

LICENSING REGULATORY COMMITTEE

Report of Inspection of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council 26th March 2015

Report of Licensing Manager

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform members of the outcomes in relation to licensing of the recent inspection of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation.

The report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) The Committee is requested to note the report in respect of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, and to consider what lessons can be learned from the report, and in particular any future training needs for members of this Committee to ensure that only fit and proper persons are permitted to hold a hackney carriage or private hire driver's licence.**
- (2) The Committee is further requested to note the recent correspondence from the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire, and to confirm its support for a future package of legislative reforms covering all aspects of taxi and private hire licensing, to protect the vulnerable.**

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Professor Alexis Jay's Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham was commissioned by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council in October 2013 and published on 26th August 2014. Covering the periods of 1997- 2009 and 2009 - 2013, it looked at how Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's (RMBC) Children's Services dealt with child sexual exploitation cases.
- 1.2 The report found evidence of sexual exploitation of at least 1400 children in Rotherham over this period. Professor Jay found there was a "collective failure" by both the Council and police to stop the abuse.
- 1.3 A best value local authority is under a general duty of best value to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness." The Secretary of State may appoint a person to carry out an inspection of a specified best value authority's compliance with the requirements of this duty in relation to specified functions.

- 1.4 On the 10th September 2014, the Secretary of State appointed Louise Casey CB under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 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.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 Louise Casey's full report is available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/401125/46966_Report_of_Inspection_of_Rotherham_WEB.pdf

Copies of the parts of the report which are relevant to taxi licensing are appended to this report at Appendix 1, and are reproduced as public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

- 2.2 Members will be aware that Rotherham is a unitary authority, and, as such has responsibilities for Adult and Children's Services, which this Council does not have. Nonetheless the comments in the report in respect of taxi licensing are relevant to this Council, although it should be noted that the comments with regard to "a divided (licensing) service" do not apply to Lancaster.
- 2.3 The extracts from Louise Casey's report are presented to this Committee to enable Members to consider if there are any lessons to be learned from the report by this Council, and in particular, given the forthcoming elections, if there are any future training needs for members of this Committee to ensure that only fit and proper persons are permitted to hold a hackney carriage or private hire driver's licence.
- 2.4 On the 16th March 2015, correspondence was received from the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire, and this is appended at Appendix 2. It is understood that parliamentary debates on the Deregulation Bill were completed on the 16th March 2015, and that the Bill, including the clauses relating to private hire vehicles, now awaits the Royal Assent. However, the Committee may wish to express its support for a package of legislative reforms covering all aspects of taxi and private hire licensing, to protect the vulnerable and prevent any recurrence of the issues which arose in Rotherham.

3.0 Conclusion

The report is for noting, but Members are asked to consider any lessons that can be learned from Rotherham, and to consider expressing support for the stance taken by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)
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Public safety should be the primary concern of a licensing regime.
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FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
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LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council is under a duty to ensure that it undertakes its statutory responsibilities with regard to hackney carriage and private hire licensing.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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