



Department for Communities and Local Government

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Secretary of State

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The Leader

Principal Councils in England

24 September 2014

Dear Leader,

Safeguarding vulnerable children

We are sure that you, like us, have been shocked and saddened by the failure of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council together with other local services (including the police) to protect and safeguard some of their most vulnerable children.

The Government has already announced that Rotherham will be subject to a statutory inspection under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 in relation to the council's exercise of its functions on governance, children and young people, and taxi and private hire licensing. Louise Casey CB has been appointed to undertake this independent statutory inspection.

We have also asked Louise, in addition to her statutory inspection, to highlight issues that councils, police forces and the justice system generally should consider in their work on child sexual exploitation, and to report on these and any further matters which might help councils and others to improve their services particularly for children and young people. There will be lessons to be learnt that can help better protect vulnerable children everywhere, not just in Rotherham. This was set out in detail in a Written Ministerial Statement to the House of Commons on 10 September, attached to this letter.

Alongside this section 10 inspection will be a thematic review of Local Authorities' children's services work in combatting child sexual exploitation announced by Ofsted last week, and the publication of an inspection on how effectively South Yorkshire Police safeguards children and young people at risk, undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. Ofsted are also inspecting Rotherham's arrangements for children in need of help and protection, and services for looked after children.

The Home Secretary is chairing a series of meetings with relevant Secretaries of State to consider the findings of Professor Jay's report and identify what further action is needed at all levels to ensure such failings do not occur again.

We are already taking work forward in a number of key areas. For example, the Chief Social Worker is working with local government and social work experts to understand the lessons from the Jay report for local authorities more widely and any implications for the Government's drive to improve front line social work practice. The National Policing lead for child protection and child abuse investigation has reviewed the national policing child sexual exploitation action plan in light of lessons from the Jay report.

Professor Jay's report highlighted serious failings in the council over a number of years with regard to the safeguarding of children, and also serious failings of corporate governance, leadership, culture, and the operation of the overview and scrutiny function. In advance of Louise Casey's inspection, we ask that every Leader read Professor Jay's report and consider whether you have adequate measures in place to ensure that you cannot be accused of similar failings.

Louise Casey will be writing to you shortly setting out the information and help she will need to undertake her work and we expect that you will give her your full cooperation and support.

We cannot undo the permanent harm that these children have suffered. But we can and should take steps to ensure that this never happens again and make sure that all local authorities deliver on their essential duty to protect vulnerable children.

This letter is copied to all Chairmen of all Health and Wellbeing Boards in England. The Home Secretary is writing in similar terms to Chief Constables, copied to Police and Crime Commissioners.



THE RT HON ERIC PICKLES MP



THE RT HON NICKY MORGAN MP

Annex A - Written Ministerial Statement by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government – 10 September 2014

Governance in Local Government

One of the most important duties of local authorities is the protection of vulnerable children. Professor Jay's recent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham has painted a horrific and awful picture that the council utterly failed its children.

As Professor Jay noted:

“No one knows the true scale of child sexual exploitation in Rotherham over the years. Our conservative estimate is that approximately 1400 children were sexually exploited over the full Inquiry period, from 1997 to 2013. In just over a third of cases, children affected by sexual exploitation were previously known to services because of child protection and neglect. It is hard to describe the appalling nature of the abuse that child victims suffered. They 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. This abuse is not confined to the past but continues to this day.”

Following the publication of the Jay report, my right honourable friend the Home Secretary announced to the House on 2 September that I was minded to use my powers to commission an independent inspection of the council. In parallel, I would also be considering the implications of the report's findings for all local authorities in England.

With clearly documented failures by the council on so many levels, the rare step of a statutory inspection is in the public interest. I have now decided to exercise my powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 to appoint Louise Casey CB to carry out an inspection of the compliance of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council with the requirements of Part 1 of that Act, in relation to the council's exercise of its functions on governance, children and young people, and taxi and private hire licensing.

In undertaking her inspection, I have directed her to consider whether, in exercising its functions on governance, children and young people, and taxi and private hire licensing, the local authority:

- allows for adequate scrutiny by councillors;
- covers up information, and whether “whistleblowers” 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.

As the statute allows, I also intend to appoint on her recommendation, assistant inspectors to ensure that she has all the skills and experience available to her which she believes are necessary for her to fulfil her remit. Louise Casey will report to me by 30 November 2014, or such later date as I may agree with her, whether or not the council is meeting this duty to secure continuous improvement in respect of its governance, the services it delivers for children and young people, and taxi and private hire licensing.

I have appointed Louise Casey to carry out this sensitive task rigorously and independently. I am confident that with her track record of working in public service and particularly in challenging established practices in regard to the most vulnerable—for example, in reducing rough sleeping, as Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses and in her current role as head of the troubled families programme—she has the experience and skills to undertake a robust and independent inspection which will provide a full and comprehensive report on these matters.

Beyond the terms of reference I have set out in this statement, it is for Louise Casey, with any assistant inspectors I appoint on her recommendation, to decide how to carry out this inspection, and her findings and conclusions will be a matter for her alone.

Louise will continue to lead the troubled families programme. While she is carrying out the inspection in Rotherham, arrangements are being put in place to ensure that progress on troubled families is maintained.

If I am satisfied that an authority is failing to comply with its duty under part 1 of the 1999 Act, that Act gives me the power to statutorily intervene in that authority. Intervention may take a number of forms, including directing the authority to take any action that I consider necessary or expedient to secure its compliance with the 1999 Act duty, or directing that certain of the authority’s functions be undertaken by me or by a person—a commissioner—appointed by me for that purpose. The inspection report that I receive will assist me in reaching my view as to whether or not Rotherham metropolitan borough council is meeting its duty under part 1 of 1999 Act.

As part of my consideration of the implications of the Jay report for all authorities in England, I shall be asking Louise Casey, in addition to and outside the scope of the statutory inspection, to explore the links between Rotherham metropolitan borough council and the police and justice system, and highlight issues that local authorities, police forces and the justice system should consider in their work on child sexual exploitation, and my right honourable friend the Home Secretary welcomes this.

I will also ask Louise Casey to report to me on whether she considers, as a result of undertaking the inspection or otherwise, there are any further matters which might appropriately be drawn to the attention of authorities and other local service providers generally to assist them to improve the delivery of their services, particularly those relating to children and young people.

In order to assist Louise Casey and help my consideration of the wider issues I will be writing to all leaders of principal councils asking them to consider the implications of the Jay report for their own authority.

I will make a statement to the House in due course on the completion of this work and after due consideration of the report.

We cannot undo the permanent harm that these children have suffered. But we can and should take steps to ensure that this never happens again and make sure that all local authorities deliver on their essential duty to protect vulnerable children.