

Cabinet Member Housing and Safety response to recommendations of a scrutiny task group

Cabinet

16 April 2013

Scrutiny Task Group – Sex Trade

As the task group said in the introduction to their report, this review was sparked off by some media coverage which suggested that Cheltenham might be a 'hotspot' for sex trafficking. After speaking to the police and public protection, the task group concluded that trafficking was not a significant issue in this town. I welcome that conclusion and that we are now in a position to give that reassurance to the public. That is not to say that there is no such activity in Cheltenham but it is on a scale that the police are geared up to deal with.

The task group also concluded that the level of sexual exploitation of vulnerable children and adults was no more prevalent a problem than any other similar town. However there was no room for complacency and they highlighted the shared feeling amongst agencies that the "stone remains unturned" when it comes to identifying the true extent of these issues. I take these issues very seriously which is why I initiated a Safeguarding seminar in the Council Chamber on 4 February this year. Ten of our elected members attended and representatives from a whole range of agencies and groups. That brought home to me the complexity of this issue and the need to have a multi agency approach to tackling it.

We have a Designated Safeguarding Officer in the council, namely Tracy Brown, the Partnerships Team Leader. She has worked hard to update the Cheltenham Borough Council Safeguarding Handbook which includes new protocols and best practice for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. The handbook sets out plans for training and raising awareness on safeguarding issues for staff and elected members and I was pleased to be able to bring this to Cabinet for approval on 12 March. This policy will now be taken forward at a local level by myself working with the Chief Executive and the council's Safeguarding Officer.

In 5.16 the task group concluded that 'combatting sexual exploitation is not a primary role for the council' and in section 8.1 of their report, 'these are multi-agency issues that require partners to work together to achieve the best outcomes for the people of Cheltenham'. For that reason I have struggled with some of the recommendations from the task group that ask the Cabinet to agree specific actions for the council outside of this multi-agency approach. Indeed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when it considered the report suggested there needed to be more clarity on the recommendations.

For those reasons my amended recommendations for Cabinet to approve would be as follows:

- 1. The Cheltenham Safeguarding Forum considers the task group report at its meeting on 26 April 2013 to discuss how it might support the recommendations.**

- 2. Similarly the task group report be considered by the Positive Lives Partnership at their meeting on 23 May 2013.**
- 3. The Designated Safeguarding Officer to collate the responses and bring a report back to Cabinet.**
- 4. The Chief Executive to forward the scrutiny task group report to the Gloucestershire's Police and Crime Commissioner and the Police and Crime Panel inviting any comments.**