



08 February 2016

Sharon Kemp
Chief Executive
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Riverside House
Main Street
Rotherham
S60 1AE

Our Ref: AG/GUES01001/01160097
Your Ref:

Dear Ms Kemp

I am writing regarding the proposed changes to Rotherham's Early Help provision, which are due to be considered by the Council's Oversight and Scrutiny Board on 12th February 2016.

I must express my deep concern at the potential impact of these proposals. I understand the proposals will see Rotherham move from an 'open for all' model of youth service provision.

The report submitted for consideration to the scrutiny board presents this decision as one of ensuring the best possible service. However, I consider this to be highly suspect. Ultimately, these measures are under consideration as a cost-cutting exercise and I believe they will harm youth service in the Borough.

I find the rationale behind these proposals to be disingenuous. I am unclear how a reduction in youth service provision can possibly lead to a better service. The scrutiny report states that vulnerable children will be identified in a non-RMBC setting and quickly referred to appropriate support. In practice, I do not believe this can possibly work. By limiting the scope of youth service provision, it follows that contact with Council services, and thus the possibility for identification, will inevitably be reduced.

Furthermore, the proposals suggest that services will be targeted at the 'most vulnerable'. I fail to see how these can be effectively identified in order to properly target the service. In my work with victims and survivors of CSE in Rotherham, I have found that many did not fit the image of a 'vulnerable child' prior to being abused. By narrowing the scope of youth services, changes in

Sarah Champion
Member of Parliament for Rotherham
Moorgate Crofts Business Centre, South Grove, Rotherham, S60 2DH
T: 01709 331035
sarah.champion.mp@parliament.uk
www.sarahchampionmp.com



character and behaviour that may suggest possible abuse may well be missed.

As part of the central government intervention in Rotherham, funding was allocated for a 'Risky Business-type' outreach programme. Without a full youth service provision, I fail to see how this can be viable. It is unfeasible that such a service alone would be able to identify and support at risk children.

Youth workers are the first line of defence in tackling CSE, sexual violence, hate crimes and radicalisation. Should the drastic cuts proposed be allowed to proceed, I am gravely concerned that RMBC will limit itself only to its statutory duties and that the result could be catastrophic.

I do of course appreciate the budgetary concerns facing the Council, as with all local authorities. However, I also consider that Rotherham's circumstances are unique. It was not budgetary concerns that led to central government intervention, but a total failure to tackle appalling Child Sexual Exploitation. I firmly believe that this must remain the central focus of the rebuilding process. By limiting youth service provision as proposed, I fear RMBC would take a retrograde step.

I would urge you to reconsider these proposals and would welcome your urgent comments.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'S. Champion', written over a faint red line.

Sarah Champion MP
Member of Parliament for Rotherham

CC Malcolm Newsam, Ian Thomas, Members of RMBC Overview and
Scrutiny Management Board, Secretary of State for Communities and Local
Government