

Questions and Answers

Executive

Thursday, 9th October, 2014

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9 October 2014

Questions and Answers



Public Questions as specified in the Council's Procedure Rules of the Constitution

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder responsible for Safeguarding by Ms Judith Bunting:

“Can the Council please provide residents of West Berkshire District with assurances that the systems, training and guidance in place in West Berkshire for Council Officers and elected Councillors are sufficiently robust that we could not have an abuse scandal of the type seen in Rotherham, happening here?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

Thank you for the question. I similarly have been asked this, I think probably every Councillor in this room and Officers as well have probably been asked a similar question.

The abuse case in Rotherham was a terrible and tragic case where over a thousand children were abused both sexually and otherwise over a period of many, many years. It is still early on in the process to understanding exactly what happened in Rotherham. There has been an outline review, the Jay Review, which has been done. What the Jay Review highlighted was there was a high level of, at best, complacency and, at worst, indifference to the risks children were under and also, potentially, even collusion and cover up, but that awaits an assessment on another day. It was a failure for a number of agencies to work effectively together that led to that level of abuse.

I am absolutely clear that in West Berkshire Council/Thames Valley area, there is absolutely no risk of a similar scandal as has happened in Rotherham. We are in no way indifferent to sexual exploitation of children and we work extremely effectively with our partners, other agencies such as Thames Valley Police, our Social Workers and others. There is no indifference towards the risk of children or the needs of children who are being abused.

It is not processes and procedures that protect children, particularly in the area of sexual exploitation. Social Workers must work very carefully with the children at risk, build very strong relationships and ensure that they understand the needs of the children and the risks that they are being faced with. Processes and procedures do play a role in ensuring that an authority operates effectively and I think we are diligent in West Berkshire in making sure that we understand what needs to be done to protect the children involved.

Councillors are regularly updated and trained. Indeed we have a training session next week which I am sure many people will be attending on sexual exploitation specifically so that people can understand the work of the Council and how it is done. So it is working with partners, it is effective working by Social Workers, it is working with Thames Valley Police, making sure things like MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) are set up and working effectively that will make sure children are protected.

In summary, whilst children are at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse in every local authority throughout the country, and it would be complacent for us to suggest otherwise, we are extremely diligent in making sure that we do everything we can to understand the risks children are placed under, that we work well with our Social Worker teams to understand that risk and to work with the children to help them, but also that we work well with our partner authorities and

ultimately a very effective Local Safeguarding Children Board in order to make sure that we are operating to the highest standards possible.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material”*

Ms Bunting answered: *I have no supplementary.*

Members’ Questions as specified in the Council’s Procedure Rules of the Constitution

There were no Member questions received in relation to items not included on the agenda.

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