

## Report to Health, Schools and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



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Portfolio	Children's Services
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### **Response to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) Report publication in April 2018**

#### **Purpose of report**

1. This report has been prepared for the consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, following the publication of the IICSA report into its Inquiry into historical events in which children in institutional settings were harmed between the 1960's and mid 1990's.  
The purpose is to summarise the findings from the report, its context and process, but importantly to provide members with information and assurance about what has changed since that period.

#### **Introduction**

2. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) was established as an independent statutory inquiry under the Enquiries Act 2005 in March 2015, by the then Home Secretary Teresa May. In November 2015 the Inquiry announced that it would commence with 13 areas of investigation. One of those was "An inquiry into allegations of the sexual abuse and exploitation of children residing at or attending Cambridge House Boys' Hostel, Knowl View School, and other institutions where their placement was arranged or provided by Rochdale Borough Council." The council made its support for the Inquiry clear from the outset.

A public hearing took place over 3 weeks between 9 and 27 October 2017 in London where the council was a core participant along with complainants, two police forces and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Staff and politicians, past and present were called to give evidence alongside a wide range of evidence from witness statements and historical documents.

A report of the findings reached as a result of the hearing was published on 12 April 2018.

## **Background**

3. The history of Cambridge House Working Boys' Hostel, an independent organisation had been widely reported in the media previously as a result of allegations against its honorary secretary Cyril Smith, who was also a councillor and later the MP for Rochdale. Similarly Sir Cyril as he later became, also had connections with Knowl View residential special school in Rochdale where wide ranging reports of harm to children continued to be reported in the media for many years after its closure.

In 2013/14 there were many allegations made in the local media of a cover up in relation to events involving Smith (by then deceased) and historical events at Knowl View. As a result Sir Neil Garnham, QC was commissioned to carry out an independent investigation into this period in Rochdale's history. The scope of his work was to examine historical information and interview potential witnesses and complainants. He was required to share any concerns about potential criminal activity with Greater Manchester Police directly.

In July 2014, the chief constable asked that Mr Garnham suspend his enquiries and the police undertook enquiries into concerns raised. This was known as Operation Clifton. It operated alongside Operation Jaguar, a separate enquiry that investigated specific allegations made by former pupils at Knowl View and other children. The police enquiries under Op. Clifton continued for almost 2 years before concluding in 2016 that there were no grounds for prosecution.

The council formally closed the Garnham enquiry in March 2016, on the basis that its remit had been subsumed into IICSA. An interim report produced by Sir Neil was passed to IICSA along with all other evidence from the council which amounted to 147,000 pages.

## **The Inquiry**

4. The work of the Inquiry commenced in early 2016 and a specialist team assembled by the council worked closely with it until after the conclusion of the hearing in October 2017, to ensure that the council provided full and transparent assistance throughout. The difference between that and the Garnham Inquiry was that being established under the Inquiry Act 2005, potential witnesses could be compelled to provide responses, attend the hearing if required and give evidence.

The council, through its Director of Children's Services, provided a corporate statement of more than 130 pages in responses to specific areas of information requested. The Director was also required to attend the hearing on 3 separate days to assist the Inquiry in its understanding of the council's statement.

The Inquiry considered and disclosed 19,667 pages of documents to core participants. It heard evidence from 56 witnesses, either in person, through statements or published documents. Nine witnesses were complainants who were former residents at one of the institutions.

## Findings of the Inquiry

### 5.

#### 5.1 Child Sexual Abuse at Cambridge House and Cyril Smith

The Inquiry heard evidence that Cyril Smith was heavily involved in Cambridge House and to a lesser extent, Knowl View School. It heard that boys at Cambridge House were sexually abused by Smith under the guise of medical examinations and the disciplining of boys who played truant, were too ill to work or ran away.

Concerns were shared with the council in 1966 after a resident alleged sexual abuse by Smith who had a direct involvement in decision making about placements at the hostel and was said to put pressure on council staff to place young men there.

It heard that Lancashire police (the force covering Rochdale at the time) conducted an extensive investigation into Smith in 1969-70 in relation to the alleged indecent assault of 8 boys; 6 of whom were residents at Cambridge House. The police concluded that Smith should be prosecuted and submitted a comprehensive report to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). A decision was returned 6 days later advising that there should be no prosecution as the charges were stale, the allegations could not be corroborated and the character of some of the boys would be likely to render some of their evidence suspect.

The Inquiry made no findings as to whether the advice that there were no reasonable prospects of a conviction was or was not reasonable.

Smith went onto receive a knighthood in 1988. The Inquiry received evidence that those involved in the appointment were informed of and deliberated on the above decision by the DPP.

A further opportunity to prosecute Smith for events at Cambridge House arose in 1998 involving Greater Manchester Police. The Crown Prosecution Service also decided not to bring charges because Smith had been informed in 1970 that no further action would be taken and it was considered to be an abuse of process by the CPS to commence a prosecution so many years later.

These investigations and the multiple concerns and local rumours led the inquiry to conclude that many were aware of allegations of child sexual abuse by Smith. The Inquiry found that he was “well informed and was willing to attempt to persuade any accusers to keep quiet”, and that there was an “...unwillingness to consider that someone in a position of public prominence might be capable of perpetrating abuse”

## **5.2 Child Sexual Abuse at Knowl View School**

The Inquiry heard evidence that “there was a wealth of evidence” that boys at Knowl View School were sexually abused and that the abuse took place within the school and elsewhere in Rochdale.

Perpetrators included a member of staff who abused children at the school.

*“he would watch me shower, tell me how to masturbate in the shower. At the time I was only 10 years old. I didn’t know what masturbation was. I just thought it was washing myself”.*

*A witness and former resident of Knowl View School*

A convicted perpetrator, Rodney Hilton was repeatedly able to gain access to boys within the school. Evidence to the Inquiry showed that sexual activity between boys resident in Knowl View also took place and that it was known to staff. Notably a report in 1976 described sexual abuse between these boys as a “subcultural tradition”.

The Inquiry called the former directors of Social Services and Education to give direct evidence to the Inquiry. A number of criticisms were made of how Knowl View School was lead and managed and of its effectiveness in meeting children’s needs and protecting them from harm. The Director of Social Services was heavily criticised for failing to pursue child protection matters and ensure an investigation into these matters. A lack of urgency and allowing matters to drift was a particular concern. Further detail will be shared about this at the briefing presentation.

The Interim report states: During the public hearing, Richard Farnell, the leader of the council between 1986 and 1992 and the serving leader at the time of the hearing, testified about his lack of knowledge that child sexual abuse had taken place at Knowl View School. Councillor Farnell said he had no recollection of it being brought to his attention. The Inquiry found this was despite what it concluded was compelling evidence to suggest otherwise. The Inquiry found that Councillor Farnell “sought to shirk his responsibility and render himself totally unaccountable for the ills of Knowl view and the children who suffered”.

## **5.3 Child Sexual Exploitation in Rochdale**

The inquiry heard evidence that boys at Knowl View and other care homes were also exploited for money by men around Rochdale. This happened as recently as the early 1990’s and took place in locations including public toilets in Smith Street, directly across the road from the council’s main offices. There were reports that men from all over the north west of England came to Rochdale to exploit and sexually abuse these boys.

Evidence to the inquiry showed that the sexual exploitation of boys from Knowl View was known to the school, to Rochdale Borough Council Social Services and Education departments and to the police. The Inquiry

considered how and why child sexual exploitation at Rochdale could have been allowed to continue without effective action being taken.

The inquiry found that “sexual exploitation of children was known about by the authorities from at least 1989....the records of individual children convey a total lack of urgency on the part of the authorities to address the problem and treat the matters involved for what they were – serious sexual assaults....rather boys as young as 11 were not seen as victims but as authors of their own abuse.”

### **The Council’s Apology**

6. In examining the evidence that made up the lengthy corporate statement, it was clear there had been significant failures on the part of the council, particularly in relation to Knowl View. It was clear however that the council had not previously acknowledged its responsibility for these failures and it was important to do so.

The chief executive of the council, Steve Rumbelow, made the following statement on behalf of the council in September 2017:

“The events that took place at Cambridge House and Knowl View and other establishments in Rochdale have cast a long shadow over the town for many years and have undoubtedly caused pain to many people.

“The council acknowledges that there were significant failings, both in the way that Knowl View School was managed, and in the council’s response to concerns about sexual abuse within and outside the school.

“That was, frankly, unforgivable. On behalf of Rochdale Borough Council, I would like to apologise sincerely to anyone who was failed by the council during those years.

“We cannot turn the clock back. But as the current chief executive of the council, working with the director of children’s services and partner agencies such as the police, and through the Rochdale Safeguarding Children’s Board, I can make sure that we continue do our level best to safeguard our children and young people now and in the future.

“The council is doing everything it can to support and work with the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in its task and I hope that it can help us fully understand what happened in Rochdale all those years ago.”

### **Changes between historical events and the current time**

7. The Inquiry reached 35 conclusions in all. Some of these relate to other public bodies, but the majority are relevant to the council. A separate table has been produced which will be tabled at the meeting. It summarises each conclusion and what actions if not already addressed are required in response.

As previously set out, the events addressed in the Inquiry happened between 1964 and 1994. Much has changed in that time and it was recognised by the Inquiry that the failures of that time should not be judged by today's standards.

Some of the events reported by the Inquiry are frankly indefensible, in that whenever they occurred they would not have been considered acceptable or reasonable. Other events reflected a level of understanding, knowledge and awareness that did not reflect a level of development or learning that was established in other parts of the country at the same point in time. Essentially, Rochdale was very slow to respond to national learning, guidance and expectations in the late 1980s and early 1990s when greater and faster progress was being made in other areas of the region and the country.

The purpose of the table is to outline how events have changed and how current legislation, guidance, policies and practice are in place to protect children in a way that clearly did not happen then. The fact that such changes were made do not in isolation, protect children. It is important that these changes are supported by values, principles, strong leadership, direction and monitoring of practice to ensure that the things that should be in place actually happen.

The role of the Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children's Board (RBSCB), has a statutory function in evaluating the quality of practice and in challenging the council and its partners to ensure that all organisations are operating effectively and in partnership to ensure that children are effectively safeguarded. The Chair of RBSCB has undertaken an assurance exercise which will be shared with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to demonstrate what provides that assurance and how this is judged. It is attached to this report as Appendix 1.

## Conclusions

8. There is no doubt that some children were harmed in the settings described. In establishing the facts around some of the events, through a substantial amount of written evidence, in the council's possession, it was clear that there had been a significant number of failures. In the period between 1989 and 1992 there is also evidence that children were harmed in public toilets and elsewhere in Rochdale as a result of sexual exploitation. Whilst this was not a concept of child abuse that was as fully understood as it is today, it is clear that it has never been acceptable for any adult to engage in sexual activity with a child, whatever the setting, age difference or apparent compliance.

The response of the council to incidents of abuse at Knowl View, involving a convicted offender and in relation to abuse of children at Smith Street toilets was in breach of the Working Together national guidance that was in place for local authorities and their child protection partners at the time. The council as the lead agency was some three years out of date in responding to national

guidance changes. It was also clear that an apology from the council was well overdue. This was addressed in 2017.

Many of the findings by the review reflect information that was provided in documentation, statements and verbal evidence to the hearing. They reflected weaknesses in leadership, governance, political accountability, management, professional knowledge and poor skill levels.

In that context, there were few surprises in the findings for those who were actively involved in the provision of data to IICSA and in preparation of the corporate statement.

The appalling history in respect of Cambridge House, Knowl View and Cyril Smith's role within both have also had a continuing impact on how Rochdale has been able to move forward for many years. The conclusion of this hearing and publication of the report may now provide victims with some acknowledgement if not closure. For the borough it may allow some forward thinking that is not regularly blighted by continued reflections.

The arrangements now in place to safeguard children in Rochdale are significantly stronger than they have been in the past. Partnership arrangements are strong, scrutiny and challenge by the council and the Safeguarding Children Board are also able to demonstrate regular and robust challenge.

## Recommendations

9. The Inquiry stated that it did not intend to make any recommendations in respect of this investigation in its report. It does expect the local authority and other public bodies to reflect on the report findings and make such changes in practice that are necessary to protect children in future.

The passage of time since the events covered by the report means that as outlined above many changes have occurred which means that practice is now very different. For this reason a report describing Rochdale in 2017 was submitted to the hearing with the council's closing statement to reflect such changes. It is attached as Appendix 2.

<b>Background Papers</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>
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