

HEALTH, SCHOOLS AND CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Notes of a meeting held Wednesday, 23rd May 2018

PRESENT: (Health, Schools and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee members) Councillor Dutton (in the Chair); Councillors Biant, Cocks, Dale, Davidson, Gartside, Hartley, Hornby, Susan Smith and Sullivan.
Other Council members in attendance: Councillors Rowbotham, Daalat Ali, Sultan Ali, West, Boriss, Martin, Taylor, Angela Smith, O'Neill, Rana, Malcolm, Heakin, Stott, Hussain, Shakil Ahmed, Donna Williams, Beswick, Kelly, Howard, Winkler, Sheerin, Paolucci, Rush, Hartley, Emsley, Rashid and Holly.

OFFICERS: S. Rumbelow (Chief Executive), G. Hopper (Director of Children's Services), J. Booth (Chair of the Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board), M. Widdup (Director of Neighbourhoods), D. Wilcock (Assistant Director – Legal, Governance and Human Resources), D. Brierley, S. Miah (Neighbourhoods Directorate) and P. Thompson (Resources Directorate)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: 10 members of the public.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: (Health, Schools and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee members): Councillor McCarthy; other members: Councillors Brett, Dearnley, Neil Emmott, Susan Emmott, Joinson, Peter Williams, Bamford, Burke, Zaman, Nickson, Meredith, Robinson and Sameena Zaheer.

IICSA - A SPECIAL BRIEFING FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

1. The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting reminding those present that the purpose was to discuss the findings of the national Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICA) following its investigation into historic events in Rochdale.

The Chair asked the Committee and others present to reflect that the national inquiry and the investigation was primarily about victims of child sexual abuse and to note that the inquiry had given them a voice after many years of them not having a voice.

The report that was presented to the meeting had been prepared 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 report summarised the findings from the Independent Inquiry report, its context and process, but importantly to provide members with information and assurance about what has changed since that period.

The Chair advised that the meeting represented an opportunity for Members of the Council, to demonstrate commitment to child protection issues.

The Chief Executive reported that 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 had made its support for the Inquiry clear from the outset.

Public hearings had taken place over three weeks between 9th and 27th 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 12th April 2018.

There followed a detailed presentation that was jointly delivered by the Chief Executive, the Director of Children’s Services and the Independent Chair of the Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board. The presentation focused upon:

- The inquiry, background and focus
- Context
- Rochdale’s role
- What happened to children in Cambridge House and Knowl View
- Key areas of concern/failure
- Political Accountability
- Could it happen now?
- Where do we get assurance currently
- The role of Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Board
- Learning for councillors

The Chief Executive reiterated the apology that the Council had issued in respect of events that took place at Cambridge House and Knowl View and other establishments in Rochdale had cast shadows over the town for many years and have undoubtedly caused pain to many people.

In terms of whether such events could happen now the Director of Children’s Services and the Independent Chair of the Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board highlighted procedures and practices that were now in place. These included a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who had responsibility for allegations management. The Council’s various procedures and policies were regularly updated and set to national standards for Residential Settings. There were monthly ‘Regulation 44’ visits by elected members and other independent professional people to residential care facilities in the Borough. There are quarterly meetings between the Assistant Director (Children’s Social Care) and residential managers. There are also annual visits to all children’s homes by the Director of Children’s Services and

the portfolio holder for Children's Services. The role of Ofsted had also been strengthened with twice yearly (unannounced) inspections to ensure all of the above measures were in place. There is also now a major focus, by the Children's Directorate on listening to children and the development of engagement strategies to support the formal role of Children in the Council's Care.

At the conclusion of the presentation the Chair permitted questions from the meeting initially from members of the health, Schools and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee then from other Councillors who were in attendance and from members of the public.

- a. Question from Councillor Gartside: Why did the inquiry decide to look at Rochdale? Was it because we have or had more of a problem with child sexual abuse than other places? The Chief Executive reported that the IICSA inquiry had not advised the Council why they decided to consider Rochdale in the first phase of public hearings but there was significant interest in high profile individuals such as Cyril Smith at the time the Inquiry was commissioned. Further hearings would be held that examined other institutions and local authorities across England including the City Of Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Lambeth.
- b. Question from Councillor Davidson: We all know that protecting children is a council priority, are we doing enough to let our residents know? The Director of Children's Services reported that the Council was engaging with residents and particularly parents through a range of different means, including drama, supported by different organisations and agencies across the Borough and she was pleased that local and regional media were now showing greater interest in this issue and giving it prominence in their detailed coverage following observations of the work of Sunrise.
- c. Question from Councillor Biant: Why wasn't Cyril Smith ever charged? The Chief Executive reported that Cyril Smith had twice been investigated by the police (including by the Lancashire Constabulary in the 1960's prior to the establishment of the Greater Manchester Police force) and on both occasions their findings had been forwarded to the Crown Prosecution Service who, on both occasions, ruled that there was insufficient evidence to proceed with a prosecution against Smith. The Chief Executive reported that the Crown Prosecution Service (now the Director of Public Prosecutions) had subsequently apologised, publically, for their failings to prosecute.
- d. Question from Councillor Sullivan: For years there has been talk of cover ups at the council – records being destroyed, people being protected, political pacts. What did the inquiry say about that? The Chief Executive reported that the Inquiry stated that it had found no evidence to suggest there had been a cover-up or a conspiracy, amongst the Borough's political groups and other individuals to guard against certain people being investigated and/or prosecuted.
- e. Question from Councillor Rowbotham: can assurance be provided that members of the Council are more aware of the issues raised in the

report, especially in terms of cultural and institutional attitudes? The Chair of the Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board reported that measures had been taken to engage with members and development sessions had been held with members that highlighted the importance of safeguarding children.

- f. Question from Councillor Kelly: the Inquiry indicated that a member of the Council had lied on oath, in giving evidence and what measures is the Council taking to deal with this? The Chief Executive confirmed that the issues raised were matters for Greater Manchester police and the appropriate political party to deal with.
- g. Question from Councillor Rowbotham: have victims been given information about how to claim compensation? The Chief Executive confirmed that victims are given appropriate support if/when they come forward.
- h. Question from Councillor Taylor: in addition to the visits detailed in the report, are there unannounced and unscheduled visits to the Borough's residential children's care facilities? The Director of Children's Services reported that such unannounced and unscheduled visits were undertaken including by Ofsted the regulator.
- i. Question from Councillor Paolucci: what measures are in place to regulate private adoption agencies? The Director of Children's Services reported that private adoption agencies were subject to the same rigorous inspection procedures as local authorities were.
- j. Question from Mrs Lynsey (member of the public): sought confirmation of joint and partnership working to assist in the safeguarding of children in the Borough. The Director of Children's Services offered to meet with Mrs. Lynsey to discuss this matter further.
- k. Councillor Rana: would Greater Manchester Police be seeking to prosecute perpetrators detailed in the report? The Chief Executive advised that this was a matter for Greater Manchester Police to pursue.
- l. Question from Councillor Boriss: the report, that was submitted to the meeting referred to 89% of care leavers finding suitable accommodation and he sought assurances regarding the other 11%? The Director of Children's Services reported that unsuitable accommodation could include those who may be in custody and others who may have returned to live with their family against advice if this was in conflict with their plan (e.g. if it was considered unsafe to place these children with their families).
- m. Question from Councillor Rowbotham: sought assurances regarding improvements that had been made to the provision of sexual health services, both from within the Council and by the National Health Service and what could the Council do to make improvements in this regard? The Chair indicated that the Health, Schools and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee would in due course be looking into this specific matter in more detail.
- n. Question from Mr. Chadwick (member of the public): was the government proposing to financially compensate the Council, regarding costs arising from the inquiry? The Director of Children's Services confirmed that the Council had applied to the Inquiry for funding which was refused, and received no additional funding from the government.

At the conclusion of the questions the Chair thanked all who were in attendance and closed the meeting.