**An Assurance Review of Operation Augusta**

**Key Messages**

Operation Augusta was a major criminal investigation undertaken from 2004 to 2005 into the sexual exploitation of children in Manchester. The independent report being published today forms part one of the assurance exercise commissioned in 2017 by the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, following the broadcast by the BBC of the *Betrayed Girls* documentary. The independent review team has been unable to complete its second strand of work on the exploitation of children in Rochdale. However, a data processing agreement has recently been signed with Rochdale Council and work is now progressing on this phase of the review. Given these delays, the Police and Crime Commissioner asked the review team to produce part one of its report, covering Operation Augusta. Work on the other elements of the review continues and the final report covering those aspects will be produced in due course.

The main findings of the report published today are as follows

* Prior to her tragic death at the age of 15, Victoria Agoglia, a child in the care of Manchester City Council, was subjected to multiple threats, assaults, and serious sexual exploitation. This was known to both the police and children’s social care but none of these incidents led to an investigation to protect her from significant harm. Only weeks before her death, Victoria disclosed to her social workers that she was being injected with heroin by an older Asian man for favours. No action was taken by the police or social care to address this, and Victoria subsequently died after having been administered an overdose. The men who sexually exploited Victoria have never been brought to justice for their crimes even though her family have been campaigning for many years, for her case to be re-opened.
* Operation Augusta was launched following the death of Victoria and during its initial scoping phase the investigation built up a compelling picture of the systematic exploitation of looked after children in the care system in the city of Manchester. They reported that there were potentially in the region of 97 persons of interest who had been identified as being involved in some way in the sexual exploitation of the victims.
* While the review team’s report recognises that there was much in Operation Augusta to be commended there were some fundamental flaws in how it was resourced. This had a significant negative impact on the investigation strategy and the operation was prematurely closed down by senior officers before it could complete its work.
* There were very few positive criminal justice outcomes emanating from Operation Augusta. Specifically, only two outcomes related to the original set of children who formed the target group for the investigation. The review team independently identified the names of 68 individuals who could reasonably have been assumed to have been part of the cohort of individuals referred to in the scoping report as persons of interest. The review also worked with Manchester City Council to identify if any of these adults were known to the council at the time, and whether the potential risks they presented to children had been actively considered. In summary, the report concludes that although there was significant information held by both Manchester City Council and Greater Manchester Police on some individuals who potentially posed a risk to children, the review team can offer no assurance that appropriate action was taken to address this risk.
* The review team undertook a detailed analysis of a sample of 25 children known to Operation Augusta. They concluded there was a significant probability that 16 children in the sample were being sexually exploited, and the review team could offer no assurance that this abuse was appropriately addressed by either Greater Manchester Police or the responsible local authority. (Fifteen of these children were looked after by Manchester City Council and one by another local authority).
* In conclusion, the assurance review has established that most of the children they considered were failed by police and children’s services. The authorities knew that many were being subjected to the most profound abuse and exploitation but did not protect them from the perpetrators. This is a depressingly familiar picture and has been seen in many other towns and cities across the country. However, familiarity makes it no less painful for the survivors involved, and it should in no way detract from the need for them to be given the opportunity to ask that the crimes committed against them now be fully investigated. The review team also apply the same expectation to the family of Victoria Agoglia, who have been asking for her abuse to be investigated since her tragic death in 2003.
* Furthermore, the review team recommends that the Mayor, as Police and Crime Commissioner, consider with Greater Manchester Police and Manchester City Council how the people who appeared to present a risk to children in 2004 can now be brought to justice and any risk they still present to children mitigated.
* The review report emphasises that any future approach needs to go beyond the investigation of individual complaints and addresses the exploitation of a significant number of children as recognised by Operation Augusta at the time. Anything less would risk repeating the mistakes of the past and not give the survivors the justice they deserve.

**Note to Editors**

The authors of the report are:

Malcolm Newsam. He is an experienced childcare expert with extensive experience of providing diagnostics, interventions and improvement support to a range of councils across the country. He has previously worked as a government appointed commissioner for children’s services in Rotherham, Sandwell and Northamptonshire. He was awarded a CBE in the 2017 New Year’s Honours for services to children's social care.

Gary Ridgway was previously a detective superintendent in Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Head of Public Protection. He has pioneered proactive victim led child sexual exploitation investigations and led Operation Erle, which resulted in the successful conviction of ten offenders. He now works as an independent consultant supporting the National Crime Agency, councils and police forces on CSE.