

Independent review into the
circumstances surrounding the murder
of Hakim Sillah

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Foreword

Hakim Sillah was murdered on the 7th November 2019. Shortly after his death I was commissioned by the London Borough of Hillingdon to undertake an independent review into the circumstances surrounding the murder. I had neither worked for the London Borough of Hillingdon in the past and nor did I know any of the staff at Hillingdon until I took up this commission. The Terms of Reference for this review are set out in an Appendix to this report.

My background is that I am a former Director of Social Services for a London Borough and then spent the last four years of my full time career working as Chief Executive of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales. I was appointed a CBE for services to youth justice in the Queen's birthday honours in 2013.

Since that time I have undertaken a variety of work in the areas of youth justice and safeguarding children. I spent four years chairing a Local Children's Safeguarding Board, and in this role I commissioned a series of serious case reviews for my Board, including the review into abuse of children at Medway Secure Training Centre. I currently chair a Youth Offending Service's Management Board in a county.

In 2016 I completed the Independent Review into the response of South Yorkshire Police into child sexual exploitation between 2000 and 2015, and in 2019 I completed a Serious Case Review for a London Borough into the murder of a 14 year-old boy.

This review into the murder of Hakim Sillah was delayed by the need for criminal proceedings to be completed; these were then delayed by the Covid crisis.

In the course of the review I have spent time with Saranba Sillah, Hakim's mother, with twelve members of the Hillingdon Youth Justice Service, and have also reviewed the evidence concerning the murder held by the Police. I also attended part of the trial of Vladimir Nachev and have read the sentencing remarks of the trial judge, the Honourable Mr. Justice Saini, as well as numerous other documents provided by the various parties. I have discussed the wider issues arising from the tragedy with officials from the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales and I have spoken to the Heads of Service of four other London Youth Offending Teams about those of their experiences that are relevant to this review.

In the report I examine the sequence of events leading up to the murder and the immediate aftermath. I have identified key issues that arise from this tragedy and make recommendations to the London Borough of Hillingdon and others that are designed to prevent a similar tragedy occurring in the future.

I express my appreciation for the assistance provided to me by Saranba Sillah during such a terrible time.

I would also like to put on record my thanks for the tireless help provided by Kat Wyatt of Hillingdon Council's Youth Justice and Adolescent Services and Detective Sergeant Russell Duke of the Metropolitan Police Service in responding to my many enquiries. Alex Coman, Hillingdon's Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Partnerships, and Michelle Smith, an Executive Officer with the Council, have also greatly assisted my review. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance provided by Carolynn Gallwey, a partner at Bhatt Murphy solicitors in facilitating my contact with Hakim's family.

John Drew CBE
London, March 2021

Chapter 1 – Summary

In November 2019 Hakim Sillah, who had just turned 18, and Vladimir Nachev, who was 17, were on the caseload of the Hillingdon Youth Offending Service (YJS)¹. Quite separately they had been convicted of offences that included the possession of weapons². The programmes on which they were engaged with the YJS were designed, amongst other things, to raise their awareness of the dangers inherent in this behaviour. As part of their programmes each boy was scheduled to attend a Weapons Awareness course organised by the YJS on the 7th November 2019.

As far as the Youth Justice Service were aware Hakim and Vladimir did not know each other. Risk assessments, an essential element in the assessment of a child's suitability to a Weapons Awareness Course, did not therefore indicate that they should be kept apart from each other and nor did these assessments indicate they were, more generally, an immediate risk to others. However, unknown to the YJS, the boys, had known each other since early 2019, and in the months before the Weapons Awareness Course began Vladimir had developed a dangerous grievance, or grievances, with Hakim. On two previous occasions in 2019 Vladimir had attacked Hakim, most seriously in September, six weeks before the course, when he had stabbed Hakim, causing injuries that led to Hakim being admitted to hospital. Hakim knew Vladimir was his assailant that night but did not feel able to tell anyone, and nor did the other boy who was with Hakim that night³.

Hakim's mother, Saranba Sillah, has made the point to me that the grievance felt by Vladimir towards her son was one sided. The evidence I have seen supports

¹ At the beginning of 2020 Hillingdon Council changed the name of its Youth Offending Service to the Youth Justice Service, and I am therefore using this title and the acronym YJS from this point forward. This change was not related to Hakim Sillah's murder. In statute (1998 Crime and Disorder Act and subsequent legislation) the core of such services are called 'youth offending teams/YOTs' and there will be some readers who are more familiar with these terms.

² Hakim Sillah was convicted on 25th September for an offence of possession of an offensive weapon (a knife). An offensive weapon is described in section 1 of the 1953 Prevention of Crime Act as "*any article made or adapted for use to cause injury to the person, or intended by the person having it with him for such use*". Vladimir Nachev was convicted on the 14th June 2019 for drug related offences as well as possession of an offensive weapon (also a knife).

³ The other boy, a friend of Hakim's, was also injured that night by Vladimir.

this view. I have found no evidence to make me believe that Hakim had similar feelings of hostility towards Vladimir.

On the 7th November Hakim arrived early for the first day of the course at the YJS office. He was carrying a knife, as was Vladimir, who arrived slightly late. Neither boy knew that the other would be at the course. However, when Vladimir joined the course he saw and immediately attacked Hakim and in less than 40 seconds he had tried to stab him four times. Two blows struck Hakim. Desperate attempts were made, first by YJS staff and then emergency services, to save Hakim's life. These included surgical intervention on site. However, one of the blows proved fatal. Hakim was pronounced dead at Hillingdon hospital an hour after the attack.

It was agreed that the Police should make initial contact with Hakim's mother, Saranba Sillah, and tell her about the attack. The first officer who called on Saranba had other duties to perform in relation to the attack and so did not arrive until Hakim had died.

Although Vladimir ran away from the Civic Centre, and cleaned and threw away his knife, there were several witnesses to the attack and he was arrested and charged with Hakim's murder within two hours of the attack. He was subsequently tried before the Honourable Mr. Justice Saini⁴ in the Isleworth Crown Court, where he was convicted of Hakim's murder on the 3rd August 2020. On the 12th October 2020 Vladimir was sentenced to be detained in custody for a minimum period of eighteen years.

In the immediate aftermath of this tragedy Hillingdon Council instituted a series of initiatives to support staff who had been affected by the murder, installed a weapons detection system for the YJS, and decided to commission this independent review into Hakim's death.

⁴ For ease of narrative I describe the Honourable Mr. Justice Saini as "the trial judge" henceforth.

Chapter 2 – Background

The first thing to understand about these events is the background against which they took place.

Hakim Sillah

Hakim Sillah was born in Breda in the Netherlands on the 22nd October 2001. He was a citizen of the Netherlands and also proud of his African heritage. He moved to England in 2011, although he later also spent two years in Sierra Leone with his father. At the time of his murder he had just turned 18. Hakim was the eldest child of Saranba Sillah, and had two younger siblings. His father, Sulaiman Daba, lives in Sierra Leone. Hakim's stepfather, who lives in east London, and his maternal uncles were also important people in his life.

Hakim spent most of the second half of his life in Hillingdon. At the time of his death Hakim was attending West London College, where he was studying Sports and Business Management. He had many ambitions in life, hoping to study sports law. Hakim was very close to his mother and his sister and brother. Saranba Sillah describes him as *“the man of the house; the protector; the guardian of his younger siblings and [he] even looked after me. He was always concerned about how I felt”*. She describes him as having *“an unbreakable bond”* with his 13-year-old sister. It was very clear in visiting his family how central Hakim was to all his family members, and how close was the bond between Hakim and his mother.

On the 9th October 2019 Hakim had been sentenced to a 10 month Referral Order⁵ in the Reading Youth Court following being convicted for possession of a knife⁶. This was the first time Hakim had been prosecuted.

Following this conviction Hakim underwent an assessment and an Intervention Plan⁷ was prepared. On the 5th November Hakim attended a Referral Order panel meeting with his mother, the Panel approved a five-point intervention plan in response to his offence. I have reviewed this plan and judge it to be entirely appropriate to the circumstances, as the Youth Justice Service (YJS) knew them at that time. Hakim was described to me as adopting a very engaged and positive attitude at the Panel meeting. The seconded Probation Officer acting in the capacity of a youth justice case officer supervising him was aware of the fact that Hakim has been attacked on at least two previous occasions but did not know who had attacked him. These incidents are described in more detail in Chapter Four, where I describe the relationship between Hakim and Vladimir Nachev.

One element of this Intervention Plan was for Hakim to attend a four-week Weapons Awareness Course⁸. This element was only added once an assessment had concluded that it was safe for Hakim to attend such a course; the safety aspect considered principally in terms of the level of risk that Hakim was judged to present to others⁹. The conclusion reached was that Hakim did not constitute a serious risk to others, a judgement that I consider it was entirely reasonable for the YJS to reach on the information available to them.

Hakim was asked whether there was anyone with whom he had “issues” and from whom it would be sensible to keep him during his Intervention Plan. Hakim apparently said that there was no one in this category. Saranba Sillah does not

⁵ A Referral Order is an order available for children who plead guilty to an offence. On receiving the order the child is referred to a Panel of two trained community volunteers and a member of the youth offending service. Together with the child’s parent (and the person harmed by the child’s offence where appropriate) the panel will agree to a contract aimed at repairing the harm caused and addressing the causes of the offending behaviour.

⁶ Hakim had been stopped and searched at Slough railway station three months previously in the company of another 17 year old. He was found to be carrying a knife. This was his only conviction.

⁷ The Intervention Plan in respect of a Referral Order details the activities set, negotiated and agreed as part of a Referral Order to support a child towards living a safe and crime-free life and making a positive contribution to society.

⁸ See Chapter 3

⁹ The reader will find more detail on this type of risk assessment in the next section (page 15 and afterwards and in Footnote 21.

remember being asked this specific question, although the social worker recalls her being present at the time.

As I reveal in Chapter Four it is now apparent that there were several aspects of Hakim's background about which the YJS were, through no fault of their own, almost completely unaware.

The first of these was the details of Hakim's exclusion from school in January 2018 on the grounds of his violent conduct (there had been a fight with two children from the year below his). I have reviewed the file of documents provided by his school, but these, heavily although appropriately redacted, are not easy to follow. Hakim does appear to have been provoked (one child called him "*u asylum seeking nerd*") and it is also hard to assess how serious the violence was, as the Metropolitan Police appear to have elected to take no further action when it was reported to them. Nevertheless it would have been helpful for the YJS to be aware of this episode. At that time the details of school exclusion, including the minutes of exclusion meetings, were not routinely sent to the YJS. Had this happened the YJS would have had more insight into Hakim's circumstances and this would have deepened their subsequent assessment.

Although I understand Hillingdon have now closed this gap in their borough¹⁰ I recommend that other local authorities consider this issue.

I do not believe that the additional knowledge that the YJS would have gained from Hakim's school would have led to any major change to the Referral Order plan, or to the decision that it was relatively safe for him to attend the Weapons Awareness Course with others.

Secondly, the Police held intelligence relating to an incident in February 2019 where they had interviewed Hakim and Vladimir Nachev together, on suspicion that they were selling cannabis. The reader will find more details about this incident in Chapter Four. This information was not shared with the YJS although Saranba Sillah recalls being warned by the Police about six weeks later about the unsuitability of Hakim's association with Vladimir. The YJS has a sophisticated tool for processing low-level information about associations between children, the AXIS system, which I will be describing later in this chapter, and this contains details of a number of incidents reported by the Police in February and March

¹⁰ All information relating to permanent exclusions is now shared with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub so that a comprehensive review of the child can be considered. Furthermore, whilst it is not mandatory for schools to share details of fixed terms exclusions with the Council, this option is being explored in Hillingdon to strengthen their response to emerging concerns, with a focus on meeting the child's needs before a permanent exclusion takes place.

2019. Had the YJS known the details of this particular episode involving Hakim and Vladimir, with the link it suggested between the boys it would have given rise to further questioning and consideration when the attendees at the November Weapons Awareness Course were being chosen. But the YJS did not hold information suggesting a link between Hakim and Vladimir.

Lastly, unknown to the YJS, in the months before the course began Vladimir had developed a dangerous grievance or grievances with Hakim. On at least two previous occasions in 2019 Vladimir had attacked Hakim, most violently on the 23rd September six weeks before the course. Hakim knew that Vladimir was his assailant that night but did not feel able to tell anyone, and nor did the other boy¹¹ who was with Hakim that night. As I have already mentioned Hakim's mother is confident that this hostility was not mutual and I have found no evidence to suggest that it was.

The YJS did know that Hakim had been attacked at least twice in 2019, but they did not know the identity of his assailant as Hakim kept this from them. As it was these attacks were only discussed in the context of Hakim describing them to explain why he felt the need to carry a knife at times, that is for his own protection in the event of further attacks.

I will describe these incidents in more detail in Chapter Four.

It is clear that if the YJS had known about this history of violence they would have sought to protect Hakim by keeping him well apart from Vladimir. Vladimir would not have been invited to attend any activity with Hakim.

Vladimir Nachev¹²

Vladimir Nachev was born in Bulgaria on the 24th July 2002. Vladimir's parents moved to England in 2010, leaving Vladimir with his maternal grandmother. Vladimir joined his parents in 2015 when he was aged 13. He lived with his mother from that time until he has imprisoned for Hakim's murder.

¹¹ The authorities also know the identity of the other boy. Like Hakim Sillah he was 17 years old at the time of this attack. He has never been convicted of an offence.

¹² In the course of this review I contacted Vladimir's solicitors in order to invite them to provide information and/or Vladimir's own contribution to this review. They were unable to contact Vladimir or his family, or contribute in any other way to my review and so I have had to depend on material from Vladimir's mobile, his interview under caution with the Police, the Pre-Sentencing Report on him provided to the court, and a letter sent to the trial judge by his social worker where these sources are relevant.

At the time of his attack on Hakim Vladimir was 17 years old. He was living in Harlington with his mother, stepfather and sister. Vladimir describes being the victim of significant bullying when he first arrived in the UK because of his status as an immigrant. A speech impediment exacerbated this isolation. He did not advance this, or the separation of his parents in 2017, as relevant to his subsequent actions.

At the time of his arrest Vladimir was attending Uxbridge College where he was completing an electrician's course.

Intelligence received by the AXIS service in 2018 indicated that Vladimir was at risk of becoming involved with organised crime groups involved in the selling of drugs¹³. An Early Help assessment¹⁴ was carried out that spring, Vladimir was seen on six occasions and his mother twice, the aim being to counteract the risk that might arise from any contact with organised crime groups. However, in late 2018 and then early 2019 the Police were aware of a number of incidents in which Vladimir appeared to be involved in the selling of drugs in some capacity¹⁵. I understand his parents were notified of these. As already described it seems that on one of these occasions Hakim Sillah was also present but this information was not shared with the YJS.

On the 6th March 2019 Vladimir was arrested for two drugs offences and the possession of a knife¹⁶. He was also found to be carrying crack cocaine. He appeared in the Uxbridge Youth Court on the 30th May 2019 where he pleaded

¹³ In a message in his social media that the Police discovered, Vladimir Nachev appears to corroborate this "16 when I first made 10 bags". NB The interpretation of his expression "no bags" is not clear.

¹⁴ The London Borough of Hillingdon describe the purpose of an early help assessment as "to identify, at the earliest opportunity, where a family's needs are not being met, and provide timely and co-ordinated support to meet those needs. This will ensure families access the right service at the right time and stop issues escalating unnecessarily." Source LB Hillingdon [2018] *Early Help Assessment and Team Around the Family*.

¹⁵ In his statement to the Police after this arrest in November, Vladimir said the intensive period of grooming of him by organised crime groups – selling drugs three times a week - began in January 2019.

¹⁶ Having reviewed the material on Vladimir's iPhone, the trial judge said in his sentencing remarks at the end of Vladimir's trial that "The evidence before me ... satisfies me that you have an obsession with knives, including hunting knives and with drill rap lyrics, some of which you compose, which extoll the virtues of using knives as part of that is clearly a misguided macho gang culture. I am also sure that these obsessions had some part to play in your regularly carrying knives, and using social media to boast about your actions and exploits in the world of drug dealing." Later on in these remarks the trial judge also said that he believed Vladimir's association with "olders" in West London "drug dealing gangs" was likely to have encourage him to carry knives, and he also accepted that Vladimir "may well have been threatened by the 'olders'."

guilty and was sentenced to an eight month Detention and Training Order¹⁷. This sentenced was overturned on appeal at the Isleworth Crown Court on the 14th June 2019 and he was given a 12 month Referral Order.

The YJS made a referral under the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)¹⁸ to the Home Office on the 22nd May 2019 requesting that the Home Office consider whether the facts of the charges brought against Vladimir were sufficient to establish that there were “*conclusive grounds*” that he was a victim of modern slavery (at the hands of an Organised Crime Group or Groups). Confirmation that the grounds were met¹⁹ was received on the 6th December 2019, by which stage Vladimir was in custody for the murder of Hakim. In practical terms the delay between May and December in reaching this decision made no difference to the YJS’s response to Vladimir as the level of intervention with him was determined by the content of the Referral Order Intervention Plan as ordered by the Court in June. In other words Vladimir would not have received a different response if the final NRM decision had been made while he was still in the community.

The assessment for his Referral Order Intervention Plan was carried out by his youth justice case officer and then presented to a Referral Order Panel. The panel then confirmed a seven-point Intervention Plan for Vladimir that included attendance at a Weapons Awareness Course.

I have reviewed the Intervention Plan and judge it to be entirely appropriate to the circumstances, as they were known to the YJS at that time. All of these interventions had begun by November 2019 and Vladimir was perceived to be making good progress²⁰.

¹⁷ A Detention and Training Order is the principle order under which children can be sentenced to a period in custody. The first half of a Detention and Training Order is served in custody, the second half is served in the community.

¹⁸ The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a process set up by the Government to identify and support victims of trafficking in the UK. It was born out of the Government's obligation to identify victims under the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Human Trafficking, which came into force on 1 February 2008. The NRM is a framework for identifying victims of human trafficking and ensuring they receive the appropriate protection and support. “*It is more likely than not*”.

¹⁹ The criterion is that “*it is more likely than not*” that a child is a victim of modern slavery.

²⁰ For more details of this see content on page 17 and Footnote 24.

Like Hakim, Vladimir had been assessed in terms of the risks that might exist around his attendance at the Weapons Awareness Course. I have examined this moment in some detail for obvious reason and this is an appropriate place to consider the issues surrounding this assessment in more detail.

The risk assessment of Vladimir Nachev:

Like Hakim Vladimir was assessed using the YJB's mandated 'AssetPlus' assessment system²¹. One part of this system requires consideration of the issue of whether a child's behaviour and circumstances create a risk of harm either to the child or to others. If such risks are thought to be present, they are then graded in one of four categories²².

Initially Vladimir was assessed as falling into the 'high' category, principally for these purposes in terms of the risk he presented to others. Therefore the YJS considered he represented too high a level of risk to be included in group-work with other boys. So the starting position was that he would receive the weapon awareness course on a one-to-one basis, i.e on his own, as had eight other boys in 2018/2019. This judgement was based on the fact that his conviction involved carrying a knife and indicated that he might be actively involved with a violent culture possibly based on an Organised Crime Group or Groups. The categorisation was confirmed at the regular Multi Agency Risk Assessment Panel meeting held on the 17th May 2019. Senior YJS staff as well as representatives of the Metropolitan Police and local education and health services attended the Panel.

At this time the YJS was very aware that they knew very little about Vladimir and were therefore committed to reviewing this assessment as they learnt more about him via their very regular contact with him during the Referral Order Intervention Plan. Good practice dictates that risk assessments should be regularly reviewed, especially in circumstances where, at the outset, very little is known about a child.

²¹ AssetPlus is the YJBs comprehensive end-to-end assessment and planning framework. It aims to identify strengths and needs and problems in a child, and to facilitate planning of appropriate interventions for children who are offended or at risk of offending, both in the custody and the community.

²² These are 'low', 'medium', 'high' and 'very high'. Descriptors are provided in the YJB guidance "*How to assess children in the youth justice system: section 4 case management guidance*", which was revised on the 1st May 2019 and is available on the Internet <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-assess-children-in-the-youth-justice-system>.

The assessment of Vladimir was reviewed at the Panel on the following occasions:

on the 28th June 2019 (when the original categorisation was maintained due to continuing uncertainty about how much was known about Vladimir's pattern of associations, notwithstanding the fact that the Crown Court had significantly downgraded his original sentence);

on the 9th August 2019 (when the original categorisation was maintained although it was noted there was no new intelligence from the Police – a decision was made to seek some specific updates from them – and also that he was making good progress with specific elements of the intervention plan); and

on the 13th September 2019 (when the original categorisation was maintained despite now several positive reports from the different elements of his intervention plan and Vladimir's own insistence that he was not associating with an organised crime group – the Panel decided cautiously to carry out further checks on Vladimir's circumstances).

However, when the Panel next met on the 11th October 2019, they concluded that Vladimir no longer appeared to represent a risk to others '*at any time*', and therefore downgraded the risk assessment from the '*high risk*' category to the '*medium risk*' category. One consequence of this was that he became eligible to attend the course in company with other children.

The YJS now felt they knew much more about Vladimir than they had at the beginning of their work with him²³. In particular he had secured a traineeship in construction where I am told he was reported to be doing well. He had a good record of attendance at the one-to-one sessions that were part of this Referral Order. Staff were impressed by his attitude and manners, and there was some evidence that he was beginning to trust them and open up about his life and attitudes²⁴. Lastly there was no intelligence to suggest he was still selling drugs or involved in violent conduct, although as we now know neither of these things was the truth.

I consider that this decision, to downgrade the risk that Vladimir was perceived to represent to others, was reasonable in the circumstances as they were known to the YJS at that time.

²³ Different Officers of the YJS met Vladimir nearly 30 times in the period between the 14th June and 7th November 2019.

²⁴ The three staff who had most contact with Vladimir both before and after Hakim's murder all described to me how impressed they were by Vladimir, and, as a consequence, how shocked they were when they heard of Hakim's murder. Two said, "*He was the very last person we would imagine carrying out this attack*" and talked about his apparent openness to them and willingness to participate in his Intervention Programme.

Like Hakim, Vladimir was also asked whether he should be kept apart from any other children or young adults who might be attending the course. He is recorded as saying he has no problems with anyone. As we now know this was not the case, although Vladimir may not have known that Hakim had recently been made the subject of a Referral Order. He had never seen Hakim at the YJS office and I saw no evidence that the two boys had talked about contact with the YJS.

There had also been a plan dating back to April 2019 that Vladimir should receive a separate intervention from a social worker from the children's services Adolescent Social Work team²⁵. This plan had been delayed first due to his custodial sentence and there had then been a delay in implementing the plan after this release. It is impossible to say whether these delays had any significant impact on the chances of Vladimir's grievances against Hakim diminishing.

The commutation of Vladimir's custodial sentence may have given rise to speculation amongst some children and young adults in Vladimir's circle that he may have become a Police informant, a "snitch", a possibility referred to by the trial judge in his sentencing remarks. The case presented by Vladimir's legal team had centred on the contention that he was being criminally exploited²⁶. However, the trial judge was told that the "snitch" story circulated and could have been relevant to later events. Vladimir wrote an account on social media that he had been acquitted²⁷. Unwittingly his action may have fuelled the impression in some people's minds that he was an informant.

Youth Justice Services in Hillingdon

²⁵ The Children's Services Adolescent Social Work team was established in November 2018 to respond to the needs of adolescents at risk of harm of harm from Child Criminal Exploitation or Sexual Exploitation, who were Missing from home, or who were exposed to Serious Youth Violence. The team adopts a relationship based practice model with high levels of contact and empowerment of the children. Once suitability has been established by assessment children choose the social worker they wish to work with from those who are available. Care plans are co-produced with the child and the overall aim is to reduce risk and increase safety in the community.

²⁶ The Home Office defined Child criminal Exploitation in 2018 as occurring where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. Criminal exploitation of children... includes for instance children forced to work on cannabis farms or to commit theft'

²⁷ He posted the following: "Not guilty n they let man go Free all the mandem"

Hillingdon Youth Justice Service is a multi agency service located within Hillingdon Children's Services Directorate based at the Civic Centre. It discharges all the functions of a youth offending team²⁸. The service provides a holistic approach to working with children aged 10-17 in the criminal justice system with a focus on reducing offending. The service has 30 staff delivering its statutory services, including within this number staff seconded from health, police and probation services along with local authority staff. The YJS works with over 300 young people in Hillingdon each year.

All children are supported through an assessment process, which is also informed by screenings undertaken by specialist staff including a Speech and Language Therapist, Nurse and Education Officers. In conjunction with any court ordered specific programmes, a tailored intervention plan is developed with the child to address and support any needs identified. Hillingdon YJS is focussed on delivering a "*child first approach*" that is balanced with "*justice for all*" working closely with partnership agencies including victim agencies and communities to address the factors surrounding child criminal activity.

The AXIS service

The Axis Service is an information hub operating as an integral part of the YJS, with three members of staff. It provides a central source of information about children and young adults' activities, with a particular focus on violence, and on personal and organised crime group associations and affiliations. Key issues on which the AXIS service focuses are:

- Children missing from their homes²⁹;
- Children found in possession of drugs with intent to supply these;
- Children caught up in serious violence; and
- Children who are at risk of sexual exploitation³⁰.

²⁸ See section 39 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, as subsequently amended.

²⁹ This will include children reported missing by a parent as well as looked after children missing from their placements.

³⁰ The Department for Education defines child sexual exploitation as "*a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.*" Source: Department for Education [2017] *Child sexual exploitation – definition and guide for practitioners* London: Department for Education.

It draws on information from the Police, education and schools, children's social care, health, youth offending services, community groups and the public. It shares the intelligence so gathered to assist risk analysis in respect of children and young adults, both individually and in groups.

This is far more than a simple database. Monthly analyses of trends and patterns are shared with safeguarding partners and schools, and with the operational and strategic high-risk panels. The service also provides a screening service on request.

On my brief examination of the service I judged this to be an important and well-organised initiative from the YJS and others to help their work with children and young adults.

Practitioners in the YJS describe different levels of engagement from the many sources from which they would wish to hear. A particular issue that they highlight is that information from the Thames Valley Police (TVP), whose area borders Hillingdon, is not always consistent or timely. There is a suggestion that this is also a problem in terms of information flows from the TVP to the Metropolitan Police. While TVP played only a minor role in this matter, I understand that this is a regular problem (I was told of two incidents in the last three months when TVP did not share information and it has also been commented upon in a recent Serious Case Review)³¹. I refer to this in my recommendations.

³¹ Serious Case Review on Child X – <https://hillingdonsafeguardingpartnership.org.uk/what-we-do/serious-case-reviews/finding-1>

Chapter 3 – The Weapons Awareness Course in Hillingdon

The Hillingdon Weapons Awareness course was the setting for Vladimir Nachev's fatal attack on Hakim Sillah. It is important to understand the context in which they were scheduled to attend the course that started in November 2019.

The place of Weapons Awareness courses in the response to knife and gun crime

Following a national roll out by the national Youth Justice Board for England and Wales³² (YJB) a Weapons Awareness programme has been a key intervention for over 8 years in Hillingdon. This underpins work with children to raise awareness of the dangers of carrying weapons. Those attending the Weapons Awareness course will have been convicted of weapons related offences and will have agreed to attend as part of their intervention plan.

The service has the capacity to run six Weapons Awareness Courses (WAC) each year. One to one courses can be held when it is judged to be inadvisable for one participant to be with other children. The framework for the Hillingdon course draws on written material³³ from the YJB. The YJB has not felt the need to update this material since 2013.

Recent outcomes achieved by the Hillingdon WAC have been impressive. In 2018/19 15 children were asked to attend the course, all did so with an average attendance of 87%. To date only two of these children have reoffended, an outcome that is better than the statistical norm for this cohort of children.

³² The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales is a Non Departmental Public Body operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice. The YJB was established by the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act (section 41). The YJB has two duties that are relevant to this review, first to advise the Secretary of State for Justice [Lord Chancellor] on any national standards that should be applied with respect to the provision of youth justice services [s. 41 (5) (b) (iii)] and secondly “to identify, to make known and to promote good practice” in the area of youth justice [s. 41 (5) (f) (i) and (iii)].

³³ Farag, D. (for the Youth Justice Board) (2013) *The Knife Crime Prevention Programme – process evaluation* London: Youth Justice Board

The Hillingdon Youth Justice Service (YJS) also carried out a larger scale programme evaluation of the WAC and other group-work in early 2019. So far as the WAC was concerned this process evaluation sought the views of 87 children and young adults and indicated that the course was well received by the attendees.

I found these approaches to evaluation to be commendable.

The service also runs a number of other related groups including a robbery/theft group, a “Say no to violence” group, “country lines”³⁴ lines sessions, and awareness sessions for parents.

The content of the Weapons Awareness Course.

Consistent with the YJB’s advice the Hillingdon WAC focuses on raising children’s awareness about the risks to them of carrying weapons, as well as exploding some myths that are known to be circulating among children. Specific elements within the WAC include:

- The law including the consequences of convictions and criminal records;
- The reasons children might consider carrying a weapon;
- Discussion on the implications for children of committing weapons crimes and/or from injuries (including some pictures of such injuries);
- Impact on families of the use of weapons;
- Detailed discussions as to whether there are “safe” parts of the body on which to stab a person;
- Case studies;
- Role-play of conflict situations, including advice on personal safety, vulnerability and decision-making;
- Discussion about guidelines to staying safe
 - public transport,
 - walking alone,
 - socialising,
 - what to do if attacked,
 - avoiding trouble; and
- Every day first aid awareness.

³⁴ The Home Offices defines “County lines” as follows: “*County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of ‘deal line’.* They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.” Source: The Home Office [2018] *Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults – County Lines guidance* London: Home Office

The course normally runs across for eight consecutive weeks but since numbers were low the November 2019 course was planned to last for four weeks³⁵.

In my opinion this is a well-designed programme without obvious omissions.

The organisation of the course

Children are identified as possible attendees on the course as a result of a weapons conviction. The YJS Case Officer then considers, in the sequencing of interventions, when the child should attend a course. The Case Officer shares the child's name and details with the Interventions Coordinator who undertakes checks regarding the child, including any known concerns or risks. These checks include contact with the AXIS service to establish, amongst other things, whether the children and young adults concerned know each other and if so whether there are any tensions between group members. All of this is in addition to the risk assessment already undertaken by the YJS Case Officer during the child's assessment. No connections between Hakim Sillah and Vladimir Nachev were identified during this check³⁶.

As I have already mentioned provision exists to run the WAC on a one to one basis if safety indicates this should happen. Eight courses were delivered on a one to one basis in 2018/2019.

The Interventions Coordinator, an experienced member of staff, assisted by a more junior and less experienced member of staff, led the November WAC. I conclude she and her colleague were suitably qualified and experienced to run such a course. The Interventions Coordinator had been running this course for two years prior to this incident and estimated that she had led "seven or eight" Weapons Awareness Courses.

The Council's advice to members of staff in the event of a serious fight breaking out in a room on their premises is to trigger the security alarm and leave the room immediately. On the 7th November the Interventions Coordinator went beyond this advice. In the words of the trial judge "*With tremendous bravery, [AB] sought to calm the situation in the room while most people would have immediately left*".

I find no fault in the conduct of either member of staff.

³⁵ Smaller groups meaning the syllabus can be covered more quickly.

³⁶ Proof of this "keep apart" system working is provided by the fact that another child was originally scheduled to attend the November course, but this arrangement was abandoned when his connections to another participant became known to the Interventions Coordinator.

Physical inventions, including possible use of restraint, are left to the Security staff. I believe this is a sensible distinction to make.

Security at the Youth Justice Service office

The Council's contracted provider provides security staff at the YJS' office. The Security work base covering the YJS is immediately above the YJS's office and I am told that security staff were at the location of the incident within one minute. As I shall describe in Chapter 5 such was the speed and violence of the attack on Hakim Sillah, the incident was over in less time than this and Vladimir Nachev had already left the office.

Static security is provided by a number of alarms that can be triggered by staff. One such alarm was in the room used by the WAC. This was in working order and was used to raise the alarm on the 7th November 2019.

There was no history of fighting at meetings of the Weapons Awareness Course (WAC) in Hillingdon. Nevertheless the YJS had discussed the more general question of the security in its office as recently at its Team Meeting on the 4th September 2019, which is two months before the fatal attack on Hakim Sillah. This discussion followed a fight between two other boys in the office on the 30th July 2019, and an earlier fight in 2018. Neither fights involved knives. The 2019 fight had been discussed immediately afterwards at a weekly Risk Panel.

A Working Group of staff had met before the September team meeting and provided a list of 17 suggestions (which I have seen) of how security could be improved. Most of these involved relatively straightforward refinements of practice. The eighth proposal, however, suggested *"All YP [thus] should be searched on arrival at the YOS [YJS office] preferably with the use of a security arch."*

This proposition was then discussed at the September team meeting where some staff advocated the introduction of a weapons detection system, probably a screening arch³⁷, and some were opposed to this. The discussion itself was not

³⁷ A screening arch is a metal detector, popularly known as a *"knife arch"*. Such arches are much like the ones used at airports - and would be positioned at the main entrance for children and adults attending the YJS to pass through. In this report I use the title *"screening arch"* to reflect the advice from the Metropolitan Police Service that this more accurately describes a system that may also detect metal objects in addition to knives.

minuted in detail but a number of staff have summarised the content for me. There was no consensus. The staff with whom I discussed the issue recalled the main arguments for and against the introduction of a weapons detection system as follows:

In favour of introducing some weapon detection system:

- It might keep visitors to the YJS office safe.
- It would provide public reassurance that the YJS office was a safe space.

Against the introduction

- It would increase the stigma attached to attending the YJS office.
- It would impact on the development of trust between the staff and the children with whom they worked.
- It might fuel fear of knives among children; such fear is known in turn to be a principal reason why some children carry knives.
- There were practical problems around how to respond if the system was triggered, especially around the handling of subsequent searches.
- The National Probation Service did not recognise the need to deploy weapons detection systems at their office.

I am told there was a fairly even split between the staff group on this issue.

The staff group also discussed the option of a Security guard being permanently based in the YJS office, although again there was no consensus on this. A YJS manager had discussed this option with the security staff and has been told that it might be possible to release staff for specific meetings but a strong case would need to be made around specific risks. As it is, it would take the Security staff one minute to come from their main office to the YJS office.

The meeting did agree to a number of other measures being taken to improve security. These included:

- Testing all security alarms and making sure all staff were aware of their location.
- Attaching these alarms to the main Civic Centre security system.
- Reminding all staff of the Council's "*Staff Safety*" policy.
- Introducing personal alarms for use when staff made home visits.
- Creating a "*keep apart*" list with pictures so that a wide range of YJS staff would be able to access this.
- Keeping blinds open throughout the office.
- Children to be reminded that if they arrived early for an appointment they would not be able to wait in the reception area.

Specific security arrangements made for the Weapons Awareness Course

The group-work room in which the November WAC was held was equipped with one alarm that was linked to the Reception desk. This worked when it was triggered on the 7th November.

The Security Officers covering the Civic Centre were not specifically told when a Weapons Awareness Course was being held as type of event was considered to be *'business as usual'* for the YJS, and did not constitute any greater risk than other work done there with children who had convictions for violent conduct or carrying a weapon. Saranba Sillah has asked me to record that she does not agree with this conclusion.

Chapter 4 - The relationship between Hakim Sillah and Vladimir Nachev

The next issue to consider is the relationship between Hakim Sillah and Vladimir Nachev.

First meeting

Hakim and Vladimir had first met in early 2019. Saranba Sillah recalls Hakim telling her in early 2019 that a mutual friend had introduced him to “V1”³⁸, as he called him.

The first official record of their friendship occurs when the two boys were stopped by the Metropolitan Police in Pinkwell Park, Hayes on the 13th February 2019. There had been suspicion that a group of four people were dealing drugs. A chase ensued and Hakim and Vladimir were stopped and searched. Neither boy was found in possession of drugs but Vladimir was in possession of a cannabis grinder and Hakim was holding £ 90 in cash. No charges arose from this incident.

Hakim was then stopped on the 1st March, again in Hayes. Hakim was found to be in possession with what was described as *“a large of quantity of cash and a number of mobile phones”*. When he was asked what he was doing he said he was waiting for “V1”, Vladimir’s nickname. Saranba Sillah recalls this incident and is confident that Hakim was only carrying two telephones, his own and hers. His phone was playing up at the time and he had asked to borrow his mothers as a back up. She does not recall how much cash he had with him that day and there is no way of being able to check the amount since it was not taken from him. She says that Hakim often carried cash in the absence of any credit or debit cards.

Hakim was stopped again at 0:45am in Hayes, but a search failed to discover anything. Lastly he was stopped on the 6th April (and possibly also the day before) but again searches revealed nothing. There is no mention of Vladimir on any of these occasions.

³⁸ “V1” was a widely used nickname for Vladimir Nachev in the circles in which he moved. There is no consensus as to what the “1” signifies.

At some stage during this episode Saranba Sillah was warned by the Police about Hakim's possible association with Vladimir. She says that Officers told her informally that they believed Vladimir ("V1") was involved in selling drugs and had undesirable association (facts that would have been established by his arrest on the 6th March, although the evidence presented in court appears to have been less extensive than her recall of what the Officers told her). She tackled Hakim about his friend and he played down his links with Vladimir, adding that he did not want to talk more about it.

Saranba cannot understand why the Police did not share what appears to her to have been more extensive information that they held about Vladimir with the YJS's Axis service.

In the run-up to Vladimir's trial the Police retrieved from his iPhone extensive messaging between Vladimir and Hakim over seven days at the end of February and the beginning of March 2019. The content of these messages are strongly suggestive that Vladimir was selling drugs at that time. The tone between the two boys appears friendly. Hakim was certainly buying drugs from Vladimir at this time but I cannot see clear evidence that he was selling with him, although after his arrest in November Vladimir has always insisted that he and Hakim did sell drugs together at times³⁹.

After Vladimir's release from custody in June 2019 he appears to have formed the view that Hakim was circulating the story that he was a Police informant or "snitch" and had been released because he had given information about others.

Vladimir has never explained why their relationship deteriorated. I am conscious that theories abound, particularly amongst children and young adults who knew them. I have followed up each of these but there is very little evidence to support any of them and for that reason I do not repeat any of them here.

Saranba Sillah believes that Vladimir may have been jealous of Hakim because of his greater social ease, particularly around girls⁴⁰. She is also aware of rumours that Vladimir was trying to get Hakim to start selling drugs with him again. The content from Vladimir's iPhone sheds no light on this although it demonstrates amply the hostility Vladimir felt towards Hakim.

³⁹ Vladimir once stated that it was Hakim who introduced him to selling drugs but I have found no evidence to support this claim, and Hakim's family vigorously denies it.

⁴⁰ In the immediate aftermath of Hakim's murder a story circulated that rivalry for the attention of one particular girl may have provided part of the reason for the attack. However, I have not been able to find any evidence to support this.

The first attack on Hakim Sillah

A first incident between the boys occurred sometime between April and June of 2019. Hakim arrived home and his mother noticed that he had a swelling to one of his eyes. Hakim told his mother that “V1” had struck him. Saranba Sillah recalls that Hakim told her they had argued about a girl. At this stage Saranba advised Hakim to keep away from Vladimir.

While the date for this is unclear Vladimir filmed the incident and then circulated it on social media at the beginning of September. The film, a 21 second version of which has been seen, shows Hakim being threatened with a sheathed knife⁴¹ before, in Vladimir’s words, “knocking him [Hakim] out”⁴². As the trial judge said, the video makes for distressing viewing. The trial judge accepted that it was Vladimir who was doing the threatening.

The assault on the 23rd September 2019

A second, and more violent, incident occurred on the 23rd September 2019. Vladimir asked Hakim and another boy to meet him in an isolated spot some time shortly before 21:00. It appears now that Vladimir attacked both boys, stabbing Hakim twice on his left arm, and also injuring Hakim’s left palm and wrist as Hakim tried to defend himself. Vladimir also stabbed the other boy who was with Hakim. Vladimir appeared later to glorify in this attack. He posted a three second video of a “zombie” knife⁴³, the wrapping around the handle of which is bloodied. On this he wrote, “man says it still has hakz blood”.⁴⁴

Vladimir had also told Hakim to bring his passport with him to this meeting. During the attack on Hakim, Vladimir seized the passport and later set fire to it.

⁴¹ The sheath is identical to the one used to cover the knife with which Vladimir attacked Hakim on the 7th November, so this may have been the same knife.

⁴² This may be a figurative expression. There is no evidence that Vladimir actually struck Hakim on this occasion.

⁴³ Zombie knives are large knives with serrated upper blades, so called because they mimic weapons frequently seen in horror films, particularly “zombie apocalypse” style films.

⁴⁴ The knife in question is identical to that found on Vladimir Nachev when he was arrested on the 7th November. It is not, however, the same knife that Vladimir used during this attack on Hakim that day. “man” is taken to be a reference to Vladimir and “Hakz” was Vladimir’s name for Hakim.

He filmed this and the images were found on his iPhone. He also circulated these images to others⁴⁵

Police Officers were called to the scene of the attack where they encountered Hakim who was obviously bleeding. Hakim was reportedly “*very vague*” about the details of the attack and said he did not know who had attacked him.

Hakim was taken to hospital by the London Ambulance Service where he was treated for three days, spending some time in an Intensive Care Unit and receiving a blood transfusion. Interviewed at the time by Police Officers, Hakim said that he did not know who had attacked them; his assailants were all “*blacked out*”.

On examination, doctors found two deep stab wounds to his left upper arm, one of which was gaping on first treatment. There was also a deep cut across his left palm that Hakim said had been caused when he tried to defend himself from his unknown attacker. Hakim was unwilling to provide a statement to the Police Officers.

The incident was followed up by a social worker from Hillingdon’s First Response team⁴⁶ who met Hakim and his mother in hospital and then later at home. Hakim insisted he did not know the identity of his assailant. Saranba Sillah told me that Hakim had not had any previous involvement with social workers and did not have time to build a trusting relationship from which he might have told her what really happened. I can see this could have had an impact but his mother was also none the wiser, and told the social worker that she too thought the attack must have been a random event. At another moment Hakim sought to reassure his mother by saying that the attack “*was just some jealousy*”.

⁴⁵ The destruction of the passport is the clearest evidence I could find of the jealousy that I believe fuelled Vladimir’s attacks on Hakim. Saranba Sillah told me that Vladimir was aware that Hakim and his family regularly travelled abroad (in 2019 they had had holidays in Greece and the Netherlands) and had commented on this with words to the effect “*you think you have it all*”. However, Vladimir’s social worker is less sure that he would have felt jealous of this as he, Vladimir, had the option of travelling to Bulgaria.

⁴⁶ Hillingdon Council’s Children’s Services “First Response” (Referral and Assessment Service) team carries out child and family assessments to enable the service to develop a clear understanding of what children need and how the Council need to intervene into their lives to reduce the risk.

Hakim's principal account was that he thought he was probably the intended victim of a robbery, but I am completely satisfied that Hakim must have known that it was Vladimir who attacked him⁴⁷.

The social worker recalls advising Hakim and his mother to take extra care, certainly in the immediate future. She recommended that Hakim should not go out on his own due to the uncertainty about his attacker's motives. She had formed a clear impression that Hakim was "*street-wise*" and in consequence, and also taking into account his age and the support of friends and family, should be able to steer clear of further trouble.

Saranba Sillah recalls this advice as having been given in stronger terms. She says the social worker not only suggested that either she or another adult should be with Hakim at all times but also that she should consider relocating. The social worker says she believes Saranba is mistaken and that she was not as emphatic on this point.

The social worker was aware that Hakim was very shortly (within the next ten days) to appear in court and that the recommendation to the Court would be that he should come under the YJS's supervision for ten months. Her offer of further personal support was declined, and on the basis of knowing that longer-term support would shortly be available from the YJS, she closed her involvement. She notified the AXIS team of the incident.

Reflecting on this episode a year after the attack, the social worker was very disappointed that Hakim did not feel able to tell her about the identity of his attacker, and wishes he had, as there was clearly more that could have been done to protect him.

After his discharge from hospital Hakim was booked in for three outpatient appointments to treat his injuries. He missed one but was taken to the next by his stepfather. His hand was still bandaged six weeks later when he was murdered.

The Probation Officer from the YJS who conducted Hakim's Referral Order assessment asked him again about the attack on him in September. Hakim

⁴⁷ I believe that Hakim must have known that his attacker was Vladimir. He, Hakim, had been summoned to the location of the attack by Vladimir, someone who had already attacked him once and was circulating taunts about him. I cannot believe he was then attacked by a stranger, furthermore someone who wanted to destroy his passport. Furthermore Hakim's injuries suggest he put up a considerable struggle. The chances that he did not notice that Vladimir was his assailant seem remote. Lastly the Police established, after Hakim's murder, that his iPhone and Vladimir's were in the same location at that time.

repeated his account that this was a random robbery by a person or people unknown to him

Chapter 5 - The events of the 7th November 2019⁴⁸

I will now describe the events of the 7th November 2019.

Arrivals

The first meeting of the November 2019 Weapons Awareness Course (WAC), to which both Hakim Sillah and Vladimir Nachev had been invited, was scheduled to start at 4:30pm on Thursday the 7th November 2019.

Hakim Sillah was dropped off by car by his mother, Saranba Sillah, outside the Civic Centre at about 4:10pm, 20 minutes early. Hakim and one other course attendee, who also arrived early, were admitted to the Youth Justice Service's (YJS) office and waited outside the groupwork room in which the WAC would take place.

Vladimir Nachev arrived at the building entrance five minutes late at 4:35pm. The other boys had been admitted to the room and Vladimir was shown straight there, as the course had already begun. The Receptionist recalls that Vladimir seemed calm.

The attack

On entering the room Vladimir saw Hakim who was seated. Witnesses record that Vladimir seemed surprised to see Hakim⁴⁹, possibly saying, *"Oh, it's you"* or words to that effect. He immediately attacked the still seated Hakim⁵⁰ using as

⁴⁸ In writing this account of the events of the 7th November 2019 I have drawn heavily on the sentencing remarks of the trial judge at the conclusion of Vladimir Nachev's trial.

⁴⁹ As already described Vladimir probably did not know that Hakim was on the caseload of the YJS. He may not have known that Hakim had recently been made the subject of a Referral Order. He had never seen Hakim at the YJS office and I saw no evidence that the two boys had talked about contact with the YJS.

⁵⁰ The speed of Vladimir's attack has puzzled some people and made them concerned that he must have been prepared for Hakim's presence i.e. knew Hakim would be at the course. However, on his iPhone Vladimir had written two months earlier about instant reaction in such circumstances thus *"See opps all I know is on sight him"*,

later became apparent a Rambo knife⁵¹, aiming blows at his upper body. The trial judge concluded that Hakim had done and said nothing to cause the attack.

The two boys briefly sprawled across the desks in the room, scattering and upending them. During his very brief attack, which I estimate can have only lasted 30 seconds⁵², Vladimir stabbed Hakim four times with extreme force. However, the trial judge was not satisfied that the evidence supported the conclusion that he intended to kill Hakim as opposed to causing him really serious injury.

During these 30 seconds Vladimir aimed four blows at Hakim. Two struck Hakim's chest: one of the blows being of such force that it transected his sternum. There was a third blow, causing a defensive injury to Hakim's right hand, and a fourth which caught the other attendee who appears to have been trying to stop the fight.

The Intervention Coordinator went to the alarm button and she recalls that she also kept telling the boys to stop fighting. She says she would have intervened physically but heard Hakim saying that Vladimir had a '*shank*', a knife. Her co-worker left the room during the fight to raise the alarm and the Head of Service for the YJS appeared at the doorway where the Intervention Coordinator was by now standing. The Head of Service also shouted at the boys to stop fighting, to "*pack it in*". The Intervention Coordinator then saw the knife that Vladimir was holding and also saw blood on it. She warned the Head of Service about this.

After this very short attack, both boys left the room, Vladimir rushing for the exit of the YJS office, and Hakim clutching his chest and saying he had been hurt while seeking help by heading in the opposite direction. Hakim collapsed on to the floor in the reception area, losing strength rapidly because of the seriousness of his injuries.

The building alarms had been activated at 4:36 pm and the Council's security staff arrived a minute later. Security Officer A took the outside route to the office and as he reached the main entrance he encountered a "*calm and relaxed*" boy

which can be loosely translated as "When I see a rival all I know is that I will attack them without hesitation". Writing this does not mean that that is how he would behave in such circumstances.

⁵¹ A "rambo knife" is a large 'survival' style knife that is, like a "*zombie*" knife, characteristically with a serrated upper blade to cause maximum harm by tearing as the knife is withdrawn from a wound.

⁵² The attack was very brief; Vladimir only spent a total of 47 seconds in the Civic Centre - the same CCTV camera captures his moments of entry to and exit from the building so we can be certain about this timing.

leaving the scene. He saw the boy was trying to conceal something and asked the boy what he was trying to hide. It then became clear to Security Officer A that the boy had a knife and so he radioed his colleagues telling them there was a boy with a knife leaving the Civic Centre campus. Security Officer A prioritised getting to the YJS office, not knowing what he might find there. However, having established that Hakim was receiving first aid and that the emergency services were on their way, he went back outside to look for the boy he had seen. By then this boy, Vladimir, had disappeared.

Attempts to save Hakim's life

The Interventions Coordinator, shortly after joined by other staff from the YJS (including two trained first aiders), fought to stop Hakim's heavy bleeding by applying pressure to his wounds⁵³. They were also reassuring Hakim that help was at hand. One of the wounds he had suffered had penetrated his chest cavity, passing through his left lung and eventually striking the back of his chest wall. The wound tracked a distance, from skin surface to deepest point of penetration, of 11 cms. This injury led to the collapse of his left lung, the inhalation of blood into Hakim's airways and bleeding to the left side of his chest. The trial judge concluded that this was the fatal wound.

The Police and Ambulance and Rescue services were alerted at 4:38pm. Uniformed Police Officers⁵⁴ arrived at 4:44pm and an ambulance crew arrived less than a minute later. This crew found Hakim unresponsive and not breathing despite the efforts of the first aiders to apply pressure to his wounds and also to talk to him. Hakim was still alive at this time. His blood pressure and temperature were normal. He was provided with oxygen and medication via injection.

As Hakim's condition deteriorated an advanced paramedic, who had arrived at 4:53pm, performed thoracostomies⁵⁵ on both sides on his chest to inflate his lungs. The indications were that severe damage had been caused to his left lung.

During these attempts to save Hakim, a lock knife⁵⁶ fell out of this pocket as the paramedics were removing his clothes.

⁵³ Other staff tended to the other boy who had been injured while trying to stop the fight.

⁵⁴ One Police Officer, seconded to the YJS, was immediately on hand.

⁵⁵ A thoracostomy is a small incision of a person's chest wall, with maintenance of the opening for drainage.

The paramedics assessed that Hakim would not survive without immediate surgery. He was taken to Hillingdon Hospital under blue light conditions, arriving there at 5:13pm. By this stage he was in cardiac arrest⁵⁷ and cardiopulmonary resuscitation⁵⁸ was being attempted by a team of 17 staff including two Consultants. These attempts to resuscitate Hakim continued until 5:25pm when the team concluded he was beyond help.

Authorities contacting Saranba Sillah

Shortly after the arrival of the Police at the YJS, the YJS's Head of Service prepared to contact Saranba Sillah, who she did not know. I think her instinct that this was her responsibility was correct, since the attack has happened on Council premises and Hakim had only been present because her service had told him he must attend.

As she prepared to contact Saranba she was approached by a Police Officer and in discussion they agreed between them that the Police Service would do make this contact. She recalled the Police making a strong representation on this point.

From a Police perspective they were dealing with a very serious crime and I assume they did not want to risk any possible evidence about this being contaminated by separate action from the Council. However, the effect of their decision was that no contact was established with Saranba in the first hour after the attack and the Officer who was tasked with contacting Saranba does not appear from his statement to have been briefed that he was also acting for the Council.

The Police Officer also had other duties to perform in relation to the incident, and thus did not arrive at the family home until 5:43pm. On his way to there he has been told that Hakim had died in hospital. This Officer had to break this news to Saranba.

⁵⁶ A 'lock' knife is a knife that has a blades that can be locked and refolded only by pressing a button Lock knives are illegal to carry in public without good reason. Saranba Sillah was aware that Hakim sometimes carried a knife, which he had told her he did for protection.

⁵⁷ His heart had heart has stopped pumping properly.

⁵⁸ Cardiopulmonary resuscitation is an emergency procedure that combines chest compressions often with artificial ventilation in an effort to manually preserve intact brain function until further measures are taken to restore spontaneous blood circulation and breathing in a person who is in cardiac arrest.

Saranba lives approximately five minutes drive from the hospital to which Hakim was taken. She accepts that she might not have arrived in time to see him alive but she would at least have been able to hold her son had she been informed more quickly. She feels this loss acutely and I agree with her criticism of the approach taken.

Between them the Council and the Police made a poor decision about contact with her. I can see why the Police apparently wanted to control this contact, but they were then under an obligation in my view to respond quickly and to ensure that their Officer prioritised contacting Saranba Sillah ahead of other tasks. It may be that Hakim was still alive when the Officer was first tasked and his mother needed to be told of the seriousness of the situation very rapidly.

I also cannot see why the Council could not have participated in telling Saranba of the attack. As I have described, the Officer did not appear to know of the agreement that he was also acting on behalf of the Council.

Meanwhile the focus of the Council's officers was on the events at the Civic Centre. The scene in the YJS office was described by a number of officers as chaotic because of the number of staff, paramedics and police officers in attendance. However, order was quickly restored.

Events leading to Vladimir Nachev's arrest and the subsequent discovery of the murder weapon

Having severely injured Hakim, Vladimir left the Civic Centre. There are clear images of Vladimir still brandishing his knife before then trying to conceal it. In such circumstances and also taking into account both the speed of the attack and the shock brought about by its violence I think it is entirely understandable that no attempt was made to try to stop him. Outside the office he was seen by a Hillingdon Security Officer, who noticed the knife. Vladimir ran off before he could be stopped.

Vladimir sent a message to a friend within 12 minutes saying *"I'm going to jail. I cheffed up hakz again inside yot"*.

He was contacted by his case officer in the YJS. His case officer had not been at the YJS office at the time of the attack as she was in the Uxbridge Magistrates Court but she was alerted to the incident at 4:48pm. She rang Vladimir at

4:52pm. Vladimir answered his phone⁵⁹ and his case officer noted that Vladimir was crying and she could not understand what he was saying.

The case officer rang Vladimir's telephone number a second time and he answered again. He said, *"They were punching me and filming me, that's why I did it."*⁶⁰

Later Vladimir cleaned his knife and tried to dispose of it in a field near his home.

At 18:45 Vladimir was detained by Police Officers outside his home. As with his conversation with his caseworker Vladimir attempted to place the responsibility for the fight on Hakim and the other boy. He told the officers that he had not started the fight but that *"they punched me up. There were two of them."*

Vladimir was arrested and searched and he was found to be carrying a large knife strapped to his calf. This was a *"Zombie"* knife. There are reasons to believe that it was this knife that he used to attack Hakim and his friend six weeks earlier. He was also holding a large amount of cannabis with an estimated street value of between £ 270 and £ 390 as well as separate *"deal bags"* of cannabis valued at approximately £ 180.

On the 10th November 2020, a Police search near Vladimir's home revealed two knives, one of which was found later to have a DNA profile that matched Vladimir's profile⁶¹. It also fitted the witness descriptions of the knife that was used to stab Hakim.

⁵⁹ I feel it is testimony to the relationship with the Case Officer that Vladimir should answer his telephone in these circumstances.

⁶⁰ This account is consistent with other accounts given by Vladimir subsequently but cannot be reconciled with the accounts of any of the witnesses, all of whom recall that Vladimir was the aggressor. There was a very brief moment during the attack when the third boy present got out his iPhone to film the attack, not realising the seriousness of what was unraveling before him. He then tried to intervene to stop the fight before receiving a wound from Vladimir himself.

⁶¹ DNA is deoxyribonucleic acid, genetic material unique to each individual. In this case the court heard that the material recovered from this knife was at least one billion times more likely to be from Vladimir than from anyone else.

Chapter 6 – After the 7th November

I shall now describe the events that followed Hakim Sillah's murder on the 7th November. Hillingdon Council responded immediately to the attack, agreeing a plan for contact between Hakim Sillah's family and the Metropolitan Police, putting in place a series of measures to support their staff, and changing security arrangements for the Youth Justice Service.

Contact with and support for the Sillah family

I have already described how Saranba Sillah first heard of the murder of her son. There is no evidence that the individual Police knew they were acting on behalf of the Council as well, either on the day of the murder, or when separate more senior Officers visited the next day. She experienced the lack of contact from the Council as an immediate distancing of the Council from her family.

The Police Officer recorded that Saranba asked a series of questions about the background, including how such an event could be allowed to take place in surroundings that should have been safe. While recording that the family had great concern about this issue, it is not obvious that this was then passed on to the Council. Obviously these Police Officers were unable to answer these questions. Had an officer from the Council been present it is possible that some initial explanation could have been provided, although obviously the continuing nature of the investigation would have limited this. At least condolences, a commitment to explain, and possibly an offer to help could have been made.

None of these comments are intended as criticism of the Police Officers, who carried out their obvious policing briefing well, and who Saranba and her family found very supportive.

Support for staff

A great number of the staff working at the Youth Justice Service (YJS) had been present in their offices during the attack. A number observed the attack at first hand, and others were involved in the attempts to provide first aid for Hakim Sillah until the paramedics arrived. It would not have been possible to have been in the office and yet have been unaware of the appalling incident.

On the day after the murder, the 8th November, a critical response advisor attended the Civic Centre and some immediate support was offered to staff. Managers were in contact with staff over the next two days, which was a weekend. A team meeting was then organised for the 11th November, and more detailed and individually targeted support and counselling was made available.

As part of this the Council and one of the NHS Trusts organised group and individual counseling sessions for any members of staff who wished to use these. In total 21 staff made use of one or other of these services, some using these services extensively. A Critical Response Advisor/Trauma Counsellor was deployed to lead much of this work for the first month following Hakim's murder. Specialist interventions were commissioned for some staff over the next 12 months. Helplines are still in place. All but one staff member has returned to front line duties, although some staff have left the YJS.

I have spoken to several members of staff who used their services. Almost all praised the Council's most immediate response although two did find support on the 8th November rudimentary. One member of staff has raised her concerns with the Council. The YJS management do acknowledge that the initial response was put together in a matter of hours (to which I would add, by a service that was in shock) and staff who wished to see the on-site Counsellor, who had more relevant materials and skills, could do so within 18 hours.

There is some divergence on the quality of the counselling subsequently provided, but the majority found it very helpful.

I am aware that one member of staff has made formal representations to the Council on these issues. I am aware of her criticisms. This is subject to a different process and outside the scope of this review and therefore I will not comment more about this here.

After reading a draft of this report, Saranba Sillah commented that none of this support was offered to her or to her two younger children. She has suggested that future planning for such incidents should include details on how a family are

contacted and supported by the public authorities “*in what is obviously an extraordinarily traumatic time and where for example there will be other younger children in the family*” as was the case with the Sillah family. I believe she has a strong point here.

In supporting their staff the YJS management led by example, maintaining a high profile. They were widely praised to me for this. Some staff who I interviewed felt there could have been more communication about what was happening, but most felt they were kept fully informed. As already mentioned one member of staff had a very different view about this.

The support of the most senior managers in the Council, the Chief Executive, Corporate Director for Social Care, and the Director of Service Delivery for children and young people was described to me as being given “*without quibble*”.

The YJS office, now a crime scene, was closed for one day but reopened the following Monday. Visits to the office were initially suspended but the YJS staff continued to visit the children with whom they were working in the community.

Two immediate changes were made to the office. A “*Detection Arch*” was installed on the 3rd December 2019⁶². Regardless of the case for and against the installation of a detection system⁶³ this was a sensible response to regain the confidence of children and parents, as well as of the staff working at the YJS.

Secondly, parts of the carpeting of the YJS’s office were replaced and some redecoration took place. This was a conscious decision to help staff who had been traumatised by the attack, supported by the Trauma Counsellor who recommended a return to the office as quickly as possible. Three members of staff I have interviewed have been critical of this decision, in particular because the new sections of carpet were a different colour. While I understand their comments, particularly in the context of the trauma they had undergone, I do not believe the Council’s managers had any alternative.

Return to a full service

Hillingdon Council held a series of review meetings immediately after the attack, and then continuing into December and the New Year. With one exception I cannot fault the degree of senior focus on the issues arising from Hakim’s

⁶² In the intervening period a Security Officer had been deployed to use a hand held detection wand.

⁶³ See Chapter 3.

murder, the exception being the contact with the Sillah family about which I have already written in this chapter.

The YJS has worked to re-establish its modes of operation steadily since the 7th November 2019, although this has obviously been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 emergency. It is apparent that different members of staff have coped in very different ways to the trauma of these events. A minority told me that they had had to rethink their approach to safety and risk in working with children and young adults. No one said they had been asked by the YJS to expose themselves to risks with which they were uncomfortable, although a small number of staff have left the service since this time.

The “*Detection Arch*” has continued to be in place at the YJS office, and will remain a permanent feature to protect children, family members and staff working at the office. The YJS has not observed any drop in the footfall of visitors, nor has the arch detected any weapons.

All arrangements concerning visits to the YJS office have been disrupted by the Covid-19 crisis but before then there had been little adverse reaction to the introduction of the arch. Two parents are recorded as having complained, and one has refused to attend meetings in the office. Staff report feeling safer.

A memorial to Hakim Sillah

The Council set aside a raised flowerbed on the path to the YJS office where members of the public could post cards and messages and leave flowers commemorating Hakim’s life. This was used extensively although with the passage of time and with the closure of the office during the Covid-19 restrictions its use has reduced.

The trial of Vladimir Nachev

After his arrest Vladimir Nachev was charged with Hakim Sillah’s murder, and remanded to custody. The date of his trial was delayed by the Covid- 19 crisis but he was convicted of the murder on the 3rd August 2020 and sentenced to be detained in custody for a minimum period of eighteen years on the 12th October 2020.

After the conclusion of his trial Saranba Sillah issued the following statement on behalf of Hakim’s family:

“Hakim was stolen from us in an unprovoked, brutal, malicious and cowardly attack. The murder of Hakim has torn apart the very fabric of our family. In addition, this senseless attack on Hakim is a painful reminder of the knife-crime

epidemic that continues to ravage our society and brings untold sadness and suffering to many families. This is a reminder that the betterment of a society is not a duty left to some, but a responsibility to be shared by all."

Chapter 7 – Discussion of issues arising from the murder of Hakim Sillah

I will now discuss the major issues that appear to me to rise from this review.

Was the risk assessment of Vladimir Nachev flawed?

It is clear from the information subsequently gathered by the Police from Vladimir Nachev's iPhone that he constituted a greater risk to children and young adults generally and to Hakim Sillah in particular than had been previously thought.

However, the Case Officer who prepared his assessment did so diligently, and she did not overlook any information that was available to her. A very experienced manager who obviously treated her task seriously then confirmed it, and it was repeatedly reviewed by the Multi Agency Review Panel, where a range of agencies has repeated opportunity to disagree with it, but did not do so.

I make no criticism of the officers involved and do not believe they are at fault here.

The YJS had worked with Vladimir for a relatively short period of time (although their engagement had been intensive, contact taking place on up to three times a week from July 2019) at the beginning of his Referral Order; he had only been convicted for one offence, and the judge in his case had found considerable mitigating circumstances. By the time that the risk assessment was downgraded he was also making progress on the other elements of his Intervention Plan and was attending his traineeship. There were some indications he was beginning to open up to his main case officer⁶⁴, and his conversations with her did not suggest any threat either to Hakim (whose name was never mentioned by Vladimir) or indeed to any other person. It would be unreasonable to expect case officers, however experienced, to understand the deeper recesses of a child's mind if the

⁶⁴ The significance of this link to Vladimir is further born out by the fact that he twice answered her phone calls in the immediate aftermath of the murder of Hakim when it might have been assumed he would have no wish to speak to the authorities.

child did not wish to share a confidence but the Council had recognised the need to deploy a separate social worker, one without any statutory role, with the explicit mission of understanding Vladimir more fully. Vladimir had indicated he would welcome this.

*

Subsequent to Hakim's murder we have learnt more about Vladimir's innermost thoughts during 2019. After his arrest on the 7th November his mobile phone was seized and its content downloaded by the Police. They reveal what the trial judge described as "*an obsession with knives, including hunting knives, and with drill⁶⁵ rap lyrics*", some of which he composed. His music extolled the virtues of using knives as part of a violent culture. He also used social media to boast about his actions and exploits, often with apparent exaggeration. On more than one occasion these included his various attacks on Hakim⁶⁶, as well as his role in selling drugs. His phone records provide clear evidence that he was actively selling drugs, including but not only cannabis, up to his arrest. Although Hakim was one of his contacts and there are exchanges between the two boys about drugs, the records that I have seen⁶⁷ do not suggest that Hakim was involved in selling drugs with Vladimir.

The trial judge reviewed all this evidence and concluded that these "*obsessive*" interests of Vladimir's had a part to play in his regularly carrying knives, and may have been part of an effort to help him "*fit in*" to a youth culture from which he originally felt excluded as an outsider from eastern Europe. The trial judge also accepted that Vladimir might well have been influenced and exploited by "*olders*" in organised crime groups, who he felt were likely to have encouraged Vladimir to carry knives and who threatened him in other ways.

What is clear is that Vladimir hid this part of his life from the staff of the YJS. There was no other information available to the YJS to set against the part of Vladimir that he chose to show them.

⁶⁵ "Drill music" is a style of music that originated in America in the early 2010s. It is defined by its dark, violent, and nihilistic lyrical content.

⁶⁶ For example, he creates a rap between April and October 2019 called "*Buck me just keep it stepping*" (translated as "If our paths cross, keep walking") that includes the lines:
*"Creep on u wit a weopen
Got down hakz in seconds
Xxxx [Named redacted] a bitch n he left him"*
And so on. From what we know the full rap is not completely accurate but the part about Hakim ("*hazz*") can be linked to the events of 23.9.19 that are described in Chapter 4.

⁶⁷ These records start in late February 2019.

Should the Youth Justice Service (YJS) have kept Vladimir Nachev and Hakim Sillah apart?

In this report so far, I have described a number of pieces of intelligence and information that were not available to the YJS as they prepared to convene the Weapons Awareness Course. It seems to me that of particular relevance were:

- Information held by the Metropolitan Police about the links between Vladimir and Hakim in early 2019; and
- Information that could only be provided by Hakim about the earlier attacks on him by Vladimir, in particular the serious wounding of the 23rd September.

If the YJS had been aware of all of this information I find it inconceivable that the two boys would have been invited to attend the same course. But the YJS were not aware of any of this. In these circumstances my conclusion is that the YJS cannot be criticised for inviting the two boys to attend the same course.

The most serious gap in the Council's knowledge related to the attack on the 23rd September. Hakim was asked twice by Council officers⁶⁸ about this. As we now know there can be no doubt that his assailant was Vladimir Nachev. However, on each of these occasions Hakim gave the same story about a random attack by an unknown assailant or assailants. He had given the same story to his mother. As it was, the YJS' Probation Officer treated the two earlier attacks as being important principally in explaining why Hakim felt a need to carry a knife at times.

Hakim did ask the Probation Officer whether he would need to visit the YJS office as part of his Intervention Plan. The Officer replied that he would and recalls asking him whether there was anyone he did not want to see there. She recalls him saying "No". Saranba Sillah, who was present at this meeting does not remember this part of the conversation, and believes she would have said that Hakim should be kept apart from Vladimir if she had been asked. The only attack by Vladimir about which she was aware was the first attack in the spring of 2019. It is important to reiterate that she did not know that the much more serious attack on the 23rd September had been carried out by Vladimir.

⁶⁸ Once by the social worker from the 'First Response' team who had been tasked with investigating the background to the attack and then later by the Probation Officer attached to the Youth Justice Service who was developing the Intervention Plan for Hakim's Referral Order.

Why did Vladimir Nachev have such a strong grievance or grievances against Hakim Sillah?

I have explored this question in detail in my report. I am unable to explain it satisfactorily although I have at times described some of the possible elements and I have given Saranba Sillah's views. During his trial no real explanation emerged, the trial judge concluding, *"Why you attacked Hakim on the day you killed him will never be truly known but it is clear that there was some form of dispute between you which had developed in the prior months."*⁶⁹

Could Vladimir Nachev have planned this specific attack on Hakim Sillah?

I have explored the possibility that Vladimir planned this specific attack, that is an attack at the Civic Centre, in great detail. I am satisfied that Vladimir did not know that Hakim would be attending the WAC, supporting evidence for this coming from his apparent surprise in seeing Hakim there and from the account of the officer who admitted him to the YJS offices that came across as calm and content, laughing when she mentioned he was slightly late.

Were there flaws in the content and organisation of the Weapons Awareness Course?

As I have already described in detail in Chapter Three, I consider that the WAC was well conceived, well organised and fulfilled an important function in the work that the Youth Justice Service (YJS) carried on with children and young adults who were known to carry knives. I have no criticism to make of any of these, and have described the commendation that the trial judge provided on the brave conduct of the Interventions Coordinator on the day.

Vladimir Nachev had developed a dangerous and consuming desire to harm or humiliate Hakim Sillah. As I have written I am satisfied that Vladimir did not know that Hakim would be at the Weapons Awareness Course (WAC)⁷⁰. For this

⁶⁹ The trial judge does then go on to refer to Vladimir and Hakim both being involved in "a drugs gang" and repeats the "snitch" story, concluding that these elements *"may have formed part of your motivation for the repeated attacks upon him [Hakim]"*. But the evidence for this is not strong. When sentencing Vladimir the trial judge considered a Pre-Sentence Report provided by a neighbouring Youth Offending Team because of the involvement of the Hillingdon YJS with the crime. This repeated an explanation provided to the officer by Vladimir in September 2020 that he has *"issues"* with the two other boys at the WAC *"from the past (drug related) and upon seeing him [Hakim] he acted instinctively and sought to attack the victim [Hakim] first before he had an opportunity to attack him...[He] only wanted to make the victim go away"*. The evidence for this explanation is not strong either.

reason he could not have planned a specific attack on the 7th November and so the location of the attack was largely a matter of coincidence. It could have happened at any time that Vladimir saw Hakim⁷¹.

Why was there no weapons detection system at the YJS office?

Having described the meeting of the two boys at the WAC as a matter of coincidence it also appears to be undeniable that had there been a way of searching or screening the boys entering the Youth Justice Service's (YJS) office, this attack could not have happened there. Knives of the type carried by both boys would have almost certainly triggered an alarm on a detection arch⁷² or other detection system and the boys would not have been allowed to enter the office.

So my focus therefore turns to the absence of any form of a detection system. Should the Hillingdon YJS have been using one?

I have already described the debate in the Hillingdon YJS team on this issue⁷³. To recap the issues reportedly considered there:

In favour of introducing some weapon detection system:

- It might keep visitors to the YJS office safe.
- It would provide public reassurance that the YJS office was a safe space.

Against the introduction

- It would increase the stigma attached to attending the YJS office.
- It would impact on the development of trust between the staff and the children with whom they worked.

⁷⁰ In his interview with the Police the day after the murder Vladimir says that he has been visiting the YJS office regularly since March and had never seen Hakim there (as indeed he would not have done as Hakim only started limited contact with the YJS in October 2020). He also makes the point that Hakim *shouldn't have been there* as he was 18.

⁷¹ During Vladimir's trial, the Police presented evidence from his seized iPhone that showed that between the 10th October and the 4th November he had been carrying out Internet searches with a focus on killings, specifically stabbings, knives, and related topics and news stories. These may be relevant his attack on Hakim but no direct link can be made between the searches and the specific attack.

⁷² It is dangerous to assume that the current weapon detection systems in use are infallible. In April 2019 the Government announced a £ 460,000 research programme to develop knife-detection technology.

⁷³ See Chapter 3.

- It might fuel fear of knives among children; such fear is known in turn to be a principal reason why some children carry knives.
- There were practical problems around how to respond if the system was triggered, especially around the handling of subsequent searches.
- The National Probation Service did not recognise the need to deploy weapons detection systems at their office.

For those of us who work with older children these arguments for and against weapons detection systems are familiar. I would like to widen this debate a little here by referring to other sources before describing emerging practice in this area in London.

I think a useful starting point is provided by internal Police guidance adopted by the Metropolitan Police Service in 2012. Relevant extracts appear to be as follows:

“Screening equipment is not a panacea but should be considered as part of the operational toolkit in making London safe...”

“The equipment is not infallible and is designed to provide an indication only. The efficacy of screening arches is affected by many factors including how they are calibrated and the experience of those operating them.”

“The deployment of screening arches is a useful tactic to:

- *Disrupt, detect and deter those committing Knife Enabled Robbery and Violence against the Person*
- *Create a safe environment for the public that is free from crime, the fear of crime and intimidation*
- *Provide public reassurance*

“Screening serves the joint purpose of detecting those carrying knives and other weapons whilst affording reassurance to communities that the MPS is doing all that it can.”

“Screening arch operations also provide a unique opportunity for personal interaction with the community and it is recommended that the MPS does not overlook the positive benefit to community relations that such operations present. In order to maximise the public reassurance that such operations provide, careful consideration should be given to appropriate media strategy. The desire to promote the positive action that the MPS is taking to tackle weapons related crime

must be balanced against the impact of press interest on those members of the community who agreed to be screened.”⁷⁴

This guidance appears to be eminently sensible and has, in effect, been followed by the Hillingdon YJS since Hakim’s death. However, as far as I can establish this guidance has not been shared outside the Police Service.

In the discussion within the YJS team meeting, some members of staff were clearly concerned about stigmatising the children with whom they work with the implication that they were dangerous and needed to be searched for weapons at each office contact. Others were concerned about fanning anxiety about the dangers of knives, with the children with whom they work, with the risk that this would actually increase the use of knives. Some were concerned about their ability to build trusting relationships with children if they were insisting these children were searched before meeting them.

The staff’s concern to establish trusting relationships with the children with whom they work is both commendable and the bedrock of most current thinking in the youth justice world about the importance of establishing relationships with children that can lead to change.

As further evidence of the widespread uncertainty about the issue of whether to use weapons detection systems or not, I would like to cite Ofsted’s research project on knife crime in education⁷⁵. This was published in 2019. It is obviously about education settings rather than youth offending teams and this difference is important. However, there is still some relevance.

While recording that 55% of the settings they surveyed used “*knife detection wands*” and 26% “*knife arches*”, Ofsted made no recommendations on the subject, presumably accepting that a sizeable minority of settings (at least 1 in 5)⁷⁶ used neither and they, Ofsted, saw no reason to suggest any change in their practice. My point here is that the YJS in Hillingdon, although obviously a very particular setting because of its focus on knife crime, was considering this issue in the absence of any clear national consensus as to how to proceed.

⁷⁴ Metropolitan Police Service [2012] *SOP providing guidance on the deployment and use of Screening Arches*

⁷⁵ Ofsted [2019] *Safeguarding children and young people in education from knife crime* Manchester: Ofsted

⁷⁶ As I understand the Ofsted report, some settings may have used both types of technology so the proportion that used neither will be higher than 1 in 5.

There is, however, evidence that London children themselves report feeling unsafe about the widespread use of knives. In March 2020 another London borough close to Hillingdon published a report of attitudes of children about knives that suggested considerable support for more police searching and the deployment of “*knife arches*” in school, attitudes that perhaps had not been thought to be widespread amongst London children in the past⁷⁷.

I have raised the issue of the deployment of Weapon Detection systems with the Youth Justice Board (YJB). Their functions, to advise the Secretary of State for Justice on the provision of youth justice services and also to make known and promote good practice⁷⁸, are relevant here. They have explained to me that they have not updated their advice in the area of Knife Crime Prevention Programmes since 2013 but they are currently working in London with the London Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) on producing a new toolkit for youth offending services working with children at risk of or engaging in knife crime related offending. The publication of this work is currently being finalised.

The YJB does not offer specific guidance about the use of weapons detection system, and nor does the current edition of the government’s “*Standards for children in the youth justice system*”⁷⁹ cover the issue. In the immediate aftermath of Hakim’s murder the YJB have told me that they took the view that decisions surrounding weapon detection systems would need to be locally led, and their expectation was that local leaders would balance “*locally known risk and needs alongside the proportionality of measures to the actual risk of knife offences on their premises, against the possibility of negative impacts on children’s perceptions of safety*”⁸⁰.

Saranba Sillah is now aware of the YJB’s position and asked me to include her comments on this: “*I am concerned that given the epidemic of knife crime amongst young people in the past five years or so the guidance disseminated by the Youth Justice Board ... was not up to date and did not make firm recommendations in*

⁷⁷ Care needs to be taken in the interpretation of messages from this research but it is worth further consideration. Source Hounslow Youth Council [2020] *Knife Crime – Young Researchers – Final report* London: London Borough of Hounslow. For an at times contrary view from see Reclaim [2020] *Listening to the experts – Getting beyond the headlines to hear what young people want and need to stay safe from violent crime* Manchester: Reclaim

⁷⁸ Section 41 (5) (b) (i) and (5) (f) (i) respectively.

⁷⁹ Ministry of Justice/YJB [2019] *Standards for children in the youth justice system* London: Ministry of Justice

⁸⁰ Correspondence with the author.

relation to weapons detection systems as of course this was the primary reason why ... no such system was installed at Hillingdon ... [this] seems to be an obvious failure to update their guidance."

With the help of the YJB I identified initially that at least three⁸¹ London Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), that is two plus Hillingdon, now use Weapons Detection systems. Subsequently I have identified at least one more London YOT that has been using routine detection systems to protect children and their staff for a year. I suspect the number is greater. In each instance the deployment of such systems⁸² follows a specific incident or incidents as well as a more generalised concern about the rising number of their children who are carrying knives for their protection (and in some instances to facilitate crime). In at least one instance the YOT consulted their children who wanted to see detection systems installed. In each instance the YOTs did not take their decisions lightly, and also in each instance they described how the use of detection systems rapidly became the "*new normal*". One YOT uses hand held detection wands when carrying out group work that involves travel away from their office.

I have also spoken to another London YOT with less direct experience of this issue. They have not had any experience of fighting in their offices and in common with other YOTs have so far resisted installing any weapons detection system for two reasons.

- They believe it would only deter people carrying knives to their office rather than acting as more general deterrent, and
- It would make more difficult the establishment of trusting relationships with the children with whom they work.

Having summarised all these points of view, it is my conclusion that Youth Offending Teams in areas where knife crime is a significant issue ought to learn the same lesson as had the Hillingdon YJS and install a weapons detection system for any buildings that they use for meeting children, and, in particular, for any buildings where they carry out weapons awareness courses. This tragedy has demonstrated that there is a risk in not having such a system and it would be a disaster if these circumstances were to reoccur.

Such a system would also require the full time presence of staff who have had security training.

⁸¹ I suspect the actual number is greater than this but short of asking each Youth Offending Team it is impossible to know. It is not a statistic kept by the YJB.

⁸² Not always an arch, and sometimes including obvious physical location of security staff at the entrance to the YOT.

The most positive way of describing such an approach would be for the YOT concerned to declare their offices “*a knife free zone for children*”. I can see no significant problem with this message. For those with real reservations about such a policy, a compromise might be combining a “*knife free declaration*” with a periodic use of a detection system, rather than a permanent one.

The three (or more) YOTs with significant experience of using detection systems, with or without additional security staff and other elements of security, all have excellent experience to share with others. I believe that priority should be attached to the sharing of this information, both amongst YOTs but also amongst other projects that work with children and young adults on issues relating to serious violence⁸³.

One final aside: the Hillingdon YJS have not noticed any significant fall in the numbers of children and young adults visiting their office since introducing the screening arch at their office, and nor has the arch itself detected any knives or other weapons. The other YOTs report the same experience, and another commonly described fear, that weapons would simply be deposited outside the YOT office is also reported as not being an issue.

How adequate were the specific security arrangements that were made for the Weapons Awareness Course?

The only specific additional security arrangement that was made for the WAC was the action in ensuring that the course was held in a room with a functioning alarm system, which it was.

Saranba Sillah is aware that the Civic Centre Security Officers were not specifically aware that the course was happening on the specific day and at the specific time that it was. She believes they should have been aware of this.

I understand her reasons for saying this but the point is that there is always potential for this sort of attack happening at a youth justice service, a point borne out by the fact that the earlier fight in July took place on a day that there was no WAC taking place. While it must be the case that there is an enhanced risk on the occasion of a Weapons Awareness Course, because the boys attending the course have been chosen because of their know possession of knives, these

⁸³ For example the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime in London is currently supporting 43 local anti-knife crime projects across London. I am only familiar with these in the most general of terms but from the brief descriptions available about these projects it seems likely that some at least would benefit from considering the deployment of some or other weapon detection system.

same boys will also be in the waiting area on other occasions as will others who could be carrying knives. For example, at one stage during his Intervention Programme Vladimir was visiting the YJS office virtually every day and he was well known to the reception staff. The fact is that fighting had never occurred before at a Weapons Awareness Course.

My conclusion is that Saranba Sillah is right to question this lack of information but the better protection for children and staff will be provided by the permanent detection of a Weapons Detection System and presence of security staff.

How adequate was information sharing in respect of Vladimir and Hakim Sillah?

It is customary for reviews of this form to find missed opportunities to share information between agencies. In this case there are two obvious such examples.

First, the YJS was not aware of the circumstances in which Hakim was excluded from school in January 2018 until after his death. There was information on file at the school and education service that would have added depth to the October 2019 assessment of Hakim. In my view, however, it would not have changed any of the events that immediately preceded Hakim's murder, in other words Hakim would still have been assessed as a suitable recipient for a Referral Order programme and would still have been selected to attend the November Weapons Awareness Course with other children.

Nevertheless, aware of this inadequate loop of information to the YJS, the Council has already taken action to close it. As I have mentioned elsewhere I recommend other Councils consider this issue.

Secondly the Police did have some limited information that there was a connection of some sort between Vladimir and Hakim, having stopped the boys together on the 13th February 2019. This was low-level intelligence but it should have been shared with the AXIS service, and yet it was not. Had this happened it is possible specific consideration would have been given to the issue of the two boys attending the same WA course, even though no one in authority knew the full nature of the contacts between the two boys.

As it is, a social worker making enquiries to the AXIS service about Vladimir's associates in April 2019 was provided with three names, but not with Hakim's.

Was this attack motivated by racism?

In the immediate aftermath of the Hakim's murder there was speculation in the media as to whether Vladimir, a white boy of Eastern European origins, had been motivated by racism when he attacked Hakim, a black Dutch boy whose family originated from Africa. It is understandable that this important question should be asked.

Vladimir himself has described little about his motivation for attacking Hakim, other than by describing his regret that the attack proved fatal⁸⁴. In these circumstances no definitive answer is possible to the speculation that racism may have fuelled the attack on Hakim. However, there is nothing in the content retrieved from his iPhone that suggests that Vladimir's dislike of Hakim was informed by racism, and nor am I aware of any other evidence from those who had contact with Vladimir that he entertained racist views.

*

I shall conclude this chapter with four more general observations.

Staff attempts to protect and save Hakim Sillah

During the attack and afterwards the whole staff team were involved in one way or another in determined attempts to protect and then save Hakim. The trial judge commended these actions. Some members of staff would like to meet Saranba and her family to explain this. Saranba attended each day of Vladimir's trial and is aware of their actions and the impact that Hakim's murder has had on them.

The hidden worlds of Hakim Sillah and Vladimir Nachev

The Police investigation allowed me to have unprecedented access to the Vladimir's social media and telephone records. In turn this has reminded me of how much of the inner worlds and thoughts of adolescents can be hidden from diligent professionals and family and friends who are trying to help them⁸⁵.

It is important to exercise a degree of caution in analysing text of the sort found on mobile phones. There is undoubtedly a degree of bravura in the words Vladimir uses, full as they can be with the dangerous language of the street and

⁸⁴ He told the author of the Pre-Sentence report that he intended to stab Hakim but not to kill him, an account that was accepted by the trial judge.

⁸⁵ It is a point, for example, that Saranba Sillah is minuted as making to Hakim at the Exclusions meeting at his school in 2018, when the meeting considered Instagram and Snapchat messages posted by Hakim to another child.

references to stabbings etc. I think it would be unwise to assume this language is the sole true picture of Vladimir's state of mind, although it certainly is a part of him.

Most local authorities, including Hillingdon, have broadened their safeguarding focus (especially when working with older children) to include what is called "*contextual safeguarding*"⁸⁶. But to be effective contextual safeguarding requires a case officer to be able to penetrate the barriers and distrust that many children feel towards them⁸⁷.

Hillingdon Council is well aware of this point. They had reviewed their services to establish a service, which can be tasked to work with children, and families who distrust statutory services to the extent that they are unable to work with them.

In developing their AXIS service, the YJS have taken a significant step towards gathering and using the sort of intelligence about children who are potentially exposed to organised crime groups that is crucial to their being able to intervene with children on a contextual basis.

The impact of violent youth culture

Vladimir's social media content shows clearly his fascination with a youth culture that either glorifies or identifies closely with violence. His recirculation of rap-based lyrics and phrasing about violence suggest that he was drawn strongly drawn to these. Left unchallenged or countered such influences can create a dangerous imbalance in the minds of an impressionable boy, which I take Vladimir to have been. I am not the first commentator to want to draw attention to those responsible for publishing material that appears to celebrate violence

⁸⁶ The Department for Education writes about this issue that "*as well as threats to the welfare of children from within their families, children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families. These extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking, online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation.*" Source: Department for Education [2018] *Working Together to Safeguard Children – a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children* London: Department for Education.

⁸⁷ At the same time as workers from the YJS could see they were making progress in engaging Vladimir in their programmes he was receiving this type of message from an associate of his: "*If you tell YOT/probation what happens in the streets you're a snitch, that's dry snitching. May guilty conscience lick yuh chest if you can relate*", a threat that cooperating with a youth justice worker could lead to being stabbed in the chest.

via social media, *whatever they may think themselves about the intent of the content*, and to ask them to think again about this.

Access to Vladimir's iPhone also highlights the ease with which boys can buy extremely dangerous and illegal knives on the Internet. In the month before he attacked Hakim, Vladimir spent an appreciable amount of time visiting mainly US-based companies' websites and considering making purchases of a wide variety of "zombie" and "Rambo" knives, similar in type to the two knives that he was later found to possess. In my view none of the knives that Vladimir's search focused on could be called hunting knives. The merchant selling these knives must realise that impressionable children and young adults would be considering buying these knives for very different purposes than hunting animals. It is hard to reconcile the ease with which children can access such knives and the intention of the section 144A of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, which makes the sale of such knives to people under 18 illegal.

Pan-London and national learning

Hillingdon Council have already made several changes to their approach to working with children and young adults in immediate response to Hakim's murder, the most important of which was the introduction of the mandatory physical screening for weapons of all children and young adults attending the YJS.

While I am recommending consideration of other issues in my final Chapter, I believe the major lessons from this Review should be considered by the other Councils and their partners who have responsibility for working with children and young adults who are likely to be carrying knives. My own search has not as yet revealed that other youth offending services in England and Wales have experienced a similar tragedy in the past, but the potential is clearly there, especially in areas where it is already known that there is a significant problem with cultures of violence and habits of carrying knives. In my view each local authority in England and Wales should therefore consider this report as though it was describing a tragedy in their own area and act accordingly.

I have also encouraged Hillingdon Council and its partners to produce an account of the services that they mobilised to support all those traumatised by Hakim Sillah's murder, including an analysis of how well these services worked, and make this available to all public bodies for possible inclusion in their Major Incident Planning. The Council should include within this consideration of how they worked with Hakim's family in the aftermath of this murder and how this could have been improved.

Chapter 8 – Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusion

The circumstances of Hakim Sillah's murder while attending a Weapons Awareness Course in Hillingdon's Civic Centre immediately gave rise to a series of questions about how this tragedy could occur. These grew as soon as it became apparent that Hakim knew his assailant, Vladimir Nachev. As enquiries grew, and it became apparent that there was a very significant history of attacks on Hakim by Vladimir these questions grew again. In the preceding Chapter I have attempted to list and address each of these questions, as well as adding some observations of my own.

My conclusion is that if the Youth Justice Services (YJS) had known the history of Vladimir's previous attacks on Hakim the two boys would not have been placed on the same Weapons Awareness Course (WAC). More than this, had the YJS known of the very serious attack by Vladimir on the 23rd September it is extremely unlikely that he would have been approved to attend any WAC with other boys. The YJS did not know of this history. I do not believe they were negligent in this. Critical information was simply not available to them, mainly because the two boys chose not to share it with anyone other than their close friends.

Turning to the issue of the location of the attack, my conclusion is that the use of a Weapons Detection system at the Youth Justice Service (YJS) office would in all likelihood have eliminated the possibility that Hakim would have been stabbed there, but it would not have eliminated the possibility that Vladimir would find another occasion and location in which to attack Hakim, so great was his anger and sense of grievance with his former friend.

I have described that Hillingdon YJS had made improvements to their security arrangements following an earlier fight four months before Hakim's murder, and that the option of deploying a Weapons Detection system had been considered at that time. In rejecting that option the Hillingdon YJS were following the views of a majority of London youth offending services at that time: that there were stronger reasons against using such systems than in their favour. Before Hakim's murder this was a finely balanced issue across London and in much of the country, but I believe that the pendulum on this issue has now swung firmly in favour of the use of a weapons detection system. This is the conclusion that

Hillingdon had already reached before my review began, although I believe it now needs to be taken on board by other London youth offending teams and indeed by all other such teams in areas where children are known to be carrying knives for whatever reason.

Almost inevitably during my review I have also found instances where other information about Hakim and Vladimir held by various agencies was not shared with the YJS as one would wish. These are identified in Chapter 7. But although this was regrettable and these gaps could, and, I am told, have been closed, I do not believe that failure to pass these pieces of information to the YJS had a critical impact on the sequence of events leading up to Hakim's murder.

My brief from the London Borough of Hillingdon invited me to conclude my review by making recommendations about changes needed to their service. The Council had already acted quickly to change a number of elements of their operation in the immediate aftermath of Hakim's murder, and this has limited the number of recommendations I might have otherwise made.

I am, however, making the following further recommendations:

Recommendations

1. To the London Borough of Hillingdon: The Council should take the earliest opportunity to share the details of this tragedy and the learning from it, including the contents of this review, with the Pan London forums of Directors of Children's Services and Heads of Youth Justice services, and also with the London Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, and the Department for Education.

2. To the London Borough of Hillingdon, the Metropolitan Police Service and the Thames Valley Police Service: All information about stop and searches should be shared with the Hillingdon AXIS service.

3. To the London Borough of Hillingdon and the Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL): The Council and CNWL should produce an account of the services that they mobilised to support all those traumatised by Hakim Sillah's murder, including an analysis of how well these services worked, and make this available to all public bodies for possible inclusion in their Major Incident Planning. The Council should include within this consideration of how they worked with Hakim's family in the aftermath of this murder and how this could have been improved.

4. To the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB): The YJB should review its advice to Youth Offending Teams, and others engaged in working with children who carry weapons, on the deployment of Weapons Detection systems, and should consider whether this issue ought in future to be incorporated into the National Standards for Youth Justice.

5. To the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice: The Home Office and the Ministry of Justice should review the provisions of section 141A of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (*“Sale of knives and offensive weapons to persons under 18”*) in the light of the circumstances of the murder of Hakim Sillah.

Appendix 1

Saranba Sillah's victim impact statement made to the Isleworth Crown Court

"I am the mother of Hakim Sillah. The feelings and emotions expressed by me, Joseph, Hakim's father, and the rest of the family in this statement will give you some idea of the impact and devastation that our Son's murder has had on us all. I will try to express how our lives without Hakim have been affected, however words alone will never be able to relay the pain and the suffering that we live with every second of every day without him here with us.

"Hakim who had just turned eighteen, was snatched away from us in such a barbaric manner. He was the man of the house; the protector of his younger siblings and even looked after me. He was always concerned about how I felt. If I was silent he would crawl up to me and ask what was wrong and try to make me smile. As his mother, he would always check I had my purse and it was safe whenever we were in public spaces or overcrowded area. He was my guardian and on holidays he was carrying my luggage and that of his younger siblings.

"We are a close knit family unit, in which Hakim played a major role being my oldest son. Hakim has two younger siblings, his sister who is thirteen and his younger brother who is only seven years old. Hakim had a very close relationship with his younger brother, teaching him how to play on his PS4, taking him to the park, dropping him and picking him up from school, and cheering him on sports days. His brother has found it very difficult to understand what has taken place. In the mind of a child he believes that it may have been something that he did wrong that caused Hakim to leave us. At the funeral of Hakim his brother, who was six years old at the time, wrote this to Hakim on the remembrance card 'I'm sorry you no till love you Hakim and I hop that you will come back. Pleas come back.'

"With his younger sister, Hakim had an unbreakable bond, like an intricate spider web woven together. Once back from school, the two would stay in Hakim's room or that of his sister and talk about what they had done during school hours. As parents we always wondered what they talked about and why it was taking so long. With time we realised they were just so closely bonded they could talk about everything and anything. Hakim would cook with his sister and experiment with different foods and play together. He would cheer for his sister during her netball and hockey matches so passionately. Sally always looked up to her big brother as a

source of inspiration and a cool, articulate, intelligent, funny handsome looking guy.

“Hakim was at College, studying Sports and Business Management and was intending to become a sports lawyer. He was interested in politics, history and current affairs with a very inquisitive mindset. Hakim has always been very passionate about football and had started to develop a keen interest in basketball. Hakim had strong oratory skills and loved writing poems that he would convert to rap music, which was another passion of his. He had always talked about having a family of his own and no doubt Hakim would have been a great father as he demonstrated by the great care he took of his younger siblings.

“None of his dreams will now ever materialise, his young and precious life cut so short. This is a loss that we as a family will never recover from.

“Since Hakim’s murder we have never stopped crying and grieving. As a mother who drove him to the spot where he was killed two hours later I am overwhelmed by guilt for having taken him there. I also feel like an accessory to my son’s murder. I feel if I had not driver him there he would probably be here today. But how was I to know that a place where I thought my son would be safe would be a place where his life would be ended in such a horrific manner. I now find myself laying in his bed, wearing his clothes, and just spending time in his room to feel closer to him now that he is no longer here with us.

“I have not experienced actual real sleep since my son’s death. My sleep patterns are irregular and inconsistent. Most of the time I just feel completely devoid of life and the will to live. Since Hakim’s murder I have been unable to visit certain places that we used to go to together as a family. Now it’s just impossible to visit these places as it feels like I am cheating him as he can no longer join us. I had bought tickets to go on holiday for this 18th birthday, which was going to be a surprise. Little did we know that two weeks after his 18th birthday, he would be brutally murdered.

“I have been put on anti-depressants, I can’t do my usual reading of novels, and my concentration level is erratic. At times we as a family feel angry, sad, powerless, frustrated, numb. It is a pure cocktail of missed feelings that are indescribable. As the first grandson, Hakim’s death has been a tremendous loss to me and my family, my mother/his ageing grandmother, my brothers and sisters and every member of the family.

“As a working mother, I have not been able to undertake any employment since the death of my son nor have I been in a position to continue with my university education. I am now dependent on Universal Credit to sustain myself and my

children. It just feels like there is little purpose and prospects in my life. I am not sure what my performance at work will look like once I return to work and the thoughts of working with vulnerable people/families scares me even though that has always been my passion.

“My relationships with friends has become somehow strange. While our family has a lot of support within the local community, the Church and outside agencies such as Victim Support Services and the Child Bereavement Group, but it sometimes feels like we are a burden to others. In short this tragic incident has created a social isolation on our part as a family. We do not want to be attended to by others out of compassion or the feeling of sorrow towards us. In addition I have started trauma therapy.

“I will never move on, I will only move forward while carrying the heavy burden of grief, pain and sadness. I will relieve the never-ending questions of what ifs. I will also live with the horror of what YOU did to my Son and how much he must have suffered. YOUR actions have robbed me of my plans as a mother to my Son, an innocent and happy young man at the prime of life.”

Saranba Sillah
21st July 2020

Appendix 2

Terms of reference for this review

To carry out an independent review for the London Borough of Hillingdon into the circumstances surrounding the death of Hakim Sillah on the 7th November 2019 and the subsequent responses made by the London Borough of Hillingdon and its partners.

Terms of reference

The review will include:

- the backgrounds of the children and young people who attended the Weapons Awareness Course on the 7th November;
- the arrangements made for the Weapons Awareness Course;
- the sequence of events on the 7th November; and
- the responses to the events of the 7th November.

Methodology and time scale for the review

The review will be conducted by John Drew, acting alone as the independent reviewer.

The relevant criminal trial date has been set for the 22nd April 2020 so the main activity of the Review will take place in May and June 2020.⁸⁸

Engagement with the Sillah family

Engagement with Hakim Sillah is family will be an integral component of the review. John Drew will seek to maximise the family's engagement in the review, including sharing a draft report with the family for comments.

Dissemination of the Review report

While the report will report to the London Borough of Hillingdon it is likely that that the review will be of wider significance and arrangements for its publication and dissemination will take this into account.

John Drew
10th February 2020

⁸⁸ As explained in the Foreword to this report, these dates were later adjusted as a consequence of the delays in holding the trial.