The Political, Social and Economic Context Viewing Trauma and Resilience Systemically

Policy Briefing

Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience®

A Social and Economic Theory



YCTCS ltd

Systemic Development for Public Services

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Executive Overview

Earlier this year *Reducing Systemic Trauma Developing Systemic Resilience: The Social and Economic Case for Transformational Change* (ST2SR) was launched. The report was commissioned by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) for the regional Trauma Informed Coalition.

The thinking developed within ST2SR is highly synergistic with implementation of the political and economic perspectives that Prime Minister, Andy Burnham promoted with Steve Rotheram in Head North and in Burnham's recent speeches.

Abstract

The findings of the ST2SR report evidences the legacy of the last 40 years of neoliberal social and economic policies, including austerity. The report provides compelling evidence of the escalating social and economic cost, being continually paid, for the long term failure to support marginalised communities impacted by systemic factors that can cause trauma. The report found very limited evidence of effectiveness of trauma informed approaches. Although, finding good evidence of the social and economic benefits of building community resilience.

The Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience® framework, (central to the ST2SR report) provides a social and economic theory for public bodies, nationally, regionally and locally, to act to reduce the deeply harmful social and economic impact of systemic trauma, through building greater systemic resilience with communities. Proposals made for *Transformational Change* could be applied in any UK nation or region.

Central Propositions

The central proposition in ST2SR is to move beyond an individualised (neoliberal) view of trauma and resilience and see both as systemic relational phenomena. This is a significant shift in understanding of how to respond to trauma and in building resilience. Placing the emphasis on structural factors underlying trauma and eroding resilience, including intergenerational inequalities, povertisation and racialisation. The insidious effects of systemic trauma can become highly toxic, impacting generationally and across the life-course, causing a range of public agencies to continually pay for failure.

The analysis and modelling in ST2SR illustrates how systemic trauma can lead to traumagenic environments in communities. Compounding the social and economic harm to individuals, local communities and the wider state.

Underpinning the ST2SR report is an overarching strategic framework, predicated on moving from Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience® (p7). The framework originated directly from studies of marginalised children and informed by a very wide range of relevant research literature.

Seeing trauma and resilience systemically links distinct academic disciplines, establishing the basis for moving from Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience® as a key understanding in social and economic policy. Whilst providing an evidenced based approach to deliver and evaluate aspects of the government ambitions set out in Rewiring of the State, and also providing local accountability for delivery. The ST2SR report and the strategic framework provide shareable outcomes for wide range of other national agendas including, system wide prevention, neighbourhood reform, public housing and public service integration.

Why it Matters Now

Burnham's analysis of failed and left behind communities across the UK characterises many areas of the West Midlands. Marginalised communities with their resilience being hollowed out by lack of opportunity and reductions in public services. The evidence suggesting that many citizens in such communities have suffered trauma, causing mental and physical harm. Leading in turn to loss of hope, reduced social cohesion and for many, long term ill health and premature death.

A consequence of neoliberal policies, including austerity and deindustrialisation is declining economic productivity in many communities, including those previously in the industrial heartlands. The marginalisation and povertisation of many communities, has created a spiralling of social and economic costs. In ST2SR the cost to the West Midlands (WMCA area) of lost productivity (GDPR) through childhood adversity related ill health and premature death alone, was estimated at £2.6 billion annually.

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Paying for these longstanding systemic failures, significantly impact across all areas of public service including the NHS, criminal justice, education services, children's services and adult social care and the Treasury. The human social cost is very high. The ST2SR framework provides an evidenced based approach to develop and evaluate policies and initiatives to rebuild community resilience, ameliorate these harms and reduce likely future occurrence.

Supporting Evidence

The ST2SR report provides significant evidence that supports the above assertions. Further findings that substantiate or are synergistic with the ST2SR report and the proposals include:

- In The Preventative State, (DEMOS 2023) the authors saw the need to build social capital and rebuild social and civic foundations.
- In Counting What Matters (DEMOS and The Health Foundation 2024) proposed a foundational shift in public accounting to identify spend on prevention. Suggesting a … *working definition of prevention as being* ***related to activities or investments that increase the resilience of individuals and communities*** *and lead to avoidance (or reduced risk) of negative outcomes*.
- The Autumn Budget 2026 has now introduced Preventative Departmental Expenditure Limits.
- A 'wellbeing economy' is an economy designed to maximise wellbeing not profit. It goes beyond GDP to measure success by what really matters: quality of life, ecological health, and **community resilience**, leading to stronger local economies, a healthier environment, and happier lives.
- The State of Child Health (RCPCH 2026), found that since 2020, *very little has improved and, on some indicators, the situation has deteriorated*. A key indicator is that infant mortality rates in England have shown little improvement in recent years, mortality rates in the most deprived areas are more than double those in the least deprived.
- Alan Milburn's interim report on young people and work considered longitudinal evidence which *found that over half of instances of being NEET at 17-years of age were attributable to persistent exposure to poverty and family adversity.*
- In the study Local Deprivation Predicts Right-Wing Hate Crime in England, (2023) the authors suggested that policies *focused on "levelling up", or improving the most deprived communities, could in addition to improving local living standards and decreasing inequalities, also help decrease the risk of far-right viol*ence.
- The Productive State (Mainstream 2026)… *outlines a way to scale up Andy Burnham's Manchesterism nationally and offers a starting point for creating the institutional basis* ***for a more inclusive, resilient and democratic society …***

Policy and Practice Implications

The Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience® framework is entirely scaleable and is applicable to high level policy across a wide range of public service areas, as well as at casework level. The framework can be applied strategically by national, regional and local government whilst also being applied to guide policy and practice at an agency level.

The scaleability and wide applicability of the framework enables setting aligned high level objectives and measurable outcomes across a wide range of public programmes, including areas as diverse in policy terms as urban planning, public housing, criminal justice, public health, physical and mental health, early help and prevention and community safety.

Political Social and Economic Benefits

The West Midlands ST2SR report strongly supports the thinking encapsulated by "*Good growth in every postcode*". We need to empower disenfranchised communities by addressing the underlying systemic inequalities that sustain trauma and erode resilience.

Applied within marginalised communities the Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience® framework can begin to rebuild community resilience, addressing the economic harms, health and social injustices that have been sustained over many decades. Promoting hope, and confidence, whilst building the foundations for significant savings for the public purse.

The ST2SR report provides a social and economic theory and details the evidenced based approaches that can build systemic resilience and create greater equity both socially and economically across the UK. Moving away from entrenching failure, further fracturing communities and paying the social and economic costs of managed decline.

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The Political, Social and Economic Context for Viewing Trauma and Resilience Systemically

I am clear Britain took a series of wrong turns in the 1980s. Political power was centralised and economic power was privatised. The country surrendered control of the essentials – housing, water, energy, transport -and left people exposed to higher costs. That in turn led to the concentration of more wealth and power in the hands of fewer people and fewer places. Large parts of Britain were deindustrialised without the power to set new ambitions for themselves. Proud British towns, now a shadow of what they once were, and high streets in decline, so common up and down the country. Slowly, at times imperceptibly, over four decades, political and economic power drained away out of our communities in every region and nation of the UK. If we want an economy and a country that works for all people and places … then it requires a new path to the one we've been on for the last 40 years.

Burnham Speech to Special Labour Conference (17/7/26)

There's a critique here, that is a more sophisticated critique than some people think. I think you have to rethink how we run things to get a different approach to public spending, and to running the economy — more focused on early investment, early intervention, setting people up for success, and much less paying for failure.

Burnham The Times (19/7/26)

Dr Alex Chard who has developed this paper, is an organisational consultant, independent academic and author. His doctorate in Systemic Practice focussed on creating systemic change in public sector services. He has over 30 years consultancy experience in public services. He is the main author of *Reducing Systemic Trauma Developing Systemic Resilience: The Social and Economic Case for Transformational Change* considered further below.

Introduction

Earlier this year *Reducing Systemic Trauma Developing Systemic Resilience: The Social and Economic Case for Transformational Change* (ST2SR) was launched. The report was commissioned by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) on behalf of the regions Trauma Informed Coalition.

This paper considers how the West Midlands findings can inform the implementation of the political and economic perspectives that Prime Minister, Andy Burnham asserted both in the book Head North (Andy Burnham and Steve Rotherham) and in recent speeches.

The ST2SR report promotes the need to begin to build resilience within communities particularly those that have been marginalised, providing compelling evidence of the massive social and economic cost being continually paid for the long term political, social and economic failure to support marginalised communities.

The report included a comprehensive literature review, finding very limited evidence of effectiveness of trauma informed practice, concluding *that being trauma-informed is only ever a beginning*. However ST2SR found strong evidence (including from the UK) of the social and economic effectiveness of building resilient communities. Importantly the report made proposals for Transformational Change in order to develop services to reduce systemic trauma in communities and build systemic resilience.

The ST2SR report included systems and financial modelling of the impact of trauma showing that the resultant social and economic cost from adversity, likely trauma and loss of resilience is extraordinarily high and that these costs are likely to compound over time. Central to the findings in the modelling were that:

> *The modelling illustrates the cumulative impact of adversity and trauma. Where recovery opportunities are not available, the levels of adversity and trauma accumulate in a population, with possible amplification of*

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adversity, risk and vulnerability. As individuals age, the number of agencies who may become involved are likely to increase, effectiveness may decrease and costs will rise.

Failing to systematically address systemic factors linked with adversity and trauma risks increasing the proportion in the population with much poorer life course outcomes and further increased costs for a range of agencies.

This strongly suggests that investing in reducing trauma and increasing resilience is both socially desirable and economically rational. The ST2SR report found that the outcomes from marginalised and potentially traumatised communities include:

- Health inequality, including high infant, child and adult mortality rates;
- Long-term harm to individuals physical and mental health and avoidable costs of adult and children's social care and health services;
- Costs to education and other services of behavioural and special educational needs caused or increased by adversity and trauma;
- Loss of educational opportunity and reduced attainment levels impacting employability;
- Lost productivity through ill health, lower skills, unemployment, and premature death;
- Lost taxes through reduced economic activity;
- Increased costs of state benefits from ill health and reduced economic activity; and,
- The impact on individuals and communities of loss of social cohesion, increased anti-social behaviour, violence and other crime.

An international research study, (Hughes et al 2021) considered ill health and premature death potentially caused by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including within the UK. Based on that study, the ST2SR report, gave an estimated annual lost cost of DALY's (Disability Adjusted Life Years) in the WMCA area at £2.6 billion, evidencing not just high financial loss but also inferring very significant underlying human suffering. (See footnote).

Lost future GDP is just one aspect of the cost of adversity in childhood. This figure does not for example, include costs to public services as a result of childhood adversity, so the actual costs to the public purse will be much higher. The modelling showed how the social and economic cost of adversity begins in early childhood and then accrue exponentially across the life course. Failing to prevent and address adversity and meet needs appropriately in childhood, causes the cumulative social and financial costs to compound, becoming an even bigger burden on future generations.

The evidence also suggests that povertised and racialised communities are more likely to be impacted by adversity and harmed in ways that may be traumatising. The intersection between structural factors such as poverty, community deprivation and discrimination may affect the capacity of an individual or community to respond resiliently, resulting in systemic trauma and traumagenic environments (see p9 below).

The ST2SR report argued for public bodies in the West Midlands to see both trauma and resilience as systemic phenomena and provided a framework to respond to the immense social and economic costs of trauma and related harms to the region (see p10 below). The ST2SR report also details the mechanisms and accountability structures that are needed to create *Transformational Change* to tackle systemic issues that create traumagenic environments and apply approaches that *do no harm* whilst increasing systemic resilience.

Although the ST2SR report considered the WMCA area, the finding are directly applicable across all areas of the UK, in particular the many urban and rural areas with high levels of deprivation including in England; East Anglia, Greater Manchester, parts of London, the West Country, the West Midlands, and the North East and North West.

The findings of the ST2SR report evidence the legacy of the last 40 years of neoliberal social and economic policies, including austerity. The section on p13 below, considers how the thinking developed within ST2SR is highly synergistic with implementation of the political and economic perspectives that Prime Minister, Andy Burnham has asserted both in the book Go North and in his recent speeches.

Footnote: Hughes (et al 2021) *Health and financial costs of adverse childhood experiences in 28 European countries: a systematic review and meta-analysis*. This study *aimed to estimate the annual health and financial burden of ACEs for 28 European countries.* The paper published in 2021 relied on earlier (2019) data. The £2.6 billion figure was a West Midlands population based fractional estimate based on UK wide data and a currency conversion from US dollars. The UK 2019 ACE-attributable costs were US $78·6 billion (2.8% of GDP) or £61.5 billion based on exchange rates on 1st October 2026.

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Reducing Systemic Trauma Developing Systemic Resilience

Viewing trauma systemically and recognising how trauma can become woven inter-generationally through lives and societies, moves us collectively from a neoliberal response of individualising trauma and expecting individuals to be strong and to cope, towards a systemic relational position that recognises that creating hope for a better future lies in addressing trauma, though collective compassion and concerted joint action.

Claire Dhami, Head of Systems Change and Inclusion at the WMCA in the Foreword to ST2SR comments:

> *Innovation in the public sector is often spoken of in terms of technology or efficiency. But true innovation, as we have learned, is about fundamentally rethinking the systems that shape people's lives. It is about moving beyond siloed responses to adversity and instead building a culture of collaboration, learning, and shared purpose.*
>
> *This report embodies that spirit. It challenges us to see trauma not as an individual failing, but as a systemic phenomenon—one that is shaped by historic, structural, and intergenerational forces. It calls for a shift from fragmented, reactive services to a holistic, preventative approach that builds resilience at every level: individual, family, community, and system.*
>
> *The path from trauma to resilience is not linear, nor is it easy. It demands courage, humility, and a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths about inequality, discrimination and the legacy of historic harms. But, it also offers hope: that by working together, we can disrupt cycles of adversity, build stronger and more inclusive communities, and create a public sector that is truly fit for the future.*

The background to the thinking that centrally informed ST2SR emanated from research and case reviews into 130 children involved in criminal justice and also known to a wide range of public bodies. One those studies of 80 children was also undertaken in the West Midlands.

Traumagenic Environments

Within the ST2SR report and this briefing paper the term traumagenic environments is used. As I was writing this briefing paper I realised that whilst I had a clear understanding of the meaning I was seeking to relay, the term was not defined.

As I first used the term I had in mind areas I had worked in and of children and families I worked directly with, who were living in highly deprived communities; including in rural and urban areas. As well as more recently the children I studied in the criminal justice system, the vast majority also living in deprived areas and having suffered very significant childhood adversity and disadvantage. These two linked quotes from Trauma-Informed Treatment Practices in Criminal Justice Settings (2022) provides an apt description of the meaning of traumagenic environments I was applying:

The experience of trauma can involve a single event and its aftermath, but many people live in chronic traumagenic environments that create cumulative toxic stress. Such conditions can disrupt the integration of emotions and experiences, leading to dysregulated feelings and behavior (Bloom, 2013). Efforts to adapt to the demands of an environment that feels unsafe can alter personal growth, leaving individuals with unhealthy ways of thinking about themselves, others, and the world.

Traumatizing experiences exist on a continuum. Some traumas may be overt and easily identified, and others subtle and harder to define, but chronic adversity can create a persistent sense of the world as an unsafe place. The impact of trauma is also determined by what happens in its aftermath and by the strength and availability of positive support systems that contribute to resilience (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Trauma is best understood not as a discrete event, but as a web of experiences through which one's understanding of self, others, and the world is organized (Bloom, 2013).

In ST2SR, I stated that traumagenic environments for communities are correlated with structural factors such as deprivation and racism, whilst greater resilience is correlated with greater wealth and equity. If we want to increase resilience for traumatised individuals families and communities we must recognise and address the systemic structural factors that sustain these highly toxic environments.

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The subsequent report, *Punishing Abuse,* was described as *harrowing* by Anne Longfield (then the Children's Commissioner for England). Her comment, reflecting the extraordinarily high levels of poverty, abuse and loss for the children studied. Key thinking developed as a result of the findings in *Punishing Abuse* were:

- At a systems level we need to view trauma as a systemic, relational phenomenon that impacts individuals, communities and societies, both nationally and globally.
- The need to respond to the systemic factors that relate to trauma in institutions and in practice including poverty and social exclusion that create adversity and vulnerability.
- Individual resilience is highly dependent on context and supportive relationships, that building and sustaining resilience is intrinsically linked to promoting broader resilience in an individuals relationships including in their family and wider community.

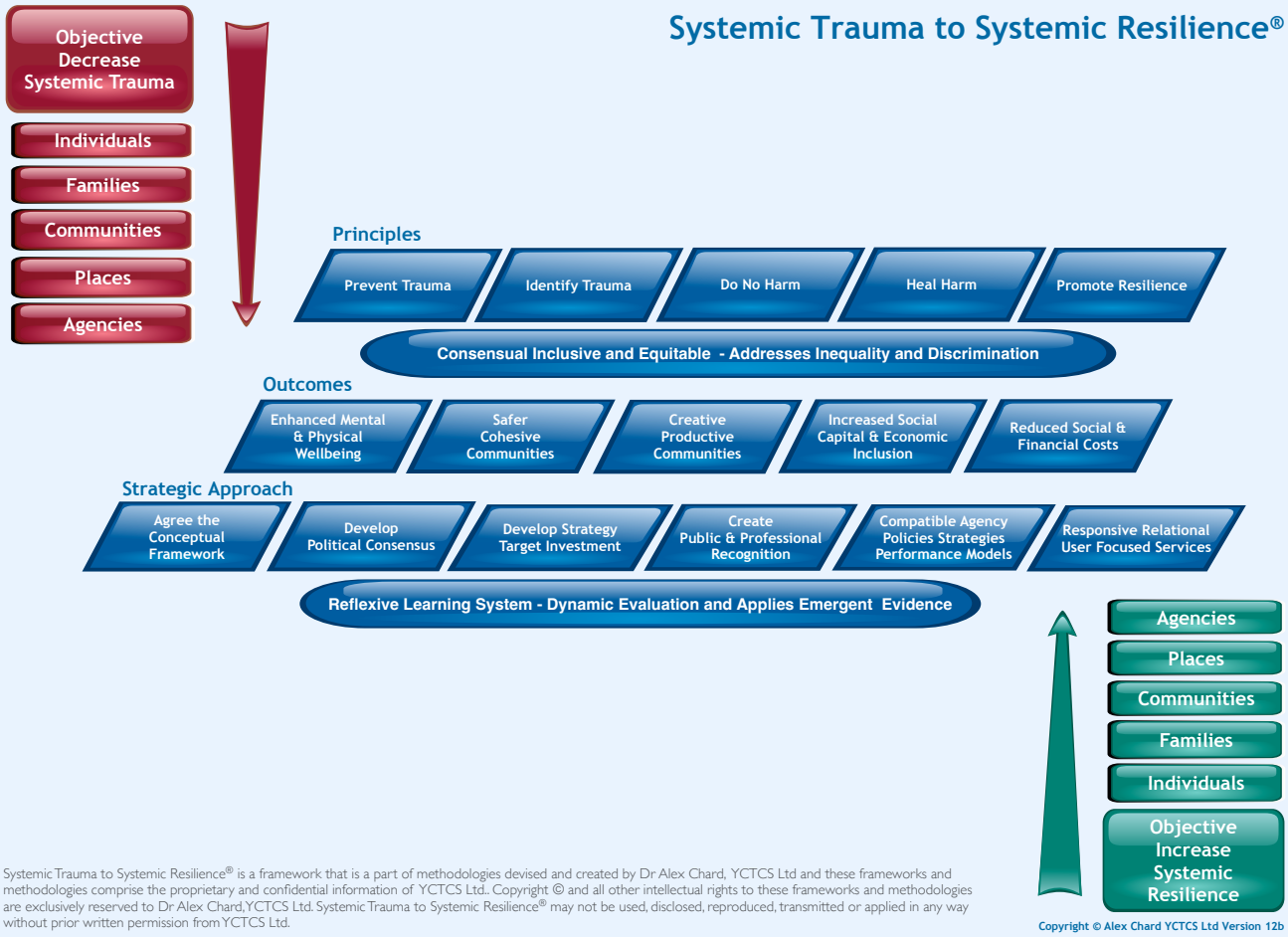
That thinking then became central to the development of the ST2SR report, that was also written for the West Midlands.

Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience® a Framework

Drawing on a wide range of academic evidence, at the heart of ST2SR was an overarching strategic framework based on moving from Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience®. That framework is shown below it is scaleable and could be applied strategically by national, regional and local public bodies including for casework. The framework provides a collective evidenced based approach for all public bodies (nationally, regionally and locally), to act together with common purpose in order to reduce the deeply harmful social and economic impact of trauma through building greater resilience for individuals and communities.

Resilience within communities is measurable and the framework could support outcomes-based decision making regionally, locally and in specific communities or projects. The framework could also be applied as part of a theory of change process accounting for complexity-aware and reflective approaches (SDC–IDS Briefing Note 08/ 2018).

Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience®



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Key Findings

Some the most significant findings in the ST2SR report included that:

- There is strong evidence that the ongoing consequences of unresolved childhood trauma have significant impact on some individuals across their life-course, including on health, mental wellbeing and longevity;
- Studies also show the broader impact of adversity on educational attainment, career success and earning potential;
- There is strong national and international evidence regarding the high social and financial harm caused by early adversity and possible trauma both for the affected individuals and society;
- There is also good evidence that trauma can impact and transmit across generations and this may adversely affect some communities this includes the often longstanding inter-generational trauma of discrimination from povertisation and racialisation;
- Illustrating the levels of trauma, areas in the West Midlands have the highest rates of child mortality anywhere in England, high levels of of child mortality are also evident nationally in many other areas of high deprivation;
- We calculated that the regional annual cost of lost productivity to the West Midlands from poor health, resulting from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) was £2,597 million (£2.6b) (Hughes et al 2021);
- An extensive literature review found very limited evidence of effectiveness of trauma-informed practice as response to adversity across the majority of areas of public service nationally and internationally;
- In contrast there is strong evidence from America and the UK of the social and financial cost effectiveness of building resilience through strengthening communities;
- Adversity and trauma can occur throughout our lives, but are much more prevalent in vulnerable groups e.g. those affected by deprivation and racialisation;
- Consequently the evidence suggests that areas with high levels of deprivation and racialisation (such as in the West Midlands) will have much greater levels of trauma than in the overall UK population.

Social Disadvantage and Systemic Trauma

A reviewer of a first draft of this paper said they *would find it helpful to understand what is distinctly important about characterising social disadvantage as 'trauma', whether at the level of communities or individuals*. Further comments related to the *structural drivers of poverty* and that *understanding of the causes, impact and strategies/solutions for addressing poverty don't feel very far away from what you describe*. I have given this careful thought. ST2SR summarised the policy position of UK Governments finding:

… the original policy driver for developing trauma-informed approaches was the detrimental impact of ACEs, the limitations of narrow ACE based approaches were becoming widely recognised. Causing a move towards broader approaches. Including, recognising structural factors underlying trauma particularly poverty and of the need to think systemically regarding developing resilience.

Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience® moves from an individualised construction of trauma and resilience to one that recognises both trauma and resilience as located within societal factors and forces that are rarely, (if ever) within the direct control of any one individual or group. Reflecting the findings in ST2SR that:

The evidence reviewed, strongly points to longstanding social and structural issues, including intergenerational poverty and discrimination as highly correlated with adversity and trauma. Such factors are also known to reduce resilience to the harmful effects of adversity.

Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience® encompasses many aspects of social disadvantage which are frequently interwoven including poverty. However, where I believe this thinking is helpful is that it creates an over-arching social and economic theory that conceptualises both trauma and resilience as systemic. Detailing the extraordinarily high social and economic costs from the failure to recognise the systemic inter-relationship of trauma and resilience, whilst providing a clear framework that enables the immense social and economic harms from adversity and trauma to be ethically addressed. Such approaches should always consider and address structural poverty and social disadvantage as these are so closely intertwined with systemic trauma.

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Transformational Change

Given the strong evidence of very high harm and high social and financial cost of adversity and trauma, doing nothing, is indefensible, socially, financially and morally. Consequently, there is a need to respond to adversity and trauma guided by the best available evidence. Whilst continuing to consider and create the developing evidence base of effective service responses that provide social and economic benefits at both strategic and individual levels.

Reducing Systemic Trauma Developing Systemic Resilience: The Social and Economic Case for Transformational Change

When applying the Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience® framework outlined above, the ST2SR report argued that for transformational change to occur a multi-layered strategic approach to prevent and reduce trauma is needed. These are approaches that can be applied nationally, regionally or locally. The highest levels of the approach are to:

- Address the systemic and structural factors correlated with traumagenic environments;
- Reduce the likelihood of adversity and trauma in families and communities and take evidenced based action to increase resilience in communities;
- Maintain and develop services to support those affected by adversity and trauma;
- Ensure that services do no harm, responding effectively to promote the wellbeing of those individuals who have been affected by adversity in order to prevent or heal trauma.

Proposals to achieve transformational change in *Reducing Systemic Trauma Developing Systemic Resilience* included:

At both a political and strategic level across all West Midlands public bodies, it should be explicitly recognised that trauma is a systemic phenomena that is structural and historic as well as inter-generational and occurs across the life course. That responding to trauma and reducing the harmful social and economic impact requires that the historic and structural factors which underlie trauma are identified and removed or reduced, that inter-generational transmission of trauma is disrupted and the systemic resilience of families and communities is increased.

A concordat should be developed across all of the main political parties acknowledging that trauma is a systemic phenomena that is causing immense social and economic harm. The concordat should agree that from the outset, all strategic, financial and economic decision-making, including devolution of powers from central government, should always consider whether proposed actions will alleviate or increase systemic trauma and build community resilience.

All public agencies should commit to developing and publishing a strategic ten-year plan to reduce the levels and impact of trauma and promote the wellbeing and systemic resilience of service users, employees and communities. An annual report on progressing the plan should be published.

The Transformational Change proposals seek to ensure that economic decision-making and policy planning always consider community wellbeing and local accountability.

Within the Productive State: A Framework for Manchesterism, the argument made is that:

For all the challenges we confront as a society, there is a shared and irreducible core of sentiment to people who call Britain home: a sharp anger at injustice, a commitment to a common life of dignity and freedom. These are not unreasonable desires. They are not unrealisable either. They are the very least people deserve.

Mathew Lawrence and Alex Williams - The Productive State: A Framework for Manchesterism - Mainstream

The findings within the ST2SR report relate particularly to those communities who have suffered some of the greatest threats to their dignity and freedoms as a result of the social and economic injustices caused by the political doctrines of the past four decades.

Applying the Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience® framework could be an intrinsic part of the devolution approach adopted by central and local government. Helping to address the past injustices created by neoliberal economic policies that have povertised and marginalised, many generations of families in so very many UK communities.

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Burnham Policy Priorities and Systemic Trauma to Systemic Resilience®

I will forever be grateful to the people here, the people of the wonderful places that make up this constituency, the proud places that always have deserved so much more. I will forever be grateful to them that they have given me the chance to go back and make this country work for Makerfield and the many places, places like it across the country who have been neglected, who feel that the country works for other people in other places but not for them. And that changes tonight. This result changes that. This result will bring about a country that works fairly for everywhere and for everybody.

Burnham Speech Makerfield Election Declaration 19/7/26

Burnham's analysis of failed and left behind communities in very many parts of the UK reflects many areas of the West Midlands. The region has some of the most highly deprived areas in the country and also has one of the most diverse populations in the UK.

Communities such as those in the West Midlands, that have high levels of poverty will also almost certainly have suffered significant mental and physical harm and likely trauma. Leading in turn to the hollowing out of resilience, loss of hope, long term ill health, premature death and reduced social cohesion. An overall consequence of the harm caused is reduced economic productivity.

Deprived communities exist in all countries and all regions of the UK and in both our rural areas and our towns and cities. In their *UK Poverty 2026* report the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that:

> *More than 1 in 5 people in the UK (21%) were in poverty in 2023/24 — 14.2 million people. Of these, 7.9 million were working-age adults and 4.5 million were children. To put it another way, around 2 in every 10 working-age adults are in poverty in the UK, with about 3 in every 10 children being in poverty.*
>
> *The deeper you go, the further away from the poverty line you look, the worse things are. In 2023/24, 6.8 million people — or almost half of those in poverty — were in very deep poverty, with an income far below the standard poverty line, meaning their incomes are at most two thirds of the poverty line. This is both the highest absolute number of people, and the highest proportion, on record, going back to 1994/95.*

The social marginalisation, povertisation and additionally in some areas, racialisation of communities has also caused a spiralling of social and economic harm. These harms significantly impact financially across all areas of public service including the NHS, criminal justice services, children's services and adult social care as well as to the Treasury in both lost tax revenue and burgeoning benefit payments.

One of the significant policy drivers for Burnham is creating a *productive and accountable* state by the rolling back of neoliberal political thinking promoted by all major political parties over the last 40 years. This underpins another fundamental policy driver which is to reduce the cost of living. Both of these policy drivers are directly linked with his intent to regenerate the British economy by the devolution of political and economic power to local areas.

A shorthand for Burnham's economic and social policies is Manchesterism. Mainstream was founded in September 2025 as *a coalition of voices from across the Labour Party.* Andy Burnham, then Labour Mayor of Greater Manchester was a founding member. A recently published document by Mainstream provides a strategic framework to develop a Productive State. One of the authors Mathew Lawrence commenting in the New Statesman asserts that:

> *This is not just a project to tackle the cost of living crisis, but an institutional basis for a more inclusive, resilient and democratic society – one in which belonging is built through what we experience in common rather than divided by what we can afford. Manchesterism is the theory in motion and the political project capable of carrying it.*

Mathew Lawrence - The New Statesman - The Productive State: A framework for Manchesterism

Head North (Burnham and Rotherham) provides a detailed analysis of the historic causes and consequences of centralisation of power in Westminster. Comparing the concentration of wealth in the south of of England they found:

> *Removing London from the UK positions the rest of the country's average wealth below that of Mississippi, which is America's poorest State.*

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Additionally, a report by the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business & Government (July 2026) states that:

> *By the late 2010s, the UK faced regional divides larger than those between east and west Germany and north and south Italy.*

Burnham's plans for regional devolution of Westminster powers have been portrayed by some in the media as tinkering with the structures of government. This ignores that the devolution of powers to regions was a central aspect of the economic policies within Labours 2024 manifesto. Jonathan Freedland, in the Guardian (24th July 2026) comments:

> *But those grumbling may also be missing what is right in front of them. A rebalancing of British power is shaping up to be the big-ticket item of the Burnham government. If it works, it will unleash myriad policy moves as yet unimagined across the country, bringing the growth that is the pre-requisite for all else.*

The first tangible sign of Burnham's intent to devolve powers to local regions was the establishment of No. 10 North. Followed swiftly by a government policy document on devolution of powers to the English regions, in the Cabinet Statement - Rewiring of the State:

The way the country is governed is not delivering for people and the places where they live: most decisions are too centralised; those advising on and taking them are too distant from the people they will affect; this impairs the ability to join up and integrate services at a local level; and, as a result, places have the wrong choices imposed on them, rather than being able to make the right choices for themselves. The public deserves better – better policies that support better outcomes and are better connected to the places people live.

Another key aspect of Burnham's analysis of the failure of public services and escalating public cost, is that we keep paying for failure. In Counting What Matters (DEMOS and The Health Foundation 2024) proposed a foundational shift in public accounting to identify spend on prevention. Suggesting a … *working definition of prevention as being related to activities or investments that increase the resilience of individuals and communities and lead to avoidance (or reduced risk) of negative outcomes.*

Chancellor John Healey in the Autumn Budget 2026 has introduced Preventative Departmental Expenditure Limits (PDEL). Recognising; … *that placing greater emphasis on early intervention can yield benefits in the long term and help to address the drivers of poor outcomes and cost. The government is committed to acting to address problems before they escalate, improving people's lives and delivering better long-term value for taxpayers.*

Nick Davies, Institute for Government's director of public services, responding in Civil Service World commented that:

> *This may sound like a dry change to budget definitions, but it has the power to be transformational, shifting not just funding but how services are designed. That's because giving a single prevention ring-fence to each front-line service could facilitate the widespread pooling of prevention budgets in local areas, enabling the integration of services around people's needs, rather than departmental silos.*

The Government Actuary's Department, GAD technical bulletin on the 2026 budget outlined that:

> *PDEL is intended to help facilitate shared resource and accountability across budget holders, and to help protect programmes that generate benefits over the longer term.*
>
> *This focus on prevention also aligns with the NHS's 10-year plan, published in 2025. One of the 3 key themes of the NHS plan is to move "from sickness to prevention", and it commits to "harnessing a huge cross-societal energy on prevention".*

This development reflects that during Andy Burnham's Mayoral leadership of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority the GMCA was named as the first prevention demonstrator in the UK Government's 10 Year Plan for Health which:

> *… will take a community-led preventative approach to the provision of public services which means fixing the foundations of a person's life – such as housing, and access to education and employment opportunities – as a means of preventing ill health from social and economic detriment and improving lives, as well as reducing pressure on acute and crisis services.*

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This approach alongside the adoption of PDEL by government strongly reflects the thinking and proposals developed within the ST2SR report.

Writing on the defence of the United Kingdom, (Times July 8th 2026), Burnham states that:

> *The global picture is darkening and we must take concerted action to enhance our resilience, starting at the local level. We have seen with increasing frequency how ordinary lives and local prosperity are impacted by global events, each time exposing fundamental vulnerabilities in our society and economy.*
>
> *I see our strength at home and our strength in the world as indivisible. Through No 10 North, and the devolution of power to all parts of the UK, we will take a new approach to regenerating and reindustrialising the country, and thereby strengthening its resilience. That same approach will consider foreign policy, economic policy, security, social cohesion and British values as inextricably linked elements of the same strategic question.*

Burnham inherently recognises the systemic factors that either weaken or strengthen the resilience of our communities and our country. Commenting in LabourList (July 23rd 2026) on Burnham's article in the Times, Dr Matthew Godwin and Dame Sara Khan authors of *Britain Under Strain*, comment that:

> *With Andy Burnham's commitment to furthering devolution and his strong record of leadership in local government, he is ideally placed to begin repairing the social contract where it matters most – at the local level. The need for a new approach is not only about efficiency and economic growth, but also about defending our democracy and enhancing our national resilience.*

High local levels of deprivation are linked to levels of right-wing hate crime. In the study Local Deprivation Predicts Right-Wing Hate Crime in England,(2023) the authors compared local levels of deprivation in Lower Layer Super Output Areas with levels of right-wing hate crime in England. Their results included:

> *… consistent with the expectation that local deprivation is an important driver of right-wing. radicalization and risk of far-right attacks. We also show that measures of local deprivation help improve forecasts of where right-wing hate crime can be expected. … our results also suggest a potential scope for policies to prevent future radicalization through reducing deprivation.*

If we want to strengthen the resilience in our country we need to strengthen the resilience of our citizens and our marginalised communities. Building systemic resilience for individuals and communities is at the heart of the thinking in the ST2SR report. The systemic position stated above by Burnham on defence, strongly reflects the position that was adopted in ST2SR where it was stated that:

> *At a local level communities can become traumatised from disasters or from events such as loss of industries and livelihoods. It is also evident that trauma can deeply affect societies. This is apparent from the impact of the horrific events taking place in the wars in several parts of the world. The ongoing traumatic impact of the Covid pandemic remains highly evident, including the poor mental health of many children. Social, emotional and financial impact and deep harm from wars and Covid have affected communities in the UK and across the world.*

The findings in the ST2SR report for the West Midlands would strongly support the understanding, that if we want to see "*Good growth in every postcode*" then we need to tackle the underlying inequalities that engender or amplify trauma and erode resilience in our marginalised communities.

We need to strengthen those marginalised communities through preventative initiatives and schemes that begin to put right the economic harms and the social injustices that have been caused.

The ST2SR report provides a framework and details the available evidenced based preventative approaches, to build systemic resilience and create greater equity, socially and economically across the UK.

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Systemic Development for Public Services

Biography Dr Alex Chard

Alex is an organisational consultant, independent academic and author. He has a Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice that was focussed on creating systemic change in public sector services. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a Member of the Society of Authors

He has 35 years consultancy experience across a range of public services, including significant experience in organisational review and change processes and creating pan-organisational learning.

He was a member of the Academic Oversight Group for the NHS Violence Reduction Academy for London. He attended an All-Party Parliamentary Group for Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Professionals and provided advice on Organisational Leadership and Culture in developing a Universal EDI Standard.

He was previously a visiting Senior Lecturer at the University of Bedfordshire teaching systemic practice to doctoral students and to social work masters students. He contributed to the revalidation of the Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice.

His published work includes:

- Reducing Systemic Trauma Developing Systemic Resilience, West Midlands Combined Authority
- Punishing Abuse, West Midlands Combined Authority
- Systemic Resilience, HMI Probation, (extended thinking in Punishing Abuse);
- Troubled Lives Tragic Consequences (a review of six children involved in very serious violence);
- Systemic Inquiry, co-editor and author, (text-book on systemic research);
- Defending Young People, co-author of three editions (a legal reference book).

Punishing Abuse was a detailed study of 80 children in the West Midlands justice system.

Anne Longfield (former Children's Commissioner for England) described the report as *comprehensive and harrowing ... a powerful reinforcement of the need to support all children who have suffered ...*

Alex presented key findings of Punishing Abuse at the opening plenary of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Conference in 2023. Punishing Abuse has influenced the delivery of national, regional and local health programmes and projects.

Following the publication of Punishing Abuse, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) commissioned Dr Alex Chard (through YCTCS Ltd) to undertake a literature review to advise the region on the social and financial benefits of the region becoming trauma-informed. The literature review also provided the evidence base for financial analysis and benefits modelling.

The final report of this project, Reducing Systemic Trauma Developing Systemic Resilience has recently been published by the WMCA. The report provides proposals on Transformational Approaches to reduce adversity and trauma across the West Midlands region.

Profile YCTCS ltd

YCTCS ltd provides specialist consultancy and service development to public services. Our focus is on strategic service development including safeguarding. We have extensive experience in working within highly complex environments, helping organisations to develop and achieve high quality outcomes for service users. Dr Alex Chard, Director YCTCS ltd, manages all company contracts.

The company has traded for twenty-five years and was a development from a partnership, which had previously traded for 10 years. The company has professional indemnity insurance of £2m and public liability insurance of £10m.

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