

Statement by the Chief Executive

Subject: Publication of Greater Manchester Mayor, Independent Assurance review of the effectiveness of multi agency responses to child exploitation in Greater Manchester

From: Joanne Roney OBE, Chief Executive, Manchester City Council
Paul Marshall, Strategic Director of Children and Education Services

Summary

The Mayor of Greater Manchester commissioned an independent review in 2017 to look at how child sexual exploitation is being addressed in Greater Manchester. The first part of the review focuses on Operation Augusta, an operation set up in 2004 by Greater Manchester Police and followed the tragic death of 15-year-old Victoria Agoglia who, who died in hospital in 2003 having been injected by an adult with heroin.

The Mayor's independent assurance review report makes for painful reading. We recognise that the social work practice and management oversight identified within the report fell below the high standards we expect and are deeply sorry that not enough was done to protect our children at that time. A copy of the Chief Executive statement issued on 14/1/20 is attached for information.

The purpose of this note is to inform the Executive:

- Of the work that has been undertaken within the council following the issues being raised that led to and in respect of the Mayor's Independent Assurance Review. The Chief Executive of Manchester City Council was an active member of the respective steering group.
- Provide reassurance that our response to the exploitation and abuse of children has strengthened significantly in Manchester.

Contact Officers:

Name: Paul Marshall
Position: Strategic Director of Children and Education Services.

Name: Joanne Roney OBE
Position: Chief Executive

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Following a number of public statements in respect of CSE across Greater Manchester in September 2017 the Greater Manchester Mayor commissioned an independent assurance exercise to explore the current and future delivery models across the conurbation in response to CSE. Within the scope of the assurance exercise is the decision making/practice in respect of Operation Augusta, a Child Sexual Exploitation investigation, which ran between 2003 and 2005.

1.2 The findings of the Mayor's review were published on 14th January 2020.

1.3 Sadly, the report concerns a period some 15 years ago when in many other towns and cities across the country child sexual exploitation was an emerging issue which was much less well understood than it is now. Senior Officers have fully engaged with the review and in addition, rather than wait for the publication we have worked proactively both within the Council but also with Greater Manchester Police from early in the review period; which remains a current and live investigation designated 'Operation Green Jacket'.

1.4 We have carefully reviewed the records of the children identified in the assurance review report and where social work practice has fallen short of what was expected we have taken action and referred individuals to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) to consider their 'fitness to practice'. Four former staff members have been referred.

2.0 Background

2.1 Manchester City Council has positively and proactively engaged with the Mayor's office and the Independent Review Team. However, there is a balance to be struck between the commitment to engage with the review and await the published findings and the council's wider duties and responsibilities to ensure children are safe and their welfare promoted. Subsequently senior officers have fully engaged with the independent review team and rather than wait for the publication we have worked with Greater Manchester Police early in the review period; which remains a current and live investigation designated Operation Green Jacket.

2.2 In addition in order to proactively contribute to the review and respond to emerging and reported issues/concerns in addition to my personal contribution to the Assurance Steering Group the following activity has been undertaken overseen and led by the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services:

2.3 Worked with Greater Manchester Police to establish and contribute to the Gold Command Structure in respect of Operation Green Jacket. Operation Green Jacket Gold Command structure was established in April 2018 to consider information provided by the Review Team and determine outcomes in relation to criminal investigations, safeguarding activity and support services or ongoing care arrangements in respect of the people involved.

2.4 Commissioned in June 2018 an independent child care/protection expert to review the historical records of the children referenced in the Mayor's assurance review to learn from, inform and further strengthen current practice; providing an insight of practice and response to CSE in Manchester and progress since 2005.

2.5 In addition as part of the Greater Manchester complex safeguarding peer review arrangements a review was undertaken on 12th September 2019; reporting to the Greater Manchester Complex Safeguarding Executive. Complex Safeguarding in Greater Manchester is described as 'criminal activity (often organised), or behaviour associated with criminality, involving vulnerable children/young people, where there is exploitation and/or a clear or implied safeguarding concern'. In Manchester this has been widened to include the exploitation of adults.

2.6 On the 4th October 2018 the Local Government Association was commissioned to undertake an independent peer review/challenge to focus on the effectiveness of the current complex safeguarding hub multi- agency arrangements and response to children at risk of exploitation and those being exploited'. This was completed during April and May 2019 and was focused on:

- Effective practice and impact on outcomes for children and families
- Resources and capacity
- Leadership and management, including vision and strategy

and within the scope considered:

- Governance structure and accountability
- Use of Quality Assurance and Performance
- Management and supervision
- Awareness raising
- Investigations and prosecutions

2.7 The findings of this review which identified were reported and considered by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 19th June 2019 as part of the annual reporting in respect of Manchester's Complex Safeguarding Hub and again on 4th September 2019 in respect of the progress made against areas for further development.

2.8 On 10th and 11th December 2019, Ofsted undertook a focused visit of Manchester's Children's Services in respect of those children in need of help and protection. Whilst the overall feedback was positive in respect of the leadership, effectiveness of the partnerships and innovative practice of staff and their commitment; more importantly the positive outcomes being achieved for children. The findings from this visit will not be published until 21st January 2020

3.0 Summary

3.1 Research and evidence tells us Child Sexual Exploitation is not only an offence of assault but the abuse of trust and power; perpetrated by the very people (adults) culturally we teach children will protect and keep them safe. As with many forms of abuse, the impact of Child Sexual Exploitation and effects for survivors is life changing and potentially enduring.

3.2 Whilst the primary legislative framework for the protection of children has been in place since 1989 (Children Act 1989), the first National Statutory Guidance in respect of Child Sexual Exploitation was published in 2008, prior to which was the Department of Health's 'Children involved in prostitution'(2000). This has undoubtedly informed and supported the awareness, understanding and response which over time has significantly improved to a point where multi- agency working is the norm and the response to disrupt and prevent the exploitation of children and identification and prosecution of perpetrators increasingly more sophisticated and intelligence led.

3.3 Certainly in Manchester there have been a great deal of changes since 2005 for the better in respect of how we care for children through the reduction in the size and fewer children's homes and response to child sexual abuse and more widely the exploitation of children and adults; with a continued focus on the performance, quality and impact of services to our residents, that is subject to independent challenge/support.

3.4 The publication of the Mayor's assurance review of child sexual exploitation is a stark reminder that agencies can never be complacent in the safeguarding and protection of children.

STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 10AM TUESDAY 14 JANUARY 2020

Statement from Joanne Roney, Chief Executive of Manchester City Council, in response to the publication and findings of the Assurance Review of Operation Augusta report.

“This report makes for painful reading. We recognise that some of the social work practice and management oversight around 15 years ago fell far below the high standards we now expect. We are deeply sorry that not enough was done to protect our children at the time. *Our hearts go out to all those affected.*”

“While we cannot change the past we have learned from it and will continue to do so to ensure that no stone is left unturned in tackling this abhorrent crime.

“The report concerns a period when, as in many other towns and cities, child sexual exploitation was an emerging issue all too often viewed through a lens of misunderstanding wherever it occurred. *We understand there will be justifiable public concern about what happened and I want to reassure them that it is an issue we take with the utmost seriousness.*”

“The review itself acknowledges that how we tackle the sexual exploitation of children has improved considerably. Manchester City Council and Greater Manchester Police work together much more closely and effectively to identify young people at risk of exploitation, put safeguarding measures in place to protect them and pursue perpetrators. *The welfare of those young people always comes first.*”

“Recent scrutiny from independent expert bodies including Ofsted and the Local Government Association has also endorsed the positive impact of this co-ordinated work. Our most recent Ofsted visit was only last month and we understand their feedback, due to be published next week, will highlight partnership working, leadership and our complex safeguarding hub as particular strengths.

“Work to build up trusted relationships with potential victims is also having success - both in prevention and in the prosecution of offenders.*

“We want to reassure Manchester people that, more than a decade and a half of learning later, we are in a much better place and the approach to tackling child sexual exploitation has strengthened significantly.

“We are also working closely with other Greater Manchester local authorities to share best practice.

“We have not simply waited for the publication of this review. Since March 2018, as soon as we became aware of concerns regarding cases in the early 2000s, we have been working with Greater Manchester Police to re-examine them and support reinvestigation wherever possible. Matters relating to the period covered by the review are subject to a live and ongoing police operation.

“*We have carefully reviewed all of these cases and where social work practice has fallen far short of what was required we have taken action and referred the individuals to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the professional*

body, to consider their 'fitness to practice.' Four former staff have been referred.

“As chief executive of the Council, I was a key member of the steering group that oversaw this review team’s work. We have fully engaged with the review and not shirked from confronting past shortcomings to help inform continuing improvements. While bad people will always try to prey on the most vulnerable, keeping children safe is our absolute priority. We cannot and will not be complacent.

“Our prime concern throughout this process has been the interests of the young people directly affected, ensuring that their identities were protected, they were kept informed and that effective actions were taken wherever possible in the interests of justice.

“We would urge anyone affected by this report to come forward to us or the police. They will be believed. They will be supported.”

Ends

Note to Editors

It is not the case that all of the children featured in the report were in the care of Manchester City Council. We would refer you to Section 6 of the Operation Augusta report which makes clear that seven of the children were not in the care of Manchester City Council but of another local authority/authorities.

*For example, in autumn last year four men were jailed for more than 25 years between them for child sexual exploitation offences against three girls in Levenshulme through Operation Enfield. While much credit belongs to the investigating officers, social workers helped build up trusting relationships with the victims and supported them through the judicial process.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

December 2017 Ofsted inspection report

<https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50004408>

Manchester City Council Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, Child Sexual Exploitation report, 4 September 2019 - includes details of LGA Peer Review and Challenge findings

<https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/documents/s9680/Child%20Sexual%20Exploitation.pdf>

See also **Appendix B** of the Operation Augusta assurance review report