

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Friday 27 May 2022

Present:- Councillor Clark (in the Chair); Councillors T. Collingham, Baker-Rogers, Baum-Dixon, Cooksey, Wyatt and Yasseen.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Cowen, A Carter, Elliott and Pitchley.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

40. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or press.

41. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items that required the exclusion of the press or public.

42. ROTHERHAM SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP - CSE REVIEW FINAL REPORT

At the meeting held on 10 November 2021, Council considered a motion regarding *Ongoing Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham*. It resolved to ask that the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership (RSCP) consider the issues detailed in the motion and report back to Councillors on any changes or amendments to its strategy to tackle and prevent Child Exploitation or additional activities that may be appropriate.

Chief Officers from RMBC, South Yorkshire Police and Rotherham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) commissioned the RSCP to undertake an independent review to examine the concerns raised in an objective and transparent way. The RSCP's Review Team appointed to conduct the review were selected based on their extensive experience in child safeguarding across the voluntary and statutory sectors, public protection and social work practice.

The Review Team were:

Jenny Myers – Independent Chair of RSCP. Ms Myers is a lead reviewer for the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and has held the role of independent chair for RSCP since October 2019. She is a former independent chair of other safeguarding partnerships and led high-profile case reviews including around CSE.

Matt Thompson – Police and Justice Lead. Mr Thompson is a former Head of Public Protection for Derbyshire Police. He is currently Head of Direct Delivery of a UK charitable network who disseminate information, best practice and learning across voluntary and statutory services to inform, educate and prevent child exploitation and abuse.

Jenny Coles – Independent Consultant. Ms Coles is a registered social worker and is a former Strategic Director of Children. She was president of the Association of Directors of Children Services. She is currently chair of the board of Trustees for What Works for Children's Social Care and a member of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.

The Chair welcomed the three Review Team members who were present at the meeting to speak to their report. The Chair also thanked the Review Team for taking the time to come to the meeting in person.

The report, titled CSE Review Final Report, had been published and circulated prior to the meeting and was attached to the covering report as Appendix 1.

Jenny Myers introduced the report and confirmed that she had been the independent chair of RSCP since 2019 and that the Review Team took their responsibilities regarding Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham very seriously. Ms Myers thanked Mr Thompson and Ms Coles for their work on the review and reiterated that they are all independent and approached the review with open minds.

The openness and transparency of all members of the Council was acknowledged ranging from chief officers and staff to all those that had supported the Review Team in undertaking the review. At no stage had the team felt blocked or felt that information was being hidden which was important to acknowledge given the history of Rotherham. Ms Myers wanted to thank all those involved for making the review as easy as possible bearing in mind the complexities of the subject.

Having worked in child protection for just under 40 years, Ms Myers fundamentally believed that every child had the right to be protected from abuse and exploitation and that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the key document along with government guidance. Safeguarding partnerships have a responsibility, including a statutory duty, to support prevention, awareness raising, recognition and provide an effective response to those that have been affected. There should be independent scrutiny of those processes. Ms Myers stated that Survivors should be at the heart of all services and involved in planning and developing those services. It was acknowledged that Survivors voices were not all one and sometimes that needed to be taken into account. As a final point, Ms Myers stated that whilst it was dreamt that there would be a world in which CSE did not exist, however it does and Rotherham must continue to accept that and provide services and develop services from feedback

from both survivors and those that work in those services.

In highlighting key points of the report, Ms Myers set out that the review was undertaken as the Conservative Group had published a briefing paper in November 2021 which raised several significant concerns which suggested that CSE was a continuing problem in Rotherham and that neither the Police nor the Council were responding to CSE effectively enough. The report set out very clearly that the concerns were taken seriously. The Review Team were acutely aware that there were new opposition Councillors coming into Rotherham and it was appropriate for them to want to understand more about the current situation around CSE in Rotherham. It was noted that the Conservative group had shared with South Yorkshire Police (SYP) a number of concerning bits of information and it was not unreasonable for them to expect some reassurance about how that information had been acted upon. Ms Myers informed OSMB that one of the recommendations, as stated on page 25 of the report) related to the induction and training of Councillors. This included helping all new Councillors to understand what to do if they had concerns; how those should be managed; and what to do if they did not feel that those concerns had been addressed.

The review was split into two stages:

- Stage 1 - addressing the specific concerns raised by Rotherham Council's Conservative Group in their briefing paper; and
- Stage 2- ensuring that the individual points raised by the Council motion are addressed, namely:
 - the multi-disciplinary approach to CSE in Rotherham, including a clear Child Exploitation (CE) strategy and senior management oversight and accountability;
 - the police and local authority's mechanisms for preventing and protecting children from exploitation;
 - the strategy for multi-agency training for front line staff;
 - RMBC's and SYP's work on CSE to ensure that it is properly scrutinised through the appropriate committees of elected members, and that the scrutiny was robust.

Ms Myers stated that it was important to note that during Stage 1 of the review, the team but in particular Mr Thompson, examined and tracked every one of the 37 reports of information and found that they had been acted upon and dealt with appropriately. There was evidence in the material that had been reviewed that there was a really robust partnership response to the concerns and that they had been dealt with effectively and that the original concerns in the briefing paper were, in the opinion of the Review Team, unfounded.

The second stage of the review looked more at the Strategy, the processes, leadership and management accountability. The Review Team also looked at and then addressed, as far as they were able, the 13 points raised within the motion.

The Review Team found no evidence that CSE was occurring on the same scale as it had in the past. Of course, CSE was occurring, but in the brief that the Review Team were given, they felt reassured that there were effective and robust partnership processes in place to address concerns when they came in. Evidence had been provided to support that conclusion.

Ms Myers highlighted areas that the Review Team though were working well such as the governance and ownership across the three key partners (CCG, RMBC and SYP) which had evolved and strengthened over the last couple of years. It was felt that there was a clear, multi-agency approach to CSE, and the Child Exploitation Strategy did address the changing nature of CSE to online abuse. There were also delivery groups and steering groups that supported effective implementation. Additionally, there was close working with the Rotherham Safeguarding Partnership and the join-up and accountability between the two organisations was clear. Senior management accountability had been imbedded and strengthened. That included colocation of police, social care and health professionals working in the MASH (Multi Agency Support Hub) and the EVOLVE (a multi-agency team.) It was felt that there were effective mechanisms for preventing and protecting children from exploitation. The Child Exploitation Tasking Group was highlighted.

However, there were seven suggested recommendations that the Review Team had made as there was room for improvement. Ms Myers summarised these during the meeting and they were set out on page 25 of the report. The suggested recommendations related to:

1. Induction and training of Councillors
2. Scrutiny
3. Re-building public trust and confidence
4. Survivors
5. Public awareness raising
6. Keeping children and young people safe
7. CE/CSE Strategy Review

The Chair invited Jenny Coles to address the Members. Ms Coles stated that, during the process of seeing people, particularly the officers at the Council and SYP, they used this review to reflect on what they were doing. It was very clear that they always wanted to improve and were actively looking for ways in which they could do better. An example of that which was included in the report was how performance was discussed with scrutiny and how that could help scrutinise areas that required particular focus. That was a really positive part of the process.

Mr Thompson explained that he had worked with around twelve Local Authorities over the past year and was currently working with four others. The willingness to take on recommendations and have the difficult conversations had been a refreshing experience for Mr Thompson in Rotherham which could not be said of everywhere.

The Chair thanked the Review Team for their presentation and opened up the meeting to questions/statements from OSMB.

It was acknowledged that fair points had been made in relation to the induction and training. The cross-party Member Development Panel would take those comments on board.

Assurance was given that the key partners were able to adapt and evolve to the changing model used by organised criminals, such as criminal activity moving online. Mr Thompson explained that the model was continuously changing but that the partners absolutely reacted to that. Agencies were well versed at tackling the changes and putting in place plans to disrupt and prevent issues. It was suggested that a positive step would be to conduct further scrutiny on how the partnership was dealing with that changing nature of crime.

It was confirmed that during the review, no specific, targeted work was evidenced relating to awareness work for children with SEND. It could exist but due to the timeframe of the review, it had not been possible to look for that evidence in detail. The matter had been raised in the report in order to ensure that the partnership was aware and to make sure that this matter was being addressed. Scrutiny could ask for further detail on what support and guidance was given, appropriately, to those children with SEND who may not instantly understand the risk.

In response to a question regarding the seminars that were held for Councillors, Ms Coles confirmed that she had looked at those in some details. The seminars held in January 2022 had been facilitated by both the Council and the Police and it was the view of the Review Team that there needed to be more of that because that was the core of the approach and the right approach. The seminars that were delivered were very engaging and at the right level. In relation to the induction part of the training, comments had been made in the report regarding the timing of those sessions but the initial safeguarding training and more general approach at the beginning seemed absolutely right and accorded with what had been seen elsewhere. The key point was to scrutinise the partnership approach and have health colleagues and/or voluntary sector colleagues come along to scrutiny meetings to enable scrutiny members to have a flavour of what was happening on the ground.

It was acknowledged in the meeting that CSE was a crime but there was an assumption by some that it should have been tackled and completely eradicated. Work could be done, and was being done by the Partnership, to mitigate the risk of that crime but the occurrence of that crime could still continue. Mr Thompson agreed and explained that issues arose when authorities believed that they could totally eradicate CSE. Of course, the eradication of CSE should be an aim but there had to be a sense of realism in that, like every other crime, it still happens. The approach therefore had to be to acknowledge that it happens and the focus on

reduction and mitigation was therefore absolutely right.

Following a question Mr Thompson explained that reporting back to Councillors and members of the public following a report was always difficult and there was room for improvement. The process taken depended on whether the information provided was indeed information or intelligence. It was then for the police to decide which route would be taken. It was the value that was attached to it that made it information or intelligence. Mr Thompson stated that there was a cultural barrier for police and law enforcement agencies in relation to reporting back. In some cases that was absolutely the right approach due to the need for confidentiality. However, in the main, it was a cultural issue and more could be done at a strategic level to provide that reassurance that what is being brought from the community to law enforcement as intelligence is actioned and taken seriously. The report did state that there was a mechanism in place along with a will and a drive to ensure that did take place. However, the short term, consistent feedback could be improved.

Ms Myers further explained that the Review Team had met with Councillor Barley and Councillor Thompson as the mover and seconder of the motion early in the review process and it was a very insightful meeting. Members needed to understand that what seemed to them to be massive was only one small bit of information that was not necessarily evidence but one small piece of a much bigger jigsaw. If it was not understood what that jigsaw looked like and what the processes were, it could seem that the information provided had been dumped into a hole and nothing further had happened. It was confirmed that the review had found that there were mechanisms in place to ensure that something was done with the information provided. However, it would be helpful for Councillors to receive some form of acknowledgement that the information had been received. This acknowledgement would not necessarily state what form of action had been taken following the provision of that information. Ms Myers stated that all information should be provided using the official form. It was acknowledged that some people were not aware of that form and as such, South Yorkshire Police and the Partnership had been pushing that out. By using the right form, the right processes could then be used to ensure the information provided is actioned. The information could also be tracked using these processes.

It was noted that whilst awareness for Councillors was important, they were only a reflection of the community, and it was therefore vital to improve communications with residents so that they could be reassured that procedures were in place. Perception and reality could be very different and there was still a perception by some that not enough was being done, despite the findings of the review. Ms Myers explained that the report provided commentary around public awareness raising and the need to really talk to communities about the good things that have been done, about the positive outcomes. It was important to work with residents to reassure them about the changes that have been made in Rotherham. The Partnership were undertaking a range of activities relating to

awareness raising but there did need to be more information about what positive steps were being taking in specific areas.

In response to a request to have this type of review conducted every two or three years, Ms Myers explained that it would be up to OSMB or the Council to decide when reviews take place. It was noted that CSE was back on the Improving Lives forward plan in a more substantive manner than previously. There was some work to do about the level of detail contained in the performance reports as some of it was overwhelming.

Concerns were raised in relation to the asking of questions in relation to the numbers of children were have been victims of CSE. Mr Thompson agreed with those concerns and stated that the answer to such a question would depend on how the question was worded. The governance around what is recorded is influenced by so many external factors such as the National Crime Recording Standards and HMRC. Those changes very often. There are some glitches in the way data is recorded but that is not unique to policing, it is true of all data sets. Data should be seen as a guide; it was not the be all and end all and should be used alongside other factors. Ms Coles stated that it would be a good concern to raise with the police and the Council so that Members could better understand the data they were scrutinising. In relation to the point made about support being provided to multi people in one family, Ms Coles stated that this had been evidenced during the review and it was very important that the whole family approach continued to be taken.

Mr Thompson confirmed that the phrase “indirect victims” was being developed which looked at the family and extended family of CSE victims.

In response to comments regarding the increased workloads of frontline staff and ensuring those workloads were not competing with CSE whilst at the same time ensuring employees were being looked after, Ms Coles confirmed that as part of the review, she had spoken with the HR Business Partner for Children and Young People’s Services. It had been made clear that there were a number of ways for checking on staff and protecting their health and wellbeing had been stepped up following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following a question on whether the training for Councillors included sufficient detail on the barriers faced by ethnic minority survivors and their families, it was confirmed that the Review Team had advised that the training be refreshed to ensure that this matter was covered. Work was ongoing with RSCP to embed equity and diversity.

Comments were made on the perception some members of the public had that new Councillors would act more on information as those Councillors that were elected prior to the Jay and Casey reports were seen by some to have covered the issue up. Concerns were also raised that it can take a lot of time to feedback information to those that have raised it and this in itself can lead to frustration and conspiracy theories.

Mr Thompson agreed that it was a dilemma on what information could be shared with members of the public and that it could look like a cover up. Therefore, expectations needed to be managed from the beginning of the process.

A written question had been submitted in advance of the meeting which stated that work was ongoing by the Partnership on issues picked up in the recommendations prior to the review taking place. Ms Myers explained that it was reassuring that the issues found were already be worked on and that lessons had been learned and changes implemented throughout the review. However, Ms Myers particularly highlighted the recommendations relating to keeping children and young people safe and the voice of adult survivors and how this was used to inform services. There had been some evidence of that, but it needed to be stronger. There was also a need for the Council and others such as the voluntary and community sector to develop some clear guidance around the offer for Rotherham residents in relation to post-CSE support.

Whilst it was acknowledged that there had to be a focus on CSE, assurances were sought regarding the work being done on other forms of child abuse. Ms Myers confirmed that all aspects of child abuse were always looked at by the RSCP and there had been an audit of the multi-agency response following several high-profile cases in the national press.

Concerns were raised as the report did not mention deprivation or poverty but a previous report in 2015 found that there was a direct correlation between child poverty and becoming a victim of CSE. A more recent report from London had also identified this correlation. It was therefore suggested that the Council should have an anti-poverty strategy that aimed to address deprivation which would then disrupt and prevent CSE. This was particularly important during the current cost of living crisis. In response Ms Myers explained that whilst she agreed with the point, the scope of the review was very tight. Deprivation and poverty were definitely on the agenda and the Vulnerable Children's group were acutely aware of the impact.

The Chair suggested that an anti-poverty strategy was something that the Improving Lives Select Commission could look into.

It was noted that the processes in place do work but there were concerns that some people did not get directed to the right process. Ms Myers agreed and stated that this issue could be addressed by improving awareness and training. There were always way to report issues and just because one person did not think it was worth reporting, that does not mean that issues should be ignored. Ms Myers also confirmed that report recommends that there should be some further work on a mapping of commissioned and non-commissioned support for CSE victims and survivors to ensure they are funnelled into the correct process, and they know what support is

available to them. A suggestion from the Commission was that a whistle-blower type hotline could be used for reporting concerns in future. Mr Thompson agreed that there was a cultural issue when it came to escalating concerns. Operation Retriever had led to lots of changes and charities/organisations were now in place to help practitioners escalate concerns.

A question was asked in relation to whether the rolling programmes of work in schools and colleagues could look at long term societal views like misogyny and toxic masculinity that feed in to CSE as well as looking at spotting the signs. Ms Coles explained that it was vital that the Safeguarding Partnership broadened the awareness training that was delivered in schools, particularly in primary schools. It would be good to build on what was already there and the experience has been that schools are very receptive to this.

Reference was made to the report from the IOPC in November 2021 and the Review Team were asked what part the report played in their investigation. Ms Myers explained that whilst she had read the report and there was some overlap/commonality, it was felt that for this piece of work it was more appropriate to focus on the Police's contribution to management, leadership etc around CSE. It was not within the remit of the Review Team to comment on the whole of SYP. Further the report focused more on the historical issues whereas the Review Team were looking at the here and now. The response of SYP to that report would be reported back to the Rotherham Safeguarding Partnership and SYP would be expected to attend a meeting to talk through that response.

A question was asked as to how the voice of survivors could be heard more and how they could be brought into the processes as this would improve the service and improve public perceptions of the work being done. Ms Myers explained that there was a difference in the experience of those that are victims of historical CSE and those that were coming through the system now. More recent survivors were much more involved and EVOLVE had provided evidence of this. Ms Myers reiterated that there is no one survivor voice, they are all different and have to be treated as such. Recommendation 4 related to survivors and how the feedback from survivors was sought. The RSCP and Adult Board were working with partners to support and develop a consistent way to get views and feedback. The Chair confirmed that the review into post-CSE support services had produced a number of recommendations, one of which related to the voice of survivors, and that all recommendations had been supported by Cabinet.

The ethnic backgrounds of offenders were discussed in the context of needing accurate information and calling out false information. Ms Myers agreed and stated that there was a lot of misinformation out there related to certain communities. It was explained that the Council needed to be able to communicate with communities in open, honest ways. The situation had not been handled well by anyone in the past. The clear and

accurate presentation of facts alongside information on the work that was being done was therefore really important.

It was acknowledged that lots of work was underway in regard to prevention from a victim's standpoint but questions were asked about what was being done in regards to prevention from a perpetrator's standpoint i.e. what was being done to target those individuals who were seen as likely to become perpetrators of CSE and prevent them from doing so? Mr Thompson explained that profiling offenders within CSE was very difficult. The range of perpetrators was clear to see in the media, it included all backgrounds for all walks of life. It was not limited to BAME communities. There was work going on in relation to prevention, specifically online offences. Good practice was shared nationally. Ms Myers explained that the work needed to start early, in primary schools for example, where healthy relationship could be taught however the investment for that had not been there. The Brook review from Oxford particularly highlighted issues related to young children who had suffered severe trauma in their early years but then when on the become perpetrators. It was felt that schools needed to be particularly aware of this.

In relation to a question on the training available for Parish Councillors it was confirmed that this had not been considered as part of the review but would be a very good idea.

Concerns were raised about the discrepancies in the data which was caused by different organisations measuring things in different ways. This led to confusion and was exploited by certain individuals or groups. The Review Team agreed that there was work that could be done but it did all relate to what question was asked. When asking questions, it was important to specify what exactly was required from the data. The questioning needed to be consistent. Work was ongoing within the RSCP to ensure the join up on performance delivery data was better.

The Review Team stated they would be extremely disappointed if anyone were to refer to their work as "marking your own homework." The investigation had been an opportunity to hold the mirror up and provide strong reassurance. This was very positive. Outside investigators had been brought in which provided that independent overview. Mr Thompson stated that he believed Rotherham was in a good place. Of course, there were improvements that could be made but the report produced should reflect positively on Rotherham.

Following the discussions, OSMB resolved to make recommendations that would be refined and discussed in further detail at the next meeting of OSMB which would be on 15 June 2022. Those recommendations were:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the Member and Democratic Support Panel, in conjunction with each of the Council's political groups draws up proposals in

order to co-ordinate the training plan with regard to CSE and to maximise member attendance at training events.

- 3) That work be carried out with the Borough's Town and Parish Council's to raise Town and Parish Councillors awareness around issues related to CSE.
- 4) That as part of the overall scrutiny work programming processes that clear expectations are set to determine which reports will come to the Improving Lives Select Commission and that there is full partnership engagement with regard to these reports (including on health check issues).
- 5) That scrutiny carries out further work to examine the link between poverty and deprivation and all issues related to children's safeguarding, and in particular to issues around CSE.
- 6) That clear plans, with defined timescales be developed in order to increase awareness and confidence with regard to issues surrounding CSE be developed in consultation with all partners.
- 7) That clear plans, with defined timescales be developed in order to ensure that a consistent approach is taken to how the "voice of the survivor" is taken into account of and listened to across the partnership.
- 8) That work is carried out across the partnership to provide clarity with regard to processes surrounding the reporting of and escalation of concerns regarding CSE.
- 9) That work is carried out across the partnership to provide clarity with regard to processes regarding performance monitoring around CSE.

As the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Victoria Cusworth was invited to comment on the report. She expressed her thanks to the Review Team and welcomed their findings. It was pleasing to see that some of the recommendations were already being worked on.

The Chair, on behalf of OSMB, expressed her sincere thanks to the Review Team for the review and for attending.

43. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

44. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items.

45. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board will be held at 10.00am on Wednesday 15 June 2022 at Rotherham Town Hall.