

HOUSE OF COMMONS
ORAL EVIDENCE
TAKEN BEFORE THE
HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

LOCALISED CHILD GROOMING

TUESDAY 4 DECEMBER 2012

ANDREW NORFOLK

Evidence heard in Public

Questions 624 - 671

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Oral Evidence

Taken before the Home Affairs Committee

on Tuesday 4 December 2012

Members present:

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

Examination of Witness

Witness: Andrew Norfolk, The Times, gave evidence.

Q624 Chair: Mr Norfolk, thank you very much for coming to give evidence. Could I refer all those present to the Register of Members' Interests, where the interests of members of this Committee are noted? This is the Committee's continuing inquiry into child grooming. May I welcome Andrew Norfolk, a columnist for *The Times*? Thank you for coming, Mr Norfolk, for this session. On behalf of the whole Committee, can I begin by thanking you for the articles that you have written in this newspaper, for the way in which you have written them, and for exposing what has been a most shocking series of events concerning child grooming? May we thank you very much for the diligence and dedication you have shown?

Andrew Norfolk: That is very kind of you; thank you.

Q625 Chair: Mr Norfolk, when you began your inquiries, did you ever think the issue was going to become quite as large as it has subsequently become?

Andrew Norfolk: I had no conception that it would develop into where we are two years later. This all started for me in 2003, when your former colleague, Ann Cryer, became the first mainstream politician to speak publicly about what was happening. In her case in Keighley, there were men waiting outside school gates and two secondary schools had complained, but nothing had been done and the parents had gone to her. The reaction to what she said was so overwhelmingly negative and hostile. The far right leapt on the story, predictably, and she was accused of demonising all Muslims. I think that it almost acted as a brake for several years on anybody seriously looking at whether there was any truth in what she was saying but, as the years passed, I noticed cases cropping up from time to time across Yorkshire and Lancashire with a very similar pattern.

Chair: Yes. You may need to speak up because the acoustics in this room are not very good.

Andrew Norfolk: I apologise.

Chair: It is not your fault; it is the way it has all been built.

Andrew Norfolk: Right.

Q626 Chair: That is very helpful, and we hope to be hearing from Ann Cryer as part of our inquiry.

Can I ask you some specific questions about the Children's Commissioner's report, which was published a short while ago? Of course, you commented about this in the newspaper. Do you think that that was a fair reflection of the issue of child grooming in the United Kingdom today? She talked about upwards of 16,500 children being at risk. When she gave evidence to this Committee, she said that she felt that there was child grooming going on not just in Rochdale and Rotherham, which you have highlighted, but in every city, town and village in the country. Do you agree with what she said in respect of her report?

Andrew Norfolk: It is difficult to challenge her figures; she spent a year putting them together. I think there was an initial figure of 2,400 directly identified as being victims. Then there was this much larger figure that was taken from hitting three of the risk factors that were identified, and I am not quite so sure how much one can rely on that.

For two years, *The Times* has been looking at one particular model of child sexual exploitation, and that is what we believe to be the most serious and the most damaging, which involves organised groups of men and often a number of girls. Ms Berelowitz's inquiry was initially going to be into gang-related violence, and it was extended to include groups.

Q627 Chair: In terms of the extent that she mentioned—the 16,500 and the 2,409—are those figures a surprise to you, or do they bear out the kind of investigations that you have been involved in?

Andrew Norfolk: Yes, the figure of 2,400 is not remotely a surprise.

Q628 Chair: Do you think it could be more, in fact?

Andrew Norfolk: When you read an internal police report from one particular county—South Yorkshire—and you read the police themselves saying in 2010 that they have up to 300 girls actively being exploited or at high risk, with each of them the victim of multiple criminal offences, meaning that in all likelihood you are looking at thousands of criminal offences in that one force area each year, I think it is possible that it could be higher.

Q629 Chair: In terms of Rochdale in particular, which you have exposed in your articles—you looked at Rochdale and Rotherham as two of the areas—does it surprise you that there are now, I think, 12 members of staff, including social workers and managers, who are facing disciplinary action? Two of them have been suspended, and the head of the Children's Safeguarding Board resigned yesterday. Is that a surprise to you, or should it have happened earlier?

Andrew Norfolk: I think it should have happened. I am pleasantly surprised to see that Rochdale has a new chief executive, who seems absolutely determined that he is going to wipe the slate clean. We will wait to see what happens. Unlike in many other areas of the country, because of the criminal trial, they had no choice but to be blinking in the spotlight, and unfortunately they decided to embark on what are now, I think, four separate reviews of how they handle cases of child sexual exploitation. The first one has reported that it found lamentable failings, particularly in the attitude of child care professionals to vulnerable girls, and heads ought to roll.

Q630 Chair: So you think that Rochdale Council failed the young girls it was supposed to protect? You have seen the evidence of Roger Ellis and other senior officials when they have appeared before this Committee. Are you clear that the blame lies with the

council, or is it with the Crown Prosecution Service or is it with the police? Where does the blame lie?

Andrew Norfolk: In so many cases, these are multi-agency failings. They are failings of the police who, in 2008, had a 15-year-old girl sitting in front of them, giving a lengthy police-filmed interview, in which she was describing seven occasions in the previous three weeks when a man in his 50s had either used her for sex himself, or had taken her in his car to houses and flats around Rochdale. When the police officer listening to that girl yawns, when he clearly has no understanding of child sexual exploitation and when he expresses incredulity that the girl should have returned to her abuser after the first occasion, which is a classic pattern, the police have a lot to account for. The CPS has a lot to account for, because the CPS lawyer who received the file with that girl's allegations rejected it because he doubted her credibility, which was nonsense. Above all, however, the social services in Rochdale have an entire culture to answer for, because you heard evidence from the specialist project that was trying to draw their attention to what was happening.

Q631 Chair: This is Sunrise.

Andrew Norfolk: Indeed. You heard evidence—

Chair: And you were not convinced with the evidence that was given to this Committee by Mr Ellis and his colleagues.

Andrew Norfolk: I am no expert on how local government works in terms of its internal management structures. It seemed quite extraordinary that the chief executive of an authority that, in 2007, had identified 50 young girls with clear links to local takeaways and associated taxi firms should sit there and say that he knew nothing about it—and would not have expected to know anything about it unless anybody felt like telling him.

Q632 Chair: Finally, before colleagues come in, let me deal with the issue of ethnicity. You were very, very specific that you felt that there was a racial and cultural issue here in this child grooming—that these were Pakistani men who were exploiting and grooming young white girls. Your articles were very, very clear on this. Is that right? Tell us why you think that is the case.

Andrew Norfolk: When we finally started looking at this in 2010, it was after a case in Rochdale, ironically, that was barely covered at all: nine men were convicted of horrific offences against one 14-year-old girl who was in a children's home. It was not the case that got all the publicity. I was on holiday in Scotland and I heard a BBC report on the radio that mentioned that nine men had been convicted, but did not say anything about them. Because of all these other cases, I was in my car thinking, "I bet I do know something about them." When I got back I checked and, sure enough, these were South Asian Muslim names. That was when we decided we must try to work out whether there was any truth in this pattern.

Q633 Chair: And you think that there is.

Andrew Norfolk: We spent months trawling the records. In the end, we found 17 prosecutions from 13 towns and cities over a 13-year period, and 56 men had been convicted. This is where two or more were involved, because it is the collective nature that is important here. Of those 56 men, 53 were Asian and 50 of them were Muslim names, and the vast majority were of British Pakistani origin. We have argued from day one that the overwhelming majority of child abusers in this country are white men acting on their own.

Chair: As Ms Berelowitz says.

Andrew Norfolk: Yes, but she would say that there is no suggestion that, in terms of the organised group grooming, there is a particular problem—and there is a massive particular problem.

Q634 Chair: So in particular, relating to organised grooming, this is a problem specifically for the British Pakistani community.

Andrew Norfolk: It is a problem that has put down deep roots in northern communities for the last 20 years. To this day, despite all the very good changes that have happened in the last two years, no official body, to my knowledge, has said, “We need to understand why.”

Q635 Chair: And are you telling this Committee the reason why perhaps this has not been dealt with more severely by some of the authorities is that, because they were of Pakistani origin, there was a fear of trampling on cultural sensitivities? Is that what you are telling this Committee? You can be very frank with us; we are very keen to hear from you.

Andrew Norfolk: Okay. One of the big problems is wider than that, which is there was a genuine failure to understand what was going on.

Chair: We understand that.

Andrew Norfolk: That was not related to that, but yes. After we ran our first story, in January last year, I was contacted by so many people who had refused to speak to me before. When you have a Director of Children’s Services ringing and saying, “My staff are jumping for joy in the office today because finally somebody has said what we have not felt able to say,” and when you have very senior police officers saying exactly the same—

Q636 Chair: And they have said this to you?

Andrew Norfolk: Yes.

Chair: They have actually said this to you—off the record, clearly, because you have not quoted them in your article?

Andrew Norfolk: Yes. Absolutely. There was a fear of treading into a cultural minefield that they did not really know anything about—a fear of marginalising; a fear of stereotyping—and it allowed this situation to develop to where we were two years ago.

Chair: That is very helpful.

Q637 Steve McCabe: Sue Berelowitz said on ITV—I think it was on “Daybreak”—that there was a model of Pakistani men with white girls, and she went on to say that she thought there were a number of other models as well. Do you think there would be profit in some research into what the variety of models are? That seems to be a problem for both the social services part of the authorities and perhaps the police at times, if they had been warned off by fear of cultural stereotypes or anything else. Do we need a bit more research on the variety of models so that people can be a bit more open-minded?

Andrew Norfolk: I do agree. One of the disappointing features of that report is—apparently for reasons of confidentiality—that there was no regional breakdown of what had been found in different parts of the country. Nearly all the cases we have been dealing with have been in the north or the midlands although, as one of your colleagues is going to be very aware, it is coming further south, and we are going to hear about them next year.

Clearly, in London, the profile may be very different, and there may be reasons why that profile is very different. In rural communities—in Devon and Cornwall or in East Anglia—I think it would have been helpful to understand the nuances a bit more.

Q638 Mr Winnick: Mr Norfolk, at a time when the press, in my view, is being criticised very harshly, I, like the Chair—and I am sure other members of the Committee—would like to congratulate you on the excellent articles, and what you have done in exposing a criminality that we look upon with shame, as does every civilised person.

Can I put this to you: would it not be the case that with what happened and what you exposed, when the people convicted happen to be of Asian origin, would not their crimes be totally condemned by the overwhelming majority of people of Asian origin or Pakistani origin in this country, and in the particular areas where the criminals lived?

Andrew Norfolk: To a large extent, I agree with you. However, it is not a threat to me, as a white man, to say that most child sex offenders in this country are white men. I understand why it is a different feeling, when you are already feeling under the pressure of all sorts of things that have nothing to do with child sexual exploitation, suddenly to have yet another stick, seemingly, to beat the Muslim community with, which has led perhaps to a more defensive reaction than we might have seen in other circumstances.

I have spoken to young men in some of the towns where this has been going on. Universally, they decry what happens. They say they are disgusted with the men who have been doing this but, equally, that they would never have dreamt of going to the police about it, because you do not turn on your own community, which I think has been an element, to a certain extent. I do not doubt for a second that the overwhelming majority abhor what has happened.

Q639 Mr Winnick: So however wrong they were in not going, if they knew about it—and presumably, obviously, most in the Pakistani community in Rochdale did not know—they were disgusted by it.

Andrew Norfolk: Yes.

Q640 Mr Winnick: As we would all be. As I said, any decent, civilised person is obviously disgusted by such behaviour. Is it not also the case that to a very large extent—perhaps arising from your articles—justice was done as a result of the decision of the prosecutor, who in this case happened to be of Asian origin, and who did not hesitate for one moment in overcoming all the hesitations and refusal of various people you have mentioned in authority to take any action? He took action, which resulted in the people being brought to justice.

Andrew Norfolk: If Nazir Afzal was running the country, we would be in a better place. He has a record on other crimes—for honour-related violence; for forced marriage—on which he cuts through everything. This is crime. He is also able to speak with an authority that perhaps others in similar positions have not felt able to.

Q641 Nicola Blackwood: Mr Norfolk, you made a comment a few moments ago that no public body has so far asked why this problem is emerging. I wonder if, from your research and discussions with different people, you have come to any conclusion as to why you think this might be happening within certain communities.

Andrew Norfolk: I would not say firm conclusions, but I think a number of issues come very much to the fore—and that is not just my opinion; it is from talking to a lot of people within the Pakistani community as well, including some very learned scholars.

I am flabbergasted that one issue that has not been remotely considered is attitudes towards the age of consent. We have come a long way in this country. In 1875, we raised the age of consent from 12 to 13. We were still treating these girls as criminals—as child prostitutes—in the late '90s. But we have an age of consent of 16. If you come from a rural Myapuri, Kashmiri community, where, whatever state law says, village tradition and sharia says that puberty is the green light for marriage—as it does—and if you recognise that most girls in this country are hitting puberty at 11 or 12, perhaps one begins to understand why it is not just lone offenders. There has to be something, given that so often this is a normalised group activity—not among a major criminal gang, but among friends, work colleagues and

relatives—that does not have the same sense of shame attached to it as would be the case for your typical white offender, who works alone because if he told too many people, somebody would report him.

Q642 Nicola Blackwood: One of the problems that has emerged is exactly this attitude to the age of consent, and very young girls being perceived to be making choices about very dangerous sexual activities. That is not particularly within the communities that you are identifying, but actually within our social services. You have commented on this problem in Rochdale, and I wonder if you think that that is being addressed, or if you think that that is still a widespread problem.

Andrew Norfolk: You are absolutely right. A joint parliamentary report by some of your colleagues earlier this year said that engrained within the child protection system across the country was an attitude that children can somehow consent to their abuse, and that if they seem willing to have sex with adults, even if they are children, that is somehow something to shrug your shoulders about and say, “Well, let them get on with it.” That was staggering to me, but I have now come across it very directly in individual cases from different towns and cities, particularly within child protection. There are attitudes—I come back to the police as well—where you have officers in one force talking about a “naughty girls’ club”. These were children who were being systematically, grotesquely abused, and they were thought to be just naughty girls. Clearly, I am not suggesting that a slightly blurred line about the age of consent is exclusive to closed, conservative Kashmiri communities, but it is one factor, as are many others.

Chair: Thank you. We probably have to move on now.

Q643 Karl Turner: Mr Norfolk, I think you mentioned, in answer to our Chairman’s first question, “good changes”, as you put it, over two years. The Committee is interested as to whether you are wholly satisfied with the changes that have taken place over the time you have been investigating this issue.

Andrew Norfolk: There has been a genuine transformation in attitudes, particularly among police forces, to whether it is right to allow this to go on without attempting to prosecute those who are taking part in it. As I said to you, over a 13-year period until 2010, there were 17 prosecutions that we identified around the country. It is less than two years since we ran that first article in January 2011, and there have been investigations, arrests and/or prosecutions in Rochdale, Manchester, Burnley, Dewsbury, Keighley, Leeds, Carlisle, Derby, Telford, Birmingham, Oxford and High Wycombe. There is a proactive intent now that we are not just simply going to talk any more about protecting children, which will always remain the most important thing. There is a realisation that one way of protecting them is to put those who are doing it to them behind bars.

Q644 Bridget Phillipson: Mr Norfolk, criminal prosecutions are obviously vital, but I wonder whether you would agree that they are vital for changing the culture that we have in society, which links to Ms Blackwood’s point about the culture of disbelief that often exists in the way we view child victims? Do you think that we still have a long way to go in understanding the behaviour of young women who are subjected to sexual abuse, who can often display quite challenging behaviour, or be engaged in criminal offences themselves? In some of these cases, their challenging behaviour—some of which has obviously been the direct result of the abuse—has meant that the police have not regarded them as being victims, because they do not fit the traditional mould of the victim.

Andrew Norfolk: Yes, I totally agree. There is a huge, huge journey to go on still to get into the mind of a 12, 13 or 14-year-old girl who is in that situation. They do indeed come

from all sections of society, although they are hugely disproportionately children in care, and there is massive over-representation of children from dysfunctional backgrounds. A year into this becoming my full-time job, talking to girls who are now young adults—remember that insidious process by which you are an adolescent anyway—you see this pushing at boundaries and you want to be treated as more grown up than you are, and there is the excitement of a boy a few years older, initially, chatting with you, flirting with you, offering you car rides, offering you alcohol and offering you drugs, and then there is the incredibly undermining process by which gradually self-respect is stripped away. That is something that a lot of us are yet to understand.

Q645 Bridget Phillipson: In the case when the police officer behaved in the dreadful way you described, was he a specially trained officer, and did he face any consequence for that behaviour?

Andrew Norfolk: Those were just beat officers in one particular force area with no specialist training. Addressing the lack of specialist training—not just in the police but for social workers, again, in terms of understanding child sexual exploitation—is a trip that must be gone on.

Q646 Bridget Phillipson: Do you know, did he face any sanction for—

Andrew Norfolk: Not to my knowledge, no.

Q647 Steve McCabe: There was an allegation—I think it was in *The Guardian* yesterday, so I recognise it was a rival newspaper—that Jonathan West has said that the Working Together to Safeguard Children guidelines are going to make it discretionary for head teachers to report allegations of abuse. Is not that likely to continue this idea that it is an individual judgment about whether this should be believed or it is serious? Surely the only way to crack down is to say it has to be compulsory for people to report these allegations.

Andrew Norfolk: It has to be. Schools are one of the big problems, in terms of their failures in the past. Their lack of joined-up thinking across the board has been hopeless. When you eventually get a terrible case that comes to light, then they go and look at who knew what when and who shared what information with whom. I am thinking particularly of one girl in Rotherham, where the school had numerous concerns, but they never got to the people who could have acted on them. I would be very disappointed if it would somehow become a voluntary act to decide that if you have concerns about a girl who is perhaps coming in dishevelled, using over-sexualised language, or going missing for large periods of time. Surely it has to be compulsory to report that.

Q648 Mr Winnick: You have made the point elsewhere that there are more care homes in Rochdale than in the 14 inner London boroughs combined. Do you think there is a connection between care homes and this sort of exploitation of young females?

Andrew Norfolk: Care homes are a disaster at the moment. May I briefly draw a contrast with Germany and Denmark, where over 50% of the children who are in care are in residential care, and to work in one of those homes you need a degree-level qualification, so that comes with degree-level remuneration? In Britain, in the 1970s, 40% of our children were in residential care; now it is 7%. Increasingly, they are the placements of absolute last resort for the most vulnerable, damaged and emotionally needy children we have, and who is looking after them? Staff with absolutely no qualifications at all, beyond the aspiration of a level 3 NVQ, which is little more than the ability to make a bed and cook a meal. It is little surprise that when you compound that with a sort of export trade in children to areas where

property is cheap—whether it is in the north-west of England or certain south coast towns—you have a situation where you have groups of men sitting in cars outside children’s homes, waiting to pick them off.

Q649 Mr Winnick: Mr Norfolk, two more questions. Do you have any confidence that the new regime in Rochdale—with the chief executive and director of social services—will mean a substantial improvement in matters?

Andrew Norfolk: I trust that Jim Taylor is going to be as good as his word, because at the moment his word is very good. They brought in the Director of Children’s Services from Blackburn, who is extremely experienced in dealing with child sexual exploitation, to oversee the transition, and they have an MP who is going to be sure that he is going to hold them to account if they do not fulfil what they are promising.

Q650 Mr Winnick: In your reporting and visiting Rochdale and the rest of it, did you come across the allegations that have been raised in the House more recently by the present Member for Rochdale regarding the former MP and allegations of sexual abuse?

Andrew Norfolk: No, I am afraid, no more than about Jimmy Savile and celebrities. I am afraid that my focus has been exclusively on girls who are still being exploited.

Q651 Michael Ellis: Mr Norfolk, I congratulate you on your clearly excellent journalistic prowess, but also add my congratulations to *The Times* on supporting you in what was quite a lengthy investigation. Was it your sole investigation for two years?

Andrew Norfolk: To get two weeks to work on one story is unusual these days. Two months is unheard of. This has been my full-time job for two years, and it is entirely down to the editor of *The Times* that that is the case.

Q652 Michael Ellis: So I wanted to add my congratulations to *The Times* for supporting you in the way that it has done.

You have expressed some criticism of South Yorkshire Police both prior to and at today’s hearing, so I want to explore that a little. You criticised their actions, and they have come back with a statement. I want to ascertain your views of that statement. Do you accept the rebuttal points that they make?

Andrew Norfolk: Not entirely, no. I am not sure whether you are referring to the press release they put out, or their actual response to this Committee.

Michael Ellis: The press release they put out in the first instance.

Andrew Norfolk: I accept very little that was in there.

Q653 Michael Ellis: What are your main sources of complaint for South Yorkshire Police?

Andrew Norfolk: I should say, again, that they have travelled a long route in two years. The internal report that we had was from late 2010. The state of play there was horrific. I am now very happy to accept that they realised how bad it was and that they have made changes, and I know there are very live, active investigations under way.

Q654 Michael Ellis: Was it because they were not taking these complaints seriously, or because they took the complaints, but did not believe them or did not think they would be believed in a court of law? Can you elaborate on what you think their rationale was for the source of your complaint about their conduct?

Andrew Norfolk: In one particular case, a 13-year-old girl who had been brutally raped by four people was not believed, having given a filmed interview. She went back six

months later and gave another interview in which she described being held in a bedroom, with the door being held from the outside, while five men went in, one after the other, to demand and receive sex acts from her. She identified the men and they were arrested, but nobody was charged with any offence. South Yorkshire Police then had three police officers across the entire force dealing with child sexual exploitation. They recognise now that that was completely inadequate. Clearly, from what they have said in their response to you after appearing, in the last 10 years, they have had 27 investigations into organised groups of offenders. They have identified 90 girls in total. They have also said that in the majority of those 27 cases, it was Asian or British Pakistani—wording one way or the other—who were involved. Having discovered that this morning, to me, it is rather more proof than denial of what we have been arguing all this time.

Q655 Michael Ellis: It is justification for your position, effectively.

Andrew Norfolk: Yes. To be honest, Rotherham Council, perhaps even more than South Yorkshire Police, has things to answer for. The fact is that last month South Yorkshire elected a new Police and Crime Commissioner, on £85,000 a year, who, from 2005 to 2010, was the cabinet member responsible for children's services in Rotherham. He is still a Rotherham councillor.

Q656 Chair: It is Shaun Wright, is it, Mr Norfolk?

Andrew Norfolk: It is, yes.

Chair: It is the intention of the Committee to take evidence from Rotherham Council, and possibly even from Mr Wright, in the future.

Michael Ellis: Carry on, Mr Norfolk.

Andrew Norfolk: South Yorkshire has been unlucky, in that I was handed 200 documents to see that covered a 10-year period. I think that if I had had the same access to almost any other force in the north or midlands, I would probably have seen the same lamentable failings, the same very slow awareness growing, the same setting up of a specialist project that was finding out all sorts of stuff, but nobody wanted to hear what it was finding, and that was identifying several hundred men and girls—

Q657 Michael Ellis: But why? We need to understand why nobody wanted to hear what these reports were finding. What is your analysis of why this extraordinary state of affairs would—to us—seem to be the case?

Andrew Norfolk: I do think initially that they really did not get what was going on. They saw this as somehow—I come back this—girls being complicit in what was happening. I come back to the situation of totally not understanding what these children are being put through and where they are ending up. Equally, I come back to mindsets, where you are seeing a child protection meeting, with the various agencies represented there, where they are talking about a 14-year-old girl being put in a car and driven to Manchester or to Bristol, or two kids being sold as part of a drugs deal to another group of men down in Bristol, and I have no answer to why nothing was done. All I can tell you is nothing was done.

Q658 Michael Ellis: Finally from me, do you think there is anything else under the surface that is still to come to light in this area?

Andrew Norfolk: I cannot tell you what our next story is going to be, but it is going to be a completely new area. It is going to be looking at the court system and at how girls who have been grotesquely abused once by men who are criminals are then abused again by the experience they—

Chair: Can you repeat that, Mr Norfolk?

Andrew Norfolk: We are going to be looking at how girls who have been abused horrifically—sexually—by offenders are then abused again by the experience of giving evidence and being cross-examined in a witness box.

Q659 Michael Ellis: How do you propose to deal with that? We have a system in this country where allegations that are put must be challenged by those against whom the allegations are made. How can we avoid a judicial process that does not allow questioning of witnesses to challenge allegations?

Andrew Norfolk: Without going into too much detail, if you will allow me to say so, I have sat through several of these trials now. Some of them have been conducted as models of what I think would be the way forward—in terms of recognising the vulnerability of the witness and protecting them, and allowing questioning for a certain period of time, but not for it to stray into areas that are utterly irrelevant to the offence—while there are others when that has not been the case.

Q660 Nicola Blackwood: Mr Norfolk, you have given us a number of examples about victims' experience with the police, and you have just touched on the problems in court. Do you think that the victim experience is starting to improve and, if so, where are the remaining gaps? In particular, I am concerned that the CPS is still acting as a block, and that even though it is doing the review at the moment, there are problems with victims being seen as credible. Then there are problems with presenting those victims in court, and with representing and understanding child sexual exploitation, as you have already identified to Ms Phillipson. I wonder whether you are of the view that expert witnesses, ISVAs or other independent supporters of that kind would be the way to go.

Andrew Norfolk: As far as the CPS goes, I think Keir Starmer gets it, and I know that Nazir Afzal gets it. Keir Starmer has said there are three key factors that militate against ever treating these girls as proper victims, in terms of when they assess victims of sexual offences. There were three things they relied on in terms of credibility: one, that the offence is reported quickly; two, that the account is consistent; and, three, that the victim never returns to the perpetrator. It was a system that was built to deny justice to these girls. He has done this review and specialists have been appointed in each of the 13 CPS areas of England, with Nazir Afzal as the lead. As more cases come to court, they will realise that juries can see through all the obfuscation that is put up by the defence and can understand—because they do. I have seen them get it; I have seen them realise.

Q661 Nicola Blackwood: What makes them get it? What works and what does not?

Andrew Norfolk: Because these have all been group cases, in the end it is the sheer weight of evidence and the fact that it is not just one girl's word—a child's word—against an adult's. It is several children's words. The pattern adds up and the occasions add up, and if you can get other evidence it is critical, whether it is mobile phone text messages, or, in lucky cases, forensic evidence. These are really difficult cases to prosecute. It is so difficult when you start with a victim who does not recognise she is a victim very often.

Q662 Nicola Blackwood: Have you seen cases collapsing because the victims cannot handle the realities of what it is like to go through that sort of case?

Andrew Norfolk: I have seen one case collapse, yes. You mentioned expert witnesses. I have not seen an expert witness in any of these cases. I know the police had very much wanted to get expert witnesses in to explain the psychology of the process that is gone through. I am told that that should be possible, but I have sat in a legal argument where the

defence has said that it would not be fair. I must admit I am not an expert on what ought or ought not to be possible, but I am sure it would be hugely helpful.

Q663 Nicola Blackwood: I want to ask you one last question. You commented at length to Mr Winnick about the problems within the care system. Obviously Ms Berelowitz has come back with some recommendations for improving the care system and addressing those concerns that you raised, which were all accepted by the Government and, as I understand it, are being implemented. Do you think that those changes are going to address your concerns, or do you think that there is more that needs to be done?

Andrew Norfolk: You may be ahead of me. My understanding was that Michael Gove, having asked Sue Berelowitz to bring forward that element of her report that specifically dealt with residential care, had ordered a thorough and wide-ranging review of all aspects of residential child care that was due to report before Christmas, but is now not going to report before Christmas. If I am wrong, I apologise, but that was the last that I was told about it.

Q664 Nicola Blackwood: What was your view about those recommendations?

Andrew Norfolk: I think they were good. Much that is in Ms Berelowitz's report, ironically, is good. We have a massive disagreement on one particular area, but then she is a passionate advocate for children and she is very good at exposing that lack of joined-up thinking and exploring the shattering impact that such offences have. I just wish she was willing to say, "There is a massive problem in one particular community and we need to understand why."

Q665 Bridget Phillipson: A final question from me, Mr Norfolk, on the area of the courts. You talked about how young women can be re-traumatised by giving evidence in the court process, and you set out some areas where you think improvements could be made—I would agree. I also wonder if you would agree that it can also be incredibly traumatic for young women if they are denied the opportunity of justice through the court system. My understanding is that the CPS—albeit, well-intentioned—has sometimes reached the decision that it would be too traumatic for the victim to give evidence. That can be the case, but that needs to be a decision that is reached in consultation with the victim, because denial of justice in the long term, and the consequences of not seeing justice for your offenders, can be very traumatic as well.

Andrew Norfolk: Yes, 100%, for victims of all crimes, and particularly victims of sexual crime. There are cases I know of in which, simply for sheer weight of numbers, a decision was made. You can only fit a certain number of people in terms of defendants in the dock, and in terms of the sheer manageability of a criminal trial—the longest I sat through was four months—perhaps decisions have been made that did deny victims the chance. If they are managed well and if, from the very moment a criminal investigation starts, the focus is on the victim, and how you are going to get her through this process, I think it is doable. It is a wide range in terms of how it is done.

Q666 Chair: Can I ask you about numbers, Mr Norfolk? We heard from South Yorkshire Police that they have now put eight specialist officers into child grooming. We have also seen what has happened following the Savile revelations: 30 Metropolitan Police officers are now on Operation Yewtree. Do you think that there ought to be a greater allocation of resources by the police in places like South Yorkshire to deal with this issue? Eight does not seem that many more than the figure they had before, bearing in mind what you have uncovered.

Andrew Norfolk: It is a lot more than three, obviously, in terms of capacity to do anything. One of the complaints raised in that internal report was the sense that it was impossible to get the resources, even when requests had been made by officers, as they had been, for resources to mount a full-scale investigation. South Yorkshire say they have eight, but I think they said that they can draw on up to 70 others when the need arises. Clearly, the Savile case is completely in isolation from any other one of its type and, for various reasons, the Met has decided to act as it has.

Q667 Chair: You contrasted the 100 prosecutions in Lancashire, and you have held out Lancashire as a good practice police area, and what we heard was that there were zero prosecutions in South Yorkshire this year. Somewhere along the line, somebody—even after your revelations and the excellent work that you have done—needs to be still getting a grip. Although things have changed and you have welcomed it, there still needs to be more being done.

Andrew Norfolk: Firstly, just briefly, I do not think I ever said there were 100 prosecutions in Lancashire or anything like that.

Chair: No, you did not tell us; Lancashire Police told us.

Andrew Norfolk: Oh, sorry.

I think where Lancashire are the way forward is that in each of their six police divisions they have a co-located multi-agency hub—I am afraid that that sounds like an awful lot of rubbish language—with, basically, 24/7, people going in to work and sitting around the table together—people from the local authority, from the police, from charities, from health and from education—so that not only is information shared immediately, instead of waiting for a twice-monthly meeting or a meeting that happens once every two months, but you are able to respond very quickly. I am prepared to accept very much with Lancashire that they have nipped stuff in the bud, whereas in other areas it has developed into a far more serious case. I know that South Yorkshire Police now have a designated force lead, which they did not have two years ago. That changes attitudes. I know that South Yorkshire Police have been talking to Lancashire and trying to learn from them. I am willing to give South Yorkshire the benefit of the doubt in terms of moving forward, for what it's worth.

Q668 Chair: You praised the work of Keir Starmer and Nazir Afzal. They now have a mechanism for sharing information, and a much, much more organised way of prosecuting. However, what has concerned me has been the lack of national co-ordination on the part of the police. There are good areas—we talked about Lancashire—but the National Crime Agency, which is obviously the place where it should all be happening, is not in existence at the moment. We have CEOP, but it has a different remit. As regards the police, where should the co-ordination be dealt with? We heard from Bernard Hogan-Howe last week that there is not the kind of evidence in the Met that you have in Rochdale and in South Yorkshire. Clearly, it is happening in the London area—it cannot not be happening here—but they do not have the live cases that you have been able to uncover. Where should the co-ordination be, as far as the police are concerned?

Andrew Norfolk: Obviously, it is a completely different structure. Keir Starmer and the CPS are able to order those 13 areas to come together, share and pool information, learn, move forward and share best practice—all the things you would logically want to do across different police forces, not least when you have girls being moved between different police areas, as you do in so many of these cases. You have a girl from the West Midlands who is being put in a car and taken to West Yorkshire, Lancashire or Greater Manchester. In some cases, clearly, individual senior officers are making decisions to talk to each other and to learn.

Q669 Chair: But it is not being shared. There is not that co-ordination. Good practice may be happening in Lancashire, but unless they come and give evidence to us, or people hear about it in some internal bulletin, another force in Norfolk may not know about it. Should it be the National Crime Agency? Where should it be in the meantime, before that has been formed?

Andrew Norfolk: It is unfortunate that CEOP's title still includes the word "online", which tends to make one think that that is the sole nature of its job. It ought to have the expertise to be able to share. In my experience, some police forces guard their independence rather too jealously. I do not know who the appropriate person is to bring people together and say, "We must learn from each other"—

Chair: But somebody needs to.

Andrew Norfolk: Somebody needs to, because when you get really imaginative, brilliant detective work, like you had in the case of Derby, with one female police officer driving through that case—

Q670 Chair: What was the name of that police officer?

Andrew Norfolk: That was Superintendent Debbie Platt.

When you have really creative, imaginative work going on, as we have had in one case that has not yet come to trial but will be doing so, I think you want the world to know about it. You want bells and whistles on it to say, "This is the way to do it".

Q671 Chair: Indeed, but it is not happening at the moment.

Andrew Norfolk: It is not happening as much as it should be.

Chair: Mr Norfolk, I end where I began: by expressing the thanks of the Committee for the extraordinary work that you have done and the investigations that you have conducted. You have been able to highlight this crucial area, and a lot of young girls have been—in my view, and in the view of this Committee—protected because of the fact that this has been exposed and those in authority have sat up and done what they had to do. Thank you very much. Please keep in touch with us. If there is further information that you think would be of relevance to us while this inquiry is progressing, we would very much like to know about it. Thank you very much.