

COMMISSION YOUNG LIVES

15th November 2023

Rt. Hon. James Cleverly MP
Home Secretary
Home Office

Dear Home Secretary,

Hidden in Plain Sight – the final report of the Commission on Young Lives

I would like to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Home Secretary, and to provide you with a copy of the Commission on Young Lives report, '[Hidden in Plain Sight](#)' which was published a year ago this month.

Following the end of my term as Children's Commissioner for England, I launched the Commission to develop a new national action plan to protect those teenagers most at risk of becoming victims of criminal and sexual exploitation, gang activity and serious violence. As you will know, every year tens of thousands of children in England are becoming victims of exploitation or becoming involved in serious violence and the criminal justice system.

Despite good initiatives like the introduction of Violence Reduction Units, and the potential for improved learning through the Youth Endowment Fund, the system for keeping our most vulnerable children safe from harm remains fractured and uncoordinated. A report by the National Audit Office published last year made clear that the present systems of intervention are not reaching many of the most vulnerable young people, and that a strategic approach across government is also lacking.

This is a national emergency. Hardly a week is passing without another teenager being killed or seriously injured, often at the hands of another young person. As I write this letter today, it has been reported that a 17-year-old has been stabbed to death in West London. Last week, two teenagers were killed, one of them close to a school.

In 'Hidden in Plain Sight' the Commission made a series of recommendations to government, including:

- Reforms to the youth justice system to prevent young people from harm, including therapeutic interventions to respond to trauma.
- A new Sure Start Plus - a 'Sure Start for Teenagers' network of intervention and prevention hubs around schools, bringing together health and education with children's services and the police to provide bespoke support for teenagers at risk – starting in the most disadvantaged areas.
- A new era of inclusion in schools to support children with special educational needs and support attendance.

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- An army of youth practitioners recruited to identify struggling youngsters and support and guide them to succeed – in and around schools. Funded by proceeds of crime funds.
- A recovery programme to support young people's mental health – including improvements in CAMHS waiting times and treatment, an extension of mental health teams in schools, and community mental health drop in centres.
- The implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, including reform to social care to prevent young people entering care and providing high quality care placements if needed.
- A national mission to identify and remove racial bias in systems that means many Black, Brown and Minority Ethnic children fall through gaps in services and into danger.

Most importantly, we need a recognition at the top of government that the crisis of teenage harm and violence is a national threat and that it should be a national priority.

As you may recall, the government of Theresa May initiated the Serious Violence Taskforce within government to begin the task of coordinating a national response to tackling the scourges of serious violence and child exploitation. Unfortunately, despite making some progress in drawing together the different strands of Whitehall with responsibility for keeping children safe, the Taskforce was mothballed following the change of Prime Minister in 2019.

I am writing to ask you to consider reconvening the Government's Serious Violence Taskforce, not only as a demonstration of the government's commitment to developing a national plan to tackle these problems, but also as a means of providing political leadership for an issue that is destroying too many young lives, families, and communities.

I accept that the Home Secretary is not responsible for education, the care system, and other systems that are not working together as they should. However, the Home Office is responsible for keeping people safe on our streets, and as a very senior Cabinet Minister you carry the political weight to make a difference and to bring other parts of government with you to tackle these problems.

I would welcome an opportunity to discuss these issues with you in future.

Best wishes



Anne Longfield CBE

CHAIR OF THE COMMISSION ON YOUNG LIVES