

**Report to COUNCIL**

# **Progress Update on the Oldham Review of Safeguarding Practice**

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## **Executive Summary**

This briefing provides an overview of the support that Oldham Council and its statutory safeguarding partners are providing to the ongoing independent review into historical safeguarding practice in Oldham launched in November 2019.

Due to the independent nature of the review we are unable to give an update on its current lines of enquiry or on any findings until the review is complete and the Independent Review Team have reported. This is expected to take place towards the end of this calendar year.

## **Recommendations**

For Council to note the ongoing work to support the independent review.

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## Progress Update on the Oldham Review into Safeguarding Practice

### 1 Background

- 1.1 In November 2019 Oldham Council and Oldham Safeguarding Partnership commissioned an independent review into historical safeguarding practice in Oldham. This review was established in response to allegations and concerns relating to child sexual exploitation (CSE) raised by members of the public on social media.
- 1.2 At this time the Leader of Oldham Council, Sean Fielding and the Chair of Oldham's safeguarding Partnership Henri Giller wrote jointly to the Mayor and the Greater Manchester Safeguarding Standards Board to request that a dedicated investigation into the effectiveness of the response to historic CSE in Oldham be carried out by the existing Independent Review Team already delivering an assurance exercise into Greater Manchester CSE practice. This team has earlier this year published the findings of a review into Manchester's safeguarding practice. This was agreed.
- 1.3 As a result, the Independent Review Team, Malcolm Newsam CBE, a child-care expert with extensive experience driving improvement in children's services, and Gary Ridgeway, previously a Detective Superintendent and Head of Public Protection, are currently undertaking a review of the practice of Oldham Council and its partner safeguarding agencies in responding to allegations of child sexual exploitation.
- 1.4 The review will focus on historical allegations relating to Child Sexual Exploitation and will consider whether the Council, along with its statutory safeguarding partners, provided an appropriate response to protect children vulnerable to or known to be victims of Child Sexual Exploitation. The scope of the Review includes, but is not limited to:
  - The Council and its statutory safeguarding partners response to allegations of CSE between 2011 and 2014 with particular reference to concerns expressed on social media that agencies were aware of the abuse, failed to respond appropriately and covered up any failings.
  - The risk posed to children from local shisha establishments during the period 2011-2014
  - The nature and extent to which adults had inappropriate access to children and young people resident in Children's homes in Oldham during 2011-2014
  - The nature and extent of the use of local taxi services to access children and young people for the purposes of CSE during 2011-2014
  - Allegations or concerns expressed in relation to specific cases.
  - The cases of known offenders previously employed by Oldham Council and the extent to which the historical actions and employment records have been investigated by the Council.
- 1.5 Additionally, as outlined clearly in the terms of reference, where it has been considered necessary to inform the overall purpose of the review, the review team have, and will continue to consider matters outside of the 2011-2014 time frame.
- 1.6 The full Terms of Reference for the Oldham Review are attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.7 There is a Data Security/Data Processing Agreement in place between Oldham Council, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the Independent Review Team which allows the Council, partners and the review team to share relevant documents and information required for the effective delivery of the review.

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- 1.8 The GMCA provides overall governance of the Review. This oversight is provided by a GM Steering Group which meets regularly and is chaired by Deputy GM Mayor, Baroness Beverley Hughes. The Managing Director of Children and Young People and Strategic Director of Communities and Reform from Oldham Council both attend this on behalf of Oldham. The GMCA provide administrative support to the Review Team.
  - 1.9 The Oldham Review is supported by an Oldham Council Team made up of Children's Services, HR, Legal, Performance and Communications which meets on a weekly basis to quality assure and co-ordinate activity required to support the efficient progress of the review. This includes the identification and contact of interviewees in accordance with the DPA and ensuring the Review Team have access to and provision of documentation.

## **2. Progress Update**

- 2.1 Since the commencement of the Review a substantial amount of written evidence has been submitted to the Independent Review Team comprising of minutes, reports, emails, intelligence and performance information relating to the Council and Safeguarding Partnership's response to historic Child Sexual Exploitation in Oldham.
- 2.2 The Review Team are also undertaking interviews with a number of individuals who have been identified as relevant to the scope and purpose of the Review. These interviews are being conducted 'virtually' through video conferencing due to Covid-19 restrictions on face-to-face contact. The Team has interviewed a number of individuals including current and previous Council employees and one former Councillor. It is understood that there remains a relatively small number of people that the review team will still seek to interview.
- 2.3 The Council is continuing to support the Independent Review Team with the identification of other individuals who can contribute to the Review and further interviews are scheduled to take place. Prior to an interview taking place, in accordance with Data Protection legislation, consent is requested from the individual identified by the Review Team prior to their contact details being shared and each interviewee receives a draft transcript of their interview for approval.
- 2.4 The Council is also supporting the Review Team to make initial contact with individuals who have expressed concerns, either on social media or through other channels, regarding the effectiveness of the Council's response to CSE. This is in order to establish if they wish to speak to the independent reviewers.
- 2.5 The Review Team are also seeking the views of survivors of CSE who feel able to share their personal experience. It is recognized by all concerned that this requires a sensitive approach. The Council is collaborating with the Review Team to ensure that this request is managed appropriately.
- 2.6 A log of all requests for information, documentation and interviews is being maintained by the Council and progress in the timely provision of these is monitored by the GMCA.
- 2.7 The Review team are expected to report their initial findings to the GM Steering Group by the end of the calendar year 2020. This is an independent review and Oldham Council do not have any direct ability to influence the timing of this report.
- 2.8 Any reports or other concerns from members of the public which relate to current or historic sexual abuse continue to be responded to through the Adult and Children's Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub which is based at the Civic Centre. Anyone with these concerns is encouraged to contact the Council on 0161 770 7777.