DCLG inspection of Rotherham MBC (Casey report)

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Summary

The Department for Communities and Local Government has published the report of the inspection of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council ordered by the Secretary of State and led by Louise Casey CB in the wake of the Jay report on child sexual exploitation in Rotherham. The inspection was of Rotherham Council’s compliance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1999 in relation to the exercise of its functions on governance, children and young people, and taxi and private hire licensing.

This briefing will be of particular interest to elected members and officers concerned with child sexual exploitation. It is expected that a separate LGiU briefing will follow on the action taken by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in response to the inspection report, and the implications for local government more broadly.

Overview

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has published the Report of the Inspection of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) (House of Commons paper HC 1050, February 2015) ordered by the Secretary of State and led by Louise Casey CB in the wake of the Jay report on child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham. The inspection was of Rotherham Council’s compliance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1999 in relation to the exercise of its functions on governance, children and young people, and taxi and private hire licensing.

The Jay report was published on 26 August 2014 (see ‘Related briefings’) and Secretary of State Eric Pickles announced on 10 September that he was exercising his powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and had appointed Louise Casey (Director General, Troubled Families) to carry out a statutory inspection; in particular, to consider whether the local authority:

- allows for adequate scrutiny by Councillors
- covers up information, and whether ‘whistle-blowers’ are silenced
- took and continues to take appropriate action against staff guilty of gross misconduct
- was and continues to be subject to institutionalised political correctness, affecting its decision-making on sensitive issues
- undertook and continues to undertake sufficient liaisons with other agencies, particularly the police, local health partners, and the safeguarding board
- took and continues to take sufficient steps to ensure only ‘fit and proper persons’ are permitted to hold a taxi licence
is now taking steps to address effectively past and current weaknesses or shortcomings in the exercise of its functions, and has the capacity to continue to do so.

Having received Ms Casey’s report, which is extremely critical and concludes that ‘RMBC does not have strong enough political and managerial leadership to guide the borough out of its present difficulties and put it on a path to success’, Mr Pickles made an oral statement to the House of Commons on 4 February 2015 in which he outlined his intentions to move Rotherham Council to holding all-out elections in May 2016 and every four years thereafter, and to appoint Commissioners to take over the roles of the Cabinet (ie. all executive functions) and other functions (including the licensing function, and a number of key senior officer appointments, including the Chief Executive). He expressed his aim to return these functions to local democratic control as rapidly as possible, and his hope and expectation that this process would begin shortly after the elections in 2016 and be complete within four years. (It is expected that a separate LGiU briefing will follow on the Secretary of State’s proposals, and their implications.)

Rotherham Council’s Cabinet issued a statement declaring their intention to resign their positions as soon as transitional arrangements are in place, and the Leader of the Council resigned with immediate effect. The interim Chief Executive has written to the DCLG asking them to confirm urgently who the Commissioners will be and to ensure that they are in place as soon as possible (Rotherham has been given to 14 days to make representations about the inspection report and the Secretary of State’s proposed intervention package).

Briefing in full

The 154-page report has a lengthy (49 page) section on ‘What happened in Rotherham and why it matters’ followed by sections on ‘Rotherham today’ covering the specific issues the inspection was directed to consider, the first and longest of which being ‘Is the council taking steps to address past weaknesses and does it have the capacity to do so?’ (24 pages). These are summarised below, in the order in which they appear in the report, and with a particular focus on those findings of potential learning or practical value to other authorities. Ms Casey led a team of inspectors, which carried out over 200 meetings with a wide range of interested parties and reviewed around 7,000 documents; these included past and current cases in Children’s Services, staff case files, taxi licensing cases, and policies, procedures and practices.

What happened in Rotherham and why it matters

This section outlines the background to the inspection: the Jay report, and the Council’s response to it; what is CSE?; a brief ‘picture’ of CSE in Rotherham; the culture of the Council; the ‘race issue’; the role of Risky Business in tackling CSE in Rotherham; children’s social care failure; where were the police?; where were the rest of the council?; and treatment of victims.

Key points arising in this section include:

- it was Rotherham Council which commissioned the Jay report, after featuring in front page stories in The Times and an inquiry by the Home Affairs Select Committee; this appeared to be a brave action which, together with the immediate resignation of the Leader of the Council on publication of the report, suggested a readiness to accept the problems of the past and an intention to right the wrongs to avoid them happening again – but that was not what inspectors found.
CSE is a form of child abuse in which perpetrators develop total control over their victims. ‘Tackling CSE is incredibly difficult. No one should underestimate this. It requires spotting the signs, helping young people to recognise their experience as abuse and getting them to trust public services instead of their abusers, often in the face of serious threats. Then it requires supporting victims through the criminal justice system… Many local authorities and other services are struggling with this complex crime and as the Ofsted report on CSE found few have got it right’ (see Related briefings)… ‘Tackling CSE effectively requires a council and its partners to mobilise their services and powers together. The Council has a duty to safeguard the victims. It also governs the landscape in which CSE is played out including many schools, care homes, parks, taxis and take away food shops. Councils have powers of licensing and regulation which can be used to disrupt illegal activity in these places and keep the community safe. This is in addition to the powers of the police.’

In Rotherham, vulnerable girls, frequently with difficult family backgrounds and/or a history of being in care, were particularly affected; perpetrators ‘appear to have been largely from the Pakistani heritage community’, and used ‘street grooming’ to prepare their victims for exploitation; perpetrators generated real fear, including sometimes amongst professionals; other patterns involved lone offenders targeting under-16s

‘When inspectors commenced work in Rotherham we were struck by the overwhelming denial of what Professor Jay set out in her report’; the methodology was disputed, and 70% of current members spoken to disputed the findings – in particular the estimate that there were at least 1,400 victims of CSE between 1997 and 2013 (though inspectors concluded that the figure is a conservative one, and suggested that taking effective action would be better than debating the numbers); there was denial of culpability, with belief that CSE was ‘being dealt with elsewhere’; there was denial that CSE was still a significant issue, due to improvements made; inspectors found Rotherham’s response to external scrutiny to be defensive, sometimes with more focus on reputation than on services

Inspectors came away with the impression of a place where some had outdated attitudes; with limited political challenge, the culture of the political leadership became more embedded and dominant; evidence was heard of sexist and bullying behaviour and a macho culture, and from what they heard about attitudes to race and culture inspectors concluded ‘that the Council could not deal sensibly with the issue… the wider culture in Rotherham we have described meant that from the outset the added dimension of the ethnic background of perpetrators was an awkward and uncomfortable truth which, in the view of the inspection team, affected the way the Council (and the police) dealt with CSE… staff perceived that there was only a small step between mentioning the ethnicity of perpetrators and being labelled a racist’

‘Rotherham’s history of tackling CSE has been closely tied into Risky Business… a small youth project established in 1997 in response to what was then called “child prostitution”. The approach that Risky Business took – in reaching out to victims and in collecting evidence about perpetrators – was ground breaking’; staff at the project developed a picture of CSE in Rotherham, gathering and sharing with colleagues in social care and the police a lot of information about CSE – where it took place, who was involved, cars, etc; by 2006, their work was informing a council-wide action plan on CSE, and Risky Business was expanded; it was critical to the success of Operation Central, a joint operation between police and the Council between 2008 and 2010 which led to the conviction of five men for a range of sex offences with children; a subsequent operation (‘Czar’) gave children’s social care the lead in working with victims, but the girls would not give evidence and the operation was not successful; ‘In 2011, Risky Business was moved fully into Children’s Social Care with the apparent intention of
bringing social workers into the project and creating a co-located, multi-agency ‘CSE’ team. However, instead of adding to the team, the social workers replaced the youth workers. The philosophy and approach behind the work no longer reflected the youth work model which had been so successful in supporting victims and in gathering information. The CSE team became an amalgamation of separate services, located in the same place, but not integrated. There is no longer effective, assertive outreach provision. The database of perpetrators was removed and given to the police… Inspectors identified three particular functions of Risky Business which seemed to be essential to an effective CSE team:

- they collected information about the victims and, from them, the perpetrators, which was regularly passed on to the police and council staff
- they developed trusting relationships with the victims, which meant that the girls would talk to them and they in turn encouraged the girls to talk to the police and social care (these relationships were vital to the success of Operation Central)
- they took a proactive approach to finding victims, who were mostly so-called ‘hard to reach’ and unlikely to seek help from public services

• the report suggests that the strengths of Risky Business were not valued – with youth workers not accorded the respect shown to social workers and, too often, the information they provided ignored and not acted upon; ‘they spoke uncomfortable truths that no-one wanted to hear’; over a decade, Risky Business went ‘from a progressive and innovative project to one that was marginalised, reshaped and eventually closed down; ‘the demise of Risky Business reflects the ambivalent attitude towards CSE within the Council… [which] wanted to be considered as a national leader on the issue… yet… refused to look at what was really happening in the area and acknowledge either the nature or the scale of what was going on’

• Children’s Social Care in Rotherham seemed to misunderstand CSE, and the tensions between statutory social care and youth services (which have different roles and responsibilities) got in the way of looking after children – also, abuse and neglect of babies and younger children takes up a much higher proportion of children's services caseload, and budgets were under pressure and CSE cases were considered high cost; but ‘the lack of understanding of CSE in Children’s Social Care meant that they got the law wrong and they got the practice wrong’; the information gathered by Risky Business was deemed not good enough (to use as evidence), the relationships developed by the project with the girls at risk of, or experiencing, CSE was undervalued and, by extension, so were the girls and the information they provided

• although how the police dealt with CSE was not part of the inspectors’ remit, ‘it was not possible to review what had happened without considering the police’s role’; the report outlines the ‘constant presence’ of the police in the development of services tackling CSE, the fact that from 2002 there was a police officer with a particular focus on CSE and police access to intelligence reports on CSE in Rotherham which ‘should have put the police ahead of the game’ – but between 1997 and 2013 (the period covered by Prof Jay) there was ‘the phenomenally low conviction rate’ of just five men convicted of sexually exploiting girls and young women, ‘despite “ongoing police operations” appearing as a continual theme of CSE’ at Rotherham Council; neither were perpetrators’ activities disrupted, nor was there a review of the failure of Operation Czar

• inspectors saw little evidence of the Council challenging the police about the lack of prosecutions, nor raising with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) the difficulties of getting CSE cases into court; ‘tackling CSE is a community safety issue’ – the report lists
locations in which street grooming was taking place (e.g., parks, takeaways, taxis, the bus station, hotels and the town centre) where the local authority has a presence and has powers and responsibilities which could have contributed towards disrupting perpetrators and protecting victims, such as injunctions and powers to tackle nuisance behaviour; the report outlines failures of community safety bodies to take a proactive role in prevention, disruption and enforcement action against perpetrators, and of the taxi regulation service to tackle the links between CSE and the taxi trade

• on the treatment of victims, the report lists a number of issues and themes, including:
  o no understanding of the law or a failure to apply it to the children being abused
  o no recognition of what CSE was, and inertia when cases were dealt with
  o thresholds that were too high to secure help when it was needed
  o a normalisation of pregnancies, miscarriages and terminations in children under 16
  o criminalisation of the victims, without understanding that their challenging behaviour was a manifestation of the exploitation
  o failure to pursue perpetrators, who were often believed over victims and their families
  o lack of understanding of the level of intimidation taking place
  o inadequate recording in case files, especially of chronologies and case summaries

• an information box sets out the law, including (summarised):
  o the age of consent is 16
  o a child under 13 does not, under any circumstances, have legal capacity to consent to any form of sexual activity, and penetration of any kind would amount to rape
  o any sexual activity with a consenting child under 16 is unlawful
  o it is an offence for an adult to communicate with a child and arrange to meet them with the intention to commit a sexual offence against them… the offence is committed when the adult meets the child or travels with the intention of meeting the child, or arranges to meet the child, or the child travels with the intention of meeting the adult
  o it is an offence to arrange or facilitate sexual activity with a child under 16.

Rotherham today

1. Is the council taking steps to address past weaknesses and does it have the capacity to do so?

In order to reach a judgement on Rotherham’s overall leadership, governance and management, inspectors looked at governance arrangements; how the Council operates; how some vital services are performing; use of resources; the role and conduct of members and senior officers; and the Council’s capacity to tackle the failings that have been identified. They found that on paper Rotherham has reasonable arrangements within the expected range, but that the overall culture, the lack of shared strategic vision, the complexity of partnership structures and the lack of strong political and managerial leadership were inhibiting its ability to tackle failings and lead the transformation of the borough. Inspectors concluded that Rotherham is failing and does not have the capacity to address past weaknesses.

The report acknowledges some progress and a recent improvement in pace, including the establishment (jointly with the LGA) of an Improvement Board, but lists features of the context in which this must be viewed: no permanent chief executive; no cohesive senior management team and several key vacancies; a structure which does not work and is being changed; a weak and
inexperienced Cabinet; no sense of collective responsibility to tackle CSE; a poorly directed tier of middle managers; a history of poor performance and a tolerance of failure in children’s services; and a denial of past failings.

Key points set out by inspectors include:

- the Council lacks the necessary skills, abilities, experience and tenacity within the Member or senior officer leadership teams to address the issues it faces
- since 2000, apart from the period 2005–07, inspection judgements have indicated significant failings and weaknesses, but the Council has not used inspection to drive improvement; it has developed action plans and monitoring reports, but these have often slipped or not been implemented at all; regular reports to Cabinet and Scrutiny committees have not led to the effective challenge expected from elected Members
- the Council’s managerial and political leadership did not effectively challenge the police over the very low CSE conviction rate, nor did they take steps to disrupt the activity of perpetrators and prevent young people becoming victims
- the former Leader personally chaired a task and finish group in 2005 to tackle CSE, but agreed actions were not implemented; ‘councillors commented that the 2008 CSE action plan was almost identical to the 2006 plan with the dates changed and sent it back’
- in 2015 inspectors found the support for victims lacked any strategy or proactive outreach, and contact with known survivors was ‘lamentable’ (though there have been recent improvements under new managerial leadership)
- ‘Inspectors found an organisation which is not corporate and which operates in silos… there is no sense of shared ownership, particularly of the difficulties facing Children’s Services. This is clearly demonstrated in relation to CSE… Too many senior figures sought to distance themselves from the issue. Despite the appointment of an excellent interim CE, even since the publication of the Jay report we have found insufficient evidence of clear managerial leadership to tackle the issues it raised, nor of political leadership to ensure officers were held to account for delivering’
- ‘Children’s Social Care maintained a good but declining performance to 2007 when it experienced a significant decline from which it never recovered. During the last seven years it has never moved above an adequate rating which in modern assessment terminology would be seen as ‘requires improvement’. It hit a low point in 2009 when it was rated as poor and subject to a government notice to improve. It managed to get itself up to an adequate rating by 2011 and the improvement notice is lifted. It did not improve further and by 2014 had declined again into inadequate’ (over the same period, the Council as a whole has improved after a highly critical corporate governance report in 2000)
- whilst plans and look appropriate or even good, they bear little relationship to what inspectors found at the frontline; many examples were found of slippage, demonstrating inadequate managerial and political oversight of key deliverables
- reports are poor and Member challenge is ineffective, for example statements in reports that ‘all of the recommendations of the Jay report have been incorporated into the CSE plan’ and ‘all children in Rotherham are safe’ were not substantiated, but apparently went without challenge
- on scrutiny and standards, the report says the Council has an adequate structure in place and some individual pieces of work have been effective, but it is not clear how effective it has been in holding Cabinet Members and senior officers to account, and inspectors could
not find much evidence of how scrutiny had changed practice or policy making – they could only find one call-in in the past two years; the culture has been one where challenge and scrutiny were not welcome

- on senior management of the Council, the report lists significant changes which took place during the inspection, including the Chief Executive leaving and an interim starting, the Strategic Director for Neighbourhoods and Adult Services and the Director for Schools and Lifelong Learning left, the former Leader resigned from the Council, a government-appointed Children’s Commissioner started, a new Director of Children’s Services was appointed, and an external Improvement Board started to meet monthly to provide support; some services are improving and winning awards, but ‘the scale of the failings in Children’s Services cannot be weighed in the balance against even the most outstanding performance elsewhere. No council can be deemed to succeed if its Children’s Social Care services are so inadequate’; CSE does not appear to feature strategically, operationally or even as a risk until 2013/14; by not tackling CSE effectively, senior officers failed children and allowed the present difficulties to prevail, with wider consequences – including the recent marches by the English Defence League (EDL) and a reported rise in racial abuse for the Pakistani heritage community, and taxi drivers in particular

- on audit and risk management, inspectors are critical; a report to the Audit Committee in September 2014 identified the Jay report as the second highest risk facing the Council, describing major reputational damage, demoralising impact on staff, potential financial claims, impact on inward investment, etc. – but didn’t set out how to mitigate such risks (now real issues), and didn’t mention risk to children.

2. **Is the Council taking steps to address weaknesses in Children’s Social Care and its work on CSE, and does it have the capacity to do so?**

Children’s Social Care was inspected by Ofsted under the single inspection framework, and the LSCB reviewed, between 16 September and 8 October 2014, and were both judged inadequate (the report was published on 19 November, when Ofsted also published a national thematic report on CSE – see ‘[Related briefings](#)’). Inspectors found the Council resistant to Ofsted’s findings but, along with the newly-appointed Children’s Commissioner (appointed following an advice note from HMCI Sir Michael Wilshaw to Education Secretary Nicky Morgan during the inspection – see ‘[Relevant briefing](#)’ on DfE Improvement Notices and Directions), they concurred with the findings.

Inspectors judged that Rotherham Children’s Social Care will need concerted attention over a prolonged period, and must be a corporate and political priority, with standards and progress independently monitored; they concluded that the Council is failing to address weaknesses quickly or robustly enough as it lacks the leadership, managerial or staff capacity to do so. Findings included the following (summarised):

- work is not effectively joined up, either internally or with key partners; there has been additional investment, but there are too many priorities so staff do not know what to tackle first, and there is inadequate managerial direction; profound weaknesses remain in the Contact and Referral Team (the ‘front door’); the IT system supporting social workers is not fit for purpose; ‘for too long, staff and partners have not been listened to. Even more importantly, neither have children’
• inertia is apparent at all levels within Children’s Social Care, with a series of reports highlighting the same issues without changes being made – senior staff know what is wrong but are either incapable of putting it right or lack the will or capacity to do so
• Rotherham Council sees CSE as a matter requiring a ‘social care’ approach only, but an effective ‘social care’ approach still requires the involvement of the whole Council and other agencies to support proper safeguarding; by inappropriately compartmentalising CSE, the Council forces artificial choices about whether children are above the threshold for a statutory intervention; ‘the proven success of assertive outreach work by youth workers in getting to know the girls, building relationships with them, and helping them to understand the street grooming process is lost in the necessary processes and paperwork of social work’
• there is a lack of clarity about the criteria a child would need to meet before receiving support from the CSE team, which is under-led, poorly managed, overloaded and overwhelmed by the scale of the challenge after a prolonged period of unrelenting public attention; the operational team is a multi-agency team in name only – in practice it is an amalgam of different services or organisations, co-located but not integrated, still working in their respective silos
• inspectors’ concerns about the CSE police team included officers overloaded with cases where no crime had (yet) been committed, inadequate training in CSE or social care, police processes and systems which do not join up with those in social care, failure to understand social work assessments and thresholds for intervention (with failure by social workers to understand evidence requirements for successful prosecutions), and insufficient action to tackle perpetrators; the approach to data protection in the absence of a working protocol caused significant delays and problems
• there are concerns about CSE victims’ access to services during transition to adulthood post-18, where they may not meet the criteria for receiving adult services despite the need for continued support
• the Council and South Yorkshire Police (SYP) CSE strategy is not sufficiently joined up within the council or with SYP and the CPS; there is insufficient capacity or expertise to do preventative work well; there is no evaluation of the impact of the widespread training which has taken place to judge its effectiveness or value (and many knowledge deficiencies are apparent in key staff groups); work in schools to raise awareness of CSE has declined – although of good quality, it is not sufficient (though some schools have put their own resources into tackling CSE); action to identify potential victims of CSE is under-resourced, and the assertive outreach youth work previously successful under Risky Business has not been replaced; work with parents and the community is under-developed; the nature and severity of CSE has not been recognised by senior officers, who see it as statistically less significant than neglect; inspectors found insufficient evidence of joint action for victims, partly because of the difficulty joining up social care and health data; information held in different parts of the council (licensing, housing, missing children, education, youth and social care) is not joined up, so links are missed and vital action is not taken; the approach to identifying and tracking children missing from home and care is inadequate, and ‘missing’ can be a significant indicator of CSE; despite recent improvements and developments, inspectors are concerned that the package of support for victims of CSE falls short of what is required – and it is not clear that victims’ views have been sought.
3. **Did Rotherham take and continue to take sufficient steps to ensure only fit and proper persons are permitted to hold a taxi license?**

The judgement is that it didn’t, and still doesn’t take sufficient steps. The report describes the structure and operation of the licensing service, including the member level Licensing Board. Key points include the following:

- some officers had worked in other licensing authorities, and commented that Rotherham was behind the times, with few written policies, and inspectors found that the Council’s bye-laws and conditions relating to vehicle, taxi driver and operator licences seemed not to have changed since 1976; inspectors were told that the private hire trade is vocal and demanding, with the suggestion that the licensing service seemed more geared towards facilitating the trade than protecting the public, with members (some of whom had previously held taxi licences) adding to the pressure to support the trade
- the report outlines a number of concerns about arrangements, including aspects of a new policy which was agreed for consultation in October 2014, and comments that the service has sought to address some of the issues that inspectors raised.

4. **Taxis and child sexual exploitation**

‘Concern around taxis remains pervasive in the town. Throughout the inspection, individual inspectors frequently heard that people did not feel safe using taxis. The well-publicised link between taxis and CSE in Rotherham has and continues to cast a long shadow over the vast majority of law abiding drivers who make their living from the taxi trade.’ Prof Jay described the prominent role of taxi drivers in CSE as a ‘common thread’ across England.

The report outlines the extent of denial within the Licensing Authority over the link between CSE and the taxi trade; ‘Officers repeatedly stressed that if presented with evidence of CSE (preferably by police in the form of a conviction) they would act on it by suspending drivers. They appeared less able to grasp the notion that in the arena of CSE ‘evidence’ rarely appears fully formed and may need to be established by building a composite picture based on different sources of information.’ The report sets out a range of evidence that the Licensing Authority knew of links made between taxis and CSE, including concerns raised at Responsible Authority meetings to discuss matters related to licensed premises (at which taxis was a standing item), and shortcomings in how concerns were dealt with.

5. **Does the Council undertake sufficient liaisons with other agencies?**

Inspectors concluded that, whilst the quantity of liaisons between the Council and the LSCB, Community Safety Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Board is sufficient, the quality is not – and the current structure is ineffective and is not delivering desired outcomes. ‘Until very recently, CSE has not been given the priority and visibility it required. As a result, there have been significant lost opportunities for all partners to actively tackle the issue of CSE across all public services, including health, policing and the criminal justice system as well as though services like licensing, housing, adults and neighbourhoods in RMBC itself.’ The report outlines inspectors’ findings about the workings of partnership arrangements across a range of organisations.

‘Inspectors reviewed the [LSCB] minutes for the last twelve months. It is clear that a wealth of information about CSE issues, soft intelligence and activity by different agencies is shared at these meetings. However, it is unclear how this information informs the overall strategies and operations
for the agencies involved. Senior managers were involved in the groups but missed opportunities to take robust action on the information that was shared.’ Ofsted found that there had been a lot of activity following the Jay report, but it was poorly coordinated and change was too slow, and this report stresses that reform needs to be accelerated – ‘work needs to connect to tangible outcomes and people need to be properly held to account for delivery’.

The Health and Wellbeing Board put a planned peer review on hold until after the Jay report and this inspection, and inspectors hope that it will address specific concerns regarding CSE, including mental health, teenage pregnancies and sexual health.

The report says that ‘partners are committed to joint working and want to contribute to Rotherham’s ‘recovery’. However, the current ineffective arrangements mean that it is difficult to make the most of this goodwill. The Council does not effectively act as a community leader and galvanise partners.’ It describes overall partnership arrangements as ‘too complex and confusing’, and its own account of them illustrates the point.

In considering community safety and tackling CSE, and partnership arrangements with the police, the report says the Council failed to hold the police to account and does not recognise its own important role in tackling and disrupting perpetrators; it lists a number of available options (eg. civil injunctions, closure orders, section 222 Local Government Act 1972, and exercise of regulatory functions – further details are provided in an annex to the report). Although the role of South Yorkshire Police was beyond the scope of the inspection, ‘the impression of inspectors was that SYP’s action has fallen short of what would be expected’, and the report outlines concerns about the excessive dependence on victims’ evidence and the police attitude towards victims.

6. **Does the Council take appropriate action against staff guilty of gross misconduct?**

‘Generally, inspectors found the Council too willing to take the path of least resistance… whilst the Council has followed its own procedures, these have not always ensured that it has taken, or continues to take, appropriate action against staff potentially guilty of gross misconduct.’ The report observes that no chief officer has faced a disciplinary investigation in relation to the Jay report, nor been held to account for the failings identified.

7. **Does Rotherham cover up information and silence whistle-blowers?**

‘Inspectors have concluded that RMBC goes to some lengths to cover up information, and silence whistle-blowers. It has created an unhealthy climate where people fear to speak out because they have seen the consequences of doing for others… Inspectors received evidence to show that the Council did not always do the right thing. Sometimes this was because officers were worried about the impact on RMBC’s reputation.’

**Comment**

A leader in *The Times* on 5 February suggested that this inspection report, and the action it has prompted ‘will not be the end of a wider grooming scandal that care workers and police have yet to tackle with the determination it demands. The worry is that as Rotherham blinks in the harsh light of national scrutiny, grooming gangs continue to operate with impunity elsewhere.’ In fact there is evidence that local authorities are concerned about the possible extent of CSE in their areas, and
the possibility that they may not be fully aware of it; as Louise Casey observes, ‘tackling CSE is incredibly difficult’.

This report, the Ofsted thematic inspection of CSE (It couldn’t happen here could it?) and a useful new LGA resource pack for councils (see ‘External links’) are among a growing range of resources available to help authorities to get to grips with the issue – and show that some are doing so effectively. There are some key points and lessons to help, including:

- there is no room for complacency: the level and range of CSE activity is far higher than most people yet recognise, and it is invariably under-reported; it needs to be sought out
- every authority needs a comprehensive, multi-agency strategy and action plan to tackle CSE – the implementation of which needs to be properly monitored and scrutinised by elected members; strategies and governance arrangements need to be linked across partnerships, with clarity about information sharing (including what information, and how)
- raising effective awareness of CSE is still at an early stage, but is crucial to the signs being recognised and acted upon; awareness raising is important across all staff groups working with young people, but also vital with young people themselves and their families; listening to young people, and giving them confidence that what they say will be taken seriously and acted upon, is essential to building trust in public services
- adequate support for those at risk of, or experiencing, CSE is essential - and, for victims, may be long-term
- tackling CSE is a community safety issue, and must be a widely-shared responsibility.

**External links**

Report of inspection of Rotherham MBC

Tackling child sexual exploitation: A resource pack for councils, LGA

**Related briefings**

Child sexual exploitation: Commons Select Committee reports (January 2015)

Sexual exploitation of children: it couldn’t happen here could it? – Ofsted report (December 2014)

Child protection: HMIC inspection of South Yorkshire Police (November 2014)

Real voices: Coffey report on CSE in Greater Manchester (November 2014)

Children’s services: DfE Improvement Notices and Directions (October 2014)

Child sexual exploitation in Rotherham – the Alexis Jay report (September 2014)

For further information, please visit www.lgiu.org.uk or email john.fowler@lgiu.org.uk