

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