the University of Bedfordshire to conduct an exploratory study into the role of children’s social care, and wider statutory services, in safeguarding black young men and boys. They were particularly keen to:

- Identify the social and contextual dynamics that impact how black boys and young men experience harm, and statutory responses to them
- Understand the extent to which professional values, processes, practices, and partnerships are informed by and inform these social and contextual features, and their impact on statutory responses to young people

In short, senior leaders in Lambeth wanted to understand the ways in which their responses to extra-familial harm, and to black young men and boys, may contribute to the risks in question – and thereby how improvements may build safety in the future. This report documents the findings from the first phase of this exploratory study.

### Research Team

The University of Bedfordshire (UoB) established a research team to support this project comprised of Dr Carlene Firmin, as Principal Investigator, Dr Lauren Wroe as Co-Investigator and Jahnine Davis and Daniel Morris as researchers. This team coordinated and delivered all the fieldwork for the study, completed the analysis and wrote the project report; ethics approval for the study was also granted from the University of Bedfordshire. The UoB team collaborated with colleagues developing the Social Model for Protecting Children to design approaches to data collection, create the analytical framework for the project, and develop the final set of project findings and recommendations: Prof. Brid

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<sup>1</sup> A range of extra-familial forms of harm were grouped together in the 2018 version of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* in which these issues were described as warranting a safeguarding (and sometimes child protection) response. These harms ‘might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking; online abuse; teenage relationship abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation’ (DfE, 2018).

Featherstone (University of Huddersfield), Prof. Kate Morris (Sheffield University), Prof. Anna Gupta and Dr Yuval Saar-Heiman (Royal Holloway University of London).

### Briefing structure

This briefing is organised into four overarching sections.

Section 1 provides a background to the issues discussed in this report, with a specific focus on the contextual and structural dynamics of extra-familial harm, and its impact on black young men.

Section 2 summarises the methodology used in this study (a more detailed methodology is provided in Appendix A), its limitations, and the implications for recommendations at this stage in the project.

Section 3 details the findings of the study thus far – organised by the key themes that were identified, and with reference to the original questions posed by Lambeth Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

Section 4 features recommendations for building safety for black young men and boys in Lambeth. We also highlight where further work is required to identify and develop effective responses to extra-familial harm and its impacts on black young men and boys, their families and wider communities.

### Background: The issues being addressed

All the young men and boys whose cases were reviewed in preparation for this report were subject to harm beyond their families, this included significant physical violence from adults and peers. In some cases, the young men and boys had subject other young people to significant acts of harm.

Over the past two decades, policy and practice responses to the harm that young people experience in their communities has undergone a shift. In Working Together 2018 'extra-familial harm' is included as a broad category of harms that young people may face beyond their families, and in their communities. These include peer-on-peer violence, sexual and criminal exploitation, online abuse and bullying. The addition of 'extra-familial harm' in safeguarding guidance places a responsibility on local authority safeguarding partners to assess and intervene where young people are at risk in extra-familial contexts.

The inclusion of extra-familial harm in Working Together 2018 draws on an increasing awareness of the nature of risk in adolescence following high-profile incidents of child exploitation over the last two decades. These events, notably the sexual exploitation of (primarily) young women and girls in Northern UK towns<sup>2</sup>, highlighted the complex dynamics of extra-familial abuse, where a combination of depleted protective infrastructure, abusive adults, and individual vulnerabilities (often related to young people's developmental life stage)<sup>3</sup>, created a perfect storm in which abuse could take place, and services failed to respond.

These incidents, and the (lack of) responses that followed, highlighted two things: that complex contextual factors<sup>4</sup> interplay to create the conditions in which the abuse of adolescents takes

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<sup>2</sup> Jay, A. (2014). Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham (1997 – 2013). Rotherham: Rotherham LSCB.

<sup>3</sup> Beckett, H. (2019) 'Moving beyond discourses of agency, gain and blame: reconceptualising young people's experiences of sexual exploitation', in: Pearce, J. (eds), *Child Sexual Exploitation: Why Theory Matters*, Bristol, Bristol Policy Press

<sup>4</sup> Firmin, C. (2017) Contextual risk, individualised responses: an assessment of safeguarding responses to nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse. *Child Abuse Review*. 27 (1) Pages 42-57 <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2449>

place, and that traditional safeguarding partnerships, in which social care work with families and the police and community safety teams deal with harm in communities, were limited in their ability to keep these young people safe<sup>56</sup>. In the past five years, the criminal exploitation of (primarily) boys, and specifically Black boys and young men, is receiving increased attention at a policy and practice level<sup>78</sup>. This poses new challenges for safeguarding partners as they formulate their wider service changes in response to extra-familial forms of harm.

Whilst some of these challenges stem from the significant physical risks posed to young people by dangerous peer or adult relationships, or risky contexts fraught with violence and crime, there is also an emerging understanding of the role that structural factors such as poverty and racism play in shaping young people's experiences of harm in their communities and the extent to which services offer effective help (or not). This research has highlighted, the role of poverty and class in shaping young girls' vulnerability to child sexual exploitation<sup>9</sup> whilst simultaneously stifling the ability of social services and the police to recognise them as victims<sup>10</sup>. It has also highlighted the relationship between poverty and the criminal exploitation of (primarily) boys<sup>11,12</sup>, the relationship between school exclusion and ethnicity<sup>13</sup> and school exclusion and criminal exploitation<sup>14</sup>. The research also highlights the 'adultification' of black boys in which the intersection of gender and ethnicity reduces their perceived vulnerability<sup>15</sup> whilst increasing their experience of school exclusion, their presence on risk panel agendas<sup>16</sup>, social care and police databases<sup>17</sup> and in the criminal justice system<sup>18</sup>. These children then become hyper-visible in the profiling of risk and invisible in the provision of support. Such evidence has emerged within broader concerns about the impact of poverty, austerity, and structural inequality on the safety and welfare of families, and their ability to access support<sup>19,20</sup>

### Background: The approach of the research team

To explore how Lambeth responds to the issues outlined above, the research team used two frameworks developed to examine and improve social care practice: 'Contextual Safeguarding' and a 'Social Model for Protecting Children'.

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<sup>5</sup>Hanson, E. and Holmes, D. (2014) *That difficult age: developing a more effective response to risks in adolescence*. Dartington: Research in Practice

<sup>6</sup> Firmin, C. (2017) Contextual risk, individualised responses: an assessment of safeguarding responses to nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse. *Child Abuse Review*. 27 (1) Pages 42-57 <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2449>

<sup>7</sup> Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel. (2020). *It was hard to escape*. London: HM Government.

<sup>8</sup> Hill, N. (2019) Serious Case Review – Chris, London: Newham Safeguarding Children Board

<sup>9</sup> Melrose, M. & Pearce, J. (2013). *Critical perspectives on child sexual exploitation and related trafficking*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, K. (2019), "Vulnerability and child sexual exploitation: towards an approach grounded in life experiences", *Critical Social Policy*, 39:4, 622-642.

<sup>11</sup> Grimshaw, R. and Ford, M. (2018). Young people, violence and knives – revisiting the evidence and policy discussions. <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/young-people-violence-and-knives-revisiting-evidence-and-policy-discussions>

<sup>12</sup> Spencer, C., Griffin, B. and Floyd, M. (2019). *Vulnerable Adolescents Thematic Review*. Croydon Safeguarding Board.

<sup>13</sup> UK Government. (2020). *Pupil exclusions*. [www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/educationskills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/pupil-exclusions/latest](http://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/educationskills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/pupil-exclusions/latest)

<sup>14</sup> Temple, A. (2020). *Excluded, Exploited, Forgotten: Childhood Criminal Exploitation and School Exclusions*. Just for Kids Law, London.

<sup>15</sup> Davis, J. and Marsh, N. (2020), "Boys to men: the cost of adultification in safeguarding responses to black boys". *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 8:2, 255-259.

<sup>16</sup> Bostock, L. Bradbury, V. & Manister, M (2021). *What can we learn from EFH risk panels about social care responses to harm in extra-familial contexts*. Making Research Count presentation.

<sup>17</sup> Wroe, L. E. (2021). Young people and "county lines": a contextual and social account. *Journal of Children's Services*, 16:1, 39-55.

<sup>18</sup> Paul, S. (2021). *Tackling Racial Injustice: children and the youth justice system*. London: Justice.

<sup>19</sup> Hood, R., Featherstone, B., Bywaters, P., Gupta, A., Bilson, A., Morris, K., Webb, C. (2021) *Evidence to Social Care Review*. Accessed Online [https://www.pfan.uk/evidence\\_scr/](https://www.pfan.uk/evidence_scr/)

<sup>20</sup> ADCS, (2018) Safeguarding Pressures Phase 6, Manchester, ADCS.

## Contextual Safeguarding

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. The approach is explained in a four-part framework<sup>21</sup>, which has been used to develop, and assess, Contextual Safeguarding in local areas<sup>22</sup>. A Contextual Safeguarding System:

- Targets the contexts and social conditions associated with abuse (Domain 1).
- Uses a child protection rather than community safety legislative framework to develop responses to extra-familial harm (Domain 2)
- Features partnerships between children's services and young people, parents, wider communities along with the range of agencies who have a reach into the places and spaces where extra-familial harm occurs (Domain 3)
- Measures contextual impact of its work – and the change it creates in public, education and peer settings, as well as for individual children and families (Domain 4)

Collectively, these four domains describe the capabilities of a safeguarding system designed to offer a contextual response to extra-familial harm. The framework is underpinned by a set of values to ensure its use aligns with its intentions<sup>23,24,25</sup>. Contextual Safeguarding is:

- **Collaborative:** Is achieved through collaboration between professionals, children and young people, families and communities to inform decisions about safety.
- **Ecological:** Considers the links between the spaces where young people experience harm and how these are shaped by inequalities
- **Rights-based:** Rooted in children's and human rights.
- **Strengths-based:** Builds on the strengths of individuals and communities to achieve change.
- **Grounded in the reality of how life happens:** Proposes solutions that are informed by the lived experiences of young people, families, communities and practitioners.

When applying Contextual Safeguarding, local authorities have undertaken activities which: recognise the interplay between contexts; assess the weight of influence different contexts have on young people's safety; and seek to build contextual safety on two levels<sup>26</sup>. On one level practitioners and teams have identified ways to consider extra-familial contexts in their direct work with children and families – such as foregrounding the impact of these contexts during assessments or recommending interventions in these contexts as part of the plan to safeguard and promote the welfare of a young person. At a second level systems have been created for referring, assessing, and providing support into groups and contexts themselves as a means of building safety.

The research team were asked to pay particular attention to what 'Contextual Safeguarding' may offer Lambeth as they develop their response to extra-familial harm. As such, throughout the project we had to consider whether Lambeth's approach to extra-familial harm; met the four domains of the Contextual Safeguarding Framework; aligned with the

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<sup>21</sup> Firmin, C, Curtis, G., Fritz, D., Olatain, P., Latchford, L., Lloyd, J., & Larasi, I. (2016). Towards a contextual response to peer-on-peer abuse. Luton: University of Bedfordshire

<sup>22</sup> Firmin, C. (2020) Contextual Safeguarding and Child Protection: Rewriting the Rules. Oxon: Routledge

<sup>23</sup> Firmin, C. (2020) Contextual Safeguarding and Child Protection: Rewriting the Rules. Oxon: Routledge

<sup>24</sup> Firmin C. and Lloyd, J (2020) *Contextual Safeguarding: A 2020 update on the operational, strategic and conceptual framework*. Luton: University of Bedfordshire

<sup>25</sup> Wroe, L., 2020. *Principles of Contextual Safeguarding*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/en/blog/2020/principles-of-contextual-safeguarding> [Accessed 08. 06. 2020].

<sup>26</sup> Firmin, C. (2020) *Contextual Safeguarding and Child Protection: Rewriting the Rules*. Oxon: Routledge

values underpinning a Contextual Safeguarding approach; and offered a comprehensive welfare-based response to contexts and groups associated with extra-familial harm, as well as safeguarded the individual children and families affected by building safety around them.

### *The Social Model for Protecting Children*

From the outset it was evident that Contextual Safeguarding alone would not offer a sufficient framework for undertaking this project. In commissioning the work, Lambeth explicitly wanted us to consider structural factors that may be relevant to what black young men and boys were experiencing including racism and poverty. As such the Social Model for Protecting Children was used as a key framework for understanding how children's social care were responding to structural, as well as contextual, sources of extra-familial harm.

The Social Model for Protecting Children<sup>27</sup> has been developed to reimagine a social care response capable of addressing the structural drivers of the challenge families face. The approach was designed by Brid Featherstone, Anne Gupta, Kate Morris and Sue White, and focuses on addressing the economic, social and cultural barriers to ensuring children are cared for safely and their relational needs and identities are respected. The broader lens the Social Model promotes marks a shift away from solely focusing on intra-familial risks in individual households. It is based upon evidence that highlights the relationship between structural factors, service responses, and the difficulties experienced by children and families, including:

- The inequalities in children's chances of being able to grow up safely in their families and communities, thus posing ethical and other concerns under the UNCRC
- Poverty and associated features, such as inadequate and insecure work, housing and health difficulties, are key contributors to family difficulties
- The shame associated with poverty affects psychological health and contributes to parents' lack of self-efficacy and confidence in parenting
- The inter-connection of psychological harms with social conditions
- The importance of social connections to individual and family well-being

When applying the Social Model local authorities need to know their communities and engage in dialogue with adults and children about their needs, strengths, vulnerabilities and the resources necessary for all to flourish. Assessments and interventions need to actively engage with the economic, social and environmental contexts in which the child and family is living. Some key elements of practice include valuing children and families' hopes and aspirations and what they say they need to thrive; actively promoting human rights and providing advocacy; fostering positive social connections; recognising the importance of practical help; and places dilemmas and decisions in a broader social, political and cultural context.

### *A joint lens*

Contextual Safeguarding and the Social Model were brought together for the first time in a 2020 briefing<sup>28</sup>, which explored what they might offer collectively in response to EFH. The Building Safety project is the first attempt to apply this thinking. For this project, therefore, researchers explored how contextual and structural factors impact the safety of black young men in Lambeth – and how services in Lambeth respond to, mitigate, or even contribute to

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<sup>27</sup> Featherstone, B., Gupta, A., Morris, K., & White, S. (2018). *Protecting children: A Social Model* (1st ed.). Bristol: Policy Press.

<sup>28</sup> Featherstone, B., Firmin, C., Gupta, A., Morris, K. and Wroe, L. (2020) *The Social Model and Contextual Safeguarding -Key Messages for Practice*. Luton: University of Bedfordshire

those factors. Practice approaches developed as part of either Contextual Safeguarding (such as context-weighting activities during assessments and safeguarding response to locations) or a Social Model (such as co-produced responses and the development of positive social networks) may be recommended as result of the project findings.

## Methodology

In the first phase of this project researchers collected data in three stages, before analysing all three datasets collectively.

### Stage 1 Data Collection

Stage 1 involved reviewing eight redacted case summaries of extra-familial harm featuring black young men and boys. Lambeth Safeguarding Children's Partnership selected the summaries to illustrate the various harms being experienced by young people in Lambeth and the types of service responses they had received. The research team reviewed and discussed their reflections on the case summaries at two analytical workshops.

During these workshops the team identified the contextual and structural drivers of extra-familial harm evident in the cases, as well as meetings, processes and partnerships that appeared to be common features of Lambeth response. Key observations were that:

- Case files featured minimal information about who these young people were; what their hopes and ambitions were, likes and dislikes and so-on. Moreover, in most cases it wasn't possible for the research team to gain a sense of how young people viewed the risks they were facing, or what safety would look like for them
- Specific processes/pathways/plans had been introduced for responding to extra-familial harm and working with adolescents. The content of those plans and the actions they led to were not detailed in the case summaries.
- The risks some young people were facing in Lambeth appeared severe and posed a significant threat to their safety. The response from professionals seemed at times chaotic and task/referral focused as a result the research team weren't clear on the intended outcomes of many actions that were taken
- A range of non-statutory services had been commissioned in response to extra-familial harm, and referral into these services was a common feature of the Lambeth response. The research team was unclear about why these specific services? had been selected and how they met the needs of the predominantly black young men who appeared to be referred into them
- It wasn't possible to get a sense of inter-agency relationships from the material provided; in particular the extent to which practitioners felt comfortable and able to challenge each other to ensure that young people were effectively supported.
- All young people in the case files were male and of Black African or Black Caribbean descent, however reflections on race and racism were almost completely absent in the paperwork provided. Where ethnicity was considered it was with specific reference to food preferences for one family.
- Structural factors such as poverty and racism appeared relevant in some cases, but case file material didn't indicate how they were engaged with by practitioners
- Family members, particularly mothers, had actively sought support in an early and timely fashion – but support had not been provided. In later years some parents sought to keep their children safe by moving them out of Lambeth, out of the UK, or by refusing to send them to Park Campus pupil referral unit
- Park Campus pupil referral unit was referenced as unsafe in more than one case file and there was a reluctance to send young people there. There was no evident

response to this context, or any of location where young people were thought to be at risk of significant harm.

The research team did not know how representative these cases were of wider practice in Lambeth. As such, we used these observations to design our next stage of data collection; through which we could explore some of the issues and gaps in knowledge outlined above.

### Stage 2 Data Collection

The research team used the observations drawn from the case summaries to design the next stage of data collection: the interview schedules, and required participants, for practitioner focus groups and interviews that would take place in Stage 2.

During Stage 2, featured two focus groups with Lambeth professionals. The first involved 10 participants from children's social care, and the second involved 10 participants from health, education, policing, youth justice and children's social care services. (The focus group interview schedule can be found in Appendix A).

Two researchers in the team also conducted eight interviews with professionals who had not participated in focus groups. Interview participants represented a range of statutory services including, children's services, policing, commissioning, youth justice and education, as well as a community organisation. (The interview schedule can be found in Appendix A).

In total 28 professionals participated Stage 2 of data collection. All interviews and focus groups were transcribed for analysis.

### Analysis

Upon completion of all interviews and focus groups the research team met to develop an approach for data analysis. Researchers who conducted interviews and/or facilitated focus groups highlighted emergent themes, and the principal investigator mapped out different options for further analysis based on those themes and the original project questions.

A coding framework (Appendix A), against which the data was then organised and analysed, was developed in line with the original project questions and following a trial with one transcript, two further codes were added which reflected the information being shared by participants. All transcripts were coded in Nvivo 12 by three members of the research team and cross-checked by the co-investigator for this project.

When transcripts were coded all references to 'race' or 'racism' were exported and subjected to further thematic analysis. All other coding was and identified dominant patterns and themes regarding:

- how participants discussed race and named racism, and challenged its impact
- the contextual and structural drivers of extra-familial harm, and its impact on black boys and young men, in Lambeth
- where services have been targeted and the extent to which this addresses challenges faced by black young men, their families, and communities
- partnerships that are prioritised and those that are required to build safety for black young men and boys in the future
- how Lambeth professionals define, and may want to redefine, successful responses to extra-familial harm

A clear narrative emerged in this process against which we structured our findings and built recommendations.



## Limitations

This phase of the Building Safety project illustrates how some Lambeth professionals view extra-familial harm, its impact of black young men and boys, and their role in responding. This is an important component for developing practices that build safety for black young men and boys in the future. Nonetheless there are limitations that warrant attention.

Firstly, the findings presented largely reflect the views of the 28 professionals who participated in this study; they are not necessarily representative of all professionals in Lambeth. They are presented as such, and with reference to the redacted case summaries reviewed in stage 1, to provide a wider context to the findings reported.

Secondly, these findings do not necessarily reflect the views of black young men and boys, their families or wider communities. A critical next stage in this project will be to speak directly with non-professionals, and the young people and families supported by Lambeth services, to triangulate, query, and resolve some of the issues raised in this report. As a result, at this stage the recommendations made are drawn from the findings that are most pronounced in the data collected, and where it is evident that action is required. Matters which require further information before conclusions can be reached are also noted.

## Findings

### Talking about race, naming racism and challenging its impact

Participants were directly asked about the safety of 'black young men and boys' in Lambeth through focus groups and interviews. This direct question led to informative discussions – or an absence of them – about racism, and racist practices, in Lambeth. Key themes that emerged were:

- A struggle to name racism as a characteristic of service responses to black young men – particularly within ones' own organisation/service
- An ability to describe 'discrimination' or differential treatment and a desire amongst some to challenge its impact
- The impact that institutional racism, and racist practices, were having on service engagement
- The intersectional impact of racism, poverty and sexism on the ability of young black men to access support – and their increased exposure to harm
- A need to create safe spaces for black professionals to share, and challenge, their experiences of discriminatory and stereotypical practices within the organisations that they work in, or are in partnership with

We detail each of these themes below; they provide an important context for the findings about the safety of black young men in Lambeth documented in later sections of this report.

### Naming racism

Participants described a range of ways in which black young men, and their families, were discriminated against by statutory services in Lambeth; however, few referred to this as 'racism'. Alternative terminology such as 'discrepancies', 'difference', and 'unconscious bias', were drawn upon to describe discriminatory practices:

... if you think about things like the police's gangs' matrix as referenced three, four years ago, the matrix for Lambeth would have been roughly 97% black African, black Caribbean heritage young boys. And then obviously when you extrapolate that out into broader community and society for Lambeth, then that is absolutely not reflective of the demographic of the borough, so there is something very particular about the over-representation on those lists and targeting.

But as I said, my broader concern is that the action that needs to be taken to *tackle that discrepancy* isn't solely police or criminal justice (BSIP7 – italics added by author)

And I do feel like they still get *stereotyped unfortunately and there is some unconscious bias* there sometimes as well, from all of us as professionals.... And I do think *young black males do come off worse unfortunately and I don't know why that, well I can probably guess why that is*, but it does seem to be more young black males than... (BSFG2 – italics added by author)

I'm kind of devastated to know that ten-year-olds are being stopped and searched and ten-year-olds are being sent to PRUs. Who does that? ... What they did was they did an audit of going through some of these young people and their experiences and highlighting that actually this is not a one off, this is in the *DNA of the behaviours for our black boys* (BSIP2 – italics added by author)

But my biggest one is around I would say is around *labelling and stereotyping* of who they are and what they can be (BSIP10 – italics added by author)

For me, I'm at the end of my working life, so I don't mind standing up and saying X and Y about BAME children and families but my biggest issue for Lambeth is around education and *the lack of aspiration* Children's Services have for Black children. (BSIP5)

On one occasion a participant clearly described racism, including the process of adultification, but before doing so stated that what they were describing wasn't racism:

A lot of the time, unfortunately, I think young black boys are often seen as men and I think the behavioural difference in how you treat men, you know your peers, someone you feel is as mentally capable as you, as physically strong as you, is very different to how you would approach a child who is vulnerable and who is probably already from a marginalised background based on sort of statistically what we're looking at that's going on in London with our local communities. I think just realising that they are children and they are the most at risk group for both having their lives ended and potentially ending someone else's life, I think there's a lot of... *I don't think it's overt racism, I don't think it's bigotry, but I think it's just a lack of value placed on the lives and the potential future sort of impact that these young black men will have in our community.* And if you think something is at times worth less than other things, you don't look after it as often and as well and I think as organisations it's been shown that we've done that, certainly with the police, certainly with social care. (BSFG2BO2 - italics added by author)

Other participants discussed discriminatory practices more generally – as a societal or national challenge, as opposed to a specific experience of practices in Lambeth:

If you have no money, then that is going to just automatically going to have a significant impact. If you're living in a racist society, that is going to have an impact upon your outcomes. So, I think it's really difficult isn't it, because I think the way in which we're having this discussion in some ways it's those societal issues that have a real big impact in terms of the inequalities and discriminations that exist (BSFG1)

I think there's something about how black boys are perceived, not only in Lambeth but across the country by education, by Children's Services, by police, by health, by employers. I think there's just something about how black boys are perceived and that links back to institutional racism that has been here for years and years that has never really been broken down (BSIP2)

Also, the major issue that I just think should be a national outrage, is the number of Black boys that are kind of excluded, permanently excluded from schools. That for me, because we know that link to them making them more vulnerable to being at risk in the community. So those issues are all I see every day, kind of interplayed when we're trying to look at children that we're trying to safeguard (BSIP4).

It is notable that on these occasions participants did use the term 'racism'. Racism was something that could be named and discussed with some distance – as something that happened out there in other places, or in other agencies, as opposed to something that was near or in processes in which they had direct involvement.

#### The impact of discriminatory practices on black young men

Despite struggling to name 'racism' as a specific issue, participants were able to account for the impact that discriminatory practices had on black young men. Disproportionate levels of school exclusions and police enforcement were raised in both focus groups and interviews:

So, with some of the young people that I've spoken to, they have all said, "I'm Black, I'm a male, I look like a criminal." So, in terms of how they're perceived by services, particularly by the police that they're always going to be a suspect. Also. "I'm Black I'm male, I can't go to certain areas." Like some of them feel unsafe simply because they have friends, because they used to live in that area, "I can't go back there because my friend is connected to something so I can't, I don't feel safe in my area." So, I've had young people basically feel like they've been criminalised because of their ethnicity, not necessarily because they've done something wrong (BSFG1)

But I do think that there are a number of obstacles in their way, and too often the families that I'm coming into contact with into that poor housing, it's about sort of job insecurity, it is about a school system that penalises their child for the slightest infraction in a very different way to how a White child is treated... I think a number of our young Black men would say so we know I'd say about the police, how they feel they're perceived by the police and how the interaction in the community with the police for them feels very much like they're being harassed. There are assumptions that are being made, it's a flashpoint, you know, we have children that have in those interactions have been hurt, feel humiliated, families feel that their children are being treated differently because they've come to the police's attention, they're not seen as children. (BSIP4)

I think someone mentioned earlier in the main group about stop and search and that being something that is happening too frequently and as a result of stigma. A lot of children are, young black men are being stopped and searched for no particular reason and that built up over time can cause frustration, anger, anxiety, fear, so I think from a, speaking from young people and their parents, I think if that could be used in an appropriate way, I think that would be helpful for them. (BSFG2BO2)

These participants were able to describe the shame and wider damaging impacts of racism. Their accounts largely described racism as something that happens between people – a relational issue that affects black young men; rather than something that may also be driven/caused/enabled by organisations or wider structures.

Other participants reflected that the approach taken by services in Lambeth had rendered black young men, and their needs, invisible within safeguarding systems:

Our approach has been they were invisible I suppose, I kind of thought about this for a very long time, they were invisible, and when they were seen, I think the narrative around them was very problematic. So, it was very much about the language that was used was sort of their criminal activity, their behaviour, the lifestyle choices, you know, sort of being very difficult. So yeah, I think we pathologised and we didn't understand that these were children, and these were children that had a right to be safeguarded (BSIP4)

I think quite a lot of the young black males I work with don't feel they're listened to, so they stop asking and they just can't see the point because I'll ask them questions about them and they'll say to me, "But you're not writing it down, XXX?" I said, "No, because I'm having a conversation with you", "Oh the social worker just writes it all down all the time and they're not listening to us because they're too busy writing" (BSFG2BO2)

The invisibility of young black men was further evidenced when participants described the services that were available for them in the borough. For the most part, participants listed a range of general services for young men – few could state that they had been commissioned with young black men in mind; despite stating that they were largely utilised by young black men:

I can't think, off the top of my head, of any specific commissioned service in Lambeth that targets black young men. I think the closest that we'd get would be youth provision (BSIP9)

I think it depends on the project. So, for example, Becoming a Man is a pilot project run by the Home Office...it hails from America where actually they were specialising with working with a lot of young black men and so although they're not exclusively working with young black men, they have a niche to work with, that kind of thing. So, I don't know if it's that they have, where we have specific things for young black men but there are things that they can tap in to definitely (BSFG2)

Such accounts suggested a double-ended invisibility: at one end young black men's experiences/needs were not considered in the commissioning process – and at the other significant assumptions were being made about those needs through the commissioning of 'gangs' and 'mentoring' services. Black young men appear to be hyper-visible when it comes to identifying people who are associated to gangs and/or in need of mentors; but their actual needs, experiences and relationships with trusted adults in their families and wider networks are often invisible in this process. Such reflections chimed with the observations from the case summary review; it was hard to 'see' the individual young people featured in the case files (who were invisible), in the face of dominant assumptions about their needs.

Against this backdrop of invisibility and discriminatory practices, some participants described how services struggled to engage black young men and their families in offers of support. They provided numerous accounts of offering black young men and their families services that were available, knowing that these services were not actually needed. Moreover, that black young men and their families had communicated what they needed, but that they were ill-equipped to meet those needs. Some reflected on how the views of young black men have not informed the services that they are offered; and that a significant gap exists between those in receipt of services and those delivering/designing them:

So, when you say they're DNA or don't want to attend appointments, if you were black and experiencing issues around anti-discriminatory practice and racism, you cannot go and tell your story to the enemy because what you're facing day in day out is structural racism. And then you're put in front of somebody white to explain it and then they're going to justify why you're in the position (BSIP4)

I think probably the biggest challenge is about being clear about what those issues need to be. So again, there's that very real risk, I think, in terms of groups of individuals, largely white men who are 50 like me, making decisions as if there's some kind of knowledge and awareness of what being a 15-year-old black man in Lambeth actually is. (BSIP9)

They will definitely talk about saying they don't want to be stopped and searched, they will definitely say that. I think I can't really answer because I feel we haven't done enough talking to them. (BSIP8)

And the other thing that's coming through quite strongly at the moment is around, again predominantly young black males feeling that their voice isn't heard and the view that they feel the community has of them and what is expected of them. And it's almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy because they believe that that's the perception and that's their only option. (BSFG2)

### Challenging disproportionality

It was evident that some participants had started to take action to address some of the

negative impacts outlined above. In particular they used 'disproportionality' or 'performance monitoring' to frame the steps they had taken to safeguard the welfare of black young men:

We've tried to, or as an organisation tried to ensure that, for me, the most simple thing is having data, having ethnicity recorded and collecting that information. I asked for data on referrals, things like to CAMHS, to EHP Plans, anything that involves added value or a service that I feel that particularly black families are excluded from, I want to see data, I want to see which families get a service and I want to see how does CAMHS and other services respond to black needs. (BSIP5)

So I meet with other [colleagues in a similar role]. One of the key things we talk about is disproportionality about what is happening within our own services, and how we can share good practice, what are the challenges around it? Some of the areas and some of the things that have been raised, the word I was trying to think of was lobbying, but I don't want to use the word lobbying because that sounds a bit political, that's not what we do. But where there is a collective concern, we collectively raise it. (BSIP10)

Such accounts described efforts to use existing structures and systems to highlight and challenge disproportionality in their services; however, it was less clear what actions/impacts occurred as a result or how black children and their families, communities were consulted or involved in this process.

Other participants acknowledged the difficulties that could arise when seeking to challenge discrimination at an institutional level:

Then I think within the organisation which I sit in Children's Social Care, I think for a very long time there has not been the political will to look at this issue, despite the evidence, the overwhelming evidence over years that this is an issue, a very, very serious issue that is impacting the community, impacting children and placing children at serious risk of harm. We've reacted to, constantly reacted to it and seen it individually and seeing it through the lens of criminality...But it needs real strong leadership and vision and commitment, and to be brave. Because you know the political backlash to kind of if they're prioritising Black boys, you know automatically what about White children, what about White boys? To be brave enough and to kind of shut that noise out and focus in that way. (BSIP4)

As will be discussed later in this report, there were occasions where professionals acknowledged a need to create safer contexts for black young men and boys and address the structural drivers of the harm they faced – including racism; however, these were often framed as unachievable aspirations.

### Intersectionality and the safety of young black men

Participants acknowledged how other forms of marginalisation and discrimination intersected with black young men's experiences of service responses and extra-familial harm. Some professionals associated poverty with black young men's exposure to crime and exploitation, but at times this reduced all issues to be about poverty and obscured issues of racism:

How that particularly intersects with young black people and especially boys for economic exploitation like county lines, ...But because of the, so we've started some work with the, so the demographics of Lambeth and to a lesser extent Southwark, mean that the most impoverished children tend to be black, and I think Bangladeshi, so they're not, there's not as many, the demographic isn't as heavily represented across the boroughs... So, simply because that's the demographic we have and they're the most impoverished demographic and there's a really profound inequality in Lambeth and Southwark, those are the children who end up being worked, well I want to say "worked with" but in reality, it's probably "worked on" by the service because they're the most impoverished, from the most deprived areas, the most deprived families. (BSIP7)

Some participants stated that young black men were disproportionately housed in impoverished and marginalised neighbourhoods, and that this in turn increased the risks they faced in public and social spaces:

And poverty. It's the environment that holds you back and makes crime. It's exactly the same when I was growing up, and I come from exactly the same area and got into all sorts. But what's not changed is that it's still predominantly black people living in those environments. The environments are the same, they're the same estates I used to hang about on and grew up on, the problems are the same, family breakdown, drugs, crime, being skint all the time, single parent, I think that's exactly the same... People say knife crime it's a black thing. Well, it's not, it's from the environment that creates that, and it just so happens that most of the people live in that environment are black. (BSIP12)

What it is is middle class gated communities and our young people live in gated communities of poverty, because they can't go beyond their boundaries because they're frightened that they're going to get stabbed or going to be stopped by somebody else. So, we have created a gated community but it's very different from the white gated community that white people have, that they can cycle their bikes and their kids can play on the road. Our children are living in a violent gated community (BSIP5)

A smaller number of participants were able to situate these accounts within wider experiences of structural racism, and thereby make the connection between discriminatory practices in education (for example) and black young men's experiences of poverty:

Yeah, just to reiterate what really everyone else has said, I think poverty especially in Lambeth, has quite a big effect on a pupil's ability to learn whilst at school and on top of that the disproportionate exclusion rates for not only black children but black boys of Caribbean heritage, they are much higher than black boys of African heritage. It still can't be explained so I don't know too much into that but, and once they have been excluded from school then the gateway is open for all types of exploitation to occur... Once they're no longer there, it's either the parent then leaves work which will drive them deeper in to poverty in order to make sure your child isn't out and about on the road, or you go and work to earn to do the best for your family and your child is then able to be groomed into all kinds of trouble. (BSFG2)

Whereas others focused in on the behaviour of black young people themselves:

But if our young people, the way they construct their world, the way they behave, is completely different to other young people and it's just black boys. White boys may have a different way of doing this, but this is something that's endemic in our communities because they don't seem to have another way of dealing with problems (BSIP5)

Poverty and racism were seen to interact with young people's experiences of extra-familial harm - increasing their vulnerability or impacting on the choices and behaviours of black families and communities. Less consideration was given to the ways in which poverty and racism shape the way services respond to black communities, either through the provision of support or through other forms of social care or policing interventions. In this sense there was a disconnect with what professionals felt black boys would say about their communities, notably that they are subject to discriminatory policing practices, and from observations from case reviews that black families seek support, and it is not offered. Suggesting that black boys and their communities are simultaneously over-represented in professionals understanding of harm in Lambeth, and under-supported.

#### [Creating safe spaces for black professionals](#)

As noted previously, participants generally struggled to name racism and to confidently discuss discriminatory practices within group settings. Several participants identified as black

and reflected on their own experiences of racism in their workplaces and in their communities. These experiences shaped their approach to service delivery:

I think that's my experience of working in Lambeth for nearly five years, and the families that I've worked with and when I speak to them. It comes from what the young people in the family are saying to me, and being a social worker working in this borough. I suppose also my lived experience as a Black woman, I know what those risks are in the community. I know what those risks are for me in the community when I'm going about my business in Lambeth as a professional woman, I know what those risks are. I think they're amplified for young Black men. (Reference anonymised for staff member)

You've got a White social worker that hasn't got a clue about a certain lady in a [African country] family and they've got to go into it, and they go into that setup maybe for an assessment, and they see everybody shouting at each other. Really that's just how they talk to each other, it's not shouting, it's not abusive, that's just their culture. Now me as a Black [county of origin removed for anonymity] I can see that and understanding of how various cultures operate and work I think it's a Social Work skill unfortunately that's not taught enough...sometimes that can create havoc for the families that we work in, because you've got somebody that comes from a totally different culture that enters and they've made their mind up about what should be and what shouldn't be. They're not actually understanding that this family actually love that child, and you come and destroy the family because of your own perception. (Reference anonymised for staff member)

It was apparent that trying to safeguard young black men within partnerships and institutions that failed to recognise their needs had taken an emotional toll on some black members of the workforce:

It breaks my heart when people say things like, "It's Lambeth, innit? Lambeth will never change." But actually, no, because then you've written off the borough, you've written off these children, you've written off the families. You've written them off and it's black kids we're writing off. (Reference anonymised for staff member)

It's really difficult for me to answer that because like last week the young person that we're working with, I'm not working with individually, has died...So that's where my head space is where it's just kind of like a child's lost his life that was known to us and I'm not about apportioning blame but what went wrong? I know some of this we can't control, but we have a responsibility here, this child is – that's just shouldn't happen. I get really upset about it actually because it really does upset me. (Reference anonymised for staff member)

...when I was younger, despite how well my mum and dad told me that I was everything anyone else was and maybe even more, was still at times made to feel like I really wasn't. And coming from a secure, two family home where I wasn't subject to arrest, stop and searches or anything like that, if that has an effect on how I think, I think for definite it's going to have an effect on the most vulnerable in our community who are the young males. I think yeah, it would just, I mean they tell you that when you're dealing with them on the street, you know? "Why are you treating me like this? Why are you treating me like this?" Why are we? (Reference anonymised for staff member)

Such accounts suggested the need for safe spaces for black professionals to discuss experiences of race and racism; and moreover, for racism to be explicitly acknowledged and challenged by leadership across the safeguarding partnership. These participant reflections also served to illustrate how service responses can be a source of risk themselves; a matter the research team first observed during the stage 1 case file review. When services respond in ways that further marginalise people in need of support, or intervene in a manner that accelerates young people's contact with criminal justice agencies (for example) services will decrease rather than build safety

## Contextual and structural drivers of harm and sources of safety

When asked to describe challenges faced by young black men and boys in Lambeth, participants most frequently described structural drivers of extra-familial harm. They described discriminatory practices in education, policing and social care, a lack of trust in policing and social workers, cuts in public services, lack of access to housing and employment, and wider experiences of poverty as creating the conditions in which black young men and boys were unsafe in Lambeth.

In these accounts, participants described how such structural drivers created contexts and produced relationships in which young people were at risk of significant harm. These included public spaces in Lambeth, and in educational settings, where young people experienced harm from peers and adults (unconnected to their families). Regarding educational settings, the pupil referral unit in Lambeth was specifically named in interviews (n=3) and both focus groups as being unsafe.

In total, 97 references were made to contextual drivers of extra-familial harm, and 172 references to associated structural drivers. Comparatively, 15 references were made to factors within families that were associated with challenges experienced by black young men, and 11 references discussed individual behaviours/decisions that drove such risks. Structural and contextual factors interplayed with each other to create the conditions in which various forms of extra-familial harm occurred. In this section we explore this relationship, by presenting contextual and structural factors together – as they pertained to specific dynamics of extra-familial harm.

### Harm in extra-familial relationships and contexts

Black young men and boys, and young people in general, were described as facing risks in Lambeth from adults unconnected to their families. Some participants believed these adults had links to 'organised crime' and groomed young black men for that purpose, whereas others were unable to detail the nature of these relationships and interactions:

and we've got to remember here now that some of these big men that we're talking about, they're grooming these kids. They're grooming these kids. So, from a young person kind of perspective, it's hard. That's why I would say I can't say hand on heart that our black young men are safe. (BSIP2)

I think it's probably about creating almost double risk for the young people who are involved. So, you've obviously then got the risk of arrest, prosecution, and processing through the criminal justice system, but then I think the risk of punishment for not obeying the unwritten rules around that business is probably more intense as well. (BSIP9)

On occasion participants described structural factors such as poverty as accelerating or enabling these relationships:

There were known people on the estates who were the controllers, he'd go pass them every day and as he got bigger, "A whole little five pounds my man" and eventually he's asked to do something, and it becomes custom and practice. If you wanted new trainers or if your mum's light's off, it's not a hard thing to do, "Carry this for me", "Bring this across there" and they just gradually groom them. (BSIP5)

Participants also stated that black young men and boys, and young people more generally, were exposed to risk in their peer relationships:



Like some of them feel unsafe simply because they have friends, because they used to live in that area, "I can't go back there because my friend is connected to something so I can't, I don't feel safe in my area (FG1)

Something we seem to be missing in Lambeth is a team or professionals who can directly engage with specific groups or opposing groups and basically address issues or tensions within the groups and the families (FG2)

But long-term in the future is that these kids need to just realise that they're exactly the same. They've got all the same issues, they've got all the same interests, they're just exactly the same, they just live down the road from each other. At some point someone needs to work on maybe showing them what their similarities are, not what their differences are. (BSIP12)

For the most part participants didn't appear to know how these relationships developed, what young people 'gained' if at all from these interactions, and whether they were built on superficial, coerced or trusting bonds (all of which would be relevant for supporting young people). While participants couldn't detail the nature of the peer or adult relationships in which black young men and boys encountered harm, they largely described these interactions as occurring in public space locations where young people spent their time.

#### Public space locations

Numerous participants stated that young black men, and sometimes young people in general, were unsafe when spending time in public spaces in Lambeth:

...when you actually get talking to [young people], there's so many areas of the borough they can't go to. They can't utilise public transport and then you've got the issue of the parents then have to pay for a taxi... (FG2)

If I was a young person in Lambeth, depending on your circumstance, your movement is going to be quite restricted. (BSIP8)

I don't think there – I don't know, and there might be, but I don't know of any safe spaces in the community for Black boys. (BSIP4)

Some participants named specific locations/services where young people had come to harm, but none were named thematically across interviews and focus groups:

Last summer a boy who'd come to see us, 21, walked out of the park and got stabbed twice. You can be in a safe space, but then you leave that safe space and then what? If you can get murdered at a youth club like the boy at Marcus Lipton, where is safe? I don't think anywhere is safe really. Maybe safety in numbers. Yeah, for them it's safety in numbers, I think. (BSIP12)

Interviewer: where are black young men and boys safe in Lambeth? So thinking about places you've possibly potentially identified.

Respondent: I don't they're safe anywhere. I don't think they're safe because if you look at 2019. Where was the place? A young man is running for his life into a youth centre and the people then followed him in there. (BSIP2)

In both interviews and focus groups participants drew upon their own experiences of raising black young men and boys in Lambeth to articulate their concerns:

.... I think when I ask my nephews, I remember the early days of this whole postcode wars, when it started, and I was speaking to my nephew. I think they're in their 30s now, and they were saying, "We can't go to those places." I'm like, "Don't be silly, what are you talking about? I can go anywhere, back in my day I could go anywhere it wasn't an issue." They told me, "We can't just go," and I'm like, "Don't be silly, why can't you just go?" They said, "Oh we'll get beat up." (FG1)

I've been out with my sons in Croydon and we've gone shopping. This must have been about 2016, I don't know, we went to buy something and I'm talking to my son and we're walking and he sees this other kid and it's almost like they lock eyes but the way they lock eyes, you know, you would think it's going to kick off any second but then they keep it moving. I said to him, "Son, what was that about? Do you know that young man?" He said, "No, I don't know him." I said, "Why were you looking at him like that?" He was like, "XXX, it's just my face. I've got a screwface." It's those kinds of things that make me feel that young people are not safe. (BSIP2)

Participants identified specific structural factors, such as a lack of community resources, positive activities, and trusted adults in public spaces, as creating hostile conditions in which interpersonal risks in public spaces could escalate:

But I'm a Lambeth child myself okay, so I've seen things in the area, I've been very fortunate to have a community around me where there was a community approach growing up and there was a lot more resources that were accessible. I feel that there's been a lot of budget cuts, those things that aren't there anymore that I had when I was growing up in Lambeth (FG1)

But that's demand, and this is what I'm trying to say, I know that obviously cuts and all of that, it will continue to affect and shape the services that we offer, but I think something that today I think we agree on, is that we really need more support for our youth in the community. I think it's about being out there. If we leave the streets, if we're just in the office it won't work in terms of contextual safeguarding, so I just wanted to share that, because I think my experience in my previous local authority in that sense was much better. (FG1BO1)

The impact of austerity is evident in the excerpts above. Previous sections of this report have highlighted how poverty more generally appears associated to young people's experiences of extra-familial harm in Lambeth. Moreover, that services available in the borough do not necessarily respond to the actual needs/requests of black young men and their families. Stretched local authority budgets have likely exacerbated both of these factors. If families are living in poverty, reduced funding will impact the extent to which local authorities can provide a buffer for this. If funding is limited, this will impact the process of commissioning and sustaining support services.

One further structural driver was identified as being of relevance to safety in public spaces. Participants named how a lack of trust in policing left black young men unprotected at best, and at worse fearful of the police they encountered as well as other peers/adults who were causing them harm:

If it's not peer on peer violence, it's the police. As a black man or a black young person if it's not your peers you have to deal with the institution which is the police. It's almost like if they don't get you, they will. It becomes extremely difficult for young people to even get to school...I haven't done a survey but I don't think many young men feel safe in the borough (BSIP2)

Like I said before I don't think our young men are safe because either they're not safe from one another or they're not safe from the police. I (BSIP12)

Whereas one participant stated that low levels of street-based policing was associated to risks black young men experienced in public spaces.

#### [The role of education and risks with the PRU](#)

In every interview and in both focus groups, educational settings were identified as contexts of harm for black young men and boys, and education policies /practices more broadly created associated structural drivers. This relationship was described in three ways.

Firstly, black young men and boys were described as being disproportionately excluded from mainstream education in Lambeth:

... I just think that the impact of those decisions made from the education element, and we know that school exclusions affect Black boys more than any other group don't we. (FG1)

... okay, so in the pupil referral that I work in at the moment, probably 5% are white boys, the rest are, of the males that are in the school, the majority are black. (FG2)

Secondly, and on an associated point, multiple participants described how black young men with ASD and/or special educational needs received very late diagnosis from services; and that their behaviour instead was interpreted as disruptive and problematic by those in education resulting in exclusions rather than support:

I would say a good 80% of my caseload are young black males, quite a high proportion of them have an undiagnosed additional learning need because they've either had poor behaviour at school and been excluded or they've just been missed and forgotten (FG2)

... So, it was an NHS manager who raised it, that access to assessment for ADHD and conduct disorder for black boys was 18 months slower than for their white counterparts. And what this did was it delayed support and intervention beyond the point where they were then in secondary school. So, they moved in to the windows of exclusion from education, rather than of having, rather than the transition from primary to secondary school with that, with their needs already understood and some effort to meet them set up. (BSIP7)

Finally, multiple participants described the PRU in Lambeth as an unsafe context:

For me that's the most important thing, they've missed education, they're out of education, they've been sent to a PRU. Now, most parents are absolutely anxious, they believe by going to a PRU, their children's life chances, education chances are diminishing but also their life chances. Most of the boys who are killed have had a connection to the PRU. (BSIP5)

I think a lot of these young people have been excluded from school. There is only one pupil referral unit in the whole of Lambeth and that is in one area of Lambeth and these kids don't feel safe going to these areas. They've got to cross through different areas of the borough to get to the Pupil Referral Unit, they then become school refusers and then trying to get them in to college with no qualifications is really hard (FG2)

...noticing that there have been young men who have been out of education for quite some time and education people will say, "Oh, they're on roll," which is a PRU, which for me is a children's prison. Then I see that parents are then making a decision, which I think is the right decision to some extent to say, "Actually, I'm not sending my child there," and then they're out of education for this long period of time. (BSIP2)

All three of these issues were evident in the case files reviewed during stage 1 of this project. A significant number of young men in the case files had been excluded from mainstream education in ways that suggested education could be a source of risk, as well as protection, in Lambeth. A number of young men in the case files had suspected ASD or learning difficulties or had received a very late diagnosis despite parents seeking support at an early stage. In two case summaries parents were recorded as refusing to send their children to Park Campus due to fears for their safety.

### Sources of safety and support

As noted above, most participants struggled to identify any context of safety for black young men in Lambeth. Nonetheless, some were able to describe where black young men access support and safety within (the aforementioned) constrained circumstances.

Open-access and community-based activities were referred to as settings where black young men could access support and advice; however, many participants questioned the

extent to which such support alone provided 'safety' or 'safeguarded the welfare' of young black men:

It's difficult to say if you safeguard, if you've saved and if you've had a role in it. We've lost seven young men from XXX project over the years through gang violence, some of them I knew since they were 6 years old, so we didn't safeguard them... so I don't know if you can claim that you've safeguarded someone. We just do what we do. We do our best. (BSIP12)

I think for me like the one thing that I hear most from young people which is what I mentioned earlier, is around somewhere to go and something to do that is safe. It's around that youth provision, but we're not in the – lots of these conversations have been about those young people who are in the thick of it and whatever, but I think at that more targeted early intervention level, that's what we hear (FG1BO2)

What does it look like? Is it for some young people they're into music so do they want studio space? With studio space comes drama. Is it football? Lambeth Tigers, for example, is a very big football club in the borough that have been around for years, but do they have the spaces and the facilities to play their matches safely? I don't even know what a safe space looks like. (BSIP2)

A small number of professionals reflected that black young men and boys found safety in relationships with peers:

So, they make themselves safe by remaining in their group, now you want to call it "peer group" or "gangs" or whatever, but they create their own safety within their social and environmental spaces, they create their own safety (BSIP5)

... Maybe safety in numbers. Yeah, for them it's safety in numbers, I think. (BSIP12)

Two participants describe how informal community networks provided a source of safety, particularly for the parents and carers of black young men and boys; and the impact of losing those networks when families were moved out of Lambeth to protect them from physical risk:

I think families and communities go to and use the familial community support that they are most comfortable with, and we have to recognise that for a lot of the population in Lambeth that will be a faith group (BSIP9)

Because the family become moved to a different borough without the support, without the family networks and the vulnerabilities are just going with them as such, instead of dealing with them within the borough. (FG2)

Whereas others described safety via community networks as an ambition rather than a reality in Lambeth.

While not necessarily framed as a context of safety, multiple professionals described efforts of families to protect black young men. This included: seeking support from services (but not necessarily being heard):

Yeah, I think the majority of parents I speak to, the parents of black boys, they find they've been asking for help almost back as far as primary school for their kids with their additional needs and they just feel like they don't get listened to. It's almost like they feel like they're, like an annoying parent, a pestering parent, "No one's listening to me". We don't get, I think they find sometimes that they don't get seen as the expert person in that child. They've raised that child, that know that child best and actually I think sometimes that gets forgotten and they just don't get listened to. And then also I've got parents that are so overwhelmed with, they're actually scared to let their child out of the house because either they've been arrested several times, they've been stop and searched several times and they feel their children are being victimised and treated as perpetrators rather than as victims when they are subject to crime. (BSFG2)

Furthermore, interview, focus group and case review data featured examples of parents moving their children out of Lambeth and sometimes out of the country for their own protection; and as noted previously, parents challenging decisions from professionals – such as refusing to send their children to Lambeth’s pupil referral unit.

Sources and contexts of safety in Lambeth therefore appeared limited. Moreover, when asked what support was available in the borough participants overwhelmingly described services and interventions, rather than relationships, networks and places. 72 references were made to support via service/intervention, compared to 14 descriptions of safe contexts. The dynamic, and the target of these services, is the next finding explored in this report.

### The target of services and the source of challenges: a mismatch

When asked what support was available for black young men and boys in Lambeth participants listed a range of statutory interventions, commissioned services and support pathways.

I think, I won’t be able to name them all, because Lambeth is very lucky in terms of the actual resources that it has (BSIP10)

... and what we do is we signpost out to anyone that can support, so that could be partly St. Giles to help reduce things, it could be Bay Tree to try and support people in terms of mental health. It can be something like Welco in terms of that, they help support single fathers, they help support families with a general round of things. (BSIP8)

...primarily I would say police, social care, then other social care and other organisations within the council, so things like the Youth Offending Service. (BSIP9)

P1... we’ve got the Becoming a Man Project that is a pilot project that Lambeth is involved with. We’ve got Football Beyond Borders, there’s CHIPS and so different kind of outside, voluntary agencies that we work with or agencies that [schools] pay for...

P2... in YOS [they have] speech and language therapist ... CAMHS, substance misuse practitioner ... you’ve got Alford House and you’ve got Marcus Lipton that we can link up with and if we refer them in for a NRM then sometimes they can get linked in to SRS and then I know that we also have referred to Safer London and I think London Gang Exit as well and St Giles but I’m not sure whether the contract still exists with St Giles and Lambeth any more. So, yeah, and we do link in with some of the boxing, I know there’s boxing gyms that we’ve got that we can, we’ve linked in with young people. (FG2)

As noted earlier this report, many of these examples did not speak to any direct needs or experiences of *black young men* and were available to young people generally in the borough.

Beyond this challenge, services listed in interviews/focus groups, and referenced in case summaries, didn’t appear to target the challenges and risks described by participants and illustrated by the case studies. Services/interventions were focused on awareness-raising about risks associated with street-based violence and exploitation, mentoring support for individual young people, diversionary and positive activities, and advice/courses for parents on the nature of exploitation and boundary setting. Whereas, as detailed in the previous section, the greatest challenges facing young black men in Lambeth were described as contextual (their lack of safety in public spaces, violence from peers, exploitation from adults and exposure to significant risks in the public referral unit); and structural (harmful/discriminatory practices by policing, social care and education, lack of access to housing and employment, under-resourcing of informal and community-based support).

At various points during interviews and focus groups, some participants reflected on this mismatch:

I know at times, I think we're focusing on self-actualisation in the sense of, "Let's get you on a college course, and let's get you on a diversionary." But actually, this young person's worry is, "I have a three grand drug debt and I'm going to be killed if I don't pay it, or my parents are going to be killed or my sister is." We're not dealing with that, we're offering them a college place (FG1)

So actually once they're, if they're asking for help, there's almost limited things that we can actually do which I think is quite frustrating as practitioners. Because you want to try and show that you are listening but actually it's very difficult to then put in to practice. (FG2)

Others identified the contextual or structural interventions that *they* believed were required; but they often framed this as unachievable or unrealistic:

Undo all the damage done by austerity. Sort the schools out. Get a much more equal education system. Stop selective schools. Get a much more proper mix of an area. Stop middle class people colonising the best schools and taking them over. More money in social services, Sure Start, things like that. Much more support for parents. Get police back on the streets. Better training for police as well (BSIP12)

And also, I think for me what would resolve the matter, I know it's not realistic and it's not going to happen, but it would be to abolish all PRUs basically. Because for me, they are breeding grounds for exploitation (FG2BO1)

These accounts gave an impression of an overwhelmed workforce. A workforce that is in many senses paralysed or stuck as they are: aware of the challenges (albeit not all) facing black young men and boys; feeling unable to address those challenges; and therefore, referring black young men and their families into services that fail to meet their needs. In various ways professionals described not having the tools to do the job that is needed, so instead they were making the job fit the tools; a consequence being that the situations facing young people are not being fixed. Such a process is likely to create an even greater distance between statutory services and those in need of support.

Sometimes we have like a revolving door where young people come in, we may make a referral to St. Giles and hope for the best, but in a few months' time you might get another referral either because they haven't engaged or something else. (FG1)

If I'm really honest, a lot of them tell me they don't think it will change which is really sad. But at the minute like a lot of them don't see a way to change it or hope of changing it. Especially in regards to the serious youth violence that's occurring, they are in it and they don't see a way out of it. (FG2BO2)

We want to put support services around them. We want to be able to be in a position where they've come to the realisation that, "This is not going to work for me and I want to do something different," and then you have some young men, you can see they're making a real effort to do something different but they're still getting murdered. (BSIP2)

So then they end up saying, "No I'm not prepared to move because I'm not prepared to lose that one thing that I have that makes my other children safe to some degree and financially will I ever get a secure tenancy again?" So then you're back in the original problem, "You didn't sort my housing issue out," and then we're back to offering a college place, and it feels like this cycle...and I know I'm not addressing the real issue... (FG1)

These accounts describe a situation in which services currently available in Lambeth have been developed that are not rooted in a dialogue with communities or aligned to their needs. It may be there was a point previously when this did occur, but services haven't moved on

since and now appear stuck in a cycle of identifying specific needs (housing, school exclusions) and responding with services that don't meet those needs (mentoring, knife crime awareness projects).

### Partnerships that are prioritised and partnerships that are needed

When asked who their key partners were in building safety for black young men and boys in Lambeth participants were more likely to list organisations/services and professional colleagues (n=67 references), than they were to name the young men themselves (n=22 references) and/or their families (n=31 references) and wider communities (n=26 references):

So that's where I'd say that my experience, where the information I'm getting it from, and also from working with partners now, so working with Children's Social Care, working with the police, working with Probation, those are all partners that are feeding into what are the issues that are being discussed at the moment (BSIP10)

I think the most effective way I find now is really you've got to engage with social services. I've said that for a few years. You've got to have so many people around the table. In my experience most young men involved in gangs or have ended up dead, seriously injured or doing double digit jail sentences, they've all been known to social services, so to me that's where you start. (BSIP12)

For me, some multi agency partners, some of whom are on this call, police, health, YOS are really instrumental in helping increasing safety. (FG2)

Partnerships between professional agencies had been used to implement new processes and procedures and facilitated pathways for information-sharing and referrals.

...our analyst has done a lovely piece of work on deprivation and where the young people reside. So we're going to pull all the partners together to look at what does this mean for us, what should our response be to those areas? Let's get all partners together and look at what can we deliver in regards to prevention intervention and also disruption. We're also then going to look at crime types that are taking place, where they're taking place, the age of the young people, the days, the times, again to try and target and task into those locations. Because it's about how do we prevent those younger children being groomed and exploited (FG1)

Basically, we're only as good as the information that we have. The next phase now, I had a meeting this morning, is about actually the partnership sharing their information because if the partners are not sharing their information, you don't really have a full picture of what's going on for that child and that young person (BSIP2)

I think having the pathway and we have had some time now, especially in, it's a few boroughs, Lambeth being one of them where children who are, who once upon a time would have been committing a crime are now treated as the victim of exploitation, modern slavery, trafficking, whatever it may be. I think 10 years ago, if you find a 14-year-old in Hertfordshire with I don't know, however many bags of cocaine, they would have been arrested and that's that. But nowadays we kind of, there's more partnership work. I think it's been well advertised that these things are going on and children are carrying things and doing things that they wouldn't otherwise be doing of their own volition. (FG2)

While participants seemed to find these processes helpful, they appeared to only serve improving communication between professionals as opposed to improving communication with young people, families and communities. This is notable given that in other ways (and noted elsewhere in this report) many participants acknowledged that far more work was required to build a dialogue, and collaborative relationship, with young people, their families, and wider communities.

Participants offered an inconsistent account of the specific role played by children's social care within these partnership approaches. Namely whether the role of social work was to: assess and refer people onto other services; intervene with parenting; undertake direct work with young people; advocate on behalf of young people and families to challenge structural harm and secure the services/responses they require; and/or intervene the contexts where harm was occurring:

How are we talking to young people? What is our intervention? Are we commissioners or do we actually intervene? I see social work as a form of intervention not commissioning everything out. So, there's been a lot of call out about institutional racism and what role do we as children's social care play into that wider system... I think for children's social care our issue is our understanding of complex safeguarding and when we look at the wider family history and the dynamics of that, I think that's a problem for us. I think we often get held holding the baby when it comes to contextual safeguarding. (BSIP2)

The reason why I'm saying that is it the social worker's role when any referral comes in whatever, is to protect that child. That protection we try and do safety in terms of trying to maybe move you out the borough or whatever, but I think in terms of creating safety within the local authority, that's a wider role outside of Social Care from Community Safety to whatever orders in terms of what actually can be put in place. (BSIP8)

So, I think going back to what XXX was saying, I think you can assess families to death, but in a way, the Child Assessment Team they wrote down the prescription to say this is what that child needs. But some of that needs to be outward facing, so whilst the internal services have got a space, really, we should be able to tap into all of these community resources. (FG2)

Especially as Social Care because I think we've become complicit and we need to be the agent of change, we need to change that conversation, and that narrative...what is core to us as social workers is social justice that's a part of our value system, and we need to kind of bring that to the fore and be looking at this context. I think that there needs to be a real commitment to do things differently and that includes the police, stop and search, how they police particular communities, how they interact with the young Black men. The schools absolutely need, I mean it's beyond the change of the curriculum, it is about teachers' biases. (BSIP4)

Within these accounts there were opportunities to rethink and reframe the role of children's social care in building safety for black young men. Some participants clearly wanted to change their approach and refocus their attention on both contextual and structural drivers of harm. However, as the above excerpts also show, this view was not shared – and some participants saw extra-familial drivers (whether they were contextual or structural) as being a matter for community safety partnerships, policing or wider community resources.

A number of participants named the same Tulse Hill locality meeting as an example of a locally based partnership between agencies and community organisations that was being used to identify concerns and plan responses:

I was just going to say in Lambeth as well they have these partnership meetings through the localities and they're actually really helpful because you get the feedback from the local area in to the meeting that as professionals we wouldn't always get. So, actually like, I don't know, I go to one of them, like there's a football team coach there and he feeds back quite a lot to the primary schools and everything so actually you get the feedback and I think that's key to know what's going on in the borough, where the tensions are and things like that. Because people on the ground will know it better than us really. (BSFG2)

However, not enough detail on these meetings was provided for the researchers to make further comment on their effectiveness at this stage in the project; further clarity was also needed about how this meeting connected to young people's planning work being led by children's social care.



A few participants acknowledged that they needed to work in partnership with the families and wider communities of black young men, and aspired to achieve this:

...also our community and voluntary services, people who are more influential in communities as well to advocate for communities. But then I have to go down again and actually we need to be talking to parents and carers and families, they are the people who are going to be around with this child in 10 years' time when they're young adults. So I know it sounds a bit like fluffy, but I do think we should just go back to the things that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility. (BSIP10)

So there's something about parents, about how we support parents and how we're not looking at them in that negative light and how actually we're trying to support them. A lot of these parents want to do the right thing by their kids but the system, which is a complicated system, has shackled them...So when we say key partners if we're talking about key partners in the way that statutory key partners in that sense, it's your usual suspects. But your usual suspects haven't been able to get it right and it's been the usual suspects for such a long time so maybe this is an opportunity to talk about actually do you have the right key partners and what is the definition of a key partner? So there's conversations to be had really. Think about it though. In my family now it doesn't make sense you telling me that the social worker is a key partner, if I had a social worker, because the key partner in that sense, it might not be. It might be my vicar at the church or it might be the imam, or it might be my aunty Flo that is a better key partner ... (BSIP2)

Now looking at strategies and ways to look at how we reach out to the hard to engage people of the community. I think it's a work in progress, still no answers in regards to that, but if you're going to try to change papers, you've got to be community led, community based, so you have to be part of the community, that's what I'd say. (BSIP8)

There was also an acknowledgement that professionals needed to work more collaboratively with black young men themselves. Some offered accounts of the difference that this was making in their efforts to engage young people in support, and mitigate the risk that their response could do more harm than good:

...I have seen evidence of risk reduction is when social workers are utilising simple things like filling in a form or doing a college application, to actually spend time with the young people but doing something out there rather than being confined in an office or a living room talking about problems and what families need to do to increase the safety of the children (FG2)

Because one young person said, "XXX you need to calm yourself, I'm not worried, I'm all right." And I had to, I had to listen to what he was saying to me. Then saying, "So this is what you want me to be saying to everybody?" And he's like, "Yes, this is what I need from you, this is what I will do to keep myself safe." He was saying to me, "You need to stop worrying." ... And I was saying, "I'm not going to stop worrying," but I do think what has happened, this is my anxiety, my worry, I think is impacting in how we're safeguard and safety planning. We have to, we need a system in place to, there is a space where we can reflect that, reflect and hold it and understand what that is. Because I think too often that is driving some of these decisions that are actually quite punitive and exacerbate, they don't reduce the risk at all (BSIP4)

And I think there has been a reticence in terms of a kind of complete understanding, or even an attempt to get a better understanding of what your average 15-year-old black kid in Lambeth wants and believes and feels, and that isn't going to be answered by talking to me, if that make sense. I guess what needs to happen is involvement in those consultative processes needs to be meaningful... It's actually having the conversations with them about what their aspirations and what the barriers to those aspirations are (BSIP9)

However, most participants were less clear about the best approach to achieving such partnerships, or what they may entail. Some focused-on partnerships that would facilitate disclosures from young people and wider information sharing from 'communities' or families

for example, rather than describe partnerships that aimed to address the structural and contextual challenges outlined previously:

This is a guy who, don't tell him a name, give him a snippet of a scenario and he will tell you exactly who that is. He will tell you about their brother, their father, their grandfather, their sister, the next-door neighbour. Somebody with so much intelligence and so much good relationships within that part of the community that knows young people and young people and families trust, why wouldn't you say that's a key partner (BSIP2)

Social services, the YOS team and the children's families. I think that collection. There's always a lot more people involved but the people that you need to have the child protection meeting as we usually do, they are ultimately who can and is able to put a safety plan in place. The family is required because no matter how good and robust your safety plan is, if the parent doesn't enforce it, doesn't call police when the child goes missing, doesn't tell the social worker then it's redundant, it's not worth anything. We ultimately have to have them. (FG2)

Some participants held the view that restorative or reconciliatory work between statutory agencies and black young men would be required for such partnerships to flourish:

I think the bit that is still in need of further development is creating that effective partnership with communities, and I think, I'm going to be, it's not bold, it's not brave, it's kind of a bit bold, but I think there are chinks of light in terms of accepting the communities are not there to be done to. It's about working with communities to identify positive achievement, and assist them in achieving it themselves. (BSIP9)

So I've had young people basically feel like they've been criminalised because of their ethnicity, not necessarily because they've done something wrong. Of course there's been an event which is why I'm in their house, which is why I'm talking to them, but I think it's interesting to hear you've got young males that feel that they've been labelled already, so then when you're a social worker going in, again what's always been said where you work with the police, I've had the no comment before. There's a lot of barriers that we need to break down when it comes to working with some of our young people because they've already got these walls up or built before we've even arrived. (FG1)

For me, it's about how do we work with the communities in order to challenge the constructions they have, i.e. police "pigs", the social workers they're "crap and useless", so it's about how do we work with specific communities to work with and challenge any preconceived notions they might have. Because ideally, whoever is at risk needs to be [connection problem] now. I think something for Lambeth specifically we need to look at is exploring restorative justice as a key theme when it comes to offending in Lambeth. I don't know that, if we have such an approach and also I think we really need trauma informed practice training across multi agency professionals including the police. So, basically when people are being arrested or coming to police attention, they can have the perception of something is different here, I hope I'm making sense. (FG2BO2)

It is important to note that in these accounts partnership working was organised around supporting black young people and communities to overcome 'preconceived notions' or 'feelings' of discrimination and being supported to recognise 'positive achievements', rather than reconciliation being grounded in accountability for, and recognition of, discriminatory and harmful practices.

Ultimately, such accounts suggested a need for relationships to be built with black young men, their families and wider communities; relationships from which partnerships, collaboration and co-production could grow. Given the challenges previously outlined in respect of a mismatch between services and needs and racism within organisations and service delivery, which in-turn undermined efforts to engage young people in support, multiple factors require attention for such relationships to take root.

## Defining success

The prioritisation of professional partnerships and processes, above partnerships with, and outcomes for, black young men, was also evident in the way participants described success in Lambeth. When asked what was currently working well in Lambeth, participants largely responded by detailing processes or pathways they were using to respond to extra-familial harm.

I think that we're clear about what needs to be done, there are mechanisms for it, so there's numerous panels that review children and young people. There's always the safeguarding, there's lots of policies and procedures out there and there's good practice from other areas as well (BSIP10)

Also, as a partnership we've agreed to review our MASH, the processes there, so we've agreed that work is ongoing now. We're doing a piece of work now around information sharing and the strategic director is now chairing a subgroup with the police around contextual safeguarding and the issues there. (BSIP2)

There is a six weekly panel chaired by XXX called Reducing Serious Youth Violence Panel and I know that XXX can have quick access to St Giles referrals if a young man is discussed at his panel as well.... And also I would say what is working well is the implementation of Young Person Safety Plans in Lambeth. So, it's an alternative to a child protection plan, it is in essence a child protection plan but referred to as a "Young Person Safety Plan" which I guess, the way that it, as I understand it is sold is that we are telling the parents that it is not their, the harm is coming from outside of the home, it's extra familial harm and we're recognising that parents are doing their best and we're asking them to work with the professional network, it's less punitive than let's say a child protection plan is. And that appears to be working well, parents seem to be perceptive to the difference. (FG2)

It wasn't clear how these responses increased safety for black young men and boys specifically, or what their impact been for young people generally. Moreover, all these processes seemed to target individual young people and their families – and not the structural or contextual factors that participants identified as warranting attention. For example, participants didn't describe that these pathways/processes resulted in successes with: addressing the disproportionate exclusion of black young men from Lambeth schools; building safety in the pupil referral unit; building relationships with the communities and families who were trying to protect black young men from harm. As was the case with services/interventions available in Lambeth – a mismatch was evident between where professional energies had focused and where community needs existed. Some participants vocalised this challenge:

I find that we do a lot of chat but not a lot of doing. We know what our issues are. We know what our problems are. The police will say, "Yeah, yeah, we're going to do this training and we're not going to see children as criminals," but you don't see that change. You don't see that shift. "We are going to share information," but you don't see that shift in the information being shared in a meaningful and timely way. We talk about not treating parents as criminals or bad parents but we're still not seeing that shift (BSIP2)

## Conclusions and recommendations

The commissioning of this study is an important institutional step towards change. The fact that so many professionals wanted to participate (more than we could accommodate), and that they provided such an honest account of the challenges they were facing, provides a critical foundation for taking this work forward. The contribution from research participants have offered a perspective on a) what is happening to young black men in Lambeth; b) what Lambeth already has in place upon which to develop effective response; and c) what

Lambeth might need to do in order to achieve change. We summarise each of these factors in conclusion of this report and use them to recommend next steps.

### Conclusion: What is happening to black young men in Lambeth?

According to the professionals who participated in this study, structural and contextual factors are driving black young men's exposure to extra-familial harm in Lambeth. Several public places in Lambeth, and the borough's pupil referral unit, are viewed as contexts where black young men are at risk of significant harm from both adults and peers. A series of structural factors, particularly discriminatory school exclusions and police enforcement, limited housing options, and broader experiences of poverty were identified as contributing to, and driving, these risks.

The accounts offered by participants suggest that institutional racism impacts the ability of services to support black young men Lambeth. Examples given included services in which black young men: were disproportionately excluded from mainstream education; unable to access timely support for ASD and learning difficulties; were disproportionality stopped and searched by the police; struggled to secure employment; and had needs and experiences that were invisible to professionals. Participants identified a range of services that had been commissioned, or were available, in Lambeth. Few of these services appeared to meet the needs of young black men or addressed the challenges that they face.

Institutional racism, wrongly targeted services, and a range of severe contextual and structural harms appear to have combined to create significant risks for black young men without much in place to mitigate them.

### Conclusion: What does Lambeth have in place to build safety for young black men?

This project identified a number of opportunities upon which Lambeth could improve safety for black young men.

Firstly, Lambeth have commissioned this study, and professionals have participated. This is a significant first step in achieving meaningful change.

Furthermore, many participants could identify both the structural and contextual challenges that black young men are facing in Lambeth. They were also able to identify some of services that are required to address these challenges. Having staff within a multi-agency partnership who are aware of what is required, and motivated to respond differently is an opportunity to be harnessed and scaled across the workforce.

Some community organisations have had a presence in Lambeth for decades. At present their contribution is often described in terms of direct support to individual young people or sharing information with statutory agencies. Such organisations have far more to offer than that by way of understanding, and shaping, the communities of which they are a part; and offering a source of safety for black young men and their families.

The parents of young black men have clearly sought support from services. They have identified what they need and have contacted professionals in a timely fashion; they have also identified which service responses might be unsafe for their children and pushed against these when required. This level of engagement presents numerous opportunities for Lambeth to review what support they offer to parents, how they offer that support, who provides it and when.

### Conclusion: What does Lambeth need to make progress?

To build on the opportunities identified in this study, and improve safety for black young men, Lambeth needs to develop its response in the following ways.

Firstly, statutory and professional organisations in Lambeth need meaningful relationships with black young men, their families and wider communities. Through these relationships Lambeth professionals will better understand what black young men need and will be able to work alongside them to co-produce services that address those needs. Co-produced services seem critical at this juncture; such an approach can reduce the likelihood that Lambeth will commission services that are then offered to black young men regardless of their needs or experiences.

Secondly, the children's social care workforce, and the wider multi-agency partnership in Lambeth need support to develop a shared understanding of racism, its impact on service development/delivery and on the safety of black young men. While some participants found ways to share the impact of racism, few were able to describe the process itself, and fewer still had a clear language to name it. Group settings are particularly important in this respect, given that the research team heard more candid accounts of racism in individual interviews than in focus groups. As such, professionals need safe institutional spaces where they can reflect on and discuss racism and its effect on their practice and wider services.

A small number of social care participants were able to articulate their role as agents of change. Other described ambitions that would require a change in how they perceived of social care, or themselves, but didn't appear to believe that such a role was possible. To overcome this inconsistency, and demonstrate leadership in this field, children's social care needs to develop a clear understanding of their role in responding to extra-familial harm, and in building safety for black young men.

Finally, and associated to the above three points, Lambeth's multi-agency partnership needs to develop a shared value base. A current value-base wasn't evident in the accounts offered by participants. For example, we didn't hear that 'in Lambeth we believe X and because of that we respond with Y'. As such, the research team weren't clear on whether the service responses being described align to Lambeth's values, an individual's values, both or neither. It is possible that by building a shared understanding of racism, better articulating the role(s) of social care as agents of change, and undertaking a process of co-production with black young men (their families and communities), shared values will emerge and be embedded.

## Recommendations

At this stage in the project the research team recommend that Lambeth Safeguarding Children's Partnership:

1. Undertake a series of activities with black young men, their families and wider communities to co-produce a service offer that meets their needs and addresses the challenges that they face<sup>29</sup>. As part of this, work is required to understand whether the challenges identified by professionals in this report are the same as those identified by black young men and their families. Through this process new partnerships can be defined, and measures of success jointly designed.
2. Create safe, courageous, reflective spaces for professionals to think about what racism is, what it does and, what is in their, and their institutions', agency to change, as well as creating a safe, reflective, spaces solely for Black professionals.
3. Map all commissioned services currently available in Lambeth in response to extra-familial harm and review what issues/challenges they are designed to address. In the

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<sup>29</sup> The University of Bedfordshire has submitted a bid to the Samworth Foundation as part of a wider funding application to support their potential contribution to this work.

process consider whether the factors identified in this report are attended to or if some commissioned work needs to be reviewed in the future.

4. Develop, and make explicit, a shared value base upon which they respond to extra-familial harm, and build safety for black young men in general
5. Review the safety of black young men in Park Campus pupil referral unit – and if required initiate a welfare-based assessment of that context and any associated plan to provide an alternative meaningful educational/provision for young people.
6. Review and address the finding that black young men are being disproportionately excluded from Lambeth schools, and not receiving timely diagnosis of ASD or learning difficulties, as a *safeguarding concern*. At present this issue appears associated to black young men's experiences of extra-familial harm and need to be addressed as such.
7. Identify the numbers of families who have requested to leave Lambeth due to extra-familial risks but have been unable to do so due to concerns regarding loss of tenancy. Identify whether this barrier is locally, or nationally, driven and work to resolve it – while communicating your awareness of this issue to the workforce

We also recommend that Lambeth children's social care:

1. Review and articulate the role of social care in creating safety for young black men. As part of this consider how social workers use existing services, partnerships, and processes to achieve safety – including partnerships with black young men; and identify how this role could challenge partner agencies, and leverage change, for black young men.
2. Assess levels of professional anxiety being held within its workforce in respects of responding to the significant violence impacting some young people in the borough. In doing so put in place support measures that enable professionals can offer a considered and appropriate response to young people they are supporting
3. Equip its workforce to support black young men and their families; using supervision, other reflective spaces, and quality assurance processes to identify and address racism within service responses in a timely fashion
4. Build the capability of its workforce to offer an intersectional response to harm, violence and discrimination. For example: developing poverty-aware practice amongst social workers; supporting social workers to challenge the decisions of partner agencies on the grounds of racism or other forms of oppression; naming, and addressing, the impact of having no-recourse-to-public-funds on families in need of support.

We also recommend that the findings of this report are considered alongside other work underway in Lambeth to develop responses to extra-familial harm, and to review services provided to black young men, to ensure one integrated approach going forward.