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## Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham 1997-2013.

### LSCB Summary of the Rotherham report by Alexis Jay OBE, August 2014.

#### Context:

Over the years, there have been a number of initiatives to work with children affected by Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham, and cases were identified, as far back as 1997. At the same time, there were a series of Police Operations, a murder, a Serious Case Review, Ofsted and Police Commissioner reviews of safeguarding services in Rotherham which were not positive. There were national criticisms regarding the lack of Police prosecutions for CSE, and high profile criminal trials of perpetrators.

This independent report was commissioned to overview the CSE safeguarding history in the town, by Rotherham's Council Cabinet in September 2013. It made fifteen recommendations to the Council, which were all accepted the following summer when the report was published – these recommendations related to risk assessment, the needs of looked after children, outreach and accessibility of services, the work of the CSE Team, better integrated working, post abuse support, quality assurance of local work, and interventions with minority ethnic communities. These recommendations and learning are applicable to any area in the UK.

The Inquiry applied the Definition of Child Sexual Exploitation, which is used in Government Guidance:

*'The sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of performing, and/or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition, for example by persuading them to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones with no immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability'. [National Working Group Network 2008].*

The report led to the reading of a wide range of minutes, reports and case files, and over a hundred people, either individually or in groups were interviewed. The report can be downloaded here: [http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1407/independent\\_inquiry\\_cse\\_in\\_rotherham](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1407/independent_inquiry_cse_in_rotherham)

The report found that over 1,400 children were intimidated, sexually exploited and harmed; some children and young people remain unable to come forward to report abuse. In just over a third of cases, children affected by sexual exploitation were previously known to services, because of child protection and neglect concerns. Children were raped by multiple perpetrators, trafficked to other towns and cities in the north of England, abducted, beaten, and intimidated. There were examples of children who had been doused in petrol and threatened with being set alight, threatened with guns, made to witness brutally violent rapes and threatened they would be next, if they told anyone. Girls as young as 11 were raped by large numbers of male perpetrators. Many of the perpetrators were from an Asian ethnic group, a minority in the town; their victims came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

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The report found that this abuse was not confined to the past but continued to this day. In May 2014, the caseload of the specialist child sexual exploitation team was 51. More CSE cases were held by other children's social care teams. There were 16 looked after children, who were identified by children's social care as being at serious risk of sexual exploitation or having been sexually exploited. In 2013, the Police received 157 reports concerning child sexual exploitation in the Borough.

### **Findings:**

- Poor leadership from senior managers in child protection services and elected members, and a lack of communication between the two on the issue of child sexual exploitation;
- A perceived 'lack of interest' in, and understanding of, grooming as a model of child abuse amongst senior managers in child protection services and elected members;
- Failings within organisational culture and processes, which meant victims were not heard or believed, and that the concerns of frontline workers were not acknowledged or acted upon at the most senior levels;
- The perception that a 'macho and bullying' culture existed in the Council up until 2009, and that this dampened the ability for child sexual exploitation to be properly discussed;
- Artificial 'professional barriers' and also 'professional jealousies' between organisations which prevented effective action;
- Denial that such events could happen in Rotherham, concerns around reputational risk and a perception that issues of ethnicity in child sexual exploitation were 'played down' by senior managers in child protection services and elected members;
- A series of reports commissioned and available to both the Council and the Police – flagging up serious concerns around the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation in Rotherham – do not appear to have been used effectively to influence the strategic or operational response of either organisation.

These failings amounted to a series of missed opportunities to understand the scale of child sexual exploitation.

### **Learning:**

- **The importance of integrated multi agency working, including information sharing at all levels of responsibility in a local area;**
- **The viewing of teenagers as victims and understanding that they need to be listened to and believed;**
- **The awareness of racism, including institutional racism in investigating concerns.**

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