

HOUSE OF COMMONS
ORAL EVIDENCE
TAKEN BEFORE THE
HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

LOCALISED CHILD GROOMING

TUESDAY 6 NOVEMBER 2012

MS SARA ROWBOTHAM

MR JIM TAYLOR and MR ROGER ELLIS

Evidence heard in Public

Questions 257 - 447

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Oral Evidence

Taken before the Home Affairs Committee

on Tuesday 6 November 2012

Members present:

Keith Vaz (Chair)
Nicola Blackwood
Mr James Clappison
Michael Ellis
Dr Julian Huppert
Steve McCabe
Bridget Phillipson
Mark Reckless
Mr David Winnick

Examination of Witness

Witness: Ms Sara Rowbotham, Crisis Intervention Team Co-ordinator and Sexual Health Improvement Specialist, Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust, Rochdale, gave evidence.

Q257 Chair: The Committee is now in session. I refer all those present to the Register of Members' Financial Interests where the interests of members of this Committee are noted.

This continues the Committee's inquiry into child grooming, and we also have another session immediately after this one on child grooming.

I welcome to the dais Sara Rowbotham, who is to give evidence in her capacity as a co-ordinator for crisis intervention and sexual health improvement. Thank you very much for coming to give evidence.

Sara Rowbotham: Thank for inviting me.

Q258 Chair: Ms Rowbotham, I am sure you have been following the proceedings of the Committee and the evidence we have received so far so you can take it as read that we are aware of the allegations that have been made in the newspapers and the evidence that we have received from members of the council and others. You are in the front line in dealing with vulnerable people, young girls. What exactly do you do in your team? We are in one of the old rooms, so you will need to speak up because of the acoustics.

Sara Rowbotham: We are a non-clinical sexual health support service, which ultimately means that we identify young people who are vulnerable in relation to their sexual health and provide them with support to improve their knowledge, skills and attitude towards their own sexual health and wellbeing. We were commissioned by the Public Health Department to identify young people who were the most vulnerable and support and improve their sexual health needs. We were part of a team with a pregnancy agenda so we were ultimately tasked to impact upon the teenage conception rates, but we also have concerns about sexually transmitted infections and a range of vulnerabilities through that.

Q259 Chair: How many girls and young women would you have seen in the job that you do?

Sara Rowbotham: We have a huge database. We were established in 2004 and we have had involvement with nearly 5,000 young people. Some of that isn't significant levels of vulnerability. That might be young people who would need a pregnancy test and then follow-up support in relation to whatever the result of that pregnancy test might be.

Q260 Chair: Of the 5,000, how many would have come to you and your team with stories of sexual abuse and ill-treatment?

Sara Rowbotham: We recently collated some figures for a freedom of information request, from 2005 until 2011, and we identified that we had made referrals of around 103 young people.

Chair: One hundred and three?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes.

Q261 Chair: How many people have been prosecuted within that period for the abuse of young girls?

Sara Rowbotham: To my knowledge, in the case that I was involved in—it was the most recent case, the high profile case—there were nine, but I'm sure you are aware that one of those perpetrators was missing and wasn't able to and didn't attend court.

Q262 Chair: What concerns do you have, that you can tell the Committee about, about the way in which the process operated in this area for dealing with vulnerable girls?

Sara Rowbotham: We were making referrals from 2004, very explicit referrals, which absolutely highlighted for protective services that young people were incredibly vulnerable. I tried to be as articulate as I possibly could to make Children's Social Care aware of the level of concern. For example, in May 2004, I was aware that a young woman was offering sex for goods and money on more than one occasion and was coerced into group sexual activity by an adult. This was reported appropriately to the police by her parent. However, mum's increasing inability to cope with her deteriorating behaviour meant that she was limited in her ability to protect her daughter from further sexual manipulation.

Q263 Chair: You have given us one example but the *Rochdale Safeguarding Children* report talks about a catalogue of failures and that the whole process had broken down. Would you agree with that? Who is to blame for the fact that so few people have been prosecuted even though you have had a great deal of evidence? You were telling us about over 100 cases of young girls who have been abused.

Sara Rowbotham: It was very difficult at the time because the young people don't necessarily present as clear-cut victims who will say, "I am being abused and I understand what's happening to me and that's wrong". They were living in an environment of absolute fear; they were being coerced and manipulated to such an extent that it was very difficult to have an impact over making changes and supporting them to make different decisions, so they didn't easily present in a police station and say, "I am being abused and I understand what's happening".

Q264 Chair: We understand that but your referral would go to the police and to Social Services because the report talks about—and I am quoting from the report—"overall, child welfare organisations missed opportunities to provide a comprehensive, co-ordinated and timely response". Do you agree with that?

Sara Rowbotham: Absolutely. I would absolutely agree with that. I think the report makes reference to—starts at—2007 and I would like to suggest that that happened much earlier, from 2004.

Q265 Chair: But you had referred to the police?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes.

Q266 Chair: Would you refer to Social Services as well?

Sara Rowbotham: Absolutely.

Q267 Chair: Would you have expected the police and Social Services to have got to together to—

Sara Rowbotham: Absolutely.

Q268 Chair: It did not happen?

Sara Rowbotham: Very rarely and if there were strategy meetings that took place, in the early days, we weren't privy to those. Eventually, I started to make the Safeguarding Children Unit aware of the referrals that I was making, and the Safeguarding Children Unit would chair strategy meetings, so they would invite the professionals together to discuss what the potential outcomes could be. So, over that period of time I made 181 alerts to Children's Social Care.

Chair: one hundred and eighty-one alerts?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes.

Q269 Chair: Is it still going on now?

Sara Rowbotham: In Rochdale? Yes, absolutely. Unfortunately.

Q270 Chair: Yes, it is?

Sara Rowbotham: There is still sexual exploitation happening.

Q271 Chair: Do you refer that, again, to the police and Social Services?

Sara Rowbotham: Of course.

Q272 Chair: What has their response been?

Sara Rowbotham: There has been movement, certainly in the past six months—the creation of a new system, a different way of working, so that the local authority would suggest that they have learnt lessons and so put different procedures in place, which might make a response a bit more effective.

Q273 Chair: So you are telling this Committee that the response is better, but it is still going on and presumably the response is not satisfactory yet?

Sara Rowbotham: We need to look at what prevention actually means, because the services are in place. Once there is a concern—and, yes, we are lucky if we capture that early enough and the young person doesn't become entrenched in a risky situation, but surely there has to be a step before that which means that they are not at risk at all. That, ultimately, is the most difficult thing to achieve.

Q274 Mr Clappison: Can I just briefly ask you, following up from that—and I appreciate it is very difficult work that you have to do—how do you know that the abuse is continuing in Rochdale?

Sara Rowbotham: We are attending strategy meetings where those concerns are being raised.

Q275 Mr Clappison: Are you able to tell us a little bit more about what those concerns are?

Sara Rowbotham: I am not a member of the team that the local authority has set up. I am not a part of that. I am invited to attend, particularly if we are aware of the young people they are prepared to discuss.

Q276 Mr Clappison: But you believe that this is still taking place?

Sara Rowbotham: I do.

Q277 Chair: You believe or you know this is taking place?

Sara Rowbotham: Well, there wouldn't have to be strategy meetings about children who were a concern in relation to sexual exploitation if there wasn't a concern about sexual exploitation.

Q278 Mr Clappison: What age of children are we talking about here?

Sara Rowbotham: Possibly between 14 and 15. Maybe as young as 13.

Q279 Mr Clappison: Are you able to say, broadly, is the sexual exploitation similar to that which we have heard about in the well-known case?

Sara Rowbotham: No. I think the exploitation that those young people experienced was incredibly severe. They were entrenched into a huge cycle of abuse that went on over a long period of time. I think agencies are alerted at an earlier stage in terms of being concerned.

Q280 Mr Winnick: Sexual grooming, sexual exploitation and the rest, as I am sure you will be the first to agree, are not confined to Rochdale. Unfortunately, it is widespread and we had a statement today from the Home Secretary on other aspects of this terrible and sick business. Would you say that, as far as Rochdale is concerned, and what happened as a result of the prosecution and the sentences when those individuals were found guilty, is different from other local authorities simply because it was worse in the sense that the local authority simply did not take the action that was necessary?

Sara Rowbotham: With respect, I think the evidence that was provided in court was absolutely corroborated by information that was held in our case notes. We knew these young people for a significant long period of time. We had made referrals to the police and social care. By the time it got to court, the abuse was almost historic; it happened a long time before. The evidence was clear-cut and we were successful in securing those prosecutions because we were able to corroborate the young people's evidence, because they told us at the time that that was happening.

Q281 Mr Winnick: Let me be blunt. Do you think the failure in Rochdale was due to incompetence or indifference? This is a Select Committee and I know you will answer frankly, Ms Rowbotham.

Sara Rowbotham: I understand. It was unfortunate that it was about attitudes towards teenagers. It was attitudes towards teenagers; it was absolute disrespect that vulnerable young people did not have a voice. They were overlooked. They were discriminated against. They were treated appallingly by protective services.

Q282 Mr Winnick: You have answered that particular question.

I want to put it to you that would it not be the case that, until the newly appointed Chief Crown Prosecutor, Nazir Afzal, decided that action was necessary and there was sufficient evidence for a court to hear the case, it is quite likely there would have been no end to those notorious individuals' activities? Is that so?

Sara Rowbotham: Absolutely.

Q283 Mr Winnick: So we would be right in coming to the conclusion that particular tribute should be paid to the person whom I have mentioned, the newly appointed Chief Crown Prosecutor?

Sara Rowbotham: Absolutely. I think we need an absolute shift in what constitutes a reliable witness. As I have already explained, those young people don't present as clear-cut victims stating, very clearly, "I am being abused". They are absolutely entrenched in a horrible set of manipulation and coercion. They are living in absolute fear so won't easily fit a box that allows a court, a process, a video, a judicial system, to easily recognise that this is a child who is being abused. I think that one of the other big gaps was that there is enough research that allows us to understand that challenging behaviour is actually about communication; it is about telling somebody there is something going wrong, and that was overlooked. That was sorely overlooked by lots of people.

Mr Winnick: Thank you very much indeed.

Q284 Nicola Blackwood: I wanted to take you back to the answers that you gave James Clappison about your view that there is ongoing child sexual exploitation in Rochdale. Obviously, we are finding, in the wake of the Savile inquiry and so on, that a lot of people are now coming forward because they feel they will now be believed, there is such a heightened awareness. But this is not necessarily new abuse, it has been ongoing, it has been there. It is just that people have not felt like they could come forward. Also, others in agencies or professional services are suddenly now seeing what they did not see before. I suppose my question is, is there new child sexual exploitation going on or is it just that everybody is seeing what was already there, and so you are having a peak of awareness and victims feeling confident to come forward?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes, I completely understand what you are saying. I wouldn't necessarily suggest that that is about victims coming forward. I think it is more to do with professional services and agencies in the community identifying what might be perceived as a concern, so it is workers who are suggesting, "We are worried about this individual, we are worried about what potentially could be happening to them."

Q285 Nicola Blackwood: Do you think that the prosecutions which have occurred have had any kind of deterrent effect at all, or do you think that there is still a sense of impunity among those who perpetrate these appalling abuses?

Sara Rowbotham: That is really hard to say. I don't work with perpetrators, I work with victims. I think there is definitely a sense in the community in Rochdale—a significant number of people are horrendously appalled that this was happening in their town. I would really like to think that the heightened awareness of the abuse that took place had an impact on anybody who was thinking about doing it again. I am not 100% sure that that is what has happened.

Q286 Bridget Phillipson: In addition to those young people who come to you having experienced coercive abuse and perhaps a gang-style grooming and exploitation, how do your staff work with young people when there might be the suggestion that that person is in what

they regard as a relationship while they are under the age of consent, perhaps with someone who is much older than them?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes, that is a really good point. I think there were varying degrees of lots of different young people who believed that was the case. That is even more tricky, that is even more difficult because, the grooming has absolutely taken over and our intervention—which might very easily be an hour a week—feels insignificant. I think what my staff are able to do is be consistent and persistent, and continually engage with that young person around the same message: “This isn’t a loving relationship, this isn’t a relationship which is based on equality. You are being abused in this situation.” Now that is very difficult to break. That pattern of abuse is already there, especially if they perceive that person as being their benefactor or their protector, because we are not that, we don’t replace that.

Q287 Bridget Phillipson: Would your staff routinely have those kinds of discussions with all young people coming to you asking for advice or contraception?

Sara Rowbotham: Absolutely, yes, of course. That is very high on our agenda. It has been for a very long time.

Q288 Bridget Phillipson: In terms of the referrals you talked about, the repeat referrals you have made to the police and Children’s Services, when those referrals were not acted upon did you take any further action?

Sara Rowbotham: I did, absolutely; I told everybody these children were being abused. As far as I’m concerned, I told everybody that these children were being abused.

Q289 Bridget Phillipson: In terms of recognising the signs of abuse—and you talked about that—do you think there needs to be changes perhaps in the way staff are trained for social work? I am aware that, in Rochdale, there were issues around the use of private children’s care homes and the training that perhaps was needed for staff there. Do you have a view on that?

Sara Rowbotham: The young people who were brought into the area and lived in independent sector children’s homes, obviously their lifestyles were a significant risk because they had been moved completely from their home. Those figures are actually quite minimal, the numbers didn’t present as anything very significant in terms of the young people we were working with. I absolutely think that, yes, social workers and social work training—you see, sexual health is my thing and I don’t think people really understand what sexual health and sexual health and wellbeing means. I think people think they know, and they think it is about contraception or sexually transmitted infections, but in actual fact it is much more. It is bigger than that: it is about your relationships, it is about the choices you make, it is about your confidence and your levels of self-esteem. All that, I think, is missing from lots of people’s agendas.

Q290 Bridget Phillipson: One final question. Obviously, we talk a lot about victims, and rightly so, and that tends in these cases to be young women. What work do you do with young men in addressing their attitudes towards relationships and the coercion they might apply to young women potentially under the age of consent in terms of healthy relationships and what is reasonable?

Sara Rowbotham: It is worth bearing in mind that some victims are also young men. I know the majority are females, but it is worth bearing that in mind. We have in the past, and we would hope to continue, offered young men’s groups, so absolutely challenging misconceptions around what it means to be in a healthy relationship, what it means to be a good boyfriend, challenging ideas around their use of condoms and contraception and making

that part and parcel of their agenda. If we don't tackle that with the young men, we continue to allow young women to be potentially vulnerable.

Q291 Chair: Ms Rowbotham, I will put to you what has been put to other witnesses: do you think there is a racial element to what is happening in Rochdale? Are there groups of a particular community, for example, the Pakistani community, that are grooming young white girls?

Sara Rowbotham: It is disproportionate in Rochdale because of the ethnic make-up of the town and so potentially we are more likely to see Asian men as being abusers, and that will feel disproportionate to us. I believe that this kind of abuse does absolutely happen around the country. We simply saw it in a particular community. I seriously believe that protective services didn't not respond because it was an issue of ethnicity. That seriously was not the case. However, we can't throw that out completely. I think that, as practitioners, we would really benefit from analysing some of that situation a lot clearer. Were you further disempowered because your abuser was of a different ethnicity? Ultimately, if you are 14 and you are in a room with people for whom English isn't their first language, are you further disempowered by those people if they are intent on abusing you? That analysis of that difference would really benefit us as practitioners.

Q292 Chair: So there should be further work on this to deal with it?

Sara Rowbotham: I really believe that would be useful. It would be really useful.

Q293 Mr Winnick: You said that the fact that these criminals were of Asian origin was not a factor. Would it not be right to say—and I would be interested in your comment—that if that had been a factor, and, foolishly and stupidly no action was taken, which it appears was not the case, simply because the criminals were of Asian origin, that would have horrified the overwhelming majority of the Asian community in Rochdale?

Sara Rowbotham: Absolutely, yes.

Q294 Steve McCabe: Are some of the young people that you work with self-referrals? Do they simply come along seeking, for example, advice on sexual health, contraception?

Sara Rowbotham: They do. They absolutely do, and I believe that we have a good reputation among young people in the community and that the majority of the referrals that came to our team were self-referrals.

Q295 Steve McCabe: There are two bits to my question. What proportion of the people you work with would you describe as self-referrals—not in any way connected with exploitation in that sense—and what proportion are referred by other agencies and cause you the concern you have been talking about?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes, that is interesting data. It really is interesting data. I would suggest that approximately 60% of everybody who came to see us, who comes to see us, are self-referrals. They are told by their friends that we are a trustworthy service and we take a lot of pride in that. Of that 60%, there will have been a proportion of young people who were being sexually exploited and came initially presenting for whatever reason—and often it wasn't with any clear agenda—and we identified they were being abused. The numbers would be very small in relation to the 5,000 that we've seen since 2004. On referrals into the team, because we have really good networks in the community, we would get referrals from school health practitioners, from learning mentors, from teachers, from youth offending team. They had already been concerned about the sexual behaviour of the—

Q296 Steve McCabe: They would be more likely to be a source of concern to somebody?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes.

Q297 Steve McCabe: How many people are in the team so we can get some sense of it?

Sara Rowbotham: We used to have 11 and now we've only got five.

Q298 Steve McCabe: Five. How are you funded?

Sara Rowbotham: We were commissioned by the Public Health Department and permanent staff were created with Choosing Health money, with a sexual health agenda.

Q299 Steve McCabe: So is this team likely to continue for the foreseeable future?

Sara Rowbotham: Hopefully, yes. Sexual health is an important part of Rochdale's agenda. I think it is a very important thing.

Q300 Chair: Presumably, with fewer resources. In answer to Mr McCabe, your team appears to have been halved.

Sara Rowbotham: Yes. The local authority have decided that there are different ways to address the concerns so there are teams that have been created with a social worker, some family support workers and police, and the local authority have arranged referrals to go that way.

Chair: I think it surprises us, knowing that you have made these referrals, that your resources have been cut and different approaches are being taken. We will have the local authority as our next witnesses and will put it to them.

Steve McCabe: Yes, indeed.

Q301 Mark Reckless: You spoke quite harshly about how vulnerable girls are being let down by those who really should have been responsible for safeguarding them. Do you think that the problem reflects on individuals who have that responsibility or the system for discharging that responsibility?

Sara Rowbotham: I can't blame frontline staff. I am a social worker, and we are managed workers. People wouldn't have been allowed to make the assessments that they have made and take them back into a process within Children's Social Care without that being okayed. Does that make sense?

Q302 Mark Reckless: It does. At what level of the management do you think that responsibility should lie?

Sara Rowbotham: The initial assessments will go back to a team manager at duty and assessment level, and it doesn't go any further if that's the bit that has been assessed as, "There are no concerns", and it's the manager, as part of that team, who ultimately approves or doesn't approve the decisions.

Q303 Mark Reckless: Can that be, sort of one bad apple as a duty manager, or must it go further than that, and it means several duty managers acting in that way and therefore, presumably, the person above them being responsible?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes. We alerted in relation to 103 young people. There wasn't one consistent duty and assessment manager who would be held responsible. There were a number over a period of six years.

Q304 Mark Reckless: The responsibility for that management oversight, would you be more inclined to hold perhaps the director of Social Services responsible or would you look higher up the council towards the chief executive function?

Sara Rowbotham: That is really hard for me to say. I think there was a culture within an organisation that allowed people to make the assessments and behave in the way that they did. Who creates that culture and who allows that culture to continue? I didn't work there, I was simply on the receiving end of it, so who established it so that they behaved in a particular way, that's very difficult for me to say.

Q305 Mark Reckless: Are you aware of any social workers or managers in Social Services leaving the employ of Rochdale because of concerns about that culture?

Sara Rowbotham: I would say that the make-up of the services that we were working with in 2005 is very different now. Lots of individuals move on for all kinds of reasons, don't they?

Q306 Nicola Blackwood: Just a very quick question to follow up the comment about the cut in the number of staff. I just wondered when in this process that occurred? At what point in terms of the Rochdale case did that happen? Was it in response, was it in the reorganisation?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes, a number of staff were on short-term contracts and their funding wasn't renewed. We had a trained worker who was part and parcel of the specific sexual exploitation team and that post was funded by the local authority and that funding stopped this year on 31 April.

Q307 Nicola Blackwood: I assume that the decision was made in some kind of strategic way. So was the decision made subsequent to the prosecutions, before the prosecutions, once it became evident that there was such a significant problem? Was it made once this safeguarding report came out?

Sara Rowbotham: It was all part and parcel. I was absolutely telling a significant number of people that that funding was at risk, and that that person was at risk. It ran concurrently with the report—that was part and parcel of my shouting.

Q308 Nicola Blackwood: You had 11 people until when?

Sara Rowbotham: Sorry. The 11 were taken piece by piece over, I would say, the past three years, and the most recent one was the person who was working very closely with the police around bringing this prosecution. Her funding stopped on 31 April this year.

Q309 Mr Clappison: I would like to understand what you see as the best way of helping children who are identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation. Perhaps you could take us through what you do when you come across such a person, when you become aware of the risk of exploitation.

Sara Rowbotham: The key for me is absolutely around persistence. It is about being persistent and also being consistent. Young people will not keep appointments with you. You could tell them to come next Tuesday at 3.00 pm and they probably won't necessarily know it is next Tuesday at 3.00 pm. You have to be persistent and make sure you find them, make sure you are available to them, equally, if they come to you at 2.00 pm on Wednesday afternoon.

Q310 Mr Clappison: I understand. What sort of steps do you take to address that problem? What do you encourage them to do?

Sara Rowbotham: It is very much about raising levels of self-esteem, levels of confidence, and those are big words, so working out what that means and breaking that down. There are definitely elements of good practice, and I believe we have really rich data that would prove that that is what we were doing. Really simple things, for example, if the young person did turn up at the door, you would tell them how lovely it was to see them, how pleased you were that they had taken the time out to come and see you.

Q311 Mr Clappison: Have you seen any evidence that, for example, sex and relationship education can be effective in helping vulnerable young people to resist exploitation?

Sara Rowbotham: Absolutely. Unfortunately sex and relationship education can focus far too easily on the mechanics and what bit goes where, pregnancy and X and Y chromosomes. Sex and relationship education is about making positive decisions about your own wellbeing. It does not necessarily have to even involve sex. Do you understand? It is something that is much broader than that.

Q312 Mr Clappison: Is there anything, any measure or any one step that could be taken, which you think would help to address the problem of child exploitation? Something that is not happening at the moment that you would like to see happen.

Sara Rowbotham: Agencies are working much better together than ever before. There are still gaps in provision. We should learn from the national agenda. We should equally look at the evidence that we already have, the rich data that we already know about locally and not necessarily look outside. We have that information locally.

Q313 Dr Huppert: You run a crisis intervention team, and I presume you would agree that it is better to try to tackle these things early, before they become a crisis.

Sara Rowbotham: Yes.

Q314 Dr Huppert: Can I therefore come back to this issue about sex and relationship education, because it is quite important? You have implied it could be rather better. Can I also ask, because not everybody has to go to sex and relationship education, do you have any sense of whether either the people who you see or the perpetrators had the sex and relationship education that there is?

Sara Rowbotham: The young people, they were totally naive. They were engaging in an awful lot of unprotected sexual activity, dangerous sexual activity in terms of the pregnancy risk and risk of sexually transmitted infections. But they absolutely did not know what was going on. They did not have a sense at all about their own wellbeing or necessarily what their bodies were able to do.

Q315 Dr Huppert: Is that because they did not have any of the sex and relationship education or because it simply did not do the job it was supposed to do?

Sara Rowbotham: A combination of the two. Some of the young people were school truants. If they did not attend school, they would not have been present. Some of them had learning needs that meant that the way that that information potentially was delivered, they were not in a position to retain the information. They sought information from elsewhere that was not necessarily the truth.

Q316 Dr Huppert: Do you know if any of them opted out of sex and relationship education?

Sara Rowbotham: Not necessarily formally, saying, “I’m not going to that lesson”.

Q317 Dr Huppert: Do you think it would help if there was a way of making sure that everybody had some sort of sex and relationship education, or is it more important to make sure that the material that there is covers a wider range of issues, that it is about consent issues, around looking at domestic violence and exploitation issues?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes.

Q318 Dr Huppert: Which do you think is most important, or are they both important?

Sara Rowbotham: Absolutely. They are both important, but it has to be delivered in a way which is going to be understood. In a school setting, sometimes that is easily received because there is your captive audience. But not everybody in that classroom setting is going to receive it in exactly the same way, or in a way that is meaningful for them, which will have an impact on them and means that they will change their behaviour. That is why we work on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. It has to be relevant to you, which means then that you will have a shift in your knowledge, a shift in your attitude, and you will be in a much better position to protect yourself.

Q319 Dr Huppert: But even with your one-to-one work, you think there are still people who fall between the cracks and do not receive any?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes. Yes.

Q320 Dr Huppert: Does that apply to the perpetrators as well? Do they get sex and relationship education? Is that something that can be done early with them?

Sara Rowbotham: If we assume that they are members of the local community who attended local schools, then they would receive it in the same way.

Q321 Nicola Blackwood: I wanted to come back and ask you about the issue in the safeguarding report regarding attitude to victims. You have touched on this a number of times in your responses. The safeguarding board report found that victims of exploitation were often, and I am quoting, “Deemed to be making their own choices and engaging in consensual sexual activity”, which, given what was going on, we all find absolutely shocking. You have indicated already that you did come across these attitudes. Could you explain what is being done locally to try and change that? Do you think that is still happening now?

Sara Rowbotham: No, I do not believe that that is happening now. There is an increased level of awareness now. To be honest, I do not think anybody would dare behave like that any more in Rochdale.

Q322 Nicola Blackwood: But what is being done to try and change that, because we are still hearing about cases that go to CPS where witnesses are found not to be credible because they are behaving in ways that are considered to be, as you have said, just teenagers being bad. Can you explain how those quite pervasive attitudes are being changed, because it was quite widespread, from what you are saying?

Sara Rowbotham: It is, and it is really difficult to work with a young person whose behaviour is perceived to be, and actually is unruly. Perhaps more could be done to understand why that unruly behaviour is there in the first instance, and a much more empathetic or sympathetic approach to that child, and considering them as a child—that has to

be the key. Organisationally, it is much easier to create a system for which people behave—do you understand what I mean?—whereby they will tick a box on an assessment, rather than own that.

Q323 Nicola Blackwood: Is it your view that it was that attitude that prevented people from taking your referrals seriously?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes. Yes.

Q324 Nicola Blackwood: In what agencies do you think that that attitude caused those problems?

Sara Rowbotham: Both Children's Social Care and the police.

Q325 Nicola Blackwood: And the police?

Sara Rowbotham: I think the police found it very difficult, because as I have already said, they did not present as victims. Their lifestyles were really chaotic. They might have had experience of the criminal justice system themselves. Their behaviour was really unruly and potentially problematic to the police, so they did not present as easy for the police to take forward as somebody people might believe. That is the issue that has to change. Teenagers vote with their feet and, unfortunately, it became a bit of a catchphrase.

Chair: I am afraid we are going to have to end this session because we have other witnesses. But we will take a quick supplementary from Mr McCabe, then Mr Ellis.

Q326 Steve McCabe: Can I just ask—time is very tight—two very quick things? One is, you said that your interest is sexual health, but is it not true that the project was originally established to reduce teenage pregnancies? That was its primary goal?

Sara Rowbotham: Yes.

Q327 Steve McCabe: The other thing is, Councillor Lambert appears to have said to the *Manchester Evening News* that the crisis intervention team did not always communicate with the police and Social Services about vulnerable girls. He seems to have a rather different impression from the one you have given the Committee today. How did that happen?

Sara Rowbotham: I am not sure who advised Mr Lambert, but he was clearly wrong.

Steve McCabe: He was wrong. Thank you.

Q328 Michael Ellis: First, congratulations on your work and the hard work that you have clearly done in difficult circumstances. It is a testing job that you do, and we thank you for doing it.

Sara Rowbotham: Thank you.

Q329 Michael Ellis: Did you have any opportunity to work with people like the Crown Prosecution Service, in any detail?

Sara Rowbotham: Unfortunately, no. There was one session at some point in early 2008, when a representative from CPS came to talk to a strategic group. That was very much about presenting the law, perpetrators and which laws—

Q330 Michael Ellis: Clearly, lawyers who work in the court system have to make judgments based on what they think will happen in the court system if they pursue prosecutions. They obviously have to persuade juries of the strength and weakness of cases, usually the strength of cases. Do you think, going forward, briefly, that it would help if there was some channel of communication, so that you could perhaps explain to Crown Prosecution

Service lawyers or police officers, but particularly CPS lawyers, the side of the young people on this, and how it might work with juries?

Sara Rowbotham: Absolutely. It is very much about vulnerable teenagers and, as a society, what are our views of vulnerable teenagers. How do we perceive them? Do we see them as trouble? Do we see them as no better than they should be? All that means that, if you are a vulnerable teenager who is in significant harm, it is much more difficult for you to have a voice.

Q331 Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Ellis. Ms Rowbotham, it must have been difficult for you to come and give evidence today. We are very impressed by the courageous way in which you have come here and told us about what has been happening over the last few years. We are shocked that, in your view, this is still continuing, and we are concerned that your resources are being cut in half. We will put some of these points to other witnesses, but we would ask you to keep in touch with this Committee about what is going on. We are very keen to know and to have further information. If there are any repercussions at all concerning your visit to us today, we would like to know immediately.

Sara Rowbotham: Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much for coming. We are most grateful.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Mr Jim Taylor**, Chief Executive, Rochdale Council, and **Mr Roger Ellis**, former Chief Executive, Rochdale Council, gave evidence.

Q332 Chair: Mr Ellis, this is your second appearance before this Committee. Thank you very much. You have always co-operated fully with us whenever we have asked for your help. Mr Taylor, thank you for coming for the first time. We appreciate, Mr Taylor, that you were not the chief executive—this was made clear when you gave evidence on the last occasion—until earlier this year. However, you, Mr Ellis, have been chief executive for 12 years and until you left you therefore were the principal officer of the council. You must feel concerned, embarrassed, disturbed, by what you read in the report that was published in September, and the serious criticisms that were made.

Roger Ellis: All of those feelings. Also shocked and sick. If I explain how the management of the organisation worked, and how information was dealt with, so that I can illustrate my position. I was chief executive, I had reporting to me four or sometimes five executive directors, one of whom was the statutory director of Children's Services.

Q333 Chair: Can we have some names? We know that Cheryl Eastwood, Steve Garner and Elaine King have all left this year, voluntarily. They were not disciplined. You left voluntarily from the council, around about the time of the successful prosecutions of the men who went to jail. Is that right? Who are we talking about? We would like to know.

Roger Ellis: All right. Through the period that we are talking about, the director of Children's Services from 2004 was Terry Piggott, who retired or left the authority in 2009.

Q334 Chair: Voluntarily?

Roger Ellis: He left on a secondment a year ahead of his normal retirement date at 60.

Q335 Chair: Secondment to where?

Roger Ellis: To BECTA. It is an education, computer technology association. He left the authority in 2009, and at that time we were recruiting Cheryl Eastwood. Cheryl started in

March 2010 and there was somebody called Steve Titcombe, who was the interim director of Children's Services from October 2009 until March 2010.

Q336 Chair: All right. Did Cheryl Eastwood work from 2010 to 2012 and leave this year?

Roger Ellis: Yes.

Q337 Chair: Steve Garner. What was his position?

Roger Ellis: He was the head of Children's Social Care, so he reported directly to the director of Children's Services.

Q338 Chair: That was Cheryl Eastwood?

Roger Ellis: That was Cheryl Eastwood. Steve Garner was appointed in the summer of 2009.

Q339 Chair: Elaine King?

Roger Ellis: Elaine King; I do not know. I knew her name, but I am not sure of her position.

Q340 Chair: She was the Safeguarding Children Unit's manager.

Roger Ellis: Okay.

Q341 Chair: Do you mean to tell this Committee that you knew nothing about what was going on? The first you heard of it was after these people were prosecuted? It is very odd for a chief executive of a local authority not to know.

Roger Ellis: The way I managed information in the organisation was this. We had a quarterly management information system that reported on progress that all the services were making against their objectives in their service plan. That produced voluminous management information that was scrutinised, not just by officers, but by members of the council. In addition to that, the director of Children's Services, along with all the other executive directors, had their own set of objectives, and I held a quarterly performance management meeting with those directors, to go through—

Chair: That is extremely helpful—

Roger Ellis: Can I just—

Chair: Yes.

Roger Ellis: I think the key bit is just coming. In addition to those formal arrangements, I had arrangements in place where I wanted no surprises. The instruction, throughout the organisation was, if there is anything of significance, of controversy, a difficulty going on, I want to be told about it. Throughout the period of office of all those directors of Children's Services whom I have mentioned, they were quite assiduous in telling me about things that were happening in their area of responsibility.

Q342 Chair: If they were being assiduous, they would have told you about all of this.

Roger Ellis: They told me about a lot of things. They did not tell me about this.

Q343 Chair: Rochdale Council is not the Pentagon, and therefore all these management arrangements are perfectly fine. What the Committee is interested to know is what you knew. Because you must know the existence of the Sunrise Unit, which was set up specifically to deal with these issues, because it is referred to in the *Safeguarding Children* report. You must be aware of what the Sunrise Unit was?

Roger Ellis: I became aware of the Sunrise Unit when I joined the Children's Safeguarding Board, when that was reorganised towards the end of 2010.

Q344 Chair: And the fact that it took two years to set up?

Roger Ellis: Prior to that, no, I had not heard of the Sunrise Unit.

Q345 Chair: Nobody told you anything about any child abuse allegations of any kind in the 12 years you were the chief executive of Rochdale?

Roger Ellis: The first I heard of these allegations was when I was told by Cheryl Eastwood in 2010 about the arrests that had taken place.

Q346 Chair: Yes, all right. Let us take it to 2010, which presumably was a public event. If somebody is arrested, it would have been in the newspapers. Despite having all these management information set-ups, the first you discovered was, it was in the newspapers and Cheryl Eastwood told you. What did you do after that?

Roger Ellis: I joined the Children's Safeguarding Board, which put in place some arrangements that were being managed by Steve Garner, reporting to Cheryl Eastwood, to oversee the work that was being done to deal with the victims and to try and improve the situation.

Q347 Chair: But the report into what has been happening, even in the last two years, has shown serious errors by the council.

Roger Ellis: Yes. I found out about those errors when I read that report.

Q348 Chair: You did not know anything between 2010 and 2012, even though you were sitting on the board?

Roger Ellis: I knew that the prosecutions were pending and I knew that some work was being done to try and improve the arrangements that were in place.

Q349 Chair: Why did you leave the council, after 12 years?

Roger Ellis: I left the council for a number of reasons. The financial crisis that was facing the authority meant that we were having to seek volunteers for early retirement and I was signing the letters to people, asking them whether they would want to be considered for early retirement. Late in 2010, I took the decision that it was probably a good idea for me to show some leadership and to offer my own early retirement. My early retirement was agreed by the council in February 2011.

Q350 Chair: But you left in 2012?

Roger Ellis: The agreement that I should take early retirement was—

Q351 Chair: You left in 2012?

Roger Ellis: I left in 2012.

Q352 Chair: Did you get a redundancy payout?

Roger Ellis: I got a redundancy payout.

Q353 Chair: Can you tell the Committee how much that was?

Roger Ellis: I am subject to a confidentiality agreement, so neither I nor the council can disclose it.

Q354 Chair: When Cheryl Eastwood left, and Steve Garner left, did they get payments by the council?

Roger Ellis: I do not know, because that was after I left.

Q355 Chair: Mr Taylor will presumably be able to assist us. You are telling this Committee that, despite the fact that very many people knew in Rochdale what was going on, you did not know until people were arrested?

Roger Ellis: That is right.

Q356 Chair: Between 2010 and 2012, you also had no idea what was going on?

Roger Ellis: I knew that there were prosecutions pending.

Q357 Chair: That is all?

Roger Ellis: Yes.

Q358 Chair: You did not ask what was going on? You did not ask whether any children were in the care of the local authority? You did not ask your social workers or your director for any reports?

Roger Ellis: I did ask that question about care of the local authority, and I was told that none of the victims in the prosecution were in the care of Rochdale, but one was in the care of another local authority and placed in a private children's home in Rochdale.

Q359 Chair: What would you like to say to the victims, now that you have this report and now that you have received the news about the prosecutions in May?

Roger Ellis: As the chief executive of a local authority, I feel responsible for everything that goes on in the local authority, whether I know about it or not. I feel a deep sense of responsibility, a sense of regret for what happened, embarrassment at the failures that seem to have occurred. But I do not feel any sense of personal culpability. I have questioned my conscience throughout the last few years about this to see whether there was anything I could have done differently at the time. But with the benefit of the information that was available to me, I do not think there was anything I could have done.

Q360 Chair: You question your conscience now, rather than over the last few years?

Roger Ellis: I said, over the last few years. Throughout.

Q361 Chair: So you have known throughout?

Roger Ellis: No, I cannot question my conscience about something I do not know about.

Q362 Chair: Exactly. That is what I was—

Roger Ellis: But ever since I had found out about the prosecutions, and the cases and the allegations that were being made, I felt heartbroken about that and deeply concerned about what was happening.

Q363 Chair: Did it worry you that these wonderful management systems you set in place did not really work?

Roger Ellis: I cannot explain why I was not being told what was happening. I can only assume that, if what was happening was that staff in Children's Social Care were disbelieving people who were going to them and presenting in whatever way as victims of sexual abuse—if staff were not believing that, if they did not apply proper credibility to what people were

telling them—it is maybe not surprising that they do not go and report that to their senior colleagues.

Q364 Nicola Blackwood: I am reading from the report that has come forward, and it says that between January and December 2007, the sexual exploitation working group that was set up under the auspices of the Rochdale Borough Council, identified 50 children and young people who were considered to be affected by or at risk of sexual exploitation, and that three individual perpetrators were reported to have been convicted as a result of police investigations with that. Is that the kind of incident that you would expect to have been informed of as something that you did not want to be surprised by in your system?

Roger Ellis: Yes.

Q365 Nicola Blackwood: Can you explain why you were not informed about that?

Roger Ellis: No, I cannot explain it.

Q366 Nicola Blackwood: Do you think that someone in Children's Services should be held accountable for that?

Roger Ellis: If it was to the knowledge of Children's Services that that sort of thing was going on, they should have passed that information on.

Q367 Nicola Blackwood: It was the sexual exploitation working group, which was reporting within Children's Services, so they must have known about it, and there were also prosecutions, so they can't have not known about it.

Roger Ellis: So I should have been told about that, yes.

Q368 Steve McCabe: I will just ask two questions. Was there no external inspection of Children's Services during this period? Presumably that gets reported to the chief executive?

Roger Ellis: Yes. There were three Ofsted inspections, 2009, 2010, 2011.

Q369 Steve McCabe: None of those indicated any problem with the level of service at all?

Roger Ellis: There were some issues in the reports, and one of the things that we did as a result of the 2009 inspection was to increase the resources available to Children's Social Care by £1 million.

Q370 Steve McCabe: What sort of things did they flag up?

Roger Ellis: Ofsted inspect process, they inspect files.

Steve McCabe: I know what they do.

Roger Ellis: They review how the organisation is working. They raised some issues about procedures.

Q371 Steve McCabe: But they did not raise anything that caused you any—

Roger Ellis: There was no mention of child sexual exploitation in any of those reports.

Q372 Steve McCabe: One last thing, I just want to be clear what you are telling the Committee. Are you saying that staff in the Children's Services Department withheld information from you, because you were the guy in charge? You did not know. Somebody knew. Did they not tell you? Did they deliberately withhold it?

Roger Ellis: The way it should have worked is that the head of Children's Social Care should have been aware of what was going on, should have briefed the director of Children's Services, who in turn would have briefed me.

Q373 Steve McCabe: Are you saying that staff withheld that information?

Roger Ellis: I can't explain what they did, whether it was withheld or what, but it did not get to me.

Q374 Steve McCabe: Can I ask one last thing on this? Before you decided to leave, by which time you were aware of some of the problems, did you think to instigate any sort of inquiry into how that information did not reach you?

Roger Ellis: I did not know, because—I did not know, for example, about—

Q375 Steve McCabe: You did before you left. That is what I am asking. This is difficult for you, for everyone, I understand that, but what I am trying to ask is, you should have known. The reason you did not know was because someone did not tell you. By the time you had made the decision to leave, you were then aware of the scale, or at least to some extent, you were aware of the problem. I am asking, did you think, before you left, to instigate an inquiry into how it was this could happen and you could be kept in the dark? Would that not have been an understandable last act of a pretty unhappy departing chief executive?

Roger Ellis: Let me just say two things. First, the decisions of the CPS not to take prosecutions before 2010—I did not know about those until after I left the authority, so I was not told about that until after I left the authority, and I found out about it through the coverage that the case has received. I did not know about the extent of what had gone on before the arrests that took place in 2010. However, I was a member of the Safeguarding Board, and the Safeguarding Board did indeed, while I was a member of it, commission the report that was published earlier this year.

Q376 Chair: I think Mr McCabe would like to know, as you were the chief executive of the council, why did you not, in fury, having discovered this was going on, have your own internal inquiry to find out what was going on, about your management structures and the reason why you did not have this information?

Roger Ellis: My fury arose after I left. While I was still in the organisation what I saw was that there were prosecutions that were taking place from 2010 onwards. I had no knowledge of what had happened before 2010.

Q377 Chair: We understand that, but why did you not initiate an inquiry to find out why you had no knowledge?

Roger Ellis: I did not know there was something about which I did not know.

Q378 Chair: You knew about the arrests.

Roger Ellis: I knew about the arrests, but—

Q379 Chair: You thought that was it?

Roger Ellis: I thought—

Q380 Chair: That was it?

Roger Ellis: There was some wrongdoing, there were some arrests, there were cases being dealt with. I was not aware that there were other cases previously that had not been dealt with.

Q381 Bridget Phillipson: Just continuing on that. The report from the Safeguarding Board said, back in 2008, about the need for a specialist multi-agency team, and that team was established, but its establishment was hampered by issues around funding and governance. Were you aware that that team had been established?

Roger Ellis: No.

Q382 Bridget Phillipson: No one told you, one way or the other. In terms of activity to disrupt offenders, there was the suggestion the council might take action around licensing activity of minicabs. Again, did anybody make you aware that that was a piece of work that was ongoing?

Roger Ellis: After the arrests took place, yes.

Q383 Bridget Phillipson: Not before?

Roger Ellis: Not before.

Q384 Bridget Phillipson: That, presumably, was not the head of Children's Services. That would have been a different senior manager?

Roger Ellis: Somebody would have had to brief the licensing team about what was required, because they were managed in a different part of the council.

Q385 Bridget Phillipson: The person reporting that information to you might have been your head of resources—or whatever term. It is not just within Children's Services that there was a failure to relay that information to you?

Roger Ellis: I do not know whether those managers were aware of the cases before 2010, either.

Q386 Bridget Phillipson: You were unaware that the police and the CPS were looking at prosecutions before 2010?

Roger Ellis: Before 2010 I had no knowledge of that.

Q387 Bridget Phillipson: No one in your organisation told you that there were ongoing police investigations?

Roger Ellis: No.

Q388 Chair: Mr Taylor, we will come to further questions from you, but just to ask you, you served with distinction as director of Children's Services at Thameside before you took on your appointment as the chief executive of Rochdale. Is that right?

Jim Taylor: It is very good of you to say that.

Q389 Chair: But you did serve there?

Jim Taylor: Yes, I did.

Q390 Chair: Have you ever come across a management structure where something as serious as this has occurred within a local authority area, and nobody tells the chief executive?

Jim Taylor: I arrived in May this year, and I was surprised when I asked questions about what investigations had happened. I was aware that the IPCC were looking into the police activity. I was aware that the CPS were reviewing their actions. I asked questions about what was happening within the council, and nothing was happening, so I instigated an

independent review of the processes, which is due to report. I also started to unpick some of the files that have been referred to earlier, to see whether there had been practice that is unacceptable. Clearly, the report indicates that there had been unacceptable practice.

Q391 Chair: We will come to that in a minute. I am just looking at the processes. You clearly did the right thing, you discovered something was going on and you instituted an inquiry, which is different from what happened before you arrived. But can I just ask you, in terms of what you have heard, is it possible in a local authority for something as serious as this to have been dealt with at director level and for the chief executive not to know?

Jim Taylor: I can only speak from my experience elsewhere and each council has its own way of operating and its own people working within that council. Certainly, from my point of view, I operate differently from that in terms of being proactive, in terms of having conversations with individuals, going to visit teams, having a chat with workers to see exactly what is going on. I cannot comment on what happened before I arrived, but that is certainly my style currently.

Q392 Chair: Of course, and I would not want you to. One final question from me, you have heard from Ms Rowbotham about the fact that her intervention team has been cut in half. Was this a decision by the council or was it by the health authority?

Jim Taylor: The Public Health Department commissioned that service, so it is not a council budget. The member of staff that the previous witness referred to, the contract terminated on 30 April this year. I presume that was the sixth down to the fifth individual. I do not know the extent to which the contract has been—

Q393 Chair: But it is not funded by you?

Jim Taylor: No, it isn't. The previous witness said that that one post was, but that was terminated by 30 April this year, which is before I arrived. The whole contract is operated by the Public Health Department. Of course, in April those contracts transfer to the local authority, but they currently sit with Public Health.

Q394 Chair: Who would have the information as to what Mr Ellis's redundancy payment was and what Cheryl Eastwood, Steve Garner, and Elaine King had? Who would have that information if we want to write and ask?

Jim Taylor: I think if you wrote to the borough solicitor to ask for the information on Mr Ellis's. I can give you information about Cheryl Eastwood and Mr Garner.

Q395 Chair: Could you tell us now what were their payments?

Jim Taylor: I could not tell you the exact payments. There were no golden handshakes for either of them. Cheryl Eastwood retired early and Steve Garner did not receive any payment other than what he was contractually entitled to. So there was no golden handshake.

Chair: So we can write and find out about Mr Ellis. Thank you very much.

Q396 Mr Winnick: Mr Ellis, you said you had absolutely no knowledge while you were chief executive of what was going on as far as the matter we are now dealing with is concerned?

Roger Ellis: The knowledge I had was that arrests took place in 2010. I took that as an example of the system working. I did not know about the failures that had preceded that.

Q397 Mr Winnick: As you have told the Chair, you knew absolutely nothing about that whatsoever?

Roger Ellis: That's right.

Q398 Mr Winnick: Would you say that would also be the position of the individuals who have just been mentioned, the senior managers involved in Children's Services and Social Services? Is it your view now that they knew what was going on?

Roger Ellis: Clearly, somebody knew what was going on. I would be very surprised indeed if either of the directors of Children's Services knew about it and did not tell me because their practice was to keep me very well informed, I thought.

Q399 Mr Winnick: You thought? Does that mean—in your view—that they did know what was going on but did not inform you?

Roger Ellis: As I say, I would be very surprised if they knew what was going on because I am confident that, if they knew what was going on, they would have told me.

Q400 Mr Winnick: Are we, therefore, to come to the view that while this form of sickening criminality was going on in Rochdale, where young females of the ages that have been described were so exploited, all those senior managers—including yourself of course—involved in the Children's Services, Social Services and the rest, never knew a single thing?

Roger Ellis: I do not know what level the knowledge reached. It certainly did not reach me and I would be, as I say, very surprised if the director of Children's Services knew about it.

Q401 Mr Winnick: It is somewhat remarkable, isn't it, to say the least?

Roger Ellis: Yes.

Q402 Bridget Phillipson: If I can just pick up on the point there, you say you would be surprised if the director of Children's Services knew. Can you really be surprised because apparently nobody told you anything?

Roger Ellis: People told me quite a lot of things, but they did not tell me about this. As I say, I can only assume that if what was happening in Children's Social Care was that people were not being believed, that they were not taken seriously, that—it seems to me—would explain why information about something, which the workers were not taking seriously, was not passed up the line to the chief executive. If they were taking it seriously, they probably would have passed it up the line.

Q403 Bridget Phillipson: But there were police investigations. The CPS were looking at charges. Surely someone more senior than a social worker on the ground would have known that was going on, even if it was not you?

Roger Ellis: I would have thought so, yes.

Q404 Bridget Phillipson: In terms of the prosecution of offenders, what impact did the decision of the CPS not to prosecute have on how Rochdale handled the cases?

Roger Ellis: I do not know because I did not find out about that until after I left.

Q405 Nicola Blackwood: Mr Ellis, is your claim incompetence rather than conspiracy?

Roger Ellis: I am not sure I would want to choose either of those words. If what was happening was that people were not—

Q406 Nicola Blackwood: I am sorry, but if you are saying that neither yourself nor the head of Children's Services was aware that child sexual exploitation on this scale was ongoing, even though a sexual exploitation working group had been set up as early as 2007 and had identified already by then 50 children and young people, who were considered to be affected by sexual exploitation, and yet neither your department head nor yourself were informed, what other conclusion can the Committee draw?

Roger Ellis: Clearly the information was withheld from me. I do not know—

Q407 Nicola Blackwood: Then that is conspiracy. I do not understand why that would be withheld. Why would that information be withheld?

Roger Ellis: It would either be—

Nicola Blackwood: Because—

Roger Ellis: I cannot explain that.

Nicola Blackwood: You cannot explain it?

Roger Ellis: No.

Q408 Nicola Blackwood: The report describes the way in which victims were told by their abusers that nobody would believe them because they were prostitutes. Is that your view—that victims were in fact treated as though that is what they were doing, consensually behaving as prostitutes in Rochdale?

Roger Ellis: That is what I have read in the Safeguarding Board report.

Q409 Nicola Blackwood: Yet you personally came across none of this. You didn't engage with the police on this issue, even once. You didn't engage with your crisis intervention centre on this issue, which we have heard they were engaged with on a daily basis. You didn't engage with Social Services at all during your time of 12 years?

Roger Ellis: I engaged with them. I spoke to groups of staff, I met staff, I went around the department, but I did not know about these particular issues.

Q410 Nicola Blackwood: Did you ask about child protection issues?

Roger Ellis: Yes, regularly. During the period following the Laming report, I instituted a series of monthly meetings with both the director of Children's Services and the head of Children's Social Care.

Q411 Nicola Blackwood: So the monthly meetings were more regular than the quarterly meetings—

Roger Ellis: Yes.

Nicola Blackwood: In these monthly meetings did you raise the issue of child sexual abuse?

Roger Ellis: No, because I was not aware that there was an issue at that time.

Q412 Nicola Blackwood: Not even generically?

Roger Ellis: No.

Q413 Nicola Blackwood: So what did you talk about in the child protection meetings?

Roger Ellis: We talked about a range of indicators, about numbers of children in care who had assigned social workers, about vacancies in the social work teams, and about the processes that were being followed to ensure that reviews of cases were being undertaken. All of the indicators that Laming identified in the report following the—

Q414 Nicola Blackwood: You talked about processes, but you did not talk about the risks that they were being exposed to?

Roger Ellis: No, we talked about processes. We did not talk about individual cases.

Q415 Nicola Blackwood: So at no point did anyone raise with you any concerns that there were any worrying cases out there affecting young people in your area?

Roger Ellis: No.

Q416 Nicola Blackwood: In 12 years?

Roger Ellis: I was told about cases involving injuries to children, about young children having to be taken into care, those kind of things. But never was child sexual exploitation mentioned to me.

Q417 Chair: So in your 12 years, you thought Rochdale was a zone where no abuse could happen, because you never asked, whereas Mr Taylor arrived as your successor and within days he had set up his own inquiry and he was actually looking at files?

Roger Ellis: The trial started in February 2012.

Q418 Chair: But you were informed in 2010, you knew there was a problem—

Roger Ellis: I knew there had been arrests.

Q419 Chair: But you knew there was a problem. People do not arrest people for fun, do they?

Roger Ellis: And the Children's Safeguarding Board put some work in place that was being overseen by the director of Children's Services.

Q420 Steve McCabe: Mr Ellis, the Home Secretary earlier today announced quite a far-reaching investigation into events in North Wales that do not seem to have been dealt with adequately at the time. Do you think there is a case for a further judicial investigation into what happened at Rochdale and who the people were who failed to protect the children they were supposed to protect?

Roger Ellis: As I understand it, there are two processes in place at the moment. One is a series of serious case reviews into the—

Q421 Steve McCabe: I am asking about a judicial process to identify the people who failed to do the job they were being charged with doing.

Roger Ellis: In addition to that, there is an internal review that Jim has commissioned—

Q422 Steve McCabe: That is an internal review. I am only asking your opinion, Mr Ellis. I am asking if you think, given what has happened, there is a case for trying to track down the people who failed to do their duty by these children. I am asking your opinion.

Roger Ellis: I would say yes to the way you have just put it.

Chair: Yes, thank you, I think that is what Mr McCabe has said.

Q423 Bridget Phillipson: Mr Ellis, you were still chief executive in 2011—that is right?

Roger Ellis: Yes.

Q424 Bridget Phillipson: The council was given a multi-agency recommendation to rescind the licences of certain individuals because the mini-cab firms were being used as a front for grooming, but that recommendation was rejected. Were you aware of that?

Roger Ellis: No.

Q425 Bridget Phillipson: Were you aware there was any work going on at all in the area of licensing, and the concerns that linked licensing and child exploitation?

Roger Ellis: Yes. I was aware that there was some work going on at that stage, but I did not know about that case that you have just referred to.

Q426 Bridget Phillipson: But it was a multi-agency recommendation to rescind those licenses that was not acted upon?

Roger Ellis: So I have read since, yes.

Q427 Bridget Phillipson: But you were not aware at the time?

Roger Ellis: No.

Q428 Mark Reckless: Mr Ellis, why did you join the children's Safeguarding Board towards the end of 2010 but not before?

Roger Ellis: Because I was invited to join. Before 2010, the director of Children's Services was the chair of the Safeguarding Board. The decision was taken in 2010 to seek an independent chair. An independent chair was appointed and she decided to restructure the Safeguarding Board and invited myself and a number of other people to join the board who had not previously been involved.

Q429 Mark Reckless: As the chief executive of the organisation, why was it you waited for an invitation to join this board rather than proactively considering whether it might be appropriate for you to be a member of it?

Roger Ellis: I had raised that with Terry Piggott, who was the former director of Children's Services and he did not think it was necessary. But I constantly made the offer, "If there is anything I can do to help, please let me know".

Q430 Mark Reckless: Terry Piggott, he was the head of children's—

Roger Ellis: He was the director of Children's Services until 2009.

Q431 Mark Reckless: Can I ask, just while I am on that subject, did he have a background in education or in social care?

Roger Ellis: In education.

Q432 Mark Reckless: Cheryl Eastwood, was she—

Roger Ellis: She was social care.

Q433 Mark Reckless: The chair of such a committee, would it be a surprise if the Social Services Department, whose conduct might be scrutinised by that committee, preferred to have its head chair that committee rather than have independent scrutiny?

Roger Ellis: No, I would not be surprised by that.

Q434 Mark Reckless: Were you aware of the sexual exploitation working group being set up in 2007?

Roger Ellis: No.

Q435 Mark Reckless: You said earlier that you were unable to tell us your payoff from Rochdale Council on account of the confidentiality agreement. Just to clarify whether the answer may actually be that you would prefer not to tell us, would you be prepared to waive that confidentiality?

Roger Ellis: I would if the council would.

Q436 Mark Reckless: Mr Taylor, can I ask if you would be prepared to waive that confidentiality agreement?

Jim Taylor: If it was my decision to make, I would.

Q437 Mark Reckless: If it is not your decision to make would you prepared to make a recommendation to the council that such confidentiality be waived?

Jim Taylor: Yes, I would.

Mark Reckless: Could I also ask if you were aware that, a few months ago I asked the Home Secretary how much Brodie Clark was given as a payoff, and she refused to answer initially on the grounds of a confidentiality agreement, but was later instructed by National Audit Office to make that disclosure?

Q438 Michael Ellis: I notice that over half of the children identified as being at risk in Rochdale were in education. What role do schools have to play, do you think, in identifying children at risk of exploitation, Mr Taylor?

Jim Taylor: School is the one organisation that is, at times, a constant in young people's lives and I think it is really important that schools are able to assess risk very, very early, as the previous witness has explained. Because it is only if we can intervene early and see some of these early signs like non-attendance at school, mood changes, et cetera, that questions can be asked. I do think that schools are better equipped these days to see those signs. Certainly, some of the work in Rochdale we have done, where we have put some awareness raising sessions in place, we have touched over 10,000 young people within each high school in Rochdale, and they have been very, very helpful and the young people hopefully will have gained in confidence. Of course, this issue has been very high profile in the media locally, so awareness has been raised.

Q439 Michael Ellis: Do you think better training for teachers and others who work regularly with children to recognise the signs of grooming and sexual exploitation would be a good thing?

Jim Taylor: Yes, I think it would. There has been training in place and it would be interesting just to evaluate that training at the moment to see whether it has been effective enough. But I certainly do think that training in this issue—as it is a national issue—is very important, particularly for schools, but I would also say for every person who works not necessarily with young children. We are rolling out a programme of safeguarding training for all our council staff. People who are in frontline services, not necessarily dealing with children, do see things and would have to know where to report them, and have the confidence that, when reported, something will be acted upon and they will get some feedback.

Q440 Michael Ellis: Mr Ellis, you were chief executive for 12 years, what about your views. Do you think that better training of teachers would help in this regard?

Roger Ellis: Of teachers and of a wide range of other staff who have any contact with children in one way or another.

Q441 Michael Ellis: Was any mechanism in place during your time as chief executive that might have helped in that way?

Roger Ellis: There was an organisation called the REAL Trust, which stood for Rochdale Education and Learning, which was established to improve the quality of the teaching workforce in 2002. When the Children Act was brought in, the decision was taken to widen that trust to include the full children's workforce. So a series of training activities and events took place, including an annual conference that I addressed on a number of occasions, where professionals from all sorts of backgrounds, including from the health service and the police, as well as social care and education, came together to review how training awareness across the full range of responsibility for children's welfare was undertaken.

Q442 Michael Ellis: Obviously, looking to the future, we want to do all we can to ensure this sort of thing is not missed again and this would be one of those mechanisms, wouldn't it?

Roger Ellis: Yes, and I think in addition to that, were I still the chief executive, I would want to know about every single allegation of child sexual exploitation so that I was aware of the level of complaint that was coming forward—

Q443 Michael Ellis: Do you feel the same way, Mr Taylor?

Jim Taylor: Yes, I do, and certainly as part of the forensic investigation that we are undertaking, we are not going to leave any stone unturned to bring the perpetrators to justice in the work we are doing with the police. I am hopeful that we can bring more perpetrators to justice.

Chair: Mr Taylor, if you have uncovered anything during your investigation that is relevant to this Committee's inquiry, we would be most grateful if you communicated it to us. Even though it concerns other council officers or processes, we would like to know about it, in view of what Mr Ellis has said to us today.

Q444 Mark Reckless: Mr Ellis, I have asked you about Terry Piggott and Cheryl Eastwood, and whether their background was in social care or in education. I know there have been recommendations in this area in which the council may be bound. Could I ask your opinion: is it necessarily a good idea to have both children's Social Services and education in the same department if that implies that there is then another manager between the chief executive and the head of education, and separately, the head of Children's Social Care.

Chair: If you could answer briefly, Mr Ellis.

Roger Ellis: The authority has a duty to have a director of Children's Services with the remit for the whole of education. Almost by definition, therefore, that person is likely to come from one background or the other and I can see that, whichever background they come from, there is a potential difficulty with the head of Children's Social Care being at one remove from the chief executive.

Q445 Mark Reckless: I am just asking your opinion. Do you think it is a good idea that it is required, even though that may imply that the head of Children's Social Care is another layer removed from—

Roger Ellis: I think it is helpful because it gives somebody complete responsibility for all issues to do with children. As we have seen in the discussion about the role of schools, I think it is really helpful that somebody sits across all those services that have something to do with children.

Q446 Mark Reckless: Could I ask Mr Taylor the same question?

Jim Taylor: I actually think that the role should be separate because of the specialist nature and the complexity of the Children's Social Care agenda currently. The Children Act of 2004 brought the two roles together for very valid reasons at that time, but certainly with emerging issues, I would say as recently as the last two or three years, nationally, I think it would be helpful if there were specialist arrangements. Many councils are moving back towards those specialist arrangements, even though they have designated one individual as the statutory officer.

Mark Reckless: That is a very interesting answer, thank you.

Q447 Chair: Mr Taylor, could you please take seriously the evidence of Ms Rowbotham. We are concerned that she has told this Committee that this is still going on in Rochdale, even despite all the publicity that has been going on. If you would use your good offices, through your Social Services Department, to pursue this, we would be grateful.

Mr Ellis, I have to say, personally, I found your evidence deeply disappointing. It is surprising that, in the 12 years you have been chief executive, you did not really have personal knowledge of any of this. You have said that neither did your directors of Social Services nor your head of Children's Services, and I find that very, very disturbing. I am pleased though that you have accepted Mr McCabe's suggestion that this perhaps should be the subject of an inquiry on its own: exactly what happened in Rochdale. Clearly, we would have to wait for the prosecutions to be completed, but it seems appropriate that there should be a further inquiry into why the council failed to act. Maybe the best course of action for this Committee is to draw Keith Bristow's attention to the evidence that you have given today because, as the Home Secretary said today, he will be co-ordinating other examples of abuse in other parts of the country.

You said you were responsible, whether you knew or not, for what has happened in the last 12 years. Have you thought about giving back the payoff that you received from the council in view of what has happened?

Roger Ellis: No, I have not, because I do not feel any sense of personal culpability for what happened.

Chair: Mr Ellis and Mr Taylor, thank you for coming in.