



Department  
for Education

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To: Directors of Children's Services

Cc: Chief Executives  
Lead Members

### **Tackling child sexual exploitation - review of assessment and decision making tools**

Today the Government has issued its response to the chronic failures to protect children from sexual exploitation in Rotherham, which were the subject of recent reports by Alexis Jay and Louise Casey. The findings of these reports show that organised child sexual exploitation had been happening on a massive scale, over many years. They also point to a system that has lost its focus on high quality, confident front line practice and the Government's response includes a package of measures to address these failings.

As part of the Government's response, the Secretary of State for Education has asked me to write to you to request that you immediately review any assessment and decision making tools in use in your authority designed to support professionals making decisions about risk. As part of this review, you should assure yourself that any tools are not only fit for purpose, but being properly implemented as well. In her report, Alexis Jay raised particular concerns about a tool used in Rotherham and South Yorkshire which was based on a numeric scoring system that resulted in risks being underestimated.

At the heart of good social work practice is the ability to make sound decisions about the safety of children. Decision making tools can be helpful but they should only ever be used to *assist* in decision-making. Operational implementation of assessment tools should only ever proceed once their validity has been seriously explored.

Indeed, even the most able social workers, with the help of the best evidence based tools, will still depend upon frequent and high quality dialogue with expert practice supervisors to help develop and test hypotheses about what is happening within families, construct meaningful and effective interventions

and make decisions about the safety of children. It is this approach we should be fostering.

While there can be a place for assessment tools to aid professionals, I ask, on behalf of the Secretary of State, that you take swift action to consider and review those that you use locally.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'I' followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line that ends in a small dot.

**Isabelle Trowler**  
**Chief Social Worker for Children and Families**