Clive Betts MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Betts

Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham

Thank you for your letter dated the 11th September.

Firstly, I am grateful for the fair and balanced manner in which the Committee was chaired and conducted, in what has been a very difficult environment.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the matters raised in your letter to the Secretary of State. Your letter raises several points, and I will address each in turn.

1. Conduct of staff

I have been very clear in my evidence both at the Home Affairs Select Committee and the Communities and Local Government Committee that I would take appropriate action based on evidence and in accordance with the Council’s own policies and procedures and employment Law. I have taken external advice from leading Counsel in this regard.

Whilst the Jay report provides an initial evidence base, it does not assist in examining conduct of individual members of staff. I realise that for the public to have confidence in the Council and the safeguarding function moving forward that a robust process must be in place to look at the conduct of staff involved. This needs a prioritised approach and we will first look at the case studies and then case files examined by Professor Jay. I think it is right and proper to have an external independent element to any process. I am sure that you are aware that we have already enlisted the assistance of the LGA to set up an improvement Board in Rotherham, and this could form part of those arrangements. Discussions are already well advanced in commissioning independent Human Resource and Social Care practice expertise.
If there are announcements regarding staffing to be made in the near future I will of course keep you advised.

2. Benchmarks and national standards

Whilst not in any way seeking to downplay the seriousness of these historic issues in Rotherham, this issue has highlighted the fact that this is a national problem which needs to be tackled differently. Whilst the issue has been raised by a number of prominent politicians on the national stage, this has not had traction and has not been understood as a specific form of abuse until relatively recently. Clearly external inspection regimes have an important role to play in ensuring that not only are services delivered to a high standard, but also that lessons can be learned and best practice shared. I would welcome the introduction of robust benchmarking processes and performance measures nationally. I am sure that the second part of Ms Casey’s report will assist in this regard.

3. Resources

As with many Local Authorities, the reduction in resources since 2010 have had a profound effect on the services we deliver. In Rotherham, we have reduced our overall budget since 2010 by £93 million, with a further £31 million reduction over the next 2 years. To put that in context, approximately 40% of our entire budget will have gone over the term of the current Government. Whilst no service or function has been immune from budget reductions, we have sought to protect the safeguarding function. This has been challenging, and as the Alexis Jay report makes clear, resources is a very real issue. I enclose a separate paper on the resources for the safeguarding function which shows the budget over the last three years, and our view of the additional resource we think is required. Whilst we realise that we have local discretion over many of the choices that we make and the resources we apportion to services, the reality is that the scale of the budget reductions is such that we have a difficult balance between providing universal services that the public expects to a good standard, whilst ensuring our most vulnerable citizens are cared for and protected. Any additional resources that could be put to safeguarding would ensure that other important services can continue to be delivered to a good standard.

I am of course happy to discuss any of these issues, and if there is further information that you think would be helpful, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Martin Kimber
Chief Executive