

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 26 November 2020

Question 1

Councillor Jennie Hewitt, Golden Valley North Ward

To: cabinet member, children and families

In this report it is claimed that “No children were put or left at risk”, if this is the case then why did the director children and families write a letter of apology to a child who was sexually assaulted (within the period covered by this review) but was not shielded from the perpetrator?

Response

The wording in 1.3 has been clarified to reflect the concern that you raise in the published supplement. The review was of written records, and found that advice was given and separation made. That said the council is aware that in some instances inadvertent contact with the perpetrator, and bullying was not always avoided. The council has shared a child’s account (with permission) to enable a better understanding of the victim’s experience when the council provides support.

Please see the supplement clarifying the wording of the report.

Supplementary question

Thank you for the response which I had. The response indicates that paragraph 1.3 either has been removed or is being changed and on the face of it we might welcome the fact that the statement has been removed that no children were hurt or put at risk of harm which was the thinnest of veneers over the evidence scattered in the body of this report - apologies made, families affected welcomed forward and admission that records were not properly kept so the facts of the matter are lost in a trick of obscurity. But taking the statement out begs the question - can we say that during this period children were properly safeguarded, and I don't mean were we compliant with the lack of advice from the DfE at the time I mean compliant under human rights and equalities act law, can we can say that children were properly safeguarded in the event of peer-on-peer sexual abuse and, if we have taken this statement out that no children were hurt or put at risk of harm, what can we say instead of this period?

Response

I think it's clear from the proposed amendment that we can do everything possible ensuring that the right advice is given and that schools are aware of every step that should be taken but I think we have to be clear that there will be occasions when it is simply impossible to protect that child from bullying or from inadvertent sighting possibly even contact. I think we must ensure that every possible step is made but other than having an officer on almost permanent patrol in the school it may well be difficult to completely reassure people on that one. That is my view and it may be that officers can add to that. We can do a great deal and will indeed do a great deal. I think we have a great deal in our report which makes it clear what we're doing, why and how we're doing it but it would not be honest to say that in every single instance we can achieve that.