

**REPORT OF:**

**Director of Childrens Services
and
Director of HR, Legal & Corporate Services
(Monitoring Officer)**

TO: The Standards Committee

ON: 2nd October 2014

SUBJECT Child Sexual Exploitation and elected member awareness

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To remind elected members of the steps the local authority and partner agencies and organisations continue to proactively take to ensure effective safeguarding of vulnerable persons in the Borough. In particular, to highlight the recent media interest in child sexual exploitation and how elected members continue to play an important role in ensuring mitigation of all forms of child abuse in the Borough. To suggest some steps, to refresh elected members knowledge of such matters assuring our continued success in the delivery of effective child protection services.

2. OPTIONS

None

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Standards Committee resolve that:

- 1 That all current elected members of the council receive timely and appropriate refresher training on Child Sexual Exploitation and other forms of child abuse, which will inform and promote our continued excellent partnerships with the police and other agencies which have seen very high conviction rates.
- 2 Subject to 1 above - that the induction training for new members includes this training - post elections.
- 3 Subject to 1 above that the Committee receives a report back on the delivery of the training and attendance of elected members at their next meeting in January 2015
- 4 They will consider any related recommendations from the extraordinary meeting of the Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29th September 2014 and make additional recommendations as appropriate.

4. BACKGROUND

In August 2014 an independent report was published into the sexual exploitation of children in the Rotherham area. The high number of children who had been subject of systematic abuse repeatedly made national headlines. However it was the failings of senior managers and politicians to adequately address the problem, unwilling to risk the perceived challenges to community cohesion in the area that were criticised by the Inquiry. As a result of the Inquiry it is vital that all elected members are aware of their responsibilities as corporate parents, both to children who are Looked After by the Local Authority and those who are vulnerable to harm, in particular child sexual exploitation.

5. RATIONALE

Following the Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, it was revealed that over 1400 children were sexually exploited over a period of 15 years, yet only a small number of offenders were prosecuted and the scale of the problem was not addressed, but instead covered up. There was a lack of awareness amongst local elected members of the extent of the problem or of the Authority and partners response to addressing it.

It is suggested that by attending timely and appropriate training elected members in Blackburn could be reminded of the work that has been undertaken in the Borough to address and mitigate child sexual exploitation, and indeed of the work of a dedicated multi-agency team that was set up in 2008.

Members could also be reminded of their corporate parent responsibilities and how it is the duty of everyone to ensure the safety of the citizens of the Borough, in particular its children and critically its most vulnerable.

The Chair and vice Chair of Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee have called an Extraordinary meeting of the Committee for Monday 29th September requesting a briefing for the Committee from the Executive Member and Director of Children's Services on child sexual exploitation arrangements in the borough. One of the expected outcomes of that meeting will be a resolution relating to the awareness and training of members.

Locally there are robust measures in place to manage safeguarding in Borough which incorporates excellent partnerships with the police and other agencies resulting in very high conviction rates. It is important however that we do not become complacent and remain vigilant and informed of the dangers presented to our children and young people of all forms of abuse. The suggested local awareness training and reminders to elected members of the vital role they play is considered an appropriate and necessary response to the Rotherham report.

The Standards Committee will also be advised of any outcomes or recommendations arising from that meeting but in any event it is suggested by the Director of Childrens Services (DCS) and the Director of HR, Legal and Corporate Services (Monitoring Officer) that the Standards Committee endorse the training referenced in this report and monitor the attendance of elected members to assure continued vigilance in this aspect of the Council's responsibilities.

It is also suggested that the Standards Committee consider resolving to include such training in the induction of new elected members, post elections.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Safeguarding the most vulnerable people is one of the six priority objectives outlined in the Corporate Plan 2013-2015. Informed by what people have told the local authority, focussing on what the Local Authority need to achieve locally over the period of this plan making the voices of the boroughs most vulnerable children heard and giving them more influence by making sure that their views directly affect the way the Local Authority designs and delivers services. This is translated into other complimentary Plans and Strategies such as Programme Area 1: Best start for children and young people; “keep children and young people safe”; of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable

10. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

The EqIA process aims to prevent discrimination against people who are categorised as being disadvantaged or vulnerable within society. These categories are called equality target groups (ETGs) and within the current designation this report specifically addresses the vulnerabilities of young people and children. Members need to be fully aware of what the Local Authority and its partner organisations are currently doing to mitigate child sexual exploitation in the borough.

11. CONSULTATIONS

The recommendations reflect a response to a national report and reflect discussions taking place led by the Executive Member Children and Young People who has reported to the Scrutiny Committee as referenced in this report.

Contact Officer: Linda Clegg – Director of Childrens Services
David Fairclough - Monitoring Officer

Date: 23rd September 2014

Background Papers: 1 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual exploitation in Rotherham 1997-2013 by Professor Alexis Jay OBE
2 Rotherham Action Plan
3 Rotherham Chief Executive’s Report to members (3/9/14)

