

# Leadership: Interview with Matthew Knights

At the time of the thematic inspection, Matthew was Head of Haringey Youth Offending Service; he is now London Accommodation Pathfinder Strategic Development Manager.



## **Please could you tell us a little bit about yourself?**

I have worked within the criminal justice system for over the past 16 years, in various roles and different local authorities, and was recently Head of Haringey Youth Offending Service before taking up this new exciting innovation project.

I have experience of leading a service to achieve the special educational needs and disability 'quality lead mark' in two local authorities. I have a strong interest in disproportionality and how our work influences the 'system' and improves practice with the children and families.

## **During the inspection, we noted Haringey's involvement with the disproportionality project. We were pleased to see a multi-agency approach to addressing disproportionality – can you tell us how you became involved in this?**

I became involved when I joined Haringey, and an opportunity for funding via the Youth Justice Board (YJB) became available to tackle serious youth violence.

Islington and Haringey local authorities completed a joint bid. I really did not want this just to be open to Haringey Youth Justice Service (YJS) practitioners and made it mandatory for all YJS staff to be involved, as well as extending it to our early help and YJS colleagues.

## **What were the aims of this work and what were the resultant recommendations?**

### **1. Structure and approach**

In any future disproportionality programme involving staff training, consider using full-day rather than half-day sessions, move ice-breaker activities to after the session outline, specify the cumulative nature of learning from session to session, and incorporate 'learning into practice' action planning after each session.

### **2. Dissemination**

Disseminate this project's key findings regarding the challenges and obstacles faced by young people and parents to relevant staff members, including senior leaders, and beyond.

### **3. Use of academic research**

Make fuller use of key social science research insights into implicit bias and the transmission of discrimination, particularly as these relate to race and ethnicity, in future iterations of the programme.



#### **4. Young people's and parental engagement**

Continue capturing the voice of young people in relation to disproportionality and consider offering a more extensive programme of parents' forums, including parent-practitioner sessions moderated by a third party.

#### **5. Being responsive to local factors**

Combine ad hoc forums in response to specific incidents and events with more regular outreach programmes that both draw on and share expertise from relevant services.

#### **6. Review the safety and risk implications of YOS procedures**

Consider whether the routinisation of young people's movements created by YOS procedures and protocols may increase risk of harm.

#### **7. Reporting on and scrutinising disproportionate court outcomes**

Explore the possibility of compiling regular reports for local courts, detailing disproportionate outcomes for black, Asian and minority ethnic young people from Haringey and Islington – particularly remand and custodial sentences – and introducing an annual or biannual scrutiny panel, including local court representation, to scrutinise those reports.

#### **8. Replicating an action-orientated training focus**

Prioritise the identification and dissemination of good practice, which can have an immediate impact on practitioners' day-to-day work, in future iterations of the programme.

#### **9. Boosting parental trust and engagement**

Consider strengthening whole-family working practices and models, including the creation of parenting worker roles where these do not already exist.

#### **10. Increasing accountability for school exclusions**

Consider identifying and collating longer-term outcomes for excluded black, Asian and minority ethnic young people, and disseminating this information on a school-by-school basis.

#### **11. Police relationships with young people**

Police borough command units should continue working to strengthen relationships with black, Asian and minority ethnic young people.

### **How has Haringey taken these forward and how have they impacted on disproportionality in the borough?**

Following this training in 2019, this led to me wanting to have a service level disproportionality plan, but as I started to draft the plan I realised that I needed to include my partner services, such as early help and YJS, given that they were part of the training and part of the same directorate. I really wanted to get them to think about this in the context of their work, and challenge them to what were the things they could also influence.

This then led to the disproportionality plan going to the YJS management board and the connection being made with other partners. I reviewed how the disproportionality data was presented to the board, linking to the YJB disproportionality toolkit but also using some of the partners' data to cross-reference all the data sets.

This led to me being invited to be part of the *Haringey education black, Asian and minority ethnic achievement steering group*, where further links were made. In addition, the work of the YJS and education sector were shared, due to the disproportionate numbers of black, Asian and minority ethnic children being excluded.

Further down the line, I led on developing a bespoke training programme with the same organisation (Aim High) that supported the previous YJS training programme. I was asked to piggy-back on a pilot social work in schools pilot programme, and targeted seven secondary schools with the aim of influencing and bringing the governors and school staff together in a series of training workshops to support with learning and culture change, and of supporting with school exclusions.

### **What was the biggest obstacle you faced, and how did you overcome it?**

Many challenges came about during this two-year process. It took a long time to try to influence the culture, but with the support of the Director of Children's Services, Ann Graham, she really helped push this agenda across the 'whole system' and gave the space at the YJS management board to present the disproportionality data sets and future ideas which allowed us to connect the dots.

Including a disproportionality section in the YJS strategic plan helped outline what the key highlights were and what we were going to do to as part of the service improvement.

Challenges such as understanding the data analysis take time to understand, but there was a lot of self-learning and being curious really to unpick the data and present it in a way where it is meaningful to others.

Other obstacles in the beginning were getting the YJS staff and partner services to understand why we were adopting this disproportionality lens at both operational and strategic levels, so just being persistent and presenting in a way that people can relate to made a difference.

### **How do you think this work is influencing sector-wide partners to tackle the evidenced over-representation of this group of boys?**

Further to the above, essentially, it's making the wider partners think about what they can do, increasing accountability and giving an appetite to influence change.

### **In practical terms, what could other YOSs take from Haringey's approach?**

All YOSs are at different stages in their own journey with this but, essentially, they should ensure that:

- there is a service plan on disproportionality which focuses on operational and strategic objectives (what are the quick wins and what are the gaps in service delivery)
- plans are linked to their YOS strategic plan and management boards, and that the dots are connected with key partner services
- they continue to be curious about the analysis of their data on disproportionality and if it makes sense.

