

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 5 February 2020

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

Report of: The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services

Summary

The Mayor of Greater Manchester commissioned an independent review in 2017 to consider how child sexual exploitation is being addressed in Greater Manchester. The first part of the review focused on Operation Augusta, an operation set up in 2004 by Greater Manchester Police following the tragic death of 15-year-old Victoria Agoglia 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 well 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 (see appendix 1).

The purpose of this report is to inform scrutiny committee members:

- Of the work that has been undertaken within the council following the issues being raised that led to 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.

Recommendations

It is recommended committee members give due regard to the content of the Greater Manchester Mayor, Independent Assurance review of the effectiveness of multi agency responses to child exploitation in Greater Manchester December 2019. Previous reports presented to the Children and Families Committee on 19th June and 4th September 2019 (see background papers) and Ofsted letter dated 21st January 2020 in respect of a Focused Visit undertaken on 10th and 11th December 2019 (appendix 2) and:

Seek assurance that the quality of leadership, practice and intervention with children at risk of/or being exploited has significantly improved and the capacity to continue to improve is present.

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

<https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/documents/s6765/Complex%20Safeguarding%20Report.pdf>

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

https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/2569/operation_augusta_january_2020_digital_final.pdf

<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50143404>

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 Child Sexual Exploitation. 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 of the report we have worked proactively both within the Council but also with Greater Manchester Police from an early point in the review period; which remains a current and live investigation designated 'Operation Green Jacket'.

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 As outlined in the previous reports submitted to the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee during 2019, since 2005 there have been significant changes and improvements to the services for children at risk of CSE in Manchester. This includes:
 - Established in 2016 a specialist CSE team
 - Work with national and regional groups to learn from and share best practice i.e. adopting ACT (trusting relationships)
 - Open the service to scrutiny and challenge
 - Reviewed and strengthened leadership arrangements
 - Reduced the number and size of Manchester's children's homes.

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.

The historical context for working with children at risk of sexual exploitation is worthy of note, the language used 15 years ago referred to exploited (and children at risk of exploitation) children as 'child prostitution' or those who abuse them as 'pimps'; in practice and guidance this would not be heard today. The appreciation of the historical operating environment is no reason to excuse the poor practice the report highlights but is used to indicate how the policy and practice development in protecting vulnerable children has developed.

- 2.2 In order to proactively contribute to the review and respond to emerging and reported issues/concerns, in addition to the contribution of the Chief Executive to the Assurance Steering Group, I have overseen the following activity;
- 2.3 Working in partnership 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 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.
- 3.0 Our staff and Social Workers deal with the complexities and many others as described in the Mayor's review on a daily basis. This is why since taking up post in 2016 I and the Children and Education Services Leadership Team have been and continue to be focused on creating the conditions that put children at the centre of what we do. The leadership team aim is to empower practitioners to be confident, purposeful and effective; effective and confident in the management of risk, focused and purposeful in improving the experience and outcomes for children working along with and alongside our key partners. In addition as previously discussed within this and other scrutiny committees, the stability of the workforce is equally important to ensure there is a sound foundation on which practice standards continually improve and for innovation to be nurtured.
- 3.1 Positively, progress has been recognised via independent reviews and Ofsted's inspections and most recently a focused visit undertaken on 10th and 11th December 2019. Whilst the report identified areas for improvement, OFSTED identified strong, effective leadership and partnerships, supported by political and corporate leaders. More importantly, enthusiastic and talented staff who use innovative and effective ways of working with children to build relationships to enable children feel confident to share their wishes, feelings and stories so that we can understand their lived experience and improve their lives. OFSTED specifically noted in the most recent focused visit letter that Manchester's complex safeguarding hub was a strength and that the co-location of multi agency partners, the effective communication and sharing of information and intelligence leads to good quality assessment, decision making and planning for children who are, or may be at risk of significant harm.
- 3.2 This was no more apparent and exemplified than in the work of our staff in the Complex Safeguarding Hub who worked with GMP on Operation Enfield for nearly 2 years. An operation that started with information/intelligence shared by young people and involved staff working closely with them to gain their trust and through the concept of a 'trusted relationship' supported them through the process of evidence gathering, interviews, preparing for a criminal trial and giving evidence; all alongside coming to terms with the trauma they have experienced as victims. The young people did this with incredible courage that led to 4 of their abusers receiving a collective sentence of 25 years. This is one of many examples in which our staff have engaged with children, built a positive relationship and positively improved their lives and why we must support and recognise the work of staff who as

previously indicated deal with many of these difficult circumstances and complexities everyday. However, managers equally need to challenge with respect and integrity when standards fall below those we expect. It is only by doing this can they put children at the heart of what they do, be confident in their work and ensure high standards of care is provided to our children and young people.

- 3.3 The aforementioned outcomes can only be achieved if the whole system (communities, statutory, non-statutory, public the judiciary and private sector) listen to children, take what they say seriously and act. As such the leadership team has focussed on improving the quality of relationships with stakeholders.

4.0 Summary

- 4.1 In Manchester there have been improvements in how the service and the partnership respond to the needs of vulnerable children since 2005, through both the reduction in the size and number of children's homes and responses to child sexual abuse as well as more widely the exploitation of children and adults. This is informed by a continued focus on the performance, quality and impact of services to our residents, which is subject to independent challenge/support.
- 4.2 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). Policy development has undoubtedly informed and supported the awareness, understanding and response to safeguarding children; 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) is increasingly more sophisticated and intelligence led.
- 4.3 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) who 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.
- 4.4 The publication of the Mayor's assurance review of child sexual exploitation is a stark reminder that if we are to ensure our children are safe today and tomorrow, we have to be open to the fact that those who seek to abuse our children are motivated, determined and wily. They will go to extraordinary lengths to achieve their objective and do so in ways that betray the trust of children; leaving a legacy of trauma; this is why we must never be complacent.