



## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

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### **SOUTH YORKSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER IS REASSURED BY SOUTH YORKSHIRE POLICE'S RESPONSE TO CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION FAILINGS**

South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner, Dr Alan Billings, has today published an independent report which has provided reassurance that South Yorkshire Police has learnt from past mistakes and has changed the way it handles reports of child sexual exploitation in each of the districts – Doncaster, Rotherham, Sheffield and Barnsley.

The report entitled 'An Independent Review into South Yorkshire Police's Handling of Child Sexual Exploitation 1997-2016' was commissioned following the broadcast of a BBC Panorama programme in March 2015 which alleged that the Force failed to listen to hundreds of abused young people in Sheffield. This followed the high profile reports produced by Professor Alexis Jay and Louise Casey which identified failings across a number of agencies within Rotherham.

Dr Billings appointed Professor John Drew CBE to undertake the review. Professor Drew is a former Chief Executive of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales.

Professor Drew has worked closely with South Yorkshire Police, partner organisations, former officers and staff, and, most importantly, survivors of child sexual exploitation, to understand how the Force has dealt with past reports of child sexual exploitation and whether things have changed.

Dr Billings said: "I commissioned this report to provide myself and the public with reassurance that South Yorkshire Police has genuinely acknowledged and fully addressed non-recent, as well as present day, occurrences of child sexual exploitation. I wanted to be assured that there was nothing happening in Doncaster, Sheffield and Barnsley that was in any way similar to what had happened in Rotherham, and to be certain that plans are in place to ensure that nothing like this can happen again.

"This report now gives me a much better idea of how the police have dealt with issues in the past and how their processes have changed in recent times. I am satisfied that during his review, Professor Drew has involved a wide selection of victims, partners, police officers and police staff in order to reach his conclusions and recommendations and I am confident that practices within the Force have changed for the better.

"Improvements can always be made, but I am assured that the Force, at all levels, has learnt from

past mistakes and has taken action to correct and address those issues. I hope that this is a step forward in restoring public confidence in South Yorkshire Police.”

In conducting his review Professor John Drew was supported by a small team of specialist advisors who assisted with the research and interviews. The review team has met and spoken with over 150 people whose responses have resulted in a number of recommendations and observations.

Professor Drew said: “My brief was to conduct a thorough review of South Yorkshire Police’s handling of child sexual exploitation to provide Dr Billings with reassurance that practices had changed and lessons have been learned.

“In conclusion, I believe that considerable lessons have been learned and that the practices that led to the catastrophic failures in Rotherham are not reoccurring today. Dr Billings also asked me to look at the past history in the whole of South Yorkshire. The history of the response to child sexual exploitation is complex, as I have outlined in my report. I am clear that South Yorkshire Police could and should have done more in the past to combat exploitation. But I did not uncover complete failure or denial of the sort that occurred in Rotherham between 1997 and 2007. I am satisfied that the Force has understood and acted upon the previous criticisms and the recommendations of previous scrutiny of its performance.

“The way in which South Yorkshire Police officers and staff now respond to allegations of child sexual exploitation is very different from how it was in Rotherham in the past. There have been significant improvements since the publication of the Jay report and I credit the current leadership team for changing the priority afforded to combating child sexual exploitation.

Ten years ago there was just one part-time officer allocated to work in this area, where there are now 68 full time staff and the rest of the Force view it as a priority area. There is also a strong commitment to multi-agency working, particularly between the Force and the Local Children’s Safeguarding Boards within South Yorkshire.

“This change in direction is reflected in the higher level of prosecutions of offenders and charges being brought against those who are alleged to have carried out both historic and present day offences against children, most notably the recent success in the Operation Clover trial which saw six non-recent offenders sentenced to over 100 years between them.

“However, there are still areas where I feel there is room for improvement and I include in my recommendations the need for improved intelligence gathering from within the community and more thorough supervision of the recording of evidence by investigators.

“Finally, whilst I received some very positive feedback about the improved way in which the Force responds to victims, several survivors told me of very close and trusting relationships with officers assigned to work with them; there were others who were not so positive. Formal engagement with victims needs to be improved and I am recommending closer working with victims and regular discussions to improve the victim experience of the criminal justice process.”

The report makes 11 recommendations which are highlighted in Chapter 10 of the report. These recommendations include: a ‘gap analysis’ of all the reports and investigations undertaken to date and the results used as a basis for a new action plan; a review of the existing arrangements for formal meetings between the Force and victims, survivors and their families; that Local Children’s Safeguarding Boards commission ‘Lessons Learned’ reviews after the conclusion of each major investigation – ensuring victims, survivors and their families are central to those reviews and that a review of intelligence gathering is commissioned to be sure intelligence is handled promptly and appropriately.

In summary, Dr Alan Billings added: “I have no doubt that the Senior Leadership Group of South

Yorkshire Police is committed to improving the way in which they respond to child sexual exploitation reports. I will be meeting with them regularly to monitor their progress in delivering the recommendations to ensure that the public of South Yorkshire can have confidence that their Force will be doing everything it can to tackle child sexual exploitation and bring those who commit these heinous crimes to justice.

“If there is anyone who feels they still have valuable information that can help identify perpetrators of child sexual exploitation across South Yorkshire, or if they would like to talk about their experiences as a police officer, former officer or employee of the Force, then I would encourage them to contact me and I can assure them that they will be listened to and taken seriously.”

Further details on what South Yorkshire Police is doing to tackle child sexual exploitation and information on the current charges and prosecutions is available on the South Yorkshire Police website: [www.southyorks.police.uk/help-and-advice/child-sexual-exploitation](http://www.southyorks.police.uk/help-and-advice/child-sexual-exploitation)

Further information on the commissioning and scope of the review is available at: [www.drewreview.uk](http://www.drewreview.uk)

**Ends**

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