



Speaking in response to the “When Safeguarding becomes Stigmatising” report published today, Sally Lewis, Independent Chair of the Bristol Safeguarding Children Board said:

“The Board has enjoyed a long, positive partnership with the city’s communities and have worked collaboratively for many years in developing safeguarding policy and practice. This includes the work we have undertaken over the past 12 months to improve policy and practice in relation to ending Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). No city has been more active than Bristol in pursuing this important aim.

“This report provides an important record of community feeling and professional practice experienced at a time when the approach taken to tackling FGM was under the intense scrutiny of communities and agencies. Since that time a wholesale review of agency approaches to tackling FGM has been undertaken.

“The Board, along with its member agencies, made a clear and joint commitment to reviewing practice in tackling FGM in April 2018. Since then safeguarding partners have engaged with communities, held discussions about the experiences of individuals, many as described in this report, and introduced new ways of working with families.

“This has led to important developments across agencies. Practices that have raised concern have been replaced allowing us to continue to pursue our shared aim to create an environment where families and individuals feel enabled to challenge FGM and also to speak up if they feel our approaches are not proportionate. Where children and families are at risk of harm we will act but we will do so in an inclusive fashion that meets the needs of communities and individuals. As with all safeguarding endeavours, prevention is our primary aim.

“The change delivered includes moving away from the use of written statements in this and other areas of safeguarding. Improved FGM risk assessment tools have been developed in collaboration with safeguarding professionals and FGM affected communities aimed at supporting more effective assessments of whether there is cause for concern for the welfare of a child.

“We value challenge of our policies, practices and procedures and believe that where concerns are raised by communities we want to work together to review what we do and how we do it. I am pleased to see the level of positive effort and collaboration over the past 12 months and satisfied that we are moving forward in a more inclusive fashion that accords with our belief that safeguarding is everyone’s business. We are proud of our diverse city and know that when we work together on issues of concerns we will ensure that we achieve the best outcomes for children.”