ROCHDALE BOROUGH COUNCIL’S RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REVIEWING OFFICER’S REPORT

Introduction

This report does not make comfortable reading for the Council or many of its employees, past and present.

The review was commissioned not to excuse past actions, but to identify what went wrong and learn important lessons.

In our response to the report’s recommendations, we have set out how the Council will tackle the issues raised. This report highlights many vitally important issues that need to be tackled, but it is important to point out that we have not waited for it to arrive to get on with the job of improving the way we tackle child sexual exploitation.

Many of these recommendations either have been, or are in the process of being, implemented.

There is much we have done that this report does not cover - such as the overhaul of the Sunrise Team (the multi-agency dedicated to preventing, protecting and prosecuting), the pro-active interventions of our licensing team and the work we are leading at a Greater Manchester level to keep our children safe from harm.

At the core of the Council’s response is a determination to right the wrongs of the past and to reassure parents in the Rochdale borough that we are committed to keeping children and young people safe from harm.

We are determined to never repeat the mistakes of the past.
RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 7.1: That the Council retains the necessary additional external interim assistance to develop and lead the implementation of a robust improvement programme for social care practice and procedures generally, ensuring that this includes within it the necessary activities to improve practice in relation to CSE. The Council should aim to secure appropriate senior leaders for the CSF department on a permanent/long term basis who have the necessary skills, experience, expertise and tenacity to continue with the improvement programmes over the medium to long term.

RESPONSE: In October 2012, a new interim Director of Children’s Services and an interim Assistant Director were appointed. Both came to the authority with a strong track record in managing children’s services and establishing an effective, multi-agency response to child sexual exploitation. Since taking up their posts, they have implemented a range of improvements that have substantially strengthened the Council’s response.

However, we fully recognise that to continue improving we need to have permanent staff in place. Interviews for the post of Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) have taken place and the appointment of the successful candidate will be announced shortly. The advert to recruit a permanent Director of Children Services has been placed, and we aim to have made an appointment by August.

RECOMMENDATION 7.2: Due to the changing nature of CSE, the growing body of research and evidence relating to successful prevention, disruption tactics etc, and the resultant need on the part of the Council and its partners to respond to these changes in behaviours, tactics and approaches, it is recommended that the Council with its partner agencies keeps under review the level of resourcing made available to the prevention, detection and prosecution of CSE, in order to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded and supported appropriately.

RESPONSE: The Council increased the Children’s Services budget for 2013/14 – despite a steep reduction in government funding.

There has been a review of membership of the Sunrise Team and new members have been added including an increase in qualified and experienced social work and police personnel. An experienced and qualified health practitioner is to join the team to provide dedicated health expertise and assist in brokering positive support from wider health partners. We have also been approached by Barnardos, NSPCC and Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation (PACE) to have people involved in the team’s work. There are also plans to appoint a dedicated adult worker. A new head of service with significant police and social work experience will be joining the team early in June.
The CSE strategic group is committed to reviewing the resource allocations to this work on a multi-agency basis to ensure that all strands are equally addressed.

**RECOMMENDATION 7.3**: That the Council conducts a review within CSC of roles and responsibilities of social workers and managers as part of the restructure of CSC; this then needs to be agreed, communicated and implemented within CSC to enable Legal Services to revert back to their primary role as professional legal advisers within the safeguarding process.

**RESPONSE**: The Council is currently conducting a review of the roles and responsibility within children’s social care, which increases the resources available to the service. Restructures were undertaken by the interim management team upon their appointments.

**RECOMMENDATION 7.4**: That the Council builds upon its successful activities thus far in raising awareness, by continuing to develop and implement a longer term plan for awareness raising with children, young people, families, foster carers and schools. Through the RBSCB and in collaboration, it should continue to deliver an ongoing engagement programme with the wider community to enable members of the public to be vigilant and raise concerns with the appropriate agencies, thereby further enabling the prevention and early detection of CSE. Where possible and appropriate this might be considered on a regional or sub-regional basis.

**RESPONSE**: We believe raising awareness of child sexual exploitation is as important as tackling the crime itself. That is why the council has implemented one of the biggest awareness raising campaigns in the country.

More than 10,000 children have had access to awareness training sessions in schools. A programme of community based awareness raising sessions for parents and carers is underway.

We are committed to continuing and extending this vital area of work. The Local Government Association requested details of our training materials to help with versions which will be rolled out to councils across the country. The CSE strategic group will be recommending that the safeguarding board monitors the rolling programme of training and awareness raising events.

In addition, the safeguarding board, under its new chair, is keen to continue to cascade learning and awareness raising beyond its own boundaries.

**RECOMMENDATION 7.5**: That the Council uses some of the actual anonymised events, including licensing discussions, allegations management discussions and initial referrals, as learning exercises for its employees and members, as a means by which the awareness raising around CSE can be embedded and intelligence can be gathered more broadly.
RESPONSE: We are committed to learning lessons from all events to ensure our wider response to child sexual exploitation is continuously improved. Wherever possible the Council uses case studies and real situations to illustrate the challenging components of CSE and how these are being addressed.

Our chief executive is leading Project Phoenix, which is a collaboration of authorities across Greater Manchester to develop a regional approach to child sexual exploitation. This partnership ensures learning and best practice is shared and cascaded amongst councils.

RECOMMENDATION 7.6: That the Council enables both Executive and Scrutiny Members, including those Members on the Corporate Parents Forum, to continue to take a greater role in the general CSC and CSE improvement programmes.

RESPONSE: Protecting children from harm is the most important thing this council does, and our members are totally committed to this. Our leader sits on the improvement board we established following Ofsted’s report last year. In addition, our cabinet member for children, schools and families commissioned a monthly drop in session for any child or young person in Rochdale who wishes to share their thoughts, ideas or concerns. The Corporate Parenting Forum has been refreshed and reconstituted into a formal board to ensure a high level of commitment and scrutiny to this and other high profile issues affecting looked after children.

RECOMMENDATION 7.7: That the Council works with all partners represented on the LSCB and other partnership forums to improve strategic and operational responses to safeguarding and protecting children, including CSE, and that there should be a focus on:

☐ More robust and effective implementation of the common assessment framework across all partners;
☐ Ensuring clarity of roles and responsibilities of all agencies’ employees in relation to their involvement with children, young people and their families.

RESPONSE: This recommendation has already been implemented. A strategic board to manage Rochdale’s response to child sexual exploitation has been established. Policies and procedures have been reviewed and endorsed by the safeguarding board – and training on these changes has also been provided. A common assessment framework is in place, and a toolkit to help embed it in the procedures of all the relevant agencies has been provided. In addition, the safeguarding board has supported the recent launch of an early help strategy that is designed to support an effective prevention and early intervention response, utilising the common assessment framework across all agencies. This work is led by the Children and Young People’s Partnership, which is chaired by the portfolio holder for children and families.
RECOMMENDATION 7.8: That the Council develops a multi-agency framework and culture which enables inappropriate behaviour/lack of ownership to be immediately challenged by peers and, where necessary, logged for discussion with managers and escalated.

RESPONSE: We have in place a whistle blowing policy and an escalation policy, which staff are made aware of through induction and supervision. A new supervision framework has also been introduced. This will be shared with the safeguarding board to ensure all partner agencies are able to follow a similar approach.

RECOMMENDATION 7.9: That the Council continues with the detailed investigations as to social work practice at an individual level as necessary, determining whether or not there are grounds for further internal action and/or referral to the Health and Care Professions Council.

RESPONSE: An extensive programme of audits has been independently commissioned to review social care cases related to child sexual exploitation. This has led to an investigation into the practice of a number of workers. The investigation has recently reported its findings and as a result five members of staff have been put through disciplinary proceedings. These staff – and a number of people – who have left the authority have all been reported to the Health and Care Professions Council. A copy of this report has also been provided to the HCPC.

RECOMMENDATION 7.10: That the Council reviews which CSC (and perhaps other) policies should be delegated to Officers for approval, and those which should more appropriately be retained for approval by Members.

RESPONSE: A revised scheme of delegation is being undertaken.

RECOMMENDATION 7.11: That the Council reviews the application in practice of the Council’s CSC policies.

RESPONSE: The new interim management team in children’s services conducted a thorough review of the Council’s processes, policies and procedures as soon as they took up their posts.

RECOMMENDATION 7.12: That the Council joins with other local authorities and appropriate agencies to seek clarity at a national level regarding:

- The legal framework for enabling social care practitioners to have access to information/intelligence regarding potential CSE perpetrators in order that preventative action can be taken to safeguard children and young people more effectively;
- The grounds and circumstances upon which authorities can suspend and/or revoke licences for taxi drivers and fast food establishments, thereby enabling more robust disruption tactics for CSE;
- The legal framework that denies local authorities the ability to restrict the number of private hire and hackney carriage licences they issue when deemed appropriate;
- The most effective over-arching legal framework(s) to enable prevention and detection of CSE, whilst at the same time enabling each agency to fulfil its role in safeguarding those at risk.

RESPONSE: The Council has raised these issues with the Local Government Association with the aim of ensuring clarity can be established at a national level on behalf of all councils.

RECOMMENDATION 7.13: That the Council engages more widely with organisations who have relevant and recent experience of CSE to learn from their practice, innovations etc.

RESPONSE: The current interim DCS has significant, extensive experience in the field of CSE as a result of the work she has undertaken in Blackburn with Darwen, which has received national recognition. Consequently, over the last nine months the Council has worked closely with a range of different organisations and partners. We are teaming up with the NSPCC to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation in Rochdale. Other councils and police forces have visited us to learn from our experiences and share knowledge. Our chief executive spoke at a national conference on child sexual exploitation held by the Local Government Association. This report is being published a week after Rochdale hosted an event for councils across the North West.

We are committed to continue learning lessons – and to help other authorities facing the same challenges.

RECOMMENDATION 7.14: That the Council in conjunction with all relevant agencies, develops and implements a targeted prevention plan that includes criminal justice activities. When developing this plan the Council and its partners must also develop an evaluation framework that clearly measures the success of each intervention and activity towards the achievement of the stated aims.

RESPONSE: See response to recommendation 7.2

RECOMMENDATION 7.15: That the Council via the Chief Executive, ensures that any necessary disciplinary investigations relating to CSE be finalised and the appropriate actions taken.

RESPONSE: Any examples of practice that do not meet the required professional standard in relation to CSE – or other matters – will be dealt with in accordance with our agreed procedures, alongside any notified professional bodies.
RECOMMENDATION 7.16: That the Council continues to implement an improved and transparent performance management and reporting regime, ensuring that the data collected is analysed and used to understand CSC services and to highlight risks and issues including CSE.

RESPONSE: A dedicated Performance and QA team has been established on an interim basis for children’s social care - and a permanent QA performance officer has been appointed to support the RSCB. This arrangement will be reviewed to ensure the performance management requirements are maintained on a longer term basis. Reports are now being presented to the cabinet, overview and scrutiny committee, the improvement board and the safeguarding board.