

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	3rd September, 2014
3.	Title:	Response to the Independent Report Prepared by Alexis Jay
4.	Directorate:	Chief Executive

5. Summary

- 5.1 Alexis Jay has now delivered to me her independent report into historic cases of child sexual exploitation and I have taken immediate steps to publish it. The full report and this response to it can be found at www.rotherham.gov.uk/inquiry. Anybody who has been affected by the report and this response can ring Rotherham Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) 01709 427327.
- 5.2 The Council has already apologised that it has previously let young people and their families down. Some of the Council's previous services were simply not good enough.
- 5.3 The report assists in explaining what went wrong and why. It outlines the contributory factors that resulted in historic services being less effective than our young people had the right to expect. The Council hopes publication of the report and this response can go some way to help to assure victims that this deplorable situation will not re-occur.
- 5.4 The report confirms the evidence of a series of recent inspections and reviews by other bodies that have taken place since 2009. They have all found that the Council's services have improved since being placed in formal Government intervention at the end of 2009 and that they continue to improve. Further opportunities for improvement are identified.
- 5.5 That services are stronger today does not mean young people in Rotherham will never be subject to sexual exploitation. The multi-agency responses to risk and the Council's preventative work have improved, but we need to be vigilant. Child sexual exploitation occurs in every town and city and there continue to be many predators intent on harming children and young people. We know that this is a problem that is hidden unless we seek it out.
- 5.6 This independent report was not commissioned to excuse or justify past decisions. Its purpose was to identify what went wrong and ensure important lessons are learned and acted upon. The mistakes of the past must not be allowed to be repeated.
- 5.7 There are not many people who would read the report and not feel complete dismay at the awful experience of some young people in Rotherham in the past. The report is clear that the Council and other agencies could and should

have been better able to protect young people from what is one of the most damaging forms of abuse imaginable.

- 5.8 The Council fully accepts the recommendations of this independent report. This response sets out what actions we propose in respect of the recommendations made.

6. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 6.1 Accept in full the findings and recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation by Alexis Jay OBE, dated 21st August 2014.**
- 6.2 Note that the report confirms that services are significantly stronger today, there have been many improvements over the last four years and that there is evidence that multi-agency working is effective.**
- 6.3 Agree that the recommendations set out in the report attached as appendix 1, which will continue to drive improvements to the way child protection services in Rotherham are delivered.**
- 6.4 Note the references in the report to the reduction in public sector funding placing councils like Rotherham under extreme pressure when faced with high demands from vulnerable children and families.**
- 6.5 Agree to the Council co-operating with the National Working Group to improve the child sexual exploitation risk assessment tool.**
- 6.6 Agree to provide a copy of the Independent Inquiry and this response to the agencies and organisations referred to in paragraph 2.18 of this report, in order to add to the national learning and improvement to child sexual exploitation responses.**
- 6.7 Refer the Independent Inquiry Report and this response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board for consideration.**

7. Findings of the Independent Report

- 7.1 The Council commissioned an independent inquiry because it wanted to ensure young people are properly protected from the threat of child sexual exploitation. It is committed to ensuring that any lessons learned from historic cases can be used to prevent their re-occurrence in Rotherham and can be shared and applied nationally.
- 7.2 The report does not make comfortable reading. There are not many people who would feel anything other than absolute dismay at the awful abuse suffered by some of our young people in the past. The report is clear, young people were let down by the Council and other agencies who were there to protect them. We could and should have done more to protect them from the most damaging form of abuse imaginable. The report contains some historic case studies that anyone involved in protecting young people past or present could not help but find deeply distressing. One can only admire the bravery of the people who have helped Ms Jay by recounting the most horrific period of their lives, in order to ensure a better response from agencies in the future.
- 7.3 The Council has apologised publicly that it has previously let young people and their families down. It is important to victims that we have said sorry. However to ensure their voice has been strongly heard, and to re-gain public confidence we must also demonstrate that we understand what went wrong and that we have put it right.
- 7.4 The report assists in explaining what went wrong and why. It outlines the contributory factors that led to services being less effective than our young people deserved and had a right to expect. The report is a critical document in helping the Council, partners and national agencies to ensure sexual exploitation services are effective.
- 7.5 Some victims rightly still feel a deep sense of injustice that criminality has not been identified and dealt with. Following the Home Affairs Select Committee In 2013 the Council asked the South Yorkshire Police for reassurance that it was doing everything possible to investigate historic child sexual exploitation cases. South Yorkshire Police currently has lengthy on-going criminal investigations into historic cases which the Council is fully supporting. The outcome of those investigations is still awaited.
- 7.6 The reasons attributed to the failure to properly protect young people include an operating environment that had seen victims of sexual exploitation not believed, a lack of understanding of grooming, artificial professional barriers preventing effective action, denial that such events could happen in Rotherham and concerns around reputational risk. These failings were identified within and between organisations and extended beyond the Council. These things must never again be allowed to prevent the Council and partners from taking effective action to protect our young people.
- 7.7 The Council and its multi-agency partners have provided public reassurance that the services today are different, stronger and better co-ordinated; that families and the public now have more knowledge about the signs of sexual exploitation and a greater willingness to talk about it, that partnership working has been strengthened and that today's young people are better protected than they were as a result. The Independent Inquiry confirms the findings of a series of recent inspections and reviews by other bodies and which have been undertaken since 2009. These have all found the Council's services

have improved since being placed in formal Government intervention at the end of 2009, and continue to improve. Services are not perfect today, but they are safe and significantly better and the report gives many examples of the improvements made. One states “The emphasis that Rotherham is now giving to quality assurance and continuous improvement in child sexual exploitation is an extremely positive development. The achievements to date are considerable...” (paragraph 7.58) and another says “Social workers who were in post in 2009 described the experience now to be “unrecognisable” because of these improvements.” (paragraph 13.36) The report also highlights areas where services should be improved further, particularly in risk assessments ensuring an appropriate level of ongoing support to victims, helping children to access services more easily and strengthening long-term post-abuse support.

- 7.8 The placing of services in Government intervention is a key point in the history of children’s safeguarding services in Rotherham. Ms Jay indicates that “By late 2009, when the Minister of State served an Improvement Notice on the Council for its children’s safeguarding services, there is no doubt that the systems and operations for protecting Rotherham’s children were unsafe” (paragraph 13.35).
- 7.9 The Improvement Notice was the trigger for a concerted and sustained improvement effort by the Council and partner agencies, and that is why the turnaround of services has its roots from this time period. The Council did not want to be in the position of not serving its young people well.
- 7.10 By stating our services are better today we are not trying to excuse what happened in the past. However it is important context as the Council was motivated to improve the ways it tackled child sexual exploitation before the articles appeared in the Times Newspaper of August 2012 or the Home Affairs Select Committee report of June 2013 Those improvements have been taking place since the beginning of 2010, and following a subsequent Ofsted inspection the Council came out of intervention in 2011.
- 7.11 However it is clear there is no room for complacency and there is still more to be done. It has to be one of the most deeply regretted chapters in the history of this Council that the report confirms that there were earlier signals of poor practice before 2009 which were downplayed and not attended to and which if acted upon might have led to children being better protected earlier. The failure to protect young people is not a chapter of history the Council can be proud of.
- 7.12 At the core of the improvements made since 2009 has been the Council’s determination to ensure we are keeping children and young people in the borough safe from harm. The Independent Inquiry recognises this commitment exists throughout the whole of the organisation today.
- 7.13 Ms Jay’s report is comprehensive and thorough. From the outset the Council was always clear of the intention that it be published. The Council has fully co-operated with the author and her team and given them unfettered access to Council records and staff. Many people past and present have given their time and opinions. It represents an honest and straightforward account and interpretation of what the author has found. It outlines a range of factors that led to responses to child sexual exploitation “rarely being good enough”.

- 7.14 The report also acknowledges a very different historic operating environment than exists today both nationally and locally and in particular that historically Rotherham was one of the few places that attempted to identify and tackle child sexual exploitation. It describes this in the following terms “It seems likely that the existence of the Risky Business Project, its ability to attract referrals directly from children and parents affected by sexual exploitation, and the attention given to child sexual exploitation at a multi-agency level over the years meant that the problem would have been more visible in Rotherham than in some other parts of the country.” (paragraph 4.11).
- 7.15 Protecting young people is not something that can be achieved by the Council alone and some of the reasons for child sexual exploitation services not being good enough in the past lie at the feet of other agencies. There are not only strong messages in this report for the Council, but also the Police and other partner agencies that were, and still are central to the protection of young people from sexual exploitation.
- 7.16 It is recommended the Independent Inquiry and this response be passed to a range of national and local agencies, including the Department for Education, The Home Affairs Select Committee, Local Government Association, Deputy Children’s Commissioner, Barnardo’s, the National Working Group, the Association of Directors of Children’s Services, Police, Health, other local partners and the Local Children’s Safeguarding Board. The next section of this report examines some of the key themes Ms Jay found and which are crucial in ensuring effective protection of young people.

8. What Went Wrong

Elected Members and Senior Officers

- 8.1 The report is critical of past actions in a number of areas, but at the core is poor political and managerial leadership. The report indicates “By 2005 it is hard to believe that any senior officers or members from the Leader and Chief Executive downwards were not aware of the issue.” (introduction to chapter 13). It is clear from the report that at this time some senior officers responsible for safeguarding simply did not do their jobs effectively.
- 8.2 Seminars to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation were held but key messages were underplayed and the seriousness of the issue was not widely recognised by members. There appeared to be no clear plan of action or corporate political drive to tackle child sexual exploitation at the scale presented. The report states “Most members showed little obvious leadership or interest in CSE for much of the period under review apart from their continued support for “Risky Business””.
- 8.3 The reports also found senior officers in children’s services did little to keep members fully informed of the scale of the seriousness of the problem on “occasion” telling members they believed it was exaggerated. The report is careful to attribute this management of information to senior staff indicating that frontline professionals “alerted senior staff to the scale of abuse and were met with disbelief and left with little management support for the good work they were trying to do.” (introduction to Chapter 13).

- 8.4 It is a re-occurring theme throughout the report particularly around the early to mid 2,000s, that the scale of child sexual exploitation was played down. This is described in the following terms, “There are reports that senior staff conveyed that sexual exploitation and the ethnicity of perpetrators should be played down. This seemed to be reinforced by the Police”(introduction to chapter 13) and “The terms used by many people we spoke to about how those in authority (members and some officers) dealt with CSE were “sweeping it under the carpet”, “turning a blind eye” and “downplaying”. One person said of the past “the people above just did not want to know.” (paragraph 13.52 of the report).
- 8.5 The report also attributes the prevailing culture in the Council until 2009 as a contributory factor in dampening the ability for child sexual exploitation to be properly discussed. It indicates that people reported a bullying and macho culture. There are strong inferences that officers were discouraged from raising sensitive issues and that firm advice was not generally welcomed. These behaviours would not have been presented or promoted by all senior officers or members but were sufficiently prevalent at some of the most influential levels to have an impact. The author did not find evidence this culture was tackled effectively, during this period. The report provides a number of quotes from people that describe wholly unacceptable behaviours and is summarised as “a succession of senior officers, past and present, male and female who were interviewed for the inquiry raised the negative culture as being an issue....” (paragraph 13.65).

Risky Business

- 8.6 The report places the tensions that built up between the Risky Business Project and the statutory agencies, particularly children’s social care as being one of the principal reasons that child sexual exploitation services were not good enough. The report recognises much of the good work undertaken by Risky Business Project, which operated on an outreach basis to young people, and describes it as “...the first public service in Rotherham to identify and support young people involved in child sexual exploitation.” (introduction to chapter 9). The report also recognised that Risky Business provided a service “which statutory services could not replicate” (paragraph 9.4), provided valuable training and played a key role in the success of Operation Central.
- 8.7 In outreach programmes young people engage voluntarily and the relationship is established through trust. Risky Business did not prescribe or direct actions, but gave support, advice and encouragement. However a failure by senior officers in children’s services to manage the interface between Risky Business and the statutory safeguarding service and the change in status of young people from engaging voluntarily to becoming a “client” resulted in too many falling through the net. This was particularly the case where young people regarded social workers with apprehension.
- 8.8 The report indicates that problems appeared in circumstances where Risky Business identified needs in the young people they encountered that ought to be referred to statutory agencies. The report author is clear that the task of resolving the transfer from non-statutory to statutory services rested “... with management.” The author concludes there were too many examples of young people properly referred to social services who somehow fell through the net. It was almost as if the source of the referral was a reason to “...attach lower importance to it...” (paragraph 9.9). The report suggests that senior managers “disbelieved” information presented by Risky Business (paragraph 9.10), and

there was evidence of professional jealousies. A similar theme emerges in relationships with other agencies. The report author references a Home Office research report dating from approximately 2002, indicating that a mapping exercise devised by Risky Business "...was not well received by the Police. No charges were brought against alleged perpetrators, nor was any investigation undertaken" (paragraph 10.8).

Missed Opportunities

- 8.9 It is clear there were three research reports prepared in 2002, 2003 and 2006 known to both the Police and the Council and which were clear about the scale of the problem of child sexual exploitation within Rotherham.
- 8.10 These reports will have provided hugely important information, and were sent to a range of agencies. The draft report of 2002 is reported to contain severe criticism of the agencies in Rotherham involved with child sexual exploitation. The most serious concerned the alleged indifference towards and ignorance of child sexual exploitation on the part of senior managers.
- 8.11 Ms Jay refers to the view of this report at the time that facts had been fabricated or exaggerated and concludes "The content to which senior officers objected to have been shown with hindsight to be largely accurate. Had this report been treated with the seriousness it merited.....by both the Police and the Council, the children involved then and later would have been better protected...." (introduction to chapter 10).
- 8.12 The later reports presented a thorough picture of the links between sexual exploitation, drugs, gangs and violent crime in Rotherham between 2002 and 2006. Whilst these were circulated widely to middle and senior managers in "all key agencies" the author was unable to find evidence of formal discussion of the reports in Council papers or the Safeguarding Board minutes.

Ethnicity

- 8.13 The report reaffirms what is widely known that there is no simple link between race and child sexual exploitation. The most significant number of perpetrators of child sexual exploitation across the UK is white men. According to the Children's Commissioner's Report the second largest category are those from a minority ethnic background particularly those recorded as Asian.
- 8.14 The file reading undertaken in connection with the preparation of the report confirmed that in Rotherham "the majority of perpetrators were of Pakistani heritage" (paragraph 11.2), though noting that one convicted perpetrator was of Afghan origin and latterly some perpetrators were emerging from the Roma Slovak community.
- 8.15 The author has confirmed very clearly that she found no evidence of social service managers being influenced by concerns about the "ethnic origins of suspected perpetrators when dealing with individual child protection cases, including CSE" (introduction to chapter 11).
- 8.16 However, the report does indicate that there was a widespread perception in the earlier years that the messages conveyed by some senior people in the Council and also in the Police were to downplay the ethnic dimensions of child sexual exploitation.

- 8.17 Attention is also drawn to the 2006 research report where it was indicated “it is believed by a number of workers that one of the difficulties that prevent this issue (CSE) being dealt with effectively is the ethnicity of the main perpetrator” (paragraph 11.5).
- 8.18 The report correctly draws attention to the UK Muslim Women Network, Deputy Children’s Commissioner Report and Home Affairs Select Committee evidence of the myth that “...only white girls are victims of sexual exploitation by Asian or Muslim males...” (paragraph 11.16).
- 8.19 Interviews with women’s groups appears to indicate that at least part of the reason child sexual exploitation is under reported within this group may be the manipulation of cultural norms.
- 8.20 The report notes the good work of the chair of the Rotherham Council of Mosques and his strong personal commitment to dealing with child protection. It recommends that relevant agencies invite dialogue with minority ethnic groups regarding child sexual exploitation, and in particular the Pakistani Heritage Community. This should be done in consultation with local women’s groups. The community should be encouraged to support young women and men to participate in this dialogue without fear or threat. The Council should ask the Local Children’s Safeguarding Board to take this forward urgently.

Looked After Children

- 8.21 The Independent Inquiry highlights the particular vulnerabilities of looked after children. In the past the Council did not have the right level of training for commissioners of services to ensure we placed as appropriately as we might young people who were vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The report author acknowledges that one solution is not suitable for all young people. Whilst some benefitted from being placed out-of-authority, for some it made them more vulnerable as they ran back to Rotherham, or indeed tried to groom others into child sexual exploitation.. The key is having good quality child-focussed assessments that take account of individual vulnerabilities before seeking an appropriate placement. This is a national issue and I will refer this matter to the Department for Education for consideration.

Taxi Licensing

- 8.22 The author comments on the role of parallel legislation in preventing and disrupting sexual exploitation such as taxi licensing. The occupation of “taxi driver” is a notifiable occupation and if suspected of an offence the Licensing Authority is informed by the police. The author notes a common thread throughout England of the prominent role of some taxi drivers in being directly linked to some children who have been abused. The report acknowledges the licensing function is an area the Council strengthened its response as a consequence of the emergence of child sexual exploitation. However there was evidence the same rate of improvement did not occur with other agencies.
- 8.23 Young People today still report being very mindful of the risks associated with travelling by taxi. We will continue to tackle this with the Council’s Licensing service and the Youth Cabinet, which gives young people an effective and direct voice.

9. Response of the Chief Executive to the Independent Inquiry

- 9.1 Never again can this Council or its partners find themselves in a position that they lack such self-awareness they are unable or unwilling to see and tackle issues that place citizens at risk. In this case it was a generation of young people. Most readers of the Independent Inquiry would be struck by the sense of the emperor's new clothes that percolates throughout it: That front line workers could see the obvious, were prepared to say it, but organisations were not prepared to hear it This relates not just to the Council, but also to other organisations.
- 9.2 During the period covered by the Inquiry the Council as a whole has made a concerted effort to improve performance of a range of services. It has been acknowledged nationally for turning poorly performing services around.
- 9.3 The role of culture is crucially important in the way organisations respond to threats and opportunities. The report covers a long period of time and there were few officers or members that were constant throughout that period. The Independent Inquiry indicates it was possible to detect a culture that was operating for much of this time, but which has been addressed in recent years. It is clear from the report as a whole that it is no longer a feature of the way the Council conducts business. This environment saw the scale of the problem downplayed, bad news was not welcomed and bullying appeared prevalent. It resulted in front line staff finding senior members and senior officers of the Council and other organisations an impenetrable barrier to recognising what needed to happen. This suppressed the ability for the organisation to respond effectively to all child sexual exploitation and particularly to the emerging threat of street-grooming. A number of policies are in place today to ensure the voice of staff is heard throughout the organisation including Dignity at Work and Whistleblowing Procedures. The Independent Inquiry recognises a far more appropriate culture exists today.
- 9.4 In respect of individual responsibility and accountability the report covers a significant period of time. Officers in senior positions responsible for children's safeguarding services throughout the critical periods when services fell some way short of today's standards do not work for the Council today. Some have retired, and others have moved on.
- 9.5 To that extent I have not been able to identify any issues of professional practice relating to current serving officers of this Council that as Chief Executive require me to consider use of disciplinary or capability procedures. Neither is there anything that has emerged that is so clear cut about any single individual officer that I feel able to make a referral to any Professional Standards Board.
- 9.6 However, where there were officers working in senior positions in child care services in Rotherham during the critical period and who are still involved in professional practice today it will be important for their current employers to read the Independent Inquiry and form their own conclusions as to their role. By taking the steps to publish the report and this response that I have set out in paragraph 1.1. I have ensured that this can happen.
- 9.7 Politicians are democratically elected and as a Chief Executive I have no influence over their selection or election, or the positions they hold on the Council. It is my role to ensure the Council is given proper advice and responds effectively to the Independent Inquiry. Mindful that Ms Jay's report

makes a number of references to the way in which historical matters were attended to politically I have formally referred the report and this response to the whip of the Labour Group for consideration. In addition the awareness of child sexual exploitation and how it should be addressed will form part of the Council's member development programme.

- 9.8 The report has implication for the Police and I shall formally refer it to the Chief Constable for consideration.
- 9.9 The report acknowledges that there have been substantial improvements from 2010 and that there is a genuine desire to improve further. The Council has a genuine commitment to better protect its young people. The report gives examples to indicate the culture of the organisation is very different today. Professional curiosity is encouraged and this supports staff to raise issues and know they will be taken seriously.
- 9.10 An infrastructure is now in place within the Council which is more appropriate to ensuring that child sexual exploitation is effectively tackled. Multi-agency working with the police is stronger and a multi-agency safeguarding hub is operating. This will provide a single point of entry for notifications related to safeguarding in one place; enables thorough research of each case to identify and address potential risk; sharing information easily between agencies; triaging referrals using agreed risk ratings; enabling early intervention to prevent risk escalating and managing cases through co-ordinated interventions. This enables a more co-ordinated approach to tackling any form of child abuse and in the case of child sexual exploitation ensures all key agencies can more quickly identify risk and have a faster multi-agency response based on comprehensive intelligence. The report recommends further improvements to the management of the CSE Team and this will be addressed in consultation with partner agencies. Despite Risky Business having been successful of its time, the current model is recognised nationally as best practice. It ensures a single and clear focus on the young person. The co-location, co-design and co-delivery of child sexual exploitation services has ensured effective integration. This has removed the artificial barriers that appear to have existed between Risky Business, children's social care and the police and which is one of the main reasons cited for young people falling through the net.
- 9.11 National awareness has moved on as a result of Operation Yew Tree, a spate of celebrity prosecutions for child abuse and successful prosecutions of perpetrators of child sexual exploitation. It is no longer a taboo subject. Parents, families and society are far more aware that child sexual exploitation is an ever-present threat that is believed to occur in every town and city and is still happening today in Rotherham.
- 9.12 There is an emphasis on underpinning this awareness by ensuring proper updates are provided on the level of risk. The Council, the Police and the Children's Safeguarding Boards receives regular reports jointly agreed with the Police on what we believe to be the level of risk to young people from child sexual exploitation, including quantification of those we believe are being exploited. Today, it cannot be said there is an attempt to downplay the challenge, and we make this information publicly available.

- 9.13 In respect of Looked After Children, we have more understanding of their vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation today. All our councillors and appropriate officers understand their role as corporate parents through training to raise awareness of the needs of Looked After Children and also Child Sexual Exploitation. The Council is a member of the White Rose regional framework for commissioning of placements for Looked After Children and this is driving improvements in quality. All placements made with carers or residential homes other than those run by Rotherham Borough Council now have to be agreed and signed off by the Director of Safeguarding, Children and Families. Whilst we feel we have strong arrangements in place we continually strive to improve them. We are actively consulting our Looked After Children on their experiences of being in care and the quality of support they receive. There remain challenges, not just in Rotherham but across the country. There are examples of young people who have themselves been exploited by being coerced into grooming others. There are no easy answers to this and it requires intensive intervention and support over a long period time. The issue needs national consideration and it is for this reason that the matter will be referred to the Department for Education.
- 9.14 This response to the Independent Inquiry is about ensuring young people are better protected. Things have improved, but there are still areas we must get stronger. The way in which we intend to respond to the recommendations are set out as appendix 1 to this report.
- 9.15 We know risks associated with child sexual exploitation showed a “marked improvement” from 2010 onwards, how “excellent audit work is helping to improve performance on risk” (paragraph 6.47) and that the quality of assessments and care planning in open cases is “good or very good in 76% of cases and adequate in the remaining 24%” (paragraph 6.17). We must not accept this as good enough and the actions in appendix 1 will make us stronger.
- 9.16 We take seriously the comments on the sub-regional risk assessment tool we use, which even though it is widely used, it has been identified as something which can be strengthened. We will work with the National Working Group on this issue to ensure the risk assessment tool is contributing to improving best practice nationally.
- 9.17 We owe survivors of child sexual exploitation from the past nothing less than our pledge that we will continue to do everything we can to improve in the future.
- 9.18 The Independent Inquiry acknowledged that at a time resources to the public sector had been cut, the Council has tried to apply a degree of protection to safeguarding services. The Independent Inquiry also noted the extreme pressure there is on Councils such as Rotherham which is faced with high demands for vulnerable children and families services, associated with significant levels of poverty and deprivation. We will use our annual budget setting process, and continue to work with partners in multi-agency settings to align resources in ways that continue to prioritise protection to vulnerable young people.
- 9.19 Finally it is appropriate that I reflect once again the courage of the survivors of child sexual exploitation for the way in which they have been prepared to share with Ms Jay what must have been the most awful episodes of abuse, to ensure young people in Rotherham and elsewhere are better protected.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1 The Council agreed that the Chief Executive commission the Independent Inquiry and has made financial provision within the base revenue budget for the costs associated with it.

11. Risks and Uncertainties

- 11.1 Steps have been taken to publish the Independent Inquiry report and this response. The Council indicated in commissioning the report that it was its intention to do this. The Council has received substantial criticism in the past for the way in which it has failed to tackle child sexual exploitation in an effective way, and has previously apologised for this. Whilst there will inevitably significant media interest in the Independent Inquiry report and this response, by publishing them we are able to demonstrate our intention to be open, honest and transparent regarding child sexual exploitation. These reports are not and never have been commissioned to protect the Council's reputation. Their purpose is to ensure there remains a clear focus on improving child protection services in Rotherham and elsewhere. There is a risk that media interest might deflect from ensuring that the reports are used positively to improve services.

12. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

- 12.1 The reports will help to ensure that we protect our most vulnerable residents, and through awareness raising education and training of young people, families and other key groups that we support people to help us to deliver services.

13. Background Papers and Consultation

- 13.1 The background paper to this report is the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham 1997-2013, Alexis Jay OBE which has been published alongside this report. By publishing the report and this response to it the Council has ensured the information is available to as wide a body of interest as possible.

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