



Dr Onkar Sahota AM
Chair of the Health Committee

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
(Sent by email)

4 December 2023

Dear Sadiq,

I am writing to you in my position as Chair of the London Assembly Health Committee following the Committee's investigation into trauma-informed approaches to youth violence in London. The Committee held a meeting in City Hall on 25 May 2023, which was attended by the following guests:

- **Vicky Hobart**, GLA Group Director of Public Health and Deputy Statutory Health Adviser
- **Lib Peck**, Director, Violence Reduction Unit
- **Farrah Hart**, Consultant in Public Health, GLA Group Public Health Unit
- **Dr Martin Griffiths CBE**, National Clinical Director for Violence Reduction, NHS England
- **Dr Estelle Moore**, Consultant Clinical and Forensic Psychologist, Head of Service, Broadmoor Hospital, and Director of Psychological Professions, West London NHS Trust
- **Keith Cohen**, Head of the Youth Justice Service, London Borough of Lewisham
- **Marika van Harskamp**, Head of Policy, Redthread
- **Aidan Phillips**, Trauma-Informed Communities Project Manager, WAVE Trust.

The Committee also visited St Mary's Hospital in Paddington on 1 November 2023, where it met with staff from the hospital and Redthread, the charity that is delivering the Youth Violence Intervention Project (YVIP) in the hospital. The visit enabled the Committee to understand how Redthread works to embed youth workers in hospitals, in order to support young people who have been impacted by violence in a trauma-informed way. Redthread staff carry out vital work in providing emotional support and guidance to young people at the 'reachable moment' when they are likely to be most receptive to this guidance, as well as helping to create referral pathways for accessing other services.

The Committee is enormously grateful to the Redthread youth workers who spoke about the work they do in A&E departments. This brought home to the Committee the value of working with young people affected by violence in a compassionate and trauma-informed way, as well as helping them to navigate and connect with a range of community services. The Committee recognises the importance of this work and believes it could be applicable in other scenarios where young people have been affected by violence.

Embedding trauma-informed practice across London

The Committee was keen to explore how trauma-informed practice is being used by agencies in London as part of a wider public-health approach to youth violence. The link between trauma and violence is rooted in the understanding that adverse childhood experiences can impact how children and young people experience the world around them, respond to situations and engage with services.

For example, guests at the Committee's meeting suggested that children and young people who have experienced trauma may find it more difficult to form trusting relationships; be less likely to want to work with people in authority; and may not always respond to certain situations in safe or appropriate ways, putting them at greater risk of violence, either as a victim or a perpetrator.¹ A trauma-informed approach seeks to embed an understanding of the impacts of trauma to inform how services work with individuals, and also target preventative interventions.

The Committee heard that the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) has played a key role in promoting trauma-informed approaches in London and has sought to embed trauma in its own programmes of work. Vicky Hobart, GLA Group Director of Public Health and Deputy Statutory Health Adviser, said the VRU had helped to deepen understanding in London that victims and perpetrators are "often from the same communities and experiencing the same traumas".² Dr Martin Griffiths CBE, National Clinical Director for Violence Reduction at NHS England praised the VRU and said it had "energised" the NHS programme on violence reduction.³

The Committee heard of various ways in which trauma-informed approaches can be practically implemented by services in London, including:

- training staff who work across a range of services to understand the signs of trauma in the people they support
- ensuring services are not retraumatising children and young people
- creating opportunities for children and young people to co-design services to better respond to children and young people with trauma
- providing support to workforces that are themselves exposed to challenging and potentially traumatic experiences through the course of their work.⁴

The Committee was struck by the potential impact of trauma-informed approaches, but also the breadth of understanding of what trauma-informed practice involves and how it can be applied at multiple levels with individuals, communities and organisations. Farrah Hart, Consultant in Public Health at the GLA Group Public Health Unit (PHU), explained that trauma is complex and impacts people differently, and trauma-informed approaches therefore need to be adaptable to individuals' experiences.⁵ Whilst the Committee recognises the inevitably flexible nature of taking a trauma-informed approach, the core components of this approach must be clearly defined to ensure it can be practically applied to services.

¹ London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023 pp.2-3

² London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023 p.2

³ London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023 p.22

⁴ London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023

⁵ London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023, p.2

It was therefore encouraging to hear of joint-working between the PHU and the VRU to develop a “framework for trauma-informed practice” to be used with partners across the system to help them embed such practice systemically across their organisations.⁶ If disseminated and promoted effectively, this could be an important factor in helping to further embed trauma-informed approaches across London. For example, Keith Cohen, Head of Youth Justice Service at the London Borough of Lewisham suggested embedding trauma-informed training across the Metropolitan Police Service would help officers “navigate the world they encounter” and manage their own vicarious trauma.⁷

Recommendation 1: *The GLA Public Health Unit and London Violence Reduction Unit should make their framework on trauma-informed practice publicly available, and support its implementation through proactive engagement with London health and care services and the Metropolitan Police Service, to increase understanding of trauma and ensure strong take-up amongst front-line practitioners.*

Developing the evidence base

The Committee heard that evidence suggests trauma-informed approaches to youth violence are effective. Lib Peck, Director of the VRU, referred to the investment being made by the Youth Endowment Fund in evaluating programmes designed to reduce youth crime and violence – including in the VRU’s Your Choice programme.⁸ Dr Martin Griffiths CBE, National Clinical Director for Violence Reduction at NHS England, also praised the work of Public Health Wales in demonstrating impact of programmes in Bangor and Cardiff.⁹

Despite undoubtedly good work taking place to demonstrate the impact of trauma-informed approaches to youth violence, the evidence base remains limited. The Committee is aware that there are considerable challenges in creating a robust evidence base in this area. Trauma-informed approaches are varied and include upstream interventions which may take many years to demonstrate impact.

Short-term funding has contributed to challenges around evidencing impact. Aidan Phillips told the Committee that short-term funding cycles do not enable programmes to plan for the long-term, and that multi-year grants with evaluation requirements were much more effective to help local projects demonstrate the impact they are having.¹⁰

The Committee was pleased to hear from Lib Peck that the VRU is “now looking at three-year contracts for organisations”¹¹ and that it is taking other measures to evidence the impact of the work that it funds, including conducting evaluations on all the programmes it is investing in and implementing a new outcomes framework.¹² The Committee is aware that, in October 2023, the VRU appointed the Behavioural Insights Team as an evaluation partner for the hospital based youth work programme. The VRU has also appointed Social Finance Limited as a Learning Partner, with the aim of supporting the delivery organisations to maintain data quality, share learning across delivery partners and identify opportunities for systems change across the hospital based youth work sector. These are positive developments, and the Committee looks forward to seeing the outcome of this work.

⁶ London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023, p.7

⁷ London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023, p.26

⁸ London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023, p.18

⁹ London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023, p.5

¹⁰ London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023, p.12

¹¹ Lib Peck subsequently clarified that the VRU is already providing three year funding for some projects

¹² London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023, p.14; 6

It was also encouraging to hear from Dr Martin Griffiths that the NHS London Violence Reduction Programme has a newly formed Violence Reduction Academy, which is “specifically geared towards acquiring that evidence to show our practice is data driven and evidence based”.¹³ Lib Peck said the VRU would be “plugged into” the academy.¹⁴

Stronger evidence in this area will only help to attract further investment from charitable trusts and foundations and build the case for multi-year funding settlements from central government. In addition to existing commitments to build the evidence base, the Committee believes that the VRU can play a key role in collating a broader evidence library on trauma-informed and public health approaches to violence reduction. As an organisation that has pioneered violence reduction work, and has benefitted from additional Mayoral funding, it would be fitting for the London VRU to lead on compiling evidence from London, the UK and international examples on the impact of trauma-informed approaches to violence reduction.

Recommendation 2: *The London Violence Reduction Unit should create and maintain an online library of evidence on the impact of trauma-informed approaches to reducing youth violence.*

Recommendation 3: *The London Violence Reduction Unit should share with the Committee the latest information about the Behavioural Insights Team's evaluation of the hospital based youth work programme and the work carried out by Social Finance Limited to support delivery organisations. This information should include the key objectives, plans for implementation and timescales of the work.*

Yours,



Dr Onkar Sahota AM
Chair of the Health Committee

¹³ London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023, p.7

¹⁴ London Assembly, [Health Committee – transcript](#), 25 May 2023, p.8