

YJB response to the publication of the Southport Inquiry report

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Stephanie Roberts-Bibby, Chief Executive of the Youth Justice Board (YJB), responds to the publication of the Southport Inquiry report.

Stephanie Roberts-Bibby, Chief Executive of the YJB, says:

“This report lays bare the devastating consequences when risk of harm and offending is not fully understood, owned or acted on across the system.

“This is an unimaginable tragedy. Three young girls lost their lives in an act of extreme and devastating violence, and many others - children, families, professionals and an entire community - will carry the impact of that day for the rest of their lives. No words can do justice to the loss felt by the families, or the harm caused to the survivors, but this Inquiry must be the catalyst for meaningful change and at pace.

“Today’s report sets out in stark terms how a child with a known history of concerning behaviour was able to reach a point of catastrophic harm, despite contact with multiple agencies. The Inquiry has exposed serious systemic issues, including failures in information sharing, risk identification and ownership and aligned objectives of agencies to manage, mitigate and reduce harm.

“What the Inquiry shows is not a failure of one agency alone, but a failure of the system to come together around a child who was clearly in need of intervention throughout years of contact with agencies that was all too often, “light touch”.

“I recognise the need for collective action across the system. Youth justice is one part of a local safeguarding and public protection landscape that includes education, health, social care and police. But I must be clear - contact with youth justice most often happens much later in a child’s journey. The report reinforces the need for earlier, more joined-up intervention long before a child reaches the point of entering the justice system. This is something we have long advocated for and strongly support.

“The YJB’s role in supporting the system with the evidence of what works remains and we will do everything in our power to provide national leadership to youth justice services and the broader system. One of the recommendations is for a lead agency to be considered as Phase 2 of the Inquiry. We fully support clearer ownership of risk but this must be reinforced by professional curiosity and responsibility.

“With any local service or agency that comes into contact with children there must be a culture that supports frontline practitioners to challenge, escalate and tenaciously persist where concerns remain. This should be underpinned by robust ownership of risk and firm collective leadership.

“The YJB is committed to ensuring this Inquiry is not just a moment of reflection but a turning point to prevent further tragedies. Through these recommendations, learnings must be translated into action, action that delivers safer outcomes for children, victims and communities.”

Phil Bowen, Chair of the YJB, said:

“This report demands more than acknowledgement - it demands action. As Interim Chair of the YJB I am very clear that the system must respond differently, with stronger shared accountability across government departments, much earlier intervention and a relentless focus on preventing harm.

“It is the Board’s role to influence change across government and support a whole system response. While no system can eliminate risk entirely, we must press for every professional who comes into contact with children to understand risk, support better information sharing and strengthen how agencies work together.”

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/yjb-response-to-the-publication-of-the-southport-inquiry-report>