

Oldham child sexual abuse: Calls for public inquiry defeated

From the [Manchester Evening News](#) and the [BBC](#). For non UK readers, as is probably obvious from the context, Oldham, once a separate town and still with its own identity, is part of the administrative area of Greater Manchester. As are Rochdale, Salford and other towns whose names will be familiar.

Calls by opposition councillors for a government-led public inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Oldham were defeated at a town hall meeting.

The Failsworth Independent Group (FIP) had tabled a motion at full council which asked the chief executive to write to the Home Secretary and Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government requesting a 'fully independent and broad ranging' public inquiry 'as soon as is practically possible'. It also called for a cross-party steering group to be established to work alongside the inquiry.

However the Labour group had tabled an amendment to the motion which removed the section about a public inquiry, which was then adopted and approved – to the fury of opposition councillors who voted against it.

At the meeting on Wednesday night Conservative member Robert Barnes described it as a 'travesty', adding it was 'the night that democracy died in Oldham'.

The three hour meeting was turbulent from start to finish, with the public gallery again filled with many angry residents. Several held protest signs and frequently banged the plastic partitions which were installed as Covid-19

measures, (but have proved very handy at keeping the public at a distance in many institutions)



Councillor Brian Hobin, from Failsworth Independents, said: “We can’t move on. Multiple failings have happened – general apologies; no good. We need a public inquiry, an independent one to tell us who failed and why, to tell us who knew and why and who did nothing about it and why.”

I love his faith in a public inquiry. He is right to call for one. But after the Rotherham inquiry no police officer, and so far as I am aware no senior (one with the power and responsibility) local government official, has been sacked, demoted or in any way disciplined for dereliction of duty or incompetence. And this week’s [Telford](#) inquiry, which was damning to the police and local government has already been pushed off the headlines. Nothing to see here. Lessons (in how to cover up better) will be learned.

“[We’ve had the review](#) which highlighted what some of us

thought all along, that [failings had happened](#) and there was grooming going on. The public meeting that we had has still left lots of questions unanswered. We found out that the review was restricted, too narrow, too few cases looked at. A victim declared the review as not fit for purpose. We need answers and the victims need answers, and the public need answers and until we get them this cloud above the administration will not move.”

A member of the public, [Debbie Barratt-Cole](#), asked [Coun Chadderton](#) directly: “Who will be held accountable for the travesty happening in our town? And explain why anyone should believe anything you say any more from this council.” She also called for a government-led ‘public criminal investigation for the children of our town’.

Jackie Stanton, an ex-Liberal Democrat councillor, asked the council leader and chief executive to ‘admit to the public of Oldham’ that none of them are ‘capable of ‘dealing with the horrific findings’ of the CSE report. She added: “Will they refer themselves to the government for failing thousands of Oldham children?”

Resident Maggie Hurley asked whether councillors who had served on licensing panels found to have in the past given licences to taxi drivers with sexual abuse convictions had the ‘courage to resign with immediate effect’. “At what point will any of you take responsibility for your actions?” she asked.

The motion was the third call that has been formally made for a government-led public inquiry into historic sexual abuse in the borough, but the first to be tabled since the long-awaited assurance review was published last month.

The Labour amendment stated that dedicated resources should be recruited or redeployed to support the work of Operation Sherwood in investigating historic sexual exploitation

allegations and seek convictions. Operation Sherwood is the name of the police investigation launched following the publication of the review report to pursue perpetrators of historic and recent abuse in Oldham.

The amendment also said that support given to victims of 'historic and current' abuse would get independent support from organisations such as the Sexual Assault Referral Centre and Keeping Our Girls safe, which would also provide advice on how to make complaints and seek reparations.

Council leader Amanda Chadderton, who moved the amendment . . . said . . . "The original motion doesn't explain what benefit at all a public inquiry would have, either providing improvements to our assurance for today's children and young people or seeking justice for historic victims of abuse. . . .

" . . .The report does not allege any misconduct in public office by council staff, however we will of course work with Greater Manchester Police who are looking at these crimes again, so should any misconduct be uncovered during that process we will of course take action against anyone found to commit misconduct. . . ."

She told the meeting the Home Office had been twice briefed by the council, including after its publication, which raised 'no concerns about the conduct or outcome of the review'.

Coun Hobin interrupted, telling the chamber his opponents' speech was 'blah blah blah and waffle'.

Coun Chadderton responded, saying: "The people calling for the public inquiry are doing so, not because they've got real concerns about current practice or concerns about seeking justice but because they want a different answer to the questions raised by the review. Those people will not be happy until they get a report that backs up their view of the world." *What is she frightened of?*

The amendment was accepted and approved by a majority of councillors – all Labour – despite all opposition councillors from the Failsworth Independents, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats voting against.