Evaluation of the Bristol Collaboration to design a service model for children, young people and families affected by extrafamilial harm and exploitation

Report

April 2023

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Report

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Executive Summary

This report outlines the context for and findings of an independent evaluation of the first year (January – October 2022) of a Bristol Collaboration to co-design a service model for children, young people and families affected by extrafamilial harm and exploitation.

The Collaboration is underpinned by an innovative strategic partnership between and shared, complementary resources for service co-design provided by Bristol City Council and the UK’s largest children’s charity, Barnardo’s. The formal strategic partnership builds on many years of partners working closely together to innovate and improve outcomes for children, young people including those who have experienced or who are at high risk of sexual or criminal exploitation.

The Collaboration has enabled a structured service design project and methodology driven by a core team and supported by a range of experts and peer influencers[[1]](#footnote-1). The project has overall aimed to build on existing research in this area and engage with local children and families affected by exploitation, and with local professional stakeholders from statutory and community-based organisations, to generate service design principles for:

* Improving existing systems and services to further promote the recovery and resilience of children and young people who have experienced ‘high harm’.
* Reducing the likelihood of their repeat harm.

The independent evaluation has been carried out alongside the Collaboration’s project activities by the Institute of Public Care (IPC), a research and development unit embedded in Oxford Brookes University. The evaluation has included: support to co-produce a Theory of Change[[2]](#footnote-2) for the Collaboration (outlined at Appendix A); targeted rapid research reviews; the development of a Baseline Report; observations of key meetings; and 1:1 interviews with 29 professional stakeholders and 3 peer influencers.

The whole system context for the Collaboration and its evaluation include that:

* This is a service and development area of significant importance for Bristol. There are overlaps with other city-wide priorities, including those emerging in response to things happening in real time within local communities (for example knife crime) which can represent both as enablers or challenges for this project and its specific focus on ‘high harm’ through exploitation.
* The ways in which extrafamilial harm and exploitation presents, is described and responded to has changed over the last 10-year period across the UK, but support services and systems thinking have not necessarily kept up with these changes. Challenging or attempting to change multi-agency systems and services takes time and considerable energy. People have different views about what needs to change and how, also how services should be funded (in the context of restrictions on public services funding). This is not a ‘quick fix’.
* Due to the lack of visible impact of previous engagement of children, parents and carers around service needs, there was significant work needed to rebuild trust. For example, the project team needed to support staff, children and families to feel safe and to engage in the project, also to ensure their views and voice were authentically captured and heard.

Whilst much of this context and potential challenge was known and acknowledged at the start of the project, it also should be born in mind with reference to findings from evaluation of the outputs and effects of a first year of the Collaboration.

## Key findings from the evaluation linked to the questions suggested by the Theory of Change

### To what extent did the organisations leading the project jointly invest their time, skills and additional resources in an appropriate way?

Alongside contributions from a range of partner organisations, Bristol City Council and Barnardo’s jointly invested considerable time, relevant and complementary skills, and resources in the project. This took the form of wide-ranging contributions from staff, including peer influencers[[3]](#footnote-3), working for each partner organisation and whose time was dedicated in full or in part to this project.

A wide range of stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation acknowledged that this was an important (and therefore appropriate) focus for detailed service and systems development moving forward in the City. Barnardo’s was also considered by interviewees from many different organisations to be a trusted and expert critical friend for statutory services including Bristol City Council, bringing much-appreciated resource and national expertise in the area of addressing child exploitation.

### To what extent was the project well-run and communications used effectively throughout?

Evaluation team observations and interviews with a wide range of stakeholders suggest that this project was well-managed and supported by a multi-disciplinary ‘core team’ of people who worked well and openly together, were committed and enthusiastic.

Stakeholders noticed in particular how the project was kept to time and agreed phases, how there were regular updates on progress, information was shared, and the outputs were of high quality.

The research element of the process was widely and highly praised, described by some as ‘gold standard’ or ‘highly credible’, putting Bristol ‘at the top of the league’ for other local authorities to follow.

However, some stakeholders expressed a view that the overall skills within the core team could have been better balanced to include even more experience of the Bristol landscape and/or expertise in children’s services [encompassing extrafamilial abuse and exploitation].

There were also significant early challenges to the project to be overcome. This included in particular (a) how to achieve a clear focus for the project [eventually on support for children who have already experienced exploitation, rather than prevention and support]; (b) a perception amongst some stakeholders that similar work had already been done in this area, including an overlapping project led by the City Mayor [to address gun and knife crime] in around the same time scales. Although overcome to a greater extent, some stakeholders reflected in interview that these challenges had affected their own clarity about the project’s purpose and / or their enthusiasm to engage fully with it.

### To what extent did the project engage with and genuinely include children, young people and families affected by exploitation, community groups and organisations?

The project addressed early obstacles to engage with children, young people and families affected by exploitation – in order to learn more about their experiences and to draw out lessons for future service re-design. 40 family members including a diverse range of 30 children and young people participated in a 1:1 or group-based consultation for the project, and practitioners supporting these young people’s engagement reflected that they were very well involved and listened to.

An intersectional lens was applied to the engagement sessions (and questions) to understand multifactorial lived experiences.

Stakeholders participating in an evaluation interview very frequently described these family engagement activities as a key success of the project, how the core team had found pro-active and creative ways to engage and effectively give voice to children and families who can often be *‘so often maligned, misunderstood’*.

However, the core strategic partners themselves acknowledged some limitations of the engagement work, namely that it hadn’t been able to reach groups thought to have important perspectives to share, such as children in care, foster carers, or fathers. A key learning was that this type of engagement work takes considerable time and staff resources, including to create a safe space for participation, and needs to take into account the potential for staff fatigue (as a result of earlier or overlapping consultation).

Core team members were well-supported by specialist operational services and the peer influencers to undertake family member engagement activities sensitively and ethically, including to recognise the potential for children, young people and broader family members to be re-traumatised by talking about their experiences. Attention to practical aspects such as safe environment, and the availability of refreshments or a recognition of time and expertise provided by young people was deemed essential.

### To what extent did stakeholders come together to work together in an open and collaborative way?

Many other stakeholders, both operational and strategic, came together to participate in the project, including partner organisations from statutory and voluntary sector services and peer influencers. Contributions included attendance at workshops to discuss systems and services, contributing materials, and supporting young people to participate in the project.

Involving such a wide range of relevant people and services was thought to have underpinned the value, power and credibility of the process. Whilst pragmatic (as a result of the Covid Pandemic) and practical (including in reaching large(r) numbers of participants), online meetings were thought to have limited at times the depth of stakeholder engagement.

Some, including grass-roots community organisations specifically, would have liked the project to have been clearer at an earlier stage about why and how they were being asked to engage and what would be the end product and purpose of the project. Their perceived lack of clarity, in spite of regular communications, is likely to have affected their enthusiasm for very open engagement.

Some stakeholders also described how they would have liked to have engaged more, including in service re-design, but felt hampered by the lack of time available to them to engage in ‘anything but the day job’ in the context of a period of time where there have been huge pressures on public services.

Early misunderstandings about the nature and leadership of the project from outside of the strategic partnership may also have led some stakeholders to reflect that the project had not felt as genuinely collaborative as they would have liked or expected (despite numerous opportunities to participate). There was a concern expressed by a small number of VCSE stakeholders that, because of their prominent role within the project, the Collaboration may have given Barnardo’s an unfair advantage in subsequent service re-commissioning (procurement) processes.

### To what extent was the project well-informed by the existing evidence base including about the impact of structural inequalities and intersectionality?

The project was informed by the existing evidence base about the prevalence and needs of children affected by exploitation, also about ‘what works’ in addressing these needs. It was also informed specifically about the impact of structural inequalities and intersectionality by:

* Taking expert advice and building intersectionality into the project design, for example by consulting with a Race and Equality Consultant to work within the project team to advise on all aspects of the work.
* Ensuring that the research sample included a diverse range of children and young people including by communicating through children’s trusted adults including peer influencers, rather than imposing unknown researchers.
* Recognising that a predominantly white British project team and senior leadership influenced the lens through which the world was understood and decisions were made. This led the Collaboration to actively ensure that the Oversight Group was more diverse and to invite different perspectives, including from the Race and Equality Consultant.
* Deploying non-White (and younger) researchers to engage with children and young people, to help with confidence in sharing experiences and views.
* Ensuring that structural inequalities and intersectionality were addressed specifically in the key recommendations of the project.
* Work undertaken at both Oversight Group and Core Group levels to ensure that the project utilised language carefully and avoided labelling of children and family members.

Overall, professional stakeholders from a range of organisations expressed a view that the project had been very well informed by the existing evidence base including about the impact of structural inequalities and intersectionality on child and young person risks of exploitation and the availability and accessibility of support.

### To what extent did the service design methodology work well to explore local issues, co-produce evidence-informed solutions and refine options?

Overall, the service design methodology worked well to explore local issues.

However, the project ran out of time towards the end to fully co-produce evidence informed solutions and refined options for service re-design. Therefore, some stakeholders questioned the need for such an in-depth, relatively resource heavy methodology.

The expressed intention of the Collaboration towards the end of the first year of activity has been to co-produce these more detailed solutions in a stage two of the partnership project.

### Was a baseline report produced to inform the service design work and to enable progress to be measured over time?

A baseline report was co-produced by IPC working with the core team to help inform the service design work and against which progress could be measured over time.

This aspect of the Collaboration recognised limitations in the form of readily available data at both a national and a local level, particularly to consistently and effectively capture the experience and impact of support services over time. It also highlighted the complex landscape of services and systems for children exploited within Bristol as well as nationally.

### To what extent was a shared, compelling vision developed?

Commissioners and service leaders interviewed for the evaluation described valuing the outputs from the project including to draw together in one place a compelling summary of the needs and circumstances of children, young people and families affected by exploitation and areas for improvement.

The outputs were well-articulated in the form of a highly engaging and visual presentation slide ‘deck’ that was shared widely in the form of an online ‘play back’ conference.

Stakeholders who responded to interview questions about the extent to which the outputs were capable of informing a blueprint for future commissioning often reflected that the project had suffered from very tight timescales[[4]](#footnote-4), particularly given the early challenges including project team skill mix. Adhering to these timescales had meant that there had been insufficient time to undertake a full co-design of options and implementation of change. It is anticipated that a form of co-design process can still be undertaken in 2023, as part of the re-specification process for specialist exploitation support services.

In the meantime, bringing together all the data and intelligence into one place was seen by many stakeholders as useful in itself, as solid evidence to inform practitioners and service managers in their work, for report writing, to educate, and to obtain funding. Some stakeholders also considered that the outputs would be useful to provide an outline of priorities for potential bidders for the new specialist service that was yet to be tendered.

## Three recommendations based on findings from the Year 1 Evaluation

### Year 2 of the Collaboration should commence by refining the Year 1 outputs with children, young people and families, also partner organisations, and developing a form of ‘blueprint’ for future services

There may be an imperative for undertaking this work relatively swiftly in order that high need service commissioning can be undertaken with confidence.

### In doing so, the learning from the Year 1 Collaboration should be taken into account

Key learning from the Year 1 Collaboration appears from all the evidence to include:

* **Building on the strengths and successes of the Year One Programme** including the: use of complementary resources and skills including peer influencers; focus on structural inequalities and intersectionality; strong evidence base; high levels of meaningful engagement of children and families; diverse Oversight Group invested in the outputs and outcomes of the Collaboration.
* **To engage more children in care**, particularly those living in residential care and/or who have disabilities, as these are 2 groups thought to be particularly at risk (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, 2022), also foster carers and fathers.
* **To develop even clearer, regular communications focused on the desired outputs and outcomes of the re-design and re-commissioning processes** and their rationale for all stakeholders who are or may be involved in supporting children who have been exploited or are at risk of exploitation. It may also be useful to identify specific community role models to support these communications.

### Regular, more consistent monitoring of child exploitation should commence

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) identified a lack of reliably collected data and ‘profiling’ of the problem of sexual abuse and exploitation in England. The baseline report for this project identified that ‘*there is a great deal of data about child exploitation in Bristol but it appears fragmented and it is consequently difficult to obtain an overall picture*’.

The baseline report also identified how the current data does not facilitate an up to date understanding of intersectionality as there is a lack of data around important aspects including child sexual or gender identity, religion or belief, immigration status and social class.

Finally, there are significant gaps across systems and services in accurately reporting the experience of children and families of services, and their outcomes.

In our baseline report, evaluators have recommended four key elements for multi-agency child exploitation monitoring, as illustrated in figure 1 below:

**Figure 1: Four key elements for monitoring child exploitation**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How many children are being exploited? | How many children are identified and being supported and safeguarded? | What is children’s experience of services and support? | What are the outcomes for children who have been supported? |

A future reporting ‘dashboard’ to inform service improvement and development has been proposed by evaluators but more work is likely to be required to refine and implement it. This would include the above 4 domains plus potentially a fifth domain - what resources are deployed to tackle exploitation?

# Introduction

Over the last 5-10 years in the UK, there has been growing national awareness about children experiencing extra-familial harm or exploitation and the harm this type of abuse causes. Initially, attention focused on child sexual exploitation, as a series of high-profile cases highlighted sexual exploitation of children by groups and networks which had often been unrecognised, ignored or poorly dealt with by statutory agencies that were more attuned to addressing intra-familial abuse and neglect (Jay, 2014). Subsequently, attention shifted towards criminal exploitation, including the effects of ‘county lines’, drug dealing, and the serious violence and knife crime associated with street gangs. Increasingly, safeguarding partnerships and agencies, including ‘Keeping Bristol Safe’, have recognised the importance of addressing these forms of extrafamilial or contextual harms prompting a wider understanding of the risks and harms which children face, including those which happen in community settings like parks, public transport, and schools or, increasingly, in the online world (Lloyd & Firmin, 2019; Kelly & Karsna, 2018).

Barnardo’s is the largest children’s charity in the UK. One of a small number of corporate core priorities for Barnardo’s is to better recognise and address harm to children resulting from of sexual abuse (including sexual exploitation), criminal exploitation and violence. As illustrated in Figure 2 below, key mechanisms for transformational change proposed to address these harms are service co-design and innovation through strategic partnerships including through building on the evidence base and amplifying lesser-heard voices.

**Figure 2: Illustration of Barnardo’s Core Priority Programme CSA/E**

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Barnardo’s is also committed to addressing all forms of discrimination and positively addressing intersectionality[[5]](#footnote-5). The CSA/E core priority work currently being driven by the organisation specifically acknowledges the findings of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA, 2020) including how cultural stereotypes and racism can lead to failures of institutions and professionals to identify and respond appropriately to child sexual abuse and how abuse can have a serious impact on children’s sense of identity and belonging within their communities.

Bristol City Council (BCC) and Barnardo’s have a 27-year history of working together including to better understand and respond to child exploitation. Partners have together developed some of the first specialist services in the county to address child sexual exploitation (currently called BASE) and child criminal exploitation (currently called ROUTES). Key features of these services are that they are: relationship-based, trauma-informed, and based on 1:1 work with children and families based on up-to-date evidence about ‘what works’.

In early 2022, partners BCC and Barnardo’s recognised the potential benefits of a **co-funded multi-agency collaborative project involving young people, families and professionals to re-imagine and co-design a model of support for children who have experienced extrafamilial harm or exploitation** including child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child criminal exploitation (CCE). It was agreed that the focus for the project, to be jointly led and resourced through a strategic partnership, would be:

* How is the current system working?
* Where are the resources? Is this right?
* Are services meeting all children’s needs?
* How can existing systems and services be improved for children and young people who have experienced ‘high harm’?
* How can the likelihood of repeat harm be reduced?

The outputs were intended to inform the re-commissioning of future services.

|  |
| --- |
| **A detailed rationale for the project in Bristol included that:**  The landscape of abuse and exploitation of children had changed over the last decade and continued to do so. Children faced multiple and emerging harms but services had not always shifted with changing patterns of harm (Lloyd & Firmin, 2019; Kelly & Karsna, 2018).  Children and young people who have experienced extrafamilial harm or exploitation across the UK are known to be at high risk of repeat exploitation and further harm, even if they are receiving support services (IICSA, 2022).  There had been a lack of consensus in Bristol (as elsewhere in the UK) about the best approach to continuously improving whole-system support for children and young people who have experienced a range of extrafamilial harms. Individual agencies rightly did not feel that they had ‘all the answers’[[6]](#footnote-6).  Baseline information and intelligence in Bristol up to early 2022 also suggested that:   * Existing service and system responses might sometimes be too slow, bureaucratic and / or ineffective. * Support for families as a whole was often a secondary thought. * Children, young people and families did not always trust services and statutory organisations to help and protect them. * There were likely to be gaps in support for vulnerable young people aged 18+. * Existing structural inequalities and intersectionality[[7]](#footnote-7) were likely to have an impact both on the likelihood of children being exploited and service response(s). * Unidentified or unmet health and education needs were thought to be increasing children and young people’s risks of (re) exploitation and impacting outcomes. |

The Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University was commissioned to become the Collaboration’s evaluation partner. An early stage of the evaluation partnership involved the co-production, with core partnership members, of a project ‘Theory of Change’ outlining: (i) the rationale for doing something different in this important area of public services; (ii) what was proposed by way of strategic partnership activities; (iii) what were the desired early signs of success; and (iv) what were the longer-term outcomes the SP was aiming to achieve. The co-produced Theory of Change is reproduced at **Appendix A**.

**Key process-related questions for the evaluation** suggested by the Theory of Change included to what extent:

1. The organisations leading the project (Bristol City Council and Barnardo’s) jointly invested their time, skills and additional resources in an appropriate way?
2. Stakeholders came together to work in an open and collaborative way?
3. The project engaged with and genuinely included children, young people and families affected by exploitation, community groups and organisations?
4. The project was well-informed by the existing evidence base including about the impact of structural inequalities and intersectionality?
5. The project was well-run and used communications effectively throughout?
6. People involved in supporting the project used language carefully and avoided labelling?
7. The service design methodology worked well to explore local issues, co-produce evidence-informed solutions and refine options?
8. A baseline report was produced to help inform the service design work and against which progress could be measured over time?
9. A shared, compelling vision was developed?

**The Theory of Change also suggested other short term impact questions** including in what circumstances, how and why (Pawson & Tilley, 1997):

* Commissioners and leaders of change were more informed of the needs and how best to support children, young people and families affected by exploitation?
* The vision was well articulated and widely understood?
* The vision was capable of informing a blueprint for future service & systems development in the future / commissioning?
* Trust and confidence in the Collaboration and the approach to service design was growing?

**Longer-term aspirations articulated in the Theory of Change were that:**

* Children and young people aged up to 25 years who had experienced extrafamilial harm or exploitation would get the support they need to recover, move forward and be safe.
* There would be a reduction in repeat harm.
* There would be greater levels of trust for family members in support services and systems.
* Agencies and services would work better together to tackle exploitation and would have greater trust and confidence in each other.
* There would be measures in place to better monitor how well children, young people and family needs were being met.

This report presents findings from a range of evaluation activities undertaken by the Institute of Public Care to explore the process and some of the short-term impact questions outlined above. The evaluation fieldwork was undertaken between March and December 2022, and included activities outlined in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: IPC Evaluation Activities and Timescales**

| **What activities** | **Detail** | **When undertaken** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Workshops to co-produce a Theory of Change (ToC) | IPC worked with the Core Project Team and Oversight (Governance) Group to co-produce a ToC that could be used to inform the scope of and project development and in evaluation (see App A) | April – May 2022 |
| Rapid research reviews | IPC acted as a critical friend to the project by generating rapid research reviews in relation to topics that emerged as areas of interest as the project progressed (and where there was not project officer resource to undertake these in addition to other literature searches).   * The impact of structural inequalities and intersectionality on work with people affected by exploitation. * Manualised interventions for intensive 1:1 work with young people and families. | May – Sept 2022 |
| Work to complete a ‘baseline’ report | Supported by the Core Project Team (undertaking service and system mapping), IPC undertook secondary analysis of local and national data to produce a baseline report inc:   * The prevalence of extrafamilial child abuse and/or child exploitation. * The activities and activity levels of systems and services currently in place to respond to the needs of children, young people and families affected by these harms. * The experiences of children, young people and families of support systems and services. * The outcomes for children, young people and families experiencing support. | April – June 2022 |
| Observation of and contributions to Oversight Group (governance) meetings | IPC observed 3 Oversight Group meetings and contributed, as relevant, including to describe evaluation project activities and progress. | March to October 2022 |
| Attendance at key Core Project Team meetings | IPC observed and contributed observations (about project progress) at 4 meetings throughout the course of the project | March to August 2022 |
| 1:1 interviews with stakeholders who had participated in the project | Total 32 interviews including with:   * 29 professionals who had participated in the project, mostly those working directly or indirectly with children experiencing extra-familial harm. These professionals worked, for example, for Bristol City Council, the Police, Health Services, Barnardo’s and Charitable Community Organisations. * 3 Peer Influencers (young people with lived experience of support services, albeit not necessarily of exploitation, who were paid for their time to be involved in the project). | November to December 2022 |

The evaluation team wished to interview (as a group or 1:1) children and young people who had participated in the project. However, there were challenges in gaining access to young people even for the core team, following the murder of a young person in the City. On advice of Bristol-based specialist services and community organisations, a decision was made that it would not be appropriate to pursue the interviews.

The findings from the evaluation activities are organised by section below:

**Section Three**: What have been the key process elements and outputs?

**Section Four**: How did stakeholders experience the Collaboration?

**Section Five**: Recommendations based on Year 1 Evaluation findings

# What have been the key process elements and outputs?

The process elements outlined below represent an initial stage (stage one) of the Collaboration from January to October 2022. It is intended that the Collaboration will continue beyond the ending of this first stage (in 2023) to further progress the vision and aspirations of the partnership work.

## Project resources contributed by partner organisations

The project has been managed overall by a seconded member of Bristol City Council services. Expertise has been allocated from partner organisations into a ‘Core Project Team’, as outlined in Table 2 below:

**Table 2: Resource Contributions to the Collaborative Project**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **From Bristol Council** | **From Barnardo’s** |
| A senior project sponsor | A senior project sponsor |
| A project manager for the duration of the project | A research lead |
| Data regarding prevalence and service activity | A service designer – service design expertise |
| A specialist Child Sexual Abuse / Exploitation (CSA/E) Advisor |
| A specialist Race and Equality Consultant with localised knowledge |
| Four Peer Influencers – young people employed on a part time basis by the Council to assist with service development. | Service activity, experience & outcomes data (relating to BASE and ROUTES) and operational support for convening meetings with children & families |

The project was driven by the Core Project Team including Project Manager, Researcher, and Service Designer.

## Key partnership activities

At the heart of the process has been a plan for an accelerated testing and learning, or ‘service design’ process undertaken in phases, summarised in Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Collaboration Process Plan Stages and Elements**

| **Stage** | **Process elements** |
| --- | --- |
| **Inception** (Jan-March 2022) | Bringing the Core Project Team together, clarifying roles and the scope of the project, bringing together the high-level governance of the project (Oversight Group) |
| **Discover** (Jan-April) | Investigating the problem space including by undertaking a rapid research review, identifying potential domains for further exploration through the project & linked questions for Bristol stakeholders.  Early conversations with key practitioners to identify stakeholder groups and to refine the questions for the project.  Building relationships with grass roots organisations, introducing them to the project. |
| **Explore and Define** through interviews with stakeholder groups (Feb-May 2022) | These included undertaking 1:1 or group-based interviews with stakeholders including:   * 30 young people * 9 parents (& 1 sibling) * 58 professional stakeholders   (more were contacted but some declined involvement).  An evidence-based approach was followed to explore, directly by members of the core team or ‘through’ colleagues across Bristol, the child’s journey, including through asking questions such as:   * How is the current system working? * Where are the resources? Is this right? * Are services meeting all children’s needs, what are the gaps?   An intersectional lens was used to understand the multifactorial lived experiences of children & families |
| **Create / Build Phase** including through core team and oversight group meetings (May – August 2022) | These meetings comprised professionals involved in stakeholder consultation with an interest in working together across agency boundaries to identify:   * Hypotheses, for example about what’s working and what may need to change to build ‘problem statements’. * Development of ideas about potential future models and solutions. |
| **Presentation of findings and opportunities** (October 2022) | Presentation led by the strategic lead for commissioning at Bristol CC and the Project Lead identifying opportunities for future service development for further testing |

It is important to note that, alongside this process of collaborative co-design, the Bristol City Mayor was also leading work to explore the impact of and what could be done to reduce violence including knife crime in specific city communities, including a ‘Youth Summit’ held in March 2022. This work highlighted child and young person health needs as an important issue (particularly neurodiversity, speech and language difficulties, and mental ill-health).

## How intersectionality was addressed through the Project

Informed by an Equality Impact Assessment undertaken early in the project, the Collaboration set out to address intersectionality in a range of ways through the project. It recognised that, for example:

* Black boys were over-represented in the cohort of children experiencing extra-familial harms.
* Although two thirds of reported victims of CSA are girls, boys may be under-identified or face additional barriers to reporting CSA.
* The core staff working on the project (from Bristol City Council and Barnardo’s), also the Oversight Group, was predominantly White British.

Key ways in which these and other issues were addressed included:

* Appointing the Director of Barnardo’s Centre for Expertise in African, Asian and Caribbean heritage young people as a member of the Oversight Group.
* Taking an intersectional approach throughout the service design stages (rather than thinking of it as an ‘add on’) – accepting that there isn’t ‘one community’ or ‘one voice’.
* Increasing the ethnic diversity of the research group.
* Working with children’s trusted adults to gain their views.
* Employing peer influencers to support the research work (see below).
* Recruiting a Race and Equality Consultant to support the project from start to finish (see below).

|  |
| --- |
| The Race and Equality Consultant provided advice and support to the Collaboration including:   * To improve the Collaboration’s intersectional understanding of race and other protected characteristics and to advise on anti-racism approaches linked to the project. * To support and advise the core team about specific project activities with reference to work already undertaken in Bristol, an in-depth understanding of specific local communities / community groups, and personalised / intersectionality toolkits. * To advise on the development of the service model including with reference to the complexities around supporting children and young people from diverse backgrounds. * To provide a specific support to the Oversight Group to ensure that meetings were held in an inclusive environment. |

|  |
| --- |
| **The Peer Influencers** were employed to:   * Support the development of and challenge the research design. * Facilitate young person engagement. * Support to feed back to the Oversight Group the findings from young person engagement. |

The characteristics of children and young people engaged in the research for this project were diverse and included:

* Children and young people whose ethnicity was described as White (47%); Black African (20%); Black African / Caribbean (14%); Somali (7%); Other ethnicity (9%); and unknown ethnicity (3%).
* Mostly young people aged 16-18 years (63%) but also younger young people 13-15 years (20%) or older young people 18+ years (17%).
* An equal number of female and male participants.
* The Core Project Team also reflected in the presentation of findings and opportunities (October 2022) that, whilst there were many strengths to the process, they would have liked to have heard more from children in care (as they are at high risk of exploitation), fathers, and carers. It is the intention that the partnership will undertake this important engagement activity in the second stage of the strategic partnership.

## Key outputs from these processes and activities have included:

### A summary of the research in this area

The key findings from this early-stage research were embedded in the final outputs from the project, alongside findings from consultation with children, young people and other family members undertaken as part of the project (see document embedded below, pages 13-39). Key learning includes that:

* Exploitation occurs within a context of wider challenges children and young people are experiencing – including socioeconomic disadvantage, ethnicity, disability, gender and immigration. Interlinking challenges lead children to be more vulnerable to exploitation.
* The communities where exploited young people live often have disproportionately high rates of crime and this surrounding environment may ‘normalise’ risky behaviours.
* There is often a lack of positive inspiration or role models or relationships with ‘safe adults’.
* All children and young people have a longing to belong and feel accepted. An overwhelming desire to fit in socially may make children more vulnerable to exploitation.
* Children who have been exploited express feeling ‘let down’ by the system there to support, for example through being excluded from school, or by the Police, or by being unable to access supports they need for example supports for mental health or ‘safe spaces’ in the community.
* There is recent evidence of victim-blaming language still being used within services which can lead to omissions in safeguarding and the provision of adequate support.
* Having a genuine and connected, consistent relationship is the foundation and most valued aspect of any exploitation support service. Doing fun activities together helps to build at ease.

### A high-level map of Bristol systems and services and child and young person journeys based on their experiences and those of their parents and carers through systems and services

Similarly, the high-level map of systems and services are embedded (see below) in the final outputs from the project.

With reference to intersectionality, family members and professionals shared that:

* They had concerns about professionals making unconscious biases and judgements about them (based for example on race or poverty) which had a negative impact on the support offer.
* Services should consider more how they can adapt to different cultural backgrounds.
* Services should be better geographically spread across Bristol.

### A Baseline Report

The baseline report (June 2022) outlined key findings from analysis of national and Bristol data relating to the likely prevalence of extrafamilial abuse and exploitation in the city area; support system and service activity levels; the experiences of children and families in accessing support systems and services; and their outcomes.

An interesting key finding was that data to inform service and partnership planning in this area remains fragmentary, and there is no single overview of the extent of child exploitation either nationally or locally. Within that, the baseline exercise also identified more information relating to prevalence and service activity than child and family experiences and outcomes.

Estimates of the scale of child exploitation in Bristol are inevitably tentative but it appears that, at any one time, around 400 children under 18 years are likely to be victims of exploitation. Many of them will have their circumstances discussed at a Safer Option meeting and to receive a form of support, although only just over 25% are likely to receive a specialist support from either BASE[[8]](#footnote-8) or ROUTES[[9]](#footnote-9).

An outline of a future reporting ‘dashboard’ to inform service improvement and development is contained within Appendix A of the report embedded below.



### A final document outlining the process of collaboration, key findings and opportunities for change

This document, in the form of a ‘slide deck’ was generated by the Core Project Team and presented to a large number of stakeholders at an online conference in October 2022.

|  |
| --- |
| **11 key recommendations for future service re-design included in the slide deck.**   1. Improve the system to support to a child at the right time. 2. Enable professionals in the system work as a genuine team to meet children’s needs. 3. Improve the speed of access for children and young people affected by exploitation to specialist support in a way that feels comfortable and safe. 4. Improve the shared understanding of children’s needs. 5. Improve the consistency of child centred outcomes. 6. Create a unified and shared understanding of the role of the Specialist Worker. 7. Ensure consistency and continuity of support that leads to trust. 8. Provide greater opportunities for young people to build effective support networks. 9. Improve the support offer for children who are being exploited. 10. Better support trusted family members and carers. 11. Create opportunities for children have more access to meaningful activities and more integrated support with education / employment. |



### Governance of the strategic partnership project

Governance of the project has been undertaken by an Oversight Group comprising senior officers of Bristol City Council and Barnardo’s. It was co-chaired by the Director for Children’s Services (BCC), Regional Director for Barnardo’s (SW England & Wales) and Director for Strategic Partnerships (Barnardo’s). In addition to members of the core team, Oversight Group members included: Peer Influencers x 3; Director of Strategic Partnerships (Barnardo’s); the Strategic Safeguarding and QA Manager (BCC); Assistant Director for CSA/E CPP (Barnardo’s); a Senior Commissioning & Police Officer (OPCC); the Cabinet Lead for Children’s Services (BCC); Assistant Director Bristol Barnardo’s Services; Head of Commissioning (BCC); Director of the Centre for Children and Young People of African, Asian & Caribbean Heritage (Barnardo’s); the Race Equity Advisor; Head of Child Protection (Avon and Somerset Police); Assistant Director of Nursing Safeguarding (Health); Head of Service Public Health; Director of Commissioning CCG; Head of Service Inclusion (BCC). Members of the Project Core Team and Peer Influencers presented information and questions to the Oversight Group on a regular basis as the project progressed.

# How did stakeholders experience the Collaboration?

## Stakeholders’ early perceptions of the project

### As an important opportunity to re-design service that needs to evolve

There was widespread recognition amongst stakeholders that the child exploitation landscape had changed considerably over recent years and that services needed to ‘catch up’ and reflect those changes.

“I’d felt like perhaps our services .. (had) been quite stuck in their development for some time … I wanted to really test … whether it was the best it could be or whether there was some complacency … so what I wanted was a complete re-think” (stakeholder 5)

“Contextual safeguarding has moved on a lot over the last 3-4 years … [I think we’ve been] making it up as we go along without having a clear strategy or plan … so any development around those processes I’m up for” (stakeholder 15)

“I was really pleased that we were acknowledging that there maybe needed to be a bit of a shake-up of … exploitation services and how we were looking at them for Bristol... Exploitation is being seen in a very different way now” (stakeholder 26)

This project was seen as a timely opportunity to review and up-date and to create a service model that was genuinely informed by all stakeholders, especially children and young people and their families, that joined up the organisations working in this space and provided a systemic solution.

“How do we work better [together] … do that collaboratively together with children and young people based on actually ‘what do they need?’, not us thinking what they need” (stakeholder 62)

“[To] have a model that was built bottom up, not top down” (stakeholder 38)

“It felt like maybe we could have a more joined up approach in terms of that multi agency working…all the research tells us that that’s what will keep young people safe” (stakeholder 26)

“What’s interested me most about this project and its potential .. was that combination of improving service delivery at the same time as systemic change. I think that’s really powerful” (stakeholder 25)

### That the project needed a clear focus

Many stakeholders reflected that the subject area was potentially very broad and that focussing its scope had been necessary in the early stages of the project, but that this had been difficult. The focus settled on children and young people who have experienced extrafamilial criminal or sexual exploitation.

“When we first got the brief … the scope was quite big in terms of how we were going to tackle these issues… We narrowed it down over the first couple of months, but it started off feeling quite overwhelming” (stakeholder 67)

“It took us time to understand what the scope was… On reflection … that could have been clearer, or maybe people didn’t know… maybe we needed to be more open about that” (stakeholder 69)

“There was quite a lot of backwards and forwarding about how far to step into prevention work and I was quite a strong voice for not clouding the purpose and maintaining and focussing on the needs of the cohort we were really thinking about (stakeholder 5)

### Might the project duplicate existing knowledge?

Some interviewees thought that the project had the potential to duplicate knowledge already held by them and others in the whole system.

“I just felt some of it was a bit of a duplication of what had already been done... it just felt like we were repeating work that had already happened” (stakeholder 20)

“I'm not sure that I was 100% clear on the need or on the scale of the work, given what learning and knowledge I felt was already held within services in the city” (stakeholder 40)

“I did direct people [in the team] to information that already exists with young people. Voices that are very clear and have been documented… you know, not having to go over the same area and make an industry out of something that already is industrialised, heavily” (stakeholder 39)

A contrasting view shared by others was that it was important to have asked and captured the views of local children and families about what they felt was working well in existing services and what was missing (even if this was reflected in the existing UK research).

“It felt very much like we were doing work that hadn’t been done anywhere else. It helps [if] you get something that hasn’t been taken off the shelf” (stakeholder 73)

“Everything should start with their [young people’s] voice and build around that voice… very powerful” (stakeholder 38)

## Stakeholder engagement in the collaborative project

### The size and diversity of stakeholder engagement was a key strength of the project

One of the key features and strengths of the project was described consistently as the amount and diversity of stakeholder engagement. Without exception, interviewees praised the project for including as many different voices as possible - from children and young people who have experienced exploitation, through grassroots practitioners working on the frontline, to statutory bodies working directly and tangentially in this area, to those with strategic oversight. Hearing from such a wide range of relevant people was thought to have underpinned the value, power and credibility of the process.

“Involving young people, the range of perspectives, was done well. I think they talked to families as well, people involved in delivering services, Council staff – I feel that was a good 360” (stakeholder 25)

“I feel that they the team, tried to be … assertive in terms of outreach to community groups … which I thought was really positive… to try and ensure there was some diversity of voice and experience of practitioners and of services” (stakeholder 40)

“I think it's been the most effective thing I've seen in recent times that has engaged with the right people... its ideas have definitely come from the people who are on the frontline and people who are strategically overseeing it. I think it's focused on those people who are both operational and strategic rather than as it usually is, just people who don't have any contact with the people on the ground” (stakeholder 39)

“When I attended update meetings, monthly, I think, they were well attended and had expert voices in the room... with quite senior people there, which showed the importance Bristol is attaching to this model" (stakeholder 10)

Interviewees often commented that it was clear that all these different voices had genuinely informed the outcome of the process.

“My only early concern was that they wouldn’t listen to young people initially. But I believe that the report showed that they really did. They took most of what young people said and used it to make changes” (stakeholder 86)

“From the presentation they gave to stakeholders afterwards, they’d done a lot of capturing the voice of children and service users generally across the whole sweep - school, home and neighbourhood. It seemed it had been done well, there was some good data there” (stakeholder 21)

“The final result … does reflect the conversations (that) were happening in the room” (stakeholder 39)

### The voice of young people and their families was well-captured

All interviewees agreed that capturing the voice of children and young people who have experienced extra familial exploitation was crucial. Hearing from parents, carers and siblings was also considered to be important.

“It was good to catch young people’s voices in this because they’re the most important people in this. There seemed a good spread of young people” (stakeholder 15)

“It's given a voice to a group [of young people] that are so often maligned, misunderstood … So that's really fantastic” (stakeholder 38)

### Engaging a representative mix of young people and their families was challenging

Stakeholders recognised that, although important, this is difficult work including because children, young people and families affected by exploitation do not always trust services and professionals[[10]](#footnote-10), or have been ‘over-researched’ leading to consultation fatigue.

“That [engagement with families] was quite difficult to get. The barriers are the shame and guilt that they’re involved so they’re not always receptive. So you need to be clear about why it’s important. We want them to be part of our service design as well, we want to work holistically, want to support them as well” (stakeholder 8)

The project team was praised for the effort they put into trying to and succeeding in engaging these young people and their families.

“They did manage to get quite a spread of young people. .. they spoke to some of those young people that are quite high risk and are involved with or in seriously violence and criminal exploitation… there was the willingness to seek those young people out” (stakeholder 20)

However, it was acknowledged, by the project team itself as well as others that, despite their best efforts, some groups were under-represented or even missing from the research, including that:

* A relatively small proportion of children in care were interviewed on this project.
* No fathers were interviewed.
* Only one sibling was interviewed.
* No foster carers or kinship carers were interviewed.

Several reasons were offered as to why young people and their families in Bristol were not ready to engage:

There was a perception amongst interviewees that CSE and CCE had become a heavily researched area in Bristol and, because the cohort of children and young people experiencing this is relatively small, they (and their families) are regularly asked about their experiences and for their opinions. As a result, they feel jaded from being over-researched.

“I know the researchers at times struggled to get organisations involved and people to respond...People are consulted and researched out. I know people who wouldn’t get involved and wouldn’t involve their young people. It was like ‘what are you doing now? What’s going to happen’” (stakeholder 17)

One apposite example, which overlapped with this project, was the Knife Crime Project in Bristol, sponsored by the mayor.

“A lot of projects were protective of their young people…some of that was because of the city’s Mayor piece of work. They were fatigued really, and also a child had been murdered and died… ‘you all keep asking us these questions but our kids are still dying’ so there was a bit of push back, particularly from the black community and some of those organisations” (stakeholder 62)

There is a cynicism about what all this research achieves; young people and their families have historically not noticed any changes as a result of answering questions.

“A group of mums said 'you know it was only four years ago that we were all brought together. We had the same conversations, and this hasn't changed'… people become over time, jaded” (stakeholder 65)

Although youth organisations appreciated the importance of research in this area, they were protective of their young people and did not want to expose them to the risk of being re-traumatised by having to re-live their experiences to an unknown (and untrusted) professional.

“We came up against a lot of blocks from professionals. Which is totally understandable. They’re trying to protect the young people they work with” (stakeholder 69)

“Each time they’re asked and they say the same things, and to a certain extent they have to repeat why they’re involved in it which from a trauma informed, therapeutic perspective is potentially triggering trauma, which is what we try not to do. Yet we know that any research around criminal exploitation is going to be helpful” (stakeholder 6)

“We had the young people [saying]: ‘But we don't want to talk to anyone else. We don't want to re traumatise ourselves by speaking to another professional about what we've already told another professional. And … what have you done with the last thing I said?’ (stakeholder 39)

It was difficult to organise research with these young people down because they may lead chaotic, unpredictable and ‘out of hours’ lives. The first step to overcoming the reluctance of young people, their families, and youth organisations was to make evident the benefits of participation by building relationships and working with young people and families to understand the importance of participation, that their input was key.

“We do have a small cohort of young people. Some of the staff may feel that (they are over researched). So we have to be clear about why it’s important” (stakeholder 8)

“For young people, that's really difficult to understand… in terms of how we explain to them, it will make services better… we're doing research and we're trying to get information… but we can't be really specific always about exactly what it is that we are going to achieve because we don't know yet…for young people, it's not tangible” (stakeholder 26)

The research team worked with and were advised by frontline practitioners on the best way to engage these young people. This included upskilling practitioners to conduct interviews and being careful that the questioning did not potentially retraumatise. The research team made it easy for young people to participate by accommodating their lifestyles, meeting them in safe environments, and offering vouchers and food.

“(By) doing projective [interviewing], ‘what do they think another young person might need that's in a certain situation?’....[We asked youth workers] what's the best way for us to speak with your young people?’ Sometimes we would take interviews…with one of the workers. But there are other times we actually gave them the tools, up-skilled those workers to do the interviews themselves … just turning up to some of these youth spaces and chatting … turn up to the Barnardo’s Base and Routes service spaces and spend the day there” (stakeholder 67)

“They need to have workers who they trust … there was always food available… a nice kind of environment for young people to come …and there were vouchers offered” (stakeholder 26)

“In the end we got our practitioners to ask the questions, in a setting that was comfortable to them, we didn’t make them go anywhere” (stakeholder 6)

“Have their worker present or even facilitating, so it’s not scary for the young person. But you must always recognise the young person’s needs first, it’s got to be right for them” (stakeholder 8)

### Community organisation engagement took time and experienced some resistance

Grassroots organisations were key to engage in the project not only because they work directly and contextually with children and young people affected by exploitation, but also because they are the gateway to conversations with the young people themselves. As mentioned previously, the involvement of these organisations was regarded as one of the key assets of the project.

The project mostly (though not always) succeeded in gaining the buy-in of grassroots organisations so they would introduce their young people to the research - but this took time. It was felt, by both the project team and those trying to engage these community organisations, that more time should have been spent earlier building relationships and preparing the way.

“We needed a step before the launch where we went out and talked to people about … what we want to do and this is how we want you to be involved... We kind of missed that step… We then were going out to ask people to participate in research and they didn’t know what they were being asked for” (stakeholder 69)

“I don't think there was enough done to nurture that relationship (with the youth organisations), explain why it was really important these young people consulted for the Council … It felt we were asking a lot of them quite quickly and they needed time to digest that … That should have been done right at the beginning, I think” (stakeholder 67)

“Getting our community organisations on board and trying to explain the importance of their involvement .. for me that was a bit of a challenge… especially as I wasn’t 100% there myself” (stakeholder 20)

### Engagement from inspiring role models in the community suggested

One of our interviewees felt that it would have been good to have included civic leaders and inspiring role models from the local business community in the research rather than only organisations that were known to the Council.

“There’s a risk that when you do this sort of research you say ‘who are the organisations?’ and you tend to define the organisations as those we know, those who are commissioned by the Council. But Bristol has a vibrant, entrepreneurial … kind of one-woman businesses… Some of those trusted adults – it could be a faith leader, or a shop keeper - I think some of that element was missing. Not everyone can have their say but we do need to make sure we don’t always talk to the usual suspects, the people we already know… maybe there could have been another research group that covered that civic leadership space” (stakeholder 25)

However, this was an isolated view. Most interviewees recognised that a wide range of statutory and community organisations had been involved, beyond those usually involved in this type of service design.

### Some lack of understanding of the end purpose of the project hampered engagement

Service design is a new approach to Bristol City Council and partner organisations. Outside of the project team, there was some lack of understanding over the end purpose of the Collaboration project. Several interviewees across different types of stakeholder groups were unsure what outcome(s) were intended and, as a consequence, their attendance at meetings had declined.

“Some people didn’t come along because they couldn’t see the ultimate purpose” (stakeholder 17)

“Ultimately why fewer and fewer people attended was that it didn’t feel clear what it was for…I suggest the outcomes of the project weren’t laid out for people very clearly...If I’m truly honest I’d say that I still don’t know” (stakeholder 21)

### Time pressures affected some stakeholders ability to engage with the project

Service design methodology includes: to start with questions / hypotheses; testing those through research; co-designing the solutions with children and families and professionals; then testing these solutions (accepting some may be effective, some may need to be adjusted or more detail added, and some may not be appropriate at all).

Lack of time was an issue for some stakeholders which meant they found it difficult to engage as much as they would have liked, particularly in the context of recovery from the Covid-19 Pandemic. There were comments about too many meetings and day-to-day commitments having to take precedence. However, others were satisfied with the amount of time they gave to the project and appreciated not feeling pressurised to give more.

“My personal worry was ‘where am I going to find the time to attend all of these meetings and contribute on top of my already busy workload?’ But that was mixed with ‘this is really important, we’ve got to be a part of this.’ So you do make the time” (stakeholder 6)

“There was a lot put into my diary, it was weekly for 3-4 months, which was too much. As a result, I dipped in and out which meant I wasn’t able to consistently see it through” (stakeholder 15)

“If I’m completely honest they were ‘how are we meant to do this when there’s so much going on with Covid and we have such a lack of other staff” (stakeholder 31)

“I always could have been [more involved]. I could have attended if I’d wanted to, I wasn’t ignored. I had a discussion with my managers and we felt we had enough representation there from Barnardo’s and the services” (stakeholder 8)

“Once it was clear that the proposed piece of work isn’t going to directly impact on my work - early intervention at school level - I was fine not to be heavily involved in the mapping of the piece of work” (stakeholder 21)

A small minority questioned why they had been invited in the first place as they felt peripheral to the topic.

“I felt we were peripheral to what was happening… it was more about being available should it be helpful… it was to make sure the ‘I’s’ were dotted and the ‘T’s’ crossed. It wasn’t that we were going to be involved in any meaningful change...I might have said something occasionally but not even once a meeting. If I hadn’t been there it wouldn’t have materially altered what was happening” (stakeholder 31)

“I've been a bit on the edge of what's been happening. It's not for the want of commitment, it's simply that the scale of the workload that I've been handling just made it impossible for me to log in… Working in relation to Child Exploitation, It's not really a core focus for me...I don't really know how I ended up being invited in ...I wasn't entirely clear what it was about” (stakeholder 38)

## The partnership, collaboration and role of Barnardo’s

### Barnardo’s contribution as a trusted, expert critical friend to Bristol Services, bringing additional resources for development and improvement work

Interviewees frequently identified Barnardo’s as a trusted organisation with high levels of expertise in the area of child sexual abuse and exploitation and were keen to point out the benefits of the Council working with them to develop and improve services.

“The relationship between Bristol and Barnardo’s is really longstanding. That was really positive. People within both those organisations have been around for a long time and worked together for a long time. There’s respect there and shared interests” (stakeholder 69)

“Barnardo's are a big organisation and bring a lot of resources along with them… already set up with their training, data recording. They’re ready to go” (stakeholder 17)

“Barnardo’s have a good understanding of how we work and we trust their abilities. There are many examples of success. Barnardo’s are without the constraints that the Council has...they have expertise through BASE and ROUTES on the issues surrounding exploitation…” (stakeholder 21)

“Barnardo’s are really knowledgeable…They’re doing the intense difficult outreach with young people” (stakeholder 31)

### To what extent was this a genuine collaboration?

Interviews undertaken at the end of the project identified how some stakeholders had an expectation that the Collaboration would include or be owned by organisations wider than Barnardo’s and Bristol City Council. As a result, some were less certain that it had felt like a genuine collaboration than others. Generally speaking, stakeholders from within Bristol City Council and Barnardo’s described this as a genuine collaboration.

“It felt very, very collaborative” (stakeholder 65)

“It eventually became about ensuring everyone was involved as equal partners…This was a great example in terms of equal voices around the table” (stakeholder 18)

“Yes (it was a collaboration of) key partners, representation from young people who have accessed the service, who have closed from the service, from individuals in the community” (stakeholder 8)

Whereas other stakeholders viewed it as a partnership between Bristol City Council and Barnardo’s, with other organisations feeding into it their information, intelligence and views.

“I envision it as Barnardo’s and Bristol City Council leading it and then everyone else underneath it – the police, the voluntary agencies, the safer options panel, everyone informing for the two at the top to create what they have” (stakeholder 6)

“I feel it’s a collaboration between two organisations (the Council and Barnardo’s) not a collaboration with the community organisations and agencies that do a lot of this work. They’ve been to them, spoken to them, taken on board what they’ve got to say but that doesn’t make it a collaboration” (stakeholder 17)

### A frequently expressed view was that Barnardo’s prominent position in the Collaboration potentially gave them an unfair advantage in subsequent re-commissioning including procurement processes

There was a relatively widespread perception that, because of their role within the project process, Barnardo’s would automatically win the re-specified and eventually re-commissioned service.

The project team had realised this could be a possible interpretation and had tried at the outset to counter it.

“Our message is it's not all about Barnardo’s. We know small community organisations play an important role....We planned a lot … in the oversight group and that's why we were really, really cautious in some of our early messaging around the project ...Yeah, we were really worried about that - a much bigger charity compared to the smaller ones” (stakeholder 64)

“There's a bit of nervousness that Barnardo’s is going to …swoop in and win all of the work… So we tried to overcome that by just getting [council senior managers] to help do a bit of positive PR. … the context of this work” (stakeholder 67)

Nevertheless, there was disquiet among some interviewees, and not just those from community organisations, that Barnardo’s would have an unfair advantage over other organisations because they had been so instrumental in shaping the specification for the service tender.

“Barnardo’s are the existing provider for the BASE contract, they’re in this strategic advisory role when there’s going to be the opportunity for them to bid at the end. I found that quite a strange move in a commercially sensitive way” (stakeholder 10)

“My concern was ‘oh well we’ll go through this, Barnardo’s will do the research and, then obviously, they’re going to get the work’. They’ve been there all along so they’ve got a massive advantage” (stakeholder 17)

These views were sometimes expressed in the context of smaller organisations having lost out to larger ones in the past.

“It's an ongoing challenge for smaller organisations who are often asked to come, be part of things, share expertise, but not necessarily deliver the work or get very small pockets of work that actually they're more equipped to be able to provide… the tendering process … is riddled …with inequality for the smaller organisations and I think that no one's oblivious to that” (stakeholder 40)

“When there's big pots of money going, I think there's this long history of those smaller, grassroots organisations don't tend to get a look in and it goes to those bigger organisations” (stakeholder 20)

There was also disquiet from grassroots organisations and other stakeholders about the sharing of commercially sensitive knowledge to help inform a competitive process. Most did so because they supported the principle of trying to find better ways to support their young people, but some had felt reluctant to participate in this way.

“We were giving lots of information [over to the collaboration], but it didn't seem to understand where that was going and also how it would benefit a grassroots organisation like ourselves by spilling our guts… It was very much sometimes like it always is, a free consultation by the community” (stakeholder 39)

## Project team and project management

### The project team showed great energy and commitment

The project team diagnosis of itself and the perception of others working closely with it was that people worked well together, were committed, enthusiastic and felt able to discuss and challenge each other in a positive way.

“The team work was good. A really positive experience. We were able to have some challenge around some of those things that was helpful and generally people were really engaged in the project wanted to do a good job” (stakeholder 69)

“The enthusiasm of the programme team to make a difference and the energy they brought to that was inspiring…The project team was diverse in terms of expertise, experience and ways of thinking” (stakeholder 81)

“There was great energy for the team and different ways of thinking and sometimes disagreement was good. A good project is where there is some challenge and that is healthy. This showed in this project.” (stakeholder 83)

### More knowledge of child exploitation and the Bristol area would have been helpful within the Core Team

A relatively frequently expressed view amongst partners was that, on reflection, the composition of the project team was not optimal. It was felt that having more subject matter knowledge - of children’s services, perhaps even exploitation - and Bristol knowledge within the inner project team would have helped. A way of compensating for this might have been to have had a local Barnardo’s specialist as a member of the inner project team.

“Having a team that came in based on the skills of service design rather than the subject matter wasn’t the right way of doing it. I think we would have been better off having people with different methodologies that were experts in exploitation. I think the first 4 months, it didn’t have the depth of research and practice expertise I would have hoped for” (stakeholder 5)

“We needed people doing that work with a bit more subject matter expertise - so not of exploitation issues necessarily, but of children services, in terms of the structures, the systems, the ways in which they generally work” (stakeholder 64)

### Project management was considered effective

There was frequently expressed positive feedback about the management of the project, including that it was clear, kept to timelines and agreed processes, provided updates, shared information and generated high quality outputs.

“Materials [shared] have been very professional - each stage was clear, well thought through, they kept to timelines. Overall, the project management was robust” (stakeholder 10)

“[The project management] was organised very well – the [core] meetings were structured, booked in advance, we knew in advance what was being discussed so could prepare. We’ve been kept up to date with the findings all along the way which meant I was able to keep my staff up to date. It was transparent, there was sharing of information” (stakeholder 6)

## The research process

### The research process was strong

The research component of the project was widely and highly praised. It was described as ‘gold standard’ and putting Bristol ‘top of the league’ for other local authorities to follow. The research was felt to be extremely thorough, methodically robust, structured, independent, conducted by experts and, because of all that, very credible.

“I don’t think we have any other piece of work with that investment and resource... The quality of some of the products, the volume of consultation felt really significant” (stakeholder 73)

“Having the research team gave it a process and a robustness, good to be able to say there was a team of experts in their field, knew what they were doing and why. People won’t be able to say ‘this is rubbish, you’ve just dreamt it up’. It was a proper process and took in lots of people’s views” (stakeholder 25)

Those stakeholders who had been interviewed or taken part in workshops felt they had been able to express themselves freely and fully and were confident that they had been listened to. There was also a sense that this was the same for the young people and families who were interviewed. The workshop facilitation was described as structured and effective.

“At my first interview it was an independent consultant I’d never met before so I could speak freely and frankly” (stakeholder 10)

“I've had some feedback that the young people felt really listened to. Some of the workforce as well.. felt really involved and listened to.” (stakeholder 64)

“I really liked the deep diving we did in the meetings I attended … Day to day we’re firefighting, lost in it, so good to be able sit outside and have the deep discussion. I liked the way the researchers set out the framework, how they set out boxes and we’d say certain things and they’d go into boxes. It was quite organised, you could see the work you were doing building” (stakeholder 17)

“I just think it was facilitated quite well. There was the space to have the discussions and …. people would challenge each other and it was fine. It felt like a safe space to do that” (stakeholder 20)

However, there was mixed opinion of the format of broader stakeholder meetings. It was recognised that on-line meetings were at times essential[[11]](#footnote-11) or convenient. This format had potentially reached a bigger audience but may have resulted in less attention and focus from participants than face-to-face meetings.

“Being able to use online meetings and workshops have been able to reach more than in person. But it’s not always the best way of getting people to share their views. But that definitely helped us to reach more professionals in a timely way” (stakeholder 69)

“[Online meetings] allows people not to turn up or dip in and out, which is what I did. You can be looking at emails at the same time. It makes it more convenient but in making it more convenient maybe people don’t give it as much attention as they could do” (stakeholder 15)

“Some of the update meetings were difficult cos they were half online, half in person. And when you joined online it was difficult to understand what was going on” (stakeholder 6)

## The co-design phase

The timescales for stage one of the collaborative project – 9 months - was considered tight by most of the project team. One of the pressures was the steep learning curve key members of the core project team had to go through to understand the child exploitation and Bristol landscape before embarking fully on the research. As mentioned earlier, another hindrance to the research starting off at pace was the need to get community organisations and their young people on board. Consequently, it seems that the information gathering ate into the end of the process. As a result, there wasn’t enough time to test out ideas with young people and other stakeholders; the co-design phase wasn’t fully carried out.

“[There needed to be] further reflective time to discuss the findings and how to implement. Some of the time seemed rushed” (stakeholder 83)

“I think we would have liked more time in the playback of design” (stakeholder 62)

“I think we could have done with more co-design sessions … with young people. We didn't get to do that so we took the learnings from the interviews forward into what that means for design. But there was a bit of a jump there… We had to very quickly take the evidence base into the services, write up recommendations, whereas ideally you'd do those initial discovery in teams and then you take them into more co-design sessions” (stakeholder 67)

“We didn’t quite get to the co-design bit and I’m not quite sure why if I’m honest… The reality is that that needed to be led by the service designer and we didn’t quite get there” (stakeholder 69)

It was anticipated by some that the co-design process can still be undertaken as part of a strategic commissioning process into 2023.

“The reality is It has been a 9-month project and that’s not long enough time to do that research and co-design and testing project. So, that testing and rethinking things has [still] got to happen...There’s an opportunity to have young people involved in that” (stakeholder 69)

### Reflections on alternative approaches to service co-design

A small number of our interviewees may have misunderstood the long-term cultural and systemic change envisioned by the Collaboration. They referenced an alternative i.e. ‘sprint’ approach to service re-design where a much smaller number of stakeholders focus on an issue over a few days. Whilst acknowledging that such an approach was less in depth and less independent, they thought it could have achieved similar short-term outputs.

“Somerset took the opposite approach and did a ‘sprint’ where they undertook the same steps as Bristol but within 5 working days. I feel from an onlooker that maybe the same outcomes have been achieved within 5 days and for far less investment” (stakeholder 10)

“I worked with one local authority who are in exactly the same boat and we designed it in 3 days. We sat down with partners, used the Google Sprintbook, we worked through a clearly defined process and 3 days later we had designed what we wanted that service to look like and it was no different to what Bristol have just said” (stakeholder 12)

### Some outstanding questions over the funding of the new service

The ambitions of a strategic partnership to develop a strategy and build a new service through attracting funding were not well understood across the partnership. This is understandable, as strategic partnerships are a new model for Bristol and it will take time for services and professionals in the city to move away from their understanding of purely contractual relationships.

Despite regular project briefings, some stakeholders still wondered how a new service design incorporating all the elements presented would be funded.

“It sounds great but where’s all the money going to come from? We don’t have the money to deliver that now so where’s the money going to come from to deliver it in the future… There’s a lot here, it's all great, but how much of this are you going to move forward with...Which out of all of your findings are you going to cherry pick?” (stakeholder 6)

“Good to have big ideas and high hopes for the service but imagine if I sent the document out to my managers they’d say ‘well who’s paying for that, no one wants to pay for anything for us?’” (stakeholder 15)

## Outputs of the Collaboration project

The final ‘product’ of stage one of the Collaboration project was an attractive presentation including the earlier mentioned slide deck of the research findings and opportunities presented to a wide stakeholder group. However, outside of the project team, few stakeholders considered that they had been briefed or consulted on the output(s) prior to the presentation. Project team members reflected that there had been considerable (time) pressures to complete and report on the project, and that this had led to a squeeze on consultation and co-design activities that they intended to draw across into Year 2.

It was frequently understood (and hoped) by many interviewees that the stage one outputs would inform Bristol City Council’s tender specification for a new contract for specialist child exploitation services in spring 2023.

### The research findings as a body of evidence

The general consensus was that the research findings, thorough and reflective of young people’s voice as they were, did not present anything new, rather that they mostly confirmed what was already known and, in that sense, were reassuring.

“I think that what young people told us reinforced either what we knew or we thought. But then again, we carry out loads and loads of learning reviews. Our problem is we don't implement them” (stakeholder 64)

“I don’t think there’s anything ground-breaking that has come out of the project but that’s probably OK. What that says is we’re not getting it really wrong currently” (stakeholder 69)

“There wasn’t anything surprising or new - but that in itself is reassuring as means we haven’t all been doing daft things” (stakeholder 25)

Bringing all the data into one place was frequently seen as useful beyond the current project; as solid evidence to assist people in their work, for report writing, to educate, and to obtain funding.

“I can see we have some underpinning elements that will help us do different things. To make bids out for additional resources, pilots to try. We might have thought we knew what we needed but at least now we have the evidence” (stakeholder 5)

“I think I can pull bits of that out and that can be quite supportive for myself when I'm trying to explain something to someone. It might help when I'm writing a report” (stakeholder 20)

“Good to bring it together in one place. Can take the presentation, or a summary of it, out to organisations…schools. Could be presented it more widely to promote system change rather than just being used for this one isolated outcome, the tender bid” (stakeholder 21)

### The extent to which a blueprint for a new service model has been generated

Several of the project team and some other stakeholders expressed disappointment that the outcome of the Collaboration project had not produced a coherent practice model for child exploitation services.

“It’s halfway there. It’s not quite where I’d expect it to be. I don’t think we have a coherent practice model. We have some principles and some points...We have a whole jumble of things that might be good for young people and some potential mechanisms for getting there… but I think we’re some steps away from feeling like a coherent model and coherence in the interface with statutory services” (stakeholder 5)

“You can see in the research where they’re telling us what’s working well and what’s not. You can see the messages…really clearly.. key priorities for year one for this contract but what we didn’t get to was the ‘how to do that’” (stakeholder 69)

“The work that’s been done is vast but in terms of outcomes it’s not what I was expecting. I’m not sure we’re any further forward in being clear about how we’re working to identify children that are being exploited in the LA, what the different pathways might be and then what the services available to them might be depending on their need. I don’t think we’re there,” (stakeholder 12)

An alternative interpretation of the outcome of the project was that it provided a platform or framework, based on clear evidence, on which the Council can build a new service with a new partner.

“It gives us a framework to go out for a strategic partner and say this is what we have learned, these are the ways of working that we want to go forwards with. We want that to be the start of the journey, not the end of the journey and we are looking for somebody who brings knowledge and expertise with that who can align with this” (stakeholder 73)

“The end product gives … enough of a framework as a starting point ...The product is from a young person’s perspective of what needs to change…so it’s not necessarily a blueprint but it explains what is needed” (stakeholder 81)

# Evaluator recommendations based on the findings from Year 1 of the Evaluation

## Year 2 of the Collaboration should commence by refining the Year 1 outputs with children, young people and families, also partner organisations, and developing a form of ‘blueprint’ for future services

There may be an imperative for undertaking this work relatively swiftly in order that high need service commissioning can be undertaken with confidence.

## In doing so, the learning from the Year 1 Collaboration should be taken into account

Key learning from the Year 1 Collaboration appears from all the evidence to include:

* **Building on the strengths and successes of the Year One Programme** including the: use of complementary resources and skills including peer influencers; focus on structural inequalities and intersectionality; strong evidence base; high levels of meaningful engagement of children and families; diverse Oversight Group invested in the outputs and outcomes of the Collaboration.
* **To engage more children in care**, particularly those living in residential care and/or who have disabilities, as these are 2 groups thought to be particularly at risk (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, 2022), also foster carers and fathers.
* **To develop even clearer, regular communications focused on the desired outputs and outcomes of the re-design and re-commissioning processes** and their rationale for all stakeholders who are or may be involved in supporting children who have been exploited or are at risk of exploitation. It may also be useful to identify specific community role models to support these communications.

## Regular, more consistent monitoring of child exploitation should commence

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) identified a lack of reliably collected data and ‘profiling’ of the problem of sexual abuse and exploitation in England. The baseline report for this project identified that ‘*there is a great deal of data about child exploitation in Bristol but it appears fragmented and it is consequently difficult to obtain an overall picture*’.

The baseline report also identified how the current data does not facilitate an up to date understanding of intersectionality as there is a lack of data around important aspects including child sexual or gender identity, religion or belief, immigration status and social class.

Finally, there are significant gaps across systems and services in accurately reporting the experience of children and families of services, and their outcomes.

In our baseline report, evaluators have recommended four key elements for multi-agency child exploitation monitoring, as illustrated in figure 1 below:

**Figure 1: Four key elements for monitoring child exploitation**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How many children are being exploited? | How many children are identified and being supported and safeguarded? | What is children’s experience of services and support? | What are the outcomes for children who have been supported? |

A future reporting ‘dashboard’ to inform service improvement and development has been proposed by evaluators but more work is likely to be required to refine and implement it. This would include the above 4 domains plus potentially a fifth domain - what resources are deployed to tackle exploitation?

# References

IICSA (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse: Child sexual exploitation by organised networks investigation report (2022) The report was downloaded here:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1051729/child-sexual-abuse-organised-networks-investigation-report-february-2022.pdf>

Jay A (2014). Independent Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham

Kelly, L., Karsna, K. (2018) Measuring the scale and changing nature of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse. Downloaded here:

<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/documents/scale-and-nature-scoping-report-2018/>

Lloyd, J., Firmin, C.E. (2019) No further action: contextualising social care decisions for children victimised in extra-familial settings. Youth Justice, 20 (1-2)

Appendix 1: Bristol Children Exploitation Collaboration Theory of Change (Draft 3 post Oversight Group)

| **What is the problem? What needs to change?** | **What do we need to do to effect change?** | **What will look and feel different (by October 2022) if we do these things?** | **What longer term outcomes will result if we succeed?** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| * Children and young people aged up to 25 frequently suffer repeated extra-familial harm, even if they are receiving services, and they generally have poor outcomes * There is a lack of consensus about the best approach to whole system support for young people who have experienced a range of harms (including sexual and criminal exploitation), which each require nuanced responses. Agencies and professionals don’t have all the answers and challenge, whilst challenging, is necessary to drive improvement   **Early information** suggests:   * Service and systems’ responses to harm can be too slow, bureaucratic, and/or ineffective. Also, statutory-led structures (e.g. Safer Options meetings) can be harder for young people, families and voluntary and community organisations to participate in fully. Children, young people and families may not trust agencies to meet their needs and protect them. * A high level of school exclusions increases risk of exploitation. There are likely to be gaps in support services e.g. for young people 18+ who have experienced or are at risk of exploitation. Structural inequalities and intersectionality have a major impact on both the likelihood of exploitation and the service response(s). Unidentified or unmet health or education needs increase risk of exploitation and impact which responses will be most effective **(revisit once discovery phase is complete)**   The issues are complex but the aims of the project are clear:   * To promote recovery and resilience for children who have been exploited; and * to reduce repeat harm | * Working together in an open and genuinely collaborative way * Proactively engaging with community groups and organisations and ensuring that they feel genuinely included * Anticipate and be more informed about the impact of intersectionality and structural inequalities on support system responses and their acceptability to communities * Use language carefully and avoid labelling * Joint commitment of time, skills and additional resources to find out more about the issues for children, young people, families, and communities (from hard data and first-hand experiences) * Applying a service design methodology to co-produce solutions for individuals and communities, and refine options with children, young people, families, and communities (including with reference to the evidence base) * Developing a compelling shared vision * Identifying a clear baseline to assist with understanding and against which progress may be measured over time * Develop effective measures of progress that can be used over time * Develop an effective communications strategy for the Collaboration | * We are more informed about the needs of and how best to support young people who have experienced exploitation * We have a compelling shared vision to reduce repeat harm, and promote resilience and recovery which is strongly articulated and understood by all * We have a realistic blueprint for future service / whole systems development that we can have confidence in going forward * Children, young people, families and communities are signed up to the vision and blueprint * Relevant services / service leaders are signed up to the vision and blueprint and the resources required to facilitate it * There is a clear baseline describing whole system support for children and young people who have experienced exploitation and their families against which progress may be measured * There is an agreed set of measures of progress * Trust and confidence in the Collaboration and the approach to service design is growing | * Children and young people aged up to 25 who have experienced harm consistently get the support they need to recover, move forward and be safe   The incidence of repeated harm is reducing   * Children and young People and their families have more trust and confidence in services * Children and young people feel safer and happier * Agencies and services are working better together to tackle exploitation and are more open to hearing from children and families * Trust and confidence in, and join up of, statutory services in addressing extra-familial harms are increasing amongst stakeholders, including community organisations * There is trust and confidence in the Collaboration and the approach to service design * Prevalence/incidence, service activity and impact measures relating to the blueprint are being monitored regularly and the findings are being discussed and acted upon * Specific measures of young people’s progress and recovery appropriate to the outputs from the service design are in place and demonstrating improvement e.g. more young people who have been exploited are in Employment, Education or Training **(to revisit as solutions are designed and specify measures)** |

1. Peer influencers are young people with lived experience of support services, albeit not necessarily of exploitation (support services), who are paid for their time to be involved in the project [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A Theory of Change articulates the rationale for the project, its key mechanisms, and its short and longer term effects [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Young people [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Resulting from Bristol CC’s commissioning timeline [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Defined as multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination resulting from: sexual orientation and identity; gender and gender identity; race; economic status; immigration status; national origin; ability [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://sites.southglos.gov.uk/safeguarding/wp-content/uploads/sites/221/2015/05/Cross-Border-Peer-Abuse-CCE-Thematic-CSPR-Report-for-publication-2.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Defined as multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination resulting from: sexual orientation and identity; gender and gender identity; race; economic status; immigration status; national origin; ability [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. BASE is a specialist Barnardo’s service working with young people who have been sexually exploited and/or are at very high risk of child sexual exploitation. It works with children and young people in Bristol but also across the wider West of England area and Somerset [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. ROUTES is a specialist service aimed at tackling serious youth violence and child criminal exploitation across central and east Bristol and is a partnership between Barnardo’s and Learning Partnership West. ROUTES also delivers a similar service in Somerset [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Including because of inter-generational trauma or earlier experiences, for example with the Police [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. As a result of the Covid Pandemic [↑](#footnote-ref-11)